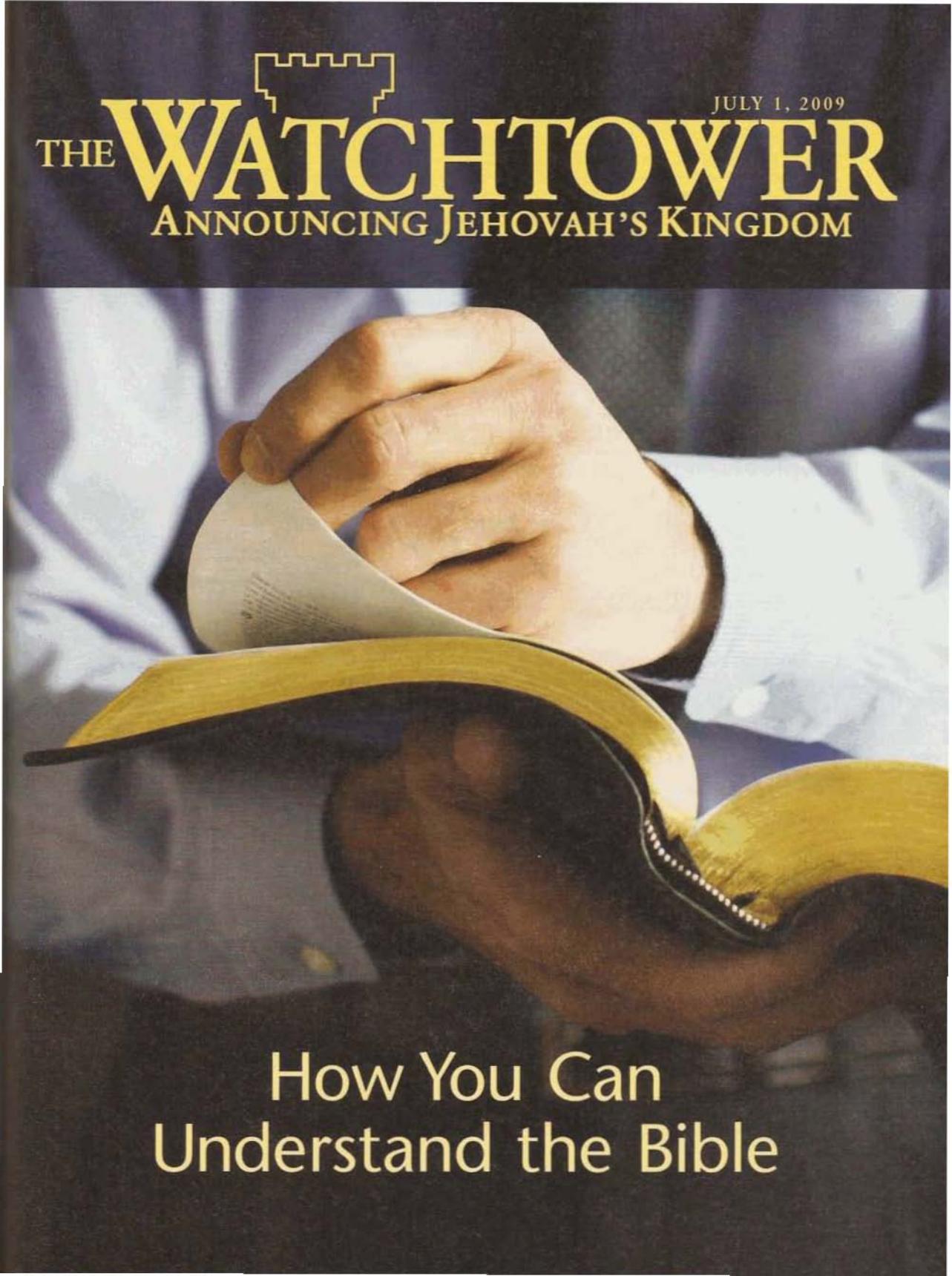


JULY 1, 2009

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

A close-up photograph showing a person's hands holding an open Bible. The hands are positioned as if they are turning a page or examining the text. The Bible has a dark brown cover with gold-colored edges and a visible zipper along the spine. The person is wearing a white shirt.

How You Can
Understand the Bible

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

This publication is not for sale. It is provided as part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References.

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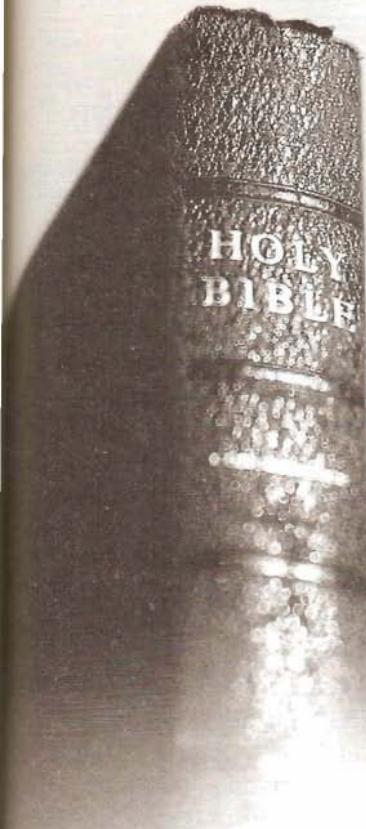
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Can the Bible Be Understood?

"Our family read the Bible every Sunday. I didn't really enjoy it very much. I believed that the Bible is God's Word, but most of what I read was very difficult to understand."—Steven, Britain.

"When I was 17, I tried to read the Bible. I found it hard to understand, so I just gave up."
—Valvanera, Spain.

"I read the Bible once because I felt that as a Catholic, I should read it. It took me three years to finish! But I understood hardly any of it."
—Jo-Anne, Australia.

THE Bible remains the most popular book in the world. It continues to outsell all other books, being available to more people, in more languages, and in more formats than ever before. Yet, many who own a Bible find it difficult to understand. Is that true of you?

Does the Author Want Us to Understand His Word?

"All Scripture is inspired of God," says the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16) Yes, Jehovah God is the Bible's Author. Does he want us to understand his Word? Or did he deliberately make the Bible unfathomable to all but a privileged few, such as clergymen and Bible scholars?

Consider the following verses from the Bible itself:

"This commandment that I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far away."—Deuteronomy 30:11.

"The very disclosure of your words gives light, making the inexperienced ones understand."—Psalm 119:130.

"In that very hour [Jesus] became overjoyed in the holy spirit and said: 'I publicly praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have carefully hidden these things from wise and intellectual ones, and have revealed them to babes.'"—Luke 10:21.

The Author of the Bible does, indeed, want you to understand his Word! However, the fact remains that many sincere people find this book difficult to comprehend. What can help? The articles that follow outline three suggestions that can help you to understand the Bible.

How You Can Understand the Bible

1. ASK THE AUTHOR FOR HELP

"There was a time when I would read the Bible before going to bed," relates Nifna, who lives in Italy. "I did so because I realized that it is God's Word, and even though I didn't enjoy reading, I wanted to know what God had written in the Bible. I had intended to read it all. In the beginning I found it easy, but then I got to parts that I found difficult, and I stopped reading it."



CAN you relate to Nifna? Many people can. Yet, as we saw in the preceding article, the Bible's Author, Jehovah God, wants you to understand his Word. How, though, can you gain such understanding? A first step is to ask the Author for help.

Jesus' apostles were considered "unlettered and ordinary" because they had not attended rabbinic schools for religious training. (Acts 4:13) Nevertheless, Jesus assured them that understanding God's Word was within their reach. How so? Jesus explained: "The helper, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, that one will teach you all things." (John 14:26) God used this holy spirit, or active force, to create the earth and all life upon it. (Genesis 1:2) He also used it to inspire about 40 writers to re-

THE WATCHTOWER ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Would you welcome more information or a free home Bible study? Please send your request to Jehovah's Witnesses, using one of the addresses below. For a complete list of addresses, see www.watchtower.org/address.

America, United States of: 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. **Australia:** PO Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. **Bahamas:** PO Box N-1247, Nassau, NP. **Britain:** The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. **Canada:** PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. **Germany:** Zweigbüro, Am Stenfels, 65618 Selters. **Guam:** 143 Jehovah St., Barrigada, GU 96913. **Guyana:** 352-360 Tyrell St., Republic Park Phase 2 EBD, Hawaii; 2055 Kamehameha IV Road, Honolulu, HI 96819-2619. **Jamaica:** PO Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. **Japan:** 4-7-1 Nakashinden, Ebina City, Kanagawa-Pref, 243-0496. **Puerto Rico:** PO Box 3980, Guayanabo, PR 00970. **South Af-**

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¹ CD also available.

² MP3 CD-ROM also available.

³ Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

cord his thoughts in the Bible. (2 Peter 1:20, 21) That same spirit is available to help those who seek to understand the Bible.

How can you receive God's holy spirit? You have to ask for it in faith. In fact, you may need to ask persistently. "Keep on asking, and it will be given you," said Jesus. "If you . . . know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!" (Luke 11:9, 13) Jehovah will gener-

ously give holy spirit to those who sincerely ask for it. That active force can help you to grasp the meaning of the inspired words written down in the Bible thousands of years ago. God's spirit can also give you the wisdom needed to apply the Bible's powerful message in your life.—Hebrews 4:12; James 1:5, 6.

Each time you sit down to read the Bible, then, pray to God, asking him for holy spirit to help you understand his Word.

How You Can Understand the Bible

2. READ WITH AN OPEN MIND

Has a friend ever told you negative things about someone you had never met? When you finally did meet that person, did your friend's comments blur your ability to see the person's talents and good qualities? Something similar can occur when it comes to the Bible.

