

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



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JAPAN

COVER: Street witnessing at a train station in Tokyo. Over 2.8 million commuters travel to Tokyo every day. Efforts are being made to reach people missed in our house-to-house preaching work

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STUDY ARTICLES

■ “Be Vigilant With a View to Prayers”

As the end of Satan’s wicked system of things nears, it is imperative that we not fall asleep spiritually. This article discusses how being vigilant with a view to prayers can help us to stay awake.

■ How Can We Maintain “a Waiting Attitude”?

In this article, find out what we can learn from the patience of the prophet Micah. Examine what events will signal the end of our period of waiting for Jehovah to act against this wicked system. Also take note of how we can show appreciation for God’s patience.

■ Seven Shepherds, Eight Dukes—What They Mean for Us Today

The account of Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s day contains practical lessons for us. The material in this article has special significance for those entrusted with shepherding the congregation.

■ Obey Jehovah’s Shepherds

■ Shepherds, Imitate the Greatest Shepherds

The first of these two articles discusses the way in which Jehovah and Jesus shepherd their earthly flock today and points out how the sheep ought to respond to their care. The second article analyzes the attitude that congregation elders should strive to adopt as they serve as under-shepherds of the flock.



“Be sound in mind, . . . and be vigilant with a view to prayers.”

—1 PET. 4:7.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

What forms of prayer do you personally need to offer more often?

Why should true Christians pray continually?

Who benefit when you pray for others?

“BE VIGILANT WITH A VIEW TO PRAYERS”

“THE most difficult time of the night to stay awake is just before the dawn of a new day,” says a former night worker. Very likely, others who have to remain awake all night would agree. Present-day Christians face a similar challenge because the long night of Satan’s wicked system of things is now at the darkest point in its history. (Rom. 13:12) How dangerous it would be for us to fall asleep at this late hour! It is imperative that we “be sound in mind” and heed the Scriptural exhortation to “be vigilant with a view to prayers.”—1 Pet. 4:7.

² Because of where we are in the stream of time, it is wise to ask ourselves: ‘How vigilant am I when it comes to prayer? Do I use every form of prayer, and do I pray continually? Is it my custom to pray for others, or do my prayers usually focus only on my needs and wants? And how important is prayer with regard to my salvation?’

CARRY ON EVERY FORM OF PRAYER

³ In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul referred to “every form of prayer.” (Eph. 6:18) In our prayers, we may often petition Jehovah for his help in satisfying our needs and in overcoming obstacles. The “Hearer of prayer” lovingly listens to our appeals for help. (Ps. 65:2) However, we should also endeavor to focus on other forms of prayer. These include those of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication.

⁴ There are many reasons why our prayers to Jehovah should include words of *praise*. For instance, we are moved to praise him when we think of “his

1, 2. (a) Why is it vital to “be vigilant with a view to prayers”? (b) What searching questions regarding prayer would we do well to ask ourselves?

3. What are some forms of prayer?

4. Why should we often praise Jehovah in our prayers?

works of mightiness” and “the abundance of his greatness.” (*Read Psalm 150:1-6.*) Why, the six verses of the 150th Psalm exhort us 13 different times to praise Jehovah! With deep reverence for God, the composer of another psalm sang: “Seven times in the day I have praised you because of your righteous judicial decisions.” (Ps. 119:164) Jehovah surely deserves to be praised. Therefore, should we not praise him in our prayers “seven times in the day,” that is, very often?

⁵ *Thanksgiving* is another important form of prayer. Paul exhorted Christians in the city of Philippi: “Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God.” (Phil. 4:6) There is a protection in expressing heartfelt gratitude in prayer to Jehovah. Especially is this the case, since we are living in the last days when people are “unthankful.” (2 Tim. 3:1, 2) The world is indeed dominated by a spirit of ingratitude. If we are not careful, that spirit can easily rub off on us. Expressing gratitude to God in prayer promotes contentment and prevents us from becoming ‘murmurers and complainers about our lot in life.’ (Jude 16) Moreover, when family heads include thanksgiving in prayers with their loved ones, they encourage a thankful spirit in their wives and children.

⁶ *Supplication* is earnest prayer coupled with intense feeling. Concerning what may we supplicate Jehovah? We can certainly do so when we are be-

5. How is a thankful spirit in prayer a protection?

6, 7. What is supplication, and concerning what may we supplicate Jehovah?

ing persecuted or if we are facing a life-threatening illness. At such times, our prayers for God’s help understandably become supplications. But are these the only times when we can supplicate Jehovah?

⁷ Consider Jesus’ model prayer, and note what he said about God’s name, His Kingdom, and His will. (*Read Matthew 6:9, 10.*) This world is drenched in wickedness, and human governments are failing to care for even the basic needs of their citizens. Surely, then, we should pray for our heavenly Father’s name to be sanctified and for his Kingdom to rid the earth of Satan’s rule. This is also a time to supplicate Jehovah to have his will done on earth as it is in heaven. Let us therefore remain vigilant, readily making use of all forms of prayer.

“PRAY CONTINUALLY”

⁸ Although the apostle Peter exhorted Christians to “be vigilant with a view to prayers,” he himself failed to be that way on at least one occasion. He was one of the disciples who fell asleep while Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. Even after Jesus told them to “keep on the watch and pray continually,” they did not do so.—*Read Matthew 26:40-45.*

⁹ Instead of judging Peter and the other apostles harshly for failing to stay awake, however, we would do well to remember that the day had evidently taken quite a toll on their weak flesh. They had made preparations for the Passover and celebrated it that evening. Then Jesus instituted the Lord’s Evening Meal, setting the pattern for future obser-

8, 9. Why should we be careful about judging Peter and the other apostles for falling asleep in the garden of Gethsemane?



Although Peter stumbled, he learned to be
“vigilant with a view to prayers”
(See paragraphs 10, 11)

vances of the Memorial of his death. (1 Cor. 11:23-25) “After singing praises, they went out to the Mount of Olives,” walking some distance through the narrow streets of Jerusalem. (Matt. 26:30, 36) By then, it may have been well past midnight. If we had been in the garden of Gethsemane that night, we too might have fallen asleep. Rather than criticize the weary apostles, Jesus lovingly acknowledged that “the spirit . . . is eager, but the flesh is weak.”

¹⁰ The experience in the garden of Gethsemane was not wasted on Peter. He learned a painful lesson from his

10, 11. (a) What lesson did Peter learn from his experience in the garden of Gethsemane? (b) How does Peter’s experience affect you?

lack of vigilance. Earlier, Jesus had said: “All of you will be stumbled in connection with me on this night.” At that, Peter exclaimed: “Although all the others are stumbled in connection with you, never will I be stumbled!” Jesus responded by saying that Peter would disown him three times. Unmoved, Peter declared: “Even if I should have to die with you, I will by no means disown you.” (Matt. 26:31-35) Nevertheless, Peter did stumble, just as Jesus had foretold. Overwhelmed by his final denial of Jesus, Peter “wept bitterly.”—Luke 22:60-62.

¹¹ Peter certainly learned a lesson from this experience and overcame his tendency to be self-confident. Evidently, prayer helped Peter in this regard. In fact, it is noteworthy that the counsel to “be vigilant with a view to prayers” comes from Peter. Are we heeding that inspired counsel? Furthermore, do we “pray continually” and thereby show our dependence on Jehovah? (Ps. 85:8) Let us also bear in mind the apostle Paul’s admonition: “Let him that thinks he is standing beware that he does not fall.” —1 Cor. 10:12.

NEHEMIAH’S PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED

¹² Consider Nehemiah, who served as cupbearer to Persian King Artaxerxes in the fifth century B.C.E. Nehemiah provides a fine example of someone who prayed fervently. For days, he had been ‘continually fasting and praying before God’ over the plight of the Jews in Jerusalem. (Neh. 1:4) When Artaxerxes asked him why his face was gloomy, “at once [Nehemiah] prayed to the God of the heavens.” (Neh. 2:2-4)

12. Why is Nehemiah a good example for us?



Being “vigilant with a view to prayers” enables us to meet various challenges
 (See paragraphs 13, 14)

With what result? Jehovah answered his prayers and directed matters in a way that benefited His people. (Neh. 2:5, 6) How faith-strengthening this must have been for Nehemiah!

¹³ Praying continually, as Nehemiah did, helps us to maintain strong faith. Satan is merciless and often strikes us when we are weak. If we are dealing with illness or are struggling with depression, for instance, we may begin to feel that the time we spend in the ministry each month means very little to God. Some of us may experience distressing thoughts, perhaps because of past experiences in life. Satan would have us believe that we are worthless. His attacks are often designed to play on our emotions and thus weaken our faith. By

13, 14. What should we do in order to keep our faith strong and resist Satan’s efforts to discourage us?

being “vigilant with a view to prayers,” however, we can keep our faith strong. Indeed, ‘the large shield of faith will enable us to quench all the wicked one’s burning missiles.’—Eph. 6:16.

