

Volume 33

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Lesson 417

PRESERVATION OF A RIGHTEOUS NATION FROM EVIL

MEMORY VERSE: “He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (**Psalm 105:14,15**).

TEXT: Numbers 23:1-30; 24:1-9

The previous study revealed the frightened king of Moab, Balak, dangling the riches of this world before prophet Balaam for him to curse the advancing Israelites so he could overcome them (Numbers 22:1-8). The study also showed God warning Balaam not to accept the offer (Numbers 22:9-22) and how the offer was increased and Balaam agreeing to go with Balak’s men (Numbers 22:15-21). As Balaam was on his way to Moab, God rebuked him through the animal he rode, and narrowly escaped death by the hand of the angel of God (Numbers 22:22-31).

Here, our attention is turned on Balak who, having prepared adequately and not willing to take ‘no’ for answer, wanted Israel cursed at all cost. He and his princes stood in an evil agreement and with them was the compromised prophet, Balaam. Leaving no stone unturned, they observed the protocols of sacrifices and endured the pain of watching tenaciously over these ungodly sacrifices. On the other hand, Balaam, a covetous prophet, was vainly attempting to appease God, obviously presuming that God would act contrary to the Abrahamic covenant. But, the unchanging God would not forget His peculiar and chosen treasure – Israel. Believers are therefore assured that, **“he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”** (Psalm 121:4). God had promised Abraham centuries before this scenario that **“...I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee”** (Genesis 12:2,3).

PREPARATION AND PERSISTENCE TO CURSE ISRAEL (Numbers 23:1-6, 13-15,21, 27-30; 24:1)

While Israel, the righteous nation was at peace, enjoying the blessings and power of God in their midst, Balak, his princes and Balaam constituted themselves into an unseen, formidable and undaunted army seeking her destruction. Before attempting to cast the spell on Israel, Balaam requested that Balak **“build ... seven altars, and prepare ... seven oxen and seven rams”** (Numbers 23:1).

Balak determinedly made huge investments, including rearing altars at a high place of Baal, Pisgah and Peor and on three different occasions sacrificing a total of 21 oxen and 21 rams. He also approved a fantastic budget as Balaam’s service charge after the successful accomplishment of his evil

mission. While the sacrifices were burning, Balaam went to a quiet place, into some dark grove on the top of the high place, apparently to have an opportunity to commune with God. It was, however, clear that he was doing the right thing at the wrong place and time having known God's mind about the mission he embarked upon.

Note that part of his preparation was to retire to a solitary place to hear from God. Though for the true believer, solitude gives a good opportunity for communion with God as seen in the practice of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 1:35), Balaam was turning what should have been solely used for the worship of the true God for the worship of idols. True, those who would walk with God must learn to regularly retire from the hustles and bustles of life to hear God's "**still small voice**" (1Kings 19:12) but it should not be in the mode of Balaam.

One would however, have thought that when a prophet raises an altar, performs sacrifices like that of Elijah it should be to the glory of God. But it was not so in the case of Balaam and Balak. How many evil altars are around us today in the name of religion! Believers should beware! The persistence and struggle of this wicked duo against their imagined enemy is worthy of note. If men would exact so much energy to fight against their perceived enemies, how believers should stand firmly and untiringly against the enemies of their souls. Though Balak's expectation was not granted, he persevered in his consecration to watch over his sacrifices and, on the other hand, mounted more pressure on the disobedient prophet to curse God's people against God's perfect will.

Question 1: *What was the driving force behind Balaam's attempt to curse the people of God?*

Buried in Balaam's heart was the love of ungodly riches and honour. He was drunk with the desire for the mammon of unrighteousness. But the Lord and Saviour warned all men to "**take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth**" (Luke 12:15). Apostle Paul also stressed that "**the love of money is the root of all evils...**" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Balaam, a once gifted prophet fell through covetousness, a weapon and messenger in the hands of our adversary, the devil. The entire Bible landscape is littered with men and women who also fell through covetousness. Judas Iscariot the disciple of the Lord, Demas the companion of Paul and Lot's wife are few of the examples. This is why the Bible warns "**let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**" (1 Corinthians 10:12). This calls on a wise pilgrim to heed the Lord's admonition to watchfulness and prayer (Matthew 26:41).

Question 2: *What lessons can we learn from the preparations and persistence of Balak and Balaam to curse Israel?*

There are salient lessons for today's believers in the attitude of both Balak and Balaam: One, just as Balak enticed and mounted pressure on Balaam to do everything possible to change the mind of God, so does the devil and his cohorts against believers of all ages at every step of their pilgrimage. Satan never gives up on tempting the believer until he takes his final breath in death or rapture. As Satan tempted Christ so he still tempts believers today. These

temptations come in various manners, methods and magnitudes. No matter how young or old in the faith, believers must be on guard against common and peculiar temptations.

Two, it is glaring from the actions of Balak that he and his people were sore afraid of the people of God. They were troubled and restless because of the mighty acts of the God of Israel. Therefore, Christians need not be afraid of the enemies. Rather, their concern should always be to secure and maintain the abiding presence of God. Three, believers who have yielded to the temptation to be covetous, like Balaam, are always more likely to compromise their faith in marriage, in business, when seeking for jobs, when writing examinations, and when making a choice of carrier and so on.

Four, covetousness leads to loss of vision, passion for God and His service. How many believers who were once on fire for the Lord, who had missionary passion, are now turned to visionless millionaires! The Lord admonishes: **“Labour not for the meat which periseth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed”** (John 6:27).

Five, from the determination and persistence of Balak and Balaam in their sinister objective of undoing Israel, we see how wicked people never rest in their attempts to ruin the believer; hence, Christians should not seek repose. Also believers should be equally zealous and determined in the pursuit of their God-given mandate of evangelization and warfare against the devil by persisting in preaching and employing new styles and methods of reaching sinners with the gospel.

PROMISES AND PRONOUNCEMENTS OF BLESSINGS UPON ISRAEL
(Numbers 23:7-12, 18-26; Exodus 33:14; Deuteronomy 28:1-13; Psalm 91:1-16; 1 Kings 8:56; Isaiah 43:1-4; 54:17)

“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?” (Numbers 23:8).

In the spiritual battle against Israel, the faithful God stoutly defended His people against the evil allies and the enemy of the righteous nation was disappointed, defeated and confounded. In fact, there was confusion in the camp of Balak as he could not agree with his hired prophet, Balaam.

The unchanging God had declared, **“For I am the LORD, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”** (Malachi 3:6). It is impossible for the enemies to change what God has said, **“that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”** (Hebrews 6:18). God used Balaam’s mouth in his first and second prophecies to re-echo what He had promised centuries back. After all, He created man’s mouth, He overrules in the affairs of men, and all powers in heaven and in the earth belong to Him.

Believers should therefore rejoice because there is no Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Balak, or Herod anywhere who can withstand the Almighty or prevail against Him. Israel was under the impenetrable protection of the Almighty God. **“If God be for us, who can be against us?”** (Romans 8:31). The submission of Balaam revealed some of the attributes of God: **“God is not a**

man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Numbers 23:19,20). God is omnipotent. He is unlimited in power, grace and resources; who **“can say unto Him what doest Thou?”** (Daniel 4:35). He is omniscient. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows where the traps of the enemies are. He guides, leads, helps, sustains and protects the believer. He is absolutely dependable. He is omnipresent. He is everywhere: whether Egypt or Canaan. And He had promised **“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest”** (Exodus 33:14).

Question 3: *What is the basic condition for receiving continued protection from God?*

At this time of intense conspiracy of Balak and Balaam, Israel rested in the everlasting arm of the righteous God of battle. **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”** (Psalm, 46:1). Israel was as **“bold as lion”** even in the enemy’s territories. As long as Israel kept her garment of righteousness, no enemy could prevail against her through curses, enchantments and divinations (Numbers 23:21). Where there is no sin, there is no curse. Physical and spiritual strength resided with Israel: No feeble one among them (Psalm 105:37). Balaam captured Israel as goodly and blessed trees planted by the river side; as precious and strong trees that experience nothing like draught in adverse weathers (Numbers 24:5,6). The Psalmist, considering the dealings of God with the righteous wrote thus, **“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”** (Psalm 37:25). God, the Deliverer, Saviour and Strength of Israel strengthened her against the enemy nations. She waxed strong, became a threat to her enemies and unconquerable to her foes.

Nothing pleases God like a righteous life. Righteousness attracts the presence, power, protection and peace of God. It is power against sin, Satan and sicknesses. It preserves from diseases, destruction and eternal death. It prospers, promotes and permits entrance into heaven.

Righteous people are the apples of God’s eyes, they are God’s battle axes, God’s inheritance and citizens of the heavenly kingdom, custodians of the oracles and resources of heaven. It was this set of people Balaam was asked to curse. He attempted the impossible at the expense of his life (Numbers 31:8). It is dangerous to fight the people of God seeing He will always preserve the righteous people, family, community or nation. Regrettably, many so-called believers today spend much of their time in things which are of no eternal value but pay little or no attention to the purity of their hearts which endears one to God. What a great challenge to Christians of our time!

PERILS AND FUTILITY IN FIGHTING AGAINST ISRAEL (Numbers 23:11, 12, 25, 26; 24:10-13; Job 5:12; Nehemiah 4:15; Psalm 33:10; Isaiah 8:10)

The several enchantments by Balaam and Balak against Israel ended in disappointment. In Balak’s case, he lost his huge financial investment in the attempt. Both Balaam and Balak lost a lot of time and resources. Much later,

Balaam lost his life with the Moabites in a battle against the Israelites (Numbers 31:8). The Bible rightly says, **“He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise”** (Job 5:12). It is really perilous to fight against the Israel of God. This teaches us that as believers, we should not be afraid of the activities of the wicked ones around us but maintain a holy walk with God always, so as to sustain God’s protection over our lives.

Question 4: Give three examples of people in the Scriptures who fought against the children of God and the consequences that followed.

God does not leave His people at the mercy of their enemies. Those who rose or fought against God’s people in the scriptures were severely dealt with by God Himself. This is in line with His promise, **“I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries”** (Exodus 23:22). People, like Korah and his group, who fought against righteous people like Moses were buried alive supernaturally (Numbers 16:3,31-33); the presidents and princes of Babylon fought against Daniel but were cast into the den of lions (Daniel 6:1-4,24); Haman was hung in the gallows for plotting to destroy Mordecai and the Jews in Shushan (Esther 3:9;7:9,10), etc. Today, all those who constitute themselves as enemies of God’s people risk the same predicaments if they choose to continue in their evil plot and fail to repent.

Question 5: How can a sinner or backslider obtain the favour of God?

Sinners and backsliders who fear the punishment of God should seek God genuinely through repentance rather than multiplying sacrifices. **“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”** (Isaiah 55:6,7). Anything short of that will not do.

BALAAM'S PROPHECIES

MEMORY VERSE: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Number 24:17).

TEXT: Numbers 24:10-25

In the last study, we saw how Balaam's vicious scheme of cursing the children of Israel failed; how he tried unsuccessfully to cast spell on a people destined for blessing. Even under intense pressure from desperate Balak, he could not reverse what God has decreed. Balaam realized too late that there was no need to join hands with the enemy of God to curse the people whom He had determined to bless. In his disappointment and frustration, he said: "**How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?**" (Numbers 23:8).

Question 1: *Why was Balaam not able to curse the children of Israel and what should believers do to maintain constant victory over enemies of righteousness?*

The Lord saw in Israel the future of "**a holy people unto the LORD... and the LORD hath chosen thee [her] to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth**" (Deuteronomy 14:2). The nation enjoyed the conditions of the covenant God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to establish, multiply and prosper them because of His favour and kindness. This was the secret of their victory over their enemy. "**He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him...**" (Numbers 23:21). As long as they remained His chosen people, their welfare was guaranteed. In the same way, if a child of God remains faithful and committed to the ideals of righteousness, submission and obedience to the word of God, the plan and purpose of the enemy cannot be fulfilled in his life (Job 5:12; Isaiah 54:14-17). We learn that God's presence is always with His people to defend and preserve them from the devices of the enemy in such a way that even our enemies, like Balaam, will come to realize the sanctity of God's purpose for His people.

This lesson brings us to the conclusion of Balaam's failed efforts at cursing the children of Israel and his complete abandonment of the ungodly project. Seeing "**that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he [Balaam] went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantment...**" (Numbers 24:1), but prophesied about the blessed state of Israel, the coming Messiah and the defeat of the heathen nations.

BALAK'S DISAPPOINTMENT AND BALAAM'S COMPROMISE (Numbers 24:10-14; 31:8, 16; Jude 11; 2 Peter 2:14-16; Ezekiel 33:31; Ephesians 5:3-5; Luke 12:15; Proverbs 29:25,26; Matthew 10:28; Acts 8:18-23).

Balak was utterly disappointed with the utterances of Balaam. His anger was expressed both in gestures and in words. In his disappointment, he dismissed Balaam saying: "**now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto**

great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour” (Numbers 24:11). The expression of Balak’s disappointment with Balaam represents the common attitude of most men, especially the rich and highly placed in society at the truth which may not be palatable to them. They like to hear what suits and keeps them in their carnal pleasures. And when a true preacher declares the word without fear or favour, they are offended. Such ministers should neither be afraid of the consequences of standing for the truth nor aim at pleasing men. They should speak uncompromisingly, aiming to please God alone.

That Balaam was not a true prophet of God is clear from his effort to please Balak in order to scurry his favour rather than God. This fear of losing favour with Balak led to his compromise, covetousness and evil counsel on how to defeat Israel. Thus, Balaam lost out completely as he tried to please the heathen prince and the Lord at the same time. The truth of scripture that no one can serve two masters is underscored for saints to take heed.

Question 2: What lessons do we learn from Balaam’s compromise and Balak’s refusal to honour him?

There are vital lessons to learn from the consequences of Balaam’s covetous disposition. One, those who forsake the way of the Lord and are carried away by mundane things of the world will eventually be forsaken by God if they fail to repent. Second, Christians should watch against covetousness in the heart because it can lead to compromise as well as defilement and damnation of the soul. Third, we should strive to please God rather than men. Fourth, we should not feel disappointed when we are denied honour or privileges for refusing to compromise our Christian stand. Finally, believers should be wary of material gifts because they can prove to be baits to lure them away from the right course.

Question 3: What are the consequences of covetousness? Give some examples in the Bible?

Following Balak’s dismissal, Balaam attempted to cover up his covetousness and failure to carry out Balak’s demands by saying: **“Spake I not also to thy messengers...saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD...”** (Numbers 24:12,13). But was Balaam really interested in obeying the commandments of God? Obviously, no. God had said, **“thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed”** (Numbers 22:12). Balaam’s claim to be acting in conformity to God’s commandment amounts to committing another sin of lying. He could not be said to be sincere with this claim.

Like Balaam, there are many so-called ministers who in their bid to cover up their covetous disposition commit other sins. The lesson here is that it is foolish and futile to cover up any form of sin; even if it is done, albeit carefully, the all-seeing God takes note of every wicked act wherever it occurs.

Still obsessed with covetousness and not satisfied with his loss of the reward of unrighteousness, Balaam came up with another ploy to circumvent God’s command. He told Balaak: **“Come therefore, and I will advertise (counsel) thee”** (Numbers 24:14). Though the counsel is not stated here because it was given privately, we learn afterward that he counseled Balak to entice the Israelites to whoredom and idolatry (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16).

Covetousness is deadly if it is not checked in the heart, confessed and repented of; it has the ability to destroy our Christian profession. Examples abound in the Bible

of those who ruined their lives and ministries through covetousness. They include: Achan, Ahab, Gehazi, Judas Iscariot, Ananias and Saphira, Demas and so on (Joshua 7:20-26; 1 Kings 21:1-4, 17-19; 2 Kings 5:20-27; Matthew 26:14-16; Acts 1:16-20; 5:1-10; 2 Timothy 4:10). We must therefore always resist covetousness bearing in mind that **“...godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content”** (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE REIGN AND DOMINION OF CHRIST (Numbers 24:15-19; Isaiah 9:6,7; Zechariah 9:10; Revelation 11:15; Daniel 7:13,14 ; Micah 5:2; Revelation 12:10)

“And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open” (Numbers 24:15,16). These last prophecies of Balaam went far beyond his immediate life and stretched over time to cover many generations of the children of Israel. God opened his eyes to see into the future just as He gave dreams concerning the future to sinful Pharaoh and idolatrous Nebuchadnezzar, and gave revelation to pleasure-seeking Belsheshezzar. Note that although Balaam prophesied concerning the coming of Christ, he had no standing relationship with God. It is possible to hear the voice of God, know His word and even perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus and yet be utterly destitute of the grace of God (Matthew 7:19-23). Some may even receive some knowledge of the truth and yet be strangers to the saving grace of God.

God expects us to be “doers” of His word and not hearers and preachers only (Matthew 7:26,27). Having spiritual gifts, being able to perform signs and wonders are not enough or substitutes for God’s grace. Believers therefore should not go after gifts without grace but should seek to have both.

However, we can take challenge from the vision which covetous Balaam had. We can seek God’s face to receive vision for the lost and the plan of God for our lives. Jesus saw the people and was moved with compassion (Matthew 9:36) and Paul the Apostle saw the lost condition of the cities which he visited and evangelized them (Acts 16:6–10; 17:16-32).