THE apostle Paul warned what can happen if we fail to read the Bible with an open mind. Regarding some Jews of his day, Paul wrote: "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God; but not according to accurate knowledge."—Romans 10:2.

Some of those first-century Jews were unwilling to accept a truth that the Hebrew



Scriptures revealed clearly: the identity of the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth fit every Scriptural requirement, fulfilled every prophecy. Yet, a rigid set of preconceived ideas prevented many of his countrymen from understanding God's Word.

What can we learn from that experience? It is important to read the Bible with an open mind. A veil of prejudice or preconceived ideas can hinder a reader from understanding Bible truth.

For example, a professor of religious studies in North Carolina, U.S.A., describes the Bible as "a very human book, with very human points of view, many of which differ from one another and none of which pro-

vides the inerrant guide to how we should live." If a person were to read the Bible as "a very human book," then would he not be inclined to discard direction or principles that do not suit his personal taste?

In contrast, the Bible encourages us to study it diligently. Regarding the Bereans in Paul's day, the Scriptures say: "They received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) Like those readers, you may need to lift any veil of bias or criticism that might blur your understanding. Read God's Word with an open mind, eager to discover its Author's thrilling message.

How You Can Understand the Bible

3. ACCEPT HELP FROM OTHERS

When explorer Edward John Eyre trekked across the desolate Nullarbor Plain, local Aborigines taught Eyre how to collect water from sand dunes and eucalyptus trees. Accepting help from those who understood the land later saved Eyre's life.

AS THIS example illustrates, successfully completing a challenging undertaking often requires help from someone more experienced. The same is true when you set out to read the Bible.

Jesus did not expect his followers to understand the Bible without help from others. On one occasion, "he opened up their minds fully to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures." (Luke 24:45) Jesus recognized

that Bible readers need help to grasp Scriptural teachings.

Help From Whom?

Jesus commissioned his genuine followers to provide this help. Before his ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, . . . teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Mat-

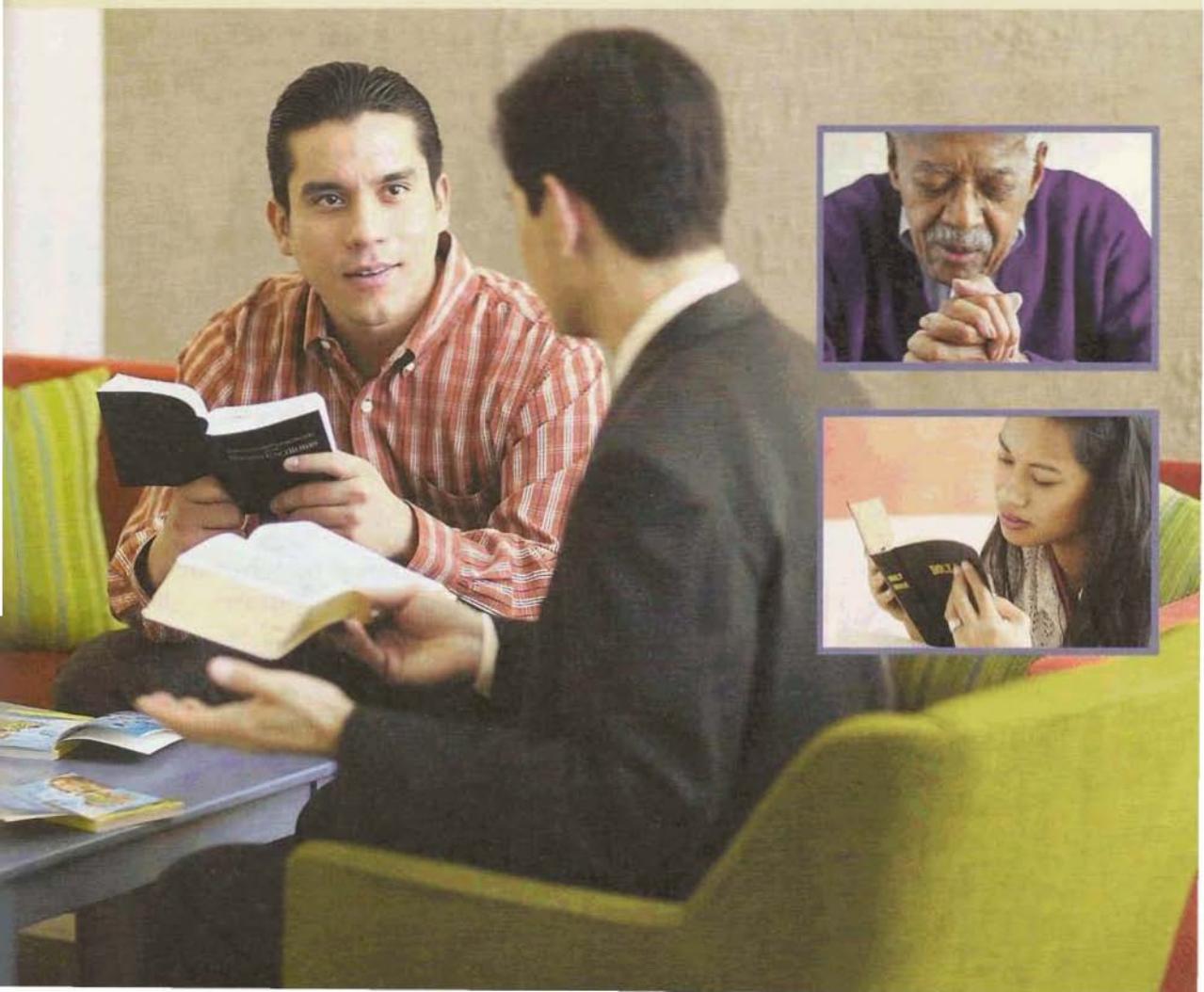
thew 28:19, 20) Christians' primary work involves *teaching*, which includes explaining how Bible principles can be applied in everyday life. True Christians help others to understand the Bible.

Not long after Jesus gave his followers that commission, a fascinating incident occurred. The Bible tells of a royal official from Ethiopia who was reading a portion of Isaiah's prophecy. He encountered a passage that left him stumped. According to the Bible record, the confusing verses read: "As a

sheep he was brought to the slaughter, and as a lamb that is voiceless before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. During his humiliation the judgment was taken away from him. Who will tell the details of his generation? Because his life is taken away from the earth."—Acts 8:32, 33; Isaiah 53:7, 8.

The official asked Philip, an experienced Christian who was well-versed in the Scriptures: "About whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about some other

To understand the Bible . . . pray for God's spirit, read with an open mind, accept help from others



man?" (Acts 8:34) The sincere Ethiopian had already gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he likely prayed for guidance. Evidently, he was reading with an eager, meek attitude. But the official still could not understand this passage. Humbly, he asked Philip for help. Philip's explanation so overjoyed the man that he was moved to become a Christian himself.—Acts 8:35-39.

Jehovah's Witnesses continue the work practiced by Philip and other early Christians. In over 235 lands, the Witnesses voluntarily help others to understand what the Bible really teaches. They do this by means of a topical study of the Scriptures. This progressive method of Bible study involves analyzing what the Bible says about a particular topic, or subject.*—See the box "Satisfying Answers to Bible Questions."

"All My Questions Were Answered"

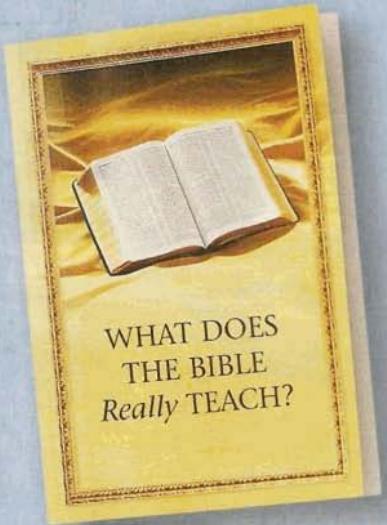
Steven, Valvanera, and Jo-Anne, quoted in the opening article, began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. "It amazed me that by simply comparing a number of

* A book that has helped many in a topical study of the Scriptures is *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Scriptural principles or accounts, often the truth of a matter was right there all the time," says Steven. "Before my Bible study, no one had shown me how to do that. It was a great relief to know that the Bible did not have to be an endless circle of debates and conflicting opinions."

Valvanera agrees. "Everything was so coherent and logical," she says. "Things were true, not just because 'the Church' says so, but because there was a reasonable explanation for everything." Jo-Anne relates: "The fact that all my questions were answered from the Bible filled me with reverence—a great respect for the Author—since he had the foresight to record a suitable response to any human inquiry."

Do you know one of Jehovah's Witnesses? Why not ask him or her to demonstrate how this study program is conducted? If you do not know one of Jehovah's Witnesses personally, please write to one of the addresses listed on page 4 of this magazine. With God's holy spirit, an open mind, and personal assistance from a qualified Bible teacher, God's Word does not have to be a closed book to you. You *can* understand the Bible!



Satisfying Answers to Bible Questions

Some of the topics considered by Jehovah's Witnesses in their Bible study program:

- What is God's purpose for the earth?
- Where are the dead?
- Are we living in "the last days"?
- Why does God allow suffering?
- How can I make my family life happy?

“I Jehovah Your God Am Holy”

Leviticus Chapter 19

HOLY, holy, holy is Jehovah God.” (Revelation 4:8) With those words, the Bible attributes to Jehovah holiness, which involves purity and cleanliness, to the superlative degree. God is completely separate from sinfulness; he cannot be defiled or tainted by sin in any way. Does this mean that imperfect humans are hopelessly alienated from the supremely holy God? By no means! Let us consider the hope-filled words recorded in Leviticus chapter 19.

