

IS THE BIBLE JUST A GOOD BOOK?





3 COVER SUBJECT IS THE BIBLE JUST A GOOD BOOK?

What do you think?

Can we trust the Bible's wisdom?

What would you say?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

The Bible says:

"Wisdom is vindicated by its results."—Luke 7:35, footnotes.

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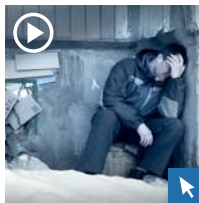
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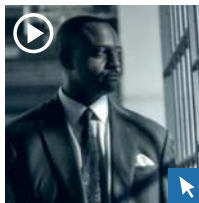
VIDEOS



See how the Bible helped an alcoholic husband and a former prisoner to make remarkable changes in their lives.

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**I Got Fed Up With
My Lifestyle**



**From Prison to
Prosperity**

Is the Bible Just a Good Book?

The Bible was completed about two thousand years ago. Since then, countless other books have come and gone. But not the Bible. Consider the following.

- ▶ The Bible has survived many vicious attacks by powerful people. For example, during the Middle Ages in certain “Christian” lands, “the possession and reading of the Bible in the vernacular [the language of the common people] was increasingly associated with heresy and dissent,” says the book *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible*. Scholars who translated the Bible into the vernacular or who promoted Bible study risked their lives. Some were killed.
- ▶ Despite its many enemies, the Bible became—and continues to be—the most widely distributed book of all time. In whole or in part, an estimated five billion copies have been printed in more than 2,800 languages. This is in sharp contrast with books on philosophy, science, and related fields, which may have a limited circulation and may quickly go out-of-date.
- ▶ The Bible has helped to preserve and shape some of the languages into which it has been translated. The German translation by Martin Luther had a big influence on that language. The first edition of the *King James Version* has been described as “probably the single most influential book ever published” in English.
- ▶ The Bible has “profoundly affected Western culture, influencing not just religious belief and practice, but also art, literature, law, politics, and other fields too numerous to mention.” —*The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*.

Those are just some of the facts that set the Bible apart. Why, though, is it so popular? Why have people risked their lives for it? The many reasons include the following: The Bible contains moral and spiritual teachings that reflect exceptional wisdom. The Bible helps us to understand the root cause of human suffering and conflict. Better still, it promises an end to those problems, even revealing how that will come about.

The Bible Gives Moral and Spiritual Insight

Secular education is important. But “education . . . that produces initials at the end of your name . . . is no guarantee of moral intelligence,” said an editorial in Canada’s newspaper *Ottawa Citizen*. Indeed, many highly educated people—including leaders in business and government—cheat, defraud, and steal, resulting in “a serious crisis of confidence,” according to a global study published by Edelman, a public relations firm.

The Bible focuses on moral and spiritual education. It gives us insight into “what is righteous and just and fair, the entire course of what is good.” (Proverbs 2:9) To illustrate, a 23-year-old man, whom we will call Stephen, was in prison in Poland. While confined, he began to study the Bible and to appreciate its practical advice. “I now see what it means to ‘honor

your father and your mother,’” he wrote. “I have also learned to control my emotions, especially excessive anger.”—Ephesians 4:31; 6:2.

A principle that Stephen took to heart is the one found at Proverbs 19:11: “The insight of a man certainly slows down his anger, and it is beauty on his part to overlook an offense.” Now, when Stephen is confronted with a challenging situation, he tries to analyze it calmly and to apply the relevant Bible principles. “I have found that the Bible is the best guidebook,” he said.

