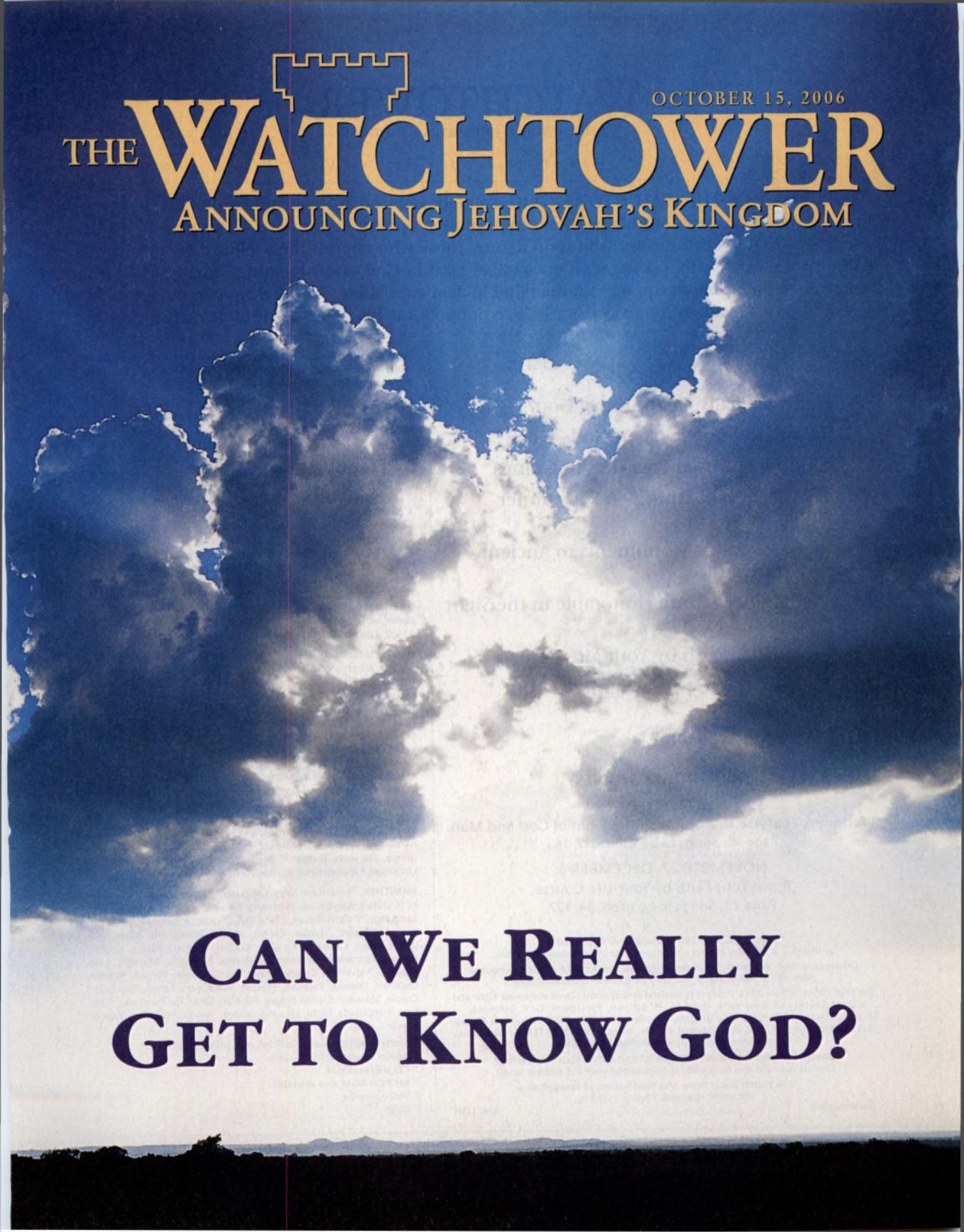


OCTOBER 15, 2006

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



CAN WE REALLY
GET TO KNOW GOD?



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

October 15, 2006

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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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Can We Really Get to Know God?

"THIS MEANS EVERLASTING LIFE, THEIR TAKING IN KNOWLEDGE OF . . . THE ONLY TRUE GOD."—JOHN 17:3.

"O THE depth of God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!" exclaimed the apostle Paul. He added: "How unsearchable his judgments are and past tracing out his ways are!" (Romans 11:33) Are we to conclude from these words that it is beyond human ability to unearth the wisdom and knowledge of God, that it is thus impossible to get to know him and his purposes?

According to those holding to the religious thinking known as *via negativa*, the answer is yes. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* states concerning this philosophy: "God transcends all that can be known of him. . . . God cannot be named or defined. Any name or definition imposes limits, and God is above . . . them. . . . He is not an object of knowledge, for he is above knowledge."^{*}

According to *Newsweek* magazine, many individuals in secular societies lean toward "a kind of new orthodoxy" that, in effect,

holds that "there is only one truth, and this truth is that there is no truth."

Still, many are left with unanswered questions about the purpose of life. They observe the heartrending problems of poverty, disease, and violence. To them, the uncertainty of life may be extremely frustrating. They may yearn to find answers, but when such are not forthcoming, they may conclude that there are none. Consequently, many of such people have withdrawn from organized religion and are looking for their own approach to God—if indeed they still believe that he exists.

The Bible's View

Those who look favorably upon the Bible and are inclined to accept Jesus Christ as God's Spokesman ought to be interested in knowing the Bible's view. You perhaps recall that Jesus once spoke of two roads, a "broad and spacious . . . road leading off into destruction" and a "cramped . . . road

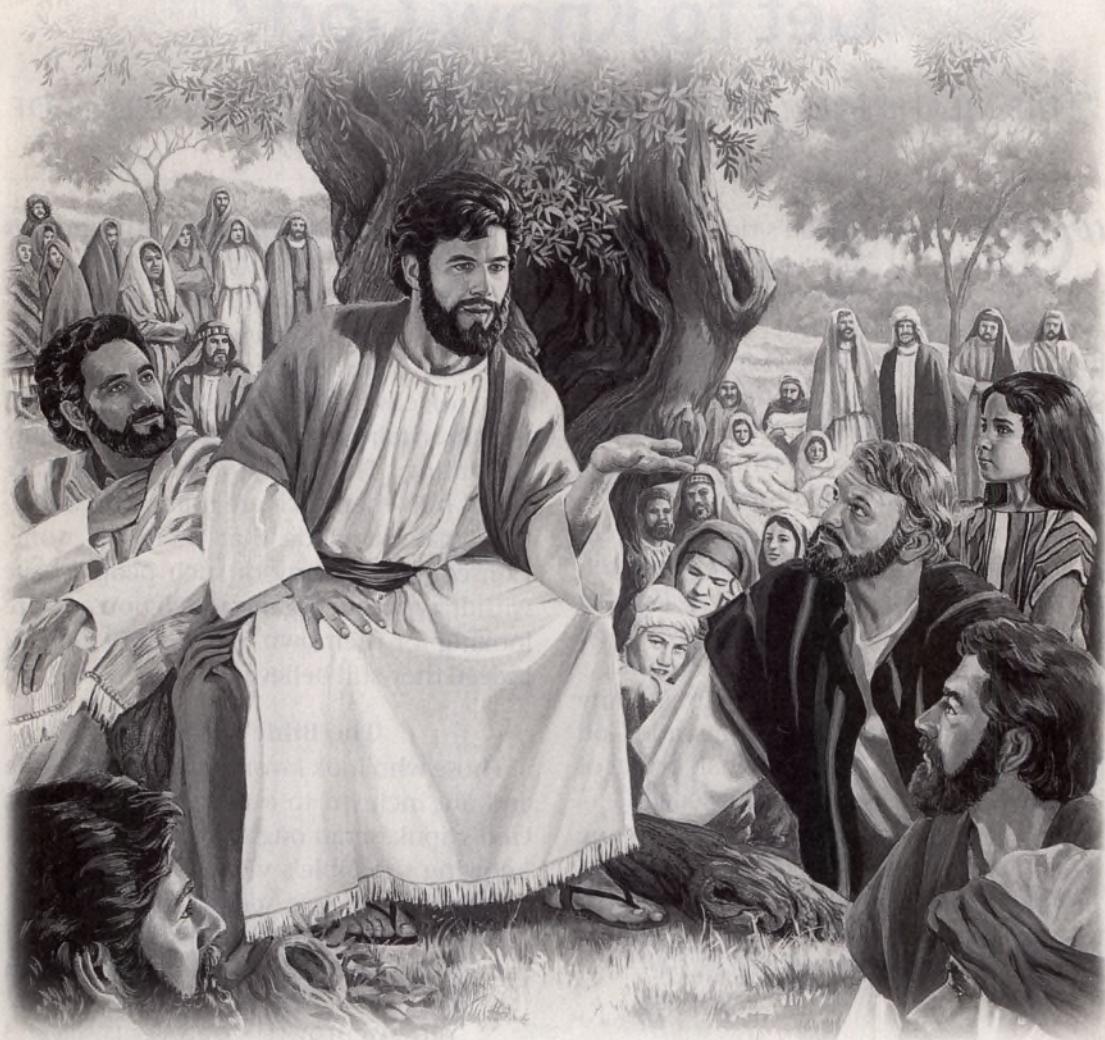
* Similar views are found in the Eastern religious traditions of Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

leading off into life." He explained how to identify those traveling on each road, saying: "By their fruits you will recognize them." By what kind of fruits? Not by what they say, but by what they do, as Jesus clarified: "Not everyone saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will." Professing belief in God is not enough. We must *do* God's will. Logically, we must first have ac-

Jesus said that a cramped road leads to life

curate knowledge of what God's will is.
—Matthew 7:13-23.

Jesus plainly showed that it is possible for humans to gain knowledge about God. He said: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) Clearly, we can acquire the wisdom and the knowledge that God reveals—but only if we exert ourselves in seeking such. However, God's gift to those who do so is everlasting life, so this search is surely worthwhile.



