



OCTOBER 1, 2012

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Corruption

WILL IT EVER END?

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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Corruption

HOW WIDESPREAD IS IT?

"Our company provides services for a local government authority. We must often wait two or three months to receive payment for those services. Recently, though, I received a phone call from a government worker. He offered to speed up the payments—if we gave him some of the money as a kickback."—JOHN.*

"Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority."

—TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

HAVE you ever been a victim of corruption? Perhaps not of the kind mentioned above, but almost certainly you have suffered the effects of corruption.

According to Transparency International's (TI) 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index,[#] "the vast majority of the 183 countries and territories assessed score below five on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean)." Two years earlier, TI acknowledged that its 2009 annual report exposed the pervasive reality of corruption: "It is clear that no region of the world is immune to the perils of corruption."

In some cases, the consequences of corruption can be disastrous. For example, *Time* magazine reported that "corruption and carelessness" were at least partially responsible for the very heavy death toll in the massive earthquake that

* Name has been changed.

[#] "The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries according to their perceived levels of public-sector corruption."—Transparency International.

struck Haiti in 2010. It added further: “Buildings rise with little if any input from engineers and plenty of bribes to so-called government inspectors.”

Is there a lasting solution to the scourge of corruption? To answer that question, we need to understand the basic causes of corruption. We will consider these in the next article.

WHY DOES Corruption PERSIST?

“Man has dominated man to his injury.”—ECCLESIASTES 8:9.

THAT statement aptly describes the history of human rulership. It has been responsible for untold suffering and misery. In all ages, well-intentioned people who have tried to establish a more just society were constantly foiled by greed and corruption. Why is that so? Why does corruption persist? Basically, because of the following three unwholesome influences.



1. The influence of sin.

The Bible plainly states that we “are all under sin.” (Romans 3:9) Like an incurable hereditary disease, sin “resides,” or is “dwelling,” within us. For thousands of years, sin has “ruled” over mankind like a king. Its “law” is continually at work in us. Sinful inclinations lead many to put their own interests first or to center their lives on gaining material possessions or authority at others’ expense.—Romans 5:21; 7:17, 20, 23, 25.


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2. The influence of the wicked world we live in.

Our world is characterized by greed and selfishness. In such an environment, some people find it difficult to be different. Driven by selfish ambition, they become power hungry. They also develop a strong desire for more money and possessions—more than they really need. Sadly, they are willing to behave in a dishonest way to achieve those goals. Rather than resisting unwholesome influences, such people “follow after the crowd for evil ends.”—Exodus 23:2.

3. The influence of Satan the Devil.

Satan, a rebellious spirit creature, is “misleading the entire inhabited earth.” (Revelation 12:9) He thrives on manipulating humans. He may craftily exploit a person’s natural desire for material comfort and financial well-being to the point that the person acts deceitfully.

Does that mean that we are mere puppets in Satan’s hands—that we are obliged to obey him when he pulls the strings? We will learn the answer in the following article.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE Honest IN A CORRUPT WORLD?

“We wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things.”—HEBREWS 13:18.

ALTHOUGH our sinful nature, the world we live in, and the Devil can exert great pressure on us, we *can* resist their influence! How? By drawing close to God and by applying time-tested principles from his Word, the Bible. Consider two examples.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Do not model your behaviour on the contemporary world.”—Romans 12:2, *New Jerusalem Bible*.

Real-life experience: Guilherme is a successful Brazilian businessman. He admits that it is not easy to be honest. “A business person can easily begin to adopt dishonest practices, perhaps because of the pressure to meet company goals or to survive in a competitive world,” he says. “Many people regard giving and receiving bribes as normal practice. When you

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[°] Braille also available.

⁺ CD also available.

[°] MP3 CD-ROM also available.

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

are an entrepreneur with heavy financial responsibilities, it is a challenge to be honest.”

Even so, Guilherme has successfully resisted the pressure to be dishonest. He says: “Even in a permissive business environment, it is possible to be honest. You need to have strong moral values. The Bible has helped me to see the benefits of honesty. An honest person has a clear conscience, an inner calmness, and self-respect. He can be a positive influence on those around him.”

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them. The love of money causes all kinds of trouble.”—1 Timothy 6:9, 10, *Contemporary English Version*.

Real-life experience: André is the owner of a company that installs security systems. One of his clients is a large soccer club. On one occasion, after a big game, André went to the administration offices and presented an invoice for the services he had performed. The financial department was still busy counting the money it had just received from the ticket

“I’m grateful that applying the Bible’s high moral principles has earned me a good reputation.”—ANDRÉ



“The Bible has helped me to see the benefits of honesty.”—GUILHERME

offices. As it was already late, the supervisor hurriedly paid the suppliers, including André.

“On my way home, I noticed that the supervisor had overpaid me,” relates André. “I knew that he probably would never know who had received the extra money. But I also knew that the poor man would have to pay what was missing out of his own pocket! I decided to go back. I managed to push my way through a crowd of fans and return the extra money. The supervisor was greatly surprised. No one had ever returned any money to him.”

“That act of honesty earned the supervisor’s respect,” André continues. “A number of years have gone by, but of all the original suppliers, I am the only one who still has a contract with the club. I’m grateful that applying the Bible’s high moral principles has earned me a good reputation.”

It is encouraging to know that we can, with God’s help, resist corruptive influences. However, individual efforts will never completely root out corruption. The causes go deep—too deep for imperfect humans to solve on their own. Does this mean, then, that corruption will never end? The final article in this series highlights the Bible’s encouraging answer.



CORRUPTION WILL END!

“Hope in Jehovah and keep his way . . .
When the wicked ones are cut off, you will see it.”

—PSALM 37:34.

DO YOU, like many people, fear that corruption is inevitable and will never be completely eliminated? If so, that fear is understandable. Throughout history, humans have tried every conceivable form of government. Yet, they have never succeeded in permanently eliminating corruption. Is there any hope that a time will come when all people will deal honestly with one another?

Happily, the Bible’s answer is yes! It tells us that God will soon take action to rid our earth of corruption. How will he do so? By means of his Kingdom, a heavenly government that will completely transform our earth. This is the same Kingdom that Jesus taught his followers to pray for. In what is sometimes called the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father, Jesus said: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth.”
—Matthew 6:10, *King James Version*.



Concerning the Ruler of that Kingdom, Jesus Christ, the Bible foretells: “He will deliver the poor one crying for help, also the afflicted one and whoever has no helper. He will feel sorry for the lowly one and the poor one, and the souls of the poor ones he will save. From oppression and from violence he will redeem their soul.” (Psalm 72:12-14) Note that Jesus has empathy for those who are victims of corruption, and *he will do something about oppression!* Is that not comforting?

In the hands of that compassionate and powerful Ruler, God’s Kingdom will rid our earth of corruption. How? By eliminating the three causes of corruption.

