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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



LIFE AFTER DEATH
Is It 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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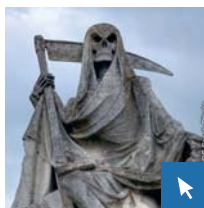
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What Happens After Death?

“I thought there were three places a person could go at death: heaven, hell, or purgatory. I knew I wasn’t good enough for heaven or bad enough for hell. It was not clear to me exactly what was in purgatory. I never saw any of that in the Bible. It was just what people said.”—Lionel.

“I was taught that all people go to heaven at death, but I was not convinced. I thought that death ends everything—that no future exists for the dead.”
—Fernando.

Have you wondered: ‘What really happens at death? Are our dead loved ones suffering somewhere? Will we ever see them again? How can we be sure?’ Please consider what the Scriptures actually teach. First, let us examine what the Bible says death is like. Then we will discuss the hope that God’s Word, the Bible, offers.

What is the condition of the dead?

THE BIBLE'S ANSWER: “*The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all, nor do they have any more reward, because all memory of them is forgotten. Whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might, for there is no work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the Grave, where you are going.*”^{*}—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.

The Grave, simply put, is where humans go when they die; it is a symbolic place or condition where any consciousness or activity ceases. How did the faithful man Job view the Grave? He had lost all his possessions and children in one day, and then he was struck with agonizing boils all over his body. He pleaded with God: “O that in the Grave [“in hell,” Catholic *Douay Version*] you would conceal me, that you would hide me.” (Job 1:13-19; 2:7; 14:13) Clearly, Job did not understand the Grave to be a fiery hell, a place where his suffering would be even worse. Rather, he thought of it as a place of relief.

There is another way to learn about the condition of the dead. We can examine the inspired Scriptural records concerning eight people who returned from the dead.—See the box “Eight Resurrections Described in the Bible.”

Not one of those eight spoke about being in a place of bliss or torment. If the people who were resurrected had gone to such a place when they died, would they not have told people about it? And would this not be included in the inspired Bible record for all to see? In the Scriptures, nothing of the kind is recorded. Those eight people evidently had nothing to say on the subject. Why not? Because they had been unconscious, as if in a deep sleep. In fact, the Bible sometimes uses sleep as an illustration to explain death. For example, faithful David and Stephen both “fell asleep in death.”—Acts 7:60; 13:36.

What hope, then, is there for the dead? Can they awaken from this sleep?

^{*} In the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, the word “Grave” is used to render the Hebrew word “Sheol” and the Greek word “Hades.” Some Bible versions use the word “hell,” but the notion of a fiery place of torment for the dead is not Scriptural.

EIGHT RESURRECTIONS DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE*

A widow’s son The prophet Elijah resurrected the young son of a widow who lived in Zarephath, north of Israel.—1 Kings 17:17-24.

A Shunammite boy Elijah’s successor, the prophet Elisha, resurrected a boy in the town of Shunem and restored him to his parents.—2 Kings 4:32-37.

A man in a burial place The corpse of a man who had recently died was hastily left in the same burial place where Elisha’s bones lay. When the man’s body touched the prophet’s bones, the man was resurrected.—2 Kings 13:20, 21.

The son of the widow of Nain Jesus interrupted a burial procession outside Nain to resurrect a young man and restore him to his grieving mother.—Luke 7:11-15.

Jairus’ daughter Jairus, an officer of the synagogue, implored Jesus to help his sick daughter. Jesus resurrected her shortly after she died.—Luke 8:41, 42, 49-56.

Lazarus, Jesus’ dear friend Lazarus was dead for four days when Jesus resurrected him before a number of onlookers.—John 11:38-44.

Dorcas The apostle Peter resurrected this beloved woman, who was known for her many acts of kindness.—Acts 9:36-42.

Eutychus The young man Eutychus died when he fell from a high window; the apostle Paul raised him back to life.—Acts 20:7-12.

