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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Does the
Bible
Foretell the
Future?

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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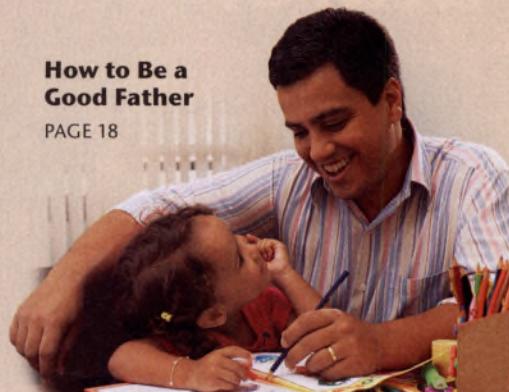


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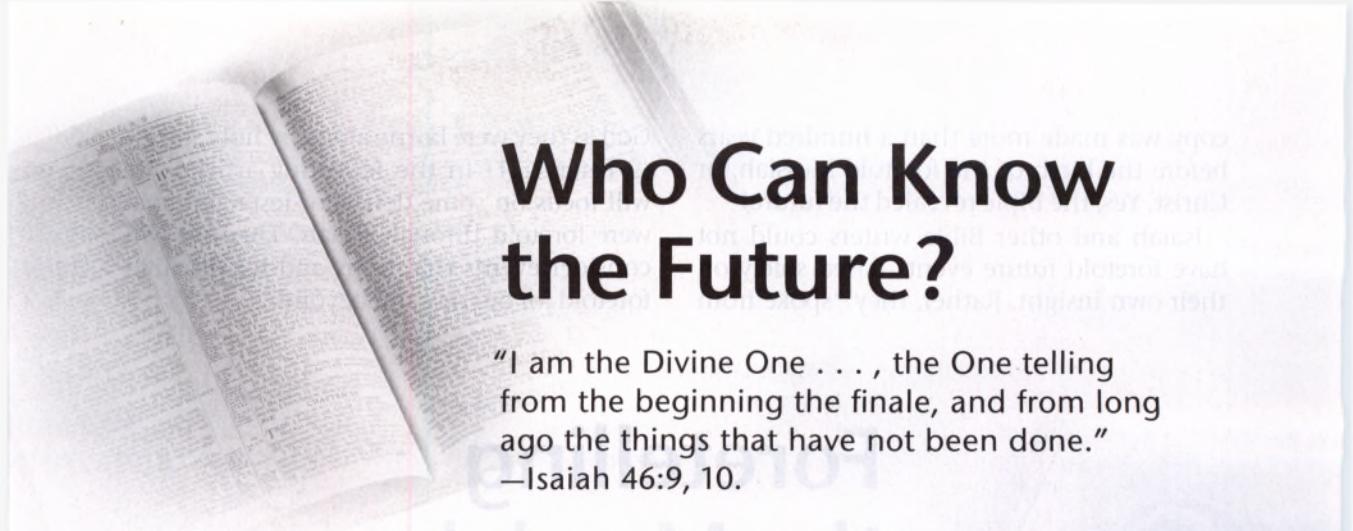


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Who Can Know the Future?

"I am the Divine One . . . , the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done."
—Isaiah 46:9, 10.

IN THESE unstable times, political, financial, and social analysts study history and modern trends in an effort to predict the future. Others, desperate to know what the future holds for them personally, look to astrology or spiritism for answers. Such people are often disappointed with the results. Is it utterly impossible to know what will happen to this world, our families, and us as individuals? In the end, can anyone really foresee the future?

In his words to the prophet Isaiah, quoted above, Almighty God, Jehovah, described his own ability to foretell the future. Through Isaiah, God foretold the release of the ancient Israelites from Babylonian captivity and their return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. How precise was this prophecy? About 200 years in advance, Isaiah correctly named Babylon's future conqueror, Cyrus. Furthermore, Isaiah accurately described Cyrus' strategy—that of diverting the Euphrates River, which served to protect the city. He even foresaw that Cyrus would find the massive two-leaved doors in the city wall carelessly left open, contributing to Cyrus' easy victory.—Isaiah 44:24–45:7.

Compared with God, man is powerless to peer into the future. "Do not make your boast about the next day," wrote wise

King Solomon, "for you do not know what a day will give birth to." (Proverbs 27:1) That observation is still true. No human can foresee even his own future. What makes God different? He completely understands everything he has created, including the nature and inclination of man. When he chooses to do so, God can foresee exactly how individuals and entire nations will act. Further, he has unlimited ability to control the outcome of events. When he foretells through his prophets that something will occur, he becomes "the One making the word of his servant come true, and the One that carries out completely the counsel of his own messengers." (Isaiah 44:26) Only Jehovah God can truthfully make that statement.

Isaiah lived more than 700 years before Jesus, the Messiah. Yet, Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Messiah. Particularly from the 18th century on, however, critics of the Bible have attacked the authenticity of the book of Isaiah. They have claimed that Isaiah's prophecies were not truly predictive but were written after the fact, a later writer merely recording what had already happened. Is that true? In 1947 a copy of the book of Isaiah was discovered, along with other ancient scrolls, in a cave near the Dead Sea. Scholars determined that this

copy was made more than a hundred years before the birth of the foretold Messiah, or Christ. Yes, the Bible revealed the future!

Isaiah and other Bible writers could not have foretold future events based solely on their own insight. Rather, they "spoke from

God as they were borne along by holy spirit." (2 Peter 1:21) In the following articles, we will focus on some details of Jesus' life that were foretold through Isaiah. Then we will consider events that Jesus and his disciples foretold for our day and beyond.

Foretelling the Messiah

KNOWING what Isaiah and other prophets had written about the Messiah, the Jewish nation long anticipated his arrival. By Jesus' day, in fact, many Jews "were in expectation" of the Messiah's imminent appearance. (Luke 3:15) Significantly, Bible prophecies include remarkable details of the Messiah's life. No mere human could either foretell such events or arrange for Jesus to experience them.

Details Surrounding the Messiah's Birth. Isaiah foretold that the Messiah, or Christ, would be born of a virgin. After describing the miraculous circumstances of Jesus' birth, the apostle Matthew wrote: "All this actually came about for that to be fulfilled which was spoken by Jehovah through his prophet, saying: 'Look! The virgin will become pregnant and will give birth to a son.'" (Matthew 1:22, 23; Isaiah 7:14) Isaiah also foretold that

"The virgin will...
give birth to a son"

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^{**} CD also available.

^{***} MP3 CD-ROM also available.

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Christ would be a descendant of David, specifically mentioning Jesse, David's father. Jesus did indeed directly descend from David. (Matthew 1:6, 16; Luke 3:23, 31, 32) Thus, before the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel told Jesus' mother, Mary: "God will give him the throne of David *his father*."—Luke 1:32, 33; Isaiah 11:1-5, 10; Romans 15:12.

Details of the Messiah's Life. In the synagogue in Nazareth, the adult Jesus read aloud from Isaiah's prophecy, including these words: "Jehovah's spirit is upon me, because he anointed me to declare good news to the poor." Applying the prophecy to himself, Jesus stated: "Today this scripture that you just heard is fulfilled." (Luke 4:17-21; Isaiah 61:1, 2) Isaiah also foretold Jesus' kind, mild, and unassuming way of dealing with those in need of healing. Matthew writes: "Many also followed him, and he cured them all, but he strictly charged them not to make him manifest; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet . . . 'He will not wrangle, nor cry aloud . . . No bruised reed will he crush.'"—Matthew 8:16, 17; 12:10-21; Isaiah 42:1-4; 53:4, 5.

Details of the Messiah's Suffering. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would not be accepted by the majority in Israel but would instead become "a stone of stumbling" to them. (1 Peter 2:6-8; Isaiah 8:14, 15) And indeed, despite Jesus' many miracles, the people "were not putting faith in him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled which he said: 'Jehovah, who has put faith in the thing heard by us?'" (John 12:37, 38; Isaiah 53:1) Contributing to the Jews' lack of faith was the popular, though mistaken, belief that the Messiah would immediately rid the nation of Roman rule and restore an independent Davidic kingdom on earth. Because Jesus suffered and died, most Jews could not accept him as the Messiah. But, in fact, Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah

would experience suffering before becoming King.

In the book of Isaiah, the Messiah prophetically says: "My back I gave to the strikers . . . My face I did not conceal from humiliating things and spit." Matthew reports what



happened when Jesus was being tried: "They spit into his face and hit him with their fists. Others slapped him in the face." (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:67) "He was letting himself be afflicted; yet he would not open his mouth," wrote Isaiah. Thus, when Pilate questioned Jesus about the Jews' accusations, Jesus "did not answer him, no, not a word, so that the governor wondered very much."—Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12-14; Acts 8:28, 32-35.

Details of the Messiah's Death. Isaiah's prophecy continued to be fulfilled at Jesus' death and even afterward. Isaiah foretold: "He will make his burial place even with the wicked ones, and with the rich class in his death." (Isaiah 53:9) How could this apparently contradictory prophecy be fulfilled? When Jesus died, he was impaled between two robbers. (Matthew 27:38) But later, wealthy Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus' body in his own newly quarried tomb. (Matthew 27:57-60) Finally, Jesus' death fulfilled one of the most important elements of Isaiah's prophecy. Speaking of the Messiah, Isaiah says: "The righteous one, my servant,

will bring a righteous standing to many people; and their errors he himself will bear." Indeed, Jesus' death provided the ransom so that the burden of sin can be lifted from all faithful people.—Isaiah 53:8, 11; Romans 4:25.

