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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**What Can You
Learn From
Jesus' Birth?**



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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Jesus' Birth

How and Why It Happened

IMPOSSIBLE!" Many non-Christians would say this upon hearing the story about the birth of Jesus. They feel that it is unscientific to believe that a virgin girl could conceive and give birth to a son without the aid of a human father. What do you think?

In 1984, *The Times* of London published a letter that reasoned on this matter, stating: "It is not logically valid to use science as an argument against miracles. To believe that miracles cannot happen is as much an act of faith as to believe that they can happen." The letter was signed by 14 professors of science in British universities. They said: "We gladly accept the virgin birth, the Gospel miracles, and the resurrection of Christ as historical events."

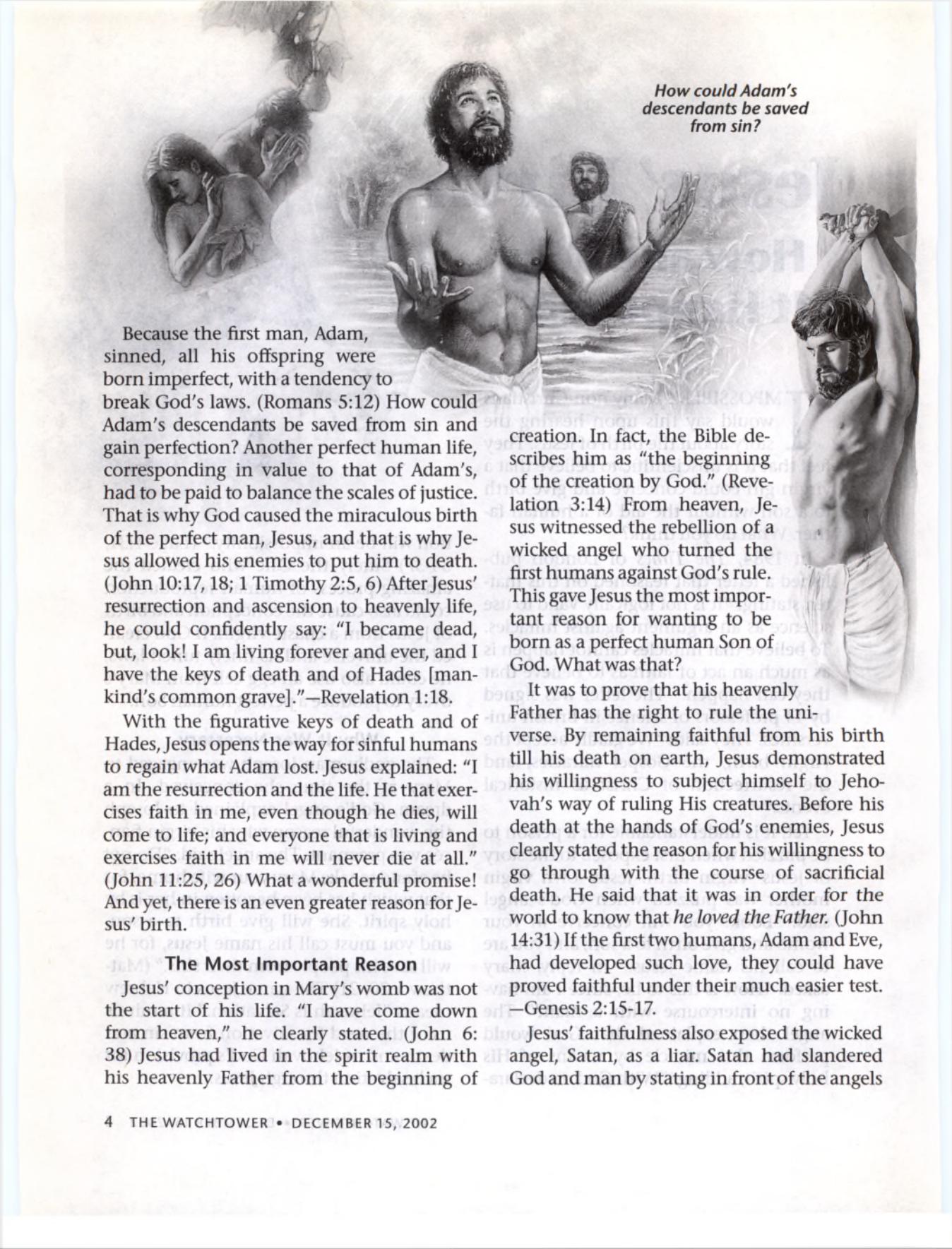
Yet, it is understandable for a person to be puzzled when first exposed to the story of Jesus' virgin birth. Jesus' own virgin mother was puzzled when God's angel said: "Look! you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus." In reply, Mary asked: "How is this to be, since I am having no intercourse with a man?" The angel then explained that God would perform this miracle by means of His holy spirit, adding: "With God no declara-

tion will be an impossibility." (Luke 1:31, 34-37) Surely the One who created the amazing process of human reproduction could also cause the conception and birth of Jesus from a chaste virgin. If God created the universe and its finely tuned laws, he could also use an egg cell from Mary's ovary to produce a perfect human Son.

Why It Was Necessary

The godly man Joseph was engaged to Mary at the time she conceived. In a dream, God's angel explained to Joseph the wonderful reason why his virgin fiancée was pregnant. The angel said: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife home, for that which has been begotten in her is by holy spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you must call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20, 21) The name Jesus in Hebrew means "Jehovah Is Salvation." It reminds us of the need for salvation from sin and death and of Jehovah God's provision for such salvation through Jesus.





How could Adam's descendants be saved from sin?

Because the first man, Adam, sinned, all his offspring were born imperfect, with a tendency to break God's laws. (Romans 5:12) How could Adam's descendants be saved from sin and gain perfection? Another perfect human life, corresponding in value to that of Adam's, had to be paid to balance the scales of justice. That is why God caused the miraculous birth of the perfect man, Jesus, and that is why Jesus allowed his enemies to put him to death. (John 10:17, 18; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6) After Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heavenly life, he could confidently say: "I became dead, but, look! I am living forever and ever, and I have the keys of death and of Hades [mankind's common grave]."—Revelation 1:18.

With the figurative keys of death and of Hades, Jesus opens the way for sinful humans to regain what Adam lost. Jesus explained: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that exercises faith in me, even though he dies, will come to life; and everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all." (John 11:25, 26) What a wonderful promise! And yet, there is an even greater reason for Jesus' birth.

The Most Important Reason

Jesus' conception in Mary's womb was not the start of his life. "I have come down from heaven," he clearly stated. (John 6:38) Jesus had lived in the spirit realm with his heavenly Father from the beginning of

creation. In fact, the Bible describes him as "the beginning of the creation by God." (Revelation 3:14) From heaven, Jesus witnessed the rebellion of a wicked angel who turned the first humans against God's rule. This gave Jesus the most important reason for wanting to be born as a perfect human Son of God. What was that?

It was to prove that his heavenly Father has the right to rule the universe. By remaining faithful from his birth till his death on earth, Jesus demonstrated his willingness to subject himself to Jehovah's way of ruling His creatures. Before his death at the hands of God's enemies, Jesus clearly stated the reason for his willingness to go through with the course of sacrificial death. He said that it was in order for the world to know that *he loved the Father*. (John 14:31) If the first two humans, Adam and Eve, had developed such love, they could have proved faithful under their much easier test. —Genesis 2:15-17.

Jesus' faithfulness also exposed the wicked angel, Satan, as a liar. Satan had slandered God and man by stating in front of the angels

in heaven: "All that a man has he will give up for his life." (Job 2:1, 4, *Tanakh—The Holy Scriptures*) Satan wrongly charged that all humans would disobey God to save their lives.

The foregoing issues challenged the righteousness and rightfulness of God's rulership. To settle them, Jesus was willing to be born as a human and prove himself faithful to death.

Thus, the main reason for Jesus' birth on earth was, as he himself said, that he "should bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37) He

Lessons From the Record of Jesus' Birth

MILLIONS are fascinated by events surrounding Jesus' birth. This is seen by the multitude of Nativity scenes that are displayed and Nativity plays that are enacted around the world at Christmastime. Though fascinating, the events surrounding Jesus' birth were not recorded in the Bible to entertain people. Rather, they form part of all Scripture that God inspired for teaching and for setting things straight.—2 Timothy 3:16.

If God had wanted Christians to celebrate Jesus' birth, then the Bible would have provided the exact date. Does it? After mentioning that Jesus was born at a time when shepherds were out-of-doors at night watching their flocks, 19th-century Bible scholar Albert Barnes concluded: "It

did that by showing in word and in deed that God's rulership is altogether righteous and that submission to it results in lasting happiness. Jesus also explained that he had come into the world to give his human life as "a ransom in exchange for many," opening the way for sinful humans to gain perfection and everlasting life. (Mark 10:45) For mankind to grasp these vital matters, a record of Jesus' birth was necessary. Additionally, events surrounding Jesus' birth contain other important lessons, as the next article will show.



is clear from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December . . . At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem. God has concealed the time of [Jesus'] birth. . . . Nor was it of consequence to *know* the time; if it had been, God would have preserved the record of it."

By contrast, the four Gospel writers clearly inform us of the day on which Jesus died. It happened on the day of the Passover, which was held on the 14th of the Jewish month Nisan, in the spring. Moreover, Jesus specifically commanded his followers to commemorate that day in remembrance of him. (Luke 22:19) The Bible contains no such command to celebrate Jesus' birthday, nor, for that matter,

any other person's birthday. Sadly, controversies over the date of Jesus' birth may overshadow the more noteworthy events that took place about that time.