Question 4: *Why should believers have vision for perishing souls?*

Christian leaders and members should be driven by clear vision for the ripened harvest of souls as well as the coming glory in heaven. This will keep them focused, dedicated and committed to serving the Lord and living lives befitting those that are expecting the coming of their Lord. Lack of vision weakens our resolve, diminishes our commitment and derails our goals in God’s service. **“Where there is no vision, the people perish”** (Proverbs 29:18). Ministers of the gospel should have their eyes opened to see the spiritual needs of the flock under them and labour to feed them with spiritual food adequate for their growth and development (Acts 20:28).

The depth and scope of Balaam’s vision and prophecies shows that God is not restricted by the choice of vessels through which He makes His will and purpose known. It also confirms that His ways and wisdom are past finding out. Of specific note is the prophecy concerning the Messiah, **“a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre ...out of Israel”** (Numbers 24:17).

Question 5: What does the “Star” and “Scepter” symbolize and how was the prophecy fulfilled?

Hundreds of years afterwards, Christ came as light into the world. He rose as a Star out of Jacob and it was no wonder that a star guided the wise men to the place where He was born (Matthew 2:2). Christ is the **“bright and the morning star” and “the Sceptre that shall not depart from Judah”**. Balaam’s prophesy concerning Christ concludes that the “Sceptre” and the “Star” shall have dominion (Numbers 24:19). This points to Christ’s eventual reign over all the kingdoms of the earth, a time when He shall outshine all the governments of other nations and **“rule with a rod of iron”** (Revelation 2:27). **“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder... Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever...”** (Isaiah 9:6,7). **“The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever”** (Revelation 11:15).

Question 6: What characteristics portray divinely approved Bible-based prophecies?

Bible-based prophecies do not contradict God’s word. They do not add or subtract from the word of God. Instead, they point to and reveal Christ as the central theme of their message. And, finally, God-given prophecies are fulfilled at their appointed time because the word of God cannot fail (Matthew 5:18). Believers should beware of false prophets who perform signs and wonders without any evidence of a righteous life.

BALAAAM’S PROPHECIES CONCERNING HEATHEN NATIONS (Numbers 24:20-25; Exodus 17:14, 16; 1 Samuel 15:1-3, 7; Revelation 6:8-17; Hebrews 12:29; 10:31)

At the time of Balaam’s prophecy, Amalek was the chief of nations (Numbers 24:23) but it shall be destroyed and wiped out of existence for their wickedness (Exodus 17:14,16). Similar fate shall befall the Kenites, who, though naturally endowed with security, shall be laid waste and taken into captivity by the Assyrians. The same judgment will come upon Asshur, Eber, Edom and others who ignore the commandments of God and lived to serve and please the devil.

Question 7: What lesson do we learn from Balaam’s prophecy concerning heathen nations?

Those who live outside the will and word of God will certainly perish, no matter how secure they feel, except they repent (Psalm 2:12). Finally, Balaam’s prophecy reveals the veracity and immutability of God’s word. Though His wheel of judgment drives slowly, it drives surely (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13). No man or nation is secure outside of Christ.

ISRAEL'S DESCENT INTO WHOREDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat and bowed down to their gods” (Numbers 25:1,2).

TEXT: Numbers 25:1-18

Our study this week deals with an ugly incident that occurred as Israel journeyed towards Canaan. In the preceding chapters of the book of Numbers, Israel was portrayed as an invulnerable and invincible redeemed army of the Lord. The divination and curses targeted at them had proved abortive in the face of divine protection (Numbers 23:23).

Unfortunately, what the enchantments of Balaam could not accomplish, the charm of Baal-worshipping women of Moab and Midian accomplished with ease. The children of Israel went into immorality with the daughters of Moab. Against all the instructions and warnings they had received, they succumbed to this grievous temptation of the flesh. One sin led to another. By committing immorality they became spiritually weak and so they also went into idolatry. **“And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel”** (Numbers 25:3). Israel provoked God by their twin sins of immorality and idolatry. The outcome was devastating: twenty-four thousand people lost their lives in the ensuing plague. Truly, the wages of sin is death. The merciful God who preserves His people from the schemes of the wicked is also the uncompromising Judge who punishes sin. Sin is punished, according to the justice of God, either in the sinner or his substitute. The only hope of mercy the sinner/backslider has today is in Christ, our sin-bearer and Substitute who bore the penalty for the sins of mankind. Every penitent sinner who repose his faith in Christ's atonement receives pardon and is freely justified.

Question 1: *How can one avoid falling prey to the wiles of the devil?*

Justified by grace, the believer needs to beware of the wiles of the devil and strongly resist yielding to temptation. Since he is engaged in spiritual warfare against the devil; he should therefore be watchful at all times. The need to **“put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”** (Ephesians 6:11) can not be overemphasized. Though Satan is the mastermind behind every temptation, the lusts in the hearts of men provide fertile ground for temptations to thrive (James 1:14). In this study, we shall see the real danger, threat and challenge Old Testament pilgrims faced. They contended not only with physical barriers like the Red Sea and Jordan and confederacy of hostile nations but with the ever-present temptation to lust and compromise with idolatrous nations.

PAINFUL DESCENT INTO IMMORALITY AND IDOLATRY (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16; 2 Samuel 11:1-4; Luke 22:31,32; 21:34,36; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Corinthians 10:6-8,11-14; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Peter 5:8,9)

“And Israel abode in Shittim and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab”. The Israelites, who have hitherto been dreaded by enemy nations, came face to face with the daughters of Moab in Shittim. Unknown that these daughters of Moab have been commissioned to debase them, the Israelites let off their guard and spiritual armour of righteousness and began to commit whoredom with these women. The daughters of Moab are all around the believer today. The scripture is loud in warning that a whorish woman can bring an honourable man from an enviable height down to a piece of bread. The lesson from this warning is all too obvious in the life of Samson and David, righteous people who yielded to the lust of the flesh.

At Shittim, the Israelites seemed to have momentarily lost sight of the fact they were pilgrims on the journey to the Promised Land. Israel forgot that the reason no enemy could hurt them was because God **“hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel, the Lord his God is with him and the shout of a king is among them”** (Numbers 23:21). Their overconfidence which made them to relax was their undoing. It is when the believer feels so strong to the extent he becomes spiritually relaxed that the enemy strikes.

Question 2: *Mention instances where overconfidence led to spiritual downfall among God’s people.*

There are many instances where overconfidence led to avoidable defeat of God’s people in the Scriptures. Israel was defeated by little Ai because Joshua lessened his dependence on God, not knowing that Achan had sinned (Joshua 7:1-5). In the case of David (2 Samuel 11:1-4), he was supposed to be actively engaged in battle, but he stayed back in leisure and that was when the enemy struck: he committed adultery. Solomon had a rare gift of wisdom from God, but his heart deceived him into multiplying women who eventually **“turned away his heart after other gods”** (1 Kings 11:4). Peter was too confident of himself to take heed to the Lord’s warning (Matthew 26:31-35) only to deny his Lord. Samson was so full of himself as a strong man that he easily discountenanced the counsel of his parents regarding unequal yoke in marriage (Judges 14:1-3) and he fell. The man of God from Judah accomplished a great task and was resting under an oak tree when the old prophet deceived him and he paid very dearly for his carelessness (1 Kings 13:1-19).

These examples and many more clearly dismiss the doctrine of eternal security. Our preservation and protection in Christ is only guaranteed as we walk in holiness and remain obedient to the word of God. Christians should not seek repose yet because danger lies ahead. On many occasions, God had warned Israel against intermingling with the heathen. His holy requirements are clearly set out in the commandments He gave to them. God’s past judgments for sins they had committed should have also restrained them from doing evil but they forgot all that they should have remembered.

Christ assures that no man or demon can pluck the believer out of His and the Father’s hands (John 10:28,29) but the believer who is filled with lust of the

flesh can be cast out of His holy arm. It is no wonder then that Apostle Paul said, **“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”** (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Question 3: *What lessons can believers learn from Israel’s downfall at Shittim?*

“Now all these things happened to them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Believers should do well to learn from the errors of those who have gone before us. One, we should constantly focus our attention on heaven where the Lord is waiting for us as pilgrims (Colossians 3:1-6; John 14:1-4). Two, there should be no room for idleness in our lives as pilgrims. The Lord’s injunction to us is to occupy till He comes (Luke 19:13). Three, we should keep the word of God in our heart always and not let it slip because it is the means by which we can be sustained in the faith (Psalm 119:11; Hebrews 2:1). Four, believers should always heed the warning to be separated from the world in all its ramifications (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

PUNISHMENT FOR IMMORALITY AND IDOLATRY (Numbers 25:4–9; Leviticus 26:18, 24; Proverbs 11:21; Ephesians 5:3-7; Proverbs 5:18-23)

It should be pointed out that not all the children of Israel were involved in whoredom at Shittim. God brought punishment upon those who were involved beginning with the leaders. The leaders were supposed to show good examples to the people but some of them disappointed God. For this reason God commanded Moses to kill them and hang their bodies so that others could see and learn lessons. **“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel”** (Numbers 25:4). It is always so: a leader’s sin is a leading sin; so judgment started with the leaders.

Question 4: *Why was God’s wrath directed against the leaders?*

Those who are entrusted with any responsibility in the house of God are expected to keep away from every form of sin in their own lives and watch after the people committed into their hands (1Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:17). They should use their positions of authority to fight against sin or any defilement and worldly compromise.

Moses instructed the people to execute God’s charge to kill all those who joined themselves to Baal-peor. Certainly, **“the soul that sinneth, it shall die”** (Ezekiel 18:4). God is holy, He is **“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity”** (Habakkuk 1:13). However, God does not have any pleasure in the death of the sinner; rather He pleads with sinners to repent before the hammer of judgment falls (Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11). Everyone that names the name of Christ should depart from iniquity. Wherever God sees sins whether in a member, worker or leader in the church, He punishes the sinner.

The only remedy for the sinner is to repent and place his faith on the vicarious work of Christ at calvary.

It must be stressed here that God does not delight in judgement but must be meted out according to His unchanging principle of justice. He delights in forgiving penitent sinners and backsliders. Forgiven, we must remain righteous to be able to enjoy His peace and inherit His holy promises in scripture concerning every need in our lives, and of entering into heaven.

PHINEHAS' ZEAL AND RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION AGAINST SIN (Numbers 25:10–18; Psalm 69:9; John 2:13-17; Malachi 3:16; 2 Corinthians 9:2)

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest has turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy” (Numbers 25:1,11).

While Moses was receiving instruction from God concerning the sordid happenings in the camp of Israel, and while many were bowed in shame and godly sorrow and weeping because of Israel's descent into whoredom, Zimri, a prince and leader in Israel impudently, brazenly and in the full glare of all Israel brought in a Midianitish, high profile whore into his tent to commit immorality. Phinehas, stirred by holy indignation went into the tent with his javelin and thrust the fornicators through.

Question 5: *What should be the Christian's reaction to the appearance of sin in the church?*

When those who were once righteous commit sin with impunity, saints should rise with equal passion to the occasion to defend God's honour and glory. Such sinners must be rebuked openly to serve as a deterrent to others. If we are to continue to enjoy the presence of God in our lives, families and in the church, we must be bold to deal with sin as Christ would. The scripture enjoins that the erring who is penitent should be restored to the faith after appropriate disciplinary measures have been meted out. Believers should continue to preach the gospel so as to save souls of sinners in the world before they meet with God's judgement and pass on to eternal hell. The wages of sin committed by either a backslider or raw sinner (represented by Zimri and Cozbi) is death. Be warned! Phinehas' action was not only justified by God but he was rewarded.

Question 6: *How was Phinehas rewarded for his zeal? What will be our reward if we manifest zeal in the service of God?*

Great and far-reaching were the rewards bestowed upon Phinehas. In the same vein, God will bless all those who rise up to defend His honour and glory today. For Phinehas, we see the following rewards: One, his action was counted for righteousness (Psalm 106:3). Two, he was acknowledged as an instrument of God's mercy, as the plague was stopped through his action (Verse 11). Finally, God gave to him and his posterity His covenant of peace and an everlasting priesthood (Verses 12, 13; Malachi 2:5).

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, vex the Midianites, and smite them for vexed you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor’s sake” (Numbers 25:16-18).

God’s judgment fell on the victims and originators of sin. As the Scriptures declares; **“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if first it begins at us, what shall the end be of them be that obey not the gospel of God”** (1 Peter 4:17). The Midianites eventually became consumed in the fire that they kindled. Balaam also who sold this evil plan of whoredom was finally killed in battle (Numbers 31:8). Sin is very deadly; those who lure others to sin will surely reap the consequences as well as those who are lured. **“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are”** (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).

Question 7: State some lessons we learn from God’s swift punishment on the Midianites.

Those who engage in immorality and idolatry will most certainly incur God’s wrath. The gross consequence of sin includes present-day pandemics like HIV/AIDS which is ravaging mankind. The cost of immorality is clearly high. This explains why believers should not just flee sin but also watch over the entire Body of Christ with godly zeal. The Church of God must also rise up to the challenge of disciplining Church members who sin, and those who lure others to sin. Purity and righteousness must be preserved at all cost.

Lesson 420

NEW GENERATION OF ISRAEL NUMBERED

MEMORY VERSE: “But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai” (**Numbers 26:64**).

TEXT: Numbers 26:1-65

Israel is just about to enter into the Promised Land, after almost forty years of wilderness journey. They are, at this point in time, in the plains of Moab, by Jordan, very close to Jericho. Having come near to the end of their wilderness wanderings, God commanded that they should be numbered again. It will be recalled that the first numbering took place while they were encamped at Sinai, in preparation for their march to the Promised Land (Numbers 1:1-54). Between the first numbering and the second, which our text records, there is a period of almost forty years. During that period, it is disheartening to know that of all the six hundred thousand men of war that were numbered in the first census, only Caleb and Joshua lived still to witness the second census. The rest of those men perished in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion against God. These were people who had journeyed out of Egypt under the mighty hands of the LORD and enjoyed great provisions of heaven. But when they did not maintain their relationship with God by obeying Him, they suffered the consequences.

Question 1: *What are Christians warned against as we look at the example of Israel’s defeat in the wilderness?*

Believers today are warned against the sins that proved to be Israel’s undoing in the wilderness. Paul warned believers to beware lest what happened to the Israelites be repeated in their lives. In the tenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul listed a number of sins that led to the defeat of Israel in the wilderness. These are: lusting after evil things, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). All these sins were the manifestations of unbelief and rebellion in the heart. And, just as they prevented the majority of Israelites from entering the Promised Land, they will also prevent professing Christians from entering the heavenly Canaan. To avoid being lost with the wicked, believers are admonished: **“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”** (Hebrews 3:7-12).

THE COMMAND TO NUMBER ISRAEL AND RULES FOR SHARING THE LAND OF CANAAN (Numbers 26: 1-4, 52-56; 1:1-17)

After the tragic incident at Shittim where twenty-four thousand Israelites died in a plague because of immorality, God commanded Moses and Eleazar the priest to number the children of Israel. **“And it came to pass after the plague, that the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers’ house, all that are able to go to war in Israel”** (Numbers 26:1,2).

Question 2: *Why was it necessary to number Israel the second time?*

The census concerned all the males, twenty years and above, among the entire congregation. The purpose of this numbering was very obvious. One, it was to have a data for the division of the land of Canaan among the various tribes of Israel (Numbers 26:52,53). Two, to ascertain the size of the army and know those men who could go to war, so as to prepare them to possess the land of Canaan. Three, to evaluate the number of the Israelites and show forth God’s faithfulness in their preservation. Despite the great number of them that perished in the wilderness, their total number at the second census was only a little less than the first (Numbers 1:46; 26:51).

This faithfulness of God in preserving His own people is a point often overlooked or under-rated by many people. Most times, we take it for granted, and do not see any special miracle in the survival of men in the face of serial problems and calamities. Yet, as we look at the case of Israel and their preservation, we ought to celebrate God and acknowledge His faithfulness towards His creatures. For Israel as a nation, to lose its entire adult generation in a short space of less than forty years, and yet maintain its distinctive features and also remain on course to the promised land, is a proof of God’s faithfulness, towards His own people. Israel owed their continuity as a nation, not to any merit of their own but, to the goodness of God. Great is God’s faithfulness to Israel because He wisely chose the younger generation to succeed the older generation, who were destroyed because of sin. As God was faithful to Israel, He is also faithful to His children today. It is because of His faithfulness that we are not destroyed.

Question 3: *What principles can believers derive from God’s instructions on how to share the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel?*

Apart from the command to number the children of Israel, God also told Moses to divide the land of Canaan for an inheritance to the children of Israel according to their respective populations. **“To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him”** (Numbers 26:54). This shows that in sharing the land, the principles of equity and impartiality should apply. Therefore God directed that the land should be shared proportionately and without bias or favouritism. To achieve this end, Moses was to cast lots to determine which portion of the land each tribe would get. Then, he was to use the population data, which he had obtained, to determine the size of each tribe’s inheritance. From this we learn that we should avoid favouritism, partiality and inequity in the church of God. Paul admonished Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus, to ensure that he avoided partiality or favouritism in his administration (1 Timothy 5:21).

