

- Song 123 and Prayer
- Opening Comments (3 min. or less)

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD

- **“Abuse of Power Leads to Loss of Authority”:** (10 min.)
Isa 22:15, 16—Shebna used his authority in a selfish way (*ip-1* 238 ¶16-17)
Isa 22:17-22—Jehovah replaced Shebna with Eliakim (*ip-1* 238-239 ¶17-18)
Isa 22:23-25—Shebna’s experience teaches us valuable lessons (*w07* 1/15 8 ¶6; *ip-1* 240-241 ¶19-20)
- **Digging for Spiritual Gems:** (8 min.)
Isa 21:1—What region was called “the wilderness of the sea,” and why? (*w06* 12/1 11 ¶2)

Isa 23:17, 18—How did Tyre’s material profit become “holy to Jehovah”? (*ip-1* 253-254 ¶22-24)

What does this week’s Bible reading teach me about Jehovah?

What points from this week’s Bible reading can I use in the field ministry?

- **Bible Reading:** (4 min. or less) Isa 17:1-14

APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

- **Initial Call:** (2 min. or less) *bh*—Use the video *Why Study the Bible?* to introduce the book. (Note: Do not play the video during the demonstration.)
- **Return Visit:** (4 min. or less) *bh*—Start a doorstep Bible study, and lay the groundwork for the next visit.
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LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

- Song 44
- **Will You “Keep on the Watch”?:** (8 min.) Talk by an elder based on the March 15, 2015, *Watchtower*, pages 12-16. Encourage all to keep on the watch, just as did Isaiah’s visionary watchman and the five virgins of Jesus’ illustration.—Isa 21:8; Mt 25:1-13.
- **Organizational Accomplishments:** (7 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.
- **Congregation Bible Study:** (30 min.) *kr* chap. 6 ¶1-7, pp. 58-59
- Review Followed by Preview of Next Week (3 min.)
- Song 141 and Prayer

ISAIAH 17-23 | Abuse of Power Leads to Loss of Authority

Shebna was the steward “in charge of the house,” likely the house of King Hezekiah. His position was second only to the king, and much was expected of him.

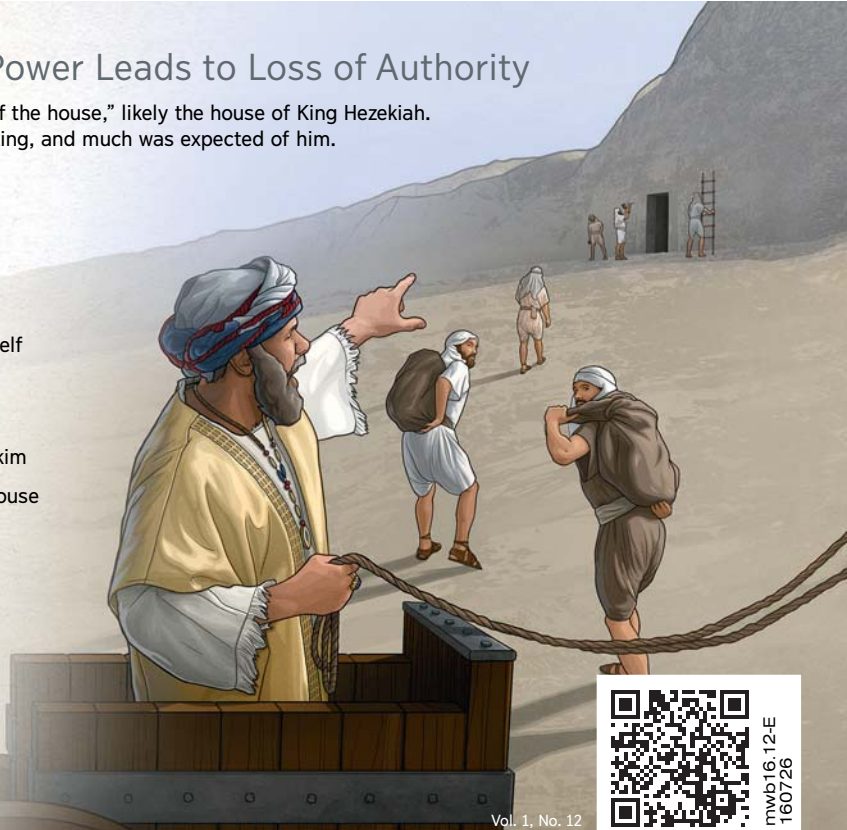
22:15, 16

- Shebna should have cared for the needs of Jehovah’s people
- He selfishly pursued glory for himself

22:20-22

- Jehovah replaced Shebna with Eliakim
- Eliakim was given “the key of the house of David,” which symbolized power and authority

Consider: How could Shebna have used his authority to help others?



123 *Shepherds—Gifts in Men* (Ephesians 4:8)

1. Help in our lives, Jehovah provides,
 Shepherds to tend his flock.
 By their example they serve as guides,
 Showing us how to walk.

(CHORUS)

*God gives us men who have earned our trust,
Men who are loyal and true.
They show concern for his precious flock;
Love them for all that they do.*

2. Shepherds who love us care how we feel;
 Gently they guide the way.
 When we are hurt, they help us to heal,
 Kind in the words they say.

(Chorus)

3. Godly advice and counsel they give,
 That we may never stray.
 Thus they assist us, God's way to live,
 Serving him ev'ry day.

(Chorus)

Isaiah 17-23

17 A pronouncement against Damascus:

“Look! Damascus will cease to be a city,
And it will become a heap of ruins.

2 The cities of A-ro'er will be abandoned;

They will become places for flocks to lie down
With no one to make them afraid.

3 Fortified cities will disappear from E'phra-im,

And the kingdom from Damascus;

And those remaining of Syria

Will be like the glory of the Israelites,” declares
Jehovah of armies.

4 “In that day the glory of Jacob will diminish,

And his healthy body will grow thin.

5 It will be as when the harvester is gathering the
standing grain

And his arm harvests the ears of grain,

Like when one gleans grain in the Valley of
Reph'a-im.

6 Only gleanings will be left,

As when an olive tree is beaten:

Only two or three ripe olives remain on the
highest branch,

Only four or five on its fruit-bearing branches,”
declares Jehovah the God of Israel.

⁷ In that day man will look up to his Maker, and his eyes will gaze at the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands; and he will not gaze at what his fingers have made, either the sacred poles or the incense stands.

⁹ In that day his fortress cities will become like an abandoned site in the woodland,
Like a branch that was abandoned before the Israelites;
It will become a wasteland.

¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of your salvation;
You have failed to remember the Rock of your fortress.
That is why you plant beautiful plantations
And set it with the shoot of a stranger.

¹¹ In the day you carefully fence in your plantation,
In the morning you make your seed sprout,
But the harvest will vanish in the day of disease
and incurable pain.

¹² Listen! There is a commotion of many peoples,
Who are as boisterous as the seas!
There is an uproar of nations,
Whose sound is like the roar of mighty waters!

¹³ The nations will make a sound like the roar of many waters.
He will rebuke them, and they will flee far away,

Chased like the chaff of the mountains before a
wind,
Like a whirling thistle before a storm wind.

14 In the evening there is terror.
Before morning they are no more.
This is the share of those pillaging us
And the lot of those plundering us.

18 Woe to the land of whirring insect wings
In the region of the rivers of E·thi·o'pi·a!

2 It sends envoys by sea,
Across the waters in papyrus vessels, saying:
“Go, you swift messengers,
To a tall and smooth-skinned nation,
To a people feared everywhere,
To a strong, conquering nation,
Whose land is washed away by rivers.”

3 All you inhabitants of the land and you residents of
the earth,
What you see will be like a signal raised on the
mountains,
And you will hear a sound like the blowing of a
horn.

4 For this is what Jehovah said to me:
“I will remain undisturbed and look on my
established place,

Like the shimmering heat along with the
sunlight,
Like the cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.

⁵ For before the harvest,
When the blossom is finished and the bloom
becomes a ripening grape,
The shoots will be cut off with pruning shears
And the tendrils will be lopped off and removed.

⁶ They will all be left for the birds of prey of the
mountains
And for the beasts of the earth.
The birds of prey will spend the summer on
them,
And all the beasts of the earth will spend the
harvesttime on them.

⁷ At that time a gift will be brought to Jehovah of
armies,
From a tall and smooth-skinned nation,
From a people feared everywhere,
From a strong, conquering nation,
Whose land is washed away by rivers
To the place that bears the name of Jehovah of
armies, Mount Zion.”

19 A pronouncement against Egypt:
Look! Jehovah is riding on a swift cloud and is
coming into Egypt.

The worthless gods of Egypt will tremble before
him,
And the heart of Egypt will melt within it.

² “I will incite Egyptians against Egyptians,
And they will fight one another,
Each against his brother and his neighbor,
City against city, kingdom against kingdom.

³ And the spirit of Egypt will become bewildered
within it,
And I will confuse its plans.
They will resort to the worthless gods,
To the charmers and to the spirit mediums and
to the fortune-tellers.

⁴ I will hand Egypt over to a hard master,
And a harsh king will rule over them,” declares
the true Lord, Jehovah of armies.

⁵ The water of the sea will be dried up,
And the river will become parched and run dry.

⁶ And the rivers will stink;
The Nile canals of Egypt will become low and
parched.
The reeds and the rushes will decay.

⁷ The plants along the Nile River, at the mouth of the
Nile,
And all the land sown with seed along the Nile
will dry up.

It will be blown away, and it will be no more.

⁸ And the fishermen will mourn,
Those casting fishhooks into the Nile will lament,
And those who spread their nets on the water
will dwindle.

⁹ Those who work in combed flax
And those making white fabric on the loom will
be put to shame.

¹⁰ Her weavers will be crushed;
All the hired workers will grieve.

¹¹ The princes of Zo'an are foolish.
The wisest advisers of Phar'aoh give
unreasonable advice.

How can you say to Phar'aoh:
"I am a descendant of wise ones,
A descendant of ancient kings"?

¹² Where, then, are your wise men?
Let them tell you if they know what Jehovah of
armies has decided concerning Egypt.

¹³ The princes of Zo'an have acted foolishly;
The princes of Noph have been deceived;
The chiefs of her tribes have led Egypt astray.

¹⁴ Jehovah has poured out on her a spirit of
confusion;

And they have led Egypt astray in whatever she
does,
Like a drunk staggering in his vomit.