¹⁴ If we are “vigilant with a view to prayers,” we will not be caught off guard and thus compromise if a test of faith comes upon us unexpectedly. When confronted with tests and trials, let us remember the example of Nehemiah and immediately turn to God in prayer. It is only with Jehovah’s help that we can succeed in resisting temptations and enduring tests of our faith.

PRAY IN BEHALF OF OTHERS

¹⁵ Jesus made supplication for Peter so that the apostle’s faith would not give out. (Luke 22:32) The faithful first-

15. What questions should we ask ourselves about praying for others?

century Christian Epaphras imitated Jesus in this regard and exerted himself in prayer in behalf of his brothers in Colossae. "He prays hard for you all the time," Paul wrote them, "that you may stand fast, ripe in conviction and wholly devoted to doing God's will." (Col. 4: 12, *The New English Bible*) We do well to ask ourselves: 'Do I pray hard for my brothers around the world? How often do my prayers include fellow believers who have suffered because of a natural disaster? When did I last exert myself in prayer for those shouldering heavy responsibility in Jehovah's organization? Have I recently prayed for individuals in the congregation who are facing hardships?'

¹⁶ Our prayers to Jehovah God in behalf of others can truly help them. (**Read 2 Corinthians 1:11.**) Although Jehovah is not obliged to act because a large number of his worshippers have made prayerful requests repeatedly, he notes their collective interest and takes into account their genuine and deep concern as he responds to their prayers. So we ought to take seriously our privilege and responsibility to pray in behalf of others. Like Epaphras, we should display our heartfelt love and concern for our Christian brothers and sisters by exerting ourselves in prayer in their behalf. Doing so will add to our happiness, for "there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

'OUR SALVATION IS NEAR'

¹⁷ Just before stating that "the night is well along; the day has drawn near,"

16. Do our prayers in behalf of others really matter? Explain.

17, 18. How will being "vigilant with a view to prayers" help us?

Paul wrote: "You people know the season, that it is already the hour for you to awake from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than at the time when we became believers." (Rom. 13:11, 12) God's promised new world is near, and our salvation is nearer than we may think. We must not fall asleep spiritually, and we should never allow the world's distractions to crowd out our time to be alone with Jehovah in prayer. Instead, let us "be vigilant with a view to prayers." Doing so will help us to engage in "holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion" as we await the day of Jehovah. (2 Pet. 3:11, 12) Our way of life will thus reveal that we are staying awake spiritually and that we really believe that the end of this wicked system of things is imminent. May we therefore "pray incessantly." (1 Thess. 5:17) Let us also imitate Jesus by seeking solitude for private prayer. If we linger in our personal prayers to Jehovah, we will draw ever closer to him. (Jas. 4:7, 8) And what a blessing that will prove to be!

¹⁸ The Scriptures state: "In the days of his flesh Christ offered up supplications and also petitions to the One who was able to save him out of death, with strong outcries and tears, and he was favorably heard for his godly fear." (Heb. 5:7) Jesus offered supplications and petitions and maintained his faithfulness to God to the very end of his earthly life. As a result, Jehovah saved his beloved Son out of death and rewarded him with immortal life in heaven. We too can be faithful to our heavenly Father regardless of what temptations and trials may come our way in the future. Indeed, we can gain the prize of everlasting life—provided we remain "vigilant with a view to prayers."

How We Can Help to Meet the Needs of Others



“VIOLENCE erupted in the wake of a contested election, forcing thousands of Jehovah’s Witnesses to flee their homes,” relates François, an elder in a developing land. “Food and medicine became scarce, and what remained was extremely expensive. Banks closed, and cash machines emptied or went off-line.”

Brothers from the branch office quickly began delivering funds and emergency supplies to displaced Witnesses gathered at Kingdom Halls around the country. Rival factions set up roadblocks, but because both sides knew that the Witnesses maintain strict neutrality, branch vehicles were usually allowed to pass.

“On the way to one Kingdom Hall, snipers opened fire on our van,” says François. “However, the bullets passed between us. Seeing a soldier running toward us, weapon in hand, we jammed the van into reverse, turned around, and sped back to the branch. We were thankful to Jehovah that we were alive. The following day, the 130 brothers in that Kingdom Hall made it to safety. Some came to the branch office, where we looked after their spiritual and material needs until the crisis was over.”

“The branch office later received many letters from brothers across the country expressing profound gratitude,” says François. “Experiencing how their brothers elsewhere had come to their aid increased their confidence in Jehovah.”

In the face of natural and man-made disasters, we do not tell needy brothers and sisters to “keep warm and well fed.” (Jas. 2:15, 16) Instead, we seek to provide for their physical needs. Similarly, after receiving warning of a coming famine in the first century, “the disciples determined, each of them according as anyone could afford it, to send a relief ministration to the brothers dwelling in Judea.”—Acts 11:28-30.

As Jehovah’s servants, we are eager to help needy individuals in a material way. However, people also have a spiritual need. (Matt. 5:3) To help them become aware of that need and take steps to satisfy it, Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples. (Matt. 28:19, 20) We individually devote much of our time, energy, and resources to carrying out that commission. As an organization, we use some donated funds to provide material help, but donations are used chiefly to promote Kingdom interests and spread the good news. We thus show our love for God and for our neighbors.—Matt. 22:37-39.

Those who support the worldwide work of Jehovah’s Witnesses can be sure that their donations are used properly and effectively. Are you in a position to help bring relief to your brothers in need? Do you desire to support the disciple-making work? If so, “do not hold back good from those to whom it is owing, when it happens to be in the power of your hand to do it.”—Prov. 3:27.

HOW SOME CHOOSE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORLDWIDE WORK

As in the apostle Paul's day, many today "set something aside," or budget, an amount of money and place it in the congregation contribution boxes labeled "Worldwide Work." (1 Cor. 16:2) Each month, congregations forward these contributions to the office of Jehovah's Witnesses that serves their country. It is also possible for you to send donations directly to a legal entity that is used by Jehovah's Witnesses in your country. To learn the name of the primary legal entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses in your country, please contact the branch office that serves the country. The address of the branch office can be found on www.jw.org. The types of donations that you can send directly are the following:

OUTRIGHT DONATIONS

- Donations of cash, jewelry, or other valuable personal property.
- Include a letter indicating that the cash or the items are an outright donation.

CONDITIONAL DONATION ARRANGEMENT

- Donations of cash with the condition that it can be returned if needed by the donor.
- Include a letter stating that the donation is conditional.

CHARITABLE PLANNING

In addition to gifts of money and valuable personal property, there are other methods of giving to benefit Kingdom service worldwide. These are listed below. Regardless of the method or methods you would like to use, please first contact the

branch office that serves your country to see which methods are available in the country. Since legal requirements and tax laws vary, it is important to consult qualified tax and legal advisers before choosing the best way to donate.

Insurance: A donation made by specifying an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or a retirement/pension plan.

Bank Accounts: Bank accounts, certificates of deposit, or individual retirement accounts set up as a trust or made payable on death to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses in accord with local bank requirements.

Stocks and Bonds: Stocks and bonds donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses as an outright gift or by means of a Transfer on Death agreement.

Real Estate: Salable real estate donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses, either by making an outright gift or, in the case of residential property, by reserving a life estate to the donor, who can continue to live in the residence during his or her lifetime.

Gift Annuity: Money or securities donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses under an arrangement where the donor, or someone designated by the donor, receives a specified annuity payment every year for life. The donor receives an income-tax deduction for the year in which the gift annuity is established.

Wills and Trusts: Property or money may be bequeathed to an entity used

by Jehovah's Witnesses by means of a legally executed will or by specifying the entity as the beneficiary of a trust agreement. This arrangement may provide certain tax advantages.

As the term "charitable planning" implies, these types of donations typically require some planning on the part of the donor. To assist individuals desiring to benefit the worldwide work of Jehovah's Witnesses through some form of charitable giving, a brochure entitled *Charitable Planning to Benefit Kingdom Service Worldwide* has been prepared in English and Spanish. The brochure was written to provide information on a variety of ways that gifts may be made now or later, as through a bequest at death. The information covered in this brochure may not apply fully to your situation because of tax or other laws in your country. Hence, after reading the brochure, you should confer with your own legal or tax advisers. By using such methods of charitable giving, many have been able to help support our religious and humanitarian activities worldwide and maximize their tax benefits. If available in your country, the brochure may be obtained by requesting a copy from the secretary of the local congregation.

For more information, you may contact the Charitable Planning Office, either in writing or by telephone, at the address listed below, or you may contact the branch office that serves your country.

CHARITABLE PLANNING OFFICE

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

100 Watchtower Drive

Patterson, New York 12563-9204

Telephone: (845) 306-0707



HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN “A WAITING ATTITUDE”?

“I will show a waiting attitude.”—MIC. 7:7.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What can we learn from Micah’s example?

We are waiting to see what events?

What are some ways in which we may express appreciation for Jehovah’s patience?