But on the other hand, those tribes who had fewer populations should not take offence if those with more population were given larger inheritance. Each tribe

should be contented with their lot and receive with thanksgiving whatever the Lord allowed to be given to them. These virtues of contentment and absolute surrender to the will of God are very crucial for us to enjoy our spiritual inheritance. We should not be envious of others who seem to have more material things or even spiritual gifts than we have. Rather, we are to make the best use of what God has graciously given to us. In the case of Israel, their entrance into Canaan and their possession of the land, even the smallest portion of that good land, was not because of their own merit but due to God's goodness and grace. Therefore, there should be no room for carnal comparison nor grumbling over God's ordained formula of sharing His gracious gifts.

THE CENSUS AND ITS RICH LESSONS (Numbers 26:3-65; Genesis 35:22; 49:3,4; Numbers 16:1-3)

As God commanded Moses and Eleazar to number the people, they directed the leaders of the people to carry out the task. Our text furnishes the result of the census tribe by tribe and it also gives a breakdown of the families in each tribe. But in addition to the record of each tribe, the inspired writer made some instructive comments on certain families or individuals who were outstanding, either because of something commendable they had done or, on the other hand, because of some blemish associated with their character.

Concerning Reuben, he was mentioned as the eldest son of Israel who should have received the double portion inheritance. But he was cursed because he committed incest with his father's wife (Genesis 35:22). As a result, he lost the privilege of the first born. From this tribe came Dathan and Abiram who, together with Korah, led the rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:1-3). They could have excelled, being famous in the congregation, but they died prematurely because of rebellion. The scripture says "**and they became a sign**" (Numbers 26:10). That means they became a warning post for succeeding generations on the grave consequences of rebellion.

Question 4: *What cautions should believers take, to avoid joining rebels in their plot?*

Believers are warned to avoid any form of rebellion against God or His appointed leaders. We should also avoid any association that is prone to rebellion. It should be observed that the arrangement of the camp of Israel made it possible for Korah, Dathan and Abiram to plot their rebellion together. The tribe of Reuben (where Dathan and Abiram belonged) were pitched towards the south of the tabernacle with the family of Kohath, son of Levi (to which Korah belonged). Ordinarily, this arrangement was intended to enhance the worship of Jehovah and make the services of the Levites close to all the tribes in Israel. But unfortunately, it gave the rebels their needed proximity to plot their evil. We should beware lest the good arrangements made by our leaders to divide the Church into House Fellowships, zones, Districts, Group of districts, Regions, States, etc. be turned into an avenue to sow discord or plot rebellion. The fate of Korah, Dathan and Abiram should serve as a deterrent against any form of rebellious attitude in the Church of God.

It is also worthy of note that the children of Korah did not die in the punishment of their parents (Numbers 26:11). Obviously divine mercy spared them from the fate of their parents and most probably because they separated themselves from their father's rebellion (Numbers 16:25,27) in obedience to Moses' instruction. It was specifically mentioned that the children of Dathan and Abiram stood with their

parents in the rebellion but the children of Korah were not mentioned. Therefore the children of Korah were spared whereas the children of Dathan and Abiram perished with their parents. This is in fulfillment of God's principle of **"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him"** (Ezekiel 18:20).

Concerning the tribe of Judah, reference was made to the death of Er and Onan. (Genesis 38:7,10; Numbers 26:19). They both died because they did wickedly before the Lord. The sin of Er was not mentioned in detail but Onan was killed because of his insincerity and refusal to fulfil his duties towards his late brother. Sin is evil and its result is always disastrous. Because of their wickedness, both Er and Onan had no posterity in Israel and as the families were about to enter Canaan, they had no person to bear the torch of their names.

The tribe of Joseph was given a double-portion inheritance among the tribes of Israel. Manasseh and Ephraim, both sons of Joseph were counted as separate tribes and as such, they received that which Reuben forfeited because of his transgression. We should beware lest we forfeit our heavenly inheritance because of a fleeting pleasure or transient treasures. Whereas Reuben allowed his passion to ruin him, Joseph resisted the sinful appeal of Potiphar's wife and thereby he obtained for himself and his posterity a choice portion among the people of God.

From this tribe of Joseph, particularly from Manasseh came the daughters of Zelophehad. Though their father had no sons before he died, they insisted on receiving their father's inheritance. As a result, their names were enlisted in the record of the males in Israel, even though they were women.

Question 5: *What challenges can we receive from the fact that the daughters of Zelophehad had their names counted among the males in Israel?*

This feat by the five daughters of Zelophehad (Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah) serves as a great challenge and eye opener to believers today on the great possibilities of faith and persevering prayer. The daughters of Zelophehad approached Moses and pleaded their case. They insisted that they be given the inheritance of their father, and though there was no precedent to be cited in support of their action God directed Moses to listen to them. This teaches us that if, through prayer and faith, we insist on our God-given inheritance of salvation, sanctification, baptism in the Holy Ghost, redemption, healing and health, success and dominion, to mention but a few, we shall receive them. It also shows that believing women should not have any kind of inferiority complex in spiritual matters. In Christ Jesus, there is equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of gender, to fulfill the great commission and to achieve great things for God. The daughters of Zelophehad had their names listed in a record that was exclusively reserved for men simply because of their courage and determination to obtain what rightly belonged to them.

The last commentary in the numbering of the new generation of Israel concerned the death of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, who died because they offered a strange fire before the Lord. Their names were mentioned to show that they had neither posterity nor inheritance among God's people. Like Reuben, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Er and Onan, they became infamous and served as negative examples for succeeding generations.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND NUMBERINGS OF ISRAEL (Numbers 1:1-2, 33; 26:1-51).

Both the first and second censuses of Israel were conducted to know the numerical strength of fighting men in the population. But as we compare the two censuses there are some notable differences from which we can learn great lessons. One, the first census took place at Sinai while the second took place at the plains of Jordan near Jericho. Two, the first census occurred in the second year after leaving Egypt, but the second census occurred about forty years later. Three, the two numberings were also different in purpose. The first was to ascertain the number of men who left Egypt and to enlist soldiers who could fight as Israel marched through the wilderness. The purpose of the second census was basically to prepare a data for sharing the land of promise among the various tribes of Israel. Four, the first census was conducted under the leadership of Moses and Aaron while the second was carried out by Moses and Eleazar. They were assisted by chosen leaders whose names were specifically mentioned. Five, the result of the first numbering showed that the fighting men of Israel were 603,550 whereas, in the second numbering they were 601,730. They had a net reduction of 1,820 men.

Comparing the breakdown of the figures for the first and second census, it will be observed that some tribes increased in number while others reduced. The tribes of Judah, Issachar, Zebulum, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan and Asher increased in number over the first census, but the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim and Naphthali decreased in number. It is also instructive to note that on the whole, the relative military strength of the various camps of Israel remained as they were in the first census. The front guard, that is the camp of Judah in the east, remained the strongest being 201,300, followed by the rear guard, the camp of Dan, being 163,200. The smallest in strength, the camp of Reuben with 106,430 men, followed the camp of Judah in their march, while the camp of Ephraim, having 130,800 men marched ahead of the camp of Dan. With this arrangement, the smaller camps were kept in the middle while the stronger ones kept the front and rear guards. But it is also noteworthy that the camp of Reuben was responsible for the bulk of the decrease in Israel's number. All the three tribes in their camp decreased, with a total of 45,020 men.

It will be recalled that the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and also the lewdness of Zimri took place in this camp (Numbers 16:1-3; 25:6-14). How true then is the word of God that **“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). Righteousness will bring increase to an individual, families or congregations, but sin will diminish them. The tribe of Ephraim which was close to the camp of Reuben also decreased in number. But all the other tribes, with the exception of Naphthali in the north camp, increased in number.

Question 6: Point out some lessons to learn from the comparison of the first and second numberings of Israel.

From the comparison of the two numberings of Israel, we learn that a change in their leadership did not affect God's purpose. Though Aaron had died and Eleazar took his place, the purpose of God for His people remained on course. Two, we learn of the great consequences of sin. The population of Israel, rather than increase, diminished because many of them were killed as a result of their iniquity. Of all the great number that left Egypt, and who were numbered at Sinai, only Caleb and Joshua survived. All the others were destroyed in the wilderness. The

wages of sin is death, that is, an eternal separation from God. Therefore a believer should not toy with sin in any form. Three, the second census was successful just as the first regardless of the fact that the names of those who assisted the leadership were not published. No doubt, new people were drafted to assist in the enumeration and collation of the data; (because those who carried out the first census had died in the wilderness) there was no grumbling or bad blood because they were not given special publicity. In the work of God, we should be more concerned about getting the task done, rather than seeking personal recognition or attention.

Four, Caleb and Joshua had their names in both numberings. They were numbered among the fighting men of Israel at Sinai and also they were among those who would share the inheritance when the roll was called at the plains of Jericho. This is a great challenge which calls for a sober reflection and self-examination. Will your name be there when the final roll is called in heaven? Caleb and Joshua served God and fought against all obstacles in the wilderness. They also lived still to partake in the inheritance of Canaan. Like them, we should ensure that we remain true to God, fight against unbelief and all hindrances to ensure that we enter into the heavenly Canaan.

THE LAW OF INHERITANCE

MEMORY VERSE: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (**Colossians 1:12**).

TEXT: Numbers 27:1-11

Our text deals with the subject of inheritance among the children of Israel. As the new generation of Israel prepared to enter the land of Canaan, a new census was taken to serve as a basis for sharing the land between the various tribes and families. Up to that point in Israel, inheritance was only shared or given to the males. Females were not given inheritance in their father’s house because they were expected to get married and move into their husband’s family. However, in our text, a new order was introduced and the law of inheritance was reviewed to give just consideration to those who had no sons but daughters to inherit them.

Question 1: *In what way does the qualification of the daughters of Zelophehad for inheritance point to believer’s inheritance in Christ?*

The daughters of Zelophehad, though not qualified to inherit anything in Israel by virtue of their gender, became qualified because of God’s intervention and sovereign command. This reminds us of the New Testament provision by which lost sinners can also be forgiven and made qualified to partake in the inheritance of God’s saints. If a sinner will only repent of his/her sins and trust Jesus Christ for salvation, he/she will receive pardon and will be given an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:12). To obtain a heavenly inheritance in Christ, one needs not despair either because of a crooked past or a long standing contrary traditions and practices of men. All that God demands from the sinner is to genuinely repent of his/her sins, call upon the name of the Lord in faith and receive a new life in Christ.

THE PECULIAR REQUEST OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD
(Numbers 27:1-4; 26:33; Esther 4:8; 5:1-3; Matthew 7:7-11)

Zelophehad was the son of Hopher from the tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph who died without a son to take over his inheritance and preserve his name in Israel. Thus, his lineage was in the danger of being eliminated or forgotten. To avoid this, his five daughters initiated a decisive move saying, **“Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son?”** (verse 4). They pointed out that though their father had no sons, his inheritance should not be forfeited simply on that account. Therefore, they requested that their father’s inheritance be given to them so that they could perpetuate their father’s name in Israel.

Question 2: State some good qualities we can emulate from the daughters of Zelophehad.

Looking at the five daughters of Zelophehad and their request from Moses and the leaders of Israel, we observe some good qualities which we should emulate. One, they manifested great interest in having an inheritance among the people of God. They did not hold the issue of inheritance in Israel as a light thing, rather they were so concerned about it that they were willing to break all protocol and prevail against all odds in order to demand their father's portion. One wonders how many people in our day are still as so interested in the divine inheritance. Most people today place low value on the inheritance of salvation, holiness and Holy Ghost baptism. Little wonder then that they are not ready to stake all it takes to obtain these experiences. Two, they were sincere and forthright in their request. Rather than murmur or harbour discontent against leadership, they came out openly to make their desire known. Their sincerity, humility, honesty, and faith in God brought them divine commendation (verse 6,7). As New Testament believers, we learn that in moments of difficulty, confusion and need, we should, instead of murmuring and speaking evil against God and our leaders, emulate such attitude. Three, they were bold and daring in their request, but at the same time they remained modest and submissive to leadership. As at the time they made their request there was no existing law or provision to give inheritance to women in Israel. In spite of this, they made their wishes known and waited for God's response. Four, they were thoughtful and determined to perpetuate their father's name in Israel. They had a great respect for their father and did not want his name to be identified with rebels who were cut off from obtaining inheritance in Israel. Their burning desire for a place in the land of promise is both challenging and thought-provoking. Canaan was a type of heaven. Like the five wise virgins in one of Christ's parables, they had a strong desire to be there by all means and at all costs. Like them, every believer is challenged to press forward into the kingdom of God through personal persuasion, determination, diligence, prayer and uncommon consecration. Five, those women had a great expectation of faith. Although Canaan was yet unconquered, they requested for their share as if it were already their own. They saw those things which were not as though they were (Romans 4.17). They believed that the land of Canaan would be possessed by Israel and that their request for inheritance would be granted. Believers today are similarly admonished to have faith in God.

Six, the outcome of Zelophehad's daughters' petition brought, not only comfort and credit to their family, but also honour and happiness to female children in Israel. God's pronouncement was: "**If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter**". Finally, they had patience. They waited until Moses was directed on what to do concerning their case. Though it is not clearly stated in scripture how long it took Moses to hear from God concerning their case, it was obvious that they waited for a while before their petition was granted. This is one area many believers stumble in our present day. They are simply impatient and restless. They lack the ability to wait for God to fulfill His good plans in their lives.

THE PRAYERFUL REACTION OF MOSES AND GOD'S RESPONSE (Numbers 27:5-7; 9:6-9; 15:32-36; Leviticus 24:10-16)

When the daughters of Zelophehad made their request, Moses and the leaders in Israel did not have an immediate answer. This was because there was no existing law or precedent concerning giving inheritance to women in Israel. Therefore, Moses decided to take the matter to God for clarification. Moses was a man of fervent devotional life. He was a man of prayer. Whenever he was confronted with a new and unusual situation, he was known to resort to prayer. He did the same thing in the cases of the son of Shelomith who was accused of cursing and blasphemy against God (Leviticus 24:10-16); those who could not keep the Passover in its appointed time because of defilement (Numbers 9:6-9); the Sabbath breaker who gathered sticks contrary to God's command (Numbers 15:32-36). Moses showed his total reliance on God for guidance. He did not resort to popular opinion of the people by calling for a vote or consensus on what should be done. Rather, he prayed and waited for God to give direction. The success and progress of any believer depends on his personal private devotional life. Jesus says that **"men ought always to pray and not to faint"** (Luke 18:1). The beloved apostle Paul admonished that we should pray without ceasing.

Question 3: *Highlight the danger of taking decisions without enquiring from the Lord.*

The reaction of Moses to the request of the daughters of Zelophehad teaches us to be close to God and to take all matters to Him in prayer. We should not lean on our own understanding or presume that we know everything. We should seek God's guidance before we take major decisions in the church. Otherwise, we will make grievous mistakes and become a stumbling block in God's work. Those who take decisions in such serious and important issues as choice of life partner, career, business, accommodation and other areas of life without consulting God, end up suffering many avoidable regrets and sorrows. Moses was close to God and he had regular communion with Him. We also can enjoy the same intimacy with God by developing a regular devotional habit so that we can easily discern God's voice when He speaks to us.

Question 4: *Point out the lessons to be learnt from God's approval of the request made by the daughters of Zelophehad.*

God responded to Moses' prayer. He told him that the daughters of Zelophehad had spoken right and they should be given their father's inheritance. This teaches us that whenever we ask anything according to the will of God, our request will be granted. **"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us"** (1 John 5:14). Two, if we can pray and have faith in God we can achieve things that others might consider impossible. No one would have thought that daughters could receive their father's inheritance in Israel. But through faith and bold demand, the daughters of Zelophehad received the inheritance of their father. Three, through our faith we can open new doors and bring about a new order for the people of God. By virtue of their faith these women became trail blazers because God thereafter made a new law that permitted daughters to inherit their fathers' inheritance, in case he died without a son. Four, God is

never in support of any discriminatory policies against women. Though He commands women to be in subjection to their own husbands, He frowns at any act of subjugation or violation of rights of the women-folk. By approving the demand of the daughters of Zelophehad, God proved that He is not biased against women and He is ready to protect their rights.

Five, God is ever willing to guide His people in every area of life. Whether in small or big things God is interested in leading us. Therefore we must always seek His face and defer all matters to Him. Six, the fact that He showed such a great and prompt interest in the demand of five spinsters who were hitherto unpopular in Israel, is an indication of God's interest in every one of His children. Those who feel neglected and desolate should learn from this instance: God loves orphans, widows, strangers and those who are lonely. He is always ready to hear their prayer and fight their cause. Seven, God is just and fair in all His ways. His principles are impeccable and equal. There is no partiality with Him and He has no sacred cows, rather all those who speak and do right are acceptable unto Him.

THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF INHERITANCE IN ISRAEL (Numbers 27:8-11; 36:1-12)

After settling the issue of the daughters of Zelophehad in particular, God gave the children of Israel a general rule and regulation to guide in matters of inheritance in the land. Generally, the sons were to inherit the property of their late father. However, if a deceased man had no sons, then his daughters were to inherit him. If the man had neither sons nor daughters, then the inheritance should be given to his siblings (that is, his brothers). If he had no siblings then his father's siblings were to inherit him. However, if his father also did not have any siblings, then a next of kin in the family line should take the inheritance. With this arrangement the question of inheritance was considered settled and all ambiguity forestalled.

