

APRIL 1, 2013

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



A MEANINGFUL LIFE
IS POSSIBLE

THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, honors Jehovah God, the Ruler of the universe. It comforts people with the good news that God's heavenly Kingdom will soon end 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 continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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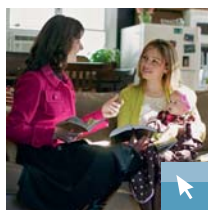
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Is a Meaningful Life Really Possible?

“The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow.”

—Psalm 90:10, *New International Version*.

HOW true those words are! Life in this world is so often glutted with “trouble and sorrow.” Perhaps you have wondered, ‘Is it even possible to have a truly meaningful life now?’

Take, for example, Maria. She was always a very active person, but now, at the age of 84, she has become practically housebound. She is mentally active, but her body, it seems, no longer cooperates. How can she possibly feel that such a life is meaningful?

How about you? You may at some time have asked yourself whether *your* life is meaningful. Your work may be repetitive, tiring, and tedious. Your efforts or work may not be recognized. Even if you do have a measure of success, you may feel insecure regarding your future. At times, you may also feel lonely or depressed. Your family life may be marked by conflict and strife. You may have lost a loved one in death. A man named André was very close to his father, who suddenly fell ill and died. For André, it was a terrible blow, and it left a void that he feels will never be completely filled.

No matter what trouble we may face, there is something we desperately need to know: Is a meaningful life really possible? We can find the answer in the life of a man who walked the earth some 2,000 years ago—Jesus Christ. In spite of all the obstacles that confronted him, Jesus truly had a meaningful life. So can we if we follow his example.



Jesus

THE KEY TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE



DID Jesus really have a meaningful life? He evidently was brought up in humble surroundings, and throughout his life he had few of this world's goods. He actually had "nowhere to lay down his head." (Luke 9:57, 58) In addition, he was hated, slandered, and finally put to death by his enemies.

You may reason, 'Such a life is not what I think of as meaningful!' But there is more to Jesus' life that we do well to consider. Let us examine four aspects of his life.

1. JESUS HAD A PURPOSE IN LIFE —TO DO GOD'S WILL.

"My food is for me to do the will of him that sent me."—John 4:34.

By his words and actions, Jesus sought to fulfill the will of his heavenly Father, Jehovah.* Jesus found great joy in doing God's will. He actually compared doing so to food, as is shown in the scripture just quoted. Consider the circumstances under which he made that comparison.

Jesus spoke those words at about noontime.

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

(John 4:6) He had trekked through the hilly country of Samaria all morning, so he surely was hungry. In fact, his disciples had urged him: "Rabbi, eat." (John 4:31) By his answer, Jesus indicated that he really felt nourished and strengthened by doing God's work. Does that not sound like the kind of man whose life had meaning?

2. JESUS HAD INTENSE LOVE FOR HIS FATHER.

"I love the Father."—John 14:31.

Jesus had an extremely close relationship with his Father in heaven. Jesus' deep love for God impelled him to make known his Father—His name, purposes, and qualities. Through his words, actions, and attitudes, Jesus perfectly reflected his Father—to the point that we see in Jesus a living portrait of his Father. Thus, when Philip asked Jesus: "Show us the Father," Jesus replied: "He that has seen me has seen the Father also."—John 14:8, 9.

Jesus loved his Father so much that he was willing to obey him to the point of death. (Philippians 2:7, 8; 1 John 5:3) Such an intense love for God filled Jesus' life with meaning.



3. JESUS LOVED PEOPLE.

“No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his soul in behalf of his friends.”—John 15:13.

Our future life prospects as imperfect humans are admittedly grim. The Bible explains: “Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned.” (Romans 5:12) We cannot on our own escape the consequence of sin, namely death.—Romans 6:23.

Thankfully, Jehovah lovingly provided a solution to mankind’s situation. He allowed his perfect and sinless Son, who became known as Jesus, to suffer and die in order to provide the ransom needed to deliver mankind from slavery to sin and death. Jesus, moved by love for his Father *and for humans*, willingly complied and gave his perfect human life in our behalf. (Romans 5:6-8) Such unselfish love gave meaning to his life.*

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

4. JESUS KNEW THAT HE HAD HIS FATHER’S LOVE AND APPROVAL.

“This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.”—Matthew 3:17.

