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THE **WATCHTOWER**  
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

THE  
GARDEN  
OF EDEN  
MYTH OR FACT?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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# EDEN

## WAS IT MANKIND'S ORIGINAL HOME?

**I**MAGINE yourself in a garden. There are no distractions, no sounds of chaotic city life drifting in over some nearby wall. This garden is vast, and nothing intrudes on its peace. Better yet, your mind is clear of worries, your body untroubled by any trace of illness, allergies, or pain. Your senses are free to take in your surroundings.

You feast your eyes first on the vivid hues of the blossoms, then on the sparkle of a stream, then on the myriad greens of foliage and grass in sun and shadow. You feel the mild breeze on your skin and smell the sweet fragrances it carries. You hear the rustling of leaves, the splash of water tumbling over rocks, the calls and songs of birds, the hum of insects at work. As you picture the scene, do you not long to be in such a place?

People around the world believe that mankind had its start in a place like that. For centuries, members of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been taught about the garden of Eden, where God put Adam and Eve to live. According to the Bible, they had a peaceful, happy existence. They were at peace with each other, with the animals, and with God, who kindly gave them the hope of living forever in that lovely environment.—Genesis 2:15-24.

Hindus too have their distinctive concepts about a paradise in ancient times. Buddhists believe that great spiritual leaders, or Buddhas, arise in such golden ages when the world is like a paradise. And numerous religions of Africa teach stories that bear a remarkable resemblance to that of Adam and Eve.

In fact, the idea of an early paradise has been pervasive in mankind's religions and traditions. One author noted: "Many civilizations believed in a primordial paradise that was characterized by perfection, freedom, peace, happiness,



abundance, and the absence of duress, tensions, and conflicts. . . . This belief gave rise in the collective consciousness to a profound nostalgia for the lost but not forgotten paradise and to a strong desire to recover it.”

Might all those stories and traditions stem from a common root? Is it possible that mankind’s “collective consciousness” is imprinted with the memory of something real? Was there actually a garden of Eden in the distant past and a real Adam and Eve?

Skeptics scoff at the idea. In this scientific age, many assume that such accounts are mere legends and myths. Surprisingly, not all the skeptics are secular. Many religious lead-

ers promote disbelief in the garden of Eden. They say that there never was any such place. They say that the account is merely a metaphor, a myth, a fable, a parable.

Of course, the Bible does contain parables. Jesus himself uttered the most famous of them. However, the Bible presents the account about Eden, not as a parable, but as *history*, pure and simple. Yet, if the events described never occurred, then how can the rest of the Bible be trusted? Let us examine why some are skeptical about the garden of Eden and see whether their reasons are sound. Then we will consider why the account should matter to each one of us.

## WAS THERE REALLY A GARDEN OF EDEN?

**D**O YOU know the story of Adam and Eve and the garden of Eden? It is familiar to people around the world. Why not read it for yourself? You will find it at Genesis 1:26–3:24. Here is the gist of the story:

Jehovah God\* forms a man from the dust, names him Adam, and settles him in a garden in a region called Eden. God himself planted this garden. It is well-watered and abundant with beautiful fruit-bearing trees. At its center is “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” God forbids humans to

eat from this tree, stating that disobedience will result in death. In time, Jehovah makes a companion for Adam—the woman Eve—forming her from one of Adam’s ribs. God gives them the job of caring for the garden and tells them to multiply and fill the earth.

When Eve is alone, a serpent speaks to her, tempting her to eat the forbidden fruit by claiming that God has lied to her and is withholding something good, something that will make her godlike. She gives in and eats the forbidden fruit. Later, Adam joins her in

\* In the Bible, Jehovah is the personal name of God.



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disobeying God. Jehovah responds by pronouncing sentence on Adam, Eve, and the serpent. After the humans are expelled from the paradisaic garden, the angels block the entrance.

Among scholars, intellectuals, and historians, it was once popular to attest that the events recorded in the Bible book of Genesis were true and historical. These days, skepticism about all such matters is more in fashion. But what is the basis for the doubts about the Genesis account of Adam, Eve, and the garden of Eden? Let us examine four common objections.

## 1. Was the garden of Eden a real place?

Why is there doubt on this score? Philosophy may have played a role. For centuries, theologians speculated that God's garden was still in existence somewhere. However, the church was influenced by such Greek philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, who held that nothing on the earth could be perfect. Only heaven could contain perfection. Therefore, theologians reasoned, the original Paradise had to be closer to heaven.\* Some said that the garden sat atop an extremely high mountain that reached just above the confines of this degraded planet; others, that it was at the North Pole or the South Pole; still others, that it was on or near the moon. Not surprisingly, the whole con-

\* The notion is unscriptural. The Bible teaches that all of God's work is perfect; corruption comes from another source. (Deuteronomy 32:4, 5) When Jehovah finished his creation of the earth, he pronounced all that he had made "very good."—Genesis 1:31.

cept of Eden took on an aura of fantasy. Some modern-day scholars dismiss the geography of Eden as nonsense, asserting that no such place ever existed.

However, the Bible does not portray the garden that way. At Genesis 2:8-14, we learn a number of specifics about that place. It was located in the eastern part of the region called Eden. It was watered by a river that became the source for four rivers. Each of the four is named, and a brief description about its course provided. These details have long tantalized scholars, many of whom have scoured this Bible passage for clues to the present-day location of this ancient site. However, they have come up with innumerable contradictory opinions. Does this mean that the physical description of Eden, its garden, and its rivers is false or mythical?

Consider: The events in the garden of Eden account unfolded some 6,000 years ago. They were put into writing, evidently by Moses, who may have made use of oral accounts or perhaps even preexisting documents. Still, Moses was writing about 2,500 years after the events described. Eden was already ancient history. Now, is it possible for such landmarks as rivers to change over the course of dozens of centuries? The earth's crust is dynamic, ever in motion. The region that likely included Eden is an earthquake belt—one that now accounts for about 17 percent of the world's largest quakes. In such areas, change is the rule rather than the exception. What is more, the Flood of

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<sup>+</sup> CD also available.

<sup>°</sup> MP3 CD-ROM also available.

<sup>°</sup> Audio recordings also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).



Noah's day may have altered the topography in ways that we simply cannot know today.\*

Here, though, are a few facts that we do know: The Genesis account speaks of the garden as a real place. Two of the four rivers mentioned in the account—the Euphrates and the Tigris, or Hiddekel—flow today, and some of their source waters are very close together. The account even names the lands through which those rivers flowed and specifies the natural resources well-known in the area. To the people of ancient Israel, the original audience who read this record, these details were informative.

Do myths and fairy tales work that way? Or do they tend to omit specifics that could readily be verified or denied? “Once upon a time in a faraway land” is a way to begin a fairy tale. History, though, tends to include relevant details, as the Eden account does.

\* The Deluge, an act of God, evidently wiped out all traces of the garden of Eden itself. Ezekiel 31:18 suggests that “the trees of Eden” were already long out of existence by the seventh century B.C.E. So all those who searched for a still-existing garden of Eden in later times were misguided.

## **2. Is it really believable that God formed Adam from dust and Eve from one of Adam's ribs?**

Modern science has confirmed that the human body is composed of various elements—such as hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon—all of which are found in the earth's crust. But how were those elements assembled into a living creature?

Many scientists theorize that life arose on its own, starting with very simple forms that gradually, over millions of years, became more and more complex. However, the term “simple” can be misleading, for all living things—even microscopic single-celled organisms—are incredibly complex. There is no proof that any kind of life has ever arisen by chance or ever could. Rather, all living things bear unmistakable evidence of design by an intelligence far greater than our own.\* —Romans 1:20.

Can you imagine listening to a great symphony or admiring a brilliant painting or marveling at an achievement of technology and then insisting that these works had no

\* See the brochure *The Origin of Life—Five Questions Worth Asking*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

maker? Of course not! But such masterpieces do not even begin to approach the complexity, beauty, or ingenuity of the design of the human body. How could we imagine that it had no Creator? Furthermore, the Genesis account explains that of all life on earth, only humans were made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26) Fittingly, only humans on earth are capable of reflecting God's creative drive, at times producing impressive works of music, art, and technology. Should it surprise us that God is far better at creating than we are?

As to creating the woman by using a rib from the man, where is the difficulty in that? God could have used other means, but his manner of making the woman had beautiful significance. He wanted the man and the woman to marry and to form a close bond, as if they were "one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Is not the way man and woman can complement each other, forming a stable and mutually nourishing bond, powerful evidence of a wise and loving Creator?

Furthermore, modern geneticists have acknowledged that all humans likely descend-

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\* Interestingly, modern medical science has found that the rib has an unusual capacity to heal. Unlike other bones, it can grow back if its membrane of connective tissue is left intact.

ed from only one male and one female. Really, then, is the Genesis account far-fetched?

