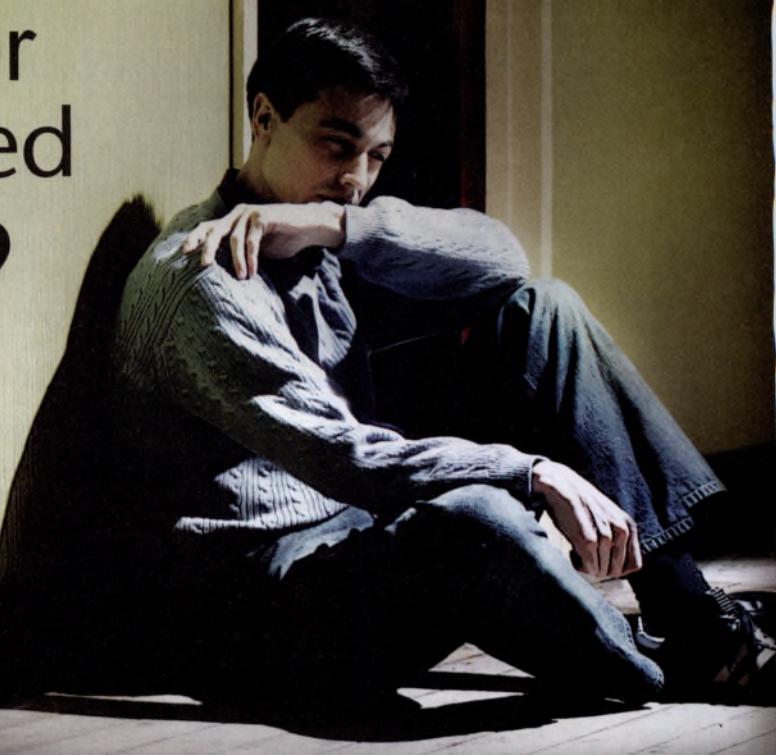


# THE WATCHTOWER

JUNE 1, 2010

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Whatever  
Happened  
to Sin?



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.

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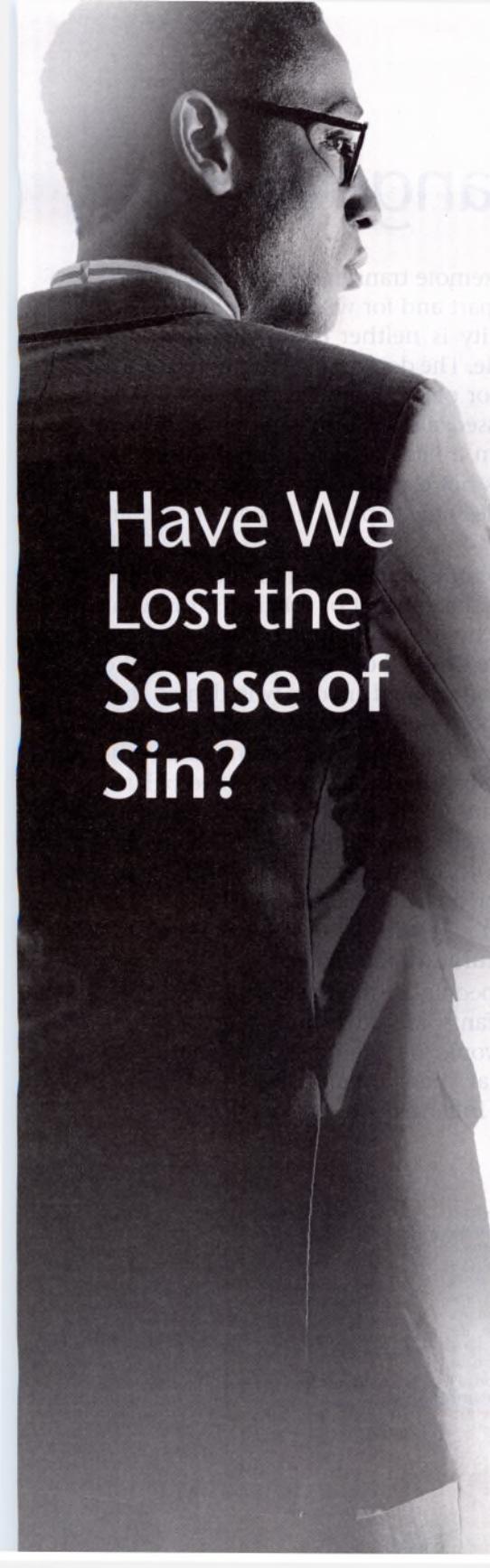


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# Have We Lost the Sense of Sin?

NOT all that long ago, churchgoers regularly heard their preacher thundering from the pulpit against what is termed the “seven deadly sins”—lust, gluttony, avarice, sloth, anger, envy, and pride. More often than not, the preacher would describe the dire consequences of sin and urge his listeners to repent. “Now,” says one writer, “most religious messages pass over the uncomfortable reality of sin to focus on ‘feel-good’ themes.”

Newspaper columnists have observed the same trend. Following are a few comments from the press:

- “The old categories of sin, repentance and redemption are out and the therapeutic language of self-esteem and self-love are in.”—*Star Beacon*, Ashtabula, Ohio.
- “The urgent sense of personal sin has all but disappeared.”—*Newsweek*.
- “We no longer ask ‘What does God require of me,’ but rather, ‘What can God do for me?’”—*Chicago Sun-Times*.

In today’s pluralistic and tolerant society, people hesitate to make moral judgments. Doing so is not politically correct, we are told. The greatest sin seems to be to judge another person’s actions. Thus, the thinking goes: ‘What you believe might work fine for you, but you really should not try to impose your thinking on anyone else. These days, people organize their life according to differing sets of values. No one has a monopoly on moral truth. Other people’s values are just as valid as yours.’

This kind of reasoning has brought about a change in people’s vocabulary. The word “sin” is now rarely used in serious contexts. For many, it has become a topic for jokes. People are no longer said to “live in sin”; they just “live together.” They are no longer “adulterers”; they are “having an affair.” They are no longer “homosexuals”; they prefer “an alternative lifestyle.”

There is no doubt that what people are prepared to accept as “normal” or condemn as “sin” has changed. But why have attitudes changed? Whatever became of sin? And does it really matter what your view is?

# Sin—What Has Changed?

**T**HE idea of Original Sin—that we are all implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity—does not sit well with the modern mind. But then neither does the idea of sin itself. . . . People like Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin may have sinned, but the rest of us are victims of circumstance and maladjustment.”

—*The Wall Street Journal.*

As the above quotation shows, the concept of sin appears to be in deep crisis today. But why? What has changed? As a matter of fact, what is this idea of sin that people today find so objectionable?

There are two aspects to the concept—Inherited sin and personal sinful behavior. The first is something we possess, whether we like it or not, while the second is something we practice. Let us take a closer look at each aspect.

## Tainted by Original Sin?

The Bible states that a moral failing—the original sin—on the part of our first parents was passed on to all humanity. Consequently, all of us are born with a stain of imperfection. “All unrighteousness is sin,” says the Bible.—1 John 5:17.

For many churchgoers, however, the idea that all humans are innately flawed because

of some remote transgression in which they took no part and for which they bear no responsibility is neither comprehensible nor acceptable. The doctrine, says Edward Oakes, a professor of theology, “is met with either embarrassed silence, outright denial, or at a minimum a kind of halfhearted lip service that does not exactly deny the doctrine but has no idea how to place it inside the devout life.”

One factor that makes it difficult for people to accept the concept of original sin is what the churches have taught about it. For example, at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the church condemned anyone who denied that the newborn need to be baptized for the remission of their sins. If an infant died without being baptized, declared the theologians, its uncleansed sins would forever bar it from the presence of God in heaven. Calvin went so far as to teach that infants ‘bring with them their own damnation from their mother’s womb.’ Their natures, he maintained, are ‘hateful and abominable to God.’

Most people instinctively feel that newborn infants are such innocent creatures that it would be against human nature to think that these infants should suffer because of inherited sin. It is easy to see why



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in flocks; insensate over all the earth, who if left  
to itself, brought a curse upon the world.

### Many today view the account of Adam and Eve as a myth



such church teachings have driven people away from the doctrine of original sin. In fact, some church leaders could not bring themselves to condemn an unbaptized infant to hellfire. For them, its final destiny remained something of a theological dilemma. Although it never became church dogma, the traditional Catholic teaching for centuries was that the souls of unbaptized innocents would dwell in the no-man's-land of Limbo.\*

Another factor that contributed to the weakening of belief in original sin was that philosophers, scientists, and theologians in the 19th century began to question whether accounts in the Bible should be accepted as historically true. For many people, Darwin's theory of evolution has relegated the story of Adam and Eve to the realm of myth. The result of all of this is that many now consider the Bible to be more a reflection of the mentality and traditions of the writers than a divine revelation.

