

LESSON 443

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY FROM EGYPT TO JORDAN

MEMORY VERSE: “And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psalm 107:7).

TEXT: Numbers 33:1-56

In our previous study in the book of Numbers, we learn about the settlement of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half tribe of Manasseh on the eastern side of Jordan. They requested for the land which Israel had already conquered because it was ideal for their cattle and sheep, and Moses granted their request with a proviso. In our text, at God's command, Moses gives a record of the itinerary and encampments of the children of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Jordan near the Promised Land. From the record, the journey can be divided into three main segments. The first, from Rameses in Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula, consists of eleven encampments (verses 1-15). The second, from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, including the wilderness wanderings, consists of twenty-one encampments (verses 16-36). The third segment, from Kadesh to the plains of Moab consists of eight encampments (verses 37-49). Altogether, there were forty encampments between Rameses in Egypt and the plain of Moab.

Question 1: *What attributes of God can believers see in the itinerary of the children Israel?*

The record of Israel's itinerary from Rameses to the plains of Moab portrays God's goodness, mercy and faithfulness. In His goodness He led them from the house of bondage to a land flowing with milk and honey. Through His mercy, they were not destroyed when they sinned but He forgave them, and in His unfailing faithfulness, He went with them even during the almost forty years that they wandered in the wilderness. Because of their unbelief and rebellion, God had to discipline them but He did not cast them away altogether. This teaches us that God chastises His children not to destroy them, but in order to correct and perfect them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORD-KEEPING (Numbers 33:1,2; Ezra 5:13-17; 6:1-12; Esther 2:21-23; 6:1-3; John 1:45; 20:30,31).

The Lord commanded Moses to record Israel's journey from their departure from Egypt till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. This shows that it is very important for believers to keep records of notable events in their personal lives, and in the church. Such personal diary, journal or church record will serve as reminder of God's faithfulness in later years, especially for up-coming generations. Besides, it will show whether the individual believer or church is making progress or not. By looking at the itinerary of the children of Israel one could easily see their progress from Rameses to Sinai. But on the other hand, it could be seen that though they

had a record of so many encampments between Sinai and Kadesh-barnea, they did not make much progress because this segment coincided with the period they wandered in the wilderness.

Question 2: *Mention some instances in the Scripture when God commanded men to write important records.*

On several occasions in the Bible, God commanded different people to write down records of specific events or instructions. Moses was commanded to write a memorial concerning the destruction of Amalek (Exodus 17:14); the ten commandments (Exodus 34:1); the terms of the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 34:27) and a song to teach Israel (Deuteronomy 31:19,22); God also commanded that a copy of the book of the law should be written for the kings of Israel to remind them of God's demands (Deuteronomy 17:18). The acts of the kings of Israel and Judah (1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles 26:22) were written by different people. The prophets were directed to write prophecies and specific instructions from God (Isaiah 8:1; 30:8; Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2,28). In the New Testament, Luke recorded all that Christ began to do and teach (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testaments were all writings which God inspired for the benefit of generations of men. John the beloved was also commanded to write the revelation which was given to him and send it to the churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 1:19; 2:1).

Question 3: *Point out the importance of written records to believers.*

Such written records are very important because they provide a strong basis for the faith of believers. In the New Testament period, believers made reference to the things that were written in the Old Testament to boost their faith in God. In addition, there were times when written records were used in evidence to prosper God's work (Ezra 5:13-17; 6:1-12). Keeping a personal journal of prayers made to God and answers received from Him goes a long way to strengthening personal faith and that of others. When we keep records of God's wonders and operations in our lives they serve as great morale boosters for the coming generations. Therefore, members and leaders in the church should be faithful in writing and keeping necessary records in their respective areas of work. Such records are also important for planning, evaluation and decision-making.

THE ITINERARY OF ISRAEL FROM EGYPT TO JORDAN (Numbers 33:3-49; Exodus 12:37; 13:20; 14:1,2,22; 15:22,23,27; 16:1; 17:1; 19:1; Numbers 11:34,35; 12:16; 20:1-22,23,25,28; 21:4,10-20; 22:1).

