

IS RELIGION  
DYING OUT?

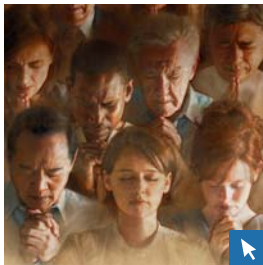
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Vol. 96, No. 11 / Monthly / ENGLISH

Printing Each Issue: 51,788,000 in 103 Languages

This publication is not for sale. It is provided as part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

*Awake!* (ISSN 0005-237X) is published monthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; L. Weaver, Jr., President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483, and by Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Canada, PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Awake!* 1000 Red Mills Road, Wallkill, NY 12589-3299.

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## COVER SUBJECT

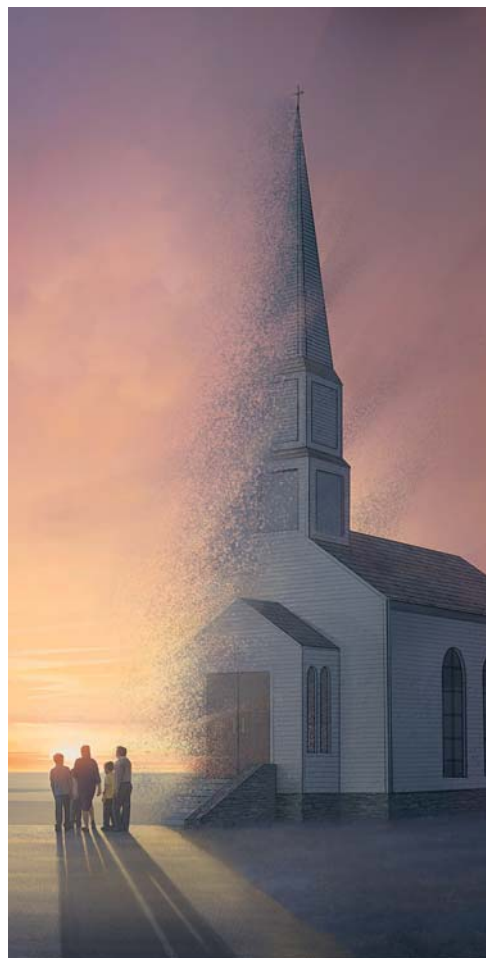
# IS RELIGION DYING OUT?

*Gaffar, who was born in Turkey, was disturbed by the idea of a vengeful God, as taught by his religion. His wife, Hediye, began to question her religion when she was just nine years old. "I was taught to believe in fate," she said. "As an orphan, I wondered, 'What have I done to deserve this?' I often cried all night. By age 15, in my heart I had abandoned my religion."*

HAVE you given up on organized religion? If so, you are far from alone. In many countries the number of people who describe themselves as 'not religious' is growing—a trend that suggests an uncertain future for institutional religion. Some of those lands are shown here.



Statistics for all countries except Tunisia are taken from the 2012 Global Index of Religion and Atheism, published by Gallup International. Polls involved 57 countries, representing over 73 percent of the world's population.



## AUSTRALIA

Polls indicate that nearly 50 percent of the population say they are not religious. Another 10 percent claim to be "convinced atheists." In 2010, a clergyman lamented that "the last 40 years or so" has seen a "wholesale abandonment of the Christian faith."

## FRANCE

Only 37 percent of the people polled claimed to be religious. The rest were either atheists or simply not religious. In some parts of this once Catholic stronghold, Catholicism is in a state of "near-collapse," said the magazine *The Economist*.

## IRELAND

The Irish seem to be losing their faith en masse. Nearly 45 percent of respondents said they are not religious, and another 10 percent claimed to be atheists. Percentagewise, Ireland was among the top ten atheist populations. News reports are talking about "the end of Catholic Ireland."

Why the Exodus?

