

DID JESUS  
REALLY EXIST?



## 3 COVER SUBJECT Did Jesus Really Exist?

*Some people doubt whether Jesus really existed, while others are convinced that he did. Still others say there's no way to know for sure.*

*This issue of "Awake!" considers what the evidence shows.*

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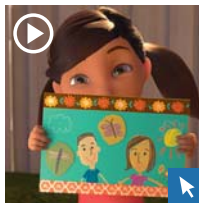
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# DID JESUS REALLY EXIST?

HE WAS neither rich nor powerful. He did not even have a home that he could call his own. Yet his teachings have influenced millions. Did Jesus Christ really exist? What do both modern and ancient authorities say?

- **Michael Grant**, a historian and an expert on ancient classical civilization, noted: “If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.”
- **Rudolf Bultmann**, a professor of New Testament studies, stated: “The doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community [of Christians].”
- **Will Durant**, a historian, writer, and philosopher, wrote: “That a few simple men [the Gospel writers] should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.”
- **Albert Einstein**, a German-born Jewish physicist, asserted: “I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.” When asked if he viewed Jesus as a historical person, he responded: “Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.”



## WHAT DOES HISTORY REVEAL?

The most detailed record of Jesus' life and ministry is recorded in the Bible accounts known as the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—named after the men who wrote them. In addition, a number of early non-Christian sources name him.



TACITUS

(c. 56-120 C.E., or Common Era) Tacitus is considered to be one of the greatest of the ancient Roman historians. His *Annals* deal with the Roman Empire from 14 C.E. to 68 C.E. (Jesus died in 33 C.E.) Tacitus wrote that when a great fire devastated Rome in 64 C.E., Emperor Nero was considered responsible. But Tacitus wrote that Nero accused the Christians in order to “scotch the rumour.” Then Tacitus said: “Christus, the founder of the name [Christian], had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus.”—*Annals*, XV, 44.



SUETONIUS

(c. 69–a. 122 C.E.) In his *Lives of the Caesars*, this Roman historian recorded events during the reigns of the first 11 Roman emperors. The section on Claudius refers to turmoil among the Jews in Rome that was likely caused by disputes over Jesus. (Acts 18:2) Suetonius wrote: “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christus], he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.” (*The Deified Claudius*, XXV, 4) Although wrongly accusing Jesus of creating disturbances, Suetonius did not doubt his existence.



PLINY THE  
YOUNGER

(c. 61-113 C.E.) This Roman author and administrator in Bithynia (modern Turkey) wrote to Roman Emperor Trajan about how to deal with the Christians in that province. Pliny said that he tried to force Christians to recant, executing any who refused to do so. He explained: “Those who . . . repeated after me an invocation to the [pagan] Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image . . . and who finally cursed Christ . . . , I thought it proper to discharge.”—*Pliny—Letters*, Book X, XCVI.



FLAVIUS  
JOSEPHUS

(c. 37-100 C.E.) This Jewish priest and historian states that Annas, a Jewish high priest who continued to wield political influence, “convened the judges of the Sanhedrin [the Jewish high court] and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ.”—*Jewish Antiquities*, XX, 200.



THE TALMUD

This collection of Jewish rabbinic writings, dating from the third to the sixth centuries C.E., shows that even Jesus’ enemies affirmed his existence. One passage says that on “the Passover Yeshu [Jesus] the Nazarean was hanged,” which is historically correct. (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, Munich Codex; see John 19:14-16.) Another states: “May we produce no son or pupil who disgraces himself in public like the Nazarene”—a title often applied to Jesus.—Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 17b, footnote, Munich Codex; see Luke 18:37.

## EVIDENCE FROM THE BIBLE

The Gospels give us a comprehensive account of Jesus’ life and ministry, including specific details about people, places, and times—the hallmarks of authentic history. An example is found at Luke 3:1, 2, which helps us to establish the exact date when a man named John the Baptist, a forerunner of Jesus, commenced his work.