Maria, who is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, was publicly insulted by a prejudiced woman, who caused quite a commotion. But instead of retaliating, Maria calmly continued on her way. The other woman then felt bad about her behavior and sought out the Witnesses. About a month later, when she finally saw Maria again, she



FAST FACTS

- ▶ The Bible is made up of 66 books; this sacred volume was completed over a period of approximately 1,600 years.
- ▶ The Bible was written by about 40 human secretaries or scribes, some of whom were also farmers, fishermen, judges, kings, and musicians.
- ▶ The Bible’s main theme is the Kingdom of God, a heavenly government that will rule the earth. (Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14) The Kingdom will eliminate evil, suffering, and death by uniting mankind under our rightful Sovereign—the Creator, Jehovah God.—1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

ABOUT 40
WRITERS



66
BOOKS



1,600
YEARS



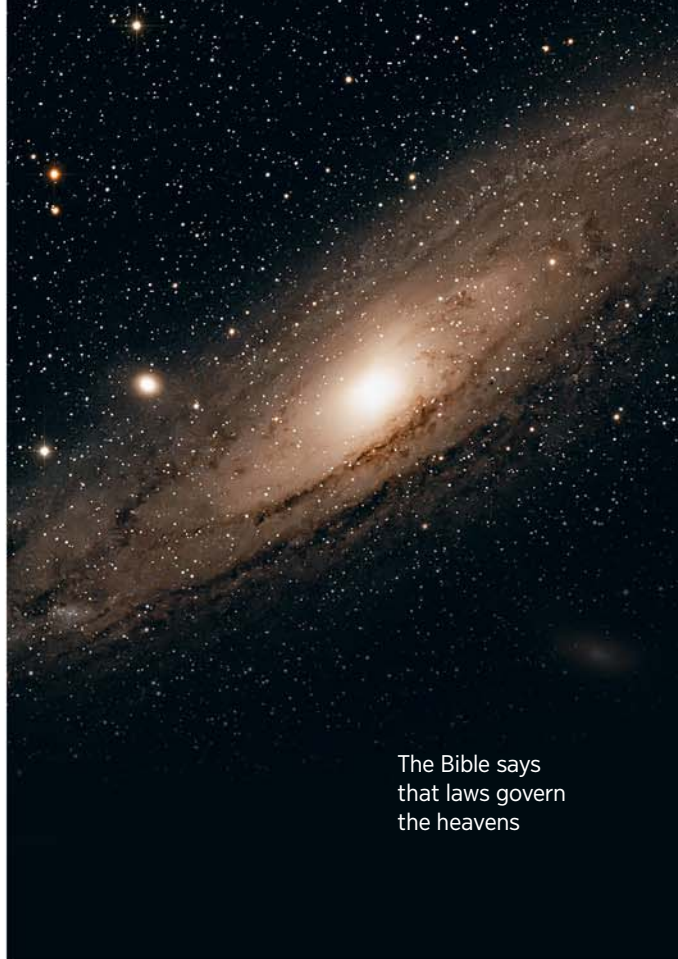
hugged Maria and apologized to her. Moreover, she correctly discerned that Maria's mildness and self-control reflected her religious beliefs. The result? The once prejudiced woman and five members of her family decided to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses.

Wisdom is vindicated by its results, said Jesus Christ. (Luke 7:35) Bible principles, therefore, stand vindicated! They bring out the best in us. They 'make the inexperienced wise,' they 'cause the heart to rejoice,' and they 'make the eyes shine' with moral and spiritual clarity.—Psalm 19:7, 8.

The Bible Explains Human Suffering and Conflict

When studying a disease epidemic, investigators try to find the cause—what triggered the outbreak. The same principle applies to understanding the “plague” of human suffering and discord. Again, the Bible is of immense help, for it documents our earliest history, the time when our troubles started.

The book of Genesis reveals that mankind's woes began when the first humans rebelled against God. Among other things, they took it upon themselves to set moral standards—a right that belonged only to our Creator. (Genesis 3:1-7) Sadly, since then, people in general have adopted the same independent thinking. The results? Human history is a chronicle, not of freedom and happiness, but of conflict, oppression, and moral and spiritual discord. (Ecclesiastes 8:9) The Bible rightly states: “It does not belong to man . . . to direct his step.” (Jeremiah 10:23) The good news is that mankind's disastrous experiment with moral independence is almost over.



