



APRIL 1, 2011

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

JESUS

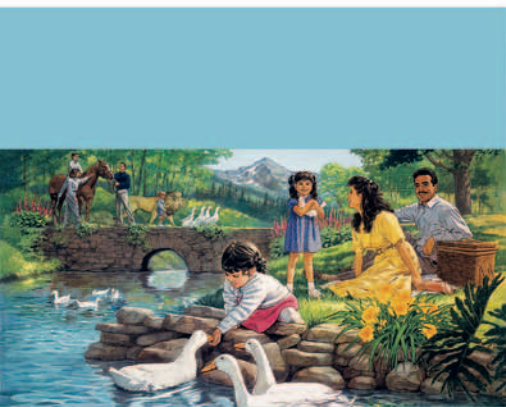
Where He Came From
How He Lived
Why He Died

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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WHO REALLY IS

Jesus Christ?

“Now when he entered into Jerusalem, the whole city was set in commotion, saying: ‘Who is this?’ The crowds kept telling: ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee!’”

—MATTHEW 21:10, 11.

WHY did the arrival of Jesus Christ* in Jerusalem on that spring day in 33 C.E. cause such commotion? Many in the city had heard about Jesus and the extraordinary things he had done. They kept telling others about him. (John 12:17-19) Yet, little did the crowds know that in their midst was a man whose influence would spread around the world and span the centuries down to our day!

Consider a few examples of the far-reaching influence that Jesus has had on human history.

- The calendar commonly used in many parts of the world is based on the year when Jesus is thought to have been born.
- Some two billion people—about a third of the world’s population—call themselves Christians.
- Islam, with more than a billion members worldwide, teaches that Jesus is “a greater prophet than Abraham, Noah, and Moses.”
- Many of Jesus’ wise sayings have, in various forms, entered everyday speech. Among them are the following:

‘Turn the other cheek.’—MATTHEW 5:39.

‘Go the extra mile.’—MATTHEW 5:41.

‘No man can serve two masters.’—MATTHEW 6:24.

‘Do not cast your pearls before swine.’

—MATTHEW 7:6.

‘All things that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them.’—MATTHEW 7:12.

‘Count the cost.’—LUKE 14:28.

Jesus’ influence is beyond question. Yet, people hold widely different ideas and beliefs about him. Hence, you may wonder, ‘Who really is Jesus Christ?’ The Bible alone tells us where Jesus came from, how he lived, and why he died. Knowing those truths about him can have a profound effect on your life—now and in the future.

* “Jesus,” the personal name of this prophet from Nazareth, means “Jehovah Is Salvation.” The word “Christ” is a title that means “Anointed One,” signifying that Jesus was anointed, or appointed by God to a special position.

JESUS | Where He Came From

“[Pilate] entered into the governor’s palace again and said to Jesus: ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer.”—JOHN 19:9.

THE Roman Governor Pontius Pilate asked that question when Jesus was on trial for his life.* Pilate knew which part of Israel that Jesus came from. (Luke 23:6, 7) He also knew that Jesus was far from being an ordinary man. Was Pilate wondering whether Jesus had lived before? Was this pagan ruler really willing to accept and act upon the truth? Whatever the case, Jesus refused to answer, and it soon became clear that Pilate was more interested in his own career than in truth and justice.—Matthew 27:11-26.

Thankfully, those who sincerely want to know where Jesus came from can easily find out. The Bible plainly reveals the origin of Jesus Christ. Consider the following.

■ **Where he was born** Modern calculations show that in the early fall of what is now called 2 B.C.E., Jesus was born under humble conditions in the Judean village of Bethlehem. A registration ordered by Caesar Augustus compelled Jesus’ mother, Mary, when “heavy with child,” and her husband, Joseph, to travel to Bethlehem, the place of Joseph’s ancestry. Unable to find lodging in

the crowded village, the couple had to make use of a stable, where Jesus was born and placed in a manger.—Luke 2:1-7.

Centuries earlier, a Bible prophecy foretold the place of Jesus’ birth: “You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, the one too little to get to be among the thousands of Judah, from you there will come out to me the one who is to become ruler in Israel.”* (Micah 5:2) Bethlehem was apparently too small to be listed among the cities of the territory of Judah. Yet, this little village would have a unique honor. The promised Messiah, or Christ, would come from Bethlehem.—Matthew 2:3-6; John 7:40-42.

■ **Where he was raised** After a brief stay in Egypt, Jesus’ family moved to Nazareth, a city in the province of Galilee about 60 miles (96 km) north of Jerusalem. At that time, Jesus was less than three years old. Here in this picturesque region where farmers, shepherds, and fishermen plied their trades, Jesus grew up in a large family, likely in modest circumstances.—Matthew 13:55, 56.

Centuries in advance, the Bible foretold that the Messiah would be “a Nazarene.”

* For more information about the arrest and trial of Jesus, see the article “The Most Infamous Trial Ever Held,” on pages 18-22 of this issue.

* Ephrathah (or Ephrath) is evidently an earlier name of Bethlehem.—Genesis 35:19.

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Gospel writer Matthew says that Jesus' family came to dwell in "Nazareth, that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'" (Matthew 2:19-23) The name Nazarene seems to be related to the Hebrew word for "sprout." Evidently, Matthew was referring to Isaiah's prophecy that called the Messiah "a sprout" out of Jesse, meaning that the Messiah would be a descendant of Jesse, father of King David. (Isaiah 11:1) Jesus was, in fact, a descendant of Jesse through David.—Matthew 1:6, 16; Luke 3:23, 31, 32.

■ **Where he originally came from** The Bible teaches that Jesus' life began long before he was born in that stable in Bethlehem. The prophecy of Micah, quoted earlier, goes on to say that His "origin is from early times, from the days of time indefinite." (Micah 5:2) As God's firstborn Son, Jesus was a spirit creature in heaven before he was born as a human on earth. Jesus himself said: "I have come down from heaven." (John 6:38; 8:23) How was this possible?

By means of holy spirit, Jehovah God performed the miracle of transferring the life of his heavenly Son to the womb of the Jewish virgin Mary so that he could be born as a perfect human.* Such a miracle is easily within the power of Almighty God. As the angel who explained matters to Mary put it, "with God no declaration will be an impossibility."—Luke 1:30-35, 37.

The Bible does more than just tell us something about where Jesus came from. The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell us much about how he lived.

* Jehovah is the name of God as revealed in the Bible.

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“My food is for me to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.”—JOHN 4:34.

THE setting in which Jesus said the above words reveals much about the focus of his life. Jesus and his disciples had been traveling all morning through the hilly country of Samaria. (John 4:6, footnote) Thinking that Jesus must be hungry by now, the disciples offered him some food. (John 4:31-33) In his reply, Jesus summed up his purpose in life. To him, doing God’s work was more important than eating. In both word and deed, Jesus lived to do God’s will for him. What did this include?

■ **Preaching and teaching about God’s Kingdom** The Bible explains Jesus’ lifework, saying: “He went around throughout the whole of Galilee, teaching . . . and preaching the good news of the kingdom.” (Matthew 4:23) Jesus did not simply preach, or proclaim, God’s Kingdom to others. He also taught people—that is, he instructed, explained, and convinced by sound reasoning. The Kingdom was the theme of Jesus’ message.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught his listeners what God’s Kingdom is and what it will do. Note the following truths about the Kingdom, along with the Scriptural citations that give us Jesus’ words on the subject.

- God’s Kingdom is a heavenly government, and Jesus is the one whom Jehovah has appointed as King.—MATTHEW 4:17; JOHN 18:36.
- The Kingdom will sanctify God’s name and cause his will to be done on earth as in heaven.—MATTHEW 6:9, 10.

- Under the rule of God’s Kingdom, the entire earth will be transformed into a paradise.—LUKE 23:42, 43.

- God’s Kingdom will soon come and carry out God’s will for the earth.*—MATTHEW 24:3, 7-12.

- **Performing powerful works** Jesus was known primarily as “Teacher.” (John 13:13) However, during his three-and-a-half-year ministry, he also performed a number of powerful works. These works served at least two purposes. First, they helped to prove that he was indeed sent by God. (Matthew 11:2-6) Second, they provided a preview of what he as King of God’s Kingdom would do on an even grander scale in the future. Notice some of the miracles he performed.

- He calmed a stormy sea and quieted strong winds.—MARK 4:39-41.

- He healed sick people, including the blind, the deaf, and the lame.—LUKE 7:21, 22.

