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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM
ABRAHAM?

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 WAS ABRAHAM?

FEW men have had greater impact on the world's religions. Revered by Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike, Abraham* has been described as "a giant in Scripture" and as "a towering example of faith." The Bible calls him "the father of all those having faith."—Romans 4:11.

Why is Abraham so highly regarded? For one thing, Abraham has the distinction of being the only person whom the Bible directly refers to as God's friend—and three times at that!—2 Chronicles 20:7, footnote; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23.

In other ways, however, Abraham was an ordinary person like us. He faced many of the same struggles that we do—and he met them successfully. Would you like to know how he did so? Consider what the Bible reveals about this remarkable man.

His Background

Born in the year 2166 B.C.E., Abraham grew up in Ur. (Genesis 11:27-31) Ur was a large and prosperous city. It was also steeped in idol worship. Abraham's father, Terah, may have been among those who worshipped various idols. (Joshua 24:2) Yet, Abraham chose to direct his worship solely to Jehovah[#] rather than to the lifeless idols of other gods.

What moved Abraham to make that decision? Well, his life overlapped that of Noah's son Shem by 150 years. If he associated with

* Originally, Abraham was known as Abram and his wife was known as Sarai. Later, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "Father of a Multitude," and he changed Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning "Princess." (Genesis 17:5, 15) For simplicity, in this series of articles, we will refer to them as Abraham and Sarah.

[#] Jehovah is the name of God as revealed in the Bible.

that much-older man, how might he have been affected? Abraham could have learned firsthand from Shem what it was like to survive the global Flood. He may also have learned the importance of worshipping Jehovah, the God who had preserved Shem and his family through that Deluge.

Whether it was through Shem or by some other means, Abraham responded favorably to what he learned about the true God. When Jehovah, "the examiner of hearts," observed Abraham, he saw something good in the man—and he helped to make the good grow.—Proverbs 17:3; 2 Chronicles 16:9.

His Life

Abraham lived a full and exciting life, one that was often challenging but never meaningless. Consider just a few of the things he experienced.

■ While Abraham was living in Ur, God directed him to leave the land of his birth and head out to a land that He would show him. Although Abraham and Sarah did not know all the details—where they were going or why God was asking them to leave—they obeyed. Abraham and Sarah eventually came to dwell in tents in the land of Canaan, living as sojourners for the rest of their lives.—Acts 7:2, 3; Hebrews 11:8, 9, 13.

■ While Abraham and Sarah were still childless, Jehovah promised to make a great nation out of Abraham. Jehovah added that all the families of the earth would be blessed by means of Abraham. (Genesis 11:30; 12:1-3) Jehovah later affirmed that promise. He told Abraham that his offspring would become numerous, like the stars of heaven.—Genesis 15:5, 6.

A Pivotal Character in Bible History

In its first ten chapters, the Bible book of Genesis recounts the life histories of several men of faith, including Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Yet, it devotes most of the next 15 chapters to the life of *one* man—Abraham.

Moreover, the Bible first mentions some of its most important concepts in connection with Abraham. For example, in Abraham's life story we find . . .

- the first reference to God as a **Shield** for, or Protector of, his servants.—Genesis 15:1; see Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 115:9; Proverbs 30:5.
- the first mention of **putting faith in God**.—Genesis 15:6.
- the first occurrence of the word **prophet**.—Genesis 20:7.
- the first reference to a parent's **love**.—Genesis 22:2.

■ When Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was nearing 90, Jehovah promised that they would have a son. That seemed impossible from a human standpoint, but Abraham and Sarah soon learned that nothing is “too extraordinary for Jehovah.” (Genesis 18:14) One year later, at the age of 100, Abraham became father to a son, whom he named Isaac. (Genesis 17:21; 21:1-5) God specifically promised that through Isaac, great blessings would come to mankind.

■ A number of years later, Jehovah made a very unusual request of Abraham: He asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, although the young man was unmarried and had no children.* Though the prospect of losing his son must have pained him, Abraham prepared to obey and offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham firmly believed that God had the power to resurrect Isaac, if necessary, in order to make His promises come true. (Hebrews 11:19) At the crucial moment when Abraham was about to offer up his son, God intervened, sparing Isaac's life. He commended Abraham for his outstanding obedience. Jehovah then repeated his earlier promises to Abraham.—Genesis 22:1-18.

■ After 175 years of life, Abraham fell asleep in death. He “died in a good old age,” says the Bible, adding that he was “old and satisfied.” (Genesis 25:7, 8) Abraham thus experienced the fulfillment of another promise made by God—namely, that he would enjoy a long life before dying in peace.—Genesis 15:15.

His Legacy

Abraham is far more than a religious or historical figure from the distant past. To this day, his story lives, providing a rich example for all of us to imitate. (Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19) Let us consider four of the good qualities that Abraham displayed. We will begin with what is perhaps his best-known quality—faith.

* See the article “Our Readers Ask . . . Why Did God Ask Abraham to Sacrifice His Son?” on page 23 of this issue.



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ABRAHAM | A MAN OF FAITH

Abraham stands outside in the stillness of evening. As he looks up at the bright, starry heavens, he cannot help but think of God's promise that his offspring will become as numerous as those luminaries. (Genesis 15:5) To Abraham, the stars are a visible reminder of Jehovah's promise. They are also a guarantee. After all, if Jehovah has the power to create the vast universe and everything in it, can he not also enable Abraham and Sarah to have a child? Such is the nature of Abraham's faith.

WHAT IS FAITH? As used in the Bible, "faith" refers to firm belief in something unseen. Such belief is based on solid evidence. A person with faith in God focuses on the fulfillment of Jehovah's promises, confident that they are as good as done.

HOW DID ABRAHAM DISPLAY FAITH? *Abraham demonstrated that he believed God's promises.* In faith, Abraham left the country of his birth, confident that Jehovah would keep His promise to show him a different land. In faith, Abraham wandered through Canaan, sure that his offspring would even-

tually possess that land. And in faith, Abraham obediently attempted to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, confident that, if need be, Jehovah would resurrect Isaac.—Hebrews 11:8, 9, 17-19.

Abraham focused on the future rather than on the past. Although Abraham and Sarah may have enjoyed a more comfortable lifestyle in Ur than they did in Canaan, "they did not keep thinking about the country they had left." (Hebrews 11:15, *Today's English Version*) Rather, they focused on how God would bless them and

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⁺ CD also available.

[°] MP3 CD-ROM also available.

[°] Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

their descendants in the future.—Hebrews 11:16.

Was Abraham's faith well-founded? Without question. Jehovah kept every one of his promises. Abraham's offspring eventually multiplied into the nation known as Israel. In time, the Israelites came to dwell in Canaan, the very land that Jehovah had promised to Abraham.—Joshua 11:23.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR US? We can be confident that Jehovah will keep his promises. Even if some of them seem impossible from a human standpoint, we trust that "with God all things are possible."—Matthew 19:26.

Abraham's example also teaches us to focus, not on how things were in the past, but on what we will enjoy in the future. That is what a man named Jason has learned to do. Jason suffers from a debilitating disease that

has left him completely paralyzed. "I must admit that there are times when I find myself thinking about the past," says Jason. He adds: "It's the little things that I miss the most, things like hugging my wife, Amanda."