¹⁵ And Egypt will not have any work to do,
Whether for the head or the tail, the shoot or the
rush.

¹⁶ In that day Egypt will become like women,
trembling and terrified because of the threatening hand
that Jehovah of armies raises against it. ¹⁷ And the land
of Judah will become a cause for terror to Egypt. They
will feel dread at the mention of it because of the
decision that Jehovah of armies has made against
them.

¹⁸ In that day there will be five cities in the land of
Egypt speaking the language of Ca'naan and swearing
loyalty to Jehovah of armies. One city will be called
The City of Tearing Down.

¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to Jehovah in the
middle of the land of Egypt and a pillar to Jehovah at
its boundary. ²⁰ It will be for a sign and for a witness to
Jehovah of armies in the land of Egypt; for they will cry
out to Jehovah because of the oppressors, and he will
send them a savior, a grand one, who will save them.

²¹ And Jehovah will become known to the Egyptians,
and the Egyptians will know Jehovah in that day, and
they will offer sacrifices and gifts and make a vow to

Jehovah and pay it. ²² Jehovah will strike Egypt, striking and healing it; and they will return to Jehovah, and he will respond to their entreaties and heal them.

²³ In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to As-syr'i-a. Then As-syr'i-a will come into Egypt, and Egypt into As-syr'i-a, and Egypt will serve God together with As-syr'i-a. ²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third along with Egypt and with As-syr'i-a, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ for Jehovah of armies will have blessed it, saying: "Blessed be my people, Egypt, and the work of my hands, As-syr'i-a, and my inheritance, Israel."

20 In the year that King Sar'gon of As-syr'i-a sent the Tar'tan to Ash'dod, he fought against Ash'dod and captured it. ² At that time Jehovah spoke through Isaiah the son of A'moz, saying: "Go, remove the sackcloth from your hips, and take your sandals off your feet." And he did so, walking about naked and barefoot.

³ Jehovah then said: "Just as my servant Isaiah has walked about naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and E-thi-o'pi-a, ⁴ so the king of As-syr'i-a will lead the captives of Egypt and the exiles of E-thi-o'pi-a, boys and old men, naked and barefoot and with exposed buttocks, the nakedness of Egypt. ⁵ And they will be terrified and will be ashamed of E-thi-o'pi-a their hope and of Egypt their pride. ⁶ The

inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, 'Look at what happened to our hope, to which we fled for help and rescue from the king of As-syr'i-a! How will we escape now?'"

21 A pronouncement against the wilderness of the sea:

It is coming like storm winds that sweep through
in the south,
From the wilderness, from a fearsome land.

² A harsh vision has been told to me:

The treacherous one is acting treacherously,
And the destroyer is destroying.
Go up, O E'lam! Lay siege, O Me'di-a!
I will put an end to all the sighing she caused.

³ That is why I am in great anguish.

Convulsions have seized me,
Like those of a woman giving birth.
I am too distressed to hear;
I am too disturbed to see.

⁴ My heart falters; I shudder in terror.

The twilight I longed for makes me tremble.

⁵ Set the table and arrange the seats!

Eat and drink!

Get up, you princes, anoint the shield!

⁶ For this is what Jehovah said to me:

“Go, post a lookout and have him report what he sees.”

⁷ And he saw a war chariot with a team of horses,
A war chariot of donkeys,
A war chariot of camels.
He watched carefully, with great attentiveness.

⁸ Then he called out like a lion:
“Upon the watchtower, O Jehovah, I am
standing constantly by day,
And I am stationed at my guardpost every night.

⁹ Look at what is coming:
Men in a war chariot with a team of horses!”
Then he spoke up and said:
“She has fallen! Babylon has fallen!
All the graven images of her gods he has
shattered to the ground!”

¹⁰ O my people who have been threshed,
The product of my threshing floor,
I have reported to you what I have heard from
Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel.

¹¹ A pronouncement against Du'mah:
Someone is calling out to me from Se'ir:
“Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?”

¹² The watchman said:
“The morning is coming, and also the night.

If you would inquire, inquire.
Come again!”

¹³ A pronouncement against the desert plain:
In the forest in the desert plain you will spend
the night,
O caravans of De'dan.

¹⁴ Bring water to meet the thirsty one,
You inhabitants of the land of Te'ma,
And bring bread for the one fleeing.

¹⁵ For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn
sword,
From the bent bow, and from the cruelty of the
war.

¹⁶ For this is what Jehovah said to me: “Within one
year, like the years of a hired worker, all the glory of
Ke'dar will come to an end. ¹⁷ The remaining bowmen
of the warriors of Ke'dar will be few, for Jehovah the
God of Israel has spoken.”

22 A pronouncement about the Valley of Vision:
What is the matter with you that you have all
gone up to the roofs?

² You were full of turmoil,
A boisterous city, an exultant town.
Your slain were not slain with the sword,
Nor did they die in battle.

³ All your dictators have fled together.
They were taken prisoner without need of a
bow.

All who were found were taken prisoner,
Even though they had fled far away.

⁴ That is why I said: "Turn your eyes away from me,
And I will weep bitterly.
Do not insist on comforting me
Over the destruction of the daughter of my
people.

⁵ For it is a day of confusion and of defeat and of
panic,
From the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah of armies,
In the Valley of Vision.
There is a demolishing of the wall
And a cry to the mountain.

⁶ E'lam picks up the quiver
With manned chariots and horses,
And Kir uncovers the shield.

⁷ Your choicest valleys
Will become full of war chariots,
And the horses will take their positions at the
gate,

⁸ And the screen of Judah will be removed.

"In that day you will look toward the armory of the
House of the Forest, ⁹ and you will see the many

breaches of the City of David. And you will collect the waters of the lower pool. ¹⁰ You will count the houses of Jerusalem, and you will pull down the houses to reinforce the wall. ¹¹ And you will make a basin between the two walls for the water of the old pool, but you will not look to its Grand Maker, and you will not see the One who formed it long ago.

¹² In that day the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah of armies,
Will call for weeping and mourning,
For shaved heads and the wearing of sackcloth.

¹³ But instead, there is celebration and rejoicing,
The killing of cattle and the slaughtering of
sheep,
The eating of meat and the drinking of wine.
‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die.’”

¹⁴ Then Jehovah of armies revealed himself in my ears: “‘This error will not be atoned in your behalf until you people die,’ says the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah of armies.”

¹⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah of armies, says: “Go in to this steward, to Sheb'na, who is in charge of the house, and say, ¹⁶ ‘What is your interest here, and who is there of interest to you here, that you hewed out a burial place here for yourself?’ He is hewing out his burial place in a high place; he is cutting out a resting-place for himself in a crag.

¹⁷ ‘Look! Jehovah will hurl you down violently, O man, and seize you forcibly. ¹⁸ He will certainly wrap you up tightly and hurl you like a ball into a wide land. There you will die, and there your glorious chariots will be, a disgrace to your master’s house. ¹⁹ And I will depose you from your position and throw you out of your office.

²⁰ “‘In that day I will call my servant E·li'a·kim the son of Hil·ki'ah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe and firmly bind your sash around him, and I will give your authority into his hand. And he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

²² And I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder. He will open and no one will shut; and he will shut and no one will open. ²³ I will drive him in as a peg in a lasting place, and he will become as a throne of glory to the house of his father. ²⁴ And they will hang on him all the glory of the house of his father, the descendants and the offspring, all the small vessels, the bowl-shaped vessels, as well as all the large jars.

²⁵ “‘In that day,’ declares Jehovah of armies, ‘the peg that is driven in a lasting place will be removed, and it will be cut down and fall, and the load that it supported will fall to ruin, for Jehovah himself has spoken.’”

23 A pronouncement about Tyre:

Wail, you ships of Tar'shish!

For the port has been destroyed; it cannot be entered.

From the land of Kit'tim it has been revealed to them.

² Be silent, you inhabitants of the coastland.
The merchants from Si'don who cross the sea
have filled you.

³ Over many waters went the grain of Shi'hor,
The harvest of the Nile, her revenue,
Bringing the profit of the nations.

⁴ Be ashamed, O Si'don, you stronghold of the sea,
Because the sea has said:
"I have not had birth pains, and I have not given
birth,
Nor have I brought up young men or raised
young women."

⁵ As when they heard the report about Egypt,
People will be in anguish over the report about
Tyre.

⁶ Cross over to Tar'shish!
Wail, you inhabitants of the coastland!

⁷ Is this your city that was exultant from long ago,
from her early times?
Her feet used to take her to distant lands to
reside.

⁸ Who has decided this against Tyre,
The bestower of crowns,

Whose merchants were princes,
Whose tradesmen were honored in all the
earth?

⁹ Jehovah of armies himself has decided this,
To profane her pride over all her beauty,
To humiliate all those who were honored
throughout the earth.

¹⁰ Cross over your land like the Nile River, O
daughter of Tar'shish.
There is no longer any shipyard.

¹¹ He has stretched his hand out over the sea;
He has shaken kingdoms.
Jehovah has ordered the annihilation of
Phoe-ni'cia's strongholds.

¹² And he says: "You will exult no more,
O oppressed one, the virgin daughter of Si'don.
Get up, cross over to Kit'tim.
Even there you will find no rest."

¹³ Look! The land of the Chal-de'ans.
This is the people—As-syr'i-a was not the one—
They made her a place for those haunting the
desert.
They have erected their siege towers;
They have stripped bare her fortified towers,
Reducing her to a crumbling ruin.

¹⁴ Wail, you ships of Tar'shish,

For your stronghold has been destroyed.

¹⁵ In that day Tyre will be forgotten for 70 years, the same as the lifetime of one king. At the end of 70 years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of a prostitute:

¹⁶ “Take a harp, go around the city, O forgotten prostitute.

Play your harp skillfully;

Sing many songs,

So that they will remember you.”

¹⁷ At the end of 70 years, Jehovah will turn his attention to Tyre, and she will return to her hire and prostitute herself with all the world’s kingdoms on the face of the earth. ¹⁸ But her profit and her hire will become something holy to Jehovah. It will not be stored or laid away, because her hire will be for those dwelling before Jehovah, so that they may eat to satisfaction and wear elegant clothing.