WHEN the Messianic Kingdom was established in 1914, Satan’s system entered its final days. As a result of the war in heaven, Jesus hurled the Devil and the demons down to the vicinity of the earth. (**Read Revelation 12:7-9.**) Satan knows that he has only “a short period of time.” (Rev. 12:12) However, that “period of time” has gone on for decades, and some may feel that the last days have lasted a long time. As we wait for Jehovah to act, have we personally become impatient?

² Impatience can be dangerous, for it can cause us to behave rashly. How can we maintain a waiting attitude? This article will help us to do so by answering the following questions. (1) What can we learn about patience from the example set by the prophet Micah? (2) What events will signal the end of our waiting period? (3) How can we express our appreciation for Jehovah’s patience?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM MICAH’S EXAMPLE?

³ **Read Micah 7:2-6.** Jehovah’s prophet Micah saw conditions in Israel deteriorate spiritually until they became appalling under the rulership of wicked King Ahaz. Micah likens the unfaithful Israelites to “a brier” and “a thorn hedge.” Just as a brier or a thorn hedge injures anyone who walks into it, those corrupt Israelites harmed anyone with whom they had dealings. The corruption became so great that even family relationships broke down. Aware that he could do nothing to change the situation himself, Micah poured out his heart to Jehovah. Then he waited patiently for God to act. Micah was confident

1. Why might we become impatient?
2. What will this article consider?
3. In Micah’s day, what were conditions like in Israel?

that Jehovah would intervene in His own time.

⁴ Like Micah, we have to live among selfish people. Many are “unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection.” (2 Tim. 3:2, 3) We find it distressing when workmates, schoolmates, and neighbors show a self-centered attitude. Some of God’s servants, though, have an even greater challenge. Jesus said that his followers would face family opposition, and he used words similar to those recorded at Micah 7:6 to describe the impact that his message would have. “I came to cause division,” said Jesus, “with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a young wife against her mother-in-law. Indeed, a man’s enemies will be persons of his own household.” (Matt. 10:35, 36) What a difficult thing it is to endure the ridicule and opposition of family members who do not share our faith! If we face such a trial, let us not cave in to family pressure. Instead, may we remain loyal and wait patiently for Jehovah to resolve matters. If we constantly ask for his help, he will give us the strength and wisdom needed in order to endure.

⁵ Jehovah rewarded Micah for his patience. Micah witnessed the end of King Ahaz and his wicked rule. He saw Ahaz’ son, good King Hezekiah, inherit the throne and restore pure worship. And Jehovah’s judgment message against Samaria through Micah was fulfilled when the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel.—Mic. 1:6.

⁶ However, Micah did not witness the fulfillment of all that Jehovah inspired him to prophesy about. For example,

4. What challenges do we face?

5, 6. How did Jehovah reward Micah, but what did Micah not witness?

Micah wrote: “In the final part of the days . . . the mountain of the house of Jehovah will become firmly established above the top of the mountains, and it will certainly be lifted up above the hills; and to it peoples must stream. And many nations will certainly go and say: ‘Come, you people, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah.’” (Mic. 4: 1, 2) Micah died long before that prophecy was fulfilled. Even so, he was determined to remain loyal to Jehovah even to death, no matter what others around him did. In this regard, Micah wrote: “All the peoples, for their part, will walk each one in the name of its god; but we, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever.” (Mic. 4:5) Micah could wait patiently during distressing times because he had absolute confidence that Jehovah would fulfill *all* of His promises. The faithful prophet trusted in Jehovah.

⁷ Do we have similar confidence in Jehovah? We have good reason for such trust. We have witnessed firsthand the fulfillment of Micah’s prophecy. During “the final part of the days,” millions from all nations and tribes and tongues have streamed to “the mountain of the house of Jehovah.” Despite having come from rival nations, these worshippers have beaten “their swords into plowshares,” and they refuse to “learn war anymore.” (Mic. 4:3) What a privilege we have to be numbered among Jehovah’s peaceful people!

⁸ Understandably, we want Jehovah to bring an end to this wicked system soon. If we are to wait patiently, though, we need to view matters from Jehovah’s

7, 8. (a) Why do we have reason for confidence? (b) What will make time pass more quickly?



Jehovah's people make every effort to help inactive ones return to Jehovah
(See paragraphs 16, 17)

perspective. He has set a day when he will judge mankind "by a man whom he has appointed," Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:31) But before then, God is giving all sorts of people the opportunity to gain "an accurate knowledge of truth," to act on that knowledge, and to be saved. Precious lives are at stake. (**Read 1 Timothy 2:3, 4.**) If we are busy helping others to gain accurate knowledge about God, the time remaining before the coming of Jehovah's judgment will pass more quickly. Soon—even suddenly—time will run out. When it does, how glad we will be that we kept busy in the Kingdom-preaching work!

WHAT EVENTS SIGNAL THE END OF OUR WAITING?

⁹ **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.** In the near future, the nations will say "Peace and security!" If we are not to be caught off guard by this declaration, we need

9-11. Has 1 Thessalonians 5:3 been fulfilled? Explain.

to "stay awake and keep our senses." (1 Thess. 5:6) To help us stay awake spiritually, let us briefly review events that have set the stage for this noteworthy proclamation.

¹⁰ In the aftermath of each of the two world wars, the nations clamored for peace. After the first world war, the League of Nations was formed in the hope of bringing peace. Later, after the second global war, the United Nations became a popular hope of bringing peace to the earth. Government and religious leaders have looked to those agencies to bring about peaceful conditions for mankind. For example, in 1986, the United Nations sanctioned a highly publicized International Year of Peace. That year, leaders from many nations and religions joined the head of the Catholic Church in Assisi, Italy, to offer prayers for peace.

¹¹ However, neither that proclamation of peace and security nor others like it have been the fulfillment of the

prophecy recorded at 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Why not? Because the foretold “sudden destruction” has not yet occurred.

¹² Who will make this significant future declaration of “Peace and security”? What role will the leaders of Christendom and of other religions play? How will the leaders of various governments be involved in this proclamation? The Scriptures do not tell us. What we do know is that no matter what form the proclamation takes or how convincing it might sound, it will be only a veneer. This old system will remain under Satan’s control. It is rotten to the core and will remain that way. How sad it would be if any of us were to believe the satanic propaganda and violate our Christian neutrality!

¹³ *Read Revelation 7:1-4.* While we wait for the fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 5:3, powerful angels are holding back the destructive winds of the great tribulation. What are they waiting for? One key event is described by the apostle John—the final sealing of the anointed “slaves of our God.”* Once that final sealing has been completed, the angels will unleash the winds of destruction. What will happen then?

¹⁴ Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion, will meet her deserved end. “Peoples and crowds and nations and tongues” will be unable to give her effective support. Already we

* For a discussion of the difference between the initial sealing of members of the anointed and their final sealing, see the January 1, 2007, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 30-31.

12. What do we know about the declaration of “Peace and security”?

13. Why are angels holding back the winds of destruction?

14. What indicates that the demise of Babylon the Great is near?

see indications that her demise is near. (Rev. 16:12; 17:15-18; 18:7, 8, 21) In fact, a lack of support is now reflected in the news media, where religion and religious leaders are increasingly coming under attack. Even so, the leaders of Babylon the Great feel that they are in no real danger. How wrong they are! Following the proclamation of “Peace and security!” political elements of Satan’s system will suddenly turn on false religion and wipe it out. *Never* again will Babylon the Great be seen! Surely it is worth waiting patiently for such momentous events.—Rev. 18:8, 10.

HOW CAN WE SHOW APPRECIATION FOR GOD’S PATIENCE?

¹⁵ Despite the reproach people heap on his name, Jehovah has waited patiently for the right time to act. Jehovah does not want any honesthearted people to be destroyed. (2 Pet. 3:9, 10) Do we feel the same way? Before Jehovah’s day comes, we can express our appreciation for his patience in the following ways.

¹⁶ *Help those who have become inactive.* Jesus said that there is joy in heaven when just one lost sheep is found. (Matt. 18:14; Luke 15:3-7) Obviously, Jehovah cares deeply about all those who have expressed love for his name, even if they are not actively serving him at present. When we help such ones return to the congregation, we contribute to making Jehovah and the angels rejoice.

¹⁷ Are you among those who are not now actively serving God? Perhaps someone in the congregation hurt you and as a result you stopped associating

15. Why has Jehovah not acted hastily?

16, 17. (a) Why should we want to help those who have become inactive? (b) Why is it urgent that inactive ones return to Jehovah?

with Jehovah's organization. Since some time may have passed, ask yourself: 'Is my life now more meaningful, and am I happier? Was it Jehovah who offended me, or was it an imperfect human? Has Jehovah God ever done anything to harm me?' Really, he has always done good toward us. Even if we are not living up to our dedication to him, he allows us to enjoy the good things he provides. (Jas. 1:16, 17) Soon, Jehovah's day will come. Now is the time to return to our heavenly Father's loving arms and to the congregation—the only safe haven in these last days.—Deut. 33:27; Heb. 10:24, 25.

