

THE WATCHTOWER

JULY 1, 2011

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Give Your Life Real Meaning
HOW?

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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DOES life have any meaning?" Countless people have asked that question. Sadly, no matter how they look at life, many are unable to escape what Austrian neurologist Viktor E. Frankl described as a "sense of meaninglessness and emptiness" in their lives.

Why do so many feel that way? For one thing, millions the world over live in unbelievably wretched, heartbreaking conditions. Each day, they wake up to poverty, disease, senseless violence, and oppression. Their lives are truly "glutted with agitation," as Job of ancient times said about human suffering. (Job 14:1) Their prime goal is simply to survive from one day to the next.

Does Life Have Any Real Meaning?

Millions of others enjoy a degree of material prosperity. Everything seems to be in place for them to find real satisfaction in life. But many still do not. Why? Because time and again, "trouble and hurtful things"—unexpected financial setbacks or bitter tragedies, such as the death of a child—shatter their treasured hopes and dreams.—Psalm 90:10.

Another factor deepens this pervasive feeling of "meaninglessness and emptiness." What is that? The extreme brevity of life. To many, it simply does not make sense that humans, who are gifted with such great potential, live such short lives. They cannot understand the harsh reality that we all face: Sooner or later, even if we escape the worst that besets mankind, death robs us of everything.—Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20.

Will Life Always Seem Meaningless?

King Solomon of ancient Israel summed up the situation very well. He saw how people in his day worked hard using their talents and abilities in planting, cultivating, building, and caring for their families, just as we do today. He asked, in effect, 'What does it all amount to in the end?' Everything people do, he

concluded, is “emptiness and chasing the wind.”—Ecclesiastes 2:17, *The New English Bible*.

But did King Solomon believe that everything mankind does would *always* be “emptiness and chasing the wind”? No. He was simply expressing a realistic view of how life in this imperfect world turns out. However,

the inspired Word of God can give you confidence that *things will not always be like this!*

How can you find that confidence? Please read the next two articles. They may help you to understand why life seems so meaningless, how this situation will be remedied, and how you can give your life real meaning even now.

Why Does Life Seem Meaningless?

WHY should you believe that life will ever be more than just a “brief span of empty existence through which” we pass “like a shadow,” as King Solomon put it? (Ecclesiastes 6:12, *The New English Bible*) God’s inspired Word, the Bible—an unfailingly dependable source of information—promises that life in the future will be truly meaningful.—2 Timothy 3: 16, 17.

The Bible tells us what God’s original purpose was for the earth. It also explains why the world is filled with injustice, oppression, and suffering. Why is it important that we understand these things? Because the main reason people think that life is completely meaningless is that they are unaware of—or choose to ignore—God’s purpose for this planet and mankind on it.

What Is God’s Purpose for the Earth?

Jehovah God* made the earth to be a perfect paradise home for humankind—a place where men and women would enjoy a full, satisfying life in human

* In the Bible, Jehovah is the personal name of God.



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

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The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; M. H. Larson, President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483, and by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Canada, PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Watchtower, 1000 Red Mills Road, Wallkill, NY 12589-3299. © 2011 Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. All rights reserved. Printed in Canada.

perfection forever. This fundamental truth contradicts the commonly accepted but Scripturally baseless idea that God made the earth to be some kind of testing ground for humans, to see if they deserved to live a more meaningful life in a spirit world.—See the box “Must We Leave the Earth to Enjoy a Meaningful Life?” on page 6.

God made man and woman in His image, giving them the capacity to reflect His wonderful qualities. (Genesis 1:26, 27) He made them perfect. They had everything they needed to enjoy a productive, meaningful life forever. That would include filling the earth and subduing it, transforming the whole planet into a paradise just like the garden of Eden.—Genesis 1:28-31; 2:8, 9.

What Went Wrong?

Obviously, something went drastically wrong. Mankind in general poorly reflects God’s image. The earth is certainly no paradise. What happened? Our original parents, Adam and Eve, abused their free will. They wanted to “be like God,” deciding for themselves what was morally “good and bad.” In doing so, they followed the rebellious course that Satan the Devil had already taken.—Genesis 3:1-6.

Evil, then, is not part of some mysterious, predetermined plan of God. It came into existence when Satan—and later Adam and Eve—rebelled against God’s rulership. As a result of their rebellion, our original parents lost Paradise and perfection, bringing sin and death upon not just themselves but also their descendants—the whole human fami-

ly. (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 5:12) This is what brought about the conditions and circumstances that make life seem so meaningless.

Why Not Stamp Out Evil Immediately?

Some wonder, ‘Why did God not stamp out evil immediately by simply destroying Satan and the other rebels and starting over again?’ Would that have really been wise? How would you react if you heard of a powerful government that immediately executed anyone who challenged its authority? Do not such actions alienate fair-minded people and undermine a government’s moral authority?

God chose not to act against the rebels immediately. Wisely, he allowed time to pass so that the issues raised in Eden regarding his way of ruling would be settled—once and for all.

Removal of All Evil

The key thing to remember is this: God has permitted evil to exist for only a limited time. He has done so knowing that he can completely undo its grievous consequences once the vital issues raised by rebellion against his way of ruling have been settled.

God has not abandoned his purpose for the earth and mankind. Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah assures us that He is the Maker of the earth, the one “who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited.” (Isaiah 45:18) Very soon now, he will begin bringing the earth

NOW PUBLISHED IN 188 LANGUAGES: Acholi, Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Armenian (West), Aymara, Azerbaijani, Azerbaijani (Cyrillic), Baoulé, Bengali, Bicol, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cambodian, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional)⁺ (audia Mandarin only), Chitonga, Chuukese, Cibemba, Croatian, Czech,⁺ Danish⁺ Dutch,⁺ Eifik, English⁺ (also Braille), Estonian, Ewe, Fijian, Finnish,⁺ French,⁺ Ga, Georgian, German,⁺ Greek, Greenlandic, Guarani,⁺⁺ Gujarati, Gun, Haitian Creole, Hausa, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hiri Motu, Hungarian,⁺ Icelandic, Igbo, Iloko, Indonesian, Isoko, Italian,⁺ Japanese,⁺ Kannada, Kazakh, Kikaonde, Kikongo, Kikuyu, Ki-

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⁺ CD also available.

⁺⁺ MP3 CD-ROM also available.

^{*} Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

back to the perfect state he originally purposed. With the rightness of his way of ruling absolutely established, he will be justified in using his irresistible power to enforce his will and utterly destroy all evil. (Isaiah 55:10, 11) In the model prayer, Jesus Christ included an appeal for God to take this action. Jesus taught us to pray: “Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.” (Matthew 6:9, 10) What does that include?

God’s Will for the Earth

Among other things, “the meek ones themselves will possess the earth.” (Psalm 37:9-11, 29; Proverbs 2:21, 22) Jesus Christ will “deliver the poor one crying for help, also the afflicted one.” He will save them “from oppression and from violence.” (Psalm 72:12-14) War will be no more; nor will death, tears, pain, or suffering be anymore. (Psalm 46:9; Revelation 21:1-4) Multitudes of people

Must We Leave the Earth to Enjoy a Meaningful Life?

For centuries, men who have no knowledge of God’s purpose for the earth have taught that we must leave the earth before we can enjoy a truly meaningful existence.

Some said that souls “enjoyed some higher existence prior to their entry into individual human bodies.” (*New Dictionary of Theology*) Others said that the soul was “incarcerated in the body as a punishment for the sins which it committed in its heavenly state.”—*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*.

Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, taught this idea: Only when the soul escapes from the limitations of a material human body would it be “released from its wanderings and follies and fears, its wild desires

and all the other ills that beset mankind” and dwell “in the company of the gods for all time to come.”—*Plato’s Phaedo*, 81, A.

Later, so-called Christian leaders incorporated Greek philosophers’ “assumptions about the inherent immortality of the soul” into their teachings.—*Christianity—A Global History*.

Contrast those ideas with three fundamental truths found in the Bible:

1. God’s purpose is for the earth to be a permanent home for humankind, not a temporary testing ground to see who deserve to live with him in heaven. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God’s laws, they would still be alive here on a paradise earth.—Genesis 1:27, 28; Psalm 115:16.

2. Whereas most religions teach that man *has* a soul

—some immaterial entity that resides within—the Bible teaches something simpler. Man is “a living soul” formed out of “dust from the ground.” (Genesis 2:7) The Bible never describes this soul as immortal. It says that the soul can be killed or destroyed, totally ceasing to exist. (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Ezekiel 18:4, 20) The first soul, Adam, positively died and *returned* to the dust from which he was created. He *returned* to nonexistence. —Genesis 2:17; 3:19.

3. Man’s future life prospects depend, not on having an immortal soul that departs to some spirit realm, but on God’s promise of a resurrection from the dead back to life on a paradise earth.—Daniel 12:13; John 11:24-26; Acts 24:15.

who have died during God's toleration of evil will be resurrected to life here on earth, and they will be given the opportunity to benefit from these and other blessings.—John 5:28, 29.