Jehovah told Moses: “Speak to the entire assembly of the sons of Israel.” The words that followed applied to everyone in the nation. What was Moses to tell them? God continued: “You must say to them, ‘You should prove yourselves holy, because I Jehovah your God am holy.’” (Verse 2) Each Israelite was to demonstrate holiness. The words “you should” show that this was not a suggestion but a command. Was God expecting the impossible?

Notice that Jehovah mentioned his own holiness, not as a standard to be equaled, but as a reason behind the commandment. In other words, Jehovah did not tell his imperfect worshippers in Israel to be as holy as he is. That would be impossible. Jehovah, “the Most Holy One,” is superior to all others in holiness. (Proverbs 30:3) However, because Jehovah is holy, he expects his worshippers to be holy—that is, to the extent possible for imperfect humans. In what ways could they prove themselves holy?



We have within us the potential to cultivate holiness

After giving the command to be holy, Jehovah through Moses outlined requirements that involved every aspect of life. Each Israelite was expected to obey such standards of conduct as the following: demonstrate proper regard for parents and older ones (verses 3, 32); show consideration for the deaf, the blind, and other afflicted ones (verses 9, 10, 14); be honest and impartial in dealing with others (verses 11-13, 15, 35, 36); and love his fellow worshipper as himself. (Verse 18) By holding to these and the other standards mentioned, the Israelite would “indeed prove to be holy to [his] God.”—Numbers 15:40.

The command regarding holiness gives us valuable insight into the thinking and ways of Jehovah God. For one thing, we learn that in order to have a close relationship with him, we need to do our best to live in harmony with his standards of holy conduct. (1 Peter 1:15, 16) By holding to those standards, we can enjoy the best way of life possible.—Isaiah 48:17.

The command to be holy also reflects Jehovah’s confidence in his worshippers. Jehovah never expects more of us than we can do. (Psalm 103:13, 14) He knows that we humans, who are made in his image, have within us the potential to cultivate holiness—at least in a relative sense. (Genesis 1:26) Are you moved to learn more about how you can draw closer to the holy God, Jehovah?

DO YOU live in peace? For many, the clear answer is no. They live in areas plagued by wars, political unrest, ethnic violence, or terrorism. Even if you are spared such calamities, you might find your peace disturbed by crime, harassment, and quarrels with business partners or neighbors. Families too are often like war zones rather than havens of peace.

Many people yearn for inner peace. They may search for it in religion, meditation seminars, or yoga groups. Others hope to find peace in nature—taking vacation trips, hiking in mountains and wilderness areas, or visiting natural spas. Even if the searchers seem to find some inner peace, they may soon come to realize that such peace is superficial and short-lived.

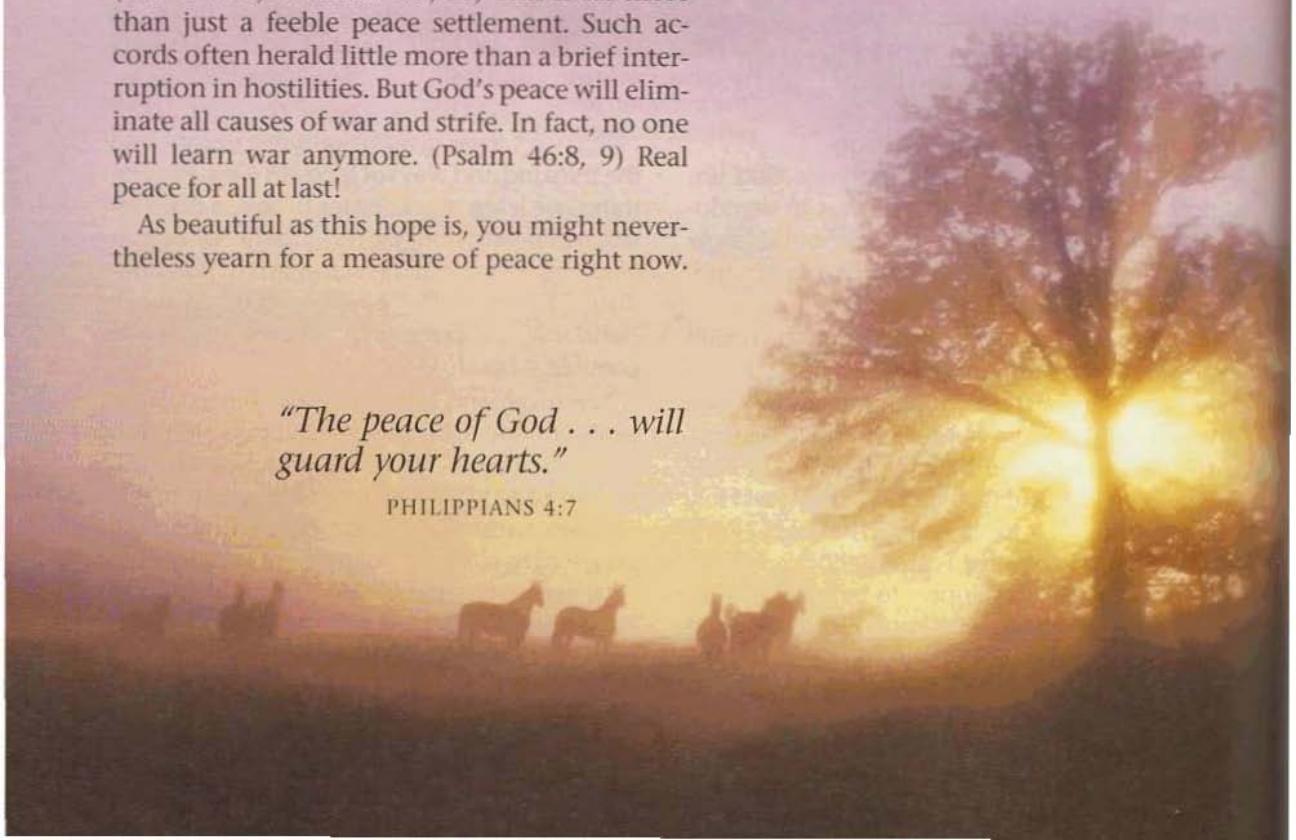
So where can you find real peace? The source of peace is our Creator, Jehovah God. Why? He is the “God who gives peace.” (Romans 15:33) Under the rule of his Kingdom that is soon to come, there will be an “abundance of peace.” (Psalm 72:7; Matthew 6:9, 10) This is far more than just a feeble peace settlement. Such accords often herald little more than a brief interruption in hostilities. But God’s peace will eliminate all causes of war and strife. In fact, no one will learn war anymore. (Psalm 46:8, 9) Real peace for all at last!

As beautiful as this hope is, you might nevertheless yearn for a measure of peace right now.

Can You Find Peace in This Troubled World?

*“The peace of God . . . will
guard your hearts.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:7



Is there a way to find inner peace that can carry you through our troubled times? Happily, the Bible shows us the way. Consider some guidelines in the 4th chapter of the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. You are invited to read verses 4 to 13 in your own Bible.

"The Peace of God"

In verse 7 we read: "The peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus." This peace does not come through mere meditation or character development. Rather, it comes from God. This peace is so powerful that it "excels all thought." It surely surpasses all our anxieties, knowledge, and reasoning. We might see no way out of our problems, but God's peace can fill us with the well-founded hope that one day all our troubles will be gone.

Impossible? With men yes; but "all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27) Faith and trust in God help us to control our worries. Think of a young child lost in a big store. He knows for sure that all he has to do is find Mommy and everything will be fine again. Like that child when he is found, we can trust that God will take us in his arms, so to speak. He will soothe us and finally chase away all our anxieties.

Many worshippers of Jehovah have experienced the peace of God under the most severe trials. For example, consider Nadine, who lost her unborn baby. She relates: "I find it hard to talk about my feelings, and I always try to keep a stiff upper lip. But inside, I was brokenhearted. Almost every day, I poured out my heart to Jehovah in prayer and begged him for help. I have felt the power of prayer, for whenever I was at my worst and thought, 'I can't go on any longer,' I experienced inner serenity and peace. I felt safe and secure."

Protection for Your Heart and Mind

Let us go back to Philippians 4:7. It says that the peace of God will guard our hearts and mental powers. Just as a sentry guards his post, the peace of God guards our heart, so that materialistic philosophies, unnecessary anxieties, and ungodly values do not enter. Consider an example.

Many people in this troubled world believe that in order to be happy and secure, they need substantial financial assets. On the advice of experts, they may invest some of their savings in stocks. Do they then really feel at peace? Not necessarily. They may anxiously check the share prices every day, wondering whether to sell, buy, or hold. When the stock market takes a downturn, they may panic. The Bible certainly does not condemn making investments, but it does offer this sound insight: "A mere lover of silver will not be satisfied with silver, neither any lover of wealth with income. This too is vanity. Sweet is the sleep of the one serving, regardless of whether it is little or much that he eats; but the plenty belonging to the rich one is not permitting him to sleep."—Ecclesiastes 5:10, 12.

Philippians 4:7 concludes by saying that the peace of God guards our hearts and mental powers "by means of Christ Jesus." What connection is there between Christ Jesus and the peace of God? Jesus plays the key role in the fulfillment of God's purpose. Jesus gave his life so that we may be delivered from sin and death. (John 3:16) He is also the enthroned King of God's Kingdom. Knowing the role that Jesus has can contribute greatly to our peace of mind and heart. How so?

If we sincerely repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, God will extend forgiveness, which contributes to our peace of mind and heart.

(Acts 3:19) When we realize that life cannot be enjoyed to its fullest extent until the coming of Christ's Kingdom, we avoid frantically living as if this life is all there is. (1 Timothy 6:19) Of course, we are not spared all trouble, but we can find comfort in the sure hope that the best life is yet to come.