### **3. The tree of knowledge and the tree of life seem mythical.**

Actually, the Genesis account does not teach that these trees had any peculiar or supernatural powers of their own. Rather, they were actual trees that Jehovah invested with symbolic meaning.

Do not humans do something similar at times? For instance, a judge may warn against the crime of acting in contempt of court. It is not the furniture, fixtures, and walls of the courtroom itself that the judge wants to protect from disrespect but the system of justice that the court represents. Various monarchs too have used the scepter and the crown as symbols of their sovereign authority.

What, then, did the two trees symbolize? Many complex theories have been put forward. The genuine answer, while simple, is quite profound. The tree of the knowledge of



good and bad represented a privilege that is God's province alone—the right to determine what is good and what is bad. (Jeremiah 10: 23) No wonder it was a crime to steal from that tree! The tree of life, on the other hand, represented a gift that only God can bestow—everlasting life.—Romans 6:23.

#### **4. A serpent that talks seems to belong to fairy-tale lore.**

Granted, this aspect of the Genesis narrative can be puzzling, especially if we do not take the rest of the Bible into account. However, the Scriptures gradually clear up this intriguing mystery.

Who or what made that serpent appear to talk? The people of ancient Israel knew of other factors that shed much light on the role of that snake. For example, they knew

that although animals do not talk, a spirit person can make an animal appear to speak. Moses also wrote the account about Balaam; God sent an angel to make Balaam's donkey talk like a man.—Numbers 22:26-31; 2 Peter 2:15, 16.

Can other spirits, including those who are God's enemies, perform miracles? Moses had seen the magic-practicing priests of Egypt duplicate some of God's miracles, such as making a staff appear to turn into a snake. The power to perform feats like that could come only from God's enemies in the spirit realm.—Exodus 7:8-12.

Evidently Moses was also the inspired writer of the book of Job. That book taught much about God's chief enemy, Satan, who lyingly challenged the integrity of all of Jehovah's servants. (Job 1:6-11; 2:4, 5) Did the Israelites of old thus reason that Satan had manipulated the serpent in Eden, making it appear to talk and deceive Eve into breaking her integrity to God? It seems likely.

Was Satan the force behind the serpent? Jesus later referred to Satan as “a liar and the father of the lie.” (John 8:44) “The father of the lie” would be the author of the first lie ever told, would he not? The first lie is found in the serpent's words to Eve. Contradicting God's warning that eating the forbidden fruit would end in death, the serpent said: “You positively will not die.” (Genesis 3:4) Clearly, Jesus knew that Satan had manipulated the serpent. The Revelation that Jesus gave to the apostle John settles the matter, calling Satan “the original serpent.”—Revelation 1:1; 12:9.

Is it really far-fetched to believe that a powerful spirit person could manipulate a serpent, making it appear to talk? Even humans, though far less powerful than spirits, can perform baffling tricks of ventriloquism and create convincing special effects.





### The Most Compelling Evidence

Would you not agree that the skepticism about the Genesis account has little real basis? On the other hand, there is powerful evidence that the account is true history.

For example, Jesus Christ is called “the faithful and true witness.” (Revelation 3:14) Being a perfect man, he never lied, never misrepresented the truth in any way. What is more, he taught that he had existed long before his life as a man on earth—in fact, he had lived alongside his Father, Jehovah, “before the world was.” (John 17:5) So he was alive when life on earth began. What is the testimony of this most reliable of all witnesses?

Jesus spoke of Adam and Eve as real people. He referred to their marriage when explaining Jehovah’s standard of monogamy. (Matthew 19:3-6) If they never existed and the garden in which they lived was a mere myth, then either Jesus was deceived or he was a liar. Neither conclusion is feasible! Jesus had been in heaven, watching as the tragedy unfolded in the garden. What evidence could be more convincing than that?

In reality, disbelief in the Genesis account undermines faith in Jesus. Such disbelief also makes it impossible to understand some of the Bible’s greatest themes and most reassuring promises. Let us see how that is so.

## WHY EDEN MATTERS TO YOU

ONE of the most surprising objections that some scholars raise to the account about Eden is that it is not supported by the rest of the Bible. For example, Professor of Religious Studies Paul Morris writes: “There are no later direct biblical references to the Eden story.” His assessment may win nods of agreement from various “experts,” but it runs directly counter to the facts.

The Bible actually makes numerous references to the garden of Eden, Adam, Eve, and the serpent.\* But the error of a few scholars pales in comparison to a much larger, more pervasive one. By discrediting the Genesis record of the garden of Eden, religious leaders and Bible critics are actually launching an all-out assault on the Bible. How so?

Understanding what happened in Eden is

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\* See, for example, Genesis 13:10; Deuteronomy 32:8; 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 1:1; Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 28:13; 31:8, 9; Luke 3:38; Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14; Jude 14; and Revelation 12:9.

essential to understanding the rest of the Bible. For example, God’s Word is designed to help us find answers to the most profound and far-reaching questions that humans face. Again and again, the Bible’s answers to those questions relate to events that took place in the garden of Eden. Consider some examples.

● **Why do we grow old and die?** Adam and Eve were to live forever if they remained subject to Jehovah. Only if they rebelled would they die. In the day that they rebelled, they began to die. (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:19) They lost perfection and could pass on only sin and imperfection to their offspring. The Bible thus explains: “Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned.”—Romans 5:12.

● **Why does God allow wickedness?** In the garden of Eden, Satan called God a liar who

# A PROPHECY THAT TIES THE BIBLE TOGETHER

"I shall put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise you in the head and you will bruise him in the heel." —Genesis 3:15.

That is the Bible's first prophecy, uttered by God in Eden. Who are the four characters: the woman, her offspring, the serpent, and its offspring? How does the foretold "enmity" play out?



**THE SERPENT**  
Satan the Devil.  
—Revelation 12:9.



**THE WOMAN**  
Jehovah's organization  
of heavenly creatures.  
(Galatians 4:26, 27) Isaiah  
spoke of "the woman,"  
foretelling that she would  
give birth to a future spiritual  
nation.—Isaiah 54:1; 66:8.



**THE SEED OF  
THE SERPENT**  
Those who  
choose to do the  
will of Satan.  
—John 8:44.



**THE HEEL WOUND**  
A painful blow to  
the Messiah but not  
permanent in its  
effects. Satan  
succeeded in having  
Jesus put to death  
on earth. Jesus  
was resurrected.



**THE SEED OF THE WOMAN**  
Primarily Jesus Christ, who  
came out of the heavenly part  
of Jehovah's organization. Also  
included in the "seed" are  
Christ's spiritual brothers, who  
rule in heaven with him. Those  
anointed Christians make up  
a spiritual nation, "the Israel  
of God." —Galatians 3:16, 29;  
6:16; Genesis 22:18.



**THE HEAD WOUND**  
A deadly blow to Satan. Jesus will put Satan out of  
existence forever. Even before that, Jesus will undo the  
evil Satan began in Eden.—1 John 3:8; Revelation 20:10.

For a concise overview of the Bible's  
central theme, see the brochure *The  
Bible—What Is Its Message?* published  
by Jehovah's Witnesses.

withholds good from his creatures. (Genesis 3:3-5) He thus called into question the rightfulness of Jehovah's way of ruling. Adam and Eve chose to follow Satan; so they likewise rejected Jehovah's sovereignty and, in effect, asserted that man can decide for himself what is good and what is bad. In his perfect justice and wisdom, Jehovah knew that there was only one way to answer the challenge properly—allow time to pass, giving humans the opportunity to rule themselves as they choose. The resulting wickedness is due, in part, to Satan's continued influence and has gradually revealed a great truth: Man is incapable of governing himself without God.—Jeremiah 10:23.

● **What is God's purpose for the earth?** In the garden of Eden, Jehovah set a standard of beauty for the earth. He commissioned Adam and Eve to fill the earth with their offspring and "subdue it," in order to bring the same measure of beauty and harmony to the whole planet. (Genesis 1:28) So God's purpose for the earth is that it be a paradise inhabited by a perfect, united family of the offspring of Adam and Eve. Much of the Bible is about God's means of fulfilling that original purpose.

● **Why did Jesus Christ come to the earth?** The rebellion in the garden of Eden brought a death sentence upon Adam and Eve and all their offspring, but God lovingly supplied hope. He sent his Son to the earth to provide what the Bible calls a ransom. (Matthew 20:28) What does that mean? Well, Jesus was "the last Adam"; he succeeded where Adam had failed. Jesus maintained his perfect human life by remaining obedient to Jehovah. Then he freely gave his life as a sacrifice, or ransom, providing the means for all faithful humans to receive forgiveness for their sins and eventually attain the kind of life that Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before they sinned. (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; John 3:16) Thus Jesus guaranteed that Jehovah's pur-



*Adam and Eve suffered the disastrous results of sin*

pose to turn this earth into an Edenlike paradise will come true.\*

God's purpose is not vague, nor is it some abstract theological concept. It is real. Just as the garden of Eden was a real place on this earth with real animals and real people, so God's promise for the future is a certainty, a reality soon to come. Will it be your future, your reality? Much of that is up to you. God wants that future for as many people as possible, even for those whose lives have gone wrong.—1 Timothy 2:3, 4.

