June 15, 1988

The Watchtower

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom

World Rulership CHANGING

The Watchtower®
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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as the Sovereign of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as they 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 the 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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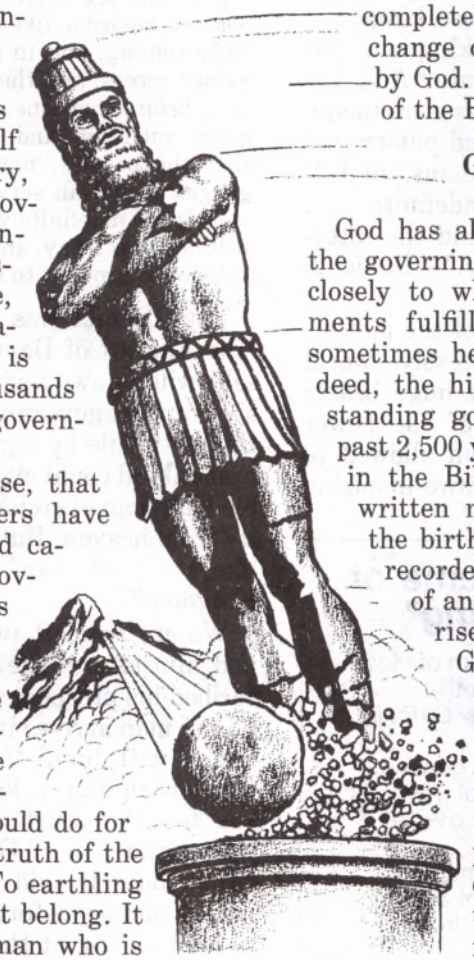
World Rulership Changing

IF YOU were able to choose, what kind of government would you want to live under? Most of us would likely choose a stable government that gave a reasonable amount of personal freedom. We would like a government that could control crime, promote peace, foster social justice, and develop material prosperity. Certainly, we would prefer a government that was not oppressive or corrupt.

Sadly, most governments have not been like this. When we consider the world as it is in the latter half of this 20th century, what do we see? Poverty, corruption, inefficiency, oppression, social injustice, crime, and international tension. This is the end result of thousands of years of human government.



It is true, of course, that some individual rulers have been fair-minded and capable. And some governmental systems have been relatively stable and effective for a time. But the failure of human government as a whole to do what we instinctively feel it should do for mankind proves the truth of the Bible's statement: "To earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10: 23) In other words, man was not made to govern himself without outside help.

That is why it is good to know that world rulership is changing. What do we mean by this expression? We mean that the day-to-day governing of the lives of humankind will soon be in the hands of an entirely new form of government that will be completely successful. This radical change of government was foretold by God. Indeed, it is the very theme of the Bible.

God's Concern About Government

God has always been concerned about the governing of mankind. He watches closely to what degree human governments fulfill their responsibility, and sometimes he calls them to account. Indeed, the histories of some of the outstanding governmental systems of the past 2,500 years of history were foretold in the Bible. In the book of Daniel, written more than 500 years before the birth of Christ, prophecies were recorded that foretold the downfall of ancient Babylon, as well as the rise and fall of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The prophecies even foretold the development of the Anglo-American World Power of our own day. A brief consideration of some of these prophecies will help us to understand what is meant by the statement that world rulership is changing.

The first of these amazing prophecies was an inspired dream in which the political world powers from Daniel's day down through our time were represented by a huge image. Then, a stone cut out, not by hands, struck and crushed this image. The stone ground these world powers to dust, "like the chaff from the summer threshing floor, and the wind carried them away so that no trace at all was found of them." —Daniel 2:31-43.

The very same chapter of Daniel explains what this meant. It shows that failing human governments would be replaced by something infinitely superior. It tells us: "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these [human] kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite . . . And the dream is reliable, and the interpretation of it is trustworthy."—Daniel 2: 44, 45.

But that was not the end of the matter. In a second vision, the successive world powers were represented by huge beasts having the characteristics of the power represented. Daniel was then allowed to see all the way up to the awe-inspiring heavenly throne of "the Ancient of Days," and he was shown something that would happen, not in his day but during the reign of the Anglo-American World Power of our time. He saw Jehovah's majestic heavenly Court sit in judgment on these world powers. (Daniel 7:2-12) As the following verses show, the divine decree was issued for a change in rulership. To whom would this rulership be given?

Someone Like a Son of Man

Daniel gives the thrilling answer:

"I kept on beholding in the visions of the night, and, see there! with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him. His rulership is an indefinitely lasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be brought to ruin."—Daniel 7:13, 14.

Thus Daniel was used to foretell that "the Ancient of Days," Jehovah God himself, will do away with misrule by oppressive human governments. He will replace this with rule by a government finer than humankind could ever imagine—an invisible Kingdom exercising power and authority from heaven. But who is this "someone like a son of man" who will receive the Kingdom?

We are not left in doubt. Jesus identified himself as "the Son of man." He described his presence as the time when "the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him." (Matthew 25:31) When the Jewish high priest demanded that Jesus tell the court whether he was "the Christ the Son of God," Jesus answered: "You yourself said it. Yet I say to you men, From henceforth you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power

"The Central Theme of Jesus' Teaching"

"The theme of the kingdom of God occupies a central place in the preaching of Jesus."—*New Catholic Encyclopedia.*

"[The Kingdom of God] is generally considered to be the central theme of Jesus' teaching."—*Encyclopædia Britannica.*

But when was the last time you heard that "central theme of Jesus' teaching" discussed in a church?

and coming on the clouds of heaven."* —Matthew 26:63, 64.

The Last Human World Power

Some 600 years after Daniel's time, the apostle John wrote the Bible book of Revelation under divine inspiration. That book refers to these world powers as mighty "kings," saying: "And there are seven kings: five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet arrived, but when he does arrive he must remain a short while." —Revelation 17:10.

The five that had already fallen when John wrote this were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The Roman Empire still 'was.' Obviously, the seventh, the Anglo-American World Power of our time, had not yet arrived. According to Revelation, no world power survives the seventh—the one that exists today. This is the last one. There will be no more.

However, that should not be a frightening thought—it is a thrilling one! It means that unjust, warring human rulership is near its end. The prophecies unite in telling of a momentous change in the way earth is ruled—a change from selfish human government to a righteous heavenly one, God's Kingdom.

The Kingdom Government

But what is that Kingdom? It is far more than just an influence for good in people's hearts and lives. It is also much more than the life of the so-called Christian church. God's Kingdom is a real government. It has a king, associate rulers, a territory, and subjects. And it will produce the marvelous blessings mentioned earlier.

Jesus is identified as King of the Kingdom. He likened himself to a man of noble birth who "traveled to a distant land to secure kingly power for himself and to return." Of that future time, he said: "When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne." —Luke 19:12; Matthew 25:31.

When would "the Son of man" arrive? We do not have to guess at the answer. Jesus' words here are part of his answer to the question: "What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matthew 24:3, 30) As has often been shown in the columns of this magazine, that "presence" began invisibly in the heavens at the end of "the appointed times of the nations" in 1914.* —Luke 21:24.

Just as Revelation chapter 12 said would happen, Jesus then took his power and hurled Satan from heaven down to the vicinity of the earth. A voice in heaven proclaimed: "Now have come to pass the salvation and the power and the *kingdom*

Confusion About the Kingdom of God

Some people have thought that "the church on earth" is the Kingdom of God, while others have believed that the present world "will develop under Christian influence until it becomes the Kingdom." Still others say that the Kingdom of God is the "reign of God in the heart and life of the individual."

But is this all there is to God's Kingdom—a religious system, gradual political change, or some spiritual condition in people's hearts?

* Regarding Daniel's vision, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says: "There can be little doubt that Daniel is here speaking of an event that is of eternal significance at the end of time." It adds: "The profession of Jesus before the Sanhedrin gives us indisputable evidence of His identification with the Son of Man and clear reference to His coming in power."

* See *The Watchtower* issues of May 1, 1982 and April 1, 1984.

of our God and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down." This explains the worsening of world conditions since that time. Thus, the voice in heaven continued: "Woe for the earth and for the sea, because the Devil has come down to you, having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time."—Revelation 12: 9-12.

That short time will soon expire. A few chapters later, the glorified Jesus is seen on a white horse. He is called "The Word of God," and he will "strike the nations" and "shepherd them with a rod of iron" —just as Daniel had shown that the nations would be crushed by God's stonelike Kingdom that would grow to fill the whole earth.—Revelation 19:11-16; Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45.

Never again will beastlike human political powers oppress mankind!

Associate Rulers

But there is more. Daniel was inspired to say that the Kingdom would be given not just to "someone *like a son of* man" but also "to the *people* who are the holy ones of the Supreme One."—Daniel 7:27.

Who are these? Revelation says of the Lamb, Christ Jesus: "You bought persons for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth." It further says that they will become "priests of God and of the Christ, and will rule as kings with him for the thousand years." Their number is given as 144,000. —Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1; 20:6.