How You Can Find God's Peace

So how can you find God's peace? We find some hints at Philippians 4:4, 5, where we read: "Always rejoice in the Lord. Once more I will say, Rejoice! Let your reasonableness become known to all men. The Lord is near." When Paul wrote those words, he was unjustly imprisoned in Rome. (Philippians 1:13) Instead of lamenting his unfair treatment, he encouraged his fellow believers always to rejoice in the Lord. His joy clearly depended, not upon his circumstances, but upon his relationship with God. We

How soothing to know that we can come to God "in everything"

too need to learn to enjoy serving God whatever our circumstances. The better we know Jehovah and the more fully we do his will, the more we will enjoy serving him. That, in turn, will bring us satisfaction and inner peace.

In addition, we are encouraged to be reasonable. If we cultivate reasonableness, we will not expect too much of ourselves. We know that we are not perfect; we cannot be the best in everything. So why lose sleep pondering how to be perfect or, at least, better than everybody else? Neither will we expect others to be perfect. Therefore, we can keep calm when they rub us the wrong way. Another rendering of the original Greek word translated "reasonableness" is "yieldingness." If we are yielding in matters of personal preference, we avoid quarrels, which

often are of little profit but which can take away peace with others as well as our inner peace for a period of time.

The next statement at Philippians 4:5, "the Lord is near," may seem to be out of context. God will soon come to replace this old system of things with a new one under his Kingdom. But even now he can be near to everyone who draws close to him. (Acts 17:27; James 4:8) Being aware of his closeness helps us to rejoice, to be reasonable, and not to be anxious about today's problems or the future, as verse 6 brings out.

When we look at verses 6 and 7, we recognize that the peace of God is a direct consequence of prayer. Some view prayer merely as a form of meditation, thinking that any form of prayer can further their inner calmness. The Bible, however, speaks of genuine communication with Jehovah, a communication as intimate as when a child shares his joys and worries with a loving parent. How soothing to know that we can come to God "in everything." Whatever is on our minds or deeply buried in our hearts, we can confide in our heavenly Father.

Verse 8 encourages us to concentrate on positive thoughts. It is not enough, however, just to think of positive things. As verse 9 explains, we also have to put the good advice of the Bible into practice. Doing so will give us a clean conscience. How true the proverb is: A good conscience is a soft pillow!

Yes, you can find inner peace. It comes from Jehovah God, who gives it to those who draw close to him and who want to follow his guidance. By an examination of his Word, the Bible, you can become familiar with his thoughts. Applying his directions is not necessarily easy. But it is worth all the effort because "the God of peace will be with you."—Philippians 4:9.

HAVE THEY FOUND Noah's Ark?



EVERY so often, it seems, there is a flurry of publicity about the search for Noah's ark. The excitement is understandable. That gigantic vessel in which Noah and his family survived the Flood back in 2370-2369 B.C.E. would certainly make for a remarkable archaeological find. Despite many efforts, though, the search for Noah's ark is ongoing. Amid all the speculation and sensational claims, what is actually known?

The Bible reveals that Noah's ark "came to rest on the mountains of Ararat." (Genesis 8:4) The region of Ararat includes the prominent peak now called Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey, near the borders of Armenia and Iran.

Numerous expeditions to this area in search of Noah's ark have led to interesting claims but not to conclusive proof. Intriguing aerial photos, recovered pieces of wood coated with tar, and reports of sightings have spurred the quest for proof that is more tangible. However, the search has been difficult. One possible site that is often mentioned lies some 15,000 feet up the slopes of Mount Ararat. Additionally, because of political tensions in the area, foreign expeditions are not always given legal access to the mountain.

Nonetheless, many ark enthusiasts are eager to see more expeditions to the site. They believe that parts of the ark are still intact on snowcapped Mount Ararat, hidden beneath snow and ice most of the year. Only

Is there solid evidence that confirms the Bible account about the Flood?

in years with warm summers, they claim, would there be any hope of seeing and reaching the ark.

Such hopes have been fueled by a number of reports. Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century C.E., refers to several earlier historians who spoke of the ark as still being visible high in the Ararat range. It was even said that people would take as souvenirs pieces from its tar-covered timbers. Among the men Josephus quoted was Berossus, a Babylonian chronicler of the third century B.C.E.

In the past century, one of the more intriguing reports came from an Armenian man, George Hagopian. He told of visiting the ark as a boy with his uncle in the early 1900's and actually climbing about the structure. Hagopian died in 1972, but his testimony still fills many with excitement and wonder.

A Real Basis for Faith?

Is there really a basis for believing that explorers have discovered the ark or might yet do so? Perhaps, but there seems to be even more basis for skepticism about such a find. For one thing, recall that the Bible does not say exactly where the ark alighted as the floodwaters ebbed. It merely mentions "the mountains of Ararat."

It is only natural for explorers and speculators to single out the highest peak in the region. However, the Scriptures do not specify that God arranged for the ark to come to rest on the very top of Mount Ararat, which is today a frigid and lofty mountain peak nearly three miles above sea level.* Remember, Noah and his family lived aboard the ark for several months after it landed. (Genesis 8:4, 5) It also seems unlikely that after disembarking, they and the many animals aboard had to climb down from a towering summit like mountaineers. Perhaps, then, the terrain where the ark landed was more accessible than some modern-day explorers imagine, yet still high enough to fit the description at Genesis 8:4, 5. And regardless of where the ark landed in the Ararat region, might it not have vanished centuries ago because of decay and scavenging?

* The mountain that is today called Mount Ararat is a volcano that has been dormant since 1840. It reaches an elevation of 16,945 feet and is covered in snow year-round.

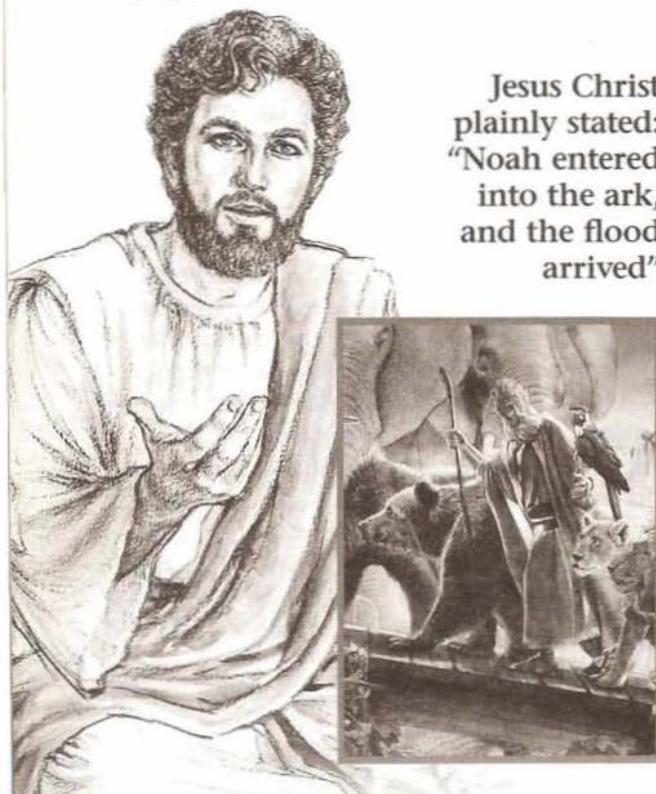
Jesus Christ plainly stated: "Noah entered into the ark, and the flood arrived"

Furthermore, there is something questionable in the claims that publicists sometimes make about the religious importance of their explorations. The organizer of one expedition claimed that finding the ark "will confirm the faith of millions . . . and many will be brought to faith." At a news conference in 2004, he said that finding the ark would be "the greatest event since the resurrection of Christ." His exploration was later canceled.

Would finding Noah's ark really confirm and even create faith? The Bible shows that genuine faith does not depend on objects we can see and touch. (2 Corinthians 5:7) Some people are so skeptical that they insist that only physical evidence would enable them to put faith in certain Bible accounts. The truth is, though, that for such individuals no amount of evidence would produce faith. Jesus himself said that some people simply cannot be convinced of spiritual truths—even if they should see someone rise from the dead!—Luke 16:31.

On the other hand, genuine faith is not credulity; it is based on solid evidence. (Hebrews 11:1) Is there solid evidence that can help reasonable people today to put faith in the Bible account about the Flood? Indeed, there is. Jesus Christ plainly stated: "Noah entered into the ark, and the flood arrived." (Luke 17:26, 27) This is the best evidence possible. Why?

Jesus was in heaven before he came to the earth. (John 8:58) He watched the building of the ark; he saw the Flood. Now, which evidence seems more convincing to you? The real eyewitness testimony of One who proved perfectly reliable and who gave proof of being the Son of God? Or the dim possibility of explorers finding some ancient pieces of wood on a frozen mountaintop? When considered from that standpoint, the evidence that Noah's ark existed is already overwhelming.





THE magazine you are reading may not be the first issue of this journal that you have seen. Perhaps Jehovah's Witnesses have visited your home and offered *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* to help you understand the Bible better. Or maybe you have seen the Witnesses offering such Bible literature on the street or at a local marketplace. In fact, the monthly circulation of this journal is in excess of 35 million, making it by far the most widely published magazine of its kind in the world.

Have you ever wondered, though, where and how all this literature is produced? To answer, let us take a look at just one of the many printeries that Jehovah's Witnesses use in various lands—the one in Wallkill, New York, U.S.A. Many of our readers around the world cannot readily travel to visit the printery that Jehovah's Witnesses operate in the United States, so this tour by means of words and pictures may be the next-best thing.

