

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Where Can You Find Comfort?

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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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Life in this world can be distressing. Is there anywhere we can turn for reliable help and comfort?

The Bible says: “**The Father of tender mercies and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our trials.**”

—2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

This issue of *The Watchtower* discusses how God offers us the comfort we all need.

Where Can You Find Comfort?

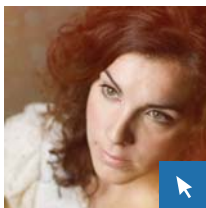
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WE ALL NEED COMFORT

Do you remember falling down when you were a young child? Perhaps you cut your hand or scraped your knee. Can you recall how your mother comforted you? Maybe she cleaned the wound and then put a bandage on it. You cried, but her soothing words and warm embrace soon made you feel better. At that time in your life, comfort was never far away.



But life gets more complicated as we get older. The problems get bigger, and comfort becomes harder to find. Adult problems, sad to say, can rarely be solved with a bandage and a mother's hug. Consider a few examples.

- Have you ever faced the trauma of losing your job? Julian says that when he got fired, the shock left him feeling distraught. 'How will I care for my family?' he wondered. 'After I put in years of hard work, why does the company feel I am useless?'

- Perhaps you are devastated by the breakup of your marriage. "When my husband suddenly left me 18 months ago, I felt a sadness come over me. It was as if my heart had broken in two," explains Raquel. "The pain was physical as well as emotional. It frightened me."

- Maybe you have a serious health problem that shows little sign of improving. There may be times when you feel as did the patriarch Job, who lamented: "I loathe my life; I do not want to go on living." (Job 7:16) Perhaps you share the feelings of Luis, a man in his 80's, who confessed, "Sometimes I feel that I am just waiting to die."

- Or possibly it is the death of a loved one that makes you yearn for comfort. "When my son died in a tragic plane accident, my first feeling was disbelief," explains Robert. "Then came the pain, the pain that the Bible compares to having a long sword run through you."—Luke 2:35.

Robert, Luis, Raquel, and Julian did find comfort, even in those distressing circumstances. They found the best Person to provide it—none other than Almighty God. How does he provide comfort? Will he likewise provide the comfort you need?

HOW GOD OFFERS COMFORT

The apostle Paul describes Jehovah* as “the God of *all* comfort, who comforts us in *all* our trials.” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) Thus the Bible assures us that no person is beyond God’s help and that no tragedy is so great that our heavenly Father cannot comfort us.

Of course, we must do something if we want comfort from God. How could a doctor help us if we never made an appointment to see him? The prophet Amos asks: “Will two walk together unless they have met by appointment?” (Amos 3:3, footnote) The Scriptures therefore urge us: “Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you.”—James 4:8.

How can we be sure that God will draw close to us? First of all, because he tells us repeatedly that he wants to help us. (See the accompanying box.) And second, because we have convincing testimony from people whom God has comforted—real people, both from our time and the past.

Like many today who seek help from God,

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

King David was all too familiar with tragedy. “Hear my pleas when I cry to you for help,” he once begged Jehovah. Did God respond? Yes. David added: “I have received his help, and my heart rejoices.”—Psalm 28:2, 7.

JESUS’ ROLE IN COMFORTING ALL WHO MOURN

God intended that Jesus have a key role in providing comfort. Among other tasks that God assigned him, Jesus was “to bind up the broken-hearted” and “comfort all who mourn.” (Isaiah 61:1, 2) As foretold, Jesus took a special interest in people who were “toiling and loaded down.”—Matthew 11:28-30.

Jesus comforted people by giving them wise advice, by treating them kindly, and even, in some cases, by curing their sicknesses. One day a leper pleaded with Jesus: “If you just want to, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus replied: “I want to! Be made clean.” (Mark 1:40, 41) And the leper was healed.





Today, the Son of God is not present on earth to comfort us personally. But his Father, Jehovah, “the God of all comfort,” continues to help those in need. (2 Corinthians 1:3) Consider four principal means that God uses to comfort people.

- **The Bible.** “All the things that were written beforehand were written for our instruction, so that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope.” —Romans 15:4.

- **God’s Holy Spirit.** Not long after Jesus’ death, the whole Christian congregation entered into a period of peace. Why? “It walked in the fear of Jehovah and in the comfort of the holy spirit.” (Acts 9:31) The holy spirit, God’s active force, is very powerful. God can use it to comfort anyone in any circumstance.