Nevertheless, Jason has absolute faith that Jehovah will fulfill his promises, including the promise that our earth will soon become a paradise and that faithful humans will be granted everlasting life in perfect health.* (Psalm 37:10, 11, 29; Isaiah 35:5, 6; Revelation 21:3, 4) "I remind myself that the best of times are yet ahead," says Jason, explaining: "Soon, this will all be over—the stress, the anxiety, the sadness, the guilt—and it will be gone forever." What an excellent example of faith like that of Abraham!

* To learn more about the future earthly paradise, see chapters 3, 7, and 8 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

ABRAHAM | A MAN OF COURAGE

Abraham looks at his family and servants as they prepare to head out into Canaan. (Genesis 12:1-5) Surveying this large group of people who depend on him for their livelihood, Abraham keenly senses his responsibility toward them. How will he provide for their material needs while in an unknown land? Might such a task have been easier back in Ur, a prosperous area with extensive pastures, fertile soil, and an ample water supply? What if he becomes ill or dies in the new land? Who will take care of his family? If Abraham has any such worries, he does not let his fears paralyze him. He is determined to act, to obey God's commands, come what may—a sign of true courage.



WHAT IS COURAGE? It is the quality of being strong, bold, and valiant—the opposite of timidity or cowardice. Being courageous does not necessarily mean that we are never afraid. Rather, a person with God-given courage takes action in spite of his fears.

HOW DID ABRAHAM DISPLAY COURAGE?

Abraham was willing to go against the crowd. Abraham grew up in an environment where people worshipped a multitude of gods and idols. Yet, he did not let fear of what others would think hold him back from doing what he knew was right. Rather, Abraham boldly took a different course in life, choosing to worship only one God—“the Most High God,” Jehovah.—Genesis 14:21, 22.

Abraham put his worship of the true God ahead of material interests. He was willing to give up his comfortable life in Ur and head out into the wilderness, fully trusting that Jehovah would care for his material needs. Of course, as the years went on, Abraham may have thought about some of the comforts he had enjoyed in Ur. But Abraham was certain that Jehovah would always provide for him and his family. Clinging to Jehovah as the most important Person in his life, Abraham found the courage to obey God’s commands.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR US? We can imitate Abraham by cultivating the courage to obey Jehovah, even if others around us do not do so. For example, the Bible teaches that those who take a stand for their belief in Jehovah God may be opposed, perhaps by well-meaning friends or relatives. (John 15: 20) When we are convinced of what we have learned about Jehovah, however, we stand up for our beliefs, doing so in a respectful manner.—1 Peter 3:15.

We can also trust in God’s promise that he will provide for those who place their faith in him. Such trust gives us the courage to

center our lives on spiritual things rather than on material concerns. (Matthew 6: 33) Consider how one family has done just that.

Although having two young sons, Doug and Becky wanted to move to a country where there was a greater need for preachers of the Bible’s good news. After careful research and fervent prayer, they decided to go ahead with their plans. “It took courage to pack up the kids and move, not knowing exactly how things would work out for

A person with God-given courage takes action in spite of his fears

us,” says Doug. “But early in our decision-making process, we discussed the example of Abraham and Sarah. Thinking about how they trusted in Jehovah—and how he never let them down—really helped us.”

Regarding their life in a foreign land, Doug says: “We’ve been blessed in a tremendous way.” He explains: “Because our lifestyle is much simpler, we are able to spend most of our day together as a family—preaching, talking with one another, and playing together with the boys. It’s a feeling of freedom that is difficult to put into words.”

Of course, not everyone is in a position to make such a drastic adjustment. Yet, all of us can imitate Abraham’s example by giving priority to our worship of God, trusting that he will be there to support us. When we do so, we are heeding the Bible’s admonition to “be of good courage and say: ‘Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid.’”—Hebrews 13: 5, 6.



A Godly Woman and a Precious Wife

Sarah was married to an outstanding man of faith. But this godly woman herself set an example worthy of note. In fact, the Bible three times mentions her by name as someone whose example godly women do well to imitate. (Isaiah 51:1, 2; Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:3-6) Although the Scriptures reveal relatively little about this remarkable woman, we

are nonetheless able to glimpse a beautiful picture of her.

Think, for example, of Sarah's initial reaction when Abraham informed her of God's direction to leave Ur. Did she wonder where they were headed and why? Did she have concerns about their material needs? Did she feel sad at the thought of leaving her friends and family, not knowing when—if ever—she would see them again? Undoubtedly, such thoughts crossed her mind. Even so, she willingly left, trusting that Jehovah would bless her for her obedience.—Acts 7:2, 3.

In addition to being an obedient servant of God, Sarah was an excellent wife. Rather than competing with her husband for control of the affairs of the family, Sarah cultivated heartfelt respect for her husband, lovingly supporting him as he guided their family. In so doing, she adorned herself—made herself beautiful—by her positive inner qualities. —1 Peter 3:1-6.

Can such traits benefit wives today? "Sarah's example has taught me that I should feel free to speak up and express my viewpoint to my husband," says a woman named Jill, who has been happily married for over 30 years. "At the same time," she continues, "as head of the family, my husband has the responsibility to make the final decision. Once he has done so, it's my job to do whatever I can to make that decision work."

Perhaps the most touching lesson we learn from Sarah is this: Although she was very beautiful, Sarah did not allow her physical beauty to cause her to become proud. (Genesis 12:10-13) Rather, she humbly supported Abraham through the ups and downs of their life together. Without a doubt, Abraham and Sarah were a faithful, humble, and loving couple—a couple who truly brought blessings to each other.



ABRAHAM | A MAN OF HUMILITY

Abraham sits in his tent, enjoying the shade it provides during the sweltering heat of the day. As he gazes toward the horizon, Abraham catches sight of three men who are visiting the area.* Without hesitation, he runs to meet the visitors, urging them to rest for a bit and enjoy his hospitality. He offers to give them “a piece of bread,” but then proceeds to arrange an elaborate meal consisting of freshly baked bread, butter, milk, and choice, tender meat. In serving this meal to his visitors, Abraham displays not only outstanding hospitality but also, as we will see, genuine humility. —Genesis 18:1-8.

WHAT IS HUMILITY? Humility is freedom from pride or arrogance. A humble person appreciates that everyone excels him in one way or another. (Philippians 2:3) He listens to the suggestions of others, and he is willing to perform lowly tasks in their behalf.

HOW DID ABRAHAM DISPLAY HUMILITY? *Abraham gladly served others.* As mentioned at the outset, when Abraham caught sight of the three visitors, he immediately set out

to accommodate their needs. His wife, Sarah, quickly began preparing a meal. Notice, though, who was also doing much of the work: *Abraham* ran to meet the visitors, *he* offered to give them something to eat, *he* ran to the herd and selected an animal to slaughter, and *he* set all the provisions before the visitors. Rather than delegating everything to his servants, this humble man threw himself into that lowly work. He did not view it as beneath his dignity to serve others.

Abraham listened to the suggestions of those under his authority. The Bible records only a

* Although Abraham may not have initially realized it, these visitors were angelic messengers of God.—Hebrews 13:2.

handful of conversations between Abraham and Sarah. Yet, twice we read that Abraham listened to Sarah's ideas and acted on them. (Genesis 16:2; 21:8-14) On one of those occasions, her suggestion was initially "very displeasing to Abraham." But when Jehovah spoke to Abraham, evaluating her idea as a good one, Abraham humbly yielded and implemented the suggestion.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR US? If we are truly humble, we will be happy to serve others. We will find joy in doing whatever we can to make their life more comfortable.