- He caused food to be multiplied, thus feeding hungry crowds.—MATTHEW 14:17-21; 15:34-38.

- On at least three occasions, he restored life to the dead.—LUKE 7:11-15; 8:41-55; JOHN 11:38-44.

Imagine what life on earth would be like under the rule of such a powerful King!

* To learn more about God’s Kingdom and how we know that it will soon come, see chapter 8, “What Is God’s Kingdom?,” and chapter 9, “Are We Living in ‘the Last Days’?,” of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

■ **Revealing the personality of Jehovah God**

When it comes to teaching others about Jehovah, no one is more qualified than God's own Son, the one who became known as Jesus Christ. As "the firstborn of all creation," Jesus lived alongside Jehovah in heaven longer than any other spirit creature. (Colossians 1:15) Think about the opportunities he had to absorb his Father's thinking and learn His will, standards, and ways.

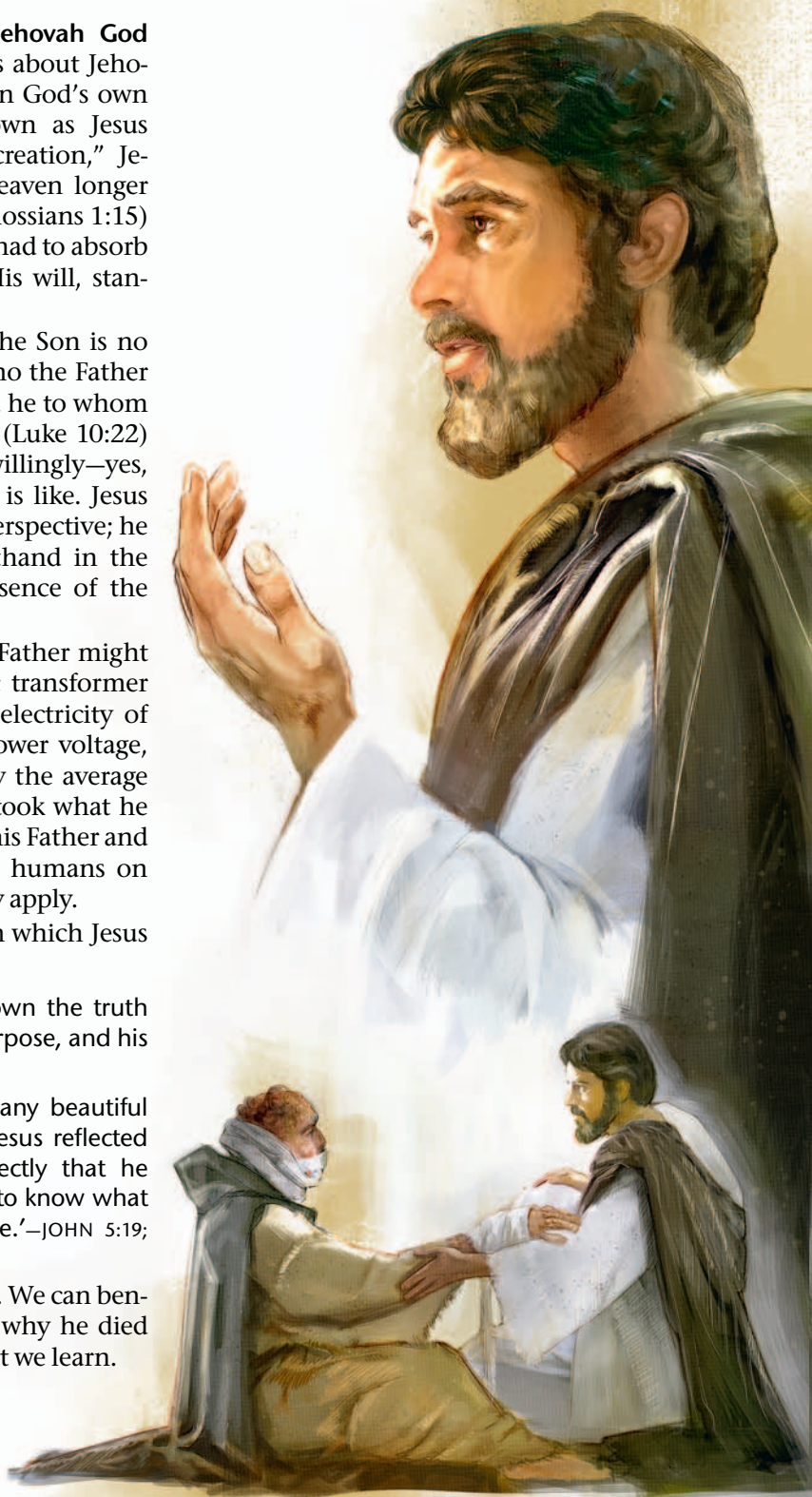
Jesus could rightly say: "Who the Son is no one knows but the Father; and who the Father is, no one knows but the Son, and he to whom the Son is willing to reveal him." (Luke 10:22) When on earth as a man, Jesus willingly—yes, eagerly—revealed what his Father is like. Jesus spoke and taught from a unique perspective; he drew on memories acquired firsthand in the spirit realm and in the lofty presence of the Most High God.—John 8:28.

What Jesus did in revealing his Father might be illustrated by what an electric transformer does. Such a device can take in electricity of high voltage and change it into lower voltage, thus making it suitable for use by the average consumer. When on earth, Jesus took what he had learned in the heavens about his Father and transmitted it in ways that lowly humans on earth could readily grasp and easily apply.

Consider two important ways in which Jesus revealed his Father.

- In his teaching, Jesus made known the truth about Jehovah—His name, his purpose, and his ways.—JOHN 3:16; 17:6, 26.
- By his actions, Jesus revealed many beautiful facets of Jehovah's personality. Jesus reflected his Father's personality so perfectly that he could, in effect, say: 'If you want to know what my Father is like, just look at me.'—JOHN 5:19; 14:9.

We marvel at the way Jesus lived. We can benefit immeasurably if we examine why he died and if we act in harmony with what we learn.



JESUS | Why He Died

“The Son of man came . . . to give his soul [or, life] a ransom in exchange for many.”—MARK 10:45.

JESUS knew what to expect. He understood that he would not live his life in peace. On the contrary, he was aware that his life would be tragically cut short while he was still in his 30's, and he was fully prepared to face his death.

The Bible attaches great importance to the death of Jesus. One reference work says that the death of Jesus is mentioned directly some 175 times in the Christian Greek Scriptures, or New Testament. Why, though, did Jesus have to suffer and then die? We need to know, for the death of Jesus can have a profound effect on our life.

■ **What Jesus expected** During the last year of his life, Jesus several times warned his disciples about the suffering and death that awaited him. On the way to Jerusalem to observe his final Passover, he told his 12 apostles: “The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and will deliver him to men of the nations, and they will make fun of him and will spit upon him and scourge him and kill him.”* (Mark 10:33, 34) Why was he so certain about what would happen to him?

Jesus was familiar with the many prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures that foretold how his life would end. (Luke 18:31-33) Consider some of the prophecies along with the

Scriptural references that explain how they were fulfilled.

The Messiah would be . . .

- Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.—ZECHARIAH 11: 12; MATTHEW 26:14-16.
- Struck and spit on.—ISAIAH 50:6; MATTHEW 26: 67; 27:26, 30.
- Impaled.—PSALM 22:16, footnote; MARK 15:24, 25.
- Reviled while on the stake.—PSALM 22:7, 8; MATTHEW 27:39-43.
- Executed without having any of his bones broken.—PSALM 34:20; JOHN 19:33, 36.

Jesus fulfilled these and many other prophecies. There is no way that he could have done this on his own. The fulfillment of all these prophecies in Jesus proves that he was, indeed, sent by God.*

Why, though, was it necessary for Jesus to suffer and die?

■ **Jesus died in order to settle vital issues** Jesus was aware of the issues of universal importance that were raised back in the garden of Eden. Influenced by a rebellious spirit creature, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. The couple's rebellion called into question the rightness of God's sovereignty, or way of ruling. Their sin also raised the question of whether any humans would prove faithful to God under test.—Genesis 3:1-6; Job 2:1-5.

* Jesus often referred to himself as “the Son of man.” (Matthew 8:20) This expression shows not only that he was fully human but also that he was the “son of man” referred to in Bible prophecy.—Daniel 7:13, 14.

