

Who Inhabit the Spirit Realm?



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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 —How I Came to Know It

In Europe, an elderly woman enters a church, rosary in hand, and kneels reverently before a statue of Mary. In Africa, a family pours out gin at the graveside of a respected relative. In the Americas, a young man fasts and meditates, hoping to contact what he believes to be his quardian angel. In Asia, a priest burns colorful paper objects as an offering to ancestral spirits.

Someone Is **Out There BUT WHO?**







HAT do these people have in common? All believe that there are intelligent beings in the spirit realm who can be contacted and who have the ability to influence profoundly the lives of humans. Of course, this belief is neither new nor surprising. What is surprising is that there are so many conflicting ideas about who live in the spirit realm.

Muslims worship one God—Allah.* People in Christendom say that God is a Trinity, made up of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Hindus believe in the existence of more than a thousand gods and goddesses. Other people say that spirits reside in certain animals, trees, rocks, and streams. Still others are influenced by books, movies, and television programs about an-

gels and demons, ghosts and goblins, gods and goddesses.

Just as there are many varied and conflicting ideas about gods and deities, there are also many varied and conflicting ideas about how to approach them. Logic tells us that not all approaches can be correct. Think of it this way: Before we make a telephone call, we need to know whom we are calling and we need to be confident that the person really exists and will be receptive to our call. To try to contact an imaginary person would be pointless. Worse yet, to contact an impostor could be dangerous.

So, then, who really live in the spirit realm? The Bible not only answers this question but also explains whom to communicate with and what to expect in return. Read on. You may be surprised at what the Bible reveals.

^{* &}quot;Allah" is not a name but simply means "God."

Visions of the Spirit Realm

AZE intently into the sky as long as you like, but you will not see a spirit person. Listen, but you will not hear one. Yet, you may be sure that spirits exist. Highly intelligent and powerful, they have distinct names and personalities. Some do us good; others want to harm us. All are interested in us.

The true God himself is a Spirit. (John 4:24) He has a unique name that distinguishes him from the many false gods. His name is Jehovah. (Psalm 83:18) The psalmist wrote: "Jehovah is great and very much to be praised. He is fear-inspiring above all other gods. For all the gods of the peoples are valueless gods; but as for Jehovah, he has made the very heavens. Dignity and splendor are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary."—Psalm 96:4-6.

Visions of the True God

"No man has seen God at any time," the Bible tells us. (John 1:18) His appearance and his splendor are beyond our comprehension, as colors are beyond a person born blind. But just as a good teacher explains complicated matters to students in terms they can relate to, so God, through his Word, the Bible, de-

scribes things we *cannot* see by means of things we *can* see. By inspired visions given to faithful ones of old, Jehovah helps us to picture the heavenly courtyards and to understand our relationship to those who reside there.

One vision given to the prophet Ezekiel, for example, associates the glory of Jehovah with fire, brightness, sapphire stone, and a rainbow. In another vision, the apostle John observes Jehovah on his throne and states that God "is, in appearance, like a jasper stone and a precious red-colored stone," adding that "round about the throne there is a rainbow like an emerald in appearance." Such descriptions tell us that Jehovah's presence is one of rare and dazzling beauty, pleasantness, and serenity.—Revelation 4:2, 3; Ezekiel 1:26-28.

The prophet Daniel too had a vision of Jehovah, in which he saw "ten thousand times ten thousand [angelic creatures] that kept standing right before [Jehovah]." (Daniel 7: 10) What a sight that must have been! To see, even in vision, one angel would be aweinspiring, but try to imagine myriads of perfect angelic creatures!



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Angels are mentioned nearly 400 times in the Bible, and their ranks include seraphs and cherubs. The Greek and Hebrew words translated "angel" in the Bible both mean "messenger." Angels can therefore communicate with one another, and they have in the past communicated with humans. The angels are not former humans who lived on earth. Jehovah created these spirit beings long before the creation of man.—Job 38:4-7.

In Daniel's vision, the multitudes of angels had gathered to witness a remarkable event. Daniel then saw "someone like a son of man" approach Jehovah's throne to be given "rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him." (Daniel 7:13, 14) The "son of man," a central figure in the spir-

it realm, is the resurrected Jesus Christ, who is granted rulership over all the earth. His rule will soon replace all human governments and bring an end to sickness, sorrow, oppression, poverty, and even death.—Daniel 2:44.

The enthronement of Jesus surely brought great joy to the multitudes of faithful angels, who want the best for humankind. Sadly, though, not all spirit creatures felt that way.

Enemies of God and Man

At the very start of human history, one of the angels, consumed by a desire to be worshipped, turned against Jehovah and made himself Satan, meaning "Resister." The ultimate personification of evil, Satan stands in bitter opposition to Jehovah, who

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personifies love. Other angels joined Satan in his rebellion. The Bible calls them demons. Like Satan, the demons have turned themselves into cruel enemies of mankind. Much of the suffering on earth, the injustice, the sickness, the poverty, and the wars are results of their influence.

Though talking about Satan has become unfashionable in many of the churches of Christendom, the Bible book of Job provides insight into the character and motives of this rebel angel. It says: "Now it came to be the day when the sons of the true God entered to take their station before Jehovah, and even Satan proceeded to enter right among them." In the exchange that followed, Satan insolently charged that the man Job served God only for what he received in return. In an attempt to prove his contention, Satan brought great tribulation upon Job, killing his livestock and all ten of his children. After that, he struck Job with malignant boils that covered his whole body. All of Satan's attacks failed to make his point.—Job 1:6-19; 2:7.

There are good reasons why Jehovah has tolerated Satan for so long, but he will not do so indefinitely. Soon the Devil will be done away with. Initial steps have already been taken and are described in the book of Revelation, where the curtain is drawn back to reveal yet another important event in the spirit realm that we could otherwise never see. We read: "War broke out in heaven: Michael [the resurrected Jesus Christ] and his angels battled with the dragon [Satan], and the dragon and its angels battled but it did not prevail, neither was a place found for them any longer in heaven. So down the great dragon was hurled, the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, who is misleading the entire inhabited earth; he was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him."-Revelation 12:7-9. Notice that Satan is said to be "misleading the entire inhabited earth." He misleads people by promoting religious lies to turn them away from Jehovah and his Word. One such lie is that at death everyone passes on to the spirit realm. There are many variations of this idea. For example, in Africa and Asia, many believe that at death people pass on to a spirit world inhabited by their ancestors. The teachings of purgatory and hell are also based on the idea that a person goes on living after death.

After Death—Heavenly Life?

What, though, about the belief, held by millions worldwide, that all good people go to heaven? It is true that some good people go there, but their number is small compared to the billions who have passed away in death. The Bible reveals that 144,000 people will be "bought from the earth" and will serve as "priests" and "kings over the earth." (Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1, 3) Together with the Son of man, Jesus Christ, they will make up a heavenly government, God's Kingdom. That government will bring an end to Satan and his demons and will make the earth a paradise. Most of those who died will be restored to life at a future time with the prospect of living forever in that Paradise on earth.—Luke 23:43.

