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AUGUST 6–SEPTEMBER 2, 2018



COVER IMAGE:
URUGUAY

Two sisters share an important message with a store owner in Montevideo, capital of Uruguay

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“My Kingdom Is No Part of This World”

“For this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.”—JOHN 18:37.

“FROM an early age, I saw only injustice,” says a sister in southern Europe about her past. “So I rejected the political system in my country, and I supported what many viewed as radical ideas. In fact, for many years I was the girlfriend of a terrorist.” A brother in southern Africa explains why he used to be violent: “I believed that my tribe was superior to all others, and I joined a political party. We were taught to kill our opponents with spears—even those of our own tribe who supported other political parties.” A sister living in central Europe admits: “I was prejudiced, and I hated anyone who was of a different nationality or who had a religion that was different from mine.”

² Today, more and more people have attitudes like those three once had. Many political groups use violence to gain independence. It is common for people to fight about politics. And in many countries, people mistreat foreigners

1, 2. (a) How is the world becoming more divided? (b) What questions will we answer in this article?

SONGS: 15, 74

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How did Jesus show that he would not get involved in politics?

What did Jesus say about paying taxes, and why was this reasonable?

How do Christians view the use of violence?

more and more. Just as the Bible foretold, people are “not open to any agreement” during these last days. (2 Timothy 3:1, 3) How can Christians remain united while the world becomes more divided? We can learn much from Jesus’ example. People in his day were also divided by strong political opinions. In this article, we will learn the answers to three questions: Why did Jesus refuse to get involved in any political group? How did Jesus show that God’s people must not take sides on political issues? And how did Jesus teach us that we should never use violence?

DID JESUS SUPPORT THOSE WHO WANTED INDEPENDENCE?

³ Many Jews to whom Jesus preached really wanted to be free from the Romans. Jewish Zealots, a fanatical political group, did all they could to make these feelings even stronger. Many of the Zealots followed a man named Judas the Galilean, who lived about the time of Jesus. Judas was a false messiah, who misled many. The Jewish historian Josephus said that Judas urged the Jews to fight against Rome and called those who agreed to pay taxes to the Romans “cowards.” The Romans eventually put Judas to death. (Acts 5:37) Some of the Zealots even became violent to achieve their goals.

⁴ Most of the Jews were eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come. They

thought that the Messiah would free them from the Romans and would make Israel a great nation again. (Luke 2:38; 3:15) Many believed that the Messiah would establish a kingdom on earth in Israel. When that happened, all the Jews who lived in different places around the world would return to Israel. Even John the Baptist once asked Jesus: “Are you the Coming One, or are we to expect a different one?” (Matthew 11:2, 3) Perhaps John wondered whether someone else would come to free the Jews. Later, two disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus after he was resurrected. They said they had hoped that Jesus was the one who would free Israel. **(Read Luke 24:21.)** Soon after that, the apostles asked Jesus: “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”—Acts 1:6.

⁵ The Jews expected that the Messiah would solve their problems. That is probably why the people of Galilee wanted Jesus to become their king. They must have thought that he would be the best leader. He was an excellent speaker, could cure the sick, and could even provide food for those who were hungry. After Jesus fed about 5,000 men, the people were amazed. Jesus realized what they wanted to do. The Bible says: “Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and seize him to make him king, withdrew again to the

3, 4. (a) In Jesus’ day, what did many Jews want? (b) How did those feelings affect Jesus’ disciples?

5. (a) Why did the people of Galilee want Jesus to be their king? (b) How did Jesus correct their thinking?



Do you focus on the world's problems or on God's Kingdom?
(See paragraph 7)

mountain all alone.” (John 6:10-15) The next day, the people had likely calmed down. Jesus then explained to them that he had not come to provide for their material needs but to teach them about God’s Kingdom. He told them: “Work, not for the food that perishes, but for the food that remains for everlasting life.”—John 6:25-27.

⁶ Shortly before his death, Jesus realized that some of his followers believed that he would start ruling as king in Jerusalem. Jesus told them the illustration of the minas to help them understand that this would not happen. That illustration was about “a man of noble birth,” Jesus, who would have to go away for a long time. (Luke 19:11-13, 15) Jesus also clearly told the

6. How did Jesus make clear that he did not want political power on earth? (See opening picture.)

Roman official Pontius Pilate that he did not take sides in the world’s politics. Pilate asked Jesus: “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33) Pilate may have been afraid that Jesus would make people revolt against the Romans. But Jesus answered: “My Kingdom is no part of this world.” (John 18:36) Jesus refused to get involved in politics, because his Kingdom would be in heaven. He said that his work on earth was to “bear witness to the truth.”—**Read John 18:37.**

⁷ Jesus understood what his assignment was. When we understand what our assignment is, we will avoid supporting any political group, even in our heart. This is not always easy. One traveling overseer says that people in his area are becoming more extreme.

7. Why may it be difficult to avoid supporting political groups even in our heart?

They are very proud of their nation and believe that their lives would be better if their own people ruled over them. He adds: “Thankfully, the brothers have safeguarded their Christian unity by concentrating on preaching the good news of the Kingdom. They look to God to solve injustice and the other problems we face.”

HOW DID JESUS REMAIN NEUTRAL IN POLITICAL ISSUES?

⁸ When people see injustices happening around them, they often become more involved in politics. In Jesus’ day, paying taxes was an issue that caused many people to take sides in politics. In fact, Judas the Galilean rebelled against Rome because the Romans were registering people to make sure that they would pay taxes. And there were many taxes to pay, such as on possessions, land, and houses. Also, tax collectors were very corrupt, which made the problem worse. They sometimes paid government officials to get a position and then used their power to make a lot of money. Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, became rich because he made people pay a lot.—Luke 19:2, 8.

⁹ Jesus’ enemies tried to get him involved in the issue of paying taxes. They asked him about the “head tax,”

8. What injustice did many Jews suffer in Jesus’ day?

9, 10. (a) How did Jesus’ enemies try to get him involved in a political issue? (b) What do we learn from Jesus’ answer? (See opening picture.)

a tax of one denarius that all Jews had to pay. **(Read Matthew 22:16-18.)** The Jews really hated this tax because it reminded them that the Roman government controlled them. The “party followers of Herod,” that is, those who supported Herod’s political ideas, hoped that if Jesus said that they should not pay the tax, they could accuse him of being an enemy of the Roman Empire. But if Jesus said that they had to pay the tax, people might stop following him. So, what did Jesus do?

