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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

*What We Learn From
Mary*

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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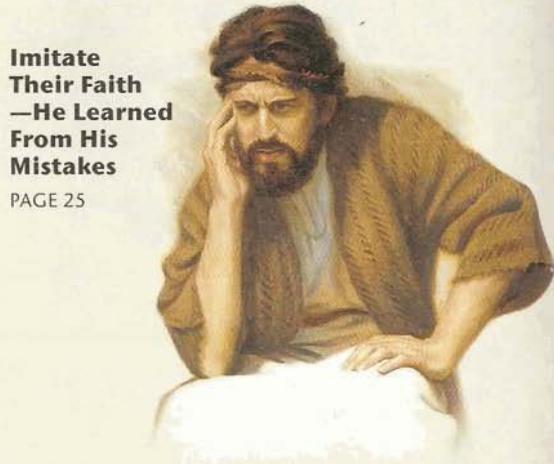
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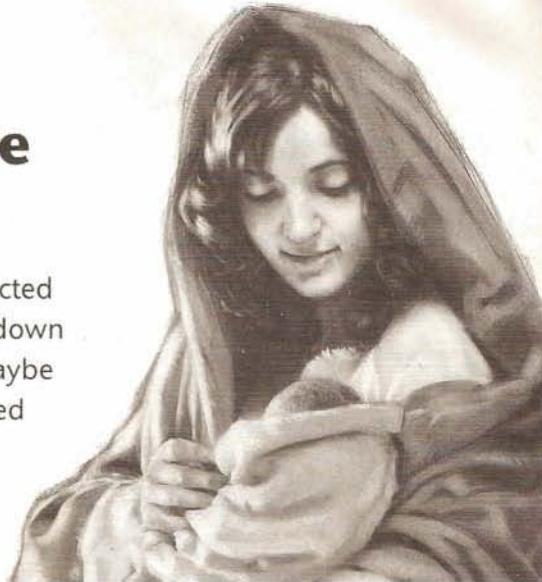


Imitate Their Faith —He Learned From His Mistakes

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What Mary's Example Can Teach Us

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by an unexpected challenge or responsibility? Do you feel worn down by the daily struggle of making ends meet? Maybe you are among the millions who feel bewildered and afraid because they have had to leave their homeland as refugees. And who of us has not experienced deep pain and emptiness after losing a loved one in death?



DID you know that Mary, the mother of Jesus, faced all those challenges? What is more, she met them successfully! What can we learn from her example?

Mary is certainly known worldwide. And no wonder, for she played a unique role in the outworking of God's purposes. Moreover, Mary is venerated by many millions of people. The Catholic Church reveres her as a beloved Mother and as a model in faith, hope, and charity. Many have been taught that Mary leads humans to God.

How do you view Jesus' mother? And more important, how does God view her?

A Unique Assignment

Mary, the daughter of Heli, belonged to the Israelite tribe of Judah. The first mention of her in the Bible is in connection with an extraordinary event. An angel visited her and said: "Good day, highly favored one, Jehovah is with you." At first, Mary was disturbed and "began to reason out what sort of greeting this

might be." So the angel told her that she had been chosen for the amazing but also extremely serious assignment of conceiving, bearing, and raising God's Son.—Luke 1:26-33.

What a responsibility was placed on the shoulders of this young, unmarried woman! How did she react? Mary might well have wondered who would believe her story. Might such a pregnancy cost her the love of Joseph, her fiancé, or might it subject her to public shame? (Deuteronomy 22:20-24) She did not hesitate to accept this weighty assignment.

Mary's strong faith enabled her to submit to the will of her God, Jehovah. She was convinced that he would look after her. She thus exclaimed: "Look! Jehovah's slave girl! May it take place with me according to your declaration." Mary was willing to face the challenges that lay ahead because she valued the spiritual privilege she had been offered.—Luke 1:38.



When Mary told Joseph that she was pregnant, he intended to break off their engagement. That must have been a time of great anguish for both of them. The Bible does not say how long this difficult period lasted. However, both Mary and Joseph must have felt extremely relieved when Jehovah's angel appeared to Joseph. That spirit emissary explained Mary's extraordinary pregnancy and directed Joseph to take her home as his wife.—Matthew 1:19-24.

Hard Times

Today, many mothers-to-be spend months preparing for the arrival of a baby, and Mary may have done the same. This was to be her first child. Yet, unexpected events complicated her plans. Caesar Augustus decreed a census, requiring all to register in their town of origin. So Joseph took Mary, now in her ninth month of pregnancy, on a journey of about 90 miles, likely on a donkey's back! Bethlehem was crowded and Mary needed somewhere private to give birth, but the only place available was a stable. Giving birth in a stable must have been hard for Mary. She may well have been both embarrassed and scared.

In these critical moments of her life, Mary surely poured her heart out to Jehovah, trusting that he would care for her and her baby. Later some shepherds arrived, eager to see the baby. They reported that angels had called this child "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Then we read: "Mary began to preserve all these sayings, drawing conclusions in her heart." She meditated on these words and drew strength from them.—Luke 2:11, 16-19.

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What about us? We are likely to suffer pain in life. Furthermore, the Bible shows that "time and unforeseen occurrence" can befall any of us, throwing all manner of hardships and challenges in our path. (Ecclesiastes 9:11) If that happens, do we turn bitter, blaming God? Would it not be better to imitate Mary's attitude and draw closer to Jehovah God by learning from his Word, the Bible, and then meditating on what we have learned? Doing so will surely help us to endure trials.

Poor and a Refugee

Mary faced other hardships too—including poverty and a forced flight from her homeland. Have you faced such challenges? According to one report, "half the world—nearly three billion people—live on less than two dollars a day," and millions more struggle to make ends meet even though they live in so-called wealthy countries. What about you? Does the day-to-day grind of providing your family with food, clothing, and shelter tire you out, even overwhelm you at times?

The Bible indicates that Joseph and Mary were relatively poor. How so? Among the few facts that the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—reveal about this couple is that 40 days after Mary gave birth, she and Joseph went to the temple to make the required offering—"a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."* (Luke 2:22-24) This sacrifice was

* One of the birds was offered as a sin offering. (Leviticus 12:6, 8) By presenting it, Mary acknowledged that she, like all other imperfect humans, had inherited the consequences of the sin of Adam, the first human.—Romans 5:12.

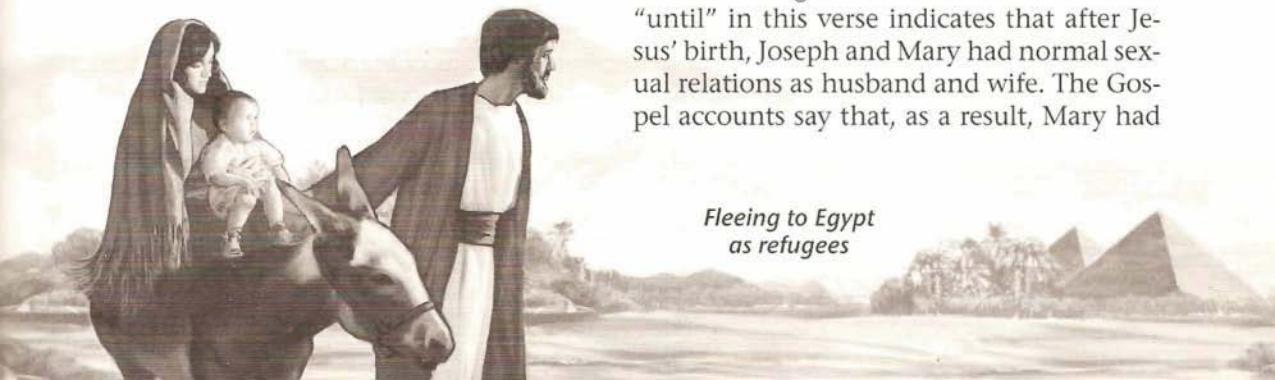
allowed only for those who were too poor to offer a young male sheep. Thus, making ends meet was likely a struggle for Joseph and Mary. Even so, they succeeded admirably in creating a loving family environment. Doubtless, spiritual concerns were their priority.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.

Not long after Jesus' birth, Mary's life was once again turned upside down. An angel told Joseph to take his family and flee to Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15) This was the second time that Mary had to leave a familiar environment, but this time she had to go to a foreign country. Egypt hosted a large Jewish community, so Mary and Joseph may have been able to live among their own people. Nonetheless, living in a foreign country can be challenging and disorienting. Are you and your family among the many millions who have left their homeland, perhaps for the welfare of their children or to escape danger? If so, you can well understand some of the hardships that Mary may have faced in Egypt.

A Devoted Wife and Mother

Apart from the accounts of the birth and infancy of Jesus, Mary is mentioned little in the Gospels. Yet, we know that Mary and Joseph had at least six other children. You may find this surprising. However, consider what the Gospels say.

Joseph had great respect for Mary's privilege of bearing God's Son. Consequently, he refrained from having sexual intercourse with her before Jesus' birth. Matthew 1:25 states that Joseph "had no intercourse with her *until* she gave birth to a son." The word "*until*" in this verse indicates that after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary had normal sexual relations as husband and wife. The Gospel accounts say that, as a result, Mary had



*Fleeing to Egypt
as refugees*

children with Joseph, both sons and daughters. James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas were Jesus' half brothers. She had at least two daughters. (Matthew 13:55, 56) However, these children were conceived in the usual manner.*

Mary was a spiritually-minded person. Although the Law did not require women to attend the Passover celebration, Mary customarily accompanied Joseph on the annual journey to Jerusalem for the festival. (Luke 2:41) That would have involved a round-trip of nearly 190 miles each year—with a growing family! But these trips were doubtless happy family occasions.

Many women today imitate Mary's fine

* See the box "Did Jesus Have Brothers and Sisters?"



Did Jesus Have Brothers and Sisters?

Yes, he did. Some theologians have tried to argue their way out of that truth, though the Gospels several times clearly reveal the fact. (Matthew 12:46, 47; 13:54-56; Mark 6:3) However, Bible scholars have noted two things about the theories that Mary bore no other children. One, there is a motive behind such theories—to uphold a doctrine that

example. They work hard and selflessly to fulfill their Scriptural obligations. How often these devoted wives show great patience, endurance, and humility! Reflecting on Mary's attitude helps them keep spiritual matters ahead of their own desire for comfort and pleasure. They know, as Mary doubtless did, that worshipping God together with their husband and children strengthens and unifies the family.

Once when Mary and Joseph were returning from a festival in Jerusalem—probably with several children now—they realized that 12-year-old Jesus was not with them. Can you imagine the distress Mary felt during the frantic three-day search for her son? When she and Joseph finally found him in

arose much later, the church teaching that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. Two, the theories themselves do not hold up under scrutiny.

For example, one such theory suggests that the "brothers" in question were stepbrothers—sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage. This notion lacks substance, for it would actually deny Jesus the legal right of the firstborn to inherit the kingship of David.—2 Samuel 7:12, 13.

Another theory is that these brothers were actually cousins of Jesus, although the Greek Scriptures use distinct words for "brother," "cousin," and "relative." Thus, scholar Frank E. Gaebelein calls these theological theories farfetched. He concludes: "The most natural way to understand 'brothers' . . . is that the term refers to sons of Mary and Joseph and thus to brothers of Jesus on his mother's side."

the temple, Jesus said: "Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?" Again, says the account, Mary "carefully kept all these sayings in her heart." Here is another indication of Mary's depth of spirituality. She carefully meditated upon all that happened regarding Jesus. Years later, she likely recounted vivid memories concerning this and other events of Jesus' early life to the Gospel writers.—Luke 2:41-52.

