

Awake!

MARCH 2015

A young man with dark hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, is looking upwards with a contemplative expression. He is in the center of a crowded city street, with other people and buildings visible in the background, though they are out of focus. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

IS THERE A GOD?
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

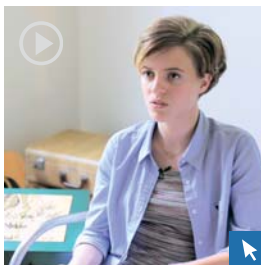
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TEENAGERS

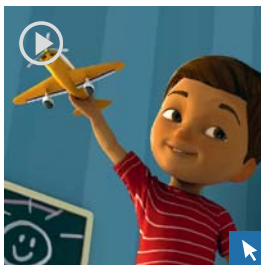


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COVER SUBJECT

Is There a God?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

The question of whether God exists seems to be either unanswerable or irrelevant to many. Hervé, who grew up in France, says: “Although I don’t define myself as atheist or agnostic, I am not a believer. For me, the best way to live is to use common sense. That doesn’t require belief in a deity.”

Others may feel as did John, in the United States. He said: “I was raised by parents who did not believe in God. As a young man, I had no position on whether God exists. Still, at times I would wonder about it.”

Have you ever wondered if there is a God and, if there is, whether there is

a larger purpose to life? Perhaps you have encountered facts that are difficult to explain without the existence of a Creator, such as scientific data on the finely tuned balance in nature that makes life on our planet possible and evidence that life does not come from lifeless matter.—See the box “Examine the Evidence.”

Consider the significance of the facts mentioned above. They are like signposts pointing to a treasure. If you find convincing evidence that God exists, along with trustworthy information about him, you will have much to gain. Here are four examples.



1. THE MEANING OF LIFE

If there is a larger meaning to life, we want to know what it is and to understand our place in it. After all, if God exists and we are unaware of it, then we are living without knowing the most fundamental truth in the universe.

The Bible says that God is the Source of all life. (Revelation 4:11) How can knowing this give our lives meaning? Consider what the Bible teaches on the matter.

If God exists and we are unaware of it, then we are living without knowing the most fundamental truth in the universe

Among all of earth's creatures, humans are unique. According to the Bible, we were created by God to be like him, to reflect his personality. (Genesis 1:27) Furthermore, the Bible teaches that humans can become God's friends. (James 2:23) Nothing can give our life more meaning than to have such a relationship with our Creator.

What does it mean to be God's friend? Friends of God can express themselves directly to him. And he promises that he will listen to them and act in their behalf. (Psalm 91:15) As friends of God, we can come to know his thoughts on many matters. This can give us reliable insight into the deepest questions about our lives.



2. PEACE OF MIND

For example, some find it difficult to believe in God because of the suffering they see worldwide. They ask, 'Why would an all-powerful Creator permit suffering and evil?'

The Bible's comforting answer is that God never intended for humans to suffer. At the time of man's creation, human life was free from suffering. Even death was not part of God's original purpose for mankind. (Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17) Is this hard to believe? A fantasy? No. If there is an all-powerful Creator and if love is indeed his foremost quality, then this is exactly the kind of life that we would expect him to purpose for humans to have.

What brought about mankind's current situation? The Bible explains that God created humans with the ability to exercise free will. We are not robots, forced to obey God. The first human couple, from whom all others have descended, chose to reject God's guidance. Instead, they selfishly pursued their own will. (Genesis 3:1-6, 22-24) We now experience the painful results.

We can gain great peace of mind from knowing that human suffering is not part of God's purpose. But, naturally, we also want relief. We need hope for the future.





3. HOPE

Immediately after mankind rebelled, God promised that he would in time fulfill his original purpose for the earth. Because he is almighty, nothing can prevent him from doing so. (Isaiah 55:11) Soon, God will undo all the consequences of the rebellion against him, and the earth and mankind will be brought in line with his original purpose.

What can this mean for you? Consider just two of the many promises God has made for our future, as found in the Bible.