Taking in Knowledge of God HOW?

SOME MAY DOUBT THAT GOD IS REALLY INTERESTED
IN REVEALING HIMSELF TO HUMANS. IF HE IS,
HOW DOES HE GO ABOUT DOING SO?

THE 16th-century Protestant Reformer John Calvin correctly concluded that men cannot of themselves know God except as he reveals himself to mankind. Some, however, may wonder whether God is really interested in revealing himself to humans. And if he is, how does he go about doing so?

Jehovah, the "Grand Creator," has a reason for everything he does. Also, as "God Almighty," he is fully able to carry out his purposes. (Ecclesiastes 12:1; Exodus 6:3) We can be certain that he has been willing to reveal his purposes to humans, for his prophet Amos was inspired to write: "The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets." Note, though, that God was said to have revealed his purposes only to his servants, to those who sincerely loved him. Is that not logical? To whom do you reveal your confidential matters? To just anyone or to your closest companions?—Amos 3:7; Isaiah 40:13, 25, 26.

God's wisdom and knowledge fill humble ones with awe, and properly so. Yet, more than awe is necessary if we are to benefit personally from divine wisdom and knowledge. The Bible stresses that in order to learn God's thoughts, we need a humble heart: 'Treasure up my own commandments with

yourself. Pay attention to wisdom with your ear. Incline your heart to discernment. Call out for understanding itself and give forth your voice for discernment. Keep seeking for it as for silver.'—Proverbs 2:1-4.

A humble person who puts forth this kind of effort will indeed be able to get to know God. That passage in the book of Proverbs continues: "Jehovah himself gives wisdom; out of his mouth there are knowledge and discernment." Yes, sincere seekers of truth can "understand righteousness and judgment and uprightness, the entire course of what is good."—Proverbs 2:6-9.

In Search of the Truth

The Encyclopedia of Religion notes: "Human life is characterized by the need to distinguish between what is real and unreal, powerful and powerless, genuine and deceptive, pure and contaminated, clear and confused, as well as relative degrees of one extreme or the other." To meet this need, people have long searched for the truth. To the extent that they have directed their search to Jehovah, whom the psalmist calls "the God of truth," they have made progress in finding it.—Psalm 31:5.

The name Jehovah literally means "He Causes to Become." (Genesis 2:4, footnote) Thus, the very meaning of God's name calls attention to his Creatorship and his

THOSE WORKING IN HARMONY WITH GOD . . .

maintain neutrality in political conflicts.

—Isaiah 2:4.

produce good fruitage by doing God's will.

—Matthew 7:13-23.

display true love among themselves.

—John 13:35; 1 John 4:20.

speak everywhere in unison.

—Micah 2:12.

do not imitate the wrong attitudes and conduct of the world around them.—John 17:16.

bear witness to the truth and make disciples.

—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

enjoy meeting regularly for mutual encouragement.—Hebrews 10:25.

praise God as an international body.

—Revelation 7:9, 10.

purpose. In reality, knowing and using the name Jehovah is an earmark of true religion. Jesus clearly recognized that fact. Referring to his followers, he said to God in prayer: "I have made your name known to them and will make it known, in order that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in union with them."—John 17:26.

Relying on his friendship with God, an ancient Hebrew named Joseph, when faced with the task of revealing the meaning of dreams, said with confidence: "Do not interpretations belong to God?"—Genesis 40:8; 41:15, 16.

Several centuries later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream that his wise men were unable to interpret. The prophet Daniel said to the king: "There exists a God in the heavens who is a Revealer of secrets, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what is to occur in the final part of the days."—Daniel 2:28.

The examples of Joseph and Daniel show that the wisdom and knowledge of God are available only to ones serving Jehovah God. Of course, our gaining God's favor may entail abandoning previously held views. First-

century Jews who became Christians had to do just that. Brought up to respect and obey the laws laid down under the Jewish system of things, they needed time to accept Jesus as the Messiah. He came to fulfill the Mosaic Law, which served as "a shadow of the good things to come." (Hebrews 10:1; Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44, 45) Taking its place was "the law of the Christ," which is far superior to the Mosaic Law.—Galatians 6:2; Romans 13:10; James 2:8.

All of us have been born into a world alienated from God. Because of sin inherited from the first human couple, we were born at enmity with God, lacking accurate knowledge of his purposes. We have also come to have a treacherous heart. (Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:12; 4:18; Colossians 1:21) To gain God's friendship, we must learn to pattern our thinking after God's ways. Doing so is far from easy.

It may be difficult to discard false religious ideas or practices, particularly if such were impressed upon us from childhood. But is continuing in the wrong way the intelligent course to take? Hardly! It is certainly wiser to change one's way of thinking and thereby gain God's approval.

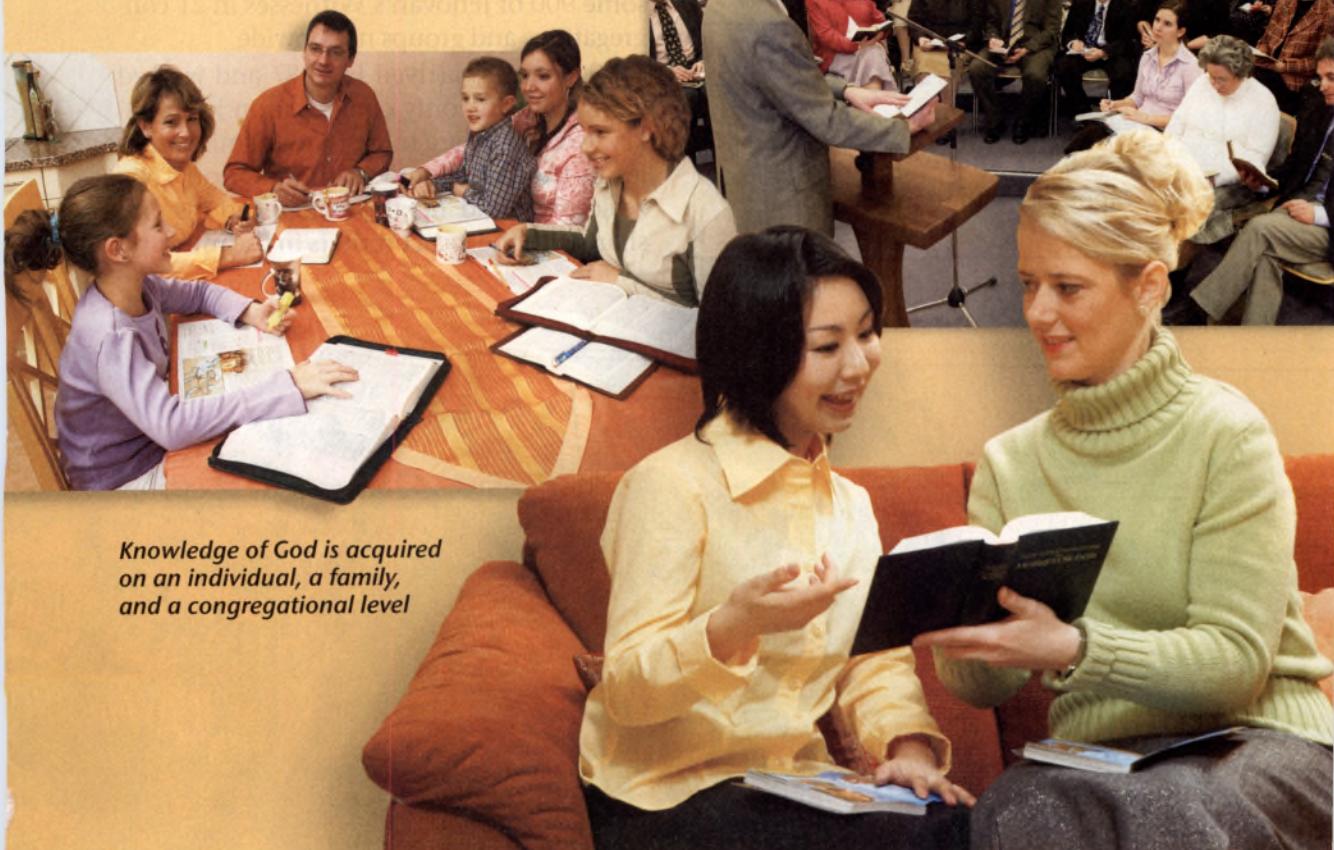
Identifying God's Channel of Instruction

Where can we find assistance in understanding the Word of truth and then in living in accord with it? In Israel of old, God provided leadership through trusted and loyal individuals in positions of responsibility. The Head of the Christian congregation today, Christ, likewise guides those who sincerely search for the truth. He does so through his trusted and loyal followers, who make up the channel responsible for directing and protecting earnest seekers of truth. (Matthew 24:45-47; Colossians 1:18) But how can one identify God's channel of instruction?

True followers of Jesus Christ strive to reflect the same qualities that Jesus manifested as a human. In an increasingly wicked world, their uniqueness in displaying such spiritual qualities makes these followers easy to identify. (See the box on

page 6.) Are these qualities reflected in the religion with which you have been affiliated or in the religions of your neighbors? It will be worth your while to investigate this matter in the light of the Bible.

We invite you, our reader, to do so by means of a Bible study course. Last year, on an average, over 6,000,000 individuals or families in 235 lands were taking advantage of this arrangement to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. Gaining the wisdom and knowledge of God is an ongoing, satisfying, and rewarding activity. Why not embark on a journey to gain the wisdom and knowledge of God? It is a journey you will never regret having taken. Yes, we *can* really get to know God!



Knowledge of God is acquired on an individual, a family, and a congregational level



Finding Spiritual Treasures in GUINEA

FOR centuries, explorers risked life and limb looking for treasure and wealth. Intrepid ones who reached Guinea, in West Africa, found two very different kinds of riches—material and spiritual. The land, rich in diamonds, gold, iron ore, and high-grade bauxite (from which aluminum is extracted), is home to more than nine million Guineans.