People are becoming disillusioned with organized religion for a variety of reasons. These include religiously motivated or religiously sanctioned violence and terror, sex scandals involving religious leaders, and more subtle factors, which may be taking a bigger toll. The latter include the following:

• **Material prosperity:** “The richer you get, the less religious you define yourself,” says the *Global Index of Religion and Atheism*. That observation is significant because in many lands, material prosperity has risen dramatically. In some places, people enjoy a “standard of living that would have made the greatest king of two hundred years ago turn green with envy,” says John V. C. Nye, a professor of economics.

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** The Bible foretold that in “the last days,” love of money and pleasures would supplant love of God and neighbor. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Aware of the spiritual dangers associated with wealth, a Bible writer said to Jehovah God: “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” Why such a desire? “So that I do not become

satisfied and deny you,” he continued. —Proverbs 30:8, 9.

• **Religious traditions and morality:** Many people, especially the young, view organized religion as irrelevant and out of touch. Others have lost confidence in religion. “If you look at the way the churches have behaved over the centuries,” said Tim Maguire, media officer for Humanist Society Scotland, “people have turned away from them because they no longer believe in them as a moral arbiter.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** Regarding false teachers, Jesus Christ warned: “By their fruits you will recognize them. . . . Every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit.” (Matthew 7:15-18) “Worthless fruit” includes political meddling and approving of practices that offend God, such as homosexuality. (John 15:19; Romans 1:25-27) It also includes substituting hollow rituals and empty traditions for the wholesome teachings found in the Scriptures. (Matthew 15:3, 9) “Feed my little sheep,” Jesus said. (John 21:17) Today, however, many people feel spiritually starved.

JAPAN & SOUTH AFRICA	TUNISIA	UNITED STATES
Just 16 percent of Japanese polled claimed to be religious; 62 percent were either not religious or atheists.  Between 2005 and 2012, the number of South African respondents who said they were religious fell by 19 percent.	In 2013, about 60 percent of Tunisians polled said that they no longer attend mosques but instead pray at home. The reason given was the violent ideology promoted there.	Since 2005, the number of people claiming to be religious fell by 13 percent. About 1 in 5 respondents had no religious affiliation. For adults under the age of 30, the ratio was 1 in 3. Thousands of churches close their doors each year.



● **Religion and money:** According to the Pew Research Center, a lot of people feel that religion puts too much emphasis on money. Adding to the problem, some religious dignitaries—unlike their flocks—enjoy lavish lifestyles. For example, in one German city where many churchgoers struggle to make ends meet, the bishop has been accused of living in great luxury. This lifestyle has offended many local Catholics. Also, a report in *GEO* magazine says that in Nigeria, “where 100 million people live on less than one euro per day, the flamboyant lifestyles of some pastors is beginning to become a problem.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:** The Bible writer Paul wrote: “We are not making profit from the word of God.” (2 Corinthians 2:17, footnote) Even though Paul was a prominent minister in the early Christian congregation, he often did manual work so as not to impose a financial burden on others. (Acts 20:34) His attitude reflected his obedience to Jesus’ command: “You received free, give free.”—Matthew 10:7, 8.

In harmony with those principles, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not charge for their literature or for Bible instruction.

Nor do they tithe or take up collections at their meetings. Instead, needed funds are supplied through private voluntary donations.—Matthew 6:2, 3.

## The Exodus From Organized Religion Foretold!

Not many decades ago, the present plight of organized religion would have been hard to imagine. God, however, foresaw this development and announced it in advance in the Bible. Using symbolic language, God likened all religion that is unfaithful to him to a flamboyant prostitute named “Babylon the Great.”—Revelation 17:1, 5.

That symbol is fitting because false religion, while claiming fidelity to God, has consorted with the rulers of the world to gain power and wealth. “The kings of the earth . . . committed sexual immorality with her,” says Revelation 18:9. The term “Babylon” is appropriate too, because many false religious teachings and practices, such as the immortality of the soul, triune gods, and occultism, have roots in ancient Babylon, a city steeped in false religion and superstition.\*—Isaiah 47:1, 8-11.

Mighty Babylon fell when its protective waters—a moat fed by the Euphrates River—were “dried up,” opening the way for an army of Medes and Persians to conquer the city. (Jeremiah 50:1, 2, 38) In fact, Babylon was taken in one night!—Daniel 5:7, 28, 30.