Prophecies Certain of Fulfillment

To establish the identity of the Messiah Scripturally, the apostles and Jesus himself quoted more frequently from the prophecy of Isaiah than from any other Bible book. Still, the book of Isaiah was not the only one to foretell the future. Many other Hebrew Scripture prophecies also find fulfillment in Jesus, his Kingdom, and the good things that the Kingdom will accomplish in the future.* (Acts 28:23; Revelation 19:10) How certain

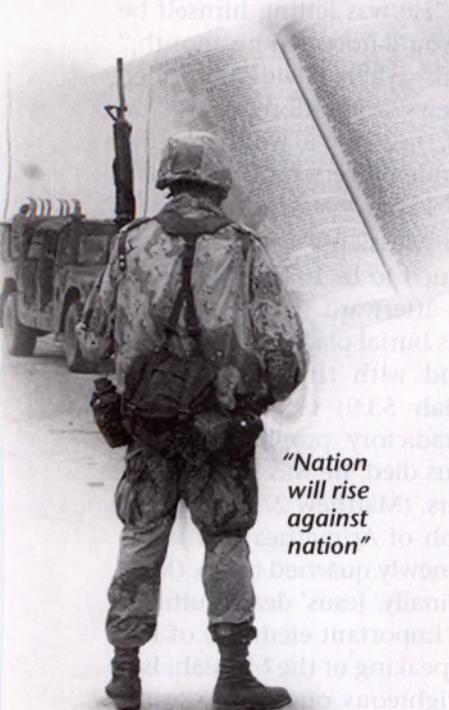
was it that these prophecies would be fulfilled? Jesus told his Jewish listeners: "Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets [that is, the Hebrew Scriptures]. I came, not to destroy, but to fulfill; for truly I say to you that sooner would heaven and earth pass away than for one smallest letter or one particle of a letter to pass away from the Law by any means and not all things take place."—Matthew 5:17, 18.

Jesus also pointed to the fulfillment of Bible prophecies in the events unfolding around him and in events to come. (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 15:7-9; 24:15) Further, Jesus and his disciples themselves foretold events that would occur after their day, including many that we have seen take place today. The following article will discuss these and other, yet future, fulfillments of Bible prophecy.

Events Foretold for Our Day

THE Bible foretells that God's Kingdom will bring permanent peace and happiness to the earth. (Daniel 2:44) In the Our Father, or the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." (Matthew 6:10) In his great prophecy given to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus foretold specific events and conditions that would immediately precede the coming of that Kingdom. Together, these features constitute a sign that would be clearly evident to all honesthearted observers. How many of the following aspects of that sign are you personally aware of?

International Wars. Jesus foretold: "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." (Matthew 24:7) Prior to the first world war in 1914, wars tended to be more localized. World War I not only engulfed large parts of the globe but also accelerat-



"Nation
will rise
against
nation"

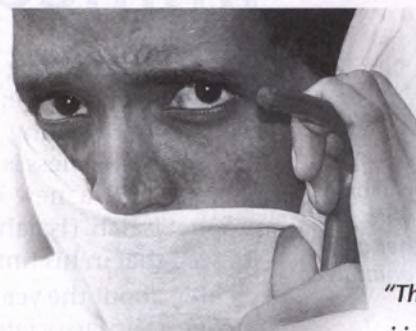
ed the development of weapons more terrible than any that mankind had ever known. For example, the newly invented airplane was used to drop bombs on civilians. Mass production of weapons increased the carnage to levels that were previously unimaginable, as about half of the 65 million soldiers that were mobilized either died or were wounded. Yet, as the 20th century progressed, the carnage expanded. In the words of one historian, the military and civilian dead of World War II "would be forever uncountable." And the wars continue even now.

Widespread Hunger. "There will be food shortages," Jesus foretold. (Matthew 24:7) In 2005, *Science* magazine stated: "There are 854 million people in the world (about 14% of our population) who are chronically or acutely malnourished." In 2007, a United Nations source reported that 33 countries lack sufficient food to feed their people. When world grain production is on the rise, how can this be? For one thing, land and grain that could be used to feed people are used to produce ethanol instead. "The amount of ethanol needed to fill a big four-wheel-drive SUV just once uses enough grain to feed one person for an entire year," reports the South African newspaper *The Witness*. In developed countries too, increasing food prices force many to choose between having food for dinner or paying for other necessities, such as medicine or heating.

Massive Earthquakes. Jesus said: "There will be great earthquakes." (Luke 21:11) If it seems to you that now more people than ever before are affected by earthquakes, you are correct. "Suddenly we are seeing a spurt in seismic activity globally," observed Indian seismologist R. K. Chadha in 2007. "Nobody knows why." Moreover, rapid population growth in areas prone to earthquakes has increased the toll of these disasters. The earthquake that struck the Indian Ocean in

2004 and the tsunami that followed made that year the "deadliest in nearly 500 years for earthquakes" and "the second most fatal in recorded history," according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Intractable Disease. "There will be . . . pestilences," Jesus foretold. (Luke 21:11) Around the globe, illnesses old and new sicken ever greater numbers, and hoped-for remedies are proving elusive. For instance, international goals to eradicate malaria have had to be scaled back repeatedly as the disease continues to defy human control. In addition, millions are killed by old diseases, including tuberculosis (TB), now operating in tandem with AIDS and other new diseases. "One-third of the world's population is currently infected with the TB bacillus," reports the World Health Organization. The organization also notes that HIV is contributing to the



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"*There will be . . . pestilences*"

TB epidemics in many countries. Every second, another person is infected with TB, and TB is developing greater resistance to drug treatment. In 2007 a patient in Europe was diagnosed with TB that was "invulnerable to every single drug we have," reported *New Scientist* magazine.

Moral and Social Breakdown. "Because of the increasing of lawlessness the love of the greater number will cool off," Jesus said. (Matthew 24:12) Besides what Jesus foretold, the apostle Paul pointed forward to a

collapse of social and moral values. He described the difficult "last days" that would come just before God's Kingdom would end this world system. "Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection, not open to any agreement, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness, betrayers, headstrong, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godly devotion but proving false to its power."

(2 Timothy 3:1-5) Have you not seen that people display such bad traits more than they used to?

Jesus and Paul did not list all the historical, social, and political factors that are to blame for these world conditions. Nevertheless, their prophecies accurately foretold the events and attitudes that we are seeing today. What about the future? The prophecy of Isaiah that reliably foretold the coming of the Messiah also describes the beneficial changes God's Kingdom will bring to the earth. Let us consider these in the following article.

Foretelling Our Immediate Future

WHEN discussing the future of man and the earth, the apostle Peter wrote: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his [God's] promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:13) A promise of "new heavens and a new earth" was originally given through the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22) By citing this prophecy, Peter showed that in his time it had not yet been completely fulfilled.

Later, about the year 96 C.E., the Revelation given through the apostle John associated that "new earth" with blessings under

Humans will be at peace with one another and with the animals



God's Kingdom. (Revelation 21:1-4) Jesus' words as well as those of the apostle Paul about world conditions just prior to the coming of God's Kingdom are now being fulfilled. Therefore, we can expect that Kingdom will soon usher in the new world. What will that new world be like? The Bible book of Isaiah tells us.

Blessings in the New World

Worldwide Peace and United Worship.

"They will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning

Abundant Food for All. "Jehovah of armies will certainly make for all the peoples, in this mountain, a banquet of well-oiled dishes, a banquet of wine kept on the dregs, of well-oiled dishes filled with marrow, of wine kept on the dregs, filtered."—Isaiah 25:6.

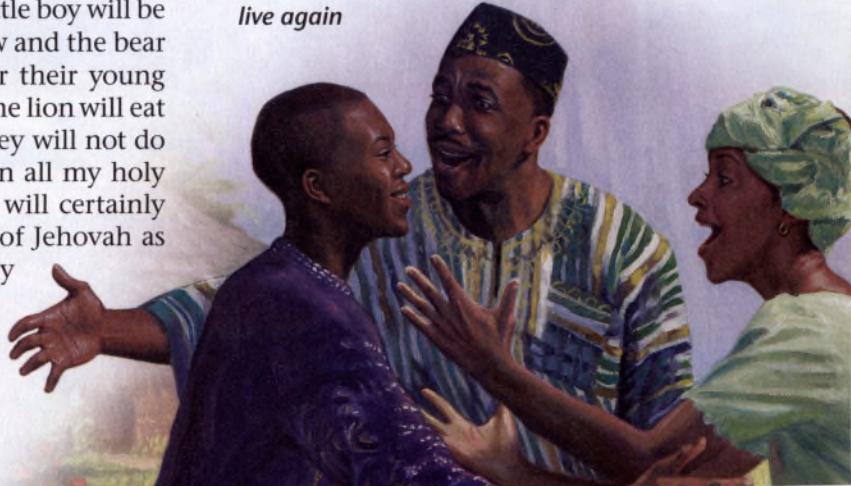
No More Death. "He [God] will actually swallow up death forever, and the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will certainly wipe the tears from all faces. And the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for Jehovah himself has spoken it."—Isaiah 25:8.

Dead Ones Resurrected. "Thy dead live, their bodies will rise again. They that sleep in the earth will awake and shout for joy . . . The earth will bring those long dead to birth again."—Isaiah 26:19, *The New English Bible*.

