

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

APRIL 1, 2006

You Can  
Understand  
the Bible



# THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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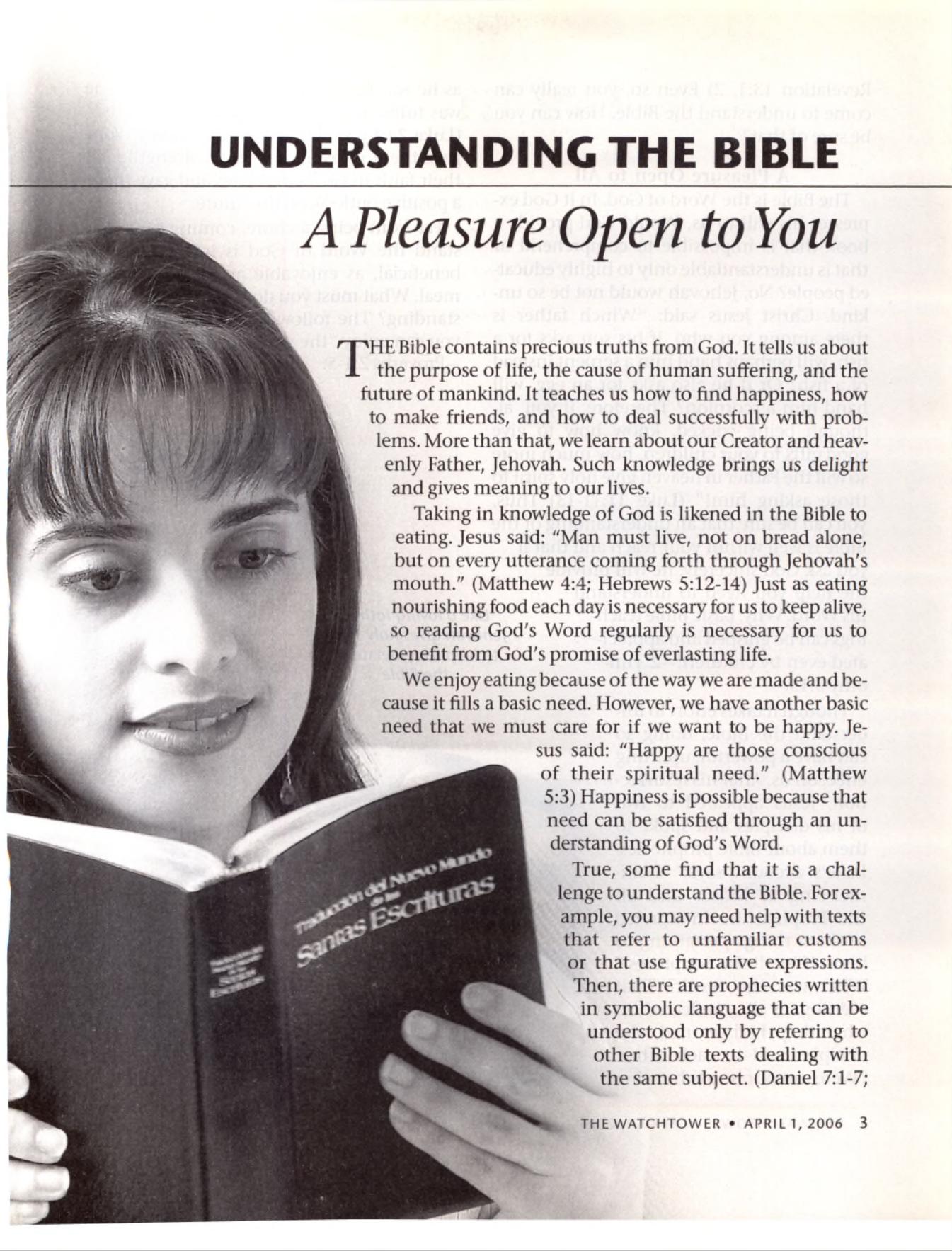
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# UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

## *A Pleasure Open to You*



THE Bible contains precious truths from God. It tells us about the purpose of life, the cause of human suffering, and the future of mankind. It teaches us how to find happiness, how to make friends, and how to deal successfully with problems. More than that, we learn about our Creator and heavenly Father, Jehovah. Such knowledge brings us delight and gives meaning to our lives.

Taking in knowledge of God is likened in the Bible to eating. Jesus said: "Man must live, not on bread alone, but on every utterance coming forth through Jehovah's mouth." (Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 5:12-14) Just as eating nourishing food each day is necessary for us to keep alive, so reading God's Word regularly is necessary for us to benefit from God's promise of everlasting life.

We enjoy eating because of the way we are made and because it fills a basic need. However, we have another basic need that we must care for if we want to be happy. Je-

sus said: "Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need." (Matthew 5:3) Happiness is possible because that need can be satisfied through an understanding of God's Word.

True, some find that it is a challenge to understand the Bible. For example, you may need help with texts that refer to unfamiliar customs or that use figurative expressions. Then, there are prophecies written in symbolic language that can be understood only by referring to other Bible texts dealing with the same subject. (Daniel 7:1-7;

Revelation 13:1, 2) Even so, you really can come to understand the Bible. How can you be sure of that?

### A Pleasure Open to All

The Bible is the Word of God. In it God expresses his will to us. Would God provide a book that is impossible to comprehend or that is understandable only to highly educated people? No, Jehovah would not be so unkind. Christ Jesus said: "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? Therefore, if you, although being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!" (Luke 11:11-13) Thus, you can be sure that an understanding of the Bible is well within your reach and that if you ask God sincerely, he will provide the help you need to understand his Word. Why, basic Bible teachings can be grasped and appreciated even by children!—2 Timothy 3:15.

Though it takes effort to understand the Bible, doing so can have a powerful, uplifting effect on us. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two of his disciples and spoke to them about Bible prophecies. Luke's account says: "Commencing at Moses and all the Prophets he interpreted to them things pertaining to himself in all the Scriptures." What was the result? That evening, as they reflected on what they had learned, the disciples said to each other: "Were not our hearts burning

as he was speaking to us on the road, as he was fully opening up the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:13-32) Understanding God's Word gave them pleasure because it strengthened their faith in God's promises and gave them a positive outlook on the future.

Far from being a chore, coming to understand the Word of God is interesting and beneficial, as enjoyable as eating a hearty meal. What must you do to gain such understanding? The following article shows how you can enjoy "the very knowledge of God." —Proverbs 2:1-5.



*Like a loving father,  
Jehovah gives holy spirit  
to help us understand  
the Bible*

# UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

## *What Will Help You?*

**“Y**OU have carefully hidden these things from wise and intellectual ones, and have revealed them to babes.” (Luke 10:21) These words that Jesus addressed to his heavenly Father indicate that to understand the Bible, we must have the right attitude. Jehovah’s wisdom is revealed in that he has provided a book that only humble, teachable people can truly understand.

Humility does not come easily to most of us. We all have an inherited tendency to be proud. In addition, we live in “the last days,” among people who are “lovers of themselves, . . . headstrong, puffed up with pride.” (2 Timothy 3:1-4) These are attitudes that work against our understanding God’s Word. Regrettably, to some degree we are all influenced by our surroundings. How, then, can you acquire the attitude needed to understand the Bible?

### **Preparing the Heart and the Mind**

Ezra, an ancient leader of God’s people, “prepared his heart to consult the law of Jehovah.” (Ezra 7:10) Is there some way that we can prepare our heart? Yes. We can begin by adopting a proper view of the Scriptures. To fellow Christians, the apostle Paul wrote:



“When you received God’s word, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but, just as it truthfully is, as the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13) Though men were used to write the Scriptures, what they wrote was from Jehovah. Recognition of that vital fact will make us more receptive to what we read.—2 Timothy 3:16.

Another way to prepare our heart is by prayer. Since the Bible was inspired by holy spirit, its message will become understandable to us with the help of that spirit. We must pray for such help. Notice how this was the concern of the psalmist who wrote: “Make me understand, that I may observe your law and that I may keep it with the whole heart.” (Psalm 119:34) We need to pray not only for the mental ability to comprehend what is written but also for the heart attitude that will allow us to accept it. To understand the Bible, we need to be receptive to what is true.

As you meditate in order to have the right frame of mind, consider what studying the Bible can do for you. We have many excellent reasons for consulting God’s Word, but more important than any other is that it

helps us to draw close to God. (James 4:8) As we read about how Jehovah reacts to different circumstances, how he appreciates those who love him, and how he deals with those who leave him, we discern what sort of person he is. Our primary motive in reading the Bible should always be to become better acquainted with God and thus strengthen our relationship with him.