Where does this leave the doctrine of original sin? Obviously, if churchgoers are persuaded that Adam and Eve never existed as

\* It is perhaps a reflection of the perplexity that this unscriptural doctrine aroused that Limbo has been eliminated from the most recent Catholic catechisms. See the box "A Theological U-Turn," on page 10.

real people, the logical conclusion is that no original sin was ever committed. Even for those who are willing to admit that humanity is basically flawed, the concept of original sin is reduced to little more than an explanation of mankind's imperfect nature.

So much for original sin. What, now, of the idea that personal sins—as distinct from inherited sin—also offend God?

### Is This Really Sinful?

When questioned about personal sins, many think of the Ten Commandments—prohibitions against murder, infidelity, lust, premarital sex, stealing, and so on. The traditional teaching of the churches was that any who died without repenting of such sins would undergo the everlasting torments of hellfire.\*

For someone to be spared such a destiny, the Catholic Church requires that sins be confessed to a priest, who they claim has the power to absolve them. However, for most Catholics, the rite of confession, absolution, and penance has become a thing of the past. A recent survey reveals, for example, that

\* The belief of eternal torment in a fiery hell finds no support in the Bible. For details, see chapter 6, "Where Are the Dead?", in the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

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more than 60 percent of Italian Catholics no longer go to confession.

It is clear that the traditional concept of personal sin and its consequences—as explained by the churches—has failed to help people to overcome the practice of sin. Many churchgoers no longer believe that all these things are wrong. Some reason, for instance,

## Sin? “We’ve Outgrown That”

- “One of the greatest obstacles of the church today is this very issue. We no longer see ourselves as ‘sinners’ in need of forgiveness. Maybe sin used to be a problem, but now we’ve outgrown that. So while the church has a solution for the problem of sin, it’s a non-problem in the eyes of most Americans—at least not a serious problem.”—John A. Studebaker, Jr., religion writer.
- “People say: ‘I have high moral expectations of myself and others, but I know we are all human so I’m looking for a batting average.’ We find a comfort zone of morality, a kind of middle-class middle level where we think we are doing well. We cut the grass. We don’t double-park. But we ignore the larger issues of sin.”—Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- “The culture celebrates what once it sanctioned [such as the so-called seven deadly sins]: parents encourage pride as essential to self-esteem; a group of self-rising French chefs has petitioned the Vatican that being a gourmand is no sin. Envy is the engine of tabloid culture. Lust is an advertising strategy; anger, the righteous province of the aggrieved. Most days I’d give anything for some sloth.”—Nancy Gibbs, in *Time* magazine.

that if two adults have consensual sexual relations and no third party is injured, what is the harm?

One possible explanation for this kind of reasoning is that deep down the individuals involved are not convinced of what they have been taught about sin. Indeed, many find it hard to believe that a loving God would torment sinners forever in hellfire. And perhaps such skepticism explains, at least in part, why “sin” appears to have lost much of its seriousness. But other factors have also contributed to the loss of the sense of sin.

### Rejection of Traditional Values

The events of the last few centuries have wrought tremendous changes in society and in people’s mentality. The two world wars, countless minor wars, and various genocides have left many questioning the worth of traditional values. ‘Does it make sense in a technologically advanced age to live by standards codified centuries ago and completely out of touch with modern realities?’ they ask. Many rationalists and moralists have concluded that it does not. They believe that society needs to shake off certain moral fetters and superstitions and reach out to attain mankind’s tremendous potential through education.

This thinking has given rise to an extremely secular culture. In many European lands, few people go to church. An increasing number believe in nothing in particular, and many are openly hostile to the creeds of churches, which they consider absurd. If humans are simply the product of their environment and of natural selection, they reason, what need is there to talk about culpability for moral transgressions?

A general relaxing of morals in the Western world in the 20th century has led to, among other things, the so-called sexual revolution. Student protests, countercultural



## A feel-good religious culture produces bad fruits

movements, and medically prescribed contraceptives have all played their part in the rejection of traditional ideas of propriety. Soon, Biblical values were upended. A new generation subscribed to a new morality and a new attitude toward sin. From then on, says one writer, "the only law was the law of love"—which basically found expression in the widespread acceptance of illicit sex.

### A Feel-Good Religious Culture

Commenting on the situation in the United States, *Newsweek* magazine candidly stated: "Many clergy, who are competing in a buyer's market, feel they cannot afford to alienate." They fear that if they make great moral demands on their hearers, they will lose them as parishioners. People do not want to hear that they should cultivate humility, self-discipline, and virtue or that they should heed their nagging conscience and repent of their sins. Hence, many churches are adopting what the *Chicago Sun-Times* called "a therapeutic, utilitarian, even narcissistic 'all about me' Christian message [and] leaving the gospel behind."

The outgrowth of this type of thinking is a religious culture that defines God in its own terms, churches whose focus is, not on God and what he requires of us, but on man and what will increase his self-esteem. The sole aim is to cater to the needs of the congregation. The fruit is religion emptied of doctrine. "What fills the hole at the center, where the

Christian moral code used to be?" asks *The Wall Street Journal*. "An ethic of conspicuous compassion, where 'being a nice person' excuses everything."

Logically, the harvest from all of this is the attitude that any religion with a feel-good effect is just fine. Anyone adopting such a view, observes *The Wall Street Journal*, "can embrace any faith, so long as it makes no real moral demands—consoles but does not judge." And the churches, in turn, are willing to accept people "exactly for who they are," without making any moral demands on them.

The foregoing may remind Bible readers of a prophecy penned by the apostle Paul in the first century C.E. He said: "There will be a period of time when they will not put up with the healthful teaching, but, in accord with their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled; and they will turn their ears away from the truth."—2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

When religious leaders excuse sin, deny its existence, and 'tickle' the ears of their congregants by telling them what they want to hear instead of what the Bible says, they are doing people a grave disservice. Such a message is false and dangerous. It represents a travesty of one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity. Sin and forgiveness occupy a central position in the good news taught by Jesus and his apostles. To see how this is the case, you are invited to read on.

# The Truth About Sin

COULD a sick man prove that he has no fever by breaking the thermometer? Of course not! Similarly, just because many reject God's view of sin, it does not mean that sin does not exist. His Word, the Bible, has much to say on the subject. Exactly what does it teach about sin?

## All Fall Short

Some two thousand years ago, the apostle Paul expressed frustration over the fact that 'the good that he wished he did not do, but the bad that he did not wish was what he practiced.' (Romans 7:19) If we are honest, we have to admit that our personal situation is similar. Perhaps we desire to live by the Ten Commandments or by some other standard of conduct, but like it or not, we all fall short. It is not that we deliberately choose to violate a norm, but we are simply weak. What is the explanation? Paul himself gives the answer: "If, now, what I do not wish is what I do, the one working it out is no longer I, but the sin dwelling in me."—Romans 7:20.

Like Paul, all humanity is afflicted by innate weaknesses—evidence of inherent sin and imperfection. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," said the apostle. What is the cause of this condition? Paul continues: "Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned."—Romans 3:23; 5:12.

Although many reject the idea that transgression on the part of our first parents alienated us from God and caused us to lose original perfection, this is, indeed, what the Bible teaches. Jesus, by quoting from the first chap-

ters of Genesis as authority, showed that he believed in the account of Adam and Eve.—Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 5:2; Matthew 19:1-5.

One of the pillars of the Bible's message is that Jesus came to earth to redeem from their sinful condition those exercising faith in him. (John 3:16) Our future life prospects depend on our accepting Jehovah's means of rescuing appreciative mankind from a predicament over which they have no control. But if we do not have a clear grasp of what sin is from God's viewpoint, we cannot appreciate the means that he has established to save us from it.

## Jesus' Sacrifice and Why It Was Needed

Jehovah gave the first man the prospect of living forever. Only if he rebelled against God would Adam lose that marvelous prospect. Adam did rebel, and when he did, he became a sinner. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6) Adam acted in a way that was contrary to God's will, fell short of perfection, and marred his relationship with God. When he committed sin by breaking divine law, he began to die. Sadly, all of Adam's descendants—including us—were born in sin, and we are destined to die because of it. Why?

The reason is quite simple. Imperfect parents cannot produce perfect children. All of Adam's offspring were born sinners, and as the apostle Paul notes, "the wages sin pays is death." (Romans 6:23) The second half of that verse, though, gives us hope: "But the gift God gives is everlasting life by Christ Jesus our Lord." That is to say, by means of the sacrificial death of Jesus, it is possible

for obedient, appreciative mankind to be cleansed of the effects of the sin that Adam committed.\* (Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18, 19) How should that make you feel?