Luke wrote: “In the 15th year of the reign of *Tiberius Caesar*, when *Pontius*

*Pilate* was governor of Judea, *Herod* was district ruler of Galilee, *Philip* his brother was district ruler of the country of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and *Lysanias* was district ruler of Abilene, in the days of chief priest *Annas* and of *Caiaphas*, God’s declaration came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” This detailed, precise list enables us to establish that “God’s declaration came to John” in the year 29 C.E.

“All Scripture is inspired of God.”  
—2 Timothy 3:16







Jesus taught people about the Kingdom of God, a world government

The seven public figures Luke names are well-known to historians. That said, for a time certain critics did question the existence of Pontius Pilate and Lysanias. But the critics spoke too soon. Ancient inscriptions bearing the names of those two officials have been discovered, confirming Luke's accuracy.\*

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The question of Jesus' existence matters because his teachings matter. For example, Jesus taught people how to live happy, fulfilling lives.<sup>#</sup> He also promised a time when mankind will live in true peace and security, united under a single world government called "the Kingdom of God." —Luke 4:43.

The designation "the Kingdom of God" is appropriate because this world government will express *God's sovereignty* over the earth. (Revelation 11:15) Jesus made that fact clear when he said in his model prayer: "Our Father in the heavens, . . . let your Kingdom come. Let your will take place . . . on earth." (Matthew 6:9, 10)

\* An inscription bearing the name of a tetrarch, or "district ruler," called Lysanias has been found. (Luke 3:1, footnote) He ruled over Abilene at the very time Luke mentioned.

<sup>#</sup> A fine example of Jesus' teachings can be found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7, often called the Sermon on the Mount.

**"No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus."**

—Albert Einstein

What will Kingdom rule mean for mankind? Consider the following:

*Warfare and civil strife will cease.*  
—Psalm 46:8-11.

*Wickedness, including greed and corruption, will be gone forever, along with ungodly people.*—Psalm 37:10, 11.

*The Kingdom's subjects will enjoy meaningful, productive work.*—Isaiah 65:21, 22.

*The earth will fully recover from its present sick state and produce bountiful crops.*—Psalm 72:16; Isaiah 11:9.

Some people may consider those promises wishful thinking. But is it not wishful thinking to trust in human efforts? Consider: Even in spite of spectacular advances in education, science, and technology, millions today feel deeply insecure and uncertain about tomorrow. And daily we see evidence of economic, political, and religious oppression, as well as greed and corruption. Yes, the reality is that human rule is a failure!—Ecclesiastes 8:9.

At the very least, the question of Jesus' existence merits our consideration.\* As 2 Corinthians 1:19, 20 states: "No matter how many the promises of God are, they have become 'yes' by means of [Christ]." ■

\* For more information about Jesus and his teachings, go to [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org) and look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED.



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE AMERICAS

News items from the Western Hemisphere show the value of the Bible's timeless wisdom.



**REDUCE STRESS—CHECK E-MAIL LESS?** People may have lower stress when they check their e-mail just three times a day instead of checking it as often as they can, according to research performed in Vancouver, Canada. Kostadin Kushlev, who led the study, says in view of its conclusions: “People find it difficult to resist the temptation of checking email, and yet resisting this temptation reduces their stress.”

**TO THINK ABOUT:** We live in “critical times hard to deal with,” so should we not look for ways to reduce stress?—2 Timothy 3:1.



**RECOVERY FROM OVERFISHING** “There have been documented cases of improvements to conch, lobster and fish populations within no-take zones” in Belize and other areas of the Caribbean, says a report to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). It adds: “Recovery of exploited species within no-take zones as opposed to fished areas may take as little as 1-6 years, but full recovery . . . may take decades.” Janet Gibson, a WCS program director, said of Belize: “It’s clear that no-take zones can help replenish the country’s fisheries and biodiversity.”