In fact, Jehovah will undo the harm that Satan's rebellion has caused. So complete will this remedial action be that “the former distresses [all the things that bring grief and pain today] will actually be forgotten.” (Isa-

iah 65:16-19) That future is guaranteed. God does not lie. All his promises come true. Life will no longer be “emptiness and chasing the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 2:17, *The New English Bible*) Rather, life will be filled with meaning.

But what about right now? Can knowing what the Bible teaches and understanding God's purpose for the earth add real meaning to your life now? The final article in this series takes up this question.

A Meaningful Life Now and Forever

YOU can find real meaning in life even now. How? By following the sound principles found in God's Word, the Bible. Let us examine just a few of them.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “*There is nothing better,*” wrote King Solomon, than that a man “should eat and indeed drink and cause his soul to see good because of his hard work.”—ECCLESIASTES 2:24.

We were made to find satisfaction in wholesome work. Even in the direst of circumstances, you can enjoy a measure of satisfaction in life right now from working diligently and honestly.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “*There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.*”—ACTS 20:35.

Many have found that doing things for others—giving of their time and energy to assist others in times of difficulty, for example—has proved to be extremely rewarding and has added real meaning to their lives. “Do not hold back good from those to whom it is owing,” wrote Solomon, “when it happens to be in the power of your hand to do it.”—Proverbs 3:27.

Consider the example of Ralph. After retirement, he joined his wife in the full-time Christian ministry. They





each spend a number of hours every month in the ministry, giving of themselves in teaching the Bible to others. “When we get home in the evening, we are tired, not just from getting older, but from giving our all in service to our heavenly Father,” says Ralph. “It’s a good tired!” He and his wife are happy because their life centers on giving.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: *“A true companion is loving all the time, and is a brother that is born for when there is distress.”*—PROVERBS 17:17.

Shared troubles can be much easier to bear. English essayist Francis Bacon wrote that for those without true friends, “the world is but a wilderness.” Having true friends—and being a good friend—can make life more bearable for you; it can be beautiful and satisfying.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: *“Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”*—MATTHEW 5:3.

Jesus thus identified a vital requirement if you want to enjoy the fulfillment of God’s promises—recognize and fill your “spiritual need.” Unlike animals, we have an innate need to understand the meaning and purpose of life. Only Jehovah God can fill that need, and he does so through his Word, the Bible. As we saw in the preceding article, the Bible reveals God’s purpose for the earth. It tells us why we are here, why there is so much suffering, and what God expects of us. Understanding such Scriptural truths is essential to our living a meaningful and satisfying life. Those who make time to study the Bible and apply what they learn are happy. Why? Because they thereby build a trusting relationship with our Creator, “the happy God,” Jehovah.—1 Timothy 1:11.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: *“Remember your Creator . . . before the time of trouble comes and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I see no purpose in them.’”*—ECCLESIASTES 12:1, THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE.

King Solomon’s advice to young people, who may for a time fail to recognize the tragedies that life can bring, is relevant for all of us. Make your Creator the focus of your life. That is what will give your life real purpose. Reject the attitude: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die.” (1 Corinthians 15:32) If you put God

first, things “will turn out well” for you, says Ecclesiastes 8:12.

A girl named Wendi found that to be true. When she was young, she and her sister learned Spanish so that they could move to the Dominican Republic, where there was a greater need for preachers of the Bible’s good news. “We made many sacrifices to serve where there was a need, but we had the time of our lives. I wouldn’t trade those six months for anything! The blessings we received far outweighed the sacrifices involved.”

Loyalty to God Makes Life Meaningful

Building a good relationship with Jehovah can add meaning to your life in a very special way. How? Not only did Satan lead Adam and Eve into rebellion against God’s rule but he also implied that no one would remain loyal to God under test. (Job 1:9-11; 2:4) You can help to prove Satan a liar! How? By remaining loyal to God, by sticking to his principles, and by demonstrating that you recognize Jehovah’s supreme right to determine for us what is good and what is bad.—Revelation 4:11.

We may have to endure challenges if we want to pursue an upright course. Will those challenges rob us of a meaningful life? Well, imagine that a vicious enemy is slandering

our beloved friend or family member. If defending that dear person’s name caused us some hardship at the hands of our enemy, would that rob us of a meaningful life? Of course not! We would gladly endure hardship for such a cause. It is the same with remaining loyal to God. Our loyalty under current evil conditions actually makes God’s heart rejoice.—Proverbs 27:11.

A Meaningful Life Forever

Make it your aim, then, to learn all you can about God and his purpose. Jesus Christ himself 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.” (John 17:3) When God fulfills his original purpose for the earth, faithful humans will enjoy what Jehovah originally intended for them—“everlasting life” on a paradise earth. Then life will truly be meaningful and satisfying.—Psalm 145:16.

Where can you find the knowledge that Jesus talked about? In the pages of God’s inspired Word, the Bible. If you would like assistance in doing this, feel free to write to the publishers of this magazine. They will gladly arrange for someone to help you to learn what the Bible really teaches.





DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

Does Jehovah Have Feelings?

If THE answer is yes, then another question arises: Does our conduct affect God's feelings? That is, can we by our actions cause God to feel happy or hurt? Some ancient philosophers said no. They argued that no one can influence God and that God must therefore be incapable of feeling. But the Bible gives a different picture, namely, that Jehovah has tender feelings and deeply cares about what we do. Consider the words found at Psalm 78:40, 41.

Psalm 78 recounts God's dealings with ancient Israel. After delivering the nation from slavery in Egypt, Jehovah offered to enter into a special relationship with them. He promised that if they would remain obedient to his laws, they would become his "special property" and be used in an extraordinary way to fulfill his purpose. The people agreed and entered into the Law covenant. Did they live up to their end of the agreement?—Exodus 19:3-8.

The psalmist says: "How often they would rebel against him in the wilderness!" (Verse 40) The next verse adds: "Again and again they would put God to the test." (Verse 41) Notice that the writer describes a pattern of rebellion. This ugly spirit surfaced early—in the wilderness shortly after their deliverance from Egypt. The people began to murmur against God, questioning whether he was able and willing to care for them. (Numbers 14:1-4) A reference work for Bible translators says that the words "they would rebel against him" might be "rendered idiomatically as 'they made their hearts hard against God' or 'they said 'No' to God.'" Yet, in his mercy, Jehovah would forgive his people

when they demonstrated repentance. But then they would return to their old ways and rebel again, and the pattern continued.—Psalm 78:10-19, 38.

How did Jehovah feel each time his fickle people rebelled? "They would make him feel hurt," says verse 40. Another translation says that they would "give him cause for grief." One Bible reference work explains: "The meaning here is that the conduct of the Hebrews was such as was fitted to cause pain, —as the conduct of a disobedient and rebellious child is." Just as an unruly child can cause his parents much pain of heart, the rebellious Israelites "pained even the Holy One of Israel."

—Verse 41.

There is nothing more precious that we could give to Jehovah than to live in a way that brings joy to his heart

What can we learn from this psalm? It is reassuring to see that Jehovah has a strong attachment to his worshippers and is not quick to give up on them. At the same time, it is sobering to consider that Jehovah has feelings and that our conduct can affect his feelings. How does knowing that affect you? Does it move you to want to do what is right?

Rather than pursue a sinful course and bring pain to Jehovah's heart, we can choose to follow an upright course and make his heart glad. And that is exactly what he asks of his worshippers: "Be wise, my son, and make my heart rejoice." (Proverbs 27:11) There is nothing more precious that we could give to Jehovah than to live in a way that brings joy to his heart.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR JULY:
■ Psalms 60-86

THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

WHY did a woman in her 60's give up idol worship? What moved a Shinto priest to leave his work at a shrine and become a Christian minister? How was a woman who had been adopted at birth able to cope with feelings of abandonment? Consider what these people have to say.



"I no longer slave for idols."

—ABA DANSOU

YEAR BORN: 1938

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: BENIN

HISTORY: IDOL WORSHIPPER

MY PAST: I grew up in So-Tchahoué, a village situated in a marshy area near a lake. The villagers fish and raise cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and birds. There are no roads in the area, so people use boats and canoes to move about. They generally build their houses out of wood and grass, although some build with bricks. People there are predominantly poor. Even so, crime is not as rampant as in the cities.

When I was a child, my father sent my sister and me to a fetish convent, where we were initiated into that traditional belief. When I grew up, I adopted Dudua (Oduduwa) from the Yoruba culture as my god. I built a house for this god and regularly offered sacrifices of yams, palm oil, snails, chickens, doves, and various other animals. These sacrifices were costly, often

consuming nearly all my resources.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED

MY LIFE: When I began to study the Bible, I learned that Jehovah is the only true God. I also learned that he does not approve of the use of idols in worship. (Exodus 20:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 10:14) I realized what I needed to do. So I threw all my images away and cleaned my house of everything pertaining to

idol worship. I stopped consulting oracles, and I no longer participated in local rituals and funeral rites.