* For more information about prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus, see the appendix topic “Jesus Christ—The Promised Messiah” of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



Jesus gave the most conclusive answer possible to both issues—Jehovah’s sovereignty and human integrity. By his perfect obedience “as far as death . . . on a torture stake,” Jesus upheld God’s sovereignty. (Philippians 2:8) Jesus also proved that a perfect man could maintain perfect integrity to Jehovah despite the severest of trials.

■ **Jesus died in order to redeem humankind**

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the promised Messiah’s suffering and death would provide atonement for the sins of humans. (Isaiah 53:5, 10) Jesus clearly understood this, and he willingly gave “his soul a ransom in exchange for many.” (Matthew 20:28) His sacrificial death opened the way for imperfect humans to have a good relationship with Jehovah and to be rescued from sin and death. Jesus’ death opens up to us the opportunity to regain what Adam and Eve lost—the prospect of living forever in perfect conditions on earth.*—Revelation 21:3, 4.

■ **What you can do** In this series of articles, we have examined what the Bible says about Jesus—where he came from, how he lived, and why he died. Knowing those truths about Jesus can do more than clear up misconceptions about him. Acting in harmony with them can bring blessings—a better life now and everlasting life in the future. The Bible tells us what we need to do if we are to reap such benefits.

- Learn more about Jesus Christ and his role in Jehovah’s purpose.—JOHN 17:3.
- Exercise faith in Jesus, showing by your way of life that you accept him as your Savior.—JOHN 3:36; ACTS 5:31.

Jehovah’s Witnesses would be pleased to assist you in learning more about Jesus Christ, the “only-begotten Son” of God, through whom we may receive the gift of “everlasting life.”—John 3:16.

* For more information about the sacrificial value of Jesus’ death, see chapter 5, “The Ransom—God’s Greatest Gift,” of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



DID YOU KNOW?

What crimes did Barabbas commit?

■ All four Gospels mention Barabbas, the man whom Roman ruler Pontius Pilate freed in place of Jesus. Barabbas is called “a notorious prisoner” and “a robber.” (Matthew 27:16; John 18:40) He was in Roman custody in Jerusalem “with the seditionists, who in their sedition had committed murder.”—Mark 15:7.

Although no secular evidence of Barabbas’ crimes exists, the fact that he is grouped with the seditionists leads some scholars to associate him with subversive groups active in first-century Israel. Historian Flavius Josephus records that bands of outlaws figured prominently in the social struggles of the day; such criminals claimed to seek

justice for oppressed Jewish peasants. The rebellion against the perceived injustices of the Romans and of the Jewish nobility reached epidemic proportions by the middle of the first century C.E. Bands of outlaws later made up a large part of the Jewish forces that chased the Romans from Judea in 66 C.E.

“Barabbas may have belonged to one of the rural brigands,” says *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. “These brigands were popular with the common people because they preyed upon the wealthy establishment of Israel and created havoc for the Roman government.”



“GIVE US BARABBAS”
BY CHARLES MULLER, 1878

In Roman times, what crimes merited a death like that of Jesus?

■ The means that the Romans used to punish subversives, outlaws, and other rebels was to fasten them to an instrument of torture and leave them there to die. This punishment was considered the worst form of death possible.

“It was public, demeaning, and painful,” says the book *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, “and it was designed to strike fear into the hearts of any who would dare pose a threat to the status quo.” One Roman writer in ancient times noted regarding the execution of criminals: “The most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear.”

According to Josephus, one prisoner of war captured by Titus’ troops during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was executed in this manner before the city walls in an attempt to intimidate the defenders into submission. When the city finally fell, many others met the same death.

The largest mass execution of this type that history records took place at the end of a revolt led by Spartacus (73-71 B.C.E.), when 6,000 slaves and gladiators were executed along the road leading from Capua to Rome.





IMITATE THEIR FAITH

“I Have Believed”

MARTHA could see it in her mind’s eye—her brother’s tomb, a cave sealed with a stone against the entrance. Her grief was a burden as cold and heavy as that rock. She could barely believe that her beloved Lazarus was gone. The four days since he had taken his last breath seemed like one long blur of mourning, visitors, and condolences.

And now, standing before Martha was the man who had meant the most to Lazarus. Seeing Jesus again brought her grief into sharp focus, for he was the one man in all the world who could have saved her brother. Still, Martha found some comfort in being with Jesus here outside the little hillside town of Bethany. In her few moments with him, she again felt warmed by the kindness in his eyes, the keen empathy that was always so encouraging. He asked her questions that helped her to focus on her faith and on her beliefs about the resurrection. The conversation led Martha to make one of the most important statements that would ever pass her lips: “I have believed that you are the Christ the Son of God, the One coming into the world.”—John 11:27.

Martha was a woman of remarkable faith. What little the Bible tells us of her imparts profound lessons that can help us strengthen our own faith. To see how that is so, let us consider the first account about Martha in the Bible.

“Anxious and Disturbed”

It was months earlier. Lazarus was alive and well. His home in Bethany was about to receive the most important of visitors, Jesus Christ. Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were an unusual family—three grown siblings who



Even when grieving, Martha let Jesus guide her to focus on faith-strengthening subjects

evidently shared a home. Some researchers suggest that Martha may have been the oldest of the three, since she seems to have acted as hostess and is mentioned first at times. (John 11:5) There is no way of knowing whether any of the three were ever married.

At any rate, they became close friends of Jesus. During his ministry in Judea, where he met so much opposition and hostility, Jesus made their home his base. No doubt, he greatly appreciated that haven of peace and support.

Martha had much to do with the comfort and hospitality of the home. A busy, industrious soul, she seems often to have been in a flurry of activity. The occasion of Jesus' visit was no exception. She soon planned a special meal with many dishes for her distinguished guest and, perhaps, some of his traveling companions. Back then, hospitality was very important. When a guest arrived, he was welcomed with a kiss, his sandals were removed, his feet were washed, and his head was greased with refreshing perfumed oil. (Luke 7:44-47) As to his accommodations and nourishment, every care was to be taken.

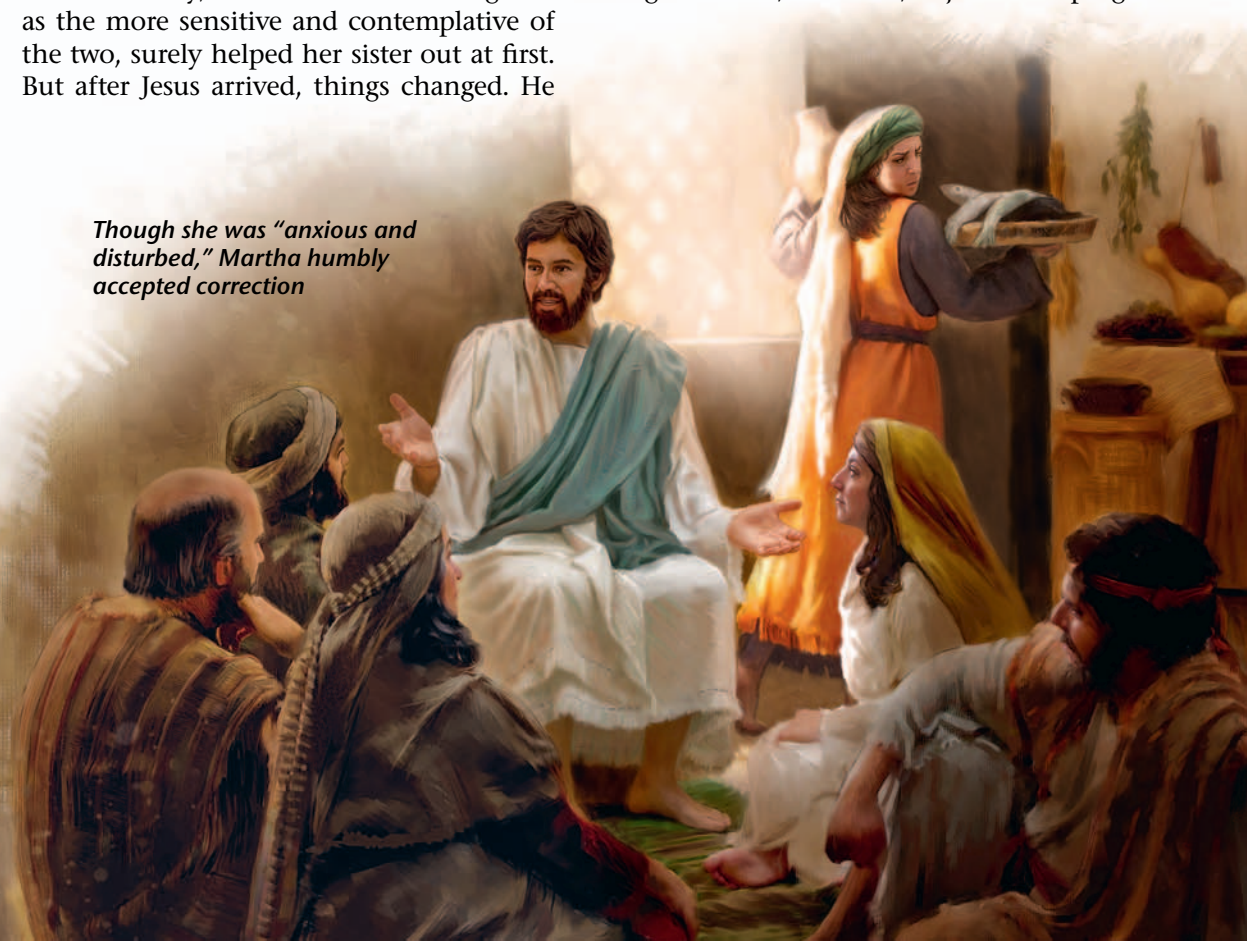
Martha and Mary had their work cut out for them. Mary, who is sometimes thought of as the more sensitive and contemplative of the two, surely helped her sister out at first. But after Jesus arrived, things changed. He