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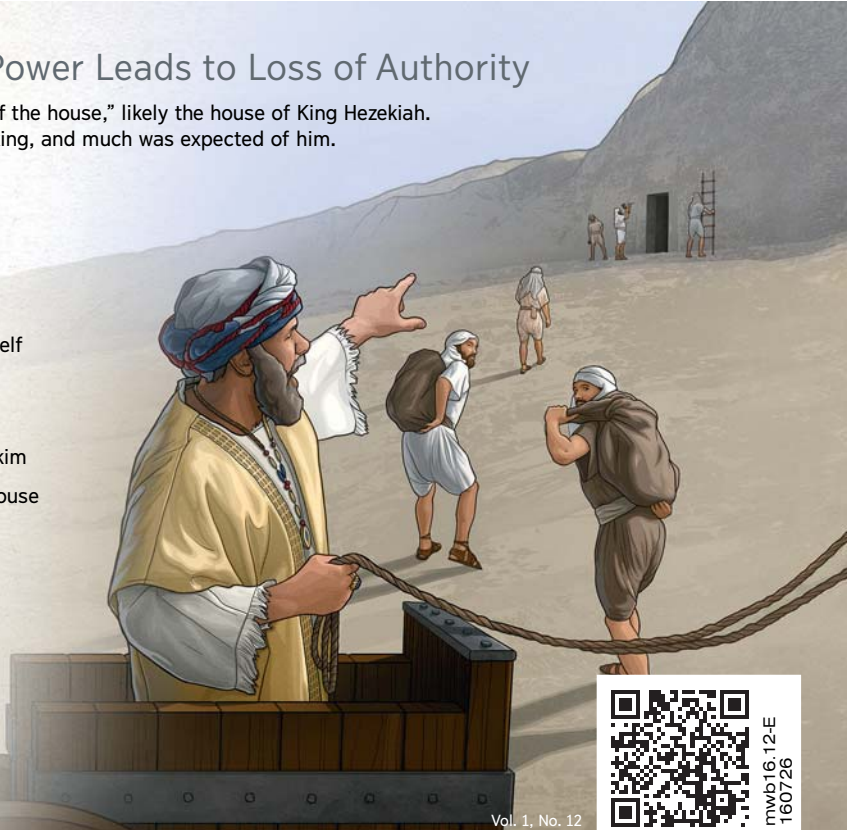
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- Eliakim was given “the key of the house of David,” which symbolized power and authority

Consider: How could Shebna have used his authority to help others?



December 26–January 1

Treasures From God's Word

Isaiah 22:15, 16—Shebna used his authority in a selfish way

Reference: *ip-1* 238 paragraphs 16-17.

A Selfish Steward

16 The prophet now turns his attention from an unfaithful people to an unfaithful individual. Isaiah writes: “This is what the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah of armies, has said: ‘Go, enter in to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house, “What is there of interest to you here, and who is there of interest to you here, that you have hewed out for yourself here a burial place?” On a height he is hewing out his burial place; in a crag he is cutting out a residence for himself.’” — **Isaiah 22:15, 16.**

17 Shebna is ‘steward over the house,’ probably the house of King Hezekiah. As such, he has an influential position, second only to the king. Much is expected of him. (1 Corinthians 4:2) Yet, when he should be giving first attention to the affairs of the nation, Shebna is pursuing glory for himself. He is having a luxurious tomb—comparable to that of a king—carved for himself high on a crag. Jehovah, observing this, inspires Isaiah to warn the unfaithful steward: “Look! Jehovah is

hurling you down with violent hurling, O able-bodied man, and grasping you forcibly. Without fail he will wrap you up tightly, like a ball for a wide land. There you will die, and there the chariots of your glory will be the dishonor of the house of your master. And I will push you away from your position; and from your official standing one will tear you down.” (*Isaiah 22:17-19*) Because of his self-centeredness, Shebna will not have even an ordinary tomb in Jerusalem. Instead, he will be hurled like a ball, to die in a distant land. In this there is a warning to all of those entrusted with authority among God’s people. Abuse of power will lead to the loss of that authority and possibly to banishment.

Isaiah 22:17-22—Jehovah replaced Shebna with Eliakim

Reference: *ip-1* 238-239 **paragraphs 17-18**.

18 How, though, will Shebna be removed from his position? Through Isaiah, Jehovah explains: “It must occur in that day that I will call my servant, namely, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. And I will clothe him with your robe, and your sash I shall firmly bind about him, and your dominion I shall give into his hand; and he must become a father to the inhabitant of Jerusalem

and to the house of Judah. And I will put the key of the house of David upon his shoulder, and he must open without anyone's shutting, and he must shut without anyone's opening." (*Isaiah 22:20-22*) Replacing Shebna, Eliakim will be given the steward's official garments along with the key of the house of David. The Bible uses the term "key" to symbolize authority, government, or power. (Compare Matthew 16:19.) In ancient times, a king's adviser, entrusted with the keys, might have general supervision of the royal chambers, even deciding on candidates for the king's service. (Compare **Revelation 3:7, 8**.) Thus, the office of steward is important, and much is expected of whoever serves in it. (Luke 12:48) Shebna may be capable, but because he is unfaithful, Jehovah will replace him.

Isaiah 22:23-25—Shebna's experience teaches us valuable lessons

Reference: *w07* 1/15 8 **paragraph 6**.

Isaiah 36:2, 3, 22. Though dismissed from serving as a steward, Shebna was allowed to continue in the king's service as a secretary to his replacement. (**Isaiah 22:15, 19**) If we are removed from a position of responsibility in Jehovah's organization for some reason, should we not continue to serve God in

whatever capacity he permits?

Reference: *ip-1* 240-241 paragraphs 19-20.

Two Symbolic Pegs

19 Finally, Jehovah uses symbolic language to describe the transfer of power from Shebna to Eliakim. He states: “I will drive him [Eliakim] in as a peg in a lasting place, and he must become as a throne of glory to the house of his father. And they must hang upon him all the glory of the house of his father, the descendants and the offshoots, all the vessels of the small sort, the vessels of the bowl sort as well as all the vessels of the large jars. In that day,’ is the utterance of Jehovah of armies, ‘the peg [Shebna] that is driven in a lasting place will be removed, and it must be hewn down and fall, and the load that is upon it must be cut off, for Jehovah himself has spoken it.”—*Isaiah 22:23-25*.

20 In these verses the first peg is Eliakim. He will become “a throne of glory” to the house of his father, Hilkiah. Unlike Shebna, he will not disgrace his father’s house or reputation. Eliakim will be a lasting support to household vessels, that is, to others in the king’s service. (**2 Timothy 2:20, 21**) In contrast, the second peg refers to Shebna. Though he may seem secure, he

will be removed. Any who continue to look to him will fall.

Digging for Spiritual Gems

Isaiah 21:1—What region was called “the wilderness of the sea,” and why?

Reference: *w06 12/1 11* **paragraph 2**.

Even though Babylon was nowhere near the actual sea, it is referred to this way. This is because the overflowing waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers flooded the region annually, creating a marshy “sea.”

Isaiah 23:17, 18—How did Tyre’s material profit become “holy to Jehovah”?

Reference: *ip-1 253-254* **paragraphs 22-24**.

22 Isaiah continues: “At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as in the song of a prostitute: ‘Take a harp, go around the city, O forgotten prostitute. Do your best at playing on the strings; make your songs many, in order that you may be remembered.’ And it must occur at the end of seventy years that Jehovah will turn his attention to Tyre, and she must return to her hire and commit prostitution with all the kingdoms of the earth upon the surface of the ground.”—*Isaiah 23:15b-*

17.

23 Following the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., Phoenicia becomes a satrapy of the Medo-Persian Empire. The Persian monarch, Cyrus the Great, is a tolerant ruler. Under this new rulership, Tyre will resume her former activity and try hard to regain recognition as a world commercial center—just as a prostitute who has been forgotten and has lost her clientele seeks to attract new clients by going around the city, playing her harp and singing her songs. Will Tyre succeed? Yes, Jehovah will grant her success. In time, the island-city will become so prosperous that toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E., the prophet Zechariah will say: “Tyre proceeded to build a rampart for herself, and to pile up silver like dust and gold like the mire of the streets.”—Zechariah 9:3.

‘Her Profit Must Become Something Holy’

24 How remarkable are the following prophetic words! “Her profit and her hire must become something holy to Jehovah. It will not be stored up, nor be laid up, because her hire will come to be for those dwelling before Jehovah, for eating to satisfaction and for elegant covering.” (*Isaiah 23:18*) How does Tyre’s material profit become something holy? Jehovah maneuvers matters so that it is used according to his will—for the eating to satisfaction of his people and for

their covering. This comes about following the Israelites' return from Babylonian exile. The people of Tyre assist them by supplying cedar timbers for rebuilding the temple. They also resume trade with the city of Jerusalem.—Ezra 3:7; Nehemiah 13:16.

Living as Christians

Reference: w15 3/15 12-16.

Will You “Keep on the Watch”?

“Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour.”—Matthew 25:13.

[Box.] How Would You Answer?

What is the message of the parable of the ten virgins?

How have the anointed applied the message of Jesus' parable concerning the ten virgins?

In what ways can those of the “other sheep” benefit from the parable of the ten virgins?

[End of Box.]

1 It must have been a remarkable thing to sit there on

the Mount of Olives—overlooking the temple in Jerusalem—when Jesus uttered one of his most fascinating prophecies. Peter, Andrew, James, and John paid rapt attention as Jesus cast his prophetic gaze far, far into the future. He told them a great deal about the last days of this wicked world system, the time when he would be ruling in God’s Kingdom. He told them that during that climactic time, his “faithful and discreet slave” would represent him on earth, giving his servants the timely spiritual nourishment they needed.—**Matthew 24:45-47.**

2 Next, in that same prophecy, Jesus related the parable of the ten virgins. **(Read Matthew 25:1-13.)** Let us focus on these questions: (1) What is that parable’s basic message? (2) How have faithful anointed ones applied the parable’s counsel, and with what results? (3) How can each of us benefit from Jesus’ parable today?

What Is the Parable’s Message?

3 We noted in the preceding article that over recent decades, the faithful slave has gradually come to explain the Scriptures with less emphasis on symbolic prophetic pictures and more on practical application. In the past, our literature at times assigned specific symbolic meanings even to small details of Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins, including the lamps, the oil,

the flasks, and so forth. Is it possible, though, that we were allowing the spotlight to shift from the parable's simple, urgent message? As we will see, the answer is of vital importance.