The Influence of Sin

At present, we must all battle sinful tendencies, which incline us to act selfishly. (Romans 7:21-23) Still, there are good people who want to do what is right. They exercise faith in the ransoming value of Jesus’ shed blood, and they can receive forgiveness of their sins.* (1 John 1:7, 9) Such people stand to benefit from God’s greatest act of love, as we read at John 3:16: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”

For faithful people, God will do something truly marvelous. In the coming new world, he will eventually remove all traces of sin, progressively raising faithful mankind to perfection and a righteous standing. (Isaiah 26:9; 2 Peter 3:13) Never again will the influence of sin cause anyone to act corruptly. Under the rule of God’s Kingdom, faithful humans “will be set free from enslavement to corruption.”—Romans 8:20-22.

* For more information on the ransoming value of Jesus’ death, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Influence of the Wicked World We Live In

Sadly, many today intentionally victimize others. They take advantage of the lowly and the poor, and they influence others to act corruptly as well. The Bible admonishes such individuals: “Let the wicked man leave his way, and the harmful man his thoughts.” If such corrupt individuals do repent, the Bible promises that God “will forgive in a large way.”—Isaiah 55:7.

However, God will have no choice but to remove those who stubbornly refuse to change their ways. By means of God’s Kingdom, the Bible’s promise will come true: “Hope in Jehovah and keep his way . . . When the wicked ones are cut off, you will see it.”* (Psalm 37:34) With the incorrigibly wicked gone, faithful worshippers of God will no longer be victims of corruption.

The Influence of Satan the Devil

Foremost among hardened sinners is Satan the Devil. How thankful we can be that Jehovah will soon restrict Satan, preventing him from influencing humans. Eventually, God will destroy Satan completely. Never again will that wicked monster be able to influence people to act corruptly.

Granted, the idea that God will do away with all causes of corruption may seem to be mere wishful thinking. You may wonder, ‘Does God really have the means to bring about such changes? If so, why hasn’t he done it already?’ Those are good questions, and the Bible provides satisfying answers.† We invite you to examine for yourself what the Bible teaches about the near future, when all corruption will be gone forever.

* Jehovah is God’s name as revealed in the Bible.

† For more information, see chapters 3, 8, and 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*



THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD ON A HINDU FAMILY

AS TOLD BY NALINI GOVINDSAMY

I WILL never forget a breakfast gathering of my immediate family on Monday morning, August 22, 2005. My life was in the balance, as I had a large tumor on my brain. My husband, Krishna, said a prayer, and then I spoke to the family.

"I am going to the hospital for a high-risk operation," I explained, "so you must all be prepared for whatever the outcome may be. I have made arrangements for my funeral, should that be necessary. To those of you who are worshipping Jehovah, please don't give up. To the rest of you, I beg that you accept the offer of a Bible study and that you attend our Christian meetings. That way you may be able to share my faith in a coming new world in which God's true worshippers will live forever in perfect health on a paradise earth."

Before explaining the outcome of my operation, allow me to tell you about my background and how I came to know the true God.

My Hindu Upbringing

My family lived in a large wood-and-iron house on a hill in the coastal city of Durban, South Africa. To get to the front gate of our house, we first had to climb 125 steps from the main road in the valley below. Those stairs led to a short, bushy pathway that brought us to an iron gate. On one side of the gate stood my grandmother's temple, which was filled with pictures and images of Hindu gods. Granny told me that I was a "temple

child" (*mandir kī baccā*, in Hindi) and that the gods we worshipped were responsible for my birth. Opposite this temple was a flight of polished red stairs, which led to the front door. The house was large, with a long passage, a big kitchen with a coal stove, seven bedrooms, and a one-bedroom outbuilding. Those dwellings were shared by 27 of us, including my grandparents, my father, his three younger brothers, his youngest sister, and their families.

It was not easy to care for the needs of such a large family. But communal living kept the family together and gave us many happy memories. The four daughters-in-law, including my mother, Gargee Devi, shared the household chores. They took turns cooking meals and cleaning. My grandfather was the head of the house, and he bought the food for the entire family. Every Wednesday my grandparents went to the market to buy meat, fruit, and vegetables for the week. We used to sit under the shade of a pine tree at the edge of the bank that overlooked the valley below as we waited for them to return from the market. As soon as we spotted them getting off the bus with their large baskets, we would run down the 125 steps to assist in bringing the goodies home.

In our garden, we had a tall palm tree in which birds called mynahs had built their nest. We would see them flying to and fro and could hear them chirping. My grandmother would sit on the stairs at the front door and tell us stories, as if she were

interpreting the sounds the mynahs made. I have so many good memories of the life we shared in that home! We laughed, we cried, we played, we smiled, we shared—we enjoyed living together as one big family. Most important, this is where we began learning about our Creator, Jehovah, and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Prior to our learning about Jehovah, our Hindu worship included many daily rituals. We also had big celebrations at regular intervals, where we would invite guests to venerate the different gods and goddesses. At some of those functions, my grandmother would go into a trance and communicate with spirits, and at exactly midnight, animal sacrifices were made to appease them. My grandfather was also well-known in the community for his charitable contributions to the construction and operation of public schools and Hindu temples.

How We Found the Truth About Jehovah

In 1972, my grandfather became ill and died. A few months later, one of my aunts named Indervathey, also known as Jane, accepted the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines from two of Jehovah's Witnesses. She felt guilty that she had not invited them into our home for a discussion. We had always turned the Witnesses away. But the next time they called, my aunt invited them in and spoke to them about a marital problem involving my uncle's abuse of alcohol. Neighbors and relatives had encouraged my aunt to

consider a divorce. The Witnesses explained God's view of marriage. (Matthew 19:6) My aunt was impressed with the Bible's advice and with its promise of a better life to come here on earth.* She changed her mind about leaving my uncle, and she began having a regular Bible study with the Witnesses. While she studied in the lounge of our home, the other daughters-in-law listened to the discussion from their rooms.

Eventually, all of the daughters-in-law joined in the Bible study. Aunt Jane shared what she learned and often read and explained stories to us from the book *Listening to the Great Teacher*.# When my uncles came to know that my aunts were studying the Bible, they began to oppose us. One of my uncles took all our literature, including a Bible, and burned it. They abused us verbally and physically for attending the meetings. My father was the only one who did not display such an attitude; he never objected to our learning about Jehovah. All four daughters-in-law kept on attending meetings and growing in their love for Jehovah God.

In 1974, my aunt Jane was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and my mother and other aunts soon followed. In time, my grandmother gave up her Hindu religious practices. For many years I tagged along, attending all the Christian meetings. Then, at a large convention of Jehovah's Witnesses, a

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

Published by Jehovah's Witnesses but now out of print.

In Mother's arms



Our family home



Near the 125 steps



With my husband (left), my daughter, and my parents

Witness named Shameela Rampersad asked, “When are you going to get baptized?” I replied, “I cannot because nobody has ever conducted a Bible study with me.” She offered to do so. At the next convention, on December 16, 1977, I was baptized. Eventually, out of the 27 members of my family that had lived together, 18 got baptized. But at the time of my surgery, my father, Sonny Deva, was still a Hindu.

“Do Not Be Anxious Over Anything”

The words recorded at Philippians 4:6, 7 have been a great help to me, especially after I was diagnosed with a large brain tumor. Those verses say: “Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus.” It is difficult not to be “anxious over anything,” especially if you are told that you are facing death at any time. At first, I just cried, and then I prayed to Jehovah. From that time on, I experienced “the peace of God that excels all thought.”