Jehovah spoke those words from heaven at the time of Jesus’ baptism. Jehovah thus openly expressed affection for and approval of his Son, Jesus. No wonder Jesus could emphatically say: “The Father loves me!” (John 10:17) Knowing that he had his Father’s love and approval, Jesus faced opposition and criticism with confidence. He even maintained balance and emotional stability in the face of death. (John 10:18) Jesus’ sense of his own Father’s love and approval undoubtedly gave even greater meaning to his life.

Jesus certainly had a meaningful life. Clearly, we can learn much from him about how we can lead a life that has real meaning. The next article will consider some of the clear advice that Jesus gave his followers about how to live.

A Meaningful Life

JESUS SHOWS THE WAY

“Walk just as Jesus walked.” —1 John 2:6, *NET Bible*.

AS WE discussed in the preceding article, Jesus led a meaningful life. So if we want to fill our life with meaning, we do well to imitate his example and listen to his advice.

Jehovah, in fact, urges us to do just that, as the above scripture shows. Walking as Jesus walked involves patterning our entire way of life after his example and teachings. Doing so will help us to gain God’s approval and have a meaningful life.

Jesus’ teaching included principles that can help us to walk just as he walked. We find a number of these principles in his famous Sermon on the Mount. Let us consider a few of the principles and how we can apply them in our life.

PRINCIPLE: “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—Matthew 5:3.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: Jesus indicated that humans have an innate spiritual need. We long to know the answers to such questions as these: Why are we here? Why is there so much suffering on this earth? Does God really care about us? Is there life after death? We need to know the answers to such questions in order to have a meaningful life. Jesus knew that there is only one reliable source that can answer those questions—God’s Word. In prayer to his Father, Jesus said: “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) Can God’s Word really help us to satisfy our spiritual need?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: As the lead singer of a popular band, Esa was well on his way toward becoming a rock star. Even so, Esa felt that something was missing. “Although I enjoyed being in the band, I longed for more meaning in my life,” he says. In time, however, Esa came in contact

with one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “I bombarded him with questions,” Esa admits. “His logical, Scriptural answers intrigued me, so I agreed to have him study the Bible with me.” What Esa learned from his study of the Bible touched his heart and moved him to dedicate his life to Jehovah. “In the past, I constantly drifted in and out of problems and crises,” he says. “Now I have a real purpose in life.”*

PRINCIPLE: “Happy are the merciful.”

—Matthew 5:7.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: Mercy involves showing compassion to others, being kind and considerate toward them. Jesus showed mercy to those in need. Moved by deep compassion, he took the initiative to relieve the suffering of others. (Matthew 14:14; 20:30-34) When we imitate Jesus in being merciful, we add meaning to our lives, for those who show mercy to others are happy as a result. (Acts 20:35) We can show mercy to others by our kind words and deeds, bringing relief to those who need our help. Does showing mercy really enhance our well-being?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: Maria and her husband, Carlos, are examples of being merciful. Maria’s father is a widower, and in recent years he has become bedridden. Maria and Carlos have taken him into their home and are looking after his every need. They have had many sleepless nights, even rushing him to the hospital when he has a diabetic crisis. They admit that they get really tired at times. But they are happy, just as

* You can read Esa’s story in its entirety on pages 8-9 of this magazine.



Maria and Carlos

Jesus said, because they have the deep satisfaction of knowing that they are providing Maria's father with the care he needs.

PRINCIPLE: "Happy are the peaceable."

—Matthew 5:9.

HOW THE PRINCIPLE CONTRIBUTES TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE: To be "peaceable" literally means to be a "peacemaker." How does being a peacemaker make life more meaningful? For one thing, we enjoy better relationships with those around us. We do well to heed the Bible's advice: "If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be peaceable with all men." (Romans 12:18) "All men" include family members and others who may not share our beliefs. Can being peaceable toward "all men" really add meaning to our life?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE: Consider the experience of a woman named Nair. Over the years, she has faced many pressures that have tested her ability to maintain peace, especially within her own family. Ever since her husband abandoned her about 15 years ago, she has been bringing up her children on her own. One of her sons had a drug problem and often became uncontrollable and threatened her and her daughter. Nair believes that what she has learned from the Bible has given her the strength to be peaceable, even under such trying circumstances. She tries not to argue or fight about things. She

Nair



endeavors to be kind, sympathetic, and understanding toward others. (Ephesians 4:31, 32) She is convinced that learning to be peaceable has enabled her to have the best possible relationships with family members and others.