The Bible says
that laws govern
the heavens

A BOOK THAT EXPOSES SUPERSTITION

Ancient peoples “envisioned a universe subject to whims of gods,” says the *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*. The Bible, however, says that the universe is governed by physical laws. For example, about 3,500 years ago, the Bible referred to “the laws governing the heavens [and] the earth.” (Job 38:33) At Jeremiah 31:35, it mentions “the laws of the moon and the stars.” People who accepted that enlightened view were protected from false worship and superstition.—Job 31:26-28; Isaiah 47:1, 13.

A BOOK THAT IS HONEST

A most endearing quality of Bible writers is their honesty—even in regard to their own failings. For example, after King David committed adultery with a woman named Bath-sheba, he frankly acknowledged: “What is bad in your [God’s] eyes I have done.” (Psalm 51:4) The apostle John admitted that he twice fell down to worship an angel. The angel responded: “Be careful! Do not do that! . . . Worship God!” (Revelation 19:10; 22:8, 9) Such candor, sadly lacking in ancient scribes, is typical of Bible writers.

A BOOK THAT PROMOTES MENTAL HEALTH

The Bible encourages us to cultivate qualities that foster good mental health, qualities such as compassion and forgiveness. “Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another,” says Ephesians 4:32.

According to a publication of the Mayo Clinic, in the United States, “if you don’t practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly.” Forgiveness, the article explains, can result in “healthier relationships; greater spiritual and psychological well-being; less anxiety, stress, and hostility; lower blood pressure; fewer symptoms of depression; and lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse.”

A BOOK THAT ADDRESSES LIFE’S BIG QUESTIONS

Science has answers to all kinds of questions. But science, enlightening though it is, has limits. The book *Biotechnology—Changing Life Through Science* states: “Most scientists, doctors, and philosophers agree that science cannot answer ethical, moral, or religious questions.”

The Bible Gives Hope

The Bible assures us that God, out of love for those who respect his authority and standards, will not forever tolerate badness and the suffering it causes. The wicked “will bear the consequences of their way.” (Proverbs 1:30, 31) “The meek,” on the other hand, “will possess the earth, and they will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.”—Psalm 37:11.

God will fulfill his purpose for a peaceful earth by means of “the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 4:43) That Kingdom is a world government, and through it God will express his rightful sovereignty over mankind. Jesus linked the Kingdom with the earth, saying in his model prayer: “Let your Kingdom come. Let your will take place . . . on earth.”—Matthew 6:10.

Yes, the subjects of God’s Kingdom will do God’s will, recognizing the Creator—not any fellow human—as rightful Ruler. Corruption, greed, economic disparities, racial prejudice, and war will cease. There will literally be one world, one government, and one set of moral and spiritual standards.—Revelation 11:15.

The key to seeing that new world is education. “[God’s] will is that all sorts of people should be saved and come to an accu-

SCIENCE CAN give us mathematical formulas for laws governing the universe, but science cannot tell us why the universe exists or why it is governed by precise laws.

SCIENCE CAN explain how the reproductive organs function, but it cannot define sexual morality.



“[God’s] will is that all sorts of people should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth.”—1 Timothy 2:3, 4

rate knowledge of truth,” says 1 Timothy 2:3, 4. That truth includes Bible teachings about what we might call the Kingdom’s constitution—the laws and principles by which it will rule, examples of which can be found in Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew, chapters 5-7) When you read those three chapters, try to imagine what life will be like when *everyone* applies Jesus’ wisdom.

Should we be surprised that the Bible is the world’s most widely distributed book? Absolutely not! Its teachings have the hallmark of divine inspiration. And its wide circulation reflects God’s desire that people of all languages and nations learn about him and benefit from the blessings his Kingdom will bring.—Acts 10:34, 35. ■

SCIENCE CAN

describe the development of a human embryo, but it cannot make moral decisions on the embryo’s right to life.



A human embryo

The Bible addresses these and many other important questions, thus helping us to “understand what is righteous and just and fair, the entire course of what is good.”—Proverbs 2:9.