We may also show humility by the way we respond to other people's suggestions. Instead of rejecting an idea simply because we did not think of it ourselves, we may wisely

welcome comments from others. (Proverbs 15:22) Such an open-minded attitude especially benefits those with a measure of authority. "I've found that a good overseer creates an environment where people feel free to express themselves," says an experienced supervisor named John. He adds: "It takes humility to recognize that someone under your oversight may have a better way of doing things than you do. But then again, no one—not even an overseer—has a monopoly on good ideas."

When we imitate Abraham by listening to the suggestions of others and by performing lowly services in their behalf, we gain Jehovah's favor. After all, "God opposes the haughty ones, but he gives undeserved kindness to the humble ones."—1 Peter 5:5.

ABRAHAM | A MAN OF LOVE

Abraham can hardly bear his sorrow. His beloved wife, Sarah, has died. A myriad of fond memories fill the aged man's head while he says his final good-byes. As the grief rises in his heart, the tears fall. (Genesis 23:1, 2) Far from being a cause for shame or embarrassment, those tears give evidence of one of Abraham's finest qualities—his love.

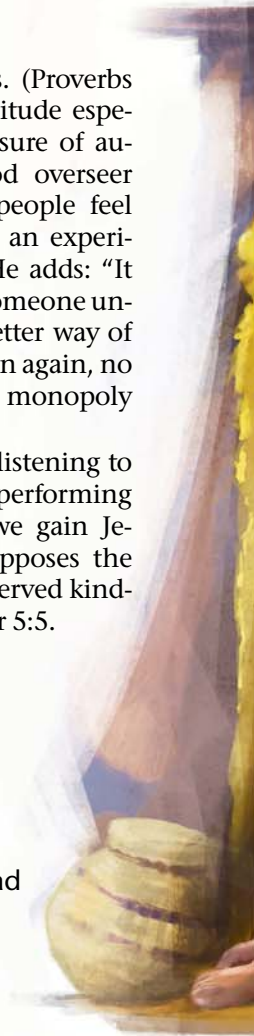
WHAT IS LOVE? Love is a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection. A loving person demonstrates by his actions how he feels about those whom he loves, even if doing so calls for personal sacrifice.

HOW DID ABRAHAM DISPLAY LOVE? *Abraham showed that he loved his family.* Undoubtedly, Abraham was a busy man. Yet, he never neglected his family's emotional or spiritual needs. In fact, Jehovah himself noticed that Abraham took the lead in worship as a family head. (Genesis 18:19) What is

more, Jehovah expressly mentioned Abraham's love. Speaking to Abraham, He referred to Isaac as the "son whom you so love."—Genesis 22:2.

We can further sense Abraham's love in the way he reacted to the death of his dear wife, Sarah. Abraham wailed over her. Though strong and manly, he was not afraid to show his grief. Abraham exhibited a beautiful blend of strength and gentleness.

Abraham showed that he loved his God. His entire life course expressed such love. How





so? We might be reminded of what the Bible says at 1 John 5:3: “This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments.” By that definition, Abraham was a stellar example of love for God.

Time and again, when Jehovah gave Abraham a command, Abraham obeyed immediately. (Genesis 12:4; 17:22, 23; 21:12-14; 22:1-3) It did not matter whether the command was easy or hard to obey; nor did it matter much whether Abraham knew why Jehovah had asked him to comply with it. To

Is It Unmanly to Cry?

Many would answer yes. Perhaps they would be surprised to learn that Abraham was just one of several vigorous, faithful men whom the Bible describes as giving way to tears in times of distress. Others include Joseph, David, the apostle Peter, the elders of the congregation in Ephesus, and even Jesus. (Genesis 50:1; 2 Samuel 18:33; Luke 22:61, 62; John 11:35; Acts 20:36-38) Clearly, the Bible does not teach that it is unmanly to cry.

Abraham, such factors were insignificant. If his God wanted him to do something, he was willing to do it. Abraham viewed each command as an opportunity to demonstrate his love for Jehovah.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR US? We can imitate Abraham by showing warm affection for others, especially for members of our family. We would never want to allow the pressures of life to crowd out time for those who mean the most to us.

We also do well to cultivate heartfelt love for Jehovah. Such love can be a powerful force in our lives. For example, it can motivate us to make changes in our attitudes, speech, and conduct in order to please God. —1 Peter 1:14-16.

Granted, obeying Jehovah’s commands is not always easy. But we can be sure that the One who helped Abraham—the One who called him “my friend”—will be there to support us too. (Isaiah 41:8) His Word, the Bible, promises: “He will make you firm, he will make you strong.” (1 Peter 5:10) What a heartwarming promise from that trusted Friend of Abraham!

Where Frontiers Mean Nothing

Jehovah's Witnesses strive to overcome barriers between peoples. They take to heart the principle underlying Jesus' words to his disciples: "All you are brothers." (Matthew 23:8) This is well illustrated in two of the Witnesses' places of worship—one in Portugal and one in Spain.



THE walled city of Valença do Minho, in northern Portugal, was built in dangerous times. Its battlements overlook the Minho River, the frontier between Spain and Portugal. Across the river lies the Spanish city of Tui, with a cathedral that looks suspiciously like a fortress. The main fortifications of Tui and Valença date to the 17th century, when Spain and Portugal were at war.

In 1995, border posts and customs controls between these two countries of the European Union became things of the past. But uniting peoples means more than dismantling border controls. It also involves minds and hearts. In Valença stands a small, attractive building that shows how barriers between peoples can be bridged. It is a place of

worship—a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses—shared by Spanish and Portuguese congregations of Witnesses.

This story began in 2001, when the Witnesses in Tui found themselves in need of a new Kingdom Hall. They had to vacate their rented premises, and they lacked sufficient funds to build a new hall. Even rented property was beyond their budget, since the congregation was not a large one. So these Spanish Witnesses asked their Portuguese brothers in Valença if they would mind sharing their hall, which lay just a couple of miles (km) from the center of Tui.

"We discussed the decision at a meeting in December 2001," recalls Eduardo Vila, a member of the Tui Congregation in Spain. "I realized when I left that meeting that Jeho-



View of Tui and the Minho River from the walled city of Valença do Minho

vah had touched the hearts of our Portuguese brothers. They had made great sacrifices to build an attractive Kingdom Hall, and it was faith strengthening to see that they were willing to share what they had.”

“We welcomed the Spanish brothers to our Kingdom Hall,” says Américo Almeida, a Portuguese Witness who was present at the same meeting. “We trusted that Jehovah would bless this arrangement, and we made the decision unanimously.” The Witnesses from both sides of the border get along well together. “It may seem strange, but we don’t even notice that we are from two different countries. We are just spiritual brothers,” says Paolo from Valença.

One of the first things visitors notice inside the Kingdom Hall is the two iden-

tical clocks on the rear wall, telling different times. Spain is one hour ahead of Portugal, but the difference in time zones is the only discordant note in the Kingdom Hall. When the building needed renovation, a Regional Building Committee based in Spain supervised enthusiastic workers from both congregations. “Many professionals came from Spain to help us, some from over 100 miles (160 km) away,” recalls Paolo. “The project cemented bonds of affection between the congregations.”