Jehovah God took hold of my right hand, as it were, and I truly felt that he led me all the way. (Isaiah 41:13) He helped me to explain boldly to the medical personnel my determination to obey the Bible’s command to abstain from blood. (Acts 15:28, 29) As a result, the surgeon and an anesthetist agreed to perform the operation without blood transfusion. Afterward, the surgeon explained that the operation was successful and that the entire tumor had been removed. He also said that he had not previously seen a patient recover so rapidly after such major brain surgery.

Three weeks later I conducted a Bible study from my bed. At the end of the seventh week,



I began driving again, went out in the preaching work, and resumed attending meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses. I appreciated the assistance of my Christian brothers and sisters who worked along with me in the evangelizing work. They made sure that I was never alone and that I got back home safely. I believe that listening to audio recordings of the Bible and focusing on the spiritual aspects of my life assisted in my rapid recovery.

I was also happy to learn that following my surgery, my dad agreed to a Bible study with the Witnesses. At the age of 73, he was baptized, and he is now serving Jehovah zealously. Over 40 members of my extended family are now united with us in worshipping Jehovah. Although my left visual fields have been damaged and my skull is held together by metal, I look forward to the time when Jehovah will make “all things new” in the coming earthly Paradise.—Revelation 21:3-5.

I am blessed with a loving husband, who serves as a Christian overseer, and a beautiful daughter, Clerista, who is a support to me as I continue to serve as a full-time evangelizer. Jehovah God has richly blessed my ministry. Thus far, I have been able to help many of my Bible students to experience the power of God’s Word in their lives. Over 30 of them are now dedicated to God and baptized.

With a heart full of hope, I look forward to the time when Jehovah God will deliver us from this painful system of things and lead us into an earthly paradise.



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES enjoy discussing the Bible with their neighbors. Do you have 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

Does God Punish People in Hellfire?

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

Will God Punish Wicked People?

Mauricio: It's good to see you again, Alejandro.

Alejandro: It's good to see you too.

Mauricio: I've been thinking about something you mentioned the last time I was here.

Alejandro: What's that?

Mauricio: You mentioned that you were surprised when you heard that Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in hellfire.

Alejandro: Yes, that did surprise me. And to be honest, it's hard for me to accept that you don't believe in it.

Mauricio: I appreciate your telling me that. I'm always interested in hearing the viewpoint of others. Since people have a lot of different ideas about hellfire, may I ask how you would explain what you believe about it?

Alejandro: Well, I've always believed that really bad people go to hell when they die and that they're tormented there forever.

Mauricio: That's a common viewpoint. Let me ask you, Alejandro, have you experienced some bad things in your life?

Alejandro: Yes. My sister was murdered five years ago.

Mauricio: I'm so sorry to hear that. You must really miss her.

Alejandro: I do. I think about her every day.

Mauricio: I've found that some people feel strongly about hellfire because they've been affected by the actions of wicked people. After all, innocent victims want to see bad people pay for their actions.

Alejandro: Exactly! I want the man who is responsible for my sister's murder to pay for what he did to our family.

Mauricio: Those feelings are certainly normal. The Bible teaches that God too is incensed when innocent people are victimized—and he promises that he will punish the wicked. Notice what is stated here at Isaiah 3: 11: "Woe to the wicked one!—Calamity; for

the treatment rendered by his own hands will be rendered to him!" So we can be confident that God *will* punish wicked people.

Alejandro: But how can that be if there's no hellfire, as you say?

Mauricio: That's a good question. In a nutshell, the answer is that God punishes the wicked with eternal destruction. Consider what the Bible says here at 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Would you please read that verse?

Alejandro: Sure. It says: "These very ones will undergo the judicial punishment of everlasting destruction from before the Lord."

Mauricio: So you see, Alejandro, there's no hope for wicked people because God punishes them with eternal death. They have no prospects for life in the future.

Alejandro: I see what the verse says, but it just doesn't seem fair. Everyone dies. Don't really bad people deserve a worse punishment?

What Does Justice Require?

Mauricio: I can see that you're a person who cares about justice.

Alejandro: I do, very much.

Mauricio: That's commendable. The truth is, humans have a sense of right and wrong because God created us with it. He too cares a great deal about justice. But when religious leaders teach that God punishes people in hellfire, they are actually portraying God as very *unjust*.

Alejandro: What do you mean?

Mauricio: Well, let me show you an example. Are you familiar with the Bible account of Adam and Eve?

Alejandro: Yes. God told them not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, but they disobeyed.

Mauricio: Correct. Let's take a look at the Bible account together. It's found at Genesis 2:16, 17. Those verses say: "Jehovah God also laid this command upon the man: 'From every tree of the garden you may eat to satis-

faction. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die.'" So, what did God say would happen if Adam ate the forbidden fruit?

Alejandro: He said that Adam would die.

Mauricio: That's right. Just think: By his sin, Adam caused the entire human race to be born as sinners.* And yet, even in this case, did God say anything about being punished in hellfire?

Alejandro: No.

Mauricio: But if Adam and Eve were in danger of being tormented forever, shouldn't God have warned them? Wouldn't that be the just and loving thing to do?

Alejandro: I would say so.

Mauricio: Consider, too, what God said to Adam and Eve after they sinned. Would you please read Genesis 3:19?

Alejandro: OK. It says: "In the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return."

Mauricio: Thank you. According to God's words, where was Adam headed?

Alejandro: He said that Adam would return to the dust of the ground.

Mauricio: Precisely. Now, wouldn't you agree that in order for someone to return to a place, he has to have been there before?

Alejandro: Of course.

Mauricio: And where was Adam before God created him?

Alejandro: He didn't exist.

Mauricio: That's right. And you'll notice that there's no mention of hellfire in God's judgment. Would it be fair for God to tell Adam that he was going back to the ground from which he had been made if he was really going to a fiery hell?

Alejandro: No, that wouldn't be fair.

* See Romans 5:12.

Does the Devil Carry Out God's Will?

Mauricio: There's something else we might consider about the teaching of hellfire.

Alejandro: What's that?

Mauricio: Well, who do people usually say is "in charge" of hellfire? Who supposedly punishes the people that are in hell?

Alejandro: The Devil.

Mauricio: Yet, the Devil is God's worst enemy. If God sends people to a fiery hell to be tormented by the Devil, wouldn't that imply a level of cooperation between God and the Devil?

Alejandro: Hmm. I never thought of it that way before.

Mauricio: To illustrate the point—you're a father, correct?

Alejandro: Yes, I have a son. He just turned 15.

Mauricio: Imagine that your son becomes very rebellious. He does a lot of bad things that sadden you. What would you do?

Alejandro: I would try to correct him.

Mauricio: I'm sure you would repeatedly try to help him get back on the right track.

Alejandro: Absolutely.

Mauricio: Let's say that despite all your efforts, he rejects what you're telling him. Eventually, you may feel that you have no choice but to punish him in some way.

Alejandro: Yes.

Mauricio: But what if you found out that an evil man had been influencing your son, teaching him to do all those bad things?

Alejandro: I would be angry with that man.

Mauricio: Now, this is where I would appreciate your comment. Knowing that a wicked, immoral man had influenced your son against you, would you turn to *that man* and ask him to punish your son for you?