However, a new complication arose on the issue when it became necessary for the daughters of Zelophehad to get married. If they were permitted to marry out into another tribe, then their inheritance (which was a portion belonging to the tribe of Manasseh) would be taken to join the inheritance of their husbands in the new tribe. This would be to the detriment of the tribe of Manasseh. Because of this, some leaders in the tribe of Manasseh came to Moses for further clarification. We should observe the orderliness and the peaceable manner these issues were resolved, and take a cue from it. Whatever problems that may arise in the Church or family can be settled amicably through patience. Moses heard from God again and commanded that daughters who obtain their father's inheritance must marry within their father's tribe so as to prevent the crossing of inheritances from tribe to tribe.

The daughters of Zelophehad being the first set of people to be affected by this law in Israel, were submissive and obedient. They did as God commanded them (Numbers 36:1-12). In other words, they decided to submit themselves to the rules and regulations of God so that they could keep and enjoy their father's inheritance. The spiritual significance of this decision is very clear for believers today. Some other women, if they were self-willed and carnal would have preferred to forfeit the inheritance and marry outside their father's tribe. However, because they placed a great value on their father's inheritance, the

daughters of Zelophehad looked away from every admirable suitor outside the tribe of Manasseh. Do we possess the same attitude of total submission to God and willingness to preserve our Father's inheritance today? How sad is it then that many people, at the slightest opportunity, throw away the great treasures of faith, holiness and separation from the world so that they can grab, with both hands, the fleeting pleasures of this moribund age! They do not place a high value on spiritual inheritance.

Question 5: *Mention some general principles to be derived from the law of inheritance in Israel.*

From the law of inheritance in Israel, some general principles can be drawn. First, we must be fair and just in handling the inheritance of a deceased relation. When a person dies his property should be given to the right person, that is, the children (Proverbs 13:22). The usual practice of taking the property and throwing out the children and widow of the deceased is ungodly and wicked. It is a mark of greed and the height of cruelty to take the property of a deceased relation while refusing to take responsibility for his widow and children. Believers should remember that God is specially concerned for the widows and fatherless children. He will avenge any unjust treatment meted to them. Second, it is very important that men should make their will very clear and unambiguous before they die. This will enable those who survive them to administer their inheritance without any confusion. The fact that God ordained a clear law of inheritance for Israel teaches us the need to also lay down a clear regulation on how our children who survive us should share whatever property God may enable us to leave behind.

Third, we must not discriminate against the female gender either in the family, church or society. The common attitude of preferring male children to female, (or vice versa in some cultures) should be avoided. Whether male or female, all children are gifts from God and if we train them in godliness they will fulfil God's purpose in life. The daughters of Zelophehad were girls but the five of them excelled and were a shining example among the children of Israel. In the New Testament, we also read of the four daughters of Phillip, the evangelist. They were virgins and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 21:8,9). On the other hand though Esau and Reuben were sons, they had little regard for godly inheritance. It is better to have godly daughters than a set of sons that cause shame. Therefore, we should hold every child that God gives to us in dignity and honour, irrespective of gender.

Question 6: *What are the things that constitute the spiritual inheritance of believers?*

The law of inheritance in Israel also points to the heavenly inheritance of believers. God has ordained a spiritual inheritance for His people. A portion of this inheritance is to be enjoyed now while there is another aspect for the future, to be enjoyed in eternity (1 Peter 1:3,4; Ephesians; 1:11,14; Hebrews 9:15). At present we can enjoy the privileges of using the name of Jesus in prayer and spiritual warfare; we can claim the benefits of Christ's redemptive work, protection, provision, divine guidance and communion with God. In eternity we shall inherit all things. We will receive mansions, thrones, crowns

and dominion. We shall be with the Lord forever. Although the children of Israel shared the land of Canaan, it was an earthly and temporary inheritance. As a matter of fact, they were taken from that land, time and again into captivity. However, the inheritance of the believer is eternal and that which shall not be taken away. Just as God gave the daughters of Zelophehad the condition for taking over their father's inheritance, there are conditions to be fulfilled before one can have right to divine inheritance today. One, there must be the new birth experience to belong to the family of God before one can have a title deed to divine inheritance. They were to marry from their tribe in order to retain the inheritance of their father. Every believer should marry from the family of God. All blood-washed saints belong to the tribe of God. Therefore, every believer must remain steadfast and abide in the faith and fellowship of saints in order to possess their divine inheritance (Hebrews 10:35-39).

JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

MEMORY VERSE: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (**John 20:19**).

TEXT: John 20:11–23; 21:1-14

In a previous lesson, we have seen that Christ did not only die but that He also rose again. His appearance to the disciples after His resurrection is one fundamental truth that authenticates the fact of His resurrection which the religious leaders of His day laboured unsuccessfully to prevent. His post-resurrection appearances to His disciples were in fulfilment of His earlier promise, and a proof of His deity. Besides, the faith of the disciples was also boosted to propagate the gospel of their living Lord. We are going to see in this study how Jesus, in fulfilment of the scriptures, appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, teaching, admonishing and encouraging them.

MARY’S LOVE AND SEARCH FOR THE RISEN LORD (John 20:11-13; John 20:2, 5-6; Mark 16:6; Mathew 28:5-7; Luke 24: 2,3,6).

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain” (John 20:11-12).

It was obvious from Mary’s concern and search for the body of Christ ‘missing’ from the grave that Christ was no longer with the dead. Mary was tearfully passionate about seeing the Lord. Her actions of stooping and looking into the sepulchre are a challenge to the lukewarm Christians today. The Lord promised to be found by those who seek Him with all their heart.

Question 1: *What did Mary find in the sepulchre?*

Mary saw two angels sitting, one at the place where Jesus’ head had been, and the other at the feet – but Jesus was no longer there (John 20:12). To assure her heart that He was alive, He came from behind her. And while Mary turned away from gazing into the sepulchre, she saw the Lord standing, not lying down. But because she was so overwhelmed by the crisis of His crucifixion at the moment, she could not recognise the presence of the Lord. Crises have a way of veiling the spiritual eyes of the believer, albeit temporarily, from perceiving the presence of the Lord. But the Lord is Jehovah Shama is ever present with believers even when they are sorrowing. The scripture reveals concerning the Israelites that in all their affliction and sorrow that He was with them. He is Emmanuel. He is always with us: problems do not drive Him away

from us – it is only sin that do. He is not only present but He also speaks in times of trouble. He spoke to Mary, asking, **“Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?”**

Question 2: What challenge can believers receive from Christ’s revelation of Himself first to Mary?

Mary’s love for the Lord is great. She enquired from the Lord (whom she took for a gardener) how to locate His dead body and carry it away. While other disciples returned from the sepulchre, the passion in her would not let go: she waited longer. Also, the love in her heart overwrote the fear of soldiers who had crucified her Lord. Besides, she was prepared to take the body of the Lord away. Indeed, love is as strong as death. It is no wonder then that the Lord revealed Himself first to her. Christ-like love is the greatest commandment in the word of God. In fact, God is love. The believer who loves God will persist in His presence and in His service; he will commit himself to the daily, regular intake of His word and fellowship with His people. Note however that purity of heart is a condition to possessing and manifesting perfect love that casts out fear. In the unfolding scene at the sepulchre, Christ mentioned her name and she came to consciousness that she had seen the risen Lord. Many people today still weep like Mary where they are supposed to rejoice because of their ignorance of the scriptures. The scripture offers consolation to believers who are faithful, diligent, watchful and prayerful that, **“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”**.

Mary was overjoyed to see the Lord. She expressed her endearment with the word **“Rabboni”** and a literal move to touch the Lord. **“Jesus saith unto her: Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God”** (John 20:17). Easily discernible from these words is the affection Jesus had for His disciples and the wonderful relationship they had with God in Christ. He referred to His disciples as **“my brethren”**. They became joint-heirs with Him through faith in God. Adopted into God’s family, they shared the Fatherhood of God with Christ. Christ’s Father and God has become theirs by faith. This is the privilege that awaits everyone who repents of his sins and receives Christ as Saviour and Lord. Those who have been saved from sin and who do the will of God are Christ’s brethren.

Christ was quick to set their focus on the abode of God and His children where He was soon to ascend. This is a message of comfort for the distressed hearts of the disciples and for believers today. God the Father and His redeemed children will live together forever.

Mary, in obedience to the Lord’s command, went to break the news that she had seen the Lord and relayed Christ’s message to them. All believers need to be prompt in obeying the Lord’s command like Mary did, not giving excuses.

JESUS’ POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES (John 20:14-15,19; John 21:1-14; Acts 1:3; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7).

Mary was not the only one who saw the Lord after He rose from the grave. Christ also appeared to other disciples. **“Then the same day at evening, being**

the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And... he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”

Christ’s literal appearance was with a declaration of peace to troubled and fearful souls of His disciples. As the Prince of peace, He needed to give them peace because it is one of the benefits to be enjoyed by those who put their trust in Him. Besides, they needed to have His peace in them before they could embark on the evangelization of the world.

Question 3: *Mention at least five instances of Christ’s appearances to His disciples after His resurrection.*

The post-resurrection appearances lay a most solid foundation for the faith of the early disciples and ours. John records three of these in our text today but a harmonized record of our Lord’s post-resurrection appearances in the gospels shows ten distinctive occasions. The first was appearance to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-17); (2) to the other women at the tomb (Matthew 28:9,10); (3) to Peter (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5); (4) to two people on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12,13; Luke 24:13-32.); (5) to the ten apostles and others (Thomas absent) (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25). All these happened the day he rose from the dead, otherwise called the first Easter Sunday.

The Lord also appeared to them on other occasions between the eight and fortieth day (when He was received up into glory). He presented Himself (6) to the eleven (Thomas included) (John 20:26-31; 1 Corinthians 15:5), (7) to two disciples and five apostles at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-25), (8) to the apostles and “**above five hundred brethren**” in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Corinthians 15:6), (9) to James, His (Christ’s) brother in the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:7), and (10) the concluding appearance to the apostles (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-12).

It is encouraging to note that Jesus appeared to His brethren in the faith, not His blood relatives; not to the political rulers; not to the Chief Priest. He made it abundantly clear during his earthly ministry that His brethren were those who shared in the faith He brought into the world. “**And he stretched forth his hands toward the disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and mother**” (Matthew 12:49,50). To all those who seek Him with all their heart and in all sincerity Jesus reveals Himself no matter their colour, race or level of education. Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances is an infallible proof that He is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour in whom all the world can repose their faith for salvation. “**Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else**” (Isaiah 45:22).

Question 4: *What is the major way Christ reveals Himself to His followers today and how does it start?*

It is clear from our text that Christ reveals Himself exclusively to those who are in His fold. The sinner is blinded and his heart darkened; he needs an

encounter with the Lord to come into the place of knowledge of the Most High God. This revelation does not come by mysticism, learning, travel or science. The major way He reveals Himself today is through the written word – the gospel message. It is as the sinner hears gospel message, repents of his sins and puts his faith in Christ that he begins to receive more revelation of Christ.

Jesus appeared to the disciples to make them know that He would not always be with them physically though His eternal spiritual presence was guaranteed. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. Apart from the fact that Jesus was handing over the baton of earthly ministry to them He was no longer concerned with death but ascension - and our resurrection. He wanted them to focus on their earthly ministry, finish it and then look up to heaven for their eternal reward. The believer therefore need to set his focus on Christ's ministry and finish his course with joy (Colossians 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrew 12:2).

The scriptures must be fulfilled. All that was written about Christ needed to be fulfilled and these would not have been complete if Christ had not appeared to His disciples. **“For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled ...”** (John 19:36). All that is written in the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation must be fulfilled.

The believer or seeker of Christ today must not insist that Christ must appear to him bodily. It is by faith that we receive Christ; He dwells in our hearts by faith and we relate with Him by faith. **“...The just shall live by His faith”** (Habakkuk 2: 4), not by dreams, visions and physical manifestations. Even though we do not see the light like Saul (who later became Paul); even though Jesus does not appear physically to us like He did to Mary Magdalene and the disciples, it is settled that He will reveal Himself to all who seek Him.

SUNDRY REACTIONS TO JESUS' APPEARANCES (John 20:20, 25; 21:1-14; Luke 24: 30 – 32; Mark 16: 13-14)

Jesus had told His disciples severally that He would die, rise again and show Himself to them but they did not understand. The disciples became joyful and assured when Jesus appeared to them. The first disciple that Jesus appeared to was Mary Magdalene, out of whom seven devils had been cast out (Mark 16:9). What a wonderful grace! When one is born again and perseveres in God, he can develop a robust relationship with the Lord. For Mary, weeping was turned to joy. She cared and loved so much; and now she was joyful. Earnest seekers are finders. Mary looked for the Lord affectionately – and found Him. It is not the title or position we have that qualifies us to have divine revelation, but our steadfastness, relationship with, and devotion to God that make us worthy of divine secrets.

Peter and John were equally excited but they were neither thorough nor did they linger. They ran forth together to the sepulchre and were among the first to come there. John outran Peter and came first before him. He stooped down, but saw only the linen clothes lying and did not go in. Simon Peter went a step further, went into the sepulcher and saw the linen clothes and also the napkin. They saw and believed; but they did not see the Master as yet. **“For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again into their own home”** (John 20:8,9).

The contrast here is in Mary's doggedness. The disciples came, saw but did not perceive. **"But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulcher"** (John 20:11). She went the extra mile and saw the risen Lord.

When later at the Sea of Tiberias Jesus showed Himself to Peter and six other disciples, their shame and failure was exposed (John 21:1-3). They had abandoned the primary vocation of fishing for men to look for fishes. Little wonder the exercise was a woeful failure. When the ever merciful Lord went in search of them, their slow reaction showed their lack of understanding and apparent shame at having backslidden. It is not good for us to abandon our charge of preaching the gospel for any other thing, no matter how lucrative. **"And he said unto them, Go, ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15). That is the everlasting charge which must not be ignored.

Question 5: *What is the best way to prepare to hear from the Lord?*

The believer should be enthusiastic and dogged like Mary Magdalene in his faith. The enthusiasm will lead him to share his faith and the doggedness will make him continue to the end. Here, we see the high point of Christian steadfastness in the face of negative scenes of our expectations. Cold, half-hearted and unbelieving response is not helpful and is not rewarding. We should also ensure that we are constantly and regularly found at our duty posts preaching, praying and persevering. Many seek Him but only a few find Him – for the very simple reason that when the Lord is talking or appearing they do not discern. **"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me"** (Revelation 3:20). It is only with spiritual faculties that we can hear from the Lord.

LESSONS FROM THE LORD'S POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES (John 5:39; 20:21, 27; 1Corinthians 10:11; John 14:1-13; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:13).

Question 6: *What lessons do you learn from Christ's post-resurrection appearances?*

The lessons to learn from Jesus' post-resurrection appearances are numerous. First, Jesus who appeared to His disciples after resurrection will appear again very soon at rapture to those who have been faithfully waiting for Him and who are keeping their garments unspotted (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). This is the next item on God's agenda and the believer will do well to prepare for it. The believer is going to abide forever in the Lord's presence.

Second, there is a preparation to be made before we can see him. He cannot reveal himself to those who are not earnestly seeking Him. We must not just be born again but our garments must be spotless, our hearts clean, our records straight, our service current, our light burning and our faith vibrant. Mary Magdalene was ready and consistent, and saw the Lord first. Peter and John were half-hearted. Thomas was unbelieving. Third, there is no room for doubt in the believer's life. What the Lord says He means and what He means He says. God is real; His word is sure. We should believe God and the totality of His word

and revelation. Fourth, Christ's revelation of Himself comes with responsibility. Like Mary Magdalene, we must be prompt in publicizing the gospel. The Lord sent her to go and inform the brethren and she did not waste time in doing that. Today the Lord has bequeathed to us the Great Commission which hinges on the believer going to preach the gospel to every creature (Mathew 28:18-20). We need to say the things we have seen and experienced. **"For thou shall be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard"** (Acts 22:15). We need to share our testimonies, we need to reproduce ourselves in others. The Lord has no other person to do it but His disciples.

Fifth, God equips the believer for the singular purpose of rescuing the lost through gospel-preaching. If they repent, their sin can be blotted out. **"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you... he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost"** (John 20:21). Those who enjoy His peace need to be equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit to preach to others who are crises-ridden so they too can enjoy the peace of God. Thus, Christ breathed on His disciples to strengthen them to carry out the work of evangelising the world. The lesson in this is that God gives sufficient grace and equips believers so that His purpose concerning the salvation of others can be fulfilled.

JESUS REPROVES THOMAS

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (**John 20:29**).

TEXT: John 20:24-31

The sadness and gloom that were brought about by the betrayal, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus Christ have given way to joy and renewal of hope with His resurrection. Now, the apostles are re-assured of the authenticity of their Master’s claim to messiahship seeing all He had predicted would happen to Him in the Passion Week had actually happened. If there were any pockets of doubts, the testimony of Mary and Christ’s personal first post-resurrection visit to them behind closed doors were enough to clear them.

That seemed not to be as the passage in focus today shows the skepticism of Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ over the testimony of the resurrection of Jesus. It is important to note that the Christian journey is a journey of faith: it is commenced by faith and it must necessarily be continued and consummated by faith, not by sight. “**For we walk by faith, not by sight**” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Harboring doubt or unbelief in the revealed word of God constitutes a hindrance or stumbling block to our Christian journey and spiritual growth. Many people today do not receive their miracles and other blessings because of doubt or unbelief. The best way to relate with God and get the best from Him is by trusting in Him. Jesus therefore underscored the importance of faith in our relationship and walk with God when He said, “**blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed**”.