As Jesus was dying, he spoke to a man whose life had taken a terrible turn. The man was a criminal; he knew that he deserved to be executed. But he turned to Jesus for comfort, for hope. Jesus' response? "You will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) If Jesus wants to see that former criminal there—resurrected and blessed with an opportunity to live forever in an Edenlike paradise—does he not want the same blessing for you? He does! His Father does! If you want that future for yourself, do all that you can to learn about the God who made the garden of Eden.

\* To learn more about Christ's ransom sacrifice, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

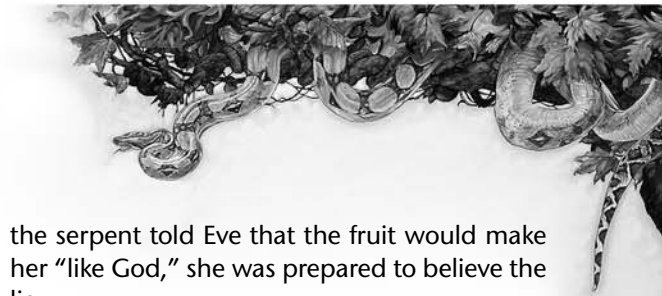
## Why would Satan use a serpent to speak to Eve?

■ You may agree that as discussed on page 8, Satan was the force behind the serpent that spoke to Eve. The Bible certainly teaches this. However, you may wonder, ‘Why would a powerful spirit manipulate a snake the way a ventriloquist uses a dummy?’

The Bible characterizes Satan’s tactics as “machinations,” or “crafty acts,” and this incident helps to prove the point. (Ephesians 6:11; footnote) What we see in Eden is no fable about a talking animal; it is a chilling example of clever strategy designed to lure people away from God. In what way?

Satan chose his target carefully. Eve was the youngest intelligent creature in the universe. Taking advantage of her inexperience, he set out to trick and seduce her. By hiding behind a serpent, a very cautious creature, Satan shrewdly concealed his own bold and ambitious aims. (Genesis 3:1) Consider, too, what he accomplished by making the serpent appear to speak.

First, Satan caught and riveted Eve’s attention. She knew that snakes do not talk; her husband had named all the animals, including this one, likely after careful study. (Genesis 2:19) No doubt Eve too had observed this cautious creature. So Satan’s ploy roused Eve’s curiosity; it got her to focus on the one thing in all the garden that was forbidden to her. Second, if the serpent was lurking in the limbs of the forbidden tree, what conclusion was Eve likely to draw? Might she not have reasoned that this lowly, dumb creature had itself eaten from that fruit and had thereafter been able to speak? If the fruit could do so much for a serpent, what might it do for her? We cannot know for sure what Eve thought or whether the snake had taken a bite of the fruit, but we do know that when



the serpent told Eve that the fruit would make her “like God,” she was prepared to believe the lie.

Satan’s choice of words also reveals much. He sowed doubts in Eve’s mind, implying that God was holding back something good from her and needlessly restricting her freedom. The success of Satan’s scheme depended on the chance that Eve’s self-interest would outweigh her love for the God who had given her everything she had. (Genesis 3:4, 5) Tragically, Satan’s gambit worked; neither Eve nor Adam had cultivated in their own hearts the kind of love and appreciation for Jehovah that they should have. Does not Satan promote the same kind of self-interest and rationalizing today?

What, though, about Satan’s motive? What was he after? In Eden, he attempted to hide both his identity and his motive. But, in time, he revealed himself. When he tempted Jesus, he surely knew that disguises were of no use. So he directly urged Jesus: “Fall down and do an act of worship to me.” (Matthew 4:9) Evidently, Satan has long been driven by jealousy over the worship that goes to Jehovah God. He will go to any length to divert or pervert such worship. He loves to destroy integrity to God.

Clearly, the Bible reveals that Satan is a deadly strategist in seeking his aims. Happily, we need not be fooled as Eve was, “for we are not ignorant of his designs.”—2 Corinthians 2:11.



**M**ANY people ask this question in all sincerity. When the issue of God's permission of wickedness is raised, the sin of the first human pair in the garden of Eden quickly comes into focus. The thought that 'God knows everything' may easily lead some to the conclusion that God must have known beforehand that Adam and Eve would disobey him.

If God truly had foreknown that this perfect couple would sin, what would this imply? Such a notion would attribute many negative traits to God. He would seem to be unloving, unjust, and insincere. Some might label it cruel to expose the first humans to something that was foreknown to end badly. God might seem responsible for—or at least an accomplice to— all the badness and suffering that followed throughout history. To some, our Creator would even appear foolish.

Does Jehovah God, as revealed in the Scriptures, match such a negative description? To answer that, let us examine what the Bible says about the creative works and the personality of Jehovah.

### **"It Was Very Good"**

Regarding God's creation, including the first humans on earth, the Genesis account says: "God saw everything he had made and, look! it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) Adam and Eve were perfectly made, ideally suited to their earthly environment. There was nothing deficient in their makeup. Created "very good," they were certainly capable of the good conduct that was required of them. They were created "in God's image." (Genesis 1:27) So they had the capacity to demonstrate to some degree the godly qualities of wisdom, loyal love, justice, and goodness. Reflecting such qualities would help them to make decisions that would benefit them and bring pleasure to their heavenly Father.

# Did God Know

## THAT ADAM AND EVE WOULD SIN?

Jehovah endowed these perfect, intelligent creatures with free will. So they were by no means preprogrammed to please God—like some sort of robot. Think about it. Which would mean more to you—a gift that is given mechanically or one that comes from the heart? The answer is obvious. Likewise, if Adam and Eve had freely chosen to obey God, their obedience would have meant all the more to him. The capacity to choose enabled the first human pair to obey Jehovah out of love.—Deuteronomy 30:19, 20.

### **Righteous, Just, and Good**

The Bible reveals Jehovah's qualities to us. These qualities make it impossible for him to have anything to do with sin. Jehovah "is a lover of righteousness and justice," says Psalm 33:5. Thus, James 1:13 notes: "With evil things God cannot be tried nor does he himself try anyone." Out of fairness and consideration, God warned Adam: "From every tree of the garden you may eat to satisfaction. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die." (Genesis 2:16, 17) The first couple were given a choice between endless life and death. Would it not have been hypocritical for God to warn them against a specific sin while

already knowing the bad outcome? As “a lover of righteousness and justice,” Jehovah would not have offered a choice that in reality did not exist.

Jehovah is also abundant in goodness. (Psalm 31:19) Describing God’s goodness, Jesus said: “Who is the man among you whom his son asks for bread—he will not hand him

Jehovah did not create the first humans as automatons programmed for a fixed course

a stone, will he? Or, perhaps, he will ask for a fish—he will not hand him a serpent, will he? Therefore, if you, although being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those asking him?” (Matthew 7:9-11) God gives “good things” to his creatures. The way humans were created and the Paradise home prepared for them testify to God’s goodness. Would such a good Sovereign be so cruel as to provide a beautiful home that he knew would be taken away? No. Our righteous and good Maker is not to blame for man’s rebellion.

### **“Wise Alone”**

The Scriptures also show that Jehovah is “wise alone.” (Romans 16:27) God’s heavenly angels witnessed many manifestations of this boundless wisdom. They began “shouting in applause” when Jehovah brought forth his earthly creations. (Job 38:4-7) No doubt these intelligent spirit creatures followed events in the garden of Eden with great interest. Would it, then, make sense for a wise God, after creating an awe-inspiring universe and an array of marvelous earthly works, to bring forth under the eyes of his angelic sons two unique creatures who he knew were

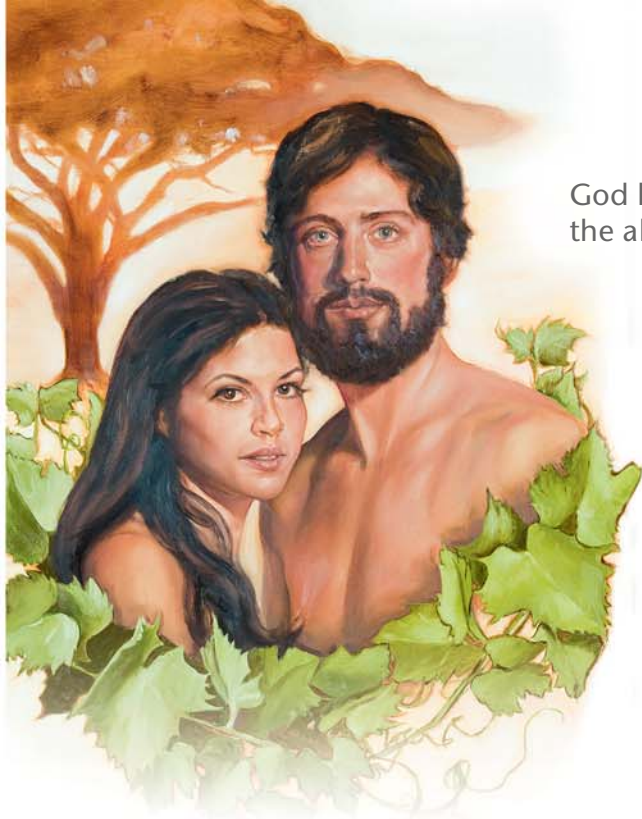
bound to fail? Clearly, to plan such a calamity would not stand to reason.