Though the religions of Christendom do not predominate in the country, worship is important, and many prize spiritual treasures. What exactly are these treasures? They

are Jehovah's faithful servants, described at Haggai 2:7 as "the desirable things of all the nations."

Spiritual Treasures

Digging deep into the earth in search of hidden treasures requires substantial effort. Likewise, in the Christian ministry, earnest effort is necessary to find spiritual riches. In Guinea, the Kingdom-preaching work began in the heart of the country in the early 1950's and did not reach the capital, Conakry, until the early 1960's. There are now some 900 of Jehovah's Witnesses in 21 congregations and groups nationwide.

Missionaries arrived in 1987 and worked along with the only congregation in Conakry. Now there are more than 20 missionaries in the capital and in the interior. They zealously build up the congregations and share with the local brothers in the ministry.

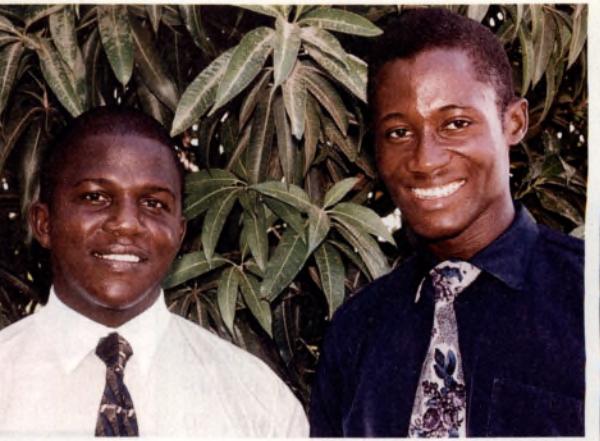
GUINEA - 2005

Peak number of Witnesses: 883
Bible studies: 1,710
Memorial attendance: 3,255

USAID

Luc, who lives in Conakry, experienced joy as he studied the Bible with Albert, a young doctor. Albert had searched for religious truth in various churches, and he was involved in spiritistic practices. He wore a ring that a spirit medium had given him with the guarantee that it would bring him good fortune. After much disappointment in his search for the true religion, Albert threw his ring away and prayed: "God, if you exist, make it possible for me to know you and serve you. Otherwise, I will just live my life according to my own desires." Shortly thereafter, Albert was visiting his sister's home and overheard one of Jehovah's Witnesses who was conducting a Bible study with his niece. Soon arrangements were made for Luc to study the Bible with him.

Week after week, Luc joyfully walked more than three miles each way to conduct the study. Though Luc had had little formal education, Albert, a university graduate, was deeply impressed by his strong faith in the Scriptures and his practical application of the material. How happy Albert was to discover that mankind's suffering is not God's fault but, rather, that Jehovah purposes to end all suffering and to make this earth into a paradise. (Psalm 37:9-11) Bible truths cou-



Albert and Luc

pled with the fine conduct that he observed among members of the congregation touched Albert's heart.

However, just as a raw diamond has to be painstakingly cut by a skilled craftsman in order to sparkle, so Albert needed to remove layers of worldliness in order to harmonize his life with God's righteous standards. He stopped consulting spirit mediums, quit abusing alcohol, and gave up gambling. Albert found it much harder to quit smoking. When he finally prayed intensely to Jehovah for help, he succeeded. Six months later, he legalized his marriage. His wife began studying the Bible. Now both are baptized servants of Jehovah.

▼ Kingdom Hall in Conakry



Martin is another spiritual diamond. He started studying the Bible in Guéckédou when he was 15 years old. His Catholic parents opposed his attending meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. They destroyed Martin's Bible literature, beat him, and chased him from the family home. Just as a diamond is formed when carbon is subjected to extreme pressure, so Martin grew firm in his love for Bible truth as a result of opposition. In time, his parents' attitude softened, and he returned home. What accounted for his parents' change of heart? They noticed a great difference between Martin's conduct and that of his younger siblings, who had developed a rebellious spirit and had become involved in sexual immorality. Convinced that Martin's new faith was good for him, his father welcomed congregation members into the home. Martin's mother has thanked the brothers many times for all they have done to help her son. Baptized at 18 years of age, Martin later attended



Ernestine

the Ministerial Training School and is now serving as a special pioneer minister.

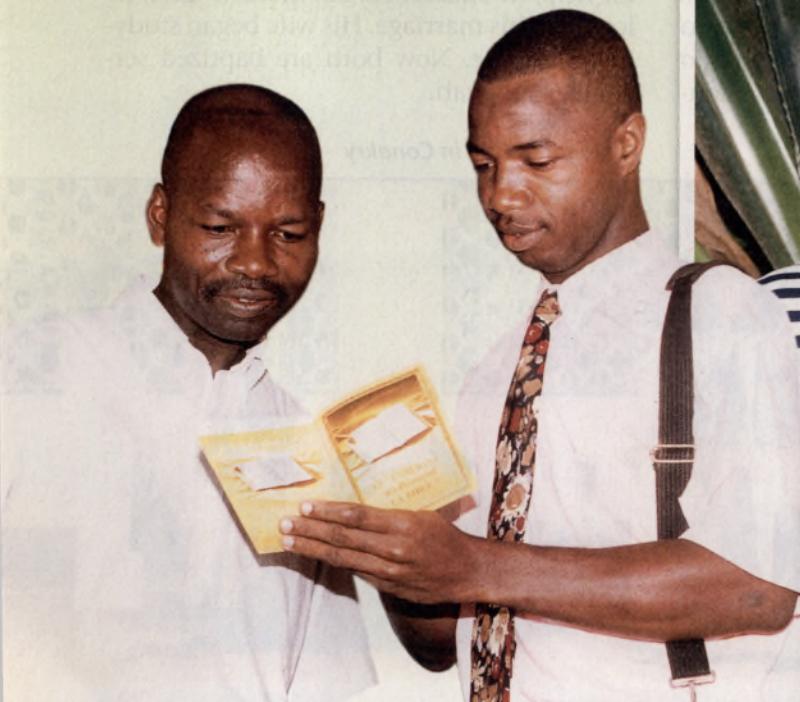
Imported Spiritual Riches

While Guinea exports much of her natural resources, some of her spiritual riches have been "imported." Many people have emigrated from other African nations, usually for economic reasons. Others have come to escape long and cruel wars.

Ernestine, from Cameroon, came to Guinea 12 years ago. She studied with Jehovah's Witnesses and attended meetings year after year without getting baptized. In 2003, tears filled her eyes as she watched the baptism at a circuit assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses. Overcome with feelings of guilt, she prayed to Jehovah: "I am now 51 years old, and I have done nothing good for you. I want to serve you." Afterward, Ernestine acted in



Zainab



Martin

harmony with her humble prayer. She explained to the man with whom she was living that they could stay together only if they got legally married. He agreed, and she later shed tears of joy at her own baptism in November 2004.

Since the early 1990's, Guinea has welcomed thousands of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, including hundreds of Jehovah's servants. Soon after arriving in a refugee camp, the brothers arrange for regular meetings, organize the preaching work, and build a Kingdom Hall. Some people have become servants of Jehovah in refugee camps. Isaac is one of these. After his baptism, the possibility arose for Isaac to return to his former position at a large Liberian company. He chose instead to remain in the Lainé refugee camp as a regular pioneer. He explains: "Now I don't have to ask permission from a boss to attend meetings or an assembly. I am free to serve Jehovah." In December 2003, a district convention was held in this remote camp for the 150 Witnesses living among the 30,000 refugees. Happily, 591 attended, including 9 deaf persons who followed the program in sign language. Twelve were baptized. The brothers deeply appreciated the efforts made to provide a spiritual banquet for them.

"Desirable Things" Make Needed Changes

No obstacle seems to be too great for those seeking gold and diamonds. It is heartwarming, however, to see the efforts new ones make to overcome all obstacles in order to serve Jehovah. Consider Zainab's case.

At the age of 13, Zainab was forced into child slavery. She was taken to Guinea from her home in another West African country. At the age of 20, she came across the message of the Bible. She was eager to apply what she was learning.

Attending Christian gatherings for worship was difficult for Zainab. But she deeply appreciated the meetings and was determined not to miss them. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) She would hide her books outside in order to retrieve them on the way to the meetings. On several occasions, she was brutally beaten by her "owners" for attending these spiritual gatherings.

Circumstances later changed, and Zainab was freed. She immediately began to attend all the meetings, which helped her to make rapid spiritual progress. She refused a high-paying job that would have prevented her from attending the meetings to receive Christian instruction. She enrolled in the Theocratic Ministry School, became an unbaptized Kingdom publisher, and later symbolized her dedication to Jehovah by water baptism. Right after that, she engaged in the auxiliary pioneer ministry. Six months later, she applied to serve as a regular pioneer minister.

After attending a few meetings, one interested person stated: "I don't feel poor when I'm here." While many people are interested only in Guinea's material riches, those who love Jehovah are eagerly searching for spiritual riches. Yes, "the desirable things of all the nations" are turning to Jehovah's pure worship today!

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Reliable Advice for Raising Children

**Do You Share Jehovah's View
of Sacred Things?**

**Showing Respect for Our
Sacred Gatherings**

Jewish Ritual Bathing

A FORERUNNER OF BAPTISM?

JOHN THE BAPTIZER preached "baptism in symbol of repentance." Jesus too commanded his followers to make disciples and to baptize them.—Mark 1:4; Matthew 28:19.

The Bible indicates that Christian baptism requires complete immersion in water. "Similar rites," claims the book *Jesus and His World*, "can be observed in many religions, past and present, across geographical and cultural boundaries." The book asserts that "the origins of Christian baptism . . . are found in Judaism." How sound is this claim?