Of course, printing starts with the written word. The Graphics Department receives material to be printed via electronic files from the Writing Department in Brooklyn, New York. These files are used to make printing plates. In Wallkill, every month some 1,400 rolls of paper arrive at the printery, which uses some 80 to 100 tons of pa-

A Visit to a **REMARKABLE PRINTERY**

per a day. The rolls—some of which weigh over 3,000 pounds—are fed onto five web-offset presses, which have been fitted with the printing plates. The paper is printed, slit, and folded into 32-page signatures. The magazine you are reading is one signature. What about books? In the bindery, the signatures are bound together to produce books. One of the two bindery lines can produce 50,000 hardcover books or 75,000 softcover books in a single day. The other bindery line can produce about 100,000 softcover books per day.

During 2008, this printery produced well over 28,000,000 books, over 2.6 million of those being Bibles. In the same period, 243,317,564 magazines were produced. The printery stocks such Bible literature in some 380 languages. Once literature is made, what happens next?

The printery receives requests from the 12,754 congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in the continental United States and 1,369 in the Caribbean and Hawaii. The

Shipping Department packages all these requested items and arranges transport to the appropriate addresses. Each year, some 30 million pounds of literature are shipped to congregations in the United States.

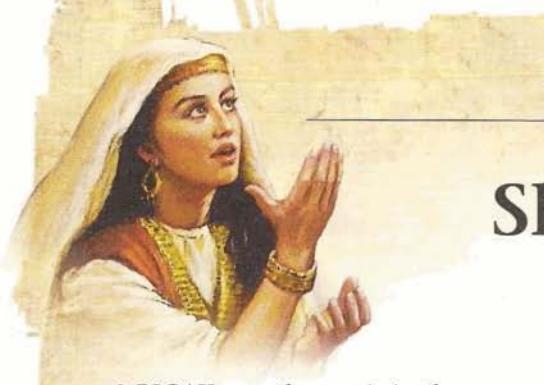
The most important element of this printery involves, not machines, but people. Over 300 work in the printery departments—Graphics, Scheduling, the Pressroom, the Bindery, and the Shipping Department. The workers—all of them un-

salaried volunteers—range in age from 19 to 92.

They are keenly interested in people—the individuals who will receive this literature eagerly and be taught, uplifted, and guided by the Bible principles discussed therein. We hope that you are among such readers and that the literature printed here helps you to continue taking in the knowledge of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ, which means everlasting life.—John 17:3.







She Acted With Discretion

ABIGAIL saw the panic in the young man's eyes. He was terrified—and for good reason. Grave danger loomed. Right at that moment, some 400 warriors were on the way, determined to kill off every male in the household of Nabal, Abigail's husband. Why?

It had all started with Nabal. He had acted cruelly and insolently, as usual. This time, though, he had insulted the wrong man—the beloved commander of a loyal and well-trained band of warriors. Now, one of Nabal's young workmen, perhaps a shepherd, came to Abigail, trusting that she would come up with a plan to save them. But what could one woman do against an army?

First, let us learn a little more about this remarkable woman. Who was Abigail? How had this crisis arisen? And what can we learn from her example of faith?

"Good in Discretion and Beautiful in Form"

Abigail and Nabal were not a good match. Nabal could hardly have chosen a better spouse, whereas Abigail found herself married to one who could hardly have been worse. Granted, the man had money. He thus saw himself as very important, but how did others view him? It would be difficult to find a Bible character who is spoken of in more contemptuous terms. His very name means "Senseless," or "Stupid." Did his parents give him such a name at birth, or was it an epithet that stuck to him later? In either

case, he lived up to his name. Nabal was "harsh and bad in his practices." A bully and a drunkard, he was widely feared and disliked.—1 Samuel 25:2, 3, 17, 21, 25.

Abigail was altogether different. Her name means "My Father Has Made Himself Joyful." Many a father is proud to have a beautiful daughter, but a wise father is far happier to discern inner beauty in his child. All too often, a person blessed with outward beauty fails to see the need to develop such qualities as discretion, wisdom, courage, or faith. Not so with Abigail. The Bible says that she "was good in discretion and beautiful in form."—1 Samuel 25:3.

Some today might wonder why such an intelligent young woman married such a good-for-nothing man. Remember, many marriages in Bible times were arranged. If not, parental consent was still of great importance. Did Abigail's parents favor this marriage, even arrange it, because they were impressed with Nabal's wealth and prominence? Did they feel pressured by poverty? At any rate, Nabal's money did not make him a fit husband.

Wise parents carefully teach their children a dignified view of marriage. They neither urge their children to marry for money nor pressure them to begin dating when still too young to take on adult roles and responsibilities. (1 Corinthians 7:36) However, it was too late for Abigail to think about such things. For whatever reason, she was mar-

ried to Nabal, and she was determined to make the best of a hard situation.

"He Screamed Rebukes at Them"

Nabal had just made Abigail's situation harder than ever. The man he insulted was none other than David. This was the faithful servant of Jehovah whom Samuel the prophet had anointed, revealing David as God's choice to succeed Saul as king. (1 Samuel 16: 1, 2, 11-13) On the run from the jealous and murderous King Saul, David was dwelling in the wilderness with his 600 loyal warriors.

Nabal lived in Maon but worked and likely owned land in nearby Carmel.* Those towns gave access to grassy uplands suitable for raising sheep, of which Nabal owned 3,000. All around, though, was wild country. To the south lay the vast wilderness of Paran. To the east, the approach to the Salt Sea led through desolate wastelands riddled with ravines and caves. In these regions David and his men struggled to survive, no doubt hunting for their food and enduring many hardships. They often encountered the young men who worked as shepherds for the wealthy Nabal.

* This was, not the famous Mount Carmel far to the north, but a town at the edge of the southern wilderness.

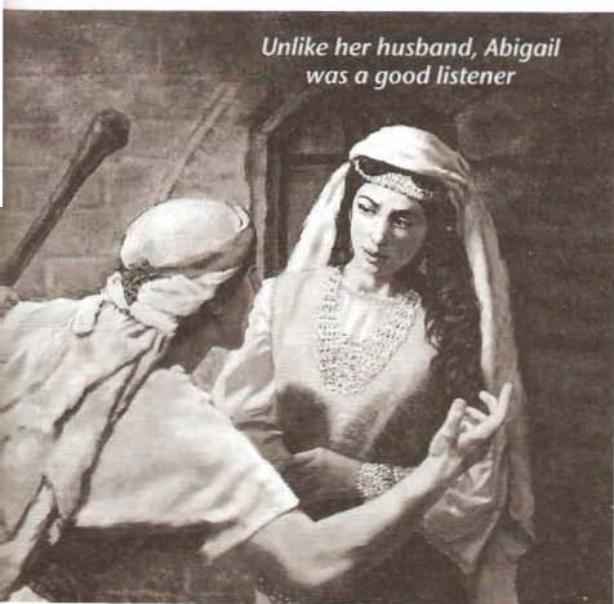
How did those hardworking soldiers treat the shepherds? It would have been easy to help themselves to a sheep now and then, but they did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, they were like a protective wall around Nabal's flocks and servants. (1 Samuel 25:15, 16) Sheep and shepherds faced plenty of dangers. Predators abounded back then. And Israel's southern border was close, so bands of foreign marauders and thieves frequently attacked.*

It must have been quite an undertaking to keep all those men fed in the wilderness. So one day David sent ten messengers to Nabal to ask for help. David chose the moment wisely. It was the festive time of sheepshearing, when generosity and feasting were customary. David also chose his words with care, using polite terms and forms of address. He even referred to himself as "your son David," perhaps a respectful acknowledgment of Nabal's greater age. How did Nabal respond?—1 Samuel 25:5-8.

He was outraged! "He screamed rebukes at them" is how the young man mentioned at the outset described the scene to Abigail. Miserly Nabal complained loudly about his precious bread, water, and slaughtered meat. He ridiculed David as inconsequential and compared him to a runaway servant. Nabal's view may have been similar to that of Saul, who hated David. Neither man had Jehovah's view. God loved David and saw him, not as a rebellious slave, but as the future king of Israel.—1 Samuel 25:10, 11, 14.

When David's emissaries reported back to him, he became furious. "Gird on every one his sword!" he commanded. Arming himself, David led 400 of his men to attack.

* David likely felt that protecting the local landowners and their flocks was a service to Jehovah God. In those days, it was Jehovah's purpose for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to dwell in that land. Protecting it from foreign invaders and marauding bands was thus a form of sacred service.



Unlike her husband, Abigail was a good listener

He vowed to wipe out every male in Nabal's household. (1 Samuel 25:12, 13, 21, 22) David's ire was understandable, but his way of expressing it was wrong. The Bible says: "Man's wrath does not work out God's righteousness." (James 1:20) How, though, could Abigail save her household?

"Blessed Be Your Sensibleness"

In a sense, we have already seen Abigail take the first step toward righting this terrible wrong. Unlike her husband, Nabal, she proved willing to listen. The young servant said of Nabal: "He is too much of a good-for-nothing fellow to speak to him."^{*} (1 Samuel 25:17) Tragically, Nabal's sense of his own importance rendered him unwilling to listen. Such arrogance is all too common to this day. But the young man knew Abigail to be different, which is no doubt why he approached her with this problem.

Abigail thought and acted quickly. "At once Abigail hastened," we read. Four times in this one account we find the same verb, "to hasten," used regarding this woman. She prepared a generous gift for David and his men. It included bread, wine, sheep, roasted grain, cakes of raisins, and cakes of figs. Clearly, Abigail knew well what she had and was thoroughly in charge of her household duties, much like the capable wife later described in the book of Proverbs. (Proverbs 31:10-31) She sent the provisions ahead with some of her servants, then followed alone. "But," we read, "to her husband Nabal she told nothing."—1 Samuel 25:18, 19.