TAKING THE FUTURE INTO ACCOUNT

If we follow Jesus' wise advice, we will find happiness and contentment in life. For a truly meaningful life, however, we also need to know what the future holds. After all, how meaningful can life be if all we know is that we will eventually grow old, get sick, and then die? Yet, these are the realities of life in this world.

There is, however, good news! Jehovah has many blessings in store for all those who endeavor to "walk just as Jesus walked." Jehovah promises that he will soon bring about a righteous new world, where faithful humans will live as Jehovah purposed for them to live—forever in perfect health. His Word says: "Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Revelation 21:3, 4.

Maria, the 84-year-old woman mentioned in the first article in this series, rejoices in the prospect of seeing those words come true. What about you? Would you like to know more about "the real life"—the one to come under God's Kingdom? (1 Timothy 6:19) If so, you can ask Jehovah's Witnesses locally or write to the publishers of this magazine.* ■

* The book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, has helped many to make a topical study of the Scriptures.



AS TOLD BY ESA LEINONEN

YEAR BORN:

1960

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:

FINLAND

HISTORY:

HEAVY-METAL MUSICIAN



© Kaj Ewart

“My behavior was brutal”

MY PAST: I grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the seaport city of Turku. My father was a boxing champion, and my younger brother and I were also actively involved in boxing. In school, I was often challenged to a fight; I never hesitated to use my fists. As a teenager, I joined a notorious gang, which got me into even more violent conflicts. I also discovered heavy-metal music and started to dream of becoming a rock star.

I bought some drums, formed a band, and soon became the lead singer of the band. I liked to go wild on stage. Because our band was aggressive and had a wild appearance, we gradually received much publicity. We started to play in front of large audiences, and we made a few recordings, the last of which received favorable reviews. In the late 1980's, we traveled to the United States to promote our band. We performed in New York and Los Angeles a few times and established some contacts with music-industry professionals before returning to Finland.

Although I enjoyed being in the band, I longed for more meaning in my life. I became disillusioned with the harshness of the music industry and became frustrated with my frivolous lifestyle. I felt that I was a bad person, and I was afraid of burning in a fiery hell. I tried to find some answers in all kinds of spiritual books, and I also prayed intensely for God's help, even though I felt that I could never please him.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: To support myself, I worked at the local post office. One day, I found out that a workmate was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I bombarded him with questions. His logical, Scriptural answers intrigued me, so I agreed to have him study the Bible with me. After I had been studying for some weeks, my band was offered an attractive recording contract with the possibility of releasing an album in the United States. I felt that this was the chance of a lifetime.

“Our heavenly Father is merciful, and he wants to heal the wounds of those who repent of their mistakes”

I told the Witness who was studying with me that I really wanted to make one more album and that after doing that, I would seriously apply Bible principles in my life. He didn't express his opinion; he simply asked me to read Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 6:24. The verse says: “No one can slave for two masters.” I was stunned when I realized the meaning of Jesus' words. But after a few days, it was my Bible teacher's turn to be stunned! I told him that because I wanted to follow Jesus, I left the band!

The Bible was like a mirror that revealed my flaws to me. (James 1:22-25) I saw that my behavior was brutal: I was proud, full of unquenchable ambition. I used bad language, and I fought, smoked, and drank heavily. When I realized how much my lifestyle contradicted Bible principles, I felt as if I had run into a brick wall. Nevertheless, I was ready to make the needed changes.—Ephesians 4:22-24.

Especially in the beginning, I was overwhelmed with remorse for my past wrongs. But the Witness with whom I was studying helped me a lot. He showed me what the Bible says at Isaiah 1:18: “Though the sins of you people should prove to be as scarlet, they will be made white just like snow.” This and other Bible verses convinced me that our heavenly Father is merciful and wants to heal the wounds of those who repent of their mistakes.