viewed the occasion as a time to teach—and teach he did! Unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus respected women and readily taught them about God's Kingdom, the theme of his ministry. Mary, thrilled at this opportunity, sat at his feet and took in every word.

We can just imagine the tension rising within Martha's heart. With all the dishes she had to prepare and all the duties she had to carry out for her guests, she became more and more anxious and distracted. As she passed to and fro on her busy way and saw her sister sitting there doing nothing to help her, did she color slightly, sigh audibly, or frown? It would not be surprising if she did. She could not do all this work on her own!

Finally, Martha could no longer suppress her frustration. She interrupted Jesus, blurted out: "Lord, does it not matter to you that my sister has left me alone to attend to things? Tell her, therefore, to join in helping

Though she was "anxious and disturbed," Martha humbly accepted correction



me.” (Luke 10:40) These were strong words. A number of translations render her question to this effect: “Lord, do you not care . . . ?” Then she asked Jesus to correct Mary, to order her back to work.

Jesus’ reply may have surprised Martha, as it has many Bible readers since. He gently said: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and disturbed about many things. A few things, though, are needed, or just one. For her part, Mary chose the good portion, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41, 42) What did Jesus mean? Was he calling Martha a materialist? Was he dismissing her hard work in preparing a fine meal?

No. Jesus clearly saw that Martha’s motives were loving and pure. Further, he did not feel that even bounteous hospitality was necessarily wrong. He had willingly attended Matthew’s “big reception feast” for him sometime earlier. (Luke 5:29) Martha’s meal was not the key issue here; rather, it was her priorities. So focused was she on her elaborate meal that she lost sight of what mattered most. What was that?

Jesus, the only-begotten Son of Jehovah God, was in Martha’s home to teach the truth. Nothing, including her lovely meal and preparations, could be more important. Jesus was no doubt saddened that Martha was missing out on a unique opportunity to deepen her faith, but he let her make her own choice. It was quite another thing, though, for Martha to ask Jesus to coerce Mary to miss out as well.

So he gently corrected Martha, repeating her name soothingly to calm her agitated nerves, and he assured her that there was no need to be “anxious and disturbed about many things.” A simple meal of one or two dishes would be sufficient, especially when a spiritual feast was available. By no means, then, would he take away from Mary “the

good portion” she had chosen—that of learning from Jesus!

This little domestic scene is rich in lessons for Christ’s followers today. We must never allow anything to crowd out the filling of our “spiritual need.” (Matthew 5:3) While we want to imitate Martha’s generous, industrious spirit, we never want to become so “anxious and disturbed” about the less essential part of hospitality that we miss out on what matters most. We associate with fellow believers, not primarily for the sake of serving or receiving sumptuous food, but for an interchange of encouragement and the imparting of spiritual gifts. (Romans 1:11, 12) Even the simplest meal may make such an upbuilding occasion possible.

A Beloved Brother Lost—And Restored

Did Martha accept Jesus’ gentle reproof and learn from it? We need not wonder. The apostle John, in introducing a thrilling account about Martha’s brother, reminds us: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” (John 11:5) Months had passed since Jesus’ visit to Bethany described above. Clearly, Martha had not indulged in sulking; she was not nursing a grudge against Jesus for his loving counsel. She had taken it to heart. In this matter too, she set an excellent example of faith for us, for who of us does not need a little correction at times?

When her brother took ill, Martha busied herself with his care. She did everything in her power to soothe his discomfort and help him get better. Nonetheless, Lazarus sank still deeper into his illness. Hour after hour, day after day, his sisters stayed by his side to care for him. How often did Martha gaze into her brother’s haggard face, remembering their many years together and the joys and sorrows they had shared?

When it looked as if Lazarus was beyond their help, Martha and Mary sent a message

to Jesus. He was preaching some two days' journey away. Their message was simple: "Lord, see! the one for whom you have affection is sick." (John 11:1, 3) They knew that Jesus loved their brother, and they had faith that he would do whatever he could to help his friend. Did they cling to the hope that Jesus might arrive before it was too late? If so, their hopes were dashed. Lazarus died.

Together, Martha and Mary mourned their brother, taking care of the preparations for his burial and receiving the many guests from Bethany and its environs. Still no news of Jesus. Martha was surely more and more puzzled as the time passed. Finally, four days after Lazarus' death, Martha heard that Jesus was nearing the town. Ever the woman of action, even in this grim hour, Martha got up and without telling Mary, rushed out to meet Jesus.—John 11:20.

When she caught sight of her Master, she put into words the thought that had been tormenting her and Mary for days: "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." Still, hope and faith were not dead in Martha. She added: "And yet at present I know that as many things as you ask God for, God will give you." Jesus immediately said something to strengthen her hope: "Your brother will rise."—John 11:21-23.

Martha thought that Jesus was talking about the future resurrection, so she replied: "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." (John 11:24) Her faith in that teaching was remarkable. Some Jewish religious leaders, called Sadducees, denied that there would be a resurrection, though it was a clear teaching in the inspired Scriptures. (Daniel 12:13; Mark 12:18) Martha knew, however, that Jesus taught the resurrection hope and had even performed resurrections—although not of anyone who had been dead as long as Lazarus had. She did not know what lay ahead.

Jesus then made an unforgettable statement: "I am the resurrection and the life." Indeed, Jehovah God has given his Son the authority to perform resurrections on a global scale in the future. Jesus asked Martha: "Do you believe this?" Then she gave the answer discussed at the outset of this article. She had faith that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah, that he was the Son of Jehovah God, and that the prophets had foretold that he would come into the world.—John 5:28, 29; 11:25-27.

Do Jehovah God and his Son, Jesus Christ, value faith of that kind? The events that next unfolded before Martha's eyes provide the clearest of answers. She hurried to get her sister. Thereafter, she saw that Jesus was deeply moved as he talked to Mary and the many mourners with her. She saw the tears come to his eyes as he freely showed his deep grief over the pain death causes. She heard Jesus order that the stone be rolled away from her brother's tomb.—John 11:28-39.

Ever practical, Martha objected that the body would smell by now, four days after death. Jesus reminded her: "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" She did believe, and she did see the glory of Jehovah God. Right then and there, he empowered his Son to bring Lazarus back to life! Think of the moments that must have been etched in Martha's memory to the end of her days: Jesus' commanding call, "Lazarus, come on out!"; the faint noise from the cave where Lazarus was entombed as the man rose and, still bound in the bandages used to prepare the body, inched his way to the door of the cave; Jesus' command to "loose him and let him go"; and, to be sure, the ecstatic embrace as Martha and Mary flew into their brother's arms. (John 11:40-44) The burden on Martha's heart was lifted!

*Martha's faith in Jesus
was rewarded when
she saw her brother
resurrected*



This account shows that the resurrection of the dead is not mere wishful thinking; it is a heartwarming Bible teaching and a proven historical reality. Jehovah and his Son love to reward faith, as they did in the case of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They have such rewards in store for you too if you build strong faith like that of Martha.*

“Martha Was Ministering”

The Bible record mentions Martha just one more time. It was the outset of the final week of Jesus' life on earth. Knowing well what hardships lay ahead of him, Jesus again chose that haven at Bethany as his residence. From there he would walk the two miles (3 km) to Jerusalem. Jesus and Lazarus were dining at the home of Simon the leper, and there we find this last glimpse of our subject: “Martha was ministering.”—John 12:2.