Does this mean that Abigail was rebelling against her husband's rightful headship? Not at all. Nabal had acted wickedly against an anointed servant of Jehovah, an action

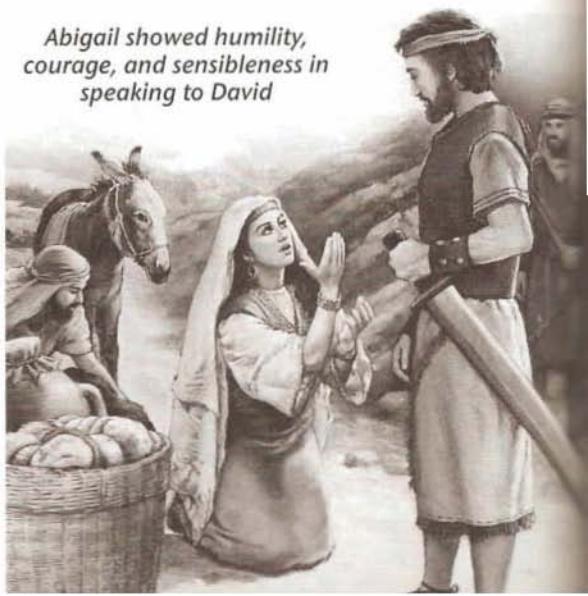
* The phrase the young man used literally means "a son of belial (worthlessness)." Other Bible renderings of this sentence include a description of Nabal as a man "who won't listen to anyone" and the conclusion, "it is no good talking to him."

that was likely to result in death for many innocent members of Nabal's household. If Abigail failed to act, might she become a sharer in her husband's guilt? In any event, she had to put her submission to her God ahead of submission to her husband.

Before long, Abigail met up with David and his men. Again she hastened, this time to descend from her donkey and humble herself before David. (1 Samuel 25:20, 23) Then she poured out her heart at length, making a powerful plea for mercy in behalf of her husband and her household. What made her words effective?

She took responsibility for the problem and asked David to forgive her personally. She realistically acknowledged that her husband was as senseless as his name implied, perhaps suggesting that it would be beneath David's dignity to chastise such a man. She expressed her trust in David as Jehovah's representative, recognizing that he was fighting "the wars of Jehovah." She also indicated that she knew of Jehovah's promise regarding David and the kingship, for she said: "Jehovah . . . certainly will commission you as leader over Israel." Further, she urged David not to take any action that might bring bloodguilt upon him or that might later become "a cause for staggering"—evident-

Abigail showed humility, courage, and sensibleness in speaking to David



ly referring to a troubled conscience. (1 Samuel 25:24-31) Kind, moving words!

And how did David respond? He accepted what Abigail had brought and said: “Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me! And blessed be your sensibleness, and blessed be you who have restrained me this day from entering into bloodguilt.” David praised her for bravely hastening to meet him, and he acknowledged that she had restrained him from incurring bloodguilt. “Go up in peace to your house,” he told her, and he humbly added: “I have listened to your voice.”

—1 Samuel 25:32-35.

“Here Is Your Slave Girl”

After they parted, Abigail could not help thinking about that meeting; nor could she have failed to notice the contrast between faithful, kind David and the brute to whom she was married. But she did not dwell on such thoughts. We read: “Later Abigail came in to Nabal.” Yes, she returned to her husband as determined as ever to carry out her role as his wife to the best of her ability. She had to tell him of the gift she had given to David and his men. He had a right to know. She also had to tell him—before he learned of it elsewhere, to his even greater shame—about the danger that had been averted. She could not tell him now though. He was feasting like a king and was as drunk as could be.—1 Samuel 25:36.

Again showing both courage and discretion, she waited until the next morning when the influence of the wine had ebbed. He would be sober enough to understand her, yet more dangerous in his temper as well. Still, she approached and told him the whole story. No doubt she expected him to explode in fury, perhaps violence. Instead, he just sat there, not moving.—1 Samuel 25:37.

What was wrong with the man? “His heart came to be dead inside him, and he himself became as a stone.” Perhaps he had suffered some form of stroke. However, his end came ten days later—and not for strictly medical reasons. “Jehovah struck Nabal, so that he died.” (1 Samuel 25:38) With that righteous execution, Abigail’s long nightmare of a marriage was over. While Jehovah does not step in with miraculous executions today, this account is a fitting reminder that no case of domestic tyranny or abuse escapes his notice. In his own time, he will always bring about justice.

Besides the release from a bad marriage, Abigail had another blessing in store. When he learned of the death of Nabal, David sent messengers to propose marriage. “Here is your slave girl,” she responded, “as a maid-servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” Clearly, she was not changed by the prospect of becoming David’s wife; she even offered to be a servant to his servants! Then we read again of her hastening, this time to ready herself to go to David.—1 Samuel 25:39-42.

This was no fairy-tale ending; Abigail’s life with David would not always be easy. David was already married to Ahinoam, and polygamy surely presented special challenges to faithful women back then.* And David was not yet king; there would be obstacles and hardships to surmount before he served Jehovah in that way. But as Abigail helped and supported David along life’s road, eventually bearing him a son, she learned that she had a husband who valued her and protected her. On one occasion he even rescued her from kidnappers! (1 Samuel 30:1-19) David thus imitated Jehovah God, who loves and values such discreet, courageous, and faithful women.

* See the article “Does God Approve of Polygamy?” on page 30.

Did You Know?

What made Jesus' inner garment so desirable to the Roman soldiers?

The four soldiers who supervised Jesus' execution divided his clothes among themselves. "But," says John 19:23, Jesus' "inner garment was without a seam, being woven from the top throughout its length." The soldiers decided not to tear it but to cast lots over it. How was such a garment made?

The inner garment appears to refer to a shirtlike tunic made out of linen or wool and reaching to the knees or ankles. These garments were usually made by sewing together two superimposed squares or rectangles of fabric, stitching along three of their sides. Holes were left for the head and arms.

A more expensive type of tunic was made in a similar way but using "only one long piece of cloth, folded in two, with a hole cut in the middle for the head" and hemmed, says the book *Jesus and His World*. This kind of tunic needed to be stitched at the sides.

Completely seamless garments, like the one Jesus

wore, were unique to Palestine. They were woven on upright looms that used two sets of vertical warp threads, one at the front and one at the back of a crossbar. The weaver would alternate his shuttle, which carried the horizontal weft thread, from the front part of the web to the back, "thus creating a cylindric piece of fabric," says one reference work. A seamless tunic would likely have been a rare possession, and the soldiers considered it a desirable one.

Were there beekeepers in ancient Israel?

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, God promised to bring the ancient Israelites into "a land flowing with milk and honey." (Exodus 3:8) It appears that most Scriptural references to honey describe the food produced by wild bees. The Bible says nothing about beekeeping in ancient Israel. However, a recent find in Israel's Bet She'an Valley reveals that in ancient times its inhabitants practiced "beekeeping on an industrial level."

At Tel Rehov, researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Institute of Archaeology unearthed an apiary dating from the tenth to the early ninth centuries B.C.E.—the early period of Israel's monarchy. This is the first time that ancient beehives were discovered in the Middle East. It is thought that the apiary originally contained some one hundred beehives arranged in rows and stacked at least three tiers high.

Each hive, says the university's report on the find, was "a cylinder composed of unbaked clay . . . around 80 centimeters [30 inches] long and 40 centimeters [15 inches] in diameter. . . . Experienced beekeepers and scholars who visited the site estimated that as much as half a ton of honey could be culled each year from these hives."

THE SITE AT TEL REHOV



© Tel Rehov Excavations
Institute of Archaeology/Hebrew University

The Bible Changes Lives

Why does a woman who had lost faith in religion now spend much of her time helping others to learn about God? What motivated a man who loved violent sports to become a lover of peace? How did a man given to taking drugs, drinking, and street fighting manage to change his lifestyle? Read what they have to say.



PROFILE

NAME: **PENELOPE TOPLICESCU**

AGE: **40**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: **AUSTRALIA**

HISTORY: **DISILLUSIONED WITH RELIGION**

MY PAST: I was born in Sydney, Australia, but when I was just two years old, my family moved to New Guinea. We lived for almost two years in Rabaul and then for eight in Bougainville. In those days, there was no TV in New Guinea, so my brother and I grew up outdoors—swimming, snorkeling, and camping.

When I was about ten, I began to take an interest in religion. Mum was a Catholic, so she suggested that I attend Bible classes with one of the local nuns. I embraced Catholicism and was baptized at ten.

However, after we moved back to Australia and I entered my teen years, I began to question my religious convictions. Throughout high school, I studied ancient history, and

my father and I had long conversations about the origin of religion and what we considered to be the myths and legends contained in the Bible. Eventually, I rejected Catholicism.

My parents separated when I was 16. Mum had difficulty coping, and I eventually moved in with my father and his fiancée. My brother stayed with Mum, and they moved to another state. I felt very alone at this stage. It took two years before I reestablished friendly relations with my mother. I began to drink, take drugs, and party. I dropped out of school, got a job, and squandered my early 20's living an immoral lifestyle.

When I turned 25, I started to think about the Bible again. I began work at a new job and

met Liene, a lovely girl who was always polite to her boss, even though he was terribly rude to her. When I asked why she didn't snap back at her boss, she explained that she was studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses and was trying to apply Bible principles in her life. Liene offered to study the Bible with me. Because of a misunderstanding, I thought that she meant that I could learn all she knew about the Bible in just one one-hour session. That night, Liene spent three hours answering my questions about the Bible. I was impressed that all the answers she gave were backed up by scriptures from the Bible.