Messiah a Righteous Judge. "He will not judge by any mere appearance to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to the thing heard by his ears. And with righteousness he must judge the lowly ones, and with uprightness he must give reproof in behalf of the meek ones of the earth."—Isaiah 11:3, 4.

Blind and Deaf Healed. "The eyes of the blind ones will be opened, and the very ears of the deaf ones will be unstopped."—Isaiah 35:5.

The dead will live again



shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore."—Isaiah 2:2-4.

Peace Between Humans and Animals.

"The wolf will actually reside for a while with the male lamb, and with the kid the leopard itself will lie down, and the calf and the maned young lion and the well-fed animal all together; and a mere little boy will be leader over them. And the cow and the bear themselves will feed; together their young ones will lie down. And even the lion will eat straw just like the bull. . . . They will not do any harm or cause any ruin in all my holy mountain; because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea."—Isaiah 11:6-9.



Wasteland Becomes Productive. "The wilderness and the waterless region will exult, and the desert plain will be joyful and blossom as the saffron. Without fail it will blossom, and it will really be joyful with joyousness and with glad crying out."—Isaiah 35:1, 2.

A New Earth. "I am creating new heavens [a new heavenly government] and a new earth [a righteous new human society]; and the former things will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart. But exult, you people, and be joyful forever in what I am creating. . . . They [inhabitants of God's promised new world] will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build and someone else have occupancy; they will not plant and someone else do the eating. For like the days of a tree will the days of my people be; and the work of their own hands my chosen ones will use to the full. They will not toil for nothing, nor will they bring to birth for disturbance; because they are the offspring made up of the blessed ones of Jehovah,

and their descendants with them. And it will actually occur that before they call out I myself shall answer; while they are yet speaking, I myself shall hear." "Just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making are standing before me,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'so the offspring of you people and the name of you people will keep standing.'"—Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22.

Foretelling a Grand Future

Isaiah is not the only Bible book that foretells blessings for the future. The Bible is filled with prophecies that describe the marvelous things that God will accomplish through his Kingdom under Christ.* Would you like to live under such paradisaic conditions? You can! Find out for yourself what the Bible really teaches about God's good purposes for the future, and learn how you can be a part of them. Jehovah's Witnesses would be happy to help you.

* For further information about God's Kingdom and what it will accomplish, see pages 76-85 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

*The whole earth will
be a paradise*



Did You Know?

Why did the Jews begin their Sabbath observance in the evening?

When Jehovah gave his people the law concerning the Day of Atonement, he said: "You must do no sort of work on this very day . . . It is a sabbath of complete rest for you . . . From evening to evening you should observe your sabbath." (Leviticus 23:28, 32) This command reflected the view that each day began in the evening, after sunset, and ended at the subsequent sunset. For the Jews, the day thus ran from evening to evening.

This method of counting days followed the pattern set by God himself. The account concerning the first figurative day of creation states: "There came to be evening and there came to be morning, a first day." The successive "days" are also counted in the same way, beginning in the "evening."—Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31.

The Jews were not the only people to reckon days in this way. The Athenians, the Numidians, and the Phoenicians did likewise. The Babylonians, on the other hand, considered sunrise to be the beginning of each new day, while the Egyptians and the Romans reck-

oned their days from midnight to midnight, as is the modern custom. Present-day Jews, however, still begin and end their Sabbath observance at sundown.

What was a "sabbath day's journey"?

After witnessing the ascension of Jesus to heaven from the Mount of Olives, his disciples returned to Jerusalem, which was "a sabbath day's journey away." (Acts 1:12) A traveler could walk perhaps 20 miles or more in a day. However, the Mount of Olives is close to Jerusalem. So, what is meant by "a sabbath day's journey"?

The Sabbath was a day on which the Israelites were to rest from their normal activities. They were not even to light a fire in their homes on that day. (Exodus 20:10; 35:2, 3) "Keep sitting each one in his own place," Jehovah commanded. "Let nobody go out :

from his locality on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:29) This law would allow the Israelites opportunity to rest from normal activities and to give increased attention to spiritual aspects of life.

Not content with the principles laid down by Jehovah's Law, legalistically minded rabbis set about establishing exactly—and somewhat arbitrarily—how far a person could walk on the Sabbath, for example, to attend worship. In this regard, the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* states: "In consequence of the rigorous laws about the observance of the Sabbath . . . , it was enacted that no Israelite is to walk on the Sabbath beyond a certain distance, called a Sabbath-day's journey." That distance was set at 2,000 cubits, which corresponds to somewhere between one half and seven tenths of a mile.

JERUSALEM AS VIEWED FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES



How Reliable Are THE GOSPELS?

"The gospels must now be seen as the result of early Christian mythmaking."
—Burton L. Mack, retired professor of New Testament studies.

THE above-quoted professor is not alone in this view. A number of scholars have questioned the reliability of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the Bible accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Why do some view the Gospels as myths? Should their opinion raise doubts in your mind about the truthfulness of the Gospels? Let us examine some of the evidence.

The Reliability of the Gospels Questioned

During the first 17 centuries of our Common Era, the reliability of the Gospels was never seriously questioned. However, especially from the 19th century onward, a number of academics have considered the Gospels, not as inspired by God, but as concocted by men. In addition, they have denied that the Gospel writers had firsthand information about Jesus and have insisted that such men were unable to record reliable history. Furthermore, they have concluded that the similarities in structure and contents in the first three Gospels—sometimes called synoptic, meaning “like view”—indicate that the evangelists copied extensively from one another. Critics have also rejected Jesus' miracles and his resurrection as described in the Gospels. Some have even claimed that Jesus was not a historical person at all!

These same individuals have concluded that Mark must have written the first of the

Gospels, since it seems to add little to those of Matthew and Luke. The critics have also assumed that Matthew and Luke used the book of Mark to compile their Gospels and that they consulted a supplementary source—a document the scholars call Q (from the German *Quelle*, or “source”). According to Bible scholar A.F.J. Klijn, this popular hypothesis “degraded the Gospel writers to compilers of isolated stories.” Such a notion actually makes the Gospel writers plagiarists and mythmakers. This theory has undermined faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible.—2 Timothy 3:16.

Were the Gospel Writers Plagiarists?

Do the similarities between the synoptic Gospels indeed prove that the writers simply copied from one another? No. Why not? For one thing, Jesus promised his disciples that the holy spirit would ‘bring back to their minds all the things he had told them.’ (John 14:26) Therefore, it is not surprising that the Gospel writers remembered and recorded some of the same events. Granted, some of the Bible writers may have read and referred to the work of other Bible writers, but such a practice would suggest careful research, not plagiarism. (2 Peter 3:15) Additionally, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* states: “Dependence on oral tradition could easily account for the memorable sayings of Jesus being recorded in identical form.”



Luke stated that he had spoken with many eyewitnesses and had "traced all things from the start with accuracy." (Luke 1:1-4) Does that sound as if he were a plagiarist or a mythmaker? On the contrary! After a thorough analysis of Luke's writings, archaeologist William Ramsay concluded: "Luke is a historian of the first rank: not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

The testimony of the early Church Fathers, including that of third-century theologian Origen, likewise suggests that the apostle Matthew was the first to write a Gospel. Origen wrote: "The first is written according to Matthew, the same that was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who having published it for the Jewish converts, wrote it in the Hebrew." Obviously, Matthew, an apostle and eyewitness, did not need to plagiarize the writings of Mark, who was not an eyewitness. What, then, are the facts concerning the claims that Matthew and Luke copied from Mark and a presumed document called Q?

Was the Gospel of Mark Written First?

The theory that Mark's Gospel was written first and served as a source for Matthew and Luke is not based on "one logically cast-iron

If Mark Had Not Been Written, We Would Not Know That . . .

Jesus looked around with indignation, being thoroughly grieved at the insensibility of their hearts (Mark 3:5)

John and James were surnamed Boanerges (Mark 3:17)

the woman with a blood flow had spent all her resources (Mark 5:26)

Herodias was nursing a grudge against John the Baptizer and Herod stood in fear of John and kept him safe (Mark 6:19, 20)

Jesus invited his disciples to rest up a bit (Mark 6:31)

the Pharisees washed their hands up to the elbow (Mark 7:2-4)

Jesus took the children into his arms (Mark 10:16)

Jesus felt love for the young ruler (Mark 10:21)

Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus privately (Mark 13:3)

a young man left his linen garment behind (Mark 14:51, 52)

Furthermore, one of Jesus' illustrations and two of his miracles are found only in the book of Mark.—Mark 4:26-29; 7:32-37; 8:22-26.

Mark's Gospel contains many more firsthand details not found in the other Gospels. Our appreciation for it will surely grow when we take time to meditate fully on the value of all such significant details.

argument," admits *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Yet, many scholars feel that Mark wrote his Gospel before Matthew and Luke wrote theirs because, they claim, Mark adds little to the other Gospels. For example, 19th-century Bible scholar Johannes Kuhn insisted that Mark's Gospel must have been written first. Otherwise, Kuhn said, "one would have to imagine that Mark had cut the two scrolls of Matthew and Luke up into little snippets, mixed these together in a pot, and produced his Gospel from this mixture."