Question 1: *What danger does unbelief pose to believers’ walk with God?*

THOMAS AND HIS UNBELIEF (John 20:24,25; Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 9:1-6; Hebrews 3:12; 10:35; 11:1,6)

Thomas was one of the twelve apostles chosen and ordained by Christ to be His close companions (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19). By virtue of this, he had known the Master’s mission here on earth, received enough spiritual truth including Christ’s resurrection and manifested the power of God in the evangelistic ministry (Luke 9:1-6). He had also shown deep devotion and commitment to Jesus when he opted to die with him (John 11:8,16).

Believers must be very careful therefore that they are not found to be casting aspersion on the person of this great apostle of our Lord. The sobriquet, the “Doubting Thomas”, which many believers and Bible-reading masses have given to this apostle, is un-biblical. The Bible simply introduces him as Thomas or Didymus, both words which mean “The Twin.” Rather than sit in judgement

over this great apostle, believers will do themselves great service by making better use of his weakness to strengthen their faith and join the group of believers who exercise great faith in Christ.

While not condemning him for seeking evidence to substantiate the claim of Christ's resurrection, it can safely be said that he should have believed His Master's predictions.

Question 2: *What lesson can the believer learn from Thomas' expressed unbelief?*

Considering his privileged position, closeness and experiences with the Lord, Thomas ought to have trusted and believed his Master's Word. Ordinarily, one would have expected that an apostle of such calibre who had been with Jesus for such a long time should not have doubted the resurrection of Jesus. So, his doubt is inexcusable. **"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more"** (Luke 12:48). In the same vein, believers should trust God and believe His word in whatever situation they may find themselves.

Note that the strength of the unbelief of Thomas is betrayed in his answer to the other apostles. He did not just say, 'If I shall see I shall believe', but that **"Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."** Thomas doubted the credibility of the testimony of his fellow apostles on the resurrection of Christ, his Lord. The veracity and the infallibility of Christ's statement on his resurrection, (Matthew 17:22, 23), does not depend on any confirmation by Thomas or any skeptic of today since, **"Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven"** (Psalms 119:89). It is clear that unbelief in scriptural truth is unreasonable, a product of hardness of heart and is totally condemned by the word of God. **"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God"** (Hebrews 3:12). Believers should be wary of seeking for signs to confirm the revealed word of God. Bearing in mind that they are called believers because of their unquestioning faith in the revealed word of God, they must not make sense evidence the basis of their faith if they must win the world to Christ.

The fault of Thomas was that he laid too much stress upon sense evidence. Today, there are many skeptics or doubters in the church. These are people who find it difficult to believe the move of the Spirit, people who want to have a scientific proof of everything that God has done or is doing in the midst of His people. Even though they may not have spoken out like Thomas, their attitude and actions portray them as faithless and unbelieving.

Question 3: *What contributed to the unbelief of Thomas and how can believers avert it?*

Thomas' problem stemmed from his absence from the assembly of disciples during Christ's first appearance. There is no reason recorded for his absence when Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. Had Thomas been there with the other disciples, the issue of doubt would not have arisen in the first place. Besides, Thomas was not there when Christ's breathed upon His disciples at His first visit (John 20:19-23). This is very instructive to members of

the church who are fond of absenting themselves from fellowship on flimsy excuses. Such unwarranted absence can be very costly leading to loss of opportunities for spiritual and divine visitations, and for growing of faith. **“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”** (Hebrews 10:23,25).

JESUS REBUKES THOMAS FOR HIS UNBELIEF (John 20:26-28; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:25; Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:5, 11; 1 Timothy 5:20)

Manifestation of unbelief by those who should know better especially His disciples always displeases the Lord. And He always expresses such displeasures. After His resurrection, His disciples did not believe that He had resurrected as He had told them. So, **“He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen”** (Mark 16:14). The Bible recorded that He even referred to them as **“fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”** (Luke 24:25) when they did not believe that He had risen from the dead. Here again, one of the apostle who did not believe got a rebuke from Him. This shows that He wants us to always trust in Him. On no account should we express doubt about His ability as Thomas did.

Thomas joined the rank of those who doubted God’s ability to follow through on what He has promised. Some doubters, of course, do not express it outwardly in words but by actions. For example, Sarah, Abraham’s wife, laughed when she was told she would bear Isaac in old age (Genesis 18:12), Manoah, Samson’s father, panicked when an angel revealed to him that his wife would give birth to Samson (Judges 13:22), Zacharias interrogated the visiting angel when told that his wife, Elisabeth, would give birth to John the Baptist.

Question 4: *What is the main purpose of rebuke?*

His concern and love for His disciples whom He cherished and groomed, prompted him to make a second visit to them after His resurrection. This time, he came specifically to recover Thomas from his doubt and unbelief and to reprove him for being faithless. Like Christ, we should be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our brethren and go the extra mile to recover as many as have been overtaken by one fault or the other **“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”** (Galatians 6:1). It is pertinent to understand that rebuke is meant to correct, restore, train, guide and instruct in love, and not to destroy.

The Lord cannot be tied down to a stereotype on how He rebukes His people. This is clear in the way Jesus rebuked Thomas and how He rebuked Peter when he denied the Lord. In the case of Peter, **“the Lord turned, and looked”** at him to remind him of what He had predicted that Peter would do (Luke 22:61). But here the Lord asked Thomas to examine Him as he wanted. But in each case, the rebuke unmistakably achieved its desired purpose – their restoration to

the faith. Therefore, the purpose of our rebuke must not deviate from that of the Lord.

Question 5: What lessons do Christ's second visit and His rebuke of Thomas teach us as believers?

We can learn some vital lessons from Christ's manner in rebuking Thomas' unbelief: (i) rebuke, when meted out with concern and love produces the best result. When Thomas saw the concern of the Master, he was moved to make one of the plainest and most irresistible confession of the deity of Jesus Christ, "**My Lord and my God**". (ii) Efforts must be made to clear doubts in the mind of new converts as such doubts could degenerate to erroneous beliefs, false doctrines and strange fire. (iii) Those who are involved in the Great Commission should be free from doubts and unbelief in order that they might be effective and fruitful (Matthew 28:19,20). (iv) It is necessary to encourage believers to stand in times of persecution (Acts 14:21,22; 15:36). (v) The appearance of Christ on those two occasions both of which took place on the first day of the week, teaches us the significance of Sunday, the first day of the week, as the day saints gather for worship service.

In summary, we need to differentiate between the expression of doubt and seeking for clarification. Asking relevant questions will help bring out spiritual truths and must not be mistaken for doubts and unbelief.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF BELIEVING (John 20:29-31; Luke 1:45; 1 Peter 1:8; Romans 4:18-25; Hebrews 11:1-33).

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Christ highly commended the faith of those who believe without having seen His resurrected body. From this we learn that to believe in Jesus, on the testimony of His apostles puts a man into the possession of the very same blessedness that the early apostles and disciples themselves enjoyed.

It is gladdening that Thomas did not make an idol of his doubt; he soon believed when he was assured by Christ that He was indeed risen from the dead. But Thomas' faith would have been more excellent and more eminently rewardable, if he had believed without such demonstrative evidence. The Bible says, "**Faith is the evidence of things not seen.**"

It is a common saying in the world that "seeing is believing" but the Lord is saying those who will not wait for evidence before believing are blessed. There are additional blessings for those who believe on the testimonies of the apostles and disciples of the Lord because those who believed while the Lord walked the streets of Judah and Jerusalem were also blessed but there are specific blessings reserved for those who would believe without physical proofs such as the ones Thomas was seeking to see and feel.

Abraham, the father of faith, demonstrated what it means to trust in God. When it was evident that he and his wife, Sarah, were too old to give birth to Isaac, he still trusted that God would not lie. Unlike Thomas, he "**against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations;**

according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be” (Romans 4:18). It is true that when believers are weak in faith, that is when they begin to consider what they should not; they do not stagger at the promise no matter what wind of circumstances that blow if they have faith in God. So long as believers are **“fully persuaded that, what he (God) had promised, he [is] able to perform”**, every trait of unbelief, doubt or fear will vanish and all things become possible to them.

May your faith so grow that you will be numbered among those **“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtain promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens”** in Jesus name.

Question 6: *What is the evidence that Thomas was restored?*

Thomas having been restored, exclaimed, **“My Lord and my God”**. This was a great confession similar to Peter’s (Matthew 16:16,17). This shows that the rebuke of his Master had achieved its purpose. He was now in the Spirit; hence he could make such remark that gives an irresistible truth about the deity of Christ.

The remark of the writer of this gospel in verse 30 does not denote that the Bible is incomplete or that more things are yet to be revealed (Revelation 22:18,19). There is no chance for any writer to begin another work on the already revealed word of God. Whatever is recorded in the Scripture is inspired by God and is enough to prove beyond all doubts that Jesus is the promised Messiah and God’s Son, and that through Him we might have full redemption and the benefits of the gospel by faith.

JESUS RESTORES PETER

MEMORY VERSE: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (**Galatians 6:1**).

TEXT: John 21:15-25

The focus of our study in this lesson is on Peter’s restoration to faith, fellowship and ministry by Jesus, the Good and Great Shepherd. Peter had been with the Lord since his call (Matthew 4:18) and had made two great confessions of his faith in Christ (Matthew 16:16; John 6:69) but openly denied Him with an oath. This was contrary to the vain-glorious boast he had made when Christ predicted that “**All ye shall be offended because of me this night**” (Mark 14:26-31). By this action, Peter forfeited his privileges, place and position in Christ because He had said: “**whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven**” (Matthew 10:33). Here again, we see Peter going back to his fishing business carrying other disciples along. Though it is legitimate to work and fend for ourselves and our family, this should not be done at the expense of our commitment to Christ and His service. They toiled that night and caught no fish until Christ came and directed them. We, as Christians cannot as much make full-proof of our ministries without adequate support from the Lord. He alone blesses and promotes without adding sorrow to it.

It is not surprising that Peter went this far in turning away from the Great Commission. This points to the fact that any Christian, in spite of his or her spiritual height or position can draw back if care is not taken to hold on steadfastly to his Lord (1 Corinthians 10:12). Believers should guard against everything that can lead to backsliding.

Question 1: *What central lesson can we learn from our study today?*

In our text, Christ, the Chief Shepherd, practically demonstrates the essential qualities of love, patience, gentleness, tenderness and wisdom. This is a great lesson to all Christians, Christian workers and leaders in the body of Christ. These qualities are needed in everyone of us to fulfil the responsibility of restoring lost souls and backsliders back to the faith and leading them in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). All believers, Christian workers and leaders are to avoid the critical and aggressive lifestyle of wicked shepherds who care less about the welfare of their flock (Ezekiel 34:1-6; Jeremiah 23:1-4).

PRIORITY OF CHRISTLIKE LOVE (John 21:15-17; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; Matthew 10:37; John 13:34,35; 1 John 3:14,15).

“So when they had dined” (verse 15). The Lord rather than directly upbraiding Peter for his unfaithfulness and ingratitude first dined together with all the disciples. This already was a token of reconciliation and was meant to draw them with the cord of love. Believers should emulate our Saviour in their efforts to restore those who have been **“overtaken in a fault”**. We should neither be hasty nor judgmental when endeavoring to bring back to the faith those who have erred through ignorance, weakness, infirmity or outright carelessness but we must approach issues **“in the spirit of meekness”** (Galatians 6:1).

Question 2: *Explain why love is an essential ingredient in all who seek to know and serve Christ.*

“Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” (verse 15). This question was put to Simon Peter three different times, and, to which he answered, not with the former assurance of a self-conceited disciple but with a graceful submission to the One who knows that without Him we can do nothing. His response shows that he has learnt **“that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong”** (Ecclesiastes 9:11). He no longer boasted that he loved the Master more than others. Second, he appealed to Christ Himself for the proof of his love, believing that He is the Omniscient God. Although men may give account of our love and commitment to Christ, He is the only one that can attest to the genuineness of our relationship with Him (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Job 16:19). Third, he must have realized the feebleness and deceit of the human heart which can only remain steadfast when buoyed by Christ’s strong arms.

Christ’s question to Peter the third time brought the message home to him. The Lord wanted a three-fold assurance of his love because love is the essential ingredient which makes other expressions of commitment, loyalty and consecration acceptable. Fasting, prayers and tears may not necessarily be taken as unequivocal proofs of genuine commitment to the cause of Christ. Fourth, those who must follow Christ as disciples must love Him above all else - possessions, occupation, recreation and profits of the world (Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26). Fifth, we also learn that the task of feeding God’s flock should be committed only to men with unwavering love for Christ in order to keep out hirelings from the vineyard of the Lord (John 10:12,13). Nothing but the love of Christ will energise believers to go the extra mile, and through difficulties and discouragements in serving the Lord.

PREPARATION FOR TOUGHNESS AND PREDICTION OF PETER’S DEATH (John 21:18,19; Matthew 10:17;24:9; John 16:1,2; Acts 9:15,16; 2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 2:10).

Question 3: *State the lesson every believer should learn from Christ’s statements on man’s lifespan.*

“Verily, verily. I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee wither thou wouldest not” (verse 18).

After re-commissioning Peter, the all-knowing and loving Lord prepared him for the challenges ahead. The Lord made it clear that the road to glory is strewn with hardship, difficulty, trials and persecutions. Those who would wear the crown of life at the end should be ready to bear the cross. As the Lord often spoke of His own sufferings and death, so did he speak of His disciples' sufferings and death for His name's sake. This was not meant to discourage them from following Him, but designed to prepare them psychologically and deepen their determination in the day of adversity (Matthew 10:16-23; Luke 14:27-33). The Apostles equally later used this plain language to encourage and strengthen their converts to withstand and conquer the worst onslaught from the gates of hell (Acts 14:21,22; Romans 8:35-39; 2 Timothy 3:12-14; 1 Peter 4:12-14). The point then is that, believers should not be overwhelmed by "**the reproach of Christ**" knowing that "**we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God**" (Acts 14:22).

"This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (verse 19). It is quite challenging that Peter fully belonged to Christ. His death was to glorify God. When we die patiently – submitting to the will of God; and die cheerfully – rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and die usefully - witnessing to the truths of the Gospel of Christ and encouraging others, we glorify God in death. This is the expectation of all saints (Philippians 1:20,21). Tradition records that Peter was crucified in Rome under Nero at about the same time Paul was martyred between AD 67 and 68. And that at his request he was crucified head downward because he considered himself unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

Question 4: *What challenge does Christ's command to Peter to follow Him pose to all believers today?*

Christ's command, "**follow me**" was an encouragement to Peter to be faithful and diligent in his work as a minister even as He was faithful to the Father who sent Him. Christ had the indelible marks of His faithfulness to God and had shown them to His disciples (John 20:20). Like Paul every leader and Christian parent should be bold to say without any sense of guilt and fear of contradiction, "**Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ**" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

PERSONAL CALL AND CONSECRATION TO FOLLOW CHRIST (John 21:20-22; Genesis 12:1; Isaiah 51:1,2; Jeremiah 35:5-10; 2 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 1:15-17).

"Then Peter, turning about seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" (verses 20,21).

Peter demanded from Christ to know what John's assignment would be if his was to feed both the lambs and the sheep. Peter's question was clearly motivated by fleshly curiosity and carnal comparison, which are condemned in Scripture. We may not also correctly evaluate the level of others' commitment to God. This can only be done by the Lord who knows all things. Believers are to provoke one another to more love for Christ, not just by empty words of

encouragement, but by our personal consecration and commitment (Philippians 1:14). God's call is personal (Isaiah 51:1,2). He only fully knows our abilities and the measure of grace He has given us. Consequently, the extent and content of our assignment is determined by the sovereign wisdom of God. Our duty then is to ensure that we make the maximum use of our talents to fulfill our ministry despite all odds (Matthew 25:14-18; Acts 20:24).

Question 5: Discuss some possible consequences of carnal comparison among worshippers in a local church.

Believers are called to look unto Jesus as their perfect example in their love and commitment to God. Carnal comparison can lead to stagnation for those who think they have done so much for the Lord. On the other hand, it can result in discouragement and despondency for those who feel they have done too little in comparison with others. Furthermore, carnal comparison breeds pride, unhealthy rivalry, competition and other evils associated with it (James 3:13-16). **“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”** (2 Corinthians 10:12). The cause of all the atrocious acts of Saul, the first king of Israel against David was due to his comparison with David who slew Goliath, the champion of the Philistines (1 Samuel 18:6-9).

The Lord's answer to Peter's question shows that whatever assignment He had for John was none of his (Peter's) business. **“Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, that what is that to thee? Follow thou me”** (verse 22). Believers are to pray and discover their ministry in the body of Christ and concentrate on fulfilling it. God has placed everyone of us in the Church to serve in various capacities and what He demands is our faithfulness to our calling, no matter how large or little (Romans 12:3,6-8).

PURPOSE OF THE SCRIPTURES (John 21:23-25; 20:30,31; 5:39; Psalms 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

“Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die...” (verse 23). The response of Jesus to Peter's question was misunderstood and misinterpreted by some who heard him, that John the beloved will be an immortal minister, probably to be an authentic reference point as a living witness of the life and ministry of Christ. But this saying, as popular as it was, was a misinterpretation of what Christ meant. This shows the uncertainty of human tradition and the folly of building our faith upon it (Colossians 2:8).