The record of Israel's journey, in our text, contains the names of their major sites of encampment. The period covered in the itinerary spanned the events of Exodus chapter 12 all through to Numbers chapter 12. But when we compare this list with those in Exodus and Numbers we observe that: one, some locations recorded in the list are also mentioned in their lists. Most of those locations listed in verses 5-18 are also mentioned in Exodus and other

places. Two, some locations mentioned here were not recorded in other lists (most of those locations in verses 19-29). Three, there are some locations mentioned in other places but not included here (for instance, Taberah – Numbers 11:3). These observations tell us that the primary purpose of the itinerary is not to furnish a comprehensive record of Israel's journey but to give a general review of their wilderness experience, and show forth the faithfulness of God in leading His chosen people. As a matter of fact, some of the locations mentioned in the record can no longer be particularly identified. However, the memory of what God did for His people in those places can never be obliterated.

Question 4: Point out some things to be learnt from the long itinerary of the children Israel.

The itinerary of the children of Israel should not be regarded as a dry and uninspiring list as many people erroneously do. Rather, believers should ponder over this list and observe the rich lessons to be drawn from it. One, it shows the love of God and His faithfulness in leading Israel through their journey. This should make believers confident that God will lead them all through their own life's journey as well. Two, their sites of encampment were well marked out by God's sovereign hand. If Israel were to choose their own path, obviously they would not have gone the way God led them, but His overruling providence directed their steps in the best way. As believers, we should always commit our ways into the hands of God and allow Him to order our steps. We must never lean on our own understanding as we go on in the journey of life. In choosing our career, marriage partner, business investment, location to live, and other decisions in life, we must allow God to guide us in His infinite wisdom. Three, the journey of Israel gives believers a picture of their own journey of faith. Just as Israel encamped in different places on their way to Canaan, believers will also pass through various experiences and situations in life. The Christian journey is not static and believers should always remember that in this present world, they have no continuing city (Hebrews 13:14). Therefore, they should prepare for changes and learn to set their focus only on the heavenly city.

The itinerary also shows that in some locations, such as Sinai, Kadesh and Nebo, significant events took place, whereas in others there was no outstanding event recorded. This teaches us that all the days of our lives, and all the location that God will graciously lead us will never be the same. Therefore, we must be prepared to cope with the easy, difficult or ordinary days of our lives and be thankful to God for them. In some of their locations, the children of Israel had great provisions while in some they had serious lack. At Elim they had plenty of water, shade and pasture for their animals; but at Raphidim they had no water. And such is the case with believers in this present world too. The journey of faith will take a believer through the delectable mountains as well as the valleys of despair, through prosperity and gain as well as adversity and pain. But whatever betides, like Israel moved on in their journey, believers should also move on in their heavenly journey, accepting the path which God chooses, whether rough or smooth. They should have the attitude of the inspired writer who said: "**In the day of**

prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him” (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

But another important lesson that must not be overlooked is the fact that Israel, at last got to a point where they were ready to enter the Promised Land. Though the names of some of their encampment sites must have brought painful memories of sin and severe chastisement, as Moses listed those places in this record there was no mention of those shortcomings. Divine grace and mercy have blotted out their sins and moved them to the place where they could safely enter the land of promise. They were able to put past failures behind them and move towards their goals. Even so, believers must learn to forget things that are behind and reach forth to things that are ahead. Past sins must be properly dealt with by confessing and forsaking them, trusting in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Not only past failures, but past glories should also be left behind as we persistently pursue spiritual excellence.

THE INSTRUCTION TO DESTROY THE CANAANITES FROM THE LAND OF PROMISE (Numbers 33:50-56; Exodus 23:23,24,31-33; 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 12:1-3; Joshua 11:10-15; Judges 2:1-3; Psalm 106:34-36).

God commanded Moses to instruct the children of Israel to ensure that when they entered the land of Canaan, they should share the land proportionately and without bias. They were also warned to ensure they destroy all the inhabitants. They were to dispose them of the land, destroying their idolatrous symbols, their molten images and pull down all their high places. The reason God directed Israel to destroy the Canaanites was that they were not only desperately wicked but also because they would be sources of temptation and irritation to them if they were allowed to live, and as a result Israel would not be able to inherit the land of Canaan permanently. God said, **“if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell”** (Numbers 33:55). Here then was an encouragement and warning to the second generation of Israel. The encouragement was in the assurance in what would be the dire consequence of not destroying the Canaanites completely. Apart from the Canaanites making Israel to stumble, God also threatened to visit upon them the judgment He had planned to inflict upon the Canaanites.

Question 5: *Why should believers take the warnings against compromise and sin very serious?*

Eventually, Israel possessed the land but sadly they failed to completely destroy the inhabitants. The Canaanites that were left did become **“pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides”** as God had said (Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:1-3). They became a snare and a chief source of enticement to sin which made the children of Israel to incur God’s wrath. **“They did not**

destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them” (Psalm 106:34-36).