Since Mark's Gospel is the shortest, it is not surprising that it contains the least amount of unique material. Still, that does not prove that it must have been written first. Further, it is simply not true that Mark adds nothing to Matthew and Luke. In Mark's vigorous, fast-moving account of Jesus' ministry, there are actually more than 180 passages and fascinating details that are not found in Matthew and Luke, making it a truly unique account of Jesus' life.—See box on page 13.

What About Document Q?

What can be said about document Q, which some claim was a source for Matthew and Luke? James M. Robinson, professor of religion, states: "Q is surely the most important Christian text that we have." That statement is surprising because document Q does not exist today, and in reality, no one can prove that it ever existed! Its total disappearance is all the more remarkable because scholars claim that several copies of the document must have circulated. In addition, document Q is never quoted by the Church Fathers.

Think about this. Q is *supposed* to have existed and to have supported the hypothetical priority of Mark's Gospel. Is that not a case of one hypothesis built upon another hypothesis? When it comes to theories such as these, we are wise to keep this proverb in mind: "A

simple man believes every word he hears; a clever man understands the need for proof." —Proverbs 14:15, *The New English Bible*.

The Gospels—Authentic and Reliable

In their speculations and unfounded hypotheses, critical scholars have distracted many from examining the reliable Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. These accounts clearly show that the early Christians did not view the events of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection as myths. Hundreds of eyewitnesses confirmed the truthfulness of these facts. These early Christians, who were willing to face persecution and death to follow Jesus, fully realized that being a Christian would be senseless if Jesus' ministry and resurrection were mere fantasy.

—1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 17, 19; 2 Timothy 2:2.

Referring to the controversy that surrounds the hypotheses about the supposed priority of Mark's Gospel and the mysterious lost document Q, George W. Buchanan, professor of theology, says: "Concentration on hypotheses of origin distracts the Bible student from studying the text itself." That thought is in harmony with the apostle Paul's counsel to Timothy not "to pay attention to false stories and to genealogies, which end up in nothing, but which furnish questions for research rather than a dispensing of anything by God in connection with faith."

—1 Timothy 1:4.

The Gospels are reliable. They contain trustworthy accounts of eyewitnesses. They are based on thorough research. They bring to us many fascinating facts about the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, like Timothy of old, we do well to heed Paul's words: "Continue in the things that you learned and were persuaded to believe." We have solid reason to accept that "all Scripture is inspired of God"—including the four Gospels.—2 Timothy 3:14-17.

“Become Imitators of God”

Ephesians 4:32–5:2

KINDNESS. Compassion. Forgiveness. Love. Sadly, it is rare to see people displaying such virtues today. What about you? Have you ever felt that your efforts to cultivate noble attributes are doomed to failure? A self-critical heart may insist that certain obstacles, such as ingrained bad habits or painful experiences from the past, make it impossible for you to develop appealing traits. Yet, the Bible teaches this reassuring truth—our Creator knows that we have within us the potential for cultivating positive qualities.

God's Word admonishes true Christians: “Therefore, become imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1) Those words are a remarkable expression of God's confidence in his worshippers. How so? Jehovah God created man in His image, according to His likeness. (Genesis 1:26, 27) God thus endowed humans with qualities that mirror his own.* Hence, when the Bible urges Christians to “become imitators of God,” it is as if Jehovah himself were saying to them: ‘I believe in you. I know that despite your imperfections, you have the ability to be like me to a certain extent.’

What are some qualities of God that we can imitate? The surrounding verses answer. Note

* Colossians 3:9, 10 indicates that being made in God's image has to do with personality traits. Those who want to please God are urged to clothe themselves “with the new personality,” which is “made new according to the image of the One [God] who created it.”



that Paul prefaced the admonition to imitate God with the word “therefore.” This term is a connection to the preceding verse, which mentions kindness, tender compassion, and forgiveness. (Ephesians 4:32; 5:1) Then, in the verse following the counsel to imitate God, Paul tells Christians to pursue a way of life characterized by unselfish love. (Ephesians 5:2) Truly, when it comes to displaying kindness,

expressing warmhearted compassion, forgiving others freely, and showing love, we have the greatest example of all to imitate—Jehovah God.

Why should we want to be like God? Notice the powerful motivation inherent in Paul's words: “Become imitators of God, as beloved children.” Is that not a touching thought? Jehovah views his worshippers as children whom he dearly loves. As a little boy may try to be just like his father, so true Christians try their best to be like their heavenly Father.

Jehovah does not force humans to imitate him. On the contrary, he has dignified us with free will. So whether you will become an imitator of God or not is up to you. (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20) Never forget, though, that you have within you the potential for displaying godlike qualities. Of course, to imitate God you must first know what he is like. The Bible can help you to learn all about the qualities and ways of the God whose matchless personality has drawn millions to become imitators of him.

Are You Ever Jealous? Joseph's Brothers Were

LET'S talk about what it means to be jealous. Have you ever found it hard to like a person because others said that he is good, handsome, or smart?*—Well, that is what can happen when you are jealous of someone.

Jealousy can occur in a family if parents favor one child over another. The Bible tells about a family in which jealousy caused a big problem. Let us consider the trouble it led to and the lesson we can learn from what happened.

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob, and Joseph's half brothers were jealous of him. Do you know why?—It was because their father, Jacob, favored Joseph. For example, Jacob had a beautiful striped coat made for Joseph. Jacob especially loved Joseph "because he was the son of his old age" and the first child by his beloved wife, Rachel.

The Bible says that 'when Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him the most, they hated Joseph.' Then one day Joseph told his family that in a dream, all of them bowed down to him, including his own father. "His brothers grew jealous of him," the Bible says, and even Joseph's father scolded him for telling about such a dream.—Genesis 37:1-11.

Some time later, when Joseph was 17, his brothers were many miles away caring for the family's sheep and goats. So Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were. Do you know what most of them wanted to do when they saw



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

him coming?— They wanted to kill him! But two of them, Reuben and Judah, did not want to.

When some merchants passed by on their way to Egypt, Judah said: “Let us sell him.” So they did. Then they killed a goat and dipped Joseph’s coat in its blood. Later, as they showed the coat to their father, he cried out: ‘A vicious wild beast must have eaten Joseph!’—Genesis 37:12-36.

In time, Joseph came to be favored by Pharaoh, Egypt’s ruler. This was because with God’s help he was able to explain the meaning of two of Pharaoh’s dreams. The first was of seven healthy cows followed by seven sick ones. The second dream was of seven healthy ears of grain and then of seven shriveled ones. Both dreams, Joseph said, meant that there would be seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine. At Pharaoh’s direction, Joseph was put in charge of storing up food in the years of plenty to prepare for the famine.

When the famine came, Joseph’s family, who lived many miles away, needed food. Jacob sent Joseph’s ten older brothers to Egypt to get food. They came before Joseph, but they did not recognize him. Without revealing who he was, Joseph tested his brothers, and he learned how sorry they were for having treated him so badly. Then Joseph told them who he was. How they hugged one another and rejoiced!—Genesis, chapters 40 through 45.

What can you learn about jealousy from this Bible story?— Jealousy can lead to big trouble, even causing a person to want to hurt his own brother! Let us read Acts 5:17, 18 and Acts 7:54-59 and see what jealousy caused people to do to Jesus’ disciples.— After reading this, can you see why we must be careful about becoming jealous?

Joseph lived to be 110 years old. He raised children, who bore him grandchildren, and then he had great-grandchildren. We can be sure that Joseph often taught them to love one another and to avoid giving in to jealousy.
—Genesis 50:22, 23, 26.

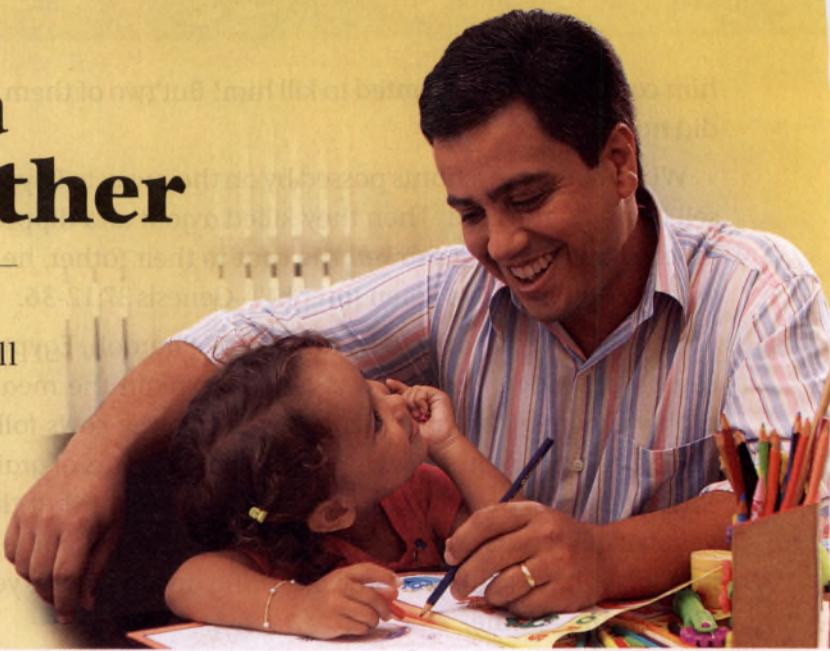
Questions:

- What does it mean to be jealous?
- What did jealousy cause the brothers of Joseph to do?
- Why did Joseph forgive his brothers?
- What can we learn from this story?

How to Be a Good Father

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."