Question 6: How can believers be free from popular errors which are peddled by some religious bodies today?

“...Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (verse 23). The inspired writer here gives us the easiest means of correcting errors and staying out of them. He repeated the very words of Christ (verse 23). This implies that to correct and overcome errors, we must adhere strictly to the words of Christ, counting them

of superior authority to the words of any other man. Second, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture (Isaiah 34:16). The word of Christ must dwell richly in our hearts. Lastly, we should stop where the Scripture stops. Going the way of some “bold theologians” who make weird extrapolations from Scripture is tantamount to adding to the word of God (Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18).

“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). The writer was an eye witness of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-4). Those who have neither encountered Christ nor tasted of His grace have no business declaring the word of God (Psalm 50:16,17).

Question 7: *What is the primary purpose of the scriptures?*

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). This means that the reality of the deeds of Christ exceeds the written reports. The depth of the riches of Christ is inexhaustible and inestimable. His acts of love, miracles and mercies are too many to fully describe in words. However, these were written **“that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name”** (John 20:31). The purposes of the Scripture then are: to reveal the love of God to us, and our need of the Saviour, inspire faith in our hearts, and lead us back to God.

In conclusion, it is proper to state that the Bible is the revelation of God needed by all men for true happiness in time and eternity. All that humanity needs to live, serve and please God in all things and get to heaven at last are contained in it. Heaven-bound saints should therefore read the word “to be wise”.

POST-RESURRECTION DISCOURSE AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (**Acts 1:9**).

TEXT: Acts 1:1-11

Our text provides the introduction to the book of Acts of the Apostles. It forms a link between the accounts of the Gospels which end with the ascension of Christ and the birth of the Church at Pentecost. The text presents a brief statement on what took place during the forty days between Christ’s resurrection and His ascension. Thus, this passage is both of great historical and spiritual importance.

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts began the writing with a brief recourse to his gospel. In Luke’s gospel, he had narrated the acts of Christ, the Master, but in Acts of the Apostles, he narrated the acts of the Holy Ghost through the Apostles. Thus, he provided a link between the gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. The action of Luke teaches us that our former labours, no matter how good, should not excuse us from further labours but should rather encourage us to do better. We also learn that our new works should not make us forget old ones. The importance of following up our converts to maturity with teaching of the truth in scripture is also underscored.

Question 1: *What is the significance of dedicating some books of the Bible to particular persons?*

The books of Luke and Acts of the Apostles were dedicated to the same person, Theophilus. The dedication of the two books to a particular person is an indication to each of us to receive them as if dedicated to us in particular or to us by name. Theophilus whose name means “lover of God” represents all the lovers or friends of God. Actually, all true believers should always see every book of the Scripture as written to and for him directly and appropriate every message as especially for him. Apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit, tells us that “**All Scriptures is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**” (2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 15:4).

Our text provides a summary of the proofs of Christ’s resurrection, His conference with His disciples before leaving them and the instructions or commandments He gave them. Above all, it gives a particular account of the climaxing event in Christ’s earthly life and ministry, which is His ascension into heaven. These form the focus of this week’s lesson.

THE PATTERN OF CHRIST’S MINISTRY (Acts 1:1, 2; Luke 24:19; Matthew 4:17-19; 7:21; Romans 2:6-11)

It is instructive to note the pattern of Christ's ministry as summarized by Luke, **"...of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen"** (Acts 1:1, 2). Christ, in His earthly ministry practised what He taught and set a pattern for His disciples to follow.

Question 2: What will be the fate of Christians and ministers who teach others but do not practice the sound doctrine they teach?

Luke summarized his Gospel as **"all that Jesus began both to do and teach"** (Acts 1:1). The doctrines that Jesus taught were confirmed by the miraculous works that followed and proved Him as a Teacher come from God (John 3:2). He was a Prophet mighty in deeds and words (Luke 24:19). From Jesus' pattern of ministry, we observe that He practised what He taught. Our deeds ought to conform to our teaching (Matthew 7:21). The best ministers are those who teach the word of God and do it. Jesus had revealed that those who **"teach"** and **"do not"** are like the Pharisees and shall not have inheritance with Christ in heaven (Matthew 5:19, 21).

Jesus also laid the foundation of all that were to be taught and done in His body, the Church. His apostles were to carry on and continue what He began, did and taught.

The phrase, **"...until the day he was taken up..."** fixes the period of His evangelistic work. Jesus' earthly ministry which began after His baptism and temptations terminated at His ascension - a period of three and a half years. This period was characterized by consistency in ministry, constancy of purpose and conformity to the Father's will. This teaches that we should not be weary in well-doing. Paul explained that only those who by patient continuance in well-doing and seek His glory will be rewarded with eternal life (Romans 2:6-11).

Jesus understood that He would leave this world very soon and consequently lived and worked in view of this understanding and consciousness. He allowed no idle moment in His life but worked tirelessly and relentlessly. His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish His work (John 4: 34). He was always going about His Father's business and pursued it with consummate passion. His passion was to **"work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"** (John 9:4,5). Believers should always live and work with the consciousness of the brevity of life and understand that their brief life span is the only ministry opportunity window they have.

THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF CHRIST (Acts.1:2,3; John 20:1-8, 20; Mark.16:1-20; Matthew 28:1-10; Act 10:40-44)

The fact of Christ's resurrection is confirmed by many infallible proofs. (Acts 1:3; Luke 24:38-45). The reality of Christ's resurrection is so important that Luke mentioned it again in Acts 1:2, 3, although he had documented it in his gospel account. The earliest convincing evidence of His resurrection was the

empty tomb (John 20:1-8). The post-resurrection appearances also laid a most solid foundation for the faith of the early disciples.

The phrases, “**showed himself**” and “**was seen of them**” imply that the post resurrection appearances of Christ were real physical appearances and not apparitions. The apostles saw Him literally. They were neither in a trance nor were they hallucinating. The fact that He walked, talked, ate, drank and even showed them the marks of His wounds were infallible proofs of His resurrection.

Question 3: *What is the relevance of the resurrection of Christ to the Christian faith?*

The appearances were regarded by the early church as sufficient proofs of the reality of the resurrection. The Lord appeared to the disciples to fulfill Bible prophecies. He also needed to show that death's prey had been delivered. The resurrection and its infallible proofs show that Jesus spoke the truth as He taught on this subject (Mark 10:34). They authenticate His claim to divinity and sonship (Acts 2:22; 1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:3, 4). They proclaim Jesus to be the universal Lord (Acts 2:36; 10:36; Romans 10:8, 9; John 20:28) and the crowning glory of His earthly ministry.

The post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ made significant impact on the disciples' lives. At Jesus' death, they were disillusioned, fearful and cowed. After witnessing the event of Christ's resurrection, their faith was strengthened. We are challenged by the fact that Christ did not go to heaven immediately after His resurrection. He stayed 40 days on earth, strengthening and confirming the faith of His disciples. This was an act of love, self-denial and compassion on His disciples. It serves as a proof that we have a High Priest that is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Leaders ought to follow in His steps and willingly sacrifice personal interests and comfort for the care of the flock (Hebrews 4:14, 15).

THE PROMISED POWER FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION (Acts 1:4-8, Luke 24:49, Joel 2:28, John 7:39; 16:7-15; Isaiah 44:3, 4)

Jesus gave the apostles the commandment that they should tarry in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Ghost, the promise of the Father, which Joel and other prophets foretold (Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36: 25-28; Acts 1:4, 5).

Question 4: *Outline the various roles of the Holy Spirit in the lives and ministries of believers.*

The endowment with the power of the Holy Ghost is important in the evangelization of the world for which Christ died. First, the Holy Spirit helps true disciples by constantly comforting them. Second, the Holy Spirit helps to bring to remembrance all that Christ had said, thereby preserving the truth and veracity of our message (John 14:26). Third, the Holy Spirit empowers the believers to preach the Gospel convincingly and effectively (1 Corinthians 12:3). Fourth, the Holy Spirit enables us to perform miracles as confirmation of the divine approval of the message (Acts 6:6,7). In short, He gives courage, boldness, confidence, insight, supernatural ability and authority to the believers.

While the Lord Jesus was focusing on the immediate assignment of witnessing in preparation for His future kingdom, His disciples interrupted Him with a political question. They unanimously asked Him “...**wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**” (Acts 1:6). From this, it is evident that the disciples had a wrong conception of Christ’s Kingdom because they conceptualized the Messiah as an earthly conqueror who would free them from the Roman’s political rule. Jesus replied that it is God, the Father, who sets the time table for all events, including when the kingdom would be restored to Israel.

From Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question we learn that, one, we should be good listeners and avoid distracting our preachers and teachers. Two, we should avoid carnality and preoccupation with mundane things. Three, that we should avoid foolish and unlearned questions that are capable of generating strife (2 Timothy 2:23).

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST (Acts 1:9; Mark 16:19,20; Luke 24:50-53; John 3:13; Ephesians 1:20; 4:8; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 3:22; Psalm 68:18).

Having commissioned the apostles, the Lord ascended to heaven. “**And when He had spoken these things while they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight**” (Acts 1:9). This event was unique and kept the apostle gazing until the angels began to speak with them.

Question 5: *What is the purpose of Christ’s ascension?*

The ascension of Christ is very significant in many ways. It brings to a climax His earthly ministry. It asserts the universal Lordship of Christ and a proof of God’s power over nature. It demonstrates Christ’s victory over hostile human and spiritual powers (Ephesians 4:8; 1:21-22; 1 Peter 3:22). It serves as a preparatory route to his “assumption of duty” as our great High Priest at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:24). It also sets precedent for the believer’s anticipated experience of resurrection and the hope of a heavenly home.

It inspires an upward look of faith and expected literal return of the glorified Christ (Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 9:28). It assures believers of the fulfillment of the coming of the Comforter. The ascension of Christ marked the conclusion of His ministry on earth in His bodily presence. It also exalted Him to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-36; 5:30, 31; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). At the same time, the ascension underscores the continuation Christ’s work on earth by His followers (Acts 6:1, 2, 8; John 14:12).

THE PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST’S SECOND COMING (Acts 1:10,11; Matthew 24:27-31)

Christ had on several occasions told His disciples that after His death, resurrection and ascension, He would later come back to the earth (Matthew 24:29-31; 25:31-46; Revelation 19:11-21). While the apostles gazed steadfastly toward heaven where Jesus had ascended to, two angels appeared to them and queried the endless, unproductive gaze. They reassured the apostles that, “**this**

same Jesus” not another; this same body, not a spirit, would so come in like manner as He had gone into heaven (Luke 24:37-43). The foregoing teaches believers today that: (1) Jesus will certainly come back again (John 14:1-4; 16:22, Matthew 25:31-46). (2) Christ’s second coming will be literal (Acts 1:10-12). (3) Whenever events in the world make us to gaze and tremble, the promise of His second coming should comfort and encourage us (John 16:19-22). (4) Believers should be ready for His sudden return at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 5:2). (5) The thought of His second coming should awaken and quicken us to the fulfilment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). (6) The expectation of His coming should make believers diligent and blameless (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8).

READINESS FOR THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY GHOST

MEMORY VERSE: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (**Luke 24:49**).

TEXT: Acts 1:12-26

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the New Testament believers recorded in the book of Acts ushered in a new reality for the church age and signalled the fulfilment of the promise of God as foretold in Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28,29). Prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ had, before His ascension, commanded His disciples to tarry (wait) in Jerusalem for the fulfilment of “**the promise of the Father**” – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The disciples, in prompt obedience to the Lord’s injunction devoted themselves to prayer as they waited expectantly for the fulfilment of the promise.

The command of the Lord to the disciples and their response convey to believers today vital lessons and instructions. Christ in His instruction to His disciples sought to communicate the indispensability of spiritual equipment and empowerment before the commencement of ministry and service. They were to wait and be filled with power before launching out into the ministry of world evangelisation. The order God has set it is, be filled: “**ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you**”; and then go out, “**and ye shall be witnesses unto me**”.

Believers today seeking the genuine experience of the baptism in the Holy Ghost should do no less, if they ever hope to achieve the same results. The need for spiritual preparation and readiness to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit cannot be overlooked. It is God’s sovereign prerogative to bestow His blessings upon prepared, ready and willing vessels.

Question 1: *What is the primary purpose of the Spirit’s outpouring for the church?*

It is instructive to note that the primary purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit is for a great end-time harvest of souls in fulfilment of the Great Commission. The prophecy as well as the promise of the Father for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for all believers today; for believers who have completely surrendered themselves to the Lord; for believers who are thirsty and hungry for “**the rivers of living water**”; for believers who are sanctified. It is to “**as many as the Lord our God shall call.**”

RETURN TO JERUSALEM FOR PREPARATION FOR THE OUTPOURING (Acts 1:12,13; Jeremiah 4:1; Hosea 6:1-3; Psalm 78:34,35; Deuteronomy 30:2,3; Isaiah 55:6,7)

The disciples after the ascension of Jesus Christ returned to Jerusalem and assembled together at the upper room in obedience to the Lord's command that they should not depart from Jerusalem but "**wait for the promise of the Father...**" (Acts 1:4). The command to wait was obviously to get them prepared for the promised outpouring of the Spirit. They were to wait till the appointed time which was "**not many days hence**".

Question 2: Why is it important to prepare adequately for the promised outpouring of the Holy Ghost?

Before them was an enormous task of taking the gospel to the four corners of the world; but for that mission to be accomplished they needed to be filled with the power to carry out the assignment. Yet, the power would not come until they were prepared to receive. The aspect of waiting and heart preparation for divine visitation and blessing is unfortunately not appreciated by many Christians today. When they are faced with such challenging tasks, they rush into them without any adequate preparation hoping that by happenstance they will succeed. No wonder the poverty of spiritual experiences and emptiness of life and profession. The counterfeit is taken for the genuine, the profane for the sacred and the natural for the supernatural. Yet, the sublime lesson must be learnt that waiting should engender in us obedience, trust, patience and implicit confidence in God. God is trustworthy and His promises ever so sure, they must come to pass. We are not to fret, worry or be anxious when God's promise seems delayed in fulfillment. Our unwavering faith, patience, and unceasing prayer and praise to God will unlock heaven's treasure trove and pour down the needed blessings into our lives.

It is in keeping with God's pattern and dealings with man that human preparation precedes God's visitation. In the Old Testament, God's command to Jacob was to return to Bethel "**and to make there an altar unto God**". The movement towards Bethel necessitated putting "**away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean and change your garments**" before God's visitation and blessings (Genesis 35:1-5,9). In Hosea Chapter 6:1-3, God instructed backslidden Israel to return unto Him for the promised revival and restoration.

For the children of Israel at the point of crossing River Jordan, the divine command was "**sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you**" (Joshua 3:5). Sanctification of believers is a definite Christian experience received by the grace of God. This was one singular experience that enabled the disciples in our study to have perfect love one for another and to pray in one accord. When believers experience sanctification, it enhances their unity, fellowship and blend their heart together, preparing them for divine visitation. It is an experience that those who want to receive the Holy Spirit baptism must possess.

Sinners who expect to receive God's blessings should repent from all their sins, while backsliders should return to the Lord. "**Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon**" (Isaiah 55:7).

Question 3: *Why is it necessary for sinners and backsliders to return to God?*

READINESS FOR THE SPIRIT'S OUTPOURING THROUGH THE UPPER ROOM SUPPLICATION (Acts 1:14; Luke 24:49; John 7:37-39; Luke 11:9-13; Acts 15:8,9; Joshua 3:5)

Christ had intimated the disciples on the work they were to accomplish for the kingdom of God and commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the descent of the Holy Spirit. And the response of the disciples exemplifies unalloyed commitment, consecration and total surrender to the will of God. They were steadfast and resolute in their praying as they waited for the promised blessings. **“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication...”** (Acts 1:14). At this time, the problem of strife, selfishness, position seeking, competitive spirit and other traits of the unsanctified life had been dealt with. They now demonstrated love, unity; they had intimate fellowship with one another, the result of the sanctification experience. When believers separate and consecrate their lives unto the Lord, they become recipients of divine blessings.

The disciples in the upper room prayed passionately, perseveringly and fervently until their fears were replaced with faith, their sorrows transmuted into joy and their weakness turned into strength. Their prayers opened the heavens and released the outpouring. God answered their prayers in accordance with His will. **“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us”** (1 John 5:14).

Question 4: *What are the conditions to be fulfilled for a believer to receive the Holy Spirit's baptism?*

To receive the infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, the believer needs to (1) consecrate his life unto the Lord; (2) have a deep hunger and desire to be filled (John 7:37-39; Isaiah 44:3); (3) ask in prayer (Luke 11:13), and (4) be expectant in faith to receive the blessing from God (Mark 11:24).

The Holy Spirit baptism is indispensable for the success, effectiveness and faithfulness in ministry of a believer, Christian workers and ministers today. The experience opens the door to the supernatural and miraculous in the believer's ministry and it is freely bestowed on prepared, ready, sanctified and longing hearts who fervently desire and passionately pray in faith to receive.