How typical of that industrious woman!

* To learn more about the Bible teaching of the resurrection, see chapter 7 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

When we first come upon her in the Bible, she is working; when we leave her, she is still working, doing her best to care for the needs of those around her. Congregations of Christ's followers today are blessed to have women like Martha—stouthearted and generous, always putting their faith into action by giving of themselves. Martha likely kept doing just that. If so, she acted wisely, for she had yet to meet her share of obstacles.

Within days, Martha had to endure the terrible death of her beloved Master, Jesus. Further, the same murderous hypocrites who killed him were determined to kill Lazarus as well, since his resurrection was boosting the faith of so many. (John 12:9-11) And of course, death did eventually sever the loving bonds that joined Martha to her siblings. We do not know how or when that happened, but we may be fairly sure of this: Martha's precious faith helped her endure to the end. That is why Christians today do well to imitate the faith of Martha.



LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

What Is God's Purpose for the Earth?

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

1. What is God's purpose for the earth?

The earth is man's home. After creating angels to live in heaven, God made man to enjoy the earth. (Job 38:4, 7) Thus, Jehovah settled the first man in a delightful paradise called Eden and gave him and his future offspring the prospect of enjoying endless life on earth.—Genesis 2:15-17; read Psalm 115:16.

The garden of Eden covered only a small part of the earth. The first human couple, Adam and Eve, were to have children. As the human family increased in number, they were to cultivate the earth and make it a paradise. (Genesis 1:28) The earth will never be destroyed.—Read Psalm 104:5.

2. Why is the earth not a paradise now?

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, so they were driven out of Eden. Paradise was lost, and no man has succeeded in restoring it. The Bible says: "Earth itself has been given into the hand of the wicked one."—Job 9:24; read Genesis 3:23, 24.

But Jehovah has not forgotten his original purpose for mankind, nor can God ever fail. (Isaiah 45:18) He will restore the human race to the way he meant it to be.—Read Psalm 37:11.



3. How will God restore peace to the earth?

For mankind to enjoy peace, God must first eliminate wicked people. At the battle of Armageddon, God's angels will destroy all who oppose God. Satan will be imprisoned for 1,000 years, but people who love God will survive to enjoy a new system of things on earth.—Read Revelation 16:14, 16; 20:1-3; 21:3, 4.

4. When will suffering end?

During the 1,000 years, Jesus will rule from heaven over the earth and restore it to a paradise. Also, he will cancel the sins of those who love God. Jesus will thus eliminate sickness, aging, and death.—*Read Isaiah 11:9; 25:8; 33:24; 35:1.*

When will God destroy evil on earth? Jesus gave a “sign” to indicate when the end is near. Present world conditions threaten man’s survival and show that we now live in “the conclusion of the system of things.”—*Read Matthew 24:3, 7-14, 21, 22; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.*

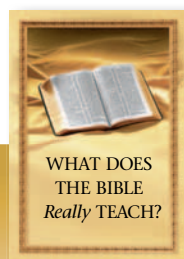


5. Who will live in the future Paradise?

Jesus directed his followers to make disciples and to teach them God’s ways of love. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Worldwide, Jehovah is preparing millions of people for life in a new system of things on earth. (Zephaniah 2:3) At Kingdom Halls of Jehovah’s Witnesses, people learn how to be better husbands and fathers and how to be better wives and mothers. Children and parents learn together about the basis for believing in a better future.—*Read Micah 4:1-4.*

At the Kingdom Hall, you will meet people who love God and who want to learn to please him.—*Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.*

For more information, see chapter 3 of this book,
published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.





THE MOST INFAMOUS TRIAL EVER HELD

FEW if any court cases from antiquity are as well-known. Four separate Bible accounts, called the Gospels, detail the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus Christ. Why should you be interested? Because Jesus told his followers to commemorate his death, which elevates the importance of the trial that led up to it; because we should know whether the charges brought against Jesus were true; and because the sacrifice Jesus made by voluntarily yielding his life is of vital importance for us

and our future.—Luke 22:19; John 6:40.

At the time of Jesus' trial, Palestine was governed by Rome. The Romans allowed the local Jewish hierarchy to administer justice among the Jews according to their own law but apparently did not grant them the legal authority to execute criminals. Jesus was thus arrested by Jewish religious foes but was executed by the Romans. His preaching so embarrassed the religious establishment of the day that its members decided that Je-

sus must die. Yet, they wanted his execution to appear to be legal. An analysis of their efforts to achieve that end moved one law professor to dub the whole affair “the darkest crime known to the history of jurisprudence.”*

One Irregularity After Another

The Law that Moses delivered to Israel has been called “the greatest and most enlightened system of jurisprudence ever promulgated.” By Jesus’ day, however, legalistically minded rabbis had added to it a mass of extra-Biblical rules, many of which were later recorded in the Talmud. (See the box “Jewish Laws in the First Centuries,” on page 20.) How did Jesus’ trial measure up to these Biblical and extra-Biblical criteria?

Did Jesus’ arrest result from concordant testimony before a court by two witnesses regarding a specific crime? For the arrest to be legal, it should have. In first-century Palestine, a Jew who believed that a law had been broken brought his charge to court during regular sessions. Courts could not initiate charges but merely investigated accusations brought before them. The only prosecutors were the witnesses to an alleged crime. Proceedings began when the deposition of at least two witnesses to the same act agreed. Their testimony constituted the charge, which led to an arrest. The evidence of just one witness was not permitted. (Deuteronomy 19:15) In Jesus’ case, however, the Jewish authorities merely sought an “effective way” to get rid of him. He was taken into custody when “a good opportunity” arose—at night and “without a crowd around.”—Luke 22:2, 5, 6, 53.

At the time of Jesus’ arrest, there was no

charge against him. The priests and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, began looking for witnesses only after he was in custody. (Matthew 26:59) They could not find two whose testimony agreed. Yet, the court had no business to be *looking* for witnesses. And “to try a man, especially for his life, without specifying beforehand the crime on which he is to be tried, is justly held to be an outrage,” says lawyer and author A. Taylor Innes.

The mob that detained Jesus took him to the house of former High Priest Annas, who began questioning him. (Luke 22:54; John 18:12, 13) Annas’ actions flouted the rule that capital charges were to be tried by day, not by night. Moreover, any fact-finding should have taken place in open court, not behind closed doors. Aware of the illegality of Annas’ interrogation, Jesus replied: “Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. See! These know what I said.” (John 18:21) Annas should have been examining the witnesses, not the accused. Jesus’ observation might have moved an honest judge to respect proper procedure, but Annas was not interested in justice.

Jesus’ response earned him a slap from an officer—not the only violence he endured that night. (Luke 22:63; John 18:22) The law recorded in the Bible book of Numbers chapter 35, concerning cities of refuge, states that the accused were to be shielded from mistreatment until guilt was established. Jesus should have been afforded such protection.

Jesus’ captors now led him to the home of High Priest Caiaphas, where the illegal nighttime trial continued. (Luke 22:54; John 18:24) There, in defiance of all principles of justice, the priests sought “false witness against Jesus in order to put him to death,” yet no two testimonies agreed as to what Jesus had said. (Matthew 26:59; Mark 14:56-59) So the high priest tried to get Jesus to incriminate

* Reprehensibly, the churches of Christendom have used the Gospel accounts about Jesus’ death to foment anti-Jewish sentiment, but that notion was far from the minds of the Gospel writers, who themselves were Jews.



