



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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FROM OUR COVER

- 3 In Search of Answers
- 4 Jesus Christ-Our Questions Answered
- 8 Do the Answers Matter?

REGULAR FEATURES

- 9 Did You Know?
- 10 Draw Close to God—"Please Let Us Come Home"
- 12 The Bible Changes Lives
- 16 Learn From God's Word—Why Are Christians Baptized?
- 23 Imitate Their Faith

 —He Protected, He Provided,

 He Persevered
- 29 Our Readers Ask . . . Who Sent the "Star"?
- 30 For Young People

 —Moses Receives a Special Assignment

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 18 Apocryphal GospelsHidden Truths About Jesus?
- 20 A Conversation With a Neighbor—Is Jesus God?



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In Search of Answers

"Nearly everyone has a theory about who [Jesus] is. No matter the level of our faith or skepticism, we all find ourselves asking, 'Who is this man?'"

-AUTHOR STAN GUTHRIE.



EOPLE are curious about Jesus. Books about him have become best sellers. Movies about him have become major box-office successes. Yet, questions about Jesus persist. People have varying opinions about who Jesus really was.

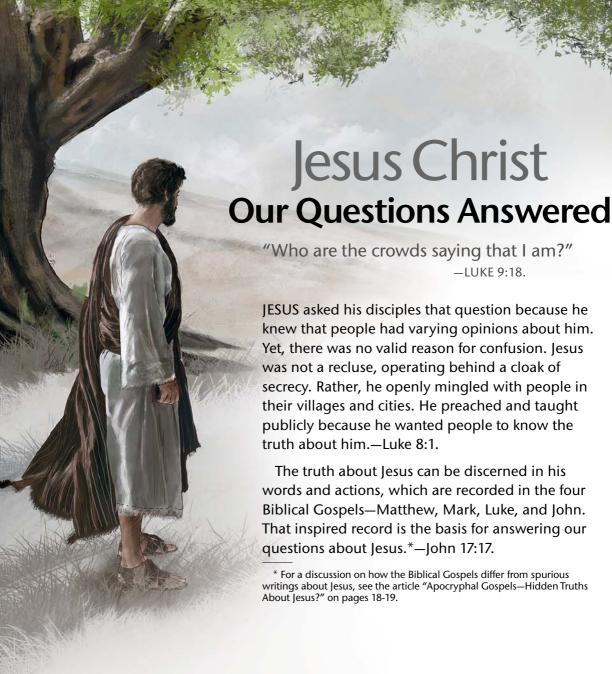
A few years ago, two journalists invited people to respond online to the question "Who was Jesus?" The answers included the following:

- "Apparently he was a rabbi (teacher) who made his life an example of compassion."
- "He was an ordinary man who lived an extraordinary life."
- "There is no proof that Jesus existed."
- "Jesus is the Son of God who was born, died, and rose from the dead to save us from our sins. He lives today, and He will come to earth again."
- "I believe Jesus Christ is the only son of God, fully human and fully divine, both at the same time."
- "Jesus is a fairy tale for grown-up children."

Clearly, such widely differing views cannot all be correct. Is there one reliable source of information that can give authoritative answers to our questions about Jesus? The publishers of this journal believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that it alone tells us the whole truth about Jesus.* -2 Timothy 3:16.

In the following article, we will consider the Bible's answers to some common questions about Jesus. He himself said that the way to salvation is open to "everyone exercising faith in him." (John 3:16) We invite you to examine the answers and then decide for yourself whether you need to learn more about Jesus and how to exercise faith in him.

^{*} For more information, see chapter 2, "The Bible—A Book From God," in the book What Does the Bible Really Teach? published by Jehovah's Witnesses.





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.

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OUESTION:

Was Jesus really a historical person?

ANSWER: Yes. Secular historians, including Josephus and Tacitus of the first century, mention Jesus as a historical figure. More important, the Gospels convincingly show that Jesus was a real person, not a fictional character. The record is specific and detailed in stating time and place. For example, Gospel writer Luke mentions seven ruling officials—whose names have been corroborated by secular historians—in order to establish the year Jesus began his ministry.—Luke 3:1, 2, 23.

The evidence that Jesus is a historical person is compelling. "Most scholars will admit that a man known as Jesus of Nazareth did live in the first century," states the book *Evidence for the Historical Jesus*.

QUESTION:

Is Jesus actually God?

ANSWER: No. Jesus never considered himself equal to God. On the contrary, Jesus repeatedly showed that he was subordinate to Jehovah.* For example, Jesus referred to Jehovah as "my God" and "the only true God." (Matthew 27:46; John 17:3) Only a subordinate would use such expressions in referring to another. A worker who refers to his employer as "my boss" or "the one in charge" is clearly assuming an inferior position.

Jesus also showed that he was separate from God. Jesus once said to opposers who challenged his authority: "In your own Law it is written, 'The witness of two men is true.' I am one that bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." (John 8:17, 18) Jesus must be separate from Jehovah. How else could they be viewed as *two* witnesses?*

OUESTION:

Was Jesus just a good man?

ANSWER: No. He was far more than that. Jesus understood that he filled a number of important roles in carrying out God's will. Here are a few of them:

- "Only-begotten Son of God." (John 3:18) Jesus knew his roots. His life actually began long before his birth on earth. "I have come down from heaven," he explained. (John 6: 38) Jesus was God's first creation, and he helped in the creation of all other things. As the only one directly created by God, Jesus could rightly be called "the only-begotten Son of God."—John 1:3, 14; Colossians 1: 15.16.
- "Son of man." (Matthew 8:20) Jesus many times referred to himself as "the Son of man," using an expression that occurs about 80 times in the Gospels. This expression indicates that he was fully human and not God incarnate. How did God's only-begotten Son come to be born as a human? By means of holy spirit, Jehovah transferred his Son's life to the womb of the Jewish virgin Mary, causing conception to take place. As a result, Jesus

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^{*} In the Bible, Jehovah is the personal name of God.

^{*} For a more detailed discussion, see the article "A Conversation With a Neighbor—Is Jesus God?" on pages 20-22.

⁺ CD also available.

^o MP3 CD-ROM also available.

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

was born sinless and perfect.—Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35; John 8:46.

- "Teacher." (John 13:13) Jesus made it clear that his God-given work was "teaching . . . and preaching the good news" about God's Kingdom. (Matthew 4:23; Luke 4:43) With remarkable clarity and simplicity, he explained what God's Kingdom is and what it will do in fulfilling Jehovah's will.—Matthew 6:9, 10.
- "The Word." (John 1:1) Jesus served as God's Spokesman—the means by which God conveyed information and instruction to others. Jehovah used Jesus to deliver His message to humans on earth.—John 7:16, 17.

OUESTION:

Was Jesus the promised Messiah?

ANSWER: Yes. Bible prophecies foretold the coming of the Messiah, or Christ, meaning "Anointed One." This Promised One would play a key role in fulfilling Jehovah's purpose. On one occasion, a certain Samaritan woman told Jesus: "I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ." Jesus then told her plainly: "I who am speaking to you am he."—John 4:25, 26.