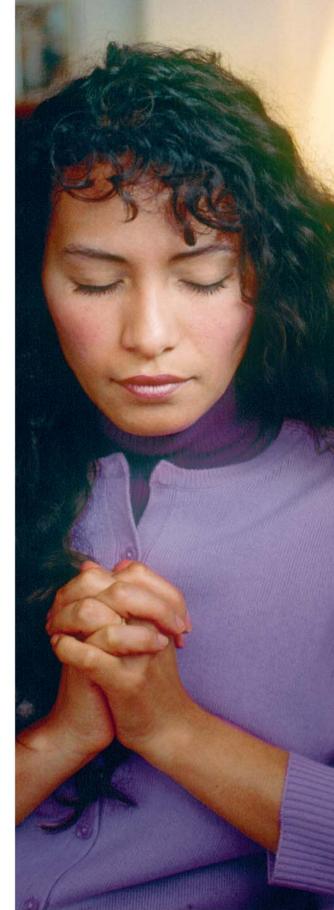
To sum up, then, multitudes dwell in the spirit realm. Supreme among them is Jehovah God, the Creator of all life. Faithfully serving him are myriads of angels. Other angels, led by Satan, turned against Jehovah and work to mislead humans. In addition, a limited number of humans have been "bought," or chosen, from the earth to take up special responsibilities in heaven. With this in mind, let us now consider who can be contacted in the spirit realm and how we should go about making the contact.

Contact With the Spirit Realm

ALMIGHTY GOD has entrusted certain responsibilities to other spirit creatures. He has, for example, placed rulership of the earth in the hands of Jesus Christ, and he has appointed faithful angels to help direct the declaring of the good news. (Revelation 14:6) Prayers, though, are different. He has not delegated the hearing of prayers. Our prayers are rightly directed only to God himself.

Jehovah is the "Hearer of prayer." (Psalm 65:2) He listens to our prayers, and he answers them. Regarding prayer, the apostle John wrote to fellow servants of Jehovah: "No matter what it is that we ask according to his will, [God] hears us. Further, if we know he hears us respecting whatever we are asking, we know we are to have the things asked since we have asked them of him." —1 John 5:14, 15.

The faithful angels do not want us to call upon or pray to them. They understand and cooperate with God's arrangement for prayer, which sometimes directly involves them. In what way? Well, when the prophet Daniel prayed to Jehovah about the



desolation of Jerusalem, God answered Daniel's prayer by sending the angel Gabriel with an encouraging message.—Daniel 9:3, 20-22.

Messages From the Dead?

Should we try to contact those who have died? Many stories tell of conversations people supposedly have had with spirits of the dead. For example, a woman in Ireland was contacted by a spirit medium who said that the night before, she had a conversation with Fred, the woman's husband. Yet, Fred had died a few weeks earlier. The medium went on to relate what "Fred" had said, matters that his wife believed were known only to her. How easy it would have been for her to conclude that Fred was alive in the spir-

it world and was trying to make contact through the stranger. That conclusion, however, would contradict what the Bible clearly says about the condition of the dead.—See box below

How, then, can stories like this be explained? One tool of deception that the demons employ is that of impersonating the dead, in this case, Fred. The motive? To turn people away from what the Bible teaches and to weaken faith and trust in Jehovah. Unquestionably, Satan and the demons mislead people "with every powerful work and lying signs and portents and with every unrighteous deception for those who are perishing."—2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10.

To be sure, there are spirit mediums and those who are associated with them who tru-

Fact and Fiction

FACT: SATAN IS A REAL PERSON

"Satan himself keeps transforming himself into an angel of light."—2 Corinthians 11:14.

"Keep your senses, be watchful. Your adversary, the Devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone."

—1 Peter 5:8.

"He who carries on sin originates with the Devil, because the Devil has been sinning from the beginning."—1 John 3:8.

"Subject yourselves, therefore, to God; but oppose the Devil, and he will flee from you."—James 4:7.

"The Devil . . . was a manslayer when he began, and 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.

FICTION: AT DEATH ALL PASS ON TO THE SPIRIT REALM

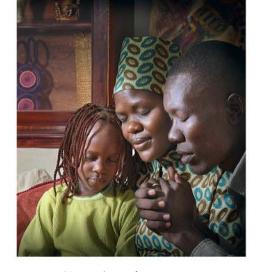
"In the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return."—Genesis 3:19.

"The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all."—Ecclesiastes 9:5.

"All that your hand finds to do, do with your very power, for there is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol [the grave], the place to which you are going."—Ecclesiastes 9:10.

"His spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground; in that day his thoughts do perish."

—Psalm 146:4.



Knowing that we can pray to the Supreme One, who loves and cares for us, why would we want to pray to anyone else?

ly believe that they are contacting people who have died. In reality, if they are contacting anyone, they are contacting spirits who are in opposition to Jehovah. Similarly, there are those who believe that they are worshipping God but who are mistaken. The apostle Paul was inspired to pen this sober warning: "The things which the nations sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God."—1 Corinthians 10:20, 21.

Knowing that we can pray to the Supreme One, who loves and cares for us, why would we want to pray to anyone else? After all, the Bible gives this assurance: "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.

FACT: FAITHFUL ANGELS CARE ABOUT US

"The angel of Jehovah is camping all around those fearing him, and he rescues them."
—Psalm 34:7; 91:11.

"Are they [angels] not all spirits for public service, sent forth to minister for those who are going to inherit salvation?"

—Hebrews 1:14.

"I saw another angel flying in midheaven, and he had everlasting good news to declare as glad tidings to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying in a loud voice: 'Fear God and give him glory.' "—Revelation 14:6, 7.

FICTION: JESUS IS EQUAL TO GOD

"I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ; in turn the head of a woman is the man; in turn the head of the Christ is God."—1 Corinthians 11:3.

"When all things will have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will also subject himself to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all things to everyone."—1 Corinthians 15:28.

"Most truly I say to you, The Son cannot do a single thing of his own initiative, but only what he beholds the Father doing."

—John 5:19.

DID YOU KNOW?



Who were the Magi who came to visit the infant Jesus?

According to the account of lesus' birth in the Gospel of Matthew, visitors from "eastern parts" who had seen the star of a new king presented gifts to voung lesus. The Greek text of the Gospel calls these visitors ma'goi, that is, "magi," (Matthew 2:1, footnote) What do we know about them?

The earliest substantial source of information about the Magi is the Greek historian Herodotus. Living in the fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus recorded that the Magi belonged to a Persian priestly class who specialized in astrology, interpretation of dreams, and casting of spells. In Herodotus' time, the religion of Persia was Zoroastrianism. Hence, the Magi he spoke about were

likely Zoroastrian priests, "In a more general sense." says The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "a mágos in the Hellenistic world had supernatural knowledge and ability and was sometimes a practitioner of magic."

A number of early "Christian" commentators, such as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Tertullian, described the Magi who visited Jesus as astrologers. For example, Tertullian wrote in his book On Idolatry: "We know the mutual alliance of magic and astrology. The interpreters of the stars, then, were the first . . . to present Him [Jesus] 'gifts.'" In harmony with this understanding, many Bible translations render ma'aoi "astroloaers."

Why did Matthew attribute words from the book of Zechariah to the prophet Jeremiah?



■ The passage in question is found at Matthew 27:9, 10, where the Gospel writer commented on the money given to Judas Iscariot for the betrayal of Jesus. The verses read: "Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying: 'And they took the thirty silver pieces, the price upon the man that was priced, . . . and they gave them for the potter's field." The source of the prophecy concerning the 30 pieces of silver is Zechariah, not Jeremiah.—Zechariah 11:12, 13.

It appears that Jeremiah, rather than Isaiah, was sometimes placed first in the collection of books called "the Prophets." (Matthew 22:40) Hence, when Matthew here spoke of "Jeremiah." he was referring to an entire section of Scripture called by the name of its first book. This section of Scripture included Zechariah.