Alejandro: Of course not. That wouldn't make any sense.

Mauricio: Really, then, does it make sense that God would ask Satan the Devil—the very one who influences wicked people—to punish those same people?

Alejandro: No, I guess not.

Mauricio: For that matter, if God wanted the wicked to be punished, why would the Devil—God's archenemy—*comply* with God's wishes and torment them?

Alejandro: I never thought of it that way before!

Jehovah Will End All Wickedness

Mauricio: Rest assured, though. God *will* take action against the incorrigibly wicked. Perhaps I could share one final scripture with you that drives this point home. The scripture is Psalm 37:9. Would you please read that verse?

Alejandro: OK. It says: "Evildoers themselves will be cut off, but those hoping in Jehovah are the ones that will possess the earth."

Mauricio: Thank you. Did you notice what Jehovah God will do to evildoers?

Alejandro: The verse says that God will cut them off.

Mauricio: That's right. In other words, he will destroy them permanently. But good people—"those hoping in Jehovah"—will enjoy life here on earth forever. Of course, this may bring some questions to your mind. For example, why doesn't God stop people from doing evil things in the first place? And if he really intends to punish wicked people, why hasn't he done so already?

Alejandro: Interesting questions.

Mauricio: Perhaps I can show you the Bible's answers the next time we talk.*


Alejandro: I would like that.

* For more information, see chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did Christians flee from Judea before Jerusalem's destruction in 70 C.E.?



■ “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near. Then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains, and let those in the midst of her withdraw.” (Luke 21:20, 21) Jesus gave those instructions to his disciples concerning the destruction to come upon Jerusalem. Is there evidence that the disciples heeded Jesus’ warning?

Several decades after Jesus’ death, a Roman army commanded by Cestius Gallus entered Palestine to put down a revolt. This invasion is confirmed by Jewish historian Josephus, who lived at that time. The legionnaires surround-

ed Jerusalem and seemed assured of taking it. Suddenly, Gallus ordered a withdrawal. According to church historian Eusebius, Judean Christians seized this opportunity to flee to Pella, a city in a mountainous region of the Decapolis.

Some years later, in 70 C.E., another Roman army, commanded by General Titus, returned and besieged the Jewish capital. This time the soldiers finished the job left undone by Gallus and laid waste to the city. Hundreds of thousands were trapped in Jerusalem and died.

Who were “the sons of the prophets”?

■ Bible accounts about the prophets Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha refer to men called “the sons of the prophets.” When Elisha had Jehu appointed king of Israel, for example, he dispatched “one of the sons of the prophets” to anoint him.—2 Kings 9:1-4.

Scholars believe that the term refers to a school of instruction or a cooperative association rather than the literal offspring of prophets. According to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the members of these groups were probably individuals who “devoted themselves to Yahweh’s [Jehovah’s] service under a prophet who was . . . their spiritual father.” (2 Kings 2:12) The account of Jehu’s anointing, in fact, refers to Elisha’s

envoy as “the prophet’s attendant.” —2 Kings 9:4.

“The sons of the prophets” appear to have lived simple lives. One such group in Elisha’s time is spoken of as constructing their own dwelling place and using a borrowed ax. (2 Kings 6:1-5) That some in these groups were married is shown by the reference to a widow “of the sons of the prophets.” (2 Kings 4:1) Faithful Israelites evidently appreciated the sons of the prophets, and in one recorded instance, they supplied them with gifts of food. —2 Kings 4:38, 42.



LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

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.

Can You Live Forever?

1. Why does our life seem short?

Some tortoises live for 150 years, and some trees for 3,000 years. By contrast, the human life span is much shorter. Yet, our life can be a lot more meaningful than that of a tortoise or a tree. Jehovah God created humans with the capacity to enjoy music, sports, dining, learning, traveling, and meeting people. God put in our hearts the desire for life without end.—*Read Ecclesiastes 3:11.*



2. Can we really live forever?

Jehovah lives forever. He does not die. He is the Source of life, so he can give everlasting life to others. (Psalm 36:9; Habakkuk 1:12) Furthermore, he has *promised* to grant everlasting life to those who obey him. He will reverse the process of aging.—*Read Job 33:24, 25; Isaiah 25:8; 33:24.*

Jesus demonstrated by his powerful works that we can trust God's promise of everlasting life in perfect health. Jesus cured many types of diseases and even resurrected people who had died.—*Read Luke 7:11-15, 18, 19, 22.*

3. When will everlasting life become a reality?

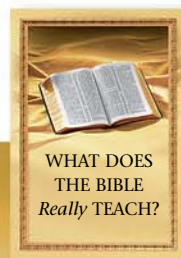
God wants us to live forever, not in a world filled with oppression and violence, but on a paradise earth. He wants us to feel secure. (Psalm 37:9, 29; Isaiah 65:21, 22) As the earth is restored to Paradise, millions who have died will return to life. Resurrected people who choose to worship God and obey him will live forever.—Read Luke 23:42, 43; John 5:28, 29.



*Becoming acquainted with God
is worth the effort*

4. How can we gain everlasting life?

We can receive endless life only from God. So, we do well to draw close to him by getting to know him. The Bible likens taking in knowledge of God to taking in food. (Matthew 4:4) Eating food is enjoyable, but obtaining and preparing our food requires effort. Similarly, taking in spiritual food requires effort. But what could be more worthwhile than drawing close to God and receiving everlasting life?—Read Luke 13:23, 24; John 6:27; 17:3.



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



“The Ancient of Days Sat Down”

“NO MAN has seen God at any time,” says the Bible. (John 1:18) God’s appearance is so glorious that no creature of flesh and blood could possibly see him and yet live. (Exodus 33:20) However, in some reported cases, Jehovah gave selected men a vision of heaven. One such man was the prophet Daniel. What he saw no doubt filled him—and should fill us too—with awe. Notice how Daniel described what he was privileged to see in vision.*—**Read Daniel 7:9, 10.**

“*The Ancient of Days.*” The title “Ancient of Days,” which only Daniel uses, indicates “one advanced (or aged) in days.” (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22) How advanced in age is Jehovah? Since he is the “King of eternity,” his existence stretches endlessly into the past—and forever into the future.

He is the kind of Judge who merits
our deepest trust and respect

(1 Timothy 1:17; Jude 25) God’s eternal existence assures us that he is infinite in wisdom, for the Bible associates age with wisdom. (Job 12:12) Granted, the idea of eternal existence is difficult for our finite minds to grasp. But should we really expect to grasp fully the incomparably wise God?—Romans 11:33, 34.

Notice that the Ancient of Days “*sat down.*” For what purpose? The surrounding verses provide some clues, using such terms as “the Court” and “judgment.” (Daniel 7:10, 22, 26) Thus, in the vision, Jehovah was sitting down as

Judge. Whom would he judge? The nations of the earth, depicted earlier in Daniel’s vision as beasts.* (Daniel 7:1-8) What kind of Judge is Jehovah?