¹⁸ *Loyally support those taking the lead.* As a loving Shepherd, Jehovah guides and protects us. He has appointed his Son as the Chief Shepherd of the flock. (1 Pet. 5:4) Elders in more than 100,000 congregations shepherd God's sheep on a personal level. (Acts 20:28) When we loyally support those appointed to take the lead, we express our appreciation to Jehovah and Jesus for all that they have done for us.

¹⁹ *Draw close to one another.* What

18. Why should we support those taking the lead?

19. How can we close ranks?

does that mean? When a well-trained army is attacked by an enemy, the individual soldiers close ranks, that is, they draw closer to one another. They thus form an impenetrable defense. Satan is intensifying his attacks on God's people. Now is no time for fighting within our ranks. Now is the time for us to draw close to one another, to overlook the imperfections of others, and to display confidence in Jehovah's leadership.

²⁰ May all of us remain spiritually alert and display a waiting attitude. Let us patiently wait for the proclamation of "Peace and security!" and for the final sealing of the chosen ones. Thereafter, the four angels will let go of the destructive winds, and Babylon the Great will be destroyed. While we wait for these momentous events to happen, let us accept direction from those appointed to take the lead in Jehovah's organization. Close ranks against the Devil and the demons! Now is the time to heed the psalmist's exhortation: "Be courageous, and may your heart be strong, all you who are waiting for Jehovah."—Ps. 31:24.

20. What should we do now?

It is now time for us
to close ranks against
Satan and the demons
(See paragraph 19)





Serving God Is His Medicine!

When two pioneers were invited into a certain house in Kenya, they were surprised to see the slight figure of a man lying on a bed. He had a very small torso and short arms. As they shared with him God's promise that "the lame one will climb up just as a stag does," the man responded with a wide smile.—Isa. 35:6.

The pioneers learned that Onesmus, now in his late 30's, was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, or brittle bone disease. His bones were extremely fragile—so much so that the slightest pressure caused them to break. Since there is no cure or effective treatment for the disease, Onesmus expected to spend the rest of his life in pain and confined to a wheelchair.

Onesmus accepted a personal Bible study. However, his mother objected to his attending Christian meetings, reasoning that this might cause him injury and additional pain. So the brothers recorded the meetings, and Onesmus listened to them at home. After studying for five months, Onesmus decided that he wanted to attend the meetings despite the risks.

Did attending Christian meetings add to Onesmus' pain? The effect was the opposite. "My constant pain seemed to diminish during the meetings," Onesmus recalls. He thought that his newfound hope was the reason he felt better.

Onesmus' mother observed the change in her son's disposition and was so delighted that she too agreed to study the Bible. "Serving God is my son's medicine," she would say.

Before long, Onesmus became an unbaptized publisher. In time, he was baptized and now serves as a ministerial servant. Although he is not able to use his legs and one of his arms, Onesmus had the desire to do all he could in Jehovah's service. He wanted to auxiliary pioneer but was reluctant to apply. Why? Because he knew that he would have to rely entirely on another person to push his wheelchair. When he expressed his concern to his fellow Christians, they promised to support him. This they did, helping Onesmus to auxiliary pioneer.

Onesmus' desire to be a regular pioneer met with the same concern. At one point, however, the daily text provided the encouragement he needed. The text was Psalm 34:8: "Taste and see that Jehovah is good." After meditating on that scripture, Onesmus decided to become a regular pioneer. He now preaches four days a week and has several Bible students who are making good spiritual progress. In 2010, he attended the Pioneer Service School. How delighted Onesmus was to have as his instructor one of the two brothers who initially called on him!

Onesmus' parents have now passed away, but brothers and sisters in the congregation care for his daily needs. He is grateful for all the blessings he now enjoys, and he looks forward to the day when "no resident will say: 'I am sick.'"—Isa. 33:24.



SEVEN SHEPHERDS, EIGHT DUKES —WHAT THEY MEAN FOR US TODAY

“We shall also have to raise up against him seven shepherds, yes, eight dukes of mankind.”—MIC. 5:5.

CAN YOU ANSWER?

How did Hezekiah, Isaiah, Micah, and the princes of Jerusalem prove to be fine shepherds in the eighth century B.C.E.?

Who correspond to the seven shepherds and eight dukes today? In what ways?

What is the most important thing that you can do now to prepare for any future attack on God’s people?

SOMETIME between 762 B.C.E. and 759 B.C.E., the king of Israel and the king of Syria declared war on the kingdom of Judah. Their goal? To invade Jerusalem, remove King Ahaz from the throne, and replace him with another man, perhaps one who was not of the line of King David. (Isa. 7:5, 6) The king of Israel should have known better. Jehovah had decreed that one of David’s descendants would occupy His throne permanently, and God’s word never goes unfulfilled.—Josh. 23:14; 2 Sam. 7:16.

² At first, the Syro-Israelite alliance seemed to have the upper hand. In one battle alone, Ahaz lost 120,000 valiant fighting men! Maaseiah, “the son of the king,” was killed. (2 Chron. 28:6, 7) But Jehovah was watching. He remembered his promise to David; thus, he sent the prophet Isaiah with a most encouraging message.

³ Isaiah said: “Look! The maiden herself will actually become pregnant, and she is giving birth to a son, and she will certainly call his name Immanuel. . . . Before the boy will know how to reject the bad and choose the good, the ground of whose two kings you are feeling a sickening dread [Syria and Israel] will be left entirely.” (Isa. 7:14, 16) The first part of that prophecy is often applied to the birth of the Messiah, and rightly so. (Matt. 1:23) However, since the “two kings,” the king of Syria and the king of Israel, were no longer a threat to Judah in the first century C.E., the prophecy about Immanuel must have had an initial fulfillment in Isaiah’s day.

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1. Why was the plot of the Syro-Israelite league bound to fail?
 - 2-4. Explain how Isaiah 7:14, 16 was fulfilled (a) in the eighth century B.C.E. (b) in the first century C.E.

⁴ Soon after Isaiah made that remarkable announcement, his wife became pregnant and bore him a son named Maher-shalal-hash-baz. One possibility is that this child was the “Immanuel” referred to by Isaiah.* In Bible times, an infant might be given one name at birth, perhaps to commemorate a special event, but be known by his parents and relatives by another name. (2 Sam. 12:24, 25) There is no evidence that Jesus was ever addressed by the name Immanuel. —*Read Isaiah 7:14; 8:3, 4.*

⁵ While Israel and Syria were focusing on Judah, another nation, a militaristic one, had ambitions toward the region. It was the rising world power of Assyria. According to Isaiah 8:3, 4, Assyria would carry off “the resources of Damascus” and “the spoil of Samaria” before attacking the southern kingdom of Judah. Instead of trusting in God’s word through Isaiah, faithless Ahaz entered into a disastrous pact with the Assyrians, which ultimately led to Judah’s being oppressed by them. (2 Ki. 16:7-10) What a disappointment Ahaz was as a shepherd of Judah! We might ask ourselves, ‘When I have important decisions to make, do I put my trust in God or in men?’—Prov. 3:5, 6.

A NEW SHEPHERD TAKES A DIFFERENT APPROACH

⁶ Ahaz died in 746 B.C.E., and his son Hezekiah inherited the materially impoverished and spiritually bankrupt kingdom of Judah. As the young king ascended the throne, what would his prior-

* The Hebrew word translated “maiden” at Isaiah 7:14 can mean either a married woman or a virgin. Thus, the same word could be applied both to Isaiah’s wife and to the Jewish virgin Mary.