Is there any proof that Jesus was indeed the Messiah? There are three lines of evidence that together provide overwhelming evidence, like the pattern of a fingerprint that identifies but one person. Does Jesus match the pattern? Consider:

- *His lineage*. The Bible foretold that the Messiah would descend from Abraham through the family line of David. (Genesis 22:18; Psalm 132:11, 12) Jesus was a descendant of both.—Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38.
- Fulfilled prophecies. The Hebrew Scriptures contain dozens of prophecies about the Messiah's life on earth, including details about his birth and death. Jesus fulfilled all the



prophecies. Among them: He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-11), he was called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2: 15), and he was executed without having any of his bones broken (Psalm 34:20; John 19: 33, 36). There is simply no way that Jesus could have maneuvered his life to fit the factors needed to fulfill all the Messianic prophecies.*

• God's own testimony. At the time of Jesus' birth, God dispatched angels to tell shepherds that the Messiah had been born. (Luke 2:10-14) On several occasions during Jesus' ministry, God himself spoke from heaven, expressing his approval of Jesus. (Matthew 3:16, 17; 17:1-5) Jehovah enabled Jesus to perform powerful miracles, providing further proof that Jesus was the Messiah.—Acts 10:38.

^{*} For a list of some of the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus, see page 200 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

OUESTION:

Why did Jesus have to suffer and die?

ANSWER: As a sinless man, Jesus did not deserve to suffer. Neither did he deserve to be nailed to a stake as a common criminal and be left there to die a shameful death. Still, Jesus expected such mistreatment and willingly submitted to it.—Matthew 20:17-19; 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Messianic prophecies foretold that the Messiah would have to suffer and die to cover the sins of others. (Isaiah 53:5; Daniel 9: 24, 26) Jesus himself said that he came "to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." (Matthew 20:28) Those putting faith in the redeeming value of his sacrificial death have the prospect of being rescued from sin and death and living forever in Paradise on earth.*—John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10.

^{*} For more information about the ransoming value of Jesus' death, see chapter 5 of the book What Does the Bible Really Teach?



OUESTION:

Can we really believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead?

ANSWER: Yes. Jesus fully expected to be raised from the dead. (Matthew 16:21) It is important to note, however, that neither Jesus nor the Bible writers ever claimed that he would rise from the dead by natural means. Such a notion would be beyond belief. Rather, the Bible says: "God resurrected him by loosing the pangs of death." (Acts 2:24) If we accept that there is a God and that he is the Creator of all things, then we have every reason to believe that he could raise his Son from the dead.—Hebrews 3:4.

Is there credible evidence that Jesus was resurrected? Consider the following.

- Eyewitness testimony. About 22 years after Jesus died, the apostle Paul wrote that there had been upwards of 500 eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus and that most of them were still alive when Paul was writing. (1 Corinthians 15:6) One or two witnesses might be easy to dismiss, but who could refute the testimony of 500 eyewitnesses?
- Credible witnesses. Jesus' early disciples—who were in a unique position to know what really happened—boldly proclaimed that Jesus was resurrected. (Acts 2:29-32; 3: 13-15) In fact, they viewed belief in his resurrection as essential to the Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19) Those disciples were willing to die rather than renounce their faith in Jesus. (Acts 7:51-60; 12:1, 2) Do you know anyone who would knowingly and willingly die for a lie?

We have considered the Bible's answers to six key questions about Jesus. Those answers clearly tell us who Jesus is. But do the answers really matter? In other words, does it make a difference what you choose to believe about Jesus?

Do the Answers Matter?

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—JOHN 8:32.

THE Bible contains the truth that can set us free from confusing or even misleading beliefs about Jesus. Does it really matter, though, what we believe about him? Yes, it does. It matters to Jehovah. It matters to Jesus. And it should matter to us.

- Why does it matter to Jehovah? Simply put, because "God is love." (1 John 4:8) Jehovah wants us to live happily forever. Jesus said: "God loved the world [of humankind] so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might... have everlasting life." (John 3:16) God sent his Son to be our Redeemer and to open the way for us to live forever in Paradise on earth, in harmony with His original purpose. (Genesis 1:28) God is eager to give the gift of everlasting life to those who learn the truth about his Son and act in harmony with it.—Romans 6:23.
- Why does it matter to Jesus? Jesus too loves humankind. He showed self-sacrificing love by willingly laying down his life for us. (John 15:13) He understood that he was thereby providing the only way to salvation. (John 14:6) Should it surprise us that Jesus wants to see as many as possi-

ble benefit from his ransom sacrifice? That is why he commissioned his genuine followers to teach people worldwide about God's will and purpose.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

• Why should it matter to us? Think for a moment about things that no doubt mean a lot to you—your health and your family. Do you yearn for good health and a better life for yourself and your loved ones? Jehovah through Jesus offers you and your loved ones the prospect of perfect health and unending life in a new world, free from pain and suffering. (Psalm 37:11, 29; Revelation 21:3, 4) Does that prospect appeal to you? If so, there is something you need to do.

Look again at the scripture text quoted along with the title: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The truth about Jesus and his role in the fulfillment of God's purpose can free us from the

worst type of slavery of all—bondage to sin and death. But to experience that liberation, you need to "know the truth." Why not learn more about this truth and how you and your loved ones can benefit from it? Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to help you.



DID YOU KNOW?



What did Jesus mean when he said to go the second mile?

■ In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus recommended: "If someone under authority impresses you into service for a mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:41) Jesus' listeners likely recognized that statement as a reference to compulsory service, which an authority could demand from citizens.

In the first century C.E., Israel was occupied by the Romans. They did not hesitate to press men or animals into service or to commandeer anything else they considered necessary in order to expedite official business. For example, Roman soldiers obliged Simon of

Cyrene to carry Jesus' torture stake to the site of his execution. (Matthew 27: 32) Such impositions were oppressive, highly unpopular, and bitterly resented by the Jews.

Just how far citizens could be compelled to carry a load is unknown. It is hard to imagine, though, that they would have been willing to go any farther than strictly required. So when Jesus urged his listeners to go the second mile, so to speak, he was telling them to perform without resentment those services that authorities legitimately demanded.-Mark 12:17.

Who was the Annas mentioned in the Gospel accounts?



■ At the time of Jesus' trial, Annas (Ananus) was described as a "chief priest." (Luke 3:2; John 18:13; Acts 4:6) He was, in fact, the father-in-law of Israel's high priest, Caiaphas, and he himself had served as high priest from about 6 or 7 C.E. until about 15 C.E., when he was removed from office by the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus. Even so, as a former high priest, Annas continued to exercise great power in Israel. Five of his sons and his son-in-law came to hold the office of high priest.

As long as Israel functioned as an independent nation, the high priest held his office for life. (Numbers 35:25) However, under the Roman occupation of Israel, the high priest served at the pleasure of the Roman governors and the kings appointed by Rome, and he could

be deposed by them. Historian Flavius Josephus reports that Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria, removed a certain Joazar from the high priesthood in about 6 or 7 C.E. and appointed Annas to the office. It seems, though, that these pagan rulers took care to select the new appointees from among the priests.

The family of Annas were notoriously greedy and enormously wealthy. They apparently acquired their riches through their monopoly on the sale of essentials for sacrifices in the temple precincts, such as doves, sheep, oil, and wine. Josephus states that Ananus (Ananias), the son of Annas, had "servants who were utter rascals and who [would] take by force the tithes of the priests; nor did they refrain from beating those who refused to give."



DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

Did you at one time serve Jehovah? Have you thought about serving him again but wondered whether he would welcome you back? Please carefully read this article and the one that follows. They were prepared especially with you in mind.

"Please Let Us Come Home"



PRAYED to Jehovah to please let me come home and to forgive me for hurting him." So said one woman who had strayed far from her Christian upbringing. Does your heart go out to her? Do you wonder: 'How does God feel about those who once served him? Does he remember them? Does he want them to "come home"?' To answer those questions, let us exam-

ine words recorded by Jeremiah. The answers will no doubt warm your heart.—*Read Jeremiah* 31:18-20.