¹⁰ Jesus was careful to remain neutral on this issue. He said: “Pay back, therefore, Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God.” (Matthew 22:21) Jesus knew that many tax collectors were corrupt, but he did not focus on that. Instead, he focused on the real solution to mankind’s problems, God’s Kingdom. Jesus set the example for us. We should not take sides in any political issue, even if one side seems right and fair and the other side seems wrong and unjust. Christians focus on God’s Kingdom and on what God says is right. For that reason, we do not have strong opinions about injustices or speak out against them.—Matthew 6:33.

¹¹ Many of Jehovah’s Witnesses have been successful in getting rid of the strong political opinions they used to have. For example, before she learned the truth, one sister in Great Britain took social studies classes at a university and developed extreme political

11. How can we help others find true justice?

opinions. She says: “I wanted to champion the rights of black people, since we had suffered so much injustice. Although I was good at winning arguments, I still ended up feeling frustrated. I did not realize that the causes of racial injustice had to be uprooted from people’s hearts. When I began to study the Bible, however, I realized that I had to start with my own heart.” And it was a white sister who helped her change the way she felt in her heart. She adds: “Now I am serving as a regular pioneer in a sign-language congregation, and I am learning to reach out to all kinds of people.”

“RETURN YOUR SWORD TO ITS PLACE”

¹² In Jesus’ time, religious leaders often supported political groups. For example, the book *Daily Life in Palestine at the Time of Christ* says that the Jews were divided into religious groups that were similar to political parties. So Jesus warned his disciples: “Keep your eyes open; look out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” (Mark 8:15) When Jesus mentioned Herod, he was probably referring to the party followers of Herod. The other group, the Pharisees, wanted the Jews to become independent from the Roman Empire. According to Matthew’s account, Jesus also warned his disciples against the Sadducees. The Sadducees wanted Rome to continue ruling because this allowed them to have powerful positions. Je-

12. What kind of “leaven” did Jesus tell his disciples to avoid?

sus warned his disciples to avoid the “leaven,” or the teachings, of these three groups. (Matthew 16:6, 12) And it is interesting that Jesus gave this warning soon after the people wanted to make him king.

¹³ When religions take sides in political issues, it often leads to violence.

Jesus taught his disciples to remain completely neutral

Jesus taught his disciples to remain completely neutral. That is one reason why the chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus. They were afraid that the people would listen to him and stop following them. If that happened, they would lose their religious and political power. They said: “If we let him go on this way, they will all put faith in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (John 11:48) So High Priest Caiaphas organized a plan to kill Jesus. —John 11:49-53; 18:14.

¹⁴ Caiaphas waited until it was nighttime and then sent soldiers to arrest Jesus. But Jesus knew about the plan to kill him. So during his last meal with the apostles, he told them to get some

13, 14. (a) How did political and religious issues lead to violence and injustice? (b) Why is it never right to be violent, even when we are treated unjustly? (See opening picture.)

swords. Two swords would be enough to teach them an important lesson. (Luke 22:36-38) Later that night, a mob came to arrest Jesus, and Peter became so angry at the injustice that he took out a sword and attacked one of the men. (John 18:10) But Jesus told Peter: “Return your sword to its place, for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52, 53) What powerful lesson did Jesus teach his disciples? That they must be no part of the world. This is what Jesus had prayed for earlier that night. **(Read John 17:16.)** Only God has the right to fight injustice.

¹⁵ The sister in southern Europe mentioned earlier learned the same lesson. She says: “I have seen that violence does not bring justice. I saw that those who resort to violence often end up dead. And many others become embittered. I was so happy to learn from the Bible that only God can bring true justice to the earth. For the last 25 years, that is the message I have been preaching.” The brother in southern Africa replaced his spear with “the sword of the spirit,” God’s Word. (Ephesians 6:

15, 16. (a) How has God’s Word helped Christians to avoid conflict? (b) What contrast does Jehovah see when he looks at today’s world?

17) Now he preaches a message of peace to all kinds of people, no matter what tribe they are from. And after the sister in central Europe became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, she married a brother from an ethnic group she used to hate. All three made these changes because they wanted to be like Christ.

¹⁶ It is very important to make these changes! The Bible says that mankind is like the sea that tosses and turns and is never peaceful. (Isaiah 17:12; 57: 20, 21; Revelation 13:1) Political issues provoke people, divide them, and lead to violence. But we are peaceful and united. When Jehovah sees how divided people in the world are, he must be very happy to see how united his people are.—**Read Zephaniah 3:17.**

¹⁷ In this article, we have learned that we can promote unity in three ways: (1) We trust that God’s Kingdom will correct all injustices, (2) we never take sides in political issues, and (3) we reject violence. But something else that can threaten our unity is prejudice. In the next article, we will learn how we can overcome prejudice, as the early Christians did.

17. (a) What are three ways we can promote unity? (b) What will we consider in the next article?

SOME EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED

We are **neutral** when we do not take sides in political issues, even in our hearts. We are “no part of the world,” but we focus on God’s Kingdom and have faith that it will solve all our problems and correct all injustices



May We All Be One as Jehovah and Jesus Are One

“I make request . . . that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me.”—JOHN 17:20, 21.

JESUS was concerned about unity during his last meal with his apostles. When he was praying with them, he said that he wanted his disciples to be one, or united, just as he and his Father are united. **(Read John 17:20, 21.)** If Jesus’ disciples were united, this would prove to others that Jehovah had sent Jesus to the earth. People would identify Jesus’ true disciples by their love for one another, and this love would make them more united.—John 13:34, 35.

² We can understand why Jesus talked a lot about unity that night. He had noticed that his apostles were not completely united. For example, the apostles argued about “which one of them was considered to be the greatest,” as they had done before. (Luke 22:24-27; Mark 9:33, 34) Another time, James and John had asked Jesus to give them prominent places in the heavenly Kingdom, right next to him.—Mark 10:35-40.

1, 2. (a) What did Jesus ask for during his last prayer with his apostles? (b) Why might Jesus have been concerned about unity?

SONGS: 24, 99

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What sort of prejudices did Jesus’ first disciples have to overcome?

How did the first Christians prove that people can overcome prejudice and be united?

How can we add to the unity of God’s people today?

³ A desire for more power and authority was not the only thing that could have prevented Christ's disciples from being united. The people in Jesus' day were divided because of hatred and prejudice. Jesus' disciples would need to overcome those negative feelings. In this article, we will discuss these questions: What did Jesus do about prejudice? How did he help his followers learn to treat others impartially, or fairly, and become united? And how will Jesus' example and the things he taught help us to keep united?