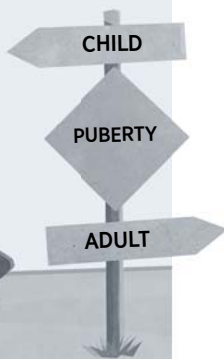
Helping Your Child Deal With Puberty



THE CHALLENGE

It seems as if it were just yesterday that you held your infant in your arms. Now you have a preteen on your hands—still a child, true, but one who may be about to embark on that section of road toward adulthood called puberty.

How can you help your son or daughter deal with this confusing and sometimes traumatic transition into sexual maturity?



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Puberty has its own timetable. It can begin as early as age eight or as late as the mid-teens. “The range of normal puberty is wide,” says the book *Letting Go With Love and Confidence*.

Puberty can bring insecurity. Adolescents can be highly sensitive about how they come across to others. “I became conscious of how I looked and acted,” recalls a young man named Jared.* “When I was around others, I’d wonder if they thought I was weird.” Self-confidence can plummet even further if acne develops. “I felt that my face was under attack!” recalls 17-year-old Kellie. “I remember crying and calling myself ugly.”

Early bloomers face special challenges. This is particularly true of girls, as they might be teased when they develop breasts or curves. “They’re also at risk of attracting the attention of older boys who are more apt to be sexually experienced,” says the book *A Parent’s Guide to the Teen Years*.

Puberty does not mean maturity. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a youth,” says Proverbs 22:15, footnote. Puberty does not change that. A young person may look grown-up, but that “tells you nothing about his ability to make intelligent decisions, behave responsibly, exercise self-control, or [display] other measures of maturity,” says the book *You and Your Adolescent*.

* Names in this article have been changed.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Talk about puberty *before* it starts. Let your child know what to expect, especially regarding menstruation (for girls) and nocturnal emissions (for boys). Different from the gradual changes of puberty, those events begin suddenly and can be confusing and even frightening. While discussing such matters, take a positive approach—that puberty initiates a beneficial makeover that paves the way for adulthood.—*Bible principle: Psalm 139:14.*

Be thorough. “When my parents gave me ‘the talk,’ they were evasive,” recalls a young man named John. “I wish they had been a bit more straightforward.” Alana, 17, feels similarly. “My mom helped me understand what was going on physically,” she says, “but I wish she had helped me cope better emotionally.” The lesson? As awkward as it may be, talk to your child about all aspects of puberty.—*Bible principle: Acts 20:20.*

Ask questions that invite conversation. To break the ice, talk about others’ experiences with puberty. For example, you could ask your daughter, “Have any of your classmates started talking about having periods yet?” “Do kids make fun of girls who develop early?” You could ask your son, “Do kids ridicule those who lag behind in physical development?” When adolescents start talking about how puberty affects others, it might be easier for them to open up about their own feelings and experiences. When they do, follow the Bible’s advice: “Be quick to listen, slow to speak.”—James 1:19.

Help your adolescent develop “practical wisdom and thinking ability.” (Proverbs 3:21) Puberty is not all about physical and emotional changes. During this stage your adolescent also develops reasoning skills that will help him or her make good decisions in adulthood. Take advantage of this opportunity to instill good values in your adolescent.—*Bible principle: Hebrews 5:14.*

Do not give up. Many young people seem reluctant to talk to their parents about puberty, but do not be fooled. “The adolescent who pretends to be uninterested, bored, disgusted, or stone deaf may be memorizing every word,” says the book *You and Your Adolescent*. ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“In an awe-inspiring way I am wonderfully made.”—Psalm 139:14.

“I did not hold back from telling you any of the things that were for your good.”—Acts 20:20, footnote.

“Mature people . . . have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.”—Hebrews 5:14.

“My parents were very supportive when I went through puberty, especially my mom. She took the time to explain everything to me. I knew exactly what was coming and what to expect, so I never felt shocked when I hit that stage. On top of that, my mom made sure that I always felt comfortable talking to her. My parents made the awkwardness easier for me to handle.”—Marie, 16.