^{*} The most important resurrection, that of Jesus Christ, differed significantly from these eight, as the following article will show.

Is There Hope for the Dead?

Can the dead live again?


THE BIBLE'S ANSWER: *"The hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Jesus'] voice and come out."*—John 5:28, 29.

Jesus thus foretold the future time when, under the rule of his Kingdom, the Grave would be emptied. "I was astounded the first time I read John 5: 28, 29," recalls Fernando, mentioned in the preceding article. "It gave me real hope, and I started thinking about the future with optimism."

In ancient times, the faithful man Job expected that after his death God would eventually restore him to life. Job asked: "If a man dies, can he live

again?" Then he confidently answered: "I will wait all the days of my compulsory service [time in the Grave] until my relief comes. You will call, and I will answer you."—Job 14:14, 15.

The resurrection was not a new thought to Lazarus' sister Martha. After Lazarus died, Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise." Martha responded: "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus then said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who exercises faith in me, even though he dies, will come to life." (John 11:23-25) Then Jesus promptly raised Lazarus back to life! That thrilling account gives us a preview of grander events in the future. Imagine such resurrections taking place on a global scale!



The resurrection of Lazarus gives us hope for the future

Will some be raised to heaven?

THE BIBLE'S ANSWER: God's Word shows that Jesus' resurrection differed from the other eight in the Bible record. Those eight people returned to life here on earth. But of Jesus' resurrection, we read: *"Jesus Christ . . . is at God's right hand, for he went to heaven."* (1 Peter 3:21, 22) Would Jesus remain the only one to be resurrected to heaven? Jesus had earlier told his apostles: "If I go my way and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will receive you home to myself, so that where I am you also may be."—John 14:3.

Christ went to heaven and prepared for the arrival of some of his disciples. Those resurrected to heaven will eventually number 144,000. (Revelation 14:1, 3) But what will those close followers of Jesus do there?

All who choose to serve God will have the prospect of living forever in complete health and happiness

They will be very busy! The Scriptures tell us: “Happy and holy is anyone having part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and they will rule as kings with him for the 1,000 years.” (Revelation 20:6) Those resurrected to heaven will rule as king-priests with Christ over the earth.

Who will be resurrected later?

THE BIBLE’S ANSWER: The inspired Scriptures record this speech given by the apostle Paul: *“I have hope toward God, which hope these men also look forward to, that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.”*—Acts 24:15.

Who will be included in the group that Paul referred to as “the righteous”? Consider an exam-

ple. The faithful man Daniel was told toward the end of his life: “You will rest, but you will stand up for your lot at the end of the days.” (Daniel 12:13) Where will Daniel awake from the sleep of death? “The righteous will possess the earth, and they will live forever on it.” (Psalm 37:29) And Jesus foretold: “Happy are the mild-tempered, since they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5) Daniel and other faithful men and women will be raised to live on the earth once again, even eternally.

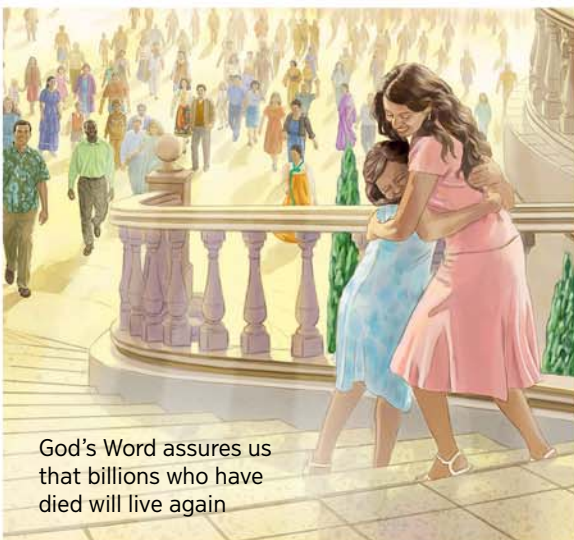
Who will be included in the group that Paul called “the unrighteous”? They are the billions of humans who have lived and died, many without ever having an opportunity to understand and apply Bible truth. After their resurrection, they will be able to come to know and appreciate Jehovah* and Jesus. (John 17:3) All those who choose to serve God will have the prospect of living as long as Jehovah himself lives—forever.