Babylon the Great too “sits on many waters.” These, the Bible tells us, mean “peoples and crowds”—the millions who

\* For more information on Babylon the Great and on what the Bible says about the condition of the dead, the nature of God, and the occult, see the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* It is available online at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

### VIETNAM

Between 2005 and 2012, the number of respondents professing to be religious fell from 53 percent to just 30 percent.

support false religion. (Revelation 17:1, 15) The Bible foretold that these symbolic waters would dry up—a development that portends the imminent and swift destruction of modern-day Babylon. (Revelation 16:12; 18:8) But at whose hands? Those of her political consorts, whose love for her will turn to hatred. They will also plunder her, or devour her figurative flesh. —Revelation 17:16, 17.\*

### “Get Out of Her”!

Because of what lies in store for Babylon the Great, God lovingly warns: “Get out of her, my people, if you do not want to share with her in her sins, and if you do not want to receive part of her plagues.” (Revelation 18:4) Notice the word “if,” mentioned twice. Yes, God’s warning is aimed at people who are disturbed by hurtful teachings and who want God’s favor—people like Gaffar and Hediye, mentioned earlier.

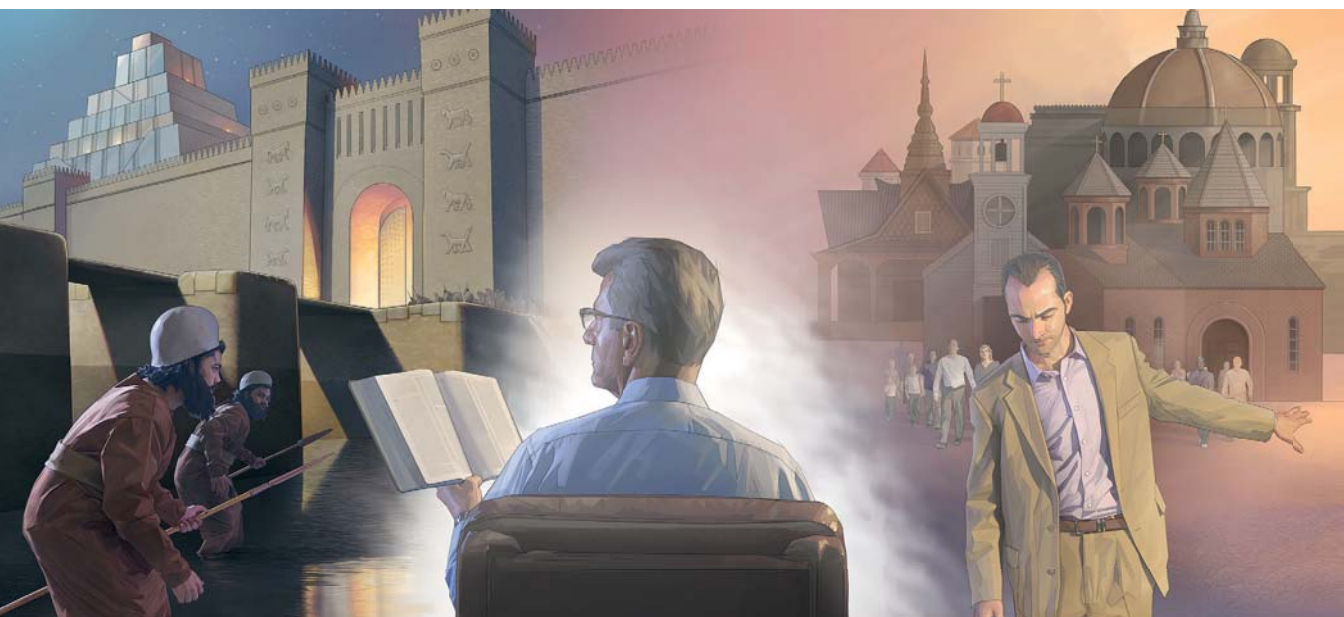
\* See “The Bible’s Viewpoint—The End of the World,” in this issue of *Awake!*

Before studying the Bible, Gaffar saw God as Someone to be obeyed mainly out of fear. “It was a relief to learn that Jehovah is a God of love,” he said, “and that he wants us to obey him primarily out of love.” (1 John 4:8; 5:3) Hediye found inner peace when she learned that God did not make her an orphan and that her situation was not the result of fate. She was comforted by such Bible texts as James 1:13, which says that God does not test people with evil. She and Gaffar embraced Bible truth and fled “Babylon.”—John 17:17.