“*His clothing was white just like snow, and the hair of his head was like clean wool.*” White is a symbol of righteousness and purity. In its natural state, wool may be white in color. Thus, hair that is like wool would be white. Can you imagine what Daniel saw? Do you see a white-haired Judge clad perhaps in a robe of snowy whiteness? These word pictures assure us that Jehovah’s judgments are righteous and wise. He is the kind of Judge who merits our deepest trust and respect.

“*There were a thousand thousands that kept ministering to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand that kept standing right before him.*” Who are these heavenly ministers? The Bible identifies the angels as “his [God’s] ministers.” (Psalm 104:4) Numbering perhaps hundreds of millions, God’s angels are busy “carrying out his word” and “doing his will.” (Psalm 103:20, 21) Is that not further proof of God’s infinite wisdom? Who else but Jehovah could keep such a vast heavenly army organized and busy over aeons of time?

Daniel’s vision inspires confidence in Jehovah, the Ancient of Days. His judgments are righteous, and his wisdom trustworthy. Why not learn more about how you can draw closer to the all-wise God?

* For a discussion of Daniel’s vision of the beasts, see chapter 9 of the book *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR OCTOBER:

■ Daniel 4—Hosea 14

* Daniel did not really see God. Rather, God impressed vivid images upon his mind. Then, in describing what he saw, Daniel used figures of speech, including anthropomorphisms—the attributing of human characteristics to God. Such word pictures help to make God comprehensible to us and are not to be taken literally.



IMITATE THEIR FAITH

“An Excellent Woman”

RUTH knelt by the pile of barley stalks she had gathered during the day. Evening was descending on the fields around Bethlehem, and many workers were already wending their way up to the gate of the little city perched atop a nearby ridge. Ruth’s muscles surely protested the long day’s labor, for she had been working steadily since the morning. Still she kept at it, swinging a small rod or a flail down onto the stalks to loosen the grains. All in all, it had been a good day—better than she could ever have hoped for.

Were things finally starting to look up for this young widow? She had attached herself to her mother-in-law, Naomi, vowing to stick with her and to make Naomi’s God, Jehovah, her own God. Together the two bereaved women had come to Bethlehem from Moab, and Ruth the Moabitess soon learned that Jehovah’s Law made practical, dignified provisions for the poor in Israel, including foreigners.* And now she found that some of Jehovah’s people, who lived under the Law and were trained by it, showed a degree of spirituality and kindness that touched her wounded heart.

One such person was Boaz, the wealthy older man in whose fields she was gleaning. He had taken fatherly notice of her today. She could not help but smile inwardly when she thought of his kind words praising her for caring for aged Naomi and for choosing to seek refuge under the wings of the true God, Jehovah.—Ruth 2:11-13.

Still, Ruth may have wondered about the life ahead of her. As an impoverished foreign-



Ruth worked hard to care for herself and Naomi

er with neither husband nor child, how would she support herself and Naomi in the years ahead? Would gleaning suffice? And who would take care of *her* when she grew old? It would be understandable if such concerns weighed on her mind. In today’s hard economic times, many struggle with similar anxieties. As we learn how Ruth’s faith helped her through such challenges, we will find much to imitate.

* See the article “Imitate Their Faith—‘Where You Go I Shall Go,’” in the July 1, 2012, issue of *The Watchtower*.

What Makes a Family?

By the time Ruth finished beating out the grain and gathering it all up, she found that she had gleaned about an ephah measure, or 20 dry quarts (22 L), of barley. Her load may have weighed some 30 pounds (14 kg)! She hoisted it, perhaps bundling it in a cloth and carrying it on her head, and then made her way to Bethlehem in the gathering darkness.—Ruth 2:17.

Naomi was pleased to see her beloved daughter-in-law, and perhaps she gasped in surprise as she saw Ruth's heavy load of barley. Ruth also brought some food left over from the meal that Boaz had provided for the workers, and the two thus shared a simple meal. Naomi asked: "Where did you glean today, and where did you work? May the one who took notice of you become blessed." (Ruth 2:19) Naomi was attentive; she saw proof in Ruth's heavy load of provisions that someone had taken notice of the young widow and had treated her kindly.

The two fell into conversation, and Ruth told Naomi about the kindness of Boaz. Moved, Naomi replied: "Blessed be he of Jehovah, who has not left off his loving-kindness toward the living and the dead." (Ruth 2:19, 20) She saw the kindness of Boaz as coming from Jehovah, who moves his servants to be generous and promises to reward his people for the kindness they show.* —Proverbs 19:17.

Naomi urged Ruth to accept Boaz' offer to keep gleaning in his fields and near the young women of his own household so that she would escape harassment from the reapers. Ruth took that advice. She also "kept on

* As Naomi noted, Jehovah's kindness is not restricted to the living; it even extends to the dead. Naomi had lost her husband and both sons. Ruth had lost her husband. Surely all three men had meant a great deal to both women. Any kindness shown to Naomi and Ruth was, in effect, kindness to the men who would have wanted those dear women to be cared for.

dwelling with her mother-in-law." (Ruth 2: 22, 23) In those words we see once more Ruth's hallmark quality—loyal love. Her example may move us to ask ourselves whether we honor the bonds of family, loyally supporting our loved ones and offering them help as needed. Jehovah never fails to notice such loyal love.

Were Naomi and Ruth somehow less than a family? In some cultures it is assumed that there must be someone to fill each role—husband, wife, son, daughter, grandparents, and so forth—for a family to be "real." But Naomi and Ruth remind us that servants of Jehovah can open their hearts and make even the smallest, most bereft of families glow with warmth, kindness, and love. Do you appreciate what family you have? Jesus reminded his followers that the Christian congregation can provide family even for those who have none.—Mark 10:29, 30.

"He Is One of Our Repurchasers"

From the barley harvest around April until the wheat harvest around June, Ruth kept gleaning in the fields of Boaz. As the weeks passed, Naomi no doubt thought more about what she could do for her beloved daughter-in-law. Back in Moab, Naomi had been convinced that she could never help Ruth find another husband. (Ruth 1:11-13) Now, though, she was beginning to think differently. She approached Ruth and said: "My daughter, ought I not to look for a resting-place for you?" (Ruth 3:1) It was customary in those days for parents to find mates for their children, and Ruth had become a true daughter to Naomi. She wanted to find Ruth "a resting-place"—referring to the security and protection that a home and a husband might provide. But what could Naomi do?

When Ruth first mentioned Boaz, Naomi said: "The man is related to us. He is one of our repurchasers." (Ruth 2:20) What did that



Ruth and Naomi helped and encouraged each other

mean? God's Law to Israel included loving provisions for families who as a result of poverty or bereavement fell on hard times. If a woman was widowed while still childless, she was especially devastated because her husband's name, his posterity, would be cut off, lost to future generations. However, God's Law allowed the man's brother to marry the widow so that she could give birth to an heir who might carry on her deceased husband's name and care for the family property.*—Deuteronomy 25:5-7.

Naomi outlined a plan of action. We might imagine the young woman's eyes widening as her mother-in-law spoke. Israel's Law was likely still new to Ruth; and many of its cus-

toms were no doubt still quite foreign. Even so, she held Naomi in such high regard that she listened carefully to every word. What Naomi advised her to do might have seemed awkward or embarrassing—even potentially humiliating—yet, Ruth agreed. She meekly said: "All that you say to me I shall do."—Ruth 3:5.