- **PEACE EARTH WIDE AND WICKEDNESS REMOVED.** “Just a little while longer, and the wicked will be no more; you will look at where they were, and they will not be there. But the meek will possess the earth, and they will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.”—Psalm 37: 10, 11.

- **SICKNESS AND DEATH ELIMINATED.** “No resident will say: ‘I am sick.’” (Isaiah 33:24) “He will swallow up death forever, and the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will wipe away the tears from all faces.”—Isaiah 25:8.

Why can we trust the promises of God found in the Bible? Because numerous prophecies recorded there have already been verifiably fulfilled. Yet, the hope of future relief from suffering does not remove the difficulties of life now. What additional help does God provide?



4. HELP WITH PROBLEMS AND DECISIONS

God provides guidance to help us cope with problems and make good decisions. Many decisions are small, but others have lifelong consequences. No human can offer us wisdom as effective as the wisdom that our Creator can provide. He has a timeless perspective and is the very Source of human life. So he knows what is best for us.

The Bible contains the thoughts of Jehovah God, as he inspired various human writers to record them. In the Bible, we find this statement: “I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One guiding you in the way you should walk.”—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

God has unlimited power, and he is willing to use his power in our behalf. The Bible describes God as a loving father who wants to help us. It says: “The Father in heaven [will] give holy spirit to those asking him!” (Luke 11:13) This power from God can guide and strengthen us.

How can you obtain such help from God? The Bible answers: “Whoever approaches God must believe that he is and that he becomes the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him.” (Hebrews 11:6) To become convinced that God exists, you need to examine the evidence for yourself.

WILL YOU INVESTIGATE?

It takes time to seek out the truth about God, but clearly you can benefit from doing so. Consider the experience of Xiujin Xiao, who was born in China and now lives in the United States. He says: “Although I believed the theory of evolution, I was curious about the Bible. So I began to study the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses. In my last year of college, I got so busy that I had little time for what I was learning from the Bible. But I was less happy. When I again made my Bible study a priority, I found inner joy.”

Would you like to learn more about our Creator, Jehovah God? Why not take time to investigate for yourself? ■

What Does the Bible Say About God?

The Bible’s message about God is simple yet thought-provoking—and to some it is surprising.

- Our Creator is not an impersonal force. God has a personality and a name, Jehovah.*—Isaiah 42:8.
- Jehovah God’s existence has no beginning and will have no end.—Psalm 93:2; Isaiah 40:28.
- God is not a stern judge, as he is portrayed by some religions. Rather, his foremost quality is love.—1 John 4:8.
- God is interested in humans and has communicated his purpose for our lives.—Ecclesiastes 12:13; Micah 6:8.

Does the Bible reveal everything about God? Of course not. The Bible itself says that we know “just the fringes of his ways.”—Job 26:14.

* Many Bibles use the title “LORD” to represent the Hebrew transliteration YHWH, which is commonly translated in English as “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.”

Examine the Evidence

The following publications present evidence that an intelligent Creator exists. You can obtain them on jw.org or from one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.



THE ORIGIN OF LIFE—FIVE QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

Available in 47 languages

From page 12: “The theory of evolution tries to account for the origin of life on earth without the necessity of divine intervention. However, the more that scientists discover about life, the less likely it appears that it could arise by chance.”



WAS LIFE CREATED?

Available in 80 languages

From page 24: “Many people claim that science disproves the Bible’s account of creation. However, the contradiction is, not between science and the Bible, but between science and the opinions of Christian Fundamentalists.”



SPOTLIGHT ON AFRICA

Many organizations and individuals continue to put forth efforts to improve the quality of life in Africa. The region, however, is still plagued by seemingly insurmountable problems.



UNREPORTED BRIBERY Countries in East Africa have some of the highest rates of bribery in the world, says Transparency International. Yet, some 90 percent of the people who encounter bribery do not report it. A spokesman for the organization's Kenya chapter says: "Citizens do not seem to trust their governments to respond to the reports on corruption."

What the Bible says: "The bribe blinds clear-sighted men."
—Exodus 23:8.