When Babylon the Great is destroyed, no harm will come to those who have obediently fled from her in order to “worship the Father with spirit and truth.” (John 4:23) Their hope is to see the earth “filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.”—Isaiah 11:9.

Yes, false worship and its ugly fruitage will come to an end, for God “cannot lie.” (Titus 1:2) True worship, on the other hand, will thrive forever! ■

The receding waters around Babylon symbolize the human exodus from Babylon the Great





# Living Without **Sight**

*“I lost most of my sight at birth when I was given harsh eye drops. During my teenage years, I became totally blind and sank into a deep depression.”—Paqui, a middle-aged woman whose husband is also blind.*

BLINDNESS or serious visual impairment can have many causes, including injury and disease. These may affect the eyes, the optic nerves, or the brain. People who lose much or all of their sight often experience denial, grief, and fear. Many, though, learn to cope very well and go on to lead satisfying lives.

The eyes are normally our primary source of information about the world around us. So when someone loses his sight, he comes to rely more heavily on other senses—hearing, smell, touch, and taste.

According to the magazine *Scientific American*, research on neuroplasticity suggests that the brain has the ability “to change with experience.” The article adds: “A large body of evidence shows when the brain is deprived of input in one sensory modality, it is capable of reorganizing itself to support and augment other senses.” Consider the following.

**Hearing:** From voices to footsteps, sounds can paint a mental picture. “I have learned to remember and recognize people by their voices or even by how they walk,” says a blind man named Fernando. Juan, who is also blind, says: “For a blind person, another’s voice is his identity.” And like all of us, the blind take careful note of tone, which can convey a variety of emotions.

To the trained ear of a blind person, sound also says a lot about the environment—from the direction of traffic to the size of a room to the location of certain obstacles.

**Smell:** The sense of smell can also be a rich source of information, but not just about the source of an aroma. For example, when a blind person walks along a certain route, his sense of smell can help him to form a mental map that may include coffee shops, restaurants, markets,

and so on. Of course, familiar sounds add to the map, as do details acquired through the sense of touch.

**Touch:** “My fingers are my eyes,” says Francisco. The range of those “eyes” can be extended by means of a cane. Manasés, who was born blind and learned to use a cane in childhood, said, “I know exactly where I am thanks to my other senses, my memory, and the patterns on the sidewalk that I detect with the aid of my cane.”

The sense of touch also enables many blind people to read by means of literature published in Braille. Nowadays, in fact, it is not unusual for a blind person to have access to a number of provisions to enrich his mental and spiritual life. Besides publications in Braille, these provisions include audio recordings and computer-based technology. With the help of these, the blind can read the Bible and a variety of Bible study aids.\*

\* Jehovah's Witnesses produce Bible study aids in Braille in more than 25 languages.



## Although Blind, I Have a Rewarding Life

Marco Antonio is a husband, father, and joint owner of a business. He is also blind from birth. He spoke with *Awake!* about some of his joys and challenges.

### You run a business. How do you accomplish that?

In my work, I handle telephone inquiries, meet clients and suppliers, and do banking.

### What do you do for recreation?

I love music. It relaxes me. And I play the piano, although it's a challenge because I cannot read Braille music and at the same time play it with both hands. When I first play a piece of music, I read it with my right hand and play the piano with the left. Then I repeat the process, but with my hands swapping roles. When I learn the score by heart, I play with both hands.