### Obstacles to Having the Right Attitude

What might hinder us from understanding God's Word? One obstacle is a misplaced feeling of loyalty. For example, you may hold the beliefs and opinions of certain ones in high esteem. However, what if these individuals do not really uphold or value the truth of God's Word? Under such circumstances, to understand what the Bible really teaches may present a challenge. Thus, the Bible encourages us to assess carefully what we have been taught.—1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Jesus' mother, Mary, faced such a challenge. She was brought up according to Jewish tradition. She carefully observed the Mosaic Law and doubtless went to the synagogue. Later in life she recognized that the way of worship that her parents had taught her was no longer acceptable to God. Consequently, Mary accepted Jesus' teaching and was among the first members of the Christian congregation. (Acts 1:13, 14) This was not showing disrespect for her parents or their traditions; rather, it was an expression of her love for God. If we are to benefit from the Bible, like Mary we must place loyalty to God before loyalty to anyone else.

Sadly, many people put little value on Bible truth. Some are content to follow religious traditions that are based on falsehood. Others show disregard for truth in their speech and way of life. Accordingly, accepting Bible truth comes at a price: It may put you at odds with friends, neighbors,

workmates, and even your family. (John 17:14) Nevertheless, the wise man wrote: "Buy truth itself and do not sell it." (Proverbs 23:23) If you hold truth in high esteem, Jehovah will help you to understand the Bible.

Still another obstacle to comprehending the Bible's message is an unwillingness to apply what it says. Jesus told his disciples: "To you it is granted to understand the sacred secrets of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those people it is not granted. For the heart of this people has grown unreceptive, and with their ears they have heard without response." (Matthew 13:11, 15) Most of those to whom Jesus preached were unresponsive, unwilling to change. How unlike the traveling merchant Jesus spoke of in an illustration! Upon finding a pearl of high value, the merchant promptly sold all the things he had to buy it. Understanding Bible truth should be equally precious to us.—Matthew 13:45, 46.

### The Challenge of Being Taught

A major challenge in understanding the Bible is that of being teachable. A person may find it difficult to accept new ideas from someone who appears to be lowly. Yet, the apostles of Jesus Christ were "unlettered and ordinary" men. (Acts 4:13) Explaining why, Paul wrote: "You behold his calling of you, brothers, that not many wise in a fleshly way were called, not many powerful, not many of noble birth; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put the wise men to shame." (1 Corinthians 1:26, 27) If you find that being taught by a lowly person challenges your humility, remember that he or she is merely the means used by God to teach you. What privilege could be greater than to be taught by Jehovah, our "Grand Instructor"?—Isaiah 30:20; 54:13.

The Syrian military commander Naaman was someone who found it challenging to receive instruction from a lowly one. Seeking a

*Naaman found it difficult to accept instructions from a lowly servant*



cure for his leprosy, he went to see Jehovah's prophet Elisha. But God's instructions for a cure were relayed to Naaman through a servant. The message and the way it was presented challenged Naaman's humility, so that he at first refused to obey the word of God's prophet. Later, Naaman changed his attitude and was healed. (2 Kings 5:9-14) We face a similar challenge when we turn to the Bible. We may learn that to be cured spiritually and morally, we need to follow a new way of life. Will we have the humility to al-

low someone to teach us what we need to do? Only those with a teachable attitude can enjoy an understanding of the Bible.

A fine attitude was displayed by a man in power under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was returning to Africa in his chariot when the disciple Philip ran alongside and approached him. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The official was humble enough to reply: "How could I ever do so, unless someone guided me?" Upon gaining an understanding of God's Word, that man was baptized. After that, he "kept going on his way rejoicing."—Acts 8: 27-39.

Jehovah's Witnesses in general are ordinary people. Each week they conduct Bible studies in the homes of over six million people. Since the Bible teaches the best way of life, explains the only sure hope for mankind, and points out how to become acquainted with God, millions have found that studying the Bible and understanding what it says is an immeasurable pleasure. It is a pleasure available to you.

*Understanding the Bible warms our heart*



# Parents Be a Fine Example for Your Children

**"P**SYCHOLOGISTS can call off their century-long search for the key to rearing a good child—not because they've found it but because it doesn't exist." So said a *Time* magazine review of a book on child rearing. The book argues that children primarily absorb the values of their peers, not those of their parents.

There is no denying that peer pressure is a powerful force to be reckoned with. (Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33) Columnist William Brown observed: "If there is any single, secular God for the teenager it is the God of conformity. . . . Being different for teens is a fate worse than death." When parents fail to make homelife warm and inviting or do not spend enough time with their children—both of which are common situations in today's busy world—they are, in effect, opening the door for peer influence to play havoc with their children.

Furthermore, during these "last days," the family unit is under attack because, as the Bible foretold, people are preoccupied with money, pleasures, and self. Should we be surprised, then, to see children becoming "disobedient to parents, unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection"?—2 Timothy 3:1-3.

The term "natural affection," as used in the Bible, describes familial love. This love is a *natural* bond that moves parents to care for their children and children to cling to

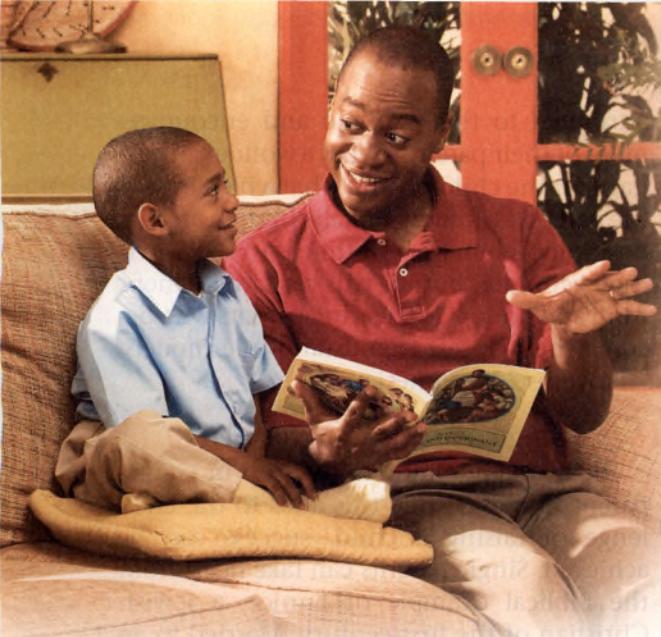


their parents. But when parents lack natural affection, children will look elsewhere for emotional support—generally to their peers, whose values and attitudes they will probably adopt. Yet, this situation can often be avoided if parents allow Bible principles to govern their family life.—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

## The Family—A Divine Institution

After uniting Adam and Eve as husband and wife, God gave them this mandate: "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth." Thereafter, the family—father, mother, and children—came into being. (Genesis 1:28; 5:3, 4; Ephesians 3:14, 15) To help humans rear their children, Jehovah made certain basic aspects of parenting instinctive. Unlike animals, though, humans need additional help, so Jehovah provided written guidelines for them. Included are directions on moral and spiritual matters and on the proper disciplining of children.—Proverbs 4:1-4.

Addressing fathers in particular, God said: "These words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and



when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 1:8, 9) Note that parents were to put God's law into their own heart first. Why was this important? Because the kind of teaching that truly motivates others is not from the mouth but from the heart. Only when parents teach from their heart will they reach the heart of their offspring. Such parents will also serve as fine examples for their children, who are quick to detect insincerity.

—Romans 2:21.

Christian parents are told to teach their children from infancy "the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4, *The Amplified Bible*; 2 Timothy 3:15) From infancy? Yes! "Sometimes we parents don't give children the credit they deserve," wrote one mother. "We underestimate their abilities. The potential is there. We parents must utilize it." Yes, children love to learn, and when taught by godly parents, they will also learn to love. Such children will feel safe and secure within the boundaries set for them. Hence, successful parents strive to be loving companions, good communicators, and patient but firm

teachers, providing a wholesome environment in which their children thrive.\*

### Protect Your Children

In a letter to parents, a concerned headmaster in Germany wrote: "We should like to encourage you dear parents to venture to take a greater hand yourselves in the upbringing of your children and not surrender to the television or to the street what is actually your own share of [the responsibility for] their personality development."

To surrender one's child to the television or the street is, in effect, to let the spirit of the world influence the child's upbringing. (Ephesians 2:1, 2) In direct opposition to God's spirit, this worldly spirit, like a strong wind, carries the seeds of "earthly, animal, demonic" thinking and liberally deposits them in the mind and heart of the naive or foolish. (James 3:15) These weedlike infestations eventually corrupt the heart. Jesus illustrated the effect of what is sown in the heart, saying: "A good man brings forth good out of the good treasure of his heart, but a wicked man brings forth what is wicked out of his wicked treasure; for out of the heart's abundance his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) Hence, the Bible exhorts us: "More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart, for out of it are the sources of life." —Proverbs 4:23.

Of course, children are children, and some are prone to be contrary, even wayward. (Genesis 8:21) What can parents do? "Foolishness is tied up with the heart of a boy; the rod of discipline is what will remove it far from him," says the Bible. (Proverbs 22:15) Some view this as harsh treatment that is out-of-date. Actually, the Bible is against violence and abuse of any sort. The "rod," though at times literal, represents parental

\* For a more detailed discussion of these specific points, see pages 55-9 of the book *The Secret of Family Happiness*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

authority that is administered firmly but lovingly and appropriately out of concern for the children's eternal welfare.—Hebrews 12:7-11.