What will earthly conditions be like?

THE BIBLE’S ANSWER: God “will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore.” (Revelation 21:4) “They will build houses and live in them, and they will plant vineyards and eat their fruitage.”—Isaiah 65:21.

Imagine living under such conditions with your resurrected loved ones! But the question remains, How can you know for sure that the resurrection will take place?

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



God’s Word assures us that billions who have died will live again

HOPE FOR THE DEAD

How Can You Be Sure?

Is it naive to think that the dead will live again? The apostle Paul did not think so. He wrote under inspiration: “If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are to be pitied more than anyone. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep in death.” (1 Corinthians 15:19, 20) Paul saw the resurrection as a certainty. It was, in effect, guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus himself.* (Acts 17:31) That is why Paul called Jesus “the firstfruits”—he was the *first* one raised to eternal life. If Jesus was first, then logically there would be others.

Here is another reason you can be sure of the resurrection hope. Jehovah is the God of truth. “God . . . cannot lie.” (Titus 1:2) Jehovah has never lied, and he never will. Would he hold out the resurrection hope, even demonstrating that he can fulfill it, and then turn his promises into lies? The very notion is absurd!

Why has Jehovah arranged for the future resurrection? Because of his love. “If a man dies, can he live again?” asked Job. “You will call, and I will answer you. You will *long* for the work of your hands.” (Job 14:14, 15) Job was convinced that his loving heavenly Father would *yearn* to resurrect him. Has God changed? “I am Jehovah; I do not change.” (Malachi 3:6) God still longs to see the dead brought back to life healthy and happy. This is just as any loving parent would wish after losing a child in death. The difference, of course, is that God has the *power* to do as he wishes. —Psalm 135:6.

* For evidence that Jesus was resurrected, see the book *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?* pages 78-86, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



Job said to God: “You will long for the work of your hands.”—Job 14:14, 15

Death is a terrible problem,
but God has the perfect solution



Jehovah will empower his Son to bring unbounded joy to those who have mourned the loss of loved ones. And how does Jesus feel about the resurrection? Before raising Lazarus to life, Jesus observed the anguish of Lazarus' sisters and friends, and he "gave way to tears" himself. (John 11:35) On another occasion, Jesus encountered the widow of Nain, who had lost her only son in death. Jesus "was moved with pity for her, and he said to her: 'Stop weeping.'" Immediately he raised her son. (Luke 7:13) So Jesus feels deeply about grief and death. How delighted he will be when he will turn sorrow into elation all over the world!

Have you been touched by grief? You might feel that death is a problem that has no solution. But there is a solution—namely, the resurrection that God will carry out by means of his Son. Remember that God wants you to *see* that solution. He wants you to be there to embrace your loved ones again. Imagine planning together for an everlasting future, never again to say goodbye!

Lionel, quoted earlier, reflects: "Eventually, I learned about the resurrection. At first, it was hard to believe, and I did not trust the person who told me about it. But I checked it out in the Bible and found it was true! I can hardly wait to see my grandfather again."

Would you like to know more? Jehovah's Witnesses would be delighted to show you in your own Bible why they are convinced of the future resurrection.* ■

* Please see chapter 7 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Also available at www.jw.org.

Jehovah Has Given Me More Than I Deserve

AS TOLD BY FÉLIX ALARCÓN

I was just 17 years old and had the concerns and ambitions typical of most teenagers. I loved mingling with my friends, swimming, and playing soccer. But one evening my life changed dramatically. I was involved in a horrific motorcycle accident that left me paralyzed from the neck down. That was some 30 years ago, and I have been bedridden for a long time now.