“It may seem strange, but we don’t even notice that we are from two different countries. We are just spiritual brothers”

“The project cemented bonds of affection between the congregations”



Let us consider a second example of overcoming the challenges of frontiers.

Unity in a Divided Valley

Puigcerdá is a Spanish city on the border with France. It lies in the heart of a fertile valley surrounded by lofty peaks of the Pyrenees mountains. The whole valley, known as Cerdaña, was once part of Spain. But in 1659, in a peace accord known as the Treaty of the Pyrenees, Spain ceded half the valley to France.

Today, French people do their shopping in Puigcerdá, the principal city of the valley. And since 1997, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Puigcerdá have also opened the doors of their Kingdom Hall to their French counter-

Renovating the Kingdom Hall

parts. In that year the French Witnesses had to leave their rented property. The nearest Kingdom Hall in France was an hour’s drive away, and during winter months the high mountain pass that travelers must cross to reach it is often snowbound.

When the French Witnesses explained their urgent need of a meeting place, the Spanish Witnesses immediately offered their own Kingdom Hall. “All the Spanish brothers felt enthusiastic about sharing the hall,” remembers Prem, a local Witness. “Of course this spirit sprang from the Scriptural training we had received over the years. A couple of weeks later, we began sharing our Kingdom Hall, and we have been together for the past 13 years.”

“Puigcerdá was the ideal place for us to have a Kingdom Hall,” explains Eric, an overseer in the French congregation. “And I still remember the warm welcome that the Spanish congregation gave us. They adorned their hall with a large bunch of flowers and a sign reading, ‘You are welcome, dear brothers and sisters.’”

“People assumed that the closing of our Kingdom Hall in France meant that the congregation had disappeared,” Eric adds. “But our regular preaching in the area—which included the distribution of printed invitations to attend our meetings in Spain—soon revealed otherwise. Interested people are happy to come to the hall in Spain. Furthermore, the fact that we share a hall with our Spanish brothers has drawn us closer together. Before, we knew that there was a Spanish congregation on the other side of the border, but we had little contact. Now that we see one another regularly, we do not feel so isolated in this remote mountain valley.”



The Pyrenees and the Cerdaña valley

Did cultural barriers create any uneasiness? “When I learned that our meetings would be held across the frontier in Spain, I felt somewhat concerned,” confessed a French Witness in her 80’s. “But thanks to the welcome and friendliness of the brothers in Puigcerdà, the change presented no problem whatever. On the contrary, it has been an opportunity to affirm the international unity of Jehovah’s people.”

The Foundation of a Closer Union

The founders of European union stated that member countries were “determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.” The dismantling

of border posts in the 1980’s and 1990’s was designed to accelerate this process. But barriers also need to be overcome in the mind.

Jehovah’s Witnesses work hard to eradicate prejudice and mistrust. They understand that diversity enriches their ranks and that “God is not partial.” (Acts 10:34) At their international conventions and in their Kingdom Halls, they have seen “how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) The unity that Witnesses from Valençà and Puigcerdà have forged with their brothers from neighboring countries is living proof of that.



Two elders from the two congregations—one Spanish and the other French—that meet in the Kingdom Hall in Puigcerdà

“How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”

PSALM 133:1



LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

Does the Bible Foretell the Future?

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

1. Are Bible prophecies specific?

Only Almighty God can foresee the future in detail. (Amos 3:7) For example, since early times, he foretold the arrival of someone called the Messiah, or Christ. The Messiah would be a descendant of the faithful man Abraham. He would be a ruler who would make it possible for obedient humans to regain the blessing of perfect life free of disease. (Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 53:4, 5) This Promised One was to come from Bethlehem.—*Read Micah 5:2.*

Jesus proved to be the Messiah. Over seven centuries in advance, the Bible foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and would be despised. He would give his life for the sins of many, and he would be buried with the rich. (Isaiah 7:14; 53:3, 9, 12) The Bi-



ble also proclaimed, over five centuries in advance, that he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey and that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Every detail came true.—*Read Zechariah 9:9; 11:12.*



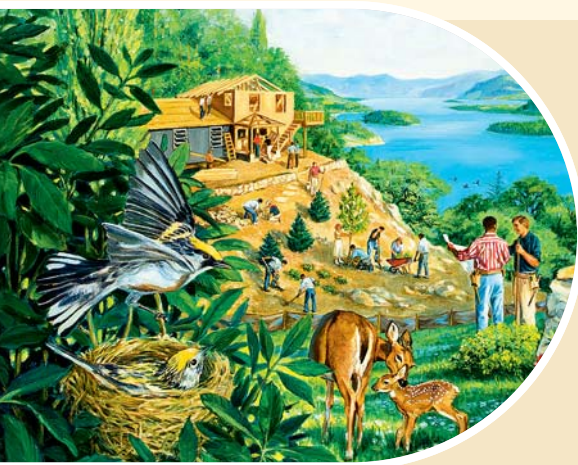
2. Does God predict dates?

Over five centuries in advance, the Bible prophesied the exact year of the Messiah's appearance. The time until his arrival was measured in weeks of years, meaning that each "week" was seven years long. There would be 7 plus 62 of such weeks, making a total of 69 weeks of years. That equals 483 years. When did that span of years begin? According to the Bible, the period began when God's servant Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and began to rebuild the city. Persian history establishes the date as 455 B.C.E. (Nehemiah 2:1-5) Jesus was baptized as the Messiah 483 years later, in the year 29 C.E., exactly on time.—*Read Daniel 9:25.*

3. Are Bible prophecies coming true now?

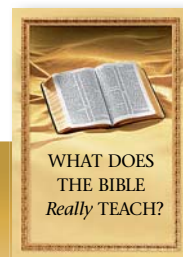
Jesus prophesied momentous events for our time. His prophecy mentions the good news of God's Kingdom, which will bring worldwide relief to people who love God. The Kingdom will bring an end to the entire wicked system of things in which we live.—*Read Matthew 24:14, 21, 22.*

Bible prophecies describe in detail the concluding period of the present system of things. The Bible revealed that in contrast with what might be expected in an age of progress, people would be ruining the earth. Distress caused by wars, food shortages, earthquakes, and disease epidemics would increase. (Luke 21:11; Revelation 11:18) Moral standards would collapse. In these difficult times, Jesus' followers would preach the good news of God's Kingdom in all nations.—*Read Matthew 24:3, 7, 8; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.*



4. What will be mankind's future?

Almighty God has good things in store for faithful mankind. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, along with his chosen ones, will rule over the earth from heaven. They make up the Kingdom government, which will rule for a thousand years. The dead will be raised and will have the opportunity of being judged worthy of everlasting life. Furthermore, the Kingdom will cure everyone then living. Sickness and death will be no more.—*Read Revelation 5:10; 20:6, 12; 21:4, 5.*



For more information, see pages 23-25 and 197-201 of the book pictured here.



DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

"I, Jehovah Your God, Am Grasping Your Right Hand"

"HOLD my hand," says a father to his young son as they get ready to cross a busy street. With his father's strong hand wrapped around his tiny fingers, the boy feels safe, unafraid. Have you ever wished that someone could take your hand and safely lead you through life's uncertainties? If so, you may find comfort in the words recorded by Isaiah. —*Read Isaiah 41:10, 13.*

Isaiah directed his words to Israel.