PREJUDICE AGAINST JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS

⁴ Even Jesus experienced prejudice. When Philip told Nathanael that he had found the Messiah, Nathanael said: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) Nathanael probably knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as the prophecy at Micah 5:2 had said. He may have thought that Nazareth was not important enough to be the Messiah's hometown. Also, there were prominent Judeans who looked down on Jesus because he came from Galilee. (John 7:52) Many Judeans thought that people from Galilee were inferior. Other Jews tried to insult Jesus by calling him a Samaritan. (John 8:48) The Samaritans

3. What may have prevented Christ's disciples from being united, and what questions will we discuss?

4. Give examples of prejudice that Jesus experienced.

were from a different nation, and their religion was different from the religion of the Jews. Both Judeans and Galileans had little respect for the Samaritans and avoided them.—John 4:9.

⁵ The Jewish religious leaders also disrespected Jesus' followers. The Pharisees called them "accursed people." (John 7:47-49) The Pharisees

To remain united, Jesus' disciples would have to change their way of thinking

viewed anyone who did not study at the Jewish religious schools and who did not follow their traditions as worthless and ordinary. (Acts 4:13, footnote) Jesus and his disciples experienced prejudice because people at that time were proud of their religion, their position in society, and their race. This prejudice also influenced the disciples and their view of others. To remain united, they would have to change their way of thinking.

⁶ Today, the world around us is full of prejudice. People may be prejudiced against us, or we might be somewhat prejudiced against others. A sister who is now a pioneer in Australia says:

5. What prejudice did Jesus' disciples experience?

6. Use examples to show how prejudice can affect us.

“My hatred for white people grew as I focused on the injustice that was inflicted on the Aboriginal people—past and present.” Her hatred also grew because of the way some had mistreated her. A brother from Canada admits how he used to feel: “I thought French-speaking people were superior.” He says that as a result, he did not like those who spoke English.

⁷ As in Jesus’ day, feelings of prejudice today are often very strong and hard to change. What did Jesus do about such feelings? First, he never became prejudiced himself. He was always impartial. He preached to rich and poor, to Pharisees and Samaritans, and even to tax collectors and sinners. Second, Jesus taught his disciples and showed them by his example that they should not be suspicious of others or prejudiced against them.

OVERCOME PREJUDICE WITH LOVE AND HUMILITY

⁸ Jesus taught an important principle that is the basis for our unity. He told his disciples: “All of you are brothers.” (**Read Matthew 23:8, 9.**) In one sense, we are all brothers because we are all children of Adam. (Acts 17:26) Jesus explained that his disciples were also brothers and sisters because they all acknowledged Jehovah as their heavenly Father. (Matthew 12:50) And they had all become part of God’s family and were united by love and faith. That

is why the apostles called other Christians their brothers and sisters in their letters to the congregations.—Romans 1:13; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 3:13.*—See footnote.

⁹ After Jesus told his disciples that they should view one another as brothers and sisters, he emphasized that they had to be humble. (**Read Matthew 23: 11, 12.**) As we have already learned, at times pride divided the apostles. And in Jesus’ day, people were very proud of their race. Many Jews believed that they were better than others because they were children of Abraham. But John the Baptist told them: “God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.”—Luke 3:8.

¹⁰ Jesus taught that it is wrong for people to be proud of their race. He made that clear when a scribe asked him: “Who really is my neighbor?” To answer that question, Jesus told a story. A Jew was beaten by thieves and left on the road. Although some Jews passed by this man, they did not help him. But a Samaritan felt sorry for the Jew and took care of him. Jesus ended his story by telling the scribe that he needed to be like that Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus showed that a

* The term “brothers” can include sisters in the congregation. Paul wrote his letter to the “brothers” in Rome, but this clearly included sisters, because he mentioned some sisters by name. (Romans 16:3, 6, 12) For many years, *The Watchtower* has called Christians in the congregation ‘brothers and sisters.’

7. What did Jesus do about prejudice?

8. What important principle is the basis for our unity? Explain.

9, 10. (a) Why did the Jews not have reason to be proud of their race? (b) How did Jesus teach that it is wrong to look down on people from a different race? (See opening picture.)

Samaritan could teach the Jews what it meant to love their neighbor.

¹¹ Before Jesus went to heaven, he told his disciples to preach in “all Judea and Samaria, and to the most distant part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) In order to do that, Jesus’ disciples would have to overcome their pride and prejudice. Jesus had often talked about good qualities in foreigners, and this prepared his disciples to preach to all nations. For example, he praised a foreign army officer who had outstanding faith. (Matthew 8:5-10) In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus explained how Jehovah had helped foreigners, such as the Phoenician widow from Zarephath and the Syrian leper Naaman. (Luke 4:25-27) Jesus also preached to a Samaritan woman and even spent two days in a Samaritan town because the people were interested in his message.—John 4:21-24, 40.

THE FIRST CHRISTIANS HAD TO FIGHT AGAINST PREJUDICE

¹² It was not easy for the apostles to overcome their prejudice. They were surprised that Jesus was willing to teach a Samaritan woman. (John 4:9, 27) Why? Perhaps because Jewish religious leaders would not talk to a woman in public, and certainly not to a Samaritan woman with a bad reputation.

11. Why did Jesus’ disciples need to be impartial, and how did he help them understand that?
12, 13. (a) How did the apostles react when Jesus taught a Samaritan woman? (See opening picture.) (b) What shows that James and John did not completely understand what Jesus was trying to teach them?

The apostles told Jesus to eat, but Jesus had enjoyed talking to this woman so much that eating was not important to him. God wanted him to preach, and doing what his Father wanted, even preaching to a Samaritan woman, was like food for him.—John 4:31-34.

¹³ James and John did not understand this important lesson. When the disciples were traveling with Jesus through Samaria, they looked for a place to spend the night in a Samaritan village. But the Samaritans would not let them sleep there. James and John became so angry that they asked Jesus if he wanted them to send fire from heaven to destroy the entire village. Jesus strongly corrected them. (Luke 9:51-56) Maybe James and John would not have become so angry if this had happened in their home area of Galilee. They were angry probably because they were prejudiced. Later, when John was preaching to the Samaritans and many listened to him, he might have felt embarrassed about the way he had reacted before.—Acts 8:14, 25.

¹⁴ Not long after Pentecost in the year 33, there was a problem of discrimination in the congregation. When the brothers gave food to needy widows, they overlooked the widows who spoke Greek. (Acts 6:1) This may have happened because of prejudice about language. The apostles solved the problem quickly. They chose seven qualified brothers to distribute the food fairly.

14. How was a problem of prejudice solved?

All of those brothers had Greek names, which may have comforted the offended widows.