### Enjoy Recreation With Your Children

It is common knowledge that for children to develop properly, they need play and diversion. Wise parents take advantage of opportunities to reinforce the parent-child bond by enjoying recreation with their children whenever possible. Thus, not only can parents guide their children in choosing the right kind of recreation but they can also show the children how much they value their company.

One Witness father says that he often played ball with his son when he came home from work. A mother recalls that board games were a favorite with her children. A grown daughter remembers that her family enjoyed cycling together. All these children are now adults, but their love for their parents—and for Jehovah—is as strong as ever if not stronger.

Truly, parents who show by word and action that they love their children and want to be with them make a deep impression that often lasts a lifetime. For example, many of the graduates of one class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead related that their desire to pursue the full-time ministry could be

attributed to the example and encouragement of their parents. What a wonderful heritage for the children and what a blessing for the parents! Granted, not all children are in a position to enter the full-time ministry when they get older, but all will certainly benefit from and honor God-fearing parents who become their closest friends and role models.—Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:2, 3.

### Single Parents Can Succeed

Today, many children grow up in single-parent homes. While this adds to the challenge of raising a child, success can be achieved. Single parents can take heart from the Biblical example of Eunice, a Jewish Christian of the first century. Married to an unbeliever, Eunice likely received no spiritual support from her husband. Nonetheless, she was exemplary in teaching Timothy. Her good influence on Timothy from his infancy, along with that of Lois, Timothy's grandmother, proved to be more powerful than any negative influence that might have come from some of Timothy's peers.—Acts 16:1, 2; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15.

Many young ones today who have grown up with an unbelieving parent or in a single-parent home reflect the same fine qualities young Timothy had. For example, Ryan, now 22 years old and a full-time minister, grew up in a single-parent home with his older brother and sister. Their father was an alcoholic,



and he left the family when Ryan was four. "Mom was determined that our household continue to serve Jehovah," recalled Ryan, "and she followed through on that resolve with all her heart."

"For one thing," said Ryan, "Mother made sure that we children enjoyed positive peer influence. She never allowed us to mix with those whom the Bible describes as bad associations, whether outside or inside the congregation. She also inculcated within us the right view of secular education." Even though Ryan's mother was often busy and tired from work, this did not prevent her from taking a loving interest in her children. "She always wanted to be with us and talk with us," said Ryan. "She was a patient but firm teacher, doing her best to make sure we

had a regular family Bible study. When it came to Bible principles, 'compromise' was not in her dictionary."

Looking back, Ryan realizes that the most powerful human influence in his life and that of his older siblings was from a parent who truly loved God and loved her children. So you Christian parents—married or widowed, with or without a believing mate—do not give in to discouragement or temporary setbacks as you strive to teach your children. At times, some young ones, like the prodigal son, may turn away from the truth. But when they see how shallow and cold the world really is, they may return. Yes, "the righteous is walking in his integrity. Happy are his sons after him."—Proverbs 20:7; 23:24, 25; Luke 15:11-24.

## JESUS' PARENTS CHOSEN BY GOD

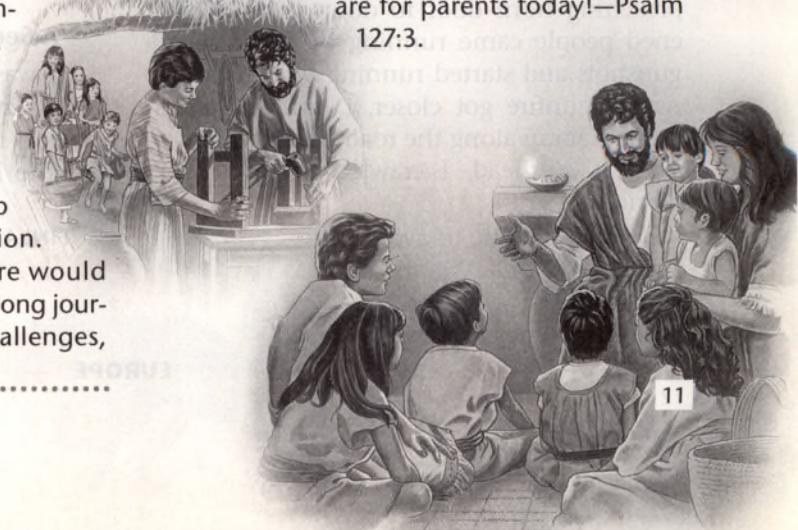
When he sent his Son to be born as a human, Jehovah chose Jesus' parents carefully. Interestingly, he chose a lowly, spiritually-minded couple who did not pamper Jesus but taught him God's Word and the value of hard work and responsibility. (Proverbs 29:21; Lamentations 3:27) Joseph taught Jesus the trade of carpentry, and no doubt both Joseph and Mary called upon Jesus, the firstborn, to help them with the care of their other children, numbering at least six.

—Mark 6:3.

You can picture Joseph's family working together at Passover time to prepare for their annual journey to Jerusalem—a 130-mile round-trip made without modern transportation. To be sure, a family of nine or more would have to be well-organized for such a long journey. (Luke 2:39, 41) Despite the challenges,

Joseph and Mary no doubt valued these occasions, perhaps taking advantage of them to teach their children about past Biblical events.

While still at home, Jesus "continued subject to" his parents, all the time "progressing in wisdom and in physical growth and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:51, 52) Yes, Joseph and Mary proved worthy of Jehovah's trust. What a fine example they are for parents today!—Psalm 127:3.





## DETERMINED TO SERVE JEHOVAH

AS TOLD BY  
RAIMO KUOKKANEN

In 1939, World War II broke out in Europe, and the Soviet Union attacked my homeland of Finland. My father went off to fight in the Finnish army. Soon Russian warplanes were dropping bombs on the city where we were, and my mother sent me to live with my grandmother in safer surroundings.

**I**N 1971, I was serving as a missionary in Uganda, East Africa. One day while I was preaching from door to door, many frightened people came running by me. I heard gunshots and started running toward home. As the gunfire got closer, I jumped into a ditch that ran along the road. With bullets zinging overhead, I crawled to my home.

I could do little to avoid the effects of World War II, but why would my wife and I expose ourselves to unrest in

East Africa? The answer is closely related to our determination to serve Jehovah.

### A Seed of Determination Is Planted

I was born in 1934 in Helsinki, Finland. My father was a painter, and one day his work took him to the building that housed the Finland branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses told FINLAND him about their congregation meetings. When he got home, he told my mother about those meetings. She did not start at-



tending at that time, but later she began discussing Bible subjects with a workmate who was a Witness. Mother soon took seriously what she learned, and in 1940 she was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Just before that, my grandmother had taken me into her country home for the duration of World War II. From Helsinki my mother began writing to her mother and younger sister about the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses. Both of them showed interest and shared what they learned with me. Traveling representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses visited Grandmother's home and encouraged us, but I was not yet determined to serve God.

### Theocratic Training Begins

When the war ended in 1945, I returned to Helsinki, and Mother started taking me to the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Sometimes I went to the cinema instead. But Mother would tell me about the talk that she had heard at the meeting, and time and again she emphasized one point to me: Armageddon is very near. I became convinced of that and stopped missing meetings. As my appreciation for Bible truth grew, so did my desire to share in all the activities of the congregation.

I especially enjoyed attending the assemblies and conventions. In 1948, I attended the district convention held near my grandmother's home, where I was spending my summer vacation. A friend of mine was to be baptized at that convention, and he invited me to do the same. I told him that I did not bring any swimming trunks, but he suggested that after he was baptized, I could use his. I agreed and was baptized on June 27, 1948, when I was 13 years old.

After the convention, some friends of my mother's told her that I got baptized. The next time she saw me, she wanted to know why I had taken such an important step without consulting her. I explained that I did

understand basic Bible teachings and that I knew I was responsible to Jehovah for my conduct.

### My Determination Grows

The brothers in the congregation helped me to strengthen my determination to serve Jehovah. They accompanied me in the house-to-house ministry and gave me parts on the meetings almost every week. (Acts 20: 20) At 16 years of age, I gave my first public talk. Soon afterward, I was appointed as Bible study servant in our congregation. All that spiritual activity helped me mature, but I still had to conquer my fear of man.

In those days, we advertised the public talk of the district convention with large signs. Each of these signs consisted of two placards connected by straps that hung over a person's shoulders and covered the front and back of his body. For that reason some people called us sandwich men.

One time, I was on a quiet street corner with my sandwich sign when I saw a group of my classmates coming right toward me. As they walked by, the look in their eyes made me cringe. I prayed to Jehovah for courage and stood still with the sign. Overcoming fear of man at that time prepared me for the greater test of maintaining Christian neutrality.