- **Prayer.** “Do not be anxious over anything,” the Bible advises us. Rather, it says, “let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your mental powers.”—Philippians 4:6, 7.

- **Fellow Christians** can provide a comforting ‘safety net’ of true friends. The apostle Paul described his companions as “a source of great comfort” in times of “distress and tribulation.”—Colossians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 3:7.

But you may be wondering how all this works in practice. Let us take a closer look at the experiences of people who have faced the problems mentioned at the outset. Like them, you can discover that God still fulfills this heartwarming promise: “As a mother comforts her son, so I will keep comforting you.”—Isaiah 66:13.

How We Know That God Wants to Comfort Us

- “You, O Jehovah, are my helper and comforter.”—Psalm 86:17.
- “‘Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God.”—Isaiah 40:1.
- “This is what Jehovah says: . . . ‘As a mother comforts her son, so I will keep comforting you.’”—Isaiah 66:12, 13.
- “Happy are those who mourn, since they will be comforted.”—Matthew 5:4.
- “Throw all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you.”—1 Peter 5:7.

COMFORT IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Trouble comes in many forms. We certainly cannot cover every kind of hardship here, but let us take a closer look at the four examples that we have already mentioned. Notice how people facing very different problems have found genuine comfort from God.

WHEN FACING UNEMPLOYMENT

“My wife and I lost our jobs at the same time,” recalls Seth.* “For two years we had to survive on family handouts and a few odd jobs. As a result, my wife, Priscilla, became depressed, and I felt worthless.

“How did we cope? Priscilla constantly reminded herself of Jesus’ words at Matthew 6:34. He said that we should not become anxious about tomorrow, since each day has its own anxieties. And her heartfelt prayers gave her the strength to keep going. In my case, Psalm 55:22 comforted me. Like the psalmist, I threw my burden on Jehovah, and I found that he did sustain me. Although I now have a job, we keep our lifestyle simple in line with Jesus’ advice at Matthew 6:20-22. Above all, we have drawn closer to God and closer to each other.”

“I was frightened about the future when our small family business went bankrupt,” confesses Jonathan. “Because of an economic crisis, 20 years of hard work came to nothing. My wife and I started arguing about money. We couldn’t even buy with a credit card, for fear it would not be honored.

“But God’s Word and his spirit helped us to make good decisions. I learned to accept any sort of work, and we cut down on all unnecessary expenses. As Jehovah’s Witnesses, we also got support from fellow believers. They bolstered our self-esteem and lent us a helping hand when times were really tough.”



“I learned to accept any sort of work, and we cut down on all unnecessary expenses.”—Jonathan

* Some names in this article have been changed.

WHEN A MARRIAGE BREAKS UP

“When my husband suddenly left me, I felt hurt and angry,” recalls Raquel. “And a terrible sadness overwhelmed me. But I drew close to God, and he comforted me. The peace of God protected my heart when I turned to him daily in prayer. It seemed to me that he repaired my broken heart.

“And thanks to his Word, the Bible, I conquered feelings of anger and resentment. I took to heart the words of the apostle Paul at Romans 12:21: ‘Do not let yourself be conquered by the evil, but keep conquering the evil with the good.’

“One wise counselor helped me to see the need to move on. He showed me Ecclesiastes 3:6 and kindly told me that there is a time when we have to ‘give up as lost.’ It was tough advice, but it was what I needed. I now have new goals in life.”

“When your marriage breaks up, you need support,” Elizabeth states. “I had a dear friend who gave me that support, day after day. She cried with me, comforted me, and made me feel loved rather than rejected. I am convinced that Jehovah used her to heal my emotional wounds.”

IN TIMES OF SICKNESS OR OLD AGE

Luis, quoted in the opening article of this series, has a serious heart condition, and he almost died on two occasions. He now needs to be on oxygen 16 hours a day. “I pray to Jehovah constantly,” he says. “And after praying to God, I feel his spirit giving me strength. Prayer gives me the courage to keep going because I have faith in him and know that he cares for me.”

“I want to do so many things, but I just can’t,” explains Petra, who is in her 80’s. “Seeing my strength diminish is very hard. I feel drained and have to rely on medication. I often think of the way Jesus asked his Father to let a certain hardship pass by if it was possible. But Jehovah gave Jesus strength, and he strengthens me. Prayer is my daily therapy. I feel much better after talking to God.”—Matthew 26:39.