In a similar way, Jesus designated as "Psalms" several Bible books also known as the Writings. Thus, when he said that all things written about him "in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and Psalms" had to be fulfilled, he was referring to the prophecies contained in the entire Hebrew Scriptures. -Luke 24:44.

DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

He Knows "the Heart of the Sons of Mankind"

2 CHRONICLES 6:29. 30

WHO of us has not felt overwhelmed by life's challenges and problems? At times, it may seem that there is no one who can truly grasp the struggles we face or the deep pain we feel. Yet, there is someone who fully understands our feelings—Jehovah God. We can find comfort in the words of Solomon found at 2 Chronicles 6:29, 30.

Solomon is offering a prayer at the inauguration of the temple in Jerusalem in 1026 B.C.E. In his prayer, perhaps ten minutes in duration, Solomon extols Jehovah as a God of loyalty, the Fulfiller of promises, and the Hearer of prayer.—1 Kings 8:23-53; 2 Chronicles 6:14-42.

Solomon implores God to hear the entreaty of his worshippers. (Verse 29) Although Solomon mentions many afflictions (verse 28), he notes that each worshipper knows "his own plague" and feels "his own pain." One person might be grieved by one thing while another may carry a very different inward burden.

Whatever the case, God-fearing ones need not carry their burdens alone. In his prayer, Solomon has in mind the individual worshipper who may be moved to 'spread out his palms,' approaching Jehovah in heartfelt prayer.* Perhaps Solomon recalls that his fa-

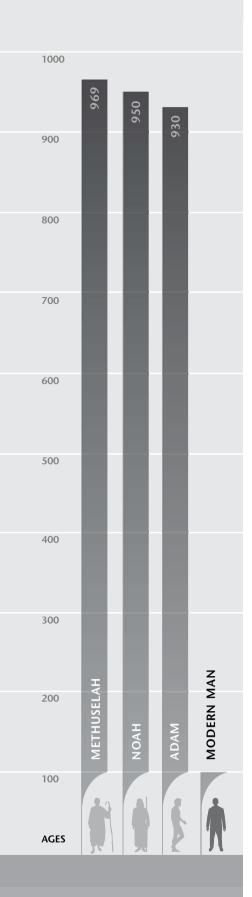
ther, David, when greatly distressed, said: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah."—Psalm 55:4. 22.

How will Jehovah respond to sincere pleas for help? Solomon beseeches Jehovah: "May you yourself hear from the heavens, the place of your dwelling, and you must forgive and give to each one according to all his ways." (Verse 30) Solomon knows that the "Hearer of prayer" cares about his worshippers not just as a group but also as individuals. (Psalm 65:2) Jehovah provides the help needed, including forgiveness for the sinner who returns to God with all his heart.—2 Chronicles 6: 36-39

Why is Solomon sure that Jehovah will respond to the pleas of the repentant worshipper? Continuing his prayer, Solomon observes: "Because you [Jehovah] know his heart (for you yourself alone well know the heart of all the sons of mankind)." Jehovah is aware of the plague or pain that each faithful worshipper may carry in his heart, and his distress matters to Him.—Psalm 37:4.

We can draw comfort from Solomon's prayer. Fellow humans may not fully understand our inner feelings—our "own plague" and our "own pain." (Proverbs 14:10) But Jehovah knows our heart, and he deeply cares about us. Pouring out our heart to him in prayer can make our burdens easier to bear. "Throw all your anxiety upon him," says the Bible, "because he cares for you."—1 Peter 5:7.

^{*} In Bible times, 'spreading out the palms,' holding out the hands with the palms facing upward, was a gesture of prayer.—2 Chronicles 6:13.





Really Live So Long?

EANNE LOUISE CALMENT died on August 4, 1997, in her hometown in southeast France. She was 122 years old!

Advancements in science, health care, and other fields of endeavor are helping people today to live longer. Still, not many individuals reach or surpass the century mark. That may be why the longevity of those who do so sometimes makes the news, as happened in the case of Madame Calment.

The Bible relates that in ancient times people lived much longer, in some cases almost one thousand years. Is that true or believable? Did people in Bible times really live that long? And should it matter to us today?

People Who Lived a Long Time

The Bible book of Genesis speaks of seven men who lived more than 900 years, all of them being born prior to the Flood of Noah's day. They were Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Jared, Methuselah, and Noah. (Genesis 5:5-27; 9:29) Many of these men may be unfamiliar to most people, but all of them were among the first ten generations in human history. Methuselah is well-known for having lived the longest—a record 969 years!

The Bible mentions at least another 25 individuals who also reached ages beyond what is common today. Some of them lived 300, 400, even 700 or more years. (Genesis 5:28-31; 11:10-25) To many people, though, Bible accounts of individuals who lived such long lives are nothing but myths. Is that really so?

Myth or Reliable Record?

According to a document published by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Germany, researchers validated the age of Madame Calment, mentioned earlier,

through the gathering of some "simple verifiable statements" made by her. These had to do with her or her relatives at the time when certain events took place. What she said was then compared with civic, notarial, and church records, as well as with newspaper articles and population censuses. Interestingly, although it was impossible to confirm each and every detail, the direct and indirect evidence available made it possible to confirm the duration of her life.

What about the accounts in the Bible? Have they proved to be trustworthy? Absolutely! Although not all details have been confirmed by available secular sources, evidence has shown again and again that what is stated in the Bible is reliable from historical, scientific, and chronological standpoints.* That should come as no surprise, for the Bible itself states: "God tells the truth, even if everyone else is a liar." (Romans 3:4, *Contemporary English Version*) Yes, being a book "inspired of God," the Bible allows no room for fiction.—2 Timothy 3:16.

Moses, who was guided by Jehovah God to write the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible, must be ranked as one of the most influential and respected men in human history. Jews consider him the greatest among all their teachers. Muslims regard him as one of their greatest prophets. As for Christians, Moses is a forerunner of Jesus Christ. Would it be reasonable to conclude that the writings of such an important historical figure are not to be trusted?

Was Time Measured Differently?

Some have alleged that time was measured differently in those days and that what was called a year was actually a month. An analysis of the Genesis account, however, leaves no doubt that people back then had the same

concept of time as we do today. Consider two examples. In the Flood account, we read that the Deluge began when Noah was 600 years old, "in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month." Then it goes on to say that the waters overwhelmed the earth for 150 days and that "in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat." (Genesis 7:11, 24; 8:4) Thus, a period of five months—from the 17th day of the second month to the 17th day of the seventh month of that year—is said to be 150 days. Clearly, the claim that a year was actually a month is totally baseless.

Now consider a second example. According to Genesis 5:15-18, Mahalalel fathered a son at the age of 65, lived on for 830 years, and died at the age of 895. His grandson Enoch also fathered a son when 65 years old. (Genesis 5:21) If a year were really one month, then those two men would have become parents when they were only five years old! Does that make any sense?

Archaeology also comes into the picture, for it agrees with Bible statements about long-lived individuals. About the patriarch Abraham, the Bible says that he was from the city of Ur, that he later resided in the city of Haran and then in the region of Canaan, and that he fought and defeated Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. (Genesis 11:31; 12:5; 14:13-17) Discoveries have confirmed the existence of these places and people. Archaeology has also shed some light on features of the lands and customs of the peoples mentioned in connection with Abraham. Since these Bible statements about Abraham are accurate, why should there be questions about his age of 175 years?—Genesis 25:7.

There is, therefore, no reason to be skeptical about the Bible's statements regarding the extraordinarily long lives of some people in ancient times. But you may ask yourself,

^{*} For details, see the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



'Why should it matter to me whether those people lived so long or not?'

