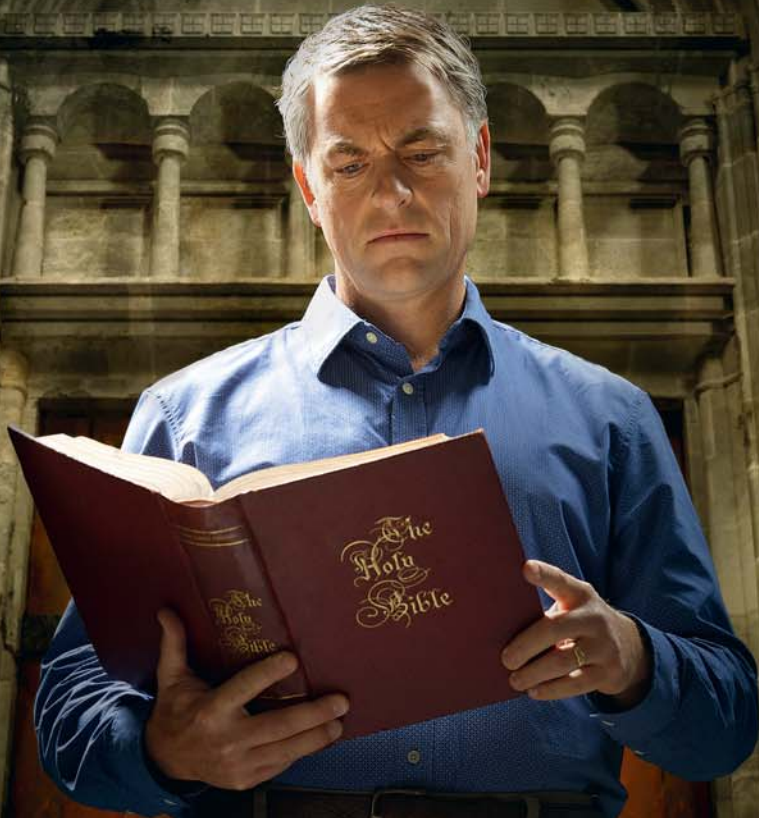


OCTOBER 1, 2011

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**FIVE LIES
ABOUT GOD
EXPOSED!**

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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HAVE YOU BEEN Lied To?

FEW experiences hurt more than learning that someone you trust has lied to you. You might feel humiliated, angry, or even betrayed. Lies destroy friendships and marriages; they defraud people of countless millions of dollars.

Imagine, then, how you would feel if you learned that you had been lied to about God. If you are devout, the effect could be profound, as it was for these churchgoers:

- “I felt that the church had betrayed me.”
—DEANNE.
- “I was angry. I felt that I had been tricked —that my hopes and goals turned out to be futile.”—LUIS.

You might hesitate even to consider the possibility that you have been lied to about God. What you know may have come from someone whom you trust and who would never intentionally hurt you—your parents, a priest, a pastor, or a close friend. You may have believed a certain teaching all your life. But would you not agree that even a widely held idea can be false? Former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized this fact, for he said: “Repetition does not transform a lie into a truth.”

How can you determine whether you have been lied to? Jesus once said to God in prayer: “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) Yes, God’s Word, the Bible, contains what we need in order to distinguish the truth from lies.

Why not let the Bible expose five common lies about God? You will see how the truth can change your life for the better.

① God Is a Mystery

IS IT TRUE?

What you may have heard: “God works in mysterious ways.”

“The Father Incomprehensible, the Son Incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost Incomprehensible.”—The Athanasian Creed, describing the Trinity taught by many churches of Christendom.

What the Bible teaches: Jesus said that those “taking in knowledge of . . . the only true God” would receive blessings. (John 17:3) But how can we take in knowledge of God if he is a mystery? Far from concealing himself, he wants everyone to know him.—Jeremiah 31:34.

Of course, we will never know everything about God. This is to be expected because his thoughts and ways are higher than ours.—Ecclesiastes 3:11; Isaiah 55:8, 9.

How knowing the truth helps you: If God is an incomprehensible mystery, then why even try to get to know him? Yet, he enables us not only to comprehend him but also to develop a close friendship with him. God described the faithful man Abraham as “my friend,” and King David of Israel wrote: “The intimacy with Jehovah belongs to those fearful of him.”—Isaiah 41:8; Psalm 25:14.

Does the idea of having an intimate friendship with God seem farfetched? Perhaps so, but note what Acts 17:27 says: “[God] is not

If God is a mysterious Trinity, how can we really get to know him?



far off from each one of us.” In what way? Through the Bible, God provides what we need in order to know him well.*

He tells us his name, Jehovah. (Isaiah 42:8) He has recorded his deeds toward mankind so that we can know the Person behind the name. More than that, God reveals his emotions to us. He is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6) Our actions can affect his feelings. For example, the ancient nation of Israel made him “feel hurt” when they rebelled against him, while those who wisely obey him bring him joy.—Psalm 78:40; Proverbs 27:11.

* For more information about what the Bible says about God, see chapter 1 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Trinity c.1500, Flemish School, (16th century) / H. Shickman Gallery, New York, USA / The Bridgeman Art Library International

THE WATCHTOWER
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH’S KINGDOM

Would you welcome more information or a free home Bible study? Please send your request to Jehovah’s Witnesses, using one of these addresses. For a complete list of addresses, see www.watchtower.org/address.

America, United States of: 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. **Australia:** PO Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. **Britain:** The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. **Canada:** PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. **Germany:** 65617 Selters. **Guam:** 143 Jehovah St, Barrigada, GU 96913. **Jamaica:** PO Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. **Japan:** 4-7-1 Nakashinden, Ebina City, Kanagawa-Pref, 243-0496. **Puerto Rico:** PO Box 3980, Guaynabo, PR 00970. **South Africa:** Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. **Trinidad and Tobago:** Lower Rapsey Street & Laxmi Lane, Curepe.

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② God Does Not Really Care

IS IT TRUE?

What you may have heard: “If God truly cared about mankind, then he would remove evil and suffering from the world. And even if he is concerned about people in general, he doesn’t care about what happens to *me*.”

What the Bible teaches: Jehovah God does not cause evil. (James 1:13) While he could remove evil at any time, he allows corrupt society to exist for now in order to settle moral issues that were raised at the start of human history. He will ultimately act in behalf of humankind and undo all the trouble caused by those who reject his rulership.—Genesis 3: 1-6; Isaiah 65:17.*

Besides his overall concern for the human family, God demonstrates an intense interest

* For more information about why God permits suffering, see chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



If God does not care, why does he invite us to pray to him?

in us as individuals. Matthew 10:29-31 shows that he observes details about us that even we do not know: “Do not two sparrows sell for a coin of small value? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore have no fear: you are worth more than many sparrows.”

How knowing the truth helps you: We usually avoid people who are harsh or uncaring. Not surprisingly, the lie that God is uncaring causes many people either to avoid getting to know him altogether or to approach him only when they feel that they have no choice. Knowing that Jehovah God really cares could lead you to want to learn more about him and build a friendship with him.

For example, you might have prayed to God but wondered whether he was listening or if he would answer you. The Bible assures us that the “Hearer of prayer” keeps this line of communication open at all times for all who approach him sincerely.—Psalm 65:2.

God invites you to “throw all your anxiety upon him, *because he cares for you*.” (1 Peter 5:7) We can rely on his concern even in times of great distress, for his Word says: “Jehovah is near to those that are broken at heart; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.” —Psalm 34:18.

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⁺ CD also available.

◊ MP3 CD-ROM also available.

◊ Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

③ God Is Vengeful

IS IT TRUE?

What you may have heard: “God keeps track of every sin and pays people back with eternal punishment in hellfire.”

“God punishes sinners with natural disasters.”

What the Bible teaches: Second Peter 3:9 says that Jehovah “does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance.” Rather than focusing on our mistakes, he focuses on our good points. God’s “eyes are roving about through all the earth to show his strength in behalf of those whose heart is complete toward him.”—2 Chronicles 16:9.

Hellfire is not a Bible teaching—the very idea of eternal torment is repugnant to God. His maximum punishment for the wicked is to revoke the gift of life. (Jeremiah 7:31; Romans 6:7) And natural disasters, which destroy indiscriminately, are not acts of God but, rather, unforeseen occurrences that can affect anyone.—Ecclesiastes 9:11.