Parents Chosen by God

Out of the thousands of families in Israel, what kind of parents did God choose to raise his Son? Did He consider such factors as prominence and wealth to be important? No. Rather, Jehovah took note of the parents' spiritual qualities. Examine Mary's song of praise, as recorded at Luke 1:46-55, which she sang after being told of her privilege of becoming the mother of the Messiah. Among other things, she said: "My soul magnifies Jehovah . . . because he has looked upon the low position of his slave girl." She humbly viewed herself as one of "low position," Jehovah's slave girl. More important, the beautiful expressions of praise in Mary's song reveal that she was a spiritual person who had a good knowledge of the Scriptures. Though a sinful descendant of Adam, she was the ideal choice as the earthly mother of God's Son.

What about Mary's husband, who became Jesus' adoptive father? Joseph was a man with a practical knowledge of carpentry. Because of his willingness to work hard with his

hands, he was able to provide for a family that eventually numbered five sons and at least two daughters. (Matthew 13:55, 56) Joseph was not rich. When the time came for Mary to present her firstborn son at God's temple, Joseph must have felt disappointed that he could not provide the sacrifice of a sheep. Instead, they had to make use of an allowance for the poor. With regard to the mother of a newborn son, God's law stated: "If she cannot afford enough for a sheep, she must then take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering, and the priest must make atonement for her, and she must be clean." —Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:22-24.

The Bible says that Joseph "was righteous." (Matthew 1:19) For example, he did not have intercourse with his virgin wife until after the birth of Jesus. This prevented any misunderstanding as to who Jesus' real Father was. For a newly married couple to abstain from intimate relations while living under the same roof could not have been easy, but it showed that they both treasured the privilege of being chosen to raise God's Son.—Matthew 1:24, 25.

Like Mary, Joseph was a spiritual person. He stopped work every year and took his family on the three-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to attend the annual festival of the Passover. (Luke 2:41) Also, Joseph must have trained young Jesus in the weekly custom of participating in worship at the local synagogue, where God's Word was read and explained. (Luke 2:51; 4:16.) Thus, there can be no doubt that God chose the right earthly mother and adoptive father for his Son.

A Grand Blessing for Humble Shepherds

In spite of the difficulty for his wife, who was now nine months pregnant, Joseph traveled to the city of his forefathers to be registered, in accord with Caesar's decree. When



the couple arrived in Bethlehem, they could not find lodging in the crowded city. Circumstances thus forced them to make use of a stable, where Jesus was born and laid in a manger. To strengthen their faith, Jehovah provided the humble parents with confirmation that this birth really was God's will. Did he send a delegation of prominent older men from Bethlehem to reassure the couple? No. Instead, Jehovah God revealed the matter to hardworking shepherds who spent the night outdoors watching over their flocks.

God's angel appeared to them and told them to go to Bethlehem, where they would find the newborn Messiah "lying in a manger." Were these humble men shocked or embarrassed to hear that the newborn Messiah was in a stable? By no means! Without delay, they left their flocks and headed for Bethlehem. When they found Jesus, they related to Joseph and Mary what God's angel had said. This, no doubt, strengthened the couple's faith that all things were working out in the way that God had purposed. "The shepherds," for their part, "went back, glori-

God chose to reveal the birth of Jesus to a few humble shepherds



What does Mary's offering two pigeons indicate?

fying and praising God for all the things they heard and saw." (Luke 2:8-20) Yes, in revealing matters to the God-fearing shepherds, Jehovah had made the right choice.

From the above, we learn what kind of people we need to be to enjoy Jehovah's favor. We do not need to seek prominence or wealth. Rather, like Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds, we need to obey God and prove our love for him by putting spiritual interests ahead of material things. Indeed, there are fine lessons to be learned by meditating upon the record of events that took place about the time of Jesus' birth.

"DRAW CLOSE TO GOD"

"Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you."—JAMES 4:8.

GOD with us." Those words have decorated national emblems and even the uniforms of soldiers. "In God we trust" has been engraved on innumerable coins and bills in modern currency. It is common for humans to claim that they have a close relationship with God. Would you not agree, though, that actually *having* such a relationship requires far more than just talking about it or displaying slogans?

² The Bible shows that it is possible to have a relationship with God. Effort is required though. Even some anointed Christians in the first century needed to strengthen their relationship with Jehovah God. The Christian overseer James had to warn some regarding their fleshly tendencies and loss of spiritual cleanliness. In the midst of that counsel, he gave this powerful exhortation: "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you." (James 4:1-12) What did James mean by "draw close"?

³ James used an expression that would have been familiar to many of his readers. The Mosaic Law gave the priests specific instructions on how to "come near to," or approach, Jehovah on behalf of his people. (Exodus 19:22) James' readers may thus have been reminded that approaching Jehovah is not something to be taken for granted. Jehovah is the greatest dignitary in the universe.

⁴ On the other hand, as one Bible scholar

1, 2. (a) What claim do humans often make? (b) What exhortation did James give, and why was it needed?

3, 4. (a) Of what might some of James' first-century readers have been reminded by the expression "draw close to God"? (b) Why may we be assured that approach to God is possible?

notes, "this exhortation [at James 4:8] reveals a powerful optimism." James knew that Jehovah has always lovingly invited imperfect humans to draw close to Him. (2 Chronicles 15:2) Jesus' sacrifice opened the way of approach to Jehovah in a fuller sense. (Ephesians 3:11, 12) Today, the way of approach to God has been opened up to millions! How, though, may we take advantage of this marvelous opportunity? We will briefly consider three means by which we can draw close to Jehovah God.

Keep On "Taking in Knowledge" of God

⁵ According to John 17:3, Jesus said: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." Many translations of this verse differ slightly from the *New World Translation*. Instead of saying "taking in knowledge" of God, they simply render the verb "to know" God or "knowing" God. However, a number of scholars note that the sense of the word used in the original Greek involves something more—a continuous process, one that may even lead to intimate acquaintance with another.

⁶ Coming to know God intimately was not a new idea in Jesus' day. In the Hebrew Scriptures, for example, we read that when Samuel was a boy, he "had not yet come to know Jehovah." (1 Samuel 3:7) Did this mean that Samuel knew very little about his God? No. His parents and the priests would surely have

5, 6. How does the example of young Samuel illustrate what is involved in "taking in knowledge" of God?

taught him much. However, the Hebrew word used in that verse can, according to one scholar, be “used for the most intimate acquaintance.” Samuel had not yet come to know Jehovah intimately, as he would later when serving as Jehovah’s spokesman. As Samuel continued growing up, he truly came to know Jehovah, gaining a close personal relationship with him.—1 Samuel 3:19, 20.

9, 10. Are you taking in knowledge of Jehovah so as to become intimately acquainted with him? To do so, you need to “form a longing” for the spiritual food that God provides. (1 Peter 2:2) Do not be satisfied with the basics. Seek to take in some of the Bible’s deeper teachings. (Hebrews 5:12-14) Are you in-

7, 8. (a) Why should we not be intimidated by the Bible’s deeper teachings? (b) What are some deep truths of God’s Word that we would do well to study?

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timidated by such teachings, assuming that they are too difficult? If so, remember that Jehovah is the “Grand Instructor.” (Isaiah 30:20) He knows how to convey deep truths to imperfect human minds. And he can bless your sincere efforts to grasp what he is teaching you.—Psalm 25:4.

8 Why not examine yourself regarding some of “the deep things of God”? (1 Corinthians 2:10) These are not dry topics such as might be debated by theologians and clergymen. They are living doctrines that provide fascinating insight into the mind and heart of our loving Father. For example, the ransom, the “sacred secret,” and the various covenants that Jehovah has used to bless his people and fulfill his purposes—these subjects and many like them are delightful and rewarding fields for personal research and study.—1 Corinthians 2:7.

9 As you grow in knowledge of deeper spiritual truths, beware of the danger that may come with knowledge—pride. (1 Corinthians

9, 10. (a) Why is pride dangerous, and what will help us to avoid it? (b) When it comes to the knowledge of Jehovah, why should we strive to be humble?

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8:1) Pride is dangerous, for it alienates humans from God. (Proverbs 16:5; James 4:6) Remember, no man has reason to boast in his knowledge. To illustrate, consider these words from the introduction to a book that surveys mankind's more recent scientific advances: "The more we come to know, the more we realize how little we know.... Everything we have learned is nothing compared to what we have yet to learn." Such humility is refreshing. Now, when it comes to the greatest body of knowledge—the knowledge of Jehovah God—we have even greater cause for keeping humble. Why?

¹⁰ Note some Biblical statements about Jehovah. "Very deep your thoughts are." (Psalm 92:5) "[Jehovah's] understanding is beyond recounting." (Psalm 147:5) "There is no searching out of [Jehovah's] understanding." (Isaiah 40:28) "O the depth of God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!" (Romans 11:33) Clearly, we will never know all there is to know about Jehovah. (Ecclesiastes 3:11) He has taught us many wonderful things, yet we will always have before us an infinite body of knowledge from which to learn more. Do we not find that prospect both thrilling and humbling? As we learn, then, let us always use our knowledge as a basis for drawing close to Jehovah and for helping others to do so—never as a means to exalt ourselves over others.—Matthew 23:12; Luke 9:48.