Still, someone may object, ‘But how could an all-wise God not have known?’ Granted, a facet of Jehovah’s great wisdom is his capability to know “from the beginning the finale.” (Isaiah 46:9, 10) However, he does not have to use this capability, just as he does not always have to use his immense power to the full. Jehovah wisely uses his ability of foreknowledge selectively. He uses it when it makes sense to do so and fits the circumstances.

The ability to refrain from using foreknowledge can be illustrated with a feature of modern technology. Someone watching a prerecorded sports match has the option to watch the final minutes first in order to know the outcome. But he does not *have* to start that way. Who could criticize him if he chose to watch the entire match from the beginning? Similarly, the Creator evidently chose not to see how things would turn out. Rather, he chose to wait and, as events unfolded, see how his earthly children would conduct themselves.

As mentioned earlier, Jehovah in his wisdom did not create the first humans as automatons programmed for a fixed course. Instead, he lovingly endowed them with free will. By choosing the right course, they could manifest their love, gratitude, and obedience, thereby bringing added delight to themselves and to Jehovah as their heavenly Father.—Proverbs 27:11; Isaiah 48:18.

The Scriptures show that on many occasions God did not make use of his ability of foreknowledge. For example, when faithful Abraham went to the point of attempting to sacrifice his son, Jehovah could say: “*Now I do know* that you are God-fearing in that you have not withheld your son, your only one, from me.” (Genesis 22:12) On the other hand, there were also occasions when the



God knew that Adam and Eve had the ability to act loyally

bad conduct of certain individuals caused God to “feel hurt.” Would he have felt such pain if he had long known what they would do?—Psalm 78:40, 41; 1 Kings 11:9, 10.

Thus, it is only reasonable to conclude that the all-wise God did not exercise his ability of foreknowledge to know in advance that our first parents would sin. He was not so foolish as to embark on a bizarre venture, using his ability to know the outcome in advance and then staging a mere rerun of what he already knew.

### “God Is Love”

God’s adversary, Satan, initiated the rebellion in Eden that resulted in negative consequences, including sin and death. Satan thus was “a manslayer.” He also proved to be “a liar and the father of the lie.” (John 8:44) Driven by bad motives himself, he strives to attribute bad motives to our loving Creator. It suits him well to shift the blame for man’s sin to Jehovah.

The quality of love is the strongest reason why Jehovah chose not to know in advance that Adam and Eve would sin. Love is God’s main attribute. “God is love,” says 1 John 4:8. Love is positive, not negative. It looks for the good in others. Yes, motivated by love, Jehovah God wanted the best for the first human pair.

Even though God’s earthly children had the option of making an unwise choice, our loving God was not inclined to be pessimistic or to be suspicious of his perfect creatures. He had amply provided for them and had equipped them well. It was only appropriate that God should expect, not rebellion, but loving obedience in return. He knew that Adam and Eve had the ability to act loyally, as was later proved even by imperfect men, such as Abraham, Job, Daniel, and many others.

“With God all things are possible,” said Jesus. (Matthew 19:26) That is a comforting thought. Jehovah’s love, along with his other dominant attributes of justice, wisdom, and power, guarantees that in due time he can and will remove all the effects of sin and death.—Revelation 21:3-5.

Clearly, Jehovah did not know beforehand that the first couple would sin. While he was pained by the disobedience of man and the ensuing suffering, God knew that this temporary situation would not prevent the fulfillment of his eternal purpose for the earth and humans upon it. Why not find out more about that purpose and how you may benefit from its glorious fulfillment?\*

\* For more information about God’s purpose for the earth, see chapter 3 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



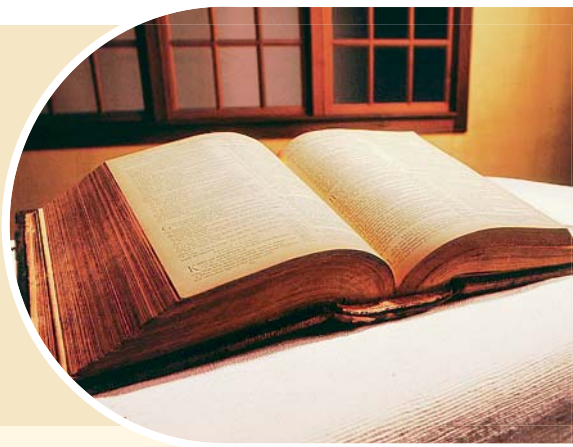
# LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

## Why Learn From God?

This article raises questions you may have wondered about and shows where you can read the answers in your Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to discuss these answers with you.

### 1. Why learn from God?

God has good news of something better for mankind. He tells us about it in the pages of the Bible. The Bible is like a letter to us from our loving Father in heaven.—*Read Jeremiah 29:11.*



### 2. What is the good news?

Mankind needs good government. No human ruler has ever relieved mankind of violence, injustice, disease, or death. But there is good news. God will give mankind a good government that will bring freedom from all causes of suffering.—*Read Daniel 2:44.*

### 3. Why is it vital to learn from God?

Soon God will clear the earth of people who cause suffering. Meanwhile, he is teaching millions of meek people to enjoy a better way of life, based on love. From God's Word, people are learning how to cope with life's problems, how to find real happiness, and how to please God.—*Read Zephaniah 2:3.*

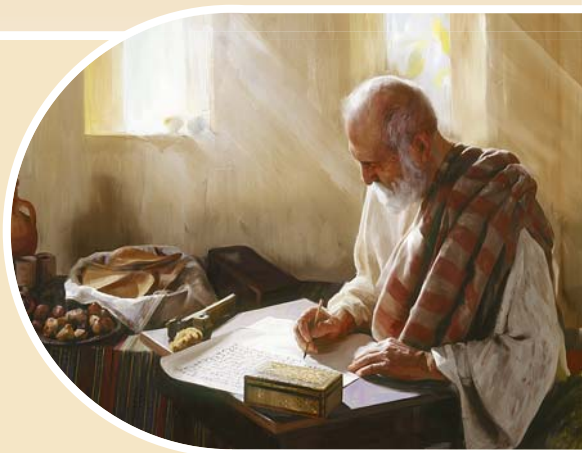




#### 4. Who is the Author of the Bible?

The Bible is made up of 66 small books. Some 40 men wrote them. The first five were written by Moses about 3,500 years ago. The last was written by the apostle John over 1,900 years ago. But the Bible writers wrote God's thoughts and not their own. So God is the Author of the Bible.—*Read 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.*

We know that the Bible is from God because it accurately foretells the future in detail. No man can do that. (Isaiah 46:9, 10) Also, the Bible bears the unmistakable stamp of God's loving personality. It has the power to change people's lives for the better. These facts convince millions that the Bible is God's Word.—*Read Joshua 23:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:13.*

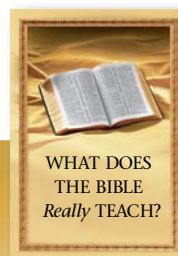


#### 5. How can you understand the Bible?

Jesus became famous as a teacher of God's Word. Although most people he spoke to were familiar with the Bible, they needed assistance to understand it. To help them, Jesus referred to one Bible text after another and explained "the meaning of the Scriptures." This feature, "Learn From God's Word," will use the same method to help you.—*Read Luke 24:27, 45.*

Few things are as fascinating as learning from God about the purpose of life. But some people may not be pleased that you are reading the Bible. Do not be discouraged. Your hope of enjoying everlasting life depends on your getting to know God.—*Read Matthew 5:10-12; John 17:3.*

For more information, see chapter 2 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.





## DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

### “He Softened the Face of Jehovah”

**I** FELT so unworthy,” says a man who had strayed from his godly upbringing. When he began to take steps to turn his life around, he feared that God would never forgive him. But this repentant sinner found hope in the Bible account about Manasseh, recorded at 2 Chronicles 33:1-17. If you have ever felt unworthy because of past sins, you too may find comfort in Manasseh’s example.

Manasseh was raised in a godly home. His father, Hezekiah, was one of the most outstanding kings of Judah. Manasseh was born about three years after his father’s life had been miraculously extended by God. (2 Kings 20:1-11) No doubt Hezekiah viewed this son as a gift resulting from God’s mercy and tried to instill in him a love for pure worship. But the children of godly parents do not always follow in their parents’ footsteps. Such was the case with Manasseh.

Manasseh was not more than 12 when he lost his father. Sadly, Manasseh “proceeded to do what was bad in Jehovah’s eyes.” (Verses 1, 2) Was the young king influenced by counselors who had no regard for true worship? The Bible does not say. What it does tell us is that Ma-

nasseh descended to gross idolatry and cruelty. He set up altars to false gods, offered his own sons in sacrifice, practiced spiritism, and put a graven image in Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem. Stubborn Manasseh refused to heed repeated warnings from Jehovah, the God whose miracle had enabled his birth.—Verses 3-10.

Finally, Jehovah allowed Manasseh to be taken in fetters to Babylon. There, in exile, Manasseh had a chance to reflect on his course. Did he now see that his impotent, lifeless idols had failed to protect him? Did he think back to the things his godly father had taught him as a child? Whatever the case, Manasseh had a change of heart. The record says: “He softened the face of Jehovah his God and kept humbling himself greatly . . . And he kept praying to Him.”\* (Verses 12, 13) But could a man who had committed such gross sins really be forgiven by God?

Jehovah was touched by Manasseh’s sincere repentance. God heard his pleas for mercy “and restored him to Jerusalem to his kingship.” (Verse 13) In proof of his repentance, Manasseh then did what he could to rectify his wrongs, clearing out idolatry from his realm and urging his people “to serve Jehovah.” —Verses 15-17.

If you feel unworthy of God’s forgiveness because of past sins, take heart from Manasseh’s example. This account is part of God’s inspired Word. (Romans 15:4) Clearly, Jehovah wants us to know that he is “ready to forgive.” (Psalm 86:5) It is not the sin but the heart condition of the sinner that matters to him. A sinner who prays with a contrite heart, abandons his wrong course, and makes determined efforts to do what is right may ‘soften the face of Jehovah,’ even as Manasseh did.—Isaiah 1:18; 55:6, 7.

\* *Young’s Literal Translation* here reads: “He . . . appeased the face of Jehovah his God.”

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**SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR JANUARY:**  
■ 2 Chronicles 29–Ezra 10

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## DID YOU KNOW?

### Since Israel has a long dry season, what strategies did its inhabitants in ancient times adopt to ensure their water supply?

■ Between October and April, rain falls in Israel and at times gushes down torrent valleys. In the summer, however, most of these “rivers” dry up, and there may be no rain for months. How did people in Bible times maintain a steady supply of water?

They resolved this problem by cutting channels into hillsides and directing winter rains into underground cavities, or cisterns. Rooftops were sufficiently sloped to direct rainwater into these cisterns. Many families had their own cistern, from which they could draw water to quench their thirst.—2 Kings 18:31; Jeremiah 6:7.

The Israelites also took advantage of natural springs. In the highlands, win-

ter rain seeps into the ground until it reaches impermeable layers of rock, along which it runs until it reappears in springs. That villages were often built near a spring (Hebrew, *en*) is suggested by such place-names as En-shemesh, En-rogel, and En-gedi. (Joshua 15:7, 62) At Jerusalem, a conduit was quarried through solid rock to bring springwater into the city.—2 Kings 20:20.

Where there were no natural springs, a well (Hebrew, *be'er*), such as the one at Beer-sheba, was sunk to tap underground water. (Genesis 26:32, 33) Author André Chouraqui notes that “the technical solutions [the Israelites] found command admiration even today.”

### What kind of house might Abram (Abraham) have lived in?

■ Abram and his wife lived in the prosperous Chaldean city of Ur. But at God’s direction, they left that city and began dwelling in tents. (Genesis 11:31; 13:12) Consider what a sacrifice this change may have involved for them.

Ur, in modern-day Iraq, was excavated by Leonard Woolley between 1922 and 1934. Among the buildings he found were some 73 houses built of brick. The rooms of many of these houses were arranged around a paved central courtyard. The courtyard sloped gently toward its center, where a drain eliminated waste water. In the larger houses, guest rooms had their own lav-

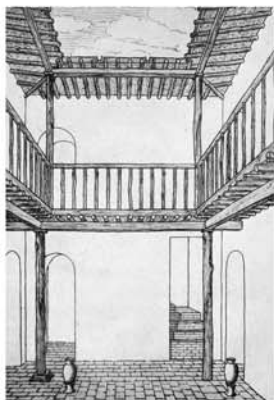
atories. Other rooms on the ground floor included kitchens with fireplaces and slaves’ sleeping quarters. The family lived on the upper level, which was accessed by a staircase. The stairs led to a wooden balcony that ran around the courtyard and permitted access to the doors of the upper rooms.

“A house . . . , with its paved court and neatly whitewashed walls, its own system of drainage, . . . of a dozen rooms or more, implies a standard of life of a really high order,” wrote Woolley. “And these are the houses . . . of the middle class, shopkeepers, petty merchants, scribes, and so on.”



CISTERN, HORVOT MEZADA, ISRAEL

© Masada National Park, Israel Nature and Parks Authority



DRAWING OF A HOUSE FROM THE TIME OF ABRAHAM

© Drawing: A. S. Whitburn

A black and white photograph of a person standing in a dark field, looking up at a starry night sky. The person is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored sweater and dark pants. The sky is filled with numerous stars and a faint nebula, creating a sense of vastness and wonder.

# Does God Really Care About You?

**D**O YOU feel loved? Or are you sometimes left with the impression that nobody cares about you? In this fast-paced, self-centered world, it may seem easy to believe that you are too small to matter, too insignificant to be noticed. True to the Bible's description of our times, many today are so absorbed in themselves that there is a widespread lack of concern for others.—2 Timothy 3:1, 2.

Regardless of age, culture, language, or race, all humans have a deep-rooted need to love and be loved. According to some reports, our nervous system is specially designed to sense love and tenderness. Jehovah God, the one who created us, understands better than anyone else our need to be loved and appreciated. How would you feel if he assured you that you are precious to him? It would certainly be the most treasured recognition you could attain. Can we really be sure that Jehovah is interested in imperfect humans? Is he concerned about us as individuals? If so, what makes a person desirable to him?

## Jehovah Does Care

Some 3,000 years ago, a God-fearing psalmist was filled with awe when he beheld the grandeur of the starry night sky. There was no doubt in his mind about the infinitely superior majesty of the One who had created the countless stars. Pondering Jehovah's greatness and contemplating man's littleness, the psalmist expressed his amazement about Jehovah's loving concern: "When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have prepared, what is mortal man that you keep him in mind, and the son of earthling man that you take care of him?" (Psalm 8:3, 4) It would be easy to conclude that the Supreme One is too far off or too preoccupied to take note of imperfect humans. Yet, the psalmist knew that in spite of our comparative insignificance and transience, man does count with God.

Another psalmist expressed this assurance: "Jehovah is finding pleasure in those fearing him, in those waiting for his loving-kindness." (Psalm 147:11) The thought expressed in



both of these psalms is touching. Jehovah, elevated as he is, is not simply *aware* of humans. Rather, he ‘takes care of them’ and ‘finds pleasure in them.’

This fact is further emphasized by a Bible prophecy that describes developments taking place in our time. Through the prophet Haggai, Jehovah indicated that the preaching of the good news of God’s Kingdom would be carried out worldwide. With what result? Notice one of the effects: “The desirable things of all the nations must come in; and I will fill this house with glory.”—Haggai 2:7.

What are these “desirable things” that are collected out of all the nations? These can hardly be material riches. (Haggai 2:8) What really makes Jehovah’s heart rejoice is not silver and gold. He delights in people who, despite their imperfections, worship him out of love. (Proverbs 27:11) They are “the desirable things” that bring him glory, and he treasures their heart devotion and zealous service. Are you among them?

The thought that imperfect human creatures can appear desirable to the Grand Creator of the universe may seem unbelievable. In reality, though, this truth should motivate us to accept the warm invitation to draw close to him.—Isaiah 55:6; James 4:8.