“My parents worked with me. For example, they tried to respect my privacy because they knew the whole experience was embarrassing for me. The fact that they weren’t announcing it to others was helpful too. And they talked to me about what was coming *before* I experienced it.”—Joan, 18.



An Embryologist Explains His Faith

PROFESSOR Yan-Der Hsuw is the director of embryo research at Taiwan's National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. He once believed in evolution, but after becoming a research scientist, he changed his mind. He explained his reasons to *Awake!*

Please tell us a little about your background.

I was born in 1966 and grew up in Taiwan. My parents' religion was based on both Taoism and Buddhism. Although we worshipped our ancestors and prayed to images, we never entertained the concept of a personal Creator.

Why did you study biology?

As a child, I liked caring for pets, and I wanted to learn how to relieve animals and people of suffering. For a time, I studied veterinary medicine, and later I studied embryology—a field that I hoped would also shed light on the origin of life.

You believed in evolution at the time. Can you tell us why?

The university professors taught evolution, claiming that evidence supports it. I believed them.

Why did you start reading the Bible?

My motive was twofold. First, I reasoned that of the many gods that people worship, one must be greater than the others. But which one? Second, I knew that the Bible is a highly respected book. So I joined Bible study classes.

When I started studying at Belgium's Catholic University of Leuven in 1992, I visited a Catholic church and asked the priest to help me understand the Bible, but he declined my request.

So how was your spiritual hunger satisfied?

Two years later, while I was still in Belgium doing scientific research, I met a Polish lady named Ruth, who was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She had learned Chinese in order to help university students who wanted to learn about God.

I had prayed for such help, so I was delighted to meet her.

Ruth showed me that the Bible, while not a science book, is in harmony with science. For example, the Bible writer David said in prayer to God: "Your eyes even saw me as an embryo; all its parts were written in your book regarding the days when they were formed, before any of them existed." (Psalm 139:16) Although David was using poetic language, in principle, he was right! Even before body parts form, the instructions for their development are all there. The accuracy of the Bible helped convince me that it is God's Word. I also began to appreciate that there is only one true God, Jehovah.¹

What convinced you that God created life?

A goal of scientific research is to find the truth, not to sup-

port preconceived ideas. My study of embryo development led me to change my view—that is, I concluded that life was created. To illustrate, engineers design assembly lines so that the right parts are fitted together in the right order and in the right way. Embryo development is somewhat similar but vastly more complex.

The process all starts with a single fertilized cell, doesn't it?

Yes. That microscopic cell then divides, starting the process of cell division. For a time, the number of cells doubles every 12 to 24 hours. Early in this process, cells called stem cells form.² Stem cells can produce almost any of the 200 or so different cell types needed for a fully formed baby, such as blood cells, bone cells, nerve cells, and so on.

The right cells must be produced in the right order and at the right places. First they assemble into tissues that will in turn assemble themselves into organs and limbs. What engineer even dreams of writing instructions for such a process? Yet, the instructions for embryo development are superbly written in DNA. When I consider the beauty of it all, I'm convinced that life was designed by God.

Why did you become one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

In a word, love. Jesus Christ said: "By this all will know that

you are my disciples—if you have love among yourselves." (John 13:35) That love is impartial. It is not influenced by a person's nationality, culture, or skin color. I both observed and experienced that kind of love when I began to associate with the Witnesses. ■

1. Psalm 83:18; 1 Corinthians 8:5, 6.

2. Because of his Christian conscience, Professor Yan-Der Hsuuw does not work with human embryonic stem cells.

My study of embryo development led me to conclude that life was created





ANXIETY

Anxiety has two faces. One is a liability; the other, an asset. The Bible helps us to recognize both kinds.

Is it normal to be anxious?