In time, the government ordered me and a number of other young Witnesses to report for military service. We went to the military base as ordered, but we respectfully refused to put on the uniform. The officials held us in custody, and soon afterward a court sentenced us to six months in prison. We were also incarcerated for the eight months required for military service. So we spent a total of 14 months in prison because of our neutral stand.

In the prison barracks, we met together every day to consider the Bible. During those months, many of us read the entire



*On our  
wedding day*

Bible twice. When our sentence was up, most of us left prison more determined than ever to serve Jehovah. To this day, many of that group of young Witnesses serve Jehovah faithfully.

After leaving prison, I returned to live with my parents. Shortly afterward, I got to know Veera, a zealous, newly baptized Witness. We were married in 1957.

### An Evening That Changed Our Lives

One evening while we were visiting with some responsible brothers from the branch office, one of them asked us if we would like to go into the circuit work. After praying all night, I called the branch and said yes. Going into the full-time ministry meant leaving my well-paying job, but we were determined to put the Kingdom first in our lives. I was 23 years old and Veera was 19 when we took up the traveling work in December 1957. For three years we enjoyed visiting and encouraging congregations of Jehovah's people in Finland.

In the latter part of 1960, I received an invitation to the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead in Brooklyn, New York. Three of us from Finland were to attend a special ten-month

course for training in branch operation. Our wives remained behind and worked at the Finland branch office.

Just before the course ended, I was told to report to the office of Nathan H. Knorr, who was then overseeing the work of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. Brother Knorr offered me and my wife a missionary assignment in the Malagasy Republic, now known as Madagascar. I wrote to Veera, asking what she thought of that assignment, and she promptly answered, "Yes." When I returned to Finland, we rushed to get ready for life in Madagascar.

### Joy and Disappointment

In January 1962 we flew to Antananarivo, the capital of the country, wearing fur hats and heavy coats, for we had left in the Finnish winter. In the tropical heat of Madagascar, we quickly changed our style of dress. Our first missionary home was a little house with one bedroom. Another missionary couple was already there, so Veera and I slept on the porch.

We started learning French, an official language of Madagascar. This was rather difficult because the two of us did not share a common language with our instructor, Sister Carboneau. She used English to teach us French, but Veera did not speak English. So I translated Sister Carboneau's instructions into Finnish for Veera. Then we realized that Veera understood technical concepts better in Swedish, so I explained French grammar to her in Swedish. Soon we were making good progress in French and took up studying Malagasy, the local language.

My first Bible study in Madagascar was with a man who spoke only Malagasy. I looked up Bible verses in my Finnish Bible, and then we searched for those verses in his Malagasy Bible. I could do little to explain the scriptures to him, but soon Bi-

### AFRICA



*From circuit work in Finland, 1960 . . .*



*. . . to missionary work in Madagascar, 1962*

ble truth grew in that man's heart, and he progressed to baptism.

In 1963, Milton Henschel from the Brooklyn headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses visited Madagascar. Shortly afterward, a new branch office was established in Madagascar, and I was appointed the branch overseer, in addition to my work as circuit and district overseer. All the while, Jehovah blessed us richly. From 1962 to 1970, the number of Kingdom publishers in Madagascar grew from 85 to 469.

As we returned from the public ministry one day in 1970, we found a note at our door ordering all missionaries of Jehovah's Witnesses to report to the office of the interior minister. There an official told us that the government had ordered that we leave the country immediately. When I asked what crime required my deportation, the official said: "Monsieur Kuokkanen, you have done nothing wrong."

"We have been here for eight years," I said. "This is our home. We cannot leave just like that." Despite our efforts, all the missionaries had to leave within one week. The branch was

closed, and a local Witness began to look after the work. Before leaving our dear brothers in Madagascar, we received a new assignment, to Uganda.

#### **Starting Anew**

A few days after departing from Madagascar, we arrived in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. We immediately started to learn Luganda, a language with a beautiful songlike quality but very difficult to learn. Other missionaries helped Veera learn English first, and in that language we were able to preach effectively.

Kampala's hot, humid climate took its toll on Veera's health. So we received an assignment in Mbarara, a town in Uganda with a more temperate climate. We were the first

Witnesses there, and on our first day in the ministry, we were blessed with a good experience. I was speaking to a man in his house when his wife came out of the kitchen. Her name was Margaret,

**AFRICA**

**UGANDA**

and she had listened to my presentation. Veera started to study the Bible with Margaret, who made fine spiritual progress. She was baptized and became a zealous Kingdom publisher.

### Fighting in the Streets

In 1971 civil war shattered our peace in Uganda. One day a battle took place around our missionary home in Mbarara. It was at that time that I had the experience described at the beginning of this account.

Veera was already at the missionary home when I arrived after crawling a long way in a ditch, hidden from the soldiers. In a corner of the house, we built a "fortress" out of mattresses and furniture. For one week we remained indoors, listening for news on the radio. Sometimes bullets ricocheted off the walls as we crouched in our fortress. At night we used no lights, concealing that we were in the house. Once, soldiers came to the front door and shouted. We stayed put, silently praying to Jehovah. After the fighting was over, our neighbors came and thanked us for their safety. They believed that Jehovah had protected all of us, and we agreed with them.

Conditions remained calm until one morning when we heard on the radio that the Uganda government had banned Jehovah's Witnesses. The announcer said that all of Jehovah's Witnesses should return to their former religion. I pleaded our case before government officials but without success. I then went to the office of President Idi Amin and asked for an appointment with him. The receptionist told me that the president was busy. I went back many times, but I never got

to see the president. Finally, by July 1973 we had to leave Uganda.

### One Year Becomes Ten

The sadness that we felt when we were expelled from Madagascar overtook us again as we left our dear Ugandan brothers. Before going to our new assignment in Senegal, we traveled to Finland. There, our African assignment was canceled, and we were told to stay in Finland. Our work as missionaries seemed to be finished. In Finland, we served as special pioneers and then again in the circuit work.

By 1990 opposition to the work in Madagascar had diminished, and Brooklyn headquarters surprised us by asking if we would go there for a one-year assignment. We wanted to go but were facing two great challenges. My elderly father needed care, and Veera continued to

have health problems. I was saddened by the death of my father in November 1990, but Veera's improving health gave us hope of returning to the missionary work. We went back to Madagascar in September 1991.

Our assignment in Madagascar was for one year, but it lasted ten. During that time, the number of publishers increased from 4,000 to 11,600. I greatly enjoyed serving as a missionary. Yet, at times I felt discouraged, wondering if I was neglecting the physical and emotional needs of my dear wife. Jehovah gave both of us the strength to continue. Finally, in 2001 we returned to Finland, where we have been working at the branch office. Our zeal for the Kingdom continues to burn, and we still dream of Africa. We are determined to do Jehovah's will wherever he assigns us.—Isaiah 6:8.



With Veera today

# WHEN EXERCISING AUTHORITY, Imitate the Christ

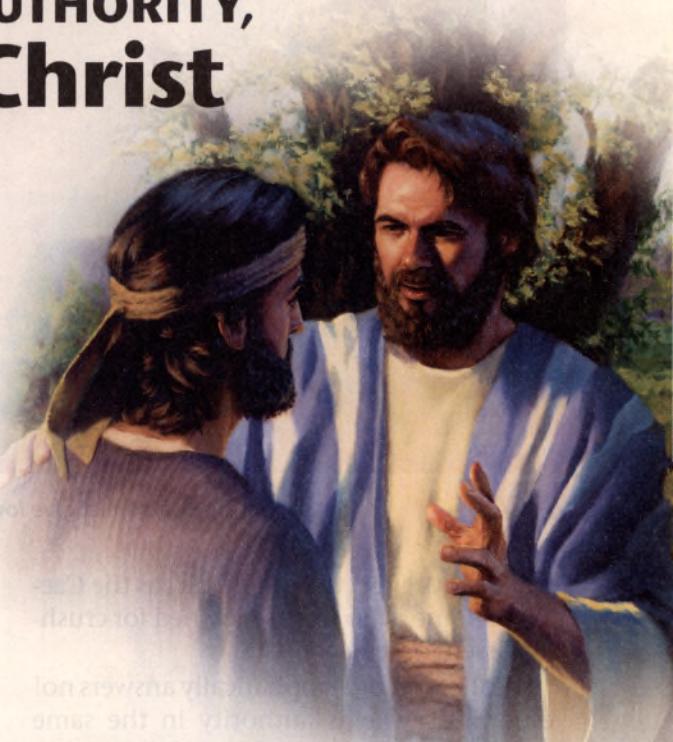
SOME years ago, an experiment in human behavior produced intriguing results. Those taking part were divided into two groups. One group were appointed as guards and were put in charge of the other group, who were assigned to be prisoners. What happened?

"Within a few days," it was reported, "most of [the guards] had become abusive and bullying, meting out frequent punishments, while the prisoners had become cowed and subservient." The conclusion that researchers came to was this: Almost anyone can fall into the trap of misusing authority.