Sometimes it is difficult for young people to listen to the advice of those who are older and more experienced. It is easy to assume that older ones do not really understand the challenges and problems the young face. Ruth's humble example reminds us that listening to the wisdom of older ones who love us and have our best interests at heart can be very rewarding. But what was Naomi's advice, and was Ruth really rewarded for heeding it?

* The right to marry such a widow was evidently extended first to the deceased man's brothers and then to the nearest male relatives, as was the right to inheritance.—Numbers 27:5-11.

Ruth at the Threshing Floor

That evening, Ruth made her way to the threshing floor—a flat, hard-packed area where a number of farmers would take their grain for threshing and winnowing. The spot chosen was usually on a hillside or hilltop, where the breezes were strong in the late afternoon and early evening. To release the grain from the chaff and straw, workers used big forks or shovels to toss the mixture into the wind, which carried off the lighter chaff and allowed the heavier grains to fall back to the floor.

Ruth watched discreetly as the work wound down in the evening. Boaz oversaw the winnowing of his grain, which grew into a great heap. After eating heartily, he lay down at one end of the heap. This was evidently a common practice, perhaps designed to protect the precious harvest from thieves and marauders. Ruth saw Boaz settling down for the night. The time had come to put Naomi's plan into action.

Ruth crept closer, her heart racing. She could tell that the man was sound asleep. So just as Naomi had said, she went over to his feet, uncovered them, and lay down by them. Then she waited. The time passed. To Ruth, it must have felt like an eternity. Finally, around midnight, Boaz began to stir. Trembling from the cold, he stretched forward, likely to cover his feet up again. But he sensed that someone was there. The account reads: "Look! a woman lying at his feet!"—Ruth 3:8.

"Who are you?" he asked. Ruth replied, perhaps with a tremor in her voice: "I am Ruth your slave girl, and you must spread out your skirt over your slave girl, for you are a repurchaser." (Ruth 3:9) Some modern interpreters have sought to imply that there were some sexual undertones in Ruth's actions and words, but they ignore two simple facts. First, Ruth was acting according to the cus-

toms of the day, many of which are long lost to us. So it would be a mistake to view her actions through the warped lens of today's debased moral standards. Second, Boaz responded in a way that clearly shows that he saw Ruth's conduct as morally chaste and highly commendable.

Boaz spoke, and no doubt his gentle, soothing tone comforted Ruth. He said: "Blessed may you be of Jehovah, my daughter. You have expressed your loving-kindness better in the last instance than in the first instance, in not going after the young fellows whether lowly or rich." (Ruth 3:10) "The first instance" referred to Ruth's loyal love in accompanying Naomi back to Israel and caring for her. "The last instance" was the present one. Boaz noted that a young woman like Ruth might easily have sought a husband among much younger men, whether rich or poor. Rather, she wanted to do good not only to Naomi but also to Naomi's deceased husband, to carry on the dead man's name in his homeland. It is not hard to see why Boaz was moved by this young woman's unselfishness.

Boaz continued: "And now, my daughter, do not be afraid. All that you say I shall do for you, for everyone in the gate of my people is aware that you are an excellent woman." (Ruth 3:11) He was pleased at the prospect of marrying Ruth; perhaps he was not completely surprised to be asked to be her repurchaser. However, Boaz was a righteous man, and he was not about to act merely on his own preferences. He told Ruth that there was another repurchaser more closely related to the family of Naomi's dead husband; Boaz would approach that man first and give him the opportunity to become Ruth's husband.

Boaz urged Ruth to lie down again and rest until morning was near; then she could slip away unnoticed. He wanted to protect her reputation as well as his own, since people



Ruth's motives in seeking out Boaz were pure and unselfish

might wrongly assume that something immoral had taken place. Ruth lay near the man's feet again, perhaps with a mind more at ease after he had responded to her petition so kindly. Then, while it was still dark, Boaz filled her cloak with a generous gift of barley, and she made her way back into Bethlehem.

How satisfying it must have been for Ruth to contemplate what Boaz had said—that she was known among all the people as “an excellent woman”! No doubt her eagerness to get to know Jehovah and to serve him had much to do with that reputation. She had also shown great kindness and sensitivity toward Naomi and her people, willingly adapting to ways and customs that were surely unfamiliar to her. If we imitate Ruth's faith, we will seek to treat others and their ways and customs with deep respect. If we do, we too

may find that we develop a reputation for excellence.

A Resting-Place for Ruth

“Who are you, my daughter?” Naomi said when Ruth arrived home. Perhaps it was the darkness that prompted the question, but Naomi also wanted to know whether Ruth was still the same unattached widow or one with prospects of marriage before her. Ruth quickly told her mother-in-law of all that had passed between her and Boaz. She also presented the generous gift of barley that Boaz had told her to give to Naomi.*—Ruth 3: 16, 17.

* Boaz gave Ruth six measures of unspecified weight—perhaps to suggest that just as six work days were followed by a Sabbath rest, Ruth's own days of toil as a widow were soon to be followed by the “rest” that a secure home and a husband could provide. On the other hand, the six measures—perhaps shovelfuls—may simply have been all that Ruth could carry.

Wisely, Naomi urged Ruth to sit at home quietly that day instead of going out to glean in the fields. She assured Ruth: “The man will have no rest unless he has brought the matter to an end today.”—Ruth 3:18.

Naomi was quite right about Boaz. He went to the city gate, where the city elders usually met, and waited until the man who was a closer relative passed by. In front of witnesses, Boaz offered the man the opportunity to act as repurchaser by marrying Ruth. However, the man refused, claiming that doing so would ruin his own inheritance. Then, before the witnesses there in the city gate, Boaz stated that he would act as the repurchaser, buying up the estate of Naomi’s dead husband, Elimelech, and marrying Ruth, the widow of Elimelech’s son Mahlon. Boaz declared his hope that doing so would “cause the name of the dead man to rise upon his inheritance.” (Ruth 4:1-10) Boaz truly was an upright and unselfish man.

Boaz married Ruth. Thereafter, we read: “Jehovah granted her conception and she bore a son.” The women of Bethlehem blessed Naomi and praised Ruth for being better to Naomi than seven sons would have been. Later, we learn, Ruth’s son became an ancestor of the great King David. (Ruth 4:11-22) David, in turn, was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.—Matthew 1:1.*

Ruth was blessed indeed, as was Naomi, who helped to raise the child as if he were her own. The lives of these two women stand as vivid reminders that Jehovah God notices all those who toil humbly to provide for their own and who serve him loyally with his chosen people. He never fails to reward faithful people who earn a reputation for excellence with him, as did Ruth.

* Ruth is one of four women the Bible lists in the ancestry of Jesus. Another one is Rahab, who was the mother of Boaz. (Matthew 1:3, 5, 6) Like Ruth, she was not an Israelite.

Jehovah blessed Ruth with the privilege of becoming an ancestress of the Messiah



Does happiness depend on marriage?

■ Does the Bible teach that you must be married in order to be fulfilled and happy? At first glance, it might seem that God's Word supports such an idea. How so?