Consider the setting of Jeremiah's words. In 740 B.C.E., decades before Jeremiah's day, Jehovah permitted the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel to be taken captive by the Assyrians.* God allowed this calamity as discipline because his people had taken up sinning in gross ways, ignoring the repeated warnings of his prophets. (2 Kings 17:5-18) Were the people softened by the hardships they experienced in exile, when they were separated from their God and far away from their homeland? Did Jehovah forget all about them? Would he ever welcome them back home?

"I Felt Regret"

The people came to their senses in captivity and were moved to repentance. Their heartfelt contrition did not escape Jehovah's notice. Listen as Jehovah describes the attitude and feelings of the exiled Israelites, spoken of collectively as Ephraim.

"I have positively heard Ephraim bemoaning himself," says Jehovah. (Verse 18) He heard the Israelites as they lamented the effects of their sinful course. The phrase "bemoaning himself" can mean "a shaking or rocking motion," says one scholar. They were like a wayward son ruefully shaking his head as he reflects on the hardships he has brought upon himself and longs for the life he had back home. (Luke 15:11-17) What were the people saying?

"You have corrected me . . . like a calf that has not been trained." (Verse 18) The people acknowledged that they deserved the discipline. After all, they had been like an untrained calf. This simile may mean that they had been like a bullock that would never have "felt the goad if he had not first rebelled against the yoke," says one reference work.

"Cause me to turn back, and I shall readily turn back, for you are Jehovah my God." (Verse 18) Their hearts humbled, the people called out to God. They had been lost in a sinful

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR APRIL:

■ Jeremiah 17-31

^{*} Centuries earlier, in 997 B.C.E., the Israelites were split into two kingdoms. One was the southern two-tribe kingdom of Judah. The other was the northern ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, also called Ephraim, for its most prominent tribe.

course, but now they pleaded for help to find their way back into his favor. One translation says: "You are our God—please let us come home."—Contemporary English Version.

"I felt regret.... I became ashamed, and I also felt humiliated." (Verse 19) The people felt sorry because they had sinned. They accepted the blame and admitted their guilt. As if beating their breast, they also felt disgraced and cast down.—Luke 15:18, 19, 21.

The Israelites were repentant. They were filled with sorrow, confessed their sins to God, and turned back from their bad ways. Would their repentance soften God's heart? Would he let them come home?

"By All Means I Shall Have Pity Upon Him"

Jehovah had a special attachment to the Israelites. He said: "I have become to Israel a Father; and as for Ephraim, he is my firstborn." (Jeremiah 31:9) How could a loving father refuse to welcome back a son whose heart is filled with genuine remorse? Notice how Jehovah expresses his Fatherly feelings for his people.

"Is Ephraim a precious son to me, or a fondly treated child? For to the extent of my speaking against him I shall without fail remember him further." (Verse 20) How tender those words are! Like a firm but loving parent, God had been obliged to speak "against" his children, repeatedly warning them about their sinful ways. When they stubbornly refused to listen, he let them go into exile—in effect, making them leave home. But even though he had to punish them, he did not forget them. He could never do that. A loving father does not forget his children. How, though, did Jehovah feel when he saw true repentance in his children?

"My intestines have become boisterous for him.* By all means I shall have pity upon him." (Verse 20) Jehovah felt a strong yearning for his

children. Their sincere repentance touched his heart, and he had a deep longing for them to return to him. Like the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, Jehovah "was moved with pity" and eager to welcome his children back home.—Luke 15:20.

"Jehovah Let Me Come Home!"

The words at Jeremiah 31:18-20 give us insight into Jehovah's tender compassion and mercy. God does not forget those who once served him. What if such ones want to return to him? God is "ready to forgive." (Psalm 86:5) He will never turn away those who come to him with repentant hearts. (Psalm 51:17) On the contrary, he is happy to welcome them home. —Luke 15:22-24.

The woman mentioned at the outset took the initiative to return to Jehovah and visited a local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. At first, she had to overcome her own negative feelings. "I felt so unworthy," she recalls. But the congregation's elders offered encouragement and helped her to regain spiritual strength. With a heart full of appreciation, she says, "It is so wonderful that Jehovah let me come home!"

If you once served Jehovah and have thought about serving him again, we invite you to visit the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Remember that Jehovah responds with compassion and mercy when repentant ones call out to him, "Please let us come home."



^{*} Commenting on this word picture about intestinal agitation, a guide for Bible translators explains: "For the Jews the interior of the body was the center for emotions."

THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

WHAT moved a man to return to the religious upbringing from which he had strayed? How did a young man find the father figure he had yearned for his whole life? Read what these people have to say.



rejected all their efforts. My parents were heartbroken.

After moving away from home, I began to experiment with drugs, even growing and selling large amounts of marijuana. I lived an immoral life and spent a lot of time partying in the club scene. I also developed a quick temper. If someone said or did something that I didn't like, I would swell with anger, often shouting at people and hitting them. Basically, I did everything that I had been taught not to do as a Christian.

but grew up in Australia. My parents are Jehovah's Witnesses, and they did their best to in-

still in me a love for Jehovah and his Word, the Bible. In my teen years, however, I began to rebel. I would sneak out of the house at night to meet up with other teenagers. We stole cars and got into a lot of other trouble.

At first, I did those things secretly for fear of displeasing my parents. But I gradually lost that fear. I formed friendships with people much older than I who did not love Jehovah, and they had a negative influence on me. Finally, I told my parents that I no longer wished to have anything to do with their faith. They patiently tried to help me, but I

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: I became close friends with a fellow drug user who had lost his father at a young age. We often stayed up talking late into the night. On some of those nights, he opened up and talked about how much he missed his father. Having grown up knowing about the hope of a resurrection, I soon found myself telling him about Jesus—that he raised the dead and that he promises to do so again in the future. (John 5:28, 29) "Imagine seeing your father again," I would say. "All of us could live forever in Paradise on earth." Those thoughts touched my friend's heart.

At other times, my friend brought up such subjects as the last days or the Trinity doctrine. I would grab his Bible and show him various scriptures that revealed the truth about Jehovah God, Jesus, and the last days. (John 14:28; 2 Timothy 3:1-5) The more I spoke about Jehovah to my friend, the more I found myself thinking about Jehovah.

Slowly but surely, the seeds of Bible truth that were dormant in my heart-seeds that my parents had tried hard to plant-began to grow. For example, sometimes when I was at a party taking drugs with my friends, I would suddenly start thinking about Jehovah. Many of my friends claimed to love God, but their conduct said otherwise. Not

> "I have been able to return to Jehovah because he drew me back"

wanting to be like that, I realized what I needed to do. I needed to return to Jehovah.

Of course, knowing what to do and actually doing it are two different things. Some changes were easy to make; I quit taking drugs without much difficulty. I also broke off my old friendships, and I began to study the Bible with a Christian elder.

Other changes, however, were much harder. It was especially difficult to control my anger. Sometimes I would do well for a while and then suffer a relapse. I felt bad afterward, thinking that I was a failure. Discouraged, I approached the elder who was studying the Bible with me. Ever patient and kind, he proved to be a true source of encouragement. One time, he had me read an article in The Watchtower about the importance of not giving up.* We discussed steps that I could take



when I felt angry. Gradually, with the article in mind and with much prayer to Jehovah, I was able to bring my temper under control. Finally, in April 2000, I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Needless to say, my parents were thrilled.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I now have peace of mind and a clean conscience, knowing that I am no longer defiling my body with drugs or immorality. No matter what I do, whether it's working, attending a Christian meeting, or enjoying some form of recreation, I am much happier. I have a positive outlook on life.