Jewish Ritual Bathing Pools

Archaeologists digging close to Jerusalem's Temple Mount have discovered nearly 100 ritual baths, or bathing pools, dating to the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. A synagogue inscription from the second or third century C.E. speaks of such baths being provided for "visitors who need them." Other pools have been found in the quarter of Jerusalem that was occupied by wealthy and priestly families; nearly every house had its own private ritual bath.

The baths were rectangular tanks hewed out of rock or dug into the earth and lined with brick or stone. They were plastered to prevent leaks. Most measured about six feet by nine feet. Conduits channeled rainwater into the tanks. The water was at least four feet deep so as to per-

mit complete immersion by crouching. The steps leading down into the water were sometimes divided by a low partition wall. It is thought that one side of the steps was used to enter the purifying bath, when the bather was unclean, and the other side to exit, to avoid any contamination.

The baths were used in connection with Jewish ritual purity. What did this entail?

The Law and Tradition on Bathing

The Mosaic Law emphasized the need for God's people to be clean, both spiritually and physically. The Israelites incurred various forms of uncleanness from which they



had to purify themselves by bathing their bodies and washing their clothes.—Leviticus 11:28; 14:1-9; 15:1-31; Deuteronomy 23:10, 11.

Jehovah God is absolutely pure and holy. So priests and Levites were required, on pain of death, to wash their hands and their feet before approaching his altar.—Exodus 30:17-21.

Scholars believe that by the first century C.E., the Jewish religious establishment had extended the requirements for priestly cleansing to non-Levites. Both the Essenes and the Pharisees practiced frequent ablutions. One source reports regarding Jesus' time: "Ritual purity was required of a Jew before entering the Temple Mount, before making a sacrifice, before receiving the benefit of a priestly offering and for other similar purposes." Talmudic texts state that bathers were expected to immerse themselves completely.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their insistence on ritual cleansing. They evidently practiced "various baptisms," including those for "cups and pitchers and copper vessels." Jesus said that the Pharisees overstepped God's commandments to impose their own traditions. (Hebrews 9:10; Mark 7:1-9; Leviticus 11:32, 33; Luke 11:38-42) No part of the Mosaic Law required complete bodily immersion.

Is the origin of Christian baptism to be found in the ritual bathing practiced by the Jews? No!

Ritual Bathing and Christian Baptism

The Jews performed cleansing rites upon themselves. The baptism John performed, though, was not a kind of ritual bathing familiar to the Jews. That John came to be known as the Baptizer indicates that the immersion he performed was different. Jewish

religious leaders even sent a delegation to him to inquire: "Why . . . do you baptize?" —John 1:25.

The cleansing required by the Mosaic Law had to be repeated as often as a worshipper became unclean. This was not true of the baptism John performed nor of that later practiced by Christians. John's baptism indicated repentance and a rejection of a former life course. Christian baptism symbolized the fact that a person had dedicated himself to God. The Christian did so once, not over and over again.

The ritual bathing performed in the homes of the Jewish priests and in the public baths close to the Temple Mount bore nothing more than a superficial resemblance to Christian baptism. The respective meanings of these immersions were completely different. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* observes: "A scholarly consensus holds that John [the Baptizer] did not take over or adapt any particular baptism from his milieu," that is, from Judaism. The same can be said of the baptism practiced in the Christian congregation.

Christian baptism represents "the request made to God for a good conscience." (1 Peter 3:21) It symbolizes that an individual has wholly dedicated himself to Jehovah to serve Him as a disciple of His Son. Complete immersion in water is an appropriate symbol of such a dedication. A person's going under the water represents his dying to his former life course. Being raised out of the water symbolizes his being made alive to do God's will.

Jehovah God grants a good conscience to those who make such a dedication and are baptized. The inspired apostle Peter could thus tell fellow believers: "[Baptism] is also now saving you." That is something that no amount of Jewish ritual bathing could ever achieve.



A Roman
milepost

ROMAN ROADS MONUMENTS TO ANCIENT ENGINEERING

WHICH is the most significant of Roman monuments? Would you say the Colosseum, the ruins of which are visible in Rome? If we want to consider the Roman constructions that have lasted the longest or that have helped to shape history, we would have to think about the roads.

More than just goods and armies have passed over Roman highways. Epigraphist Romolo A. Staccioli says that along the road "moved ideas, artistic influences, and philosophical and religious doctrines," including those of Christianity.

In ancient times, Roman roads were considered monuments. Over a period of centuries, the Romans built an efficient network that ultimately stretched for over 50,000 miles in an area that now belongs to more than 30 countries.

The first important *via publica*, or highway as it would be called today, was the Via Appia, or Appian Way. Known as the queen of roads, it linked Rome with Brundisium (now called Brindisi), the port city that was the gateway to the East. This road took its name from Appius Claudius Caecus, the Roman official who started building it about 312 B.C.E. Rome was also served by the Via Salaria and the Via Flaminia, both of which stretched east toward the Adriatic Sea, opening up the way to the Balkans as well

as to the Rhine and Danube regions. The Via Aurelia headed north toward Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula, and the Via Ostiensis toward Ostia, Rome's preferred port for voyages to and from Africa.

Rome's Biggest Construction Project

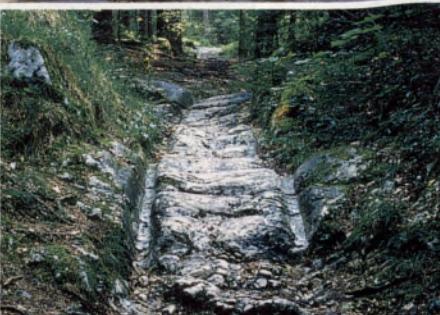
Roads were important to Rome even before her inhabitants started building new ones. The city arose where ancient routes converged at the only existing ford of the lower Tiber River. According to ancient sources, to improve the roads they found, the Romans copied the Carthaginians. But the real forerunners of the Romans in the art of road construction were probably the Etruscans. The remains of their roads are still visible. Moreover, before Roman times many well-traveled paths existed in the area. These may have been used to take animals from one pasture to another. The roads were difficult to travel, however, as they were dusty in the dry season and muddy in the wet. The Romans often built their roads over such tracks.

Roman roads were carefully designed and were built to be solid, useful, and beautiful. Ideally, the roads connected a starting point with a destination by means of the shortest possible route, which explains why many have long straight stretches. Often, though, the roads had to follow the natural contours of the terrain. Where possible, in hilly and mountainous areas, Roman engineers built their roads halfway up the slopes, along the sunny side of the mountain. For road users, this position minimized any inconvenience

Via Appia on the outskirts of Rome



A road in ancient Ostia, Italy



Ruts made by ancient carriages, Austria



Part of a Roman road with mileposts, Jordan

that might be caused by adverse weather conditions.

Just how did the Romans build their roads? There were variations, but here is basically what archaeological excavations have revealed.

The course of the road was first defined. This job was assigned to the surveyors of that era. Then, the backbreaking work of digging was left to legionnaires, laborers, or slaves. Two parallel trenches were dug.

The minimum distance between them was about 8 feet, but the usual distance was 14 feet, and they were even wider on curves. Finished road width could reach a total of 33 feet, including footpaths on both sides. The earth between the two trenches was then removed, forming a hollow. Once a solid base was reached, the hollow was filled in with three or four layers of different materials. First might be large stones or rubble. Then would come pebbles

Far left, Ostia: ©danilo donadoni/Marca/age fotostock;
far right, road with mileposts: Pictorial Archive (Near Eastern History) Est.

or flat stones, perhaps held together with concrete. This was followed with compressed gravel or crushed stones on top.

The surface of some Roman roads was no more than compacted gravel. Yet, it was the paved roads that sparked the admiration of the ancients. The top surface of such roads was formed by large stone slabs, usually of rock that could be found locally. They were cambered, having a slight upward curve, to favor rainwater drainage from the crown of the road into gutters on either side. This construction has contributed to the durability of these monuments and the survival of some until our day.

About 900 years after the Appian Way was built, Byzantine historian Procopius described it as "marvelous." Concerning the slabs that formed its surface, he wrote: "Despite the great amount of time that has elapsed and the many carriages that have passed over them day after day, their compo-



*Ruins of tombs on the
Via Appia outside Rome*

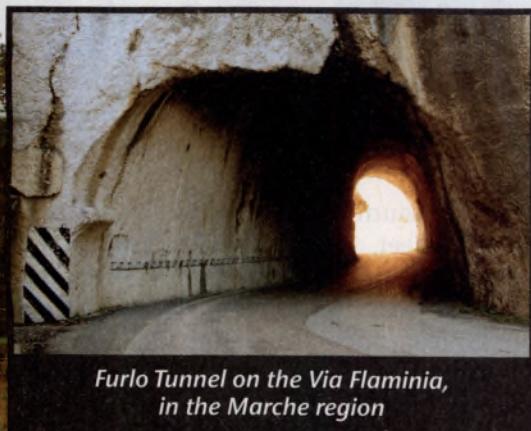
sure has not in any way been disturbed, nor have they lost their smooth finish."

How could these roads pass over natural obstacles, such as rivers? One key was bridges, some of which still stand, testifying to the outstanding technical ability of the ancient Romans. The tunnels in the Roman road system are perhaps less well-known, but their construction was even more chal-

lenging, given the techniques of that era. Says one reference work: "Roman engineering . . . obtained results that were destined to remain unmatched for centuries." An example is the tunnel at the Furlo pass on the Via Flaminia. Back in 78 C.E., after careful planning by engineers, a 130-foot tunnel, 16 feet wide and 16 feet high, was dug out of solid rock. That was a truly impressive accomplishment, considering the tools available at the time. Building such a road system was one of the greatest of human enterprises.