### Have you faced any special challenges?

When I was growing up, my parents and siblings took good care of me, and they treated me as if I were not blind. Granted, I suffered the usual bumps and falls, but I got used to doing most things a sighted person can do. When I reached adulthood, the only thing that really bothered me was that I couldn't drive.

Now I am a husband and father, and I have a loving family whom I support and who give me support. My dear son, David, has inherited my condition—optic nerve atrophy. But I am trying to set a good example for him. I want him to learn that with



Those spiritual provisions have been a source of immeasurable comfort and hope to Paqui and her husband, mentioned at the outset. They have also gained the support of a large spiritual family, the local Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. "We are now able to live a full and reasonably independent life," Paqui says.

Indeed, blindness presents special challenges. But what a testimony to human adaptability and resilience when people confront those challenges and carry on with the joys of life! ■



Reading a Braille *Watchtower* magazine

patience and determination, he can do many things.

**You now have a guide dog. Why did you choose to get one?**

With Dante—that's my dog's name—I can walk faster and safer. When I go somewhere for the first time, my wife, Loli, who is not blind, accompanies us so that Dante and I can learn the route. I must confess that at first I found it hard to entrust my safety to a dog. But Dante earned my full trust. No matter what happens around us, he concentrates on the job. But when I remove his harness, he behaves like any other dog.

**As one of Jehovah's Witnesses, how do you personally study the Bible?**

When technology for the blind was limited, Loli read the Bible and Bible study aids to me.

She was a great help. As a result, I was even able to give talks at congregation meetings. Nowadays, though, I can read for myself because I have the Bible and study aids in Braille. I can also go to the website established by Jehovah's Witnesses—jw.org—where I download audio recordings. And I have a Braille display, which enables me to read what is on my computer monitor. The display has small pins that pop up in groups to form Braille characters. It's quite amazing!

A privilege I have especially enjoyed is assisting with Braille transcription at the Spain branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Madrid. In order to improve the quality of Braille publications, those preparing them value suggestions from the blind. So I can honestly say that I feel both loved and appreciated by my spiritual brothers and sisters.

**Do you enjoy interacting with others?**

Yes, especially with my immediate family and fellow Witnesses, with whom I also go out preaching from door to door. My spiritual brothers and sisters treat me the way they treat anybody else. In fact, they sometimes forget that I'm blind!

I might add that the ministry enables me to share with others the precious hope found in the Bible. For example, at Isaiah 35:5, we read that under God's Kingdom government, "the eyes of the blind will be opened." When Jesus Christ was on the earth, he cured the blind, giving us a preview of that future time. (Matthew 15:30, 31) Blindness, therefore, is a temporary problem, which is true of all disabilities. In the earthly Paradise to come, no one will say, 'I am sick or disabled.'—Isaiah 33:24; Luke 23:43.



# A Mathematician Explains His Faith

Dr. Gene Hwang, born in 1950 in Tainan, Taiwan, is a retired professor of mathematics at the National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan. He is also professor emeritus at Cornell University, U.S.A., where he taught and did research in statistics and probability. For years he was one of the most published authorities on statistics, a field in which he is still involved. As a young man, he believed that life began by evolutionary processes. But he later changed his view. *Awake!* asked him about his work and religious beliefs.

## What teachings were you exposed to as a youth?

My school taught the theory of evolution, but no one explained how life itself began. When my parents became Taoists, I used to listen to their religious instructors and ask them a lot of questions. But I received few answers that satisfied me.

## Why did you become a mathematician?

When I was in elementary school, I became fascinated with mathematics. This fascination continued when I went to university, where I especially enjoyed courses in mathematics and probability. To me, a concise mathematical proof can be both beautiful and elegant.

## How did you become interested in the Bible?

In 1978 my wife, Jinghuei, began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, and occasionally I shared in the discussions. By then, we were living in the United States. Jinghuei had just received her doctorate in physics, and I was studying statistics at Purdue University in Indiana.

## What did you think of the Bible?

I was impressed by its account of how the earth was prepared for human life. The six creative periods described in Genesis, albeit in simple language, seemed to fit the facts—unlike

## Believing in a Creator meant rejecting my childhood religion

ancient mythologies.\* Still, for many years I did not commit to belief in a Creator.