How knowing the truth helps you: We can draw closer to God when we recognize that he is “ready to forgive” and not quick to condemn. (Psalm 86:5) We need not serve God out of feelings of guilt or a morbid dread of punishment. Instead, we can build our faith with the best motive—love of Jehovah. Such love serves as an uplifting force that moves us to do our best to please him.—Matthew 22:36-38; 1 John 5:3.

While God wants everyone to turn to doing good, he knows that many will never do so. If he never acted against those determined to do bad things, then he would be no different from a ruler who makes laws

without enforcing them, allowing injustice and suffering to flourish indefinitely. (Ecclesiastes 8:11) Our knowing that God will not tolerate wickedness forever gives us a sound hope for the future. God has promised to remove those who persist in evil deeds, so that “the meek ones” can enjoy eternal life on earth as he originally intended.—Psalm 37:10, 11, 29.*

* To learn more about how God will make the earth a paradise, see chapters 3 and 8 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



Would God want us to worship him because we fear punishment?

Engravings by Doré

4 God Is Unfair

IS IT TRUE?

What you may have heard: “God is in charge of this world, and everything that happens is by his will. Since the world is full of discrimination, injustice, and oppression, God must be responsible.”

What the Bible teaches: God is not the source of the world’s injustice. Describing Jehovah, the Bible says: “Perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice.”—Deuteronomy 32:4.

God is generous toward all, including those apparently undeserving. For example, “he makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45) He treats people of all races and cultures justly, as Acts 10:34, 35 shows: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”

What, then, is the source of injustice? Many people choose to act unfairly, not following God’s example of justice. (Deuteronomy 32:5) Also, the Bible shows that God is allowing his enemy, the Devil, to exercise authority over the world.* (1 John 5:19) However, God’s permission of this unjust rule

* To learn how the Devil came into existence, see chapter 3 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

will soon end. He has already set in place his means to “break up the works of the Devil.” —1 John 3:8.

How knowing the truth helps you: You might be perplexed by the seemingly endless reports of corruption, oppression, and injustice. Knowing the cause of the trouble helps you understand why conditions are so bad and why man’s best efforts to make the world a better place consistently fail. (Psalm 146:3) Rather than devoting time and energy to making changes that would be temporary at best, you can have a sound hope for the future based on trust in God’s promises. —Revelation 21:3, 4.

Understanding the real source of injustice can especially help us when hardship hits close to home. When we are treated unfairly, we may cry out as did God’s servant Habakkuk: “Law grows numb, and justice never goes forth.” (Habakkuk 1:4) God did not chastise Habakkuk for saying this. Instead, God reassured His servant that He had set a time for correcting matters and helped Habakkuk to find joy in the face of trouble. (Habakkuk 2:2-4; 3:17, 18) Similarly, trusting in God’s promise to correct injustice can help you gain serenity and peace of mind in an unfair world.



Is God really responsible for suffering and injustice?

⑤ God Accepts All Sincere Worship IS IT TRUE?

What you may have heard: “Just as many paths and roads lead to the same destination, there are also many paths that lead to God. Each person must find his own way to God.”

What the Bible teaches: We must be sincere in our worship, avoiding pretense and hypocrisy. Jesus told the religious leaders of his day why God had rejected them: “Isaiah aptly prophesied about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far removed from me.’” (Mark 7:6) Yet, sincerity alone does not guarantee that God will accept our worship.

Jesus made this clear by exposing the key flaw in the worship offered by those religious leaders and their followers. He applied to them God’s words: “It is in vain that they keep worshiping me, because they teach as doctrines commands of men.” (Mark 7:7) Their worship was “in vain,” or useless, because they put their religious tradition ahead of God’s requirements.

Instead of supporting the idea that there are many acceptable ways to approach God, the Bible teaches that there is only one. Matthew 7:13, 14 says: “Go in through the narrow gate; because broad and spacious is the road leading off into destruction, and many are the ones going in through it; whereas narrow is the gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are the ones finding it.”

How knowing the truth helps you: Imagine how you would feel if you had trained for months to run a marathon and you had finished the race in first place, but then you were disqualified for unknowingly violating



Do all religions teach people to worship God as *he* approves?

one of the rules. You could feel that all your effort was wasted. Could something like this happen with our worship of God?

Comparing our worship to an athletic competition, the apostle Paul wrote: “If anyone contends even in the games, he is not crowned unless he has contended according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:5) We gain God’s favor by worshipping him “according to the rules,” that is, in the way that *he* approves. We cannot choose our own path to God any more than a runner can run wherever he wants to and still expect to be declared the winner of the race.

To please God, we must keep our worship free of lies about him. Jesus said: “The true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth.” (John 4:23) We learn the true path to God from his Word, the Bible.—John 17:17.*

* For more information on the worship that God approves, see chapter 15 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

The Truth **CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

YOU may have heard or been taught one of the lies about God that this series of articles has exposed. Still, you might hesitate to change your beliefs, especially if you have held them for a long time.

Such hesitancy is understandable. Some churches discourage the idea of comparing their teachings with what the Bible says. Others try to defend falsehood by saying that the Bible is complicated, not meant to be understood by everyone. Yet, most of Jesus' disciples were ordinary people, without higher education, and they readily grasped what he taught.—Acts 4:13.

You could also hold back from scrutinizing your beliefs out of fear that doing so would display a lack of faith. But does it make sense that God would be displeased with you for looking into the Bible, his message to mankind, to understand what he asks of you? On the contrary, his Word encourages you to examine the Scriptures personally, saying: "Prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."—Romans 12:2.

Learning the truth about God is more

than an intellectual exercise—it can change your life for the better. (John 8:32) Deanne, mentioned in the opening article, has now built her faith on God's Word. She relates: "I never realized that the Scriptures were so clear until I began studying the Bible. Now I know Jehovah, not just as an impersonal God, but as my loving heavenly Father. I've found a real purpose in life."

Maybe you studied the Bible before without feeling that you benefited. If so, do not give up. Trying to understand the Bible when you have been taught lies about God is like trying to assemble a puzzle using the wrong picture as a reference. You might put a few pieces together correctly but then give up in frustration when these do not match the overall picture you were given. Start with the right picture, though, and the pieces will fall into place.

Would you like to learn the truth about God? We invite you to contact Jehovah's Witnesses in your community or write to the appropriate address on page 4 of this magazine for a free home Bible study.



"Prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."
—ROMANS 12:2



DID YOU KNOW?

Why were there money changers in Jerusalem's temple?



■ Shortly before his death, Jesus addressed a gross injustice taking place in the temple. The Bible reports: "Jesus . . . threw out all those selling and buying in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. And he said to them: 'It is written, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a cave of robbers.'"—Matthew 21:12, 13.

First-century Jews and Jewish proselytes traveled from many lands and cities to the temple in Jerusalem, bringing with them coins from their local area. Yet, they were required to use acceptable currency to pay the annual

temple tax, to buy sacrificial animals, and to make other voluntary offerings. Thus, money changers would, for a fee, convert coins of different origins and denominations into the required currency. As Jewish festivals approached, these money changers would set up stalls in the temple's Court of the Gentiles.

Jesus' criticism that the money changers were turning the temple into "a cave of robbers" evidently indicates that the charges for their services were exorbitant.

Why were olive trees particularly appreciated in Bible times?



■ Olive trees and vineyards were among the blessings that God promised his people for their faithfulness to him. (Deuteronomy 6:10, 11) To this day, the olive tree is highly esteemed in areas in which it grows. It can produce abundant fruit for hundreds of years with relatively little care. A cultivated tree can flourish even in rocky soil and can endure frequent droughts. If the tree is felled, the rootstock produces several shoots that can develop into new trunks.

In Bible times, the bark and leaves of the tree were valued for their fever-reducing properties. The gum resin that seeps from old branches and has a vanilla scent was used to make per-

fume. Primarily, however, the tree was prized as a source of food—its berries and especially its oil. The pulp of a ripe olive is about half oil.

One good tree could yield as much as 15 gallons (57 L) of oil a year. Olive oil was also used as lamp fuel, for ceremonial and religious purposes, as a cosmetic for the body and hair, and as a medicine to soften wounds and soothe bruises.—Exodus 27:20; Leviticus 2:1-7; 8:1-12; Ruth 3:3; Luke 10:33, 34.

OUR READERS ASK . . .

Should infants be baptized?