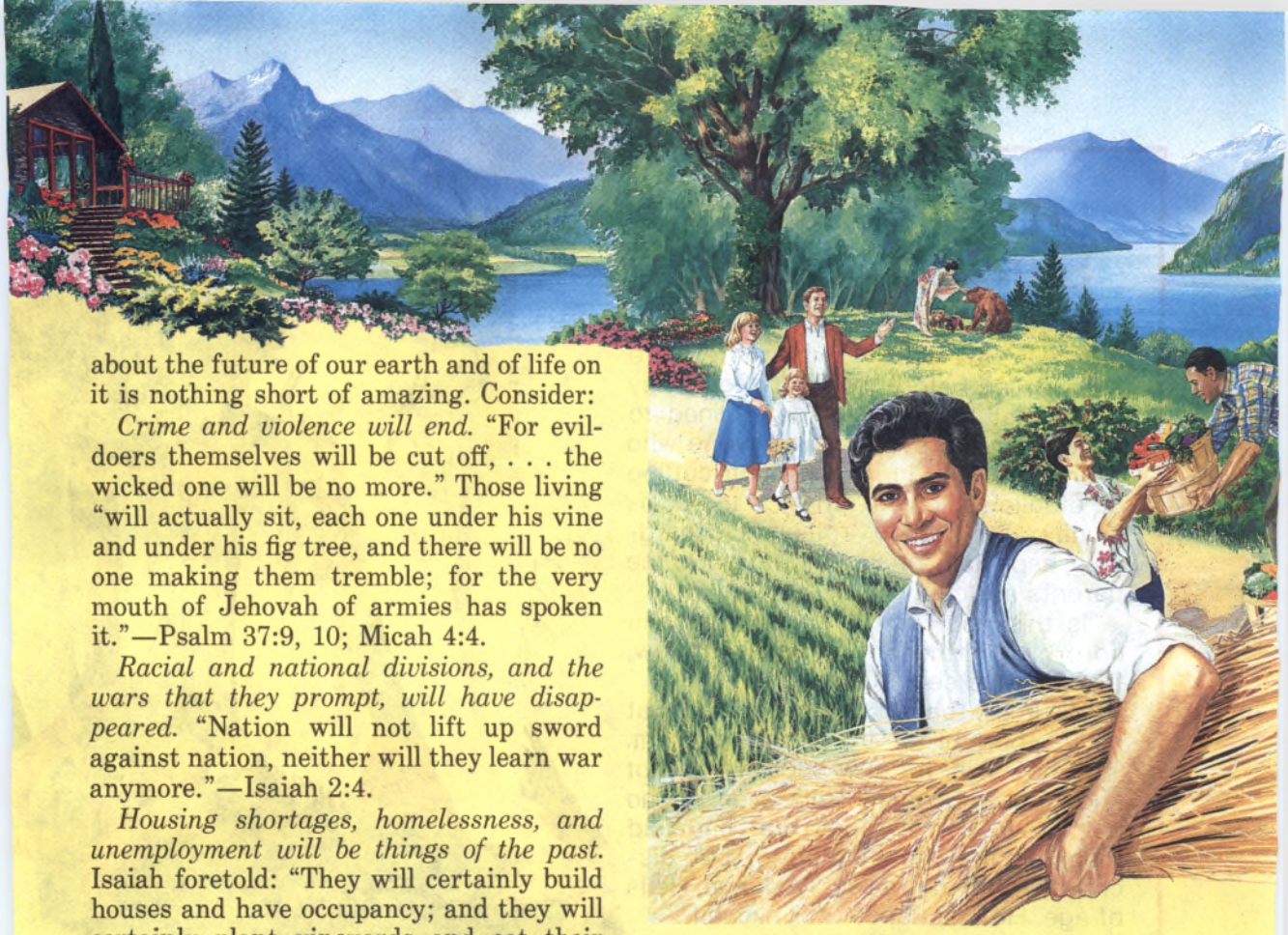
These are the ones whom the Most High God chooses for a share in world government with his Son, Jesus Christ. Could our future be in safer hands than in these God chooses? No, this Kingdom will be the best possible government—far superior to anything man has ever known. Under its rule all the earth will be transformed to the Paradise originally purposed by God.

Read the following article and see whether this is the kind of government you would choose to live under.

Earth's Bright Future Under God's Kingdom

THE Bible says that "faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for." (Hebrews 11:1) As we saw in the previous article, more than 500 years before the birth of Christ, God caused to be written in the book of Daniel a prophetic foreview of the rise and fall of world powers from Daniel's day down to our own. The accuracy of these prophecies assures us, gives us strong reason for faith, that the rest of Daniel's prophecies will also be fulfilled, and very soon God's Kingdom under Christ Jesus will replace human governments.

What a change that will mean for humanity! Looking forward to that time, God himself says: "Look! I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5) A consideration of some of the inspired prophecies that paint a picture for us of that happy time will help us to see just how "new" things will be, how completely different from what we see today under human rulership. Indeed, what the Bible says



People living now may look forward to marvelous blessings—the end of war, crime, poverty, sickness, and even death. Would you enjoy such a future?

about the future of our earth and of life on it is nothing short of amazing. Consider:

Crime and violence will end. "For evildoers themselves will be cut off, . . . the wicked one will be no more." Those living "will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble; for the very mouth of Jehovah of armies has spoken it."—Psalm 37:9, 10; Micah 4:4.

Racial and national divisions, and the wars that they prompt, will have disappeared. "Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore."—Isaiah 2:4.

Housing shortages, homelessness, and unemployment will be things of the past. Isaiah foretold: "They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. . . . And the work of their own hands my chosen ones will use to the full."—Isaiah 65:21, 22.

Horrible famines, such as those that have recently plagued parts of Africa, will be replaced by an abundance of food for all. "There will come to be plenty of grain on the earth; on the top of the mountains there will be an overflow." "The earth itself will certainly give its produce; God, our God, will bless us."—Psalm 72:16; 67:6, 7.

In addition, there will be health and life with which to enjoy these blessings. Even during Jesus' earthly ministry, it was truthfully said that "the blind are receiving sight, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed and the deaf are hearing." However, a far greater promise will apply: "He [God] will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Luke 7:22; Revelation 21:4.

What a magnificent change! What relief all of this will bring to distressed mankind! We encourage you to submit yourself even now to God's Kingdom, so that you too may reap the benefits that will come from this epochal change in world rulership.

The Pharisees' Stubborn Unbelief

THE parents of the once blind beggar are afraid when they are called before the Pharisees. They know that it has been determined to expel from the synagogue anyone who expresses faith in Jesus. Such cutting off of fellowship with others in the community can work a tremendous hardship, especially on a poor family. So the parents are cautious.

"Is this your son who you say was born blind?" the Pharisees ask. "How, then, is it he sees at present?"

"We know that this is our son and that he was born blind," the parents confirm. "But how it is he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know." Surely their son has told them all that has occurred, but discreetly the parents say: "Ask him. He is of age. He must speak for himself."

Therefore, the Pharisees again call the man. This time they try to intimidate him by indicating that they have gathered incriminating evidence against Jesus. "Give glory to God," they demand. "We know that this man is a sinner."

The once blind man does not deny their charge, observing: "Whether he is a sinner I do not know." But he adds: "One thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, I see at present."

Trying to find a flaw in his testimony, the Pharisees again ask: "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

"I told you already," the man complains, "and yet you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?" Sarcastically, he asks: "You do not want to become his disciples also, do you?"

This reply enrages the Pharisees. "You are a disciple of that man," they charge, "but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he is from."

Expressing surprise, the humble beggar responds: "This certainly is a marvel, that you do not know where he is

from, and yet he opened my eyes." What conclusion should be drawn from this? The beggar points to the accepted premise: "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to this one. From of old it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of one born blind." Thus, the conclusion should be obvious: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing at all."

The Pharisees have no answer for such straightforward, clear logic. They cannot face up to the truth, and so they revile the man: "You were altogether born in sins, and yet are you teaching us?" At this, they throw the man out, apparently expelling him from the synagogue.

When Jesus learns about what they have done, he finds the man and says: "Are you putting faith in the Son of man?"

"Who is he, sir," the once blind beggar answers, "that I may put faith in him?"

"He that is speaking with you is that one," Jesus replies.

Immediately, the man bows before Jesus and says: "I do put faith in him, Lord."

Jesus then explains: "For this judgment I came into this world: that those not seeing might see and those seeing might become blind."

At that, Pharisees who are listening ask: "We are not blind also, are we?" If they would acknowledge that they were mentally blind, there would be an excuse for their opposition to Jesus. As Jesus tells them: "If you were blind, you would have no sin." Yet, they hardheartedly insist that they are not blind and need no spiritual enlightenment. So Jesus observes: "Now you say, 'We see.' Your sin remains." **John 9:19-41.**

- Why are the parents of the once blind beggar afraid when they are called before the Pharisees, and so how do they answer cautiously?
- How do the Pharisees try to intimidate the once blind man?
- What logical argument of the man infuriates the Pharisees?
- Why are the Pharisees without excuse for their opposition to Jesus?

Do You Appreciate Sacred Things?

"Pursue peace with all people, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord, carefully watching . . . that there may be no fornicator nor anyone not appreciating sacred things, like Esau, who in exchange for one meal gave away his rights as firstborn."—HEBREWS 12:14-16.

JEHOVAH our God is a most generous Provider. He freely supplies the needs of all his creation. The majority of mankind, though, gives little thought to this. They neither thank Jehovah nor acknowledge their great debt to him. Christians, on the other hand, do not take Jehovah's goodness for granted. They honor him for what he does on their behalf. Because of their devotion to him, Jehovah has entrusted his people with a number of sacred things that are not enjoyed by mankind in general. These are precious things, set apart as holy and having to do with Jehovah's worship. Do you know what these sacred things are? And do you have a deep, heartfelt appreciation for them? —Psalm 104:10-28; Matthew 5:45; Revelation 4:11.