Travelers and the Spread of Ideas

Soldiers and tradesmen, preachers and tourists, actors and gladiators all used these roads. Those traveling on foot could cover some 15 to 20 miles a day. Travelers could get information about distances by consulting the mileposts. These stones of various shapes, usually cylindrical, were positioned every 4,854 feet—the length of a Roman mile. There were also rest areas, where travel-



*Furlo Tunnel on the Via Flaminia,
in the Marche region*

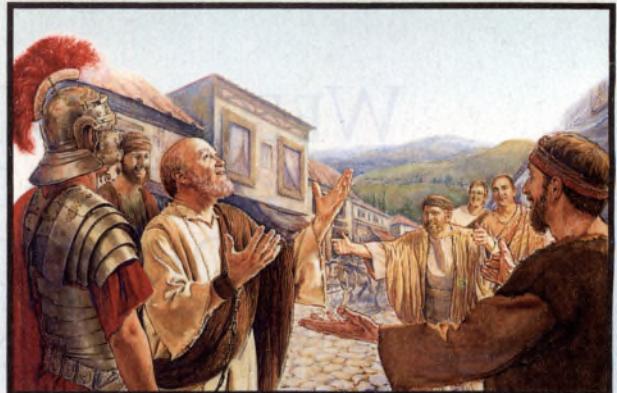


ers could change horses, buy something to eat or, in some cases, stay overnight. Some of these service areas developed into little towns.

Shortly before the birth of Christianity, Caesar Augustus started a road maintenance program. He appointed officials to care for one or more roads. He had what was known as the *miliarium aureum*, the golden milepost, erected in the Roman Forum. This column with gilded bronze letters was the ideal end-point of all Roman roads in Italy. This gave rise to the proverb: "All roads lead to Rome." Augustus also had maps of the empire's road system put on display. It seems that the network was in optimum condition for the needs and standards of the times.

Some ancient travelers even used written guides, or itineraries, to facilitate their journeys. These guides provided such information as distances between the various stopping places and descriptions of services that were available at such locations. The guides, however, were expensive and therefore not available to everyone.

Even so, Christian evangelizers planned and undertook many long-distance journeys. The apostle Paul, like his contemporaries, tended to travel by sea when he was going eastward, to take advantage of the prevailing winds. (Acts 14:25, 26; 20:3; 21:1-3) In the Mediterranean, these blow from the west during the summer months. When Paul traveled westward, however, he often went over-



Paul met fellow believers at the busy Appii Forum, or Marketplace of Appius

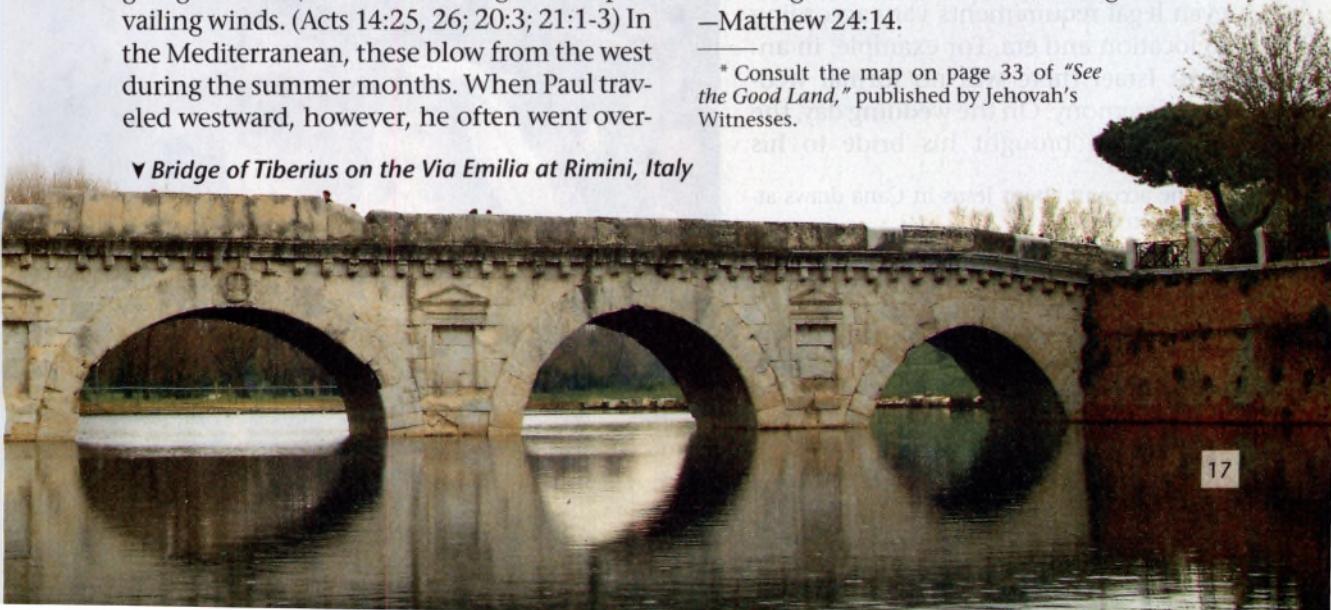
land, using the Roman road system. Following this pattern, Paul organized his second and third missionary journeys. (Acts 15:36-41; 16:6-8; 17:1, 10; 18:22, 23; 19:1)* In about 59 C.E., Paul traveled along the Appian Way to Rome and met fellow believers at the busy Appian Forum, or Marketplace of Appius, 46 miles southeast of Rome. Others awaited him nine miles closer to Rome at the rest area of Three Taverns. (Acts 28:13-15) About 60 C.E., Paul was able to say that the good news had been preached "in all the world" as then known. (Colossians 1:6, 23) The road system had a role in making that possible.

Roman roads, then, have proved to be extraordinary and lasting monuments—and ones that have contributed to the spreading of the good news of God's Kingdom.

—Matthew 24:14.

* Consult the map on page 33 of "See the Good Land," published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

▼ Bridge of Tiberius on the Via Emilia at Rimini, Italy



WEDDINGS THAT ARE HONORABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD AND MAN

"A marriage feast took place in Cana . . . Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the marriage feast."—JOHN 2:1, 2.

JESUS, his mother, and some of his disciples knew the joy that an honorable wedding among God's people can bring. Christ even made one wedding outstanding by performing his first recorded miracle there, adding to the pleasure of that event. (John 2:1-11) You may have attended and enjoyed weddings of Christians who want to serve Jehovah as happily married people. Or you may look forward to having such a wedding yourself or to helping a friend to make his or her wedding a success. What can contribute to that outcome?

² Christians have found that the advice in God's inspired Word is very helpful when a man and a woman plan to get married. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Granted, the Bible does not outline exact procedures for a Christian wedding. That is understandable because customs and even legal requirements vary according to location and era. For example, in ancient Israel there was no formal wedding ceremony. On the wedding day, the bridegroom brought his bride to his

1. The account about Jesus in Cana draws attention to what?
2. What information does the Bible contain about weddings?

In an ancient Israelite wedding, the groom brought the bride to his own home or to his father's

own home or to his father's. (Genesis 24:67; Isaiah 61:10; Matthew 1:24) This public step constituted the wedding, without the formal ceremony common in many weddings today.

³ The Israelites recognized that step as constituting the marriage or wedding. Thereafter, they might share in a celebratory feast, such as that mentioned at John 2:1. Many Bible versions render that verse something like this: "There was a *wedding* in Cana."

3. To what event in Cana did Jesus contribute?



But the original-language word is well rendered "marriage feast" or "wedding banquet."⁴ (Matthew 22:2-10; 25:10; Luke 14:8) The account makes it clear that Jesus was present at and contributed to a feast linked to a Jewish wedding. A key point, however, is that what constituted such a wedding back then differs from what is common now.

⁴ In many countries today, Christians who want to marry must meet certain legal requirements. Once they do so, they may wed in any legally accepted manner. That could be in a small, simple ceremony that is conducted by a judge, mayor, or minister authorized by the State. Some choose to marry in such a way, possibly asking a few relatives or Christian friends to be present as legal witnesses or just to share in the joy of this important occasion. (Jeremiah 33:11; John 3:29) Similarly, other Christians may choose not to hold a sizable wedding feast or reception that would require considerable planning and cost. They may arrange, instead, for a quiet meal with some close friends. Whatever our personal preferences in this regard may be, we should recognize that other mature Christians may have viewpoints different from our own.—Romans 14:3, 4.

⁵ Most Christian couples choose to have a Bible-based talk at their wedding.⁵ They recognize that Jehovah originated marriage and provides in his Word wise advice on how marriage can succeed and bring happiness.

⁴ The same word might be used for a feast that was not connected to a marriage.—Esther 9:22, Septuagint.

⁵ An outline for a 30-minute marriage discourse entitled "Honorable Marriage in God's Sight" is used by Jehovah's Witnesses. This draws on fine Scriptural advice found in the book *The Secret of Family Happiness* and other publications of Jehovah's Witnesses. The discussion is helpful for the couple getting married and for all attending the wedding.

4. What type of wedding do some Christians choose, and why?

5. Why do many Christians want to have a wedding talk when they marry, and what does it feature?

(Genesis 2:22-24; Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 5:22-33) And most couples want Christian friends and relatives to share in the happy occasion. Yet, how are we to view the great variety of legal requirements, procedures, and even prevailing local practices? This article will consider situations in various regions. Some may differ considerably from what you know of or from what is done in your area. Nevertheless, you can note certain common principles or aspects that are important to God's servants.

Honorable Marriage—Legal Marriage

⁶ While Jehovah originated marriage, human governments have some control over the actions of those getting married. This is appropriate. Jesus said: "Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Mark 12:17) Similarly, the apostle Paul directed: "Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God; the existing authorities stand placed in their relative positions by God." —Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1.

⁷ In most lands Caesar, or the civil authority, determines who is eligible to marry. Thus, when two Christians who are Scripturally free choose to get married, they conscientiously comply with local law. This may involve obtaining a license, using a State-authorized marrying agent, and perhaps registering the completed marriage. When Caesar Augustus required a "registration," Mary and Joseph complied, traveling to Bethlehem "to get registered."—Luke 2:1-5.