■ “I was afraid that my little brother, John, was doomed to Limbo,” relates Victoria. Why did she have that fear? “John died before he was baptized,” she explains, “and a Catholic priest said that for this reason, John would remain in Limbo forever.” Such a notion is certainly frightening, but is it Scriptural? Does the Bible teach that children who die without being baptized are forever doomed?

The Bible does teach that Christians should be baptized. Jesus instructed his followers: “Make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19, 20) Note that those who are baptized must be disciples of Jesus. That is, they are individuals who have learned about Jesus and have chosen to follow him—a choice that no infant, of course, can make.

Even so, many insist that Jesus’ command applies to small children. “Everyone is to be baptized, including infants,” asserts Lutheran pastor Richard P. Bucher. He adds: “To keep them from baptism is to keep them from forgiveness and to endanger them with damnation.” In fact, though, such comments contradict Jesus’ teachings in at least three ways.

First, Jesus did not teach that infants should be baptized. Why is that fact significant? Consider: Jesus earnestly taught his disciples about God’s requirements. At times, he repeated key teachings. Why? To ensure that his disciples grasped the point. (Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Mark 9:34-37; 10:35-45) Yet, not even once did he teach that infants should be baptized. Did Jesus somehow forget to mention the requirement? Impossible! Surely, if infants must be baptized, Jesus would have said so.



Second, Jesus never taught that *anyone* suffers after death. He believed the Scriptures, which clearly state: “The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:5) Jesus knew that the dead do not languish in purgatory, Limbo, hellfire, or any other location. Rather, he taught that they are unconscious, as if asleep.—John 11:1-14.

Third, Jesus taught that “all those in the memorial tombs” will come back to life. (John 5:28, 29) Undoubtedly, these will include many millions who were never baptized. Upon being resurrected, they will have the opportunity to learn God’s requirements and live forever in Paradise on earth.*—Psalm 37:29.

Clearly, then, the Bible does not teach that infants should be baptized.

* To learn more about the earthly Paradise and the hope of a resurrection, see chapters 3 and 7 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

WHAT moved a young woman to return to the religious upbringing from which she had strayed? Read what she has to say.



“I now have a real purpose in life.”

—LISA ANDRÉ

YEAR BORN: 1986

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: LUXEMBOURG

HISTORY: PRODIGAL CHILD

MY PAST: I grew up in Bertrange, a clean, safe, and prosperous little town near the city of Luxembourg. I am the youngest of five children. My parents are Jehovah’s Witnesses, and they worked hard to instill Christian values in my brothers and sisters and in me.

When I entered my early teenage years, I began to have serious doubts about what Jehovah’s Witnesses teach. At first, I ignored these doubts, but gradually my faith became weaker and weaker. My parents did everything they could to guide me in the right direction, but I rejected their help. Without their knowledge, I spent time with young people who had little respect for authority. I wanted the freedom that their lifestyle seemed to offer. We partied a lot, slept around, and abused drugs and alcohol. I was



initially glad to be with people who seemed to enjoy life to the full.

In reality, though, I was not truly happy. Life with those associates was so trivial; no one gave much thought to anything. By contrast, I was bothered by such issues as the widespread injustice in the world. As time went on, I felt more and more depressed.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED

MY LIFE: One day when I was 17, I was feeling very low. Sensing how unhappy I was, my mother asked me to give the Bible another chance.

She encouraged me to examine its teachings and then decide for myself whether I wanted to live in harmony with them or not. That heart-to-heart conversation was a real turning point for me. I agreed to study the Bible with my older sister Caroline and her husband, Akif. He had not been raised as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses but had become one as an adult. Because of Akif’s past, I felt that I could speak openly with him, which was important to me.

“We partied a lot, slept around, and abused drugs and alcohol”



“I am aware of my past mistakes, but I try not to dwell on them”

I knew that my lifestyle was not suitable for a Witness, but initially, I felt that what I did with my life was a personal matter. From studying the Bible, however, I realized that my conduct affects Jehovah’s feelings. (Psalm 78:40, 41; Proverbs 27:11) I also came to understand that it affects other people too.

As I examined the Bible further, I found that there are logical and convincing reasons to believe that it is the Word of God. For example, I learned of numerous Bible prophecies that have come true—with an amazing degree of accuracy. Such knowledge helped me to resolve my earlier doubts.

About a year after I started studying the Bible, my parents and I visited my older brother who was a volunteer at the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany. When I saw how happy my brother was, I felt deeply moved. That happiness was exactly what I had been looking for! I was also impressed by the other Witnesses who volunteered there. They were far different from the dishonest, thrill-seeking people with whom I had been associating. Shortly thereafter, I offered a heartfelt prayer to Jehovah, promising to serve him for the rest of my life. At the age of 19, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah by getting baptized.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I now have a real purpose in life. I find joy in teaching the Bible to others, helping them to learn about Jehovah and his promises for the future. My family has also benefited—they no longer worry about me.

I am aware of my past mistakes, but I try not to dwell on them. Instead, I focus on Jehovah’s forgiveness and on his loving interest in me. I wholeheartedly agree with the words of Proverbs 10:22, which says: “The blessing of Jehovah—that is what makes rich, and he adds no pain with it.”

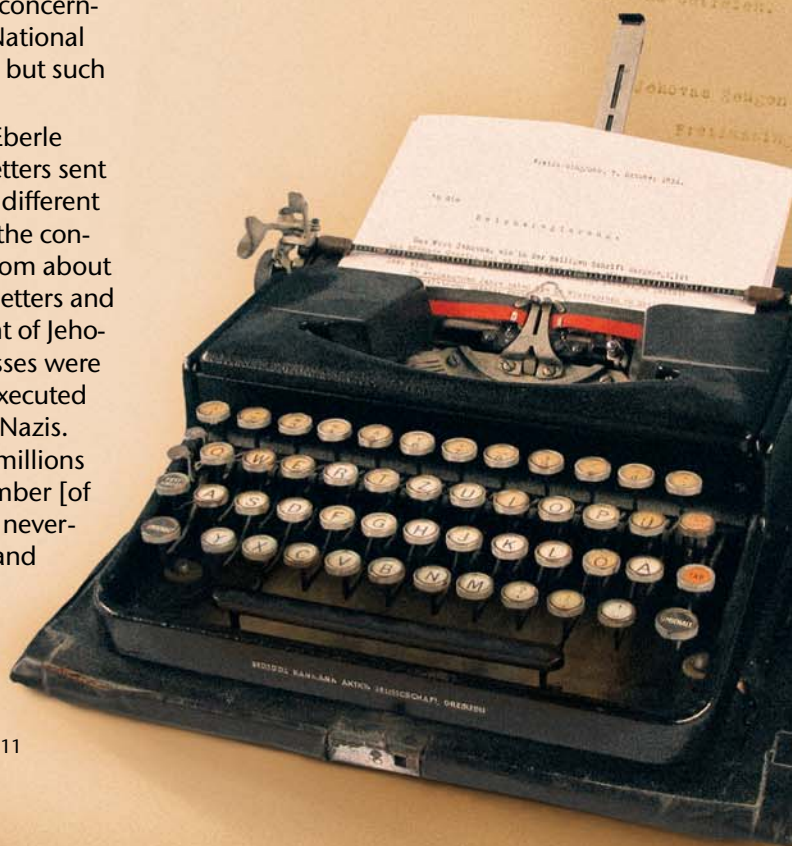


“Defiance That Commands Respect”

DURING his ruinous term as German chancellor, Adolf Hitler received tens of thousands of letters. In 1945, after the Russians occupied the territory surrounding Berlin, many of these letters were taken to Moscow and stored there. Historian Henrik Eberle has examined thousands of such letters in the Moscow archives in order to study who wrote to Hitler and why. Eberle published his conclusions in the book entitled *Briefe an Hitler* (Letters to Hitler).

“Teachers and students, nuns and priests, the unemployed and top businessmen, admirals and ordinary storm troopers—they all wrote to Hitler,” says Dr. Eberle. “Some revered him as the born-again Messiah; others saw in him the very essence of wickedness.” Did Hitler receive letters of protest from church officials concerning the outrages perpetrated by the National Socialists, or Nazis? There were some, but such letters were few and far between.