### Christ's Love "Compels Us"

The inspired apostle Paul gave God's answer to the above question. He wrote: "The love the Christ has compels us, because this is what we have judged, that one man died for all; . . . and he died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised up." (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15) If a person appreciates that Jesus' sacrifice can potentially free him from the effects of sin—and he desires to show gratitude for that provision—he should strive to live his life in accord with God's wishes for him. This includes acquiring an understanding of what God requires, training his conscience according to Bible standards, and then living his life in harmony with them.—John 17:3, 17.

Wrongdoing damages our relationship with Jehovah God. When King David recognized the seriousness of his adultery with Bath-sheba and the murder of her husband, he no doubt felt great shame. But what concerned him most—and rightly so—was that his sins had offended God. He contritely admitted to Jehovah: "Against you, you alone, I have sinned, and what is bad in your eyes I have done." (Psalm 51:4) Likewise, when Joseph was tempted to commit adultery, his conscience caused him to ask: "How could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?"—Genesis 39:9.

Sin, then, is not just a question of feeling

\* For a full explanation of how Jesus' sacrificial death has the power to save obedient mankind, see *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* pages 47 to 54, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



*Living in accord with God's Word results in a healthy relationship with God and men*



bad about ourselves because we may have lost face. It is not just a case of having to answer to public opinion or to society because we may have fallen short of some ideal. Violating God's laws on sex, honesty, respect, worship, and so on, damages our personal relationship with him. If we deliberately

practice sin, we are making ourselves God's enemies. This is a truth that demands sober reflection.—1 John 3:4, 8.

So whatever happened to sin? The fact is that nothing happened to it. People just began calling it by other names in hopes that it would appear less serious than it is. Many either dulled or ignored their conscience. All who desire God's favor must resist such a tendency. As we have seen, the wages of sin

is, not just a bruised ego or embarrassment, but death. Sin is a matter of life and death.

The good news is that forgiveness through the redeeming value of Jesus' sacrifice is possible if we sincerely repent of our sins and leave them. "Happy are those whose lawless deeds have been pardoned and whose sins have been covered," wrote Paul. "Happy is the man whose sin Jehovah will by no means take into account."—Romans 4:7, 8.

## A Theological U-Turn

For the majority of Catholic churchgoers, the idea of Limbo has always been somewhat foggy. In recent decades, it has been gradually fading away—to the point that the notion no longer appears in catechisms. In 2007, the Catholic Church officially signed Limbo's "death certificate" in a document mentioning "theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved and brought into eternal happiness."—International Theological Commission.

Why this change of position, this theological U-turn? Basically, it allowed the church to free itself from what French columnist Henri Tincq called "a burdensome inheritance, defended, from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, by a manipulative Church, only too happy to use the threat of Limbo to incite parents to baptize their children as quickly as possible." But the demise of Limbo also raises other issues.

**Tradition or Scripture?** Historically, belief in Limbo resulted from 12th-century theological debates relative to purgatory. The Catholic Church taught that the soul survives after death, so it had to find a place for the souls of children who could not go to heaven because they were not baptized but



who nonetheless were not deserving of hell. Thus was born the idea of Limbo.

The Bible, however, does not teach that the soul survives after death. Instead, it clearly states that rather than being immortal, human souls who sin can be "destroyed" and "shall die." (Acts 3:23; Ezekiel 18:4, *Douay-Rheims Version*) Since the soul is mortal, such a place as Limbo cannot exist. Moreover, the Bible speaks of death as being a state of unconsciousness, similar to sleep.—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; John 11:11-14.

The Bible indicates that God considers holy the young children of Christian parents. (1 Corinthians 7:14) Such a statement would be pointless if the baptism of infants were necessary for their salvation.

The teaching of Limbo was truly an insult to God, depicting him as a cruel tyrant who punishes the innocent, rather than the just and loving Father that he is. (Deuteronomy 32:4; Matthew 5:45; 1 John 4:8) No wonder, then, that this unscriptural teaching has always run counter to the common sense of sincere Christians!



"Adjust your accident report a bit, and everything will be fine."



"The tax authorities don't have to know everything."



"The main thing is not to get caught."



"Why pay when you can get it free?"

## Is It Really Dishonest?

**Y**OU may hear expressions like these if you ask for advice on financial matters. Some people seem to have clever "solutions" for everything. The question is, Are those solutions truly honest?

Dishonesty is so widespread today that people often view lying, cheating, and stealing as acceptable ways to avoid punishment, to make money, or to move ahead. Prominent members of society often set a poor example regarding honesty. In one European country, cases of fraud and embezzlement grew by over 85 percent from 2005 to 2006. And that did not include many minor cases of dishonesty, which some people call peccadilloes, or "little sins." Perhaps it was not so surprising that leading business and political figures in that country were involved in a scandal in which they were found to have used forged diplomas to advance their careers.

Despite the world's pervasive dishonesty, however, many people want to do what is right. Likely you are one of them. Perhaps because you love God, you want to do what is right in his eyes. (1 John 5:3) You may feel as did the apostle Paul, who wrote: "We trust we

have an honest conscience, as we wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things." (Hebrews 13:18) For that reason, we invite you to look at some situations that can test a person's desire to conduct himself "honestly in all things." We will also consider Bible principles that can be helpful in such circumstances.

### Who Should Pay for an Accident?

While driving one day, a young woman named Lisa\* makes a mistake and collides with another car. Nobody is injured, but there is damage to both vehicles. In her country, young drivers pay high premiums for car insurance, and those premiums go up after each accident. Since Lisa's older cousin Gregor is with her, a friend suggests that they report that Gregor was driving her car. In that way, Lisa can avoid higher insurance costs. The solution seems prudent. What should she do?

Insurance companies use the premiums paid by their policyholders to settle claims. Hence, by following her friend's suggestion, Lisa would in essence be forcing other

\* Some names have been changed.



policyholders to pay for her accident through higher insurance rates. She would not only be making a false report but also be stealing from others. The same would be true of making false statements to increase an insurance settlement.

Legal penalties may be a strong deterrent to such a dishonest act. But a more important reason to avoid being dishonest is found in God's Word. "You must not steal," states one of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:15) The apostle Paul reiterated that command for Christians, saying: "Let the stealer steal no more." (Ephesians 4:28) By obeying God's Word in such insurance matters, you avoid doing something that God condemns. You also demonstrate your love and respect for God's law and for your neighbors.—Psalm 119:97.

*Photo by iStockphoto.com*

**"Render to all their dues, to him who calls for the tax, the tax."**  
**To gain God's approval, we pay all taxes required by law**

### **"Let the stealer steal no more."**

Respect for God's law and love of neighbor move us to be honest in insurance matters

### **"Caesar's Things to Caesar"**

Peter is a businessman. His accountant suggests that he claim a tax deduction for the "purchase" of expensive computer equipment. Such a purchase is normal for a business like Peter's. Although Peter never made the purchase, the government would not likely investigate such an expense. That deduction would save Peter a considerable sum on his tax payments. What should he do? What could guide him in making his decision?

The apostle Paul told Christians in his day: "Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities . . . Render to all their dues, to him who calls for the tax, the tax; to him who calls for the tribute, the tribute." (Romans 13: 1, 7) Those who desire to gain God's approval pay all taxes that the authorities require of



them. On the other hand, if the law of the land grants reduced tax rates to certain individuals or businesses, there is nothing wrong with claiming such benefits if legally qualified to do so.

Here is another situation that involves the paying of taxes. David is employed as a carpenter at a local company. But his friends and neighbors ask him to make cabinets and furniture for their homes, and he does so after hours. They offer him higher pay than he is earning at his regular job, but they expect him to work without an invoice. Thus no one keeps a record of the work done, and no one pays taxes. Many people feel that this is fine, since everyone benefits from this arrangement. Because David is interested in pleasing God, how should he view work that is done off the books?

Although a person working in such a way may not get caught, he is not paying the taxes that the government has a right to collect. Jesus commanded: "Pay back, therefore, Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Matthew 22:17-21) Jesus said this to correct his listeners' thinking regarding the payment of taxes. Governmental authorities, whom Jesus called Caesar, consider tax payments their rightful due. Hence, followers of Christ view the paying of all taxes as their Scriptural obligation.

### Cheating on Exams

A high school student named Marta is getting ready for her final exams. Because her prospects for a decent job depend on her receiving high marks, she has spent hours studying. Some of her classmates have also prepared—but in a different way. They will be using pagers, preprogrammed calculators, and cell phones to cheat in order to achieve high grades. Should Marta do what "everybody" is doing to make sure that she gets good grades?