4 Let us take a look at Jesus' basic message in this parable. First, consider the main characters. Who is *the bridegroom* of the parable? Clearly, Jesus was talking about himself. Why, on a different occasion, he even referred to himself as the bridegroom! (Luke 5:34, 35) What about *the virgins*? In the parable, Jesus says that the virgins have the responsibility to be ready with their lamps lit when the bridegroom arrives. Note the similar directions that Jesus gave to his "little flock" of anointed followers: "Be dressed and ready and have your lamps burning, and you should be like men waiting for their master to return from the marriage." (Luke 12:32, 35, 36) Furthermore, both the apostle Paul and the apostle John were inspired to liken Christ's anointed followers to chaste virgins. (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 14:4) Clearly, Jesus intended the parable recorded at Matthew 25:1-13 as counsel and a warning to his anointed followers.

5 Next, consider the time frame. To what time period did Jesus' counsel apply? Jesus supplies us with a clear time indicator toward the end of the parable: "The bridegroom *came*." (Matthew 25:10) As was discussed

in the July 15, 2013, issue of this journal, Jesus' prophecy recorded in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 contains eight references to his "coming"; in each case, a form of the same Greek word is used. In every instance, Jesus was referring to the time during the great tribulation when he will come to carry out the judging work and then the destruction of this world system of things. Evidently, then, this parable applies during the last days, but its climax comes during the great tribulation.

6 What is the parable's basic message? Remember the context. Jesus had just discussed his "faithful and discreet slave." That slave would prove to be a small group of anointed men who would take the lead among Christ's followers during the last days. Jesus warned those men that they must remain faithful. Next, he broadened his focus and gave this parable to admonish *all* his anointed followers in the last days to "keep on the watch" lest they miss out on their precious reward. (**Matthew 25:13**) Let us now go through the parable and see how the anointed have applied its counsel.

How Have the Anointed Applied the Counsel of the Parable?

7 Jesus' parable stresses that the discreet virgins, unlike the foolish, were ready for the bridegroom's

coming. Why? Because of two qualities: preparedness and vigilance. The virgins, assigned to this nighttime vigil to wait for the arrival of the bridegroom, needed to keep their lamps burning and to remain alert throughout the long hours until the exciting event. Unlike the foolish ones, though, five virgins truly prepared themselves, bringing extra oil in their flasks along with their lamps. Have faithful anointed ones likewise proved to be prepared?

8 They have indeed! Throughout the last days, anointed Christians have acted like those discreet virgins, prepared to carry out their assignment faithfully until the end. They count the cost of faithful service, realizing from the outset that their assignment will mean giving up many of the material advantages available in Satan's world. They devote themselves exclusively to Jehovah and serve him, not with some date or deadline in mind, but out of love and loyalty to him and to his Son. They maintain their integrity, refusing to adopt the spirit of this wicked world and its materialistic, immoral, and selfish attitudes. They thus remain ready, steadily shining as illuminators, undaunted by any apparent delay in the arrival of the Bridegroom.—**Philippians 2:15**.

9 The second quality that helps those virgins to be ready is vigilance. Would it be possible for individual

anointed Christians to get sleepy during a long nighttime vigil? Indeed. Note that Jesus says of the ten virgins that “they all became drowsy and fell asleep” during the apparent delay of the bridegroom. Jesus knew well that even a willing, eager spirit may be hampered by the weakness of the flesh. Faithful anointed ones have heeded that implied warning and have worked ever harder to remain vigilant, watchful. In the parable, all the virgins responded to the nighttime shout: “Here is the bridegroom!” But only the vigilant ones endured to the end. (**Matthew 25:5, 6**; 26:41) What about faithful anointed ones today? Throughout the last days, they have responded to strong evidence that, in effect, cries out, “Here is the bridegroom”—just about to come. They have also endured, keeping ever ready for the Bridegroom to arrive. However, the climax of the parable focuses on a more specific period of time. How so?

Reward for the Discreet and Punishment for the Foolish

10 Perhaps the most puzzling part of the parable comes near the end, in the verbal exchange between the foolish and the discreet virgins. (**Read Matthew 25:8, 9.**) That exchange raises this question: “When in the history of God’s people would faithful ones refuse help to some who asked for it?” The solution to the

puzzle presents itself when we again consider the time frame. Recall our clarified understanding that Jesus, the Bridegroom, comes to render judgment near the end of the great tribulation. Is it not likely, then, that this part of the parable focuses on what happens just prior to that climactic judgment? It would seem so, for by that time the anointed will have received their final sealing.

11 So, then, *before* the great tribulation starts, all the faithful anointed on earth will have received their final sealing. (**Revelation 7:1-4**) From then on, their calling is sure. But think about the years before the tribulation begins. What would happen to anointed ones who failed to remain watchful, who lost their integrity? They would lose their heavenly reward. Obviously, they would receive no final sealing prior to the start of the tribulation. By that time, other faithful ones would be anointed. When the tribulation starts, the foolish ones might be shocked to see the destruction of Babylon the Great. It may be only at that point that they realize that they are not ready for the arrival of the Bridegroom. At that late hour, if they in desperation ask for help, what would happen? Jesus' parable gives us the grim answer. The discreet virgins refused to give up their oil for the sake of the foolish, telling them to go instead to the sellers of oil. Remember, though, it was "in the

middle of the night.” Would they be able to find sellers of oil at that hour? No. It would simply be too late.

12 Likewise, during the great tribulation, faithful anointed ones cannot help any who had turned unfaithful. There will be no help available. It will simply be too late. What end, then, will such ones face? Jesus explains what happened when the foolish virgins went off on their futile errand: “The bridegroom came. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.” When Christ comes in his glory near the end of the tribulation, he will gather his faithful anointed ones to heaven.

(**Matthew 24:31; 25:10; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17**) The door will, indeed, be shut to the unfaithful ones, who prove to be like the foolish virgins. They may, in effect, cry out: “Sir, Sir, open to us!” But they receive an answer like the one that so many goatlike ones receive in that hour of judgment: “I tell you the truth, I do not know you.” How sad!—**Matthew 7:21-23; 25:11, 12.**

13 In view of the foregoing, what may we conclude? Was Jesus saying that many of his anointed servants would prove unfaithful and need to be replaced? No. Remember, he had just warned his “faithful and discreet slave” never to turn into an evil slave. That did not mean that he expected such an outcome. Similarly,

this parable conveys a powerful warning. Just as five virgins were foolish and five were discreet, each anointed one has the full capacity to choose either a course of preparedness and vigilance or a course of folly and unfaithfulness. The apostle Paul was inspired to make a similar point when addressing his anointed fellow Christians. (**Read Hebrews 6:4-9**; compare Deuteronomy 30:19.) Note that Paul's warning was very firm, but he followed it up with a loving expression of his confidence that "better things" lay ahead of his Christian brothers and sisters. Likewise, the warning in Jesus' parable is given with loving confidence. Christ knows that each of his anointed servants can remain faithful and receive the thrilling reward!

How Can Christ's "Other Sheep" Benefit?

14 Because Jesus directed the parable of the ten virgins to his anointed followers, should we conclude that this passage contains no benefit for Christ's "other sheep"? (John 10:16) Far from it! Remember, the message of the parable is simple: "Keep on the watch." Does that apply only to the anointed? Jesus once said: "What I say to you, I say to *all*: Keep on the watch." (Mark 13:37) Jesus requires all his followers to prepare their hearts for faithful service and to meet the same standard of watchfulness. So all Christians follow the lead set by the anointed in this regard, imitating their

good example and putting the ministry first in life. Each of us may also keep in mind that the foolish virgins asked the discreet ones to give up some of their oil. Their vain request reminds us that no one can be faithful for us, can stay in the truth for us, or can keep on the watch for us. Each of us will answer to the righteous Judge whom Jehovah has appointed. We must be ready. And he is coming soon!

15 All Christians may also benefit from the main event in Jesus' parable. After all, who of us is not excited about that prospective marriage? The anointed will be there in heaven; after the war of Armageddon, they will become Christ's bride. (**Revelation 19:7-9**) Everyone then on earth will benefit from that heavenly marriage, for it guarantees a perfect government for all. Whatever our hope for the future, whether heavenly or earthly, let us be resolved to learn the vital lesson of the parable of the ten virgins. Let us prove ready by preparing our hearts and keeping steadfast, ever vigilant, so that we may enjoy the glorious future that Jehovah has in store for us!

The End

- Song 123 and Prayer
- Opening Comments (3 min. or less)

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD

- **“Abuse of Power Leads to Loss of Authority”:** (10 min.)
Isa 22:15, 16—Shebna used his authority in a selfish way (*ip-1* 238 ¶16-17)
Isa 22:17-22—Jehovah replaced Shebna with Eliakim (*ip-1* 238-239 ¶17-18)
Isa 22:23-25—Shebna’s experience teaches us valuable lessons (*w07* 1/15 8 ¶6; *ip-1* 240-241 ¶19-20)
- **Digging for Spiritual Gems:** (8 min.)
Isa 21:1—What region was called “the wilderness of the sea,” and why? (*w06* 12/1 11 ¶2)

Isa 23:17, 18—How did Tyre’s material profit become “holy to Jehovah”? (*ip-1* 253-254 ¶22-24)

What does this week’s Bible reading teach me about Jehovah?

What points from this week’s Bible reading can I use in the field ministry?

- **Bible Reading:** (4 min. or less) Isa 17:1-14

APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

- **Initial Call:** (2 min. or less) *bh*—Use the video *Why Study the Bible?* to introduce the book. (Note: Do not play the video during the demonstration.)
- **Return Visit:** (4 min. or less) *bh*—Start a doorstep Bible study, and lay the groundwork for the next visit.
- **Bible Study:** (6 min. or less) *lv* 150-151 ¶10-11—Show how to reach the heart.

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

- Song 44
- **Will You “Keep on the Watch”?:** (8 min.) Talk by an elder based on the March 15, 2015, *Watchtower*, pages 12-16. Encourage all to keep on the watch, just as did Isaiah’s visionary watchman and the five virgins of Jesus’ illustration.—Isa 21:8; Mt 25:1-13.
- **Organizational Accomplishments:** (7 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.
- **Congregation Bible Study:** (30 min.) *kr* chap. 6 ¶1-7, pp. 58-59
- Review Followed by Preview of Next Week (3 min.)
- Song 141 and Prayer

ISAIAH 17-23 | Abuse of Power Leads to Loss of Authority

Shebna was the steward “in charge of the house,” likely the house of King Hezekiah. His position was second only to the king, and much was expected of him.