I grew up in the city of Alicante, on the east coast of Spain. My family was completely dysfunctional, so as a youth I spent much of my time on the streets. Close to my house was a tire repair shop. There I became friends with José María, one of the employees. He was a warm person who gave me the attention I sorely missed in my own family. In times of distress, he was like a real brother to me—a true friend, although he was 20 years my senior.

José María had started studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. I could tell that he loved the Scriptures, and he often shared Bible truths with me. I listened to him respectfully, but I never really took an interest in what he said. My teenage heart was preoccupied with other matters. That, however, was about to change.

AN ACCIDENT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

I do not like to talk much about that road accident. What I will say is that I was foolish and reckless. In just one day, my whole life changed completely. From being a young teenager full of vitality, I suddenly found myself paralyzed and

stuck inside a hospital ward. Coming to terms with this predicament was really tough. I kept asking myself, 'Is there any point in living?'

José María came to see me, and he quickly arranged for Jehovah's Witnesses from the local congregation to visit me at the hospital. Those regular visits touched my heart. As soon as I left the intensive care unit, I began to study the Bible. I discovered the truth about why people suffer and die and why God allows bad things to happen. I also learned about God's promises for the future, when the whole earth will be filled with perfect humans and nobody will ever say: "I am sick." (Isaiah 33:24) For the first time in my life, a wonderful hope was opening up to me.

When I left the hospital, I progressed quickly in my study of the Bible. With the use of a special wheelchair, I even attended some meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses and shared in their preaching activity. On November 5, 1988, at the age of 20, I was baptized by immersion in a special bathtub. Jehovah God had given me a whole new outlook on life. But what could I do to show my appreciation?

ON THE MOVE DESPITE MY DISABILITY

I was determined not to let my condition stop me from doing all that I could in Jehovah's service. I wanted to progress. (1 Timothy 4:15) At first, that was not easy, for my family was opposed to my new faith. But I had my fellow believers, who were my spiritual brothers and sisters. They made sure that I never missed a meeting and that I had an active share in the preaching work.

As time went by, however, it became evident that I was going to need round-the-clock specialized care. After a long search, I eventually found a suitable center for the disabled in the city of Valencia, 100 miles (160 km) north of Alicante. This center became my permanent home.

Although bedridden, I was determined to continue pressing forward. Using my disability pension and other subsidies, I obtained a computer and had it installed next to my bed. I also purchased a cell phone. Now, each morning, a caregiver switches on my computer and activates my cell phone. To operate the computer, I use a joystick that I control with my chin. I also have a special rod that I hold with my mouth. This rod allows me to type letters on a keyboard and dial numbers on my cell phone.

How has this technology helped me? First of

all, it gives me access to the jw.org website and the *Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY*. What marvelous tools these have proved to be for me! I often spend hours each day studying and researching Bible-based publications so that I can continue learning about God and his wonderful qualities. And whenever I feel alone or a little discouraged, there is always something on the website that lifts my spirits.

My computer also allows me to listen to and participate in congregation meetings. I can comment, offer prayers, present talks, and even read the *Watchtower* magazine when I am assigned to do so. Although I cannot attend those meetings in person, I still feel that I am very much a part of the local congregation.

Having a telephone and a computer also allows me to have a full share in the preaching work. True, I cannot go from house to house as most of Jehovah's Witnesses do. But that has not stopped me. Using these tools I am able to share my faith with others. In fact, I enjoy my phone conversations so much that the local elders have even asked me to coordinate telephone preaching campaigns. These campaigns have been particularly helpful to housebound members of the congregation who are unable to leave their homes.

Conducting a Bible study



Enjoying an evening of family worship with friends



But my life does not revolve around just technology. Each day, dear friends come to see me. They bring along relatives and acquaintances who are interested in the Bible. Often, they even ask me to take the lead in discussions with them. On other occasions, families visit and invite me to share in their evening of family worship. I especially like it when young children sit at my bedside and tell me why they love Jehovah.