Jewish Laws in the First Centuries

Jewish oral tradition, put into writing in the early centuries C.E. but believed to be of great antiquity, included the following rules:

- In capital cases, arguments for acquittal were heard first
- The judges were to make every effort to save the accused
- Judges could argue *for* the accused but not *against* him
- Witnesses were warned of the seriousness of their role
- Witnesses were examined separately, not in the presence of any other witness
- Testimony had to agree on all essential points—date, place, time of day of the action, and so on
- Capital charges had to be tried by day and concluded by day
- Capital cases could not be considered on the eve of a Sabbath or a festival
- Capital cases could begin and end on the same day if the verdict was favorable to the accused; if it was unfavorable, the case could be concluded only on the next day, when the verdict would be announced and the sentence executed
- Capital cases were tried by at least 23 judges
- Judges took turns when voting to acquit or to condemn, commencing with the youngest; scribes recorded the words of those who favored acquittal and of those who favored conviction
- Acquittal was decided by a simple majority of one, but conviction only by a majority of two; if the vote was for conviction by a majority of just one, two judges were added as often as necessary until a valid decision was reached
- A verdict of guilty without at least one judge arguing for the accused was invalid; a unanimous verdict of guilty was considered “indicative of a conspiracy”

Illegalities in Jesus’ Trial

- The court heard no arguments or witnesses for acquittal
- None of the judges sought to defend Jesus; they were his enemies
- The priests sought false witnesses to condemn Jesus to death
- The case was heard at night behind closed doors
- The trial began and concluded in one day, the eve of a festival
- There was no indictment, or charge, prior to Jesus’ arrest
- Jesus’ claim to Messiahship, said to be “blasphemy,” was not examined
- The charge was changed when the case came before Pilate
- The accusations were false
- Pilate found Jesus innocent but still had him executed

himself. "Do you say nothing in reply?" he asked. "What is it these are testifying against you?" (Mark 14:60) This tactic was completely out of line. "Putting the question to the accused, and founding a condemnation on his answer, was [a] violation of formal justice," observes Innes, quoted earlier.

That assembly finally seized upon a statement Jesus made. In response to the question: "Are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered: "I am; and you persons will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." The priests construed this as blasphemy, and "they all condemned him to be liable to death."—Mark 14:61-64.*

According to the Mosaic Law, trials were to be held in public. (Deuteronomy 16:18; Ruth 4:1) This, on the other hand, was a secret trial. No one attempted to or was allowed to speak in Jesus' favor. No examination was made of the merits of Jesus' claim to Messiahship. Jesus had no opportunity to summon witnesses for his defense. There was no orderly voting among the judges as to guilt or innocence.

Before Pilate

Because the Jews apparently lacked the authority to execute Jesus, they took him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate's first question was: "What accusation do you bring against this man?" Knowing that their trumped-up charge of blasphemy meant nothing to Pilate, the Jews tried to get him to condemn Jesus without investigation. "If this man were not a wrongdoer, we would not have delivered him up to you," they said. (John 18:29, 30) Pilate rejected this argument, forcing the Jews to make a new accusa-

* Blasphemy consisted of using the divine name impiously or usurping power or authority belonging to God alone. Jesus' accusers produced no evidence that he had done either.




tion: "This man we found subverting our nation and forbidding the paying of taxes to Caesar and saying he himself is Christ a king." (Luke 23:2) So the charge of blasphemy was now slyly switched to that of treason.

The accusation of "forbidding the paying of taxes" was false, and the accusers knew it. Jesus taught just the opposite. (Matthew 22:15-22) As for the charge that Jesus made himself a king, Pilate quickly saw that the man before him presented no threat to Rome. "I find no fault in him," he declared. (John 18:38) Pilate retained that conviction throughout the trial.

Pilate first tried to free Jesus by allowing him to benefit from the customary release of a prisoner at Passover. Yet, Pilate ended up freeing Barabbas, who was guilty of sedition and murder.—Luke 23:18, 19; John 18:39, 40.

The Roman governor's next attempt to free Jesus was a compromise. He had Jesus scourged, dressed in purple, crowned with



Witnesses Answerable for Blood

Jewish courts gave this warning concerning the value of life to the witnesses in capital cases before they gave evidence:

“Perhaps it is your intention to give testimony on the basis of supposition, hearsay, or of what one witness has told another; or you may be thinking, ‘We heard it from a reliable person.’ Or, you may not know that in the end we are going to interrogate you with appropriate tests of interrogation and examination. You should know that the laws governing a trial for property cases are different from the laws governing a trial for capital cases. In the case of a trial for property cases, a person pays money and achieves atonement for himself. In capital cases [the accused’s] blood and the blood of all those who were destined to be born from him [who was wrongfully convicted] are held against him [who testifies falsely] to the end of time.”
—Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 37a.

If the accused was convicted, the witnesses had to act as executioners.—Leviticus 24:14; Deuteronomy 17:6, 7.

thorns, beaten, and mocked. Again he declared Jesus innocent. It is as though Pilate was saying: ‘Isn’t this enough for you priests?’ Perhaps he hoped that the sight of a man ravaged by a Roman scourging would satisfy their lust for vengeance or appeal to their compassion. (Luke 23:22) Yet, it did not.

“Pilate kept on seeking how to release [Jesus]. But the Jews shouted, saying: ‘If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar. Every man making himself a king speaks against Caesar.’” (John 19:12) The Caesar of that time was Tiberius, an emperor with a reputation for executing any whom he considered disloyal—even high-ranking officials. Pilate had already irritated the Jews, so he could not risk any further friction, much less an accusation of disloyalty. The crowd’s words amounted to a veiled threat—black-mail—and Pilate was afraid of it. He bent under pressure and had Jesus, an innocent man, impaled.—John 19:16.

A Review of the Evidence

Many legal commentators have analyzed the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ trial. They have concluded that it was a sham, a travesty of justice. “That such a trial should be begun and finished and sentence formally pronounced, between midnight and morning, was a violence done to the forms and rules of Hebrew law as well as to the principles of justice,” writes one lawyer. A professor of law says: “The whole procedure was permeated with such gross illegality and such flagrant irregularities that the result can be considered nothing short of judicial murder.”

Jesus was innocent. Yet, he knew that his death was necessary for the salvation of obedient mankind. (Matthew 20:28) So great was his love for justice that he submitted to the most blatant injustice ever perpetrated. He did so for sinners like us. This we should *never* forget.



DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

When Old Ones Will Be Young Again

WHO of us welcomes the effects of old age—wrinkled skin, poor eyesight, loss of hearing, and unsteady legs? You may wonder, ‘Why would God create us with the potential to enjoy the vigor of youth only to have us end up dreading the effects of old age?’ The good news is that this is not what God intended for us. Rather, he has lovingly purposed to release us from the aging process! Notice the words spoken to the patriarch Job, found at Job 33:24, 25.

Consider the situation of Job, a loyal man whom Jehovah loved. Unknown to Job, Satan questioned Job’s integrity, saying that he served God only for selfish reasons. Jehovah, with confidence in Job and knowing His own power to undo harm, allowed Satan to test Job. Satan then “struck Job with a malignant boil from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.” (Job 2:7) Job’s flesh became covered with maggots, and his skin formed crusts, blackened, and dropped off. (Job 7:5; 30:17, 30) Can you imagine his agony? Yet, Job remained faithful, saying: “Until I expire I shall not take away my integrity from myself!”—Job 27:5.

Job, however, did make a serious mistake. As he seemingly inched closer to death, he became overly concerned with vindicating himself, “declaring his own soul righteous rather than God.” (Job 32:2) God’s spokesman Elihu reproved Job. But Elihu also conveyed to Job a positive message from God: “Let him [Job] off from going down into the pit [the common grave]! I have found a ransom! Let his flesh become fresher than in youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.” (Job 33:24, 25) Those words must have filled Job with hope. He did not have to continue suffering right down to his death. If Job would repent, God

would be pleased to accept a ransom in his behalf and set him free from his calamities.*

Job humbly accepted correction, and he repented. (Job 42:6) Jehovah evidently accepted a ransom in Job’s behalf, allowing it to cover his error and open the way for God to restore and reward him. Jehovah “blessed the end of Job afterward more than his beginning.” (Job 42:12-17) Imagine Job’s relief when, among other blessings, his loathsome disease cleared up and his flesh, in effect, became “fresher than in youth”!

The ransom that God accepted in Job’s behalf had limited value, for the man remained imperfect and later died. We have a much better ransom available to us. Jehovah lovingly gave his Son, Jesus, as a ransom for us. (Matthew 20:28; John 3:16) All who put faith in that ransom have the prospect of living forever on a paradise earth. In that coming new world, God will release faithful humans from the aging process. Why not learn more about how you may live to see the time when old ones will see their “flesh become fresher than in youth”?

* The word “ransom” used here means “covering.” (Job 33:24; footnote) In Job’s case, the ransom might have been an animal sacrifice, which God would accept to cover, or atone for, Job’s error.—Job 1:5.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR APRIL:

■ **Job 16-37**





TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

Do You Ever Feel Lonely and Afraid?