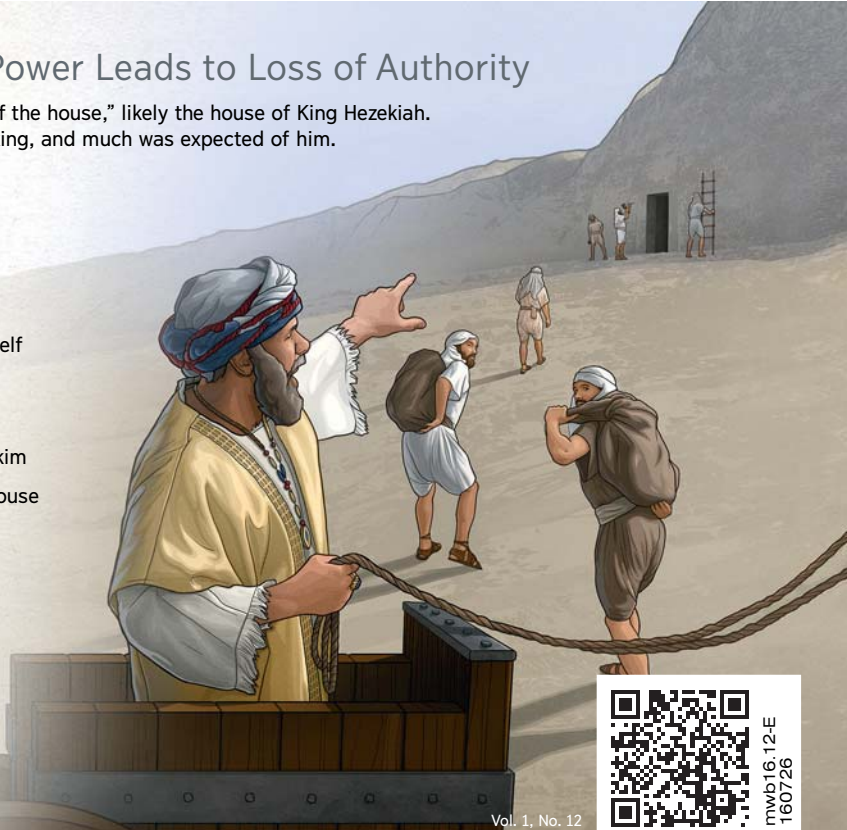
22:15, 16

- Shebna should have cared for the needs of Jehovah’s people
- He selfishly pursued glory for himself

22:20-22

- Jehovah replaced Shebna with Eliakim
- Eliakim was given “the key of the house of David,” which symbolized power and authority

Consider: How could Shebna have used his authority to help others?



(Psalm 127:3) Was this simply an oversight? No, for two birthday celebrations are mentioned—that of a Pharaoh of Egypt and that of Herod Antipas. (Genesis 40:20-22; Mark 6:21-29) Both events, however, are presented in a bad light—especially the latter, which saw John the Baptizer beheaded.

¹⁰ “The early Christians,” notes *The World Book En-*
10, 11. How did the early Christians view birthday celebrations, and why?

“HOLY” DAYS AND SATANISM

It is of interest to note that the most important day in the religion called Satanism is one’s birthday. Why? Because Satanists hold that each individual is a god if he chooses to view himself as one. Thus, to celebrate one’s own birthday is to celebrate the birth of a god. Of course, most people do not take such an extreme, egotistical view. Nevertheless, the book *The Lore of Birthdays* states: “Other holidays lift the heart, but birthdays warm the ego.”

The next most “holy” days on the Satanists’ calendar are Walpurgis Night and Halloween. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines the former as “the eve of May Day on which witches are held to ride to an appointed rendezvous.”

cyclopedia, “considered the celebration of anyone’s birth to be a pagan custom.” The ancient Greeks, for instance, believed that each person had a protective spirit that attended the person’s birth and thereafter watched over him. That spirit “had a mystic relation with the god on whose birthday the individual was born,” says the book *The Lore of Birthdays*. Birthdays also have a long-standing and an intimate link with astrology and the horoscope.

¹¹ Besides rejecting birthday customs on account of pagan and spiritistic roots, God’s servants of old likely rejected them on principle as well. Why? These were humble, modest men and women who did not view their arrival in the world as so important that it should be celebrated.* (Micah 6:8; Luke 9:48) Rather, they glorified Jehovah and thanked him for the precious gift of life.#—Psalm 8:3, 4; 36:9; Revelation 4:11.

* See the box “‘Holy’ Days and Satanism,” on page 194.

The Law covenant required that a woman, after giving birth, present a sin offering to God. (Leviticus 12:1-8) A poignant reminder that humans pass sin on to their children, this legal requirement helped the Israelites to have a balanced view of the birth of a child and may have discouraged them from adopting pagan birthday customs.—Psalm 51:5.

44 *Sharing Joyfully in the Harvest*

(Matthew 13:1-23)

1. We live in the time of the harvest,
 A priv'lege beyond all compare.
 God's glorious angels are reapers;
 In this work we too have a share.
Christ Jesus has set the example
 By taking the lead in the field.
 So great is the honor bestowed on us
 To joyfully share in his yield.
2. True love for our God and our neighbor
 Now moves us to speed up our pace.
 Both harvest and preaching are urgent,
 For shortly the end we will face.
The joy we receive is surpassing;
 As God's fellow workers, we share.
 So may we endure in his Kingdom work
 And know that his blessing is there.

Will You “Keep on the Watch”?

“Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour.”—MATT. 25:13.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What is the message of the parable of the ten virgins?

How have the anointed applied the message of Jesus’ parable concerning the ten virgins?

In what ways can those of the “other sheep” benefit from the parable of the ten virgins?

IT MUST have been a remarkable thing to sit there on the Mount of Olives—overlooking the temple in Jerusalem—when Jesus uttered one of his most fascinating prophecies. Peter, Andrew, James, and John paid rapt attention as Jesus cast his prophetic gaze far, far into the future. He told them a great deal about the last days of this wicked world system, the time when he would be ruling in God’s Kingdom. He told them that during that climactic time, his “faithful and discreet

1, 2. (a) What did Jesus reveal about the last days? (b) What questions will we consider?



Will You “Keep on the Watch”?

*“Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know
neither the day nor the hour.”—MATI. 25:13.*

slave” would represent him on earth, giving his servants the timely spiritual nourishment they needed. —Matt. 24:45-47.

2 Next, in that same prophecy, Jesus related the parable of the ten virgins. (Read Matthew 25:1-13.) Let us focus on these questions: (1) What is that parable’s basic message? (2) How have faithful anointed ones applied the parable’s counsel, and with what results? (3) How can each of us benefit from Jesus’ parable today?

WHAT IS THE PARABLE’S MESSAGE?

3 We noted in the preceding article that over recent decades, the faithful slave has gradually come to explain the Scriptures with less emphasis on symbolic prophetic pictures and more on practical application. In the past, our literature at times assigned specific symbolic meanings even to small details of Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins, including the lamps, the oil, the flasks, and so forth. Is it possible, though, that we were

3. In the past, our literature has taken what approach to the parable of the ten virgins, with what possible result?

allowing the spotlight to shift from the parable's simple, urgent message? As we will see, the answer is of vital importance.

4 Let us take a look at Jesus' basic message in this parable. First, consider the main characters. Who is *the bridegroom* of the parable? Clearly, Jesus was talking about himself. Why, on a different occasion, he even referred to himself as the bridegroom! (Luke 5:34, 35) What about *the virgins*? In the parable, Jesus says that the virgins have the responsibility to be ready with their lamps lit when the bridegroom arrives. Note the similar directions that Jesus gave to his "little flock" of anointed followers: "Be dressed and ready and have your lamps burning, and you should be like men waiting for their master to return from the marriage." (Luke 12:32, 35, 36) Furthermore, both the apostle Paul and the apostle John were inspired to liken Christ's anointed followers to chaste virgins. (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 14:4) Clearly, Jesus intended the parable re-

4. In the parable, how can we discern the identity of (a) the bridegroom? (b) the virgins?

corded at Matthew 25:1-13 as counsel and a warning to his anointed followers.

5 Next, consider the time frame. To what time period did Jesus' counsel apply? Jesus supplies us with a clear time indicator toward the end of the parable: "The bridegroom *came*." (Matt. 25:10) As was discussed in the July 15, 2013, issue of this journal, Jesus' prophecy recorded in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 contains eight references to his "coming"; in each case, a form of the same Greek word is used. In every instance, Jesus was referring to the time during the great tribulation when he will come to carry out the judging work and then the destruction of this world system of things. Evidently, then, this parable applies during the last days, but its climax comes during the great tribulation.

6 What is the parable's basic message? Remember the context. Jesus had just discussed his "faithful and discreet slave." That slave would prove to be a small

5. How did Jesus indicate the time period when his parable would apply?

6. In light of the context, what is the basic message of the parable?

group of anointed men who would take the lead among Christ's followers during the last days. Jesus warned those men that they must remain faithful. Next, he broadened his focus and gave this parable to admonish *all* his anointed followers in the last days to "keep on the watch" lest they miss out on their precious reward. (Matt. 25:13) Let us now go through the parable and see how the anointed have applied its counsel.

HOW HAVE THE ANOINTED APPLIED THE COUNSEL OF THE PARABLE?

⁷ Jesus' parable stresses that the discreet virgins, unlike the foolish, were ready for the bridegroom's coming. Why? Because of two qualities: preparedness and vigilance. The virgins, assigned to this nighttime vigil to wait for the arrival of the bridegroom, needed to keep their lamps burning and to remain alert throughout the long hours until the exciting event. Unlike the foolish ones, though, five virgins truly prepared themselves, bringing extra oil in their flasks along with their

7, 8. (a) The discreet virgins proved ready because of what two qualities? (b) How have the anointed proved to be prepared?

lamps. Have faithful anointed ones likewise proved to be prepared?