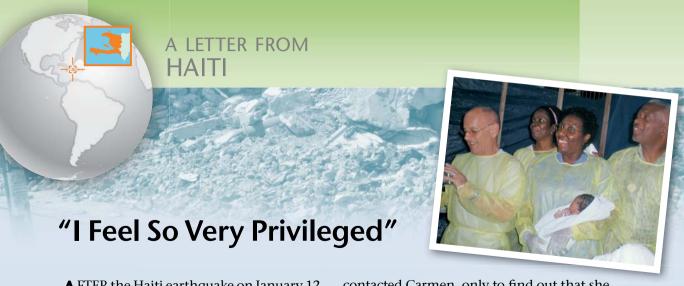
You Can Live Longer Than You Think!

The outstanding longevity of those men living prior to the Flood proves that the human body has a remarkable potential for life. Modern technology has enabled scientists to take a closer look at the human body and its marvelous design, including its amazing capacity for regenerating and healing itself. Their conclusion? It is capable of living indefinitely. "[Aging]," says Professor of Medicine Tom Kirkwood, "remains one of the great mysteries of medical science."

To Jehovah God, though, aging is neither a mystery nor a problem without a solution. He created the first man, Adam, perfect and purposed that humans should live forever. Sadly, Adam decided to turn his back on God. As a result, he fell into sin and became imperfect. Herein lies the explanation scientists have been looking for: "Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned." (Romans 5: 12) It is because of sin and imperfection that we get sick, grow old, and die.

However, the purpose of our loving Creator has never changed. As a remarkable proof of that, he provided the ransom sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, which opened the door to perfection and everlasting life. The Bible states: "Just as in Adam all are dying, so also in the Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22) People before the Flood were closer to perfection than we are, and that is why they lived longer—much longer—than we do at present. But today we are closer to the time when God's promise will be fulfilled. Soon all traces of sin and imperfection will be gone, and people will not have to degenerate and die.—Isaiah 33:24; Titus 1:2.

How can you receive such blessings? Do not assume that what God has promised is just a dream. Jesus said: "He that hears my word and *believes him that sent me* has everlasting life." (John 5:24) So take in Bible knowledge and apply it. If you do, you will be following the example of those whom the apostle Paul spoke of as "safely treasuring up for themselves a fine foundation for the future, in order that they may get a firm hold on the real life." (1 Timothy 6:19) You can be sure that the God who made it possible for individuals mentioned in the Bible to live so long can make *you* live forever!



AFTER the Haiti earthquake on January 12, 2010, I found it hard even to look at the devastation on the news. Then on the 20th, my dear friend Carmen called me and suggested that we go to Haiti as volunteer workers. I had met Carmen some years earlier when we worked as volunteer nurses at a Kingdom Hall construction site. Since then, we have volunteered for other projects and have become close friends.

I told Carmen that I might not be able to handle Haiti physically or emotionally. She reminded me that we worked well as a team and could support each other. Encouraged by her words, I called the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York, and spoke with the person who was organizing the relief work from the United States. I gave him my name to add to the list of volunteers. I mentioned Carmen and said that we would like to work together. I was told that there was no guarantee that either she or I would be called or that we would work together.

So I went about my daily routine, thinking that I would not be invited to go. Four days later, on Monday the 25th, I received a call from Brooklyn asking if I could travel to Haiti—the following day if possible! I could not believe my ears. I agreed to do my best. First, I arranged to get time off from work. Next, I

contacted Carmen, only to find out that she had not been invited because she does not speak French. I was excited and afraid at the same time. On January 28, after managing to get a plane ticket, I flew from New York to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, which borders Haiti.

A young Witness met me at the airport and drove me to the Dominican Republic branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses. Two other nurses also arrived from the United States that day, and we roomed together that night. The next morning, we were driven to the Haiti branch office in Port-au-Prince, a journey of seven and a half hours.

After crossing the border into Haiti, we saw the devastation. It was almost unreal to see what 35 seconds of earthquake did to this beautiful land. It had been hard enough to look at the devastation on TV; I cannot describe how I felt seeing it firsthand. Many homes, including the presidential palace, were damaged, while others had been reduced to piles of rubble. Many of those homes represented a lifetime of hard work—all lost in seconds. I could not help but reflect on the fact that the truly important things in life are not material.

When we arrived at the branch, the receptionist caught sight of us walking in and ran from her desk to meet us at the door with a

big hug and a warm smile. She thanked us for putting our lives on hold to be there. After the noon meal, we went to the nearby Assembly Hall, which had been converted into a hospital. There I met other Witnesses who had volunteered to come, including a couple from Germany who were both physicians, their assistant, and a midwife from Switzerland

I started working that first night. There were 18 patients, both Witnesses and non-Witnesses, lying on mattresses on the floor of the Assembly Hall. Every patient received the same attention and free medical care from the medical staff of Witnesses.

That night, one patient, an 80-year-old man, died. His wife was at his side, along with my roommate and me. After that, a young woman named Ketly started to cry out in pain. Her right arm had been amputated because of injuries sustained from the earthquake. Beside her was the Witness who was Ketly's Bible teacher. She had been sleeping at Ketly's bedside at the Assembly Hall practically every night.

I went to Ketly, wanting so much to ease her pain, but this was more than physical pain. She told me that she was at the home of a friend when the earthquake struck. They were not sure what was happening. They started to run to the balcony, arm in arm, when a wall fell on them, pinning them under the debris. She called out to her



friend, but she did not respond. She said that she knew right away that her friend had died. The friend's body was lying partially on Ketly until rescuers arrived four hours later. Ketly lost her right arm all the way up to the shoulder joint.

During my first night there, Ketly was reliving the experience every time she tried to sleep. Sobbing, she said to me: "I know what the Scriptures say about the last days and earthquakes. I know we have a happy hope for the future. I know I should be grateful to be alive. But put yourself in my place just for a minute. One day you have everything going for you, and before you know it, you find yourself like this." Feeling utterly helpless, I just held her, and I too started to cry. We both kept crying until she fell asleep.

Every day, one doctor and two nurses were sent out to help those who needed medical attention. I was sent to Petit Goave, about a two-hour drive from Port-au-Prince. I went with two other volunteers—a nurse from Florida and a physician from France. We arrived at 9:30 a.m., unloaded our supplies, and moved them inside the local Kingdom Hall. People had been told that we were coming, so they were seated and waiting for our arrival.

We got to work right away. It was hot, and the lines of those needing treatment kept getting longer and longer. It was about three o'clock before we could take a break. The three of us gave 114 vaccinations and did 105 medical consultations that day. I was exhausted but happy that we could contribute to the well-being of those in need.

Altogether I spent a little over two weeks in the Haitian relief work. Almost every night, I worked a 12-hour shift at the Assembly Hall. It was a heavy responsibility, one that I had never experienced before. Yet, I felt privileged and blessed to have



been there. I am very happy that I could bring some comfort and relief to the Haitian people, who have suffered so greatly.

We have so much to learn from them. For example, one of the patients I took care of, Eliser, a boy of 15, had to have one of his legs amputated. I noticed that he would save his meal to share with Jimmy, who had been spending the night at his bedside. He explained to me that Jimmy did not always get to eat before he came in the evening. Eliser's example impressed on me that we do not have to be rich—or even well—in order to share what we have with others.