—Colossians 3:21, *The Holy Bible—New International Version*.



HOW can a father avoid making his children feel bitter? It is vital that he recognize the importance of his role as a father. "Fatherhood turns out to be a complex and unique phenomenon with huge consequences for the emotional and intellectual growth of children," says one journal on mental health.

What is the role of a father? In many families the father is seen primarily as the one who dispenses discipline. Many a mother has told a misbehaving child, 'Just wait till your father gets home!' To be sure, children need balanced discipline and a measure of firmness if they are to become well-adjusted adults. More, though, is involved in being a good father.

Sadly, not every father had a good example to help him. Some men were raised without a father in the home. But in other cases, men who were brought up by a rigid, austere father may tend to treat their children the same way. How can such a father break that mold and improve his parenting skills?

There is a source of practical and trustwor-

thy advice on how to be a good father. The Bible contains the best advice on family life. Its counsel is not mere theory; nor does its guidance ever work to our harm. The Bible's counsel reflects the wisdom of its Author, Jehovah God, who is the Originator of family life. (Ephesians 3:14, 15) If you are a father, you would do well to consider what the Bible has to say about parenting.*

Being a good father is important not only for the physical and emotional welfare of your children but also for their spiritual well-being. A child who has a very loving and close relationship with his father may even find it easier to develop a close and intimate relationship with God. After all, the Bible shows that, in a sense, Jehovah, our Creator, is a Father to us. (Isaiah 64:8) Let us now consider six things that children need from their father. In each case, we will examine how applying Bible principles can help a father to fill those needs.

* Although the Scriptural counsel considered in this article focuses primarily on the father's role, many of the principles are applicable to mothers as well.

1 Children Need Their Father's Love

Jehovah sets the perfect example as a Father. Describing how God feels about Jesus, his firstborn Son, the Bible says: "The Father loves the Son." (John 3:35; Colossians 1:15) On more than one occasion, Jehovah expressed love for his Son and approval of him. When Jesus was baptized, Jehovah spoke from the heavens, saying: "You are my Son, the beloved; I have approved you." (Luke 3: 22) Jesus never doubted his Father's love for him. What can a human father learn from God's example?

Never be reluctant to tell your children that you love them. Kelvin, a father of five, says: "I have always tried to express my love for my children not only by telling them that I love them but also by showing a personal interest in each one of them. I shared in changing their diapers and in bathing them." In addition, your children need to know that they have your approval. So do not be overly critical, constantly correcting them. Rather, be generous with praise. Donizete, who has two teenage girls, recommends, "A father should make a point of looking for opportunities to commend his children." Knowing that they have your approval can help your children to have a healthy sense of self-worth. That, in turn, can help them to draw closer to God.

2 Children Need a Positive Example

Jesus can do "only what he beholds the Father doing," says John 5:19. Notice that the text says that Jesus saw and practiced what his Father was "*doing*." Children will often do the same. For example, if the father treats his wife with respect and dignity, his son may well grow up to treat women with dignity and respect. Not only are boys' attitudes affected by their father's example but girls' views of

men may be influenced by their father's example.

Do your children find it difficult to apologize? Here again, example is important. Kelvin remembers an occasion when two of his boys broke an expensive camera. He got so angry that he pounded a wooden table and it split in two. Kelvin felt very bad afterward and apologized to all, including his wife, for having lost his temper. He feels that his apology had a positive effect on his children; they do not have any difficulty in saying that they are sorry.

3 Children Need a Happy Environment

Jehovah is a "happy God." (1 Timothy 1: 11) Not surprisingly, his Son, Jesus, found great joy in being with his Father. Proverbs 8: 30 sheds light on the relationship between

*A father needs to be
a positive example to his children*



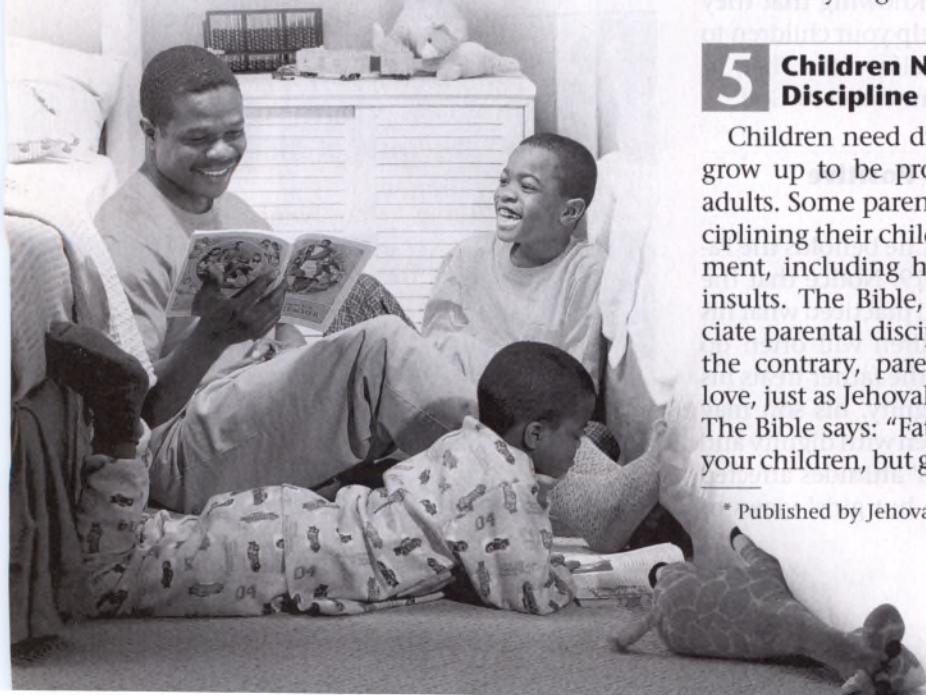
Jesus and his Father: "I came to be beside him [the Father] as a master worker, . . . I being glad ["rejoicing," NIV] before him all the time." What a warm relationship existed between Father and Son!

Your children need a happy environment. Taking the time to play with your children can help to create such an environment. Playing together helps parent and child to bond. Felix agrees with that. He has a teenage son and says: "Setting aside time for recreation with my son has been very important to our relationship. We play games together, associate with friends, and visit enjoyable places. This has strengthened our sense of family togetherness."

4 Children Need to Be Taught Spiritual Values

Jesus was taught by his Father. Jesus could therefore say: "The very things I heard from him [the Father] I am speaking in the world." (John 8:26) In God's eyes, a father is responsible for educating his children morally and

A father should fill his children's spiritual needs



spiritually. One of your responsibilities as a father is to inculcate right principles into the hearts of your children. Such training should start from an early age. (2 Timothy 3:14, 15) Felix began to read Bible stories to his son when he was still small. Felix used colorful, interesting stories, including those found in *My Book of Bible Stories*.* As his son grew older, Felix chose other Bible-based publications that were appropriate for his son's age.

Donizete says: "It is a real challenge to make family Bible study enjoyable. It is important that parents show that they appreciate spiritual matters, since children are quick to note inconsistencies." Carlos, who has three sons, comments: "We hold a weekly meeting to consider the family's needs. Each member of the family has the opportunity to choose what will be discussed." Kelvin always sought to talk to his children about God wherever they were and whatever they were doing. That reminds us of Moses' words: "These words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up."—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.

5 Children Need Discipline

Children need discipline so that they can grow up to be productive and responsible adults. Some parents seem to think that disciplining their children involves severe treatment, including harsh threats or belittling insults. The Bible, however, does not associate parental discipline with harshness. On the contrary, parents should discipline in love, just as Jehovah does. (Hebrews 12:4-11) The Bible says: "Fathers, do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah.”—Ephesians 6:4.

Occasionally, punishment may be necessary. A child, though, should understand why he is being punished. Parental discipline should never leave a child feeling rejected. The Bible does not endorse severe beatings, which may even injure a child. (Proverbs



Children need loving discipline

16:32) Kelvin comments, “When I needed to correct my children about serious matters, I always tried to make it clear that my motive for correcting them was my love for them.”

6

Children Need to Be Protected

Children need to be protected from unwholesome influences and potentially harmful associates. Sadly, there are “wicked men” in this world who are bent on exploiting innocent children. (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13) How can you protect your children? The Bible offers this wise advice: “Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself, but the inexperienced have passed along and must suffer the penalty.” (Proverbs 22:3) To shield your children from calamity, you must be alert to dangers. Anticipate situations that could lead to problems,

and take due precautions. For example, if you allow your children access to the Internet, be sure that they know how to use it safely. It may be best to keep the computer in an open area where you can easily monitor its use.

A father needs to prepare and train his children for the dangers they may face in this abusive world. Do your children know what to do in case someone tries to take advantage of them when you are not present?* Your children need to know the proper and improper use of their private body parts. Kelvin comments: “I never left this training to others, not even their teachers. I felt that it was my personal responsibility to teach my children about sex and the danger of child molesters.” All his children safely reached adulthood and are now happily married.

Seek God’s Help

The greatest gift a father can give to his children is that of helping them to develop a solid personal relationship with God. The father’s example is of utmost importance. Donizete says: “Fathers need to show how much they treasure their own relationship with God. This should become especially clear when they face personal problems or difficulties. On such occasions, the father shows how deeply he trusts in Jehovah. Family prayer, with repeated expressions of appreciation to God for His goodness, will teach children the importance of having God as their Friend.”