**"All things are . . . openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting."**

**Though teachers may not catch us cheating, we want to be honest before God**

Because cheating is so commonplace, many feel that there is nothing wrong with it. "The main thing is not to get caught," they reason. That reasoning, however, is unacceptable to true Christians. Although a teacher may not notice those who cheat, there is someone who does. Jehovah God knows what we do and will call us to account for our actions. Paul wrote: "There is not a creation that is not manifest to his sight, but all things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting." (Hebrews 4:13) Knowing that God is watching because he is interested in our doing what is right is strong motivation to be honest when we take a test, is it not?

### What Will You Do?

Lisa, Gregor, Peter, David, and Marta saw the seriousness of the circumstances they faced. They decided to act honestly and thus maintained a clear conscience and their

moral integrity. What will you do when faced with similar circumstances?

Your colleagues, classmates, and neighbors may have no qualms about lying, cheating, or stealing. In fact, they may use ridicule to try to force you to act in the same way as they do. What can help you to make the right decision despite the pressure to act dishonestly?

Remember, acting in harmony with God's will results in our having a clean conscience

as well as God's approval and favor. King David wrote: "O Jehovah, who will be a guest in your tent? Who will reside in your holy mountain? He who is walking faultlessly and practicing righteousness and speaking the truth in his heart. . . . He that is doing these things will never be made to totter." (Psalm 15:1-5) A clean conscience and friendship with the God of heaven are worth more than any material advantage gained through dishonesty.

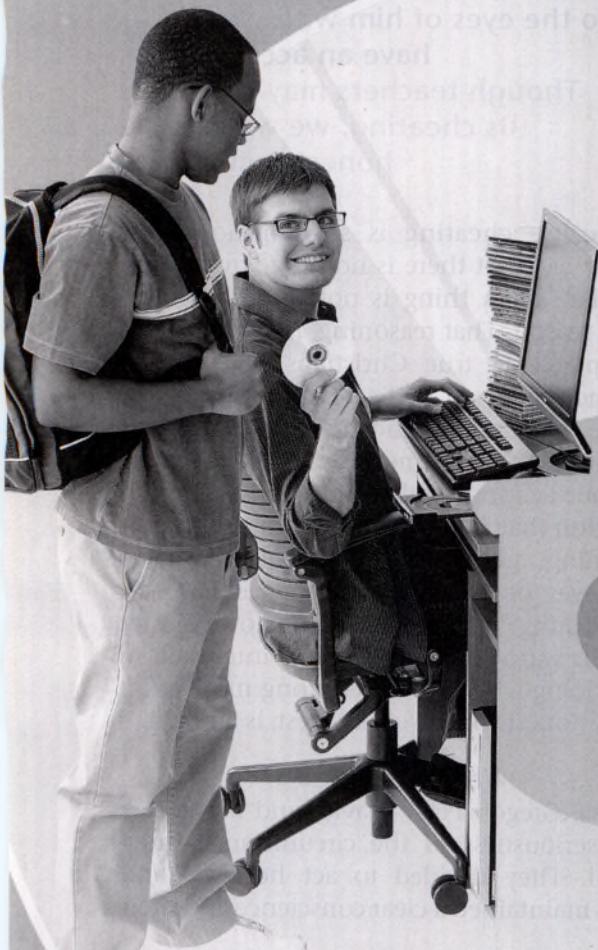
## Theft That Is "Invisible"

Your friend has purchased the latest edition of a computer program, and you would like to have it. He offers to save you money by making you a copy of the software. Is that dishonest?

When users buy computer software, they agree to abide by the limits spelled out in the licensing agreement for that program. The license may allow the purchaser to install and use the program on only one computer. In that case, copying the software for someone else breaks the licensing agreement and is illegal. (Romans 13:4) Such copying is also stealing, for it deprives the copyright holder of income that he has a right to receive.—Ephesians 4:28.

Some may reason, 'No one will ever know.' Be that as it may, we should remember Jesus' words: "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them." (Matthew 7:12) All of us appreciate fair payment for our work and desire that others treat our property with respect. We should, therefore, extend the same consideration to others. We avoid "invisible" thievery, such as taking intellectual property\* that does not belong to us.—Exodus 22:7-9.

\* Intellectual property includes such copyrighted material as music, books, or software, whether it is printed on paper or stored electronically. Trademarks, patents, trade secrets, and publicity rights also fall into this category.



# DID YOU KNOW?

## What was the city gate so often mentioned in Bible accounts?



ABRAHAM AT THE CITY GATE, SEEKING TO BUY LAND

■ In Bible times, most cities were surrounded by protective walls. Inside many gates, there were open areas where people gathered to meet others, to trade, and to share news. Here public announcements were made, and here prophets might pronounce their messages. (Jeremiah 17:19, 20) The publication *The Land and the Book* says that “nearly every public transaction took place at or near the city gates.” In ancient Israel, the city gates were much like the community centers of modern-day towns.

Abraham, for example, purchased

property for a family burial site from Ephron “before the eyes of the sons of Heth among all those entering the gate of his city.” (Genesis 23:7-18) And Boaz asked ten elders of Bethlehem to sit at the city gate while, in their presence, he made arrangements for Ruth and her deceased husband’s inheritance, in compliance with the law regarding levirate marriage. (Ruth 4:1, 2) When the older men of a city acted as judges, they would sit at the city gate to hear cases, render decisions, and execute judgments.—Deuteronomy 21:19.

## Where was Ophir, which the Bible refers to as a source of gold of superior quality?

■ The book of Job first mentions “gold of Ophir” and equates it with “pure gold.” (Job 28:15, 16) About 600 years after Job’s day, King David collected “gold of Ophir” for the construction of Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem. His son Solomon likewise imported gold from Ophir.—1 Chronicles 29:3, 4; 1 Kings 9:28.

According to the Scriptures, Solomon had a fleet of ships constructed in Ezion-geber, on the Red Sea, that brought gold from Ophir. (1 Kings 9:26) Scholars locate Ezion-geber at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba in the general area of present-day Elat and Aqaba. From there, ships could reach any part of the Red Sea or more distant trading posts on the African or Indian coasts, possible locations of Ophir. Others be-

lieved, however, that Ophir lay in Arabia, where ancient gold mines have been found and deposits have been exploited even in modern times.

As to whether Solomon’s gold mines were merely legendary, as some would have it, Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen writes: “Ophir itself is no myth. A Hebrew ostracaon [or, earthenware fragment] of perhaps the eighth century [B.C.E.] is clearly inscribed with the brief note of account: ‘Gold of Ophir for Beth-Horon—30 shekels.’ Ophir here is a real source of gold, just as with ‘Gold of ‘Amau,’ or ‘Gold of Punt’ or ‘Gold of Kush’ in Egyptian texts—gold in each case, either derived from the land named or from that land’s type or quality.”



HEBREW OSTRACON WITH INSCRIPTION NAMING OPHIR

Collection of Israel Antiquities Authority, Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem



## A LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

# "Why Would Anyone Stop Here?"

**H**IGH RISK AREA—ROBBERY AND PROSTITUTION," warns the sign alongside the narrow country road. We pull off the road and into the dust to join a few other cars waiting under a prominent billboard that points the way to a luxury resort and casino complex farther down the road. Expensive cars speed by, and we cannot help but notice the puzzled glances out of the car windows. 'Why would anyone stop *here*?' those puzzled expressions seem to say.

As our car comes to a halt, we step out to join the group of neatly dressed people standing in the shade of the billboard. Our group is made up of individuals from a multitude of racial and ethnic backgrounds, something still fairly unusual to see in South Africa. We have traveled to this area about 60 miles northwest of Johannesburg, hoping to share Bible truths with those who live in the villages here.

We hold a brief meeting on the roadside to discuss a Scripture text and finalize arrangements to call from house to house. A prayer is said, and we return to our cars. Across the plain and far into the distance stand houses and shacks in chaotic array. They are dwarfed

by towering dark mounds of tailings from the platinum mines. The widespread poverty around us belies the immense mineral wealth lying belowground here.

My wife and I are with two visitors from Germany, and the four of us begin our morning by calling from house to house. About a third of the residents here are unemployed, so the homes are humble. Many are shacks of corrugated iron over a rickety timber frame, held together by large nails driven through flattened beer-bottle caps serving as washers.

As we approach each home, we call out a greeting from the gate, and we are often met by the woman of the house. Those we speak to are eager to hear the message we bring, and we are treated like honored guests. The sun beating down on the metal roofs turns the houses into furnaces during the day. The children are often dispatched into the house to fetch chairs to place under a tree, and we are invited to sit down in the shade.

The family gathers and sits on rough stools or upturned crates. Even young children are called from where they are playing with their homemade toys to come and lis-



ten. We share some scriptures and invite the school-age children to read from our Bible-based publications. Almost everyone we meet is happy to accept our literature, and many invite us to return.