When I came to know and appreciate Jehovah as a Person, I wanted to dedicate my life to him. (Psalm 40:8) I was baptized in 1992 at an international convention of Jehovah's Witnesses held in St. Petersburg, Russia.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I have made many good friends among Jehovah's worshippers. Now and then, we get together to play decent music and enjoy this gift from God. (James 1:17) A special blessing has been my marriage to my beloved wife, Kristina. With her, I have shared many things—the joys and challenges of life, as well as my deepest feelings.

Had I not become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I might not be alive today. In the past, I constantly drifted in and out of problems and crises. Now I have a real purpose in life, and I feel that everything is in place. ■





WALL RELIEF OF WARRIORS CARRYING
HEADS OF ENEMY CAPTIVES AND
THROWING THEM IN A HEAP

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY



Why was ancient Nineveh called “the city of bloodshed”?

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was a mighty city with magnificent palaces and temples, broad streets, and massive walls. The Hebrew prophet Nahum referred to it as “the city of bloodshed.”—Nahum 3:1.

That was an apt description, for reliefs from Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh attest to Assyrian cruelty. One depicts a torturer wrenching the tongue out of a prisoner who had been pinned to the ground. Inscriptions boast that captives were led by cords attached to hooks piercing their noses or lips. Captive officials were made to wear around their necks the severed heads of their kings, like grotesque necklaces.

Assyriologist Archibald Henry Sayce describes the barbarities that followed the capture of a town: “Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burned alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled, flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses.” ■

What was the purpose of putting a parapet around the rooftops of Jewish houses?

The Jews were commanded by God: “In case you build a new house, you must also make a parapet for your roof, that you may not place bloodguilt upon your house because someone . . . might fall from it.” (Deuteronomy 22:8) The parapet was a necessary safety measure, since Jewish families in Bible times made good use of their rooftops.

Most Israelite homes had a flat roof. The housetop was an ideal place for people to linger in the warmth of the sun, enjoy the air, or do domestic chores. In summer, it was a comfortable place to sleep. (1 Samuel 9:26) A farmer would use the rooftop to dry grain prior to milling or to dry figs and raisins.—Joshua 2:6.

The rooftop was also used for worship, both true and idolatrous. (Nehemiah 8:16-18; Jeremiah 19:13) The apostle Peter went up to the rooftop at noontime to pray. (Acts 10:9-16) If shaded by vines or palm leaves, a housetop must have been a pleasant retreat.

The work *The Land and the Book* says that Israelite homes had a stairway or ladder to the rooftop, “outside of the house, but within the exterior court.” So a householder could leave the rooftop without having to enter the house. This may explain Jesus’ warning about the urgency of fleeing a doomed city: “Let the man on the housetop not come down to take the goods out of his house.”—Matthew 24:17. ■

“Keep On Asking, and It Will Be Given You”

“Lord, teach us how to pray.” (Luke 11:1) That request was put to Jesus by one of his disciples. As part of his response, Jesus related two illustrations that teach us how to pray and be heard by God. If you have ever wondered whether God hears your prayers, you will be interested in Jesus’ reply.—**Read Luke 11:5-13.**

The first illustration focuses on the one who prays. (Luke 11:5-8) In the story, a man receives a guest late at night and has no food to set before him. To the host, the matter is urgent. Despite the hour, he goes to a friend’s house in order to borrow some bread. At first, the friend is reluctant to get up because his family is fast asleep with him. But with unembarrassed persistence, the determined host keeps asking until finally his friend gets up and gives him some provisions.*

What does the illustration teach us about prayer? Jesus is telling us that we need to be persistent—to keep asking, seeking, and knocking. (Luke 11:9, 10) Why? Is Jesus suggesting that when we pray we are, in effect, pounding at the door of a reluctant God? No. Jesus’ point is that unlike the hesitant friend, God is eager to grant the proper requests of those who pray in faith. We show such faith by our persistence. By repeatedly asking, we reveal that we really need what we are asking for and that we truly believe that God can grant it—if that is his will.—Mark 11:24; 1 John 5:14.

The second illustration focuses on the “Hearer of prayer,” Jehovah. (Psalm 65:2) Jesus asks:

* Jesus’ illustration reflects real-life customs and practices. The Jews viewed showing hospitality as a sacred duty. A family baked enough bread for a day, so borrowing was common if the supply ran out. Also, if they were poor, the whole family slept on the floor in a single room.