### Why was that an issue for you?

My feelings were involved. Believing in a Creator meant rejecting my childhood religion, because traditional Taoism does not teach that there is a personal God, or Creator.

### Later, though, your viewpoint changed. Why was that?

The more I thought about the origin of life, the more I became convinced that the first living thing must have been very complex. For example, it had to be able to reproduce, which requires genetic information and a mechanism for accurately replicating that information. Also, even the simplest living cell needs molecular machines for building all the parts of a new cell, as well as the means to harness and direct energy. How could such complex mechanisms assemble randomly from non-living matter? As a mathematician, I could not accept that assumption. It asks far too much of random processes.

\* For more information on the creative periods, see the brochure *Was Life Created?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses. It is available online at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

### What was it that moved you to examine more closely the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses?

I had studied with the Witnesses on and off. Then, in 1995, while visiting Taiwan, I fell sick and needed help. From the United States, my wife contacted Jehovah's Witnesses in Taiwan. They found me exhausted outside a hospital where there were no available beds. One of the Witnesses took me to a hotel to rest. He kept checking on me and then took me to a clinic for treatment.

That genuine concern deeply touched me, and I reflected on how often Jehovah's Witnesses had shown kindness to my family on other occasions. The Witnesses' faith made them different. So I resumed my study of the Bible with them. The following year I was baptized.

### Does your faith conflict with your secular studies?

Not at all! In recent years I have provided mathematical support for scientists who study gene function. The study of genetics provides insight into the mechanisms of life

—an insight that fills me with awe for the Creator's wisdom.

### Give an example of that wisdom.

Consider reproduction. Some organisms, such as amoebas, don't have male and female counterparts. These single-cell microbes simply make a copy of their genetic information and divide—a process called asexual reproduction. Most animals and plants, however, reproduce sexually, combining genetic information from male and female parents. Why is sexual reproduction remarkable?

Why would a system of reproduction in which one organism simply divides into two—and has done this very well for who knows how long—develop into a system in which two things combine to form one? The mechanisms required to take half the genetic information from the male and half from the female and combine them are immensely complex, presenting a huge problem to evolutionary biologists. In my view, gender-based reproduction points unequivocally to the mind of God. ■



# How to Praise Children



## THE CHALLENGE

Some people say that it is impossible to give your child too much praise. Others claim that constant praise will spoil your child and make him feel entitled, as if the world owed him something.

Besides *how much* you praise your child, you also have to consider the *kind* of praise you offer. Which type will encourage your child? Which type might hinder him? How can you offer praise that will have the best outcome?

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Not all praise is equal. Consider the following.

**Too much praise can be harmful.** Some parents dole out undeserved praise in an attempt to boost their children's self-esteem. But young ones "are smart enough to see through the exaggeration and conclude that you do not really mean what you say," warns Dr. David Walsh. "They know that they did not deserve [the praise] and may conclude that they cannot trust you."\*

**Praise based on ability is better.** Suppose your daughter has a knack for drawing. Naturally, you want to praise her for this, which will motivate her to hone her skill even more. But there can be a drawback. Praise focused on talent *alone* could cause your child to think that the only skills worth pursuing are those that come easily. She may even shy away from new challenges, fearing that she will fail. 'If something takes effort,' she reasons, 'I must not be cut out for it—so why try?'

**Effort-based praise is best.** Children who are praised for their hard work and perseverance rather than simply for their talents come to realize a vital truth—that acquiring

\* From the book *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*.





skill requires patience and effort. Knowing that, “they put in the work needed to achieve the desired result,” says the book *Letting Go With Love and Confidence*. “Even when they come up short, they don’t view themselves as failures, but as learners.”

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Praise effort, not just talent.** Telling your child, “I can see that you put a lot of thought into your drawing,” may do more good than saying, “You’re a natural artist.” Both statements offer praise, but the second one could unwittingly imply that inborn skills are the *only* ones your child will be good at.