I thank Jehovah for my parents, who never forgot about me. I also think of Jesus' words found at John 6:44: "No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him." I am touched to think that I have been able to return to Jehovah because he drew me back.

^{*} The article, entitled "Success Through Perseverance," appeared in the February 1, 2000, issue, pages 4-6.



YEAR BORN: 1977

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: CHILE HISTORY: DEATH-METAL BAND MEMBER

MY PAST: I was raised by my mother in Punta Arenas, a pleasant city on the Strait of Magellan near the southern tip of

South America. My parents separated when I was five years old, which left me feeling abandoned. I yearned for a father.

My mother studied the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, and she took me to Christian meetings at the Kingdom Hall. However, I had an aversion to the meetings, and I would often throw a tantrum on the way there. When I was 13, I stopped attending altogether.

By that time, I had developed a love for music, and I realized that I had a knack for it. By age 15, I was playing heavy-metal and deathmetal music at festivals, bars, and private gatherings. My association with talented musicians spawned in me an interest in classical music. I began to study music at a local conservatory. At 20, I moved to the capital, Santiago, to further my studies. I also continued playing in heavy-metal and death-metal bands.

All this time, I was plagued with feelings of emptiness. In an effort to alleviate those feelings, I would get drunk and take drugs with my bandmates, whom I considered my family. I had a rebellious attitude, which was evident in my appearance. I wore dark clothing, grew a beard, and let my hair grow almost down to my waist.

Time and again, my attitude got me into fights and in trouble with the law. Once, under the influence of alcohol, I attacked a group of drug dealers who were bothering my friends and me. The drug dealers beat me so badly that I ended up with a fractured jaw.

My greatest pain, however, came from those closest to me. One day, I found out that

my girlfriend had been cheating on me for years with my best friend, and all my friends had been hiding it from me. I was crushed.

I moved back to Punta Arenas, where I began teaching music and working as a cellist. I also continued playing and recording with heavy-metal and death-metal bands. I met an attractive girl named Sussan, and we began living together. Some time later, Sussan found out that her mother believed in the Trinity doctrine and that I didn't. "So, what is the truth?" she asked me. I responded that I knew that the Trinity doctrine is false but that I couldn't prove it from the Bible. However. I knew who could. I told her that Jehovah's Witnesses could show her the truth from the Bible. Then I did something I hadn't done for many years-I prayed to God and asked for his help.

A few days later, I saw a man who looked familiar, and I asked him if he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although visibly shaken by my appearance, he kindly answered my questions regarding meetings at the Kingdom

Hall. I was convinced that this encounter was the answer to my prayer. I went to the Kingdom Hall and sat in the last row so that no one would notice me. However, many began to recognize me from the days when I had attended as a child. They welcomed me and embraced me so affectionately that I felt an overwhelming peace. It was as if I had come home. When I saw the man who had taught me the Bible when I was little, I asked him to study with me again.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: One day, I read Proverbs 27:11, which says: "Be wise, my son, and make my heart rejoice." I was impressed to think that a mere mortal could make the Creator of the universe rejoice. It dawned on me that Jehovah was the Father figure that I had sought all my life!

I wanted to please my heavenly Father and do his will, but I had been a slave to drugs and alcohol for many years. I came to understand Jesus' teaching recorded at Matthew 6:24, which says that "no one can slave for two masters." As I struggled to make changes, the principle recorded at 1 Corinthians 15:33 hit home: "Bad associations spoil useful habits." I realized that I could not quit my harmful habits if I continued to frequent the same places and associate with the same people. The Bible's counsel was clear: I had to take drastic measures to break away from the

things that were making me stumble.—Matthew 5:30.

My passion for music made quitting the heavy-metal scene the most difficult decision I've ever had to make. But with the help of my friends in the congregation, I was finally able to break free. I quit overdrinking and taking drugs. I also cut my hair, shaved off my beard, and stopped dressing only in black. When I told Sussan that I wanted to cut my hair, her curiosity got the best of her. She said, "I'm going with you to see what this Kingdom Hall is all about!" She loved what she saw there, and soon she began studying the Bible herself. Eventually, Sussan and I got married. In 2008, we were baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses. We are happy to be united with my mother in serving Jehovah.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I have escaped from a world of sham happiness and treacherous associates. I still love music, but I am selective now. I use my experiences to benefit family members and others, especially young people. I want to help them see that much of what this world offers may appear attractive, but in the end it is just "a lot of refuse."—Philippians 3:8.

I have found loyal friends in the Christian congregation, where love and peace prevail. Above all, by drawing close to Jehovah, I have finally found my Father.





LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

Why Are Christians **Baptized?**

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. What does Christian baptism mean?

Baptism is a request for a good relationship with God. So, a Christian should be baptized, not when a baby, but when he or she is old enough to learn about God and become a disciple of Jesus. (Acts 8: 12; 1 Peter 3:21) We become a disciple of Jesus when we learn and do the things that he commanded.—Read Matthew 28:19, 20.

In the days of Jesus' apostles, many people took action without delay to learn about God and Jesus. For example, when one man learned that Jesus' death had opened the way to salvation, he immediately became a disciple. Today, many sincere people have chosen to become Jesus' followers.—Read Acts 8:26-31, 35-38.



2. Why was Jesus baptized?

Jesus was about 30 years of age when John the Baptizer dipped him under the water of the Jordan River. Jesus' baptism represented his decision to do God's will for him. (Hebrews 10:7) This would include his laying down his life as a sacrifice for the sins of humankind. Even before he came down from heaven to live on earth, Jesus had always loved and obeyed his Father, Jehovah.—Read Mark 1:9-11; John 8:29; 17:5.

3. Why should a Christian be baptized?

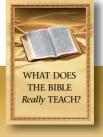
Our situation is different from that of Jesus—we are born as sinners. Yet, Jesus' sacrificial death makes it possible for us to have a good relationship with God. (Romans 5:10, 12; 12:1, 2) It is actually possible for us to belong to him as a member of his family. (2 Corinthians 6:18) How do we gain that privilege? In private prayer, we dedicate ourselves to Jehovah, vowing to do his will for the rest of our life. After making such a dedication, we symbolize it in public by being baptized.—*Read Matthew 16:24;* 1 Peter 4:2.





4. How can you prepare for baptism?

Jehovah's Witnesses study the Bible with anyone who wants to draw close to God. Studying the Bible and attending Christian meetings will strengthen your love for God and your faith in him. It will also help you to cultivate positive attitudes and habits. Developing love, faith, and other godly qualities will help you live up to your vow to serve Jehovah forever.—*Read John 17:3; Hebrews 10:24, 25.*





Apocryphal Gospels

HIDDEN TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS?

"THIS is big. A lot of people are going to be upset." "This changes the history of early Christianity." These dramatic statements came from scholars welcoming the publication of the "Gospel of Judas," a text thought lost for over 16 centuries (shown above).

There is renewed interest in such apocryphal gospels. Some people claim that these texts unveil momentous events and teachings from Jesus' life that were long kept hidden. But what are the apocryphal gospels? Can they really teach us truths about Jesus and Christianity that we cannot find in the Bible?

Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels

Between 41 and 98 C.E., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote down "the history of Jesus Christ." (Matthew 1:1) These accounts are sometimes called gospels, meaning "good news" about Jesus Christ.—Mark 1:1.