“Which father is there among you who, if his son asks for a fish, will perhaps hand him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he also asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion?” The answer is obvious—no caring father gives harmful things to his children. Then, Jesus applies the illustration: If imperfect human fathers “give good gifts” to their children, “how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit”—the best of gifts—to his earthly children who ask him!—Luke 11:11-13; Matthew 7:11.

God is eager to grant the proper requests of those who pray in faith

What does this illustration teach us about Jehovah, the “Hearer of prayer”? Jesus invites us to see Jehovah as a caring Father who is eager to respond to the needs of his children. Hence, Jehovah’s worshippers can feel free to approach him with the requests of their heart. And knowing that he wants what is best for them, they can readily accept his answer to their request, even if the answer is not what they expected. # ■

* Jesus often used a “how much more so” line of reasoning—arguing from the lesser to the greater. One scholar explains: “The argument runs, ‘If A is true, then how much more will B be true also.’”

To learn more about how to pray and be heard by God, see chapter 17 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR APRIL
Luke 7-21

He “Walked With the True God”

NOAH straightened his back and stretched his aching muscles. Picture him seated on a broad wooden beam, taking a moment’s rest from his work as he looked out over the immense structure of the ark. The pungent smell of hot tar was in the air; the sounds of woodworking tools reverberated. From where he sat, Noah could see his sons hard at work on various parts of the great network of timbers. His sons, their wives, and his own dear wife had all been laboring with him on this project for decades now. They had come a long way, but they had a long way to go!

The people of the region thought that all of them were fools. The more the ark took shape, the more the people laughed at the very thought of a deluge that would cover the whole earth. The disaster that Noah kept warning them about seemed so far-fetched, so preposterous! They could hardly believe that a man would waste his life—and the lives of his family—in such a foolish endeavor. However, Noah’s God, Jehovah, saw the man in a very different light.

God’s Word says: “Noah walked with the true God.” (Genesis 6:9) What did that mean? Not that God walked on earth, nor that Noah somehow went to heaven. Rather, Noah obeyed his God so closely and loved him so dearly that it was as if he and Jehovah walked together as friends. Thousands of years later, the Bible said of Noah: “Through [his] faith he condemned the world.” (Hebrews 11:7) How was that so? What can we today learn from his faith?

A FAULTLESS MAN IN A TWISTED WORLD

Noah grew up in a world that was rapidly going from bad to worse. It had been bad in the days of his great-grandfather Enoch, another righteous man who walked with God. Enoch had foretold that a day of judgment was coming upon the ungodly people of the world. Now, in Noah’s day, the moral climate was far worse. In fact, from Jehovah’s viewpoint, the earth was ruined, for it was filled with violence. (Genesis 5:22; 6:11; Jude 14, 15) What had happened to make things so much worse?

A terrible tragedy unfolded among God’s spirit sons, the angels. One of them had already rebelled against Jehovah, becoming Satan the Devil by slandering God and luring Adam and Eve into sin. In Noah’s day, other angels began to revolt against Jehovah’s just rule. Forsaking their God-given station in heaven, they came to earth, assumed human form, and took beautiful women as their wives. Those proud, selfish rebel angels were a poisonous influence among humans.—Genesis 3:1-5; 6:1, 2; Jude 6, 7.

Further, the unnatural unions between materialized angels and human women produced hybrid sons of extraordinary size and strength. The Bible calls them Nephilim, which literally means “Fellers”—those who cause others to fall. Vicious bullies, the Nephilim intensified the world’s brutal, ungodly spirit. Little wonder that in the view of the Creator, “the badness of man was abundant in the earth and every inclination of the



thoughts of his heart was only bad all the time.” Jehovah determined that he would wipe out that wicked society within 120 years.—Genesis 6: 3-5.

Imagine trying to raise a family in such a world! Yet, Noah did so. He found a good wife. After Noah turned 500 years of age, his wife bore him three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth.* Together, the parents had to protect their boys from the vile influences surrounding them. Little boys tend to be filled with awe and admiration for “mighty ones” and “men of fame”—and the Nephilim were just that. Noah and his wife could hardly shield the children from every report about the exploits of those giants, but they could teach the appealing truth about Jehovah God, the one who hates all wickedness. They had to help their boys see that Jehovah felt hurt by the violence and rebellion of the world.—Genesis 6:6.