8 They have indeed! Throughout the last days, anointed Christians have acted like those discreet virgins, prepared to carry out their assignment faithfully until the end. They count the cost of faithful service, realizing from the outset that their assignment will mean giving up many of the material advantages available in Satan’s world. They devote themselves exclusively to Jehovah and serve him, not with some date or deadline in mind, but out of love and loyalty to him and to his Son. They maintain their integrity, refusing to adopt the spirit of this wicked world and its materialistic, immoral, and selfish attitudes. They thus remain ready, steadily shining as illuminators, undaunted by any apparent delay in the arrival of the Bridegroom. —Phil. 2:15.

9 The second quality that helps those virgins to be ready is vigilance. Would it be possible for individual

9. (a) How did Jesus warn about the natural tendency toward drowsiness? **(b)** How have the anointed responded to the shout: “Here is the bridegroom”? (See also footnote.)

anointed Christians to get sleepy during a long nighttime vigil? Indeed. Note that Jesus says of the ten virgins that “they all became drowsy and fell asleep” during the apparent delay of the bridegroom. Jesus knew well that even a willing, eager spirit may be hampered by the weakness of the flesh. Faithful anointed ones have heeded that implied warning and have worked ever harder to remain vigilant, watchful. In the parable, all the virgins responded to the nighttime shout: “Here is the bridegroom!” But only the vigilant ones endured to the end. (Matt. 25:5, 6; 26:41) What about faithful anointed ones today? Throughout the last days, they have responded to strong evidence that, in effect, cries out, “Here is the bridegroom”—just about to come. They have also endured, keeping ever ready for the Bridegroom to arrive.* However, the climax of the parable focuses on a more specific period of time. How so?

* In the parable, there is a distinct interval between the shout, “Here is the bridegroom!” (verse 6) and the actual coming, or arrival, of the bridegroom (verse 10). Throughout the last days, vigilant anointed ones have discerned the sign of Jesus’ presence. They thus know that he is “here”—ruling in Kingdom power. They face the challenge of enduring until his coming, or arrival.

REWARD FOR THE DISCREET AND PUNISHMENT FOR THE FOOLISH

10 Perhaps the most puzzling part of the parable comes near the end, in the verbal exchange between the foolish and the discreet virgins. (Read Matthew 25: 8, 9.) That exchange raises this question: “When in the history of God’s people would faithful ones refuse help to some who asked for it?” The solution to the puzzle presents itself when we again consider the time frame. Recall our clarified understanding that Jesus, the Bridegroom, comes to render judgment near the end of the great tribulation. Is it not likely, then, that this part of the parable focuses on what happens just prior to that climactic judgment? It would seem so, for by that time the anointed will have received their final sealing.

11 So, then, *before* the great tribulation starts, all the

10. The verbal exchange between the discreet and the foolish virgins raises what puzzling question?

11. (a) What will happen just before the start of the great tribulation? (b) What did the discreet virgins mean when they directed the foolish ones to the sellers of oil?

faithful anointed on earth will have received their final sealing. (Rev. 7:1-4) From then on, their calling is sure. But think about the years before the tribulation begins. What would happen to anointed ones who failed to remain watchful, who lost their integrity? They would lose their heavenly reward. Obviously, they would receive no final sealing prior to the start of the tribulation. By that time, other faithful ones would be anointed. When the tribulation starts, the foolish ones might be shocked to see the destruction of Babylon the Great. It may be only at that point that they realize that they are not ready for the arrival of the Bridegroom. At that late hour, if they in desperation ask for help, what would happen? Jesus' parable gives us the grim answer. The discreet virgins refused to give up their oil for the sake of the foolish, telling them to go instead to the sellers of oil. Remember, though, it was "in the middle of the night." Would they be able to find sellers of oil at that hour? No. It would simply be too late.

12 Likewise, during the great tribulation, faithful anointed ones cannot help any who had turned unfaithful. There will be no help available. It will simply be too late. What end, then, will such ones face? Jesus explains what happened when the foolish virgins went off on their futile errand: “The bridegroom came. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.” When Christ comes in his glory near the end of the tribulation, he will gather his faithful anointed ones to heaven. (Matt. 24:31; 25:10; John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:17) The door will, indeed, be shut to the unfaithful ones, who prove to be like the foolish virgins. They may, in effect, cry out: “Sir, Sir, open to us!” But they receive an answer like the one that so many goatlike ones receive in that hour of judgment: “I tell you the truth, I do not know you.” How sad!—Matt. 7:21-23; 25:11, 12.

12. (a) During the great tribulation, what grim experience will befall any who were once anointed but lost their integrity before the final sealing? **(b)** What is the end for those who prove to be like the foolish virgins?

13 In view of the foregoing, what may we conclude? Was Jesus saying that many of his anointed servants would prove unfaithful and need to be replaced? No. Remember, he had just warned his “faithful and discreet slave” never to turn into an evil slave. That did not mean that he expected such an outcome. Similarly, this parable conveys a powerful warning. Just as five virgins were foolish and five were discreet, each anointed one has the full capacity to choose either a course of preparedness and vigilance or a course of folly and unfaithfulness. The apostle Paul was inspired to make a similar point when addressing his anointed fellow Christians. (Read Hebrews 6:4-9; compare Deuteronomy 30:19.) Note that Paul’s warning was very firm, but he followed it up with a loving expression of his confidence that “better things” lay ahead of his Christian brothers and sisters. Likewise, the warning in Je-

13. (a) Why is there no need to conclude that many of Christ’s anointed followers will prove unfaithful? (b) Why may Jesus’ words of warning also be taken as an expression of his confidence? (See opening image of the standard edition.)

Jesus' parable is given with loving confidence. Christ knows that each of his anointed servants can remain faithful and receive the thrilling reward!

HOW CAN CHRIST'S "OTHER SHEEP" BENEFIT?

14 Because Jesus directed the parable of the ten virgins to his anointed followers, should we conclude that this passage contains no benefit for Christ's "other sheep"? (John 10:16) Far from it! Remember, the message of the parable is simple: "Keep on the watch." Does that apply only to the anointed? Jesus once said: "What I say to you, I say to *all*: Keep on the watch." (Mark 13:37) Jesus requires all his followers to prepare their hearts for faithful service and to meet the same standard of watchfulness. So all Christians follow the lead set by the anointed in this regard, imitating their good example and putting the ministry first in life. Each of us may also keep in mind that the foolish

14. Why can those of the "other sheep" also benefit from the parable of the ten virgins?

virgins asked the discreet ones to give up some of their oil. Their vain request reminds us that no one can be faithful for us, can stay in the truth for us, or can keep on the watch for us. Each of us will answer to the righteous Judge whom Jehovah has appointed. We must be ready. And he is coming soon!

15 All Christians may also benefit from the main event in Jesus' parable. After all, who of us is not excited about that prospective marriage? The anointed will be there in heaven; after the war of Armageddon, they will become Christ's bride. (Rev. 19:7-9) Everyone then on earth will benefit from that heavenly marriage, for it guarantees a perfect government for all. Whatever our hope for the future, whether heavenly or earthly, let us be resolved to learn the vital lesson of the parable of the ten virgins. Let us prove ready by preparing our hearts and keeping steadfast, ever vigilant, so that we may enjoy the glorious future that Jehovah has in store for us!

15. Why is the prospect of the marriage of Christ to his bride thrilling for all true Christians?

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

In the past, our publications often mentioned types and antitypes, but in recent years they have seldom done so. Why is that?

■ *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1950, defined a “type” and an “antitype” this way: “A *type* is an image or representation of something that will come to pass at some future time. The *antitype* is the reality of the thing which the type represents. The type may properly be called a *shadow*; the antitype, the *reality*.”

Many years ago, our publications stated that such faithful men and women as Deborah, Elihu, Jephthah, Job, Rahab, and Rebekah, as well as many others, were really types, or shadows, of either the anointed or the “great crowd.” (Rev. 7:9) For example, Jephthah, Job, and Rebekah were thought to represent the anointed, while Deborah and Rahab were said to foreshadow the great crowd. However, in recent years we have not drawn such comparisons. Why not?

The Scriptures do indicate that some individuals mentioned in the Bible served as types of something greater. As recorded at Galatians 4:21-31, the apostle Paul mentions “a symbolic drama” involving two women. Hagar, Abraham’s slave girl, represented or corresponded to literal Israel, which was bound to Jehovah by the Mosaic Law. But Sarah, “the free woman,” symbolized God’s wife, the heavenly part of his organization. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul links king-priest Melchizedek to Jesus, highlighting specific similarities between the two. (Heb. 6:20; 7:1-3) Further, Paul compares Isaiah and his sons to Jesus and his anointed followers. (Heb. 2:13, 14) Paul was writing under inspiration; thus, we gladly accept what he says about these types.

However, even where the Bible indicates that someone is a type of someone else, we should not conclude that every detail or incident in the life of the type is a picture of something greater. For example, although Paul tells us that Melchizedek is a type of Jesus, Paul

says nothing about the fact that on one occasion Melchizedek brought out bread and wine for Abraham to enjoy after he had defeated four kings. Hence, there is no Scriptural basis for finding a hidden meaning in that incident.—Gen. 14:1, 18.

Some writers in the centuries after Christ's death fell into a trap—they saw types everywhere. Describing the teachings of Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains: “They sought for types, and of course found them, in every incident and event, however trivial, recorded in Scripture. Even the most simple and commonplace circumstance was thought to conceal within itself the most recondite [hidden] truth . . . , even in the number of fish caught by the disciples on the night the risen Saviour appeared to them—how much some have tried to make of that number, 153!”

Augustine of Hippo commented extensively on the account where we read that Jesus fed about 5,000 men with five barley loaves and two fish. Since barley was

considered to be inferior to wheat, Augustine concluded that the five loaves must represent the five books of Moses (the inferior “barley” representing the supposed inferiority of the “Old Testament”). And the two fish? For some reason he likened them to a king and a priest. Another scholar fond of looking for types and antitypes asserted that Jacob’s purchase of Esau’s birthright with a bowl of red stew represented Jesus’ purchase of the heavenly inheritance for mankind with his red blood!

If such interpretations seem far-fetched, you can understand the dilemma. Humans cannot know which Bible accounts are shadows of things to come and which are not. The clearest course is this: Where the Scriptures teach that an individual, an event, or an object is typical of something else, we accept it as such. Otherwise, we ought to be reluctant to assign an antitypical application to a certain person or account if there is no specific Scriptural basis for doing so.