RHINO POACHING A total of 1,004 rhinos in South Africa were illegally killed in 2013, compared with just 13 in 2007. Despite this increased supply of rhino horn, though, it continues to be in such high demand that it can cost more per kilogram than gold. A single horn can fetch up to half a million dollars.

To think about: Will governments ever be able to eliminate lawlessness?—Jeremiah 10:23.

AFRICANS ONLINE Almost 20 percent of Africans were expected to be using the Internet by the end of 2014, according to the International Telecommunication Union. The number of mobile Internet subscriptions in Africa is growing at a rate twice the global average.





Dealing With In-Laws



THE CHALLENGE

“When we were going through a difficult time, my wife told her parents about it. Then her father called me to give me advice about the situation. I wasn’t very happy about that!” —James.*

“My mother-in-law will often say, ‘I miss my boy so much!’ She talks about how close they were, which makes me feel guilty for marrying him and causing her all this heartache!”—Natasha.

Is it possible to keep an in-law problem from becoming a marriage problem?

* Names in this article have been changed.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Marriage creates a new family unit. The Bible says that a man who marries “will leave his father and his mother and will stick to his wife.” The same is true of a wife regarding her parents and husband. When she marries, the Bible says, the two become “one flesh.” They are a new family unit.—Matthew 19:5.

Your marriage comes before your parents. “One of the basic tasks of a marriage is to establish a sense of ‘we-ness’ between husband and wife,” writes counselor John M. Gottman. “Creating or renewing your sense of solidarity with your spouse may involve some rending and tearing away from your primary families.”*

Some parents may find it difficult to adjust. One young husband relates: “Before getting married, my wife would always put priority on her parents’ wishes. After we were married, her mother saw that someone else came first. That wasn’t easy for her to accept.”

Some newlyweds may find it difficult too. “Having in-laws is not like having friends you chose,” says James, quoted earlier. “It’s as though someone said, ‘You have two new friends, whether you like it or not.’ Even if they drive you crazy, they’re family!”

* From the book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you and your spouse are at odds over an in-law situation, work to resolve issues in a spirit of cooperation. Follow the Bible's advice to "seek peace and pursue it."—Psalm 34:14.

To help you do that, consider the following scenarios. Each is presented from the perspective of either the husband or the wife. However, the challenges really apply to either gender, and the principles discussed can help you resolve a number of in-law issues.

- **Your wife says she wishes you had a better relationship with her mother. But you find her mother difficult to deal with.**

Try this: Discuss the problem with your wife, and be willing to make concessions. The issue is, not how you feel about your mother-in-law, but how you feel about your spouse—the person whom you have vowed to love. Come away from the discussion with one or two specific ways that you could improve your relationship with her mother, and then follow through. As your wife notices your efforts, her respect for you will undoubtedly grow.—*Bible principle: 1 Corinthians 10:24.*

- **Your husband says that you are more interested in pleasing your parents than in pleasing him.**

Try this: Discuss the problem with your husband, and try to see it from his point of view. Of course, your husband should not feel threatened if you are simply giving due honor to your parents. (Proverbs 23:22) Still, you might need to reassure him—by your words and actions—that he comes before your parents in your life. If your husband has that confidence, he will be less likely to feel that he is competing with your parents for your attention.—*Bible principle: Ephesians 5:33.*

- **Your wife goes to her parents for advice rather than to you.**

Try this: Talk with your wife, and reach an agreement on where the boundaries should be set. Strive to be reasonable. Is it *always* wrong to talk to a parent about a concern? When might it be appropriate? If you both agree on reasonable boundaries, this issue does not have to be a problem.—*Bible principle: Philippians 4:5.* ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

"Let each one keep seeking, not his own advantage, but that of the other person."—1 Corinthians 10:24.

"The wife should have deep respect for her husband."—Ephesians 5:33.

"Let your reasonableness become known."—Philippians 4:5.