¹⁵ In the year 36, Jesus' disciples began to preach to people from all nations. Before that, the apostle Peter had usually spent his time only with Jews. Then God made it clear that Christians should not be partial, and Peter preached to Cornelius, a Roman soldier. **(Read Acts 10:28, 34, 35.)** After that, Peter spent time with and ate with non-Jewish Christians. Years later, though, in the city of Antioch, he stopped eating with non-Jewish Christians. (Galatians 2:11-14) Paul corrected Peter, and Peter accepted the correction. How do we know? When Peter wrote his first letter to the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in Asia Minor,

15. How did Peter learn to show impartiality to everyone? (See opening picture.)

he talked about how important it is to love **all** our brothers.—1 Peter 1:1; 2:17.

¹⁶ Clearly, because of Jesus' example, the apostles learned to love “all sorts of men.” (John 12:32; 1 Timothy 4:10) Even though it took time, they changed the way they viewed people. In fact, the first Christians became known for their love for one another. About the year 200, the writer Tertullian quoted what other people said about Christians: “They love one another,” and “They are ready even to die for one another.” Because those Christians put on “the new personality,” they learned to view all people as equal, the way God views them.—Colossians 3:10, 11.

¹⁷ Today, it may also take time for us

16. What did the first Christians become known for?

17. How can we get rid of any feelings of prejudice? Give examples.

We are united
and love one another
because we seek “the
wisdom from above”
(See paragraph 19)



to get rid of any feelings of prejudice. A sister in France describes how difficult this has been for her. She says: “Jehovah has taught me what love means, what sharing means, what loving people of all kinds means. But I am still learning to overcome prejudice toward others, and it is not always easy. That is why I continue praying about it.” A sister in Spain explains that sometimes she still has to fight negative feelings about a certain group of people. She says: “I succeed most of the time. But I know that I need to keep on fighting. Thanks to Jehovah, I am happy to belong to a united family.” All of us need to think carefully about how we feel. Do we too need to get rid of some feelings of prejudice?

WHEN LOVE GROWS, PREJUDICE DISAPPEARS

¹⁸ It is good for us to remember that we all used to be far away from God. (Ephesians 2:12) But Jehovah drew us to him with love. (Hosea 11:4; John 6:44) And Christ welcomed us. He made it possible for us to become part of God’s family. **(Read Romans 15:7.)** Even though we are imperfect, Jesus has kindly accepted us, so we

18, 19. (a) What reasons do we have to welcome everyone? (b) How can we do this?

should never even think of rejecting anyone!

¹⁹ As we get closer to the end of this wicked system, people will become more divided, prejudiced, and hateful. (Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:13) But as Jehovah’s people, we seek “the wisdom from above,” which helps us to be impartial and promotes peace. (James 3:17, 18) We are happy to make friends with people from other countries, accept the way they do things, and maybe even learn their language. When we do this, we enjoy peace “like a river” and justice “like the waves of the sea.”—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

²⁰ When the sister from Australia studied the Bible, all her strong prejudice and hatred slowly disappeared. Love changed the way she thought and felt. The French-speaking brother from Canada says that he now realizes that people often hate others simply because they do not know them. He learned that “people’s qualities do not depend on their place of birth.” He even married a sister who speaks English! These examples prove that love overcomes prejudice. Love unites us with a bond that cannot be broken.—Colossians 3:14.

20. What happens when love changes the way we think and feel?

SOME EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED

Prejudice is the negative feeling that others are inferior because of their race, culture, religion, or language. Prejudice is often caused by pride and prevents people from being united



Let God's Laws and Principles Train Your Conscience

"I ponder over your reminders."—PSALM 119:99.

JEHOVAH gave humans something special. It is our conscience. This is one thing that makes us superior to animals. How do we know that Adam and Eve had a conscience? After they disobeyed God, they hid from him. Their conscience bothered them.

² Our conscience is an inner sense of right and wrong that can guide us in life. A person whose conscience is not well-trained is like a ship with a broken compass. Winds and ocean currents can send that ship in the wrong direction. But a compass that works well will help the captain keep the ship on course. In a similar way, if we train our conscience correctly, it can guide us well.

³ If our conscience is not trained correctly, it will not

1. What is one thing that makes us superior to animals?
2. How is our conscience like a compass? (See opening picture.)
3. What can happen if we do not train our conscience correctly?

SONGS: 127, 88

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How is your conscience like a compass?

Why is it important that we learn to love God's laws?

How does our conscience help us to become mature?

warn us against doing what is wrong. (1 Timothy 4:1, 2) It may even convince us that “bad is good.” (Isaiah 5:20) Jesus told his followers: “The hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he has offered a sacred service to God.” (John 16:2) That is what those who murdered the disciple Stephen thought. (Acts 6:8, 12; 7:54-60) Throughout history, many religious people have committed evil crimes, such as murder, and claimed they did so for God. But in reality, what they have done is against God’s laws. (Exodus 20:13) Obviously, their conscience has not guided them correctly!

⁴ So how can we make sure that our conscience works properly? Laws and principles from the Bible are “beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16) We must study the Bible regularly, think deeply about what it says, and apply it in our life. In this way, we will learn to think more and more as Jehovah thinks. Then we can be sure that our conscience will guide us well. Let us discuss how we can use Jehovah’s laws and principles to train our conscience.

LET GOD’S LAWS TRAIN YOU

⁵ If we want God’s laws to help us, we must do more than simply read them

4. How can we make sure that our conscience works properly?

5, 6. How do God’s laws help us?

or know what they are. We need to love and respect them. The Bible tells us: “Hate what is bad, and love what is good.” (Amos 5:15) But how can we do that? We need to learn to view things the way Jehovah views them. Think of it this way. Imagine that you are not sleeping well, and your doctor instructs you to eat healthier food, get more exercise, and make other changes in your way of life. You follow his advice, and it works! How do you feel about the doctor’s instructions?

⁶ In a similar way, our Creator has given us laws to protect us from the bad results of sin and to improve our life. For example, the Bible teaches us that we should not lie, cheat, steal, commit immorality, act violently, or have anything to do with demonism. **(Read Proverbs 6:16-19; Revelation 21:8)** When we experience the good results that come from obeying Jehovah, our love for him and his laws grows.

⁷ We do not need to suffer the consequences of breaking God’s laws in order to learn what is right and what is wrong. We can learn from the mistakes that others made in the past. These examples are recorded in the Bible. Proverbs 1:5 says: “A wise person listens and takes in more instruction.” This instruction comes from God and is the best instruction possible! For example, think of how much David suffered after he disobeyed Jehovah and committed immorality with Bath-

7. How do Bible accounts help us?



A mature Christian respects the conscience of others
(See paragraphs 11, 12)

sheba. (2 Samuel 12:7-14) When you read that account, ask yourself: ‘How could David have avoided these problems? What would I do in a similar situation? If I was tempted to commit immorality, would I be like David or like Joseph?’ (Genesis 39:11-15) If we think carefully about the terrible results of sin, we will “hate what is bad” more and more.