What, then, is the key to being a good father? Seek the advice of the one who knows best how to raise children—Jehovah God. If you train your children according to the guidance of God’s Word, you may well see the results described at Proverbs 22:6: “Even when he grows old he will not turn aside from it.”

* For information on protecting children from sexual abuse, see *Awake!* of October 2007, pages 3-11, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

She Drew “Conclusions in Her Heart”

MARY shifted her weight uncomfortably atop the little beast of burden. She had been riding for hours. Just ahead, Joseph walked steadily onward, leading the way along the road toward distant Bethlehem. Mary once again felt the stirring of life within her.

Mary was well along in her pregnancy; the Bible describes her at this time with the expressive phrase “heavy with child.” (Luke 2:5) As the couple passed by one field after another, perhaps some of the farmers looked up from their plowing or sowing and wondered why a woman in such a condition would go on a journey. What had led Mary so far from her home in Nazareth?

It all began months earlier when this young Jewish woman received an assignment that was unique in all human history. She was to give birth to the child who would become the Messiah, the Son of God! (Luke 1:35) As the time to give birth approached, the need to take this journey arose. In the process, Mary faced a number of challenges to her faith. Let us see what helped her to stay spiritually strong.

The Trip to Bethlehem

Joseph and Mary were not the only ones on the move. Caesar Augustus had recently decreed that a registration be carried out in the land, and people had to travel to their town of origin in order to comply. How did Joseph respond? The account reads: “Of course, Joseph also went up from Galilee,

out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David’s city, which is called Bethlehem, because of his being a member of the house and family of David.”—Luke 2:1-4.

It was no coincidence that Caesar issued his decree at this time. A prophecy written down some seven centuries earlier foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Now it so happened that there was a town named Bethlehem a mere seven miles from Nazareth. However, the prophecy specified that it was “Bethlehem Ephrathah” that would produce the Messiah. (Micah 5:2) By present-day roads, some 93 hilly miles separate Nazareth from that little village in the south. That was the Bethlehem to which Joseph was summoned, for it was the ancestral home of the family of King David—the family to which both Joseph and his bride belonged.

Would Mary support Joseph in his decision to comply? After all, the trip would be hard on her. It was likely early in the *autumn* of the year, so light rains were possible as the dry season gradually ended. What is more, the phrase “went *up* from Galilee” is appropriate, for Bethlehem was perched at a lofty altitude of over 2,500 feet—quite a climb, an arduous end to a trek of several days. Perhaps it would take longer than usual, for Mary’s condition might require numerous periods



of rest. Now, of all times, a young woman might yearn to stay close to home, where she had family and friends who were ready to help when her birth pangs began. Without a doubt, she needed to have courage to take this trip.

Nonetheless, Luke writes that Joseph went "to get registered with Mary." He also notes that Mary "had been given [to Joseph] in marriage as promised." (Luke 2:4, 5) Being Joseph's wife made a great deal of difference in Mary's decisions. She viewed her husband as her spiritual head, embracing her God-given role as his helper by supporting him in his decisions.* So she met this potential challenge to her faith with simple obedience.

What else may have motivated Mary to obey? Did she know of the prophecy about Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah? The Bible does not say. We cannot rule out the possibility, for the fact was evidently common knowledge among religious leaders and even people in general. (Matthew 2:1-7;

* Note the contrast between this passage and the description of an earlier trip: "Mary rose . . . and went" to visit Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39) At that time, as an engaged but unwed woman, Mary may have acted without consulting Joseph. After the couple was married, the action of their trip together is ascribed to Joseph, not to Mary.



John 7:40-42) When it came to the Scriptures, Mary was far from an ignorant girl. (Luke 1:46-55) At any rate, whether Mary decided to travel in order to obey her husband, a secular decree, or Jehovah's own prophecy—or because of a combination of factors—she set a sterling example. Jehovah greatly values a humble, obedient spirit in both men and women. In our age, when submission often seems to be among the most disregarded of virtues, Mary's example stands as a beacon for faithful people everywhere.

The Birth of Christ

Mary must have breathed a sigh of relief when she first caught sight of Bethlehem. As they mounted the hillsides, passing by olive groves—among the last of the crops to be harvested—Mary and Joseph may well have thought about the history of this little village. It was too insignificant to be numbered among Judah's cities, just as Micah the prophet had said; yet it was the birthplace of Boaz, Naomi, and later David, all over a thousand years earlier.

Mary and Joseph found the village crowded. Others had arrived to register before them, so there was no space for them at the lodging room.* They had no choice but to settle down for the night in a stable. We can just imagine Joseph's concern as he saw his wife suffering a sharp discomfort she had never known, which then intensified. Here, of all places, her birth pangs had begun.

Women everywhere can empathize with Mary. Some 4,000 years earlier, Jehovah had foretold that it would be the common lot of women to suffer pain during childbirth because of inherited sin. (Genesis 3:16) There is no evidence to suggest that Mary was any exception. Luke's account draws a discreet curtain of privacy around the scene, saying

* It was the practice of the day for towns to provide a common room to shelter travelers and passing caravans.

simply: "She gave birth to her son, the firstborn." (Luke 2:7) Yes, her "firstborn" had arrived—the first of Mary's many children, at least seven in all. (Mark 6:3) This one, though, would ever stand apart. Not only was he her firstborn but he was Jehovah's own "firstborn of all creation," the only-begotten Son of God!—Colossians 1:15.

It is at this point that the account adds a famous detail: "She bound him with cloth bands and laid him in a manger." (Luke 2:7) Nativity plays, paintings, and scenes around the world sentimentalize this setting. Consider, though, the reality. A manger is a feeding trough, a bin from which farm animals eat. The family was thus lodging in a stable, hardly a place to be noted for good air or hygiene—then or now. Really, what parents would choose such a spot for childbirth if there were any other options? Most parents want the best for their children. How much more so did Mary and Joseph want to provide the best for the Son of God!

However, they did not let their limitations embitter them; they simply did the best they could with what they had. Notice, for instance, that Mary herself cared for the infant, wrapping him up snugly in cloth bands, then laying him carefully in the manger to sleep, ensuring that he would be warm and safe. Mary was not about to let anxiety over her present circumstances distract her from providing the best that she could. She and Joseph both knew, too, that caring spiritually for this child would be the most important thing they could do for him. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) Today, wise parents cultivate similar priorities as they bring their children up in this spiritually impoverished world.

A Visit Brings Encouragement

A sudden commotion disturbed the peaceful scene. Shepherds rushed into the stable, eager to see the family and the child in par-

ticular. These men were bubbling over with excitement, their faces radiating joy. They had hurried in from the hillsides where they were living with their flocks.* They told the wondering parents about a marvelous experience they had just had. On the hillside during the night watch, an angel had suddenly appeared to them. Jehovah's glory had gleamed all around, and the angel told them that the Christ, or Messiah, had just been born in Bethlehem. They would find the child lying in a manger, swaddled in cloth bands. Then, something even more spectacular—a mighty chorus of angels had appeared, singing of Jehovah's glory!

No wonder these humble men came rushing into Bethlehem! They must have been thrilled to see a newborn infant lying there just as the angel had described. They did not keep this good news to themselves. "They made known the saying . . . And all that heard marveled over the things told them by the shepherds." (Luke 2:17, 18) The religious leaders of the day evidently looked down on shepherds. But Jehovah clearly valued these humble, faithful men. How, though, did this visit affect Mary?

Mary was surely exhausted from the rigors of childbirth, yet she listened intently to every word. And she did more: "Mary began to preserve all these sayings, drawing conclusions in her heart." (Luke 2:19) This young woman truly was a thinker. She knew that this angelic message was vital. Her God, Jehovah, wanted her to know and to appreciate her son's identity and importance. So she did more than listen. She stored away the words in her heart so that she could ponder over them again and again in the months and years to come. Here is an outstanding key to

* That these shepherds at the time were living out of doors with their flocks confirms what Bible chronology indicates: The birth of Christ did not occur in December when the flocks would have been sheltered closer to home but, rather, sometime in early October.

the faith that Mary showed throughout her life.

Will you follow Mary's example? Jehovah has filled the pages of his Word with vital spiritual truths. However, those truths can do us little good unless we first pay attention to them. We do that by reading the Bible regularly—not merely as a work of literature but as the inspired Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16) Then, like Mary, we need to store up spiritual sayings in our heart, drawing conclusions. If we meditate on what we read in the Bible, contemplating ways in which we can apply Jehovah's counsel more fully, we will give our faith the nourishment it needs to grow.

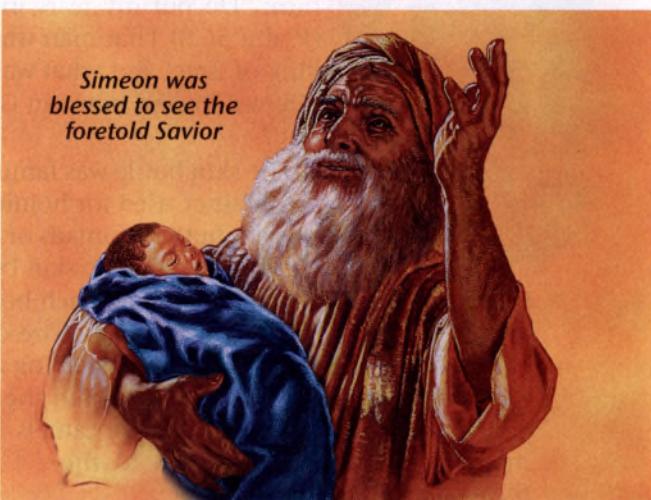
More Sayings to Preserve

On the baby's eighth day, Mary and Joseph had him circumcised as the Mosaic Law required, naming him Jesus as directed. (Luke 1:31) Then, on the 40th day, they took him from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem, a few miles away, and presented the purification offerings that the Law allowed for poorer folk—two turtledoves or two pigeons. If they felt shame in offering less than the ram and a turtledove that other parents could afford, they put such feelings aside. At any rate, they received powerful encouragement while they were there.—Luke 2:21-24.