When you praise effort, you teach your child that ability can improve with practice. Your child might then take on new challenges more confidently.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 14:23.*

**Help your child deal with failure.** Even good people make mistakes, perhaps repeatedly. (Proverbs 24:16) But after each misstep, they get up, learn from the experience, and move on. How can you help your child to cultivate that positive approach?

Again, focus on effort. Consider an example: Suppose you often tell your daughter, “You’re a natural at math,” but then she fails a math test. She might conclude that she has lost her knack, so why try to improve?

When you focus on effort, however, you foster resilience. You help your daughter to view a setback as just that, and not as a disaster. So rather than give up, she may try another approach or simply work harder.—*Bible principle: James 3:2.*

**Give constructive criticism.** When given in the right manner, negative feedback will help a child, not crush his spirit. Also, if you regularly give appropriate praise, likely your child will welcome feedback on how he can further improve. Then his achievements will become a source of satisfaction both to him and to you.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 13:4.* ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“There is benefit in every kind of hard work.”—Proverbs 14:23.

“We all make mistakes many times.”—James 3:2, footnote.

“The diligent one will be fully satisfied.”—Proverbs 13:4.

## MEETING NEW CHALLENGES

The Bible tells us of people who were able to develop skills beyond their natural talents. For example, Moses was hesitant when he was asked to approach the powerful and obstinate king of Egypt. “I have never been a fluent speaker,” Moses said. (Exodus 4:10) Jeremiah responded similarly when he was commissioned as a prophet. “I do not know how to speak,” he protested, “for I am just a boy.” (Jeremiah 1:6) Yet, both Moses and Jeremiah fulfilled their commissions superbly.

The lesson? Your child’s true potential lies beyond his innate gifts. Give effort-based praise, and he may surprise you—and himself—with newfound skills.



# THE END OF THE WORLD

“The world is passing away and so is its desire,” says 1 John 2:17. What is that “world”? How and when will it pass away?

## What is the “world” that will end?

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** Because the world in question has ‘desires’ that merit God’s disapproval, it is obviously not the literal earth. Rather, it is the world of mankind who disregard God, making themselves his enemy. (James 4:4) The people who make up that world “will undergo the judicial punishment of everlasting destruction.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) On the other hand, people who remain “no part of the world,” in obedience to Jesus Christ, have the prospect of everlasting life.—John 15:19.

Indeed, 1 John 2:17 concludes: “The one who does the will of God remains forever.” Yes, that one has the prospect of everlasting life right here on earth, as stated at Psalm 37:29: “The righteous will possess the earth, and they will live forever on it.”

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*“Do not love either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”—1 John 2:15.*

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## How will the world end?

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** The end will come in two main stages. First, God will destroy organized false religion, portrayed as a prostitute named “Babylon the Great.” (Revelation 17:1-5; 18:8) While professing loyalty to God, she has consorted with the world’s political leaders. These very rulers, however, will turn on her. “[They] will hate the prostitute and will make her devastated and naked, and they will eat up her flesh [or, riches] and completely burn her with fire.”—Revelation 17:16.

Next, God will turn his attention to the political rulers themselves—“the kings of the entire inhabited earth.” Along with wicked people in general, these will be destroyed in “the war of the great day of God the Almighty,” also called “Armageddon.” —Revelation 16:14, 16.

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*“Seek Jehovah, all you meek ones of the earth . . . Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Probably you will be concealed on the day of Jehovah’s anger.”—Zephaniah 2:3.*

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## When will the world end?

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** The end will come when mankind has been sufficiently warned by a global proclamation of God's Kingdom—a world government that will replace human rulership. (Daniel 7:13, 14) Jesus Christ said: "This good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, *and then the end will come.*" (Matthew 24: 14) That preaching work, which reflects God's justice and mercy, is part of a composite "sign" marking the time of the end. The sign also includes international warfare, earthquakes, famine, and disease. —Matthew 24:3; Luke 21:10, 11.