5. What foolish decision did King Ahaz make?
6. Compare the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

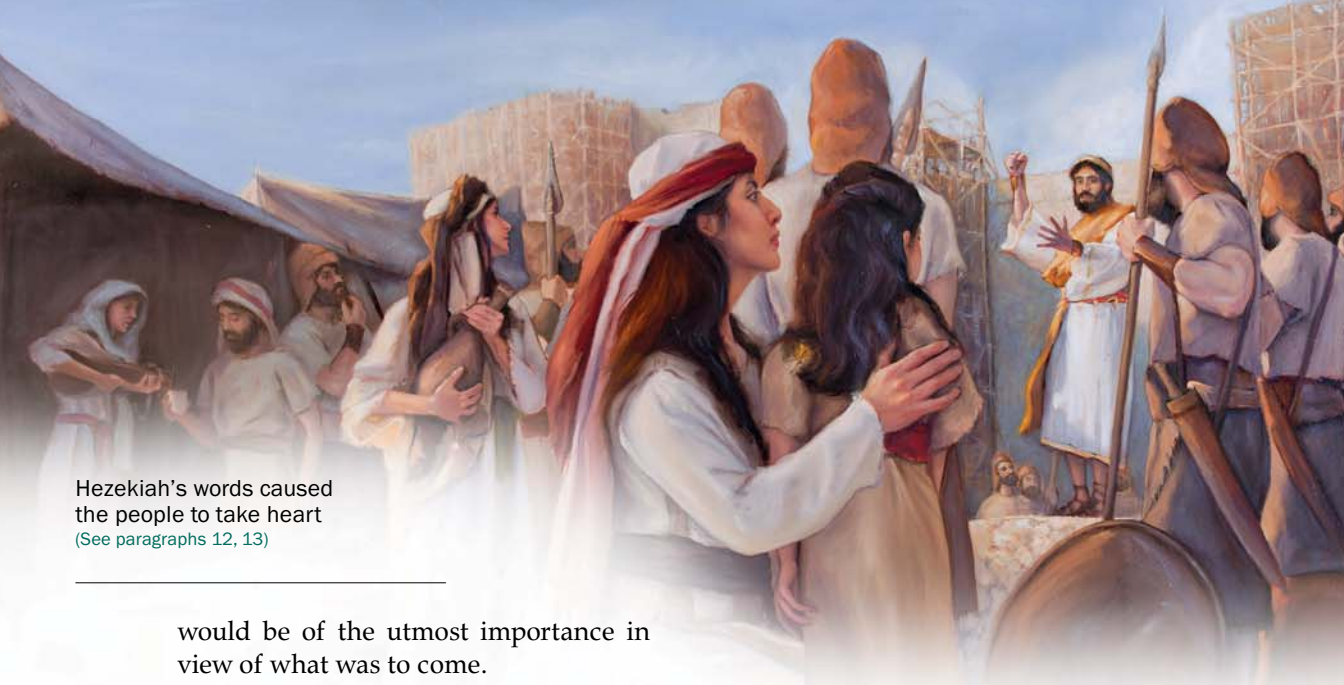
ity be? To shore up Judah’s ailing economy? No. Hezekiah was a spiritual man, a worthy shepherd of his national flock. His first act was to reestablish pure worship and to reinforce the wayward nation’s frayed relationship with Jehovah. When he understood God’s will for him, Hezekiah acted decisively. What a fine example for us!—2 Chron. 29:1-19.

⁷ The Levites would play a vital role in the important task of restoring pure worship. Therefore, Hezekiah met with them to assure them of his support. Picture the faithful Levites who were present at that meeting, tears of joy streaming down their faces as they heard their king declare: “You are the ones whom Jehovah has chosen to stand before him to minister to him.” (2 Chron. 29:11) Yes, the Levites had a clear mandate to promote pure worship!

⁸ Hezekiah invited all of Judah and Israel to a great Passover celebration, followed by the seven-day Festival of Unfermented Cakes. The people enjoyed the festival so much that it was extended for seven days more. The Bible reports: “There came to be great rejoicing in Jerusalem, for from the days of Solomon the son of David the king of Israel there was none like this in Jerusalem.” (2 Chron. 30:25, 26) What an inspiration that spiritual feast proved to be for all the people! From 2 Chronicles 31:1, we learn: “As soon as they finished all this, . . . they proceeded to break up the sacred pillars and cut down the sacred poles and pull down the high places and the altars.” In a mighty way, Judah thus began to turn back to Jehovah. This spiritual cleansing

7. Why was it important for the Levites to be assured of the new king’s support?

8. What further steps did Hezekiah take to shore up the spirituality of the nation, and with what result?



Hezekiah's words caused the people to take heart (See paragraphs 12, 13)

would be of the utmost importance in view of what was to come.

THE KING PREPARES FOR TROUBLE

⁹ True to Isaiah's word, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and deported its inhabitants, thus frustrating Israel's plans to place a usurper on David's throne. But what of Assyria's plans? The Assyrians now set their sights on Judah. "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and proceeded to seize them." Reportedly, Sennacherib conquered 46 Judean cities in all. Imagine how you would have felt if you had lived in Jerusalem at that time. One after another, Judah's cities fell before the advancing Assyrian armies!—2 Ki. 18:13.

¹⁰ Of course, Hezekiah was aware of the approaching danger, but rather than desperately enlist the help of a pagan nation, as his apostate father, Ahaz, had done, Hezekiah placed his trust in Jeho-

vah. (2 Chron. 28:20, 21) He may have been aware of the words of the prophet Micah, a contemporary who foretold concerning Assyria: "As for the Assyrian, . . . we shall also have to raise up against him seven shepherds, yes, eight dukes of mankind. And they will actually shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword." (Mic. 5:5, 6) These inspired words would surely have encouraged Hezekiah, for they show that a most unusual army would be raised up against the Assyrians and that the hostile aggressors would ultimately be defeated.

¹¹ The prophecy concerning seven shepherds and eight dukes ("princes," *The New English Bible*) was to find its primary, or most important, fulfillment long after the birth of Jesus, the "ruler in Israel, whose origin is from early times." (*Read Micah 5:1, 2.*) This would be at a time when the very existence of Jehovah's servants would be threatened by a modern-day "Assyrian." What forces will

9. (a) How were the plans of Israel frustrated?
(b) Sennacherib had what initial success in Judah?

10. Why might Micah 5:5, 6 have encouraged Hezekiah?

11. When would the prophecy concerning seven shepherds and eight dukes have its primary fulfillment?

Jehovah, through his now-reigning Son, marshal to confront the fear-inspiring foe? We shall see. But first, let us consider what we can learn from the action Hezekiah took in the face of the Assyrian menace.

HEZEKIAH TAKES PRACTICAL STEPS

¹² Jehovah is always willing to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, but he does expect us to do what we can. Hezekiah consulted “his princes and his mighty men,” and together they decided “to stop up the waters of the springs that were outside the city . . . Furthermore, [Hezekiah] took courage and built up all the broken-down wall and raised towers upon it, and on the outside another wall, . . . and made missiles in abundance and shields.” (2 Chron. 32:3-5) In order to protect and shepherd His people at that time, Jehovah used a number of valiant men—Hezekiah, his princes, and the spiritually strong prophets.

¹³ What Hezekiah did next was of even greater value than stopping up the waters or fortifying the city walls. Concerned shepherd that he was, Hezekiah gathered the people and encouraged them spiritually with the words: “Do not be afraid nor be terrified because of the king of Assyria . . . , for with us there are more than there are with him. With him there is an arm of flesh, but with us there is Jehovah our God to help us and to fight our battles.” What a faith-strengthening reminder—Jehovah would fight for his people! Upon hearing this, the Jews “began to brace themselves upon the words of Hezekiah the king of

Judah.” Notice that it was “the words of Hezekiah” that caused the people to take heart. He and his princes and mighty men, as well as the prophets Micah and Isaiah, proved to be effective shepherds, just as Jehovah had foretold through his prophet.—2 Chron. 32:7, 8; *read Micah 5: 5, 6.*

¹⁴ The king of Assyria set up camp at Lachish, southwest of Jerusalem. From there, through three envoys, he ordered the city to surrender. His spokesman, whose official title was Rabshakeh, used a variety of tactics. Speaking in Hebrew, he urged the people to betray the king and to submit to the Assyrians, falsely promising to relocate them to a land where they could enjoy a comfortable life. (*Read 2 Kings 18:31, 32.*) Then Rabshakeh asserted that just as the gods of the nations had been unable to protect their worshippers, so Jehovah would be unable to deliver the Jews out of the Assyrians’ clutches. Wisely, the people did not try to respond to the slanderous propaganda, a course often followed by Jehovah’s servants in our day.—*Read 2 Kings 18:35, 36.*

¹⁵ Hezekiah was understandably upset, but instead of turning to a foreign power for help, he sent for Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah told Hezekiah: “He [Sennacherib] will not come into this city nor will he shoot an arrow there.” (2 Ki. 19: 32) All that was required of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was that they stand their ground. Jehovah would fight for Judah. And fight he did! “It came about on that night that the angel of Jehovah proceeded to go out and strike down

12. What steps did Hezekiah and those with him take to protect God’s people?

13. What was the most important step that Hezekiah took to prepare the people for the coming attack? Explain.

14. What role did Rabshakeh play, and how did the people react?

15. What was required of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and how did Jehovah bring salvation to the city?

a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians.” (2 Ki. 19:35) Judah’s salvation came, not by Hezekiah’s stopping up the fountains of waters of the city nor by his building up its walls, but by divine intervention.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

¹⁶ The prophecy about seven shepherds and eight dukes has its major fulfillment in our day. The citizens of ancient Jerusalem were attacked by the Assyrians. In the near future, Jehovah’s apparently vulnerable people will come under attack from the modern-day “Assyrian,” whose intent will be to wipe them out. The Scriptures refer to that attack as well as the attack of ‘Gog of Magog,’ the attack of “the king of the north,” and the attack of “the kings of the earth.” (Ezek. 38:2, 10-13; Dan. 11:40, 44, 45; Rev. 17:14; 19:19) Do these represent separate attacks? Not necessarily. The Bible could be referring to the same attack under different names. What ‘secret weapon’ does Micah’s prophecy indicate Jehovah would raise up against that implacable foe—“the Assyrian”? A very unlikely one—“seven shepherds, yes, eight dukes”! (Mic. 5:5) The shepherds and dukes (or, “princes,” *NEB*) in this implausible army are the congregation elders. (1 Pet. 5:2) Today, Jehovah certainly has provided an abundance of spiritual men to shepherd his precious sheep, to strengthen his people for the future attack of the modern-day “Assyrian.”* Micah’s prophecy states that they

* The number seven is used frequently in the Scriptures to signify completion. The number eight (one more than seven) sometimes represents an abundance.