1. What lack of appreciation do most humans show, but how are Christians different?

[2] Not all of God's people have properly appreciated sacred things. Isaac's son Esau, for example, *failed* in this regard. Paul spoke of him when he wrote to anointed Hebrew Christians. After urging these ones to "pursue peace with all peo-

2. Who showed a notable lack of appreciation?

ple," he warned them to be sure that there would prove to be in their midst "no fornicator nor anyone not appreciating sacred things, like Esau, who in exchange for one meal gave away his rights as firstborn."—Hebrews 12:14-16.

[3] What were these rights of the firstborn? Jehovah promised Esau's grandfather, Abraham, that through him and his descendants one eventually would be born who would be the Seed of promise, the Messiah, or the Christ. By means of this Seed all nations would be able to bless themselves, leading to their being delivered from sin and death.—Genesis 22: 15-18; Galatians 3:16.

[4] Esau, Isaac's firstborn, had the opportunity to be a part of the line that would produce that Seed. This was part of his birthright. But to his shame, the Bible record states: "Esau despised the birthright." He impetuously sold it for one meal of lentil stew and some bread. Certainly, we do not want to imitate his lack of appreciation. We should, rather, develop the attitude of Esau's brother, Jacob. He was next in line for the birthright, which he bought in view of his brother's evident lack of appreciation. Jacob thus ensured that the right to be an ancestor of the promised Seed was passed on by one who properly valued this sacred thing.—Genesis 25:27-34.

[5] Within the Christian congregation, Jehovah has made available many sacred things to keep us spiritually strong and properly equipped for his service. Let us discuss a number of these. Then, individually, we can meditate on them and strengthen our appreciation for them so that we will never take them for granted.

3, 4. What were the sacred rights of the firstborn that Esau sold to Jacob for a bowl of stew?
5. What sacred things will we consider, and how can we avoid taking these for granted?

Jehovah's Name and the Ransom —Most Sacred

[6] First on our list of sacred things is *Jehovah's name.* How lofty is this name in your mind and heart? In giving the model prayer, Jesus said first: "Let your name be sanctified." (Matthew 6:9) When we get baptized, we become one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10, 11) What an honor! And when we talk about Jehovah's goodness and his grand purposes, others get to know him by his personal name, and they too want to serve him. But if one neglects to talk about him or, worse still, gets involved in wrongdoing, this brings reproach on Jehovah's good name and reputation. Jehovah's faithful Christian Witnesses strive always to sanctify his holy name before others by what they say and do.—Leviticus 22:31, 32; Deuteronomy 5:11.

[7] High on the list of sacred things is the *ransom sacrifice.* How precious is Christ's sacrifice to you? Only on the basis of complete faith in this perfect human sacrifice can we have our sins forgiven. (1 John 2: 1, 2) Paul speaks of the anointed congregation as being "purchased with the blood of [God's] own Son." (Acts 20:28; compare 1 Peter 1:17-19.) Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, gave up his position in heaven, lived on earth among sinful men and women, and then offered up his perfect human life in an agonizing death on the torture stake in order that we might have everlasting life. (Matthew 20:28) It would be the height of ungratefulness if one did not daily show deep appreciation for this precious gift of God.—Hebrews 10:28, 29; Jude 4, 5.

6. In what ways can we show that we do not take for granted the sacredness of Jehovah's name?
7. Why should we show utmost appreciation for the ransom sacrifice of Christ?

Our Relationship With Jehovah and His Organization

[8] This brings us to another very sacred matter, our *relationship with Jehovah.* How dearly we should cherish this intimacy we have with our heavenly Father. If we 'draw close to God, he will draw close to us.' (James 4:8) He loves us very much, and he wants us to love him with all our heart. (Matthew 22:37, 38; John 3:16) David gave his son Solomon sound counsel about his relationship with Jehovah. Included in this was a warning: "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a complete heart and with a delightful soul; for all hearts Jehovah is searching, and every inclination of the thoughts he is discerning. If you search for him, he will let himself be found by you; but if you leave him, he will cast you off forever." (1 Chronicles 28:9) So "keep yourselves in God's love, while you are waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ with everlasting life in view."—Jude 21.

[9] Do you appreciate also what a sacred privilege it is to be a part of *Jehovah's organization?* All of us must remember that we are in it only by the undeserved kindness of Jehovah. If a person proves unappreciative and becomes an unrepentant wrongdoer, he will lose this privilege. Paul warned: "Consequently let him that thinks he is standing beware that he does not fall." (1 Corinthians 10:6-12) Paul gave this warning after telling of the 23,000 Israelites who perished because of idolatry and immorality. We can show our appreciation for the sacredness of Jehovah's organization by each of us doing our part to keep it free of uncleanness, immorality, strife, commercialism, and feelings of superiority and prejudice. (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:14-16) We can work at strengthening the bond of brotherly love, while carefully observing theocratic order and cooperating with those taking the lead.—1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 5:12, 13.

8. How precious is our relationship with Jehovah?

9. In what ways do we show that we do not take for granted the privilege of being a part of Jehovah's organization?

God's Word, Laws, and Kingdom Hope

[10] God's inspired Word, the *Holy Bible,* is also sacred. It contains divine pronouncements, instructions, counsel, promises, revelations, yes, all we need to 'equip us for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) How can we show appreciation for this? First, by studying it and applying what we learn in our lives. Then, by properly heeding the Bible-based "food at the proper time" that Jehovah is providing through "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45) And from a practical standpoint, we need to keep our personal copies of the Bible, as well as the Christian publications that we use in our preaching activity, neat and clean. It might bring reproach on Jehovah if we go out witnessing and use a Bible that is badly soiled or unsightly.

10. How do we show that we appreciate fully the Holy Scriptures?

[11] In God's Word are Jehovah's *sacred laws.* Do you always view them as sacred, or do you at times tend to take them lightly? Jehovah's laws are like signs, markers, and safety barriers along the roadway to life. If we obey them, we will travel safely and eventually reach our destination in Jehovah's new world; but if we take Jehovah's commands and reminders lightly, we are headed for disaster. —Psalm 119:10, 11, 35, 101, 102; Proverbs 3:1-4.

[12] Through the Bible, we also learn of a sacred thing that should be dear to our hearts: our *Kingdom hope.* Speaking of faithful Abraham, Paul says at Hebrews 11:10: "For he was awaiting the city [God's Kingdom] having real foundations, the builder and maker of which city is God." Do you have a similar strong, enduring hope in God's Kingdom? Is your faith so strong that your heart entertains no doubts, and does your zeal remain undiminished while you wait for God's purposes to be fulfilled in his due time? —Matthew 24:20-22, 33, 34, 42.

11. Why should we not take for granted Jehovah's sacred laws?
12. How is our Kingdom hope a sacred thing?

Sacred Gatherings and Privileges

[13] "Incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as some have the custom," counseled Paul. This indicates that our *Christian meetings* are another sacred provision not to be taken lightly. At the meetings, we receive vital instruction and warm fellowship that we urgently need. Here we can also make "public declaration of our hope" by speaking from the platform as we have opportunity and by commenting regularly. (Hebrews 10:23-25) And since the Kingdom Hall is where most of our meetings are held, do you regularly contribute funds and work hard to keep it properly maintained?—Exodus 35:21.

[14] The privilege Christians have of preaching the good news is likened by Paul to "treasure in earthen vessels." (2 Corinthians 4:1, 7) Yes, the *Christian ministry* is also a sacred thing that we deeply appreciate. While most of the ones we preach to are indifferent, we should keep reminding ourselves of the lofty privilege we have of telling others about Jehovah and his purposes. Thus we will fulfill our commission to preach the good news of God's Kingdom and to make disciples. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) Watching new disciples make progress is a further cause for joy. (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20) If we treasure the ministry, we will not be irregular or inactive in declaring the good news.

[15] *Privileges within Jehovah's organization* are also sacred. Actually, such privileges are a sacred trust. (Compare Acts 20:28.) Whether the responsibility involves oversight, shepherding, teaching,

13. Why should we not take for granted the benefits of the Christian meetings?
14. What will help us appreciate that our Christian ministry is a sacred treasure?
15. Why is the caring for privileges within Jehovah's organization not to be taken lightly?

or some other service to fellow Christians, give it extraordinary care. Even if a task seems insignificant, do not take it lightly, but do it well, promptly, as unto Jehovah. Remember, "the person faithful in what is least is faithful also in much."—Luke 16:10.

Marriage and the Family

[16] In listing sacred things, do not forget to include *marriage and the family.* True, non-Christians also get married, but Christians view marriage as sacred, involved in their worship of Jehovah. (Compare 1 Peter 3:1-7.) How do they show respect for this sacred thing? The Bible says at Hebrews 13:4: "Let marriage be honorable among all, and the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers." Jesus warned that looking at a woman continuously so as to have a passion for her would amount to committing adultery in the heart. (Matthew 5:27, 28) If you choose to marry, do so honorably. Then, never take your marriage for granted. Build up genuine love and deep respect every day. If you have children, 'bring them up in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah.' In this way your family will be "holy."—Ephesians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 7:14.

16. In what ways may we show that we consider marriage and the family to be sacred things?

What Answer Would You Give?

- How can we avoid taking Jehovah's name and the ransom sacrifice for granted?
- What may betray that we do not appreciate our relationship with Jehovah and his organization?
- What are some things that demonstrate our appreciation for God's Word and laws, and the Kingdom hope?
- How may we show that we do not take Christian meetings and theocratic privileges for granted?
- What are some additional sacred things for which we should cultivate a deep appreciation?