It was not easy for me—a woman in her 60's—to make these changes. My friends, relatives, and neighbors opposed me and made fun of me. But I prayed to Jehovah for the strength to do what is right. I took comfort in the words of Proverbs 18:10, which says: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. Into it the righteous runs and is given protection."

Something else that helped me was attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. There I experienced Christian love, and I was impressed because these people try to live by the Bible's high moral standards. What I saw convinced me that Jehovah's Witnesses practice the true religion.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: Applying Bible principles has helped me improve my relationship with my children. I also feel that a burden has been lifted from my shoulders. I used to exhaust my resources on lifeless idols that did not benefit me in any way. Now I worship Jehovah, who provides a lasting solution to all our problems. (Revelation 21: 3, 4) I am so happy that I no longer slave for idols, but rather, I slave for Jehovah! In him I have found true security and protection.

Among Jehovah's Witnesses, I have experienced Christian love



YEAR BORN: 1951

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: JAPAN
HISTORY: SHINTO PRIEST

"I had been looking for God since childhood." —SHINJI SATO

MY PAST: I grew up in a country town in Fukuoka Prefecture. My parents were very religious; they raised me from childhood to revere the Shinto gods. As a young boy, I thought often about my salvation and had a strong desire to help people who were in trouble. I recall a time in elementary school when the teacher asked the class what we wanted to do when we grew up. My classmates had very concrete hopes, such as becoming a scientist. I said that my dream

was to serve God. Everyone laughed at me.

After high school, I entered a school for religious teachers. During that training, I met a Shinto priest who spent his spare time reading a book with a black cover. One day he asked me, "Sato, do you know what this book is?" I had noticed the cover of the book, so I answered, "The Bible." He said, "Everyone who wants to be a Shinto priest should read this book."

I went right out and bought a Bible. I put the Bible in the most prominent place on my bookshelf and took good care of it. But I did not make time to read it, as school life kept me very busy. When I finished school, I began working at a shrine as a Shinto priest. My childhood dream had come true.

I soon discovered, however, that being a Shinto priest was not what I had expected it to be. Most priests showed little love or con-

cern for others. Many also lacked faith. One of my superiors went so far as to tell me: "If you want to succeed here, you must talk only about philosophical matters. Talking about faith is forbidden."

Such remarks caused me to feel disillusioned with the Shinto religion. Although I continued my work at the shrine, I began to investigate other religions. Yet, none of them seemed to offer anything better. The more religions I examined, the more discouraged I became. I felt that there was no truth in any religion.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: In 1988, I met a Buddhist who encouraged me to read the Bible. I thought of the Shinto priest who years earlier had urged me to do the same. I decided to apply the advice. As I started reading the Bible, I quickly became absorbed in it. Sometimes I would read all night long until the morning sun peeked through the window.

What I read moved me to want to pray to the God of the Bible. I began with the model prayer outlined at Matthew 6:9-13. I repeated this prayer every two hours—even while performing my service at the Shinto shrine.

I had many questions about what I was reading. By this time, I had married, and I knew that Jehovah's Witnesses teach people about the Bible because they had visited my wife in the past. I sought out one of the Wit-

nesses and plied her with questions. I was impressed when she used the Bible to answer each of them. She arranged for the Witnesses to study the Bible with me.

Shortly thereafter, I started attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. I did not realize it at the time, but among the Witnesses present were some to whom I had been very rude in the past. Even so, they warmly greeted me and made me feel welcome.

At those meetings, I learned that God expects husbands to show love and honor to their family members. Until that point, I had focused so much on my work as a priest that I had neglected my wife and our two children. It dawned on me that I had listened intently to what people who came to worship at the shrine had to say but I had never once listened to what my wife had to say.

As my studies progressed, I learned many things about Jehovah that drew me to him. I was especially touched by such verses as Romans 10:13, which says: "Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved." I had been looking for God since childhood, and now, at last, I had found him!

I started to feel out of place at the shrine. At first, I worried about what others would think if I left the Shinto religion. But I had always told myself that I would leave if I found the true God elsewhere. So in the spring of 1989, I decided to follow my conscience. I left the shrine and put myself in Jehovah's hands.

Leaving the shrine was not easy. My superiors berated me and tried to pressure me into staying. Even harder, though, was breaking the news to my parents. On the way to their house, I felt so overwhelmed with anxiety that my chest hurt and my legs were as weak as noodles! I stopped many times along the way to pray to Jehovah for strength.

The Shinto shrine where I once worshipped





When I arrived at my parents' house, I was initially too afraid to broach the subject. Hours passed. Finally, after much prayer, I explained everything to my father. I told him that I had found the true God and that I was leaving the Shinto religion in order to serve Him. My father was shocked and saddened. Other relatives came to the house and tried to change my mind. I did not want to hurt my family, but at the same time, I knew that serving Jehovah was the right thing to do. In time, my family came to respect me for my decision.

Physically leaving the shrine was one thing; *mentally* leaving it was another. The life of a priest was deeply ingrained in me. I tried hard to forget it, but everywhere I

turned, there seemed to be reminders of my former life.

Two things helped me to rid myself of these influences. First, I searched thoroughly for anything in my home that was related to my former religion. Then I burned them all—books, pictures, and even expensive memorabilia. Second, I sought as many opportunities as possible to associate with the Witnesses. Their friendship and support helped me a great deal. Little by little, my past ways faded from memory.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I used to neglect my wife and children, which made them feel very lonely. But when I started to spend time with them, as the Bible teaches husbands to do, we became closer. In time, my wife joined me in serving Jehovah. Together with our son, our daughter, and her husband, we are now united in true worship.

When I think back to my childhood dream of serving God and helping other people, I realize that I have found everything I was looking for—and more. Words cannot express my gratitude to Jehovah.



“I knew that something was missing.”

—LYNETTE HOUGHTING

YEAR BORN: 1958

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: SOUTH AFRICA

HISTORY: FEELINGS OF ABANDONMENT

MY PAST: I was born in Germiston, a middle-class mining town without much crime. Feeling that they would be unable to take care of me, my parents decided to give me up for adoption. At the tender age of 14 days, I was adopted by a loving couple whom I came to regard as my mother and father. Still, after I learned of my history, I struggled with feelings of

abandonment. I began to feel that I did not belong to my adoptive parents and that they did not really understand me.

When I was about 16, I started going to cocktail bars, where my friends and I would dance and listen to live music. At age 17, I began to smoke cigarettes. I wanted to be thin like the models I saw in smoking advertisements. When I turned 19, I started working in Johannesburg, where I quickly fell in with the wrong crowd. Soon I was using bad language, smoking heavily, and drinking a lot on the weekends.

Even so, I was quite active physically. I regularly did aerobics and played squash and ladies' soccer. I also worked hard at my career, making a name for myself in the computer industry. As a result, I was financially comfortable, and many people considered me successful. Yet, I was actually very unhappy—lost and disappointed with my life. Deep down, I knew that something was missing.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: When I started studying the Bible, I learned that Jehovah is a God of love. I also learned that he has demonstrated that love by giving us his Word, the Bible. It is as if he has written us a personal letter to guide our steps. (Isaiah 48:17, 18) I realized that if I wanted to benefit from Jehovah's loving guidance, I would have to make some big changes in my life.

One change I needed to make was in my associations. I took to heart the words of Proverbs 13:20, which says: "He that is walking with wise persons will become wise, but he that is having dealings with the stupid ones will fare badly." That principle influenced me to leave my old friendships behind and make new friends among Jehovah's Witnesses.

My biggest challenge was to quit smoking; my addiction was very strong. As I gradually

overcame that hurdle, I faced another challenge. Giving up cigarettes caused me to gain over 30 pounds (13.6 kg)! That was a real blow to my self-worth, and it took me nearly ten years to shed the excess weight. Yet, I knew that quitting smoking was the right thing to do. I prayed to Jehovah continually, and he gave me the strength to succeed.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I now enjoy better health. I am also content—I no longer chase after the elusive happiness promised by a secular career, status, and wealth. Instead, I find joy in sharing Bible truths with others. As a result, three of my former colleagues now serve Jehovah along with my husband and me. Before each of my adoptive parents died, I was able to tell them about the Bible's promise of a resurrection to a paradise earth.

Drawing close to Jehovah has helped me to cope with feelings of abandonment. He has given me a sense of belonging by bringing me into a worldwide family of fellow believers. Among them, I have many mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters.—Mark 10:29, 30.





LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

What Is God's Kingdom?

1. What is God's Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God is a heavenly government. It will replace all other governments and will cause God's will to be done in heaven and on earth. So God's Kingdom is the solution to our need for good government.—*Read Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10.*

This article raises questions you may have asked and shows where you can read the answers in your Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to discuss these answers with you.