⁸ We stay far away from things that God hates. But what should we do if we are in a situation for which there is no

8, 9. (a) What does our conscience help us to do? (b) How does our conscience work with Jehovah’s principles?

specific law in the Bible? How will we know what God wants us to do? If we have allowed the Bible to train our conscience, we will make a wise decision.

⁹ Because Jehovah loves us, he has provided principles that can guide our conscience. He explains: “I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One guiding you in the way you should walk.” (Isaiah 48:17, 18) When we think deeply about Bible principles and allow them to touch our heart, we can correct and adjust our conscience. This naturally helps us to make wise decisions.

LET GOD'S PRINCIPLES GUIDE YOU

¹⁰ A principle is a basic truth that guides our thinking, helping us to make good decisions. Knowing Jehovah's principles helps us to understand how he thinks and why he gives us certain laws. Jesus used principles to teach his disciples that attitudes and actions have consequences. For example, he taught that anger can lead to violence and that immoral thoughts can lead to adultery. (Matthew 5:21, 22, 27,

Are you willing
to make a
personal sacrifice
to help others?

28) When we allow Jehovah's principles to guide us, our conscience will be well-trained, and we will make choices that bring honor to God.—1 Corinthians 10:31.

¹¹ Even when Christians train their conscience using the Bible, they can still come to different conclusions on certain subjects. An example of this could be whether to drink alcohol. The Bible does not say that it is wrong to drink alcohol, but it does warn us that we should not drink too much or get

drunk. (Proverbs 20:1; 1 Timothy 3:8) Does this mean that as long as a Christian does not drink too much, he does not need to think about anything else when he makes his decision? No. Even if his own conscience allows him to drink alcohol, he still needs to think about the conscience of others.

¹² Paul showed that we need to respect the conscience of others when he wrote: "It is best not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything over which your brother stumbles." (Romans 14:21) So even though we have the right to drink alcohol, we would be willing to sacrifice that right if we knew that drinking it would bother the conscience of another Christian. Perhaps a brother was addicted to alcohol before he learned the truth and has decided not to drink at all. We would not want to do anything that would cause him to return to his old habits. (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) If that brother was a guest in our home, would we try to make him drink alcohol, even though he refused it? Of course not!

¹³ When Timothy was a young man, he agreed to get circumcised even though this was painful. He knew that circumcision was important to the Jews to whom he was going to preach. Timothy, like Paul, did not want to offend anyone. (Acts 16:3; 1 Corinthians

10. What is a principle, and how did Jesus use principles in his teaching?

11. How can one conscience be different from another?

12. How can the words at Romans 14:21 help us to respect the conscience of others?

13. How did Timothy respect the conscience of others in order to help them accept the good news?

9:19-23) Are you also willing to make a personal sacrifice to help others?

“PRESS ON TO MATURITY”

¹⁴ We should all want to move “beyond the primary doctrine about the Christ” and “press on to maturity.” (Hebrews 6:1) We do not become mature Christians just because we have been in the truth for many years. It takes effort to become mature. We need to keep growing in our knowledge and understanding. So we need to read the Bible every day. (Psalm 1:1-3) As you read the Bible daily, you will better understand Jehovah’s laws and principles.

¹⁵ What is the most important law for Christians? It is the law of love. Jesus

14, 15. (a) How do we become mature?
(b) How do mature Christians treat others?

told his disciples: “By this all will know that you are my disciples—if you have love among yourselves.” (John 13:35) Love is called “the royal law” and “the law’s fulfillment.” (James 2:8; Romans 13:10) We are not surprised that love is so important, because the Bible says that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) For God, love is more than just a feeling. He proves his love by his actions. John wrote: “By this the love of God was revealed in our case, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might gain life through him.” (1 John 4:9) When we show love for Jehovah, Jesus, our brothers, and other people, we prove that we are mature Christians.—Matthew 22:37-39.

¹⁶ As we become mature Christians,

16. As we become mature Christians, why do we value principles more and more?

Our conscience becomes
a more reliable guide
when we reason on
Bible principles
(See paragraph 16)



we value principles more and more. Laws usually apply to a specific situation, but principles apply to many different situations. For example, a young child does not understand how dangerous it is to make friends with bad people, so his parents need to make rules to protect him. (1 Corinthians 15:33) But as that child becomes mature, he learns how to reason on Bible principles. These principles will help him to choose good friends. **(Read 1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20.)** The more we reason on Bible principles, the more reliable our conscience becomes. We understand more clearly what God would like us to do in any situation.

¹⁷ We have everything we need to make decisions that please Jehovah. In the Bible, we find laws and principles that help us to become “fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Bible principles help us to understand how Jehovah thinks. But it takes effort to find them. (Ephesians 5:17) To help us, we have the *Watch Tower Publications In-*

dex, the *Research Guide for Jehovah’s Witnesses*, the *Watchtower Library*, the *Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY*, and the *JW Library* app. When we use these tools, we will benefit from our personal and family study.

A BIBLE-TRAINED CONSCIENCE BRINGS BLESSINGS

¹⁸ Our life improves so much when we apply Jehovah’s laws and principles! Psalm 119:97-100 says: “How I do love your law! I ponder over it all day long. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, because it is with me forever. I have more insight than all my teachers, because I ponder over your reminders. I act with more understanding than older men, because I observe your orders.” When we take time to think deeply about God’s laws and principles, we will act with more wisdom and understanding. And when we use his laws and principles to train our conscience, we will reach “the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of the Christ.” —Ephesians 4:13.

17. Why can we say that we have everything we need to make wise decisions?

18. What happens when we apply Jehovah’s laws and principles in our life?

SOME EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED

A **law** is a clear statement of what should or should not be done.

A **principle** is the reason or thinking behind the law. When we understand the principle behind a law, we understand the reason why Jehovah gave the law. In other words, we try to understand Jehovah’s thinking



“Let Your Light Shine” to Glorify Jehovah

“Let your light shine before men, so that they may . . . give glory to your Father.”—MATTHEW 5:16.

WE ARE so excited to hear how God’s servants are letting their light shine! Last year, Jehovah’s people conducted more than 10,000,000 Bible studies. And millions of newly interested ones came to the Memorial and learned about Jehovah’s loving gift of the ransom.—1 John 4:9.