Jehovah's Holy Spirit and Prayer

[17] We need all of Jehovah's provisions, and one important help from Jehovah is his *holy spirit.* (John 14:26) We do not always know the ways Jehovah uses his holy spirit in our behalf, but one thing is certain: We cannot get along without it. We should pray for holy spirit to help us understand true teachings and to endure trials. We need it to help us cultivate the fruits of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22, 23) And we are warned at Ephesians 4:30 that we should "not be grieving" the holy spirit, getting involved in things that restrict its flow to us. May we ever appreciate Jehovah's holy spirit.

[18] The last sacred thing we will discuss, *prayer,* is certainly not the least in importance. What a privilege we have to communicate with the Sovereign of the universe, Jehovah! Obviously, we should approach him respectfully, reverentially, never lightly. We can be confident that he will hear and answer our prayers that are offered in harmony with his will. "Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6) Prayer will keep us appreciative of sacred things.

17. Why can we not take for granted God's holy spirit?
18. Why is prayer a sacred privilege?

[19] We have discussed just 13 sacred things that we should never take for granted. Many more could be mentioned. If we appreciate such things, we will keep a good relationship with our God, Jehovah, and have his daily blessing. What peace of mind this brings, along with a good conscience! Never take that precious relationship for granted! Love Jehovah with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and he will always love you. (1 John 4:16) Nothing except your own unfaithfulness can break that bond of love.—Romans 8:38, 39.

19. What blessings come to those who properly appreciate sacred things?

[20] Let us also keep busy in Kingdom service, caring well for all privileges and appreciating all spiritual provisions. With hearts ever full of gratitude, may we be alert to obey all of Jehovah's sacred laws and reminders, appreciating that they have been posted to guide us safely on the road to life. And, as we keep walking on that narrow road to life, it is likely that Jehovah will not only preserve us alive through the great tribulation but give us eternal life with endless blessings in his new world, now so very near. All of this because we appreciated sacred things.

20. How can we successfully walk on the road to life in Jehovah's new world?

Detest Utterly the World's Disgraceful Course

"Because you do not continue running with them in this course to the same low sink of debauchery, they are puzzled and go on speaking abusively of you."—1 PETER 4:4.

A "LOW sink of debauchery." That is how the apostle Peter describes the disgraceful situation in which many in the first century were before they became Christians. Other translations speak of it as the "swamp of profligacy" (*The New American Bible*); the "cesspool of dissipation" (*The New Testament,* by Kleist and Lilly). What was in this low sink of debauchery? The apostle mentions specifically loose conduct, lusts, excesses with wine, revelries, drinking matches, and illegal idolatries.—1 Peter 4:3, 4.

1. How does the Bible describe the former worldly course in which many Christians of the first century were running?

[2] What a difference there is between this world and the true Christian congregation! Peter warmly commended the Christians to whom he wrote for not continuing to run with their former worldly companions through this swamp, this cesspool, of badness. It pleases us very much to give similar commendation to Christians today, when conditions are even worse than they were in the first century. Jehovah's Witnesses are putting forth diligent effort to practice the clean and undefiled worship approved by our God and Father, which includes 'keeping oneself without spot from the world.'

2. Why are Christians today to be commended?

(James 1:27) Their high moral standard brings great honor to Jehovah's name.

[3] To maintain their high standard as a clean organization, however, God's people sometimes have to reprove or even disfellowship the relatively few who allow themselves to be enticed into the debauched practices of this world. This is a cause for sadness, and we feel as the apostle Paul did when he saw a similar situation in the first century. He wrote: "For there are many, I used to mention them often but now I mention them also with weeping, who are walking as the enemies of the torture stake of the Christ, and their finish is destruction, and their god is their belly, and their glory consists in their shame, and they have their minds upon things on the earth." (Philippians 3:18, 19) How can we, as individuals, avoid such a thing's happening to us? By learning to imitate Jesus in loving Jehovah's high standards of righteousness and by hating the uncleanness of this world.—Hebrews 1:9.

Do Not Look Back

[4] Never underestimate the power of sin. The attractions of this world are strong and many; the Devil is sly and vicious; the human heart is treacherous. (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Peter 5:8; Jeremiah 17:9) When the heart becomes set in its desire for something, it often does not listen to reason. That is why we receive so many reminders in God's Word to help us keep our hearts devoted to Jehovah and the doing of his will. It is very important not to let wrong desire even start to build up in the heart. (James 1:14, 15; Matthew 5:27-30) We must keep fortifying our hearts with reasons why we should love what is right and utterly detest and reject this world's filthy ways. The apostle

Detesting utterly this world's disgraceful course will help servants of God gain entry into the new world of righteousness

3. What was a cause for sadness to Paul, as it also is to us today?

4. (a) Why is there a possibility of our being enticed to turn to the degraded practices of this world? (b) What will help us to avoid building up wrong desire?

Paul summed it up this way: "Let your love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is wicked, cling to what is good."—Romans 12:9.

[5] In view of the danger of turning aside from the Christian course, it is wise for each of us continually to examine our motives, our desires, our goals. Are you personally like those Christians whom Peter was able to commend for not returning to this same "low sink of debauchery"? Or do you at times manifest the attitude of Lot's wife, who looked back longingly at the things from which she had been delivered? —Genesis 19:26; Luke 17:31-33.

5. Why is it wise to make a careful examination of our motives and desires?

Wickedness Abounds in "the Last Days"

[6] Think for a moment about the world in which we find ourselves at the close of this 20th century. What an abundance of wickedness! As the apostle Paul foretold, men and women are "lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." Indeed, 'wicked men and impostors advance from bad to worse, misleading and being misled.'—2 Timothy 3:1, 4, 13.

[7] Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, and abortion—these and other words have become household expressions. Such things are freely and approvingly spoken about on radio and television and in religious and educational circles. Pornography is big business and readily available to all. Some of the most popular movies, stage plays, and television soap operas involve stories connected with immorality of some kind. How grateful we are to be no part of this! And how hard we need to fight to be sure that such insidious propaganda does not affect our hearts!

[8] Wise Christians heed Paul's warning: "Let fornication and uncleanness of every sort or greediness *not even be mentioned among you,* just as it befits holy people . . . Keep on making sure of what is acceptable to the Lord . . . So keep strict watch that how you walk is not as unwise but as wise persons." Rather, Paul said, we should think about things that are true, righteous, chaste, lovable, and virtuous. —Ephesians 5:3-16; Philippians 4:8.

[9] Do you carefully keep this sound

6, 7. (a) What attitude toward pleasure does the Bible say would mark "the last days"? (b) How do people of the world flaunt their unclean thinking and actions?

8. As to the immoral practices of this world, what does the Bible say we should do and should not do?

9. What can easily happen if we choose questionable entertainment?

advice in mind when selecting entertainment? Remember, the more we listen to degraded things, the more the world's lifestyle seems acceptable, not so bad after all. We may even begin secretly to admire or imitate prominent ones in sports or entertainment who are practicing such things. Be alert to any such tendency.

Do Not Be Entrapped by This World's Reasoning

[10] In Paul's day many subscribed to the philosophy of the Epicureans, who lived for pleasure, to satisfy the senses. When death overtakes you, they said, everything is over as far as you are concerned. So why not get all the pleasure possible out of life while you are still alive, for tomorrow you might die.

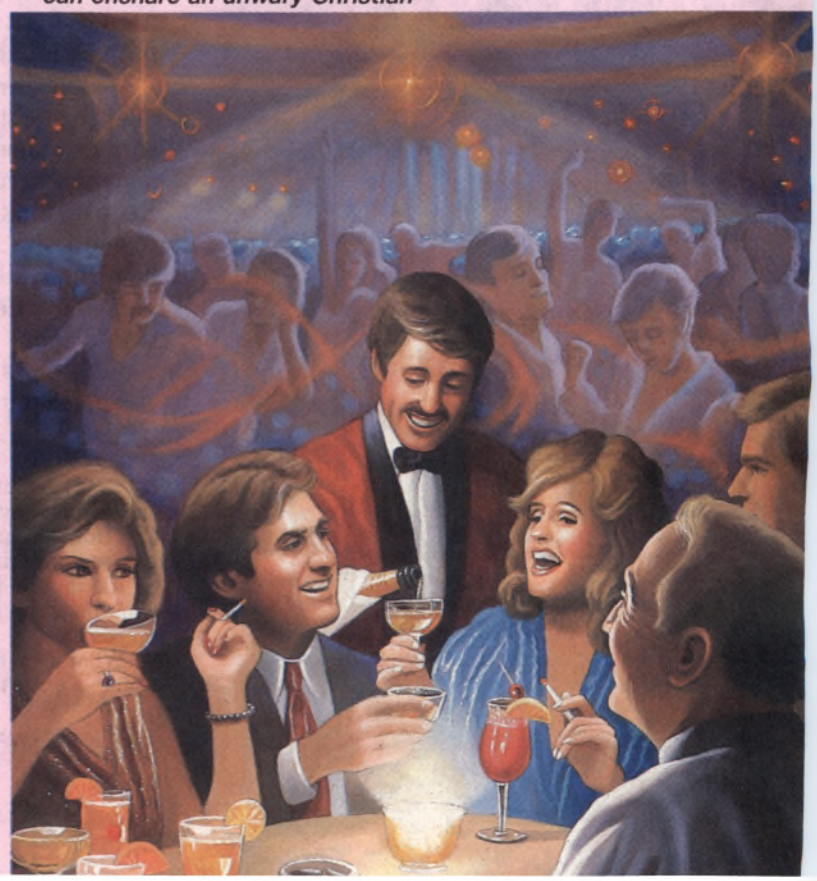
[11] Many today have the same attitude. They unashamedly indulge themselves in pleasures of every sort, with little thought as to how their conduct affects others. To them, God does not exist, or if he does, he gives no evidence of caring about human affairs. Since man is a product of evolution—as they claim—they really do not have to answer to anyone except themselves and the society in which they live. There is even an excuse for acting like the animals. If immoral practices that the Bible condemns bring pleasure to the senses, surely they are not to be condemned. Why live a life of self-denial and frustration, such persons reason, when all of us wind up in the same place—the grave?