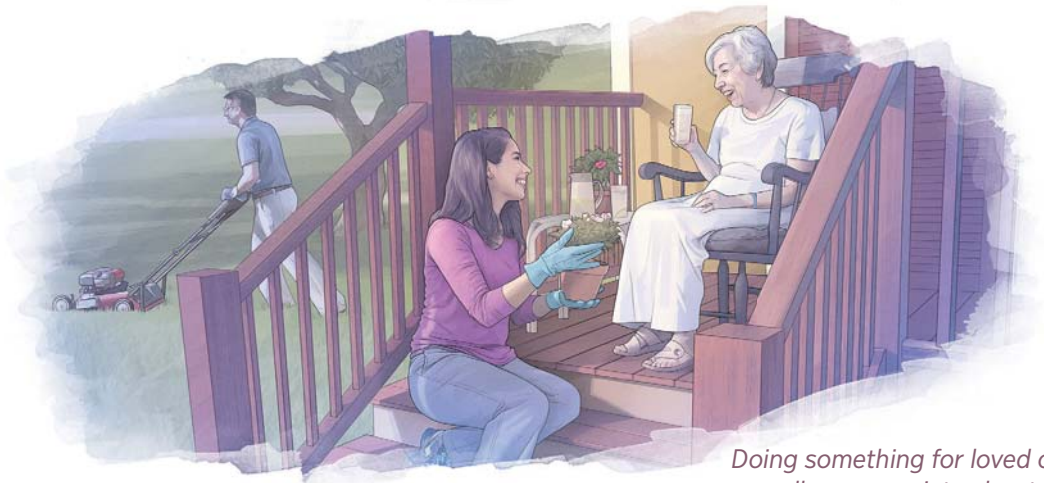
THE REALITY Anxiety involves feelings of uneasiness, nervousness, or worry. Because we live in an uncertain world, bouts of anxiety can overtake any of us.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS King David wrote: “How long will I have anxious concern, with grief in my heart each day?” (Psalm 13:2) What helped David to cope? He poured out his heart to God in prayer, trusting fully in God’s loyal love. (Psalm 13:5; 62:8) In fact, God invites us to unburden ourselves to him. “Throw all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you,” says 1 Peter 5:7.

Often, though, we can allay anxieties by addressing them in a practical way. For

example, when the Bible writer Paul felt “anxiety for all the congregations,” he worked hard to comfort and encourage those for whom he was concerned. (2 Corinthians 11:28) In that respect, his anxiety proved to be an asset, for it moved him to extend needed help. The same can be true of us. The opposite attitude—apathy or indifference—would indicate a lack of loving concern.—Proverbs 17:17.

“Look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”—Philippians 2:4.



Doing something for loved ones can allay our anxiety about them



How can you deal with undue anxiety?

THE REALITY People may be anxious about past misdeeds, the future, or finances.*

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS *Concern about past misdeeds:* Before becoming Christians, some people in the first century were drunkards, extortioners, sexually immoral, and thieves. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Rather than dwell on their past, they changed their ways and trusted in God's great mercy, which he extends willingly. "With you [God] there is true forgiveness, so that you may be held in awe," says Psalm 130:4.

Uncertainty about tomorrow: "Never be anxious about the next day," said Jesus Christ, "for the next day will have its own anxieties." (Matthew 6:25, 34) His point? Address today's concerns. Do not compound them by bringing tomorrow's

* People suffering from serious anxiety disorders may be wise to consult a doctor. *Awake!* does not recommend any particular therapy or treatment.

forward, which can cloud judgment and lead to rash decisions. Also keep in mind that many anxieties may later prove to be unwarranted.

Money worries: A wise man once prayed: "Give me neither poverty nor riches." (Proverbs 30:8) Instead, he sought contentment—a feeling that merits God's approval. At Hebrews 13:5, we read: "Let your way of life be free of the love of money, while you are content with the present things. For [God] has said: 'I will never leave you, and I will never abandon you.'" Unlike money, which can—and does—fail, God never fails those who trust in him and lead a simple life.

"I have not seen anyone righteous abandoned, nor his children looking for bread."—Psalm 37:25.

Will we ever be free of anxiety?

WHAT PEOPLE SAY "We are entering a new age of anxiety," said journalist Harriet Green in a 2008 article in *The Guardian*. In 2014, Patrick O'Connor wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that "Americans are registering record levels of anxiety."