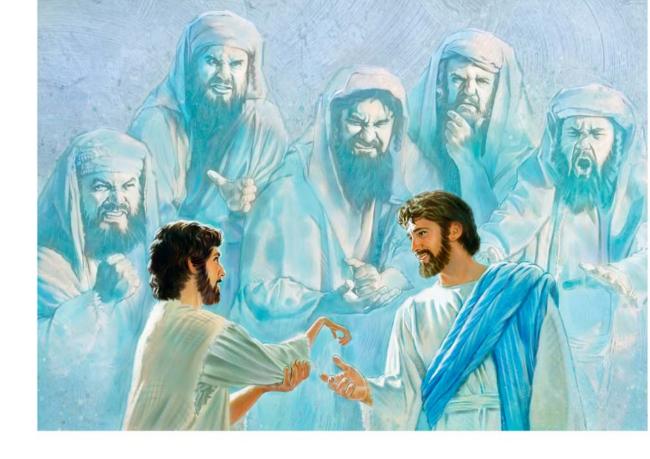
That spirit was also evident among the volunteers who were on my team. One volunteer was not well herself; another was suffering from back pain. Yet, all put the patients' needs ahead of their own personal comforts. This gave me the encouragement I needed to carry on. We all felt emotionally, mentally, and physically drained from time to time, but we supported one another and

kept going. What an unforgettable experience! I am thankful to be part of an organization of fine Christians who are kind, loving, and self-sacrificing.

Before I left Haiti, two of the patients who had had their right arms amputated managed to write me thank-you letters that they insisted I read only after I got on the plane. That was what I did. The letters touched my heart, and I could not stop weeping.

Since my return home, I have been in contact with some of the new friends I met in Haiti. Strong friendships are forged and tested during times of hardship and crisis. Our bonds of friendship, I believe, will stand the test of any hardship in the future. I feel so very privileged.





WHY DID THEY **REJECT THE MESSIAH?**

WHEN Jesus was on earth, the crowds were enthralled by the things he said and amazed by the miracles he performed. As a result, many "put faith in him" and accepted him as the foretold Messiah, or Christ. They reasoned: "When the Christ arrives, he will not perform more signs than this man has performed, will he?"—John 7:31.

Despite the overwhelming evidence in support of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the majority of those who saw and heard Jesus did not become believers. Sadly, even some who initially believed turned away later. Why did so many reject Jesus as the Messiah in

spite of the powerful evidence? Let us consider the reasons, and as we do, ask yourself, 'Could I be in danger of making a similar mistake today?'

Unfulfilled Expectations

At the time of Jesus' birth, many Jews were expecting the appearance of the Messiah. When Jesus was brought as an infant to the temple, he was met by those "waiting for Jerusalem's deliverance" by the promised Messiah. (Luke 2:38) Later, many who observed the works of John the Baptizer wondered: "May he perhaps be the Christ?" (Luke 3:15)

What, though, were the Jews in the first century expecting the Messiah to do?

The common belief among the Jews in those days was that the Messiah would come and liberate them from the oppressive Roman yoke and restore the earthly kingdom of Israel. Before Jesus began his ministry, a number of charismatic leaders arose and advocated violent resistance to the existing political rule. What these men did likely influenced the people's expectations of the Messiah.

Jesus stood in stark contrast to such false Messiahs. He did not promote violence but taught his listeners to love their enemies and to be submissive to the authorities. (Matthew 5:41-44) He rejected the people's efforts to make him a king. Instead, he taught that his kingdom was to be "no part of this world." (John 6:15; 18:36) Still, preconceived ideas about the Messiah exerted a very strong influence on the people.

John the Baptizer personally saw and heard miraculous evidence establishing Jesus' identity as God's Son. Yet, when John was imprisoned, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus: "Are you the Coming One, or are we to expect a different one?" (Matthew 11:3) Perhaps John wondered if Jesus was indeed the promised Deliverer, who would fulfill the Jews' expectations.

Jesus' apostles found it difficult to understand that he would be killed and then resurrected. On one occasion when Jesus explained that it would be necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die, Peter "took him aside and started rebuking him." (Mark 8:31, 32) Peter was not yet able to see how Jesus' death could fit in with his role as the Messiah.

Upon entering Jerusalem shortly before Passover 33 C.E., Jesus was welcomed by enthusiastic crowds hailing him as King. (John 12:12, 13) How quickly the situation changed! Within the week, Jesus was arrested and executed. After Jesus' death, two of his

disciples lamented: "We were hoping that this man was the one destined to deliver Israel." (Luke 24:21) Even when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, the idea that the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom still lingered. They asked: "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" Clearly, mistaken expectations about the Messiah were deeply entrenched in the hearts and minds of Jesus' listeners.—Acts 1:6.

After Jesus' ascension to heaven and the outpouring of the holy spirit, his disciples came to understand clearly that the Messiah would rule as a heavenly King. (Acts 2:1-4, 32-36) The apostles Peter and John boldly preached about Jesus' resurrection and gave evidence of God's backing by performing miracles themselves. (Acts 3:1-9, 13-15) Thousands in Jerusalem responded and became believers. This, however, did not sit well with the Jewish authorities. Just as they had opposed Jesus, they now opposed his apostles and disciples. Why did the Jewish religious leaders so fiercely reject Jesus?

Rejected by Religious Leaders

By the time Jesus came to earth, Jewish religious thinking and practices had strayed far from what was taught in the inspired Scriptures. The religious leaders of the day-the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes-upheld man-made traditions, putting them ahead of God's written Word. Time and again they accused Jesus of breaking the Law because he performed miraculous cures on the Sabbath. By forcefully refuting their unscriptural teachings, Jesus challenged both their authority and their claims of having an approved standing with God. By contrast, Jesus came from a humble background and lacked their formal religious education. No wonder it was so difficult for such proud men to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah! Such confrontations so enraged them that they "took

counsel against [Jesus] that they might destroy him."—Matthew 12:1-8, 14; 15:1-9.

How, though, could the religious leaders explain away Jesus' ability to perform miracles? They did not deny that the miracles occurred. Instead, they blasphemously tried to undermine faith in Jesus by attributing his power to Satan, saying: "This fellow does not expel the demons except by means of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."—Matthew 12:24.

There was another deep-seated reason for their adamant refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. After Jesus resurrected Lazarus, leaders of the various religious factions consulted together and said: "What are we to do, because this man performs many signs? If we let him alone this way, they will all put faith in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Would you have recognized the Messiah if you had lived in Jesus' day?

For fear of losing their power and position, the religious leaders conspired to kill both Jesus and Lazarus!—John 11:45-53; 12:9-11.

Community Prejudice and Persecution

The attitude of first-century Jewish religious leaders created a social climate that was hostile to anyone accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Taking pride in their prominent positions, they belittled anyone showing faith in Jesus, saying: "Not one of the rulers or of the Pharisees has put faith in him, has he?" (John 7:13, 48) Some Jewish leaders, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, did become disciples of Jesus, but they kept their faith secret out of fear. (John 3:1, 2; 12:42; 19:

38, 39) The Jewish leaders had decreed that "if anyone confessed [Jesus] as Christ, he should get expelled from the synagogue." (John 9:22) Such a person would be shunned and scorned as a social outcast.

Opposition to Jesus' apostles and disciples eventually ignited violent persecution. Because of their bold preaching, the apostles suffered at the hands of the Sanhedrin. the Jewish high court. (Acts 5:40) Opposers framed false charges of blasphemy against the disciple Stephen. He was condemned by the Sanhedrin and stoned to death. Then, "great persecution arose against the congregation that was in Jerusalem; all except the apostles were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." (Acts 6:8-14: 7:54–8:1) Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, shared in a campaign of persecution that was officially supported by the high priest and "the assembly of older men." -Acts 9:1, 2; 22:4, 5.