Parents today may well sympathize with Noah and his wife. Our world is likewise poisoned by violence and rebelliousness. Even entertainment directed at children may be saturated with such themes. Wise parents do all they can to counter such influences by teaching their children about the God of peace, Jehovah, who will one day bring all violence to an end. (Psalm 11:5; 37:10, 11) Success is possible! Noah and his wife succeeded. Their boys grew up to be good men, and

* People in those early days lived far longer than we do today. Their longevity evidently had to do with their being closer to the vitality and perfection that Adam and Eve once had but lost.

they married wives who were likewise willing to put the true God, Jehovah, first in their lives.

“MAKE FOR YOURSELF AN ARK”

One day, Noah’s life changed forever. Jehovah spoke to this beloved servant and told him of His purpose to bring the world of that time to an end. God commanded Noah: “Make for yourself an ark out of wood of a resinous tree.”—Genesis 6:14.

This ark was not a ship, as some assume. It had neither bow nor stern, keel nor rudder—no bends or curves. It was basically a great chest, or box. Jehovah gave Noah the precise dimensions of the ark, some details regarding its design, and directions to coat it inside and out with tar. And he told Noah why: “Here I am bringing the deluge of waters upon the earth . . . Everything that is in the earth will expire.” However, Jehovah gave this direction to Noah: “You must go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” Noah was also to bring representatives of all kinds of animals. Only those aboard the ark could survive the coming Deluge!—Genesis 6:17-20.

Noah faced a gigantic task. This ark was to be enormous—some 437 feet (133 m) long, 73 feet (22 m) wide, and 44 feet (13 m) tall. It was far larger than the largest seagoing wooden ships built even in modern times. Did Noah back off from this assignment, complain about its challenges, or alter the details to make it easier on himself? The Bible answers: “Noah proceeded to



Noah and his wife had to protect their children from bad influences

do according to all that God had commanded him. He did just so.”—Genesis 6:22.

The work took decades, perhaps 40 to 50 years. There were trees to fell, logs to haul, and beams to hew, shape, and join. The ark was to have three stories, or decks, a number of compartments, and a door in the side. Evidently, there were windows along the top, as well as a roof that likely peaked in the middle with a slight pitch so that water would run off.—Genesis 6:14-16.

As the years passed and the ark took shape, Noah must have been so glad to have the support of his family! There was another aspect to the work that might have been even more challenging than ark building. The Bible tells us that Noah was “a preacher of righteousness.” (2 Peter 2:5) So he courageously took the lead in trying to warn the people of that wicked, godless society about the destruction that was heading their way. How did they respond? Jesus Christ later recalled that time, saying that those people “took no note.” He said that they were so caught up in the affairs of daily life—eating, drinking, and marrying—that they paid no heed to Noah. (Matthew 24:37-39) No doubt many ridiculed him and his family; some may have threatened him and violently opposed him.

Yet, Noah and his family never quit. Even though they lived in a world that was geared toward making their primary pursuit in life, building the ark, seem trivial, misguided, or foolish, they still kept at it faithfully. Christian families today can thus learn a great deal from the faith of Noah and his family. After all, we live in what the Bible calls “the last days” of this world system. (2 Timothy 3:1) Jesus said that our era would be just like the era in which Noah built the ark. If the world reacts to the message about God’s Kingdom with apathy, ridicule, or even persecution, Christians do well to remember Noah. They are not the first to face such challenges.

“GO . . . INTO THE ARK”

Decades passed, and the ark gradually assumed its final shape. As Noah neared his 600th



year, he dealt with losses. His father, Lamech, died.* Five years later, Lamech’s father, Noah’s grandfather Methuselah, died at the age of 969—ending the longest human life in the Bible record. (Genesis 5:27) Both Methuselah and Lamech had been contemporaries of the first man, Adam.

In that same year, the patriarch Noah received a new message from Jehovah God: “Go, you and all your household, into the ark.” At the same time, God told Noah to take all the varieties of animals into the ark—by sevens in the case of the clean ones, fit for sacrificial use, and the rest by twos.—Genesis 7:1-3.