Though God viewed that nation as his "special property," it was surrounded by enemies. (Exodus 19:5) Did Israel need to fear? Jehovah used Isaiah to convey a reassuring message. As we examine those words, let us keep in mind that they also apply to God's worshippers today. —Romans 15:4.

"Do not be afraid," urges Jehovah. (Verse 10) These are not empty words. Jehovah explains why his people do not need to fear: "For I am with you." He is not a distant source of aid, promising only to arrive in time to help in moments of need. He wants his people to know that he is *with* them—as if by their side—ever ready to support them. Is that not a comforting thought?

Jehovah further assures his worshippers, saying: "Do not gaze about." (Verse 10) The Hebrew verb used here can refer to those who "look about in all directions to see whether there is anything that can harm them." Jehovah explains why his people do not need to look over their shoulder in fear: "For I am your God." What could be more reassuring than



that? Jehovah is "the Most High," "the Almighty One." (Psalm 91:1) With the all-powerful Jehovah as their God, why should they fear?

What, then, can Jehovah's worshippers expect from him? He promises: "I will really keep fast hold of you with my right hand of righteousness." (Verse 10) He also says: "I, Jehovah your God, am grasping your right hand." (Verse 13) What do you think of when you hear those words?

"Taken together, these two verses present a powerful picture of parent and child," explains one reference work. "[The father] does not merely stand by to defend, but he is also physically with the child; he will not allow the child to be separated from him." Just imagine—Jehovah will not allow his people to be separated from him, even during what may seem to be the darkest moments in their life.—Hebrews 13:5, 6.

Jehovah's worshippers today can find much comfort in the words Isaiah recorded. In these "critical times hard to deal with," we may at times feel overwhelmed by the pressures of life. (2 Timothy 3:1) But we do not have to face such challenges alone. Jehovah is willing to reach out and grasp our hand. Like trusting children, we can hold on to his mighty hand, confident that he will lead us in the right direction and help us in our time of need.—Psalm 63:7, 8.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR JANUARY:

■ **Isaiah 24-42**

THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

HOW did a young woman with a tragic childhood find real meaning in life?
What moved a violent political rebel to become a peaceable minister of religion?
Read these accounts to find the answers.



**“I was desperate
to find love and
warmth.”** —INNA LEZHNINA

YEAR BORN: 1981

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: RUSSIA
HISTORY: TRAGIC CHILDHOOD



MY PAST: I was born deaf to deaf parents. The first six years of my life were pleasant. Then my parents divorced. Even though I was very young, I understood what divorce meant, and it hurt me deeply. After the divorce, my father and my older brother stayed in Troitsk, while my mother moved to Chelyabinsk and took me with her. In time, she remarried. My stepfather was an alcoholic, and he often beat my mother and me.

In 1993, my beloved older brother drowned. The accident came as a big shock to our family. My mother took to drinking, and she joined my stepfather in mistreating me. I began to search for a better life. I was desperate to find love and warmth. I started attending different churches, look-

ing for comfort, but I found none.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: When I was 13 years old, a classmate, who was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, told me some stories from the Bible. I enjoyed learning about such Bible characters as Noah and Job, who served God despite difficult circumstances. Soon I was studying the Bible with the Witnesses and attending their meetings.

Studying the Bible opened my eyes to many beautiful truths. I was touched to learn that God has a name. (Psalm

83:18) I was impressed to see how accurately the Bible foretold conditions that would exist during “the last days.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5) And I was thrilled to learn about the hope of the resurrection. Just think—I will see my brother again!—John 5:28, 29.

However, not everyone shared my newfound joy. My mother and my stepfather were hostile toward Jehovah’s Witnesses. They tried to pressure me into quitting my

**“I was touched to learn that
God has a name”**



My husband and I enjoy sharing sign-language publications with the deaf

Bible study. But I loved what I was learning, and I wasn't about to quit.

It was not easy to cope with the opposition from my family. Another blow came when my younger brother, who had accompanied me to meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses, also drowned. Yet, the Witnesses were always

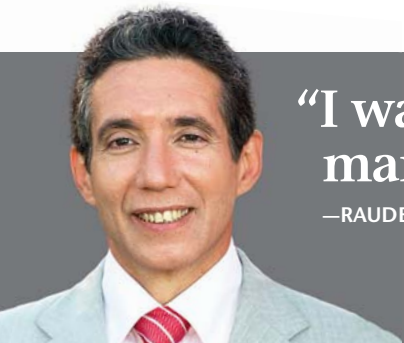
been married to a wonderful man named Dmitry. Together we serve at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in St. Petersburg. In time, my parents' attitude toward my beliefs softened.

I am so thankful to know Jehovah! Serving him has given my life real meaning.

there for me. Among them, I found the love and warmth that I had longed for my whole life. I knew that this must be the true religion. In 1996, I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED:

For the past six years, I've



"I was troubled by many questions."

—RAUDEL RODRÍGUEZ RODRÍGUEZ

YEAR BORN: 1959

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: CUBA

HISTORY: POLITICAL REBEL



MY PAST: I was born in Havana, Cuba, and was raised in a poor neighborhood where street brawls were common. As I grew up, I developed an interest in judo and other combat sports.

I was a good student, and my parents encouraged me to go to a university. While there, I began to feel that the political system of my country needed to change. I decided to rebel. A classmate and I

attacked a police officer, hoping to rob him of his gun. The struggle left the officer with serious head injuries. My classmate and I were put in prison for that attack and sentenced to death by firing squad. I was only 20 years old, yet I was about to die!

In the loneliness of my prison cell, I rehearsed how I would behave before the firing squad. I didn't want to show any fear. At the same time, I was troubled by many questions. I wondered: 'Why is there so much injustice in the world? Is this life all there is?'

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: Our death penalty was eventually commuted to a sentence of 30 years in prison. It was at this point that I met some of Jehovah's Witnesses, who were in prison for their religious beliefs. I was impressed by the Witnesses' courageous yet peaceable behavior. Though wrongly imprisoned, they were not angry or bitter.

The Witnesses taught me that God has a purpose for mankind. They showed me from the Bible that he will transform our earth into a paradise free of crime and injustice. They taught me that the earth will be filled with good people, who will have the opportunity to live forever in perfect conditions. —Psalm 37:29.

I enjoyed what I was learning from the Witnesses, but my personality had little in common with theirs. I thought that being politically neutral or turning the other cheek would be impossible for me. So I decided to read the Bible on my own. When I finished, I realized that Jehovah's Witnesses are the only people who behave like the early Christians.

From studying the Bible, I knew that I needed to make some drastic changes in my life. For example, I needed to clean up my

speech, as I was in the habit of constantly using swear words. I also needed to quit smoking. And I would have to stop taking sides on political issues. It wasn't easy to make these changes, but with Jehovah's help, I gradually succeeded.

One of the hardest changes was learning to control my temper. I still pray for self-control in this regard. I have been greatly helped by such Bible verses as Proverbs 16:32, which says: "He that is slow to anger is better than a mighty man, and he that is controlling his spirit than the one capturing a city."