Even under such difficult circumstances, Christianity grew rapidly in the years after Jesus' death. Although thousands became believers, however, Christians remained a minority in first-century Palestine. Publicly identifying oneself as a follower of Christ meant risking ostracism and even violence.

Learn From Those Who Rejected Jesus

As we have seen, misconceptions, community pressure, and persecution prevented many in the first century from putting faith in Jesus. Today, erroneous ideas about Jesus and his teachings can have a similar effect. For example, many have been taught that God's Kingdom is in their heart or will come about by human efforts. Others are persuaded to look to science or technology for solutions to mankind's problems, thus doing away with the need to put faith in the Messiah. Many modern critics assert that the



Do not let preconceived ideas prevent you from learning the truth about Jesus

events of Jesus' ministry recorded in the Bible are not historical facts; these men thus undermine faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The result of such ideas and theories is that many have either been confused as to the role of the Messiah or see no need to consider the matter. However, for those who are willing to examine the evidence, there is actually more proof today that Jesus is the Messiah than there was in the first century. We have the entire Hebrew Scriptures containing numerous prophecies about what the Messiah would do and the record in the four Biblical Gospels of what Jesus did in fulfillment of those prophecies.*

There is really no lack of evidence by which each one of us can make an informed choice or decision in this matter. And that decision is urgent. Why? Because the Bible reveals that as the Messianic King of God's Kingdom, Jesus will soon take action to remove all those who are ruining the earth and bring about righteous rule that will allow all obedient subjects to live forever on earth in paradisaic conditions. (Daniel 2:44: Revelation 11: 15, 18; 21:3-5) This marvelous future can be yours if you make the effort to learn about Iesus and demonstrate faith in him now. Take to heart Jesus' own words: "God loved the world so much that he gave his onlybegotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life."—John 3:16.

^{*} See the chart "Prophecies Regarding the Messiah" on page 200 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Show Consideration for Single Parents



EW people have to contend with more demands on their time and energy than single parents do. The challenges they face are innumerable. They must care for the many responsibilities of raising a family. Besides working at a job, there is shopping, cooking, cleaning, parenting. Then there is the need to provide health care, recreation, and emotional support for the children and, if at all possible, to find a few precious moments of personal time.

Although single-parent families are becoming an increasingly larger and more visible part of society today, they can easily be overlooked. As one mother candidly admitted, "Until I became a single parent, I wasn't really aware of them." What can you do to show consideration for single parents? Should you be concerned about them? Let us consider three reasons for giving attention to their needs.

Reasons for Showing Consideration

Many single parents want help. A 41-yearold widow with two children stated, "There are times when I am not sure what to do, and I feel quite overwhelmed by the many responsibilities I have." Widowhood, abandonment, or other unfavorable circumstances have left many single parents feeling the way one mother did. She said, "We are pleading for relief, and we need it desperately!"

It contributes to your own happiness. Have you ever helped someone carry a load that was too heavy for one person? If so, you likely felt a sense of satisfaction in knowing that you had assisted someone in a practical way. Similarly, single parents carry a load that can at times be too taxing for one person. When you respond to their needs by lending a helping hand, you will experience the truthfulness of what is stated at Psalm 41:1: "Happy is anyone acting with consideration toward the lowly one."

It is pleasing to God. James 1:27 says: "The form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation." This includes looking after single parents.* Hebrews 13:16 states: "Do not forget the doing of good and the

^{*} Though the expression "single parent" does not appear in the Bible, the terms "widow" and "fatherless boy" are frequently used. This suggests that single parents were common even in Bible times.—Isaiah 1:17.

sharing of things with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Having in mind these three reasons for showing consideration for single parents, let us now see what you can do to help and how you can be sure that the assistance you provide will be practical.

Discerning Their Needs

It may seem that the obvious thing to do is to ask a single parent, "How can I help?" Realistically, though, this rarely results in someone's telling you what his or her real needs are. As noted earlier, Psalm 41:1 recommends "acting with consideration." One reference work explains that the Hebrew term used here can mean "the process of thinking through a complex arrangement of thoughts resulting in a wise dealing."

Therefore, to find out the best way to help, you need to give serious thought to the challenges the single parent faces. Be observant, not just taking a superficial look at the situation. Ask yourself, 'If I were in that situation, what help would I want?' Of course, many single parents will tell you that, try as you may, you can never fully appreciate what it is like to be a single parent unless you are one yourself. Still, doing your best to empathize with their circumstances will put you in a better position to 'act with consideration' toward single parents.

Imitate God's Perfect Example

When it comes to caring for single parents, no one has done this more lovingly and effectively than Jehovah God. Many scriptures highlight the consideration and concern that Jehovah God shows to widows, fatherless boys and, hence, single parents. By examining the way God responds to the needs of such lowly ones, we can learn much about offering assistance that is truly helpful and practical. There are four key factors to consider.

Give a listening ear

In the Law he gave to ancient Israel, Jehovah declared that he would 'unfailingly hear the outcry' of the disadvantaged one. (Exodus 22:22, 23) How can you imitate this fine example? Single parents often experience intense feelings of loneliness, having no other adult to talk to. "When the children go to bed, I sometimes can't stop crying," lamented one single parent. "The loneliness is too much to bear at times." If appropriate, can you make yourself available to 'hear the outcry' of a single parent who may need to pour out his or her feelings? Your giving a listening ear under proper circumstances can do much to help that one cope with the challenges of single parenthood.

Offer words of encouragement

Jehovah inspired the writing of sacred songs, or psalms, that the Israelites would sing during occasions for worship. Imagine the encouragement Israelite widows and fatherless boys received when singing the divinely inspired words that reminded them that Jehovah was "a father" and "a judge" for them and that he would provide them with relief. (Psalm 68:5; 146:9) We too can offer words of encouragement that can stay with a single parent for years to come. Although 20 years have passed, Ruth, a single parent, still fondly remembers the occasion when an experienced father told her: "You're really doing a good job raising your two sons. Keep it up." Ruth relates: "Hearing those words from him really had an impact on me." Indeed, "kind words are good medicine" and can encourage a single parent more than we may ever know. (Proverbs 15:4, Contemporary English Version) Can you think of specific, genuine commendation that you can give to a single parent?

Provide material assistance where necessary

Jehovah's Law to ancient Israel included arrangements for widows and fatherless boys to obtain needed food in a dignified way. Through such provisions, these lowly ones had enough to "eat . . . and satisfy themselves." (Deuteronomy 24:19-21; 26: 12, 13) We too can, in a discreet and dignified manner, offer material assistance to a single-parent family in need. Could you drop off some food or a bag of groceries at their home? Do you have clothing that a single parent or the children could use? Or can you offer some financial assistance so that a single parent can buy certain items that the family needs?

Provide association

Jehovah commanded that widows and fatherless boys be included in the nation's annual festivals, where they could enjoy association with fellow Israelites. In fact, they were told: "You must rejoice." (Deuteronomy 16:10-15) Similarly today, Christians are admonished to "be hospitable to one another," providing occasions for joyful association. (1 Peter 4:9) So why not invite a single-parent family to your home for a meal? It need not be elaborate. 'A few things are needed, or just one,' said Jesus when he enjoyed association at the home of friends. —Luke 10:42.