“There is a time when we have to ‘give up as lost.’ . . . I now have new goals in life.”—Raquel



“After praying to God, I feel his spirit giving me strength.”—Luis

Julian, who has been battling multiple sclerosis for nearly 30 years, feels likewise. “I have exchanged an executive’s chair for a wheelchair,” he says. “But my life is worthwhile because it is devoted to serving others. Giving can alleviate suffering, and Jehovah does keep his promise to strengthen us in time of need. Like the apostle Paul, I can truly say: ‘For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power.’” —Philippians 4:13.



“Although the plane crash took the life of our son, we still have many happy memories of times shared together.”
—Robert

IN TIMES OF LOSS

“When my father died in a traffic accident, I could not believe it at first,” Antonio recalls. “It seemed so unfair—he was just an innocent pedestrian. But there was nothing I could do. He was in a coma for five days before he passed away. Somehow, I kept myself from weeping in front of my mother, but I broke down when I was alone. ‘Why? Why?’ I kept asking myself.

“During those dreadful days, I kept asking Jehovah to help me control my emotions and to give me peace. And I gradually felt calmer. I remembered that the Bible explains that ‘unexpected events’ can befall any one of us. Since God cannot lie, I am convinced that I will see my father again in the resurrection.”—Ecclesiastes 9:11; John 11:25; Titus 1:2.

Robert, mentioned in the opening article, has similar thoughts. He says: “My wife and I experienced the peace of mind spoken of at Philippians 4:6, 7. It came to us through our prayers to Jehovah. This inner peace enabled us to speak to news reporters about our hope of the resurrection. Although the plane crash took the life of our son, we still have many happy memories of times shared together. We try to concentrate on them.

“When fellow Witnesses told us that they had seen us explaining our faith calmly on television, we told them that doubtless it was thanks to so many prayers being offered in our behalf. I truly believe that Jehovah was supporting us by means of their countless messages of comfort.”

As the foregoing examples show, God can provide comfort to people facing a wide range of problems and challenges. What about you? No matter what trouble you may face in life, there is comfort available to help you through the hard times.* So why not turn to Jehovah for help? He is “the God of all comfort.”—2 Corinthians 1:3. ■

* If you would like help to draw close to God and receive his comfort, please contact Jehovah’s Witnesses in your area or write to the nearest branch office.

“The Battle Belongs to Jehovah”

DAVID braced himself against the rush of soldiers jostling past him. They were wide-eyed with fear as they ran away from the battle line. What scared them so? Over and over, David must have heard them nervously repeating one word. It was the name of a man. And there, standing defiantly on the valley floor, was the man himself, perhaps looming larger than any man David had ever seen.

Goliath! David could see why the soldiers feared him—he seemed impossibly huge, a mountain of a man. Even without his formidable armor, he probably weighed more than two large men combined. But he was heavily armed, and he was an immensely strong, experienced warrior. Goliath bellowed out a challenge. Imagine his booming voice echoing on the hillsides as he taunted the army of Israel and their king, Saul. He dared any man to come forward and fight him, to settle this war in single combat!—1 Samuel 17:4-10.

The Israelites cowered. King Saul cowered. The situation, David learned, had been dragging on for over a month! The two armies, Philistine and Israelite, remained deadlocked as Goliath repeated his taunts day after day. David was distressed. How humiliating to think of Israel’s king and his soldiers, including three of David’s older brothers, cringing in fear! In David’s eyes, this pagan Goliath was doing far worse than embarrassing the army of Israel; he was insulting the God of Israel, Jehovah! But what could David, a mere youth, do about it? And what can we

today learn from the faith of David?—1 Samuel 17:11-14.

“ANOINT HIM, FOR THIS IS THE ONE!”

Let us go back to a time many months earlier. Evening was falling as David tended his father’s sheep somewhere on the hillsides near Bethlehem. He was a well-formed young man, likely still in his teens, with a ruddy look about him and appealing, intelligent eyes. In quiet moments, he passed the time playing the harp. The beauty of God’s creation moved him, and his musical skills had grown steadily through many happy hours of practice. But on the evening in question, David was summoned. His father wanted to see him right away.—1 Samuel 16:12.