In the Moscow archives, however, Eberle found a file containing a number of letters sent to Hitler by Jehovah’s Witnesses from different parts of Germany, protesting against the conduct of the Nazis. In fact, Witnesses from about 50 countries sent Hitler some 20,000 letters and telegrams protesting the mistreatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Thousands of Witnesses were arrested, and several hundred were executed or died following ill-treatment by the Nazis. Dr. Eberle concludes: “In view of the millions of victims of the Nazi regime, this number [of Witness victims] appears small. But it nevertheless testifies to an act of collective and uncompromising defiance that commands respect.”





DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

You Can Find “the Very Knowledge of God”

JEHOVAH GOD has put within our reach a priceless treasure, and it is his heart's desire that we find it. This treasure does not bring material wealth, but it will result in something that all the money in the world cannot buy—inner peace, contentment, and a satisfying life. What is this treasure? The words of wise King Solomon recorded at Proverbs 2:1-6 explain.

Solomon identifies this treasure as “the very knowledge of God”—that is, the truth about God and his purposes as revealed in the Bible. (Verse 5) There are several aspects to this treasure.

True teachings. The Bible answers such questions as these: What is God's name? (Psalm 83:18) What happens at death? (Psalm 146:3, 4) Why are we here? (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 115:16) Really, what price would you put on the answers to such important questions?

Wise counsel. The Bible tells us the best way to live. How can you make a marriage last? (Ephesians 5:28, 29, 33) How can you raise responsible children? (Deuteronomy 6:5-7; Ephesians 6:4) How can you find happiness in life? (Matthew 5:3; Luke 11:28) Again, what do you think—how valuable is reliable advice on such matters?

Insight into God's nature and personality. The Bible is the main source of accurate information about God. What is he like? (John 1:18; 4:24) Does he care about us? (1 Peter 5:6, 7) What are some of his outstanding qualities? (Exodus 34:6, 7; 1 John 4:8) How much, would you say, is truthful information about our Creator worth?

“The very knowledge of God” is indeed a spiritual treasure. How can you find it? A clue lies in verse 4 of Proverbs chapter 2, where Solomon compares this knowledge to “hid treasures.” Think about this: A hidden treasure will not jump out of its hiding place and deposit itself into idle hands. We have to put forth effort to find it. So it is with the knowledge of God. This treasure is, in effect, buried in the Bible. To find it, we need to put forth effort.

Solomon explains what we need to do in order to find “the very knowledge of God.” The words “receive my sayings” and “incline your heart” show that we need a receptive heart. (Verses 1, 2) The words “call out,” “keep seeking,” and “keep searching” indicate that we need to expend ourselves, earnestly showing our initiative. (Verses 3, 4) To find the treasure, then, we need to make a diligent study of the Bible, doing so with a sincere heart.—Luke 8:15.

If we show such initiative, Jehovah will do the rest. “Jehovah himself gives wisdom,” says verse 6. Only with God's help can we fully grasp the truths found in the Bible. (John 6:44; Acts 16:14) Of this you can be sure: If you sincerely search into God's Word, you will find “the very knowledge of God”—a treasure that will enrich your life beyond measure.—Proverbs 2:10-21.*

* Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide offer a free home Bible study to those who want to understand the Bible. Why not contact them locally or write to the appropriate address listed on page 4?

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR OCTOBER:
■ Proverbs 1-21



LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

How Can Your Family Be Happy?

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. Why is marriage vital to family happiness?

Jehovah, the happy God, originated marriage. It is vital to family happiness because it provides not only companionship but also a secure environment in which to raise children. How does God view marriage? He wants it to be a permanent, legally registered union between a man and a woman. (Luke 2: 1-5) God wants husbands and wives to be loyal to each other. (Hebrews 13:4) Jehovah allows Christians to divorce and remarry only if their spouse commits adultery.—*Read Matthew 19:3-6, 9.*



2. How should a husband and wife treat each other?

Jehovah created men and women to fill complementary roles in marriage. (Genesis 2:18) As family head, a husband should take the lead in providing materially for his family and in teaching them about God. He should be self-sacrificing in his love for his wife. Husbands and wives should love and respect each other. Since all husbands and wives are imperfect, learning to forgive is a key to happiness in marriage.—*Read Ephesians 4:31, 32; 5:22-25, 33; 1 Peter 3:7.*

3. Should you abandon an unhappy marriage?

If you and your spouse experience difficulties, work at treating each other with love. (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5) God's Word does not recommend separation as a way to resolve

marital problems. In extreme situations, however, a Christian would have to decide whether it is advisable to separate or not.—*Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-13.*

4. Children, what does God want for you?

Jehovah wants you to be happy. He gives you the best advice on how to enjoy your youth. He wants you to benefit from the wisdom and experience of your parents. (Colossians 3:20) Jehovah appreciates anything you do to praise him.—*Read Ecclesiastes 11:9–12:1; Matthew 19:13–15; 21:15, 16.*

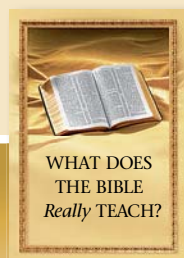


5. Parents, how can your children find happiness?

You should work hard to provide food, housing, and clothing for your children. (1 Timothy 5:8) But in order for your children to find happiness, you also need to teach them to love God and to learn from him. (Ephesians 6:4) Your example in showing love for God can deeply influence your child's heart. When based on God's Word, your instruction can mold your child's thinking in a positive way.—*Read Deuteronomy 6:4–7; Proverbs 22:6.*

Children benefit when you encourage and commend them. They also need correction and discipline. Such training protects them from conduct that could rob them of happiness. (Proverbs 22:15) Yet, discipline should never be harsh or cruel.—*Read Colossians 3:21.*

Jehovah's Witnesses publish several books that are especially written to help parents and children. These books are based on the Bible.—*Read Psalm 19:7, 11.*



For more information, see chapter 14 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



IMITATE THEIR FAITH

She Stood Up for God's People

ESTHER tried to calm her heart as she approached the courtyard in the palace at Shushan. It was not easy. Everything about the castle—its multicolored relief sculptures of winged bulls, archers, and lions of glazed brickwork, its fluted stone columns and imposing statues, even its position atop huge platforms near the snowcapped Zagros Mountains and overlooking the pure waters of the river Choaspes—was designed to remind each visitor of the immense power of the man whom she was going to see, the one who called himself “the great king.” He was also her husband.

Husband! How different Ahasuerus was from the kind of husband any faithful Jewish girl might have expected!*

 He looked to no examples such as Abraham, a man who humbly accepted God's direction to listen to Sarah, his wife. (Genesis 21:12) The king knew little or nothing of Esther's God, Jehovah, or of His Law. Ahasuerus knew Persian law, though, including a law forbidding the very thing that Esther was about to do. What was that? Well, the law said that anyone who appeared before the Persian monarch without first being summoned by the king was liable to death. Esther had not been summoned, but she was going to the king anyway. As she drew near to the inner courtyard, where she would be visible from the king's throne, she may have felt that she was walking to her death.—Esther 4:11; 5:1.

Why did she take such a risk? And what can we learn from the faith of this remarkable woman? First, let us see how Esther got into the unusual position of being a queen in Persia.

* Ahasuerus is widely thought to be Xerxes I, who ruled the Persian Empire early in the fifth century B.C.E.

“Beautiful in Appearance”

Esther was an orphan. We know very little of the parents who named her Hadasah, a Hebrew word for “myrtle,” a lovely white-blossomed shrub. When Esther's parents died, one of her relatives, a kindly man named Mordecai, took pity on the child. He was her cousin, but Mordecai was much older. He brought Esther into his home and treated her as his own daughter.—Esther 2: 5-7, 15.

Mordecai and Esther lived as Jewish exiles in that Persian capital, where they probably had to deal with a measure of disdain over their religion and the Law they tried to follow. But Esther surely drew closer to her cousin as he taught her about Jehovah, the merciful God who had rescued His people from trouble many times in the past—and would do so again. (Leviticus 26:44, 45) Clearly, a loving and loyal bond grew between Esther and Mordecai.

Mordecai evidently worked as some kind of official at the castle at Shushan, regularly sitting within its gate along with other ser-

vants of the king. (Esther 2:19, 21; 3:3) How the young Esther passed her time as she grew up, we can only guess, although it seems safe to say that she took good care of her older cousin and his home, which was likely situated in the humbler quarters across the river from the royal castle. Perhaps she enjoyed going to the market in Shushan, where goldsmiths, silversmiths, and other merchants displayed their wares. Esther could not have imagined that such luxuries would later become commonplace to her; she had no idea of the future in store for her.