## Authority—Use and Misuse

The proper use of authority, of course, can be a force for good. It can provide suitable direction and can result in physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits. (Proverbs 1:5; Isaiah 48:17, 18) As the above-mentioned experiment showed, however, there is an ever-present danger of going beyond what is reasonable in the exercise of authority. The Bible points to this danger and says: "When anyone wicked bears rule, the people sigh." —Proverbs 29:2; Ecclesiastes 8:9.

Abusing one's authority is harmful, even if it is done with a good motive. Recently, for example, a religious teaching order in Ireland publicly apologized for the way some teachers had abused their authority over children in their care. No doubt, the objectives of many of these teachers were noble,



but the methods used by some were extremely damaging. One newspaper reported that "many children [were] scarred in some way by the excessive violence and harshness of approach of many teaching brothers." (*The Irish Times*) How, then, can you exercise authority so as to get the best out of others rather than alienate or hurt them by word or deed?—Proverbs 12:18.

## "All Authority" Given to Jesus Christ

Consider the example of Jesus Christ. Shortly before his ascension to heaven, he said to his disciples: "All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth." (Matthew 28:18) Did that somehow strike fear into the disciples? Did they feel that Jesus



*At times, elders must give loving counsel to erring ones*

would now reflect the same spirit as the Caesars of Rome, who were renowned for crushing dissent or revolt?

The Bible record emphatically answers no! Jesus Christ wields authority in the same way that his Father does. Though Jehovah is rightfully the almighty Universal Sovereign,

## **Jehovah's use of power is always in perfect harmony with his justice, wisdom, and love**

he desires willinghearted service from his subjects, not mindless, fearful, or servile obedience. (Matthew 22:37) Jehovah never abuses his authority. A dramatic vision given to the prophet Ezekiel shows this.

In this vision, Ezekiel saw four angelic creatures who upheld God's sovereignty. Each had four faces. "As for the likeness of

their faces," writes Ezekiel, "the four of them had a man's face with a lion's face to the right, and the four of them had a bull's face on the left; the four of them also had an eagle's face." (Ezekiel 1:10) These four faces represent the four perfectly balanced cardinal qualities, or attributes, of God. These are identified in God's Word as: *love*, represented by the man's face; *justice*, represented by the lion's face; and *wisdom*, represented by the eagle's face. These three attributes work together with the fourth—*power*, as shown by the bull's face. What does all of this mean? The vision shows that Jehovah never exercises his unlimited power and authority in a way that is out of harmony with his other cardinal qualities.

In imitation of his Father, Jesus Christ always wielded his authority in a way that perfectly harmonized with love, wisdom, and justice. His disciples found great refreshment serving under Jesus' authority. (Matthew 11:28-30) If any one attribute characterizes both Jehovah God and Jesus Christ,

it is love, not power or authority!—1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 John 4:8.

### How Do You Exercise Authority?

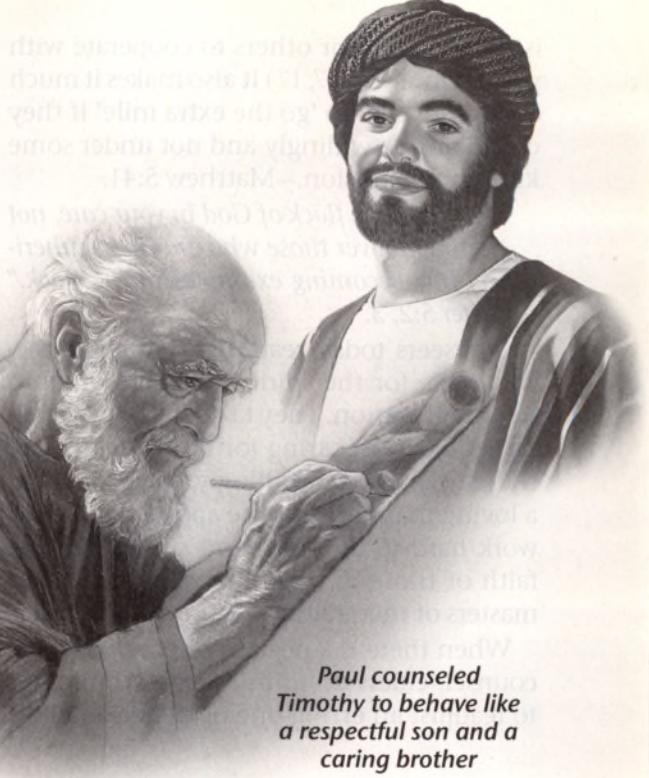
How do you measure up in this regard? In the family, for example, do you control things by weight of authority even when this means insistence on your own personal whims or fancies? Do the others in your family comply with your decisions out of fear or out of love? Is superior force the deciding factor? These are questions that family heads can consider with a view toward upholding theocratic order in the family arrangement.

—1 Corinthians 11:3.

What if you have a degree of authority in the Christian congregation? To check whether you are handling it properly, measure yourself against the following principles inspired by Jehovah God and exemplified by Jesus Christ.

*“A slave of the Lord . . . needs to be gentle toward all, . . . keeping himself restrained under evil, instructing with mildness those not favorably disposed.”*—2 Timothy 2:24, 25.

Some individuals in the early Christian congregation exercised great authority. Timothy, for example, could even “command certain ones not to teach different doctrine.” (1 Timothy 1:3) We can be sure, though, that Timothy reflected godly qualities in all that he did, for he undoubtedly acted in harmony with Paul’s counsel to instruct “with mildness” and to “be gentle toward all” in the discharge of his Christian oversight. Because he was relatively young himself, he was to behave like a respectful son to older



*Paul counseled Timothy to behave like a respectful son and a caring brother*

ones and a caring brother to younger ones. (1 Timothy 5:1, 2) Under such loving care, the Christian congregation reflects the spirit of a warm, loving family, not that of a cold, heartless business corporation.—1 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8.

*“The rulers of the nations lord it over them and the great men wield authority over them. This is not the way among you; but whoever wants to become great among you must be your minister.”*—Matthew 20:25, 26.

Worldly despots “lord it over” others by imposing their will on them and insisting that they do things in a certain way, threatening sanctions if they disobey. Jesus Christ, however, emphasized serving others and not pressuring them. (Matthew 20:27, 28) He always treated his disciples in a loving, caring manner. When you follow Jesus’ example, it

is much easier for others to cooperate with you. (Hebrews 13:7, 17) It also makes it much easier for them to 'go the extra mile' if they can, doing so willingly and not under some kind of compulsion.—Matthew 5:41.

*"Shepherd the flock of God in your care, not . . . lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but becoming examples to the flock."*  
—1 Peter 5:2, 3.

Overseers today realize that they are accountable for the spiritual welfare of all in the congregation. They take this responsibility seriously. In caring for the flock of God, they strive to do so willingly, eagerly, and in a loving manner. Like the apostle Paul, they work hard to build up and strengthen the faith of those in their charge, not to act as masters of their faith.—2 Corinthians 1:24.

When there is a need to offer appropriate counsel, elders do so in a spirit of mildness to readjust an erring one or to help a fellow

*Jesus Christ exercises his authority in a wise, just, and loving way*



Christian to progress spiritually. They bear in mind the apostle Paul's reminder: "Brothers, even though a man takes some false step before he is aware of it, you who have spiritual qualifications try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness, as you each keep an eye on yourself, for fear you also may be tempted."—Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 6:1, 9-12.

*"Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely . . . Clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union."*—Colossians 3:13, 14.

How do you deal with any who might fail to measure up perfectly to Christian standards? Do you make allowances for their imperfections, as Jehovah and Jesus Christ do? (Isaiah 42:2-4) Or do you insist on applying the letter of the law in every case? (Psalm 130:3) Remember, it is fitting to show gentleness where possible and firmness only when required. Acting with love will help to forge strong bonds of mutual confidence and trust between you and those over whom you exercise authority.

If you are entrusted with any kind of authority, work hard to imitate Jehovah God and Jesus Christ in the exercise of it. Recall the marvelous picture the psalmist painted in describing the way in which Jehovah exercises his authority over his people. David sang: "Jehovah is my Shepherd. I shall lack nothing. In grassy pastures he makes me lie down; by well-watered resting-places he conducts me. My soul he refreshes. He leads me in the tracks of righteousness for his name's sake." Similarly, of Jesus, we read: "I am the fine shepherd, and I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I surrender my soul in behalf of the sheep." What better models can we possibly have of the loving exercise of authority?—Psalm 23:1-3; John 10:14, 15.

# 'GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES, BAPTIZING THEM'

*"Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them . . . , teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you."*

—MATTHEW 28:19, 20.

SOME 3,500 years ago, a whole nation made a vow to God. Assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites declared publicly: "All that Jehovah has spoken we are willing to do." From that moment on, Israel became a people dedicated to God, his "special property." (Exodus 19:5, 8; 24:3) They looked forward to receiving his protection and living generation after generation in a land "flowing with milk and honey."—Leviticus 20:24.