A kingdom must have a king. Jehovah appointed his Son, Jesus, to be the King of His Kingdom.—*Read Luke 1:30-33.*



2. Why is Jesus the ideal Ruler?

God's Son is the ideal King because he is kind, firm for what is right, and powerful enough to help people. (Matthew 11:28-30) After he was resurrected, Jesus ascended to heaven and began to wait at Jehovah's right hand. (Hebrews 10:12, 13) Finally, God gave him power to begin ruling from heaven.—*Read Daniel 7:13, 14.*

3. Who else will rule with Jesus?

A group called "the holy ones" are chosen by God to rule with Jesus in heaven. (Daniel 7:27) The first prospective holy ones chosen were Jesus' faithful apostles. Jehovah has continued to select faithful men and women as holy ones until now. Like Jesus, they are resurrected with a spiritual body.—*Read John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:42-45.*

How many people go to heaven? Jesus called them a "little flock." (Luke 12:32) They will finally number 144,000, and they will rule over the earth with Jesus.—*Read Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1.*



4. When did God's Kingdom start ruling?

Jesus became King in 1914.* Shortly afterward, he threw Satan and his demons down to the earth. (Revelation 12:7-10, 12) Since then, mankind's troubles have severely increased. Wars, earthquakes, famines, epidemics, and lawlessness are part of a sign that the present system of things is in its last days. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) All who want to benefit from God's Kingdom should learn how to become followers of the King, Jesus.—*Read Luke 21:7, 10, 11, 31, 34, 35.*

* For details of how Bible prophecy points to the year 1914, see pages 215-218 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

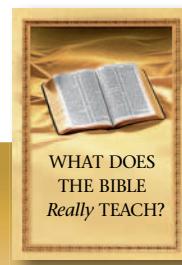


5. What does God's Kingdom accomplish?

By means of a global preaching work, God's Kingdom is already helping millions from all nations to learn God's ways. (Matthew 24:14) It will protect "a great crowd" of Jesus' loyal subjects when it destroys the present wicked system of things on earth.—*Read Revelation 7:9, 10, 13-17.*

During a period of 1,000 years, the Kingdom will gradually make the earth a paradise. Finally, Jesus will hand the Kingdom back to his Father. (1 Corinthians 15:24-26) Do you know someone whom you would like to tell about God's Kingdom?—*Read Psalm 37:10, 11, 29.*

For more information, see chapters 8 and 9 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.





IMITATE THEIR FAITH

He Took Comfort in His God

ELIJAH ran through the rain as the darkness deepened. He had a long way to go before he would reach Jezreel, and he was no young man.

Yet, he ran on tirelessly, for “the very hand of Jehovah” was upon him. The energy coursing through his body was surely unlike any he had ever known. Why, he had just out-paced the team of horses that was pulling King Ahab in his royal chariot!—1 Kings 18:46.

Now King Ahab was far behind him, and the open road lay before him. Imagine Elijah blinking the raindrops from his eyes as he ran, thinking back over the most eventful day of his life. Without question, it was a glorious victory for Elijah’s God, Jehovah, and for true worship. Far behind him now, lost in the gloom of the storm, lay the windswept heights of Mount Carmel, where Jehovah had used Elijah to strike a mighty and miraculous blow against Baal worship. Hundreds of Baal prophets were exposed as wicked frauds and justly executed. Then Elijah prayed to Jehovah for an end to the drought that had afflicted the land for three and a half years. The rains fell!*—1 Kings 18:18-45.

As Elijah splashed along those 19 miles (30 km) to Jezreel, it may have seemed to him that a real turning point had come at last. Ahab would have to change! After what he had witnessed, surely he had no choice but to abandon Baal worship, to restrain his queen, Jezebel, and to stop the persecution of Jehovah’s servants.

When things seem to be going our way, it is only natural that our hopes rise. We may

imagine that our lot in life will continue to improve, perhaps even thinking that our worst problems are finally behind us. If Elijah thought that way, no wonder, for he “was a man with feelings like ours.” (James 5:17) Actually, though, Elijah’s problems were far from over. In fact, within hours Elijah would be so fearful, so low in spirits, that he would wish to die. What happened? And how did Jehovah help his prophet to renew his faith and his courage? Let us see.

An Unexpected Turn of Events

When Ahab reached his palace in Jezreel, did he give any evidence of being a changed, more spiritual man? We read: “Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and all about how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.” (1 Kings 19:1) Notice that Ahab’s account of the day’s events left out Elijah’s God, Jehovah. A fleshly man, Ahab saw the day’s miraculous events in strictly human terms—what “Elijah had done.” Clearly, he had not learned to respect Jehovah God. And how did the vengeful Jezebel react?

She was furious! Livid with rage, she sent this message to Elijah: “So may the gods do, and so may they add to it, if at this time tomorrow I shall not make your soul like the

* See the “Imitate Their Faith” articles “He Stood Up for Pure Worship” and “He Watched, and He Waited” in the January 1 and April 1, 2008, issues of *The Watchtower*.

soul of each one of them!" (1 Kings 19:2) This was a death threat of the worst kind. In effect, Jezebel was vowing that she herself should die if she could not have Elijah killed within the day to avenge her Baal prophets. Imagine Elijah being awakened from sleep in some humble lodging in Jezreel on that stormy night—only to hear the queen's messenger deliver those awful words. How was he affected?

Overcome by Discouragement and Fear

If Elijah cherished any notions that the war against Baal worship was all but over, his hopes came crashing down at that moment.



Jezebel was undeterred. A great many of Elijah's faithful colleagues had already been executed on her orders, and now, it seemed, he was to be next. The Bible tells us: "He became afraid." Did Elijah picture in his mind's eye the terrible death that Jezebel had in store for him? If he dwelled on such thoughts, it is no wonder that his courage failed him. At any rate, Elijah "began to go for his soul"—he ran for his life.—1 Kings 18:4; 19:3.

Elijah was not the only man of faith ever to be overcome by fear. Much later, the apostle Peter had a similar problem. For instance, when Jesus enabled Peter to join Him in walking on water, the apostle began "looking at the windstorm." He then lost his courage and started to sink. (Matthew 14:30) The examples of Peter and Elijah thus teach us a valuable lesson. If we want to maintain our courage, we must not let our mind dwell on the dangers that frighten us. We need to keep our focus on the Source of our hope and strength.

"It Is Enough!"

Driven by fear, Elijah fled southwestward some 95 miles (150 km) to Beer-sheba, a town near the southern border of Judah. There he left his attendant behind and struck out into the wilderness alone. The record says that he went "a day's journey," so we may picture him starting off at sunrise, evidently carrying no provisions with him. Depressed, spurred ever onward by fear, he struggled over the rough and wild terrain under the blazing sun. As that glaring disk gradually reddened and sank to the horizon, Elijah's strength gave out. Exhausted, he sat down under a broom tree—the closest thing to shelter in that barren landscape.—1 Kings 19:4.

*Jehovah blessed Elijah mightily,
both in good times and in bad*

Elijah prayed in utter desperation. He asked to die. He said: "I am no better than my forefathers." He knew that his forefathers were then mere dust and bones in the grave, unable to do any good for anybody. (Ecclesiastes 9:10) Elijah felt just as worthless. No wonder he cried out: "It is enough!" Why go on living?

Should it be shocking to learn that a man of God could become so low in spirits? Not necessarily. A number of faithful men and women in the Bible record are described as feeling so sad that they wished for death —among them Rebekah, Jacob, Moses, and Job.—Genesis 25:22; 37:35; Numbers 11:13-15; Job 14:13.

Today, we live in "critical times hard to deal with," so it is not surprising that many people, even faithful servants of God, find themselves feeling low at times. (2 Timothy 3:1) If you ever find yourself in such a dire situation, follow Elijah's example in this respect: Pour out your feelings to God. After all, Jehovah is "the God of all comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:3) Did he comfort Elijah?

Jehovah Sustained His Prophet

How do you think Jehovah felt as he looked down from heaven and saw his beloved prophet lying under that tree in the wilderness and begging for death to take him? We do not have to guess. After Elijah sank into sleep, Jehovah sent an angel to him. The angel gently woke Elijah with a touch and said: "Rise up, eat." Elijah did so, for the angel had kindly set out a simple meal of fresh, warm bread and water for him. Did he even thank the angel? The record says only that the prophet ate and drank and went back to sleep. Was he too despondent to speak? At any rate, the angel woke him a second time, perhaps at dawn. Once more, he urged Elijah, "Rise up, eat," and he

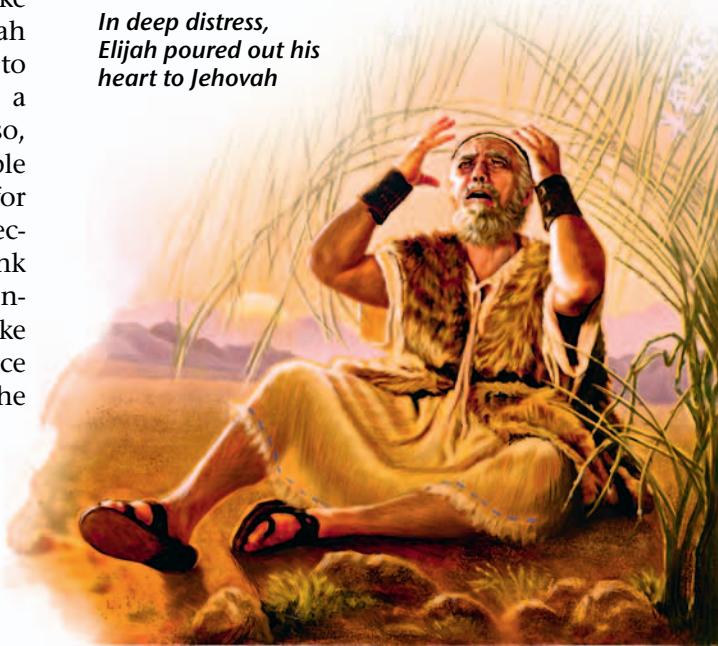
added these remarkable words, "for the journey is too much for you."—1 Kings 19:5-7.