MANY people today feel lonely; they feel that nobody really cares about them. Older people often feel this way. But lots of children today, even many who serve God, also feel lonely and afraid. ***Do you know why?—****

There can be many reasons. Let's take the example of a man who lived a long time ago—nearly a thousand years before Jesus was born. His name was Elijah. He lived when people in the nation of Israel had left off serving the true God, Jehovah. Most had begun to worship the false god Baal. Elijah said: "I only am left." ***But do you think that Elijah really was the only one still serving Jehovah?—***

Although Elijah did not realize it, others in Israel still worshipped the true God. But they had gone into hiding. They were afraid. ***Do you know why?—***

Ahab, the king of Israel, was not serving Jehovah; he was worshipping Baal, the false god of Ahab's wicked wife, Jezebel. So she and Ahab were trying to find those who served Jehovah and kill them, especially Elijah. That is why Elijah ran away. He went almost 300 miles (483 km), all the way into the desert to Horeb, a place that is also called Sinai in the Bible. There, hundreds of years before Elijah's time, Jehovah had given his people the Ten Commandments and the rest of

* If you are reading with a child, the dash provides a reminder to pause and encourage the child to express himself.

his Law. Elijah hid in a cave in Horeb all by himself. ***Do you think Elijah should have been afraid?***—

The Bible shows that earlier Jehovah used Elijah to perform great miracles. Jehovah once answered Elijah's prayer to send fire from heaven to eat up a sacrifice. In that way, Jehovah proved that He was the true God, not Baal. Now, while Elijah was in the cave, Jehovah spoke to him.

"What is your business here?" Jehovah asked. That is when Elijah said, 'I only am left of those worshipping you.' Jehovah then kindly corrected Elijah, saying, 'I have yet seven thousand who serve me.' Jehovah told Elijah to return, explaining that He had more work for him to do.

What do you think we can learn from Elijah's example?— Even those who serve Jehovah may be afraid sometimes. So *all* of us, young and old alike, need to remember to turn to Jehovah for help. The Bible promises: "Jehovah is near to all those calling upon him."

There is another lesson: We have brothers and sisters everywhere who love Jehovah and love us. The Bible says: "The same things in the way of sufferings are being accomplished in the entire association of [our] brothers in the world." ***Aren't you happy to know that we are never really alone?***—

READ IN YOUR BIBLE

1 Kings 19:3-18

Deuteronomy 5:1-22

Psalms 145:18

1 Peter 5:9



THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

WHAT influenced an antisocial punk rocker to learn to love people and reach out to help others? What motivated a man in Mexico to put away an immoral lifestyle? Why did one of Japan's leading bicycle racers leave racing behind in an effort to serve God? Consider what these people have to say.



"I was a rude, arrogant, aggressive person." —DENNIS O'BEIRNE

YEAR BORN: 1958

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: ENGLAND

HISTORY: ANTISOCIAL PUNK ROCKER

MY PAST: On my father's side, my family is Irish, and I grew up as an Irish Catholic. I usually had to go to church by myself, though, and I did not like going. Still, I had a hunger for spiritual things. I said the Lord's Prayer regularly, and I can remember lying in bed at night thinking about its meaning. I used to break it down into separate parts and try to figure out what each part meant.

In my mid-teens, I was involved with the Rastafarian movement. I also looked into such political causes as the Anti-Nazi League. But I got deeply involved in the rebellious attitude of the punk rock movement. I took drugs, especially marijuana, which I smoked almost every day. Adopting an "I don't care" attitude, I drank heavily, took risks with my own life, and cared little for other people. I was antisocial, hardly speaking to anyone un-

less I deemed the discussion meaningful. I even refused to be photographed. Looking back now, I can see that I was a rude, arrogant, aggressive person. Only if someone was close to me was I kind and generous.

When I was about 20, I got interested in the Bible. A drug-dealing friend had taken up reading the Bible while in prison, and we had a lengthy discussion about re-

ligion, the Church, and Satan's role in the world. I bought a Bible and started studying it on my own. My friend and I would read parts of the Bible, get together to discuss what we had learned, and then draw conclusions. This went on for months.

These are some of the conclusions that we drew from what we read: that we are living in the last days of this world; that Christians should preach the good news of God's Kingdom; that they should be no part of this world, including its politics; and that the Bible offers sound moral guidance. We could clearly see that the Bible is true and that there must be a true religion. But which one? We thought about the mainstream churches with their pomp and ceremony as well as their involvement in politics, and we saw that Jesus was nothing like that. We knew

that God was not using them, so we decided to consider some of the lesser-known religions to see what they had to offer.

We would meet with adherents of such religions and ask them a series of questions. We knew what the Bible said about each question, so we could readily see whether they answered in harmony with God's Word. After such meetings, I would always pray to God, 'If those people represent the true religion, please move me to want to meet with them again.' But after months of such meetings, I still had not found a group that answered our questions from the Bible; nor did I have a desire to meet with any of them again.

Finally, my friend and I came into contact with Jehovah's Witnesses. We asked the same questions as always, but they answered from the Bible. What they said fit perfectly with what we had already learned. So we went on to ask questions for which we had not yet found answers in the Bible—for example, about God's view of smoking and drugs. Again, they were able to answer using God's Word. We agreed to go to a meeting at the Kingdom Hall.

Attending a meeting was hard for me. I was so antisocial that I did not like being approached by all those friendly, well-dressed people. I attributed wrong motives to some, and I did not want to go to any more meetings. But as always, I prayed to God that he would give me a desire to meet with these people again if they represented the true religion, and I felt an overwhelming desire to study the Bible with the Witnesses.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: I knew that I had to stop using drugs, and I was able to quit readily. The real difficulty was cigarettes. I tried several times to stop smoking but failed. When I heard of others who had simply thrown their cigarettes away and nev-

er smoked again, I talked to Jehovah about the matter. Thereafter, with Jehovah's help, I was able to stop smoking. I had learned the value of speaking honestly and openly to Jehovah in prayer.

Another big change I made involved my dress and grooming. At my first meeting at the Kingdom Hall, my hair was spiky with a peacock-blue stripe in it. Later, I dyed it bright orange. I wore jeans and a leather jacket with slogans stenciled on it. I saw no need to change, even though the Witnesses kindly reasoned with me. Finally, though, I thought about 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not be loving either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." I concluded that through my appearance, I was showing love for this world and that in order to show my love for God, I would have to change. This I did.

In time, I realized that it was not just the Witnesses who wanted me to attend Christian meetings. Hebrews 10:24, 25 showed me that it was something that God wanted me to do. After I started going to all the meetings and really getting to know the people, I decided to symbolize my dedication to Jehovah by getting baptized.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I have been deeply moved by the way Jehovah allows us to have an intimate relationship with him. His compassion and care have impelled me to imitate him and to follow his Son, Jesus Christ, as my model in life. (1 Peter 2:21) I have learned that while striving to have a Christian personality, I can still have my own identity. I have worked to cultivate a loving and caring spirit. I try to be Christlike in the way I treat my wife and son. And I care deeply for my brothers and sisters in the truth. Following Christ has brought me dignity, self-respect, and the ability to show love for others.



“They treated me
with dignity.”

—GUADALUPE VILLARREAL

YEAR BORN: 1964

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: MEXICO

HISTORY: IMMORAL LIFESTYLE

MY PAST: I was one of seven children, brought up in Hermosillo, in Sonora, Mexico, an area afflicted with much poverty. My father died when I was a little boy, so my mother had to work to support us. I usually went barefoot because we had no money to buy shoes. While still young, I started working to help with the family’s expenses. Like many families, we lived crowded together.

For most of the day, my mother was not around to protect us children. When I was 6 years old, I fell victim to a 15-year-old who began to abuse me sexually. This abuse continued for a long time. One result was that I became very confused sexually. I thought it was normal to feel attracted to men. When I sought the help of doctors or clergymen, they assured me that I had no problem and that my feelings were normal.

When I was 14, I made the decision to present myself to the world as a homosexual. I stayed that way for the next 11 years, even living with several different men during that time. Eventually, I took a course to become a hair stylist and ran a beauty shop. However, I was unhappy. I led a life of suffering and betrayal. I sensed that what I was doing was not right. I started to ask myself, ‘Are there any good and worthwhile people?’

I thought of my sister. She began studying the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses and eventually got baptized. She would tell me what she was learning, but I paid no attention. Still, I admired her for her life and her marriage. I could see that she and her husband really loved and respected each other. They treated each other with kindness. In time, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses

began to study the Bible with me. At first, I just went along with it—without enthusiasm. Then things changed.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: The Witnesses invited me to one of their meetings, and I went. It was a new experience for me. People in general made fun of me but not the Witnesses. They greeted me kindly, and they treated me with dignity. I was moved.