Besides foretelling world events, the Bible also gives us a social profile of "the last days." We read: "Critical times hard to deal with will be here. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, . . . disobedient to parents, . . . without

self-control, fierce, without love of goodness, . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God."<sup>\*</sup>—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

All those conditions mark the era that began about the time of World War I in 1914. Moreover, since that year, God's Kingdom has been announced in every corner of the earth, and Jehovah's Witnesses count it an honor to be closely identified with this work. In fact, their main journal is entitled *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*. ■

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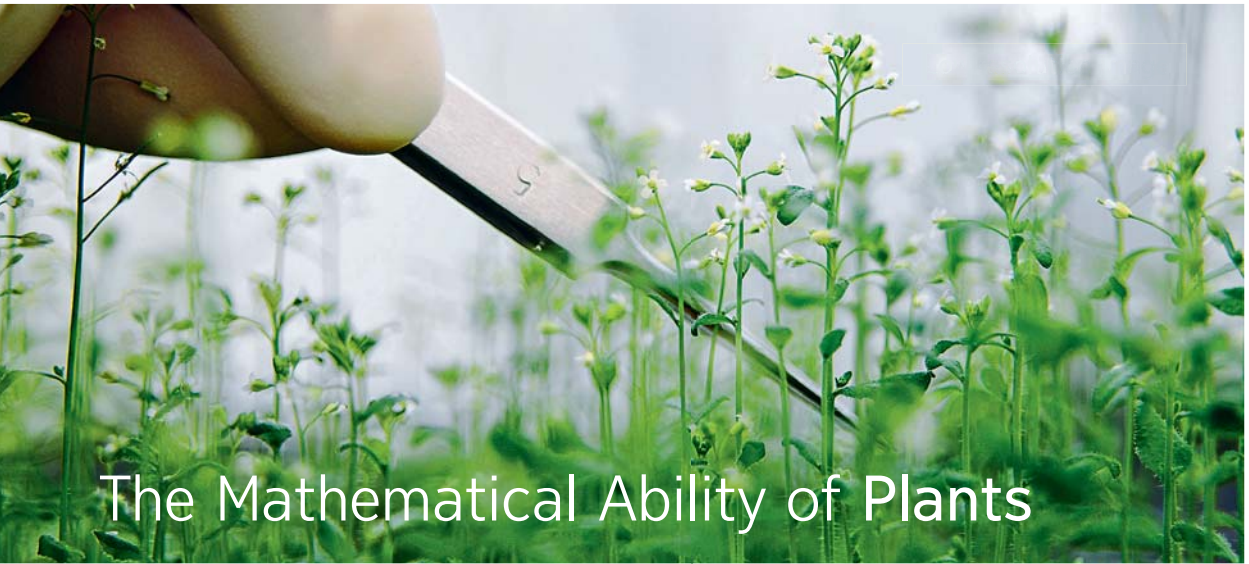
<sup>\*</sup> For more information, see chapter 9 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

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*"Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour."*—Matthew 25:13.



The present wicked world will soon 'pass away.'—1 John 2:17



Fancy Collection/Superstock

# The Mathematical Ability of Plants

**P**LANTS use a complex process called photosynthesis to extract energy from sunlight to create food. Studies on certain species have revealed that they perform yet another feat—they calculate the optimum rate at which to absorb that food overnight.

**Consider:** By day, plants convert atmospheric carbon dioxide into starch and sugars. During the night, many species consume the starch stored during the day, thus avoiding starvation and maintaining plant productivity, including growth. Moreover, they process the stored starch at just the right rate—not too quickly and not too slowly—so that they use about 95 percent of it by dawn, when they start making more.

The findings were based on experiments on a plant of the mustard family called *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Researchers found that this plant carefully rations its food reserves according to the length of the night, no matter whether 8, 12, or 16 hours remained until dawn. Evidently, the plant divides the amount of starch available by the length of time remaining until dawn, thus determining the optimal rate of consumption.

How do plants ascertain their starch reserves? How do they measure time? And what mechanism enables them to do math? Further research may shed light on these questions.

**What do you think?** Did the mathematical ability of plants come about by evolution? Or was it designed? ■