Thanks to God-given insight, the angel knew where Elijah was headed. He also knew that the journey would be too much for Elijah to carry out in his own strength. What a comfort to serve a God who knows our goals and our limitations better than we do! (Psalm 103:13, 14) How did Elijah benefit from that meal?

We read: "He rose up and ate and drank, and he kept going in the power of that nourishment for forty days and forty nights as far as the mountain of the true God, Horeb." (1 Kings 19:8) Like Moses some six centuries before him and Jesus nearly ten centuries after him, Elijah fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. (Exodus 34:28; Luke 4:1, 2) That one meal did not make all his problems go away, but it sustained him in a miraculous way. Imagine that older man laboring through the trackless wilderness day after day, week after week, for nearly a month and a half!

Jehovah sustains his servants today as well, not with miraculous physical meals, but in a far more vital way. He provides for his servants spiritually. (Matthew 4:4) Learning about God from his Word and from publications that are carefully based on the Bi-

*In deep distress,
Elijah poured out his
heart to Jehovah*



Jehovah used his awesome power to comfort and encourage Elijah

ble sustains us spiritually. Taking in such spiritual nourishment may not make all our problems go away, but it can help us endure what might otherwise be unendurable. It also leads to “everlasting life.” —John 17:3.

Elijah walked nearly 200 miles (320 km) until he finally reached Mount Horeb, where Jehovah God through an angel had long before appeared to Moses in the burning thornbush and where Jehovah had later made the Law covenant with Israel. Elijah found shelter in a cave.

How Jehovah Comforted and Strengthened His Prophet

At Horeb, Jehovah’s “word”—evidently delivered by a spirit messenger—posed this simple question: “What is your business here, Elijah?” The question was likely spoken in a gentle way, for Elijah took it as an invitation to pour out his feelings. And pour them out he did! He said: “I have been absolutely jealous for Jehovah the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have left your covenant, your altars they have torn down, and your prophets they have killed with the sword, so that I only am left; and they begin looking for my soul to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:9, 10) Elijah’s words reveal at least three reasons for his low spirits.

First, Elijah felt that his work had been in vain. Despite years of being “absolutely jealous” in serving Jehovah, putting God’s sacred name and worship above all else, Elijah saw that conditions seemed only to have grown worse. The people were still faithless and rebellious, while false worship was run-



ning rampant. Second, Elijah felt alone. “I only am left,” he said, as if he were the last man in the nation who still served Jehovah. Third, Elijah was scared. Many of his fellow prophets had already been killed, and he was convinced that he was next. It may not have been easy for Elijah to admit to those feelings, but he did not let pride or embarrassment hold him back. By opening his heart to his God in prayer, he set a good example for all faithful people.—Psalm 62:8.

How did Jehovah address Elijah’s fears and concerns? The angel told Elijah to stand at the mouth of the cave. He obeyed, not knowing what was in store. A mighty wind sprang up! It must have emitted a deafening roar, for it was so powerful that it tore mountains and crags apart. Picture Elijah trying to shield his eyes while clinging to his heavy, rustic garment of hair as the gusts whipped it about him. Then he had to struggle to keep his footing, for the very earth began to heave

and toss—an earthquake shook the region! He had barely recovered when a great fire swept through, forcing him back into the cave to shield himself from the searing heat. —1 Kings 19:11, 12.

In each case, the account reminds us that Jehovah was not to be found within these spectacular displays of nature's power. Elijah knew that Jehovah was not some mythical nature god, such as Baal, who was hailed by his deluded worshippers as the "Rider of the Clouds," or bringer of rains. Jehovah is the real Source of all the awesome power found in nature, but he is also vastly greater than anything he has made. Even the physical heavens cannot contain him! (1 Kings 8:27) How, though, did all of this help Elijah? Remember his fear. With a God like Jehovah on his side, with all that overwhelming power at His disposal, Elijah had nothing to fear from Ahab and Jezebel!—Psalm 118:6.

After the fire was gone, a hush fell and Elijah heard "a calm, low voice." It invited Elijah to express himself again, and he did so, pouring out his concerns a second time.* Perhaps that brought him further relief. Undoubtedly, though, Elijah found even more comfort in what the "calm, low voice" told him next. Jehovah reassured Elijah that he was far from worthless. How so? God revealed much of his long-range purpose regarding the war against Baal worship in Israel. Clearly, Elijah's work had not been in vain, for God's purpose was moving inexorably forward. Furthermore, Elijah still figured in that purpose,

* The source of this "calm, low voice" may have been the same spirit who was used to deliver "Jehovah's word" mentioned at 1 Kings 19:9. In verse 15, this spirit is referred to simply as "Jehovah." We might be reminded of the spirit emissary whom Jehovah used to guide Israel in the wilderness and of whom God said: "My name is within him." (Exodus 23:21) We cannot be dogmatic on this point, of course, but it is worth noting that in his pre-human existence, Jesus served as "the Word," the special Spokesman to Jehovah's servants.—John 1:1.

for Jehovah sent him back to work with some specific instructions.—1 Kings 19:12-17.

What, though, about Elijah's feelings of loneliness? Jehovah did two things about that. First, he told Elijah to anoint Elisha as the prophet who would eventually succeed him. This younger man would become Elijah's companion and helper for a number of years. How practical that comfort was! Second, Jehovah revealed this thrilling news: "I have let seven thousand remain in Israel, all the knees that have not bent down to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18) Elijah was far from alone. It must have warmed his heart to hear of those thousands of faithful people who refused to worship Baal. They needed Elijah to keep up his faithful service, to set an example of unshakable loyalty to Jehovah in those dark times. Elijah must have been deeply touched to hear those words through Jehovah's messenger, the "calm, low voice" of his God.

Like Elijah, we may be awestruck by the immense natural forces evident in creation, and rightly so. Creation vividly reflects on the power of the Creator. (Romans 1:20) Jehovah still loves to use his limitless might to help his faithful servants. (2 Chronicles 16:9) However, God speaks most fully to us through the pages of his Word, the Bible. (Isaiah 30:21) In a sense, the Bible is like that "calm, low voice," whereby Jehovah guides us today, corrects us, encourages us, and reassures us of his love.

Did Elijah accept the comfort Jehovah gave him on Mount Horeb? Without a doubt! Soon he was back in action, once more the bold, faithful prophet who stood up against the wickedness of false worship. If we likewise take to heart the inspired words of God, "the comfort from the Scriptures," we will be able to imitate the faith of Elijah.—Romans 15:4.

OUR READERS ASK . . .

Does God value one race above others?

■ No, he does not. The Bible clearly states: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34, 35.

God’s viewpoint in this regard is much loftier than that of imperfect humans. Many people believe that one race (usually their own) is superior to others. Such bias reflects the thinking of Charles Darwin, who wrote: “At some future period, . . . the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races.” Sadly, many have indeed been victimized by those of other races who saw themselves as superior.

Do feelings of racial superiority have any merit? For example, has science proved that some races are genetically superior, while others are inferior? On the contrary, geneticist and Oxford professor Bryan Sykes states: “There’s no genetic basis for any kind of rigid ethnic or racial classification. . . . I’m always asked is there Greek DNA or an Italian gene, but, of course, there isn’t. . . . We’re very closely related.”

Such findings harmonize with what we read in the Scriptures. The Bible teaches that God created just one man and one woman, from whom all other humans descended. (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:26) In God’s eyes, then, there is really only one race—the human race.

Jehovah attaches no significance at all to a person’s skin color or facial features. Rather, He values something of far greater importance—our figurative heart, or the person we are inside. He states: “People judge others by what they look like, but I judge people by what is in their hearts.” (1 Samuel 16:7, *Contemporary English Version*) Remembering that fact can be of great encouragement to us. How so?



Regardless of our racial background, many of us are dissatisfied with aspects of our physical appearance, yet we have little power to change such things. However, we *can* improve what matters most—the thoughts and feelings of our heart. (Colossians 3:9-11) If we are honest with ourselves, we may realize that we are inclined to feel at least a little superior, or perhaps inferior, to people of another race. Since neither viewpoint is compatible with God’s thinking, we should work hard to remove any such feelings from our heart.—Psalm 139:23, 24.