⁸ When two Christians marry in a way that is legal and recognized, that union is binding in God's eyes. Hence, Jehovah's Witnesses

6, 7. Why should we be interested in the legal aspects of getting married, and how might we manifest this?

8. How binding is marriage, and what policy of Jehovah's Witnesses reflects that understanding?

do not repeat a marriage by having multiple legal ceremonies, nor do they renew marriage vows, such as on a couple's 25th or 50th wedding anniversary. (Matthew 5:37) (Some churches ignore a legally approved civil marriage ceremony, claiming that it is not really a proper marriage unless a priest or a clergyman performs a ritual or declares the couple man and wife.) In many lands, the government authorizes a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses to solemnize marriages. If that is possible, he would likely want to do so along with a wedding talk at the Kingdom Hall. That is the local place of true worship and an appropriate location for a talk about this arrangement, which Jehovah God instituted.

⁹ In other countries, the law requires that a couple marry at a government office, such as city hall, or before a designated civil agent. Christians often choose to follow up that legal step with a wedding talk at the Kingdom Hall on the same day or the next. (They would not want many days to pass between the civil ceremony and the Bible talk, for they are married before God and man, including the Christian congregation.) If a couple who will have a civil marriage desire to have a talk at a certain Kingdom Hall, they should beforehand seek the permission of the elders forming the Congregation Service Committee. In addition to confirming that the couple have a good reputation, these overseers will make sure that the timing of the wedding will not interfere with the regular meetings and scheduled programs at the hall. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) They will also review any preparations of the hall that the couple may request and decide whether there will be an announcement made about its use.

9. (a) In the case of a civil marriage, what might a Christian couple choose to do? (b) How might the elders be involved in the wedding plans?

¹⁰ The elder giving the wedding talk will strive to make the discussion warm, spiritually upbuilding, and dignified. If the couple were first joined in a civil marriage, he will make it clear that they were married according to Caesar's law. If marriage vows were not exchanged in the civil ceremony, the couple may want to do so during the talk.* If that civil ceremony included vows but the newly married couple want to say vows before Jehovah and the congregation, they would do so in the past tense, showing that they were already "yoked together."—Matthew 19:6; 22:21.

¹¹ In certain places, the law may not require a couple to get married in any ceremony, even before a government agent. The marriage occurs when they present a signed marriage registration form to an official. Thereupon, a marriage certificate is registered. In this way the couple are looked upon as husband and wife, this being the date of their marriage. As noted above, the couple who are thus married may want to follow that registration right away with a Bible-based talk at the Kingdom Hall. The spiritually mature brother selected to give the talk will inform all attending that the couple are married by reason of the registration that just took place. Any vows would be handled in accord with what is outlined in

* Unless local law requires something else, these vows that honor God are used. For the groom: "I [name of groom] take you [name of bride] to be my wedded wife, to love and to cherish in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian husbands, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God's marital arrangement." For the bride: "I [name of bride] take you [name of groom] to be my wedded husband, to love and to cherish and deeply respect, in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian wives, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God's marital arrangement."

10. If there must be a civil marriage, how would this affect the wedding talk?

11. In certain places, how does a couple get married, and with what impact on the wedding talk?



After a customary marriage, Christians may wish to have a talk at the Kingdom Hall

paragraph 10 and its footnote. Those in attendance at the Kingdom Hall will rejoice with the couple and benefit from the counsel given from God's Word.—Song of Solomon 3:11.

Customary and Civil Marriages

¹² In some countries, couples enter into what may be called a customary (or, tribal) marriage. This does not refer to two individuals just living together, nor does it refer to a common-law situation that may have a degree of status in some locales but is not a full legal marriage.* We are speaking of a marriage entered into according to the publicly

* The Watchtower of May 1, 1962, page 287, offers comments about common-law marriage.

12. What is a customary marriage, and what is advisable after such a marriage?

recognized custom of the tribe or area. This may involve the full payment and acceptance of a bride-price, by which the couple are legally and Scripturally married. The government views such customary marriage as valid, legal, and binding. Thereafter, it is usually possible to record or register the customary marriage that occurred, and upon doing so, the couple may receive an official certificate. Registration can offer protection for the couple or for the wife if she becomes a widow and for any future children. The congregation would urge any who enter such a customary marriage to register it as soon as possible. Interestingly, it seems that under the Mosaic Law, marriages and births were officially recorded.—Matthew 1:1-16.

¹³ The couple legally united in such a customary process become husband and wife when that marriage occurs. As noted above, Christians entering such a legal marriage may desire to have a marriage talk, with wedding vows, at the Kingdom Hall. If that is done, the speaker would acknowledge that the couple were already married in harmony with the laws of Caesar. There would be only one such talk. There is one marriage, in this case the legally valid customary (tribal) marriage, and one Scriptural talk. Keeping the two aspects as close together timewise as possible, preferably on the same day, contributes to honoring Christian marriage in the community.

¹⁴ In some lands where customary marriage is recognized as legal, there are also provisions for civil (or, statutory) marriage. A civil marriage is usually carried out before a government agent, and it may include both taking marriage vows and signing a registry. Some Christian couples prefer this civil marriage to a customary one. There is no legal need for both; each procedure is legally valid. What is said in paragraphs 9 and 10 about a wedding talk and vows applies here too. The main thing is that the couple are married in a

13. After a customary marriage, what is appropriate as to a wedding talk?

14. What might a Christian do if both a customary and a civil marriage are possible?

Do You Recall?

- Why should we be interested in both the legal and the spiritual aspects of weddings?
- If two Christians marry in a civil ceremony, what might they decide to have soon afterward?
- Why are wedding talks given at the Kingdom Hall?

way that is honorable before God and man.
—Luke 20:25; 1 Peter 2:13, 14.

Maintain Honor in Marriage

¹⁵ When a problem arose in the marriage of a Persian king, a chief adviser named Memucan gave advice that could have a positive effect—‘that all the wives give honor to their husbands.’ (Esther 1:20) In Christian marriages, that does not need to be decreed by any human king; wives want to honor their husbands. Comparably, Christian husbands assign their mates honor and praise them. (Proverbs 31:11, 30; 1 Peter 3:7) Linking honor to our marriage should not come only after many years. It should be manifest right from the outset, yes, from the wedding day on.

¹⁶ The man and the woman—the husband and the wife—are not the only ones who ought to show honor on the wedding day. If a Christian elder will deliver a wedding talk, that too should be marked by honor. The talk should be addressed to the couple. As part of honoring them, the speaker will not feature humor or folk sayings. He should not include overly personal observations that might embarrass the couple and the listeners. Rather, he will strive to be warm and upbuilding, highlighting the Originator of marriage and His outstanding advice. Yes, the elder’s dignified wedding discourse will contribute to a marriage that brings honor to Jehovah God.

¹⁷ You likely noted in this article many points about the legal details of marriage. Certain aspects may not directly apply in your locality. Yet, all of us ought to be aware of how important it is that wedding arrangements among Jehovah’s Witnesses manifest respect for local laws, for the requirements of Caesar. (Luke 20:25) Paul urged us: “Render

15, 16. How should honor be involved in a marriage?

17. Why is there a legal aspect to Christian weddings?

to all their dues, to him who calls for the tax, the tax; to him who calls for the tribute, the tribute; . . . to him who calls for honor, such honor." (Romans 13:7) Yes, it is fitting that Christians, right from the wedding day, honor the arrangement that God has in place for the present.

¹⁸ Many a Christian wedding is followed by

18. What optional feature of a wedding merits attention, and where can we find information on this matter?

a social gathering—a wedding feast, a meal, or a reception. Recall that Jesus chose to be present at one such feast. If there is such a gathering, how can counsel from the Bible help us to ensure that it too will bring honor to God and reflect well on the newlyweds and on the Christian congregation? The following article will consider that very matter.*

* See also the article "Increase the Joy and Dignity of Your Wedding Day," on page 28.

PROVE YOUR FAITH BY YOUR LIFE COURSE

"Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself."—JAMES 2:17.

AS A whole, the early Christians proved their faith by how they actually lived. The disciple James urged all Christians: "Become doers of the word, and not hearers only." He added: "As the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 1:22; 2:26) About 35 years after he wrote that, many Christians were continuing to prove their faith with appropriate works. But sadly, some were not. Jesus commended the congregation in Smyrna; yet, to many in the congregation in Sardis, he said: "I know your deeds, that you have the name that you are alive, but you are dead."—Revelation 2:8-11; 3:1.

² Accordingly, Jesus encouraged those in Sardis—and by extension all who would later

1. Why did the early Christians give attention to both faith and works?

2. What should Christians ask themselves about their faith?

read his words—to prove their first love for Christian truth and to be awake spiritually. (Revelation 3:2, 3) Each of us can ask himself: 'How about *my* deeds? Do my actions clearly show that I am doing my best to prove my faith by all I do, even in the areas not directly related to the preaching work or congregation meetings?' (Luke 16:10) Many aspects of life could be considered, but let us deal with just one: social gatherings, including those that often follow Christian weddings.

Small Social Gatherings

³ Most of us appreciate being invited to a gathering of happy Christians. Jehovah is "the happy God," who wants his servants to be happy. (1 Timothy 1:11) He had Solomon include in the Bible this reality: "I myself commended rejoicing, because mankind

3. What is the Biblical position about sharing in gatherings?

Even when inviting just a few people, be guided by "the wisdom from above"

have nothing better under the sun than to eat and drink and rejoice, and that it should accompany them in their hard work for the days of their life." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, 13; 8:15) Such rejoicing may be at a family meal or at some other small social gathering of true worshippers.—Job 1:4, 5, 18; Luke 10:38-42; 14:12-14.