Focus on the Positive

"Having a good relationship with your in-laws is important. They are the ones who cared for and raised your spouse, and no matter what their imperfections are, you need to be thankful to them. You can also learn a lot from their experience. If you focus on your in-laws' positive qualities and imitate those, you can become a well-rounded person."—Jessica.



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DECREES THAT DIVIDED CONTINENTS

AFTER Christopher Columbus returned from his first voyage to the Americas in 1493, the kings of Spain and Portugal disagreed on who should control trade and colonization of the newly discovered lands. Spain looked to the pope, Alexander VI, to settle the dispute.

QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Successive popes urged Spain and Portugal to Christianize any pagans encountered on their voyages of discovery.
- ▶ In 1493, Pope Alexander VI drew a line down the middle of the Atlantic Ocean that granted Spain authority over the area to the west.
- ▶ Alexander's decree, and others similar to it, were used by Spain to make full claims on the newly discovered lands.
- ▶ For centuries, European nations fought to defend or attack the legitimacy of territorial claims authorized by papal decrees.

KINGS AND POPES SLICE UP CONTINENTS

Spain, Portugal, and the Papacy had already considered ownership of newfound lands. In 1455, Pope Nicholas V granted the Portuguese exclusive rights to explore lands and islands along the Atlantic Coast of Africa and to claim for themselves everything that they found there. In 1479, in the Treaty of Alcáçovas, Afonso V of Portugal and his son, Prince John, surrendered sovereignty over the Canary Islands to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. In exchange, Spain recognized the Portuguese monopoly over African trade and Portuguese sovereignty over the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, and Madeira. Two years later, Pope Sixtus IV reaffirmed this treaty, specifying that any new discoveries south and east of the Canary Islands would belong to Portugal.

However, John, now John II of Portugal, claimed that the lands discovered by Columbus belonged to Portugal. The Spanish monarchs were having none of it, and they appealed to the new pope, Alexander VI, for the right to colonize and Christianize the areas discovered by Columbus.

Alexander initiated three formal decrees in response. The first, "by the authority of Almighty God," awarded ex-

With the stroke of a pen, Pope Alexander VI divided continents

clusive and perpetual possession of the new territories to Spain. The second fixed a north-south line of demarcation running about 350 miles (560 km) west of the Cape Verde Islands. All lands discovered, or to be discovered, west of that line, said Alexander, were Spain's. By the stroke of a pen, the pope divided continents! His third decree seemed to extend Spanish influence eastward as far as India. This, of course, infuriated King John, whose subjects had only recently succeeded in rounding the tip of Africa, thus extending the Portuguese monopoly into the Indian Ocean.

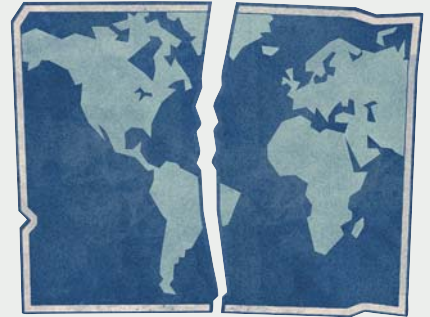
A NEW LINE ON THE MAP

Fed up with Alexander,* John negotiated directly with Ferdinand and Isabella. "The Spanish monarchs, fearing the ruthless Portuguese and busy enough digesting the New World, were more than happy to seek a reasonable compromise," says author William Bernstein. So, in 1494, a treaty named after the Spanish town in which it was stipulated was signed in Tordesillas.

The Treaty of Tordesillas maintained the north-south line Alexander had drawn but moved it 920 miles (1,480 km) farther west. Supposedly, all Africa and Asia now "belonged" to Portugal; the New World to Spain. This westward shift of the line, however, brought much of the as-yet-undiscovered land later known as Brazil into Portuguese territory.

The decrees that authorized Spain and Portugal to take possession of and defend newly acquired lands were used as a basis for much bloodshed. These decisions not only ignored the rights of people who lived in those lands—leading to their subjugation and exploitation—but also spawned centuries of conflict among nations over power and the freedom of the seas. ■

* For more information on this infamously corrupt pope, see the article "Alexander VI—A Pope That Rome Does Not Forget," in *The Watchtower* of June 15, 2003, pages 26-29.