Express Your Love for Jehovah

¹¹ Fittingly, the apostle Paul made a connection between knowledge and love. He wrote: "This is what I continue praying, that your love may abound yet more and more with accurate knowledge and full discernment." (Philippians 1:9) Rather than puffing us up with pride, every precious truth that we

11, 12. (a) How should the knowledge we take in regarding Jehovah affect us? (b) What determines whether a person's love for God is genuine?

learn about Jehovah and his purposes should increase our love for our heavenly Father.^{10,11}

¹² Of course, many who claim to love God really do not. They may be sincere about strong feelings that well up in their hearts. Such feelings are good, even commendable, when in harmony with accurate knowledge. But they do not in themselves amount to real love for God. Why not? Note how God's Word defines such love: "This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments." (1 John 5:3) Love for Jehovah, then, is genuine only when it is expressed in obedient actions.¹²

¹³ Godly fear will help us to obey Jehovah. This profound awe and deep respect for Jehovah stems from taking in knowledge of him, learning about his infinite holiness, glory, power, justice, wisdom, and love. Such fear is crucial to drawing close to him. In fact, note what Psalm 25:14 says: "The intimacy with Jehovah belongs to those fearful of him." So if we have a healthy fear of displeasing our beloved heavenly Father, we can draw close to him. Godly fear will help us to heed the wise counsel recorded at Proverbs 3:6: "In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight." What does that mean?

¹⁴ You have to make decisions every day, both major and minor. For instance, what kind of conversation will you have with your workmates, schoolmates, neighbors? (Luke 6:45) Will you work hard at the tasks set before you, or will you seek ways to get by with minimal effort? (Colossians 3:23) Will you draw closer to those who show little or no love for Jehovah, or will you seek to strengthen your relationships with spiritual people? (Proverbs 13:20) What will you do, even in

13. How will godly fear help us to demonstrate our love for Jehovah?

14, 15. (a) What are some of the decisions we face in everyday life? (b) How can we make decisions in a way that reflects our godly fear?

small ways, to promote the interests of God's Kingdom? (Matthew 6:33) If such Scriptural principles as those cited here guide your everyday decisions, then you are indeed taking notice of Jehovah "in all your ways."

¹⁵ In effect, with each decision we make, we should be guided by this thought: 'What would Jehovah want me to do? What course would please him most?' (Proverbs 27:11) Showing godly fear in this manner is an excellent way to express love for Jehovah. Godly fear will also move us to keep clean—spiritually, morally, and physically. Remember, in the same verse in which James urges Christians to "draw close to God," he also exhorts: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you indecisive ones."—James 4:8.

¹⁶ Of course, expressing our love for Jehovah involves far more than refraining from what is bad. Love also moves us to do what is right. For instance, how do we respond to Jehovah's overwhelming generosity? James wrote: "Every good gift and every perfect present is from above, for it comes down from the Father of the celestial lights." (James 1:17) Granted, when we give to Jehovah of our possessions, we do not enrich him. He already owns all the goods and resources there are. (Psalm 50:12) And when we give to Jehovah of our time and energy, we are not filling a need that he cannot otherwise meet. Even if we were to refuse to preach the good news of God's Kingdom, he could cause the stones to cry out! Why, then, give to Jehovah of our resources, time, and energy? Above all, because we thereby express our love for him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.—Mark 12:29, 30.

¹⁷ When we give to Jehovah, we should do so gladly, "for God loves a cheerful giver."

16. By giving to Jehovah, what can we never accomplish, yet what may we always succeed in doing?

17. What can motivate us to give cheerfully to Jehovah?

(2 Corinthians 9:7) The principle recorded at Deuteronomy 16:17 can help us to give cheerfully: "The gift of each one's hand should be in proportion to the blessing of Jehovah your God that he has given you." When we contemplate how generous Jehovah has been with us, we feel a desire to give freely to him. Such giving makes his heart rejoice, much the way a little gift from a beloved child delights a parent. Expressing our love in this way will help us draw close to Jehovah.

Build Intimacy by Means of Prayer

¹⁸ Our moments of private prayer afford us an invaluable opportunity—occasions for intimate, confidential talk to our heavenly Father. (Philippians 4:6) Since prayer is a vital means of drawing close to God, it is worthwhile to pause and consider the quality of our prayers. Not that they must be models of eloquence and organization, but they should be sincere expressions that come from the heart. How can we improve the quality of our prayers?

¹⁹ We might try meditating before we pray. If we meditate ahead of time, we can make our prayers specific and meaningful, thus avoiding the practice of repeating phrases that feel familiar and spring readily to mind. (Proverbs 15:28, 29) Perhaps pondering some of the themes that Jesus mentioned in his model prayer and then considering how these relate to our own circumstances might help. (Matthew 6:9-13) For example, we might ask ourselves what small part we hope to play in the doing of Jehovah's will here on earth. Might we express to Jehovah our desire to be as useful to him as possible and request his help in carrying out whatever assignments he has given us? Are we

18. Why is it worthwhile to consider how to improve the quality of our prayers?

19, 20. Why meditate before we pray, and what are some fitting subjects for such meditation?

The yeartext for 2003 will be: "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you."
—James 4:8.

burdened by concerns about our material needs? For what sins do we need forgiveness, and toward whom do we need to be more forgiving? What temptations afflict us, and do we realize how urgently we need Jehovah's protection in that regard?

²⁰ Additionally, we might think about people we know who are in particular need of Jehovah's help. (2 Corinthians 1:11) Not to be forgotten, though, is the matter of giving thanks. If we stop and think about it, we can surely come up with reasons to thank Jehovah and praise him each day for his abundant goodness. (Deuteronomy 8:10; Luke 10:21) Doing so has an added benefit—it can help us to gain a more positive, appreciative outlook on life.

²¹ Study can aid our prayers as well. There are outstanding prayers by faithful men and

21. Studying what Scriptural examples might help us when we approach Jehovah in prayer?

women recorded in God's Word. For instance, if a challenging problem is looming ahead of us, causing us some anxiety and even fear for our well-being or that of our loved ones, we might read over the prayer of Jacob regarding his upcoming meeting with his vengeful brother, Esau. (Genesis 32: 9-12) Or we might study the prayer uttered by King Asa when a force of some one million Ethiopians threatened God's people. (2 Chronicles 14:11, 12) If we are troubled by a problem that threatens to bring reproach on Jehovah's good name, then Elijah's prayer before the Baal worshipers on Mount Carmel is worth considering, as is Nehemiah's prayer regarding the deplorable state of Jerusalem. (1 Kings 18:36, 37; Nehemiah 1:4-11) Reading and meditating on such prayers can strengthen our faith and give us ideas as to how best to approach Jehovah with the concerns that weigh us down.

²² Clearly, there is no greater honor, no higher aim, than heeding James' counsel to

22. What is the yeartext for 2003, and what might we ask ourselves from time to time throughout the year?

The prayer that Elijah uttered on Mount Carmel is a good example for us



"draw close to God." (James 4:8) May we do so by progressing in our knowledge of God, by seeking to express our love for him more and more, and by developing intimacy with him in our prayers. Throughout the year 2003, while we keep in mind James 4:8 as the yeartext, let us continue to examine ourselves as to whether we are indeed drawing close to Jehovah. What, though, about the latter part of that statement? In what sense will Jehovah "draw close to you," bringing what blessings? The following article will take up this matter.

"HE WILL DRAW CLOSE TO YOU"

"[God] is not far off from each one of us."—ACTS 17:27.

HAVE you ever looked up at the starry heavens on a clear night and been filled with wonder? The sheer number of stars and the vastness of space inspire awe. In this immense universe, the earth is but a speck. Does this mean that the Creator, "the Most High over all the earth," is too lofty to be concerned about humans or too distant and unsearchable to be known by them?—Psalm 83:18.

² The Bible assures us that humans are far from insignificant in Jehovah's eyes. In fact, God's Word encourages us to seek him, saying: "He is not far off from each one of us." (Acts 17:27; 1 Chronicles 28:9) Indeed, if we take steps to draw close to God, he will respond to our efforts. In what way? The words of our yeartext for 2003 give this heartwarming

1, 2. (a) When looking up at the starry heavens, what question might we ask regarding the Creator? (b) How does the Bible assure us that humans are far from insignificant in Jehovah's eyes?

Do You Recall?

- Why is drawing close to Jehovah something to take seriously?
- What are some goals we might set in regard to taking in knowledge of Jehovah?
- How can we demonstrate that we have genuine love for Jehovah?
- In what ways might we build greater intimacy with Jehovah in prayer?

ing answer: "He will draw close to you." (James 4:8) Let us discuss some of the marvelous blessings that Jehovah showers upon those who are close to him.

A Personal Gift From Jehovah

³ First, Jehovah's servants have a precious gift that he has reserved for his people. All the power, wealth, and education that this system of things offers cannot secure this gift. It is a personal gift, one that Jehovah gives only to those close to him. What is it? God's Word answers: "If . . . you give forth your voice for discernment itself, if you keep seeking for it as for silver, and as for hid treasures you keep searching for it, in that case you will understand the fear of Jehovah, and you will find the very knowledge of God. For Jehovah himself gives wisdom." (Proverbs 2:3-6) Imagine imperfect humans being able to

3. What gift does Jehovah give to those who draw close to him?

find "the very knowledge of God"! That gift—the knowledge found in God's Word—is compared to "hid treasures." Why?