He found his father, Jesse, talking with a very old man. It was the faithful prophet Samuel. Jehovah had sent him to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as Israel’s next king! Samuel had already seen David’s seven older brothers, but Jehovah made it clear to Samuel that He had chosen none of them. When David arrived, though, Jehovah told Samuel: “Anoint him, for this is the one!” In front of all of David’s older brothers, Samuel opened a hollowed-out horn filled with special oil and poured some of it on David’s head. David’s life was never the same after that anointing. The Bible says: “The spirit of Jehovah began to empower David from that day forward.”—1 Samuel 16:1, 5-11, 13.

Did David begin to cultivate ambitions about



the kingship? No, he was content to wait on the leading of Jehovah's spirit to let him know when it was time to assume greater responsibilities. In the meantime, he continued his humble work of shepherding. It was a work that he carried out with great dedication and courage. His father's flocks were threatened on two occasions, once by a lion and once by a bear. David did not simply try to drive off those predators from a safe distance. Rather, he leaped right into the fray to defend his father's helpless sheep. Both times, he single-handedly killed the ferocious wild beast!—1 Samuel 17:34-36; Isaiah 31:4.

In time, David was summoned again. His reputation had reached the ears of King Saul. Though still a powerful warrior, Saul had lost Jehovah's favor by rebelling against God's instructions. Jehovah had withdrawn his spirit from Saul, and thus the king was often subject to a bad spirit—fits of anger, suspicion, and violence. When this bad spirit was upon Saul, one thing that could soothe him was music. Some of Saul's men had learned of David's reputation as a musician and as a fighter. So David was summoned, and he soon became one of Saul's court musicians and armor-bearers.—1 Samuel 15:26-29; 16:14-23.

Young people in particular can learn much from David's faith in these matters. Notice that he spent his spare time in pursuits that drew him closer to Jehovah. Additionally, he patiently developed skills that were practical and that made him readily employable. Above all, though, he responded to the leading of Jehovah's spirit. What outstanding lessons for all of us to learn!—Ecclesiastes 12:1.

“LET NO ONE LOSE HEART BECAUSE OF HIM”

While serving Saul, David often returned home to shepherd the sheep, sometimes for extended periods. It was during one such period that Jesse sent David to check on the three oldest sons, who were serving in Saul's army. Obediently David, laden with supplies for his brothers, headed to the Valley of Elah. When he arrived, he was dismayed



David humbly credited Jehovah for his victories over wild beasts

to find the two armies locked in the stalemate described at the outset of this article. They faced each other from the opposing slopes of that wide, curved valley.—1 Samuel 17:1-3, 15-19.

To David, the situation was not tolerable. How could the army of the living God, Jehovah, flee in terror from a mere man—and a pagan at that? David saw Goliath's taunts as a direct insult to Jehovah. So he began talking eagerly to the soldiers about defeating Goliath. Before long, David's oldest brother, Eliab, got wind of David's talk. He rebuked his younger brother harshly, accusing him of being there only to witness the carnage of battle. But David answered him: "What have I done now? I was only asking a question!" Then he went right on speaking confidently about defeating Goliath, until someone repeated his words to Saul. The king ordered David to be brought before him.—1 Samuel 17:23-31.

David spoke these encouraging words to the king about Goliath: "Let no one lose heart because of him." Saul and his men had indeed lost heart because of Goliath. Perhaps they had made

the natural mistake of comparing themselves to that huge man, picturing how they came up only to the man's midriff or chest. They imagined that armored giant making short work of them. But David did not think that way. As we will see, he saw the problem in a completely different light. So he offered to fight Goliath himself.—1 Samuel 17:32.

Saul objected: "You are not able to go fight against this Philistine, for you are but a boy, and he has been a soldier from his youth." Was David really a child? No, but he was too young to join the army, and he may have been youthful looking. But David was already known as a valiant fighter and may have been in his late teens by this time.—1 Samuel 16:18; 17:33.

David reassured Saul by recounting what had happened with the lion and the bear. Was he boasting? No. David knew how he had won those battles. He said: "Jehovah, who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear, he is the one who will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Resigned at last, Saul responded: "Go, and may Jehovah be with you."—1 Samuel 17:37.