In 1991, I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The baptism was performed in a barrel of water in the prison. The next year, some of us prisoners were released and sent to Spain because we had relatives there. Upon arriving in Spain, I immediately attended meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses there welcomed me as if I had been among them for years, and they helped me to start my life anew.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I am a happy man, serving God along with my wife and our daughters. I am privileged to spend most of my time helping others to learn the Bible. Sometimes I think back to that young man who was about to die, and I appreciate how much I have gained since then. Not only am I alive but I also have hope. I look forward to the promised Paradise—to the time when justice will prevail and "death will be no more." —Revelation 21:3, 4.





DID YOU KNOW?

Who is the Persian King Ahasuerus mentioned in the Bible book of Esther?



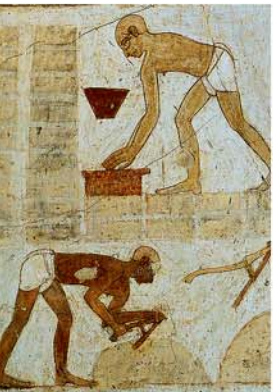
STONE RELIEF OF
XERXES (STANDING)
AND DARIUS THE
GREAT (SEATED)
Werner Forman/Art
Resource, NY

■ According to the book of Esther, Ahasuerus chooses the Jewish maiden Esther to be his queen, and she proceeds to save her people from an attempted genocide. For a long time, opinions differed widely as to which Persian king Ahasuerus might have been. However, the problem appears to have been settled by the deciphering of trilingual inscriptions on Persian monuments. These leave little doubt that Ahasuerus was Xerxes I, the son of Darius the Great (Hystaspis). The way the name Xerxes appears in the Persian inscription, when transliterated into Hebrew, is almost identical to

the way it appears in the Hebrew text of the book of Esther.

Everything said in the book of Esther regarding Ahasuerus agrees with this identification. From his capital at Susa (Shushan), in Elam, the Persian monarch also ruled over Media, and his domain extended from India to the islands of the Mediterranean. (Esther 1: 2, 3; 8:9; 10:1) “This is all true of Xerxes, but of no other Persian monarch,” says scholar Lewis Bayles Paton. “The character of Ahasuerus, as portrayed in the Book of Est[her], also agrees well with the account of Xerxes given by Herodotus and other Greek historians.”

What evidence is there that bricks were made in ancient Egypt?



DETAIL OF WALL
PAINTING IN TOMB
OF REKHMIRE
Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

■ The Bible book of Exodus states that the Egyptians put their Hebrew slaves to work making bricks. The slaves had to make a prescribed number each day, using clay mortar and straw.—Exodus 1:14; 5:10-14.

The making of sun-dried bricks was an important occupation in the Nile Valley in Bible times. Ancient monuments built from this material still stand in Egypt. A wall painting in the 15th-century B.C.E. tomb of Rekhmire in Thebes, almost contemporary with the events recounted in the book of Exodus, illustrates the process.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes the scene in this painting as follows: “Water is brought

from a pool; mud is mixed with a hoe and then carried to a spot convenient for the brickmaker. This mud is pressed into a wooden mold which the brickmaker holds to the ground. The mold is then lifted off, leaving a newly shaped brick to dry in the sun. Rows and rows of bricks are molded and, when dry, stacked preparatory to use. This procedure is still followed in the Near East.”

Different papyrus documents from the second millennium B.C.E. also refer to the making of bricks by serfs, to the use of straw and brick-clay, and to the daily production quota of bricks that workers had to meet.

Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son?

■ As recorded in the Bible book of Genesis, Jehovah God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. (Genesis 22:2) Some Bible readers struggle to understand that account. “When I first heard this story as a child, I was outraged,” says a professor named Carol. “What kind of God would ask such a thing?” While such feelings are understandable, we do well to keep a couple of points in mind.

First, consider what Jehovah did *not* do. He did not allow Abraham to go through with the sacrifice, even though Abraham was prepared to do so, nor has God ever again made such a request of anyone. Jehovah wants all of his worshippers, including children, to continue living—to enjoy a long and satisfying life.

Second, the Bible suggests that Jehovah had a special reason for asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God knew that many centuries later, He would allow His own Son,* Jesus, to die in our behalf. (Matthew 20:28) Jehovah wanted to convey to us just how much this sacrifice would cost him. He provided a powerful demonstration of that future sacrifice by what he asked of Abraham. How so?

* The Bible does not teach that God literally fathered Jesus by means of a woman. Rather, Jehovah created the spirit creature who was later sent to the earth to be born to the virgin Mary. As the Creator of Jesus, then, God may rightly be called his Father.

Consider Jehovah’s words to Abraham: “Take, please, your son, your only son whom you so love, Isaac, and . . . offer him up as a burnt offering.” (Genesis 22:2) Notice that Jehovah referred to Isaac as the son “whom you so love.” Jehovah knew how precious Isaac was to Abraham. God also knew how He felt about his Son, Jesus. Jehovah loved Jesus so dearly that he twice spoke from heaven, directly referring to Jesus as “my Son, the beloved.”—Mark 1: 11; 9:7.

Note, too, that Jehovah’s request to Abraham included the word “please.” One Bible scholar suggests that God’s use of this word indicates that “the LORD appreciates the costliness of what he is asking.” As we can imagine, that request would have grieved Abraham deeply; in a similar way, we can barely imagine the intense pain that Jehovah must have felt as he watched his beloved Son suffer and die. It was undoubtedly the greatest pain Jehovah had ever experienced or ever will experience.

Really, then, although we may recoil at the thought of what Jehovah asked Abraham to do, we are wise to remember that Jehovah did not allow that faithful patriarch to go through with the sacrifice. He spared Abraham the worst loss a parent can suffer; he protected Isaac from death. Yet, Jehovah did not shield “his own Son but delivered him up for us all.” (Romans 8:32) Why did Jehovah submit himself to such a terrible ordeal? He did so in order that “we might gain life.” (1 John 4:9) What a powerful reminder of God’s love for us! Are we not moved to show our love for him in return?*

* To learn more about why Jesus’ death was necessary and how we can demonstrate our appreciation for it, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*





IMITATE THEIR FAITH

She Acted Wisely, Bravely, and Selflessly

ESTHER slowly approached the throne, her heart racing. Imagine a hush falling over the great royal chamber in the Persian palace of Shushan, a silence so profound that Esther could hear her own soft footsteps and the rustling of her royal garments. She could not let her attention wander to the grandeur of the royal court, the graceful columns, the richly carved ceiling of cedars imported from distant Lebanon. She trained all her attention on the man seated upon the throne, the man who held her life in his hands.

The king watched her intently as she approached, extending his golden scepter toward her. It was a simple gesture, but it meant Esther's life, for by it the king excused her from the offense she had just committed—that of appearing before him without a royal invitation. As she came to the throne, Esther reached out and gratefully touched the top of the scepter.—Esther 5:1, 2.*

Everything about King Ahasuerus bespoke his immense wealth and power. The royal garb of the Persian monarchs of those times reputedly cost the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet, Esther could see some warmth in her husband's eyes; in his own way, he did love her. He said: "What do you have, O Esther the queen, and what is your request? To the half of the kingship—let it even be given to you!"—Esther 5:3.