⁴ For one thing, the knowledge of God has great value. One of its most precious blessings is the prospect of everlasting life. (John 17:3) But that knowledge enriches our life even now. For example, as a result of our careful study of God's Word, we have come to know the answers to such important questions as: What is God's name? (Psalm 83:18) What is the true condition of the dead? (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) What is God's purpose for the earth and mankind? (Isaiah 45:18) We have also come to know that the best way to live is by applying the Bible's wise counsel. (Isaiah 30:20, 21; 48:17, 18) Thus, we have sound guidance that helps us to cope with the anxieties of life and to pursue a course that promotes genuine happiness and satisfaction. Above all, our study of God's Word has enabled us to come to know Jehovah's marvelous qualities and to draw close to him. What could be more valuable than a close relationship with Jehovah based on "the very knowledge of God"?

⁵ There is another reason why the knowledge of God can be compared to "hid treasures." Like many treasures, it is relatively rare in this world. Of earth's six billion inhabitants, some six million worshipers of Jehovah, or about 1 in 1,000, have found "the very knowledge of God." To illustrate what a rare privilege it is to know the truth of God's Word, consider just one Bible question: What happens to humans at death? We know from the Scriptures that the soul dies and that the dead are unconscious. (Ezekiel 18:4) Yet, the false belief that something inside a person continues living after death is embraced by most of the world's religions. It is an integral part of the religions of Christendom. It also prevails in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jain-

4, 5. Why can "the very knowledge of God" be compared to "hid treasures"? Illustrate.

ism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Taoism. Just think—billions of people are deceived by this one false doctrine!

⁶ Why have not more people found "the very knowledge of God"? Because one cannot fully grasp the meaning of God's Word without His help. Remember, this knowledge is a gift. Jehovah gives it only to those who are willing to search his Word with honesty and humility. Such ones may not be "wise in a fleshly way." (1 Corinthians 1:26) Many among them may even be considered "unlettered and ordinary" by the world's standards. (Acts 4:13) Yet, that does not matter. Jehovah rewards us with "the very knowledge of God" because of qualities he finds in our heart.

⁷ Consider an example. Many scholars in Christendom have produced extensive commentaries on the Bible. Such reference works may explain historical background, the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words, and more. With all of their learning, have such scholars really found "the very knowledge of God"? Well, do they clearly understand the theme of the Bible—the vindication of Jehovah's sovereignty by means of his heavenly Kingdom? Do they know that Jehovah God is not part of a Trinity? We do have an accurate understanding of such matters. Why? Jehovah has blessed us with insight into spiritual truths that escapes many "wise and intellectual ones." (Matthew 11:25) How Jehovah blesses those who are close to him!

"Jehovah Is Guarding All Those Loving Him"

⁸ Those who are close to Jehovah enjoy another blessing—divine protection. The psalm-

6, 7. (a) Who only can find "the very knowledge of God"? (b) What example shows that Jehovah has blessed us with insight that escapes many "wise and intellectual ones"?

8, 9. (a) How did David describe another blessing for those who are close to Jehovah? (b) Why do true Christians need divine protection?

ist David, who was no stranger to adversity, wrote: "Jehovah is near to all those calling upon him, to all those who call upon him in trueness. The desire of those fearing him he will perform, and their cry for help he will hear, and he will save them. Jehovah is guarding all those loving him." (Psalm 145:18-20) Yes, Jehovah is near to those who love him and therefore can be swift in responding to their cries for help.

⁹ Why do we need divine protection? In addition to feeling the effects of living in these "critical times hard to deal with," true Christians are a special target of Jehovah's chief Adversary, Satan the Devil. (2 Timothy 3:1) That crafty enemy is out "to devour" us. (1 Peter 5:8) Satan persecutes, pressures, and tempts us. He also looks for attitudes of mind and heart that he can exploit. He has an objective in mind: to weaken our faith and consume us spiritually. (Revelation 12:12, 17) Since we have such a powerful foe to contend with, is it not reassuring to know that "Jehovah is guarding all those loving him"?

¹⁰ How, though, does Jehovah guard his people? His promise of protection does not guarantee us a problem-free life in this system; nor does it mean that he is obligated to work miracles in our behalf. Nevertheless, Jehovah does provide physical protection for his people as a group. After all, he would never allow the Devil to efface true worshipers from the earth! (2 Peter 2:9) Above all, Jehovah protects us spiritually. He equips us with what we need to endure trials and to safeguard our relationship with him. In the long run, spiritual protection is the most important kind of protection. Why? As long as we have our relationship with Jehovah, nothing—not even death—can do us lasting harm.—Matthew 10:28.

10. (a) How does Jehovah guard his people? (b) What is the most important kind of protection, and why?

Jehovah has blessed us with insight into spiritual truths



¹¹ Jehovah has made abundant provisions for the spiritual protection of those who are close to him. Through his Word, the Bible, he grants us wisdom to cope with various trials. (James 1:2-5) Applying the practical counsel found in the Scriptures makes a difference. In addition, Jehovah gives "holy spirit to those asking him." (Luke 11:13) That spirit is the most powerful force in the universe, so it can certainly equip us to face successfully any trial or temptation that may come our way. Through Christ, Jehovah provides "gifts in men." (Ephesians 4:8) These spiritually qualified men endeavor to reflect Jehovah's own heartfelt compassion in helping fellow worshipers.—James 5:14, 15.

¹² Jehovah provides something else to safeguard us: spiritual food at the proper time. (Matthew 24:45) By means of printed publications, including the journals *The*

11. What provisions has Jehovah made for the spiritual protection of his people?

12, 13. (a) By what means does Jehovah supply us with spiritual food at the proper time? (b) How do you feel about Jehovah's provisions for our spiritual well-being?

Watchtower and *Awake!*, as well as by meetings, assemblies, and conventions, Jehovah supplies us with what we need when we need it. Can you recall an occasion when you heard something at a Christian meeting, an assembly, or a convention that touched your heart and strengthened or comforted you? Have you ever read an article in one of the above-mentioned journals and felt that it was written for you?

¹³ One of Satan's most effective weapons is discouragement, and we are not immune to its effects. He well knows that prolonged despondency can rob us of strength, even making us vulnerable. (Proverbs 24:10) Because Satan is trying to capitalize on negative feelings, we need help. The *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines have occasionally featured articles that help us to combat discouragement. Regarding one such article, a Christian sister wrote: "I read the article almost every day, and the tears still well up. I keep it by my bed so that I can have it with me whenever I am feeling down. Through articles like these, I can just feel Jehovah's protective arms embracing me."* Are we not grateful to Jehovah for supplying us with timely spiritual food? Remember, his provisions for our spiritual well-being are evidence that he is close to us and has placed us under his protective care.

Access to the "Hearer of Prayer"

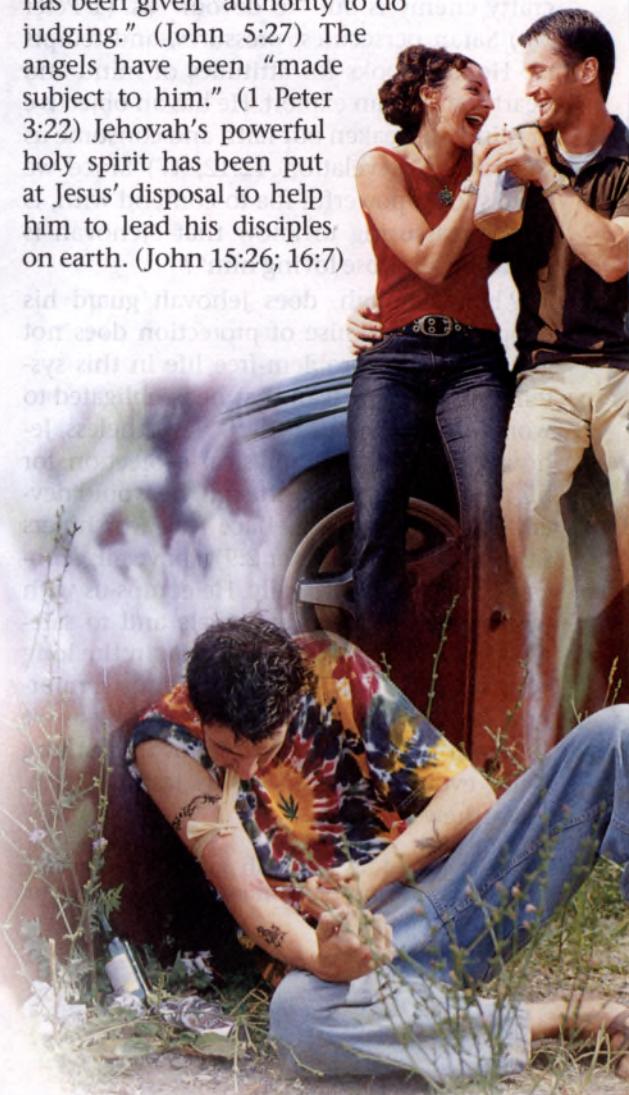
¹⁴ Have you ever noticed that as humans gain power and authority, they often become less accessible to those under them? What, though, about Jehovah God? Is he too far removed to be interested in the expressions

* A response to the article "Jehovah Is Greater Than Our Hearts," in the May 1, 2000, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 28-31.

14, 15. (a) What personal blessing does Jehovah bestow upon those who are close to him? (b) Why is being granted free access to Jehovah in prayer a remarkable privilege?

made to him by mere humans? On the contrary! The gift of prayer is yet another blessing that Jehovah bestows upon those who are close to him. Being granted free access to the "Hearer of prayer" is a truly remarkable privilege. (Psalm 65:2) Why?