An aged man named Simeon approached them and gave Mary even more sayings to treasure in her heart. He had been promised that he would see the Messiah before he died, and Jehovah's holy spirit indicated to him that little Jesus was the foretold Savior. Simeon also warned Mary of the pain that she would one day have to endure. He said that she would feel as if a long sword were run through her. (Luke 2:25-35) Even those foreboding words may have helped Mary to endure when that hard time came over three

decades later. After Simeon, a prophetess named Anna saw little Jesus and began speaking about him to everyone who cherished the hope of Jerusalem's deliverance. —Luke 2:36-38.

What a good decision Joseph and Mary had made in bringing their baby to Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem! They thus launched their son on a lifelong course of faithful attendance at Jehovah's temple. While there, they gave of themselves



according to their ability and received words of instruction and encouragement. Mary surely left the temple that day stronger in faith, her heart full of spiritual sayings to meditate on and share with others.

It is a beautiful thing to see parents today following that example. Among Jehovah's Witnesses, parents faithfully bring their children to Christian meetings. Such parents give what they can, offering words of encouragement to their fellow believers. And they come away stronger, happier, and full of good things to share with others. You are cordially invited to meet with them. If you do, you will find that your faith, like Mary's, will grow ever stronger.

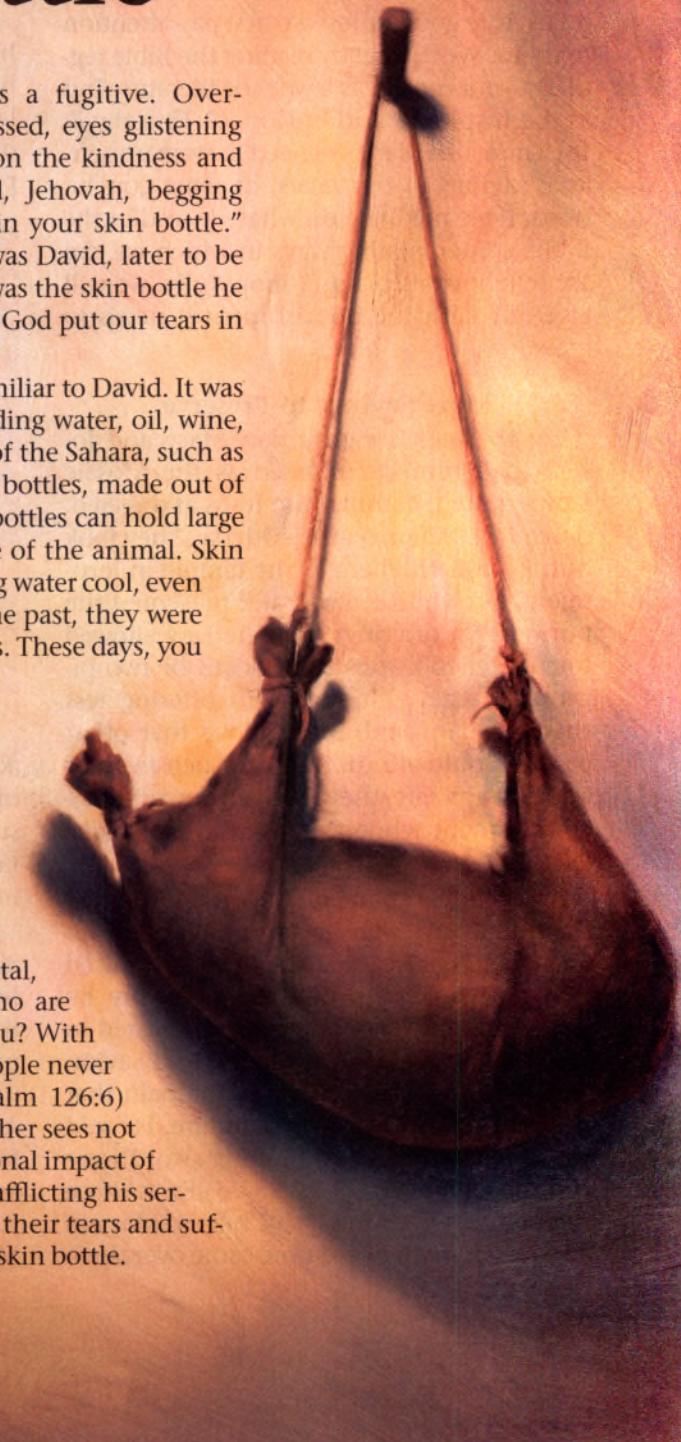
Tears in a Skin Bottle



THE young man was a fugitive. Overwhelmed and distressed, eyes glistening with tears, he called upon the kindness and compassion of his God, Jehovah, begging him: "Do put my tears in your skin bottle." (Psalm 56:8) That man was David, later to be king of Israel. But what was the skin bottle he referred to, and how can God put our tears in one?

The skin bottle was familiar to David. It was a container used for holding water, oil, wine, or even butter. Nomads of the Sahara, such as the Tuareg, still use skin bottles, made out of the whole skin of a goat or a sheep. Such bottles can hold large quantities of water, depending on the size of the animal. Skin bottles have earned a reputation for keeping water cool, even in the intense heat of the desert sun. In the past, they were generally transported by donkeys or camels. These days, you might even see one attached to the front of an all-terrain vehicle!

David's touching words about the skin bottle can also have meaning for us. How so? Well, the Bible explains that Satan controls this world and that he has "great anger" in our day. As a result, the earth is experiencing terrible woes. (Revelation 12:12) For that reason, there are many who, like David, are faced with emotional, mental, or physical suffering—especially those who are trying to please God. Does that describe you? With courage, "even weeping," such faithful people never stop trying to live a life of integrity. (Psalm 126:6) They can be assured that their heavenly Father sees not only the trials they face but also the emotional impact of those trials. He truly understands the pain afflicting his servants, and he compassionately remembers their tears and sufferings, figuratively storing them up in his skin bottle.



Our Readers Ask

IF ADAM WAS PERFECT, HOW WAS IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO SIN?

It was possible for Adam to sin because God created him with free will. That gift is not at all in conflict with the fact that Adam was perfect. In truth, only God is perfect in the absolute sense. (Deuteronomy 32:3, 4; Psalm 18:30; Mark 10:18) Perfection in anyone or anything else is limited. For example, a knife might be perfect for cutting meat, but would you use it for eating soup? A thing is perfect only in relation to its purpose.

For what purpose, then, did God create Adam? It was God's objective to produce through Adam a race of intelligent people with free will. Those who wanted to cultivate their love for God and his ways would show this by choosing to obey his laws. Obedience was therefore not programmed into man's thinking faculties but would spring voluntarily from the heart. (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13; 30:19, 20) Thus, if Adam had lacked the ability to choose disobedience, he would have been incomplete—*imperfect*. As to how Adam chose to use his free will, the Bible record shows that he followed his wife in disobedience to God's law concerning "the tree of the knowledge of good and bad."—Genesis 2:17; 3:1-6.

Well, then, did God create Adam with a moral weakness, so that he lacked the ability to make sound decisions or to withstand temptation? Prior to Adam's disobedience, Jehovah God had examined all of his earthly creation, including the first human pair, and had determined that it was "very good." (Genesis 1:31) Thus, when Adam sinned, his Creator did not need to correct some design flaw but

rightly placed the blame squarely on Adam. (Genesis 3:17-19) Adam had failed to let love for God and right principle motivate him to be obedient to God above all.

Consider, too, that Jesus when on earth was a perfect man like Adam. Yet, Jesus, unlike other descendants of Adam, was conceived as a result of holy spirit and thus inherited no vulnerability to temptation. (Luke 1:30, 31; 2:21; 3:23, 38) Jesus of his own volition remained loyal to his Father despite the strongest pressures. Adam, in exercising his own free will, was personally responsible for his failure to obey Jehovah's command.

Why, though, did Adam choose to disobey God? Did he believe that he would improve his situation in some way? No, for the apostle Paul wrote that "Adam was not deceived." (1 Timothy 2:14) However, Adam decided to accede to the wishes of his wife, who had already chosen to eat from the forbidden tree. His desire to please her was greater than his desire to obey his Creator. Surely, upon being presented with the forbidden fruit, Adam should have paused to reflect on the effect that disobedience would have on his relationship with God. Without a deep, unbreakable love of God, Adam was vulnerable to pressure, including that from his wife.

Adam sinned before fathering children, so all his descendants have been born imperfect. Yet, like Adam, we have the gift of free will. May we choose to meditate appreciatively on Jehovah's goodness and build a strong love for God, who is worthy of our obedience and worship.—Psalm 63:6; Matthew 22:36, 37.