How, then, can we benefit from the events and ex-


amples found in the Scriptures? At Romans 15:4, we read the apostle Paul’s words: “All the things that were written beforehand were written for *our* instruction, so that through *our* endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures *we* might have hope.” Paul was saying that his anointed brothers in the first century could learn powerful lessons from the events that were recorded in the Scriptures. However, God’s people in every generation, whether of the anointed or of the “other sheep,” whether living in “the last days” or not, could benefit—and have benefited—from the lessons taught in “all the things that were written beforehand.”—John 10:16; 2 Tim. 3:1.

Instead of viewing most of these accounts as finding their application to only one class, whether the anointed or the great crowd, and to only one time period, God’s people of either class and from any time period can apply to themselves many of the lessons the accounts teach us. Thus, for example, we need not limit the application of the book of Job to the

experiences the anointed endured during World War I. Many of God’s servants, both men and women, both of the anointed and of the great crowd, have undergone experiences such as Job faced and “have seen the outcome Jehovah gave, that Jehovah is very tender in affection and merciful.”—Jas. 5:11.

Consider: In our congregations today, do we not find older women as loyal as Deborah, fine young elders as wise as Elihu, courageous pioneers as zealous as Jephthah, and faithful men and women as patient as Job? How grateful we are that Jehovah preserved the record of “all the things that were written beforehand,” so that “through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope”!

So for these reasons our publications in recent years have emphasized the lessons we can learn from Bible accounts instead of trying to find typical and antitypical patterns and fulfillments.

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SECTION 2

KINGDOM PREACHING

Spreading the Good News Worldwide

YOU prepare for the ministry early on your day off from secular work. You hesitate for a moment, feeling a bit tired. A morning of rest seems so appealing! But you pray about it and resolve to go. You work with a faithful elderly sister, and her endurance and kindness touch your heart. And as you share the message of the truth from house to house, it occurs to you that your brothers and sisters around the world are sharing this same message, using the same literature, all benefiting from the same training. By the time you get home, you feel energized. You are so glad you did not stay home!

At present, the Christian ministry is the chief work of God's Kingdom. Jesus foretold that the preaching work would have an astounding scope during the last days. (Matt. 24:14) How has his prophecy been fulfilled? In this section, we will examine the people, the methods, and the tools that have been so important to the Christian ministry, which is helping millions the world over to see God's Kingdom as real.

6 People Who Preach

Ministers Offer Themselves Willingly

FOCUS OF CHAPTER

The King raises up an army of preachers

POLITICAL RULERS often make promises that go unfulfilled. Even those with the best of intentions may be unable to carry out their promises. In refreshing contrast, the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, always proves true to his word.

² After he became King in 1914, Jesus was ready to fulfill a prophecy he had made some 1,900 years earlier. Shortly before he died, Jesus foretold: “This good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth.” (Matt. 24:14) The fulfillment of those words would be part of the sign of his presence in Kingdom power. However, an important question arises: How would the King be able to raise up an army of willing preachers in the last days—a time period that would be marked by a selfish,

1, 2. What great work did Jesus foretell, and what important question arises?

loveless, and irreligious spirit? (Matt. 24:12; 2 Tim. 3: 1-5) We need to know, for the answer to that question involves all true Christians.

³ Look again at Jesus' prophetic words. Do the words "*will be preached*" express confidence? Indeed, they do! Jesus was sure that he would have willing supporters in the last days. Where did he get such confidence? He learned it from his Father. (John 12: 45; 14:9) In his prehuman existence, Jesus observed firsthand that Jehovah has confidence in the willing spirit of His worshippers. Let us see how Jehovah expressed that confidence.

“Your People Will Offer Themselves Willingly”

⁴ Recall what happened when Jehovah directed Moses to construct the tabernacle, or tent, that was to be the center of worship for the nation of Israel. Jehovah, through Moses, invited all the people to support the work. Moses told them: “Let everyone with a willing heart bring a contribution for Jehovah.” The result? The people “continued to bring . . .

3. What confidence did Jesus express, and where did he get such confidence?

4. What work did Jehovah invite the Israelites to support, and how did they respond?

voluntary offerings, morning after morning.” They brought so much that they had to be “restrained from bringing in anything else”! (Ex. 35:5; 36:3, 6) The Israelites lived up to the confidence that Jehovah had placed in them.

⁵ Did Jehovah expect to find such a willing spirit among his worshippers in the last days? Yes! More than 1,000 years before Jesus was born on earth, Jehovah inspired David to write about the time when the Messiah would begin to rule. (**Read Psalm 110:1-3.**) Jesus, the newly installed King, would have enemies who would oppose him. Yet, he would also have an army of supporters. They would not have to be forced into serving the King. Even the young among them would offer themselves freely, becoming a multitude so great that they could aptly be compared to the countless dewdrops that blanket the ground in the morning sun.*^[1]

⁶ Jesus knew that the prophecy recorded in Psalm 110 applied to him. (Matt. 22:42-45) Hence, he

*^[1] In the Bible, dew is associated with abundance.—Gen. 27:28; Mic. 5:7.

5, 6. According to Psalm 110:1-3, what spirit did Jehovah and thus Jesus expect to find among true worshippers in the time of the end?

had every reason to be confident that he would have loyal supporters who would offer themselves willingly to preach the good news in all the earth. What do the historical facts show? Has the King, in fact, raised up an army of willing preachers in these last days?

“My Privilege and Duty Is to Announce That Message”

⁷ Shortly after he was installed as King, Jesus took steps to prepare his followers for the vast work to be done. As we saw in Chapter 2, he did an inspection and a cleansing work from 1914 to early 1919. (Mal. 3:1-4) Then, in 1919, he appointed the faithful slave to take the lead among his followers. (Matt. 24:45) Especially from that time onward, that slave began dispensing spiritual food—by means of convention discourses and printed publications—that repeatedly emphasized the responsibility of all Christians to have a *personal* share in preaching.

⁸ **Convention discourses.** Eager for direction, the Bi-

7. After he was installed as King, what steps did Jesus take to prepare his supporters for the work ahead?

8-10. How did conventions give impetus to the preaching work? Give an example. (See also the box “Early Conventions That Gave Impetus to the Preaching Work.”)

141 Searching for Friends of Peace

(Luke 10:6)

1. Jesus commanded: 'Let the truth be heard.'
In summer heat, on dusty roads,
He let all hear Jehovah's word.
He loved God's sheep and called to ev'ryone.
He searched the land
from the sunrise 'til the day was done.
From door to door and in the street,
We share with ev'ryone we meet
The news that soon man's troubles
all will be gone.

(CHORUS)

*Searching the world
For friends of peace in ev'ry nation,
Searching to find
A heart inclined toward salvation,
Wanting to leave
No stone unturned.*

2. Time waits for no one, so the search goes on.
A million hearts, a million lives,
We give our all to save just one.
Love is the force that makes us call again.
A wounded heart can be healed,
and broken lives can mend.
We search the towns and city squares,
And when we find someone who cares,
The joy we feel inspires us to go on.

(Chorus)

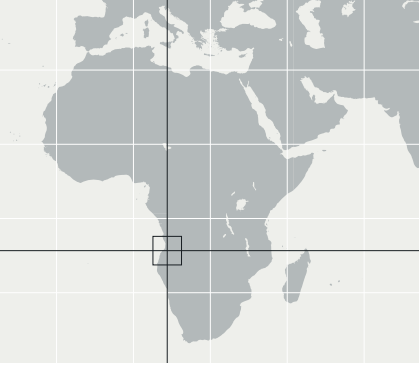
NOVEMBER 2016

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
DECEMBER 26, 2016–JANUARY 29, 2017



COVER IMAGE:
ANGOLA

In the city of Benguela, special pioneers are conducting a Bible study in sign language, using the brochure *Listen to God and Live Forever*. The 10 deaf publishers in that city were delighted that 62 people attended the Memorial there in 2015

PUBLISHERS
115,948

BIBLE STUDIES
502,848

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE
(2015)
529,827

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31 FROM OUR ARCHIVES

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

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121 *Encourage One Another* (Hebrews 10:24, 25)

1. As we encourage one another
 To serve Jehovah faithfully,
We find the bonds of love are strengthened;
 Fine works bring peace and unity.
 The love we find among God's people
 Gives each the courage to endure.
Our congregation is a refuge,
 A place where we can feel secure.

2. A word when spoken at the right time
 Is, oh, how comforting to hear!
We hear these words of consolation
 From friends so faithful and so dear.
 How good it is to work together
 With those whose hopes and goals we share!
We seek to strengthen one another
 And help each one his burden bear.

3. As we with eyes of faith are seeing
 The nearness of Jehovah's day,
We need our gathering together
 To keep us walking in the way.
 United with Jehovah's people,
 We hope to serve eternally.
So we encourage one another
 To hold to our integrity.

(See also Luke 22:32; Acts 14:21, 22; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:14.)

“Keep On Encouraging One Another Each Day”

“If you have any word of encouragement for the people, tell it.”—ACTS 13:15.

SONGS: 121, 45

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

Why is encouragement a power for good?

What do the examples of Jehovah, Jesus, and the apostle Paul teach us about giving encouragement?

How can we give encouragement that is effective?

“MY PARENTS hardly ever encourage me, but they criticize me a lot. And their words can be so hurtful,” says Cristina, who is 18 years old.[1] “They say that I’m immature, that I’ll never learn, and that I’m fat. So I cry often and prefer not to talk to them. I feel that I’m worthless.” How devastating life without encouragement can be!

2 On the other hand, encouragement is a power for good. “I have fought feelings of worthlessness for many years,” says Rubén. “But one time, I was preaching with an elder who realized that I was having a bad day. He listened with sympathy

1, 2. Show why encouragement is important.



“Keep On Encouraging One Another Each Day”

“If you have any word of encouragement for the people, tell it.”—ACTS 13:15.

Our children thrive when we warmly encourage them
(See paragraph 14)



as I expressed my feelings. Then he reminded me of the good I was accomplishing. He also reminded me of Jesus' words—that each of us is worth more than many sparrows. I often recall that scripture, and it still touches my heart. The elder's words made a huge difference.”—Matt. 10:31.

3 It should not surprise us that the Bible emphasizes the need for regular encouragement. The apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians: “Beware, brothers, for fear there should ever develop in any one of you a wicked heart lacking faith by drawing away from the living God; but keep on encouraging one another *each day*, . . . so that none of you should become hardened by the deceptive power of sin.” (Heb. 3:12, 13) You know how important the counsel to encourage one another is if you recall a time when words of encouragement lifted your spirits. So let us consider these questions: Why is encouragement vital? What can we learn from the way Jehovah, Jesus, and Paul encouraged others? And how can we give encouragement that is effective?