¹⁵ To illustrate: The chief executive of a large corporation has many responsibilities. He decides which matters he will handle personally and which he will delegate to others. Similarly, the Sovereign Ruler of the universe has the option to determine which matters he will involve himself in and which he will delegate. Consider all that Jehovah has delegated to his beloved Son, Jesus. The Son has been given "authority to do judging." (John 5:27) The angels have been "made subject to him." (1 Peter 3:22) Jehovah's powerful holy spirit has been put at Jesus' disposal to help him to lead his disciples on earth. (John 15:26; 16:7)



Jesus could therefore say: "All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth." (Matthew 28:18) Yet, when it comes to our prayers, Jehovah has chosen to involve himself personally. That is why the Bible directs us to address our prayers only to Jehovah, doing so in the name of Jesus.—Psalm 69:13; John 14:6, 13.

¹⁶ Does Jehovah really listen to our prayers? If he were indifferent or unconcerned, he would never urge us to "persevere in prayer"

16. Why can we be confident that Jehovah really listens to our prayers?

Jehovah provides spiritual protection



or to throw our burdens and anxieties on him. (Romans 12:12; Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7) Faithful servants in Bible times had complete confidence that Jehovah listens to prayer. (1 John 5:14) Thus, the psalmist David stated: "[Jehovah] hears my voice." (Psalm 55:17) We too have every reason to be confident that Jehovah is close, ready to hear our every thought and care.

Jehovah Rewards His Servants

¹⁷ Jehovah's position as the Universal Sovereign is unaffected by what mere humans may do or refuse to do. Nevertheless, Jehovah is an appreciative God. He values—in fact, cherishes—the faithful service of his intelligent creatures. (Psalm 147:11) This, then, is another benefit enjoyed by those who are close to Jehovah: He rewards his servants. —Hebrews 11:6.

¹⁸ The Bible clearly shows that Jehovah values what his worshipers do. For example, we read: "He that is showing favor to the lowly one is lending to Jehovah, and his treatment He will repay to him." (Proverbs 19:17) Jehovah's merciful consideration for lowly ones was reflected in the Mosaic Law. (Leviticus

17, 18. (a) How does Jehovah feel about the faithful service of his intelligent creatures? (b) Explain how Proverbs 19:17 shows that our merciful deeds do not go unnoticed by Jehovah.



14:21; 19:15) How does Jehovah feel when we imitate his mercy in our dealings with lowly ones? When we give to the lowly one, expecting nothing in return, Jehovah views this as a loan made to Him. Jehovah promises to repay that debt with favor and blessings. (Proverbs 10:22; Matthew 6:3, 4; Luke 14:12-14) Yes, when we show compassion to a fellow worshiper in need, it touches Jehovah's heart. How grateful we are to know that our merciful deeds do not go unnoticed by our heavenly Father!—Matthew 5:7.

¹⁹ Jehovah especially appreciates what we do in behalf of his Kingdom. When we draw close to Jehovah, it is only natural that we want to use our time, energy, and resources to share as fully as possible in the Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making work. (Matthew 28:19, 20) At times, we may feel that we are accomplishing little. Our imperfect heart might even cause us to wonder whether Jehovah is pleased with our efforts. (1 John 3:19, 20) But Jehovah treasures every gift—no matter how small—that springs from a heart motivated by love. (Mark 12:41-44) The Bible as-

19. (a) Why can we be assured that Jehovah appreciates what we do in the preaching and disciple-making work? (b) How does Jehovah reward acts of service rendered in support of his Kingdom?

Do You Recall?

- What gift does Jehovah give to those who draw close to him?
- What provisions does Jehovah make for the spiritual protection of his people?
- Why is being granted free access to Jehovah in prayer a remarkable privilege?
- How does the Bible show that Jehovah appreciates the faithful service of his intelligent creatures?

*Jehovah is close,
ready to hear our
every prayer*



sures us: "God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name." (Hebrews 6:10) Indeed, Jehovah remembers and rewards even the smallest act of service rendered in support of his Kingdom. In addition to rich spiritual blessings now, we can look forward to the joys of life in the coming new world, where Jehovah will generously open his hand and satisfy the righteous desires of all who are close to him!—Psalm 145:16; 2 Peter 3:13.

²⁰ Throughout the year 2003, let us ask ourselves if we are making continuous effort to draw close to our heavenly Father. If we are, we can be certain that he will respond as he has promised. After all, "God . . . cannot lie." (Titus 1:2) If you draw close to him, he will draw close to you. (James 4:8) And with what result? Rich blessings now and the prospect of drawing ever closer to Jehovah throughout eternity!

20. Throughout the year 2003, how might we keep in mind the words of our yeartext, and with what result?



Are You Acquainted With *Shaphan and His Family?*

WHEN reading your Bible, have you ever noticed references to Shaphan and some members of his influential family? Who were they? What did they do? What lessons can we learn from them?

The Bible introduces "Shaphan the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam" to us in connection with Josiah's restoration of true worship in about 642 B.C.E. (2 Kings 22:3) During the following 36 years, until Jerusalem's destruction in 607 B.C.E., we are introduced to his four sons, Ahikam, Elasar, Gemariah, and Jaazaniah, and to his two grandsons, Micahiah and Gedaliah. (See chart.) "The family of Shaphan dominated the bureaucracy [in the kingdom of Judah] and held the position of king's scribe from the time of Josiah until the Exile," explains the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. A review of what the Bible says about Shaphan and his family will help us appreciate how they supported the prophet Jeremiah and the true worship of Jehovah.

Shaphan Supports True Worship

In 642 B.C.E., when King Josiah was about 25, we find Shaphan serving as the king's secretary and copyist. (Jeremiah 36:10) What did that involve? The above-mentioned reference work states that a royal scribe and secretary was a close adviser to the king, in charge of financial matters, competent in diplomacy, and knowledgeable in foreign affairs, international law, and trade agreements. Thus, as a royal secretary, Shaphan

was one of the most influential men in the kingdom.

Ten years earlier, young Josiah had "started to search for the God of David his forefather." Shaphan was evidently much older than Josiah and could therefore be a good spiritual adviser to him and a supporter of Josiah's first campaign of restoring true worship.*—2 Chronicles 34:1-8.

During temple repair work, "the very book of the law" was found, and Shaphan "began to read it before the king." Josiah was shocked to hear its content and sent a delegation of trusted men to Huldah the prophetess in order to inquire of Jehovah concerning the book. The king showed confidence in Shaphan and his son Ahikam by including them in the delegation.—2 Kings 22:8-14; 2 Chronicles 34:14-22.

This is the only reference in the Scriptures to what Shaphan himself did. In other Bible verses, he is just referred to as a father or a grandfather. Shaphan's offspring came into close contact with the prophet Jeremiah.

Ahikam and Gedaliah

As we have already noted, Shaphan's son Ahikam is first mentioned in connection with the delegation sent to the prophetess Huldah. A reference work notes: "Although

* Shaphan must have been much older than Josiah, considering that Shaphan's son Ahikam was a grown man when Josiah was about 25 years old.—2 Kings 22:1-3, 11-14.

Ahikam's title is not given in the Hebrew Bible, it is evident that he was high-ranking."

Some 15 years after that incident, Jeremiah's life was in danger. When he warned the people about Jehovah's intention to destroy Jerusalem, "the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying: 'You will positively die.'" What then developed? The account continues: "It was the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan that proved to be with Jeremiah, in order not to give him into the hand of the people to have him put to death." (Jeremiah 26:1-24) What does this show? *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* states: "This incident not only attests the influence wielded by Ahikam, but also indicates that he, like other members of the family of Shaphan, was kindly disposed toward Jeremiah."

About 20 years later, after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. and taken most of the people into exile, Shaphan's grandson Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, was appointed governor over the remaining Jews. Did he, like Shaphan's other family members, care for Jeremiah? The Bible record reads: "Accordingly Jeremiah came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam at Mizpah and took up dwelling with him." Within a few months, Gedaliah was killed, and the

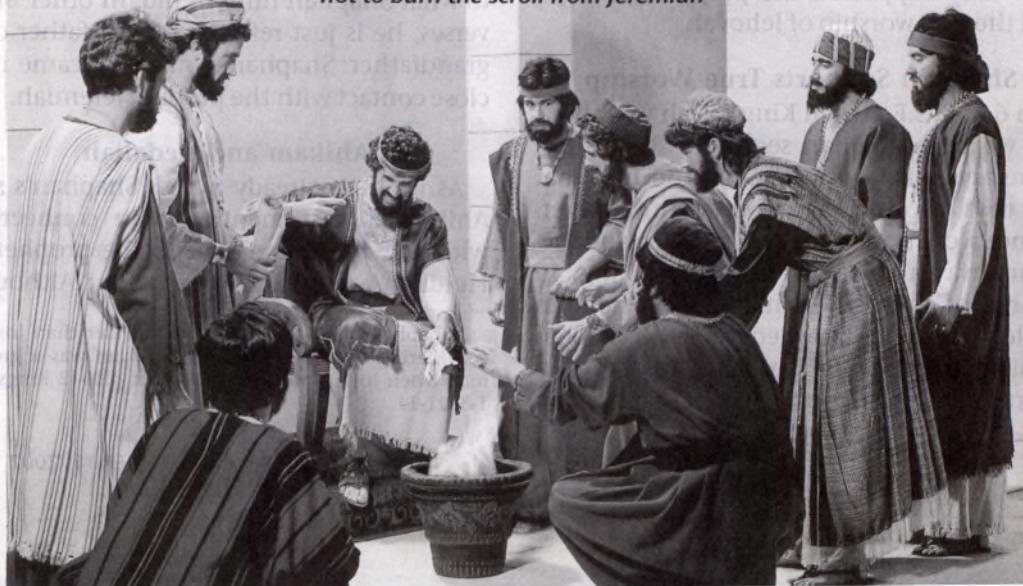
remaining Jews took Jeremiah with them when they moved to Egypt.—Jeremiah 40:5-7; 41:1, 2; 43:4-7.