I remember driving home that night after my discussion with Liene and feeling angry at God for not letting me learn the truth about him sooner. I knew that the Witnesses lived a morally clean life and thought that it was way too late for me to be able to change my habits. I also thought that I could never go from door to door preaching as the Witnesses did. I continued studying the Bible with the Witnesses, but my motive was to find fault with their teachings so that I could

"I decided to pray *before* I gave in to temptation rather than afterward, and that made a big difference"

in good conscience stop my contact with them. One day I realized that I was not going to find that loophole.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: The more I learned about the Bible's moral standards, the more my conscience bothered

me. To ease my conscience, I gave up drugs. But then I moved overseas for a time and got caught up in a round of partying and drinking. It seemed that each time I tried to make some progress toward living in harmony with Bible principles, I would backslide. In shame, I would pray to Jehovah, but I still felt bad.

When I learned about King David's dealings with Bath-sheba and how Jehovah mercifully dealt with them, that helped me. David was brave enough to admit his error when counseled, without trying to justify his actions. And he humbly accepted the discipline he received. (2 Samuel 12:1-13) Every time I stumbled, I thought of that account and it became easier to tell Jehovah that I was sorry. Then I decided to pray *before* I gave in to temptation rather than afterward, and that made a big difference.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I had always had a bad temper. However, the scripture at Ephesians 4:29-31 helped me see the need to avoid "bitterness and anger and wrath." As I learned to control my temper, I learned to control my tongue. In addition, Jesus' counsel to "let your word Yes mean Yes" helped me to become a more decisive person.—Matthew 5:37.

My mother, who at first opposed my associating with the Witnesses, later told me that she was proud of me. She even said, "I know that the woman you have become is not due to your upbringing but is due to what you have learned about Jehovah." It gave me great joy to hear her say that.

I now feel that my life has purpose and meaning. For the past nine years, my husband and I have been full-time Bible teachers. Yes, I go preaching from door to door, and I now feel that this is the most rewarding work I have ever done.



PROFILE

NAME: DENIS BUSIGIN

AGE: 30

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: RUSSIA

HISTORY: KARATE ENTHUSIAST



MY PAST: I was born in the city of Perm' and grew up in Furmanov, a city of about 40,000 inhabitants in the region of Ivanovo, Russia. Furmanov is a picturesque city with many beautiful trees that turn yellow and red in the fall. During the 1980's and 1990's, the crime rate rose in the city. My family lived very modestly on a small income. I lived with my parents and my younger brother in a one-bedroom apartment, so it was rather cramped.

At the age of seven, I began to learn karate. I loved the sport; my whole life revolved around it. I spent all my spare time at the gym, so all my friends were sportsmen. By 15, I had earned my red belt in karate, and a year later, my brown belt. I was part of a karate team that competed in Russian and Eurasian championship tournaments. The future looked bright, but when I was 17, my whole life changed.

Some friends and I committed a crime and were caught. I was sentenced to a two-year prison term. Prison life was difficult. However, it was while in prison that I saw the Bible for the first time. I read Genesis, Psalms, and the New Testament. I even memorized the Our Father and would recite it each night before going to bed, thinking that doing so would somehow help me.

I was released from prison in 2000, but my life lacked direction and purpose. I began

taking drugs. About this time my mother died. She was the dearest person to me, and it was a difficult loss for me to bear. However, I managed to free myself from drugs and began going to the gym again. I also moved to the city of Ivanovo. There I found work in a food store. The chief shop assistant at that store was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She explained to me some basic truths from the Bible and arranged for another Witness to study the Bible with me on a regular basis.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: During my Bible studies, I was deeply moved when I learned of God's purpose to make the earth a paradise, and I wanted to qualify to be part of that future. I soon realized that Jehovah God has high standards that he wants people to live by. I had spent much of my life thinking only of myself. But I learned that Jehovah wanted me to think of others and to develop qualities that I did not possess at the time—qualities including kindness and a love of peace.

As I began to think deeply about all that Jehovah had done for me—such as giving his Son as a sacrifice in behalf of my sins—gratitude for God's love moved me to make changes in my life. For example, I learned from Psalm 11:5 that Jehovah hates violence. So I stopped watching TV programs that glorified violence and hatred. And with great difficulty, I gave up violent sports. The

principle at 1 Corinthians 15:33 helped me to see that those I chose to associate with would have a big effect on me. The fact that I had ended up in prison was proof of that principle. So I decided to stop associating with those whose lives revolved around violent sports.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: Associating with Jehovah's Witnesses and studying the Bible has helped me to become an honest person. For example, from Hebrews 13:5, I learned of the need to be content and to fight against a love of money. Applying this advice has helped me to shun lying and stealing.

I have always valued friendships. In the past, I had seen friendships ruined as a result of greed or fear. Jehovah's Witnesses are not perfect, but I have learned that they respect God's standards and try hard to apply his counsel in the way they deal with others. Among them, I have now made some true friends.

I can only guess what my life would be like if I had not learned to live by Bible standards. I would probably be back in prison or causing other people pain and suffering. Now, though, I have a lovely wife and two sons, and as a family, we find real pleasure in helping others learn the truth about God.



PROFILE

NAME: **JOSÉ CARLOS PEREIRA DA SILVA**

AGE: **31**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: **BRAZIL**

HISTORY: **STREET FIGHTER**



MY PAST: I grew up in the squalid slums of Americana, São Paulo. We had no access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation. The area had a reputation for being violent and full of crime.

I grew up violent and aggressive. I was always involved in street fights, so people in the neighborhood were afraid of me. My dress, grooming, and demeanor projected the image that I was tough. I drank heavily, often until I was unconscious. Like my brothers, I used drugs. In fact, one of my brothers died of an overdose.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: When I met Jehovah's Witnesses, they showed me from the Bible that God will make the whole earth a paradise. (Luke 23:42, 43; Revelation 21:3, 4) I also learned that the dead are not conscious of anything, so God does not punish bad people in a fiery hell. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6) This was a great relief to me. What I learned about God gave me a strong desire to change my lifestyle. But it was not easy to make the changes—to give up the drugs, the drinking, the fighting, and the bad language I habitually used.

However, I was greatly encouraged by the apostle Paul's words recorded at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. That scripture shows that some first-century Christians at one time had some of the same bad habits that I had developed. But that passage also says: "That is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God." Those words gave me hope that I too would be able to make the necessary changes in my life to please God.

When I began associating with Jehovah's

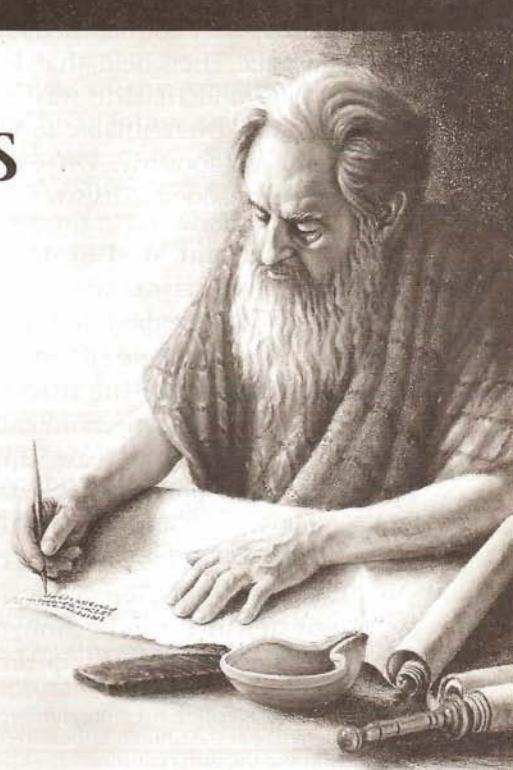
Witnesses, I was convinced that they practiced the true religion. They knew of my past violent, aggressive behavior, yet they still welcomed me warmly and lovingly into their company.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: If I had not studied the Bible and changed my lifestyle, I would probably be dead by now. Instead, I have had the pleasure of helping one of my brothers learn about the Bible and break free from his drug addiction. And I have also encouraged other relatives to start studying the Bible. I am so grateful that I have been able to dedicate my life to serving God, who cares so much for us!

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS Truly Apostolic?

BY THE start of the second century C.E., false teachings had begun to muddy the clear waters of Christian truth. Just as inspired prophecy had foretold, after the death of the apostles, certain ones abandoned the truth and turned instead to "myths." (2 Timothy 4:3, 4, footnote) About 98 C.E., John, the last surviving apostle, warned of such erroneous teachings and of people "who [were] trying to mislead" faithful Christians.—1 John 2:26; 4:1, 6.

Soon, men who came to be known as the Apostolic Fathers arrived on the scene. What stand did they take in the face of religious deception? Did they heed the apostle John's divinely inspired warning?



Who Were They?

The expression "Apostolic Fathers" has been applied to religious writers who may have known one of Jesus' apostles or may have been taught by disciples who learned from the apostles. Generally, these men lived from the close of the first century C.E. on into the middle of the second century.* Among them were Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Papias of Hierapolis, and Polycarp of Smyrna. Writing during the same period were the unnamed authors of works known as *The Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and the second letter of Clement.

Today, it is difficult to judge just how closely the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers corresponded to Jesus' teachings. The aim of these men was undoubtedly to preserve or else promote a certain brand of Christianity. They condemned idolatry and loose morals. They held that Jesus is the Son of God and that he was resurrected. However, they were unable to restrain the rising tide of apostasy. On the contrary, some of them added to its swell.

Insignificant Modifications?