**TO THINK ABOUT:** Does the resilience evident in nature point to a wise Creator?—Psalm 104:24, 25.

**VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL** Violence is increasing in Brazil, reports the news service Agência Brasil. In 2012, the number of homicides surpassed 56,000—the highest yearly rate ever recorded by the Ministry of Health. Public security specialist Luís Saporì believes that the increase reflects a moral breakdown. Once people lose respect for the laws of a civilized society, “they start using brute force to make their interests prevail,” he said.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The Bible foretold a time when love would “grow cold” and lawlessness would increase.—Matthew 24:3, 12.



# Teaching Your Child About Sex



## THE CHALLENGE

Just a few decades ago, parents had at least a good *chance* to be the first to talk to their son or daughter about sex. And they could explain things gradually, according to the child's age and need.

That has all changed. "Children are being exposed to sexual messages at increasingly early ages, and the sexual content of children's media is on the rise," says the book *The Lolita Effect*. Does this new reality help children or hurt them?



## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Explicit content is everywhere.** In her book *Talk to Me First*, Deborah Roffman writes that "conversations, advertisements, movies, books, song lyrics, TV shows, texts, games, billboards, and phone and computer screens [are] so laced with sexual imagery, language, and innuendo that many [teens, preteens, and even young children] must conclude, at least unconsciously, that sex must be . . . the absolute most important thing."

**Marketing is partly to blame.** Advertisers and retailers peddle sexy clothing for children, training them from an early age to put undue emphasis on appearance. "Marketers know about young children's vulnerabilities, and they exploit them," says the book *So Sexy So Soon*. "All these sexual images and products are not intended to sell children on sex" but "on shopping."

**Information is not enough.** Just as there is a difference between knowing how a car works and being a responsible driver, there is a difference between having knowledge about sex and using that knowledge to make wise decisions.

**The bottom line:** Today, more than ever, you need to help your children train their "powers of discernment" so that they can "distinguish both right and wrong."  
—Hebrews 5:14.





## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Get involved.** No matter how awkward it may be, talking to your children about sex is your responsibility. Accept it.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 22:6.*

**Have small discussions.** Instead of having one big talk, take advantage of casual moments to communicate, perhaps while the two of you are traveling in your car or doing a chore. To help your child open up, ask viewpoint questions. For example, rather than saying, “Are you attracted to ads like that?” you could say, “Why do you think advertisers use those types of images to sell products?” After your child answers, you could ask, “How do you feel about that?”—*Bible principle: Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.*

**Keep it age appropriate.** Preschoolers can be taught the proper names of the sex organs, as well as how to protect themselves from sexual predators. As they grow, children can be told basic facts about reproduction. By puberty, they should have come to understand more fully the physical and moral aspects of sex.

**Impart values.** Start teaching your child—at an early age—about honesty, integrity, and respect. Then, when sex is discussed, you have a foundation to build on. Also, state your values clearly. For example, if you view sex before marriage as improper, say so. And explain why it is wrong and harmful. “Teens who say they know that their parents disapprove of teens having intercourse are less likely to actually have sex,” says the book *Beyond the Big Talk*.

**Set the example.** Live by the values you teach. For instance, do you laugh at obscene jokes? dress provocatively? flirt? Such actions may undermine the moral values you are trying to teach your children.—*Bible principle: Romans 2:21.*

**Keep it positive.** Sex is a gift from God, and in the right circumstance—in marriage—it can be a source of great pleasure. (Proverbs 5:18, 19) Let your child know that in time he or she may be able to enjoy that gift, without the heartache and worries that come from premarital sex. —1 Timothy 1:18, 19. ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Train a boy [or, “child; youth,” footnote] in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”—Proverbs 22:6.

“You must impress [God’s commandments] upon your sons.” —Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, footnote.

“Do you, however, the one teaching someone else, not teach yourself?”—Romans 2:21.

## A PARENT’S ROLE

Despite common perceptions, children—including teenagers—are more influenced by their parents than by peers. “Children always look first to the immediate adults in their lives for guidance and for framing the world in a way they can relate to and understand. They go elsewhere only when they know or sense that we are not willing to be present or available. . . . What decades of research demonstrate should be no great surprise: families who sustain this kind of connectedness around issues such as sexuality raise healthier children who make better decisions, take greater responsibility for their actions, and perhaps most important, postpone potentially risky behaviors.”—*Talk to Me First*.