Enduring in the Face of Suffering and Loss

What became of Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father? After briefly appearing in the description of that one incident from Jesus' youth, Joseph disappears from the Gospel record. Some take this absence as an indication that Joseph died sometime before Jesus' ministry began.* In any case, it does seem that Mary was a widow by the end of Jesus' ministry. At the time of his death, Jesus entrusted his mother to the apostle John. (John 19:26, 27) Jesus would not likely have done so if Joseph were still living.

Mary and Joseph had been through so much together! They were visited by angels, escaped a tyrant, relocated several times, and raised a large family. How many evenings must they have sat together and talked about Jesus, wondering what he would have to face in the future, concerned about whether they were training him and preparing him in the right way? Then suddenly Mary found herself alone.

Have you lost your mate in death? Do you still feel the pain and emptiness such a loss

* It has been noted that Joseph's absence from the record of Jesus' ministry is remarkable because Jesus' other family members—his mother, brothers, and sisters—are mentioned. At the wedding feast in Cana, for example, we see Mary actively involved and even taking some initiative, but there is no sign of Joseph. (John 2:1-11) In another incident, we find the people of Christ's hometown referring to the man Jesus, not as the son of Joseph, but as "the son of Mary."—Mark 6:3.

She Had the Courage to Change

Mary was born into a Jewish family, and she followed the Jewish religion. She attended the local synagogue, as the Jewish place of worship is called, and she visited the temple in Jerusalem. As Mary's knowledge of God's purposes grew, however, she came to see that the traditions of her fathers no longer had God's approval. Jewish religious leaders had her Son, the Messiah, put to death. Before that happened, Jesus announced to them: "Look! Your house is abandoned to you." (Matthew 23:38) God withdrew his blessing from the religious system in which Mary had been raised.—Galatians 2:15, 16.

When the Christian congregation was formed, Mary may have been about 50 or so. What would she do? Did she reason that she had been born into the Jewish religious system and that she wanted to remain loyal to the traditions of her forefathers? Did she say that she was too old to change? Of course not! Mary understood that God's blessing was now with the Christian congregation, so she had the faith and courage to change.

causes, even after many years? No doubt Mary found solace in her faith and in the knowledge that there will be a resurrection.* (John 5:28, 29) Such comforting thoughts, however, did not end Mary's problems. Like so many single mothers today, she faced the

* For more information about the Bible's promise of a resurrection, see chapter 7 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

challenge of caring for her children without the help of a husband.

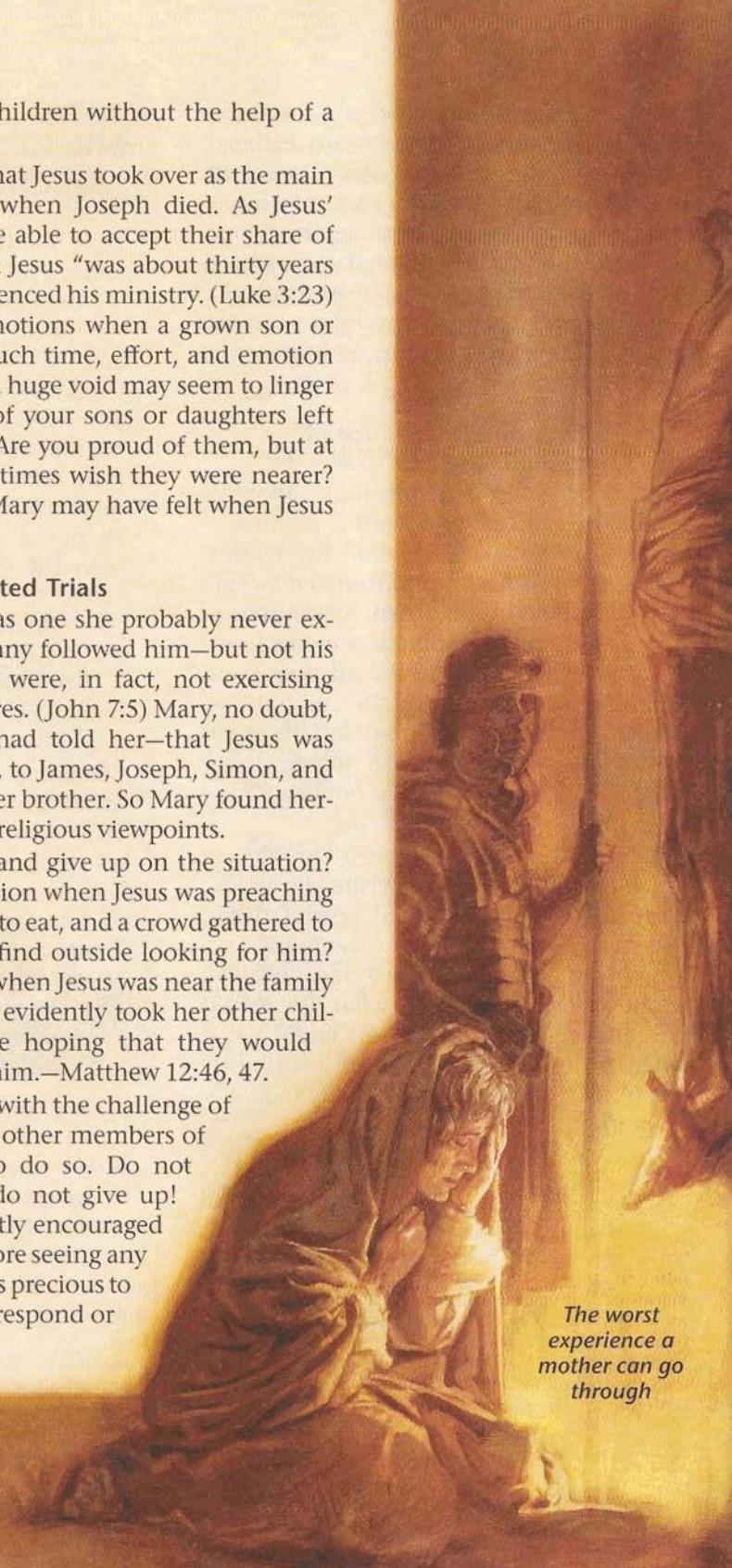
It is reasonable to believe that Jesus took over as the main breadwinner of the family when Joseph died. As Jesus' brothers grew, they would be able to accept their share of family responsibilities. When Jesus "was about thirty years old," he left home and commenced his ministry. (Luke 3:23) Most parents have mixed emotions when a grown son or daughter leaves home. So much time, effort, and emotion are invested in children that a huge void may seem to linger when they leave. Have any of your sons or daughters left home to pursue their goals? Are you proud of them, but at the same time, do you sometimes wish they were nearer? Then you can imagine how Mary may have felt when Jesus left home.

Unexpected Trials

Another of Mary's trials was one she probably never expected. As Jesus preached, many followed him—but not his own brothers. "His brothers were, in fact, not exercising faith in him," say the Scriptures. (John 7:5) Mary, no doubt, told them what the angel had told her—that Jesus was "God's Son." (Luke 1:35) Still, to James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, Jesus was just their older brother. So Mary found herself in a family with differing religious viewpoints.

Did Mary get discouraged and give up on the situation? Absolutely not! On one occasion when Jesus was preaching in Galilee, he went to a house to eat, and a crowd gathered to listen to him. Whom do we find outside looking for him? Mary and Jesus' brothers. So when Jesus was near the family home, she followed him and evidently took her other children along with her, maybe hoping that they would change their attitude toward him.—Matthew 12:46, 47.

You may similarly be faced with the challenge of striving to follow Jesus while other members of your family do not want to do so. Do not become downhearted, and do not give up! Many, like Mary, have patiently encouraged family members for years before seeing any real change. Such endurance is precious to God, whether other humans respond or not.—1 Peter 3:1, 2.



The worst experience a mother can go through

The Hardest Challenge

Mary's last trial, as recorded in the Scriptures, was no doubt the most heart-wrenching. She watched her beloved son die in agony after he was rejected by his people. The death of a child has been described as "the ultimate loss," "the most devastating death," whether the child is still young or he is an adult. Just as had been foretold decades earlier, Mary felt as if a sword had been run through her!—Luke 2:34, 35.

Did Mary let this final test destroy her emotionally or let it weaken her faith in Jehovah? No. The next time Mary is mentioned in the Bible record, we find her with Jesus' disciples, "persisting in prayer" with them. And she was not alone. Her other sons, who by

this time had begun to exercise faith in their older brother, were with her. How that must have comforted Mary!*—Acts 1:14.

Mary had a full and satisfying life as a faithful woman, wife, and mother. She had many spiritually rewarding experiences. She overcame many tests and trials. When we face unexpected challenges or when we are anxious over family problems, we can certainly learn from her example of faithful endurance.—Hebrews 10:36.

What though, can be said about Mary as an object of special religious devotion? Does the Bible account of Mary's unique role justify her being venerated?

* See the box "She Had the Courage to Change," on page 7.

Mary's Role in God's Purpose

DURING Jesus' ministry, a woman raised her voice above the din of the crowd and called out: "Happy is the womb that carried you and the breasts that you sucked!" If Jesus wanted his mother to be revered, he had here a golden opportunity to recommend that form of devotion. Instead, he replied: "No, rather, Happy are those hearing the word of God and keeping it!"—Luke 11:27, 28.

Jesus did not single out his mother for any special honors; nor did he ever tell his followers to do so. How does this fit in with the adoration that many sincere believers bestow on Mary? Let us consider some of the widespread teachings about Jesus' mother in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

"Full of Grace," "Blessed . . . Among Women"

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary what her role in God's purpose would be. On that occasion, he greeted her, saying: "Good day, highly favored one, Jehovah is with you." (Luke 1:28) An alternative translation of that same greeting is: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Soon thereafter, Elizabeth greeted Mary with the words: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42) Do these phrases not indicate that particular reverence is due Mary?

In reality, no. Although these words are incorporated in a prayer that Catholics direct to Mary, the Bible itself gives no justification for praying to her.

Gabriel and Elizabeth acknowledged Mary's outstanding privilege as the one who was to bear the Messiah, but the thought of praying to her is alien to the Scriptures. On the contrary, when Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he indicated that prayers were to be directed to his Father. In fact, Jesus' famous model prayer begins with the words: "Our Father in the heavens." —Matthew 6:9.

Among the Rulers

Another common teaching about Mary is that she is now "the Queen of heaven." The Bible never accords her such a title. It does show, however, that she occupies a special place in God's heavenly arrangement. What place is that?

Jesus indicated that some of his faithful disciples would rule with him in his Kingdom. (Luke 22:28-30) Jesus will empower those chosen ones to serve as "priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth." (Revelation 5:10) The Bible clearly leads us to the conclusion that Mary is among those who have been granted this exalted privilege. How can we say this?

You will recall that after Jesus' death, Mary was "persisting in prayer" with Jesus' disciples and his brothers. Some 120 met for this purpose, including "some women." (Acts 1:12-15) While "the festival of Pentecost was in progress," says the Bible, "they were all together at the same place" when God's holy spirit was poured out upon them, granting them the ability to speak in foreign languages.—Acts 2:1-4.

That Mary was among those blessed in this way shows that she and the other women who received the holy spirit were chosen to be a part of Jesus' heavenly Kingdom. So we have every reason to believe that Mary now sits with Jesus in heavenly glory. (Romans 8:14-17) Consider some of the privileges that

she and Jesus' other corulers will have in the outworking of God's purposes.