Would you like to have faith like David's? Note, then, that David's faith was not mere idealism or wishful thinking. He had faith in his God because of knowledge and experience. He knew Jehovah as a loving Protector and a Keeper of promises. If we want to acquire such faith, we need to keep learning about the God of the Bible. As we live by what we learn, we will find that the good results will likewise strengthen our faith.—Hebrews 11:1.

"JEHOVAH WILL SURRENDER YOU INTO MY HAND"

At first, Saul tried to outfit David with his own armor. It was much like Goliath's, made of copper, and it likely included a large hauberk, or shirt of mail, composed of overlapping scales. However, David tried moving about while wearing that large and cumbersome equipment and soon found that it would not work for him. He was not trained as a soldier, so he was not used to wearing armor, especially the armor that was worn by Saul, who was

the tallest man in the nation of Israel! (1 Samuel 9:2) He removed it all and chose the garb he was used to wearing—that of a shepherd equipped to protect his flock.—1 Samuel 17:38-40.

David carried his shepherd's staff, a bag over his shoulder, and a sling. Now a sling might not seem like much, but it was in fact a formidable weapon. Consisting of a small pouch at the end of two long leather straps, it was an ideal weapon for a shepherd. He would place a stone in the pouch, whirl it over his head at great speed, and then release one of the straps, hurling the stone with lethal accuracy. So effective was this weapon that armies sometimes used divisions of slingers.

Thus equipped, David hurried to meet his foe. We can only imagine David's fervent prayers as he stooped in the dry riverbed on the valley floor and collected five small, smooth stones. Then he went out onto the field of battle—not walking but running!

When Goliath saw his opponent, what did he think? "He sneered at him in contempt," we read, "because he was just a ruddy and handsome boy." Goliath boomed out: "Am I a dog, so that you are coming against me with sticks?" Evidently he saw David's staff but took no note of the sling. He cursed David in the name of the Philistine gods and vowed to feed the corpse of this contemptible foe to the birds and beasts of the field.—1 Samuel 17:41-44.

To this day, David's response stands as a great statement of faith. Just imagine the young man calling out to Goliath: "You are coming against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I am coming against you in the name of Jehovah of armies, the God of the battle line of Israel, whom you have taunted." David knew that human power and weaponry mattered little. Goliath had shown disrespect for Jehovah God, and Jehovah would respond. As David put it, "the battle belongs to Jehovah."—1 Samuel 17:45-47.

David was not blind to Goliath's size or his weapons. Yet David refused to let such things daunt him. He did not make the mistake that Saul

and the members of his army did. David did not compare himself to Goliath. Instead, he looked at Goliath in comparison with Jehovah. Standing some nine and a half feet (2.9 m) tall, Goliath towered over other men, but how big was he compared to the Sovereign of the universe? Really, like any human, he was barely more than an insect—in this case, one that Jehovah was ready to exterminate!

David ran toward his foe, reaching into his bag for a stone. He loaded his sling and whirled it over his head until it fairly whistled. Goliath, perhaps close behind his shield-bearer, advanced toward David. Goliath's great height may actually have been a disadvantage for him, since a shield-bearer of normal size could hardly have raised a shield high enough to protect the giant's head. And that is just where David aimed.—1 Samuel 17:41.

David released his stone. Imagine the silence as it hurtled toward its mark. Jehovah doubtless made sure that David would not have to fling another one. The stone struck home, sinking

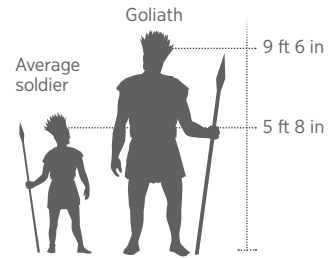
into Goliath's forehead. The colossus toppled to the earth, facedown! The shield-bearer likely fled in terror. David approached, took Goliath's own sword, and cut off the giant's head with it.—1 Samuel 17:48-51.

Finally, Saul and his soldiers found their courage. With a mighty battle cry, they rushed against the Philistines. The battle turned out just as David had told Goliath that it would: "Jehovah . . . will give *all of you* into our hand."—1 Samuel 17:47, 52, 53.

Today, servants of God do not engage in carnal warfare. That time has passed. (Matthew 26:52) Still, we do need to imitate the faith of David. Like him, we need to see Jehovah as real—as the only God to serve and to hold in awe. We may, at times, feel small in comparison to our problems, but our problems are small compared to Jehovah's limitless power. If we choose Jehovah as our God and we put faith in him as David did, then no challenge, no problem, need daunt us. Nothing is beyond the power of Jehovah to conquer! ■

David saw that even a giant is puny when compared to Jehovah God





DAVID VERSUS GOLIATH

—Did It Really Happen?