⁴ If you are arranging such a gathering and are responsible for it, you should think through what is planned, even if you are inviting just a few believers for a meal and friendly conversation. (Romans 12:13) You will want to see that "all things take place decently," guided by "the wisdom from above." (1 Corinthians 14:40; James 3:17) The apostle Paul wrote: "Whether you are eating or drinking or doing anything else, do all things for God's glory. Keep from becoming causes for stumbling." (1 Corinthians 10:31, 32) What are some aspects needing particular attention? Considering such beforehand can help to ensure that what you and your guests do will manifest your faith in action.—Romans 12:2.

What Will the Gathering Be Like?

⁵ Many hosts have faced the issue of whether to serve alcoholic beverages. Such are not needed for a gathering to be upbuilding. Recall that Jesus provided a meal for a

4. A person who arranges a gathering should be interested in what?
5. Why should the host give careful thought to whether he will serve alcoholic beverages and have music?



sizable group that came to him—he multiplied bread and fish. The account does not say that he miraculously provided wine, although we know that he was able to do so. (Matthew 14:14-21) If you decide to serve alcoholic beverages at a gathering, be moderate as to how much there will be, and make sure that there are appealing alternatives for those who prefer them. (1 Timothy 3:2, 8; 5:23; 1 Peter 4:3) Definitely refrain from making anyone feel pressured to drink something that might bite "just like a serpent." (Proverbs 23:29-32) What about music or singing? If your gathering will include music, no doubt you will carefully select the songs, considering both rhythm and lyrics. (Colossians 3:8; James 1:21) Many Christians have found that playing *Kingdom Melodies* or even singing such songs together contributes to a good atmosphere. (Ephesians 5:19, 20) And, of course, check on the volume regularly so that the music neither stifles enjoyable conversation nor disturbs any neighbors. —Matthew 7:12.

⁶ At a social gathering, Christians may talk about various subjects, read some material

6. How can a host show that his is a living faith when it comes to conversation or other activities?

aloud, or relate interesting experiences. If the conversation strays, the host can tactfully redirect it. He should also be alert that no one person dominates the conversation. If he sees that developing, he can judiciously speak up and provide for variety, perhaps by drawing out the young ones or introducing a subject that invites varied comments. Both young and old will be delighted with this aspect of the gathering. If, as the organizer, you guide matters wisely and tactfully, your 'reasonableness will become known' to those present. (Philippians 4:5) They will sense that yours is a living faith, one that affects all phases of your life.

Weddings and Wedding Receptions

⁷ One special occasion for rejoicing is a Christian wedding. God's ancient servants, including Jesus and his disciples, willingly shared in such happy events, including associated feasting. (Genesis 29:21, 22; John 2: 1, 2) In recent times, however, experience has clearly shown that planning the social activities linked to weddings calls for special effort if they are to reflect good judgment and Christian balance. Yet, these are normal aspects of life that give a Christian opportunity to demonstrate his faith.

⁸ Many people who neither know nor care about godly principles view a wedding as an occasion for extremes, or perhaps one where extremes are excused. In one European magazine, a new wife said this about her "royal" wedding: 'We rode in a four-horse parade carriage followed by 12 horse-drawn cabs and a coach containing a band playing music. Then we had an exquisite menu and excellent music; it was superb. Just as I wanted, I was queen for the day.'

7. Why does planning weddings and related gatherings merit consideration?

8, 9. How do the practices at many weddings bear out what we read at 1 John 2:16, 17?

⁹ While practices may vary from land to land, those sentiments simply bear out what the apostle John wrote: "Everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world." Can you imagine a mature Christian couple wanting to have a "royal" wedding with a lavish fairytale reception? Rather, their outlook should take into account that "he that does the will of God remains forever."—1 John 2:16, 17.

¹⁰ Christian couples want to be both realistic and reasonable, and the Bible can help them. Significant as the wedding day is, they know that it is just the beginning of the married life of two Christians who have everlasting life ahead of them. They are not obligated to have a large wedding feast. If they do choose to have a gathering, they will want to calculate the expense of the gathering and consider its nature. (Luke 14:28) In their Christian life together, the husband will be the Scriptural head. (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22, 23) So the groom is primarily responsible for the wedding reception. Of course, he will lovingly consult with his wife-to-be on such matters as whom they want to or are able to invite to the wedding feast. It may not be possible or practical to invite all their friends and relatives; hence, some decisions may have to be made with modesty. The couple should be able to trust that if they cannot invite some fellow Christians, these will be understanding and will not be offended.—Ecclesiastes 7:9.

"Director of the Feast"

¹¹ If a couple choose to host a gathering to celebrate the wedding, how can they make

10. (a) For a reasonable wedding, why is planning essential? (b) How should decisions be made about those invited?

11. What role can a "director of the feast" play at a wedding?

sure that the occasion remains dignified? For some decades now, Jehovah's Witnesses have appreciated the wisdom of including an aspect mentioned in connection with the gathering Jesus attended in Cana. There was a "director of the feast," certainly a responsible fellow believer. (John 2:9, 10) Similarly, a wise groom will choose a spiritually mature Christian brother for this key role. Having ascertained the groom's wishes and tastes, the director of the feast can follow through on details both before and during the gathering.

¹² In line with what was discussed in paragraph 5, some couples choose to exclude alcoholic beverages from the wedding feast lest the abuse of such mar the happiness and success of the occasion. (Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11) Yet, if they include alcoholic beverages, the groom should see to it that these are served or made available in moderation. There was wine at the wedding Jesus attended in Cana, and he supplied wine of fine quality. Interestingly, the director of that feast commented: "Every other man puts out the fine wine first, and when people are intoxicated, the inferior. You have reserved the fine wine until now." (John 2:10) Surely Jesus did not contribute to any drunkenness, for he viewed such as reprehensible. (Luke 12:45, 46) In expressing surprise at the quality of the wine, the director made it clear that he had observed instances when some wedding guests did get drunk. (Acts 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:7) Hence, both the groom and the trustworthy Christian he designates as director of the feast ought to make sure that all present fol-



12. What should the groom consider regarding the use of alcoholic beverages?

low the clear directive: "Do not be getting drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery."—Ephesians 5:18; Proverbs 20:1; Hosea 4:11.

¹³ As is true of other gatherings, if there is to be music, due attention should be given to the volume so that it allows for easy conversation. One Christian elder noted: "As the evening progresses, when conversation becomes more animated or dancing commences, sometimes the volume of the music increases. What began as background music may become loud and hinder conversation. A wedding reception offers an opportunity for pleasant fellowship.

How sad it would be if loud music spoiled this opportunity!" Here, too, the groom and the director of the feast need to act responsibly, not relinquishing to musicians, whether hired or not, the control over the nature and volume of the music. Paul wrote: "Whatever it is that you do in word or in work, do everything in

the name of the Lord Jesus." (Colossians 3:17) When the guests go home after a wedding feast (or, reception), will they remember the music as reflecting that the couple were doing everything in the name of Jesus? That should be the case.

¹⁴ Yes, a well-arranged wedding can be fondly remembered. Adam and Edyta, who have been married for 30 years, commented on one wedding: "You could really feel the Christian atmosphere. There were songs praising Jehovah but also some other fine entertainment. Dancing and music were of secondary importance. It was pleasant and

13. What should a couple consider if they arrange to have music at a wedding feast, and why?

14. Christians should fondly remember what about a wedding?

upbuilding, and everything was in harmony with Bible principles." Clearly, the bride and groom can do much to show that they are proving their faith by their works.

Wedding Gifts

¹⁵ In many lands it is common for friends and relatives to give a gift to those getting married. If you choose to do so, what might you bear in mind? Well, recall the apostle John's comment about "the showy display of one's means of life." He linked such showiness, not with Christians who manifest their faith in actions, but with 'the world that is passing away.' (1 John 2:16, 17) In view of John's inspired observation, should the newlyweds identify to all the giver of each gift? Christians from Macedonia and Achaia made contributions to brothers in Jerusalem, but there is no indication that their names were publicized. (Romans 15:26) Many Christians who give a wedding present would want to remain anonymous rather than attract undue attention to themselves. In this regard, review Jesus' counsel found at Matthew 6:1-4.

¹⁶ Identifying the givers of gifts could lead to "stirring up competition" as to which is the better or the more costly gift. Thus, wise Christian newlyweds will refrain from publicly announcing the names of gift givers. Announcing the names of the givers might embarrass others who were perhaps unable to afford to give a gift. (Galatians 5:26; 6:10) Granted, it is not wrong for the bride and groom to know who gave a certain gift. They could possibly learn that from an appropriate card that accompanies the present but is not read publicly. When buying, giving, and receiving wedding gifts, we all have a chance

15. What Bible counsel can be applied in regard to wedding gifts?

16. How can newlyweds avoid hurting others' feelings when it comes to wedding gifts?

to prove that even in such a private matter, our faith is affecting our actions.*

¹⁷ Proving our faith certainly involves more than living morally, attending Christian meetings, and sharing in the preaching work. May each of us have a living faith that affects all that we do. Yes, we can show our faith by deeds "fully performed," including those in areas of life discussed above.—Revelation 3:2.

¹⁸ After Jesus set a fine example for his faithful apostles by the lowly act of washing their feet, he said: "If you know these things, happy you are if you do them." (John 13:4-17) In the locality where we live today, it may not be necessary or normal to wash the feet of another person, such as a guest in our home. As we have considered in this article, however, there are other aspects of life in which we can manifest our faith by loving, considerate actions, including those associated with social gatherings and Christian weddings. That is so whether we are getting married or are guests at a wedding or a subsequent happy gathering of Christians who want to show their faith by their actions.

* Additional aspects of weddings and associated receptions are treated in the following article, "Increase the Joy and Dignity of Your Wedding Day."

17. Christians should have what goal in regard to their faith and works?

18. How can the words at John 13:17 prove true in connection with Christian weddings and gatherings?

How Would You Answer?

How can you prove your faith

- when organizing a social gathering?
- when organizing a wedding or a reception?
- when giving or receiving wedding gifts?