While there may have been oral traditions as well as other writings about Jesus, these four Gospels were the only ones considered inspired of God and worthy of being part of the Holy Scriptures—providing "the certainty of the things" regarding Jesus' earthly life and teachings. (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1, 2; 2 Tim-

othy 3:16, 17) These four Gospels are mentioned in all the ancient catalogs of the Christian Greek Scriptures. There is no basis for questioning their canonicity—their status as part of the inspired Word of God.

In time, though, other writings started to appear that were also given the name gospels. These other gospels were called apocryphal.*

At the end of the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon wrote that those who had apostatized from Christianity had "an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings," including gospels that "they themselves have forged, to bewilder the minds of foolish men." Hence, the apocryphal gospels ended up being considered dangerous not only to read but even to own.

However, medieval monks and copyists kept those works from going into oblivion. In the 19th century, interest in the subject increased greatly and many collections of texts and critical editions of the apocrypha, including several gospels, came to light. Today

^{*} The term "apocryphal" comes from the Greek word that means "to hide away." The word originally indicated a text that was reserved for the followers of a particular school of thought and was hidden to the uninitiated. However, it eventually came to denote writings not included in the authentic Bible canon.

there are editions published in many of the major modern languages.

Apocryphal Gospels: Far-fetched Accounts About Jesus

The apocryphal gospels often focus on people who are spoken of little or not at all in the canonical Gospels. Or they tell of alleged incidents regarding Jesus' infancy. Consider some examples.

- The "Proto-Gospel of James," also called "The Birth of Mary," describes Mary's birth and childhood as well as her marriage to Joseph. For good reason, it has been described as religious fiction and as a legend. It promotes the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary and has clearly been written to glorify her.—Matthew 1:24, 25; 13:55, 56.
- The "Infancy Gospel of Thomas" concentrates on Jesus as a child—between 5 and 12 years of age—and credits him with performing a series of far-fetched miracles. (See John 2:11.) Jesus is presented as a naughty, irascible, vindictive child, who uses his miraculous powers to take revenge on teachers, neighbors, and other children, some of whom he blinds, cripples, or even kills.
- Some apocryphal gospels, such as the "Gospel of Peter," dwell on events related to the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Others, such as the "Acts of Pilate," a part of the "Gospel of Nicodemus," focus on people connected with those events. The invention of facts and even people discredits these texts completely. The "Gospel of Peter" seeks to exonerate Pontius Pilate and describes Jesus' resurrection in a fanciful way.

Apocryphal Gospels and Apostasy From Christianity

In December 1945, near Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt, peasants chanced upon 13 papyrus manuscripts containing 52 texts. These fourth-century documents have been attributed to a religious and philosophical move-

ment called Gnosticism. Mixing elements of mysticism, paganism, Greek philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity, the movement was a contaminating influence on some professed Christians.—1 Timothy 6:20, 21.

The "Gospel of Thomas," the "Gospel of Philip," and the "Gospel of Truth," found in the "Nag Hammadi Library," present various mystic Gnostic ideas as if coming from Jesus. The recently discovered "Gospel of Judas" is also counted among the Gnostic gospels. It portrays Judas in a positive light as the only apostle who really understood who Jesus was. One expert on this gospel notes that it describes Jesus as "a teacher and revealer of wisdom and knowledge, not a savior who dies for the sins of the world." The inspired Gospels teach that Jesus did die as a sacrifice for sins of the world. (Matthew 20:28; 26:28; 1 John 2:1, 2) Clearly, the Gnostic gospels are intended to undermine, rather than strengthen, faith in the Bible.—Acts 20:30.

The Superiority of the Canonical Gospels

A close consideration of the apocryphal gospels exposes them for what they are. Held next to the canonical Gospels, they betray a clear lack of divine inspiration. (2 Timothy 1: 13) Written by people who never knew Jesus or his apostles, they reveal no hidden truths about Jesus and Christianity. Rather, they contain inaccurate, invented, fanciful accounts that are of no help in getting to know Jesus and his teachings.—1 Timothy 4: 1, 2.

On the other hand, Matthew and John were among the 12 apostles; Mark and Luke were close associates of the apostles Peter and Paul, respectively. They wrote their Gospels under the guidance of God's holy spirit. (2 Timothy 3:14-17) For this reason, the four Gospels contain all that is needed for a person to believe that "Jesus is the Christ the Son of God."—John 20:31.



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES enjoy discussing the Bible with their neighbors. Is there a particular Bible subject that you have wondered about? Are you curious about any of the beliefs or religious practices of Jehovah's Witnesses? If so, do not hesitate to bring up the subject the next time you come in contact with a Witness. He or she will be pleased to discuss such matters with you.

A Conversation With a Neighbor

Is Jesus God?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Karen has come to the home of a woman named Samantha.

Is It True That You Do Not Believe in Jesus?

Samantha: My pastor says that Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in Jesus. Is that true?

Karen: Let me assure you that we *do* believe in Jesus. In fact, we believe that exercising faith in Jesus is vital to salvation.

Samantha: I believe that too.

Karen: So this is something that you and I have in common. By the way, my name is Karen. May I ask your name?

Samantha: Samantha. Nice to meet you.

Karen: Nice to meet you too, Samantha. You may wonder, 'If Jehovah's Witnesses really do believe in Jesus, why do people say otherwise?'

Samantha: Yes, I'm curious about that.

Karen: In a nutshell, Samantha, we have very strong faith in Jesus, but we do not believe everything that people say about him.

Samantha: Can you give me an example?

Karen: Yes. Some people say that Jesus was simply a good man. But we do not agree with that idea.

Samantha: Neither do I.

Karen: So that's another thing that you and I have in common. A second example is that Jehovah's Witnesses do not agree with teachings that contradict what Jesus himself said about his relationship with the Father.

Samantha: What do you mean?

Karen: Many religions teach that Jesus is God. Perhaps that is what you have been taught.

Samantha: Yes, my pastor says that God and Jesus are the same.

Karen: Would you agree, though, that the best way to learn the truth about Jesus is to examine what he said about himself?

Samantha: Yes, I would agree with that.

What Did Jesus Say?

Karen: Let's consider a Bible verse that sheds some light on the matter. Notice, please, what we read at John 6:38. Jesus said: "I have come down from heaven to do, not my will, but the will of him that sent me." Now, that statement would be a bit puzzling if lesus were God.

Samantha: What do you mean?

Karen: Well, notice that Jesus said he did not come down from heaven to do his *own* will.

Samantha: Right, he said that he came to do the will of the One who sent him.

Karen: But if Jesus is God, who sent him down from heaven? And why did Jesus yield to the will of that One?

Samantha: I see what you're getting at. But I'm not sure that this one verse proves Jesus isn't God.

Karen: Consider, though, what Jesus said on another occasion. He made a similar statement in the next chapter of John. Would you please read John 7:16?

Samantha: Sure. "Jesus, in turn, answered them and said: 'What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me.'"

Karen: Thank you, Samantha. According to this verse, did Jesus teach his own ideas?

Samantha: No, he said that his teachings belong to the One who sent him.

Karen: That's right. Again, we have to wonder: 'Who sent Jesus? And who gave him the truths he taught?' Wouldn't that One be greater than Jesus? After all, the sender is superior to the one who is sent.

Samantha: That's interesting. I never read that passage before.

Karen: Consider, too, Jesus' words at John 14:28: "You heard that I said to you, I am going away and I am coming back to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going my way to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am." Based on that verse, how would you say Jesus viewed himself in relation to the Father?

Samantha: Well, he said that the Father is greater than he is. So I guess he viewed God as his superior.

Karen: Exactly. For another example, notice what Jesus told his disciples as recorded

at Matthew 28:18. That verse says: "All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth." So did Jesus say that he always had all authority?