As we strive to see ourselves and others the way Jehovah does, we can be sure of his help. His Word reminds us: “As regards Jehovah, his eyes are roving about through all the earth to show his strength in behalf of those whose heart is complete toward him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9) That is true no matter what race we happen to belong to.

Who Made the Laws That Govern Our Universe?

“**H**AVE you grasped the celestial laws?” (Job 38:33, *The New Jerusalem Bible*) In asking Job that question, God was helping His troubled servant to understand just how little humans really know in comparison with the limitless wisdom of the Creator. What do you think of that comparison?

Humans have learned a great deal about the laws that govern the physical heavens, but most scientists will readily admit that there is much yet to be learned. Again and again, new discoveries have led scientists to rethink their theories on the workings of the universe. Have new findings rendered God’s question to Job obsolete? Or does such progress actually furnish proof that Jehovah is the Author of the laws of the heavens?

The Bible contains fascinating statements that help to answer such questions. Granted, the Bible does not claim to be a science book. However, when it comments on the starry heavens, what it says is amazingly accurate and often far ahead of its time.

Some Historical Perspective

To provide some perspective, let us go to the fourth century B.C.E., about a century after the writing of the Old Testament—the Hebrew portion of the Bible—was completed. At that time, the Greek philosopher Aristotle was teaching the leading scholars of his day about the physical heavens. Today, he is still ranked among the most influential scientists who ever lived. (See the box on page 25.) According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Aristotle was the first genuine scientist in history. . . . Every scientist is in his debt.”

Aristotle carefully worked out a model for the cosmos. He proposed a system in which the earth was at the center of a universe made of over 50 crystalline spheres, one nestled inside the other. The stars were affixed to the outermost sphere, the planets to spheres nearer the earth. Everything beyond earth was eternal, changeless. Those ideas may sound fanciful to us today, but they influenced men of science for some 2,000 years.

How, though, do Aristotle’s teachings compare with those in the Bible? Which teachings have withstood the test of time? Let us consider three questions about the laws that govern our universe. The answers will help us build faith in the Author of the Bible, the Lawmaker behind “the statutes of the heavens.”—Job 38:33.

1. Is the Universe Rigid?

Aristotle reasoned that the celestial spheres were rigid. The one holding the stars in place, like the others, could neither shrink nor expand.

Does the Bible offer a similar conjecture? No; it states nothing dogmatically on this point. However, note the interesting word picture that it presents: “There is One who is dwelling above the circle of the earth, the

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dwellers in which are as grasshoppers, the One who is stretching out the heavens just as a fine gauze, who spreads them out like a tent in which to dwell.”—Isaiah 40:22.*

Which proves more fitting today—Aristotle’s model or the Bible’s imagery? How does modern cosmology view the universe? In the 20th century, astronomers were amazed to learn that the universe is anything but rigid. In fact, the galaxies appear to be moving rapidly away from one another. Few scientists, if any, had ever imagined such expansion of the universe. Today, cosmologists generally believe that the universe started out in a very compact state and has been expanding ever

* It is remarkable that the Bible calls the earth a circle, or sphere, as the Hebrew word may also be translated. Aristotle and other Greeks of ancient times theorized that the earth is spherical, but this question was still debated millennia later.

since. In effect, science has rendered Aristotle’s model obsolete.

What about the Bible’s words? It is not hard to imagine such a man as the prophet Isaiah looking at the starry sky draped elegantly overhead and finding that the image of a tent stretched out was remarkably apt.* He might even have noted the similarity between the Milky Way and the appearance of “fine gauze.”

Further, Isaiah’s words invite us to create mental pictures. We may imagine a tent of Bible times; perhaps we envision a relatively small bundle of sturdy fabric being opened, unfurled, and spread out before being raised up on poles and becoming a home. Similarly, we may imagine a merchant picking up a

* This metaphor is used repeatedly in the Bible.—Job 9:8; Psalm 104:2; Isaiah 42:5; 44:24; 51:13; Zechariah 12:1.

A Profound Influence

“Aristotle was the greatest philosopher and scientist of the ancient world.” So says the book *The 100—A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*. It is not hard to see why such statements are made about this unusual man. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) was a student of

the famous philosopher Plato and later tutored the prince who became Alexander the Great. According to ancient lists, Aristotle’s prodigious output included some 170 books, 47 of which have survived. He wrote extensively on astronomy, biology, chemistry, zoology, physics, geology, and psychology. Some of the minute details he recorded about

living things were not observed and studied again for centuries. “Aristotle’s influence upon all later Western thought has been immense,” notes *The 100*. It adds, however: “Admiration for Aristotle became so great that in late medieval times it approached idolatry.”



small bundle of fine gauze and stretching it out for a customer to inspect. In either case, something relatively compact is spread out and becomes larger to our eyes.

Of course, we are not saying that the Bible's poetic imagery of a tent and fine gauze is meant to explain the expansion of the physical universe. Is it not fascinating, though, that the Bible offers a description of the universe that fits in so well with modern science? Isaiah lived more than three centuries before Aristotle's day and thousands of years before science provided compelling evidence on this subject. Yet, the description penned by this humble Hebrew prophet does not need to be revised as does the ingenious model designed by Aristotle.

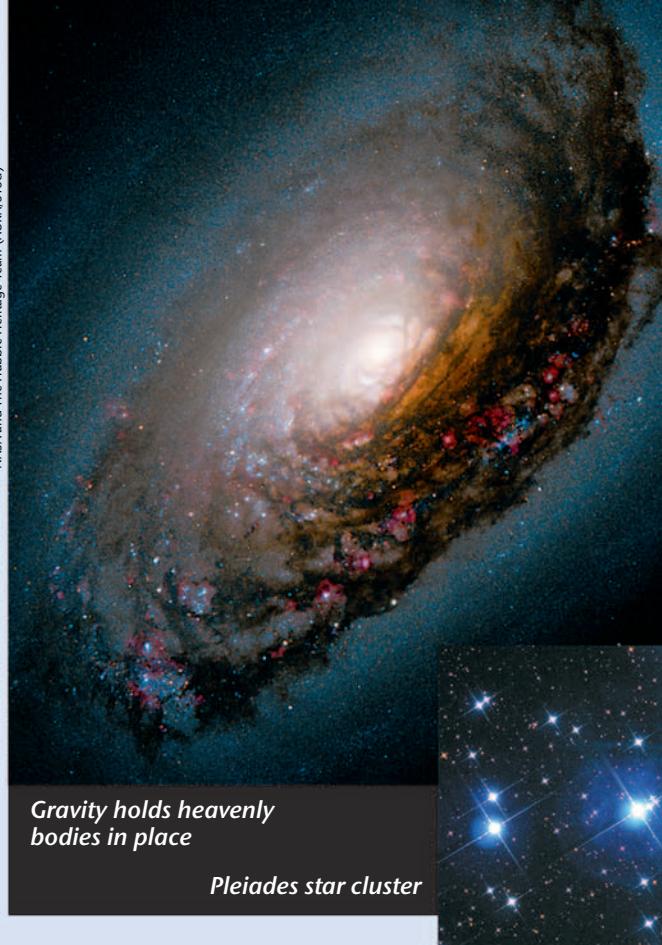
2. What Holds the Heavenly Bodies in Place?

To Aristotle, the universe was packed full. He saw the earth and its atmosphere as composed of four elements—earth, water, air, and fire. The universe beyond was filled with crystalline spheres, all composed of an eternal substance he called ether. The heavenly bodies were attached to the invisible spheres. Aristotle's idea long appealed to most men of science, for it seemed to fit a basic assumption: An object must rest on or be attached to something, or else it will fall.

What about the Bible? It contains a record of the words of a faithful man named Job, who said about Jehovah: "He is . . . hanging the earth upon nothing." (Job 26:7) Such a notion would surely have struck Aristotle as preposterous.