[12] It is noteworthy that some Christians in Corinth seem to have been affected by this kind of reasoning. In writing to the congregation there, Paul acknowledged that "if the dead are not to be raised up," then there would be some logic to the common expression of the day: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die." But he quickly exposes this fallacious reasoning: "Do not be misled. Bad associations spoil useful habits. Wake up to soberness in a righteous way and do not

10. What was the philosophy of life practiced by the Epicureans of the first century?
11. How do many people of the world today imitate the Epicureans in their thinking and actions?

12, 13. (a) What is the danger if Christians are exposed to worldly reasoning? (b) What was the root of the problem in Corinth? (c) What should be done to prevent us from being affected by a selfish view of life?

The world's disgraceful entertainment can ensnare an unwary Christian



practice sin, for some are without knowledge of God. I am speaking to move you to shame."—1 Corinthians 15:32-34.

[13] Note how Paul gets right to the root of the problem of those Corinthian Christians. Their wrong thinking came from bad association. We can learn from this. If we are not careful, we can begin to think that we should taste some forbidden pleasures before we get too old to enjoy them or before we die. If we have some tendency to reason this way, we need quickly to change our way of thinking. How? Remember that this selfish view ignores God's righteous standards. It shows a lack of faith in God's sure promises, including the resurrection hope. Even from a practical standpoint, those who live a debauched life bring upon themselves many heartaches and troubles. To get the right perspective, they need to "wake up to soberness in a righteous way." They cannot reason correctly and soberly if they "are without knowledge of God."

[14] Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul made it clear that fornicators, adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, greedy persons, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, all of whom abounded in Corinth, would not be a part of God's Kingdom. He added: "And yet that is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified." Their being cleansed in this way showed the power of God's Word and the ransom sacrifice. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Surely, to return to the uncleanness of the old world would be the height of foolishness!

[15] Peter said: "Certainly if, after having escaped from the defilements of the world by an accurate knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they get involved again with these very things and are overcome, the final conditions have become worse for them than the first. The saying of the true proverb has happened to them: 'The dog has returned to its own vomit, and the sow that was bathed to rolling in the mire.'" (2 Peter 2:20, 22) Strong language! Yet, forceful words are necessary at times to impress upon us the seriousness of the counsel given. This warning given to Christians in the first century is even more appropriate for us today.

14. Who will not inherit the blessings of God's Kingdom, yet what did Paul acknowledge about the past life of some?

15. What graphic language did Peter use to describe the position of those who return to the filthy practices of this world?

We Reap What We Sow

[16] Christians see proof all around them that the immoral, debauched living of this world is harmful, deadly. (Romans 1:18-32) Just in the area of sexuality alone, think of the heartache and suffering that result when there is no respect for God's law on morality: broken homes, illegitimate pregnancies, abortions, rape, child molestation, and sexually transmitted diseases, just to list a few things. Then there are the health problems that come when the body is abused by excessive eating and drinking, and the taking of drugs for the thrill of it. Giving way to greed often results in stealing and fraud. There is hardly any violation of God's law that does not result in some physical or emotional harm to the transgressor. It is as the apostle Paul reminded Christians: "Do not be misled: God is not one to be mocked. For whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap; because he who is sowing with a view to his flesh will reap corruption from his flesh, but he who is sowing with a view to the spirit will reap everlasting life from the spirit."—Galatians 6:7, 8.

16. In what ways does a person 'reap what he sows' when living a life of debauchery?

[17] On the other hand, what powerful reasons the Scriptures give for keeping to God's standards. How true what God's Word says: "A man of faithful acts will get many blessings"! (Proverbs 28:20) Those who detest this world's disgraceful course avoid the terrible consequences of a debauched life. They enjoy a clean relationship with their brothers and sisters, and with their God, Jehovah. Moreover, they have the grand hope of receiving the prize of everlasting life in God's new world. Now that we are well along into the end of this system of things, those of the "other sheep" even have the special hope of living through "the great tribulation" and not dying at all. They have implicit faith that, if death comes before then, God promises to resurrect all those in the memorial tombs. (John 5:28, 29; 10:16; Revelation 7:14) In view of all of this, why would anyone give even a passing thought to getting involved in the detestable practices of this world?—Romans 6:19-23; 1 Peter 4:1-3.

[18] The Bible shows clearly that we are living in the final part of what it terms "the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 24:3) Peter said "the heavens and the earth that are now are stored up for fire and are being reserved to the day of judgment and of destruction of the ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:7) When this long-awaited day of reckoning occurs, the claim that man can act independently of God and that his immoral, violent behavior is just a product of evolution will go up in smoke. (Colossians 3:5, 6) Listen to how God himself describes, in his last recorded words in the Bible, the outcome for those who serve him and for those who do not: "Look! I am coming quickly, and the reward I give is with me, to render to each one as his work is. . . . Happy are those who wash their robes, that the authority to go to the trees of life may be theirs and that they may gain entrance into the city by its gates. Outside are the dogs and those who practice spiritism and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone liking and carrying on a lie."—Revelation 22:12-15.

[19] As this world's moral condition worsens, be firmly resolved to please Jehovah by doing what is clean, honorable, and right. Keep reaching out for the prize of life. Refuse to be sucked into this world's "low sink of debauchery," which is a hole of death. You can win in the battle against debauched thinking if you detest utterly this world's disgraceful course!

17. Why should a Christian be motivated to live by God's righteous standards?

18. (a) How will Jehovah express his judgment against "ungodly men" at "the great tribulation"? (b) As to judgment, how does Jehovah express himself in his last recorded words in the Bible?

19. What should be our resolve as we face the future?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why is there a danger of getting involved in the disgraceful practices of this world?
- ☐ Why do we need to be very careful in selecting entertainment?
- ☐ What fatal reasoning can easily influence us if we associate with modern-day Epicureans?
- ☐ What is Jehovah's judgment against those who *unrepentantly* turn to this world's disgraceful course?
- ☐ What blessings are ahead for those who keep free from the detestable conduct of this world?

They Were Convinced of Jehovah's Love

HIGH waves were battering the ship caught in a tremendous storm at sea. A 14-day battle with the raging waters had left passengers and crew hopeless, except for one. He was confident that Jehovah would protect him, as the comforting words, "Have no fear, Paul" rang in his mind. During the next decisive hours, the ship grounded, permitting all to make it safely to land. Once more the apostle Paul had reason to be convinced of Jehovah's love.—Acts 27:20-44.

Are you equally convinced of God's love? Constant study of God's Word and use of what you learn to strengthen others is vital. Yet, to be really convinced of Jehovah's love, you must actually live on Jehovah's utterances by experiencing his acting on your behalf. One who is firmly convinced of this is a traveling overseer working in the lofty Bolivian mountains who, like many others, has experienced Jehovah's care.

"Working out of Oruro," he relates, "I was to visit a congregation in Kami, a mining town 62 miles away. The hilly, winding road reaches 15,000-foot altitudes and can be very treacherous, especially when it rains. Temperatures often descend to 14° F. or lower.

"Another brother, Aníbal, was going to take me on his motorcycle, and we set out at 6:00 a.m., prepared for a five-hour trip. From the outset it was raining, and mud kept getting caked between wheel and fender, bringing us to a halt. Only after painstakingly poking the mud out could we go on. Riding pillion behind Aníbal, I tried to protect my shoes and trousers but gave up when they were completely soaked.

Evidence of Jehovah's Love

"Six hours had passed when the engine stalled on a steep hill, and we began to roll backward. Jumping off, we tried in every way to hold the heavy machine in the slippery mud. This proved futile, however, and our hearts sank as the motorcycle plunged over the side of a ravine 300 feet deep! We anxiously looked down. Unbelievably, the machine had come to rest only partway down. Still, we would never be able to raise it without help.

"Hours crept by, but we had little hope

that anyone would come along that desolate road. Then a man with a donkey and some llamas appeared. Seeing our plight, he said in the Quechua tongue: 'Yes, I have some tethers.' He tied the leather strips to the donkey and to the motorcycle. Then, we lifted from down below while he encouraged the donkey to pull. Finally, after much goading of the donkey, we were back on the road, our foreheads wet with perspiration. How could we make it up to him? We offered him a *Bible Stories* book, and he was so impressed with the book that he wanted to *return* the favor with potatoes from his load!

"The engine started, and we were ever so thankful to Jehovah. Farther along, we thought of stopping, since the engine began faltering. We came to an isolated coffee shop. 'Where are you headed?' the owner asked. We told him and explained our problem. 'I have a spark plug and some tools I'll lend you,' he said. We could hardly believe our ears—this was a place where friends, let alone total strangers, are often mistrusted. With the new spark plug the engine ran well.