Dispensing Marvelous Blessings

The Bible book of Revelation says that 144,000 individuals would be resurrected to heavenly glory to serve alongside Jesus as priests, judges, and kings. (Revelation 14:1, 4; 20:4, 6) As priests, they will share in applying the merits of Jesus' sacrifice to all obedient mankind, raising them to spiritual, moral, and physical perfection. (Revelation 21:1-4) What a privilege it will be for all loyal worshippers of Jehovah to see that wonderful time!*

Mary played, and still plays, a part in the outworking of Jehovah's purposes. For her humility, faith, obedience, and devotion as a mother, not to mention her endurance under trial, she is worthy of imitation. For her role in giving birth to the Messiah and in dispensing everlasting blessings to mankind, she is to be highly respected.

However, the most important lesson we learn from Mary is that she, along with all

Mary's humility, faith, and obedience are worthy of imitation

other faithful servants of God, worships Jehovah and no other god. Mary, along with Christ's other corulers in heaven, raises her voice to proclaim: "To the One sitting on the throne [Jehovah God] and to the Lamb [Jesus Christ] be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the might forever and ever."—Revelation 5:13; 19:10.

* For more information concerning these blessings, see chapter 8 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Do You Fear the Dead?

TO THIS question, many answer with a simple, "No. Why should I?" They believe that the deceased really are dead. Millions, however, are convinced that the dead live on as spirits.

In Benin, West Africa, many believe that the dead can return to kill other members of their own family. People sell possessions or go into debt to pay for animal sacrifices and ceremonies to appease dead relatives. Some practice spiritism, which includes the idea that a spirit part of humans survives at death and can communicate with the living. Others have fearsome experiences that they attribute to the influence of spirits of the dead.

One who had such an experience is Agboola, a man who lives near the border between Benin and Nigeria. He says: "Spiritism dominates life in our area. It is the custom to wash corpses ceremonially to prepare them for the spirit realm. I often gathered up leftover soap and mixed it with certain leaves. Then, as I applied the concoction to my hunting rifle, I said aloud which type of game I wanted to shoot. Practices like this are common and seemed to be quite effective. However, some aspects of spiritism were frightening."

"When two of my sons died mysteriously, I suspected that someone was practicing spiritism against me. To find out, I went to an old man, renowned for his spiritistic powers. He confirmed my suspicions. Worse, he explained that my sons were now waiting in the spirit world to become servants of their killer when he died. The old man added that my third son was doomed to the same fate. A few days later, that son too was dead."

Agboola then met John, one of Jehovah's Witnesses from neighboring Nigeria. John's explanation of the condition of the dead was based on the Bible. That explanation changed Agboola's life. It can change yours too.

Are the Dead Alive?

Who can best answer this question? Not some man, however renowned he might be. Rather, Jehovah, the Creator of all life "in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible," has the answer. (Colossians 1:16) He created angels to inhabit the spirit realm and man and animals to live on the earth. (Psalm 104: 4, 23, 24) Life everywhere is dependent on Him. (Revelation 4:11) Consider, then, what God's own Word, the Bible, says about death.

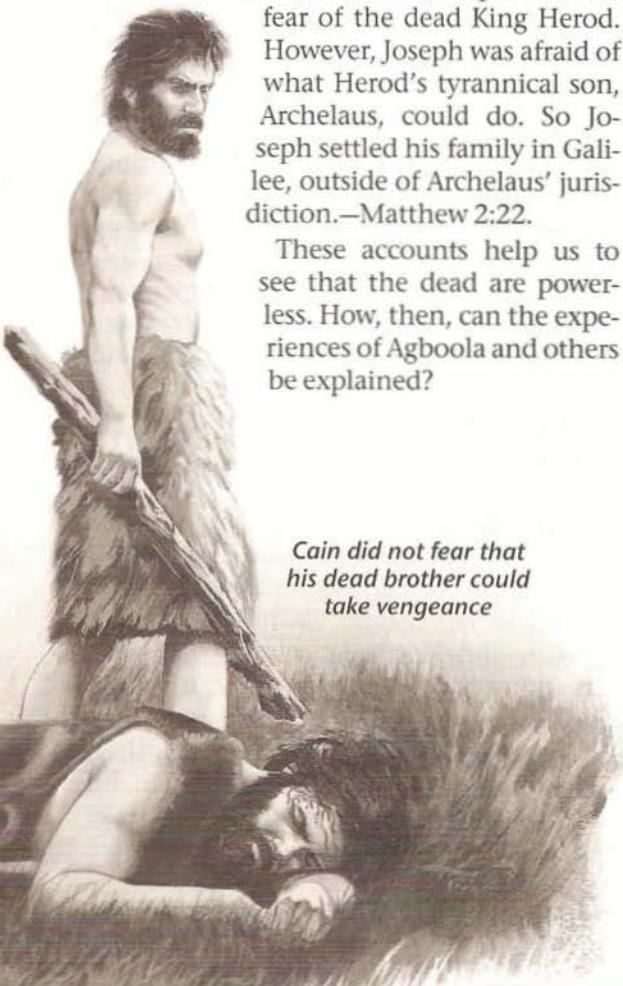
Jehovah was the first to speak of death. He warned that Adam and Eve would die if they disobeyed him. (Genesis 2:17) What did that mean? Jehovah explained: "Dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:19) At death the body disintegrates; it goes back to the dust. Life ceases.

Adam and Eve were willfully disobedient and were therefore sentenced to death. They, however, were not the first to die. Their son Abel was. His older brother, Cain, murdered him. (Genesis 4:8) Cain did not fear that his dead brother could take vengeance. Rather, Cain was apprehensive

about what living men might do to him.
—Genesis 4:10-16.

Many centuries later, King Herod was agitated when astrologers informed him that a “king of the Jews” had been born in his realm. Bent on eliminating this potential rival, Herod schemed to have all boys in Bethlehem two years of age and under slain. But an angel warned Joseph to take Jesus and Mary and “flee into Egypt.”—Matthew 2:1-16.

When Herod died, the angel told Joseph to return to Israel, “for those who were seeking the soul of the young child [were] dead.” (Matthew 2:19, 20) The angel, a spirit himself, knew that Herod could harm Jesus no more. Joseph had no fear of the dead King Herod.



However, Joseph was afraid of what Herod’s tyrannical son, Archelaus, could do. So Joseph settled his family in Galilee, outside of Archelaus’ jurisdiction.—Matthew 2:22.

These accounts help us to see that the dead are powerless. How, then, can the experiences of Agboola and others be explained?

Cain did not fear that his dead brother could take vengeance

“Demons,” or Unclean Spirits

As an adult, Jesus encountered wicked spirit creatures. They recognized Jesus and addressed him as the “Son of God.” Jesus likewise knew who they were. They were not spirits of dead humans. Rather, Jesus identified them as “demons,” or unclean spirits.—Matthew 8:29-31; 10:8; Mark 5:8.

The Bible speaks of spirits loyal to God and of those who have rebelled against him. The book of Genesis says that when Jehovah drove disobedient Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, he posted cherubs, or angels, to the east of the garden to prevent anyone from entering it. (Genesis 3:24) This was apparently the first time that spirits became visible to humans.

Some time later, a number of angels came to earth and took on human form. Jehovah had not commissioned them to carry out any assignment on earth. Instead, they “forsook their own proper dwelling place” in the spirit realm. (Jude 6) Their motives were selfish. They took wives, who gave birth to hybrid offspring called Nephilim. The Nephilim and their rebellious fathers filled the earth with violence and other great badness. (Genesis 6:1-5) Jehovah dealt with the situation by bringing the global Deluge of Noah’s day. Floodwaters destroyed wicked men and women as well as the hybrids. What happened to the angels?

The Flood forced them back into the spirit realm. Jehovah, however, prevented them from resuming “their original position.” (Jude 6) The Bible states: “God did not hold back from punishing the angels that sinned, but, by throwing them into Tartarus, delivered them to pits of dense darkness to be reserved for judgment.”—2 Peter 2:4.

Tartarus is not a particular location; it is a prisonlike, abased condition that limits the activity of these outcasts. The demons can no longer materialize, but they still have

great power and influence over minds and lives. They can possess humans and animals. (Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 8:27-33) They also deceive humans by posing as the spirits of the dead. Why? To keep people from worshipping Jehovah in a way that pleases him and to confuse them regarding the real condition of the dead.

How to Overcome Fear

Agboola saw the reasonableness of the Bible's explanations regarding death and the identity of the spirits. He understood that he needed to learn more. He began to read the Bible and Bible-based publications with John. Agboola found comfort in the knowledge that his sons were asleep in the grave, not waiting in the spirit realm to become their killer's servants.—John 11:11-13.

Agboola also realized that he had to make a complete break with spiritistic practices. He burned all his possessions connected with the occult. (Acts 19:19) Some in the community warned him that the spirits would react unfavorably. But Agboola had no fear. He followed the counsel found at Ephesians 6:11, 12: "Put on the complete suit of armor from God . . . because we have a wrestling . . . against the wicked spirit forces." This spiritual suit of armor includes truth, righteousness, the good news of peace, faith, and the sword of the spirit, God's Word. Such armor originates with God and is powerful!

Agboola was ostracized by some of his friends and relatives when he shunned customs associated with spiritism. However, at the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, he found new friends, who believe what the Bible teaches.

Agboola now knows that Jehovah will soon cleanse the earth of wickedness and will reduce the demons to total inactivity. Eventually, He will destroy them. (Revelation 20:1, 2, 10) God will resurrect here on the

earth "all those in the memorial tombs." (John 5:28, 29) That will include Abel, the innocent children whom King Herod murdered, and millions of others. Agboola has faith that his three sons will be included. Your loved ones who have died may well be among them. All such resurrected ones will confirm that from their death to their resurrection, they were completely unconscious—unaware of any ceremonies performed for them.

You have no reason to fear the dead. Rather, you can look forward to being reunited with dead loved ones. In the meantime, why not study the Bible to strengthen your faith? Associate with those who believe what the Bible teaches. If you dabble in spiritism, stop immediately. Protect yourself from the demons by putting on "the complete suit of



Agboola no longer fears the dead, and he has learned how to resist the demons

armor from God." (Ephesians 6:11) Jehovah's Witnesses will be happy to help you. They offer free home Bible studies, using the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?**

Agboola no longer fears the dead, and he has learned how to resist the demons. He says: "I don't know who caused the deaths of my three sons. But since I have been serving Jehovah, I have had seven other children. No one in the spirit realm has ever harmed them."

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

BE THANKFUL FOR THE RAIN

RAIN! What would we do without it? True, too much rain can cause disastrous floods. Also, people who live in cold, wet climates or seasons like that may not always enjoy the rain. (Ezra 10:9) But what about the millions who must endure hot, dry weather much of the time? When at last the rains come, they are, oh, so refreshing!

That was the case in Bible lands, such as the interior of Asia Minor, where the apostle Paul did missionary work. While there, Paul told the ancient Lycaonians: “[God] did not leave himself without witness in that he did good, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts to the full with food and good cheer.” (Acts 14:17) Note that Paul mentioned rain first, for without it nothing could grow and there would be no “fruitful seasons.”

The Bible has a lot to say about rain. The Hebrew and Greek words for rain appear in the Bible more than one hundred times. Would you like to know more about the remarkable gift of rain? At the same time, would you like to strengthen your faith in the scientific accuracy of the Bible?