I appreciate receiving so many visitors. My room is often a hub of activity, with friends coming to see me from near and far. As you can imagine, this loving attention surprises the caregivers at my center. Each day, I thank Jehovah for allowing me to be part of such a wonderful brotherhood.

BATTLING ON

Whenever anybody greets me and asks how I am, I simply say, “Here I am, still battling on!” Of course, I know I am not alone in this struggle. Whatever our circumstances or impediments, all Christians are in a fight—“the fine fight of the faith.” (1 Timothy 6:12) What has helped me to battle on for so many years? I pray each day and thank Jehovah for giving my life a sense of purpose. And I try to stay as busy as possible in serv-

ing God, keeping my eyes focused on the hope ahead.

I often think about the new world and what it will be like to run and jump again. At times, I have joked with my good friend José María—who suffers from polio—about running a marathon together. “Who would win?” I ask him. “It doesn’t matter who wins,” he replies. “What really matters is being there, in Paradise, to run the race.”

It has not been easy for me to come to terms with my disability. I know that as a teenager, I did something stupid, and that has cost me dearly. Yet, how grateful I am that Jehovah did not abandon me. He has given me so much—a large spiritual family, the will to live, the joy of helping others, and a wonderful hope for the future. If I had to sum up my feelings in just one sentence, I guess I would say that Jehovah has truly given me more than I deserve. ■

Although bedridden, I am determined to share my faith with others

José María



“I Arose as a Mother in Israel”

DEBORAH looked around at the soldiers who were gathered atop Mount Tabor. It was touching to see them there. In the morning light, she contemplated their bravery and the faith of their leader, Barak. Though they were 10,000 strong, their faith and courage would face a great test this day. They were going against a vicious foe, and they were outnumbered and poorly armed. But they had come here anyway—largely because of the encouragement of this one woman.

Picture Deborah, her garments rustling in the breeze as she and Barak looked out over a sweeping vista. Mount Tabor resembled a great cone with its top blunted. Its flat summit commanded a view of the Plain of Esdraelon, some 1,300 feet (400 m) below, which fanned out to the southwest. The Kishon River wound through the flat grassland, leading out to the Great Sea by Mount Carmel. The riverbed may have been dry that morning, but something else glistened on that broad plain. Sisera’s army was drawing nearer, flashing ominously with the glint of iron. It came from the pride of Sisera’s forces—some 900 chariots, which may have been equipped with iron scythes protruding from the axles. Sisera intended to cut down the ill-equipped Israelites as if he were harvesting barley!

Deborah knew that Barak and his men were waiting for some word, some signal, from her. Was she the only woman there? What was it like for her to bear so much responsibility in such a setting?

Did she wonder what she was doing there? Evidently not! Jehovah, her God, had told her to start this war; he had also revealed that he would use a woman to bring it to an end. (Judges 4:9) What can Deborah and these courageous fighters teach us about faith?

“GO AND MARCH TO MOUNT TABOR”

When the Bible first introduces Deborah, it refers to her as “a prophetess.” That designation makes Deborah unusual in the Bible record but hardly unique.* Deborah had another responsibility. She was also evidently settling disputes by giving Jehovah’s answer to problems that came up. —Judges 4:4, 5.

Deborah lived in the mountainous region of Ephraim, between the towns of Bethel and Ramah. There she would sit beneath a palm tree and serve the people as Jehovah directed. Her assignment was surely challenging, but Deborah did not allow it to daunt her. There was a dire need for her services. In fact, she later took part in composing an inspired song, and it included this comment about her unfaithful people: “They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates.” (Judges 5:8) Because the Israelites left Jehovah to serve other gods, Jehovah abandoned them to their enemies. Canaanite King Jabin dominated them, using a mighty general named Sisera.