"It was now dark, and I became apprehensive, as my legs were going numb in the freezing cold. Then, while making a steep climb, the engine stalled again. Both pumping the starter and pushing the motorcycle for two miles proved fruitless. Totally exhausted, we sat down by the road. At least my legs were no longer numb! But we were upset and at a loss as to what to do. We took a short rest and then tried to start the engine again. Would it work?

"To our surprise the engine did start. However, it now began to rain, and on the next grade we stalled again. Once more we were sitting by the roadside, this time in the pouring rain. We took another break. With some doubts we tried the engine again—and it started! Soon we were crossing the highest point of our journey. I felt relieved, thinking that even if the engine stalled, we could almost coast into Kami. But on a steep descent the brake handle broke off in Aníbal's hand! Quickly jumping off while holding onto the rear carriage, I dug both feet into the ground and slid down the hill. In this way I managed to bring us to a stop. This happened on two more grades.

Kami—At Last

"It was 3:00 a.m. when we finally reached Kami. We had been on the road for 21 hours. Finding the brothers would be a problem, since this was my first visit. We knocked on doors but were told: 'Go away! We're sleeping!' After knocking on various doors, I felt the best thing to do would be to rest under an overhanging roof and search for the brothers in the morning. Slumping down, I went fast asleep. When I awoke, I found myself surrounded by people. I stood up, and a husky man came over and hugged me tight. Yes, they were our brothers! Aníbal had found them. I could not speak as my emotions welled up within me.

"Wasting no time, they picked up our belongings, including the mud-encrusted motorcycle, which a brother literally carried to his yard. My hosts were a humble couple, the wife in a typical pollera, a multiple full skirt. 'You take our bed,' they said. I did not want them to sleep on the floor, especially since the wife was pregnant. But they insisted.

"The next thing I knew, it was 8:00 a.m. Someone was knocking on the door. 'The brothers are ready for service,' I was told. Seeing their expectant faces glowing with appreciation, I had no other choice but to wrench my aching body out of bed and begin the visit. And what a heartwarming visit it was! As I accompanied the brothers

The winding mountain road that leads to the mining town of Kami

Road through the mountains to Kami

Donkeys can be very useful in an emergency!

in their ministry, they simply brimmed over with joy and enthusiasm. I meditated on how vital these visits are, in spite of all we'd been through—like 'streams of water in a waterless country.'—Isaiah 32:2.

"The next day we visited a village where an evangelist pastor had threatened to break up our meeting when I arrived. After the discourse, a robust man gave me a Bolivian hug* and said: 'Brother, you have the truth!' Afterward, I asked who it was. 'The pastor,' they said.

"The visit to Kami was over all too soon, and we were leaving. The brothers had repaired the motorcycle and washed all our muddy clothes. When we mentioned the man who lent us the tools, they marveled, since he is known as one who almost never helps out. After many hugs and handshakes, we were off and soon we were back to see the kind coffee-shop owner. After returning everything, we asked him: 'How much do we owe?' 'Nothing,' he replied. 'I was glad to help!'

"Back in Oruro, five hours later, we thought of how important it was not to give up and how Jehovah marvelously cared for us. Aníbal was so deeply moved by the experience that he exclaimed: 'I'd give anything to go back!' He has done just that, carrying other traveling overseers on his motorcycle to Kami and other places. Yes, we had solid reason to be convinced even more of Jehovah's love." —*As related by circuit overseer Ricardo Hernández.*

* A Bolivian hug consists of a handshake, a mutual pat on the back, and another handshake.

How Did the Crowds Hear Jesus?

THE Gospel of Matthew reports that on one occasion Jesus Christ "went aboard a boat and sat down, and all the crowd was standing on the beach. Then he told them many things by illustrations." (Matthew 13:1-35; Mark 4:1-9) In their book *Come See the Place: The Holy Land Jesus Knew,* Robert J. Bull and B. Cobbey Crisler raise some interesting questions regarding this account. They ask: "How could one have been heard by 'a great multitude' without the benefit of some sort of voice amplification? And is it possible to find a seashore spot with acoustical properties that would produce such amplification?" Perhaps you too have wondered about this.

Well, note their answer: "Among several coves near Capernaum, there is one that has recently been found to have just such sound characteristics of a natural amphitheater. Acoustical tests have been carried out on this site to show that 'a great multitude' of some five thousand to seven thousand people, assembling here, could indeed have both seen and clearly heard a person speaking from a boat located at a spot near the cove's center." And how were these acoustical experiments carried out? Virginia Bortin, a writer on archaeological topics, explains in *The San Juan Star,* a newspaper in Puerto Rico.

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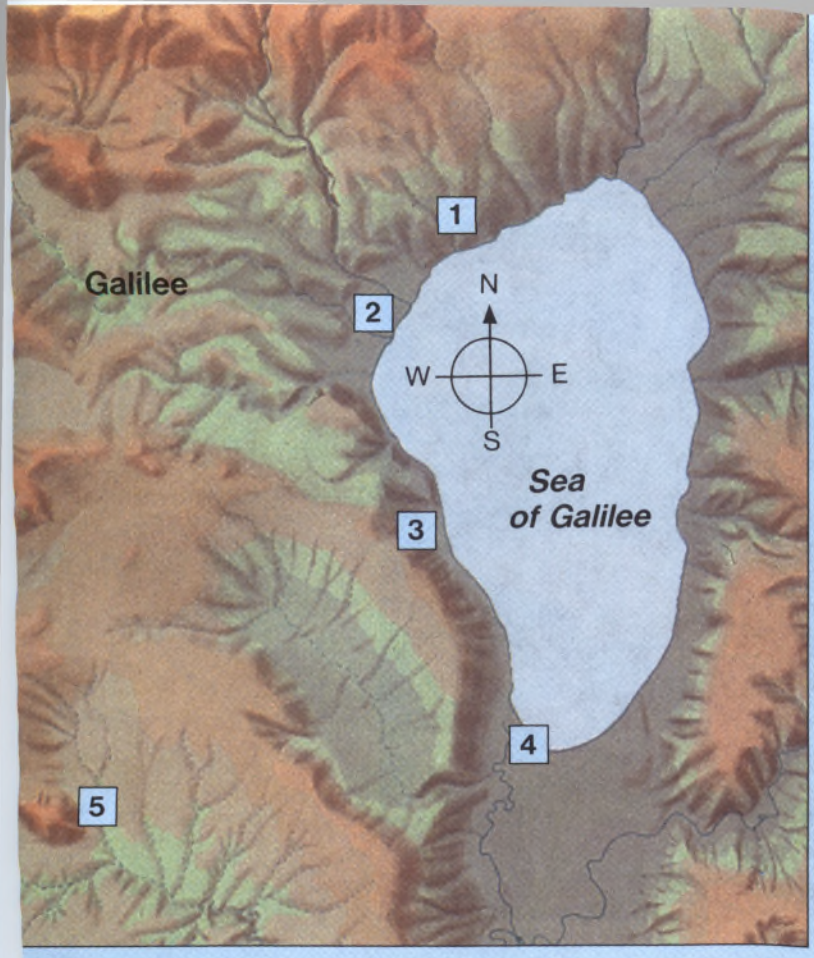
Looking to the northeast along the Sea of Galilee toward Capernaum; seen from the edge of the Plain of Gennesaret

According to Bortin, archaeologist B. Cobbey Crisler, coauthor of the above-mentioned book, and acoustical engineer Mark Myles conducted tests "near Tell Hum, site of ancient Capernaum." There "the land slopes gently upward from the Sea of Galilee to a modern road more than a football field away." Crisler waded out into



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Site of:

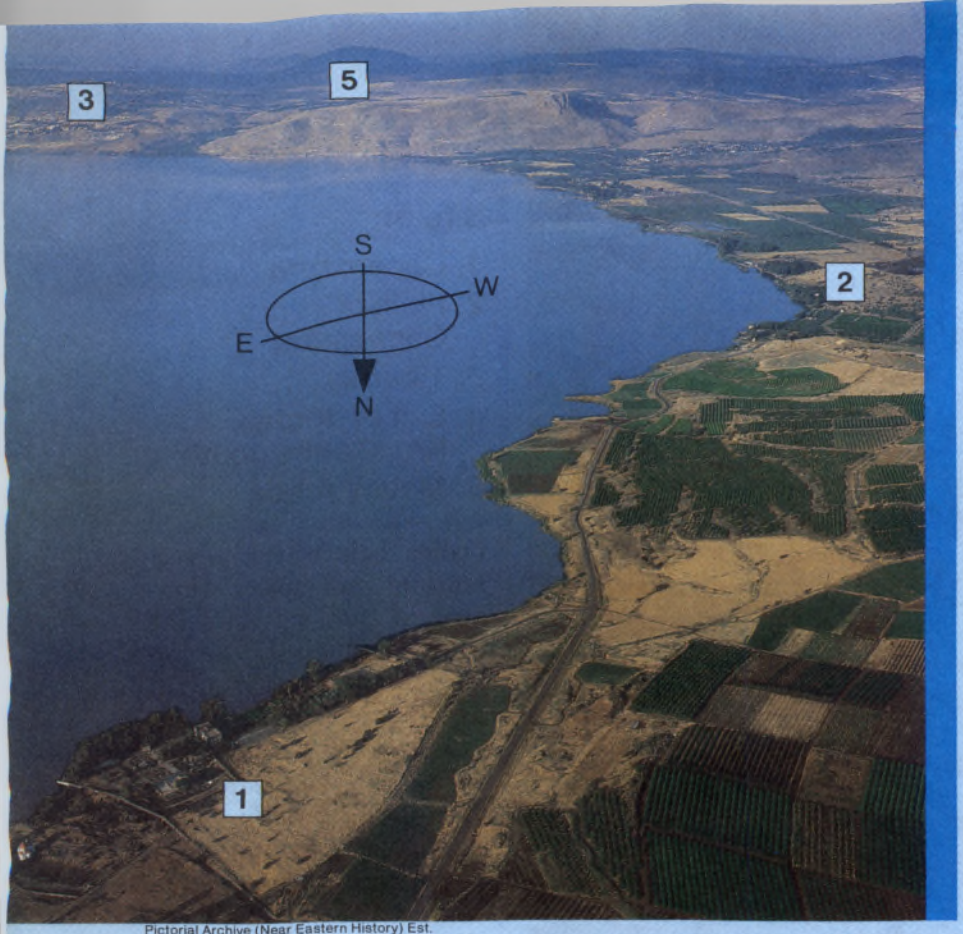
1. Capernaum
2. Plain of Gennesaret
3. Tiberias
4. Exit of Jordan River to the south
5. Mount Tabor