RELIANCE ON DIVINE GUIDANCE IN LEADERSHIP SELECTION (Acts 1:15-26; Matthew 26:24; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Exodus 18:21; Romans 8:14; Luke 6:12-16)

Judas, who received the same calling and ministry with the apostles, by his personal choice ignored the warnings of Christ, hardened his heart and betrayed his Master. His sin of covetousness and love for filthy lucre led to his ultimate undoing. What a warning, for Christians who abandon their faith in Christ.

Question 5: *What precaution should believers take to avoid backsliding from the faith?*

To avoid the pitfalls of backsliding and derailing from the faith, believers should take heed unto themselves, shun evil companions, engage in daily self-examination, be watchful and prayerful, continue in fellowship with Christ, maintain daily, regular quiet time and be faithful in preaching the gospel.

Judas' treacherous plot and betrayal of Christ brought him to a miserable end and brought about the elevation of Mathias to the office from which "**Judas by transgression fell**". In the choice of Mathias, the qualification for the appointment of leaders to fill vacancies in the church is revealed. Those for appointment must be from the "**men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John; until that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection**" (Acts 1:21,22). Novices are not to be appointed to leadership positions in the church, but such as have been proved to be faithful, dependable, committed, consecrated, consistent and diligent in the service of the Lord.

Question 6: *What scriptural principle should guide the church in the selection of leaders?*

Joseph and Mathias, the two appointed, were so well fitted for the office. Hence, they sought guidance and direction from the Lord "**who knowest the hearts of all men**". Workers and leaders are to be chosen for the work of the Lord in the church not by their physical yardsticks only, but by their godly attitude, temperament, disposition and their holy lifestyles. The disciples desired of God to "**shew whether of these two thou has chosen.**" This attitude demonstrated by them is very instructive here: that the prerogative should be left to God to choose his own servants. God, however, does this, through the leaders He has appointed. Thus, Mathias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot and to "**take part of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell**" (Acts 1:26).

The choice of a replacement of Judas was determined by lot: "**And they gave forth their lots and the lot fell upon Mathias and he was numbered with the eleven apostles**" (verse 26). Bearing in mind that the Church was still at its infancy, it is understandable that they engaged in casting of lots which had been an age-long practice dating back to the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:8, 9; Joshua 14:2). The apostles were not yet free from the influence of Old Testament practices of casting lots though they had prayed.

After the Holy Spirit came, there was no record that they ever needed to depend on this method again (Acts 6:1-5; 3:2-4). As New Testament believers, we are to seek the face of God and guidance of the Holy Spirit in all issues of life. And leaders in the church are to be chosen by the leading of the Holy Spirit after prayer (Romans 8:14; Luke 6:12-16).

WATER BAPTISM

MEMORY VERSE: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (**Matthew 28:19,20**).

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-17; Acts 8:26-40

Water baptism is an ordinance instituted by the Lord and made binding on all believers in Christ. It is an essential part of the full gospel that the Lord has given unto us. A study of the gospel will show that water baptism comes along with the salvation message and with the Great Commission. It is binding on the believer as much as the gospel of repentance is binding on the sinner. It is as urgent and compelling as the Great Commission for the Church. Along with the Great Commission comes the command to baptize and both are unavoidable obligations and duties for a living, Bible-believing church.

Question 1: *What other ordinance was instituted by the Lord, apart from water baptism?*

Apart from water baptism, Christ also instituted the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). He gave the command on the Lord’s Supper before His death and that on water baptism after His resurrection from the dead.

MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF WATER BAPTISM (Matthew 3:13-16; Acts 2:41; 8:36-38; 9:17,18; 16:30-34; John 13:17; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27).

Water baptism is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet one of the most misunderstood teachings by contemporary teachers and preachers. At one extreme are those who believe that it is not necessary. To them, repentance from sin and faith toward Jesus Christ is all that matters. They point to the thief on the cross to support their argument. At the other extreme are those who believe that without water baptism one cannot be saved. In the middle of the two groups are those who believe that though it is necessary, it must be administered in the name of Jesus only.

All these are wrong. The Scripture shows that the ordinance was commanded by Christ and it is a necessity for all believers. There may be circumstances that will make water baptism impossible for a convert/believer such as we see in the case of the thief on the cross. His case shows that salvation or the new birth experience is not conditioned on water baptism. But it is a necessity for all born again Christians. Jesus commanded it to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; not in the name of Jesus only.

Question 2: *Mention some erroneous views people hold on water baptism and say why they are wrong.*

The word 'baptize' is derived from a Greek word 'baptiso' which means to immerse or dip inside liquid. This shows that the proper form of baptism should be by immersion in water. The immersion signifies identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12). In baptism, the believer shows his faith that Christ died for his sins and rose again for his justification: that if he dies he will be raised again in the resurrection; and that he dies to his old life and rises to walk in the new life in Christ.

It was not John who searched out Jesus to baptize Him, neither did he try to pester Jesus to be baptized in water. Rather, it was Jesus Himself who came to John the Baptist to be baptized. If you have been born again, you are the one to tell the leadership of your local church to baptize you in water. Water baptism is more important than other ceremonies of the Church. The Church must, therefore, not allow any programme or project to hinder it from carrying out the duty of baptizing all who have repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ "**for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.**" The baptizer and the baptized fulfil all righteousness when they obey the commandments of the Lord on water baptism. To delay the baptism of new converts is to fail to fulfil all righteousness.

Question 3: Mention some erroneous practices in water baptism. What is the proper order of water baptism?

The erroneous practices include three immersions, sprinkling of water, making people to squat in water, infant baptism, baptism of the dead, making the sign of the cross with water on the participant's face or pouring water on the participant, and, baptizing in the name of Jesus only.

Water baptism is by immersion, by submerging an individual into the water, by dipping him inside the water to symbolize the death of the Lord Jesus and bringing him up again to symbolize His resurrection. Water baptism is to be done in accordance with the commandment of Jesus: "**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**" The immersion is done only once and not three times. Jesus Christ was dipped inside River Jordan only once (Matthew 3:16); the Eunuch of Ethiopia was immersed in water once (Acts 8:38). Submission to water baptism serves as public acknowledgment of our faith in Christ. It is a public ceremony which testifies to the fact that we have put off the old man and his deeds and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Delay in water baptism for a long time is not in accordance with the Word of God.

THE COMMAND TO BAPTIZE (Matthew 28:19; 3:13-15; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:37,38; John 14:15).

The command to "**go ye ... and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**" is part of the very last words Jesus left for the Church. The Church has, therefore, no choice than to baptize converts and believers. If the Church, in obedience to the Lord's command, preaches the gospel, then it must baptize those who believe in the preaching, in obedience also to the commandment of the Lord. The Lord Himself, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, laid down an example when He submitted to water baptism. He was righteous and holy. He had no sin. He never did nor said anything wrong, yet He submitted to water baptism. If He did, we also need to, no matter how holy or righteous we think we are.

Question 4: *What lessons do we learn from the Lord's submission to water baptism?*

Obviously, Jesus was more spiritual than John the Baptist, yet He asked to be baptized by Him. You may think you are more spiritual than the people who have the responsibility to baptize you, all the same, you need to submit yourself to be baptized in water by them. Even though the Lord was righteous and holy, He needed to submit to water baptism to fulfil all righteousness. You may have been justified by faith in, and cleansed by the blood of Christ, but you have not fulfilled all righteousness until you are baptized in water.

Question 5: *Of what significance is water baptism to the believer?*

The Lord expects you to be baptized in water after you have heard the message, repented of your sins and believed the gospel. If you have not been baptized in water, you ought to. Repentance is an act of obedience to the Word of God, so is water baptism. We cannot separate the two. Water baptism is a visible, eloquent testimony of the sign of the believer's death, burial and resurrection with Christ. It is his public identification with Christ in His humiliation, burial and resurrection. The believer who is baptized in water is publicly testifying to the world around that he has renounced the things of the world and accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. The Apostles kept this command by baptizing believers; the disciples also obeyed the command by submitting themselves to the ordinance of water baptism. If you are a believer, you have no choice than to obey so that you too can receive the blessings of obedience.

THE CONDITION FOR WATER BAPTISM (Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:12; Mark 1:14,15; John 3:3; Acts 2:38; 10:44-48; 19:18,19; 20:21; Matthew 3:7,8).

Repentance from sin is the condition for water baptism. In other words, water baptism follows a very definite experience of repentance and faith in Christ. "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.**" A sinner needs to hear the gospel and believe before water baptism can take place. He needs not understand all the doctrines of the Bible, interpret and explain all the difficult verses of the Bible before he is baptized in water. Once someone has shown a very definite assurance of salvation from sin and faith in the atoning blood of Jesus, he is to be baptized in water. The message of the Kingdom is summarised in this timeless admonition: "**repent ye, and believe the gospel.**" The natural, unregenerated man cannot enter into the kingdom of God. A sinner cannot merit by his power or strength the grace to live the kingdom life. The appropriate response of a sinner who wants to enter into the kingdom of God is to repent and believe the gospel. True repentance leads the sinner to break from every connection he might have had with idol worship, occultism, secret society and evil fraternity. The one and only condition that candidates for water baptism need to meet before they are baptized, is true and full repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.

Question 6: *Why is infant baptism wrong and, what are the conditions for water baptism?*

An infant is innocent and has not practised sin to repent of. Therefore, he cannot be baptized in water. Likewise a nominal Christian or a church-goer who has not been born again, who has not shown proof of repentance from sin, and who has not been justified by personal faith in the atoning blood of Jesus cannot be baptized in water. Water baptism follows a definite experience and assurance of salvation from sin.

Jesus commanded that sinners be preached to and as they repent and believe the gospel, they should be baptized. This confirms that water baptism is for those who have fully repented of their sins (Acts 2:38). This also confirms that only adults who can exercise faith to believe can be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; 20:21; Mark 1:14,15). As it is being practised by some churches, it is fundamentally wrong to baptize infants who have not reached the age of accountability.

The pages of the New Testament are filled with references on water baptism. In Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus Christ submitted Himself to John the Baptist for water baptism. This was followed by the testimony of God the Father to the ministry of His Son, through the descent of the Holy Ghost on Him as He came out of the water. Christ's command in Matthew 28:19 was re-echoed in Mark 16:16. The Apostles also continued to baptize believers in obedience to the command of Christ. Among those baptized were the converts of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-42,47); Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:36,37), Samaritan converts (Acts 8:12,13), Cornelius and his kinsmen (Acts 10:47,48); the Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:30-33); and the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:5).

BELIEVER'S BAPTISMS (Hebrews 5:12 - 6:2; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 7:24-30; John 3:22-34; Matthew 20:20-23; Acts 1:5,8; 2:1-12).

The Bible, especially the New Testament, has a lot to say about baptism. There are various kinds of baptism. There was John's Baptism (Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 1:1-5; Luke 7:24-30; Acts 10:34-37; 13:24,25; 18:24-26; 19:1-6) as there is Christ's baptism (John 3:22-34). There was the disciples' baptism (the baptism that the disciples did for people who believed on Christ while He was here on earth - John 4:1-4) and, there is water baptism (commanded by Jesus before He went away, and in which if you believe, then you are baptised - Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). There is the baptism of suffering (which the believer goes through as he suffers persecution, deprivations because of his conviction and faith in Christ - Matthew 20:20-23) and there is the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5,8; 2:1-12). Hence the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews uses the expression, "doctrine of baptisms" (Hebrews 6:2). That the word "baptisms" is in the plural shows that there are various kinds of baptism. But it is unfortunate that in the Christian fold, there is ignorance on this basic teaching of the Word of God.

It is instructive that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews first mentioned "**repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God**" before mentioning "**the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.**" In many Pentecostal/Charismatic assemblies the cart is put before the horse; they leave out the all-important issue of repentance from sin and faith in the Lord and concentrate on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In many a prayer and breakfast fellowship, worshippers are interested only in laying of hands and baptism in the Holy Spirit. Conspicuously missing is the clear and unambiguous teaching on repentance from sin and faith in the atoning Blood of the Lord Jesus. But a careful and diligent study of the Word of God shows no reason for such a re-arrangement or trade-off.

In the proper order of doing things, “**laying on of hands**” is preceded by repentance from sin; not the other way round. Repentance and salvation from sin are in turn followed by water baptism before the laying on of hands. Repentance makes God to forgive the sinner all the sin he ever committed — as though he never sinned. Not only does He forgive, He also changes and gives the repentant and returning soul the ability to live a morally upright and victorious life. Through God’s grace and power at work in the born again Christian, he is empowered to live a morally pure life. The use of the word “brethren” earlier in the epistle (Hebrews 3:1) shows that the writer of the epistle was writing to people who had received the gospel and are born again.

Question 7: What is the danger one faces for seeking ‘anointing’ without genuine experience of the new birth?

Jesus has laid down the standard for water baptism and it is to be carried out in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19). Every believer, in obedience to Christ’s command, should therefore submit to the ordinance of water baptism.

However, salvation does not come through water baptism but by grace through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 2:8,9; 1 John 1:7,9; Hebrews 9:22; Matthew 26:28; John 1:12; 3:16,17; 1 Peter 3:21). The Scripture records a catalogue of those who got saved without water baptism being a pre-condition: the sick of palsy healed by Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:1-7); the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and cleansed them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10); the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) the Eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:30-37) and believers at Antioch (Acts 11:20,21). In fact, Saul of Tarsus was addressed as Brother Saul by Ananias before he submitted himself for water baptism (Acts 9:17).

The opinion of men cannot contradict the stand of the Scripture (Matthew 28:19). Once a person repents of his sin, it is mandatory that he submits himself to water baptism as provided for in the scriptures (Romans 6:3,4). The practice was upheld in the early church. Converts were baptized in water soon after their salvation experience (Acts 2:41; 8:37,38; 16:30,31,33). Every convert is therefore enjoined to yield to this important injunction. Peter encouraged his hearers to “**repent and be baptized everyone of you.**” Pastors must do their best to encourage their flocks to attach great importance to this practice.

Obedience to this divine injunction attracts great blessings. It gladdens the heart of God to see the believer identifying with Christ in His death and resurrection. Submission for water baptism places the believer on the pedestal to enjoy divine favour and showers blessings from God as Christ did when He was baptized. “**And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased** (Matthew 3:16,17). For God to be well-pleased with you, obey Him as Christ did.

SOWING AND REAPING

MEMORY VERSE: “But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15; Malachi 3:8-12; Galatians 6:7

The teaching of the Scriptures on sowing and reaping is clear. The believer who sows will reap; if he fails to sow, there will be nothing to reap. If he gives to God, he will reap, not just what he has given but more. Somebody puts it this way: “When I shovel to God He shovels back to me”. Prophet Malachi puts it another way: “**Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it**” (Malachi 3:10).

SOWING: THE SECRET OF PROSPERITY (2 Corinthians 9:6-8; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35b; Deuteronomy 28:1-6).

There have been inspiring testimonies in the Bible and in contemporary times of people who have been blessed as a result of giving unto God. The practice of *tithing and offering* is more than a duty that one does mechanically. A business enterprise does not expect a bank to pay interest on money that was not deposited with it. Yet, some Christians expect God to bless them financially when they are not committed to Him financially. Many sing: “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold”, only to be reluctant each time they have opportunity to demonstrate their love and commitment to God.

In the economy of God, to receive, we must give. The mistake made by man is to want to receive without attempting to give. Many people desire and pray for prosperity but refuse to make use of the divine key to enjoying prosperity - sowing.

Just like farmers who expect to reap must sow, so also believers who expect to reap blessings of prosperity must sow by giving to God. Paul the Apostle said, “**Let every one of you lay by him in store...**” No member of the church is excluded. If we sow, we shall all reap.

Giving is like investing in God’s bank and it is indeed a spiritual sacrifice that brings fruit into the account of the giver. God is interested in your material needs. When you give to God, you reap untold blessings from Him. He says, “**And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts**” (Malachi 3:11,12).

Question 1: *In what ways can one give to God?*

Although God is in heaven, He works actively among men. We may not see Him physically, but we know that the work of the gospel is His major concern on earth. The local church or Christian ministry is synonymous with the storehouse in the Old Testament. We can gladden the heart of God today by entering into partnership with Him and giving our tithes and offerings regularly so that there will be meat **“in my (His) house.”** Evangelistic crusades, Christian literature, church projects and other evangelistic ventures are carried out by the church. God will not send funds from heaven in order to advance His cause on earth. He expects His people to “play” the role of His partners on earth. He rewards those who are faithful.

You must obey the word of God if you want Him to prosper you. There may be economic depression all over the world, God still showers prosperity on those who adhere to the divine blueprint for financial prosperity. In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-eight, prosperity, wealth and abundance are promised to the obedient. **“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God”** (Deuteronomy 28:1,2). God has not promised that blessings of prosperity will come to you in small measure, but that they will overtake you. What a blessing!

Just as God will bless the obedient, the word of God clearly reserves curses for the disobedient. **“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee”** (Deuteronomy 28:15). Can this be true? Read the words of Prophet Malachi: **“Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me...”** (Malachi 3:9). To prosper financially, you must obey the word of God on giving.

Question 2: *Why is it necessary to give bountifully to God?*

What is the secret for prosperity? Giving. What is the essence of Biblical giving? Biblical giving centres on the ability to earn material resources and the willingness to use these resources for the maximum benefit of the Kingdom of God. God’s material and financial assets have been put in the believers charge and he is called to give out of them for the progress of God’s work on earth. This kind of giving is over and above the tithe.