Gemariah and Micaiah

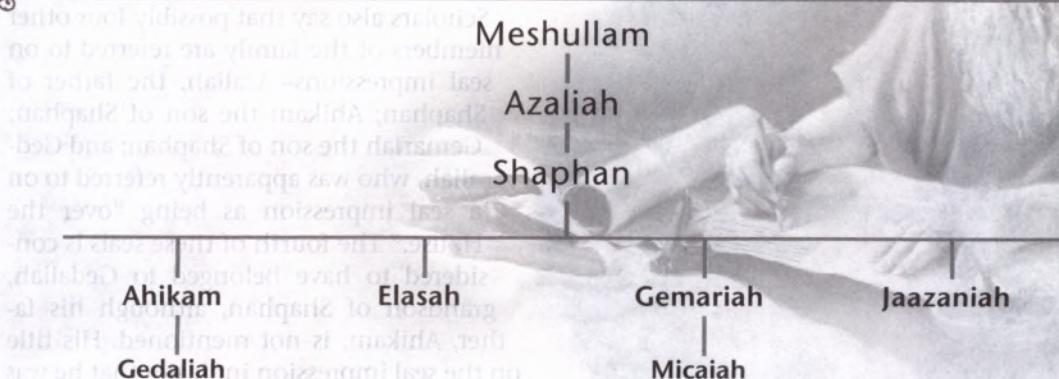
Shaphan's son Gemariah and grandson Micaiah played a prominent part in the events described in Jeremiah chapter 36. The time was about 624 B.C.E., in the fifth year of King Jehoiakim. Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, read aloud from the book the words of Jeremiah at the house of Jehovah, "in the dining room of Gemariah the son of Shaphan." Accordingly, "Micaiah the son of Gemariah the son of Shaphan got to hear all the words of Jehovah from out of the book."—Jeremiah 36:9-11.

Micaiah notified his father and all the other princes about the scroll, and they all wanted to hear what it said. How did they react? "Now it came about that as soon as they heard all the words, they looked at one another in dread; and they proceeded to say to Baruch: 'We shall without fail tell the king all these words!'" Before speaking to the king, however, they advised Baruch: "Go, conceal yourself, you and Jeremiah, so that no one at all will know where you men are."—Jeremiah 36:12-19.

Gemariah and others pleaded with Jehoiakim not to burn the scroll from Jeremiah



The Family Tree of Shaphan



As anticipated, the king rejected the message in the scroll and burned it piece by piece. Some princes, including Shaphan's son Gemariah, "pleaded with the king not to burn the roll, but he did not listen to them." (Jeremiah 36:21-25) The book *Jeremiah—An Archaeological Companion* concludes: "Gemariah was a strong supporter of Jeremiah at the court of King Jehoiakim."

Elasah and Jaazaniah

In 617 B.C.E., Babylon took control of the kingdom of Judah. Thousands of Jews, "all the princes and all the valiant, mighty men . . . and also every craftsman and builder of bulwarks," were taken into exile, including the prophet Ezekiel. Mattaniah, whose name the Babylonians changed to Zedekiah, became the new vassal king. (2 Kings 24:12-17) Later Zedekiah sent a delegation that included Shaphan's son Elasah to Babylon. Jeremiah entrusted to Elasah a letter that had an important message from Jehovah to the exiled Jews.—Jeremiah 29:1-3.

The Bible record thus indicates that Shaphan, three of his sons, and two of his grandsons used their influential positions to support true wor-

ship and the faithful prophet Jeremiah. What about Shaphan's son Jaazaniah? Unlike the other members of Shaphan's family, he evidently engaged in idol worship. In the sixth year of Ezekiel's exile in Babylon, or about 612 B.C.E., the prophet had a vision in which 70 men offered incense to idols at the temple in Jerusalem. Among them was Jaazaniah, the only one mentioned by name. This may suggest that he was a prominent member of this group. (Ezekiel 8:1, 9-12) Jaazaniah's example demonstrates that being raised in a godly family does not ensure one's becoming a faithful worshiper of Jehovah. Each individual is responsible for his own course of action.—2 Corinthians 5:10.

Historicity of Shaphan and His Family

By the time Shaphan and his family played a part in the events that took place in Jerusalem, the use of seals had become common in Judah. Seals were used to witness or sign documents and were made of precious stones, metal, ivory, or glass. Usually the name of the seal's owner, his father's name and, occasionally, the owner's title were engraved on them.



Courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority



Jaazaniah, though a member of Shaphan's family, was seen in a vision worshiping idols

Hundreds of Hebrew seal impressions on clay have been found. Professor Nahman Avigad, scholar on Hebrew epigraphy, the study of ancient inscriptions, noted: "The seal inscriptions are the only Hebrew epigraphic source that mentions persons known from the Bible." Have any seal inscriptions of Shaphan or his family members been found? Yes,

the names Shaphan and his son Gemariah appear on the seal shown on pages 19 and 21.

Scholars also say that possibly four other members of the family are referred to on seal impressions—Azaliah, the father of Shaphan; Ahikam the son of Shaphan; Gemariah the son of Shaphan; and Gedaliah, who was apparently referred to on a seal impression as being "over the House." The fourth of these seals is considered to have belonged to Gedaliah, grandson of Shaphan, although his father, Ahikam, is not mentioned. His title on the seal impression indicates that he was one of the highest officials in the state.

What Can We Learn?

What a fine example Shaphan and his family set in using their influential position in support of both true worship and faithful Jeremiah! We too can use our resources and influence to support Jehovah's organization and our fellow worshipers.

It is enriching and faith-inspiring for us not only to read the Bible regularly but also to dig into it and acquaint ourselves with such ancient witnesses of Jehovah as Shaphan and members of his family. They too belong to the great "cloud of witnesses" whose examples we can imitate.—Hebrews 12:1.

Huldah—An Influential Prophetess

Upon hearing the reading of "the very book of the law" found in the temple, King Josiah ordered Shaphan and four other high-ranking officials to "inquire of Jehovah" about the book. (2 Kings 22:8-20) Where could the delegation find the answer? Jeremiah and possibly Nahum and Zephaniah, all prophets and Bible writers, lived in Judah at the time. The delegation, however, approached Huldah the prophetess.

The book *Jerusalem—An Archaeological Biography* comments: "The remarkable thing about this episode is that the male-female aspect of the story was completely unremarked. No one considered it the least bit inappropriate that an all-male committee took the Scroll of the Law to a woman to determine its status. When she declared it the word of the Lord, no one questioned her authority to determine the issue. This episode is often overlooked by scholars assessing the role of women in ancient Israel." Of course, the message received was from Jehovah.

View Matters From God's Standpoint



IN NEW YORK, U.S.A., September 14, 2002, was a warm and sunny day. On that day, an international crowd of 6,521 met at the Patterson Educational Center and two other complexes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the region. The crowd gathered to witness the graduation of the 113th class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. The students came from 14 lands and had spent the past five months preparing for missionary service in 19 countries to which they were assigned.

Carey Barber, in his 98th year of life and a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, served as chairman of the program. He called attention to the nearly 60-year heritage of Gilead School, which has equipped thousands to go out in the missionary field. Brother Barber remarked: "It is no exaggerated claim that grand results have come from their further training. Literally hundreds of thousands of meek ones throughout the earth have dedicated their life to Jehovah and have taken up his true worship and sacred service because of the help that trained missionaries have given them."

Prior to attending Gilead, many of the students demonstrated interest in expanding their ministry. One couple had spent over a year taking classes in Mandarin in an effort to reach a large ethnic Chinese population in their home area in Canada. Another couple began studying Albanian on their own and eventually moved to Albania to care for the growing interest in the Bible there. Others in the class came to Gilead from Hungary, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic, lands to which they had moved to serve where there was a great need for teachers of God's Word.

Now, before departing for assignments in Africa, Eastern Europe, Central and South America, and the Far East, all the graduating students were encouraged to take God into account in all they do.

View Matters From God's Perspective

Following his opening remarks, Brother Barber introduced Maxwell Lloyd, a member of the United States Branch Committee. He highlighted the theme "View All Mat-

ters From the Standpoint of God." Brother Lloyd called attention to the examples of David and the Son of God, Jesus. (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:11; Luke 22:42) After reminding the students that their five-month study of the Bible had given them training in viewing things from God's standpoint, the speaker asked: "When conducting Bible studies with people in your new assignment, will you help them to reason on matters from the standpoint of God?" And as regards counseling others, he advised the students: "Don't say, 'From my standpoint, I feel . . .' Rather, help them to see what God's view is.

CLASS STATISTICS

Number of countries represented: 14

Number of countries assigned to: 19

Number of students: 46

Average age: 35.0

Average years in truth: 17.2

Average years in full-time ministry: 13.7



113th Graduating Class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead

In the list below, rows are numbered from front to back, and names are listed from left to right in each row.