A Queen Deposed

One day, Shushan was buzzing with gossip about turmoil in the household of the king. At a grand feast, where Ahasuerus was entertaining his noblemen with sumptuous food

Mordecai had good reason to be proud of his adopted daughter



and wine, the king decided to summon his beautiful queen, Vashti, who was feasting separately with the women. But Vashti refused to come. Humiliated and enraged, the king asked his advisers how Vashti should be punished. The result? She was deposed as queen. The king's servants began searching throughout the land for beautiful young virgins; from among them the king would select a new queen.—Esther 1:1–2:4.

We may imagine Mordecai gazing fondly at Esther from time to time and noting with a mixture of pride and concern that his little cousin was grown-up—and had turned out to be a remarkable beauty. “The young woman was pretty in form and beautiful in appearance,” we read. (Esther 2:7) Physical beauty is delightful, but it needs to be coupled with wisdom and humility. Otherwise, it may breed vanity, pride, and other ugly traits of the heart. (Proverbs 11:22) Have you ever seen that to be true? In Esther's case, what would beauty turn out to be—an asset or a liability? Time would tell.

The king's servants noticed Esther. They gathered her up in their search, taking her away from Mordecai and off to the grand palace across the river. (Esther 2:8) It must have been a difficult parting, for the two were like father and daughter. Mordecai would not have wanted his adopted daughter to marry any unbeliever, even a king, but events were out of his control. How eagerly Esther must have listened to Mordecai's words of advice before she was taken away! As she was led to Shushan the castle, her mind was filled with questions. What kind of life lay ahead of her?

She Won Favor “in the Eyes of Everyone Seeing Her”

Esther found herself ushered into a world that was entirely new and strange to her. She was among “many young women” who had been gathered from far and wide in the



Esther knew that humility and wisdom were far more important than physical appearance

Persian Empire. Their customs, languages, and attitudes must have varied widely. Placed under the charge of an official named Hegai, the young women were to undergo an extensive beauty treatment, a yearlong program that involved massages with fragrant oils. (Esther 2:8, 12) Such an environment and lifestyle might easily have bred an obsession with personal appearance among those young women, along with vanity and competitiveness. How was Esther affected?

No one on earth could have been more concerned about Esther than Mordecai was. We read that day by day, he made his way as near as he could to the house of the women and endeavored to learn of Esther's welfare. (Esther 2:11) As bits of information trickled out to him, perhaps through cooperative servants in the household, he must have beamed with fatherly pride. Why?

Esther so impressed Hegai that he treated her with great loving-kindness, giving her seven servant girls and the best place in the house of the women. The account even says: "All the while Esther was continually gaining

favor in the eyes of everyone seeing her." (Esther 2:9, 15) Would beauty alone have impressed everyone so profoundly? No, there was much more to Esther than that.

For instance, we read: "Esther had not told about her people or about her relatives, for Mordecai himself had laid the command upon her that she should not tell." (Esther 2:10) Mordecai had instructed the girl to be discreet about her Jewish heritage; he no doubt saw that among Persian royalty, there was much prejudice against his people. What a pleasure it was for him to learn that now, even though Esther was out of his sight, she still showed the same wise and obedient spirit!

Young people today may likewise bring joy to the hearts of parents and guardians. When out of their parents' sight—even if surrounded by people who are shallow, immoral, or vicious—they can resist bad influences and stick to the standards that they know are right. When they do so, like Esther, they make the heart of their heavenly Father rejoice.—Proverbs 27:11.

When the time came for Esther to be presented to the king, she was given the liberty to select any items that she thought she might need, perhaps to beautify herself further. Following Hegai's advice, though, she modestly asked for nothing beyond what she was offered. (Esther 2:15) She probably realized that beauty alone would not win the king's heart; a modest and humble spirit would prove a far rarer commodity in that court. Was she right?

The account answers: "The king came to love Esther more than all the other women, so that she gained more favor and loving-kindness before him than all the other virgins. And he proceeded to put the royal head-dress upon her head and make her queen instead of Vashti." (Esther 2:17) It must have been hard for this humble Jewish girl to adjust to the change in her life—she was the new queen, wife to the most powerful monarch on earth at that time! Did her new position go to her head, filling her with pride?

Far from it! Esther remained obedient to her adoptive father, Mordecai. She kept her connection to the Jewish people a secret. Further, when Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate Ahasuerus, Esther obediently passed his warning along to the king, and the plotters were foiled. (Esther 2:20-23) She still expressed faith in her God by showing a humble, obedient spirit. Obedience is rarely valued as a virtue today; disobedience and rebellion are the norm. But people of genuine faith treasure obedience, as Esther did.

Esther's Faith Under Test

A man named Haman rose to prominence in the court of Ahasuerus. The king appointed him prime minister, making Haman his principal adviser and the second in command in the empire. The king even decreed that all who saw this official must bow down to him. (Esther 3:1-4) For Mordecai, that law

posed a problem. He believed in obeying the king but not at the cost of disrespecting God. You see, Haman was "an Agagite." That evidently means that he was a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king who was executed by God's prophet Samuel. (1 Samuel 15:33) So wicked were the Amalekites that they had made themselves enemies of Jehovah and Israel. As a people, the Amalekites stood condemned by God.* (Deuteronomy 25:19) How could a faithful Jew bow down to a royal Amalekite? Mordecai could not. He stood his ground. To this day, men and women of faith have risked their lives to adhere to this principle: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

Haman was enraged. But it was not enough for him to find a way to kill off Mordecai. He wanted to exterminate all of Mordecai's people! Haman spoke to the king, painting a dark portrait of the Jews. Without naming them, he implied that they were inconsequential, a people "scattered and separated among the peoples." Even worse, he said that they did not obey the king's laws; hence, they were dangerous rebels. He proposed to donate to the king's treasury an immense sum of money to cover the expense of slaughtering all the Jews in the empire.[#] Ahasuerus gave Haman the king's own signet ring to seal any order that he had in mind.—Esther 3:5-10.

Soon messengers were speeding on horseback to every corner of the vast empire, delivering a death sentence to the Jewish people. Imagine the impact of such a proclamation when it reached far-off Jerusalem, where a

* Haman may have been among the very last of the Amalekites, since "the remnant" of them were destroyed back in the days of King Hezekiah.—1 Chronicles 4:43.

[#] Haman offered 10,000 silver talents, worth hundreds of millions of dollars today. If Ahasuerus was Xerxes I, the money might have made Haman's offer more appealing. Xerxes lost a fortune in his disastrous war against the Greeks, evidently before his marriage to Esther.



Esther risked her life to protect God's people

remnant of Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon were struggling to rebuild a city that still had no wall to defend it. Perhaps Mordecai thought of them, as well as of his own friends and relatives in Shushan, when he heard the terrible news. Distraught, he ripped his clothes, wore sackcloth and placed ashes on his head, and cried aloud in the middle of the city. Haman, however, sat drinking with the king, unmoved by the grief he had stirred up among the many Jews and their friends in Shushan.—Esther 3:12-4:1.

Mordecai knew that he had to act. But what could he do? Esther heard of his distress and sent clothes to him, but Mordecai refused to take comfort. Maybe he had long wondered why his God, Jehovah, had allowed dear Esther to be taken from him and

made the queen of a pagan ruler. Now the reason seemed to be emerging. Mordecai sent a message to the queen, imploring Esther to intercede with the king, to stand up “for her own people.”—Esther 4:4-8.

Esther’s heart must have sunk when she heard that message. Here was her greatest test of faith. She was afraid, as she freely revealed in her reply to Mordecai. She reminded him of the king’s law. To appear before the king unsummoned meant a death sentence. Only if the king held out his golden scepter was the offender spared. And did Esther have any reason to expect such clemency, especially in view of Vashti’s fate when she refused to appear when bidden to do so? She told Mordecai that the king had not invited her to see him in 30 days! Such neglect left her plenty of reason to wonder if she had fallen out of



the capricious monarch's favor.*—Esther 4: 9-11.