At midday, we pause for a sandwich and something cool to drink before returning to visit those we have called on before. Our first stop is to see Jimmy, an immigrant from Malawi who works in one of the local platinum mines. We have been calling on Jimmy for a number of months. He is always glad to see us, and we have spent some time discussing the Bible with him. Jimmy is married to a local Setswana woman and has two delightful children. We failed to find him at home on our last visit, so we are eager to see how he is.

As we pull up to Jimmy's simple home, we can immediately see that something is wrong. His normally immaculate garden is unkempt, his corn patch has withered, and the chickens that scratch out their existence on the meager soil are gone. The door is locked with a heavy chain on the outside. A neighbor comes over to see what is happening. We ask where Jimmy might be. She breaks the shocking news: Jimmy has died, and his wife and children have moved back to be with her family.

It is considered impolite to pry, but we ask for details. "He was sick, and then he died," she tells us. "There are many diseases these

days. A lot of people are dying." Although she has not named anything specific, as such matters are seldom mentioned, the steadily growing line of new graves in the local cemetery is stark testimony to the truth of the woman's words. We discuss the resurrection hope with her for a while, and then with heavy hearts, we leave for our next call.

We enter another village and drive to the last row of houses, where a mine dump rises steeply from the earth. We turn into the drive at the end of the street. Brightly painted on a rock in the garden are the words "Indecision is the thief of time; procrastination is its chief accomplice." David,\* who is the author of the sign, pokes his head out from behind the engine of his ancient Volkswagen Beetle. He squints into the setting sun and then smiles broadly as he recognizes us, the light glinting off the fashionable gold facings on his front teeth. He wipes his hands and comes forward to greet us.

"Hello, my friends!" he calls out. "Where have you been?" It is good to see David again. He apologizes that he cannot spend much time with us today because he has found work since our last visit and needs to be at the mine in a little while. Throughout our animated discussion, the smile never leaves David's face. "That first day you met me changed my life!" he says excitedly. "Seriously, I don't know where I would be today if you hadn't come."

Our spirits lifted, we leave David. As the sun starts to sink below the horizon, we turn our car homeward. Taking a last look over the plain, hazy now as the sunlight sparkles in the dusty air, we wonder how all these people will be reached with the good news. We feel deeply the meaning of Jesus' words: "The harvest, indeed, is great, but the workers are few."—Luke 10:2.

\* Name has been changed.



# Do the Stars Influence Your Life?

**O**N A clear night and observed far away from the lights of any human presence, the heavens look like black velvet with thousands of tiny diamonds sparkling across the expanse. Only in the last three and a half centuries has man started to grasp the enormity of the size of the stars and their distance from us. We are just beginning to understand the colossal forces that operate throughout the awesome place that is our universe.

From earliest times, humans have observed the precise movements of the heavenly bodies across the night sky and the seasonal changes of their locations in the firmament. (Genesis 1:14) Many have expressed sentiments like those of King David of Israel, who some 3,000 years ago wrote: "When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have prepared, what is mortal man that you keep him in mind?"—Psalm 8:3, 4.

Yet, whether we realize it or not, the celestial bodies and their movements influence our life in far more tangible ways. The sun, our home star around which the earth orbits, establishes the most basic units of human timekeeping—the lengths of our day and

year. The moon is "for appointed times," or "to tell us the seasons." (Psalm 104:19; *Contemporary English Version*) And the stars are reliable guides in navigation, even for astronauts to orient their spacecraft. Because of this, some wonder if the stars can actually do more for us than tell times and seasons and enhance our appreciation for God's creative work. Can they also predict our future or warn us about calamities?

## The Origin and Purpose of Astrology

The practice of looking to the heavens for omens to direct the course of life on earth had its origins in ancient Mesopotamia, dating back perhaps to the third millennium B.C.E. The early astrologers were careful observers of the heavens. From their efforts to map movements of heavenly bodies, catalog star positions, develop calendars, and predict eclipses, the science of astronomy was born. But astrology goes beyond observing the natural influence of the sun and moon on our environment. It asserts that the location and alignment of the sun, moon, planets, stars, and constellations not only influence major events on earth but also control individual lives. In what ways?



EL CARACOL OBSERVATORY,  
CHICHÉN ITZÁ, YUCATÁN,  
MEXICO, 750-900 C.E.

## The Maya made extensive use of astrological observations

Some practitioners use astrology as a means to look to the celestial bodies for indications or warnings about the future, which the knowledgeable can make use of and benefit from in various ways. Others feel that astrology actually shows what we are predestined to do or that it can help us to determine the auspicious time to engage in certain activities or to embark on particular endeavors. Such information is said to be obtained by observing the alignment of key heavenly bodies and "calculating" their interaction with one another and with the earth. Their influence over a particular individual is said to depend upon the alignment of the heavenly bodies at the time of his birth.

The earliest astrologers imagined that the earth was the center of the universe and that the planets and stars were locked in a series of progressively larger celestial spheres that rotated around the earth. They also thought that the sun traveled through the sky among the stars and constellations along a specific path in a yearly journey. They called the apparent path of the sun the ecliptic and divided it into 12 zones, or segments. Each segment was named after the constellation in it

through which the sun passed. Thus came into being the 12 signs of the zodiac. These zones, or "houses of heaven," were considered to be the abodes of specific deities. Of course, in time, scientists learned that the sun does not travel around the earth but the earth travels around the sun. That discovery dealt astrology its deathblow as a science.

From its origin in Mesopotamia, the practice of astrology spread to nearly all parts of the world and became embedded in various forms in practically all major civilizations of mankind. Following the Persian conquest of Babylon, astrology spread to Egypt, Greece, and India. From India, Buddhist missionaries carried it into Central Asia, China, Tibet, Japan, and Southeast Asia. While the actual route of transmission to the Maya is not known, that civilization made extensive use of astrological observations in a way similar to that of the Babylonians. The "modern" form of astrology apparently developed in Hellenized Egypt and has had a significant impact on the thinking of elements of Judaism, Islam, and Christendom.

Even before their exile to Babylon in the seventh century B.C.E., the nation of Israel

was not immune to the influence of astrology. The Bible tells us about the efforts of faithful King Josiah to remove from among the people the practice of offering sacrifices “to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations of the zodiac and to all the army of the heavens.”—2 Kings 23:5.

### The Source of Astrology

Astrology is based on gross errors regarding the structure and the operation of the universe. Thus, it obviously cannot be from God. Because its basic premises are founded on untruths, astrology cannot be an accurate

*The precise astrological calculations of the Maya did not save their civilization from collapse*

source of information regarding the future. Its failure is well-illustrated by two intriguing historical events.

During the reign of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, the priests and astrologers were unable to interpret for the king a dream that he had. Daniel, a prophet of the true God, Jehovah, pointed out the reason for the problem: “The secret that the king himself is asking, the wise men, the conjurers, the magic-practicing priests and the astrologers themselves are unable to show to the king. However, there exists a God in the heavens who is a Revealer of secrets, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what is to occur in the final part of the days.” (Daniel 2:

27, 28) Yes, Daniel looked to Jehovah God, the “Revealer of secrets”—not to the sun, moon, or stars—and he provided the king with the correct interpretation.—Daniel 2: 36-45.

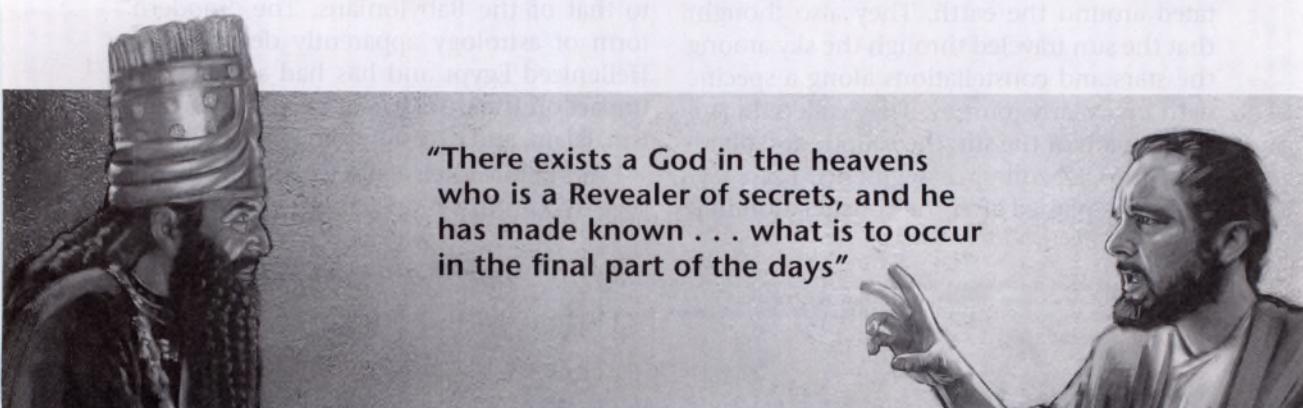
The extremely precise astrological calculations of the Maya did not save their civilization from collapse in the ninth century C.E. These failures not only show that astrology is a fraud, incapable of accurately predicting anything, but they also unmask its real purpose: to keep people from looking to God for accurate information regarding the future.