It must have been an unforgettable sight. From the horizon they streamed in by the hundreds—walking, flying, crawling, waddling, lumbering—all in a dizzying variety of sizes, shapes, and dispositions. We need not imagine poor Noah trying to corral, wrangle, or somehow cajole all those wild animals into entering the confined space of the ark. The account says that “they *went in* . . . to Noah inside the ark.”—Genesis 7:9.

Some skeptics might ask: ‘How could such a thing happen? And how could all those animals coexist peacefully in a confined space?’ Consider

* Lamech had given his son the name Noah—probably meaning “Rest; Consolation”—and had prophesied that Noah would fulfill the significance of his name by leading mankind to a rest from toiling on cursed ground. (Genesis 5:28, 29) Lamech did not live to see this prophecy fulfilled.



Despite evidence of God's blessing on Noah, people ridiculed him and ignored his message

this: Is it really beyond the power of the Creator of the universe to control his animal creations, even render them tame and docile if needed? Remember, Jehovah is the God who parted the Red Sea and made the sun stand still. Could he not carry out every event described in Noah's account? Of course he could, and he did!

Granted, God could have chosen to save his animal creations in some other way. However, he wisely chose a way that reminds us of the trust that he originally placed in humans to take care of all the living things on this earth. (Genesis 1: 28) Many parents today thus use Noah's story to teach their children that Jehovah values the people and the animals he has created.

Jehovah told Noah that the Deluge would come in a week. It must have been a hectic time for the family. Imagine the work of getting all the animals and their foodstuffs placed in an orderly fashion and hauling the family's belongings aboard. Noah's wife and the wives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth may have been especially concerned about making a livable home aboard that ark.

What of the community? They still "took no note"—even in the face of all the evidence that Jehovah was blessing Noah and his endeavors. They could not help but notice the animals streaming into the ark. But we should not be surprised at their apathy. People today take no note of the overwhelming evidence that we are now

living in the final days of this world system of things. And as the apostle Peter foretold, ridiculers have come with their ridicule, mocking those who heed God's warning. (2 Peter 3:3-6) Likewise, people surely ridiculed Noah and his family.

When did the ridicule end? The account tells us that once Noah brought his family and the animals inside the ark, "Jehovah shut the door behind him." If any ridiculers were nearby, that divine action no doubt silenced them. If not, the rain surely did—for down it came! And it kept coming and coming and coming—flooding the world, just as Jehovah had said it would.—Genesis 7:16-21.

Did Jehovah take delight in the death of those wicked people? No! (Ezekiel 33:11) On the contrary, he had given them every opportunity to change their ways and do right. Could they have done so? Noah's life course answered that question. By walking with Jehovah, obeying his God in all things, Noah showed that survival was possible. In that sense, his faith condemned the world of his day; it cast the wickedness of his generation in a clear light. His faith kept him and his family safe. If you imitate the faith of Noah, you may likewise do yourself and those you love a world of good. Like Noah, you can walk with Jehovah God as your friend. And the friendship can last forever!

Is it possible to understand the Bible?

The Bible is God's Word. It is like a letter from a loving father. (2 Timothy 3:16) In the Bible, God explains how we can please him, why he allows evil, and what he will do for mankind in the future. But teachers of religion have twisted Bible teaching; as a result, many people despair of ever understanding it.—Acts 20:29, 30.

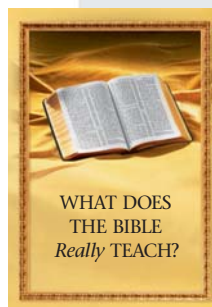
Jehovah God wants us to know the truth about him. For that reason, he has given us a book that is possible to understand.—**Read 1 Timothy 2: 3, 4.**

How can you understand the Bible?

In addition to giving us the Bible, Jehovah provides us with help to understand it. He sent Jesus to teach us. (Luke 4:16-21) Jesus helped his listeners to understand the Scriptures, referring to one verse after another.—**Read Luke 24:27, 32, 45.**

Jesus established the Christian congregation so that the work he had started would continue. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Today, Jesus' genuine followers help people to understand what the Bible teaches about God. If you would like to understand the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to help you.—**Read Acts 8:30, 31.**

For more information,
see chapter 2 of this book,
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