² All over the earth, Jehovah’s Witnesses speak many different languages. But this does not stop us from praising Jehovah as one united family. (Revelation 7:9) No matter what language we speak or where we live, we can shine “as illuminators in the world.”—Philippians 2:15.

³ Our ministry, our Christian unity, and our sense of urgency all bring glory to Jehovah. How can we let our light shine in these three areas?—**Read Matthew 5:14-16.**

1. What special reason do we have to be happy?
- 2, 3. (a) What does not stop us from “shining as illuminators”?
(b) What will we discuss in this article?

SONGS: 77, 59

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

In addition to preaching, how else can we let our light shine?

How does our Christian unity make others want to learn the truth?

Why is it so important that we keep on the watch?

HELP OTHERS TO WORSHIP JEHOVAH

⁴ Preaching and making disciples is an important way we let our light shine. (Matthew 28:19, 20) In 1925, the article “Light in the Darkness” stated that during the last days, no one could be faithful to the Lord if he did not take “the opportunity of letting his light shine.” Then it said: “He must do this by telling the good news to the peoples of the earth, and by conforming himself to the ways of light.” (*The Watch Tower*, June 1, 1925) In addition

Our preaching and our conduct bring glory to Jehovah

to our preaching, our conduct brings glory to Jehovah. Many people notice us when we preach. When we smile at them and say a warm hello, it helps them think well of us and the God we worship.

⁵ Jesus told his disciples: “When you enter the house, greet the household.” (Matthew 10:12) In the area where Jesus preached, it was the custom for people to invite strangers into their home. In many places today, this is no longer the custom. People are often nervous or irritated when they see a

stranger at their door. But if we are friendly and kind, they may feel more relaxed. When you are doing public witnessing using a literature cart, have you ever noticed that if you smile and greet people in a friendly way, they feel more comfortable coming and taking a publication? They may even want to start a conversation!

⁶ An older couple in England can no longer preach from house to house as much as they used to because their health is not very good. So they set up a table with literature just outside their house. They live near a school, so they put out literature that will appeal to the parents who come to pick up their children. Some parents have taken these publications, including *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volumes 1 and 2. A pioneer sister often joins the couple. The parents notice that she is friendly and that the couple really want to help others. One parent has even started to study the Bible.

⁷ Recently, many have had to flee from their homeland and now live in other countries as refugees. What can you do to help refugees in your area learn about Jehovah? First, you could learn how to say hello in their language. In addition, by using the *JW Language* app, you could learn a few phrases that might make them want to stop and talk with you. Then, you

4, 5. (a) In addition to preaching, how can we let our light shine? (b) What good results come from kindness? (See opening picture.)

6. What helps one older couple stay active in the ministry?

7. How can you help refugees in your area?

could show them videos and publications that are available in their language on jw.org.—Deuteronomy 10:19.

⁸ Jehovah gives us exactly what we need to be effective when we preach. For example, what we learn at the Life and Ministry Meeting helps us feel more confident about making return visits and starting Bible studies.

⁹ When visitors come to our meetings, they are often impressed with the comments that our children make. You can teach your children to comment in their own words. Some people have been drawn to the truth when they

8, 9. (a) How do our midweek meetings help us? (b) How can parents help their children to improve their comments at meetings?

heard children express their faith in a simple and sincere way.—1 Corinthians 14:25.

STRENGTHEN UNITY

¹⁰ When we try hard to train our family to work together in unity and peace, we bring glory to Jehovah. For example, if you are a parent, arrange to have a regular Family Worship evening. Many families watch JW Broadcasting together, and afterward they discuss how they can use what they learned. Remember that the guidance a young child needs is different from the guidance a teenager needs.

10. How can family worship help families to be more united?

It is good for us to spend time with older ones
(See paragraph 11)



Do all you can to help each member of your family really benefit from family worship.—Psalm 148:12, 13.

¹¹ Even if you are young, you can help to make everyone in the congregation feel needed. One way is by making friends with older brothers and sisters. Ask them what has helped them to keep serving Jehovah over many years. They can teach you very valuable lessons. This will encourage both them and you! And all of us, whether

Can you get to know the brothers in your congregation better?

we are young or old, can make visitors to our Kingdom Hall feel welcome. You can say hello, give them a nice smile, help them find a seat, and introduce them to others. Make them feel at home.

¹² If you are assigned to conduct meetings for field service, you can help older ones keep their light shining brightly. Make sure that they have suitable territory. Arrange for younger people to work with them. Older brothers and sisters and those with health problems often feel discouraged that they cannot preach as much as they used to. But they will feel much

11-13. How can we help our congregation to be more united?

better when they know that you care about them and understand their situation. No matter how old they are or how long they have been in the truth, your kindness can encourage them to keep preaching with zeal.—Leviticus 19:32.

¹³ The Israelites enjoyed worshipping Jehovah together. The psalmist wrote: “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (**Read Psalm 133:1, 2.**) He compared this unity to anointing oil, which refreshes the skin and smells good. In a similar way, we can refresh our brothers and sisters by being pleasant and kind. This makes the congregation more united. Can you get to know the brothers in your congregation better? —2 Corinthians 6:11-13; footnote.

¹⁴ Your light can shine no matter where you are. Your kindness could make your neighbors want to learn more about Jehovah. Ask yourself: ‘What do my neighbors think about me? Is my home neat and clean? Does it make the neighborhood look better? Am I a helpful neighbor?’ Ask other Witnesses how their kindness and good example have affected their relatives, neighbors, workmates, or schoolmates.—Ephesians 5:9.

KEEP ON THE WATCH

¹⁵ If we want to keep our light shining brightly, we need to be aware of the

14. How can you let your light shine in the area where you live?

15. Why do we need to keep on the watch?



During shepherding visits, we can benefit from God's wisdom
(See paragraphs 18, 19)

time in which we live. Several times, Jesus told his disciples: "Keep on the watch." (Matthew 24:42; 25:13; 26:41) If we feel that the "great tribulation" is still far away, we will not be alert to every opportunity to help others learn about Jehovah. (Matthew 24:21) Instead of shining brightly, our light will gradually become weaker and may even disappear.

¹⁶ We need to keep on the watch now

16, 17. What can you do to keep your sense of urgency?

more than ever before. Conditions in the world continue to get worse. But we know that the end will come at the exact time Jehovah has chosen. (Matthew 24:42-44) In the meantime, we need to be patient and focus on our future. Read the Bible every day, and never stop praying to Jehovah. (1 Peter 4:7) Learn from brothers and sisters who have served Jehovah for years. For example, you can read life experiences, such as the article "Seventy Years of Holding On to the Skirt of a Jew," published in

The Watchtower of April 15, 2012, pages 18-21.