<sup>2</sup> As the psalmist Asaph acknowledged, however, the Israelites "did not keep the covenant of God, and in his law they re-

1. What decision did the nation of Israel make at the foot of Mount Sinai?
2. What relationship with God can people today enjoy?

fused to walk." (Psalm 78:10) They failed to keep the vow that their forefathers had made to Jehovah. Eventually, the nation lost that unique relationship with God. (Ecclesiastes 5:4; Matthew 23:37, 38) God, therefore, "turned his attention to the nations to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) And in these last days, he is gathering together "a great crowd, which no man [is] able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues," who joyfully acknowledge: "Salvation we owe to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb."—Revelation 7:9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> To be among those who enjoy that precious relationship with God, one must

3. What steps must one take to enjoy a personal relationship with God?





## THE TWO BAPTISMAL QUESTIONS

*On the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, have you repented of your sins and dedicated yourself to Jehovah to do his will?*

*Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit-directed organization?*

make a dedication to Jehovah and symbolize it publicly by water baptism. This is in obedience to Jesus' direct command to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) The Israelites listened to a reading of "the book of the covenant." (Exodus 24:3, 7, 8) Thus, they understood their obligations toward Jehovah. Likewise today, an accurate knowledge of God's will as found in his Word, the Bible, is essential before one takes the step of baptism.

<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Jesus intended for his disciples to have a solid foundation for their faith before they would get baptized. He instructed his

4. What must one do to qualify for baptism? (Include the box above.)

followers not only to go and make disciples but also to teach them 'to observe all the things he had commanded.' (Matthew 7:24, 25; Ephesians 3:17-19) Therefore, those who qualify for baptism have usually studied the Bible for months or even a year or two, so that their decision is neither hasty nor ill-informed. At the baptism itself, the candidates answer yes to two key questions. Since Jesus emphasized that 'our Yes should mean Yes, our No, No,' it will be helpful for all of us to review carefully the significance of these two baptismal questions.—Matthew 5:37.

### Repentance and Dedication

<sup>5</sup> The first baptismal question asks the candidate if he has repented of his former life course and dedicated his life to Jehovah to do his will. This question emphasizes two vital steps that must be taken prior to baptism, namely repentance and dedication.

<sup>6</sup> Why must a person repent before presenting himself for baptism? The apostle Paul explains: "We all at one time conducted ourselves in harmony with the desires of our flesh." (Ephesians 2:3) Before we came to an accurate knowledge of God's will, we lived in harmony with the world, according to its values and standards. Our life course was under the control of the god of this system, Satan. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Having come to know God's will, however, we resolve to live "no more for the desires of men, but for God's will."—1 Peter 4:2.

<sup>7</sup> This new course brings many rewards. Above all, it opens the way to a precious relationship with Jehovah, which David compared to an invitation to enter into God's

5. What two fundamental steps does the first baptismal question emphasize?

6, 7. (a) Why is repentance necessary for all baptismal candidates? (b) What changes must be made after one has repented?

"tent" and "holy mountain"—a grand privilege indeed. (Psalm 15:1) Logically, Jehovah would invite not just anyone but only those "walking faultlessly and practicing righteousness and speaking the truth in [their] heart." (Psalm 15:2) Depending on our circumstances before we learned the truth, meeting these requirements may mean that we must make certain changes—both in conduct and in personality. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 3:5-10) The motivation for such changes is repentance—deep regret over our former life course and a strong determination to please Jehovah. This leads to a complete turnaround—abandoning a selfish, worldly way of life and pursuing a course pleasing to God.—Acts 3:19.

<sup>8</sup> The second part of the first baptismal question asks the candidates if they have dedicated themselves to Jehovah to do his will. Dedication is an essential step that must precede baptism. It is made in prayer, in which we express the desire to give our life to Jehovah through Christ. (Romans 14:7, 8; 2 Corinthians 5:15) Jehovah then becomes our Master and Owner, and like Jesus we delight to do God's will. (Psalm 40:8; Ephesians 6:6) This solemn promise to Jehovah is made only once. Since we make our dedication in private, however, a public declaration on the day of baptism serves to let everyone know that we have made this solemn dedication to our heavenly Father.—Romans 10:10.

8. How do we make our dedication, and what connection does it have with baptism?



*Dedication is a solemn promise made to Jehovah in prayer*

<sup>9</sup> What does following Jesus' example in doing God's will involve? Jesus said to his disciples: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me." (Matthew 16:24) Here he outlined three things that we must do. First, we "disown" ourselves. In other words, we say no to our selfish, imperfect inclinations and yes to God's counsel and direction. Second, we 'pick up our torture stake.' In Jesus' day a torture stake was a symbol of shame and suffering. As Christians, we accept our part in suffering for the sake of the good news. (2 Timothy 1:8) Although the world may ridicule or reproach us, like Christ we 'despise shame,' happy in the knowledge that we are please-

ing God. (Hebrews 12:2) Finally, we follow Jesus "continually."—Psalm 73:26; 119:44; 145:2.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, even some opposers recognize the dedication that Jehovah's Witnesses have made to God to serve him unreservedly. For example, in the Buchenwald concentration camp of Nazi Germany, Witnesses who refused to renounce their faith were required to sign the following printed statement: "I am still a committed Bible Student and will never break the oath I have sworn to Jehovah." Surely this well expresses the attitude of all dedicated, faithful servants of God!—Acts 5:32.

9, 10. (a) What does doing God's will involve? (b) How did even Nazi officials recognize our dedication?

## Identified as One of Jehovah's Witnesses

<sup>11</sup> The second question asks the candidate, first of all, if he understands that his baptism serves to identify him as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. After undergoing immersion, he becomes an ordained minister who bears Jehovah's name. This is both a great privilege and a serious responsibility. It also puts the one baptized in line for eternal salvation, provided he remains faithful to Jehovah.—Matthew 24:13.

<sup>12</sup> Certainly, it is a singular honor to bear the name of the almighty God, Jehovah. The prophet Micah said: "All the peoples, for their part, will walk each one in the name of its god; but we, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever." (Micah 4:5) Nevertheless, an obligation accompanies this honor. We must strive to live our life in a way that brings honor to the name we bear. As Paul reminded the Christians in Rome, if one does not practice what one preaches, the name of God is "blasphemed," or brought into disrepute.—Romans 2:21-24.

<sup>13</sup> When a person becomes one of Jehovah's Witnesses, he also assumes the respon-

11. What privilege comes to one who gets baptized?
12. What obligation accompanies the honor of bearing Jehovah's name?
13. Why do dedicated servants of Jehovah have the responsibility to witness about their God?

### Can You Explain?

- Why does each Christian need to repent before baptism?
- What does dedication to God involve?
- What responsibilities come with the honor of bearing Jehovah's name?
- What should motivate us to make the decision to be baptized?

sibility to witness about his God. Jehovah invited the dedicated nation of Israel to be his witnesses in order to testify to his eternal Godship. (Isaiah 43:10-12, 21) But the nation failed to fulfill this role, and they eventually lost Jehovah's favor completely. Today, true Christians are proud to have the privilege of bearing witness to Jehovah. We do so because we love him and long for his name to be sanctified. How can we be silent when we know the truth about our heavenly Father and his purpose? We feel as did the apostle Paul when he said: "Necessity is laid upon me. Really, woe is me if I did not declare the good news!"—1 Corinthians 9:16.

<sup>14</sup> The second question also reminds the candidate of his responsibility to work with Jehovah's spirit-directed organization. We are not alone in serving God, and we need the help, support, and encouragement of "the whole association of brothers." (1 Peter 2:17; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13) God's organization plays a vital role in our spiritual growth. It provides a wealth of Bible publications that help us to grow in accurate knowledge, to act wisely when we are faced with problems, and to cultivate a close relationship with God. Like a mother who makes sure that her child is well-fed and cared for, "the faithful and discreet slave" provides an abundance of timely spiritual food for our spiritual advancement.—Matthew 24:45-47; 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8.

<sup>15</sup> At weekly meetings, Jehovah's people receive the needed training and encouragement to be faithful Witnesses of Jehovah. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) The Theocratic Ministry School teaches us to speak in public, and the Service Meeting trains us to present our message effectively. Both at our meetings

- 14, 15. (a) What role does Jehovah's organization play in our spiritual growth? (b) What provisions are available to help us spiritually?

and through our personal study of Bible publications, we can see Jehovah's spirit at work, directing his organization. By means of these regular provisions, God alerts us to dangers, trains us to be effective ministers, and helps us to keep spiritually awake. —Psalm 19:7, 8, 11; 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 11; 1 Timothy 4:13.

### The Motivation Behind the Decision

<sup>16</sup> The two baptismal questions thus remind the candidates of the significance of water baptism and the responsibilities it brings. What, then, should motivate them to make the decision to get baptized? We become baptized disciples, not because someone forces us, but because Jehovah "draws" us. (John 6:44) Since "God is love," he rules the universe by love, not by force. (1 John 4:8) We are drawn to Jehovah by his kind qualities and by the way he deals with us. Je-

16. What motivates us to dedicate ourselves to Jehovah?

### *Our preaching work demonstrates our dedication to God*



hovah gave his only-begotten Son for us and offers us the best possible future. (John 3:16) In turn, we are moved to offer him—to dedicate to him—our life.—Proverbs 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15.