"The Arrogance of the West"

"This notion, of a Roman pontiff dividing up whole continents to the exclusive benefit of two small European kingdoms, seems incredible now, a celebrated instance of the arrogance of the West," says author Barnaby Rogerson. This papal decree "can be seen as the starting gun for the cruelties of all subsequent colonial empires," adds Rogerson.



Fresh Air and Sunshine

NATURAL “ANTIBIOTICS”?

WHEN scientists first discovered chemical antibiotics in the mid-20th century, doctors hoped that these new medications would eliminate certain diseases. At first, the new medicines seemed to live up to their promise. Yet, their widespread use since then has resulted in the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

To find new weapons against infection, some scientists are taking a second look at disease-control methods of the past. One of these involves harnessing the health benefits of sunshine and fresh air.

A Lesson From the Past

England had several early advocates of the curative value of sun and fresh air. Physician John Lettsom (1744-1815) prescribed sea air and sunshine for children who were suffering from tuberculosis (TB). In 1840, surgeon George Bodington noted that those who worked in the

open air—farmers, plowmen, shepherds—were generally free of TB, while those who spent much of their time indoors seemed more susceptible to it.

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) became famous for her innovations in nursing while caring for British soldiers injured during the Crimean War. She asked: “Do you ever go into the bed-rooms of any persons . . . at night, or before the windows are opened in the morning, and ever find the air anything but unwholesomely close and foul?” She recommended that the air in a patient’s room be kept as fresh as the outside air, but without chilling the patient. She added: “It is the unqualified result of all my experience with the sick, that second only to their need of fresh air is their need of light . . . And that it is not only light but direct sunlight they want.” Many at that time also believed that exposing bed linens and clothing to the sun promoted health.



Science has progressed since the 1800's, yet modern studies have reached similar conclusions. For instance, a 2011 study in China found that crowded college dormitories with a low rate of ventilation are "associated with more respiratory infections."

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that natural ventilation, which includes outside air flowing through a building, is important for infection control. Indeed, WHO guidelines published in 2009 encourage use of such natural ventilation as an effective measure in reducing the risk of infection at health-care facilities.*

'That is all very good,' you might say. 'But what is the science behind this? How do sunshine and air prevent infection?'

* Certain factors may make it undesirable to leave windows open. These include external air quality, noise, fire regulations, and security.

Nature's Disinfectants

Studies conducted at a United Kingdom Ministry of Defence site provide some answers. Scientists there were trying to establish how long the air would remain dangerous if a biological weapon armed with harmful bacteria were exploded over London. To determine the viability of airborne pathogens, the researchers anchored *E. coli* microorganisms to threads of spider silk and exposed them to the open air. The experiment was performed at night, since it was known that sunlight kills these bacteria. What were the results?

Some two hours later, nearly all the bacteria were dead. Yet, when the bacteria were kept in a closed box in the same location and at the same temperature and humidity, most of them were still alive past the two-hour mark. Why? Evidently, something about being in the open air kills germs. This so-called *open-air factor* has not been clearly identified. However, researchers point to a compound that occurs naturally in open air and that "acts as a natural disinfectant against pathogens or germs that lurk in the atmosphere."

Sunlight also has natural disinfecting properties. The *Journal of Hospital Infection* explains that "the majority of microbes that cause airborne infections cannot tolerate sunlight."

How can you take advantage of this? You might want to go outdoors, where you can spend a *moderate* amount of time in the sunshine and breathe some fresh air. It will likely do you good. ■



GAMBLING

Some people view gambling as an innocent diversion, while others see it as a dangerous vice.

Is there anything wrong with gambling?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY Many people view gambling as harmless fun, as long as it is practiced legally. Some forms of legalized gambling, such as government-sponsored lotteries, generate revenue for programs that benefit the public.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS The Bible makes no significant mention of gambling. Yet, it does offer a number of guiding principles that reveal how God feels about gambling.