* Other prophetesses included Miriam, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah.—Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14; Isaiah 8:3.



Sisera! The very name caused terror and panic in Israel. The Canaanite religion and culture were brutal, featuring child sacrifice and temple prostitution. What was it like to have a Canaanite general and his army dominating the land? Deborah's song reveals that travel was nearly impossible in the land and village life had all but ended. (Judges 5:6, 7) We may imagine people cowering in the woods and hills, afraid to farm or to live in un-walled villages and terrified to travel on the open roads lest they be attacked, their children taken, and their women raped.*

Terror reigned for 20 years, until Jehovah saw evidence that his stubborn people were ready to change or, as the inspired record of the song of Deborah and Barak says, "Until I, Deborah, rose up, until I arose as a mother in Israel." We do not know if Deborah, the wife of a man named Lappidoth, was a mother in a literal sense, but this expression was intended figuratively. In effect, Jehovah assigned Deborah to provide the nation with motherly protection. He commissioned her to summon a strong man of faith, Judge Barak, and direct him to rise up against Sisera.—Judges 4:3, 6, 7; 5:7.

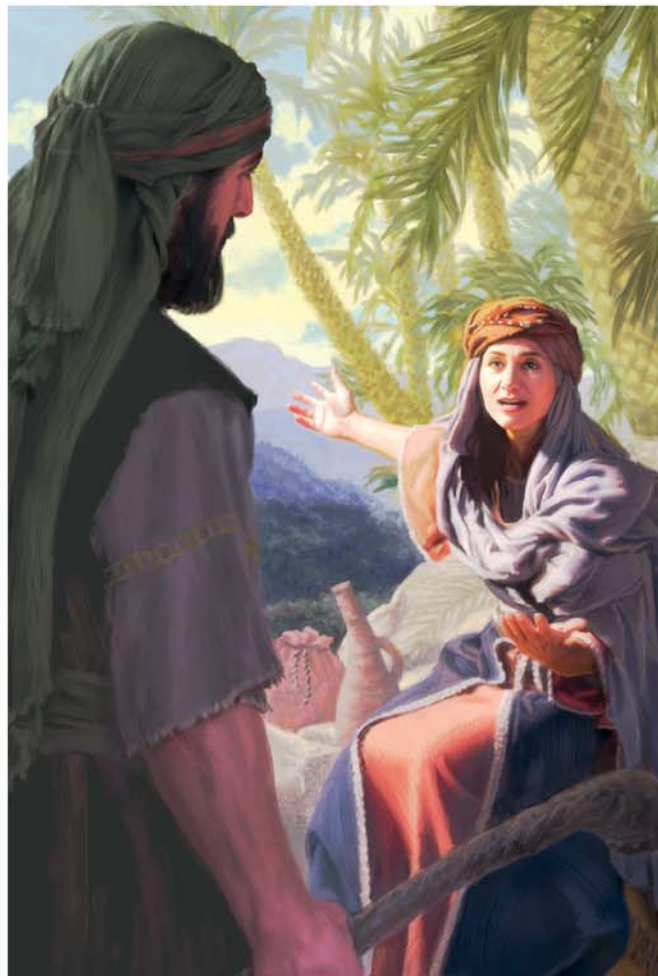
"Go and march to Mount Tabor," Jehovah ordered through Deborah. Barak was to muster 10,000 men from two of Israel's tribes. Deborah conveyed God's promise that they would defeat the mighty Sisera and his 900 chariots! The promise surely astounded Barak. Israel had no army and virtually no weaponry. Still, Barak agreed to go into battle—but only if Deborah came to Mount Tabor too.—Judges 4:6-8; 5:6-8.

Barak has been called faithless because of this request, but unfairly so. After all, he did not ask God for more weapons. Rather, as a man of faith, Barak saw the value in having Jehovah's represen-

tative there to strengthen him and his men. (Hebrews 11:32, 33) Jehovah responded favorably. He allowed Deborah to go, as Barak requested. However, Jehovah also inspired her to prophesy that the battle's final glory would not go to a man. (Judges 4:9) God had decided that a woman would execute wicked Sisera!