HOW MY FAITH HELPED ME TO FACE TRAGEDIES

AS TOLD BY
SOLEDAD CASTILLO



Several times in my life, loneliness might have overwhelmed me—but it didn't. When I was 34, my dear husband died. Six years later, my father died. Eight months after the death of my father, I learned that my only son had an incurable disease.

MY NAME is Soledad, which means “Loneliness.” Strange as it may seem, though, I have never felt entirely alone. When I faced tragedies, I believed that Jehovah God was there, ‘grasping me by the hand and helping me so that I did not feel afraid.’ (Isaiah 41:13) Allow me to explain how I survived my personal tragedies and how they drew me closer to Jehovah.

A Happy Life With Few Problems

I was born in Barcelona, Spain, on May 3, 1961, the only child of my parents, José and Soledad. When I was nine years old, my mother learned the truth of God’s Word. She had searched for answers to her religious questions but had not found satisfaction in her church. One day, two of Jehovah’s Witnesses visited her at home and answered all her questions from the Scriptures. She eagerly accepted a Bible study.

Within a short time, my mother became a baptized Witness of Jehovah, and a few years later, my father followed her example. Eliana,

who conducted the study with my mother, soon noticed my keen interest in God’s Word. Although I was only a young girl, Eliana suggested that I have my own study. Thanks to her help and my mother’s encouragement, I got baptized at the age of 13.

During my teenage years, I often turned to Jehovah in prayer—especially when I had decisions to make. Frankly, I had relatively few problems during adolescence. In the congregation, I had many friends, and I had a close relationship with my parents. In 1982, I married Felipe, a Witness who had spiritual goals like mine.

Bringing Up Our Child to Love Jehovah

Five years later, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy whom we named Saúl. Felipe and I were delighted to have a child. We hoped that Saúl would grow up as a healthy, balanced child with a love for God. Felipe and I spent a lot of time with Saúl, talking to him about Jehovah, having meals together, taking him to the park, and playing games with

him. Saúl loved going with Felipe to share Bible truths with others, and Felipe got him involved in the ministry at an early age, teaching him to ring the doorbells and offer tracts to people.

Saúl responded well to our love and training. By the age of six, he regularly preached with us. He loved listening to Bible stories, and he looked forward to our family Bible study. Soon after he began to attend school, he started to make small decisions based on his knowledge of the Bible.

However, when Saúl reached the age of seven, our family life changed dramatically. Felipe contracted a viral infection in his lungs. For 11 months, he struggled with the disease, unable to work and often confined to bed. At the age of 36, my husband died.

I still weep when I remember that difficult year. I watched my husband gradually lose the battle against the virus, and there was nothing I could do. Throughout it all, I tried to keep giving Felipe encouragement, although deep inside, my own hopes and plans were being dashed to pieces. I read Scriptural articles to him, and these strengthened us when we could not attend Christian meetings. When he died, a feeling of great emptiness came over me.

Yet, Jehovah sustained me. I constantly asked him to give me his spirit. I thanked him for the happy years Felipe and I had

spent together and for the hope of seeing Felipe again in the resurrection. I asked God to help me be happy with the memory of what my husband and I had shared together and to give me the wisdom to bring up our child as a true Christian. Despite the great pain, I felt comforted.

My parents as well as those in the congregation gave me considerable support. Still, I had to take the lead in studying the Bible with Saúl and teaching him how to serve Jehovah. A former employer offered me a good office job, but I preferred to do cleaning work so that I could spend more time with Saúl and be with him when his school day ended.

One scripture emphasized for me the importance of Saúl's spiritual training: "Train up a boy according to the way for him; even when he grows old he will not turn aside from it." (Proverbs 22:6) This text gave me the hope that if I did my best to communicate spiritual values to Saúl, Jehovah would bless my efforts. True, I had to make some economic sacrifices, but I needed to spend time with my son, and this mattered much more to me than any material advantage.

When Saúl was 14 years of age, my father died. Saúl felt especially devastated, since his grandfather's death brought back all the pain he had felt upon losing his own father. My father had also set a fine example of love for Jehovah. After this loss, Saúl decided that

*With my husband, Felipe, and
our son, Saúl*



My parents, José and Soledad



he had become the only "man" in the family, and he would now have to take care of his mother and his grandmother.

Fighting Leukemia

Eight months after the death of my father, our family doctor told me to take Saúl to the local hospital, since he was suffering from extreme fatigue. After a series of tests, the doctors informed me that Saúl had leukemia.*

During the following two and a half years, Saúl was in and out of the hospital as he struggled to cope with the cancer and the chemotherapy the doctors used in their effort to fight it. The first six-month program of treatment led to a remission that lasted about 18 months. But the cancer returned, and Saúl had another shorter treatment of chemotherapy that severely weakened him. The cancer went into remission for only a brief period, and Saúl could not cope with a third course of chemotherapy. Saúl had dedicated his life to God and had expressed his desire to be baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, but he died just after reaching the age of 17.

Doctors often recommend blood transfusions to counteract the aggressive nature of chemotherapy. Of course, transfusions cannot cure the disease. When the doctors first diagnosed the leukemia, both Saúl and I had to make clear that we would not accept this treatment, since we wanted to obey Jehovah's law to "abstain . . . from blood." (Acts 15:19, 20) On several occasions, Saúl had to convince the doctors in my absence that he was making his own decision in this matter. (See box on page 31.)

* Saúl had lymphoblastic leukemia, a serious type of blood cancer that destroys the white blood cells.

The doctors finally came to the conclusion that Saúl was a mature minor who understood perfectly well the nature of his disease. They agreed to respect our stand and offered us bloodless treatment, although we were under constant pressure to change our decision. I felt very proud of Saúl when I listened to him explaining his stand to the doctors. Clearly, he had developed a close relationship with Jehovah.

During the summer when we first learned of Saúl's disease, the book entitled *Draw Close to Jehovah* was released at our district convention in Barcelona.

That invaluable book proved to be like an anchor to keep us firm as we faced our uncertain and daunting future. During the hours we spent in the hospital, we read portions of it together. During the many difficult times that we endured afterward, we often recalled its contents. That was when the text of Isaiah 41:13, mentioned in the prologue of that book, came to have special meaning for us. It says: "I, Jehovah your God, am grasping your right hand, the One saying to you, 'Do not be afraid. I myself will help you.'"

Saúl's Faith Touches the Hearts of Others

Saúl's maturity and optimism deeply impressed doctors and nurses at Vall d'Hebrón Hospital. He endeared himself to the entire team that took care of him. The chief hematologist handling cancer cases has since treated other Witness children suffering from leukemia, and he has accorded them great respect and dignity. He recalls Saúl's firm decision to uphold his beliefs, his courage in the face of death, and his happy outlook on life. The team of nurses told Saúl that he was the best patient they had ever had in that ward.



Saúl one month before his death

They said that he never complained and never lost his sense of humor—even when he was about to die.

A psychologist told me that many children who have to face such a terminal illness at this age tend to rebel against doctors and parents because of discomfort and frustration. She noticed that this did not occur in the case of Saúl. To her, it was amazing to see Saúl so calm and positive. This gave Saúl and me an opportunity to witness to her about our faith.

I also recall how Saúl indirectly helped a Witness in our congregation. He had suffered from depression for some six years, and medication had not improved his condition. On several occasions, he spent the night caring for Saúl in the hospital. He told me that Saúl's attitude in the face of leukemia deeply

impressed him. He noticed that despite his exhaustion, Saúl tried to encourage everyone who visited him. "Saúl's example gave me the courage to fight my depression," this Witness says.

Three years have now passed since Saúl's death. The pain, of course, is still there. I am not strong, but God has given me "the power beyond what is normal." (2 Corinthians 4:7) I have learned that even the most difficult and painful experiences can have a positive side. Learning to cope with the deaths of my husband, my father, and my son has helped me to become more unselfish and more understanding toward others who suffer. Above all, it has drawn me closer to Jehovah. I can face the future without fear because my heavenly Father still helps me. He still grasps me by the hand.

HAVE YOU WONDERED?

You may have heard that Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept blood transfusions. Have you ever wondered why?

This Scriptural stand is often misunderstood. Sometimes people assume that Jehovah's Witnesses refuse all medical treatment or that they simply do not value life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jehovah's Witnesses seek the best medical care available to them and their family members. However, they seek nonblood medical management. Why?

Their stand is based on a fundamental law that God gave to mankind. Just after the Flood of Noah's day, God gave Noah and his family permission to eat the flesh of animals. God imposed this one restriction: They were not to consume blood. (Genesis 9:3, 4) All humans of all races descended from Noah, so this law

is binding on all of mankind. It was never rescinded. Over eight centuries later, God reaffirmed that law to the nation of Israel, explaining that blood is sacred, representing the soul, or life itself. (Leviticus 17:14) Over 1,500 years later, the Christian apostles commanded all Christians to "keep abstaining . . . from blood."—Acts 15:29.

To Jehovah's Witnesses, it is clearly impossible to abstain from blood while taking it into the body in a transfusion. They therefore insist on alternative treatments. That Scriptural stand often results in an even higher standard of medical care. No doubt that is why many people who are not Jehovah's Witnesses also request bloodless medical treatment.



- Did the Bible foretell the problems we see in the world today? See page 6.
- Is it possible for us to imitate God? If so, how? See page 15.
- What do all children need from their father? See page 18.
- What can we learn from Mary in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus? See page 22.
- If Adam was perfect, how could he sin? See page 27.