Mordecai replied firmly to bolster Esther's faith. He assured her that if she failed to act, salvation for the Jews would arise from some other source. But how could she expect to be spared once the persecution gathered force? Here Mordecai showed his profound faith in Jehovah, who would never let His people be exterminated and His promis-

* Xerxes I was known for his mercurial, violent temper. The Greek historian Herodotus recorded some examples from Xerxes' war against Greece. The king ordered that a pontoon bridge of ships be built across the strait of Hellespont. When a storm ruined the bridge, Xerxes ordered the engineers beheaded and even had his men "punish" the Hellespont by whipping the water while an insulting proclamation was read aloud. In the same campaign, when a wealthy man begged that his son be excused from joining the army, Xerxes had the son cut in half, his body displayed as a warning.

es go unfulfilled. (Joshua 23:14) Then Mordecai asked Esther: "Who is there knowing whether it is for a time like this that you have attained to royal dignity?" (Esther 4:12-14) Mordecai trusted completely in his God, Jehovah. Do we?—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

A Faith Stronger Than the Fear of Death

For Esther, the decisive moment had arrived. She asked Mordecai to get her countrymen to join her in a three-day fast, concluding her message with a statement that has echoed through the centuries in its simple faith and courage: "In case I must perish, I must perish." (Esther 4:15-17) She must have prayed more fervently in those three days than she ever had in her life. Finally, though, the moment came. She dressed in her very best royal finery, doing all she could to appeal to the king. Then she went.

As described at the outset of this article, Esther made her way to the king's court. We can only imagine the anxious thoughts, the fervent prayers, filling her mind and heart. She entered the courtyard, where she could see Ahasuerus on his throne. Perhaps she tried to read the expression on his face—the face that was framed by the carefully tended, symmetrical curls of his hair and of his squared beard. If she had to wait, it must have felt like an eternity. But the moment passed—her husband saw her. He was surely surprised, but his expression softened. He held out his golden scepter!—Esther 5:1, 2.

Esther had gained an audience, a hearing ear. She had taken a stand for her God and for her people, setting a beautiful example of faith for all servants of God down through time. But her work was only beginning. How would she convince the king that his favorite adviser, Haman, was a wicked plotter? How could she help to save her people? We will consider these questions in a future article.



TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

When We Should Stay Awake

YOU may agree that staying awake when you are at school is important. Many get sleepy during their class periods, but to learn, you must stay awake. Perhaps you also go to meetings where you study the Bible.

What do you think you can do to help you stay awake?—* One idea is to go to bed earlier at night. Maybe a nap in the afternoon will also help. Let's see what we can learn from what happened to a youth who fell asleep late one night during a talk by the apostle Paul. Look in the Bible at Acts chapter 20, verses 7 to 12, and see what happened.

Paul had been visiting the congregation located in the seaport city of Troas. The Bible says that Paul "was going to depart the next day" by boat. So "he prolonged his speech until midnight." We read: "Seated at the window, a certain young man named Eutychus fell into a deep sleep while Paul kept talking on." ***What happened next?—***

Eutychus fell out of the window and "down from the third story." Paul and the others ran down the stairs as fast as they could. Eutychus was on the ground—dead! ***Can you imagine how sad they all felt?—*** The Bible says that Paul took Eutychus into his arms and hugged him. Soon Paul cried out with joy: 'Don't worry, he's all right!' God had brought Eutychus back to life!

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

What can we learn about God from what happened to Eutychus?— One thing is that Jehovah, our heavenly Father, can bring the dead back to life, including young ones. Jehovah understands and loves you, yes, even more than your parents do. When Jesus was on earth, he showed what the Father is like by taking little ones into his arms and blessing them. He also resurrected young people, including a 12-year-old girl.

How does knowing that your heavenly Father loves you make you feel?— Yes, it makes us love Jehovah in return and want to obey what He says. **Do you know how we can show that we love Him?**— One way is by saying that we do. Jesus said: “I love the Father.” But Jesus did more than just say that he loved God. He showed it by what he did.

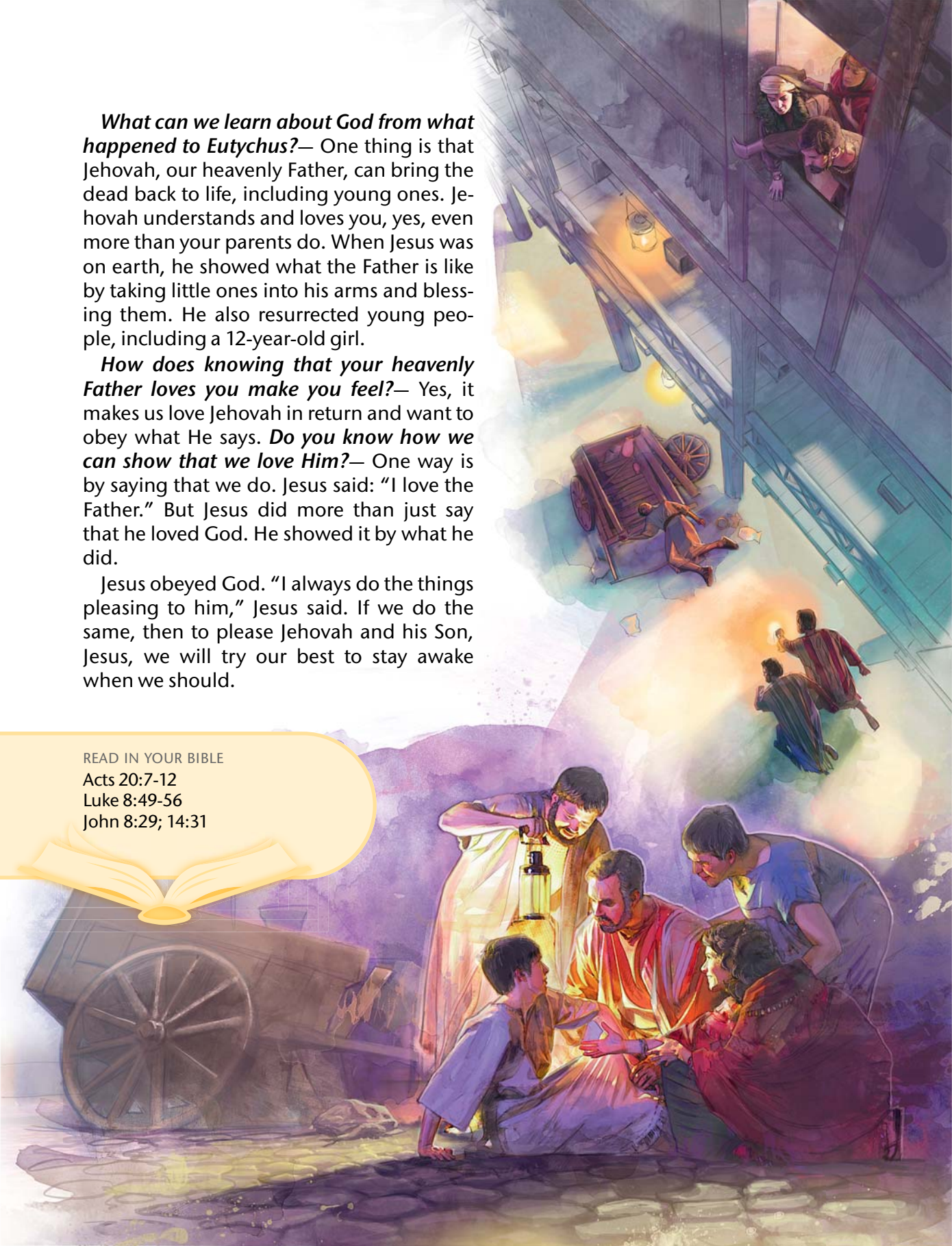
Jesus obeyed God. “I always do the things pleasing to him,” Jesus said. If we do the same, then to please Jehovah and his Son, Jesus, we will try our best to stay awake when we should.

READ IN YOUR BIBLE

Acts 20:7-12

Luke 8:49-56

John 8:29; 14:31





This is the first of two articles in consecutive issues of *The Watchtower* that discuss scholarly questions surrounding the date of the destruction of ancient Jerusalem. This two-part series presents thoroughly researched and Bible-based answers to questions that have puzzled some readers.

When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed?