Certain currents of early "Christian" thought actually deviated from the teachings of Christ and his apostles. For example, contrary to the practice instituted by Jesus at the Lord's Evening Meal, known also as the Last Supper, the author of *The Didache* advised the passing of the wine before the bread. (Matthew 26:26, 27) This writer also stated that if no body of water was available to perform baptism by immersion, pouring water on the head of the baptism candi-

* The writers, theologians, and philosophers generally referred to as the Church Fathers lived between the second and the fifth centuries C.E.

date would suffice. (Mark 1:9, 10; Acts 8:36, 38) The same text encouraged Christians to observe such rituals as obligatory fasting twice a week and recitation of the Our Father exactly three times a day.—Matthew 6: 5-13; Luke 18:12.

For his part, Ignatius envisioned a new organization of the Christian congregation, with just one bishop presiding "in the place of God." This bishop would hold authority over many priests. Such inventions opened the way for further waves of unscriptural teaching.—Matthew 23:8, 9.

Exaggeration, Martyrdom, and Idolatry

Exaggeration carried some Apostolic Fathers adrift. Papias thirsted for truth and referred to the Christian Greek Scriptures. At the same time, he believed that during the foretold Thousand Year Reign of Christ, grape vines will produce 10,000 branches, each branch 10,000 twigs, each twig 10,000 shoots, each shoot 10,000 clusters, each cluster 10,000 grapes, and each grape the equivalent of 1,000 quarts of wine.

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Polycarp was willing to die a martyr's death

Polycarp was willing to die a martyr's death rather than renounce his Christian faith. It is reported that he was instructed by the apostles and others who knew Jesus. He quoted from the Bible, and it appears that he strove to live by Christian principles.

The devotion that some had to Polycarp, however, verged on idolatry. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* states that after his death, the "faithful" were eager to claim his remains. They considered his bones "more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold." Clearly, the poisoned waters of error were surging.

Apocryphal Texts

Some Apostolic Fathers accepted extra-Biblical texts as if they were inspired. Clement of Rome, for one, cites the apocryphal works *Wisdom* and *Judith*. The writer of *The Epistle of Polycarp* refers to *Tobit* to give credence to the idea that the giving of alms has power to deliver the giver from death.

In the second century C.E., false gospels spread spurious accounts of Jesus' life, and the Fathers frequently lent credence to them. Ignatius, for instance, quoted from the so-called *Gospel of the Hebrews*. And regarding Clement of Rome, one source says: "Clement seems to know Christ, not through the Gospels, but through non-canonical writings."

A Tidal Wave of Error

By resorting to myth, mystic ideas, and philosophy to explain the Christian faith, these men opened the way for a tide of error. Clement, for example, referred to the mythological story of the phoenix as proof of the resurrection. The phoenix, a legendary bird said to rise from its own ashes, was associated with sun worship in Egyptian mythology.

Another writer who demeaned Scriptural truth was the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*. He interpreted the Mosaic Law as if it were mere allegory. According to him, clean animals—chewers of the cud with split (cleft) hooves—represented people who meditate on, or chew over, God's

Some Apostolic Fathers, including Clement, referred to myth, mystic ideas, and philosophy in their writings

Word. The split hoof, said the writer, symbolized that the righteous man "walks in this world" while at the same time looking forward to life in heaven. Such interpretations are not based on Scripture.—Leviticus 11:1-3.

The Witness of the Apostle John

During the first century, the apostle John warned: "Beloved ones, do not believe every inspired expression, but test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world." (1 John 4:1) How appropriate these words were!

By the end of the first century, many so-called Christians had already abandoned the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. Far from resisting the rising tide of apostasy, the Apostolic Fathers rode its waves. They adulterated truth with poison. The apostle John said of such individuals: "Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God." (2 John 9) For all sincere seekers of Scriptural truth, this divinely inspired warning was—and remains—crystal clear.

Our Readers Ask

DOES GOD APPROVE OF POLYGAMY?

No; the standard God set in Eden with the first marriage was that of monogamy. Jesus Christ later reaffirmed that standard for his followers.—Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-6.

Did not such men as Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon of pre-Christian times have more than one wife? Yes, but how does the Bible portray that arrangement? It reveals the friction and strife that arose in the families of Abraham and Jacob as a result of the practice. (Genesis 16:1-4; 29:18-30:24) Later, God's Law included this directive to each king: "He should . . . not multiply wives for himself, that his heart may not turn aside." (Deuteronomy 17:15, 17) Solomon disregarded that statute by marrying over 700 wives! Tragically, Solomon's heart did indeed turn aside from Jehovah because of the bad influence of his many wives. (1 Kings 11:1-4) Clearly, the Bible paints a negative picture of polygamy.

Still, some might wonder why God chose to tolerate polygamy among his people. Consider: Have you ever temporarily tolerated a piece of furniture though it needed to be replaced, perhaps reasoning that it would prove impractical or disruptive to remove it for now? Of course, God's ways and thoughts are higher than our own. (Isaiah 55:8, 9) Yet, we may discern some practical reasons why he tolerated polygamy for a time.

Remember that in Eden, Jehovah promised a "seed" who would ultimately destroy Satan. Later, Abraham was told that he would father a great nation and that the foretold Seed would come from his family line. (Genesis 3:15; 22:18) Satan was determined to prevent that Seed from arriving. He was thus bent on

destroying that ancient nation of Israel. He often seduced Israel into sin so that the nation would lose God's favor and protection.

To counter the attacks, Jehovah repeatedly sent his prophets to warn his people when they veered from righteous standards. However, he knew in advance that his people would often fail to obey even the most basic of commands, such as the one against idolatry. (Exodus 32:9) If they would struggle to obey so basic a law, how would they fare with a law against polygamy? With his perfect grasp of human nature, Jehovah saw that it was not yet the time to forbid that practice, which was already long-established in those days. Had he done so, Satan would have found a very easy means of seducing Israel into sin.

God's temporary toleration of polygamy had other advantages. It helped the nation to grow rapidly. The larger population helped to ensure the nation's survival until the time of the Messiah. Polygamy may also have provided a measure of protection for some women, giving them shelter and a household in dangerous times.

Keep in mind, though, that Jehovah did not originate this practice. He tolerated it for a limited time, while strictly regulating it to prevent abuses. (Exodus 21:10, 11; Deuteronomy 21:15-17) When Jehovah chose to end the practice of polygamy among his worshippers, he used his own Son to reaffirm the marital standard set in Eden. Jesus thus forbade polygamy among his followers. (Mark 10:8) Then, this truth became even clearer: The Law of Moses was fine in its time, but "the law of the Christ" is even better.—Galatians 6:2.

A Man Who Had Faith in God's Promises

Instructions: Do this exercise in quiet surroundings. As you read the scriptures, imagine that you are part of the event. Visualize the scene. Hear the voices. Feel the emotions of the main characters.

ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ GENESIS 12:1-4; 18:1-15; 21:1-5; 22:15-18.

Describe how Abraham may have felt upon hearing God's promise that he would be a forefather of a "seed" that would benefit the whole world.

How do you picture the three visitors described at Genesis 18:2? _____

How do you imagine the activity described at Genesis 18:6-8? (Keep in mind that Abraham was close to 100 years old at the time.) _____

DIG DEEPER.

How much time elapsed between the time that Jehovah promised a son to Abraham and the time that Isaac was born? (Reread Genesis 12:4 and 21:5.) _____

What assurances did Jehovah give Abraham throughout the waiting period? (Read Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-5, 12-21; 17:1, 2, 7, 8, 15, 16.)

What did Jehovah do for Abraham when Abraham manifested a measure of uncertainty about having a son? (Reread Genesis 15:3-5, 12-21.)

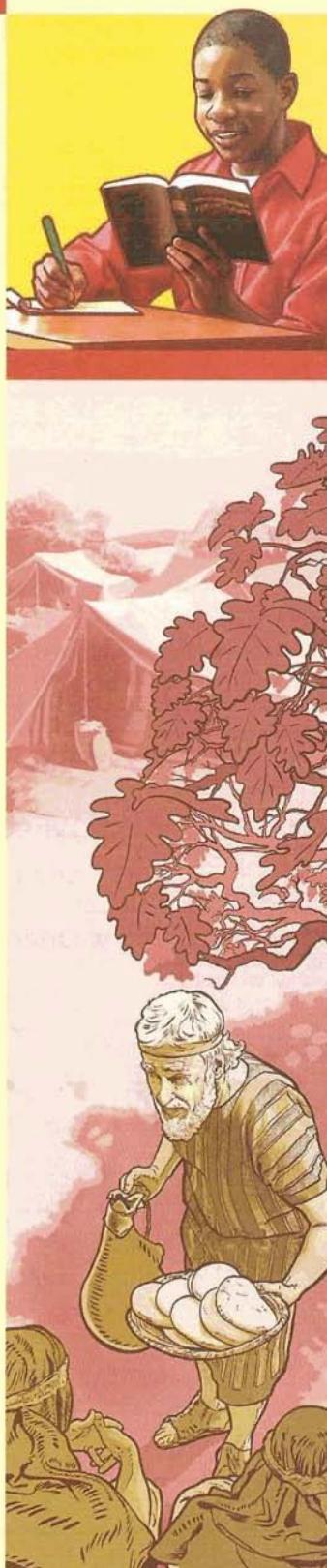
How did Jehovah progressively reveal details about the "seed"? _____

APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED. WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT...

The need for faith in God's promises. _____

How Jehovah progressively reveals his will. _____

WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY?



- Where can you get help to understand the Bible?
See pages 6-8.
- Is it possible to find inner peace in this troubled world?
See pages 10-12.
- Have they found Noah's ark? See pages 13-14.
- Who was Abigail, and what can her faith teach us today?
See pages 18-21.
- Does God approve of polygamy? See page 30.