My good impression of the Witnesses deepened when I attended an assembly. I saw that even in large groups, these people were like my sister—genuine and sincere. I asked myself if this might be the group of good and worthwhile people whom I had long been seeking. Their love and unity amazed me, as did their use of the Bible to answer every question. I realized that it was the Bible that was the force for good in their lives. And I saw, too, that I would have to make many changes to become one of them.

In fact, I had to undergo a complete metamorphosis, for I was living a feminine life. My speech, mannerisms, clothing, hairstyle, and choice of friends all needed changing. My former friends began to mock me, saying: “Why are you doing this? You were fine as you were. Don’t study the Bible. You have everything.” The most difficult things to

change, though, were the practices of my immoral lifestyle.

Still, I knew that great changes were possible, for the Bible's words at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 had reached my heart: "What! Do you not know that unrighteous persons will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be misled. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with men . . . will inherit God's kingdom. And yet that is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean." Jehovah helped people back then to make changes, and he helped me too. It took several years and a good deal of struggling, but the guidance and love of the Witnesses helped me a great deal.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: Today, I lead a normal life. I am married, and my wife and I are teaching our son to live by Bible princi-

ples. My former life is far behind me now, and I enjoy many spiritual benefits and privileges. I serve as an elder in the congregation, and I have been able to help others to learn the truth of God's Word. The changes I made in my life made my mother so happy that she accepted a Bible study and has since become a baptized Christian. A sister of mine who led an immoral life also became one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Even some of the people who knew me in my former life now recognize that I have changed for the better. And I know what has been behind those changes. In the past I sought professional help but received only bad advice. However, Jehovah truly helped me. Although I felt unworthy, he noticed me and treated me with love and patience. The fact that such a wonderful, intelligent, loving God would take notice of me and want me to have a better life made all the difference.



**"I felt dissatisfied,
lonely, and empty."**

—KAZUHIRO KUNIMOCHI

YEAR BORN: 1951

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: JAPAN

HISTORY: COMPETITIVE BICYCLE RACER



MY PAST: I grew up in a sleepy port town in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan, where our family of eight lived in a small house. My father ran a bicycle shop. From the time I was small, he took me to bicy-

cle races and got me interested in the sport. My father then began to plan for me to become a professional racer. When I was still in middle school, he began training me in earnest. In high school I won three successive titles in the yearly national athletic contests. I received an offer to attend a university, but I decided to go directly to a racing school. At the age of 19, I became a professional racer.

By then, it was my goal in life to become the top bicycle racer in Japan. I planned to make a lot of money so that I could give my family a secure and settled life. I threw myself into my

training. Whenever I felt daunted by the rigors of training or a difficult part of a race, I would tell myself over and over that I was born to race bicycles and that I just had to go on somehow! And I did. My hard work started to pay off. In my first year, I won the rookie title. In my second year, I qualified to enter the race that determines Japan's number one racer. Six different times, I came in second in that race.

As I remained in the upper range of prize-winning racers, I became known as the strong legs of Tokai, an area of Japan. I was very competitive. In time, I was feared because I was merciless in the races. My income grew, and I found that I could buy whatever appealed to me. I bought a house with an exercise room equipped with the best machines. I bought a foreign car that cost almost as much as a house. For security I began investing my money in real estate and the stock market.

Still, I felt dissatisfied, lonely, and empty. By that time, I was married and had children, but often I was impatient with my family. I would lose my temper with my wife and children over little things. They began nervously studying my facial expressions to see if I was in another bad mood.

In time, though, my wife began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. That led to many changes. She said she wanted to attend the meetings of the Witnesses, so I decided that we would go as a family. I can still remember the night when an elder called at my home and began to study the Bible with me. What I learned made a deep impression on me.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: I will never forget how reading Ephesians 5:5 affected me. It says: "No fornicator or unclean person or greedy person—which means being an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and of God." I saw that

bicycle racing was tied up with gambling and that the sport promoted a greedy spirit. My conscience became troubled. I felt that if I wanted to please Jehovah God, I would need to quit racing. But it was a hard decision for me.

I had just finished my most satisfying racing year ever, and I yearned for more. I found, though, that studying the Bible put me in a peaceful, calm frame of mind—a far cry from the spirit I needed to win races! I raced only three times after I started studying, but in my heart I had not fully let go of racing. I was also at a loss as to how to support my family. I felt stuck, moving neither forward nor backward, and my relatives began giving me a very hard time about my new faith. My father was bitterly disappointed. Torn, I became ever more stressed and developed an ulcer.

What helped me through that difficult time was that I kept studying the Bible and going to the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Gradually, my faith grew stronger. I asked Jehovah to hear my prayers and to help me see that he does. My stress eased further when my wife assured me that she didn't have to live in a big house in order to be happy. Slowly, I made progress.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I learned that Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 6:33 are really true. He said: "Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you." We have never lacked the "other things" that Jesus referred to, the basic necessities of life. Although my income is about a 30th of what I made as a racer, I have lacked nothing for me and my family these past 20 years.

Better still, when I work or worship with my fellow believers, I find joy and satisfaction that I never knew before. The days simply fly by. My family life has improved greatly as well. My three sons and their wives have all become faithful servants of Jehovah.



OUR READERS ASK . . .

Is Gehenna a place of fiery torment?

■ In the Gospel accounts, Jesus warns his disciples against suffering the judgment of Gehenna. Obviously, Jesus intended that the warning be taken seriously. However, was he referring to a burning hell of everlasting torment?—Matthew 5:22.

First, let us look at the word itself. The Greek word *Ge'en-na* corresponds to the Hebrew *geh Hin-nom'*, meaning "valley of Hinnom," or more fully *geh veneh-Hin-nom'*, "valley of the sons of Hinnom." (Joshua 15:8; 2 Kings 23:10) This geographic site, known today as Wadi er-Rababi, is a deep and narrow valley located to the south and southwest of Jerusalem.

In the times of the kings of Judah, from the eighth century B.C.E., this location was used for pagan rites, including the sacrificial burning of children in fire. (2 Chronicles 28:1-3; 33:1-6) The prophet Jeremiah foretold that the same valley would become the place of slaughter for Judeans at the hands of the Babylonians in judgment from God for their wickedness.*—Jeremiah 7:30-33; 19:6, 7.

* Commenting on this prophecy, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says: "In the destruction of Jerusalem so many of its inhabitants would be killed that their corpses would be cast, unburied, into the valley to rot or be burned."

According to the Jewish scholar David Kimhi (c. 1160-c. 1235 C.E.), the valley was later transformed into a garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. The place served as an incinerator where fires were kept burning to dispose of rubbish. Anything thrown into this dump would be completely destroyed, turned into ashes.

Many Bible translators have taken the liberty of rendering *Ge'en-na* "hell." (Matthew 5:22, *King James Version*) Why? Because they associated the pagan-inspired notion of an afterlife of fiery judgment for the wicked with the physical fire in the valley outside Jerusalem. Jesus, however, never associated Gehenna with torment.

Jesus knew that the very thought of burning people alive is repugnant to his heavenly Father, Jehovah. Referring to the use made of Gehenna in the days of the prophet Jeremiah, God said: "They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, in order to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, a thing that I had not commanded and that had not come up into my heart." (Jeremiah 7:31) Moreover, the idea of torment for the dead conflicts with God's loving personality as well as with the Bible's clear teaching that the dead are "conscious of nothing at all."—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.

Jesus used the term "Gehenna" to symbolize the utter destruction resulting from God's adverse judgment. Hence, "Gehenna" has a meaning similar to that of "the lake of fire," mentioned in the book of Revelation. Both symbolize eternal destruction from which no resurrection is possible.—Luke 12:4, 5; Revelation 20:14, 15.



SPECIAL PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Where Can We Find Help to Cope With Today's Problems?

There is no shortage of advice in today's world. Books and TV programs dealing with self-help appeal to the masses. Yet, basic problems persist. You may wonder, 'Is there a source of guidance that I can really trust?' The answer is *yes!*

The Bible, although thousands of years old, contains timeless principles that can answer such questions as these:

- How can I resolve conflicts and enjoy better relationships with others?
- How can I find happiness?
- How can I deal with economic problems?
- How can I relieve anxiety?

The answers to these questions will be discussed in the public discourse **"Bible Principles—Can They Help Us to Cope With Today's Problems?"** This Bible-based talk will be given worldwide in over 230 lands. In most places, it will be delivered at the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses on **Sunday, May 1, 2011.**

The Witnesses in your area will be glad to provide you with the time and address. You are warmly invited to attend.

Would you welcome a visit?