PART ONE WHY IT MATTERS WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

"According to historians and archaeologists, 586 or 587 B.C.E. is generally accepted as the year of Jerusalem's destruction. Why do Jehovah's Witnesses say that it was 607 B.C.E.? What is your basis for this date?"*

SO WROTE one of our readers. But why be interested in the actual date when Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II razed the city of Jerusalem? First, because the event marked an important turning point in the history of God's people. One historian said that it led to "a catastrophe, indeed the ultimate catastrophe." The date marked the end of a temple that had been at the heart of the worship of Almighty God for more than 400 years. "O God," lamented a Bible psalmist, "they have dishonored your holy temple. They have left Jerusalem in ruins."—Psalm 79:1, God's Word Bible.[#]

Second, because knowing the actual year when this "ultimate catastrophe" began and understanding how the restoration of true

worship in Jerusalem fulfilled a precise Bible prophecy will build your confidence in the reliability of God's Word. So why do Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a date that differs from widely accepted chronology by 20 years? In short, because of evidence within the Bible itself.

"Seventy Years" for Whom?

Years before the destruction, the Jewish prophet Jeremiah provided an essential clue to the time frame given in the Bible. He warned "all those living in Jerusalem," saying: "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jeremiah 25:1, 2, 11, *New International Version*) The prophet later added: "This is what Jehovah has said, 'In accord with the fulfilling of seventy years at Babylon I shall turn my attention to you people, and I will establish toward you my good word in bringing you back to this place.' " (Jeremiah 29:10) What is the significance of the "seventy years"? And how

* Both years are mentioned in secular sources. For simplicity, we will refer to 587 B.C.E. in this series. B.C.E. means "Before the Common Era."

[#] Jehovah's Witnesses produce a reliable Bible translation known as the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. However, if you are not one of Jehovah's Witnesses, you may prefer to use other translations when considering Bible subjects. This article quotes from a number of widely accepted Bible translations.

does this time period help us to determine the date of Jerusalem's destruction?

Instead of saying 70 years "at Babylon," many translations read "for Babylon." (*NIV*) Some historians therefore claim that this 70-year period applies to the Babylonian Empire. According to secular chronology, the Babylonians dominated the land of ancient Judah and Jerusalem for some 70 years, from about 609 B.C.E. until 539 B.C.E. when the capital city of Babylon was captured.

The Bible, however, shows that the 70 years were to be a period of severe punishment from God—aimed specifically at the people of Judah and Jerusalem, who were in a covenant to obey him. (Exodus 19:3-6) When they refused to turn from their bad ways, God said: "I will summon . . . Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon . . . against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations." (Jeremiah 25:4, 5, 8, 9, *NIV*) While nearby nations would also suffer Babylon's wrath, the destruction of Jerusalem and the 70-year exile to follow were called by Jeremiah "the punishment of my people," for Jerusalem had "sinned greatly."—Lamentations 1:8; 3:42; 4:6, *NIV*.

So according to the Bible, the 70 years was a period of bitter punishment for Judah, and God used the Babylonians as the instrument for inflicting this severe chastisement. Yet, God told the Jews: "When seventy years are completed, . . . I will . . . bring you back to this place"—the land of Judah and Jerusalem.—Jeremiah 29:10, *NIV*.

When Did "the Seventy Years" Start?

The inspired historian Ezra, who lived after the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy were fulfilled, wrote of King Nebuchadnezzar: "He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land

enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah."—2 Chronicles 36:20, 21, *NIV*.

Thus, the 70 years were to be a period when the land of Judah and Jerusalem would enjoy "sabbath rests." This meant that the land would not be cultivated—there would be no sowing of seed or pruning of vineyards. (Leviticus 25:1-5, *NIV*) Because of the disobedience of God's people, whose sins may have included a failure to observe all the Sabbath years, the punishment was that their land would remain unworked and deserted for 70 years.—Leviticus 26:27, 32-35, 42, 43.

When did the land of Judah become desolated and unworked? Actually, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem twice, years apart. When did the 70 years commence? Certainly not following the first time that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Why not? Although at that time Nebuchadnezzar took many captives from Jerusalem to Babylon, he left others behind in the land. He also left the city itself standing. For years after this initial deportation, those left remaining in Judah, "the lowly class of the people," lived off their land. (2 Kings 24:8-17) But then things drastically changed.

A Jewish revolt brought the Babylonians back to Jerusalem. (2 Kings 24:20; 25:8-10) They razed the city, including its sacred temple, and they took many of its inhabitants captive to Babylon. Within two months, "all the people [who had been left behind in the land] from the least to the greatest, together with the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians." (2 Kings 25:25, 26, *NIV*) Only then, in the seventh Jewish month, Tishri (September/October), of that year could it be said that the land, now

desolate and unworked, began to enjoy its Sabbath rest. To the Jewish refugees in Egypt, God said through Jeremiah: “You have seen all the disaster that I brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah. Behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them.” (Jeremiah 44:1, 2, *English Standard Version*) So this event evidently marked the starting point of the 70 years. And what year was that? To answer, we need to see when that period ended.

When Did “the Seventy Years” End?

The prophet Daniel, who lived until “the kingdom of Persia came to power,” was on the scene in Babylon, and he calculated when the 70 years were due to end. He wrote: “I, Daniel, perceived in the books the num-

ber of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.”—Daniel 9:1, 2, *ESV*.

Ezra reflected on the prophecies of Jeremiah and linked the end of “the seventy years” to the time when “the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation.” (2 Chronicles 36:21, 22, *NIV*) When were the Jews released? The decree ending their exile was issued in “the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia.” (See the box “A Pivotal Date in History.”) Thus, by the fall of 537 B.C.E., the Jews had returned to Jerusalem to restore true worship.—Ezra 1:1-5; 2:1; 3:1-5.

According to Bible chronology, then, the 70 years was a literal period of time that end-

A PIVOTAL DATE IN HISTORY

The date 539 B.C.E. when Cyrus II conquered Babylon is calculated using the testimony of:

■ **Ancient historical sources and cuneiform tablets:** Diodorus of Sicily (c. 80-20 B.C.E.) wrote that Cyrus became king of Persia in “the opening year of the Fifty-fifth Olympiad.” (*Historical Library*, Book IX, 21) That year was 560 B.C.E. The Greek historian Herodotus (c. 485-425 B.C.E.) stated that Cyrus was killed “after he had reigned twenty-nine years,” which would put his death during his 30th year, in 530 B.C.E. (*Histories*, Book I, Clio, 214) Cuneiform tablets show that Cyrus ruled Babylon for nine years before his death. Thus, nine years prior to his death in 530 B.C.E. takes us back to 539 B.C.E. as the year Cyrus conquered Babylon.

◀ **Confirmation by a cuneiform tablet:** A Babylonian astronomical clay tablet (BM 33066) confirms the date of Cyrus’ death in 530 B.C.E. Though this tablet contains some errors regarding the astronomical positions, it contains the descriptions of two lunar eclipses that the tablet says occurred in the seventh year of Cambyses II, the son and successor of Cyrus. These are identified with lunar eclipses visible at Babylon on July 16, 523 B.C.E., and on January 10, 522 B.C.E., thus pointing to the spring of 523 B.C.E. as the beginning of Cambyses’ seventh year. That would make his first regnal year 529 B.C.E. So Cyrus’ last year would have been 530 B.C.E., making 539 B.C.E. his first year of ruling Babylon.



ed in 537 B.C.E. Counting back 70 years, the start date of the period would be 607 B.C.E.

But if the evidence from the inspired Scriptures clearly points to 607 B.C.E. for Jerusalem's destruction, why do many authorities hold to the date 587 B.C.E.? They lean on two sources of information—the writings of classical historians and the canon of Ptolemy. Are these sources more reliable than the Scriptures? Let us see.

Classical Historians—How Accurate?

Historians who lived close to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed give mixed information about the Neo-Babylonian kings.* (See the box "Neo-Babylonian Kings.") The time line based on their chronological information disagrees with that of the Bible. But just how reliable are their writings?

One of the historians who lived closest to the Neo-Babylonian period was Berossus, a Babylonian "priest of Bel." His original work, the *Babyloniaca*, written about 281 B.C.E., has been lost, and only fragments are preserved in the works of other historians. Berossus claimed that he used "books which had been preserved with great care at Babylon."¹ Was Berossus really an accurate historian? Consider one example.

* The Neo-Babylonian Empire began with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, and ended with the reign of Nabonidus. This time period is of interest to scholars because it covers most of the 70 years of desolation.