In today's world, a great deal of injustice, violence, and abuse is heaped upon women. Rarely are they accorded the dignity that God wants them to receive. However, God grants women and

Deborah encouraged Barak to stand up as a deliverer of God's people



* The song of Deborah indicates that Sisera often returned from his military actions with plunder that included girls, sometimes more than one for each soldier. (Judges 5:30) The word used for "girl" in that verse literally means "womb." Such language reminds us that those women were valued mainly for their reproductive organs. Rape was likely commonplace.

men equal value and standing before him. (Romans 2:11; Galatians 3:28) Deborah's example reminds us that he also blesses women with privileges and signs of his particular trust and favor. It is vital that we never adopt the bigotry so common in this world.

“THE EARTH SHOOK, AND THE HEAVENS POURED”

Barak went to muster his army. He gathered 10,000 men who were brave enough to go up against Sisera's daunting forces. As Barak led his men up to Mount Tabor, he was glad to have a way to boost their courage. We read: “Deborah also went up with him.” (Judges 4:10) Imagine how it lifted the spirits of those soldiers to see that brave woman join them in their march toward Mount Tabor, willing to risk her life at their side because of her faith in Jehovah God!

When Sisera learned that Israel had dared to muster an army against him, he acted quickly. A number of Canaanite kings joined forces with King Jabin, who may have been the most powerful among them. Then Sisera's great squadrons of chariots made the earth shake as they rumbled in formation across the plain. The Canaanites were sure that they would make quick work of the pathetic army of Israel.—Judges 4:12, 13; 5:19.

What would Barak and Deborah do as the enemy approached? If they remained on the slopes of Mount Tabor, they might have an advantage over the advancing Canaanite forces, for those chariots needed flat open country to fight effectively. But Barak was going to fight as Jehovah directed, so he waited for word from Deborah. At last, the moment came. She said: “Rise up, for this is the day that Jehovah will give Sisera into your hand. Is Jehovah not going out before you?” Next, we read: “Barak descended from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.”—Judges 4:14.*

* The battle that ensued is described twice in the Bible—in the historical narrative of Judges chapter 4 and in the song of Deborah and Barak in chapter 5. The two records are complementary, each supplying details not mentioned in the other.

The forces of Israel charged down the mountain and out onto the open, flat ground, heading right toward those fearsome machines of war. Did Jehovah go out before them, as Deborah had promised? The answer came very soon. “The earth shook, and the heavens poured,” we read. Sisera's proud forces were thrown into confusion. And down came the rain! It came in such torrents, it seems, that the ground was quickly swamped. Soon, the heavy iron-bearing chariots were more of a liability than an asset. They sank into the mud and became hopelessly bogged down.—Judges 4:14, 15; 5:4.

Barak and his men were not troubled by the storm. They knew where it was coming from. They ran right at the Canaanite forces. Acting as God's executioners, the Israelites left none of Sisera's army alive. The Kishon River surged and flooded, washing the corpses downstream toward the Great Sea.—Judges 4:16; 5:21.

Today, Jehovah no longer sends his servants into physical battles. Yet, he does ask his people to engage in spiritual warfare. (Matthew 26:52; 2 Corinthians 10:4) If we try to obey God in today's world, we are taking our stand in that war. We need courage, for those who side with God today may face fierce opposition. But Jehovah has not changed. He still comes to the defense of those who, like Deborah, Barak, and the brave soldiers of ancient Israel, put their faith and trust in Him.

“MOST BLESSED OF WOMEN”

One of the Canaanite enemies escaped—the worst of them all! Sisera, the great oppressor of God's people, fled the battlefield on foot. Leaving his men to die in the mire, he slipped past the Israelite soldiers and made his way to firmer ground, heading toward the nearest allies he could think of. Scurrying across miles of open terrain, ever terrified that Israelite soldiers might find him, he headed to the tents of Heber, a Kenite who had broken away from the rest of his nomadic people to the south and established some kind of accord with King Jabin.—Judges 4:11, 17.