Your Consideration Will Be Appreciated

Kathleen, a single parent who brought up three children, says she will never forget this sage advice, "Expect nothing; appreciate everything." Like Kathleen, many single parents recognize the personal responsibility they have to raise their children. Therefore, they do not expect others to do for them what they must do for themselves. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that they appreciate any assistance they receive. You can contribute to their well-being and your own happiness by showing consideration for single parents, confident that Jehovah God "will reward you for what you have done." —Proverbs 19:17, New Century Version.

When was the last time you had a single-parent family over for a meal? Why not do so soon?



OUR READERS ASK . . .

Where is the Biblical Paradise?

■ Jesus promised a dying man who courageously expressed faith in him: "You will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Where would the man be? Would Paradise be located in heaven, on earth, or at some intermediate location where humans await judgment?

Our ancestors once lived in Paradise. The Bible tells us: "Jehovah God planted a garden in Eden, toward the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. . . . And Jehovah God proceeded to take the man and settle him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to take care of it." (Genesis 2:8, 15) When those words were translated into Greek, the word "garden" was rendered pa·ra'dei·sos, from which came the English word "paradise."

Just as a couple would enlarge their home when they have more children, so our first parents were expected to expand Paradise beyond the borders of Eden as the human family grew. God told them: "Fill the earth and subdue it."—Genesis 1:28.

Our Creator's purpose, then, was for humans to live and bear children in Paradise here on earth. They would live forever in an earthly garden with no need for any cemeteries. The earth was to become the permanent home for all mankind. No wonder the natural features of our planet bring us so much delight! We were created to live on a beautiful earth.

Has God's purpose changed? No. For Jehovah assures us: "So my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted." (Isaiah 55:11) Over 3,000 years after man's creation, the Bible stated regarding "the Former of the earth and the Maker of it" that he "did not create it simply for nothing," but he "formed it even to be inhabited."

(Isaiah 45:18) God's will has not changed. The earth will yet be a paradise.

Interestingly, many Bible passages about Paradise are simply descriptions of life on earth. For example, a prophecy of Isaiah states: "They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage." (Isaiah 65:21) Where are houses built and vineyards planted? Where is fruit eaten? On the earth. Proverbs 2:21 explicitly states: "The



upright are the ones that will reside in the earth."

Jesus too spoke about an earthly paradise. True, he also promised a heavenly paradise, but that was for a select few. (Luke 12:32) After death, these are resurrected to the heavenly Paradise and join Christ to rule over the earthly Paradise. (Revelation 5:10; 14:1-3) These heavenly corulers will ensure that Paradise on earth will be properly governed and maintained according to God's standards.

Jesus knew that this was God's will for the earth. After all, he was in heaven with his Father when the garden of Eden was created. Life in a future earthly paradise is open to all people who exercise faith today. (John 3:16) To such ones, Jesus promises: "You will be with me in Paradise." —Luke 23:43.



GOD IS A "DOER OF GREAT THINGS"

HOW I CAME TO KNOW IT

AS TOLD BY MAURICE RAI

My family, along with thousands of other immigrants, ran to escape one of the most ferocious assaults in World War II. For days we traveled through the dense Burmese jungle, sleeping under the trees at night. I was nine years old. A little bundle tied to my back held all my possessions. But this was just the beginning.

THE year was 1942. The world was at war, and we were fleeing from the advancing Japanese army. It had just invaded Burma, now called Myanmar, and had seized the oil fields of Yenangyaung. Before we could reach India's border, Japanese soldiers overtook us and forced us to return home.

When I was a child, we lived in Yenangyaung, where my father worked for the Burmah Oil Company. After the Japanese occupation, the rich oil fields of Yenangyaung became the target of intense bombing by British warplanes. Once, our family was sheltered in a trench for three days as bombs exploded all around us. Finally we fled by boat to Sale, a small town on the Ayeyarwady, or Irrawaddy, River. Grateful to be alive, we spent the remainder of the war there.

Tragedy Leads to Truth

My younger brother was born in 1945, the year World War II ended. My father was delighted to have a child in his old age. But his happiness was short-lived. Three months later my brother died. Father died from grief shortly afterward.

Friends, intending to comfort me, said that God had taken my father and brother to be with Him in heaven. How I yearned to be with them! My family attended the Catholic church, where I received my early parochial education. I was taught that priests and nuns go straight to heaven, while others have to spend time in purgatory, a place of temporary torment where they are cleansed of their sins. Determined to be reunited with my father and brother, I set my mind on attending the Catholic seminary in Maymyo, now called Pyin Oo Lwin, some 130 miles (210 km) from where we lived.

A good formal education was needed in order to gain entry to the seminary. As an immigrant, I had attended school for only two years. Then all schools were closed during the war. Though the schools reopened, our family was in dire economic straits. My mother was caring not only for my two brothers and me but also for the three young children of her deceased sister. She could no longer afford to keep us boys in school.

My older brother went to work, but I was only 13 years old and there was little I could

do. My father's brother, Manuel Nathan, lived in Chauk, a town near Sale. I reasoned, 'If I leave home, there will be one less mouth to feed.' So I went to Chauk to live with my uncle.

I did not know that my uncle had recently come in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses and was eager to share his newfound Bible knowledge. He shared it with me little by little, starting by explaining the meaning of the Our Father prayer, as Catholics call it. It begins: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."—Matthew 6:9, 10, Douay-Rheims Version.

"So God has a name," my uncle explained. "And that name is Jehovah." He then showed me the name of God in the Bible. I wanted to learn more. But I was a poor reader, even in my native Tamil, and the Bible and Bible literature my uncle had were in English, which I did not know well. Despite my limited schooling, I gradually came to understand Bible teachings. (Matthew 11:25, 26) My eyes were opened to see that many of the doctrines I had been taught were not based on the Bible. "Uncle," I finally said, "this is the truth!"

At the age of 16, I began sharing what I had learned with others. There were only 77 Witnesses of Jehovah in Myanmar at the time. Not long after, Robert Kirk, a Witness missionary from the capital city, Rangoon, now called Yangon, visited my uncle in Chauk. I told Robert that I had dedicated my life to Jehovah. So on December 24, 1949, I was baptized in the Ayeyarwady River, in symbol of my dedication to God.

Overcoming Obstacles

Soon afterward I moved to Mandalay to find suitable employment. My goal was to become a pioneer, as full-time ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses are called. One day while watching a soccer match, I collapsed with convulsions. I had developed epilepsy and had to move back to my family so that they could care for me.

The seizures continued on and off for eight years. When my health improved, I was able to take on some secular work. Although Mother discouraged me from pursuing the full-time ministry because of my condition, one day I told her: "I can't wait any longer. I want to become a pioneer. Jehovah will take care of me!"

In 1957, I moved to Yangon and began to pioneer. Amazingly, my seizures did not return until 50 years later, in 2007. Now they are controlled by medication. In 1958, I was appointed as a special pioneer, devoting 150 hours each month to the preaching work.

My first assignment was Kyonsha, a village some 70 miles (110 km) northwest of Yangon. A small group there had read our Bible literature and wanted to know more. When Robert and I arrived, a large crowd gathered. We answered their many Bible questions and showed them how to conduct Bible meetings. Some of them soon joined us in the preaching work. I was asked to stay in that village. Within a few months, the small group became a thriving congregation. Today, there are more than 150 Witnesses in the area.