Samantha: No, he said that it had been given to him.

Karen: But if Jesus is God, how could he be given more authority? And who gave it to him?

Samantha: I'll have to think about that.

To Whom Was He Speaking?

Karen: There is something else that is rather puzzling if Jesus truly is God.

Samantha: What's that?

Karen: It's what we read about Jesus' baptism. Notice the account recorded at Luke 3: 21, 22. Would you please read those verses?

Samantha: "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized and, as he was praying, the heaven was opened up and the holy spirit in bodily shape like a dove came down upon him, and a voice came out of heaven: 'You are my Son, the beloved; I have approved you.'"

Karen: Did you notice what Jesus was doing as he was being baptized?

Samantha: He was praying.

Karen: Yes. Of course, we might wonder, 'If Jesus is God, to whom was he praying?'

Samantha: That's a good question. I'll have to ask my pastor.

Karen: Along a similar line, note that after Jesus came up out of the water, someone spoke from heaven. Did you notice what that One said?

Samantha: He said that Jesus was His Son, that He loved him, and that He approved of him.

Karen: That's right. But if Jesus is God, who said those things from heaven?

Samantha: I never thought of it that way before.

Why "Father" and "Son"?

Karen: Here's something else to consider: We've read that Jesus spoke of God as his heavenly Father. And when Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven referred to Jesus as His Son. In fact, Jesus specifically called himself God's Son. Now, if you wanted to teach me that two people are equal, what sort of family relationship might you use to illustrate the point?

Samantha: I might use two brothers.

Karen: Exactly—perhaps even identical twins. But Jesus referred to God as the *Father* and to himself as the *Son*. So, what message do you suppose Jesus was conveying?

Samantha: I see your point. Jesus is describing one individual as being older and as having more authority than the other.

Karen: Exactly. Think about this: You came up with such a fitting illustration of equality, that of brothers or twins. If Jesus really were God, don't you think that Jesus, as the Great Teacher, would have thought of the same comparison—or an even clearer example of equality?

Samantha: Of course.

Karen: But, instead, he used the terms "Father" and "Son" to describe his relationship with God.

Samantha: You raise an interesting point.

What Did Jesus' Early Followers Say?

Karen: Before I leave, I'd like to consider one other aspect of this subject with you, if you have a moment.

Samantha: Yes, I have a few minutes.

Karen: If Jesus truly is God, wouldn't you expect that Jesus' disciples would have plainly said so?

Samantha: That seems reasonable.

Karen: Yet, nowhere in the Scriptures do we read of their teaching that. On the con-

trary, notice what one of Jesus' early followers, the apostle Paul, wrote. At Philippians 2:9, he describes what God did after Jesus' death and resurrection: "God exalted him [Jesus] to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name." According to this verse, what did God do for Jesus?

Samantha: It says that God exalted him to a superior position.

Karen: Yes. But if Jesus were equal to God before he died and God later exalted him to a higher position, wouldn't that put Jesus above God? How could anyone be superior to God?

Samantha: He couldn't. It's impossible.

Karen: I agree. Based on all this evidence, then, would you say that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God?

Samantha: No, it doesn't seem that way. The Bible says that he is God's Son.

Karen: That's right. Let me assure you though, Samantha, that Jehovah's Witnesses hold Jesus in very high regard. We believe that his death as the promised Messiah opened the way to salvation for all faithful humans.

Samantha: I believe that too.

Karen: You might wonder, then, 'How can we show Jesus that we appreciate his giving his life in our behalf?'*

Samantha: I have wondered about that.

Karen: Perhaps I could come back and share the Bible's answer with you. Will you be home about this time next week?

Samantha: Yes, I will be here.

Karen: Great, I'll see you then.

^{*} For more information, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



IMITATE THEIR FAITH

He Protected, He Provided, He Persevered

JOSEPH swung another load onto the donkey's back. Picture him looking around at the darkened village of Bethlehem and patting the flank

of the sturdy little beast of burden. He was surely thinking of the long trip ahead. Egypt! A foreign people, a foreign tongue, foreign customs—how would his little family adapt to so much change?

It was not easy to tell the bad news to his beloved wife, Mary, but Joseph braced himself and did it. He told her of the dream in which an angel delivered this message from God: The king, Herod, wanted their little son dead! They had to move right away. (Matthew 2:13, 14) Mary was deeply concerned. How could anyone want to kill her innocent, harmless child? Neither Mary nor Joseph could fathom it. But they trusted in Jehovah, so they readied themselves.

Unaware of the unfolding drama, Bethlehem slept as Joseph, Mary, and Jesus slipped out of the village in the darkness. Heading southward, with the sky beginning to lighten in the east, Joseph likely wondered about what lay ahead. How could a lowly carpenter protect his family against forces so powerful? Would he always be able to provide for his own? Would he manage to persevere in carrying out this heavy assignment that Jehovah God had given him, to care for and raise this unique child? Joseph faced daunting challenges. As we consider how he rose to meet each one, we will see why fathers today—and all of us—need to imitate the faith of Joseph.

Joseph Protected His Family

Months earlier, in his hometown of Nazareth, Joseph's life changed forever after his

engagement to the daughter of Heli. Joseph knew Mary as an innocent, faithful young woman. But then he learned that she was pregnant! He intended to divorce her secretly to protect her from scandal.* However, an angel spoke to him in a dream, explaining that Mary was pregnant by means of Jehovah's holy spirit. The angel added that the son she bore would "save his people from their sins." He further reassured Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife home."—Matthew 1:18-21.

Joseph, a righteous and obedient man, did just that. He took on the weightiest of assignments: raising and caring for a son who was not his own but who was most precious to God. Later, in obedience to an imperial decree, Joseph took his pregnant wife to Bethlehem to register. It was there that the child was born.#

Joseph did not take the family back to Nazareth. Instead, they settled in Bethlehem, just a few miles from Jerusalem. They were poor, but Joseph did all he could to protect Mary and Jesus from want or suffering. In a short

^{*} In those days, engagement was viewed in almost the same light as marriage.

[&]quot;See the article "Imitate Their Faith—She Drew 'Conclusions in Her Heart'" in the October 1, 2008, issue of *The Watchtower.*



Joseph acted decisively and selflessly to protect his child

time, they took up living in a humble home. Then, when Jesus was no longer a baby but a small child—perhaps over a year old—their lives suddenly changed again.

A group of men arrived, astrologers from the East, likely from faraway Babylon. They had followed a star to the home of Joseph and Mary and were looking for a child who was to become king of the Jews. The men were deeply respectful.

Whether they knew it or not, the astrologers had put little Jesus in great peril. The star they had seen led them first, not to Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem. There they told wicked King Herod that they were looking for a child who was to become king of the Jews.

This inflamed the man with jealous rage.
—See the article "Our Readers Ask . . . Who Sent the 'Star'?" on page 29.

Happily, though, there were forces greater than Herod at work. How so? Well, the visitors brought out gifts, asking for nothing in return. How strange it must have been for Joseph and Mary to find themselves suddenly in possession of "gold and frankincense and myrrh"—valuable commodities! The astrologers intended to tell King Herod just where they had found the child they sought. However, Jehovah intervened. By means of a dream, he instructed the astrologers to return home by another route.—Matthew 2:1-12.

Shortly after the astrologers left, Joseph received this warning from Jehovah's angel: "Get up, take the young child and its mother and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I give you word; for Herod is about to search for the young child to destroy it." (Matthew 2:13) So, as we noted at the outset, Joseph obeyed swiftly. He put his child's safety above all else and took his family to Egypt. Because those pagan astrologers gave the family such costly gifts, they now had assets that might help them in the sojourn ahead.