the cove and stood on a large rock there. Then he inflated balloons of the same size to produce a uniform sound and punctured them at measured intervals of time. Myles, using an electronic volume meter, registered the decibel levels as he walked upward toward the road. Crisler then came to shore and repeated the balloon puncturing there. Result? The sound intensity was greater from the rock out in the cove than from the shore! Interestingly, while Crisler was out in the cove, several automobiles with tourists stopped on the road above him. He could clearly hear one person ask: "What's he doing down there?" Another answered: "I don't know. He's just standing there holding some red balloons."

Evidently, when people are standing or seated on one level, the sound of a projected voice is absorbed by bodies, hair, clothing, vegetation, and space. However, if they are on a hill or an incline as near Capernaum, the speaker, at an appropriate distance below and away from them, can be heard, his voice being greatly amplified. Of course, not to be discounted is the quiet, rapt attention paid by the audiences then and the marked absence of modern-day background noises from jet airplanes, cars, trucks, and so forth.

But what about other occasions on which the Bible reports that Jesus spoke to large crowds? Crisler and Myles theorize that Jesus and other Biblical personalities who addressed large audiences deliberately "sought out open areas known for their natural amplification properties and used them for mass communication."

Crisler and Myles have



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Northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee. Likely, it was near Capernaum that Jesus spoke to the crowd from a boat

also made investigations "to determine how many people could clearly have seen Jesus the day he spoke there." Assuming it was a bright, cloudless day, they estimated that "an audience of 5,000 and 7,000 could have heard and seen Jesus speaking from offshore." This caused newspaper writer Bortin to conclude that "this supports Gospel accounts of large crowds from throughout Palestine that flocked to Galilee to witness the miraculous healer as he addressed them in parables. The Capernaum location with its bowl-shaped natural amphitheater indeed allowed everyone to observe him clearly."

Of course, it cannot be stated dogmatically that Crisler and Myles have discovered the actual site of Jesus' shoreside lecture. Yet, it is interesting to note that the proposed site is a place where thornbushes and rocks abound, with yellow mustard flowers growing among them. Jesus' featuring them in his illustrations would have thus added to his teaching. In an area of such fine acoustics, Jesus' command to "listen" would also have been most appropriate. (Mark 4:3) Similarly, his use of the word "ears" and the many forms of the verb "to hear" could easily have been appreciated by all his listeners in such a place. Yes, all present there in that "natural amphitheater" not only could have heard and seen Jesus quite clearly but also could have grasped the full impact of his illustrations simply by looking around.

Insight on the News

The Only Cure

When many of the world's experts on aging met last year at New York's Mount Sinai Medical Center to discuss the biology of aging, one fact was apparent—no one could agree on why man grows old and dies. Some experts theorize that "aging is genetically 'programmed,' like other stages of life," reports *Newsweek on Science & Technology.* However, the article adds that "it is difficult to conceive why nature would evolve a gene for growing old." One theory proposed by Leonard Hayflick, a gerontologist with the University of Florida, was that "certain genes may have evolved to keep people healthy and functioning until they can reproduce." Hayflick concludes that by the time man reaches 30 or so, such longevity genes would begin to wear out. The fact is, the average life expectancy for an American is little more than 74 years "for today's diaper set," and "even cures for the diseases of old age—cancer, arthritis, Alzheimer's—will do little to extend the outer boundaries," notes the article.

Though scientists find a cure for aging to be as elusive as its cause, careful students of God's Word do not. The reason man grows old and dies is *explained* at Romans 5:12: "Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men." The only cure for the effects of inherited sin will come through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "God sent forth his only-begotten Son into the world that we might gain life through him." (1 John 4:9) Under his Kingdom rule, "death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore." —Revelation 21:3, 4.

Universal Significance

When the leaders of the two major world powers met together on December 8, 1987, to sign a treaty for missile reduction, it was described as an event that is "profoundly significant" for mankind. Why? Because "it is the first time since the dawn of the Atomic Age that the superpowers have agreed not just to restrain nuclear weapons but to *eliminate* entire systems," reports the New York *Daily News.* Commenting on both the treaty itself and the reduced number of weapons, the *News* added: "If their substance and principles can be extended, history ultimately may record them as the first act in Earth's most important drama of peace and international security."

True, current proposals toward peace and security are of significance. However, of much greater universal significance will be the moment in history when world leaders will cry peace and security in a more pronounced way than ever before. A moment will come when their cry will prove different from the many peace efforts that had been made up until that time. Why can we be sure? Because long ago the apostle Paul foretold that "whenever it is that they are saying: 'Peace and security!' then sudden destruction is to be instantly upon them . . . and they will by no means escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3) *True* peace and security will then follow under the benevolent rule of Christ Jesus, the "Prince of Peace."—Isaiah 9:6, 7.

"The Real Disease"

"AIDS is neither an unfortunate accident nor an inescapable natural calamity. Its epidemic proportion is a product of our own folly. . . . We have no one but ourselves to blame," says a Denver obstetrician-gynecologist, W. M. Merrick Thomas. Explaining the reason for his view in the newspaper *Rocky Mountain News,* he notes: "AIDS is not a disease of homosexuality. It is a disease of proximity and promiscuity. . . . Diseases of promiscuity will directly affect all who are promiscuous." Thus, as Thomas observes, "our behavior is the real disease."

How timely are the words of Paul, who, when describing the inexcusable conduct of persons who claim to know God, said: "Therefore God, in keeping with the desires of their hearts, gave them up to uncleanness, . . . to disgraceful sexual appetites, . . . working what is obscene and receiving in themselves the full recompense, which was due for their error"! (Romans 1:24-27) Clean living in harmony with Bible standards often serves as a protection against afflictions that plague mankind today. —Psalm 19:7-11.

Becoming an Ordained Minister God's Way!

A VISITOR would likely have been intrigued—perhaps even perplexed—by what he heard. The scene was a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses. An address was being given to a group of people who were about to get baptized. Surprisingly, the speaker told these baptismal candidates: "Your presence in this group of baptismal candidates indicates your desire to be an *ordained minister* of the Kingdom."

'How can that be?' a visitor might have asked. 'Is not baptism for persons freshly exposed to Christianity—and for babes? Does it not take years of extensive training and education to become an ordained minister?' Perhaps you would reason similarly. But what the Bible actually says about baptism and ordination may surprise you.

Before One Is Baptized

First of all, baptism is not for persons barely acquainted with the Christian message. The Bible, at Acts 8:12, shows that people in the first century were baptized after "they believed." Matthew 28:19 also shows that a person must become a 'disciple' before baptism. And how does one become a 'believer,' or 'disciple,' ('taught one')? Through careful study of the Bible! In this way, a person gains an accurate knowledge of Jesus and Jehovah God. (John 17:3) Only after gaining this knowledge is a student in a position to consider getting baptized. In the first century, established Christians gave such instruction to new converts.—Acts 8:31, 35, 36.

In congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses today, arrangements are similarly made for interested individuals to enjoy a free home Bible study. A person with a responsive heart gradually comes to appreciate what he is learning. He is moved to share his newfound convictions with others. (Romans 10:8-10) He begins regularly attending Christian meetings, where he gains yet more Biblical instruction. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) And after weeks or months of this, the new believer develops a desire to follow the Bible's counsel at Romans 12:1: "Consequently I entreat you by the compassions of God, brothers, to present your bodies a sacrifice living, holy, acceptable to God, a sacred service with your power of reason."

Knowledge alone, however, does not qualify one to make this dedication. One must also repent and "turn around." (Acts 3:19) Why is this? Frankly, some have had immoral life-styles prior to learning God's standards. Others have been wrapped up in selfish pursuits. But to present themselves to God as "holy, acceptable," they must show regret for such past actions. They must be remorseful for having used their life, vitality, and abilities in unscriptural pursuits. Such remorse must also be accompanied by appropriate action so as really to "turn around," or change their life course.

To help the new believer further, Christian elders arrange to meet with him and spend time reviewing the basic teachings of the Bible. This, for one thing, assures the elders that the prospective Christian has acquired an accurate knowledge of God's purposes. And, of course, the review proves most helpful to the student. As needed, certain matters that were not correctly understood are clarified.

Baptisms are generally held in connection with conventions or assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses. On such occasions, a pointed talk is given to the baptismal candidates. They are reminded that baptism is not a matter of joining a new religion. Jesus said: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him *disown himself* and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me." —Matthew 16:24.