- (1) Lighthart, M.; Hosoi, S.; Berktold, A.; Liem, C.; Aoki, J. (2) Baglyas, J.; Bouqué, S.; Bossi, A.; Alton, J.; Escobar, I.; Escobar, F. (3) Stoica, A.; Stoica, D.; Freimuth, S.; Karlsson, M.; LeBlanc, R. (4) Bianchi, R.; Bianchi, S.; Kaminski, L.; Joseph, L.; Paris, S.; LeBlanc, L. (5) Paris, M.; Skidmore, B.; Horton, J.; Horton, L.; Skidmore, G. (6) Liem, B.; Alton, G.; Quirici, E.; Langlois, M.; Steininger, S.; Aoki, H. (7) Langlois, J.; Steininger, M.; Bossi, F.; Kaminski, J.; Bouqué, J.; Lighthart, E.; Hosoi, K. (8) Baglyas, J.; Quirici, M.; Karlsson, L.; Freimuth, C.; Berktold, W.; Joseph, R.

Following this course, you will prove to be a real blessing to those with whom you associate in your assignment."

Next on the program was Gerrit Lösch, a member of the Governing Body. Speaking on the theme "I Am With You," he called attention to many occasions when Jehovah said to his faithful servants, "I am with you." (Genesis 26:23, 24; 28:15; Joshua 1:5; Jeremiah 1:7, 8) In our day, we can have the same confidence in Jehovah if we remain faithful. Brother Lösch pointed out: "Do you worry whether you will find people with whom to study the Bible? Remember, Jehovah said, 'I

am with you.' Do you worry about having enough in a material way? Jehovah said: 'I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5) Brother Lösch concluded by reminding the students that Jesus promised to be with his faithful followers in the disciple-making work.—Matthew 28:20.

"Will You Find Your Security in the Fire?" was the theme of Gilead instructor Lawrence Bowen. He noted that because of the issues raised in Eden, all those who have desired to give Jehovah exclusive devotion have been faced with difficulties and, at times, fiery

trials. He encouraged the graduating students to follow the example of Jesus, who found true security by fully relying on Jehovah and accepting the fiery tests that Jehovah permitted to perfect his Son's obedience. (Hebrews 5:8, 9) Jehovah can be compared to a refiner of gold who applies just the right amount of heat to remove impurities. Of course, faith tested by fire provides far greater security than refined gold. Why? "Because refined faith can take any pressure," said Brother Bowen, "and it equips us to endure all the way to 'the end.'"—Matthew 24:13.

Another Gilead instructor, Mark Noumair, asked: "Will You Be Likable?" His theme centered on the words of 1 Samuel 2:26, which describe Samuel as "likable both from Jehovah's standpoint and from that of men." After considering Samuel's example, Brother Noumair, who spent over a decade in missionary service in Africa, stated: "You too can become very likable in God's eyes by sticking loyally to the work God has given you to do. He has given you a precious missionary assignment." Brother Noumair then encouraged the graduating class to view their assignments as a sacred trust from God and to adopt God's thinking in carrying out their assignments.

During the school term, the students had many opportunities on weekends to share with people in the area "the magnificent things of God" set out in the Bible. (Acts 2:11) In fact, they were able to speak about these things in ten different languages. Wallace Liverance, another Gilead instructor, interviewed a group of students who related their experiences under the theme "The Magnificent Things of God' Rouse People to Action." He noted: "The spirit impelled those in the upper room at Pentecost to speak about 'the magnificent things of God.' That same spirit works today in all of God's faithful servants." Some have even been motivated to learn new languages with a view to witnessing to many more people.

Practical Advice on Viewing Matters From God's Standpoint

Following the opening talks, Gary Breaux and William Young, members of the United States branch staff, interviewed members of different branch committees in lands where missionaries are currently serving as well as a couple who spent 41 years in the missionary service. One observation made was: "Those demanding the least stay longer. They focus attention on the reason why they came. They know they came to preach the good news and to help people come to know Jehovah."

David Splane, another member of the Governing Body, rounded out the program with a talk on the theme "You Are Not Going Far!" What did he mean by that, in view of the fact that the 46 graduates were now being sent to lands around the globe? He explained: "No matter where you are on earth, you will always be in the house of God as long as you are faithful." Yes, all faithful Christians, no matter where they may be physically, are serving in a part of God's great spiritual temple, or house, which came into existence at the time of Jesus' baptism in the first century. (Hebrews 9:9) How comforting for those in attendance to know that Jehovah is near to all his faithful servants on earth! Just as Jehovah was interested in Jesus when he was on the earth, so He is interested in all of us and our service to Him, no matter where we may be. So in matters of worship, we are never far from one another and from Jehovah and Jesus.

After acknowledgment of greetings received from around the world, the announcing of assignments, and the reading of a letter from the class that expressed appreciation for the training received at Gilead, the chairman brought the program to a successful conclusion. He encouraged the new missionaries to keep up their good work and to rejoice in Jehovah's service.—Philippians 3:1.

Express Affection in the Family Circle

BURN it if you can! Burn it!" Tohru dared his wife, Yoko.* "I certainly will," she retorted and lit a match to burn the photo taken of the two of them. She then snapped, "I'll burn down the house!" Tohru responded by slapping his wife, ending the argument with violence.

Three years earlier, Tohru and Yoko started their life together as a happily married couple. What, then, went wrong? Although Tohru appeared to be a pleasant man, his wife felt that he did not show affection for her and that he rarely cared for her feelings. He seemed to be incapable of responding to her affection. Unable to cope with this, Yoko became increasingly resentful and angry. She developed such conditions as insomnia, anxiety, poor appetite, irritability, and depression and even experienced panic attacks. Yet, Tohru seemed unconcerned about the tense atmosphere that prevailed in his household. It just seemed natural to him.

* Some names have been changed.



"Critical Times Hard to Deal With"

Such problems are common today. The apostle Paul foretold that our time would be characterized by people who have "no natural affection." (2 Timothy 3:1-5) The original Greek word here translated "no natural affection" is closely related to the word depicting natural affection found among family members. Our time has certainly seen a lack of such affection. Even if affection exists, family members may seldom express it toward one another.

Many parents today do not know how to express love and affection toward their own children. Some have grown up in a family environment lacking affection and may not realize that life can be happier and more pleasant if only affection is felt and expressed. That seems to have been the case with Tohru. During his childhood, his father was always busy at work and came home late at night. He rarely talked to Tohru, and when he did, he was abusive. Tohru's mother also worked full-time and did not spend much time with him. The television set was his baby-sitter. There was neither commendation nor communication in the family.

Culture may also be a factor. In some parts of Latin America, a man has to go against the prevailing culture to express his affection for his wife. In many Oriental and African countries, it goes against tradition for one to express affection in words or in deeds. Husbands may find it awkward to say "I love you" to their wives or children. Nevertheless, we can learn a lesson from

the foremost family relationship, which has stood the test of time.

Exemplary Family Relationship

The best model for the family is found in the intimate relationship between Jehovah God and his only-begotten Son. They express love toward each other in a perfect way. Over countless thousands of years, the spirit creature who later became Jesus Christ enjoyed a happy relationship with his Father. He described the bond this way: "I came to be the one he was specially fond of day by day, I being glad before him all the time." (Proverbs 8:30) The Son was so sure of his Father's love that he could declare to others that Jehovah was specially fond of him day by day. He felt happy before his Father all the time.

Even when on earth as the man Jesus, God's Son was given reassurance of his Father's deep love. After Jesus was baptized, he heard his Father's voice: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." (Matthew 3:17) What an encouraging expression of love at the beginning of Jesus' mission on earth! It must have touched his heart to hear his Father's approval as he regained the full memory of his life in heaven.

Thus, Jehovah sets the finest example in expressing love for his universal family in the fullest measure. If we accept Jesus Christ, we too can enjoy Jehovah's affection. (John 16:27) Although we will hear no words from heaven, we will see Jehovah's love expressed in nature, in the provision of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, and in other ways. (1 John 4:9, 10) Jehovah even gives ear to our prayers and answers them in our best interests. (Psalm 145:18; Isaiah 48:17) As we cultivate an intimate relationship with Jehovah, we deepen our appreciation for his loving care.

Jesus learned from his Father how to show empathy, consideration, kindness, and deep concern for others. He explained: "Whatever things [the Father] does, these things the Son

also does in like manner. For the Father has affection for the Son and shows him all the things he himself does." (John 5:19, 20) In turn, we can learn the art of expressing affection by studying the example Jesus set while he was on earth.—Philippians 1:8.

Affection in the Family—How?

Since "God is love" and we are created "in his image," we have the potential both for feeling and expressing love. (1 John 4:8; Genesis 1:26, 27) Yet, that potential does not bear fruit automatically. In order to express affection, we must first feel affection toward our mate and children. Be observant, and note likable qualities in them, however trivial those may at first seem to be, and dwell on such thoughts. 'There is nothing appealing about my husband [wife or children],' you may say. Those who are in an arranged marriage may have felt little affection for their mates. Some may not have wanted children. Still, consider how Jehovah felt about his figurative wife, the nation of Israel, in the tenth century B.C.E. While his prophet Elijah concluded that there were no other worshipers of Jehovah among the ten-tribe nation of Israel, Jehovah carefully scrutinized them and found a considerable number of people—7,000 in all—who in his eyes had appealing qualities. Can you imitate Jehovah by looking for the good in the members of your family?—1 Kings 19:14-18.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Comfort for Those Who Suffer

Now More Than Ever, Stay Awake!

What Can Help Us to Handle
the Word of the Truth Aright?

In order to let other members of the family feel your affection, however, you must make a conscious effort to convey it. Whenever you notice something commendable, put your appreciation into words. In describing a capable wife, God's Word notes an interesting characteristic of her family: "Her sons have risen up and proceeded to pronounce her happy; her owner rises up, and he praises her." (Proverbs 31:28) Notice how freely the family members expressed their appreciation

*Jehovah provides help
in his Word, the Bible*



to one another. By verbally praising his wife, a father sets a fine example for his son, encouraging him to be generous in commanding his mate when he marries.