The fact that astrology is based on untruths also helps us to identify its author. Jesus said of the Devil: “He did not stand fast in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks according to his own disposition, because he is a liar and the father of the lie.” (John 8:44) Satan pretends to be “an angel of light,” and the demons masquerade as “ministers of righteousness.” In reality, they are deceivers intent on trapping people in a web of deceit. (2 Corinthians 11: 14, 15) God’s Word exposes the “powerful work and lying signs and portents” as “the operation of Satan.”—2 Thessalonians 2:9.

### Why You Should Avoid It

Astrology is based on falsehoods and is therefore detestable to the God of truth, Jehovah. (Psalm 31:5) For that reason, the Bible clearly condemns it and urges people to have nothing to do with it. At Deuteronomy 18:10-12, God clearly states: “There should not be found in you . . . anyone who looks for omens or a sorcerer, . . . anyone who consults

**“There exists a God in the heavens  
who is a Revealer of secrets, and he  
has made known . . . what is to occur  
in the final part of the days”**



a spirit medium or a professional foreteller of events or anyone who inquires of the dead. For everybody doing these things is something detestable to Jehovah."

Since Satan and the demons are the power behind astrology, dabbling in it leaves a person open to their influence. Just as experimenting with drugs can put someone under the control of drug traffickers, experimenting with astrology can put someone under the control of the master deceiver, Satan. Consequently, those who love God and truth must totally reject astrology and instead heed the Bible's counsel: "Hate what is bad, and love what is good."—Amos 5:15.

Astrology thrives on people's desire to know the future. Is it possible to know the future? And if so, how? The Bible tells us that we cannot know what will happen to us personally tomorrow, next month, or next year. (James 4:14) Even so, the Bible does reveal to us the general picture of what will happen to humankind in the near future. It lets us

know that soon the Kingdom for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer will come. (Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10) It also tells us that human suffering is soon to end and will never trouble us again. (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:4) Rather than predestinating human life, God is inviting people everywhere to learn about him and what he will do for their benefit. How do we know? The Bible makes it clear that God's will is that "all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth."—1 Timothy 2:4.

The magnificent heavens and everything in them are not put there to control our life. Rather, they point to Jehovah's power and Godship. (Romans 1:20) They can move us to reject falsehoods and look to God and his Word, the Bible, for reliable guidance and direction for a successful life. "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight."—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

## Balsam of Gilead THE BALM THAT HEALS

**A**FAMILIAR account in the Bible book of Genesis tells the story of Joseph's being sold by his brothers to some Ishmaelite traders headed for Egypt. The traders' caravan was from Gilead, and the camels were transporting balsam and other goods to Egypt. (Genesis 37:25) This brief account suggests that balsam from Gilead was highly desirable in the ancient Middle East, valued for its special healing properties.

In the sixth century B.C.E., however, the prophet Jeremiah asked with sadness: "Is there no balsam in Gilead?" (Jeremiah 8:22) What prompted Jeremiah to ask this question? Just what is balsam? Is there a balsam that is useful for healing today?



## Balsam in Bible Times

Balsam is a general term that describes an aromatic and usually oily and resinous substance secreted by various plants and bushes. Balsam oil, often used in incense and perfumes, was one of the luxuries of the ancient Middle Eastern world. It was named among the ingredients of the holy anointing oil and the incense used at the tabernacle shortly after the Israelites came out of Egypt. (Exodus 25:6; 35:8) Balsam oil was also among the lavish gifts that the queen of Sheba brought to King Solomon. (1 Kings 10:2, 10) Esther received beauty care and massages "six months with balsam oil" before presenting herself to Persian King Ahasuerus.—Esther 1:1; 2:12.

While balsam oil came from various parts of the Middle East, balsam of Gilead was native to the Promised Land, Gilead being the region just east of the Jordan River. The patriarch Jacob considered balsam one of "the finest products of the land," and he sent it as a gift to Egypt. (Genesis 43:11) And the prophet Ezekiel listed balsam among merchandise that Judah and Israel exported to Tyre. (Ezekiel 27:17) Balsam was well-known for its particular medicinal properties. Ancient literature frequently mentions the curative and restorative powers of this balm, essentially in connection with the healing of wounds.

### Balsam for a Sick Nation

Why, then, did Jeremiah raise the question, "Is there no balsam in Gilead"? To understand that, we have to look at the nation of Israel back then. Earlier, the prophet Isaiah gave a vivid description of their deplorable spiritual state: "From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no sound spot in it. Wounds and bruises and fresh stripes—they have not been squeezed out or bound up." (Isaiah 1:6) Rather than recognizing their

pitiable condition and seeking a cure, the nation continued in their wayward course. By his time, Jeremiah could only lament: "They have rejected the very word of Jehovah, and what wisdom do they have?" If only they had returned to Jehovah, he would have healed them. "Is there no balsam in Gilead?" What a thought-provoking question!—Jeremiah 8:9.

In many ways, today's world is full of "wounds and bruises and fresh stripes." People are suffering from poverty, injustice, selfishness, and a lack of kindness, all because love of God and neighbor has cooled off. (Matthew 24:12; 2 Timothy 3:1-5) Many feel rejected on account of their race, ethnic background, or age. On top of that, famine, sickness, war, and death add to their pain. Like Jeremiah, many sincere believers wonder if there is no "balsam in Gilead" with which to bind up the emotional and spiritual wounds of those who are suffering.

### The Good News That Heals

In Jesus' day, the same question was on the minds of humble ones. But it was not left unanswered. In the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of the year 30 C.E., Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, saying: "Jehovah has anointed me to tell good news to the meek ones. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." (Isaiah 61:1) Jesus then applied those words to himself, presenting himself as the Messiah with the commission of making known a message of comfort.—Luke 4:16-21.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus zealously preached the good news of the Kingdom of God. (Matthew 4:17) In the Sermon on the Mount, he promised afflicted ones that their situation would be changed: "Happy are you who weep now, because you will laugh." (Luke 6:21) By announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God—a message of hope—Jesus 'bound up the brokenhearted.'

In our day, "the good news of the kingdom" remains just as comforting. (Matthew 6:10; 9:35) Take, for example, the case of Roger and Liliane. In January 1961 they first learned about God's promise of everlasting life, and it was like soothing balsam to them. "I danced around the kitchen at the thought of what I was learning. I was so happy," recalls Liliane. Roger, who at that time had been partially paralyzed for ten years, adds, "I found great joy, the joy of living, thanks to a marvelous hope—that of the resurrection and the end of all pain and sickness."—Revelation 21:4.

In 1970 they suffered the loss of their 11-year-old son in death. But they did not sink into despair. They personally felt that Jehovah "is healing the brokenhearted ones, and is binding up their painful spots." (Psalm 147:3) Their hope comforted them. For nearly 50 years now, the good news of God's incoming Kingdom has brought them peace and contentment.

### A Healing Yet to Come

So is there "balsam in Gilead" today? Yes, today there still exists spiritual balsam. The comfort and hope provided by the good news of the Kingdom is able to bind up broken hearts. Would you like to experience such healing? All you need to do is open your heart wide to the comforting message from God's Word and allow it to fill your life. Millions of people have already done so.

The healing by this balsam provides a foregleam of greater relief that is still to come. The time is fast approaching when Jehovah God will bring about "the curing of the nations," with everlasting life in view. At that time, "no resident will say: 'I am sick!'" Yes, there still is "balsam in Gilead!"—Revelation 22:2; Isaiah 33:24.

*The healing power  
of the good news  
of God's Kingdom  
continues to ease  
the pain of  
brokenhearted  
ones today*





## Those Who Wrote About Jesus

**D**O YOU enjoy reading together about Jesus?—\* Some people are surprised to learn that the Bible contains nothing that Jesus wrote. Yet, eight Bible writers tell us a lot about him. These all lived when Jesus did, and they tell us what he taught. Can you name the eight?— There are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The other four are Peter, James, Jude, and Paul. What do you know about these writers?—

Let's first talk about the three writers who were also among Jesus' 12 apostles. Do you know their names?— Peter, John, and Matthew. Peter wrote two letters to fellow Christians. He told them about things he knew Jesus did and said. Turn in the Bible to 2 Peter 1:16-18, and read there Peter's description of hearing Jehovah God speak to Jesus from heaven.—Matthew 17:5.