<sup>17</sup> We dedicate ourselves, not to a cause or to a work, but to Jehovah himself. The work that God has for his people will change, but their dedication to him remains the same. For example, what he told Abraham to do was very different from what he told Jeremiah to do. (Genesis 13:17, 18; Jeremiah 1:6, 7) Yet, both of them carried out the specific task God gave them to do because they loved Jehovah and desired to do his will faithfully. During this time of the end, all baptized followers of Christ strive to carry out Christ's command to preach the Kingdom good news and to make disciples. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) Doing that work wholeheartedly is a fine way to show that we love our heavenly Father and that we are truly dedicated to him.—1 John 5:3.

<sup>18</sup> Without a doubt, baptism opens up the way to many blessings, but it is not a step to be taken lightly. (Luke 14:26-33) It expresses a resolve that takes priority over every other responsibility. (Luke 9:62) When we get baptized, we are really making the public statement: "This God is our God to time indefinite, even forever. He himself will guide us until we die."—Psalm 48:14.

<sup>19</sup> The following article will examine further questions that may arise in connection with water baptism. Might there be valid reasons for a person to hold back from getting baptized? Should age be a factor? How can all contribute to the dignity of the occasion of baptism?

17. To what have we not dedicated ourselves?

18, 19. (a) What public statement do we make by means of our baptism? (b) What will be considered in the following article?

# MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

*"What prevents me from getting baptized?"—ACTS 8:36.*

A YEAR or two after the death of Jesus, a government official was traveling south on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. A tiring chariot ride of perhaps a thousand miles lay ahead. This devout man had journeyed all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. On the lengthy return trip, he was making wise use of his time by reading the Word of God—such was the man's faith. Jehovah took note of this sincere man, and by means of an angel, He directed the disciple Philip to preach to him.—Acts 8:26-28.

<sup>2</sup> Philip found it easy to strike up a conver-

1, 2. How did Philip strike up a conversation with an Ethiopian official, and what attests to the spiritual inclination of this man?

sation, since the Ethiopian official was reading aloud, as was the custom in those days. Hence, Philip was able to hear that he was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. One simple question from Philip aroused the man's interest: "Do you actually know what you are reading?" This led to a discussion of Isaiah 53:7, 8. Finally, Philip "declared to him the good news about Jesus."—Acts 8:29-35.

<sup>3</sup> Within a short time, the Ethiopian understood Jesus' role in God's purpose, along with the need to become a baptized disciple of Christ. "What prevents me from getting baptized?" he asked Philip upon sighting a

3, 4. (a) Why did Philip baptize the Ethiopian without delay? (b) What questions will we now consider?

*"What prevents me  
from getting baptized?"*



convenient body of water. Of course, these were special circumstances. Here was a man of faith who already worshipped God as a Jewish proselyte. He would probably not have another opportunity to get baptized for a long time. More important, this man understood what God required of him, and he wanted to respond unreservedly. Philip happily consented to his request, and the Ethiopian, after being baptized, "kept going on his way rejoicing." He doubtless became an enthusiastic preacher of the good news in his home country.—Acts 8:36-39.

<sup>4</sup> Although the steps of dedication and baptism are not to be taken lightly or hastily, the example of the Ethiopian official shows that there have been occasions when individuals were baptized shortly after hearing the truth of God's Word.\* Thus, it is appropriate to consider the following questions: What sort of preparation should precede baptism? To what extent should age be a factor? What spiritual progress should be evident before a person is baptized? Above all, why does Jehovah require his servants to take this step?

### A Solemn Agreement

<sup>5</sup> After delivering the Israelites from Egypt, Jehovah offered to accept them as his "special property," to love and protect them and to constitute them "a holy nation." To receive such blessings, however, the people had to respond to God's love in a concrete way. This they did by agreeing to do 'all that Jehovah had spoken' and entering into a covenant with him. (Exodus 19:4-9) In the

\* The three thousand Jews and proselytes who listened to Peter's speech at Pentecost likewise got baptized without delay. Of course, like the Ethiopian eunuch, they were already familiar with the basic teachings and principles of God's Word.—Acts 2:37-41.

5, 6. (a) How did God's people in the past respond to Jehovah's love? (b) What close relationship with God can we enjoy once we are baptized? *Continued*

first century, Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of people of all nations, and those who embraced his teaching were baptized. A good relationship with God depended on faith in Jesus Christ followed by baptism.—Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38, 41.

<sup>6</sup> These Scriptural accounts show that Jehovah blesses those who make and keep a solemn agreement to serve him. For Christians, dedication and baptism are necessary steps that lead to Jehovah's blessing. We are resolved to follow his ways and seek his guidance. (Psalm 48:14) Jehovah, in turn, figuratively grasps us by the hand and leads us in the way in which we should walk.—Psalm 73:23; Isaiah 30:21; 41:10, 13.

<sup>7</sup> The motivation for us to take these steps should be love for Jehovah and a desire to serve him. No one should get baptized merely because someone tells him that he has studied long enough or because his friends are getting baptized. Naturally, parents and other mature Christians may encourage a person to think about dedication and baptism. The apostle Peter urged those who heard him at Pentecost to "be baptized." (Acts 2:38) Nevertheless, our dedication is a personal matter, and nobody else can make it for us. The decision to do God's will must be our own.—Psalm 40:8.

### Adequate Preparation for Baptism

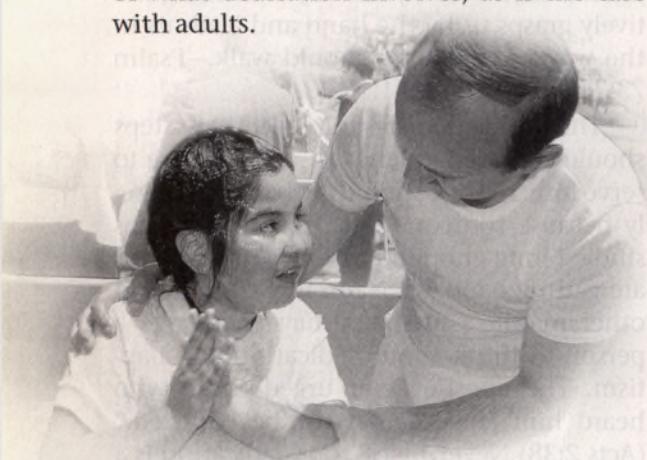
<sup>8</sup> Are children in a position to make an intelligent dedication? The Scriptures give no age requirements for baptism. Still, infants certainly could not become believers, exercise faith, or make a dedication to God. (Acts 8:12) Regarding first-century Christians, historian Augustus Neander states in his book

7. Why must dedication and baptism be a personal decision?

8, 9. (a) Why is infant baptism Scripturally unacceptable? (b) What spiritual progress should young ones have made before baptism?

*General History of the Christian Religion and Church:* "Baptism was administered at first only to adults, as men were accustomed to conceive baptism and faith as strictly connected."

<sup>9</sup> In the case of youths, some develop a measure of spirituality at a relatively tender age, while others take longer. Before getting baptized, however, a youngster should have a personal relationship with Jehovah, a sound understanding of the fundamentals of the Scriptures, and a clear comprehension of what dedication involves, as is the case with adults.



<sup>10</sup> Jesus instructed his disciples to teach new ones all the things he had commanded. (Matthew 28:20) So first of all, the new ones need to acquire an accurate knowledge of the truth, which in turn would enable them to develop faith in Jehovah and in his Word. (Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 2:4; Hebrews 11:6) Then, when Scriptural truth touches a person's heart, it moves him to repent and turn around from his previous way of life. (Acts 3:19) Finally, the person reaches the point where he desires to dedicate himself to Jehovah and get baptized, as Jesus commanded.

10. What steps must precede dedication and baptism?

<sup>11</sup> Another important step in the progress toward baptism is that of sharing in preaching the Kingdom good news. This is the principal work that Jehovah has assigned his people during these last days. (Matthew 24:14) Unbaptized publishers can thus have the joy of speaking about their faith to others. Sharing in this work also equips them for regular and zealous participation in the field ministry after baptism.—Romans 10:9, 10, 14, 15.

### Does Something Prevent You From Getting Baptized?

<sup>12</sup> Certain ones may hold back from baptism because they are reluctant to accept the responsibility it brings. They realize that to meet Jehovah's standards, they will have to make significant changes in their lives. Or they may fear that they will find it difficult to live up to God's requirements after baptism. Some may even reason, "Maybe one day I will do something bad and be disfellowshipped from the congregation."