Also, parents do well to commend their children. That can help instill self-respect in the children's hearts. After all, how can a person 'love his neighbor as himself' if he has no respect for himself? (Matthew 22:39) On the other hand, if parents always criticize their children, not commanding them at all, the children can easily lose their self-respect and may have difficulty showing affection for others.—Ephesians 4:31, 32.

You Can Find Help

What if you were not raised in a loving household? You can still learn to express af-

fection. The first step is to recognize the problem and appreciate the need for improvement. God's Word, the Bible, is a great help in this regard. It can be likened to a mirror. When we examine ourselves in the mirror-like teachings of the Bible, the defects, or flaws, in our thinking are reflected back at us. (James 1:23) In harmony with Bible teachings, we can readjust any inappropriate inclinations. (Ephesians 4:20-24; Philippians 4:8, 9) We need to do so regularly, never 'giving up in doing what is fine.'—Galatians 6:9.

Some may find it difficult to show affection because of their upbringing or culture. However, recent studies indicate that such obstacles can be overcome. Dr. Daniel Goleman, a mental-health specialist, explains that 'even the most deeply implanted habits of the heart learned in childhood can be reshaped.' Over 19 centuries ago, the Bible indicated that with the help of God's spirit, even the most entrenched heart inclinations can be transformed. It admonishes us: "Strip off the old personality with its practices, and clothe yourselves with the new personality."—Colossians 3:9, 10.

Once the problem is identified, the family can study the Bible with their needs in mind. For instance, why not look up the word "affection" in a Bible concordance? You may find a scripture such as this: "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome Jehovah gave, that Jehovah is very tender in affection and merciful." (James 5:11) Then consider the Bible account of Job, focusing on how Jehovah was tender in affection and merciful toward Job. You will no doubt want to imitate Jehovah in being very tender in affection and merciful toward your family.

Being imperfect, however, "we all stumble many times" in our use of the tongue. (James 3:2) In the family circle, we may fail to use

our tongue in an encouraging way. This is where prayer and reliance on Jehovah come in. Do not give up. "Pray incessantly." (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Jehovah will help the ones who seek affection in the family as well as the ones who want to show it but who are inhibited in doing so.

In addition, Jehovah has kindly provided help in the Christian congregation. James wrote:

"Is there anyone [spiritually] sick among you? Let him call the older men of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, greasing him with oil in the name of Jehovah." (James 5:14) Yes, elders in the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses can be of great help to families whose members are having problems in showing affection to one another. Though not therapists, the elders can patiently help their fellow believers, not telling them what they should do, but reminding them of Jehovah's viewpoint and praying with them and for them.—Psalm 119:105; Galatians 6:1.

In the case of Tohru and Yoko, Christian elders always gave ear to their problems and comforted them. (1 Peter 5:2, 3) On some occasions, an elder and his wife visited so that Yoko might benefit from the company of an experienced Christian woman who could recall Yoko 'to her senses to love her husband.' (Titus 2:3, 4) By showing understanding and sympathy for the sufferings and heartaches of fellow Christians, the elders become "a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rainstorm."—Isaiah 32:1, 2.

With the assistance of kind elders, Tohru came to realize that he had a problem in expressing his emotions and that in "the last

days," Satan attacks the family arrangement. (2 Timothy 3:1) Tohru decided to face his problem. He began to see that his failure to express love came from his not experiencing love while growing up. Through serious Bible study and prayer, Tohru gradually became more responsive to Yoko's emotional needs.

Though she had been angry at Tohru, when Yoko understood his family background and saw her own frailties, she made a serious effort to see the good in her husband. (Matthew 7:1-3; Romans 5:12; Colossians 3:12-14) She earnestly begged Jehovah for strength to keep loving her husband. (Philippians 4:6, 7) In time, Tohru began to express his affection, to the delight of his wife.

Yes, even if you find it difficult to feel and express affection in the family, you can certainly over-

come that problem. God's Word gives us wholesome guidance. (Psalm 19:7) By recognizing the seriousness of the matter, by trying to see good in the members of your family, by studying and applying God's Word, by relying on Jehovah through earnest prayer, and by seeking the help of mature Christian elders, you can overcome what may seem a formidable barrier between you and your family. (1 Peter 5:7) You too can rejoice, as did one husband in the United States. He was encouraged to express his affection toward his wife. When he finally mustered up the courage to say "I love you," he was surprised by her response. With tears of joy in her eyes, she said: "I love you too, but this is the first time in 25 years you've said it like that." Do not wait that long to express your affection for your mate and your children!

Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*?

Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

- **How can “thinking ability” prove to be a safeguard? (Proverbs 1:4)**

It can alert us to spiritual dangers and motivate us to plan a wise course, such as avoiding sexual temptations on the job. It helps us to recognize that fellow Christians are imperfect, which can move us to avoid hasty reactions when provoked. It can also enable us to avoid materialistic pressures that might push us off track spiritually.—8/15, pages 21-4.

- **How can one become an asset as a neighbor?**

Two ways to be a fine neighbor are being a good giver and being a gracious receiver. It is valuable to be a good neighbor when adversity strikes. Jehovah’s Witnesses strive to be good neighbors by warning others of the event soon to occur, God’s act to end wickedness.—9/1, pages 4-7.

- **According to the Bible, who are true saints, and how will they help mankind?**

All early Christians were true saints, or holy ones, made such by God, not by men or organizations. (Romans 1:7) Once resurrected to heavenly life, holy ones will share with Christ in blessing faithful ones on earth. (Ephesians 1:18-21)—9/15, pages 5-7.

- **Knowing something about athletic events in ancient Greece may be of what value to Christians?**

The writings of the apostles Peter and Paul have illustrations based on or allusions to the ancient games. (1 Corinthians 9:26; 1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 5:10) For an ancient athlete, it was important to have a good trainer, to exercise self-control, and to direct his efforts well. The same is true with regard to the spiritual efforts of Christians today.—10/1, pages 28-31.

- **What are the challenges and the rewards of raising children in a foreign land?**

Many children learn a new language more quickly than their parents, who may find it hard to understand their children’s thinking and reactions. And the children may not easily grasp Bible teachings in their parents’ language. Yet, family bonds can be strengthened as parents teach their tongue to their children, who may thus know two languages and feel part of two cultures.—10/15, pages 22-6.

- **Why is learning to apologize important?**

A sincere apology is often a way to repair a damaged relationship. The Bible provides examples of the power an apology can have. (1 Samuel 25:2-35; Acts 23:1-5) Often, when two humans are at odds, there is some blame on both sides. Therefore, mutual concessions and apologies are called for.—11/1, pages 4-7.

- **Why is gambling, even of small amounts, bad?**

Gambling can incite egotism, a competitive spirit,

and greed, which the Bible condemns. (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) Many who are addicted to gambling began at an early age by placing small bets.—11/1, page 31.

- **Since many books of the Bible were written in Greek, why has there been a need for translating the Bible into Greek, and with what results?**

Modern Greek is quite different from the Greek of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and from that of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Over recent centuries there have been numerous attempts to render some or all of the Bible into spoken Greek. Today, there are some 30 renderings of the Bible, in whole or in part, that are readable to the average Greek, a notable one being the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published in 1997.—11/15, pages 26-9.

- **Why is tithing not required of Christians?**

Under the Law given to ancient Israel, tithing was a means of supporting the tribe of Levi and caring for needy ones. (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:28, 29) The sacrificial death of Jesus abolished the Law and its tithing requirement. (Ephesians 2:13-15) In the early congregation, the pattern was for each Christian to give according to his means and as he resolved in his heart. (2 Corinthians 9:5, 7)—12/1, pages 4-6.

- **Does Revelation 20:8 mean that in the final test, Satan will mislead a vast number?**

The text says that those misled will be “as the sand of the sea.” In the Bible, that expression often means an unknown number, without suggesting that it is immense. Abraham’s seed, which was to be “like the grains of sand that are on the seashore,” turned out to be 144,000 persons, aside from Jesus Christ. (Genesis 22:17; Revelation 14:1-4)—12/1, page 29.

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"The Three Wise Men"

Who Were They?

Nativity scenes usually depict three robed men with their camels, arriving at a stable where the babe Jesus is lying in a manger. The splendidly dressed visitors are commonly called the three wise men. What does the Bible have to say about them?

According to the Bible, the so-called wise men were "from eastern parts," and it was there that they had learned about Jesus' birth. (Matthew 2:1, 2, 9) It must have taken a long time for these men to travel to Judea. When they eventually found Jesus, he was no longer a newly born babe in a stable. Instead, the men found Mary and "the young child" living in a house.—Matthew 2:11.

The Bible calls these men magi, or "astrologers," and it does not say how many there were. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* explains: "The connection between magic and astrology is reflected in the visitors' fascination with the star that had led them to Bethlehem." The Bible clearly condemns all forms of magic and the Babylonian practice of trying to get information from the stars.
—Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 47:13.

The information conveyed to these men did not lead to any good. It aroused wicked King Herod's jealous anger. This, in turn, resulted in the flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt and the murder of all male children in Bethlehem "from two years of age and under." Herod had carefully ascertained the time of Jesus' birth from what he learned from the astrologers. (Matthew 2:16) In view of all the troubles caused by their visit, it is reasonable to conclude that the star that they saw and the message about "the one born king of the Jews" came from God's enemy, Satan the Devil, who wanted to do away with Jesus.—Matthew 2:1, 2.