What the Bible Says About Rain

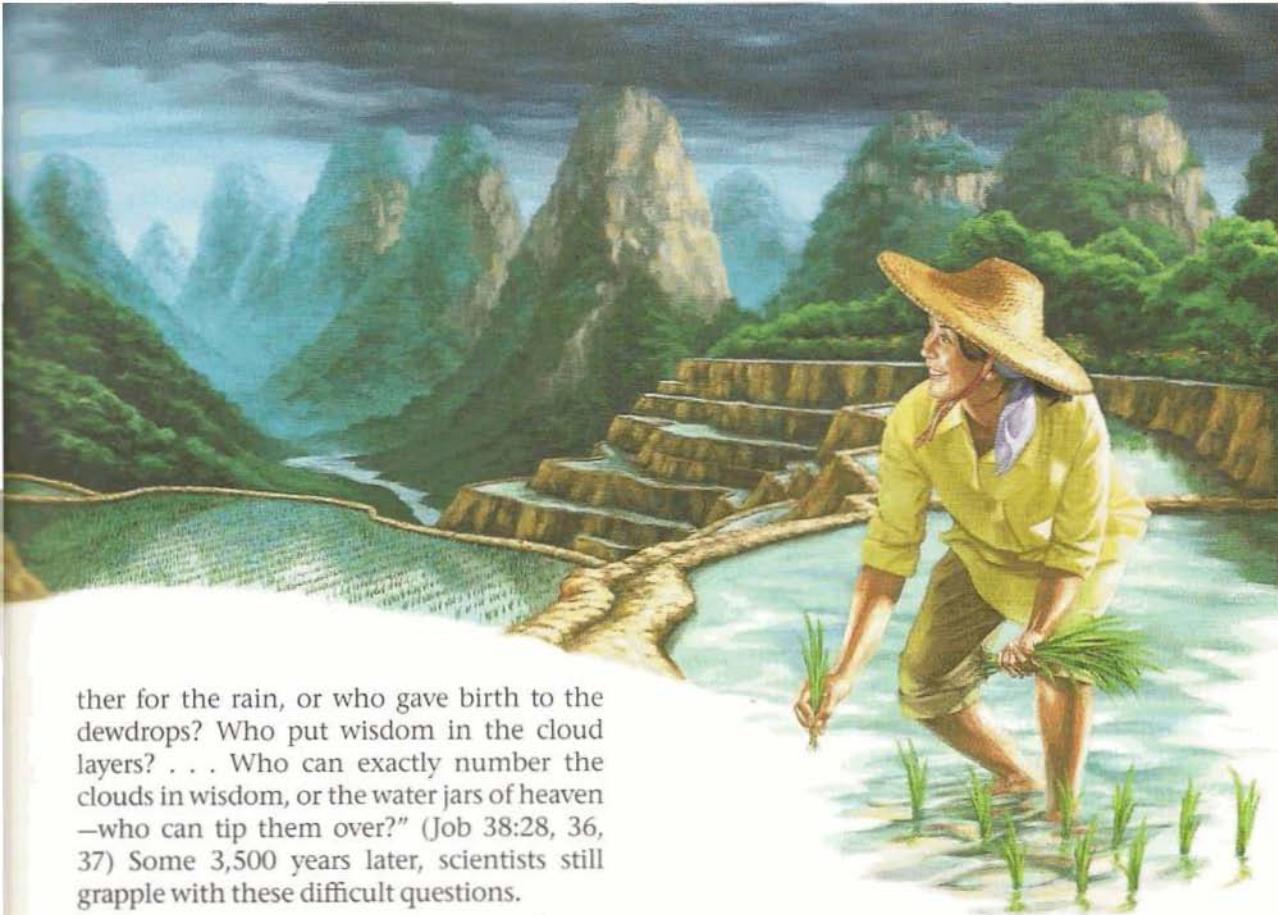
Jesus Christ drew attention to a vital provision without which there would be no rain. “Your Father,” said Jesus, “makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45) Did you notice that Jesus referred to the sun before mentioning

the rain? That is fitting because the sun not only provides plants with energy to grow but also drives earth’s water cycle. Yes, it is the heat from the sun that causes an approximate 100,000 cubic miles of seawater to evaporate into freshwater vapor each year. Because Jehovah God created the sun, he is rightly called the one who draws up water to make rain.

The Bible describes the water cycle, saying: “God . . . draws up the drops of water; they filter as rain for his mist, so that the clouds trickle, they drip upon mankind abundantly.” (Job 36:26-28) In the thousands of years since those scientifically accurate words were written, man has had a lot of time to try to understand the water cycle. “Currently,” states the 2003 textbook *Water Science and Engineering*, “the mechanism of raindrop formation is not known with certainty.”

What scientists do know is that raindrops are formed from microscopic particles that become the nuclei of tiny droplets in clouds. Each of these droplets must increase in size a million or more times to make a single drop of rain. It is a complex process that can take several hours. A science textbook, *Hydrology in Practice*, states: “There are several theories of how cloud droplets grow to become raindrops, and investigations into the details of several proposed methods continue to claim the attention of research workers.”

The Creator of the mechanisms that produce rain could ask his servant Job these humbling questions: “Does there exist a fa-

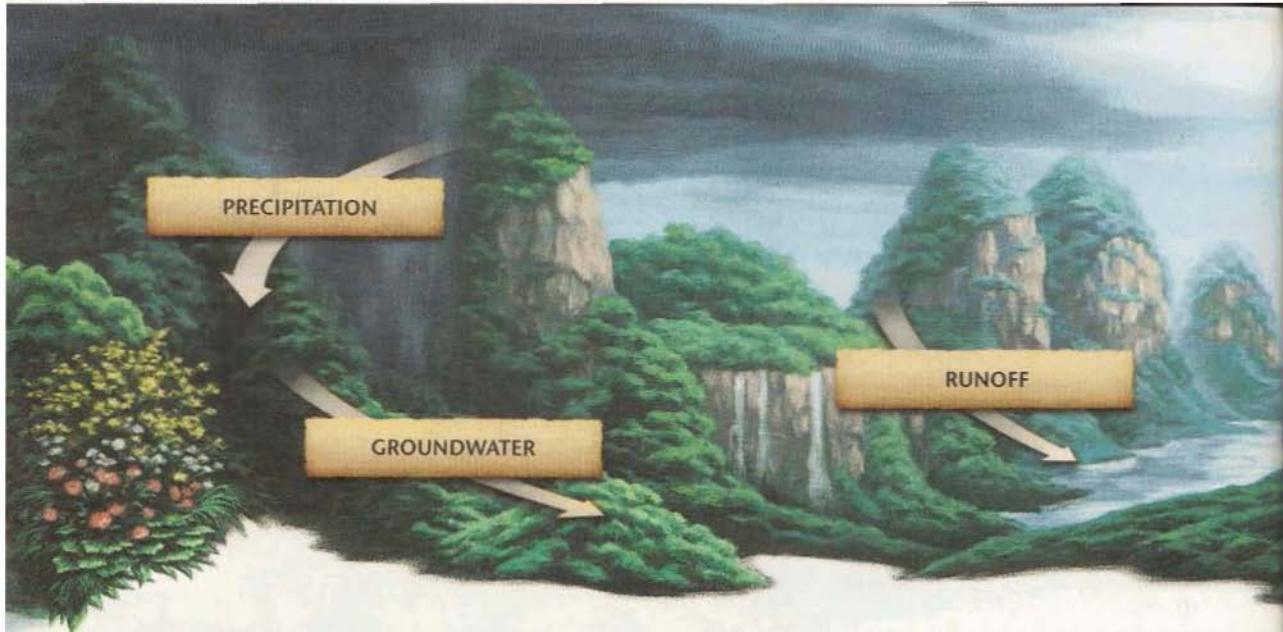


ther for the rain, or who gave birth to the dewdrops? Who put wisdom in the cloud layers? . . . Who can exactly number the clouds in wisdom, or the water jars of heaven —who can tip them over?" (Job 38:28, 36, 37) Some 3,500 years later, scientists still grapple with these difficult questions.

Which Way Does the Water Cycle Go?

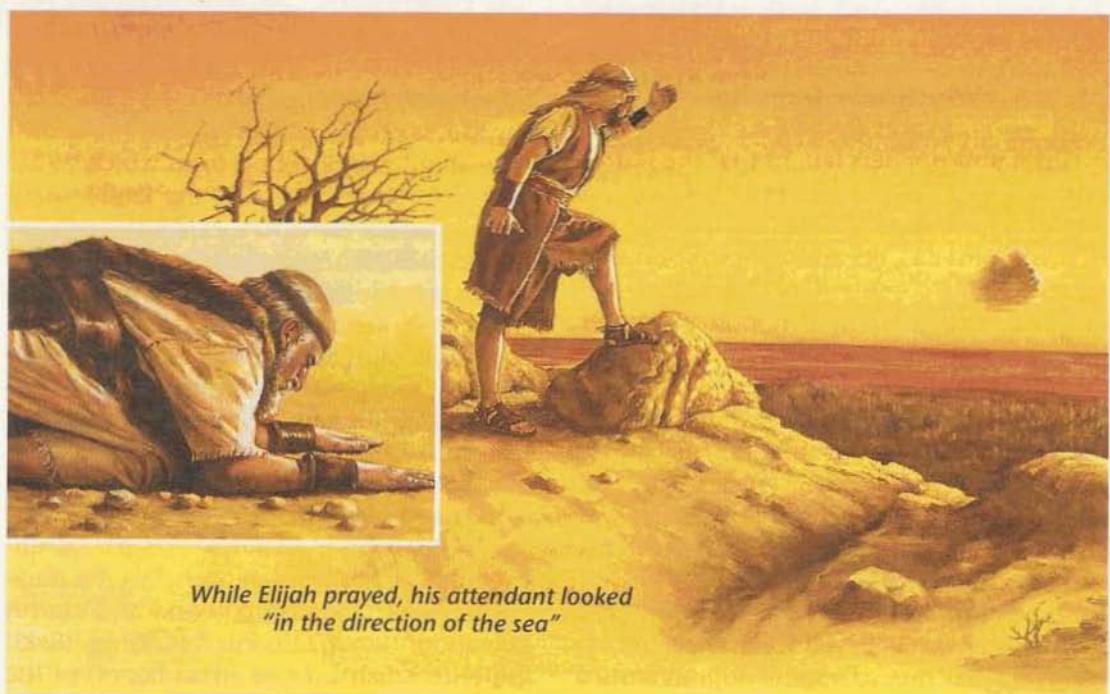
Greek philosophers taught that the source of river water was not rain but seawater that somehow flowed under the earth to the top of the mountains, becoming fresh springwater. One Bible commentary claims that Solomon embraced such a notion. Consider Solomon's inspired words: "All the winter torrents are going forth to the sea, yet the sea itself is not full. To the place where the winter torrents are going forth, there they are returning so as to go forth." (Ecclesiastes 1:7) Did Solomon really mean that seawater was somehow piped up the inside of mountains to become the source of rivers? To answer that question, let us see what Solomon's fellow countrymen believed about the water cycle. Were they bound by false notions?