Some people wonder if the account about David and Goliath is true history or just myth. Did such a doubt cross your mind as you read the preceding article? If so, please consider the following three questions.

1 | Could a man really be some nine and a half feet (2.9 m) tall?

The Bible says that Goliath's "height was six cubits and a span." (1 Samuel 17:4) The cubit in question was 17.5 inches (44.5 cm) long; the span, 8.75 inches (22.2 cm). That adds up to about nine feet six inches (2.9 m). Some insist that Goliath could not have been that tall, but consider: In modern times, the tallest man documented was over 8 feet 11 inches (2.7 m) tall. Is it really impossible that Goliath was six inches (15 cm) or so taller? He was of the tribe of the Rephaim, men who were known for their unusual size. An Egyptian document from the 13th century B.C.E. mentions that some fearsome warriors in the region of Canaan were over eight feet (2.4 m) in height. So Goliath's height, while unusual, is hardly impossible.

2 | Was David a real person?

There was a time when scholars tried to relegate King David to the realm of myth, but that has become harder to do. Archaeolo-

gists have found an ancient inscription that mentions "the house of David." Furthermore, Jesus Christ spoke of David as a real person. (Matthew 12:3; 22:43-45) Jesus' identity as the Messiah is supported by two detailed genealogies showing that he descended from King David. (Matthew 1:6-16; Luke 3:23-31) Clearly, David was a real man.

3 | Did the events described in the account unfold in a real place?

The Bible says that the battle occurred in the Valley of Elah. But it gets still more specific, noting that the Philistines camped on a hillside somewhere between two towns, Socoh and Azekah. The Israelites were stationed across the valley on the opposite hillside. Were these real places?

Note what a recent visitor to the area says: "Our guide—who was not a religious man—took us to the Valley of Elah. We ascended a path that took us to the brow of a hill. As we looked over

the valley, he had us read 1 Samuel 17:1-3. Then he pointed across the valley, saying: 'There, to your left, lie the ruins of Socoh.' Turning, he said, 'Over there, to your right, are the ruins of Azekah. The Philistines camped between those towns, somewhere on the hillsides facing you. So we may be standing where the Israelites camped.' I thought of Saul and David standing right where I was. Then we descended, and on the valley floor, we crossed a streambed, mostly dry, that was full of stones. I could not help but picture David stooping here to pick up five smooth stones, one of which killed Goliath." That visitor, like many others, was deeply impressed with the authentic details in the Bible record.

There is no real basis for doubting the truthfulness of this historical account. It involves real people and real places. More important, it is part of God's inspired Word, so it comes from the God of truth, the One who "cannot lie."—Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:16. ■



AS TOLD BY
ADRIÁN DE LA FUENTE

YEAR BORN

1974

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

MEXICO

HISTORY

**VIOLENT ADOLESCENT,
STREET FIGHTER**



I was bitter at heart and violent

MY PAST: I was born in Ciudad Mante, a beautiful region of the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico. In general, the city's inhabitants are generous and kind. But sad to say, because of organized crime, the area was very dangerous.

I was the second of four boys. My parents had me baptized in the Catholic Church, and later I was part of the parish choir. I wanted to please God because I greatly feared being judged and burning forever in hell.

When I was five years old, my father left us. That caused me deep sorrow and left an emptiness in my heart. I couldn't understand why he abandoned us when we loved him so much. My mother had to work long hours outside the home to provide for us four boys.

I took advantage of the situation and skipped school to associate with older kids. They taught me to swear, smoke, steal, and fight with my fists. Since I liked to dominate others, I learned boxing, wrestling, and martial arts, as well as how to use weapons. I became a violent adolescent. I was often involved in gunfights, and several times I ended up covered with blood and was left for dead on the street. How much sorrow I caused my mother when she found me like that and had to pick me up and rush me to the hospital!