All Bible believers must cultivate the habit of giving. Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” One does not get into prosperity by hoarding. Have you ever wondered why many dear saints of God are ever incurring debts and finding it difficult to be balanced financially? It is because of their failure to give. **“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself”** (Proverbs 11:24,25).

How are we sure that we shall reap when we give to God? Here is a divine assurance. **“...prove me now herewith saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not**

open you the windows of heaven” (Malachi 3:10). Prove God and you will experience overflowing financial prosperity. Your obedience and faith will germinate and grow into a bountiful harvest. What you give to God (in tithe and freewill offering) will be returned to you in full and overflowing measure.

Question 3: Explain the law of sowing and reaping.

MANNER AND MOTIVE OF SOWING (2 Corinthians 9:7,8; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Proverbs 11:24,25; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

God blesses both our manner of giving and motive when we give. Giving should not be done reluctantly but cheerfully. Giving is one of the greatest challenges of the Christian life and one of the greatest privileges that we enjoy as believers. However, many are yet to discover the great potential in giving. The church often runs short of money because of lack of giving on the part of the members. Church projects and evangelistic outreaches are often abandoned, delayed or hindered as a result of lack of funds. Why is this so? It is because many are yet to understand the Bible doctrine of stewardship and the biblical principle of giving. Lack of money is not the problem, but a lack of clear understanding of our responsibilities as stewards of God’s money.

Ministers of the gospel who have surrendered their lives for the spiritual benefit of members of the church should be supported. The missionary outreach of the church should also be supported. This is only possible if we give heartily and continuously. A proper estimate of the benefits that we enjoy from a faithful ministry and a true Bible church should propel us to give cheerfully. It is no secret that spiritual benefits cannot be really quantified. The only way of showing appreciation for what God is doing in and through the church is to give sacrificially, cheerfully and consistently towards the progress of His work.

According to our text, our giving should be characterized by bountifulness. Giving should be done with an open, generous heart and a willing mind. The metaphor of the harvest implies that the more generous the gift, the greater will be the return. Bountiful sowing attracts bountiful reaping. God will bless you materially when you give to Him. He will also bless you spiritually. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work... Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God”** (2 Corinthians 9:8,11). Other benefits of giving include being loved of God **“...for God loveth a cheerful giver”** (2 Corinthians 9:7). Also, the Pastor and other ministers of God will glorify God for your liberality and their prayers for you will bring great blessings and they will **“glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you”** (2 Corinthians 9:13,14).

Giving is not measured by the amount of money you give. The Macedonian believers, in spite of their poverty, gave to the Lord: **“How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality”** (2 Corinthians 8:2). There were cases of individuals who made pledges to God without really knowing how to fulfil the pledge but soon found that God gave abundantly above what they even pledged.

And they were able to pay their pledges. God is faithful. And giving is a venture of faith.

The Bible says, “**Let everyone of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him...**” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Does God expect a wealthy believer to pay his tithes? How about those who have little or no money? The unchanging word of God is the same for all and sundry: “**Let everyone of you lay by him in store.**” Whoever you are and whatever your position, make conscious effort always to pay your tithe promptly. Those who are poor are not exempted from giving and the rich too should make conscious efforts to give - we should all give.

Question 4: What are God’s conditions for giving and to what extent can a believer give?

BENEFITS OF SOWING (2 Corinthians 9:8-11; Malachi 3:10-12; Luke 6:38).

Liberal and cheerful giving, though, may be forgotten by the giver - who may not “**let his left hand know what his right hand doeth**” - it is never forgotten by God. Those who see giving as a pleasurable act rather than a painful act will reap abundant fruits. The short-sighted always feel that giving means losing, and that saving in the bank or some other way, means gaining. But the Bible says, “**There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty**” (Proverbs 11:24). Those who sow little will reap little. The niggardly farmer reaps a lean, scanty harvest. A reluctant, miserly giver will reap a lean harvest. It becomes clear therefore that, in the providence of God, liberality in giving is the way of prosperity.

If God expects you to give, then you need to give priority to giving to Him, as you draw your budget week after week or month after month. You must cultivate the habit of giving to God first, before you start spending on your personal or family needs. “**Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty...**” (Proverbs 3:9,10). God expects you to give the first fruits of your income or gain to Him. In practical terms, that means you give to God before you start spending what God has given you. Many people who are convinced and are willing to give, often fail to pay their tithe and offerings. This is because they often want to delay their giving a little bit and, before they know it, some other pressing expenses crop up and so they find it difficult to fulfil their financial obligation to God. “First-fruits” giving is the biblical pattern of giving. Give to God first. Get into the experience of giving to God today and He will give unto you “**good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over...**” Remember, what you sow is what you reap. Give to the Lord and in so doing, plant the seed so He can bless it and multiply it back to you many times.

Finally, expect a miracle. Believe that the windows of heaven will be opened and God will pour blessings of prosperity on you. Have you ever heard of a farmer who laboured tirelessly but refused to gather the proceeds at harvest time? That would be strange. As you give, expect God to give you. “**...Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it**” (Malachi 3:10).

THE LIFESTYLE OF THE SOWER (Hosea 10:12; Matthew 5:23-25).

One fundamental principle of acceptable giving is righteousness. For God to receive your tithe and offering, you must first give your life to Him. If you are a sinner or backslider, you must repent of your sins, confess them to God, forsake them, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Saviour. Otherwise, God will not delight in your giving, and He will not reward you. **“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”** (Micah 6:8).

God loves your soul more than your substance. He does not take delight in the sacrifice of fools. Saul believed more in sacrifice rather than in obedience to God’s word and he lost everything, including his life. **“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”** (1 Samuel 15:22).

Your sacrifice and your heavy fats of rams burning with enticing aroma cannot please God. They are an abomination to the Lord, if you are still living in sin and trespasses. Give your life first, then give your substances to the Greatest Giver.

Question 5: *What is the most important thing you can give to God, and why should it be given first before anything else?*

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE OF CHRISTIANS

MEMORY VERSE: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (**Hebrews 13:4**)

TEXT: Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:22-33

Marriage is one of the most sacred institutions in life. Marriage or the joining together of a man and a woman in holy matrimony signals or flags off the family life. In response to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus “**answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?**” (Matthew 19:4,5).

Christian teaching on marriage is expected to be accepted and practised like other doctrines or teachings of the Bible. Our marriages must be directed and guided by God’s word so as to achieve the purpose for which the wise God set it up. Wherever the teaching of God’s word on marriage is neglected or rejected, much trouble results. It is sad that the guiding scriptural principles on marriage are deliberately being ignored by many so-called Christians today resulting in incalculable spiritual loss, frustration, disappointment, unfaithfulness, sorrow and, at times, painful separation for couples that were joined together in a Bible-believing Church.

Though it is not unexpected to see unbelievers abuse this sacred institution, heaven is very sad at the sight of multitude of Christians going contrary to the will, purpose and plan of God in their choice of life partners. Life goals have been aborted, ministries cut short, joy ruined and life destroyed because people turned aside from God’s command on marriage and family life. Scores of young men and women who should be on fire for God groan under the painful consequences of wrong choice in marriage. This is why a clear teaching on marriage and family life is very significant to enhance the health and spiritual wholeness of the Church today.

Question 1: Give scriptural reasons why God instituted marriage and family life.

We establish from the Scripture that marriage is, first, God’s plan and programme from the beginning (Genesis 2:18,20,22-24; Ephesians 5:31). Second, marriage is a divinely ordained necessity (Genesis 2:18; Psalm 68:6). Third, it makes for preservation of purity and holiness in the church and society (1 Corinthians 7:2,9-11; 1 Timothy 5:9-15). Fourth, marriage works for the completeness and fulfillment of true living (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11). It provides needed fellowship, comfort, companionship and partnership. Finally, marriage complements God’s work of procreation (Genesis 1:27,28; Psalm 128:3). With very few exceptions, most people should marry. These few exceptions should be guided by God (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8,32,34) and must not be the product of selfish, immature decisions, misguided imitation, faithless conclusion or religious compulsion. And, as the believer takes the journey into marriage, he or she should

pray, study and meditate on God's word sufficiently in order to avoid being misled by 'concerned' counsellors (in or outside the church), friends, family members and family planning clinics in the world.

Question 2: *Mention some wrong motivations that compel some people not to marry.*

COMMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY OF MARRIAGE (Ecclesiastes 3:1,11; Psalm 32:8,9; Joshua 3:4; Isaiah 30:18-21)

Marriage journey begins with a desire or a sense of need in an individual for a life partner with whom to share life in an intimate way. God has created every man with this innate feeling and it manifests naturally through maturity, inner urge or a compelling feeling for a life partner when the time comes.

A believer's response to this urge is to approach God in prayer for guidance. As we pray earnestly and sincerely, God communicates with our hearts in a way as to lead us to His perfect choice of partner. It may be through a still small voice in the heart (Proverbs 20:27; John 10:4,5,27; Acts 10:17-21) or a strong mind-dominating affection for a particular person. Such affection is God-given and it cannot be quenched by temporary or contrary circumstances (Songs 8:6,7). Still, in other cases, it may be through dreams or a definite impression in the heart. For others, God can speak through His Word or make a definite impression in the heart in the course of listening to a message or sermon. Whatever channel He chooses to use - revelation, dream, vision or impression - God will not contradict His written word. If any revelation we receive contradicts the Scripture it must be rejected. It should also be subjected to the peace test contrary to fear and hurry.

Question 3: *Mention some ways through which God reveals His will in marriage to us.*

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID (1 Corinthians 10:6-12; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-3; Ezekiel 14:1-6)

The path to the married life is strewn with dangers which the believer must avoid in order to remain in the will of God and enjoy a healthy relationship.

Question 4: *Mention some pitfalls to avoid in the choice of a life partner.*

As we seek to know the will of God, we should not walk by sight. To determine the suitability of an intending partner through his or her material possession and secular position is to walk by sight. The possession of a good brain and a good hand to make money does not guarantee the possession of a good heart which makes a good home. Second, we should not pre-empt God. In other words, a heavy dependence, for example, on dreams and dreams alone makes it easier to be deceived. Rather, the sincere seeker should be open to whatever channel God decides to use to speak. Pre-empting God leads to confusion.

Third, every 'idol' should be removed from the heart. That is to say that we should not pre-fix our minds on a particular person asking only that God should rubber-stamp him or her for us. That idol may not be God's will. He or she may not even be a child of God. We should remember that only God knows the heart of men. Some who appear like Christians outwardly may be something else within. Samson

made his choice by sight and suffered greatly for it. Several others are still ensnared in this trap today.

Fourth, under no circumstance should a true believer marry a non-believer. It does not matter whether the person attends church or not. God prohibits unequal yoke in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15,16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Fifth, we should avoid the carnal practice of allowing others to pick partners for us. God is still our perfect Match-maker. Some people run back to the village to get married to people they little know. In doing so, they feel that they are smart and cutting short what they consider to be a long procedure by the church. They avoid serious praying and close scrutiny of spiritual leaders whom God has set over them. In time, they reap the bitter fruits of unhappy and burdensome marriage.

CHRISTIAN COURTSHIP (Genesis 24:49-52; Proverbs 24:27; Luke 14:28-32; 1:26,27; Matthew 1:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

After knowing the will of God, the intending brother or sister, as the case may be is expected to inform the pastor of the church or his appointed leaders who carry out the oversight function of guiding young believers in marriage. The pastor or committee then counsels them on simple but basic regulatory procedures to follow. The first is to secure their parents' consent. Parental consent gives the church authority to allow the intending couple to begin courtship.

The period between knowing the will of God in marriage and the wedding is known as courtship. It is a period of learning and getting to know one another through regular praying and discussions tailored towards the future of their dream home. This period also affords them the opportunity to talk about important issues like money management in the home, career after marriage, bearing and rearing children, type of accommodation, and so on.

During courtship, openness must be made a mutual principle. Truth about one another's past and present that have the potential to affect them in future should be discussed. Second, holiness should be central as the intending couples are not expected to engage in actions that are meant only for married people. Third, prayer should not be relegated to the background. Problems are solved, doubts dissolved, mountains moved and oppositions are turned to opportunities through prayers. Prayer brings down heaven's provisions. Fourth, neither of the two should impose his or her ideas on the other. Fifth, if they are unable to resolve a particular issue, such should be brought to the attention of the supervising committee or the pastor. Should there be some grave or shocking discoveries, for example, that either of the party is a sinner, has demonic problems, irreconcilable conviction on Christian marriage, doubts over doctrines, etc. recourse must be made to the marriage committee. We should always remember that a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage.

Question 5: *Mention some helpful guiding principles during courtship.*

CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING (John 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 4:12,16).

Both engagement and wedding are common to the world and the church. These two occasions should be done bearing Scriptural injunctions in mind. Neither should there be a forum to feed the flesh, display carnality and worldliness and water down sound conviction that had been upheld for years.

During engagement, especially, all forms of deception should be discouraged. Deceits couched in jokes in the name of tradition should be avoided. Believers must steer clear of all such jokes and feigned lies. We must also avoid compromise in the areas of what we do or give as part of the engagement requirement. Anything that has to do with idolatry, alcoholic beverages, cowries, kola nuts, etc. must be avoided.

Generally, engagement and wedding become problematic when an intending couple live inconsistent lives. Costly provisions for the pride of life should be left out. Worldly adornments, practices and dressing should be avoided. The following questions could provide a gauge for our engagement and wedding: how godly or worldly is my dressing and spending? How watchful or wasteful am I? Who will be glorified at my wedding – Christ, self or the flesh? Will I be sad or happy should Christ come on my wedding day?

Question 6: *What should be the focus of a Christian during the engagement and marriage ceremonies?*

CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE (Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 5:15-23; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5,10; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8).

Family life after wedding is a learning experience that can only be terminated by death. The bottom-line is the need to carefully but excitedly study one another. There is always the need for adjustments by both husband and wife. The areas of adjustments are numerous. These initial adjustments will work well only in an environment of humility, love, patience and temperance.

Question 7: *What causes problems in Christian families and what are the solutions?*

As the couple relates together from day to day, offences will certainly come. These offences have some of their causes rooted in finance, food pattern, time management, working life, non-availability of one of the partners, house helps, sharp differences in tribal practices, exaggerated expectations, wrong notions, interference from extended families and so on. The magnitude and nature of the problems differ from family to family. Proper attitude in handling the problems is a vital issue. When problems are poorly-handled, they snowball into bigger, more complex proportions and, at times, result in separation. There are homes where, though the couples live together, they are indeed separated at heart.

Divorce, separation, strained, stressful or dead relationship amongst couples is not the will of God. The word of God has solutions to all family problems. God instituted marriage and He has adequately provided for happiness in our families.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE HOME (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7; John 15:12-14; Genesis 25:20-23; Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

Problems in Christian families begin when the couple gives the devil a place in their hearts. This is done unwittingly as one or both partners entertain insinuation of in-laws, gossips of maids and neighbours or suspicion. This has caused much harm (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 4:1). Another source of problem is the failure of either of the partners to “leave and cleave” (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; Genesis

2:24). God expects the man to leave (though not to abandon) his parents and cleave to his wife.

The third cause of problems in the family is worldliness, extravagance and carnal comparison of one's family or spouse with others (1 Samuel 8:4,5,7). Comparing one's family with others is unwise (2 Corinthians 10:12). Instead, we should endeavour to live by God's standard. Fourth, lack of love and affection for one another (Titus 2:4; John 15:12-14). Both spouses must have the will to love. Impatience, strife, malice, nagging, and bitterness should not be named in Christian families. A real sanctification experience in the lives of the couple keeps all these vices out of the family and keeps the family in unity, harmony and love. Fifth, pride. The wife need not challenge the husband's headship and authority but respond in godly submission. When she feels marginalized or trampled under, the husband should apologize. Inability to apologize and failure to always go to the Lord in prayer strain relationships, create communication gaps, and reduce mutual trust and respect for one another.

Sixth, problems of childlessness may bring emotional stress and conflict in the family. Where this occurs, the couple should take it to the Lord in prayer (Genesis 25:20-23). The Lord can make "**the barren to be mother of seven**" (1 Samuel 2:5). Any decision suggested by unbelief is wrong and sinful because "**whatever is not of faith is sin**" (Romans 14:23).

Seventh, lack of submission on the part of the wife. The Bible commands the wife to be submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7). The wife's submission provokes the husband to much love. He will labour to provide the needs of the family. He will cherish the wife as the Lord does the Church. On the other hand, lack of love from the husband can affect the wife negatively.

While each partner tries to meet the needs of one another at home, there might be noticeable shortcomings. No matter how pronounced these might be, there must be mutual appreciation of one another's effort. Lack of appreciation creates conflicts.

Eight, conflicts also come through money management, business and spending habits (Luke 16:10-12). Secretiveness in financial matters or projects makes room for suspicion and tension. Ninth, conflicts may also come through demonic infiltration through house helps, third parties or relations. Tenth, where infidelity or unfaithfulness creeps in, confusion will surely ensue. Immorality destroys the fabrics of the family and should be avoided by all means. This sin or any sin for that matter should not once be seen among Christians.

God's will for every family is that they live the days of heaven here on earth (Deuteronomy 11:21). This is attainable if we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and prayerfully build the walls of our home with our commitment to work towards a happy, healthy and holy home.