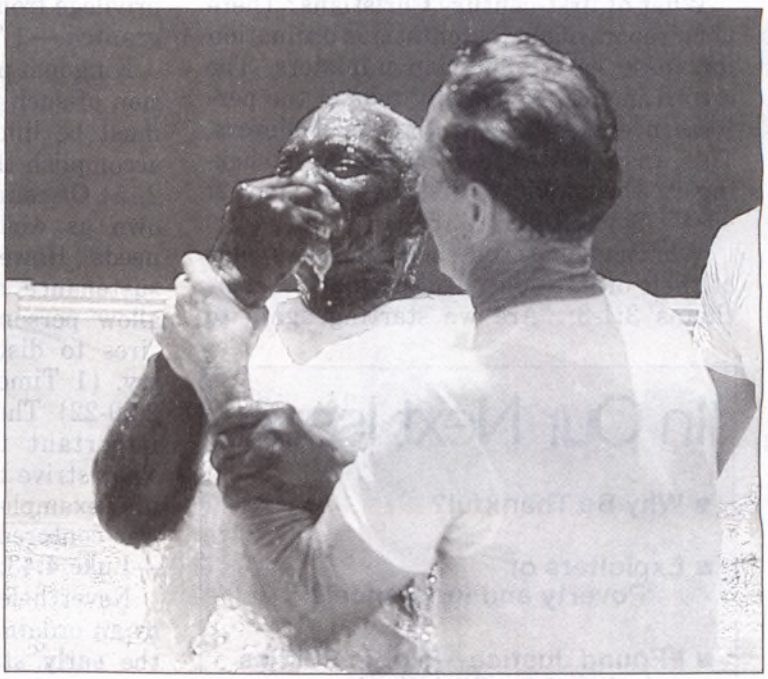
The candidates are further reminded of the deep significance of baptism. The text at 1 Peter 3:21 is often read: "That which corresponds to this is also now saving you, namely, baptism, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the request made to God for a good conscience,) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Here, Peter compares baptism to Noah's experience of passing through the waters of the Flood. While those waters proved death-dealing to earth's wicked populace, they proved life-saving to Noah as they safely carried him in the ark. Likewise, baptism 'saves' Christians from this wicked world. When someone, on the basis of his faith in the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, gets baptized, such a person is, in a sense, in a 'saved' condition before God. He is no longer considered a part of this wicked generation doomed to destruction.—See Acts 2:40.

Therefore, getting baptized is not a step that should be taken in the heat of emotion, as so often happens at religious revival meetings. Highlighting this is the fact that before new disciples are actually immersed, the minister presiding at the baptism asks them two penetrating questions. Their answers in the affirmative are a "public declaration" of their faith in the ransom and of the fact that they have unreservedly dedicated themselves to Jehovah. (Romans 10:9, 10) Now they are ready for water baptism.

Ordained as Ministers of the Kingdom

Complete immersion in water is a fitting symbol of their dedication to God. While under the water, it is as if they have died to their former course of life. On coming out of the water, it is as if they are now alive to a new course of self-sacrifice in service to God.—Compare Romans 6: 2-4.

How, though, does ordination fit in with the action of baptism? Note what



According to the Bible, a Christian minister is ordained at baptism

M'Clintock and Strong's *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1877), Volume VII, page 411, says: "Ordination signifies the appointment or designation of a person to a ministerial office, whether with or *without* attendant ceremonies." (Italics ours.) This acknowledges that there is no need for an elaborate ceremony or a certificate of ordination to be a Christian minister.

But does the Bible teach this? Consider Jesus Christ. There is no question that he was the *foremost* minister of God. Nevertheless, did he have some elaborate ordination ceremony before commencing his preaching work? Did he have a certificate identifying him as a minister? Quite the contrary. It was after his simply getting baptized in water that God expressed his approval of Jesus as his Son and ordained him as His minister.—Mark 1:9-11; Luke 4:18-21.

What of first-century Christians? There is no report of any ostentatious ordination for these early Christian ministers. The record in Acts repeatedly tells of the performance of simple baptisms of believers. This was followed by their zealously sharing in the public ministry.—See Acts 2: 41-47; 8:36-39; 22:14-16.

What evidence did such ministers have of their ordination? Paul says at 2 Corinthians 3:1-3: "Are we starting again to recommend ourselves? Or do we, perhaps, like some men, need letters of recommendation to you or from you? *You yourselves are our letter,* inscribed on our hearts and known and being read by all mankind. For you are shown to be a letter of Christ written by us as ministers, inscribed not with ink but with spirit of a living God, not on stone tablets, but on fleshly tablets, on hearts." The effect of God's spirit on these taught ones' hearts produced a new Christian personality, which could be read by all observers. This was sufficient testimony that God had indeed ordained the ones sharing in teaching these new disciples.

Exerting Oneself in the Ministry

Likewise today, a minister is recognized by his works. He is earnest in 'exerting himself vigorously' in his ministry. (Luke 13:24) He views his ministry as a grand privilege from God. He does not take it for granted.—1 Timothy 1:12-16.

Kingdom preaching is the prime obligation of such ministers. All other pursuits must be limited so that they can 'fully accomplish their ministry.' (2 Timothy 4: 2, 5) Of course, they must care for their own as well as their family's physical needs. However, they are 'content with sustenance and covering.' They do not allow personal pursuits or personal desires to distract them from the ministry. (1 Timothy 5:8; 6:7, 8; Philippians 2:20-22) They make sure of the "more important things." (Philippians 1:10) They strive to keep before themselves the fine example of Jesus Christ, whose life was centered around Kingdom preaching. —Luke 4:43; John 18:36, 37.

Nevertheless, when a person is baptized as an ordained minister, he is actually in the early stages of his service to God. True, he has gained knowledge of Christ Jesus and Jehovah God. He has also made

In Our Next Issue

- **Why Be Thankful?**
- **Exploiters of 'Poverty and Ignorance'?**
- **I Found Justice—Not in Politics but in True Christianity**

many changes in his life so that his Christian ministry cannot be found fault with. (2 Corinthians 6:3) The newly baptized Christian still has much growing to do. His baptism, which signifies his ordination, is just one important milestone in his growth as a Christian. (Philippians 3:16) Therefore, each ordained minister must continue building up heart appreciation of spiritual things. He needs to schedule time for personal study. He should take advantage of all provisions for the congregation to meet together. He should work on improving the quality of his prayers, resulting in a closer personal relationship with God.—Luke 6:45; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Peter 4:7.

We hope these Scriptural thoughts have helped you to understand why a university degree is not a requirement for those who wish to serve as ministers of God. Over three million of Jehovah's Witnesses are faithfully serving God as his ministers, proclaiming the truths outlined in his Word. Why not let one of them assist you in gaining knowledge of the Bible?

Questions From Readers

■ **In view of Jesus' words at John 15:15, should Christians view themselves as his "slaves," or can we consider ourselves to be his "friends"?**

We can and should be both. To see why, let us note what Jesus there said to his faithful apostles on his final night with them:

"No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his soul in behalf of his friends. You are my friends if you do what I am commanding you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, because all the things I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."—John 15:13-15.

First, what did Jesus mean by saying that his loyal disciples were slaves? He did not mean slaves in the sense that all human descendants of Adam are born imperfect, thus sold into or enslaved to sin. (John 8:34; Romans 5:18, 19; 6:16; 7:14) As with Christians since then, the apostles were once enslaved in that way, but Jesus' sacrifice would provide the means to free, or release, them. (1 Peter 1:18, 19; Galatians 4:5) Yet, they did not thereupon become totally free. As the apostle Paul later wrote, they were "bought with a price," Jesus' blood, so they became slaves of God and of Christ.—1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:22, 23.

At John 15:15 Jesus was not suggesting that the faithful apostles who would shortly receive holy spirit and become anointed Christians were no longer slaves. (Compare John 15:20.) Of course, servitude to God through Christ is not oppressive and death-dealing. It is loving and life-preserving. (2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 1:1, 2) A Christian who gladly accepts the value of Christ's blood and becomes a slave of God would face permanent death only if he later rejected that sacrifice and gave himself back over to sin, becoming a slave of it again. (Galatians 1:10; 4:8, 9; Hebrews 6:4-6) Hence, Jesus' disciples would continue to be slaves of God and of Christ, but they were even more than slaves. Why?

Jesus and the apostles understood that back then, in a normally cold or formal master-slave relationship, 'a slave would not know what the master does.' Normally, a human master would not confer with his purchased slave, nor would he reveal to him his private thoughts and feelings.

We can see from Jesus' words, though, that it was different with the apostles. He said: "I have called you friends, because all the things I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) Yes, as is common between dear friends, Jesus had disclosed to them details and understandings that had been secret. (Matthew 13:10-12; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16) Though they were still servants, or slaves, of God by means of Jesus, the apostles enjoyed a warm intimacy that marked them also as trusted friends. (Compare Psalm 25:14.) That can and should be true of us as well. What a privilege to have as Masters in heaven Ones who treat us as trusted and respected confidants, as friends!

"Helpful as guides to daily living"

THAT is what a woman from Toronto, Canada, called the publications of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. "I enjoy reading them and find the material very informative, heartwarming, and above all, very helpful as guides to daily living."

She added: "I am a university graduate, and I must shockingly admit that I have learned much more through your publications than through all my years of study. I especially enjoyed your book *Making Your Family Life Happy*. No other publications have managed to have such a positive impact on my life as yours have—they have helped me immensely; and for this I truly thank you."