16. Who today are represented by (a) Jerusalem’s citizens (b) “the Assyrian” (c) the seven shepherds and eight dukes?

will “shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword.” (Mic. 5:6) Yes, among ‘the weapons of their warfare,’ you will find “the sword of the spirit,” God’s Word. —2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:17.

¹⁷ Elders who are reading this article can draw some useful conclusions from the account we have just considered: (1) The most practical step that we can take to prepare for the coming attack of “the Assyrian” is that of strengthening our faith in God and helping our brothers to do the same. (2) When “the Assyrian” attacks, the elders must be absolutely convinced that Jehovah will deliver us. (3) At that time, the life-saving direction that we receive from Jehovah’s organization may not appear practical from a human standpoint. All of us must be ready to obey any instructions we may receive, whether these appear sound from a strategic or human standpoint or not. (4) Now is the time for any who may be putting their trust in secular education, material things, or human institutions to adjust their thinking. The elders must stand ready to help any who may now be wavering in their faith.

¹⁸ The time will come when God’s modern-day servants will appear to be just as vulnerable as the Jews trapped inside Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s day. At that time, may all of us draw strength from Hezekiah’s words. Let us remember that with our enemies “there is an arm of flesh, but with us there is Jehovah our God to help us and to fight our battles”—2 Chron. 32:8.

17. What four conclusions can the elders draw from the account we have considered?

18. How might reflecting on this account benefit us in the future?



OBEY JEHOVAH'S SHEPHERDS

JEHOVAH compares himself to a shepherd. (Ezek. 34:11-14) That is significant because it helps us to understand what Jehovah is like. A loving human shepherd takes full responsibility for the survival and welfare of the flock of sheep under his care. He leads them to pasture and to water sources (Ps. 23:1, 2); watches over them by day and by night (Luke 2:8); protects them from predators (1 Sam. 17:34, 35); carries the newborn (Isa. 40:11); searches for strays, and cares well for sheep that are injured.—Ezek. 34:16.

² Because Jehovah's people of ancient times lived in a predominantly pastoral and agricultural society, they readily understood the significance of comparing Jehovah God to a loving shepherd. They knew that sheep need care and attention in order to thrive. In a spiritual sense, it is the same with people. (Mark 6:34) Without good spiritual care and leadership, people suffer. They become vulnerable and stray morally—just as the “sheep that have no shepherd” scatter. (1 Ki. 22:17) However, Jehovah lovingly provides for the needs of his people.

³ The portrayal of Jehovah as a shepherd carries meaning even in modern times. Jehovah is still providing for his sheeplike people. Let us see how he directs his sheep and satisfies their needs today. We will also consider how the sheep should respond to Jehovah's loving interest in them.

THE FINE SHEPHERD PROVIDES UNDERSHEPHERDS

⁴ Jehovah has appointed Jesus as Head of the Christian congregation. (Eph. 1:22, 23) As “the fine

1, 2. Why is it significant that Jehovah likens himself to a shepherd?

3. What will we discuss in this article?

4. What role does Jesus play in providing for Jehovah's sheep?

“Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls.”—HEB. 13:17.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How do congregation elders shepherd God's sheep?

Why should the sheep listen to the undershepherds?

Why is the imperfection of the undershepherds no reason to disregard their Scriptural counsel?

shepherd,” Jesus reflects his Father’s interests, purposes, and qualities. Jesus even ‘surrendered his soul in behalf of the sheep.’ (John 10:11, 15) What a blessing Christ’s ransom sacrifice is for mankind! (Matt. 20:28) Why, it is Jehovah’s purpose that “everyone exercising faith in [Jesus] might not be destroyed but have everlasting life!”—John 3:16.

⁵ How do the sheep respond to the Fine Shepherd, Jesus Christ? “My sheep listen to my voice,” said Jesus, “and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) Listening to the Fine Shepherd’s voice means following his guidance in all things. This includes cooperating with the spiritual undershepherds whom he has appointed. Jesus indicated that his apostles and disciples were to continue the work that he had begun. They were to ‘teach’ and to ‘feed Jesus’ little sheep.’ (Matt. 28:20; *read John 21:15-17.*) As the good news spread and the number of disciples increased, Jesus arranged for mature Christians to shepherd the congregations.—Eph. 4:11, 12.

⁶ When addressing the overseers of the first-century congregation in Ephesus, the apostle Paul pointed out that holy spirit had appointed them overseers “to shepherd the congregation of God.” (Acts 20:28) The same is true of Christian overseers today, since they too are appointed on the basis of Scriptural requirements inspired by the holy spirit. Thus, obeying Christian overseers shows our respect for Jehovah and Jesus, the two greatest Shepherds. (Luke 10:16) Surely this should be the foremost reason why we desire to be submissive to

5, 6. (a) Whom has Jesus appointed to care for his sheep, and what does benefiting from this arrangement require of the sheep? (b) What should be the foremost reason for our wanting to obey congregation elders?

the elders. However, there are also other factors that make such compliance wise.

⁷ In giving direction to fellow believers, elders provide encouragement and counsel based either on the Scriptures themselves or on Scriptural principles. Their objective in providing such guidance is not to dictate how their brothers should live their lives. (2 Cor. 1:24) Rather, it is to give their fellow Christians Scriptural guidelines to help them make good decisions and to promote order and peace in the congregation. (1 Cor. 14:33, 40) The elders are ‘watching over souls’ in the sense that they desire to help each member of the congregation maintain a good relationship with Jehovah. They will thus be quick to offer assistance if they perceive that a brother or a sister is about to take, or has already taken, a “false step.” (Gal. 6:1, 2; Jude 22) Are these not good reasons for being “obedient to those who are taking the lead”?—*Read Hebrews 13:17.*

⁸ The apostle Paul, a spiritual shepherd himself, wrote to his brothers in Colossae: “Look out: perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey through the philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary things of the world and not according to Christ.” (Col. 2:8) This warning draws attention to another good reason for paying attention to the Scriptural counsel of the elders. They defend the flock by putting their brothers on guard against any who might attempt to undermine their faith. The apostle Peter warned of “false prophets” and “false teachers” who would try to “entice unsteady souls”

7. How do the elders help you to maintain a good relationship with Jehovah?

8. How do the elders defend the flock of God?



As a shepherd protects his flock, elders protect the sheep entrusted to them
(See paragraph 8)

into wrongdoing. (2 Pet. 2:1, 14) Present-day elders must give similar warnings when necessary. As mature Christian men, they have experience in life. Further, before being appointed, they demonstrated that they had a clear understanding of the Scriptures and that they were qualified to teach what is healthful. (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9) Their maturity, balance, and Bible-based wisdom enable them to give skillful direction to the flock.

THE FINE SHEPHERD FEEDS AND PROTECTS THE SHEEP

⁹ Through his organization, Jehovah provides an abundance of spiritual food

9. How does Jesus direct and feed the Christian congregation today?

to the whole association of brothers worldwide. Much Scriptural counsel is provided by means of our publications. In addition, at times the organization gives guidance directly to congregation elders, either through letters or through instructions delivered by traveling overseers. In such ways, the sheep receive clear direction.

¹⁰ In a spiritual sense, overseers have the responsibility of protecting, nursing, and caring for the health of members of the congregation, especially those who have hurt themselves or who have fallen sick spiritually. (*Read James 5:14, 15.*) Some of these individuals may have

10. What responsibility do spiritual shepherds have regarding those who have strayed from the flock?

strayed from the flock and have stopped engaging in Christian activities. In such a case, would not a caring elder do all in his power to find each lost sheep and urge that one to return to the fold, that is, to the congregation? Of course he would! "It is not a desirable thing with my Father who is in heaven for one of these little ones to perish," explained Jesus.—Matt. 18:12-14.

HOW SHOULD WE VIEW SHORTCOMINGS OF UNDERSHEPHERDS?

¹¹ Jehovah and Jesus are perfect Shepherds. The human undershepherds to whom they entrust the care of the congregations are not. This reality may make it challenging for some to follow the elders' lead. Such individuals may reason: 'They are imperfect humans just like us. Why should we listen to their counsel?' True, the elders are imperfect. However, we need to have a proper view of their shortcomings and weaknesses.

¹² The Scriptures candidly acknowledge the failings of those whom Jehovah used to lead his people in the past. For example, David was anointed as king and leader of Israel. Yet, he succumbed to temptation and became guilty of adultery and murder. (2 Sam. 12:7-9) Also consider the apostle Peter. Although entrusted with great responsibility in the first-century Christian congregation, he made serious mistakes. (Matt. 16:18, 19; John 13:38; 18:27; Gal. 2:11-14) With the exception of Jesus, no humans since Adam and Eve have been perfect.

11. Why may some find it challenging to follow the elders' lead?

12, 13. (a) What can be said about the failings of some whom Jehovah has used in responsible positions? (b) Why were the shortcomings of responsible men recorded in the Bible?