In the ministry in Rangoon, Burma, about 1957



Traveling to attend a convention in Kalemyo, Burma, late 1970's

Later, I was appointed to serve as a traveling minister, visiting congregations and isolated groups throughout Myanmar. I rode countless miles over dusty roads atop loaded trucks, hiked through jungles, sailed rivers, and trekked across mountain ranges. Although I was not strong physically, I felt that Jehovah gave me the power to keep going. —Philippians 4:13.

"Jehovah Will Help You"

Then in 1962, I was transferred to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yangon, where Robert gave me some training. All too soon, government authorities ordered all foreign missionaries to leave Myanmar, and within a few weeks, they were gone. To my surprise, I was to look after the branch office.

'How can I do this work?' I wondered. 'I am uneducated and inexperienced.' Noting my anxiety, several older ones told me: "Maurice, don't worry. Jehovah will help you. And we are all with you." How reassuring their words were to me! A few months later, I had to compile the annual report of our preaching activities in Myanmar for the

1967 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses. For the next 38 years, I compiled this annual report for the country. Time after time, events made it clear to me that Jehovah truly is directing our activities.

For example, earlier, when I applied for Myanmar citizenship, I lacked the 450 kyats* needed to pay for my citizenship book, so I put the matter off. Then one day, while I was passing the office of the company that had employed me years earlier, my former boss saw me. He cried out: "Hey, Raj, come and get your money. You forgot to collect your provident fund when you left." It amounted to 450 kyats.

As I left the office, I thought of all the things I could do with 450 kyats. But since it was the *exact* amount needed to get my citizenship book, I felt that it was Jehovah's will that I use it for that purpose. And that choice proved to be most beneficial. As a citizen, I could remain in the country, travel freely, import literature, and carry out other duties vital to our preaching work in Myanmar.

A Convention in the North

By 1969, our work was progressing rapidly in the town of Myitkyina in northern Myanmar, so we decided to have a convention in this city. Our biggest challenge, however, was providing transportation for all the Witnesses in the south. We prayed and then requested from Myanmar Railways reservations for six railway coaches. We were greatly surprised when our application was approved.

In time, we had everything ready for our convention. On the day delegates were scheduled to arrive, we went to the railway station about midday, expecting the train to arrive at 2:30 p.m. While we were waiting, the stationmaster handed us a telegram that

 $^{^{*}}$ Equivalent, at the time, to about \$95 (U.S.), a sizable sum.



Our lovely new branch facilities, which were expanded in 2000



With Doris today

read: "We have disconnected the six coaches of the Watch Tower Society." He said that the train could not pull the extra coaches uphill.

What could we do? Our first thought was to reschedule the convention. But that would mean applying for another set of permits, which would require weeks! Just as we were praying fervently to Jehovah, the train pulled into the station. We could not believe our eyes—all six coaches filled with Witnesses! They were smiling and waving. When we asked what had happened, one of them explained, "They did disconnect six coaches, but not our six!"

Between 1967 and 1971, the number of Witnesses in Myanmar doubled to nearly 600. Then in 1978, the branch office was moved to a two-story house. Twenty years later, the number of Witnesses had increased to over 2,500. Further expansion of the branch facilities was made, and on January 22, 2000, John E. Barr, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, came from the United States and gave the dedication talk for the three-story office and residence complex that is in use today.

Looking Back on Blessings

Today, 52 volunteers live and work here at the branch in Yangon, and there are about 3,500 Witnesses serving in 74 congregations



In the doorto-door ministry together

and groups throughout the country. I am happy to say that in 1969, shortly before her death, my dear mother also became one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Doris Ba Aye, a local pioneer minister, became a translator at our branch office in the mid-1960's. Earlier, in 1959, she had attended the 32nd class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, a school for training missionaries of Jehovah's Witnesses. Her natural beauty, cheerful personality, and deep spirituality captured my heart. We were married in 1970. To this day, we remain devoted to Jehovah and to each other.

For more than six decades now, I have seen God's hand in the preaching work being accomplished in this land. Truly, he is great and very much to be praised. He is a "Doer of great things," as I have seen throughout my life.—Psalm 106:21.



TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

A Secret You Can Tell Others

AVE you ever been told a secret?—*
There is one I would like to tell
you. In the Bible it is called "the sacred
secret which has been kept in silence
for long-lasting times." (Romans 16:
25) At first only God knew "the sacred
secret." Let's see how God saw to it that
this secret became known to many.

To begin with, do you know what "sacred" means?— The word means holy, clean, or very special. So the secret is called the sacred secret because it is from God, who is holy. Who do you think wanted to know this special secret?—Angels did. The Bible says: "Into these very things angels are desiring to peer." Yes, they wanted to understand this holy secret.—1 Peter 1:12.

When Jesus came to earth, he talked about the sacred secret and began to explain it. He told his disciples: "To you the sacred secret of the kingdom of God has been given." (Mark 4:11) Did you notice what the sacred secret is about?— It is about God's Kingdom, which Jesus taught us to pray for!—Matthew 6:9, 10.

Now let's see how it was that God's Kingdom was a secret "for long-lasting times" until Jesus came to earth and began to explain it. After Adam and Eve broke God's law and were put out of the garden of Eden, God's servants came to know that God would still make the whole earth into a paradise. (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:8, 9; Isaiah 45:18) They wrote about the happiness people would enjoy on earth under God's Kingdom.—Psalm 37:11, 29; Isaiah 11: 6-9; 25:8; 33:24; 65:21-24.

Think, now, about the Ruler of God's Kingdom. Do you know whom God chose to be Ruler?— His Son, the "Prince of Peace," Jesus Christ. "The princely rule will come to be upon his shoulder," the Bible says. (Isaiah 9: 6, 7) You and I must take in "knowledge of the sacred secret of God, namely, Christ." (Colossians 2:2) We need to know that God took the life of the first angel (spirit Son) whom he created and put that life inside Mary. That Son, who had been a powerful angel, became the one whom God sent to earth as a sacrifice so that we can have everlasting life.—Matthew 20:28; John 3:16; 17:3.

There is more, though, that we need to know about this secret than that God has chosen Jesus to be the Ruler of His Kingdom. Part of the sacred secret is that others will be with the resurrected Jesus in heaven, both men and

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



What do you think the angels were trying to find out?

women. They will rule with Jesus in heaven!—Ephesians 1:8-12.

Let's learn the names of some of those who will rule with Jesus in heaven. Jesus told his faithful apostles that he was going there to prepare a place for them. (John 14:2, 3) By looking at the following scriptures, you will see the names of a few of the men and women who will rule with Jesus in his Father's Kingdom.—Matthew 10: 2-4; Mark 15:39-41; John 19:25.

For a long time, it was not known

how many people would rule in heaven with Jesus as part of his Kingdom. But now we know the number. Do you know it?— The Bible says it is 144,000. This too is part of the sacred secret.—Revelation 14:1, 4.

Do you agree that this "sacred secret of the kingdom of God" is the most wonderful secret anyone could ever come to know?—If so, let us try to learn all we can about it so that we can explain these things to as many people as we can.

QUESTIONS:

- What is the secret we talked about called, and why is it called that?
- What is this secret, and who first began teaching people about it?
- What are some things about this secret that you have learned?
- How might you explain the sacred secret to a friend?



Is it possible to make contact with the spirit realm?

SEE PAGES 3-9.



Did people in Bible times really live hundreds of years?

SEE PAGE 12.



What was it like working among earthquake victims in Haiti?

SEE PAGE 15.



Would you have recognized the Messiah if you had lived in Jesus' day? SEE PAGE 18.



What can you do that is really helpful to single parents?

SEE PAGE 22.

Would you welcome a visit?