# The Wonder Element

"No element is more essential to life than carbon," says the book *Nature's Building Blocks*. The unique characteristics of carbon enable it to bond with itself and many other chemical elements, thus forming millions of compounds, more of which are constantly being discovered or synthesized.

As the examples here show, carbon atoms can also combine to form various shapes, including chains, pyramids, rings, sheets, and tubes. Carbon truly is a wonder element! ■



## DIAMOND

Carbon atoms form pyramids, called tetrahedrons, making the structure extremely rigid and making diamond the hardest naturally occurring substance known. A perfect diamond is essentially a single molecule of carbon atoms.



## GRAPHITE

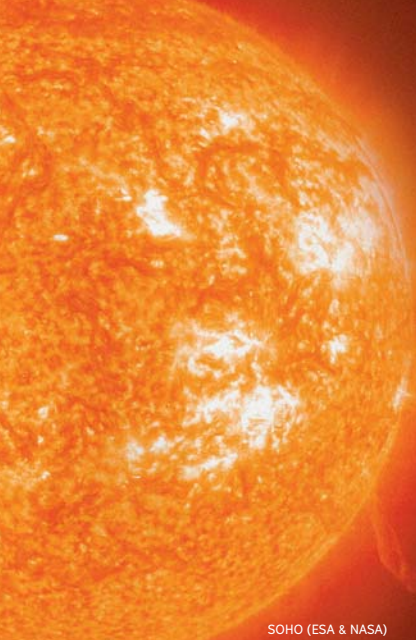
Tightly bonded carbon atoms are set out in loosely bonded layers that can slide away from one another like sheets of paper on a stack. Because of these characteristics, graphite is both a fine lubricant and a key compound in lead pencils.\*



## GRAPHENE

This refers to a single layer of carbon atoms arranged in a hexagonal mesh, or lattice. Graphene has a tensile strength many times that of steel. A pencil trace may have small amounts of graphene in single or multiple layers.

\* See the article "Does Anyone Have a Pencil?" in the July 2007 issue of *Awake!*



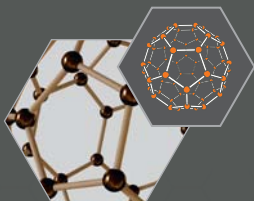
SOHO (ESA & NASA)

## Carbon—A Product of Ultrafine Tuning in the Stars

Carbon is formed by the fusion of three helium nuclei, which scientists believe occurs inside stars called red giants. For the helium to combine, however, certain conditions must be *exactly* right. “Change just a few of the settings [of physical laws] even an infinitesimal amount,” wrote physicist Paul Davies, and “we’d have no universe, no life and certainly no humans.” How can we account for such ultrafine tuning? Some say it just happened. Others see it as evidence of a wise Creator. Which view do you consider more reasonable?

### FULLERENES

These hollow molecules of carbon come in shapes that include microscopic balls and tubes called nanotubes. They are measured in nanometers, or billionths of a meter.



### LIVING ORGANISMS

The many cells that make up plants, animals, and humans are built on a framework of carbon—an element found in carbohydrates, fats, and amino acids.



“[God’s] invisible qualities . . . are perceived by the things made.”  
—Romans 1:20.





# GRATITUDE

Showing gratitude has so many proven benefits—physical, mental, and emotional—that everyone should make it part of their daily life.

## How is gratitude good for your well-being?

**WHAT MEDICAL SCIENCE SAYS** According to an article in the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, “gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.”

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** The Bible encourages us to cultivate a spirit of gratitude. “Show yourselves thankful,” wrote the apostle Paul, who set a fine example himself. For instance, he ‘thanked God unceasingly’ for the positive response of others toward the message he shared with them. (Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:13) Lasting happiness comes not from merely saying thank

you occasionally but from having a *grateful disposition*. That, in turn, protects us from feelings of entitlement, envy, and resentment, which would alienate people from us and rob us of joy in life.