Less than a hundred years after Solomon's day, God's prophet Elijah showed his knowledge about the direction from which to expect rain. During his day, the land experienced a severe drought for over three years. (James 5:17) Jehovah God brought this calamity upon his people because they had rejected him in favor of the Canaanite rain-god, Baal. But Elijah helped to bring the Israelites to repentance, so he was now willing to pray for rain. While praying, Elijah asked his attendant to look "in the direction of the sea." On being informed of "a small cloud like a man's palm ascending out of the sea," Elijah knew that his prayer was answered. Soon, "the heavens themselves darkened up with clouds and wind and a great downpour began to occur." (1 Kings 18:43-45) Thus Elijah showed an awareness of the

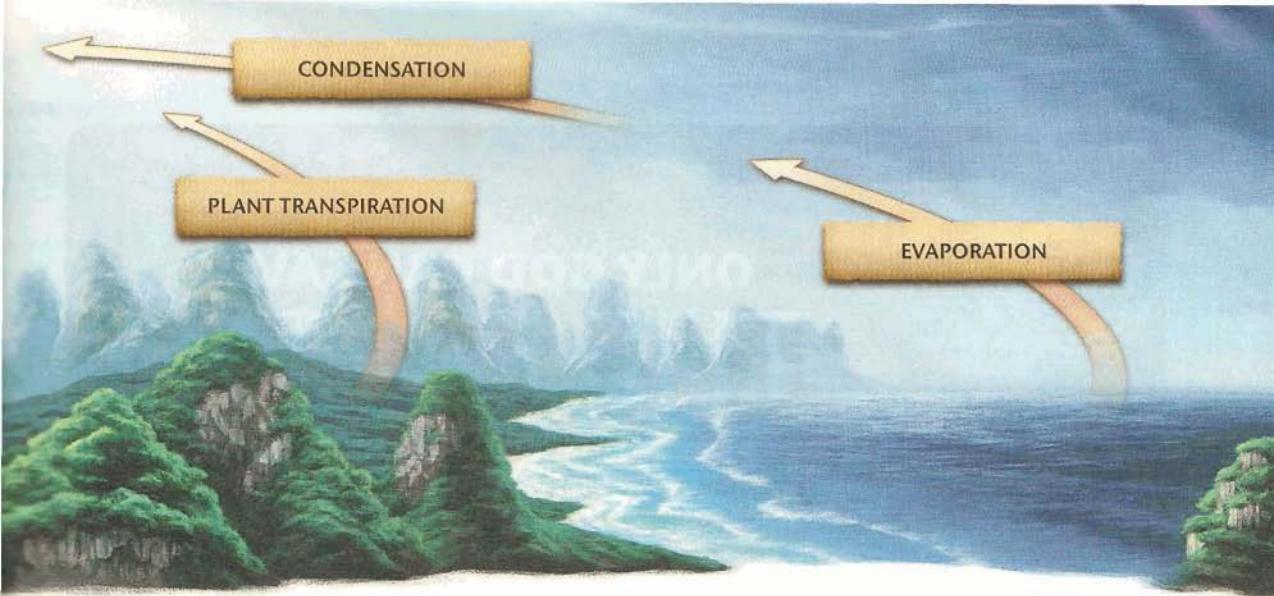


water cycle. He knew that clouds would form over the sea to be blown eastward by winds over the Promised Land. To this day, that is the method by which the land gets its rain.

About one hundred years after Elijah's prayer for rain, a humble farmer named Amos emphasized an important detail about the source of the water cycle. Amos was used by God to prophesy against the Israelites for



*While Elijah prayed, his attendant looked
"in the direction of the sea"*



oppressing the poor and for worshipping false gods. Lest they perish at God's hand, Amos urged them to "search for Jehovah, and keep living." Then Amos explained that Jehovah alone should be worshipped because he is the Creator, "the One calling for the waters of the sea, that he may pour them out upon the surface of the earth." (Amos 5:6, 8) Amos later repeated this wonderful fact about the water cycle and its direction. (Amos 9:6) Amos thus showed that the oceans are the main source of earth's rain.

This fact was scientifically proved by Edmond Halley in 1687. Yet, it took time before others accepted Halley's evidence. "The idea that there is a circulatory system within the Earth, by which seawater is conveyed to mountaintops and there discharged, persisted until early in the 18th century," states *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Today, the truth about the direction of the water cycle is common knowledge. The same source explains: "The waters of the sea are evaporated, are subsequently condensed within the atmosphere, fall to the Earth as precipitation, and finally flow in the rivers back to the sea." Clearly, then, Solomon's words about the

rain cycle, recorded at Ecclesiastes 1:7, refer to the same process involving clouds and rain.

What Should This Move You to Do?

The fact that the water cycle was so accurately described by various Bible writers is one of many outstanding proofs that the Bible is inspired by mankind's Creator, Jehovah God. (2 Timothy 3:16) True, man's mismanagement of the earth has apparently thrown the weather patterns off balance, resulting in severe floods in some areas and droughts in others. But the Creator of the water cycle, Jehovah God, long ago promised that he would eventually intervene and "bring to ruin those ruining the earth." —Revelation 11:18.

In the meantime, how can you show your appreciation for God's gifts, such as the rain? You can do so by studying his Word, the Bible, and applying in your life what you learn. Then you will have the hope of surviving into God's new world, where you will be able to enjoy all of God's gifts forever. For, indeed, "every good gift and every perfect present" comes from the Source of the rain, Jehovah God.—James 1:17.



ONLY GOD CAN SAVE THE EARTH

"A SPARKLING BLUE AND WHITE JEWEL." That is how astronaut Edgar Mitchell described our earth as he viewed it against the contrasting blackness of space.

God went to great lengths to prepare the earth as a home for man. Its creation moved the angels to shout "in applause." (Job 38:7) After studying the wonders of this planet, we too have reason to applaud. There are many intricate ecosystems that enable life to thrive on earth. In one of the best-known systems, green vegetation uses sunlight, carbon dioxide from the air, and water to make food. A by-product of this process is the release into the atmosphere of oxygen—vital to our existence.

The Bible shows that God entrusted man with the stewardship of the earth. (Genesis 1:28; 2:15) For earth's ecology to remain in balance, however, man needed to have the right attitude. In fact, he needed to *love* his earthly home. He had to *want* to maintain it in a beautiful state. But man was endowed with free will, so the possibility existed that he might choose to exploit the earth and mismanage it. And that is exactly what he has done. The results of man's carelessness and greed have been devastating.

To mention but some of the problems: (1) Deforestation is affecting earth's ability to absorb carbon dioxide, which, in turn, may contribute to more extreme weather patterns. (2) Excessive pesticide usage is destroying in-

sect populations that perform vital ecological roles, including the pollinating of crops. (3) Overfishing and pollution of seas and rivers are greatly decreasing the fish populations. (4) The greedy use of earth's natural resources leaves little for future generations and is thought to be hastening global warming. Some environmentalists point to the retreating of glaciers and the calving of icebergs in the Arctic and Antarctic as evidence of global warming.

Faced with an increase of natural disasters, some might say that the earth is fighting back, causing misery for man. God gave us the earth without charge. Man was, in effect, given free tenancy. (Genesis 1:26-29) However, current world events show that many people have no desire to maintain their beautiful earthly home. Instead, man is occupied with his own selfish desires and activities. He has, in fact, proved to be a bad tenant—"ruining the earth," as foretold at Revelation 11:18.

Bible prophecy shows that Almighty God, Jehovah, the Creator of earth's life-sustaining ecosystems, has decreed that the time has come to "evict" the bad tenants. (Zephaniah 1:14; Revelation 19:11-15) Before man can damage the earth irretrievably, God will act—sooner than we may expect.* (Matthew 24:44) Truly, only God can save the earth.

* For further information on the urgency of the times, see the brochure *Keep on the Watch!* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Did You Know?

Did Pontius Pilate have reason to fear Caesar?

To pressure the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate into executing Jesus, the Jewish leaders said: "If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar." (John 19:12) The "Caesar" mentioned here was Roman Emperor Tiberius. Would Pilate have had any reason to fear this Caesar?

What kind of person was Tiberius Caesar? Years before Jesus' trial, Tiberius had already become "a man who seemed interested only in his own satisfactions and the increasingly perverse ways to find them," says *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. Paranoia moved him to torture and execute anyone who was even suspected of treason. "If the near-contemporary historians are to be believed," reports the same reference work, "his favourite entertainments were cruel and obscene. Even under the most favourable interpretation, he killed ferociously and almost at random."

Therefore, Tiberius' reputation may well have figured in Pilate's decision to bow to the pressure from the Jewish leaders and order the execution of Jesus.—John 19:13-16.

Why did Jesus wash the feet of his apostles?

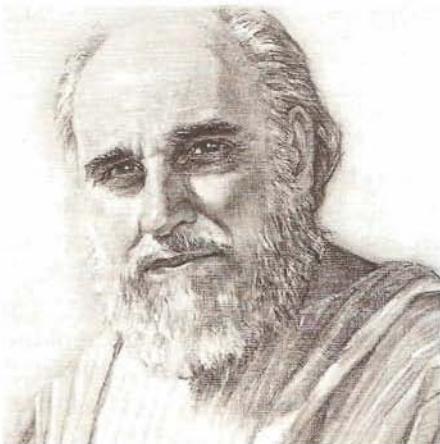
In ancient Israel, many ordinary people would have gone about their daily business barefoot. Footwear, for those who did use it, consisted of sandals, which were little more than a sole strapped to the foot and ankle. Since roads and fields were dusty or muddy, people's feet would inevitably get dirty.

It was the custom, therefore, for a person to remove his sandals upon entering a home. Hospitality required that a guest's feet be washed. This task would be performed either by the householder or by a servant. The Bible contains a number of references to this common practice. For example, Abraham

said to visitors to his tent: "Let a little water be taken, please, and you must have your feet washed. Then recline under the tree. And let me get a piece of bread, and refresh your hearts."—Genesis 18:4, 5; 24:32; 1 Samuel 25:41; Luke 7:37, 38, 44.

This background information throws light on Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet during his last Passover with them. On that occasion, there was no householder or servant to perform this service, and evidently none of the disciples volunteered to do it. So by taking a basin of water and a towel to wash and dry his apostles' feet, Jesus gave those men a lesson in love and humility.—John 13:5-17.



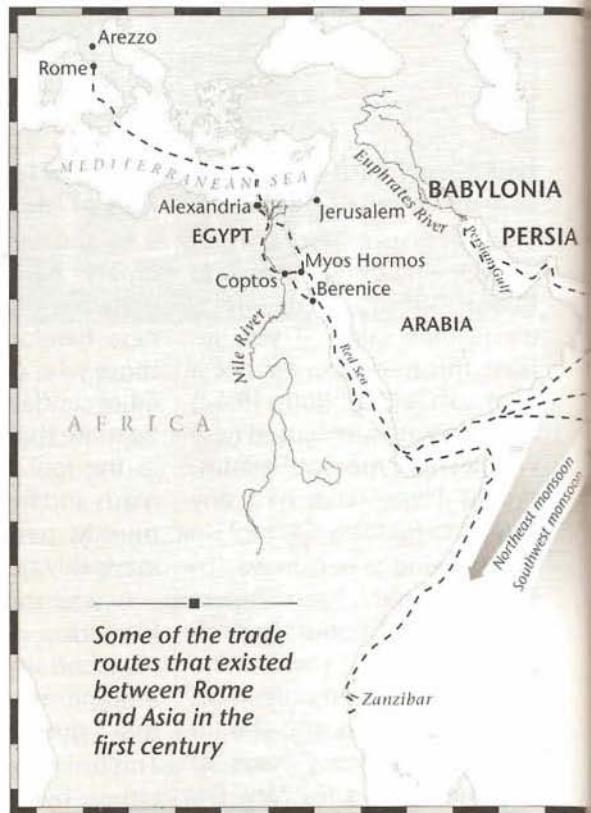


How Far East Could Missionaries Go?

LESS than 30 years after Jesus' death, the apostle Paul wrote that the good news was being preached in "all creation" under heaven. (Colossians 1:23) His statement is not to be taken literally, as if meaning that every person alive at that time had heard the good news. Even so, Paul's point is clear: Christian missionaries were preaching extensively in the then-known world.