According to the Genesis account, God saw that it was "not good" for the first man Adam to remain alone. So God made Eve as a "complement" for Adam. (Genesis 2:18) The word "complement" means that which makes something complete. From that account, we might conclude that a person is not complete unless he or she is married. Additionally, a number of Bible accounts portray matrimony as a source of blessings and joy. The story of Ruth is one example.

However, are such accounts really meant to teach us that Christians today cannot be happy, fulfilled, or complete unless they marry and have children? That cannot be the case. The most complete and fulfilled human who ever lived was Jesus Christ. Yet, he remained single to his death. Jesus, the wisest man who ever lived, was also the perfect reflection of "the happy God," Jehovah. (1 Timothy 1:11; John 14:9) Jesus revealed what it takes to be happy, or blessed, in this world. (Matthew 5:1-12) He did not include marriage in the list.

So, then, does the Bible contradict itself on this subject? Not at all. We need to consider marriage in the context of Jehovah's purpose. While he designed marriage to be a source of joy, intimacy, and comfort, the institution has at times also played a key role in fulfilling certain aspects of his will. For example, God's purpose for Adam and Eve was for them to "be fruitful and become many and fill the earth." (Genesis 1:28) Neither Adam nor Eve could fulfill God's stated purpose alone. Rather, each needed the other, and each completed the other in a special sense.

Similarly, Jehovah had special purposes involving marriage and family life while he was dealing with the earthly nation of Israel. He wanted his nation to be populous so that it would not be overwhelmed by its enemies. He also purposed that the tribe of Judah produce the Messiah, who would rescue faithful mankind from the effects of sin and death. (Genesis 49:10) Faithful women of Israel thus viewed it as a special privilege to marry and bear children and as a source of shame and grief if they did not.

What, though, about today? Does God's ancient command to "fill the earth" obligate Christians now living on this teeming planet to marry and reproduce? No. (Matthew 19:10-12) Nor does God any longer need to protect and ensure the lineage of the Messiah or to shield the nation in which that Savior would be born. How, then, are Christians to view marriage and singleness?

Really, both states can be described as gifts from God. As you know, a gift that is well-suited to one person might be ill-suited to another. Marriage is a sacred arrangement that can provide love, companionship, and a stable basis for a family. At the same time, the Bible realistically notes that those who marry in this imperfect world will also face problems, or "tribulation in their flesh." As to singleness, Jehovah does not view it as a cause for shame or grief. Rather, his Word states that singleness has certain distinct advantages over marriage.—1 Corinthians 7:28, 32-35.

The Bible thus presents a balanced view of marriage and singleness. Jehovah, the Originator of marriage and the family, wants all of his servants to be happy and fulfilled, whether they are single or married.

THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

HOW did a man with a tragic upbringing become a happy, successful husband and father? What moved a woman with many vices to clean up her life? Read what these people have to say.



“I felt worthless.”

—VÍCTOR HUGO HERRERA

YEAR BORN: 1974

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: CHILE

HISTORY: ADDICTED TO ALCOHOL



MY PAST: I was born in the city of Angol, in the beautiful south of Chile. I never met my father. When I was three years old, my mother moved with my brother and me to the capital, Santiago. We ended up living in a small room in a makeshift camp for the homeless. We used a public outhouse, and we got our water from a fire hydrant.

After about two years, the government gave us a small house. Unfortunately, our new neighborhood was plagued with drug and alcohol abuse, crime, and prostitution.

One day my mother met a man, whom she eventually married. My stepfather was a heavy drinker. He would beat my mother and me. I often wept in private, wishing I had a father to protect me.

Even though my mother worked hard to provide for us, we were very poor. When we were hungry, sometimes all we had to eat was powdered milk and sugar. For entertainment, my brother and I would sneak over to watch television through a neighbor's window. But one day the neighbor caught us, and that was the end of that!

When my stepfather was sober—which was not very often—he would buy my brother and me something to eat. On one occasion he

bought us a small television. That is one of the few times I remember feeling happy.

At age 12, I learned to read. A year later, I quit school and started working full-time. After work I would go out with adult workmates to parties where we would get drunk and take drugs. Soon I was hooked.

When I was 20, I met Cati, and we eventually got married. At first, all went well, but then I returned to the life I had led before. My conduct went from bad to worse. It finally dawned on me that I was headed either to jail or to the grave. Worse yet, I was making my son Víctor suffer the same things that I did when I was young. I felt sad, I was angry with myself, and I felt worthless.

About 2001, two of Jehovah's Witnesses visited our home, and Cati began to study the Bible with them. She talked to me about what she was learning. Out of curiosity, I also began to study the Bible. In 2003, Cati was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED

MY LIFE: One day, I read Ruth 2:12, which says that Jehovah rewards those who act in faith, seeking refuge in him. I realized that if I made changes, I could please God and be rewarded by him. I noticed how often the Bible condemns drunkenness. The words of 2 Corinthians 7:1 had an impact on me. That verse urges us to "cleanse ourselves of every defilement." So I started to abandon my bad habits. As I did, at first my temper worsened, but Cati never stopped supporting me.

I finally quit my job because the pressure to smoke and drink was very strong. Although being out of work for a while meant getting by on very little, it did give me more time to study the Bible. That was when I really began to make spiritual progress. Cati never demanded more than I could give materially, nor did she reproach me for our simple lifestyle. I'm truly grateful for her loving support.

I gradually began to associate more closely with the Witnesses. They helped me to appreciate that despite my lack of secular education, Jehovah values my sincere desire to serve him. The love and unity we saw in the Christian congregation had a profound effect on our family. We had not found such peace anywhere else. In December 2004, I too was baptized.



"Even though I never knew my father, the Bible has taught me how to raise my three sons"

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I've experienced the truthfulness of Jehovah's words recorded at Isaiah 48:17, where he says: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself." My mother and my brother were so impressed by my changes that they are now studying the Bible. Even my neighbors rejoice to see how different I am and what a happy family we have.

I have a wife who loves God and who views me as her trustworthy companion and friend. Even though I never knew my father, the Bible has taught me how to raise my three sons. They respect me. Most important, they see Jehovah as a real Person, and they have grown to love him.

I'm truly grateful that despite my unhappy childhood, Jehovah has given me the chance to become a happy man.

MY PAST: I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in a middle-class family. My father left our family when I was six years of age. That came as a big shock, and it caused me tremendous emotional pain. I felt rejected and unworthy of being loved. As I got older, these feelings made me rebel. I became an angry, aggressive young woman.

When I was 14, I ran away from home for the first time. I often stole money from my mother and grandparents. In school I was always in trouble because of my violent temper, and as a result, I was sent to five different schools within only a few years. Three years before I should have received my diploma, I left school. I led a very immoral life. I became addicted to smoking cigarettes and marijuana. I drank a lot, partied constantly, and became involved in drug trafficking. I couldn't make sense of living in a hopeless world where people were suffering and dying. So I lived only for each day's pleasures.