The apostle John wrote five Bible books. He was next to Jesus at the last meal that the disciples ate with their Master. John was also with Jesus when He died. (John 13:23-26; 19:26) John wrote one of the four Bible accounts of Jesus' life called the Gospels. He also wrote down the Revelation that Jesus gave him and the three letters in the Bible that are named after him. (Revela-

tion 1:1) The third Bible writer who became an apostle of Jesus was Matthew. He had been a tax collector.

Two other Bible writers knew Jesus in a special way. They were his younger half brothers, also children of Joseph and Mary. (Matthew 13:55) At first, they did not become Jesus' disciples. They even thought that he was a bit crazy because of his zealous preaching. (Mark 3:21) Who were these brothers?— James is one. He wrote the Bible book of James. The other is Judas, who is also called Jude. He wrote the Bible book of Jude.—Jude 1.

Two others who wrote about Jesus' life are Mark and Luke. Mark's mother, Mary, had a large home in Jerusalem, where early Christians met, including the apostle Peter. (Acts 12:11, 12) Years earlier, on the night Jesus held his last Passover with his apostles, likely Mark followed them when they went to the garden of Gethsemane. At Jesus' arrest, soldiers grabbed Mark, but he escaped without his garment.—Mark 14:51, 52.

Luke was a well-educated medical doctor who apparently became a disciple after Jesus died. He made a careful study of Jesus' life and wrote a clear, accurate story about it. Later, Luke became a traveling companion of the apostle Paul and also wrote the Bible book of Acts.—Luke 1:1-3; Acts 1:1.

\* If you are reading with a child, the dash provides a reminder to pause and encourage the child to express himself.



Paul is the eighth Bible writer who wrote about Jesus. He studied under the famous lawyer Gamaliel. Reared and taught by Pharisees, Paul, then called Saul, hated Jesus' disciples and shared in having them killed. (Acts 7:58-8:3; 22:1-5; 26:4, 5) Do you know how Paul came to learn the truth about Jesus?—

Well, Paul was on the way to Damascus to arrest disciples of Jesus when he was suddenly blinded by a bright light from heaven. He heard a voice ask: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting

me?" It was Jesus speaking! He told Paul to go into Damascus. Then Jesus directed his disciple Ananias to speak with Paul, and Paul became a disciple of Jesus. (Acts 9:1-18) Paul wrote 14 books of the Bible, starting with Romans and continuing through Hebrews.

Have you started to read the Bible books about Jesus or to have someone read them to you?— One of the best things you will ever do in your life is to start now while you are young to learn what the Bible says about Jesus.

## QUESTIONS:

- Which apostles of Jesus became Bible writers?
- Which two Bible writers were half brothers of Jesus?
- Why might Mark have known Jesus, but why might Luke not have known him?
- How did Paul come to be a disciple of Jesus?





## DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

# "You Will Act in Loyalty"

2 SAMUEL 22:26

**F**EW things can hurt us more deeply than being let down or betrayed by someone we trust. Such disappointments are all too common in this disloyal world. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Is there anyone we can count on to remain completely loyal to us? Let us consider the testimony of King David of ancient Israel.

During his lifetime, David experienced disloyalty at its worst. He was wrongly outlawed and persecuted by jealous Saul, Israel's first king. Closer to home, Michal, David's wife, did not remain loyal to her husband but, rather, "began to despise him in her heart." (2 Samuel 6:16) Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, turned traitor and joined in a rebellion against David. The leader of this conspiracy? Why, none other than Absalom, David's own son! Faced with such repeated betrayal of trust, did David give up and conclude that there is no one who is unbreakably loyal?

We find the answer in the words of David recorded at 2 Samuel 22:26. A man of unshakable faith, David in poetic song says of Jehovah

God: "With someone loyal you will act in loyalty." David was confident that no matter how other humans might disappoint him, Jehovah would remain loyal to him.

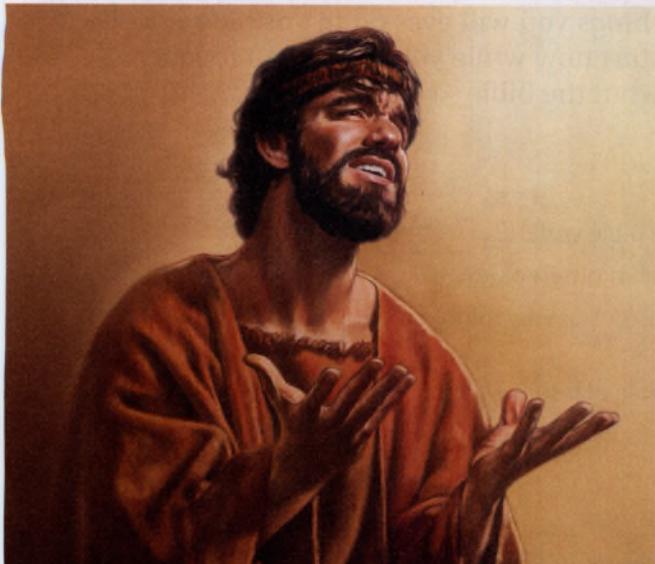
Let us take a closer look at David's words. The Hebrew term translated "act in loyalty" may also be rendered "act in loving-kindness." True loyalty is rooted in love. Jehovah lovingly attaches himself to those who are loyal to him.\*

Note, too, that loyalty is more than just a feeling; it is active, not passive. Jehovah acts in loyalty, as David learned firsthand. During the darkest periods of David's life, Jehovah acted in his behalf, loyally protecting and guiding the faithful king. A grateful David credited Jehovah with delivering him "out of the palm of all his enemies."—2 Samuel 22:1.

What do David's words mean for us? Jehovah does not waver or change. (James 1:17) He remains true to his standards and is ever faithful to his word of promise. In another of his psalms, David wrote: "Jehovah . . . will not leave his loyal ones."—Psalm 37:28.

Jehovah values our loyalty. He treasures our loyal obedience to him, and he urges us to imitate him in showing loyalty in our dealings with others. (Ephesians 4:24; 5:1) If we display loyalty in these ways, we can trust that he will never abandon us. No matter how other humans may let us down, we can count on Jehovah to act loyally in our behalf, helping us to face successfully whatever trials may come our way. Are you moved to draw closer to Jehovah, "the loyal One"?—Revelation 16:5.

\* Second Samuel 22:26 parallels Psalm 18:25. One Bible translation renders that psalm: "To the loyal You show Yourself full of love."—*The Psalms for Today*.



# OUR READERS ASK . . .

## How do Jehovah's Witnesses view interfaith?

■ According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are some "10,000 distinct religions worldwide." Because conflicts between them have led to untold hurt, the concept of interfaith brings hope to many worshippers. They believe that it can engender peace and unity in a divided world.

The Bible encourages unity. The apostle Paul likened the Christian congregation to a human body, each member being "harmoniously joined together and being made to cooperate." (Ephesians 4:16) Similarly, the apostle Peter urged his fellow believers: "All of you be like-minded."—1 Peter 3:8.

The early Christians lived in a multicultural and multireligious world. Yet, when writing about the mingling of different religions, Paul asked: "What portion does a faithful person have with an unbeliever?" Then he warned Christians to "get out from among them." (2 Corinthians 6:15, 17) Clearly, Paul was speaking against interfaith. Why did he do so?

The apostle explained that spiritual fellowship between one who is a true Christian and one who is not would be an uneven yoke, a misfit. (2 Corinthians 6:14) It could result only in harm to the Christian's faith. Paul's concerns were like those of a father who knows that some children in his neighborhood behave badly. As a concerned parent, he wisely sets limits on whom his child should play with. His restrictions may be unpopular. Under the circumstances, however, being separate would protect his child from bad influences. Similarly,

Paul knew that being separate from other religions would protect Christians against their harmful practices.

In taking that stand, Paul was imitating Jesus. While Jesus set the greatest example in promoting peace among people, he did not practice interfaith. Many religious groups, such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were active during Jesus' earthly ministry. In fact, these religious factions joined forces to challenge Jesus, going as far as to plot his death. Jesus, on the other hand, directed his followers to "watch out . . . for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."—Matthew 16:12.

What about today? Is the Bible's warning against interfaith still valid? Yes, it is. This is because differing religious beliefs cannot bond through interfaith any more than oil and water can mix simply by putting them together in a pot. For instance, when people of different religions come together to pray for peace, which god is being petitioned? Christendom's Trinitarian God? Hinduism's Brahma? The Buddha? Or someone else?

The prophet Micah foretold that "in the final part of the days," people from all nations would say: "Come, you people, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." (Micah 4:1-4) The result would be peace and unity on a worldwide scale, not because all faiths are somehow joined, but because all people accept the one true faith.