¹³ Why did Jehovah have Bible writers record accounts of the shortcomings of men whom he had commissioned? Among other reasons, God did this to show that he can use imperfect men to lead his people. In fact, he has always done so. Hence, we should not use the imperfections of those who take the lead among us today as an excuse to murmur against them or to ignore their authority. Jehovah expects us to respect such brothers and to obey them.—*Read Exodus 16:2, 8.*

¹⁴ Obedience to those who today are taking the lead among us is vital. Think of how Jehovah communicated with his people during critical times in the past. When the people of Israel left ancient Egypt, God's orders for them came through Moses and Aaron. To survive the tenth plague, the Israelites had to obey the instructions to have a special meal and to splash some of the blood of a slaughtered sheep on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. That direction did not come to them by means of a voice out of heaven. No, they had to listen to the older men of Israel, who in turn received specific instructions from Moses. (Ex. 12:1-7, 21-23, 29) In those circumstances, Moses and the older men acted as bearers of Jehovah's instructions to his people. Christian elders fulfill a comparably vital function today.

¹⁵ Very likely, you can think of numerous other occasions in Bible history when Jehovah provided life-saving instructions through human or angelic representatives. In all these cases, God saw fit to delegate authority. Messen-

14, 15. What can we learn from the way Jehovah communicated with his people in the past?



Elders seek to protect single-parent families from harmful association
(See paragraphs 17, 18)

gers spoke in his name, and they told his people what they needed to do in order to survive a crisis. Can we not imagine that Jehovah might do something similar at Armageddon? Naturally, any elders today who are delegated the responsibility of representing Jehovah or his organization must be exceptionally careful never to abuse the authority entrusted to them.

“ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD”

¹⁶ Jehovah’s people constitute “one flock” under “one shepherd,” Jesus

16. To what “word” do we need to be attentive?

Christ. (John 10:16) Jesus indicated that he would be with his disciples “all the days until the conclusion of the system of things.” (Matt. 28:20) As heavenly King, he is in full control of all the developments that will lead to the execution of judgment against Satan’s world. In order to remain united and safe within the flock of God, we need to listen to ‘a word behind us,’ telling us which way to go. This “word” includes what God’s holy spirit says as expressed through the Bible and what Jehovah and Jesus say through those whom they have appointed as undershepherds.—*Read Isaiah 30:21; Revelation 3:22.*

¹⁷ Satan is said to be walking about “like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone.” (1 Pet. 5:8) Like a wild and ravenous predator, he is stalking the flock, waiting for an opportunity to pounce on the unwary or on those who stray. That is all the more reason why we should stay very close to the rest of the flock and to “the shepherd and overseer of [our] souls.” (1 Pet. 2:25) Concerning the survivors of the great tribulation, Revelation 7:17 says: “The Lamb [Jesus] . . . will shepherd them, and will guide them to fountains of waters of life. And God will wipe out every tear from their eyes.” What better promise could there possibly be?

¹⁸ Having considered the very important role of Christian elders as spiritual undershepherds, we do well to ask, How can these appointed men make sure that they treat Jesus’ sheep in an appropriate manner? The answer will be discussed in the following article.

17, 18. (a) What danger threatens the flock, but of what can we be confident? (b) What will be discussed in the next article?



SHEPHERDS, IMITATE THE GREATEST SHEPHERDS

“Christ suffered for you, leaving you a model for you to follow his steps closely.”—1 PET. 2:21.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

As shepherds, how may elders imitate Jehovah?

How can elders imitate Jesus Christ?

What is the objective of the elders’ shepherding activity?

SHEEP thrive when a shepherd takes a keen interest in the welfare of his flock. According to one manual on sheep raising, “the man who simply turns the flock to pasture and gives it no more attention or thought will very likely find himself confronted with a lot of diseased and unprofitable sheep within a few years.” When sheep are cared for properly, however, the shepherd’s flock will fare well.

² The quality of care and attention that shepherds of the flock of God give to the individual sheep entrusted to them will affect the spiritual health of the whole congregation. You may recall that Jesus pitied the crowds because “they were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt. 9:36) Why were they in such a sad condition? Because those who had the responsibility of teaching the people God’s Law were harsh, demanding, and hypocritical. Rather than helping and nurturing members of their flock, Israel’s spiritual leaders put “heavy loads” on their shoulders.—Matt. 23:4.

³ Present-day Christian shepherds—the appointed elders—thus have a serious responsibility. The sheep in the flock they tend belong to Jehovah and to Jesus, who identified himself as “the fine shepherd.” (John 10:11) The sheep have been “bought with a price” that Jesus paid with his own “precious blood.” (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19) He loves the sheep so much that he willingly sacrificed his life for them. Elders should always remember that they are under-shepherds, subject to the oversight of God’s loving

1, 2. (a) What results when sheep are well cared for? (b) Why were many people in Jesus’ day like sheep without a shepherd?

3. Of what should congregation elders be aware as they carry out their role as spiritual shepherds?

Son, Jesus Christ, “the great shepherd of the sheep.”—Heb. 13:20.

⁴ How, then, are Christian shepherds expected to treat the sheep? Members of the congregation are urged to “be obedient to those who are taking the lead” among them. On the other hand, Christian elders are exhorted to avoid “lording it over those who are God’s inheritance.” (Heb. 13:17; *read 1 Peter 5:2, 3.*) How, then, can appointed elders take the lead without lording it over the flock? In other words, how can elders care for the needs of the sheep without overstepping the authority that God has granted to overseers?

“IN HIS BOSOM HE WILL CARRY THEM”

⁵ Concerning Jehovah, the prophet Isaiah said: “Like a shepherd he will shepherd his own drove. With his arm he will collect together the lambs; and in his bosom he will carry them. Those giving suck he will conduct with care.” (Isa. 40:11) This word picture conveys the idea that Jehovah cares about the needs of the weak and vulnerable members of the congregation. As a shepherd is conscious of the particular needs of each sheep in his flock and stands ready to attend to them, Jehovah is aware of the needs of those in the congregation and is happy to provide the required care. Just as a shepherd carries a newborn lamb in the fold of his garment when necessary, Jehovah—“the Father of tender mercies”—will carry us through troublesome times. He will comfort us when we are experiencing a great test or we are in special need.—2 Cor. 1:3, 4.

⁶ What a wonderful lesson a spiritual

4. What will this article consider?

5. What does the word picture at Isaiah 40:11 show us about Jehovah?

6. As a spiritual shepherd, how can an elder follow Jehovah’s example?

shepherd can learn from our heavenly Father! Like Jehovah, he must be attentive to the needs of the sheep. By knowing what challenges they are facing and what specific needs require immediate attention, an elder will be in a position to offer the necessary encouragement and support. (Prov. 27:23) Clearly, an elder must have good communication with his fellow believers. While respecting their right to privacy, he takes an interest in what he sees and hears in the congregation and lovingly makes himself available to “assist those who are weak.”—Acts 20:35; 1 Thess. 4:11.

⁷ Consider the attitude of shepherds whom God condemned. In the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Jehovah denounced those who should have been caring for his sheep but were not doing so properly. When no one was keeping watch over the sheep, the flock was preyed upon and it scattered. Rather than feeding the sheep, those shepherds were exploiting them and “feeding themselves.” (Ezek. 34:7-10; Jer. 23:1) God’s condemnation of those shepherds can appropriately be applied to the leaders of Christendom. But it also stresses how important it is for Christian elders to give Jehovah’s flock proper and loving attention.

“I SET THE PATTERN FOR YOU”

⁸ Because of human imperfection, some of God’s sheep may be slow to understand what Jehovah expects of them. They may fail to take action that is in harmony with Scriptural counsel, or they

7. (a) How were God’s sheep being treated in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah? (b) What can we learn from Jehovah’s condemnation of unfaithful spiritual shepherds?

8. How did Jesus set an excellent pattern in correcting wrong attitudes?

may act in a way that indicates a lack of spiritual maturity. How are the elders to react? They should imitate Jesus' patience with his disciples when they were preoccupied with the question of who among them would become the greatest in the Kingdom. Instead of losing patience with them, Jesus continued to teach his disciples and to give them loving counsel about manifesting humility. (Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27) By washing their feet, Jesus provided an object lesson in humility, a quality that Christian overseers need to display.—*Read John 13:12-15*; 1 Pet. 2:21.

⁹ Jesus' view of a spiritual shepherd's role differed from that once manifested by James and John. The two apostles sought to secure a prominent position in the Kingdom. But Jesus corrected their attitude, saying: "You know that foreign rulers like to order their people around. And their great leaders have full power over everyone they rule. But don't act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others." (Matt. 20:25, 26, *Contemporary English Version*) The apostles needed to resist a tendency toward wanting to "lord it over" their companions, or to 'order people around.'