<sup>13</sup> In Jesus' day, some allowed personal interests and family ties to hinder them from becoming his disciples. One scribe declared that he would follow Jesus wherever He went. But Jesus pointed out that on many occasions, he did not even have a place to spend the night. When Jesus invited another listener to be his follower, this man replied that he would first need to "bury" his father. Likely, he preferred to stay at home and wait until his father died rather than follow Jesus and care for that family responsibility when it came. Finally, a third said that before following Jesus, he needed to "say good-bye" to his household. Jesus described such procras-

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11. Why is it important that we regularly share in the preaching work before baptism?
  12. What may hold some back from getting baptized?
  13. In Jesus' day, what held certain ones back from becoming Jesus' followers?



*Baptism is both  
a serious and  
a joyous occasion*



tination as 'looking at the things behind.' Thus, it appears that those who wish to do so will always be able to find excuses for evading their Christian responsibility.—Luke 9: 57-62.

<sup>14</sup> The example of Peter, Andrew, James, and John stands in sharp contrast. When Jesus invited them to follow him and become fishers of men, the Bible states: "At once abandoning the nets, they followed him." (Matthew 4:19-22) By readily making that decision, they personally experienced what Jesus later told them: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light." (Matthew 11: 29, 30) While baptism does bring a yoke of responsibility, Jesus assures us that it is a kindly and bearable one that will refresh us immensely.

<sup>15</sup> Feelings of inadequacy, of course, are normal. Both Moses and Jeremiah initially felt incapable of handling the assignments Jehovah gave them. (Exodus 3:11; Jeremiah

14. (a) How did Peter, Andrew, James, and John respond when Jesus invited them to become fishers of men? (b) Why should we not hesitate to accept Jesus' yoke?

15. How do the examples of Moses and Jeremiah show that we can rely on receiving God's support?

1:6) How did God reassure them? "I shall prove to be with you," he told Moses. "I am with you to deliver you," he promised Jeremiah. (Exodus 3:12; Jeremiah 1:8) We too can have confidence in divine support. Love for God and trust in him can help us to overcome lingering doubts about whether we will be able to live up to our dedication. "There is no fear in love," wrote the apostle John, "but perfect love throws fear outside." (1 John 4:18) A little boy may be fearful when he has to walk alone, but he is confident when he walks hand in hand with his father. Likewise, if we trust in Jehovah with all our heart, he promises to 'make our paths straight' as we walk alongside him.—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

### A Dignified Occasion

The baptism itself is usually preceded by a Scriptural talk explaining the significance of Christian baptism. At the conclusion of this talk, candidates are asked to make a public declaration of their faith by answering the two baptismal questions. (Romans 10:10; see the box on page 22.) The candidates are then immersed in water, following the pattern set

16. Why does baptism involve total immersion in water?

by Jesus himself. The Bible shows that after getting baptized, Jesus "came up from the water" or "out of the water." (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10) Clearly, John the Baptizer had immersed Jesus totally.\* Complete immersion appropriately symbolizes the dramatic change we have made in our life—we figuratively die to our former life course and begin life anew in the service of God.

<sup>17</sup> Baptism is both a serious and a joyful occasion. The Bible indicates that Jesus was praying when John immersed him in the Jordan River. (Luke 3:21, 22) In harmony with this example, baptism candidates today should show proper decorum. And since the Bible urges us to dress with modesty in everyday life, how much more so should we heed this counsel on the day of our baptism! (1 Timothy 2:9) Observers can also show due respect by listening carefully to the baptism discourse and by observing the event in an orderly manner.—1 Corinthians 14:40.

### Blessings Enjoyed by Baptized Disciples

<sup>18</sup> Once we have dedicated ourselves to God and are baptized, we become part of a unique family. First of all, Jehovah becomes our Father and our Friend. We were alienated from God before our baptism; now we become reconciled. (2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:20) Through the sacrifice of Christ, we have drawn close to God and he draws close to us. (James 4:8) The prophet Malachi describes how Jehovah pays attention and listens to those who use and bear his name, and he includes their names in his book of remembrance. "They will certainly become

\* The Greek word *ba'pti-sma* (baptism) signifies "the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence," according to Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

17. How can both the baptism candidates and the observers contribute to the dignity of the occasion?
- 18, 19. What privileges and blessings does baptism bring?

mine," God says, "and I will show compassion upon them, just as a man shows compassion upon his son who is serving him."—Malachi 3:16-18.

<sup>19</sup> Baptism also enables us to become part of a worldwide brotherhood. When the apostle Peter asked what blessings Christ's disciples would receive for the sacrifices they had made, Jesus promised: "Everyone that has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive many times more and will inherit everlasting life." (Matthew 19:29) Years later, Peter wrote about "the whole association of brothers" that had developed "in the world." Peter had personally experienced the support and blessings of a loving brotherhood, and we can too.—1 Peter 2:17; 5:9.

<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Jesus indicated that those who follow him "will inherit everlasting life." Yes, dedication and baptism offer the prospect of gaining "a firm hold on the real life"—everlasting life in God's new world. (1 Timothy 6:19) What better foundation for the future could we possibly build for ourselves and for our families? This blessed prospect will enable us to "walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever."—Micah 4:5.

20. What blessed prospect does baptism offer?

### Can You Explain?

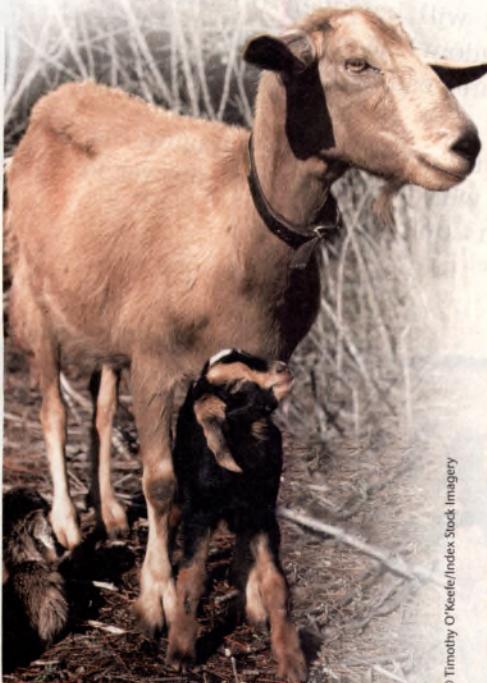
- How and why should we respond to Jehovah's love?
- What spiritual progress should precede baptism?
- Why should we not allow fear of failure or reluctance to accept responsibility to hold us back from baptism?
- What unique blessings can baptized disciples of Jesus Christ enjoy?

## Questions From Readers

**What can we learn from the prohibition found at Exodus 23:19: "You must not boil a kid in its mother's milk"?**

This directive of the Mosaic Law, which appears three times in the Bible, can help us appreciate Jehovah's sense of propriety, his compassion, and his tenderness. It also highlights his abhorrence of false worship.—Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21.

To boil a young goat or other animal in its mother's milk would be contrary to Jehovah's natural arrangement of things. God provided the mother's milk to nourish the kid and help it grow. Cooking the kid in the milk of its own mother would, in the words of one scholar, display "a contempt of the relation which God has established and sanctified between parent and young."



Further, some suggest that boiling a kid in its mother's milk may have been a pagan ritual performed to produce rain. If that was the case, the prohibition would have served to protect the Israelites from the senseless and heartless religious practices of the nations surrounding them. The Mosaic Law specifically forbade the Israelites to walk in the statutes of those nations.—Leviticus 20:23.

Finally, we see in this particular law Jehovah's tender compassion. Actually, the Law contained a number of similar injunctions against cruelty to animals and safeguards against working contrary to the natural order of things. For instance, the Law included commands that prohibited sacrificing an animal unless it had been with its mother for at least seven days, slaughtering both an animal and its offspring on the same day, and taking from a nest both a mother and her eggs or offspring.—Leviticus 22:27, 28; Deuteronomy 22:6, 7.

Clearly, the Law was not just a complex set of commands and prohibitions. Among other things, its principles help instill in us an elevated moral sensibility that truly reflects Jehovah's marvelous qualities.—Psalm 19:7-11.

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Keys to Communicating  
With Your Mate

How Can You Make Decisions  
God's Way?

"I Am With You People"

## An Invitation . . .

### IS GOD STILL IN CONTROL?

NATURAL disasters, deadly diseases, corruption in high places, terrorist attacks, wars, crime. Hardly a day goes by without some news of this sort coming our way. Whether you have personally been affected by such things or not, it is hard not to wonder just where the world is heading and if things will ever get better.

To address such concerns, Jehovah's Witnesses in over 200 lands around the world will be presenting a timely public discourse entitled "**Is God Still in Control?**" It will consider what God says and promises in his infallible Word, the Bible, regarding these vital questions:

*Is God interested in earth's affairs?*

*How does he feel about mankind?*

*Is he concerned about your welfare?*

In most areas, the talk will be given on **Sunday, April 30, 2006**, at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses in your area will be glad to provide you with the time and address.

You are warmly invited to attend this encouraging free Bible-based discourse that will offer a satisfying answer to the question: Is God Still in Control?