Just how far might they have gone? The Scriptures relate that commercial shipping enabled Paul to extend his preaching activity as far westward as Italy. This intrepid missionary also wanted to preach in Spain.—Acts 27:1; 28:30, 31; Romans 15:28.

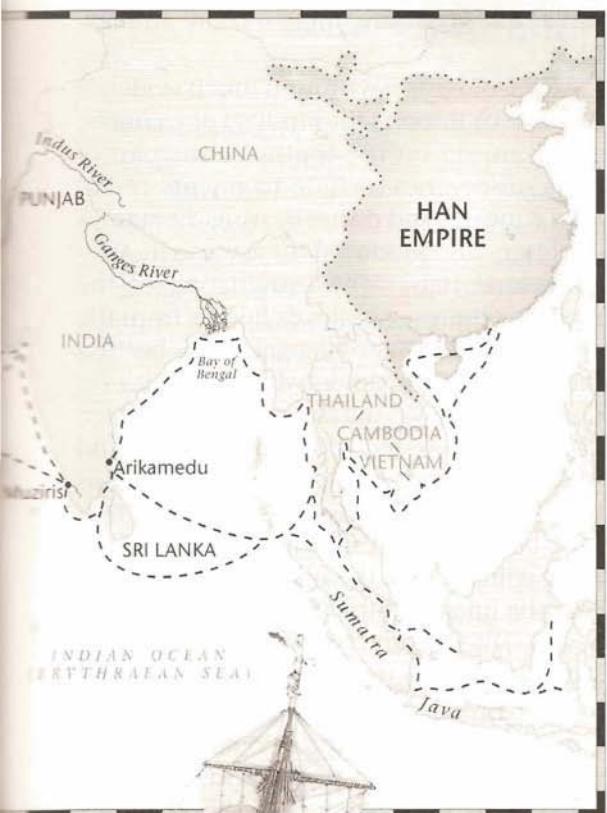
What, though, of the opposite direction? How far east did early Christian evangelizers



go? We cannot say for sure, since the Bible does not comment on this. However, you might be surprised to learn just how far trade routes between the Mediterranean and the Orient extended in the first century C.E. At the very least, the existence of such routes indicates that there were good possibilities for travel to the east.

Alexander's Legacy

Alexander the Great's conquests took him eastward through Babylonia and Persia and as far as the Punjab, in northern India. Those expeditions enabled the Greeks to become acquainted with the coasts stretching from the mouth of the Euphrates, in the Persian Gulf, to the mouth of the Indus.



Model of a Roman cargo ship

Spices and incense soon flowed into the Greek world from across the Indian Ocean, via the Red Sea. This trade was first controlled by Indian and Arab merchants. But when the Ptolemies of Egypt discovered the secrets of the monsoon, they too entered the Indian Ocean trade.

In that sea, winds blow steadily out of the southwest from May to September, allowing ships to sail from the mouth of the Red Sea

either along the southern coast of Arabia or directly to southern India. Between November and March, the winds switch to the opposite direction, facilitating the return journey. Arab and Indian seamen had been exploiting knowledge of these winds for hundreds of years, traveling back and forth between India and the Red Sea with cargoes of cassia, cinnamon, nard, and pepper.

Sea Routes to Alexandria and Rome

When the Romans conquered the lands ruled by Alexander's successors, Rome became the main market for precious goods from the East—ivory from Africa, incense and myrrh from Arabia, spices and precious stones from India, and even silk from China. Ships carrying such merchandise converged on two main ports on the Egyptian Red Sea Coast—Berenice and Myos Hormos. Both were served by overland caravan routes to Coptos, on the Nile.

From Coptos, goods descended the Nile, the main artery of Egypt, to Alexandria, where they were loaded onto ships bound for Italy and elsewhere. An alternative route to Alexandria was via a canal that joined the head of the Red Sea—close to modern Suez—with the Nile. Of course, Egypt and its seaports were relatively close to the lands where Jesus preached and could readily be accessed from there.

According to first-century Greek geographer Strabo, in his time, 120 Alexandrian ships sailed from Myos Hormos to engage in trade with India every year. A first-century handbook on navigation in this area has survived to our day. It was probably written by a Greek-speaking Egyptian merchant for the benefit of fellow traders. What can be learned from this ancient book?

The guidebook, often referred to by its Latin title, *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Voyage Around the Erythraean Sea) describes

maritime routes stretching thousands of miles south of Egypt, as far as Zanzibar. Looking eastward, the author lists distances, anchorages, emporiums, goods traded, and the disposition of local people along the south shore of Arabia, down the west coast of India to Sri Lanka and then back up the east coast of India as far as the Ganges. The book's accurate and vivid descriptions lead to the conclusion that the author had visited the places he describes.

Westerners in India

In India western merchants were known as Yavanas. According to the *Periplus*, one of their regular destinations in the first century C.E. was Muziris, located close to the southern tip of India.* Tamil poems, dating to the early centuries C.E., refer to these traders continually. "The beautifully built ships of the Yavanas came with gold and returned with pepper, and Muziris resounded with the noise," says one poem. In another, a prince of southern India is urged to drink fragrant wine brought by the Yavanas. Among other Western goods that found a ready market in

* While the exact site of Muziris is unknown, scholars locate it close to the mouth of the Periyar River, Kerala State.

India were glassware, metals, coral, and textiles.

Archaeologists have found much evidence of Western imports into India. For example, at Arikamedu on the southeastern coast of India, discoveries include fragments of Roman wine jars and dishes bearing the stamps of potters who produced these wares in Arezzo, central Italy. "The imagination of the modern enquirer kindles as he lifts from the alluvium of the Bay of Bengal sherds bearing the names of craftsmen whose kilns lay on the outskirts of Arezzo," says one writer. Commerce between the Mediterranean and India is further attested to by numerous hoards of Roman coins, gold and silver, that have been found in southern India. Most of these coins date to the first century C.E. and bear the images of the Roman Emperors Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero.

The possibility that Roman citizens established permanent trading colonies in southern India is raised by the evidence of an ancient map, a medieval copy of which still exists. This map, known as the Peutinger Table—which is said to depict the Roman world as it was in the first century C.E.—indicates a temple of Augustus at Muziris. "Such

An Emperor's Complaint

In 22 C.E., the Roman Emperor Tiberius lamented the boundless excesses of his countrymen. Their reckless appetite for luxuries and the immoderate yearning of Roman matrons for jewels were dissipating the wealth of his empire, diverting it to "strange or hostile nations." Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23-79 C.E.) also complained about similar expenditures. "At the very lowest computation," he wrote, "India, the Seres, and the Arabian Peninsula, withdraw from our empire one hundred millions of sesterces every year—so dearly do we pay for our luxury and our women."*

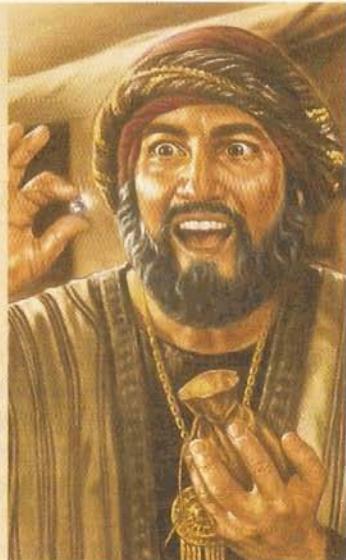
* Analysts calculate that 100 million sesterces represented about 2 percent of the Roman Empire's total economy.



Museo della Civiltà Romana, Roma; Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

Where Merchants Sought Their Goods

Jesus spoke of "a traveling merchant seeking fine pearls." (Matthew 13:45) The book of Revelation likewise mentions "traveling merchants" whose stock included precious stones, silk, scented wood, ivory, cinnamon, incense, and Indian spice. (Revelation 18:11-13) The sources of these goods lay along trade routes to the east of Palestine. Fragrant timbers, such as sandalwood, came from India. Pearls of gem value could be found in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and, according to the author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, in the vicinity of Muziris and in Sri Lanka. Indian Ocean pearls were likely of the best quality and the most costly.



a structure," says the book *Rome's Eastern Trade: International Commerce and Imperial Policy*, 31 BC-AD 305, "would have been built only by subjects of the Roman Empire, and presumably ones who were living in Muziris or who spent a significant proportion of their time there."

Roman records mention the visits of at least three Indian embassies to Rome during Augustus' reign, from 27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E. "These embassies had a serious diplomatic purpose," says one study on the subject—that of agreeing where business between people of different lands could be transacted, where taxes could be imposed, where foreigners could reside, and so on.

In the first century C.E., then, travel between the Mediterranean basin and India was neither infrequent nor unusual. It would have been simple for a Christian missionary at the north of the Red Sea to board a ship bound for India.

Beyond India?

Just how far eastward Mediterranean merchants and other travelers ventured—and how early—is hard to establish. However, it

is believed that by the first century C.E., some westerners journeyed as far as Thailand, Cambodia, Sumatra, and Java.

The *Hou Han-Shou* (Annals of the Later Han Dynasty), which cover the period from 23 C.E. to 220 C.E., fix the date of one such journey. In 166 C.E., an embassy from the king of Daqin, named An-tun, arrived at the Chinese court bearing tribute for the Emperor Huan-ti. Daqin was the Chinese name for the Roman Empire, while An-tun appears to be the Chinese rendering of Antoninus, the family name of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor at the time. Historians suspect that this was not an official embassy but merely an effort on the part of enterprising western traders to obtain silk directly from China instead of through middlemen.

Coming back to our original question, How far east could ancient ships have taken first-century Christian missionaries? To India and beyond? Perhaps. Certainly, the Christian message spread far enough so that the apostle Paul could say that it was "bearing fruit and increasing in all the world"—that is, to the far-flung reaches of the then-known world.—Colossians 1:6.

A Judge Who Always Does What Is Right

Genesis 18:22-32

JUSTICE. Fairness. Impartiality. Are you not drawn to such noble attributes? We humans have an innate need to be treated fairly. Sadly, justice often proves to be elusive in today's world. There is, however, a Judge who deserves our trust—Jehovah God. He always does what is right. This was made clear in a conversation that took place between Jehovah and Abraham, as recorded at Genesis 18:22-32.*

When Jehovah told Abraham of His decision to investigate conditions in Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham feared for the safety of any righteous people living there, including his nephew Lot. Abraham implored Jehovah: "Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous men in the midst of the city. Will you, then, . . . not pardon the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are inside it?" (Verses 23, 24) God said that he would spare the cities if just 50 righteous men were there. Abraham pleaded with Jehovah five more times, gradually reducing the number until it was down to ten. Each time, God said he would not bring the cities to ruin if that many righteous men were there.