Apocryphal myths and legends later romanticized the journey to Egypt, claiming that little Jesus miraculously shortened the trip, rendered bandits harmless, and even made date palms bend down to his mother to yield their fruit.* In truth, it was simply a long, arduous trek into the unknown.

Parents can learn a lot from Joseph. He readily interrupted his work and sacrificed his own comfort in order to protect his family from danger. Clearly, he viewed his family as a sacred trust from Jehovah. Parents today raise their children in a perilous world, a

^{*} The Bible clearly shows that Jesus' first miracle did not occur until after his baptism. (John 2:1-11) To learn more about apocryphal gospel accounts, see the article "Apocryphal Gospels—Hidden Truths About Jesus?" on page 18.

world full of forces that would endanger, corrupt, or even destroy young ones. How admirable are those mothers and fathers who act decisively as Joseph did, working hard to protect their children from such influences!

Joseph Provided for His Family

It seems that the family did not stay long in Egypt, for soon the angel informed Joseph that Herod was dead. Joseph led his family back to their homeland. An ancient prophecy had foretold that Jehovah would call his son "out of Egypt." (Matthew 2:15) Joseph helped to fulfill it, but where would he lead his family now?

Joseph was cautious. He wisely feared Herod's successor, Archelaus, who was likewise vicious and murderous. Divine guidance led Joseph to take his family up north, away from Jerusalem and all its intrigues, back to his hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. There he and Mary raised their family.—Matthew 2: 19-23.

They led a simple life—but not an easy one. The Bible refers to Joseph as the carpenter, using a word that embraces many ways of working with wood, such as cutting down timber, hauling it, and seasoning it for use in building houses, boats, small bridges, carts, wheels, yokes, and all kinds of farm implements. (Matthew 13:55) It was hard physical work. The carpenter in Bible times often worked near the doorway of his simple house or in a shop adjacent to it.

Joseph used a wide range of tools, some likely handed down from his father. He may have used a square, a plummet, a chalk line, a hatchet, a saw, an adze, a hammer, a mallet, chisels, a drill that he worked by pulling a bow back and forth, various glues, and perhaps some nails, though they were costly.

Imagine Jesus as a small boy watching his adoptive father at work. His eyes wide and in-

tent on Joseph's every movement, he no doubt admired the strength in those broad shoulders and sinewy arms, the skill of the hands, the intelligence in the eyes. Perhaps Joseph began showing his young son how to perform such simple tasks as smoothing rough spots on wood with dried fish skin. He



Joseph worked hard to provide for his family

likely taught Jesus the differences between the varieties of wood that he used—the sycamore fig, oak, or olive, for example.

Jesus learned, too, that those strong hands that felled trees, hewed beams, and pounded joints together were also gentle hands that caressed and comforted him, his mother, and his siblings. Yes, Joseph and Mary had a growing family that eventually included at least six children in addition to Jesus. (Matthew 13:55, 56) Joseph had to work ever harder to care for and feed them all.

Joseph, however, understood that caring for his family's spiritual needs was paramount. So he spent time teaching his children about Jehovah God and His laws. He



Joseph regularly took his family to worship at the temple in Jerusalem

and Mary regularly took them to the local synagogue, where the Law was read aloud and explained. Perhaps Jesus was full of questions afterward and Joseph tried hard to satisfy the boy's spiritual hunger. Joseph also took his family to religious festivals in Jerusalem. For the annual Passover, Joseph may have needed two weeks to make the journey of about 70 miles (112.65 km), observe the occasion, and then return.

Christian family heads today follow a similar pattern. They give of themselves for their children, putting spiritual training above every other concern, including material comforts. They go to great lengths to take their children to Christian meetings both large and small. Like Joseph, they know that there is no better investment they can make for the sake of their children.

"In Mental Distress"

When Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph took the family to Jerusalem as usual. It was Passover, a festive time, and large families traveled together in long caravans through the lush spring countryside. As they approached the starker landscapes near lofty Jerusalem, many would sing the famous psalms of ascent. (Psalms 120-134) The city may have teemed with hundreds of thousands of people. Afterward, the families and their caravans began to head homeward. Joseph and Mary, perhaps with much to do, assumed that Jesus was traveling with others, maybe family members. Only after Jerusalem lay a full day behind them did they realize a terrifying truth—Jesus was missing!—Luke 2: 41-44.

Frantically, they traced their steps all the way back to Jerusalem. Imagine how empty and strange the city seemed to them now as they paced the streets, calling out their son's name. Where could the boy be? By the third day of searching, did Joseph begin to wonder if he had failed terribly in this sacred

trust from Jehovah? Finally, they went to the temple. There they searched until they came upon a chamber where many learned men, versed in the Law, were gathered—with young Jesus sitting among them! Imagine the relief Joseph and Mary felt!—Luke 2: 45, 46.

Jesus was listening to the learned men and eagerly asking questions. The men were amazed at the child's understanding and his answers. Mary and Joseph, though, were astounded. In the record, Joseph is silent. But Mary's words speak eloquently for both of them: "Child, why did you treat us this way? Here your father and I in mental distress have been looking for you."—Luke 2:47, 48.

Thus in a few deft strokes, God's Word paints a realistic picture of parenthood. It can be stressful—even when the child is perfect! Parenting in today's dangerous world can bring untold "mental distress," but fathers and mothers can take comfort in knowing that the Bible acknowledges the challenge they face.

Happily, Jesus had stayed in the one place in the world where he felt the closest to his heavenly Father, Jehovah, eagerly soaking up anything he could learn. Thus, he answered his parents in simple sincerity: "Why did you have to go looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?" —Luke 2:49.

Joseph surely thought those words over many times. Perhaps he came to beam with pride over them. After all, he had worked diligently to teach his adopted son to feel that way about Jehovah God. By that time in his life as a boy, Jesus already had warm feelings about the word "father"—feelings shaped largely by his exposure to Joseph.

If you are a father, do you realize what a privilege you have to help your children to form a concept of what a loving, protective

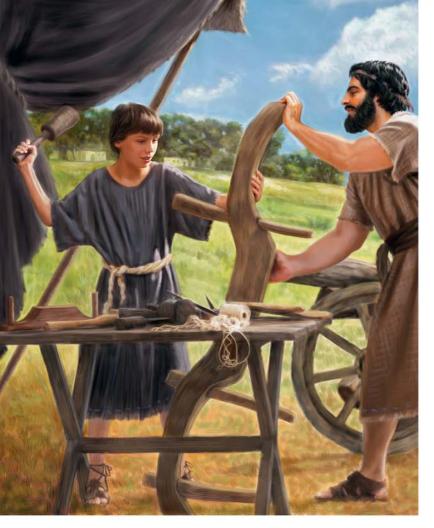
When Did Joseph Die?

We know that Joseph was alive when Jesus was 12 years old. At that age many lewish youths began to learn their father's trade and became apprentices at 15. Joseph evidently lived long enough to teach Jesus to be a carpenter. Was Joseph still living when Jesus began his ministry at about 30 years of age? It seems very doubtful. Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters are all mentioned as living at that time but not Joseph. Jesus was once even called "the son of Mary," not the son of Joseph. (Mark 6:3) Mary is spoken of as acting and taking initiatives on her own, without consulting a husband. (John 2: 1-5) That would have been unusual in Bible times unless she was a widow. Finally, as he was dying, Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to the apostle John. (John 19:26, 27) There would have been no need to do so if Joseph were still living. Evidently, then, Joseph died when Jesus was still a relatively young man. As the eldest son, Jesus undoubtedly took over the carpentry business and cared for the family until his baptism.

father is? Likewise, if you have stepchildren or adopted children, remember Joseph's example and treat each one as unique and precious. Help them to draw closer to their heavenly Father, Jehovah God.