### **“You Are Someone Very Desirable”**

In his advanced age, the prophet Daniel had a striking encounter early one evening. While Daniel was praying, a distinguished visitor arrived suddenly. His name was Gabriel. Daniel had met him before and recognized him as Jehovah’s angel. Gabriel explained the reason for his sudden appearance: “O Daniel, now I have come forth to make you have insight with understanding . . . because you are someone very desirable.”—Daniel 9:21-23.

On another occasion, one of Jehovah’s angels addressed Daniel, saying: “O Daniel, you very desirable man.” Then, to strengthen Daniel, the angel said: “Do not be afraid, O very desirable man. May you have peace.” (Daniel 10:11, 19) Three times Daniel is thus described as “very desirable.” This expression can also mean “greatly beloved,” “highly esteemed,” even “a favorite.”

Surely, Daniel already felt close to his God and no doubt perceived that Jehovah approved of his devoted service. But that expression of God’s great affection as conveyed through his angelic messengers must have been most reassuring. Not

God expressed his affection for Daniel by sending the angel Gabriel to strengthen him



surprisingly, Daniel responded: “You have strengthened me.”—Daniel 10:19.

The heartwarming account of Jehovah’s tender feelings for his faithful prophet is recorded in God’s Word for our benefit. (Romans 15:4) Reflecting on Daniel’s example allows us to understand what makes a person desirable to our loving heavenly Father.

### **Study God’s Word Regularly**

Daniel was a diligent student of the Scriptures. We know this because he himself wrote: “I . . . discerned by the books the number of the years . . . for fulfilling the devastations of Jerusalem.” (Daniel 9:2) The books available to him at the time likely included the inspired writings of Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets. We can imagine Daniel surrounded by numerous scrolls, thoroughly immersed in reading and comparing the prophetic pronouncements that had a bearing on the restoration of true worship in Jerusalem. Undisturbed, possibly in his roof chamber, he no doubt meditated deeply on the meaning of such passages. His purposeful study strengthened his faith and drew him close to Jehovah.

Studying God’s Word also molded Daniel’s personality and affected his whole life course. Scriptural instruction during his tender years no doubt made him determined as a youth to observe the dietary regulations of God’s Law that were applicable at the time. (Daniel 1:8) Later, he fearlessly declared God’s message to Babylon’s rulers. (Proverbs 29:25; Daniel 4:19-25; 5:22-28) His diligence, honesty, and trustworthiness were well-known. (Daniel 6:4) Above all, rather than compromising in order to save his own life, Daniel fully trusted in Jehovah. (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Daniel 6:23) No wonder he was “very desirable” in God’s sight!

In some respects, Bible study is easier for us today than it was for Daniel. Bulky scrolls

have given way to convenient books. We now have the complete Bible, including the written record of how some of Daniel’s prophecies were fulfilled. And we have at our disposal an abundance of Bible study aids and research tools.\* Do you make good use of such tools? Do you schedule regular times for Bible reading and meditation? Then the effect of your doing so will be the same as it was in Daniel’s case. You will be able to build solid faith and deepen your relationship with Jehovah. God’s Word will be a sure guide for your life, giving you the assurance of his loving care.

### **Persevere in Prayer**

Daniel was a man of prayer. He made appropriate requests of God. As a young man, he faced the threat of execution if unable to interpret Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Without hesitation, Daniel implored Jehovah to grant him support and protection. (Daniel 2:17, 18) Years later, in humble realization of his human imperfection, the faithful prophet confessed his sin together with the sin of his people and begged Jehovah for forgiveness. (Daniel 9:3-6, 20) When he lacked understanding regarding the things that were given him by inspiration, Daniel asked for God’s help. In one instance, the angel who subsequently visited Daniel to give him further insight confirmed: “Your words have been heard.”—Daniel 10:12.

Faithful Daniel, though, did more than offer petitions to God. Daniel 6:10 states: “Even three times in a day he was . . . praying and offering praise before his God, as he had been regularly doing.” Daniel found many reasons to thank and praise Jehovah. And he did so regularly. Yes, prayer was an integral

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\* Jehovah’s Witnesses publish a number of research and study aids that can help to make Bible reading and study more beneficial. If you are interested in obtaining such aids, feel free to ask any of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

part of his worship, so much so that he could not give it up even at the risk of his life. Certainly, this steadfastness endeared him to Jehovah.

What a wonderful gift the privilege of prayer is! Never let a day go by without talking to your heavenly Father. Remember to thank and praise him for all the goodness he shows. Freely express your anxieties and concerns. Reflect on how your requests or supplications have been answered, and express your gratitude. Take time to linger in prayer. When we thus open our heart to Jehovah in prayer, we experience his love in a very personal way. What an incentive to “persevere in prayer”—Romans 12:12.

### **Glorify Jehovah’s Name**

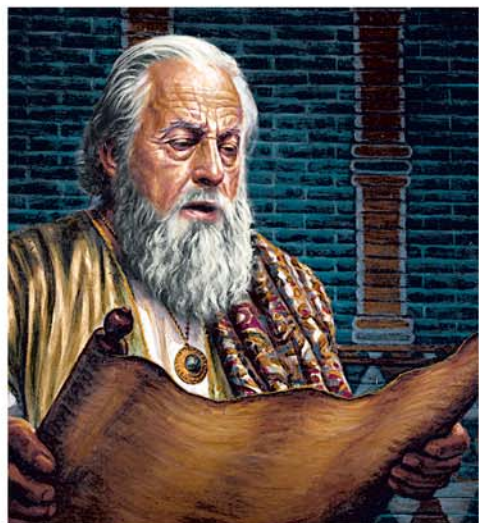
No friendship can thrive if one party is self-centered. The same is true in our relationship with Jehovah. Daniel was aware of this fact. Consider how greatly he was concerned about glorifying Jehovah’s name.

When God answered his prayer by revealing to him Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, Daniel said: “Let the name of God become blessed from time indefinite even to time indefinite, for wisdom and mightiness—for they belong to him.” Later, when making known to Nebuchadnezzar the dream and its meaning, Daniel repeatedly gave credit to Jehovah, emphasizing that only He is the “Revealer of secrets.” Similarly, when pleading for forgiveness and deliverance, Daniel prayed: “O my God, . . . your own name has been called upon your city and upon your people.”—Daniel 2:20, 28; 9:19.

We have many opportunities to imitate Daniel in this regard. When praying, we may express our concern that God’s “name be sanctified.” (Matthew 6:9, 10) Never would we want our conduct to bring reproach on Jehovah’s holy name. Instead, may we always glorify Jehovah by sharing with others what we learn about the good news of his Kingdom.

Granted, in the world around us, love and concern for others are wanting. We can, however, find great comfort in knowing that Jehovah really does care about his worshippers as individuals. As the psalmist says: “Jehovah is taking pleasure in his people. He beautifies the meek ones with salvation.”—Psalm 149:4.

Daniel’s diligence in study and prayer refined his personality and endeared him to God





## IMITATE THEIR FAITH

# He Endured Despite Disappointments

SAMUEL could feel the grief in Shiloh. It almost seemed that the town was awash in tears. From how many houses did the cries of women and children emanate, the sounds of mourning over the news about fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers who would not be coming home? We know only that Israel had lost some 30,000 soldiers in a terrible defeat at the hands of the Philistines not long after the loss of 4,000 in another battle.—1 Samuel 4:1, 2, 10.

That was just part of a string of tragedies. High Priest Eli had two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who had marched out of Shiloh with the sacred ark of the covenant. Usually housed in the holy compartment of the tabernacle—a tentlike temple—this precious chest was a symbol of God’s presence. The people then took the Ark into battle, foolishly thinking that it would act like a charm and give them victory. But the Philistines captured the Ark, killing Hophni and Phinehas.—1 Samuel 4:3-11.

The tabernacle in Shiloh had been honored with the presence of the Ark for centuries. Now it was gone. Upon hearing this news, 98-year-old Eli fell backward from his chair and died. His daughter-in-law, widowed that very day, died in childbirth. Before expiring, she said: “Glory has gone away from Israel into exile.” Indeed, Shiloh would never be the same.—1 Samuel 4:12-22.

How would Samuel cope with these profound disappointments? Would his faith stand up to the challenge of helping a people who had lost Jehovah’s protection and favor? All of us today may, at times, face hardships and disappointments that challenge our faith, so let us see what we can learn from Samuel.

### He “Effected Righteousness”

The Bible record turns away from Samuel at this point and follows the sacred Ark, showing us how the Philistines suffered for taking it and were forced to return it. When we come upon Samuel again, some 20 years have passed. (1 Samuel 7:2) How was he occupied during those years? We need not guess.

We learn that before this period began, “the word of Samuel *continued* to come to all Israel.” (1 Samuel 4:1) The record reveals that after the period was over, Samuel made a custom of visiting three cities in Israel, making a circuit each year, handling disputes and resolving questions. Then he would return to his hometown of Ramah. (1 Samuel 7:15-17) Clearly, Samuel always kept busy, and during that 20-year interval, he had much to do.