¹⁷ Stay busy serving Jehovah. Do kind things for others, and spend time with your brothers and sisters. Then you will be happy, and it will seem that time is passing quickly. (Ephesians 5:16) Jehovah's servants have accomplished so much over the past one hundred years. And today, we are busier than ever. Jehovah's work has grown as we could never have imagined. Our light is shining brightly!

¹⁸ Even though we make many mistakes, Jehovah allows us to serve him. To help us, he provides "gifts in men," the congregation elders. (**Read Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12.**) So when the elders visit you, take advantage of the time you have with them to learn from their wisdom and advice.

¹⁹ For example, a couple in England had some difficulties in their marriage, and they asked two elders for help. The wife felt that her husband was not taking the lead in serving Jehovah. The husband felt that he was not a

good teacher and admitted that he was not arranging for regular family worship. The elders helped the couple think about Jesus' example. They encouraged the husband to imitate the way Jesus took care of his disciples. They encouraged the wife to be patient with her husband. They also made some suggestions about how the couple could have family worship with their two children. (Ephesians 5:21-29) The husband worked hard to become a better family head. The elders encouraged him not to give up and to keep relying on Jehovah's spirit. The love and kindness that the elders showed really helped that family!

²⁰ "Happy is everyone who fears Jehovah, who walks in His ways." (Psalm 128:1) You will be happy when you let your light shine. So teach others about God, do all you can to help your family and congregation be united, and keep on the watch. Others will see your good example and will also want to give glory to our Father, Jehovah.—Matthew 5:16.

18, 19. How can elders help us to serve Jehovah with zeal? Give an example.

20. What will be the result when you let your light shine?

SOME EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED

We **let our light shine** by our preaching and our good conduct, which bring glory to Jehovah

PEACE

How Can You Find It?

LOVE

JOY

PEACE

PATIENCE

KINDNESS

GOODNESS

FAITH

MILDNESS

SELF-CONTROL

WE LIVE in a stressful world, so it can be difficult to find peace. Even when we have some peace, we can easily lose it. What does the Bible say that can help us to find true and lasting peace? And how can we help others to do so?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

In order to find real peace, we need to feel safe and protected. We need to have good friends, and most important, we need to draw close to God. How can we do that?

Jehovah's commands and principles are always good for us. When we obey them, we show that we trust in Jehovah and want to have a peaceful relationship with him. (Jeremiah 17:7, 8; James 2:22, 23) Then Jehovah will draw close to us and give us peace of mind. Isaiah 32:17 says: "The re-

sult of true righteousness will be peace, and the fruitage of true righteousness will be lasting tranquillity and security." We can find real peace when we obey Jehovah willingly.—Isaiah 48:18, 19.

Jehovah has also given us a precious gift to help us develop lasting peace. This gift is his holy spirit.—Acts 9:31.

GOD'S SPIRIT HELPS US DEVELOP PEACE

The apostle Paul said that peace is part of "the fruitage of the spirit." (Galatians 5: 22, 23) Since God's spirit produces peace, we need to allow holy spirit to guide us if we want peace. How can we do this?

First, we need to read God's Word regularly. (Psalm 1:2, 3) As we think deeply about what we read, holy spirit helps us to understand what Jehovah thinks

Anxiety takes away
our peace



about various subjects. For example, we learn how he maintains his peace and why peace is so important to him. When we apply what we learn from the Bible, we will have more peace in our lives.—Proverbs 3:1, 2.

Second, we must pray for God’s holy spirit. (Luke 11:13) Jehovah promises those who ask for his help: “The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6, 7) When we stay close to Jehovah and rely on his spirit, he will give us real peace of mind.—Romans 15:13.

The Bible has helped many people make changes in their lives, and now they enjoy peace with Jehovah, peace of mind, and peace with others. How have they made these changes?

HOW SOME FOUND TRUE PEACE

Before coming into the truth, some of our brothers and sisters were angry and even violent. But they worked hard to change, and now they are more kind, patient, and peaceable with others.* (See footnote.) (Proverbs 29:22) See how a brother named David and a sister named Rachel made such changes in their personalities.

Before **David** came into the truth, he was often critical of others and spoke to his family in a harsh way. But then he realized that he needed to change. How did he find peace? David says, “I began applying Bible principles in my life, and as a result, the respect between me and my family grew.”

Rachel was affected by the environment she grew up in. She explains, “Even now, I

* We will discuss kindness in a future article in this series on the fruitage of God’s holy spirit.



We can find peace when we apply Bible principles and pray for God’s spirit



struggle with feelings of anger because I was brought up in an angry household.” What helped Rachel to find peace? She says, “Prayerful reliance on Jehovah.”

David and Rachel are just two examples of people who now have peace because they applied Bible principles and relied on holy spirit. Even though we live in an angry world, we can still have peace of mind. This will make it easier to get along with our family members and our brothers and sisters in the congregation. But Jehovah tells us to “be peaceable with **all** men.” (Romans 12:18) Is that really possible? And why should we try to have peace with others?

WORK TO HAVE PEACE WITH OTHERS

In our field ministry, we preach a peaceful message about God’s Kingdom. (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Matthew 24:14) Many like this message and accept it. As a result, they no longer feel helpless or angry because of what is going on in the world. They now have real hope for the future, and this makes them want to “seek peace.”—Psalm 34:14.

Still, not everyone likes our message, at least not at first. (John 3:19) No matter how people react, God gives us his spirit. It helps us to remain peaceful and respectful when we preach. In this way, we follow Jesus’ advice: “When you enter the house, greet the household. If the house is deserving, let the peace you wish it come upon it; but if it is not deserving, let the peace from you return upon you.” (Matthew 10:11-13) When we have this attitude, we can remain peaceful no matter what others say or do. And we remember that we may still have the chance to help those people in the future.

We also promote peace by being respectful when we speak with government

officials, even if they oppose our work. For example, in one African country, the government would not allow us to build Kingdom Halls. Our brothers knew that they should try to solve this problem in a peaceful way. They sent a brother who had once been a missionary in that country to see the High Commissioner in London, England, and tell him about the peaceful work that Jehovah’s Witnesses do.

The brother said: “When I arrived at the reception desk, I concluded by the receptionist’s manner of dress that she belonged to a tribe whose language I had learned. So I greeted her in her own tongue. Taken by surprise, she asked me, ‘What is the reason for your visit?’ I politely told her that I wished to see the High Commissioner. She telephoned the official, who came out to meet me and greeted me in the local language. After that, he carefully listened to me as I explained to him the peaceful activities of the Witnesses.”