Joseph Persevered Faithfully

The Bible discloses only a few more traces of Joseph's life, but they are worth considering closely. We read that Jesus "continued subject to them"—his parents. We find also that "Jesus went on progressing in wisdom



Joseph trained his son to become a carpenter

tice and judgment; and they shall not be found where parables are spoken." Later, Jesus exposed the emptiness of that proverb. As a boy, how often he had heard his adoptive father, humble carpenter though he was, teach effectively about Jehovah's "justice and judgment"! No doubt, on countless occasions.

We may also see evidence of Joseph's influence in Jesus' physical growth. A wellcared-for boy, Jesus grew into a strong, healthy man. Further, Joseph trained his son to be skilled at his physical work. Jesus was known not only as the carpenter's son but also as "the carpenter." (Mark 6:3) So Joseph's training was successful. Family heads wisely imitate Jo-

seph, caring for the practical well-being of their children and ensuring that they can support themselves.

Once we reach the point in the Bible record where Jesus is baptized at the age of 30, we find that Joseph is no longer part of the story. The evidence suggests that Mary was a widow by the time Jesus began his ministry. (See the box "When Did Joseph Die?" on page 27.) Yet, Joseph left a clear mark—a sterling example of a father who protected his family, provided for them, and persevered faithfully to the end. Any father, any family head, or any other Christian would do well to imitate the faith of Joseph.

and in physical growth and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:51, 52) What do those words reveal about Joseph? Several things. We learn that Joseph continued taking the lead in his household, for his perfect son respected his father's authority and remained in subjection to it.

We also learn that Jesus continued to grow in wisdom. Joseph surely had much to do with his son's progress in that regard. In those days, there was a time-honored proverb among the Jews. It asserted that only men of leisure could become truly wise, whereas tradesmen such as carpenters, farmers, and blacksmiths "cannot declare jus-

OUR READERS ASK . . .

Who sent the "star"?

■ Have you seen nativity scenes or plays that depict three kings, or wise men, visiting the newborn baby Jesus as he lay in a manger? According to the story, God used a star to lead them to the stable in Bethlehem. Countless children have even memorized the names of those three kings—Melchior, Caspar, and Baltazar. However, does that popular account match what the Bible actually says? No. In a number of ways, the story is inaccurate.

First, who were those men? In the original Greek, the Bible calls them neither kings nor wise men. They were magi, or astrologers. They were evidently practicers of the pagan art of divination based on the stars. The Bible record reveals neither the names nor the number of those visitors.

Second, when did those men visit? Not when Jesus was a baby in a manger. How do we know that? The Gospel writer Matthew says: "When they went into the house they saw the young child with Mary its mother." (Matthew 2:11) Note that Jesus was no longer a newborn baby, but a "young child." Mary and Joseph were no longer spending nights in a stable; rather, they were by then living in a house.

Third, who sent that "star" to lead the astrologers? Religious leaders commonly teach that God sent the "star." Did he really? Remember, the "star" did not first lead those astrologers to Bethlehem. Rather, it led them to King Herod in Jerusalem. They revealed Jesus' existence to that jealous and powerful murderer and even gave him strong reason for hating the child who was to become "king of the Jews." (Mathew 2:2) Craftily, Herod told them to report back to him on the precise location of this child, claiming that he wanted to honor it as well. The

"star" then led the astrologers to Joseph and Mary. So the astrologers were on a course that would have doomed the young child had God not intervened. Happily, he did intervene. So enraged was Herod when the astrologers did not report back to him that he ordered all the male children two years of age and younger in and around Bethlehem to be killed.—Matthew 2:16.

Jehovah later referred to Jesus as "my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." (Matthew 3:17) Consider: Would that loving, righteous Father select pagan astrologers—practicers of an occult art forbidden in his Law—as his messengers? (Deuteronomy 18:10) Would he use a star to lead them to the most dangerous and powerful murderer in the land, bearing a message sure to inflame Herod's jealous hatred? Would God then use the same star and astrologers to reveal the spot where his help-less son lay?

To illustrate: A good military commander sends his best soldier on a dangerous mission into enemy territory. Would he reveal to the enemy where to find that soldier? Of course not! Likewise, Jehovah sent his Son to this dangerous world. Would He reveal to wicked King Herod where His Son lay as a defenseless child? Never!

Who, then, sent the "star," or starlike object? Well, who had the greatest interest in seeing the child Jesus put to death, preventing him from growing up and fulfilling his mission on earth? Who seeks to mislead people and promotes lies, violence, and slaughter? Jesus himself identified the "liar and the father of the lie," the one who "was a manslayer when he began"—Satan the Devil.—John 8:44.

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Moses Receives a Special Assignment

Instructions: Do this exercise in quiet surroundings. As you read the scriptures, imagine that you are a bystander watching the action unfold. Visualize the scene. Hear the voices. Feel the emotions of the characters. Let the account come to life.

Main characters: Jehovah God and Moses

Summary: Jehovah commissions Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

ANALYZE THE SCENES.—READ EXODUS 3:1-14; 4:1-17.				
Describe the appearance of the burning bush, as you picture it.				
What do you imagine Moses' response is—both in his facial expression and his				
voice—when he hears God's words to him, found at Exodus 3:4?				
What emotions do you "hear" in Moses' voice as he questions Jehovah, as recorded at Exodus 3:11, 13 and 4:1, 10?				
DIG DEEPER.				
Using research materials at your disposal, find out more about the phrase "I				
shall prove to be what I shall prove to be." (Exodus 3:14) Why did Jehovah say				
that in response to Moses' question about His name?*				
* Jehovah's Witnesses publish a number of books and brochures that can help you to dig deeper in your study of the Bible. For more information, contact Jehovah's Witnesses locally or write to the pub-				

lishers of this magazine.

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1		Why, do you think, was Moses reluctant to approach Pharaoh? (Clue: Read Numbers 12:3.)	
1		proder mardon (clac. neda maribers 12.5.)	
1			
		Why might Moses have hesitated to approach	
1		his fellow Israelites?	
3			
	3	APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED. WRITE	
		DOWN WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT	
1		The human tendency to lack self-confidence.	N LOWING
			I STATE OF THE STA
		Jehovah's confidence in you and your abilities.	
3			AN WEST
0		FOR FURTUER APPLICATION	A ZHANANA
0		FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.	
3		In what areas of your life do you lack confidence?	
		dence?	
3		In what ways might you be useful to Jehovah	
3		God despite your limitations?	
3			
			IF YOU
3	4	WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST	DON'T HAVE A BIBLE,
		MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY?	ASK JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES FOR ONE, OR
			READ IT ONLINE AT
			www.watchtower.org
		To download and/or print out this article, go to www.jw.org	
4			



Where can we find reliable information about Jesus? SEE PAGES 3-7.



Does Jehovah still care about those who have strayed from him? SEE PAGES 10-11.



How did a young man find the father figure that he had searched for his whole life? SEE PAGES 14-15.



What can we learn from Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph? SEE PAGES 23-28.

Would you welcome a visit?

Even in this troubled world, you can gain happiness from accurate Bible knowledge of God, his Kingdom, and his wonderful purpose for mankind. If you would welcome further information or would like to have someone visit you to conduct a free Bible study, please write to Jehovah's Witnesses at the appropriate address listed on page 4.