As Deborah foretold, Jehovah fought for his people, defeating Sisera's forces

Exhausted, Sisera arrived at Heber's encampment. He found that Heber was not at home. But the man's wife, Jael, was there. Sisera evidently assumed that Jael would honor her husband's accord with King Jabin. Perhaps it was inconceivable to him that a woman could act or even think differently from her husband. Sisera obviously did not know Jael! Clearly, she saw the wickedness of the Canaanite oppression in the land; likely she also saw that she had a choice before her. Either she could aid this wicked man or she could throw in her lot with Jehovah and strike a blow against this enemy of His people. But what could she do? How could a woman vanquish such a powerful, battle-hardened warrior?

Jael had to think fast. She offered Sisera a place to rest. He ordered her to conceal his presence from any man who might come looking for him. She covered him when he lay down, and when he asked her for water, she gave him creamy milk. Soon Sisera sank into a deep sleep. Jael then took a pair of household implements that tent-dwelling women used often and skillfully—a tent pin and a mallet. Crouching near Sisera's head, she now faced the terrifying task of acting as an executioner for Jehovah. Even an instant of uncertainty or hesitation could have meant disaster. Did she

think of God's people and of how this man had brutalized them for decades? Or did she think of the privilege of taking her stand for Jehovah? The record does not say. We know only that the deed was soon done. Sisera was dead!—Judges 4:18-21; 5:24-27.

Later, Barak came in search of his quarry. When Jael showed him the corpse with the tent pin through the temples, he knew that Deborah's prophecy had come true. A woman had killed the mighty warrior Sisera! Modern-day critics and skeptics have called Jael all manner of vile names, but Barak and Deborah knew better. In their song, they were inspired to praise Jael as "most blessed of women" for her courageous deed. (Judges 4: 22; 5:24) Note the generosity of Deborah's spirit. She did not begrudge Jael such praise; rather, she cared only that Jehovah's word had come true.

With Sisera gone, King Jabin's power was broken. The Canaanite oppression was over at last. Peace prevailed for 40 years. (Judges 4:24; 5:31) How blessed were Deborah, Barak, and Jael for putting faith in Jehovah God! If we imitate the faith of Deborah, boldly taking our stand for Jehovah and encouraging others to do the same, Jehovah will bless us with victories—and lasting peace. ■

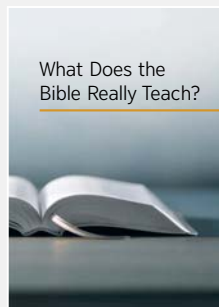


DOES IT SOMETIMES SEEM TO YOU
THAT LIFE IS ALL TOO SHORT?

Is this life all there is?

Have you ever wondered if there is more to life than just playing, working, marrying, raising a family, and growing old? (Job 14:1, 2) The Bible shows that even very wise people have wondered about this.—**Read Ecclesiastes 2:11.**

Does life have some meaning? First, we have to ask, How did life begin? After considering the remarkable design of our brain and the rest of our body, many have concluded that a wise Creator is behind it all. (**Read Psalm 139:14.**) If so, then he must have made us for a reason! Learning that reason can add great meaning to our life.



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Why were humans created?

God blessed the first human pair and gave them a thrilling assignment. His purpose was for them to fill the earth, make it a paradise, and live forever.—**Read Genesis 1:28, 31.**

God's purpose was delayed when humans rebelled against his rule. But God did not give up on us—or his purpose. The Bible assures us that God has been working to save faithful people and that his purpose concerning the earth will be fulfilled! So God wants you to see life the way he meant it to be! (**Read Psalm 37:29.**) From the Bible, learn how you personally can fit into God's purpose.

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