*Members of the world's major religions at an interfaith conference, 2008*

REUTERS/Andreas Manolis

# The Apologists

## Christian Defenders or Would-Be Philosophers?



*To Justin, imitating philosophy was "safe and profitable"*

**I**NCEST, child murder, cannibalism—these were some of the absurd charges leveled against Christians in the second century C.E. This led to such a wave of persecution that professed Christian writers felt obliged to defend their faith. Later known as the apologists, or defenders of their beliefs, these writers set out to prove that their religion was harmless so as to win over the Roman authorities and public opinion.

It was a risky undertaking, for the empire and public opinion were usually appeased only by giving in to them. There was also a real danger of stirring up more persecution or of watering down the Christian faith by unwarranted compromises. Just how did the apologists defend their faith? What arguments did they use? And what were the results of their efforts?

### The Apologists and the Roman Empire

The apologists were educated men from the second and early third centuries. The most famous among them were Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.\* Their writings were principally addressed to pagans and the Roman authorities, with the intention of explaining the Christian faith, and included frequent references to the Bible. Above all, the apologists stood up against the persecutors, denied their accusations, and presented the Christians in a favorable light.

One of the apologists' major concerns was to convince the political authorities that Christians were not enemies of the emperor or the empire. Tertullian said of the emperor that "our God has appointed him," and Athenagoras defended the hereditary nature of the imperial throne, thus getting involved in the politics of the time. In so doing, they ignored the words of Jesus Christ, who said: "My kingdom is no part of this world."—John 18:36.

\* There were also Quadratus, Aristides, Tatian, Apollinaris, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Melito, Minucius Felix, and other lesser-known writers. See *The Watchtower* of May 15, 2003, pages 27-29, and March 15, 1996, pages 28-30.



Clement saw philosophy as "true theology"



Tertullian's philosophizing helped to pave the way for the Trinity doctrine



Tatian called Christianity "our philosophy"

Clement: Historical Pictures Service; Tertullian: © Bibliothèque nationale de France

The apologists also suggested links between Rome and the Christian religion. According to Melito, the two entities formed a pair and contributed to the welfare of the empire. The anonymous writer of *The Epistle to Diognetus* likened Christians to the soul that was 'holding the world together.' And Tertullian wrote that Christians prayed for the prosperity of the empire and for the end of the system of things to be put off until later. As a result, the coming of God's Kingdom somehow seemed less necessary.—Matthew 6:9, 10.

### "Christianity" Becomes a Philosophy

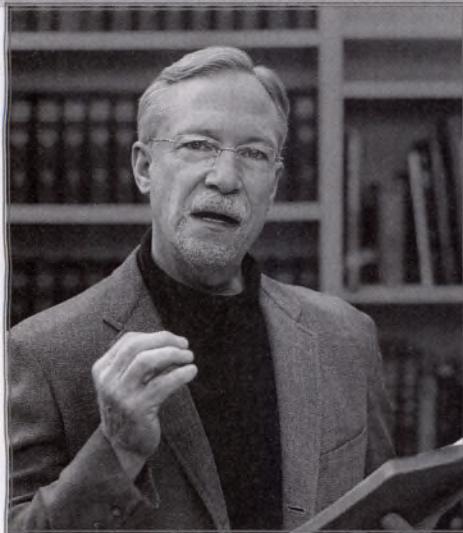
The philosopher Celsus mockingly described Christians as "labourers, shoemakers, farmers, the most uninformed and clownish of men." This mockery was too much for the apologists to bear. They determined to win over public opinion by resorting to a new tactic. Once rejected, worldly wisdom was now used in the service of the "Christian" cause. Clement of Alexandria, for example, saw philosophy as "true theology." Justin, though claiming to reject pagan philosophy, was the first to use philosophical language and concepts to express "Christian" ideas, consider-

ing this type of philosophy "to be safe and profitable."

From this point on, the strategy was, not to oppose philosophy, but to make supposed Christian thought a philosophy higher than that of the pagans. "On some points we teach the same things as the poets and philosophers whom you honour, and on other points are fuller and more divine in our teaching," wrote Justin. Adorned with its new philosophical finery, "Christian" thought now claimed the dignity of old age. The apologists pointed out that Christian books were far older than those of the Greeks and that the prophets of the Bible lived earlier than Greek philosophers. Certain apologists even concluded that the philosophers copied from the prophets. Plato was made out to be a disciple of Moses!

### Christianity Distorted

This new strategy led to a mixture of Christianity and pagan philosophy. Comparisons were made between Greek gods and Bible characters. Jesus was compared to Perseus; and Mary's conception to that of Perseus' mother, Danaë, who was said to be also a virgin.



**Modern-day clergy and theologians have followed the path of the apologists**

Certain teachings were greatly modified. For example, in the Bible, Jesus is called "the Logos," meaning God's "Word," or Spokesman. (John 1:1-3, 14-18; Revelation 19:11-13) Very early on, this teaching was distorted by Justin, who like a philosopher played on the two possible meanings of the Greek word *logos*: "word" and "reason." Christians, he said, received the word in the person of Christ himself. However, *logos* in the sense of reason is found in every man, including pagans. Thus, he concluded, those who live in harmony with reason are Christians, even those who claimed or were thought to be atheists, like Socrates and others.

Moreover, by forcing the tie between Jesus and the *logos* of Greek philosophy, which was closely linked with the person of God, the apologists, including Tertullian, embarked on a course that eventually led Christianity to the Trinity dogma.\*

The word "soul" appears over 850 times in the Bible, including more than 100 times in

its Greek form. It basically refers to mortal, living creatures, either human or animal. (1 Corinthians 15:45; James 5:20; Revelation 16:3) The apologists, however, twisted this Bible teaching by linking it with Plato's philosophy that the soul is separate from the body, invisible and immortal. Minucius Felix even asserted that belief in the resurrection had its early beginnings in Pythagoras' teaching of the transmigration of the soul. How far Greek influence had led them from the teachings of the Bible!

### **The Wrong Choice**

Some apologists sensed the danger that philosophy could pose to the Christian faith. Yet, even though they criticized the philosophers, they still loved the intellectual approach of philosophy. Tatian, for example, denounced the philosophers for accomplishing nothing good but, at the same time, called the Christian religion "our philosophy" and indulged in philosophical speculations. Tertullian on the one hand decried the influence of pagan philosophy on Christian thinking. On the other hand, he stated that he wanted to follow in the steps of "Justin, philosopher and martyr; Miltiades, the sophist of the churches," and others. Athenagoras called himself "a Christian philosopher of Athens." As for Clement, it is said that he felt that "philosophy can be judiciously used by the Christian as an aid to wisdom and the defense of the faith."

Whatever success these apologists might have had in defending their faith, they had nonetheless committed a serious error in their defense. How so? The apostle Paul reminded Christians that among the spiritual weapons at their disposal, none is more potent than "the word of God," which "is alive and exerts power." With it, Paul said, "we are overturning reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." —Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5; Ephesians 6:17.

\* For further information on Tertullian's beliefs, see *The Watchtower* of May 15, 2002, pages 29-31.



*The apostle Paul warned against the philosophies and deception of men*

On the night before he was killed, Jesus told his disciples: “Take courage! I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33) The trials and tribulations that he experienced in the world had not overcome his faith and his loyalty to his Father. Similarly, the last surviving apostle, John, wrote: “This is the conquest that has conquered the world, our faith.” (1 John 5:4) Although the apologists wanted to defend the Christian faith, they made the wrong choice in adopting the ideas and the approach of worldly philosophy. In so doing, the apologists allowed themselves to be seduced by such philosophies and, in effect, allowed the world to conquer them and their brand of Christianity. So rather than being champions and defenders of true Christian faith, the apologists of the early church, perhaps unwittingly, fell into the trap set by Satan, who “keeps transforming himself into an angel of light.”—2 Corinthians 11:14.

The clergy and theologians of the churches today have largely followed in the same path. Instead of defending true Christianity by using God’s Word, they often downgrade the

Bible and resort to worldly philosophy in their teaching in an effort to win over public opinion and the establishment. Rather than sounding a warning against the dangers of following the unscriptural trends of the world, they have become teachers who do their best to ‘tickle the ears’ of their listeners in order to win adherents. (2 Timothy 4:3) Sadly, as did the early apologists, these

**“We are overturning reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”**

—2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

teachers have ignored the apostolic warning: “Look out: perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey through the philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary things of the world and not according to Christ.” And we are reminded that “their end shall be according to their works.” —Colossians 2:8; 2 Corinthians 11:15.



Learn the truth about what has happened to sin.

SEE PAGES 3-10.



What can help us live honestly when dishonesty  
is so widespread? SEE PAGES 11-14.



Do the stars have any influence on your life?

SEE PAGES 18-21.

What do the Scriptures say about interfaith?

SEE PAGE 27.