Esther had already shown remarkable faith

* In the previous article in this series, we saw how the orphan Esther was adopted by her much older cousin, Mordecai, and was later chosen to be the wife of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia. The king's adviser, Haman, hatched a wicked plot to exterminate Mordecai's people, the Jews. Mordecai convinced Esther to approach the king to plead in behalf of her people.—See the article "Imitate Their Faith—She Stood Up for God's People," in the October 1, 2011, issue of *The Watchtower*.

and courage; she came before the king to protect her people from a plot to wipe them all out. So far, she had met with success, but greater challenges lay ahead. She had to convince this proud monarch that his most trusted adviser was a wicked man who had duped him into condemning Esther's people to death. How would she persuade him, and what can we learn from her faith?

She Wisely Chose "a Time to Speak"

Should Esther have revealed to the king the whole problem in front of his court? Doing so might have humiliated him and given his adviser Haman time to dispute her charges. So what did Esther do? Centuries earlier, wise King Solomon was inspired to write: "For everything there is an appointed time, . . . a time to keep quiet and a time to speak." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7) We may imagine Esther's adoptive father, the faithful man Mordecai, teaching the young woman such principles as she grew up under his care. Esther certainly understood the importance of choosing carefully the "time to speak."

Esther said: "If to the king it does seem good, let the king with Haman come today to



Esther humbly acknowledged the king's mercy

the banquet that I have made for him.” (Esther 5:4) The king agreed and had Haman summoned. Can you see how wisely Esther spoke? She preserved her husband’s dignity and created a more suitable setting for revealing her concerns to him.

No doubt Esther prepared that feast carefully, seeing to it that in every detail she catered to her husband’s preferences. The banquet included fine wine to encourage a happy mood. (Psalm 104:15) Ahasuerus enjoyed himself, and he was moved to ask Esther again what her petition might be. Was this now the time to speak?

Esther thought not. Rather, she invited the king and Haman to come to a second banquet, on the following day. (Esther 5:7, 8) Why did she delay? Remember, all of Esther’s people were facing death by the king’s decree. With so much at stake, Esther had to be sure that the moment was right. So she waited, creating yet another opportunity to show her husband how highly she regarded him.

Patience is a rare and precious quality. Though distressed and eager to speak her

mind, Esther patiently waited for the right moment. We can learn much from her example, for all of us have likely seen wrongs that need to be put right. If we seek to convince someone in authority to address a problem, we may need to imitate Esther and be patient. Proverbs 25:15 says: “By patience a commander is induced, and a mild tongue itself can break a bone.” If we wait patiently for the right moment and speak mildly, as Esther did, even opposition as hard as bone may be broken. Did Esther’s God, Jehovah, bless her patience and wisdom?

Patience Paves the Way for Justice

Esther’s patience paved the way for a remarkable chain of events. Haman left the first banquet in high spirits, “joyful and merry of heart” that the king and queen favored him so. As Haman passed through the castle gate, though, his eyes fell upon Mordecai, that Jew who still refused to pay him special homage. Mordecai’s reasons had nothing to do with disrespect but, rather, with his conscience and his relationship with Jehovah God. Yet, Haman “was immediately filled with rage.”—Esther 5:9.

When Haman told his wife and friends of this slight, they urged him to prepare a huge stake, over 72 feet (22 m) tall, and then to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai on it. Haman liked their idea and immediately set about the task.—Esther 5:12-14.

Meanwhile, the king had an unusual night. "The king's sleep fled," the Bible tells us, so he had the official records of State read aloud to him. The reading included the report of an assassination plot against Ahasuerus. He remembered the affair; his would-be murderers were caught and executed. What, though, about the man who had exposed the plot—Mordecai? Suddenly alert, the king asked how Mordecai had been rewarded. The answer? Nothing at all had been done for the man.—Esther 6:1-3.

Agitated, the king asked what court officials were available to help him correct this oversight. Of all people, Haman was in the king's court—early, it seems, because he was eager to secure permission to execute Mordecai. But before he could make his request, the king asked Haman how best to honor a man who had won the king's favor. Haman assumed that the king had him in mind. So Haman devised a lavish honor: Clothe the man in royal garb, and have a high official parade him around Shushan on the king's own horse, calling out the man's praises for all to hear. Imagine the expression on Haman's face when he learned that the man to be honored was Mordecai! And whom did the king assign to sing out Mordecai's praises? Haman!—Esther 6:4-10.

Haman grudgingly carried out what to him was an odious duty and then rushed home in distress. His wife and friends said that this turn of events could only bode ill; he was bound to fail in his fight against Mordecai the Jew.—Esther 6:12, 13.

Because Esther was patient, waiting that one extra day to present her request to the



king, Haman was given time to lay the basis for his own downfall. And might not Jehovah God have been behind the king's sleeplessness? (Proverbs 21:1) Little wonder that God's Word encourages us to show a "waiting attitude." (Micah 7:7) When we wait on God, we may find that his solutions to our problems far exceed anything we might have devised ourselves.

She Spoke Up Bravely

Esther dared not test the king's patience any further; at her second banquet, she had to tell all. But how? As it turned out, the king gave her the opportunity, asking again what her petition might be. (Esther 7:2) Esther's "time to speak" had come.

We may imagine Esther saying a silent prayer to her God before uttering these words: "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if to the king it does seem good, let there be given me my own soul at my petition and my people at my request." (Esther 7:3) Notice that she assured the king that she respected his judgment regarding what seemed good. How Esther differed from Vashti, the king's previous wife, who had purposely humiliated her husband! (Esther 1:10-12) Further, Esther did not criticize the king's folly of trusting in Haman. Rather, she



Esther bravely pointed out the wickedness of Haman

begged the king to protect her from a danger to her own life.

That request surely moved and amazed the king. Who would dare endanger his queen? Esther went on: “We have been sold, I and my people, to be annihilated, killed and destroyed. Now if we had been sold for mere men slaves and for mere maidservants, I should have kept silent. But the distress is not appropriate when with damage to the king.” (Esther 7:4) Note that Esther frankly exposed the problem, yet she added that she would have kept quiet about it if mere slavery had been the threat. This genocide, though, would be too costly to the king himself to keep quiet about it.

Esther’s example teaches us much about the art of persuasion. If you ever need to lay bare a serious problem to a loved one or even to a person in high authority, a mixture of patience, respect, and candor can be of great help.—Proverbs 16:21, 23.

Ahasuerus demanded: “Who is this, and just where is the one who has emboldened himself to do that way?” Imagine Esther pointing a finger as she said: “The man, the adversary and enemy, is this bad Haman.” The accusation hung in the air. Terror filled Haman. Picture the volatile monarch’s face

coloring as he realized that his trusted adviser had duped him into signing an order that would destroy his own beloved wife! The king stormed out into the garden to regain his composure.—Esther 7:5-7.

Haman, exposed as the scheming coward that he was, groveled at the queen’s feet. When the king came back into the room and saw Haman pleading with Esther on her couch, he angrily accused Haman of attempting to rape the queen in the king’s own home. That sounded the death knell for Haman. He was taken away, his face covered. One of the king’s officials then spoke up, telling the king of the huge stake that Haman had intended for Mordecai. Ahasuerus immediately ordered that Haman himself be hanged upon it.—Esther 7:8-10.