In 1998, when I was 24 years of age, I was arrested at the airport in São Paulo, Brazil, while engaging in illegal drug trafficking. I was sentenced to four years in prison.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: In 2000, Jehovah's Witnesses started visiting my prison once a week. One of the Witnesses, Marines, was very kind to me. She awakened in me a desire to learn more about the Bible. Since I had never heard of Jehovah's Witnesses, I asked my fellow inmates what they could tell me about them. To my surprise, most of the people I asked reacted dis-

"I became an angry, aggressive young woman." —NABIHA LAZAROVA



YEAR BORN: 1974

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: BULGARIA

HISTORY: DRUG TRAFFICKER

approvingly. One inmate told me to join *any* religion but Jehovah's Witnesses. Her statement made me

even more curious; I wanted to find out why these people were hated so much. I came to believe that it was because they practice the true religion. After all, the Bible says that everyone who sincerely tries to follow Jesus will be persecuted.—2 Timothy 3:12.

During that time, I was assigned to work in the administration building of the prison. One day I found some boxes with older *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines* in a storage room. I took the magazines to my prison cell and started reading them. The more I read, the more I felt like someone in a parched desert who had just found a well of fresh water. Since I had much time on my hands, I studied the Bible every day for many hours.

One day I was called to the prison office. I expected to be released from prison, so I quickly collected my few belongings, said good-bye to my fellow inmates, and ran to the office. However, when I arrived there, I

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

learned that a new case, involving holding false documents, had been filed against me. As a result, I was sentenced to two more years of imprisonment.

At first, I was crushed. But a couple of days later, I began to realize that this development was a blessing in disguise. Although I had learned many things from the Bible, in my heart I still wanted to continue my previous lifestyle after being released from prison. I needed more time to change.

Sometimes I felt that it would be impossible for God to accept me as one of his worshippers. But I meditated on passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Those verses reveal that in the first century C.E., some Christians had been thieves, drunkards, and extortioners before serving Jehovah. Yet, with Jehovah's help, they changed. Their example was a big encouragement to me.

Some of my vices were easy for me to give up. For example, I broke free from drug abuse without much difficulty. But quitting

"I had found the best Father—one who would never forsake me!"

smoking was another story. I put up a hard fight for more than a year before I finally succeeded in breaking the habit. One thing that helped was educating myself about the bad things that smoking does to a person's health. Above all, it was incessant prayer to Jehovah that enabled me to quit.

As I drew closer to Jehovah, I slowly started to overcome the feelings of rejection I had battled with after my father abandoned us. The words of Psalm 27:10 touched me deeply. That verse says: "In case my own father and my own mother did leave me, even Jehovah himself would take me up." I realized that I had found the best Father—one who

would never forsake me! Now my life had a purpose. In April 2004, six months after being released from prison, I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I am a happy person. Free of destructive habits, I enjoy much better physical and emotional health than when I was younger. I enjoy a happy marriage, and I have a close friendship with my heavenly Father, Jehovah. Among his worshippers, I have found many fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. (Mark 10:29, 30) I'm grateful that they saw potential in me—even before I saw it in myself.

At times, I am overwhelmed with feelings of guilt because of my past. But I draw comfort from knowing that in God's promised new world, bad memories "will not be called to mind." (Isaiah 65:17) In the meantime, my experiences help me to be empathetic toward people who face similar challenges. In that sense, my past is an advantage. When I'm sharing in the Christian ministry, for example, I find it relatively easy to talk to people who are drug addicts, alcoholics, or criminals—without feeling prejudiced. I'm confident that if I could make changes in order to please Jehovah, *anyone* can!



Guard Against Ambition!

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

Main characters: David, Absalom, Joab

Summary: Absalom attempts to usurp his father's throne.

1 ANALYZE THE SCENES.—READ 2 SAMUEL 14:25-33; 15:1-17; 18:9-17, 30-33.

Describe the appearance of Absalom, as you picture him. (*Reread 2 Samuel 14: 25, 26.*) _____

What do you imagine Absalom's attitude and tone of voice were like as he tried to win the hearts of those coming to the king for justice? (*Reread 2 Samuel 15: 2-6.*) _____

What do you perceive about Absalom's personality from the incident recorded at 2 Samuel 14:28-30? _____

2 DIG DEEPER.

How had Absalom laid the groundwork for seizing the throne? (Clue: Read 2 Samuel 13:28, 29. Amnon was David's eldest son and hence heir to the throne.) _____

Despite his ambition and attempts at self-glory, what does the manner of Absalom's burial indicate as to how he was really viewed? (*Reread 2 Samuel 18:17.*) _____

What, do you think, might have contributed to Absalom's ambitious spirit? (For comparison, read what is stated about Diotrephes at 3 John 9, 10.) _____

How was David affected by Absalom's actions?
(Clue: Read Psalm 3, which David wrote at the
time of Absalom's revolt.) _____

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

The danger of an ambitious spirit. _____

The pain that a person's actions can cause to
others, including his or her parents. _____

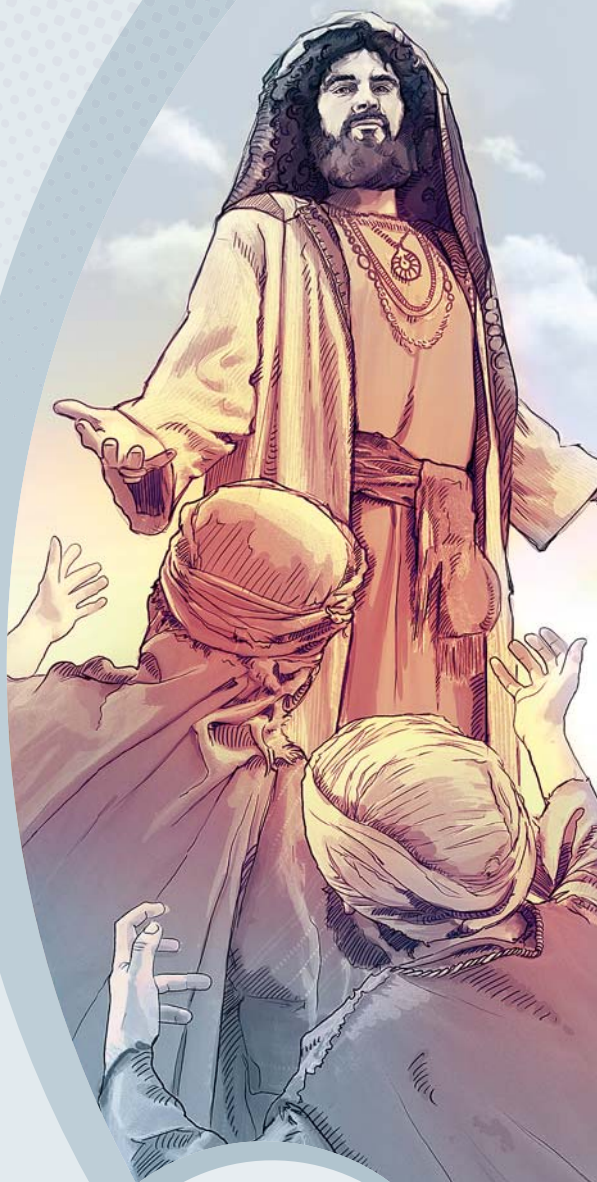
FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.

How might you fall into the trap of ambition?

How can you avoid developing undue pride?

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

Suggestion: Imagine a different ending to this
account. What might have happened if Absalom
had been modest rather than ambitious?—Prov-
erbs 18:12.



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