When I was 16, a childhood friend named Jorge visited our home. He told us that he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses and that he wanted to share an important message with us. He began to explain his beliefs, using the Bible to do so. I had never read it, and I was excited to learn about God's name and his purposes. Jorge offered to study the Bible with us. We accepted.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: I was greatly relieved to learn the truth about hellfire—that it is not a Bible teaching. (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5) Once I learned that, I no longer felt a morbid fear of God. Rather, I began to see him as a loving Father who wants the best for his children.

As I progressed in my Bible study, I saw the need to make changes in my personality. I needed to cultivate humility and stop resorting to violence. The counsel recorded at 1 Corinthians 15:33 helped me. It says: “Bad associations spoil useful habits,” or, as the footnote states, “corrupt good morals.” I realized that if I wanted to transform my personality, I needed to stop associating with people who had a negative influence on me. So I replaced my old friends with members of the true Christian congregation—people who resolved their differences, not with blows or forms of violence, but by applying Bible principles.

Another passage of Scripture that had an impact on me was Romans 12:17-19. It says: “Return evil for evil to no one. . . . If possible, as far as it depends on you, be peaceable with all men. Do not avenge yourselves, . . . for it is written: ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ says Jehovah.” I came to accept that Jehovah will take care of injustice in his own way and time. Little by little, I overcame my violent lifestyle.

I’ll never forget what happened one evening when I was returning home. A group of youths from a former rival gang attacked me, and the leader struck me on the back, shouting, “Defend yourself!” At that moment I said a brief prayer to Jehovah, asking him to help me endure the assault. Although I felt a very strong urge to retaliate, I was able to get away instead. The next day I encountered the gang leader by himself. Vengeful anger welled up in me, but again I silently begged Jehovah to help me control myself. To my surprise, the youth came right up to me and said: “Forgive me for what happened last night. The truth is, I would like to become like you. I want to study the Bible.” How glad I was that I had been able to control my anger! Thanks to that, we began to study the Bible together.

Regrettably, the rest of my family did not con-

tinue studying the Bible at that time. However, I made a firm decision to continue studying and not allow anyone or anything to hold me back. I knew that associating regularly with God’s people would heal my emotional wounds and give me the family that I needed. I continued making progress, and in 1991, I was baptized as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: I used to be bitter at heart, domineering, and violent. But God’s Word has completely transformed my life. Now I share the Bible’s message of peace with anyone who will listen. I have had the privilege of serving as a full-time minister for the past 23 years.

For a time, I did volunteer work at the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Mexico. While there, I met Claudia, a very dynamic young Christian woman, and we were married in 1999. How grateful I am to Jehovah for blessing me with this loyal companion!

We served together in a Mexican Sign Language congregation, helping the deaf to learn about Jehovah. Later, we were invited to move to Belize to teach the Bible to people in that country. Although our life is much simpler here, we have all that we need to be happy. We would not change it for anything.

In time, my mother resumed her study of the Bible and got baptized. Also, my older brother, his wife, and their children are now Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some of my former friends with whom I shared the Kingdom message now serve Jehovah too.

Sadly, some members of my family have died because they didn’t change their violent temperament. If I had continued down that same path, I probably would have ended up like them. I am grateful that Jehovah drew me to himself and to his worshippers, who patiently and kindly taught me to apply Bible principles in my life. ■

What is the Kingdom of God?

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE that it represents the reign of God in a person's heart; others think that it is the product of human efforts to bring world peace and brotherhood. What do you think?

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. . . . It will crush and put an end to all these [human] kingdoms." (Daniel 2:44) God's Kingdom is a real government.

WHAT ELSE WE LEARN FROM THE BIBLE

- The Kingdom of God rules from heaven.
—Matthew 10:7; Luke 10:9.
- God uses the Kingdom to accomplish his will in heaven and on earth.—Matthew 6:10.

When will God's Kingdom come?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

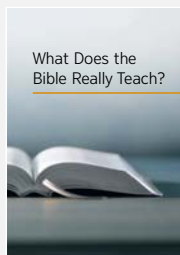
- No one knows
- Soon
- Never

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

"This good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) Once the good news has been fully preached, the Kingdom will come to bring the present wicked system to an end.

WHAT ELSE WE LEARN FROM THE BIBLE

- No one on earth knows exactly when God's Kingdom will come.—Matthew 24:36.
- Bible prophecy shows that the Kingdom will come soon.—Matthew 24:3, 7, 12.



Please send me a copy of *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*

For more information, see chapter 8 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses

Also available at www.jw.org

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NAME _____

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