After the High Commissioner heard what the brother said, he understood our work better and he was not as prejudiced as before. A while later, that government changed its decision and allowed Jehovah’s Witnesses to build Kingdom Halls. The brothers were so happy! Clearly, when we treat others with respect, we promote peace.

ENJOY PEACE FOREVER

Today, Jehovah’s people enjoy a spiritual paradise, as they worship him in a peaceful environment. Each of us can add to this peace by working to develop peace in our own life. Then we can be sure that Jehovah is pleased with us. And in his new world, he will give us peace that lasts forever.—2 Peter 3:13, 14.

He Could Have Had GOD'S FAVOR



WE SERVE Jehovah and want his favor and his blessing. But how can we have God's favor? In Bible times, some people who had committed serious sins regained God's favor, or approval. Others had good qualities but in the end lost God's favor. So we might ask, "What is Jehovah looking for in each of us?" The example of Rehoboam, a king of Judah, can help us find the answer.

A BAD START

Rehoboam's father, Solomon, was the king of Israel for 40 years. (1 Kings 11:42) After his father died, Rehoboam traveled from Jerusalem to Shechem to become king. (2 Chronicles 10:1) Was he afraid to become the next king? Solomon was known for his great wisdom. Soon, Rehoboam would have to prove whether he was wise enough to solve a difficult problem.

The Israelites felt oppressed and sent representatives to tell Rehoboam what they wanted him to do: "Your father made our yoke harsh.

But if you make the harsh service of your father easier and you lighten the heavy yoke he put on us, we will serve you."—2 Chronicles 10:3, 4.

Rehoboam had a difficult choice to make. If he did what the people wanted, he and his family and those in the palace might have to live without some of the luxuries they had been used to. However, if he refused the people's request, they might rebel against him. What did he do? He first talked to the older men who had helped his father. They told him to listen to the people. But then Rehoboam spoke to those of his own age and decided to treat the people harshly. He told them: "I will make your yoke heavier, and I will add to it. My father punished you with whips, but I will do so with scourges."—2 Chronicles 10:6-14.

Do you see a lesson for us? Today, we have many older ones with us who have served Jehovah for many years and who can help us make good decisions. Let us be wise and listen to them.—Job 12:12.

"THEY OBEYED THE WORD OF JEHOVAH"

Rehoboam now gathered his army to fight the rebellious tribes. However, Jehovah sent the prophet Shemaiah to tell them: "You must not go up and fight against your Israelite brothers. Each one of you must return to his house, for I

have caused this to happen.”—1 Kings 12:21-24.*
—See footnote.

Was it easy for Rehoboam to listen to Jehovah? What would people think of their new king? He had told them that he would punish them “with scourges,” but now he was not going to do anything about this shocking rebellion! (Compare 2 Chronicles 13:7.) Still, no matter what the people thought of him, the king and his armies “obeyed the word of Jehovah and went back home, as Jehovah had told them.”

What is the lesson for us? It is always wise to obey God, even if people ridicule us for doing so. God will always bless us when we are obedient. —Deuteronomy 28:2.

Was Rehoboam blessed for his obedience? Rehoboam still ruled the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and he decided to build new cities in those territories. He also made some cities stronger “to a very great degree.” (2 Chronicles 11:5-12) More important, for a time he obeyed Jehovah’s laws. Because the ten-tribe kingdom started to worship idols, many from there traveled to Jerusalem to support Rehoboam and true worship. (2 Chronicles 11:16, 17) So because Rehoboam obeyed Jehovah, his kingdom became stronger.

REHOBAM’S SIN AND REPENTANCE

When Rehoboam’s kingdom became strong, he did something strange. He stopped obeying Jehovah’s law and began to worship false gods! But why? Did his mother, who was an Ammonitess, influence his decision? (1 Kings 14:21) We do not know, but the nation followed his bad example. So Jehovah allowed King Shishak of Egypt to capture many cities in the kingdom of Judah. This happened even though Rehoboam had made those cities very strong!—1 Kings 14:22-24; 2 Chronicles 12:1-4.

The situation became worse when Shishak and his army came to attack Jerusalem, where Reho-

boam ruled. At this point, the prophet Shemaiah gave Rehoboam and his princes this message from God: “You have abandoned me, so I have also abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.” How did Rehoboam react to that discipline? In a very positive way! The Bible says: “The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said: ‘Jehovah is righteous.’” Therefore, Jehovah rescued Rehoboam, and Jerusalem was not destroyed.—2 Chronicles 12:5-7, 12.

After that, Rehoboam continued to rule over the kingdom of Judah. Before he died, he gave many gifts to his sons. He probably wanted to make sure that they would not rebel against their brother Abijah, who would be the next king. (2 Chronicles 11:21-23) By doing that, Rehoboam acted more wisely than he had when he was younger.

WAS REHOBAM GOOD OR BAD?

Even though Rehoboam did some good things, the Bible says about his rule: “He did what was bad.” Why? Because “he had not resolved in his heart to search for Jehovah.” So Jehovah was not pleased with him.—2 Chronicles 12:14.

What can we learn from the life of Rehoboam? He obeyed God sometimes. And he did some good things for Jehovah’s people. But he did not have a close relationship with Jehovah, and he did not have a strong desire to please him. Thus, he stopped doing the right thing and started worshipping false gods. You might wonder: ‘When Rehoboam accepted Jehovah’s correction, was it really because he felt deeply sorry for his mistakes and wanted to please God? Or was it just because of what others said he should do?’ (2 Chronicles 11:3, 4; 12:6) Later in life he again did what was bad. He was very different from his grandfather King David! It is true that David made mistakes. But he genuinely repented from the serious sins he committed. And he loved Jehovah and true worship all his life.—1 Kings 14:8; Psalm 51:1, 17; 63:1.

* Because Solomon was unfaithful, God had already said that the kingdom would be split in two.—1 Kings 11:31.



Rehoboam did not have a close relationship with Jehovah, as David did

We can learn much from this Bible account. It is commendable when people provide for their families and do good things for others. But to have Jehovah's favor, we must worship him in a way that pleases him, and we must have a strong relationship with him.

To reach that goal, we need a deep love for Jehovah. Just as we keep a fire alive by putting more wood on it, we keep our love for God alive by studying his Word regularly, meditating on it, and persevering in prayer. (Psalm 1:2; Romans 12:12) And this love will motivate us to please Jehovah in all that we do. It will also motivate us to feel truly sorry when we make mistakes and to ask Jehovah to forgive us. Then we will not be like Rehoboam but will remain faithful to true worship.—Jude 20, 21.