Berossus wrote that Assyrian King Sennacherib followed "the reign of [his] brother"; and "after him his son [Esarhaddon ruled for] 8 years; and thereafter Sammuges [Shamash-shuma-ukin] 21 years." (III, 2.1, 4) However, Babylonian historical documents written long before Berossus' time say that Sennacherib followed his *father*, Sargon II, not his brother, to the throne; Esarhaddon ruled for 12 years, not 8; and Shamash-shuma-ukin ruled for 20 years, not 21. Scholar R. J. van der Spek, while acknowledging that Berossus consulted the Babylonian chronicles, wrote: "This did not prevent him from making his own additions and interpretations."²

How do other scholars view Berossus? "In the past Berossus has usually been viewed as a historian," states S. M. Burstein, who made a thorough study of Berossus' works. Yet, he concluded: "Considered as such his performance must be pronounced inadequate. Even in its present fragmentary state the *Babyloniaca* contains a number of surprising errors of simple fact . . . In a historian such flaws would be damning, but then Berossus' purpose was not historical."³

In view of the foregoing, what do you think? Should Berossus' calculations really be viewed as consistently accurate? And what about the other classical historians who, for the most part, based their chronology on the writings of Berossus? Can their historical conclusions really be called reliable?

NEO-BABYLONIAN KINGS

If these historians are reliable, why do they disagree?

Kings	BEROSSUS c. 350-270 B.C.E.	POLYHISTOR 105-? B.C.E.	JOSEPHUS 37-?100 C.E.	PTOLEMY c. 100-170 C.E.
Nabopolassar	21	20	—	21
Nebuchadnezzar II	43	43	43	43
Amel-Marduk	2	12	18	2
Neriglissar	4	4	40	4
Labashi-Marduk	9 months	—	9 months	—
Nabonidus	17	17	17	17

Length of king's reign (in years) according to classical historians

The Canon of Ptolemy

The Royal Canon of Claudius Ptolemy, a second-century C.E. astronomer, is also used to support the traditional date 587 B.C.E. Ptolemy's list of kings is considered the backbone of the chronology of ancient history, including the Neo-Babylonian period.

Ptolemy compiled his list some 600 years after the Neo-Babylonian period ended. So how did he determine the date when the first king on his list began to reign? Ptolemy explained that by using astronomical calculations based in part on eclipses, "we have derived to compute back to the beginning of the reign of Nabonassar," the first king on his list.⁴ Thus, Christopher Walker of the British Museum says that Ptolemy's canon was "an artificial scheme designed to provide astronomers with a consistent chronology" and was "not to provide historians with a precise record of the accession and death of kings."⁵

"It has long been known that the Canon is *astronomically* reliable," writes Leo Depuydt,

one of Ptolemy's most enthusiastic defenders, "but this does not automatically mean that it is *historically* dependable." Regarding this list of kings, Professor Depuydt adds: "As regards the earlier rulers [who included the Neo-Babylonian kings], the Canon would need to be compared with the cuneiform record on a reign by reign basis."⁶

What is this "cuneiform record" that enables us to measure the historical accuracy of Ptolemy's canon? It includes the Babylonian chronicles, lists of kings, and economic tablets—cuneiform documents written by scribes who lived during, or near, Neo-Babylonian times.⁷

How does Ptolemy's list compare with that cuneiform record? The box "How Does Ptolemy's Canon Compare With Ancient Tablets?" (see below) shows a portion of the canon and compares this with an ancient cuneiform document. Notice that Ptolemy lists only four kings between the Babylonian rulers Kandalanu and Nabonidus. However, the

HOW DOES PTOLEMY'S CANON COMPARE WITH ANCIENT TABLETS?

Ptolemy omits some kings in his list. Why?

PTOLEMY'S CANON

Nabonassar
Nabu-nadin-zeri (Nadinu)
Mukin-zeri and Pul
Ululayu (Shalmaneser V)
"King of Assyria"
Merodach-baladan
Sargon II "King of Assyria"
First Kingless Period
Bel-ibni
Ashur-nadin-shumi
Nergal-ushezib
Mushezib-Marduk
Second Kingless Period
Esarhaddon "King of Assyria"
Shamash-shuma-ukin

Kandalanu

Nabopolassar
Nebuchadnezzar
Amel-Marduk
Neriglissar

Nabonidus

Cyrus
Cambyses



THE URUK KING LIST AS FOUND ON ANCIENT TABLETS

Kandalanu
Sin-shumu-lishir
Sin-sharra-ishkun
Nabopolassar
Nebuchadnezzar
Amel-Marduk
Neriglissar
Labashi-Marduk
Nabonidus

The Babylonian chronicles are part of the cuneiform record that helps us to measure the accuracy of Ptolemy's canon

Uruk King List—a part of the cuneiform record—reveals that *seven* kings ruled in between. Were their reigns brief and negligible? One of them, according to cuneiform economic tablets, ruled for seven years.⁸

There is also strong evidence from cuneiform documents that prior to the reign of Nabopolassar (the first king of the Neo-Babylonian period), another king (Ashur-etel-ilani) ruled for four years in Babylonia. Also, for more than a year, there was no king in the land.⁹ Yet, all of this is left out of Ptolemy's canon.

Why did Ptolemy omit some rulers? Evidently, he did not consider them to be legitimate rulers of Babylon.¹⁰ For example, he excluded Labashi-Marduk, a Neo-Babylonian king. But according to cuneiform documents, the kings whom Ptolemy omitted actually ruled over Babylonia.

In general, Ptolemy's canon is regarded as accurate. But in view of its omissions, should it really be used to provide a definite historical chronology?

The Conclusion Based on This Evidence

To sum up: The Bible clearly states that there was an exile of 70 years. There is strong evidence—and most scholars agree—that the Jewish exiles were back in their homeland by 537 B.C.E. Counting back from that year would place Jerusalem's destruction in 607 B.C.E. Though the classical historians

and the canon of Ptolemy disagree with this date, valid questions can be raised about the accuracy of their writings. Really, those two lines of evidence hardly provide enough proof to overturn the Bible's chronology.

However, further questions remain. Is there really no historical evidence to support the Bible-based date of 607 B.C.E.? What evidence is revealed by datable cuneiform documents, many of which were written by ancient eyewitnesses? We will consider these questions in our next issue.

A QUICK SUMMARY

- Secular historians usually say that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.E.
- Bible chronology strongly indicates that the destruction occurred in 607 B.C.E.
- Secular historians mainly base their conclusions on the writings of classical historians and on the canon of Ptolemy.
- The writings of classical historians contain significant errors and are not always consistent with the records on clay tablets.



Notes

1. *Babyloniaca* (*Chaldaeorum Historiae*), Book One, 1.1.

2. *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society*, page 295.

3. *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, page 8.

4. *Almagest*, III, 7, translated by G. J. Toomer, in *Ptolemy's Almagest*, published 1998, page 166. Ptolemy knew that Babylonian astronomers used mathematical schemes to "compute" the times of past and future eclipses because they discovered that eclipses of the same character reoccur every 18 years.—*Almagest*, IV, 2.

5. *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period*, pages 17-18.

6. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Volume 47, 1995, pages 106-107.

7. Cuneiform is a form of writing in which a scribe pressed various signs into the surface of a soft clay tablet using a sharp stylus with a wedge-shaped point.

8. Sin-sharra-ishkun ruled for seven years, and 57 economic tablets of this king are dated from his accession year through year seven. See *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Volume 35, 1983, pages 54-59.

9. The economic tablet C.B.M. 2152 is dated in the fourth year of Ashur-etel-ilani. (*Legal and Commercial Transactions Dated in the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods—Chiefly From Nippur*, by A.T. Clay, 1908, page 74.) Also the Har-

ran Inscriptions of Nabonidus, (H1B), I, line 30, has him listed just before Nabopolassar. (*Anatolian Studies*, Vol. VIII, 1958, pages 35, 47.) For the kingless period, see Chronicle 2, line 14, of *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, pages 87-88.

10. Some scholars contend that certain kings were omitted by Ptolemy—who supposedly listed only kings of Babylon—because these were called by the title "King of Assyria." However, as you will note in the box on page 30, several kings included in Ptolemy's canon also had the title "King of Assyria." Economic tablets, cuneiform letters, and inscriptions clearly reveal that kings Ashur-etel-ilani, Sin-shumu-lishir, and Sin-sharra-ishkun ruled over Babylonia.



What are five common lies about God? SEE PAGES 4-8.



How can learning the truth about God
change your life? SEE PAGE 9.



Should infants be baptized? SEE PAGE 11.



What will make your family life happy? SEE PAGES 16-17.



What can we learn from Esther's example of faith and
courage? SEE PAGE 18.

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