In the 17th century C.E., some 3,000 years after Job's day, prevailing scientific theory held that the universe was filled, not with crystalline spheres, but with a kind of fluid. Late in that century, though, physicist Sir Isaac Newton proposed a completely different idea. Gravity, he said, caused an attraction between the heavenly bodies. Newton

NASA and The Hubble Heritage Team (AURA/STScI)



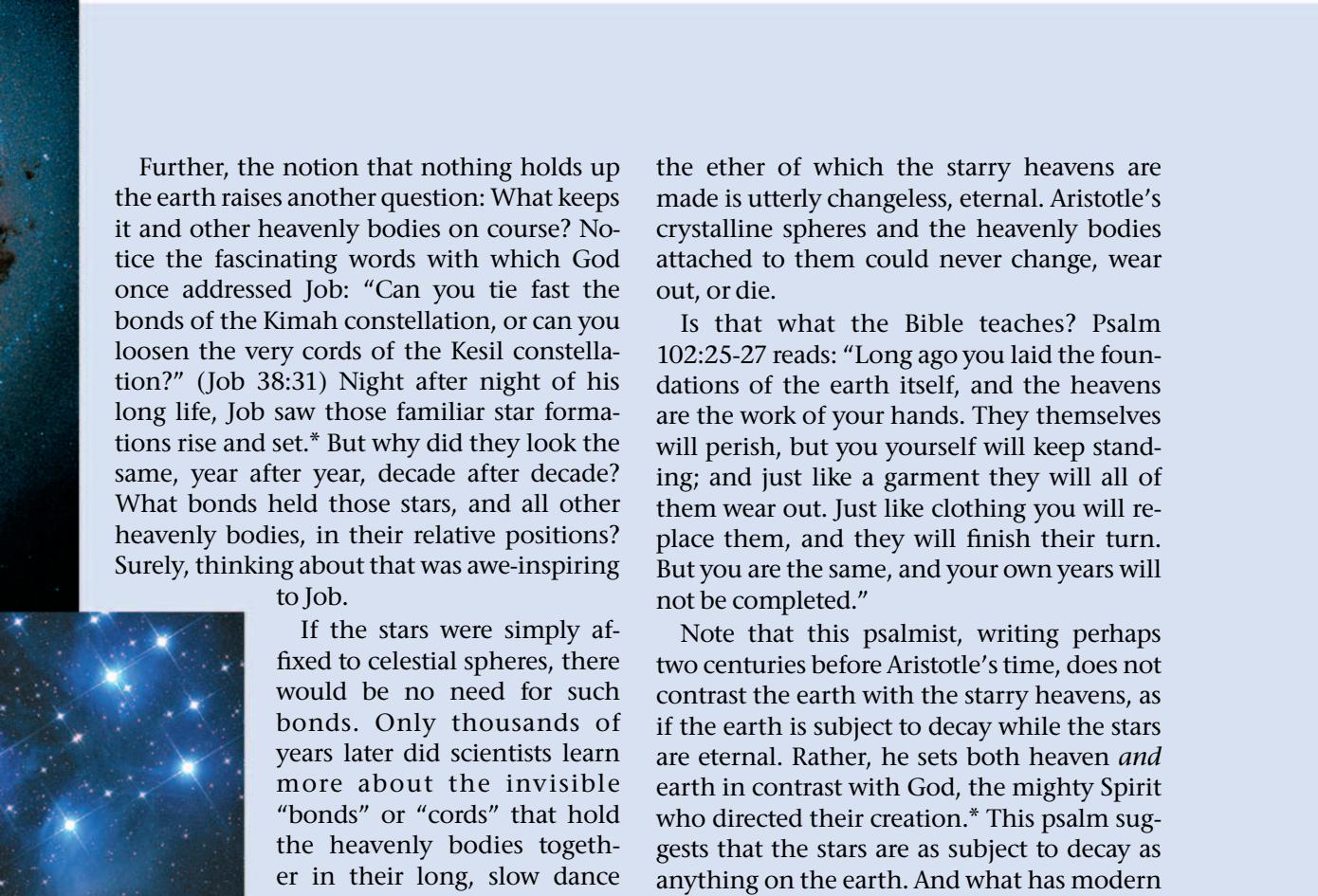
Gravity holds heavenly bodies in place

Pleiades star cluster

had come one step closer to understanding that the earth and other heavenly bodies did indeed hang in empty space, what would appear to humans as "nothing."

Newton's theory about gravity met with a great deal of opposition. It was still hard for many scientifically minded men to envision that stars and other heavenly bodies were not held in place by something substantial. How could our massive earth or the heavenly orbs simply hang there in space? The idea struck some as supernatural. Since Aristotle's day, most men of science had believed that space must be filled with *something*.

Of course, Job knew nothing of the invisible means by which the earth is held in a stable orbit around the sun. What, then, led him to say that our planet hangs "upon nothing"?



Further, the notion that nothing holds up the earth raises another question: What keeps it and other heavenly bodies on course? Notice the fascinating words with which God once addressed Job: “Can you tie fast the bonds of the Kimah constellation, or can you loosen the very cords of the Kesil constellation?” (Job 38:31) Night after night of his long life, Job saw those familiar star formations rise and set.* But why did they look the same, year after year, decade after decade? What bonds held those stars, and all other heavenly bodies, in their relative positions? Surely, thinking about that was awe-inspiring to Job.

If the stars were simply affixed to celestial spheres, there would be no need for such bonds. Only thousands of years later did scientists learn more about the invisible “bonds” or “cords” that hold the heavenly bodies together in their long, slow dance through the blackness of space. Isaac Newton and later Albert Einstein became famous for their discoveries in this field. Of course, Job knew nothing of the forces God uses to bind the heavenly bodies together. Yet, the inspired words in the book of Job have withstood the test of time far better than have the notions of the learned Aristotle. Who but the Lawmaker could have such insight?

3. Eternal or Subject to Decay?

Aristotle believed that there was an enormous distinction between the heavens and the earth. The earth, he said, is subject to change, decay, and deterioration, whereas

* “Kimah constellation” may have referred to the Pleiades star group. “Kesil constellation” was probably a reference to the Orion constellation. It takes tens of thousands of years for such star formations to change significantly.

the ether of which the starry heavens are made is utterly changeless, eternal. Aristotle’s crystalline spheres and the heavenly bodies attached to them could never change, wear out, or die.

Is that what the Bible teaches? Psalm 102:25-27 reads: “Long ago you laid the foundations of the earth itself, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They themselves will perish, but you yourself will keep standing; and just like a garment they will all of them wear out. Just like clothing you will replace them, and they will finish their turn. But you are the same, and your own years will not be completed.”

Note that this psalmist, writing perhaps two centuries before Aristotle’s time, does not contrast the earth with the starry heavens, as if the earth is subject to decay while the stars are eternal. Rather, he sets both heaven *and* earth in contrast with God, the mighty Spirit who directed their creation.* This psalm suggests that the stars are as subject to decay as anything on the earth. And what has modern science found?

The science of geology supports both the Bible and Aristotle in saying that the earth is subject to decay. In fact, the rocks of our earth are ever wearing down through erosion and being replenished through volcanic and other geologic activity.

What, though, about the stars? Are they naturally subject to decay, as the Bible suggests, or are they inherently eternal, as Aristotle taught? European astronomers began to doubt Aristotle’s notion of eternal stars in the 16th century C.E. when, for the first time, they observed a supernova, the spectacular explosion of a star. Scientists have since observed that stars may die violently in such

* Because Jehovah used his only-begotten spirit Son as the “master worker” to bring all things into existence, the words of this passage may also be applied to the Son.—Proverbs 8:30, 31; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:10.

explosions or burn out slowly or even collapse on themselves. However, astronomers have also observed new stars forming in ‘stellar nurseries,’ clouds of gas enriched by the explosions of old stars. Hence, the Bible writer’s image of clothing wearing out and being replaced is entirely appropriate.* How remarkable that this psalmist of ancient times managed to write words that harmonize so well with modern-day discoveries!

Still, you might wonder: ‘Does the Bible teach that the earth or the starry heavens as a whole will one day come to an end or need replacing?’ No, the Bible promises that they will last forever. (Psalm 104:5; 119:90) But that is not because such creations are eternal in themselves; rather, the God who created them promises to sustain them. (Psalm 148: 4-6) He does not say how, but does it not

* In the 19th century, scientist William Thomson, also known as Lord Kelvin, discovered the second law of thermodynamics, which explains why, over time, natural systems tend to decay and break down. One factor that inspired him to reach this conclusion was a careful study of Psalm 102:25-27.

stand to reason that the One who created the universe would have the power to sustain it? In a similar way, a master builder might lovingly maintain a house he built for himself and his family.

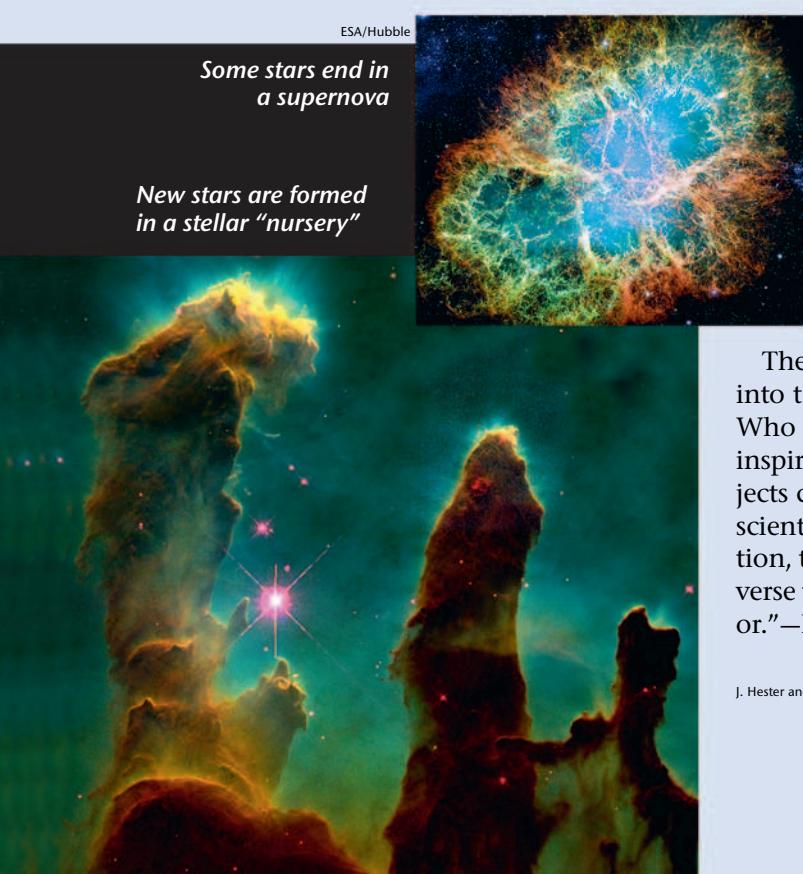
Who Should Get the Glory and the Honor?