In today’s unjust world, it is easy to imagine that we will never see justice done. Have you ever felt that way? Esther never despaired, never turned cynical, never lost faith. When the time came, she spoke up bravely for what was right, and she trusted in Jehovah to do the rest. Let us do the same! Jehovah has not changed since Esther’s day. He is still more than able to catch the wicked and cunning in their own traps, just as he did Haman.—Psalm 7:11-16.

Questions About Esther

Why did Mordecai allow Esther to marry a pagan unbeliever?

There is no basis for the suggestion of some scholars that Mordecai was an opportunist who wanted Esther to wed the king for the sake of prestige. A faithful Jew, he would not have favored such a marriage. (Deuteronomy 7:3) Ancient Jewish tradition holds that Mordecai tried to prevent the marriage. It seems unlikely that either he or Esther, mere foreigners in a land ruled by an autocrat who held a godlike status, would have had much choice in the matter. In time, it became clear that Jehovah used Esther's marriage as a means of protecting his people.—Esther 4:14.

Why does the book of Esther contain no mention of God's personal name, Jehovah?

Mordecai was evidently the inspired writer of the book. Perhaps the book was at first kept with official Persian records before it was taken back to Jerusalem. The use of Jehovah's name might have moved worshippers of the Persian gods to destroy the book. In any case, Jehovah's involvement in the story is clear. Interestingly, God's personal name is concealed in the original Hebrew text by means of acrostics, wherein the phrasing appears to have been arranged deliberately so that the first or the last letters of successive words spell out God's name.—Esther 1:20, footnote.

Is the book of Esther historically inaccurate?

Critics level that charge against the book. However, some scholars have noted that the writer of the book showed a remarkably detailed knowledge of Persian royalty, architecture, and customs. True, no mention of Queen Esther has been found in surviving secular documents, but Esther would hardly be the only royal personage who was erased from public records. What is more, secular records do show that a man named *Mardukâ*, a Persian equivalent of Mordecai, served as a court official in Shushan at the time described in the book.

She Acted Unselfishly for Jehovah and for His People

At last, the king learned who Mordecai was—not only his loyal protector against assassination but also the adoptive father of Esther. Ahasuerus bestowed Haman's position as prime minister on Mordecai. Haman's house—including his immense fortune—the king gave to Esther, who placed Mordecai over it.—Esther 8:1, 2.

Now that Esther and Mordecai were safe, could the queen relax? Only if she were selfish. At that moment, Haman's decree to kill all the Jews was making its way to every corner of the empire. Haman had cast lots, or *Pur*—evidently a form of spiritism—to determine the opportune time to carry out this vicious attack. (Esther 9:24-26) The day was yet months away, but it was fast approaching. Could disaster still be averted?

Esther unselfishly risked her life again, appearing before the king once more without an official invitation. This time, she wept for her people, pleading with her husband to revoke the terrible edict. But laws passed in the Persian monarch's name could not be revoked. (Daniel 6:12, 15) So the king empowered Esther and Mordecai to enact new laws. A second proclamation was sent out, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves. Rid-

Esther and Mordecai sent out proclamations to the Jews of the Persian Empire



ers sped to every part of the empire, taking the Jews this good news. Hope was kindled anew in many hearts. (Esther 8:3-16) We may imagine the Jews throughout that vast empire arming themselves and preparing for battle, which they could never have done without that new edict. More important, though, would “Jehovah of armies” be with his people?—1 Samuel 17:45.

When the chosen day finally came, God’s people were ready. Even many Persian officials were on their side now, as news had traveled far and wide about the new prime minister, Mordecai the Jew. Jehovah gave his people a great victory. He no doubt saw to it that, lest his people face terrible reprisals, their enemies suffered a thorough defeat.* —Esther 9:1-6.

Furthermore, Mordecai would never be safe to preside over Haman’s house while ten sons of that evil man still lived. They too were killed. (Esther 9:7-10) A Bible prophecy was thus fulfilled, for God had earlier foretold the complete destruction of the Amalekites, who had proved to be wicked enemies of his

* The king allowed the Jews a second day to finish their conquest of their enemies. (Esther 9:12-14) To this day, the Jews commemorate that victory each year in the month of Adar, which corresponds to late February and early March. The festival is called Purim, named after the lots that Haman cast in his quest to destroy Israel.

A Prophecy Fulfilled

In fighting for God’s people, Esther and Mordecai fulfilled another Bible prophecy. Over a dozen centuries earlier, Jehovah inspired the patriarch Jacob to foretell regarding one of his sons: “Benjamin will keep on tearing like a wolf. In the morning he will eat the animal seized and at evening he will divide spoil.” (Genesis 49:27) In the “morning” of Israel’s kingly history, Benjamin’s descendants included King Saul and other mighty warriors for Jehovah’s people. In the “evening” of that royal history, after the sun had set on Israel’s kingly line, Esther and Mordecai, both of the tribe of Benjamin, warred effectively against Jehovah’s enemies. In a sense, they also divided spoil, in that Haman’s vast estate went to them.

people. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) The sons of Haman may well have been among the very last of that condemned nation.

Esther had to take on her young shoulders her share of very heavy burdens—such as royal edicts involving war and execution. It could not have been easy. But Jehovah’s will required that his people be protected from destruction; the nation of Israel was to produce the promised Messiah, the one source of hope for all mankind! (Genesis 22:18) Servants of God today are delighted to know that when the Messiah, Jesus, came to the earth, he forbade his followers from that time forward to take part in physical warfare.—Matthew 26:52.

Nonetheless, Christians do engage in a spiritual warfare; Satan is ever more eager to destroy our faith in Jehovah God. (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4) What a blessing to have Esther as an example! Like her, may we show faith by our wise and patient use of persuasion, by our courage, and by our unselfish willingness to stand up for God’s people.



Guard Against Wicked Spirits!

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

1 ANALYZE THE SCENES.—READ GENESIS 6:1-6 AND ACTS 19:11-20.

Describe the appearance of the Nephilim as you picture them. _____

How do you imagine the men felt after encountering a wicked spirit, as described at Acts 19:13-16? _____

2 DIG DEEPER.

Using research materials at your disposal, find out more about the Nephilim. Why, do you think, did they have such a violent disposition? _____

In what way can it be said that wicked spirits “forsook their own proper dwelling place”? (Read Jude 6.) Why, do you think, was it unnatural—even perverted—for them to seek out human wives? _____

What do the two accounts that you read tell you about the obsession wicked spirits have with sex and violence? _____

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

The vicious and selfish disposition of wicked spirits. _____

FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.

Since wicked spirits can no longer materialize, in what indirect ways might they try to influence you?

What forms of entertainment today reflect the attitude and interests of wicked spirits? _____

How can you show that you are determined to resist the influence of wicked spirits? (*Reread Acts 19:18, 19.*)

4 WHAT ASPECTS OF THESE ACCOUNTS CAPTURE YOUR INTEREST MOST, AND WHY?



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DON'T HAVE
A BIBLE,**

ASK JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
FOR ONE, OR
READ IT ONLINE AT
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Does the Bible really foretell the future?

SEE PAGES 16-17.



How did a young woman with a tragic childhood find real meaning in life? SEE PAGES 19-20.



Why did the faithful man Abraham attempt to offer up his son? SEE PAGE 23.



What can the example of Queen Esther of Bible times teach us about courage, patience, and persuasiveness? SEE PAGES 24-29.



Would you welcome a visit?