The immorality and corruption of Eli’s sons had eroded people’s faith. Many, it seems, turned to idolatry as a result. After two decades of hard work, though, Samuel delivered this message to the people: “If it is with all your heart you are returning to Jehovah, put away the foreign gods from your midst and also the Ashtoreth images, and direct your heart unswervingly to Jehovah and



serve him alone, and he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”—1 Samuel 7:3.

“The hand of the Philistines” had grown heavy on the people. With Israel’s army effectively smashed, the Philistines felt free to oppress God’s people with impunity. But Samuel assured the people that things would change if only they returned to Jehovah. Were they willing? To Samuel’s delight, they put away their idols and “began serving Jehovah alone.” Samuel convened an assembly at Mizpah, a town in the mountainous country north of Jerusalem. The people gathered, fasted, and repented for their many sins of idolatry.—1 Samuel 7:4-6.

However, the Philistines learned of this great gathering and saw an opportunity. They sent their army to Mizpah to crush those worshippers of Jehovah. The Israelites heard news of the approaching danger. Terrified, they asked Samuel to pray for them. He did so, offering a sacrifice as well. During that sacred ceremony, the Philistine army came up against Mizpah. Jehovah then answered Samuel’s prayer. In effect, Jehovah let out a roar of indignation. He “caused it to thunder with a loud noise on that day against the Philistines.”—1 Samuel 7:7-10.

Now, should we imagine that those Philistines were like little children who scurry in

fear to hide behind their mommies when they hear a thunderclap? No, these were tough, battle-hardened soldiers. This thunder, then, must have been unlike anything they knew. Was it the sheer volume of this “loud noise”? Did it come out of a clear blue sky, or did it echo bafflingly from the hill-sides? At any rate, it shook those Philistines to the core. In utter confusion, they changed quickly from bullies to targets. The men of Israel poured forth from Mizpah, defeated them, and chased them for miles, down southwest of Jerusalem.—1 Samuel 7:11.

That battle was a turning point. The Philistines kept retreating during the rest of Samuel’s days as judge. City after city returned to the control of God’s people.—1 Samuel 7:13, 14.

Many centuries later, the apostle Paul listed Samuel among the faithful judges and prophets who “effected righteousness.” (Hebrews 11:32, 33) Samuel did indeed help to bring about what was good and right in God’s eyes. He remained effective because he waited patiently on Jehovah, faithfully keeping at his work in spite of disappointments. He also showed an appreciative spirit. After the victory at Mizpah, Samuel had a monument erected to commemorate the way that Jehovah had helped his people.—1 Samuel 7:12.

Do you want to ‘effect righteousness’ yourself? If so, you do well to learn from Samuel’s patience and his humble, appreciative spirit. Who of us does not need those qualities? It was good for Samuel to acquire and display such traits when relatively young,

*How could Samuel help his people cope with terrible loss and disappointment?*



for he faced deeper disappointments in his later years.

### **"Your Own Sons Have Not Walked in Your Ways"**

The next time we see Samuel, he "had grown old." Samuel had two adult sons by this time, Joel and Abijah, and he entrusted them with the responsibility of helping him in the work of judging. Sadly, though, his trust was misplaced. Honest and righteous though Samuel was, his sons used their positions for selfish ends, perverting justice and taking bribes.—1 Samuel 8:1-3.

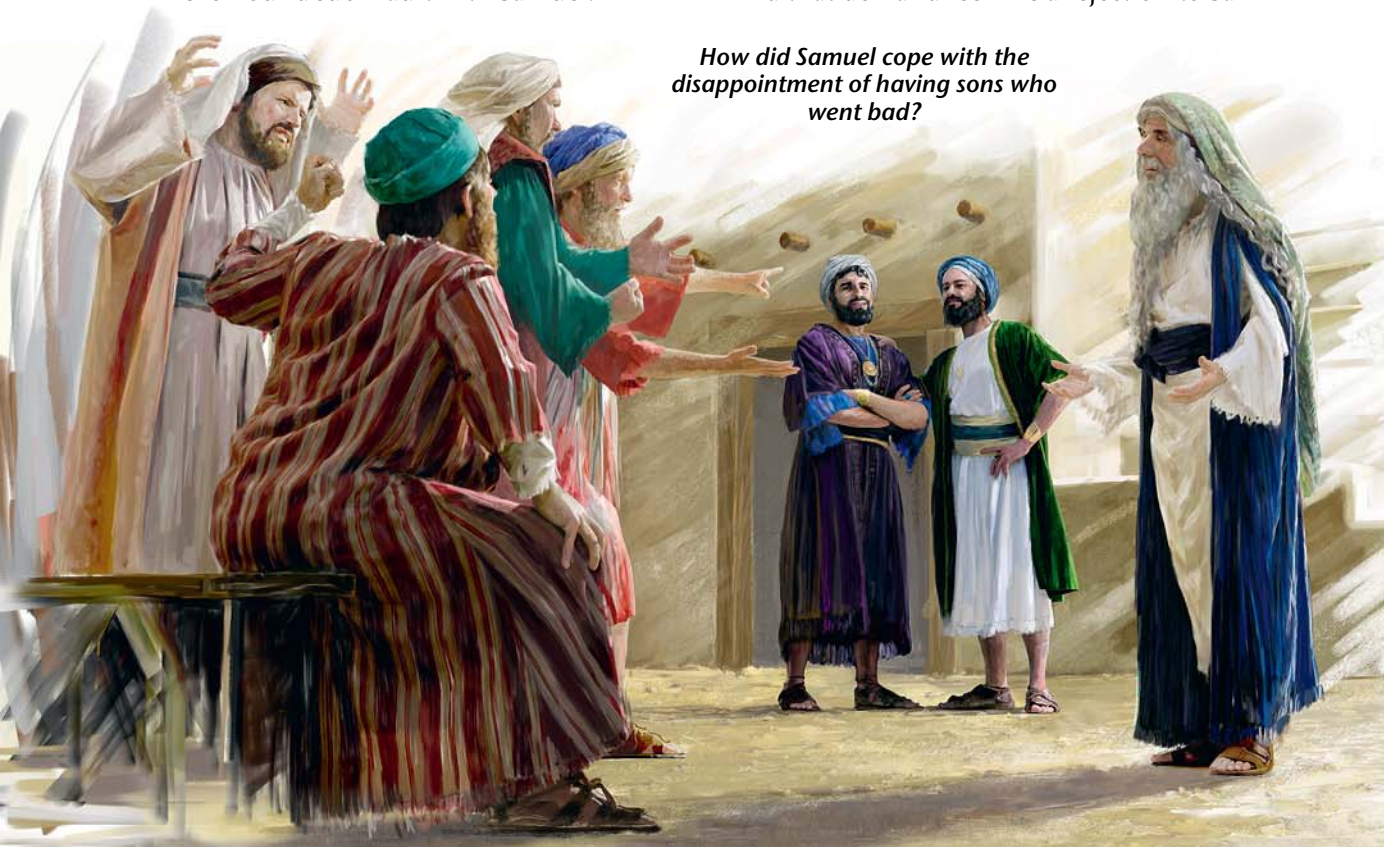
One day, the older men of Israel approached the elderly prophet to complain. "Your own sons have not walked in your ways," they said. (1 Samuel 8:4, 5) Was Samuel aware of the problem? The account does not say. Unlike Eli, however, Samuel was surely not a reprehensible father. Jehovah had rebuked and punished Eli for failing to correct his sons' wickedness, for honoring his sons more than God. (1 Samuel 2:27-29) Jehovah never found such fault with Samuel.

The account does not reveal Samuel's agonizing shame, anxiety, or disappointment once he learned of his sons' wicked conduct. Many parents, however, can imagine his feelings only too well. In today's dark times, rebellion against parental authority and discipline is pandemic. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Parents who are dealing with that kind of pain may find a measure of comfort and guidance in Samuel's example. He did not let his sons' faithless ways alter his own course one bit. Remember, even after words and discipline fail to reach hardened hearts, parental example remains a powerful teacher. And parents always have the opportunity to make their own Father, Jehovah God, proud—as did Samuel.

### **"Do Appoint for Us a King"**

Samuel's sons could not have imagined how far the effects of their greed and selfishness would reach. The older men of Israel went on to say to Samuel: "Now do appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." Did that demand feel like a rejection to Sam-

*How did Samuel cope with the disappointment of having sons who went bad?*



uel? After all, he had been judging those people on Jehovah's behalf for decades. Now they wanted, not some mere prophet like Samuel, but a king to be their judge. The nations round about had kings, and the Israelites wanted one too! How did Samuel react? "The thing was bad" in his eyes, we read.—1 Samuel 8:5, 6.