Increase the Joy and Dignity of Your WEDDING DAY

MY WEDDING day was one of the most meaningful and joyful days of my life," said Gordon, who has been married for almost 60 years. What makes the wedding day so meaningful for true Christians? It is a day when they make a sacred promise to ones they dearly love—their mate and Jehovah God. (Matthew 22:37; Ephesians 5:22-29) Yes, couples planning to marry want to enjoy their wedding day, but they also want to honor the Originator of marriage.—Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:5, 6.

How can a groom enhance the dignity of this happy occasion? What can a bride do to show honor to her husband and to Jehovah? How can others who attend add to the joy of the wedding day? Considering some Bible principles will help to answer those questions, and applying those principles will minimize possible problems that could detract from this special occasion.

Who Is Responsible?

In many lands, a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses may legally officiate at a marriage ceremony. Even in places where the legal step must be performed by a civil agent, a couple may want to have a Bible-based talk. In such a talk, the groom is usually asked to reflect on the God-given role of the family head. (1 Corinthians 11:3) Accordingly, the groom has the prime responsibility for what happens at the wedding. Of course, the arrangements for the wedding ceremony itself and for any gathering that may follow

are usually made well in advance. Why may this present challenges?

One reason is that relatives on one side or the other may attempt to exert a dominant influence on wedding plans. Rodolfo, who has performed many weddings, notes: "At times, the groom comes under tremendous pressure from relatives, especially if they are helping to pay for the wedding reception. They may have strong opinions as to what should happen during the wedding ceremony and at the reception. This could undermine the groom's Scriptural role as the one responsible for the occasion."

Max, who has been performing wedding ceremonies for more than 35 years, observes: "I have noticed a trend toward the bride taking the lead in deciding what will take place at the wedding and at the reception, with the groom having less to say." David, who has also officiated at many weddings, comments: "Grooms may not be used to taking the lead and are commonly not sufficiently involved in the wedding preparations." How can the groom effectively shoulder his responsibility?

Communication Increases Joy

For the groom to carry out his responsibility for wedding preparations successfully, he must communicate effectively. The Bible pointedly says: "There is a frustrating of plans where there is no confidential talk." (Proverbs 15:22) However, much frustration can be avoided if the groom first discusses wedding preparations with the bride, fami-

ly members, and others who can give sound Bible-based advice.

Yes, it is vital that an engaged couple first discuss with each other the plans and possibilities. Why? Well, listen to some comments from Ivan and his wife, Delwyn, who have been happily married for many years but who came from different cultural backgrounds. Recalling their wedding plans, Ivan says: "I had definite ideas about what I wanted for my wedding, including a reception with all my friends present, a wedding cake, and my bride wearing a white wedding dress. Delwyn, on the other hand, wanted a small, simple wedding with no wedding cake. She even considered wearing something other than a wedding gown."

How did this couple work out these differences? By kind, honest communication. (Proverbs 12:18) Ivan adds: "We studied Bible-based articles on the subject of

weddings, such as those published in *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1984.* This material helped us to have a spiritual view of the occasion. In view of our different backgrounds, we had to compromise in several areas of personal choice. We met somewhere in the middle."

* Additional material appeared in *Awake!* of February 8, 2002, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

A couple should communicate openly but respectfully while planning their wedding

Aret and Penny followed a similar course. Regarding their wedding day, Aret says: "Penny and I discussed our different desires for the wedding, and we were able to reach a harmonious agreement. We prayed for Jehovah's blessing on the day. I also sought the advice of our parents and some other mature married couples in the congregation. Their suggestions were very helpful. As it turned out, our wedding was beautiful."

Maintaining Dignity in Dress and Grooming

It is understandable that both bride and groom want to be well-dressed for their wedding. (Psalm 45:8-15) They may spend time, effort, and money on appropriate clothing. Which Bible principles can help them to choose what is both dignified and attractive?

Consider what the bride wears for the occasion. While tastes vary from person to person and from country to country, the Bible's admonition is applicable everywhere. Women are "to adorn themselves in well-arranged dress, with modesty and soundness of mind." That applies to Christian women at all times, and it certainly includes the wedding day. The fact is that a joyful wedding does



not require "very expensive garb." (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3, 4) How satisfying when this advice is applied!

David, mentioned earlier, comments: "Most couples endeavor to follow Bible principles, and they deserve commendation. There have been cases, though, when the gowns of brides and bridesmaids were immodest, being very low-cut or see-through." In his meeting with the bride and groom beforehand, one mature Christian elder helps them to keep a spiritual perspective. How? By asking them whether the attire they have in mind would be modest enough to wear to a Christian meeting. Granted, the style of clothing might be different from regular meeting attire, and what is worn for the wedding may reflect local custom, but the level of modesty should accord with dignified Christian standards. Even if some in the world might view the Bible's moral code as restrictive, true Christians are content to resist the world's attempts to squeeze them into its mold.

—Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 4:4.

"Rather than viewing the clothes or the reception as the most important thing," says Penny, "Aret and I focused on the ceremony, the spiritual part of the occasion. It was the most important part of the day. The special things I remember are, not what I wore or ate, but whom I spent the day with and the happiness I felt at marrying the man I love." A Christian couple do well to keep such thoughts in mind as they plan their wedding.

The Kingdom Hall—A Dignified Venue

Many Christian couples desire to have their wedding ceremony in a Kingdom Hall if such is available. Why do they prefer this? One couple explained their reasoning: "We realized that marriage is Jehovah's sacred ar-

rangement. Getting married in the Kingdom Hall, our place of worship, helped impress upon us right from the start that Jehovah needed to be part of our marriage. Another benefit of having the ceremony in the Kingdom Hall instead of at another location was that it showed our nonbelieving relatives who attended how important worship of Jehovah is for us."

If the congregation elders responsible for the Kingdom Hall give permission for the wedding to be held there, the couple should advise them in advance of preparations that are being considered. One way the bride and groom can show due respect for those invited to the wedding is by being firmly resolved to arrive at the scheduled time for the wedding. And they will certainly want to be sure that everything is done in a dignified manner.* (1 Corinthians 14:40) They will thus avoid the outrageous displays that mark many worldly weddings.—1 John 2:15, 16.

Those who attend the wedding can also show that they have Jehovah's view of marriage. For example, they would not expect the wedding to outdo other Christian weddings, as if there were some competition as to whose wedding was more elaborate. Mature Christians also realize that being at the Kingdom Hall for the Bible-based talk is more important and beneficial than being at a wedding feast or a gathering that might follow. If time or circumstances will permit a Christian to be present for only one of the two, being at the Kingdom Hall would certainly be preferable. An elder named William says: "If guests are needlessly absent from the Kingdom Hall but are present at the reception later, this shows a lack of ap-

* If the couple plan to have someone photograph or record the ceremony at the Kingdom Hall, they should make sure beforehand that nothing that is done will detract from the dignity of the wedding.



preciation for the sacredness of the occasion. Even if we are not invited to the reception, we can show our support for the bride and groom and give an excellent witness to nonbelieving relatives at the wedding by attending the ceremony at the Kingdom Hall.”

Joy That Lasts Beyond the Wedding Day

The commercial world has turned the wedding celebration into a huge industry. According to one recent report, the average wedding in the United States “costs \$22,000, or half the average [annual] income of an American household.” Influenced by commercial propaganda, many newlyweds or their families incur for that one day a burdensome debt that they carry for years. Is such a course a prudent way to start one’s marriage? Those who do not know or do not care about Bible principles may opt for such extravagance, but how different it is among true Christians!

Keep the spiritual significance of your wedding day uppermost in mind

By limiting the size of their wedding to what is reasonable and affordable and by focusing on the spiritual aspect of the event, many Christian couples have been able to use their time and assets in line with their dedication to God. (Matthew 6:33) Consider the example of Lloyd and Alexandra, who have continued in the full-time ministry for 17 years since their marriage. Lloyd comments: “Some may have viewed our wedding as a rather simple event, but Alexandra and I were very pleased. We felt that our wedding day should be, not a financial burden to overcome, but a celebration of Jehovah’s arrangement to bring great happiness to two people.”

Alexandra adds: “I was in the pioneer ministry before we were married, and I did not want to give up this privilege just to have an extravagant wedding. Our wedding day was very special. However, it was only the first day of the rest of our lives together. We applied the advice to avoid concentrating too much on the act of *getting* married and have sought Jehovah’s guidance in our life of *being* married. This has definitely brought us Jehovah’s blessing.”*

Yes, your wedding day is a special occasion. The attitudes and actions evident on that day can set a pattern for your married life for years to come. Therefore, rely on Jehovah for guidance. (Proverbs 3:5, 6) Keep the spiritual significance of the day uppermost in mind. Support each other in your God-assigned roles. You can thus lay a solid foundation for your marriage, and with Jehovah’s blessing, you will have joy that lasts well beyond your wedding day.—Proverbs 18:22.

* See page 26 of the book *The Secret of Family Happiness*, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



“Why Are We Here?”

NOBEL Prize winner and Nazi Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once called it “the most important question a human being has to face.” What is it? The question, “Why are we here?”

Have you ever pondered that question? Many have, but the answer eludes them. In his attempt to identify life’s meaning, British historian Arnold Toynbee wrote: “Man’s true end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.”

Interestingly, over three millenniums ago, another man, who was noted for being a keen observer of life, had already identified the fundamental answer. Wise King Solomon said: “The conclusion of the matter, everything having been heard, is: Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man.”—Ecclesiastes 12:13.

This basic principle was supported by God’s Son, Jesus Christ. While on earth, Jesus made every effort to glorify his heavenly Father. Serving his Creator enriched Jesus’ life. It nourished and sustained him, enabling him to say: “My food is for me to do the will of him that sent me.”—John 4:34.

So why are we here? Like Jesus, Solomon, and many other servants of God, we can find true meaning and lasting happiness in life by doing God’s will. Would you like to know more about how to worship God “with spirit and truth”? (John 4:24) Jehovah’s Witnesses in your community will be happy to help you to answer the question, “Why are we here?”