The basic nature of gambling—winning money at the expense of others—is at odds with the Bible's warning to “guard against every sort of greed.” (Luke 12:15) Gambling is, in fact, fueled by greed. Gaming institutions advertise big jackpots, while downplaying the poor odds of winning, because they know that dreams of wealth prompt players to wager large amounts at the casinos. Rather than helping a person guard against greed, gambling promotes the desire for easy money.

Gambling is based on an inherently selfish goal: winning money that other players have lost. However, the Bible encourages a person to “keep seeking, not his own advantage, but that of the other person.” (1 Corinthians 10:24) And one of the Ten Commandments states: “You

must not desire . . . anything that belongs to your fellow man.” (Exodus 20:17) When a gambler sets his heart on winning, he is, in essence, hoping that others will lose their money in order for him to profit.

The Bible also cautions against viewing luck as a mystic force that might bestow blessings. In ancient Israel, there were some who lacked faith in God and began “setting a table for the god of Good Luck.” Was such devotion to “the god of Good Luck” acceptable to God? No, he said to them: “You kept doing what was bad in my eyes, and you chose what displeased me.”—Isaiah 65:11, 12.

True, in some parts of the world, funds from legalized gambling are used to pay for education, economic development, and other public programs. But the use of those funds does not change how they were obtained—through activities that openly encourage greed and selfishness and that promote the idea of getting something for nothing.

“You must not desire . . . anything that belongs to your fellow man.”

—Exodus 20:17.



What negative effects can gambling have on the gambler?

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS The Bible warns that “those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge men into destruction and ruin.” (1 Timothy 6:9) Gambling is rooted in greed, and greed is so corrosive that the Bible lists “greediness” among several behaviors that should be strongly avoided. —Ephesians 5:3.

With its focus on easy wealth, gambling nurtures a *love* of money—something that the Bible identifies as “a root of all sorts of injurious things.” The desire for money can easily become an overpowering influence in a person’s life, leading to intense anxiety and damaging one’s faith in God. Figuratively speaking, the Bible describes those ensnared by the love of money as having “stabbed themselves all over with many pains.”—1 Timothy 6:10.

Greediness breeds discontent, leaving people unsatisfied with their financial status and robbing them of their happiness. “A lover of silver will never be satisfied with silver, nor a lover of wealth with income.”—Ecclesiastes 5:10.

Millions lured into gambling have found themselves ensnared by a vicious gambling addiction. The problem is widespread, with millions of gambling addicts in the United States alone, according to estimates.

One proverb states: “An inheritance obtained first by greed will not be a blessing in the end.” (Proverbs 20:21) Problem gambling has plunged addicts into debt or even bankruptcy and has cost many of them jobs, marriages, and friendships. Applying the Bible’s guiding principles can help a person avoid the negative effects that gambling can have on life and happiness. ■

“Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge men into destruction and ruin.”

—1 Timothy 6:9.





The Remarkable Hearing of the Greater Wax Moth



© Andrew Darrington/Alamy

THE greater wax moth can hear high-pitched sound better than any known creature in the world. Yet its ears are very simple in structure, each being about the size of a pinhead.

Consider: For years, the greater wax moth's hearing has been a subject of study. More recently, scientists at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, tested the moth's hearing with a wide range of sounds. They measured the vibrations of these tympanal membranes and recorded the activity of their auditory nerves. The "eardrums" still responded when exposed to sounds at a frequency of 300 kilohertz. By comparison, bat echolocation has been recorded at up to 212 kilohertz, the hearing of dolphins peaks at 160 ki-

lohertz, and humans do not hear beyond 20 kilohertz.

Researchers would like to use the superior hearing capability of the greater wax moth as the basis for new technology. How? "To help make better, and smaller, microphones," says Dr. James Windmill of the University of Strathclyde. "These could be put in a wide range of devices such as mobile phones and hearing aids."

What do you think? Did the remarkable hearing of the greater wax moth come about by evolution? Or was it designed? ■