Was Abraham arguing with God? By no means! That would have been the height of arrogance. Abraham's tone reflected due reverence and humility. He referred to himself as mere "dust and ashes." Four times he respectfully said "please." (Verses 27, 30-32) Furthermore, Abra-

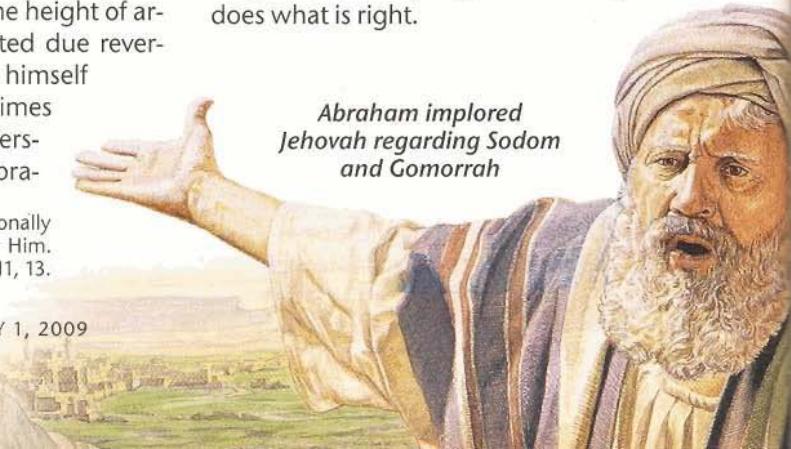
ham's words revealed his confidence in Jehovah's fairness. The idea that God would destroy the righteous along with the wicked would be "unthinkable," said Abraham—not once but twice. The faithful patriarch voiced his conviction that "the Judge of all the earth" would "do what is right."—Verse 25.

Was Abraham correct in the things he said? Yes and no. He was mistaken in suggesting that there were at least ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah. But he was certainly right in saying that God would never "sweep away the righteous with the wicked." When God later destroyed those wicked cities, righteous Lot and his two daughters escaped with angelic help.—2 Peter 2:7-9.

What does this account teach us about Jehovah? By informing Abraham of His intention to inspect the cities, Jehovah had, in effect, invited the dialogue. Then he listened patiently as his friend Abraham expressed the concerns of his heart. (Isaiah 41:8) How beautifully this teaches us that Jehovah is a humble God, who dignifies and honors his earthly servants! Clearly, we have every reason to place our complete trust in Jehovah, the Judge who always does what is right.

Abraham implored Jehovah regarding Sodom and Gomorrah

* On that occasion, Jehovah was personally represented by an angel who spoke for Him. For another example, see Genesis 16:7-11, 13.



He Learned From His Mistakes

JONAH wished he could shut out the terrible sounds. It was not just the fierce wind, which was shrieking through the ship's rigging; nor was it just the mountainous waves, which were thundering against the sides of the vessel, making her every timber creak and groan. No, far worse to Jonah were the shouts of those mariners, the captain and his crew, as they struggled to keep the ship afloat. Jonah felt sure that those men were about to die—all because of him!

What had put Jonah in such dire straits? He had made a serious mistake in his dealings with his God, Jehovah. What had he done? Were matters beyond repair? The answers can teach us much. For example, Jonah's story helps us to see how even those with genuine faith can go astray—and how they can make amends.

A Prophet From Galilee

When people think of the man Jonah, they often seem to focus on negative traits, such as his lapses into disobedience or even his hardheadedness. But there was far more to the man than that. Remember, Jonah was selected to serve as a prophet of Jehovah God. Jehovah would not have picked him for such a weighty responsibility had he been unfaithful or unrighteous.

At 2 Kings 14:25, we learn a little about Jonah's background. He was from Gath-hepher, just two and a half miles from Nazareth, the town where Jesus Christ would grow

up some eight centuries later.* Jonah served as a prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam II of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. The time of Elijah was long past; his successor, Elisha, had died during the reign of Jeroboam's father. Although Jehovah had used those men to wipe out Baal worship, Israel was willfully going astray again. The land was now under the influence of a king who "continued to do what was bad in Jehovah's eyes." (2 Kings 14:24) So Jonah's service could not have been easy or pleasant. Yet, he carried it out faithfully.

One day, though, Jonah's life took a dramatic turn. He received an assignment from Jehovah that he found to be extremely difficult. What was Jehovah asking him to do?

"Get Up, Go to Nineveh"

Jehovah told Jonah: "Get up, go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim against her that their badness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:2) It is not hard to see why this assignment might have appeared daunting. Nineveh lay some 500 miles to the east, an overland journey that would likely take about a month on foot. However, the hardships of such a trek might have seemed the

* Jonah's origin in a Galilean town is noteworthy because the Pharisees arrogantly said about Jesus: "Search and see that no prophet is to be raised up out of Galilee." (John 7:52) Many translators and researchers suggest that the Pharisees were making a sweeping generalization that no prophet ever has arisen or ever does arise out of lowly Galilee. If so, those men were ignoring history as well as prophecy.—Isaiah 9:1, 2.



easy part of the job. At Nineveh, Jonah was to deliver Jehovah's judgment message to the Assyrians, who were notoriously violent, even savage. If Jonah had seen little response among God's own people, what could he hope to see among those pagans? How would a lone servant of Jehovah fare in vast Nineveh, which would come to be called "the city of bloodshed"?—Nahum 3:1, 7.

Such thoughts may well have occurred to Jonah. We do not know. What we do know is that he ran. Jehovah had directed him to go east; Jonah headed west, and as far west as he could go. He went down to the coast, to a port city named Joppa, where he found a ship headed to Tarshish. Some scholars say that Tarshish was in Spain. If so, Jonah was heading some 2,200 miles away from Nineveh. Such a voyage to the far end of the Great Sea—as the Mediterranean Sea was called in those days—might have taken as long as a year! Jonah was that determined to get away from the assignment Jehovah had given him!

Does this mean that we can dismiss Jonah as a coward? We should not be too quick to judge him. As we shall see, he was capable

of remarkable personal courage. Like all of us, though, Jonah was an imperfect human struggling with a great many faults. (Psalm 51:5) Who of us has never struggled with fear?

It may occasionally seem that God asks us to do what strikes us as difficult, even impossible. We may even find it daunting to preach the good news of God's Kingdom, as Christians are required to do. (Matthew 24:14) It is only too easy for us to forget the profound truth that Jesus uttered: "All things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27) If we lose sight of that truth at times, perhaps we can understand Jonah's difficulty. What, though, were the consequences of Jonah's flight?

Jehovah Disciplines His Wayward Prophet

We can just imagine Jonah getting himself situated on that vessel, likely a Phoenician cargo ship. He watched as the captain and his crew bustled about to get their craft under way and out of port. As the shoreline slowly receded and disappeared, Jonah may have hoped he was escaping the danger he so dreaded. But suddenly, the weather changed.

At Jonah's urging, the sailors lifted him up and hurled him into the sea



Strong winds churned up the sea into a nightmarish rage, with waves that might dwarf even modern-day vessels. How long did it take for that wooden craft to seem terribly small and frail, lost in a watery wilderness of towering waves and plunging canyons? Did Jonah know, at that point, what he later wrote—that “Jehovah himself hurled forth a great wind at the sea”? It is hard to say. He saw, though, that the mariners began crying out to their various gods, and he knew that no help would come from that direction. His account says: “As for the ship, it was about to be wrecked.” (Jonah 1:4; Leviticus 19:4) And how could Jonah pray to the God he was running from?

Feeling powerless to help, Jonah went below the deck of the ship and found a place to lie down. There, he went fast asleep.* The captain found Jonah, woke him up, and urged him to pray to his god, as everyone else was doing. Convinced that there was something supernatural about this storm, the seamen cast lots to see which of the people on board might be the cause of their trouble. No doubt Jonah’s heart sank as the lots eliminated one man after another. Soon the truth was plain. Jehovah was directing the storm, as well as the lots, toward one man—Jonah!—Jonah 1:5-7.

Jonah told the sailors everything. He was a servant of the almighty God, Jehovah. This was the God he was running from and had offended, putting them all in this terrible danger. The men were aghast; Jonah could see the terror in their eyes. They asked him what they should do to him in order to save the ship and their lives. What did he say? Jo-

* The Septuagint stresses the depth of Jonah’s slumber by adding that he snored. However, lest we judge Jonah’s sleep as a sign of indifference on his part, we might recall that sometimes an urge to sleep overcomes those who are very low in spirits. During Jesus’ agonizing hours in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter, James, and John were “slumbering from grief.”—Luke 22:45.

nah may have shuddered to think of himself drowning in that cold, wild sea. But how could he send all these men to such a death when he knew he could save them? So he said: “Lift me up and hurl me into the sea, and the sea will become still for you; because I am aware that it is on my account that this great tempest is upon you.”—Jonah 1:12.

Hardly the words of a coward, are they? It must have warmed Jehovah’s heart to see Jonah’s brave, self-sacrificing spirit in that dire moment. Here we see Jonah’s faith at its best. We can imitate it today by putting the welfare of others ahead of our own. (John 13:34, 35) When we see someone in need, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually, do we give of ourselves in order to help out? How we please Jehovah when we do so!

Perhaps the sailors were moved too, for at first they refused to comply! Instead, they did everything they could to work their way through the storm—but to no avail. The tempest only grew worse. Finally, they saw that they had no choice. Calling out to Jonah’s God, Jehovah, to show them mercy, they lifted the man up and hurled him over the side, into the sea.—Jonah 1:13-15.

Jonah Finds Mercy and Deliverance

Jonah plummeted into the raging waves. Perhaps he struggled, floundering a bit, and saw amid a chaos of foam and spray that the ship was swiftly moving away. But the mighty breakers crashed over him and forced him under. He sank down and down, sensing that all hope was gone.

Jonah later described how he felt at this time. Fleeting images crossed his mind. He thought with sadness that he would never again see the beautiful temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem. He had the sensation of descending to the very depths of the sea, near the roots of the mountains, where seaweed

entangled him. This, it seemed, was to be his pit, his grave.—Jonah 2:2-6.

But wait! There was something moving nearby—an immense, dark shape, a living thing. Looming close, it darted at him. A great maw opened over him, engulfed him, swallowed him down!

This must be the end. Yet, Jonah sensed something astounding. He was still alive! He was neither crushed, nor digested, nor even suffocated. No, the breath of life was still in him, though he was in what should rightly be his grave. Slowly, Jonah became filled with awe. Without a doubt, it was his God, Jehovah, who had “appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.”*—Jonah 1:17.

Minutes passed, stretching into hours. There, in the deepest darkness he had ever known, Jonah composed his thoughts and prayed to Jehovah God. His prayer, recorded fully in the second chapter of Jonah, is revealing. It shows that Jonah had extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, for it often refers to the Psalms. It also shows a heartwarming quality: gratitude. Jonah concluded: “As for me, with the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will pay. Salvation belongs to Jehovah.”—Jonah 2:9.

Jonah learned that salvation is something that Jehovah can bring to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Even there, “in the inward parts of the fish,” Jehovah found and saved his troubled servant. (Jonah 1:17) Only Jehovah could keep a man alive and well for three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish. It is good for us to remember today that Jehovah is “the God in whose hand your breath is.” (Daniel 5:23) We owe our every

* When translated into Greek, the Hebrew word for “fish” was rendered “sea monster,” or “huge fish.” Although there is no way to determine exactly what kind of sea creature was involved, it has been observed that there are sharks in the Mediterranean large enough to swallow a man whole. There are far larger sharks elsewhere; the whale shark can reach up to 45 feet in length—possibly even more!

breath, our very existence, to him. Are we grateful? Do we not, then, owe Jehovah our obedience?

What about Jonah? Did he learn to show his gratitude to Jehovah through obedience? He did. After three days and three nights, the fish brought Jonah right to the shore and “vomited out Jonah onto the dry land.” (Jonah 2:10) Imagine—after all that, Jonah did not even have to swim ashore! Of course, he did have to find his way from that beach, wherever it was. Before long, though, his spirit of gratitude was put to the test. Jonah 3:1, 2, says: “Then the word of Jehovah occurred to Jonah the second time, saying: ‘Get up, go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim to her the proclamation that I am speaking to you.’” What would Jonah do?