¹⁰ Jesus expects Christian elders to treat the flock the same way that he treated it. They must be willing to act as servants to their companions, not masters over them. The apostle Paul had that humble attitude, for he told the older men of the congregation in Ephesus: "You well know how from the first day

9. What attitude did Jesus recommend to his disciples?

10. How does Jesus want elders to treat the flock, and what example did Paul set in this regard?

that I stepped into the district of Asia I was with you the whole time, slaving for the Lord with the greatest lowliness of mind." The apostle desired that those elders help others in an earnest, humble manner. He said: "I have exhibited to you in all things that by thus laboring you must assist those who are weak." (Acts 20:18, 19, 35) Paul told the Corinthians that he was not the master over their faith. Instead, he was a humble fellow worker for their joy. (2 Cor. 1:24) Paul set a fine example of humility and hard work for elders today.

'HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITHFUL WORD'

¹¹ A congregation elder must 'hold firmly to the faithful word as respects his art of teaching.' (Titus 1:9) But he does so "in a spirit of mildness." (Gal. 6:1) Rather than trying to force his associates in the congregation to act in a certain way, a good spiritual shepherd thinks in terms of appealing to their heart. An elder might highlight the Scriptural principles that a brother should consider when he is endeavoring to make an important decision. He might review with him what has been published on the topic. He might also urge the individual to consider how different courses of action would affect his relationship with Jehovah. The elder can stress the importance of seeking God's guidance in prayer before making a decision. (Prov. 3:5, 6) After discussing such matters with the fellow believer, an elder will allow him to make his own decision.—Rom. 14:1-4.

¹² The only authority that Christian overseers have comes from the Scriptures. Therefore, it is vital that they use

11, 12. How might an elder help a fellow believer to make a decision?



Elders assist their families to prepare for the ministry
(See paragraph 13)

the Bible skillfully and adhere to what it says. Doing so helps elders to avoid any possible abuse of power. After all, they are only undershepherds, and each member of the congregation will answer to Jehovah and Jesus for the decisions he or she makes.—Gal. 6:5, 7, 8.

“EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK”

¹³ After admonishing the older men in the congregation not ‘to lord it over those allotted to them,’ the apostle Peter exhorted them ‘to become examples to the flock.’ (1 Pet. 5:3; ftn.) How may an elder be an example to the flock? Consider two of the qualifications that must be met by a man who is “reaching out for an office of overseer.” He needs to be “sound in mind” and must be “presiding over his own household in a fine manner.” If an elder has a family, he must preside over it in an exemplary way, for “if indeed any man does not know how to preside over his own household,

13, 14. In what areas must an elder be an example to the flock?

how will he take care of God’s congregation?” (1 Tim. 3:1, 2, 4, 5) To qualify for the office of overseer, a man must be sound in mind in that he clearly understands divine principles and knows how to apply them in his own life. He is levelheaded and not hasty in judgment. Seeing these qualities in the elders inspires confidence among congregation members.

¹⁴ Taking the lead in field service is another area in which overseers set a fine example for their fellow Christians. In this regard, Jesus set the example for overseers. Preaching the good news of the Kingdom was an important part of Jesus’ earthly activity. He showed his disciples how this work was to be done. (Mark 1:38; Luke 8:1) In our day, how encouraging it is for publishers to preach side by side with elders, to witness the elders’ zeal for this lifesaving work, and to learn from their teaching methods! The overseers’ zealous determination to devote time and effort to preaching the good news despite their busy schedule encourages the whole congregation to display similar zeal. Elders can also set a good example for their brothers by preparing for and participating in congregation meetings and other activities, such as cleaning and maintaining the Kingdom Hall.—Eph. 5:15, 16; *read Hebrews 13:7.*

“SUPPORT THE WEAK”

¹⁵ A good shepherd is quick to take helpful action when a sheep is injured or becomes sick. Similarly, the elders need to give prompt attention to any in the congregation who are suffering or require spiritual assistance. The elderly

15. What are some reasons that elders make shepherding calls?



Overseers set the example in field service
(See paragraph 14)

and the sick may need attention in connection with their physical needs, but they especially need spiritual help and encouragement. (1 Thess. 5:14) Young members of the congregation may be facing challenges, such as resisting “the desires incidental to youth.” (2 Tim. 2: 22) Shepherding thus involves visiting members of the congregation periodically with a view to understanding the situations they are facing and encouraging them with appropriate Scriptural counsel. When such issues are addressed in a timely fashion, many problems can be resolved before they ever become serious.

¹⁶ What if problems develop to the point that the spiritual health of a member of the congregation is threatened? “Is there anyone sick among you?” asked the Bible writer James. “Let him call the older men of the congregation to him,

16. When a member of the congregation is in need of spiritual help, what assistance can the elders provide?

and let them pray over him, greasing him with oil in the name of Jehovah. And the prayer of faith will make the indisposed one well, and Jehovah will raise him up. Also, if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.” (Jas. 5:14, 15) Even if the spiritually ailing one does not “call the older men,” they should quickly come to his aid as soon as they become aware of his situation. When they pray with and for their brothers and support them in times of need, the elders prove themselves to be spiritually refreshing and encouraging to those under their care.—*Read Isaiah 32:1, 2.*

¹⁷ In all they do in Jehovah’s organization, Christian shepherds strive to imitate “the great shepherd,” Jesus Christ. With the spiritual assistance of such responsible men, the flock benefits greatly and continues to flourish. For all of this, we are grateful and are moved to praise our incomparable Shepherd, Jehovah.

17. When elders imitate “the great shepherd,” what can result?

“I Was Like a Turtle in Its Shell”

DURING a whirlwind nine-day witnessing campaign in August/September 1929, over 10,000 preachers fanned out across the United States. They placed a quarter of a million books and booklets in the hands of the people. Among those Kingdom proclaimers were some one thousand colporteurs. How their number had grown! The *Bulletin** declared it “almost unbelievable” that the pioneer ranks had tripled from 1927 to 1929.

Late in 1929, there was a financial crash. On Black Tuesday—October 29, 1929—collapsing prices on the New York Stock Exchange created shock waves that plunged the global economic system into the Great Depression. Banks failed by the thousands. Farms stopped operating. Giant factories shut their doors. Millions lost their jobs. In 1933, U.S. home foreclosures peaked at 1,000 per day.

How could full-time preachers manage during such a crisis? One answer was a home on wheels. Rent free and tax free, a house car or a trailer enabled many pioneers to pursue their ministry with the least possible expense.[#] And during convention time, a mobile home served as a free hotel room. In 1934, the *Bulletin* supplied detailed plans for a compact but comfortable abode with such practical features as a water system, a cooking stove, a fold-up bed, and insulation against the cold.

Resourceful preachers around the world set about building their homes on wheels. “Noah

* Now called *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

[#] In those times, most pioneers did no secular work. They received Bible literature at reduced rates and used contributions from placements for their modest living expenses.



had no boat-building experience,” recalled Victor Blackwell, “and I had no experience in or knowledge of building a house trailer.” But build he did.

Avery and Lovenia Bristow had a house car. Said Avery, “I was like a turtle in its shell—my home was always with me.” The Bristows pioneered with Harvey and Anne Conrow, whose mobile home had tar-paper walls. Pieces of the paper fell off every time they moved their home. “No one ever saw a trailer like it before,” recalled Avery, “and no one has ever seen one like it since!” But Avery said that the Conrows and their two sons were “the happiest family you ever saw.” Harvey Conrow wrote, “We never wanted for anything, and we felt completely secure in Jehovah’s service and under his loving care.” The four Conrows later attended Gilead School and were assigned to Peru as missionaries.

The Battainos too pioneered as a family. After Giusto and Vincenza learned that they were to be parents, they transformed a 1929 Model A Ford truck into a home that “seemed like a fine hotel” compared with the tents they had lived in before. With their little girl, they continued in the

assignment they loved, preaching to Italians living in the United States.

The good news found many listening ears, but poor and jobless people could seldom contribute money toward Bible literature. Instead, they offered all kinds of goods in a fair exchange. Two pioneers listed 64 types of items given to them by interested ones. The list read "like an inventory from a country store."

Fred Anderson met a farmer who wanted a set of our books and offered in exchange a pair of glasses that had been his mother's. At the next farm, a man showed interest in our literature but said, "I don't have glasses to read with." When he wore his neighbor's glasses, however, he could read the books just fine and gladly contributed for the books and glasses.

Herbert Abbott carried a portable chicken coop in his car. After trading for three or four chickens, he took them to market, sold them, and filled his gas tank. "Were we down to the last

dime at times? Oh yes," he wrote, "but we did not let that stop us. If we had gas in the tank, we would go on, placing our faith and trust in Jehovah."

Reliance on Jehovah and hardy determination carried his people through those difficult years. During one rainstorm Maxwell and Emmy Lewis escaped from their trailer just in time to see it cut in half by a falling tree. "These things were no obstacles," Maxwell wrote, "just incidents, and the thought of giving up never entered our minds. There was much work to be done, and we intended to do it." Undeterred and with the help of loving friends, Maxwell and Emmy rebuilt their home on wheels.

In our own challenging times, the same self-sacrificing spirit characterizes millions of zealous Witnesses of Jehovah. After all, like those early pioneers, we are determined to continue in the preaching activity until Jehovah says the work is done.

A house car about to be floated across a river during monsoon season in India



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