Our Creator himself has set a fine example in showing appreciation—even to mere humans! Hebrews 6:10 states: “God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name.” Yes, our Creator considers it unrighteous, or unjust, to show a lack of gratitude.

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*“Always be rejoicing. Give thanks for everything.”—1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18.*



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## How does gratitude improve our relationships with others?

**WHAT EXPERIENCE TELLS YOU** When we express sincere gratitude—whether for a gift, a kind word, or practical help—we make the giver feel valued and appreciated. Even strangers respond warmly to people who sincerely thank them for doing a kind deed, such as holding a door open.

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** “Practice giving,” said Jesus Christ, “and people will give to you. They will pour into your laps a fine measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing.” (Luke 6:38) Consider the experience of Rose, a deaf girl in Vanuatu, an island nation in the South Pacific.

Rose attended the Christian meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses but got little benefit from them, since neither she nor anyone else in the congregation knew sign

language. When a couple who were proficient sign-language interpreters visited the congregation and saw the problem, they started a sign-language class. Rose was deeply grateful. “I am happy to have so many friends who love me,” she said. Seeing her gratitude and watching her now participate in the meetings is more than enough reward for the couple who helped her. Rose also deeply appreciates the efforts that others made to learn sign language in order to communicate with her.—Acts 20:35.

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*“The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies [God].”—Psalm 50:23.*

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## How can you cultivate a grateful spirit?

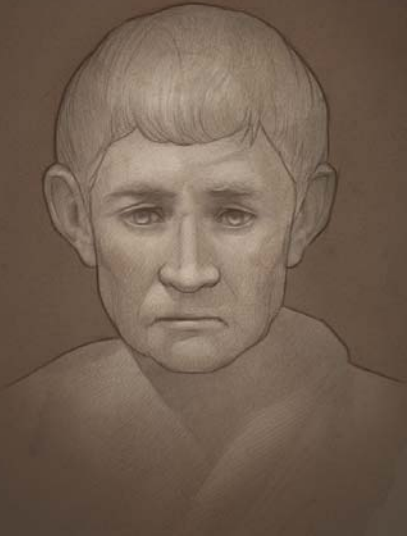
**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** Our feelings are closely linked to our thoughts. The Bible writer David said in prayer to God: “I meditate on all your activity; I eagerly ponder over the work of your hands.” (Psalm 143:5) Yes, David was not a distracted, superficial person. His thankful spirit stemmed from his regular contemplation of God’s ways, a practice he cultivated all his life.—Psalm 71:5, 17.

The Bible gives us this excellent advice: ‘Whatever things are true, lovable, well-spoken-of, virtuous, and praiseworthy

—continue thinking about these things.’ (Philippians 4:8, footnote) The words “continue thinking about” point yet again to our need to have a thoughtful disposition, which is a prerequisite for a grateful spirit. ■

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*“The meditation of my heart will show understanding.”—Psalm 49:3.*



# ARISTOTLE

OVER 2,300 years ago, Aristotle made major contributions to science and philosophy. His works have commanded sustained interest and have been widely translated and studied. History Professor James MacLachlan wrote that “Aristotle’s views of nature dominated European thought for almost 2,000 years.” Some of Aristotle’s views even influenced Catholic and Protestant teachings, as well as Islam.

## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Aristotle had a passion for knowledge and “a deep reverence for the value and excellence of the universe about him.”—*Aristotle—A Very Short Introduction*.
- ▶ Nature, he believed, has an eternal “Prime Mover” that causes eternal movement and that is good and exists outside the universe.
- ▶ Aristotle is credited with founding two sciences—biology and logic.
- ▶ Aristotle tutored a Macedonian boy who later became the empire builder Alexander the Great.

From the book *The Historians' History of the World*, Vol. IV, Henry Smith Williams, 1904

## His Range of Interests Was Vast

Aristotle wrote about art, astronomy, biology, ethics, language, law, logic, magnetism, metaphysics, motion, pleasure, poetry, politics, psychology, and rhetoric, as well as the soul, which he viewed as mortal. His fame, however, rests foremost on his work in biology and logic.