Jonah did not hesitate. We read: “At that, Jonah got up and went to Nineveh in accord with the word of Jehovah.” (Jonah 3:3) Yes, he obeyed. Clearly, he learned from his mistakes. In this too we need to imitate Jonah’s faith. We all sin; we all make mistakes. (Romans 3:23) But do we give up, or do we learn from our mistakes and turn to a course of obedient service to God?

Did Jehovah reward Jonah for his obedience? Indeed he did. For one thing, it seems that Jonah eventually learned that those sailors had survived. The storm abated immediately after Jonah’s self-sacrificing act, and those mariners “began to fear Jehovah greatly” and made a sacrifice to him instead of to their false gods.—Jonah 1:15, 16.

An even greater reward came much later. Jesus used Jonah’s time in the huge fish as a prophetic picture of his own time in the grave, or Sheol. (Matthew 12:38-40) How thrilled Jonah will be to learn of that blessing when he is resurrected to life on the earth! (John 5:28, 29) Jehovah wants to bless you too. Like Jonah, will you learn from your mistakes and display an obedient, selfless spirit?

Jonah Faces the Critics

■ Did the events recorded in the Bible book of Jonah really happen? Since ancient times, the book has had its critics. In the modern era of higher criticism, the book is often dismissed—whether as fable, legend, myth, or fiction. One 19th-century author reported how a clergyman explained the account of Jonah and the huge fish as a strange sort of allegory: Jonah stayed at a hotel in Joppa called The Sign of the Whale. When he did not have enough money to pay his bill, the landlord ejected him. Thus was Jonah “taken in” by and later “vomited” from a whale! Really, Bible critics seem more determined to devour Jonah than that huge fish was!

Why does this Bible book elicit so much skepticism? It describes miracles. Many critics, it seems, approach miracles with this rigid pre-conception: Such things are impossible. But is that approach truly reasonable? Ask yourself this, ‘Do I believe the first sentence of the Bible?’ It says: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) Many millions of reasonable people around the world wisely accept that simple truth. In a way, though, that statement

alone encompasses far more than any of the miracles described later in the Bible.

Consider: For the One who created the vast starry heavens and all the complex wonders of life on the earth, what elements in the book of Jonah would be impossible? Creating a storm? Impelling a huge fish to swallow a

“With God no declaration will be an impossibility.”

—LUKE 1:37

man? Or causing that same fish to vomit the man out again? For One with unlimited power, such things would not be difficult at all.—Isaiah 40:26.

Even without intervention by divine power, amazing things sometimes happen. For example, it is said that in 1758, a sailor tumbled from his ship into the Mediterranean Sea and was consumed by a shark. However, a cannon was fired at the shark. Struck, the fish disgorged the sailor, who was pulled to safety alive and barely injured. If it is true, we might deem the story remarkable, even amazing—but not a miracle. Could God not use his power to do far more?

Skeptics also insist that no man could stay alive within a fish for three days without suffocating. However, humans have been clever enough to figure out how to fill tanks with compressed air and use them in order to breathe underwater for extended periods. Could God not use his infinitely greater power and wisdom to keep Jonah alive and breathing for three days? As one of Jehovah’s angels once said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, “with God no declaration will be an impossibility.”—Luke 1:37.

What else marks the book of Jonah as accurate history? Jonah’s description of the ship and its crew is detailed and realistic. At Jonah 1:5, we see the sailors hurling articles from the ship to lighten it. Ancient historians and even rabbinic law show that this was a common practice in the face of bad weather. Jonah’s later description of Nineveh also fits in with historical and archaeological evidence. Above all, though, Jesus Christ referred to Jonah’s three-day sojourn in the huge fish as prophetic of his own stay in the grave. (Matthew 12:38-40) The testimony of Jesus confirms that Jonah’s story is true.

Our Readers Ask

WHY DO SOME PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED?

God is very approachable. Just as a loving father is glad to have his children speak freely with him, Jehovah God welcomes our prayers. At the same time, like any wise father, God has good reasons for not answering some requests. Are his reasons mysterious, or does he reveal something about them in the Bible?

The apostle John explains: "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that, no matter what it is that we ask according to his will, he hears us." (1 John 5:14) Our requests must be in harmony with God's will. Some pray for things that are clearly not God's will—to win the lottery, for example, or to win a bet. Others pray with improper motives. The disciple James warns against such abuse of prayer, saying: "You do ask, and yet you do not receive, because you are asking for a wrong purpose, that you may expend it upon your cravings for sensual pleasure."—James 4:3.

Imagine, for example, that both sides in a soccer game pray to win. God can hardly be expected to respond to such conflicting prayers. The same can be said about modern-day warfare when opposing sides pray for victory.

Those who show contempt for God's law pray in vain. Jehovah once felt compelled to say to hypocritical worshippers: "Even though you make many prayers, I am not listening; with bloodshed your very hands have become filled." (Isaiah 1:15) The Bible says: "He that is turning his ear away from hearing the law—even his prayer is something detestable."—Proverbs 28:9.

On the other hand, Jehovah will always listen to the sincere prayers of worshippers who

are doing their best to serve him according to his will. Does that mean, though, that he will grant their every request? No. Consider some Scriptural examples.

Moses had an exceptionally close relationship with God; yet, he too had to ask "according to [God's] will." Contrary to God's stated purpose, Moses begged for permission to enter the land of Canaan: "Let me pass over, please, and see the good land that is across the Jordan." But previously, because of his sin, Moses was told that he would not enter that land. So now, instead of granting Moses' request, Jehovah told him: "That is enough of you! Never speak to me further on this matter."—Deuteronomy 3:25, 26; 32:51.

The apostle Paul prayed for relief from what he called his "thorn in the flesh." (2 Corinthians 12:7) This "thorn" may refer to a chronic eye affliction or to the constant harassment of opposers and "false brothers." (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 4:14, 15) Paul wrote: "I three times entreated the Lord that it might depart from me." However, God knew that if Paul continued preaching despite this nagging "thorn in the flesh," it would clearly demonstrate God's power and Paul's implicit trust in Him. So rather than grant Paul's request, God told him: "My power is being made perfect in weakness."—2 Corinthians 12:8, 9.

Yes, God knows better than we do whether granting certain requests is in our best interests. Jehovah always responds for our good, in harmony with his loving purposes recorded in the Bible.

A Young Man's Courage

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

ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ 1 SAMUEL 17:1-11, 26, 32-51.

Describe Goliath's appearance and voice as you imagine them. _____

Although David was not in the Israelite army, what prompted him to get involved in a battle against Goliath? (See verse 26.) _____

What basis did David have for believing that Jehovah would come to his aid? (Reread verses 34-37.) _____

DIG DEEPER.

Using research tools at your disposal, try to determine

(1) Goliath's height. (1 Samuel 17:4) Six cubits and a span = _____

(2) The weight of Goliath's coat of mail. (1 Samuel 17:5)

5,000 shekels of copper = _____

(3) The weight of Goliath's spear blade. (1 Samuel 17:7)

600 shekels of iron = _____

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

Courage. _____

Reliance on Jehovah rather than on your own strength. _____

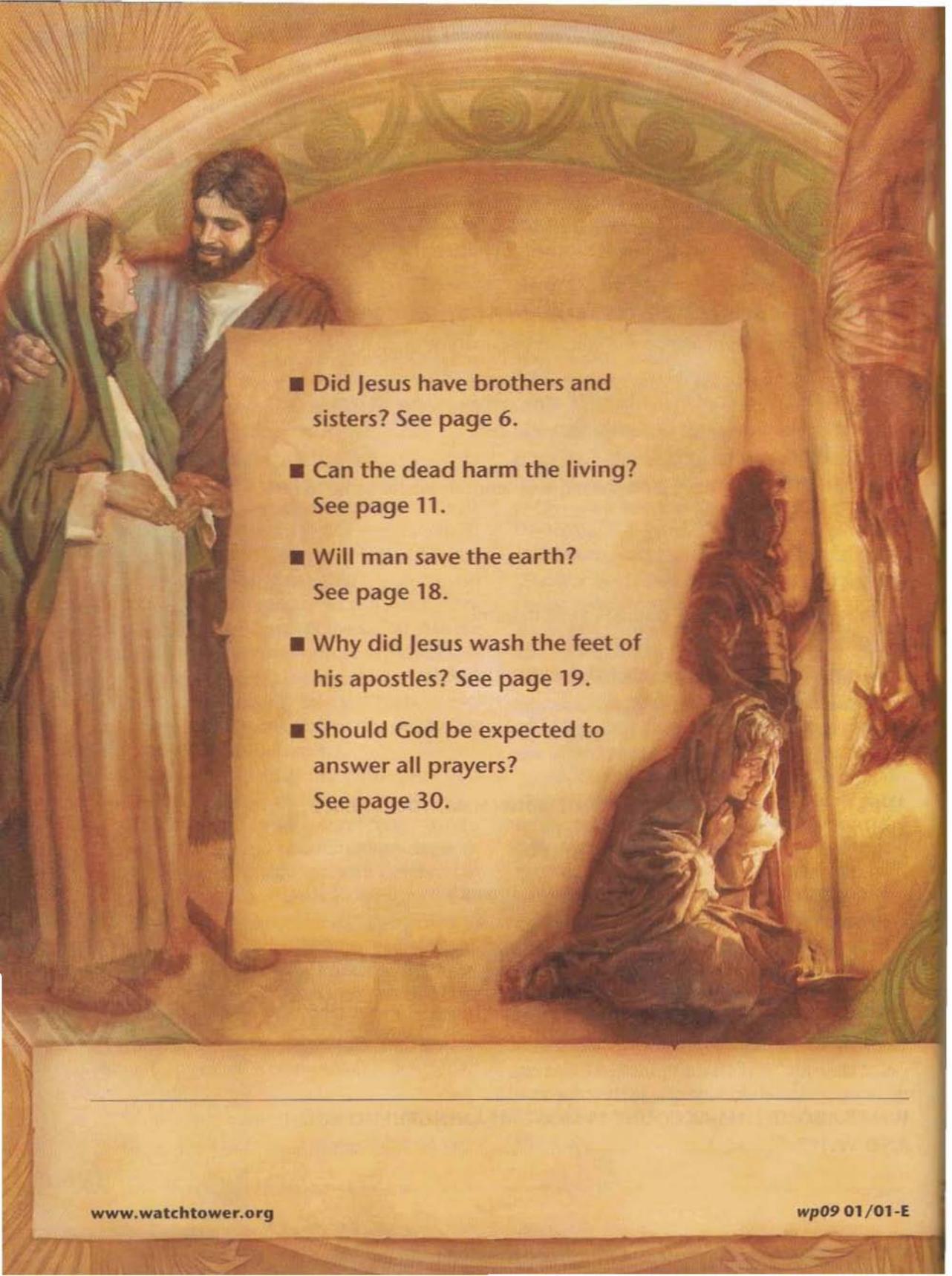
FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.

What Goliathlike obstacles do you find yourself up against? _____

What experiences (of your own or of others) convince you that Jehovah will not abandon you? _____

WHAT ABOUT THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY? _____



- 
- A painting depicting a scene from the Bible. In the center, Jesus, with a beard and brown hair, is kneeling and washing the feet of a disciple who is wearing a white robe. To the left, a woman in a green and blue robe is watching this act. In the background, another figure is visible near a pillar.
- Did Jesus have brothers and sisters? See page 6.
 - Can the dead harm the living? See page 11.
 - Will man save the earth? See page 18.
 - Why did Jesus wash the feet of his apostles? See page 19.
 - Should God be expected to answer all prayers? See page 30.