Note how Jehovah responded when Samuel took the matter to him in prayer: "Listen to the voice of the people as respects all that they say to you; for it is not you whom they have rejected, but it is I whom they have rejected from being king over them." How comforting for Samuel, yet how awful an insult those people had flung at Almighty God! Jehovah told his prophet to warn the Israelites of the high price they would pay for having a human king. When Samuel complied, they insisted: "No, but a king is what will come to be over us." Ever obedient to his God, Samuel went and anointed the king whom Jehovah chose.—1 Samuel 8:7-19.

How, though, did Samuel obey? In a resentful, perfunctory way? Did he allow disappointment to poison his heart, letting bitterness take root? Many a man might respond that way in such a situation, but not Samuel. He anointed Saul and acknowledged that the man was Jehovah's own choice. He kissed Saul, a sign of welcome and submission to the new king. And he said to the people: "Have you seen the one whom Jehovah has chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?"—1 Samuel 10:1, 24.

Samuel focused, not on faults, but on the good in the man Jehovah had chosen. As to himself, he focused on his own record of integrity to God rather than on the approval of fickle people. (1 Samuel 12:1-4) He also worked faithfully at his own assignment, counseling God's people about the spiritual dangers they faced and encouraging them

to remain faithful to Jehovah. His counsel reached their hearts, and the people begged Samuel to pray in their behalf. He gave them this beautiful reply: "It is unthinkable, on my part, to sin against Jehovah by ceasing to pray in your behalf; and I must instruct you in the good and right way."—1 Samuel 12:21-24.

Have you ever felt disappointed when someone else was chosen for a certain position or privilege? Samuel's example is a powerful reminder that we must never let jealousy or bitterness take root in our heart. God has plenty of rewarding, fulfilling work for each of his faithful servants.

### **"For How Long Will You Be Mourning for Saul?"**

Samuel was right to see good in Saul; this was a remarkable man. Tall and impressive in appearance, he was courageous and resourceful yet initially modest and unassuming. (1 Samuel 10:22, 23, 27) In addition to such gifts, he had a precious one—free will, the ability to choose his life course and make his own decisions. (Deuteronomy 30:19) Did he use that gift well?

Sadly, when a man basks in the warm glow of newly acquired power, modesty is often the first quality to melt away. Before long, Saul began to turn arrogant. He chose to disobey Jehovah's orders that Samuel transmitted to him. Once, Saul grew impatient and offered up a sacrifice that only Samuel could rightfully offer. Samuel had to give him strong correction and foretold that the kingship would not remain in Saul's family. Instead of being chastened by the discipline, Saul went on to commit worse acts of disobedience.—1 Samuel 13:8, 9, 13, 14.

Through Samuel, Jehovah told Saul to wage war against the Amalekites. Jehovah's instructions included an order to execute their wicked king, Agag. However, Saul

spared Agag as well as the best of the spoil that was to be destroyed. When Samuel came to correct him, Saul revealed how much he had changed. Instead of modestly accepting correction, he rationalized, excused himself, justified his actions, sidestepped the issue, and tried to shift the blame to the people. When Saul tried to deflect the discipline by claiming that some of the spoil was intended for a sacrifice to Jehovah, Samuel uttered the famous words: "Look! To obey is better than a sacrifice." Courageously, Samuel rebuked the man and revealed Jehovah's decision: The kingship would be ripped away from Saul and given to another—a better man. —1 Samuel 15:1-33.

Samuel was deeply upset over Saul's failings. He spent the night crying out to Jehovah about the matter. He even went into mourning for the man. Samuel had seen so much potential in Saul, so much good, and now his hopes were shattered. The man he once knew had changed—he had lost his best qualities and turned against Jehovah. Samuel refused to see Saul ever again. In time, though, Jehovah offered Samuel this gentle reproof: "For how long will you be mourning for Saul, while I, on the other hand, have rejected him from ruling as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I shall send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, because I have provided among his sons a king for myself." —1 Samuel 15:34, 35; 16:1.

Jehovah's purpose does not depend on the wavering loyalties of imperfect humans. If one man turns unfaithful, Jehovah will find another to carry out His will. So aged Samuel let go of his grief over Saul. At Jehovah's direction, Samuel went to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem, where he met a number of impressive-looking sons. Yet, from the first, Jehovah reminded Samuel: "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stat-

ure . . . For not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is." (1 Samuel 16:7) Finally, Samuel met the youngest son, and here was Jehovah's choice—David!

In his final years, Samuel got to see ever more clearly the rightness of Jehovah's decision to replace Saul with David. Saul descended into murderous jealousy and apostasy. David, however, showed beautiful qualities—courage, integrity, faith, and loyalty. As Samuel's life drew to a close, his faith grew ever stronger. He saw that no disappointment is too great for Jehovah to heal, to resolve, or even to turn into a blessing. Finally, Samuel died, leaving behind the record of a remarkable life that spanned the better part of a century. All Israel mourned the loss of that faithful man—and no wonder! To this day, servants of Jehovah do well to ask, 'Will I imitate the faith of Samuel?'





ROME® Vagnari

Mediterranean Sea

EAST ASIA

PACIFIC OCEAN

# AN EAST ASIAN IN ANCIENT ITALY

**H**OW did a man of East Asian origin end up in the ancient Roman Empire 2,000 years ago? That was the question facing archaeologists after they made a fascinating discovery in southern Italy in 2009.

The site was an ancient Roman cemetery at Vagnari, 40 miles (60 km) west of Bari. Seventy-five human skeletons were uncovered. Tests on the bones indicated that most of the people were born nearby. Yet, the skeleton of one man surprised the researchers. Analysis of his mitochondrial DNA showed that he had East Asian ancestry on his mother's side.\* His remains dated to the first or second century C.E. According to a report on the find, "this appears to be the first time that a skeleton with an East Asian ancestry has been discovered in the Roman Empire." So who was this man?

"At first glance it's tempting to link this fellow to the silk trade that flourished between China and Rome," says the same report. However, it is thought that such trade was carried on by a series of intermediaries, or middlemen, with no one person actually making the whole 5,000-mile (8,000-km) trek between China and Italy.

What can the place where the remains were found tell us? In ancient times, Vagnari was a rural imperial estate—land controlled by the emperor—where laborers smelted iron

\* Mitochondrial DNA analysis is unable to provide any information concerning paternal ancestry.



SKELETON OF AN EAST ASIAN MAN UNCOVERED IN AN ANCIENT ROMAN CEMETERY

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and produced clay tiles. Many of the workers there were slaves, and it is likely that this Oriental was too. In fact, his burial was not that of a wealthy man. His surviving goods, which were buried with him, amounted to a single pot, and another body had been buried on top of his.

Why is this find of interest? The spread of the Christian message in the first century C.E. depended on how far the ancients traveled. The Bible reports that after Pentecost 33 C.E., the good news was carried far and wide by foreign visitors to Jerusalem. (Acts 2:1-12, 37-41) At the very least, this skeleton suggests that about that time some people were traveling from East Asia to the Mediterranean region.\*

\* There is also evidence that Westerners were traveling to East Asia. See the article "How Far East Could Missionaries Go?" in the January 1, 2009, issue of *The Watchtower*.

## Appreciate Sacred Things!

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

**Main characters:** Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau

**Summary:** Esau sells his birthright to his twin brother, Jacob.

### 1 ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ GENESIS 25:20-34.

What characteristics did Jacob and Esau display even while still in the womb? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do you picture the physical appearance of Jacob and of Esau as young men? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What emotions do you sense in the conversation between Jacob and Esau in verses 30 to 33? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **DIG DEEPER.**

Using research materials at your disposal, find out something about the rights of the firstborn son. Why were these rights important? What was the significance of selling these rights for a bowl of stew? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2 ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ GENESIS 27:1-10, 30-38.

What emotion do you sense in Esau's voice when he realized that his brother had received the blessing of firstborn? \_\_\_\_\_

**DIG DEEPER.**

Was it wrong for Rebekah and Jacob to maneuver events so that Jacob received the blessing? Why, or why not? (Clue: See Genesis 25:23, 33.)

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

The long-term consequences of instant gratification.

**FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.**

What sacred things have been entrusted to you?

In what specific ways can you show that you value sacred things?

**4 WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY?**



IF YOU  
DON'T HAVE  
A **BIBLE**,  
ASK JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
FOR ONE, OR  
READ IT ONLINE AT  
[www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org)





Does it really matter whether there was a garden of Eden?

SEE PAGES 9-11.



Did God know in advance that Adam and Eve would sin?

SEE PAGES 13-15.



How can you know if your sins can be forgiven by God?

SEE PAGE 18.



Is God concerned about you as an individual?

SEE PAGES 20-23.

**Would you welcome a visit?**