PEOPLE NEED ENCOURAGEMENT

4 All of us need encouragement. That is especially true when we are growing up. “Children . . . need encouragement like plants need water,” explains educator Timothy Evans.

3. (a) What did the apostle Paul say about encouragement? (b) What will we consider in this article?

4. Who needs encouragement, but why is it scarce today?

“With encouragement, a child feels worthwhile and appreciated.” But we live in critical times. People are selfish, there is little natural affection, and encouragement is scarce. (2 Tim. 3:1-5) Some parents do not commend their children because their own parents never gave them any encouragement. Many employees are not being commended, so they complain that there is a chronic shortage of encouragement in the workplace.

5 Encouragement often involves commending a person for something he or she did well. We can also be encouraging by reassuring others that they have good qualities or by speaking “consolingly to those who are discouraged.” (1 Thess. 5:14, ftn.) The Greek word usually translated “encouragement” literally means “a calling to one’s side.” As we serve alongside our brothers and sisters, we likely have opportunities to say something encouraging. (Read Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10.) Do we use suitable occasions to let others know why we love and appreciate them? Before answering that question, we would do well to think about this proverb: “A word spoken at the right time—how good it is!”—Prov. 15:23.

6 Satan the Devil wants to discourage us because he knows that discouragement can make us weak spiritually and in other ways. “If you become discouraged in the

5. What does encouragement involve?

6. Why does the Devil want to discourage us? Give an example.

day of distress,” says Proverbs 24:10, “your strength will be meager.” Satan used a combination of calamities and accusations in an effort to discourage righteous Job, but that cruel scheme failed. (Job 2:3; 22:3; 27:5) We can fight the works of the Devil by encouraging members of our family and of the congregation. This will help to make our home and the Kingdom Hall places where we feel happy and secure.

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

7 Jehovah. The psalmist sang: “Jehovah is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those who are discouraged.” (Ps. 34: 18, ftn.) When Jeremiah was afraid and discouraged, Jehovah built up that faithful prophet’s confidence. (Jer. 1:6-10) And just imagine how encouraged the elderly prophet Daniel was when God sent an angel to strengthen him. That angel called Daniel a “very precious,” or “highly esteemed,” man! (Dan. 10:8, 11, 18, 19; ftn.) Could you similarly encourage publishers, pioneers, and older brothers and sisters whose strength is failing?

8 God did not feel that because he and his dear Son had worked together for ages, there was no need to commend and encourage Jesus when he was on earth. Instead, on two occasions Jesus heard his Father speak from heaven and say:

7, 8. (a) What Bible examples show that Jehovah considers it important to give encouragement? (b) What can parents do to follow Jehovah’s example? (See opening picture of the standard edition.)

“This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5) God thus commended Jesus and assured him that he was doing well. Jesus must have felt encouraged on the two occasions when he heard these words—at the beginning of his ministry and during the final year of his earthly life. Jehovah also sent an angel to strengthen Jesus when he was in anguish on the night before his death. (Luke 22:43) If we are parents, let us follow Jehovah’s example by regularly encouraging our children and giving them commendation when they do well. We should also give them extra support if they are facing tests of integrity day after day in school.

9 Jesus. On the night when Jesus instituted the Memorial, pride was one negative trait that he saw in his apostles. Jesus humbly washed their feet, but they were still arguing about which one of them was the greatest; and Peter was overconfident. (Luke 22:24, 33, 34) Yet, Jesus commended his faithful apostles for sticking with him in his trials. He predicted that they would do works greater than his, and he assured them that God had affection for them. (Luke 22:28; John 14:12; 16:27) We might ask ourselves, ‘Shouldn’t I imitate Jesus by commending my children and others for what they do well instead of focusing on their shortcomings?’

9. What can we learn from the way Jesus treated his apostles?

10 The apostle Paul. In his letters, Paul spoke highly of his fellow Christians. He had traveled with some of them for years and undoubtedly knew their faults, but he said good things about them. For instance, Paul described Timothy as his “beloved and faithful child in the Lord,” one who would genuinely care for the concerns of other Christians. (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19, 20) The apostle commended Titus to the Corinthian congregation as “my companion and a fellow worker for your interests.” (2 Cor. 8:23) How encouraged Timothy and Titus must have been to learn what Paul thought of them!

11 Paul and Barnabas risked their lives by going back to places where they had suffered violent attacks. For instance, even though they had faced fanatic opposition in Lystra, they returned there in order to encourage new disciples to remain in the faith. (Acts 14:19-22) In Ephesus, Paul faced an angry crowd. Acts 20:1, 2 says: “When the uproar . . . subsided, Paul sent for the disciples, and after he had encouraged them and said farewell, he began his journey to Macedonia. After going through those regions and giving many words of encouragement to the ones there, he arrived in Greece.” Giving encouragement certainly was very important to Paul.

10, 11. How did the apostle Paul show that he saw the need to encourage others?

ENCOURAGEMENT IN ACTION TODAY

12 One reason why our heavenly Father has kindly arranged for us to have regular meetings is that we can give and receive encouragement there. (Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.) Just like Jesus' early followers, we meet together to learn and to be encouraged. (1 Cor. 14:31) Cristina, who was mentioned at the beginning of this article, says: "What I like most about the meetings is the love and encouragement I receive there. Sometimes I feel depressed when I arrive at the Kingdom Hall. But then sisters approach me, give me a hug, and say I look pretty. They tell me that they love me and are pleased to see my spiritual progress. Their encouragement makes me feel so much better!" How refreshing it is when all of us play our part in "an interchange of encouragement"! —Rom. 1:11, 12.

13 Even experienced servants of God need encouragement. Consider Joshua. He had served God faithfully for many years. Yet, Jehovah told Moses to encourage him, saying: "Commission Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him, because he is the one who will cross over before this people and he is the one who will cause them to inherit the land that you will see." (Deut. 3:27, 28) Joshua was about to take on the huge responsibility of leading the Israelites in

12. What part do our meetings play in our giving and receiving encouragement?

13. Why do experienced servants of God need encouragement?

the conquest of the Promised Land. He would face setbacks and at least one military defeat. (Josh. 7:1-9) No wonder Joshua needed to be encouraged and strengthened! So let us personally encourage elders, including circuit overseers, who work hard to care for the flock of God. (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.) “Sometimes the brothers give us a thank-you letter saying how much they enjoyed our visit,” stated one circuit overseer. “We keep these letters and read them when we are feeling low. They are a real source of encouragement.”

14 Christian elders and parents find that commendation and encouragement are effective in emphasizing Bible counsel. When Paul commended the Corinthians for applying his counsel, they must have been encouraged to continue doing what was right. (2 Cor. 7:8-11) Andreas, who has two children, says: “Encouragement helps children to grow up spiritually and emotionally. You nail down counsel by giving encouragement. Even though our kids know what is right, *doing* the right thing becomes their way of life through our constant encouragement.”

HOW TO GIVE EFFECTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT

15 *Show appreciation for the fine efforts and positive*

14. What shows that commendation and encouragement are effective when we are giving counsel?

15. What is one step we can take to encourage others?

qualities of fellow worshippers. (2 Chron. 16:9; Job 1:8) Jehovah and Jesus greatly value what all of us do to support Kingdom interests, even if our efforts and contributions are limited because of our circumstances. (Read Luke 21:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:12.) For instance, some of our dear elderly ones make great effort to attend and share in meetings and the ministry regularly. Should we not commend and encourage them?

16 *Seize opportunities to encourage others.* If we see something that merits commendation, why hold back? Consider what happened when Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch in Pisidia. The presiding officers of the synagogue there told them: “Men, brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, tell it.” Paul responded by giving a fine talk. (Acts 13:13-16, 42-44) If we can offer a word of encouragement, why not speak up? We will very likely find that if we make it a habit to be encouraging, people will encourage us in return.—Luke 6:38.

17 *Be sincere and specific.* General words of encouragement and commendation are helpful, but Jesus’ message to Christians in Thyatira shows that being *specific* is better. (Read Revelation 2:18, 19.) If we are parents, for example, we could tell our children what we appreciate about the

16. Why should we never hold back from encouraging others?

17. What gives deep meaning to our words of commendation?

spiritual progress they are making. We might tell a single mother what impresses us regarding the way she is raising her children despite her challenging situation. Such commendation and encouragement can do so much good!

18 Jehovah will not personally tell us to say something encouraging to a particular individual as he told Moses to encourage and strengthen Joshua. Yet, God is pleased when we speak encouragingly to fellow believers and others. (Prov. 19:17; Heb. 12:12) For instance, we might tell a public speaker how his talk gave us advice we needed or helped us to understand a certain scripture. “Although we spoke for only a few minutes,” wrote a sister to a visiting speaker, “you saw my heavy heart, and you comforted and uplifted me. I want you to know that when you spoke in such a kind way, both from the platform and in person, I felt that it was a gift from Jehovah.”

19 We will very likely find many ways to build others up spiritually if we are determined to apply Paul’s counsel: “Keep encouraging one another and building one another up, just as you are in fact doing.” (1 Thess. 5:11) All of us will surely please Jehovah if we “keep on encouraging one another each day.”

18, 19. How can we build up those needing encouragement?

ENDNOTE:

[1] (paragraph 1) Some names have been changed.

1. Move ahead, move ahead to maturity!
It's the will of our God that we gain ability.
Try your best to improve in your ministry,
Then our God your work will bless.
There's a place in the service for all.
It's the work Jesus did, you'll recall.
Look to God that you thus at no time may fall,
Standing firm for righteousness.
2. Move ahead, move ahead, boldly witnessing!
Everlasting good news to all sorts of people bring.
Join in praise to Jehovah, our God and King,
As we preach from door to door.
Wicked foes try to cause us to fear.
Don't shrink back, but let ev'ryone hear
Joyful news that the Kingdom of God is here.
Teach the truth yet more and more.
3. Move ahead, move ahead, always follow through,
And improve in your skills
for there's so much work to do.
Let God's spirit keep on motivating you.
Find the joy that is divine.
Love the people you work hard to find.
Keep returning to reach heart and mind.
And assist all good progress each day to make,
So the light of truth will shine.