Contemplating a few of the laws of the heavens sheds brilliant light on this question. When we consider who caused the innumerable stars to stretch out across the vastness of space, who holds them in place with the bonds of gravity, and who sustains them through their endless cycles, are we not filled with awe?

Perhaps the reasons for such awe are best expressed at Isaiah 40:26: “Raise your eyes high up and see. Who has created these things? It is the One who is bringing forth the army of them even by number, all of whom he calls even by name.” The stars are well likened to an army, which may comprise vast numbers of individual soldiers. Without

instructions from a commander, that army would be nothing but a mob in chaos. Without laws from Jehovah, the planets, stars, and galaxies would not follow orderly paths; all would be chaos. Instead, just picture an army of billions with a Commander who not only orders the movements of his troops but also knows by heart each soldier’s name, whereabouts, and condition!

The laws of the heavens give us a glimpse into the limitless mind of this Commander. Who else could have designed such laws and inspired men to write accurately on such subjects centuries and even millenniums before scientists understood them? Without question, then, we have all the reasons in the universe to give Jehovah “the glory and the honor.”—Revelation 4:11.





DID YOU KNOW?

How did Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day view the common people?



■ In the first century C.E., the social and religious hierarchy of Israel despised those who had little or no learning. The Pharisees are quoted as saying: "This crowd that does not know the Law are accursed people."—John 7:49.

Extra-Biblical sources show that the privileged classes contemptuously called the uneducated masses '*am ha'aretz*', or "people of the land." Originally, this was a term of respect for citizens of a specific territory. It embraced not only the poor and lowly but also the prominent.—Genesis 23:7, footnote; 2 Kings 23:35; Ezekiel 22:29.

By Jesus' day, however, the term was used to brand those who were considered ignorant of the Mosaic Law or

who failed to observe the minutiae of rabbinic traditions. The Mishnah (a collection of commentaries that became the foundation of the Talmud) warns against staying in the homes of '*am ha'aretz*'. According to *The Encyclopedia of Talmudic Sages*, second-century scholar Rabbi Meir taught: "When a man marries his daughter to an *am ha'aretz* it is as if he bound her and placed her in front of a lion who steps on his victim before devouring her." The Talmud quotes another rabbi as stating that "uneducated people will not be resurrected."

What is the significance of the name Caesar as used in the Bible?



SILVER DENARIUS WITH IMAGE OF TIBERIUS

■ Caesar was the Roman family name of Gaius Julius Caesar, who was appointed dictator of Rome in 46 B.C.E. Several subsequent Roman emperors laid claim to the name Caesar, including three mentioned by name in the Bible—Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius.—Luke 2:1; 3:1; Acts 11:28.

In 14 C.E., Tiberius became emperor and ruled for the entire period of Jesus' ministry. He thus was the Caesar in power when Jesus, in answering a question about paying taxes, said: "Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Mark 12:17) Evidently, Jesus did not intend for his response to be limited to Tiberius. Rather,

"Caesar" symbolized the civil authority, the State.

In about 58 C.E. when facing the threat of a miscarriage of justice, the apostle Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. (Acts 25:8-11) By so doing, Paul asked to be judged, not specifically by Nero, emperor at the time, but by the highest court of the empire.

The family name Caesar became so closely tied with sovereign rule that even after the end of the Caesarean dynasty, the name was retained as a regal title.



FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

How to Resist Temptation

JOSEPH—PART 1

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 characters. Let the account come to life.

Main characters: Joseph, Potiphar's wife

Summary: Joseph resists temptation to have sex with Potiphar's wife.

① ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ GENESIS 39:1-12.

Describe the grandeur of Potiphar's house as you imagine it.

How do you picture Joseph's appearance? (Clue: Reread verse 6.)

What emotions do you sense in Joseph's voice as he speaks to Potiphar's wife in verses 8 and 9?

② DIG DEEPER.

What might have made it tempting for Joseph to compromise his morals? (Clue: Read Philippians 2:12, and think about Joseph's circumstances. At the time, for example, where were Joseph's family members and fellow worshippers of Jehovah?)

Why, do you think, did Joseph feel that committing adultery would be a sin against God when, at the time, there was no law from God against adultery? (Clue: Read and reflect on the following scriptures: Genesis 2:24; 12:17, 18; Romans 2:14, 15; and Hebrews 5:14.)

③ APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED. WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT . . .

The connection between self-control and dignity.

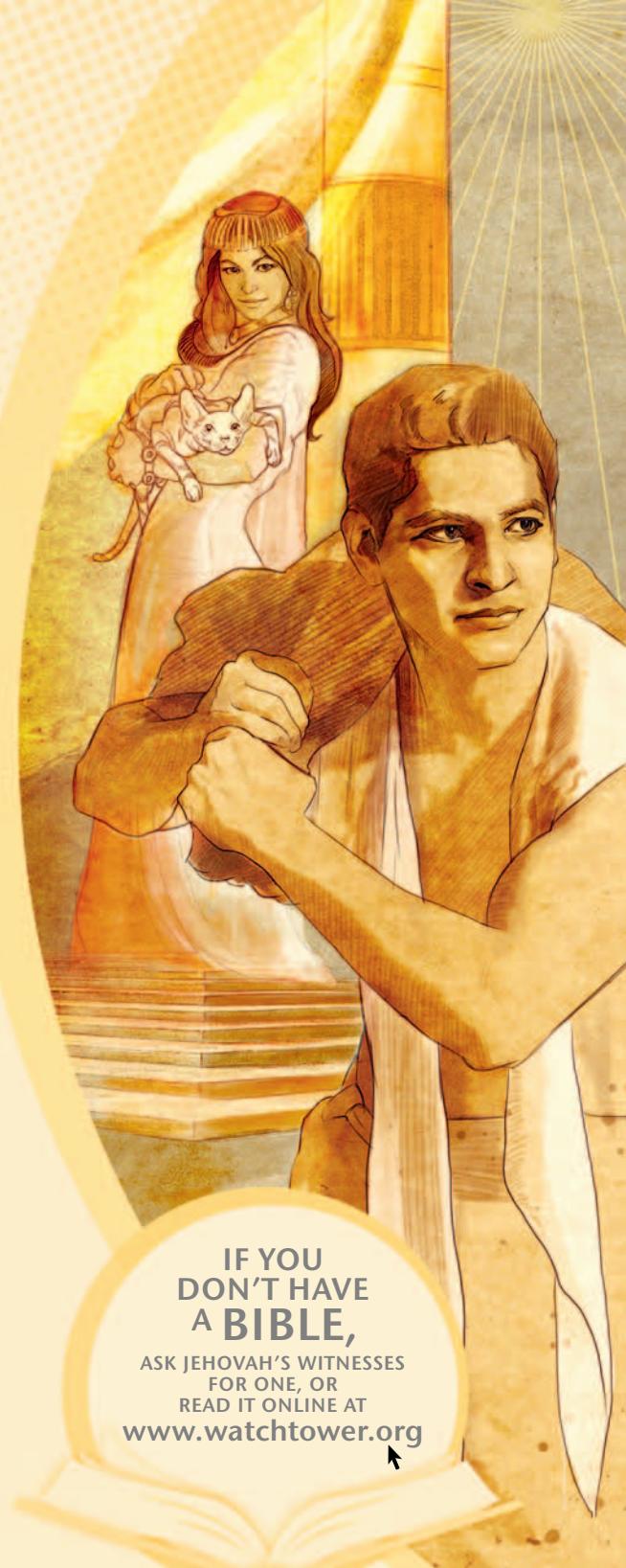
The benefits that come to those who adhere to God's moral standards.

The need to train your "perceptive powers." (Hebrews 5:14)

FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.

In what area(s) of life could you be more decisive when it comes to resisting sexual temptation? (Clue: Read and reflect on Job 31:1; Psalm 119:37; Ephesians 5:3, 4.)

④ WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY?



IF YOU
DON'T HAVE
A BIBLE,
ASK JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
FOR ONE, OR
READ IT ONLINE AT
www.watchtower.org



What was God's purpose in creating the earth? SEE PAGES 4-6.



Is it possible to fill your life with greater meaning? If so, how? SEE PAGES 7-9.



What is the Kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray?
SEE PAGES 16-17.



Is any one race superior to another?
SEE PAGE 23.

Would you welcome a visit?