Ancient Greek scholars relied on their powers of observation, deduction, and logic to explain the natural world. Starting with what they considered to be obvious truths, they believed that if they reasoned carefully on such truths, they would be able to come to correct conclusions.

Guided by that philosophy, they did draw a number of sound conclusions—one being that there was an underlying order in the universe. A major problem, however, was that their powers of observation were limited to their unaided senses—a limitation that led many brilliant men, including Aristotle, astray. For instance, they believed that the planets and stars moved around the earth. At that time, this was considered to be a self-evident truth. “Both reason and experience seemed to confirm the



## Some of Aristotle's teachings attained the status of received truth

Greek view of an earth-centred universe,” states the book *The Closing of the Western Mind*.

That mistaken view would have been of little consequence had it remained purely in the realm of science. But it did not.

### Catholicism Embraces Aristotle

In medieval “Christian” Europe, some of Aristotle’s teachings attained the status of received truth—that is, they were generally accepted as being correct. Roman Catholic theologians—most notably Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-1274)—incorporated Aristotle’s writings into their theology. Thus, Aristotle’s notion that a stationary earth lies at the center of the universe became Catholic dogma. The teaching was also adopted by Protestant leaders, such as Calvin and Luther, who said it was Biblical.—See the box “They Read Too Much Into the Bible.”

“In some areas of thought [Aristotle’s teachings] and Catholicism became virtually indistinguishable,” said writer Charles Freeman. Thus, it has been said that Aquinas “baptized” Aristotle into the Catholic faith. In reality, however, “Aquinas was converted to Aristotelianism,” wrote Freeman. And to some extent, we might add, so was the church. As a result, Italian astronomer and mathematician Galileo, who dared to present observational proof that the earth orbited the sun, was required to appear before the Inquisition and was forced to recant.\* Ironically, Aristotle recognized that scientific knowledge is progressive, subject to revision. If only churches had adopted the same view! ■

\* For more on “Galileo’s Clash With the Church,” see the April 22, 2003, issue of *Awake!*



Many ancients believed in an earth-centered universe

### They Read Too Much Into the Bible

Some early theologians clung to Aristotle’s geocentric view of the universe because they read too much into certain Bible passages, such as Psalm 104:5. It states: “[God] established the earth on its foundations; it will not be moved from its place forever.” The Bible writer was not describing earth’s place in the cosmos. Rather, using poetic language, he was pointing to the planet’s permanence according to God’s purpose.—Ecclesiastes 1:4.

That said, when the Bible touches on scientific matters, its statements are accurate. For example, Job 26:7, recorded about 3,500 years ago, says that God “[suspended] the earth upon nothing.” Job 38:33 states that celestial bodies are governed by physical laws.



## “It Is Such a Fresh Approach!”

**SOO-JEONG**, a high school guidance counselor in South Korea, has used videos from the [jw.org](http://jw.org) website in her class. She says: “The students’ reaction to the video *What’s a Real Friend?* is outstanding! After watching the video, they make comments like this: ‘I have never thought about friendship this way. It is such a fresh approach!’ Some said that they would go to this website whenever they needed advice.” Soo-jeong adds: “I have recommended this video to many others in my field, and they have been happy to have such a fine tool to use in their classes.”

Another video that many students in South Korea have found helpful is the whiteboard animation *Beat a Bully Without Using Your Fists*. A lecturer working with the Juvenile Violence Prevention Foundation showed it to a class of students. “The

video catches the attention of many young ones because of its appealing artwork,” she said. “In addition, the video is practical in that it shows not only ways to cope with violence but also ways to prevent it.” The foundation asked for permission to use the video in their lectures, which are presented in many elementary and middle schools. Approval was granted. Even police authorities are using videos found on [jw.org](http://jw.org).

If you have not yet visited the site, why not do so? It is easy to navigate, and all downloads—audio and video, as well as the Bible and many other publications—are free of charge. ■