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up." (Proverbs 12:25) An especially "good word" can be found in the good news of God's Kingdom. (Matthew

24:14) That Kingdom, a government by God, will soon do what we alone could never do—eliminate all anxiety by removing the root causes, including sickness and death! "[God] will wipe out every tear from [our] eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore."—Revelation 21:4. ■

"May the God who gives hope fill you with all joy and peace by your trusting in him."—Romans 15:13.



The Magnificent Macaws

BRILLIANT colors burst from the forest canopy as a flock of birds take wing! This magnificent sight amazed the European explorers who arrived in Central and South America beginning in the late 15th century. What they saw were macaws, long-tailed parrots that can be found in the tropical regions of the Americas. Before long, pictures of these spectacular creatures appeared on maps of the region as a symbol of the newly found paradise.

Both male and female macaws are vividly colored, an oddity among brightly colored avians. Macaws are also intelligent,

social birds with harsh squawks and piercing shrieks. In flocks of up to about 30 individuals, they leave their roosts early in the morning to forage for seeds, tropical fruits, and other foods. Typical of parrots, they often use their claws to grasp food, which they bite into with their big, curved bill. They can even crack open the tough shells of nuts! After feeding, they commonly flock to cliffs or riverbanks to nibble on clay, which may help to neutralize toxins in their food as well as to supply needed chemical elements.

Macaws normally mate for life, and they cooperate in caring for their young. The various species nest in tree hollows, in holes in riverbanks and termite mounds, or in the cavities and crevices of cliffs, where mates can be seen preening each other. Though fully grown at six months of age, the young stay with their parents for about three years. In the wild, macaws live between 30 and 40 years, but in captivity some have lived for more than 60. There are about 18 species, some of which are shown here. ■

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Green-winged macaw, also called red-and-green macaw. Length: up to 37 inches (95 cm)



Scarlet macaw. Length: 33 inches (85 cm)

© Marco Simoni/age fotostock

◀ **Blue-and-yellow macaw**. Length: 33 inches (85 cm)



© FLPA/Bernd Rohrschnei/age fotostock

◀ **Hyacinth macaw**. Length: up to 39 inches (100 cm). The largest of all parrots, it can weigh over three pounds (1.3 kg)

“[God] has made everything beautiful in its time.”

—Ecclesiastes 3:11



SPOTLIGHT ON RELATIONSHIPS

When it comes to relationships, is the Bible the first place you would go for advice, or is it perhaps the last? Consider how its ancient wisdom compares with recent research.



INDIA Sixty-one percent of youths aged 18-25 believe that premarital sex “is no longer a big issue in India,” according to a 2014 survey. A Mumbai-based physician told the *Hindustan Times* that in his view, “embarking on a relationship does not mean youngsters have marriage on their mind. Whether it is a one-night stand, a casual relationship or a live-in, commitment does not have to be on the agenda.”

TO THINK ABOUT: Are sexually transmitted diseases and emotional trauma more closely associated with sex before marriage or sex after marriage? —1 Corinthians 6:18.

DENMARK Having frequent arguments with family members is associated with a double risk of dying in middle age. Researchers at the University of Copenhagen tracked almost 10,000 middle-aged people over an 11-year period and found that participants who frequently argued with someone close to them were far more likely to die prematurely than those who seldom had conflicts. An author of the study says that handling worries and demands and managing conflicts “may be considered important strategies for reducing premature deaths.”

THE BIBLE SAYS: “A man of knowledge restrains his words, and a discerning man will remain calm.”—Proverbs 17:27.

UNITED STATES “Cyclical couples”—those who break up and get back together during courtship—are more likely to have a trial separation during the first five years of their marriage, according to a recent study of 564 newlyweds in Louisiana. They also tend to have more conflict and to be less satisfied with their marriage.

THE BIBLE SAYS: “What God has yoked together [in marriage], let no man put apart.”—Matthew 19:6.