The warning of God to Israel, their failure to heed the instruction that they should destroy the Canaanites and the penalty of their failure are all full of instructions for present day believers. God warns His people of the danger of compromise and sin. The Scripture is full of admonitions against unequal yoke with unbelievers and warnings not to tolerate sin in our personal lives or in the church assembly (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Revelation 2:14-16,20,21). Like in Israel’s case, these warnings to totally separate from sins and worldliness are to safeguard us from the influence of the world and keep us from sinning against God. If we fail to heed God’s warning but tolerate sin in our lives and compromise with the world then trouble, divine chastisement, destruction or even death may result. Such a person who dies in disobedience and evil will eventually be lost forever.

As it was with Israel, we have a choice to make either to be **“willing and obedient”** so that we can **“eat the good of the land”** or else to **“refuse and rebel”** and **“be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it”** (Isaiah 1:19,20).

LESSON 444

DIVISION OF THE PROMISED LAND BY LOT

Memory Verse: “**And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot**” (Acts 13:19).

Text: Numbers 34:1-29

This study focuses on God’s appointed boundaries of Canaan and His instructions concerning the division of the land among the various tribes of Israel. In the preceding chapter, God had commanded leaders in Israel to divide the land by lot to the nine and a half tribes proportionately. God who knew the length and breadth of the land determined the yardstick for proportional sharing. Thus, He went further to give specific instructions on the boundaries of the land, the formula for sharing and the people to supervise the sharing.

Question 1: *What does the believer learn from God’s instruction for sharing the land of Canaan?*

It should be clear and comforting to all believers that God knows the details of the promises He has made to us and how they can be fulfilled. He knows how to deliver our portion of blessings to us. Though the promise was originally made to Abraham many years before (Genesis 15:18-21), God still fulfilled His word. But before the fulfillment, Israel was required to obey the Lord. We equally recall that they had enjoyed God’s blessings of protection, preservation, provision and purging while they were expecting the fulfillment of this great promise. It is unfortunate that some believers who have received specific promise and blessing from God now think they have arrived. They have forgotten that enjoying God’s blessings should draw them closer to Him rather than make them disregard His word. No matter how great the blessing the believer has enjoyed from God, the best is yet to come. Therefore, we need to avoid works of the flesh and continue to live righteously to get the best the Lord has reserved for us.

THE PORTION OF ISRAEL’S INHERITANCE (Numbers 34:1-15; 26:55,56; Deuteronomy 1:8; Joshua 18:10; 14:1,2; 2 Peter 1:3,4; 1 Peter 1:3,4).

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof)” (Numbers 34:2).

The Scripture affirms that God is the Creator and Owner of all things. Ownership of parcels of land in this world confers some authority on the owner. And our text reveals that the land that God, the Landlord commanded the children of Israel to inherit was once “**the land of Canaan**” which the occupiers forfeited as a result of their sinful lifestyle and disregard for God’s will, word and ways. Many sinners who have been endowed with

some natural blessings, talents, gifts, intelligence, etc. refuse to acknowledge God's existence and sovereignty in the affairs of men to their own hurt. This is because unbelief will not change the truth about the sovereignty of God and will not stop Him from doing whatever He wants. God's government affects all on the surface on the earth and His laws are made for all men. Those who walk contrary to His laws have tales of loss to tell in this world and in the world to come.

The instruction God gave to Moses concerning the land was an assurance that the children of Israel would actually possess the Promised Land. Even though they had not yet conquered the land in practical terms, God spoke about their possessing it as a reality. Such is the language of faith that God expects from believers. He calls those things that be not as though they were and whatever He has promised, He also has the power to perform (Romans 4:17,21). Believers should trust God even if it appears His promises are being delayed. If we are patient and faithful we shall receive the fulfillment of all the blessings that God has promised us.

Question 2: What challenge do believers receive from the divinely set boundaries of the Promised Land?

To Abraham, God described the Promised Land in terms of the people who inhabited it; but in our text, God describes the land in terms of its geographical boundaries. A general survey of the land reveals both the beauty and bounties of God's provision because the land God gave them was much more than they needed. The territory was quite larger than the area they eventually occupied. Really, God is "**able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us**" (Ephesians 3:20).

God defined the boundaries of the Promised Land in definite and unmistakable terms. He stipulated, in an orderly manner the borders of the land: beginning from the south border to the west, then the north and the east. Even in the matter of geography and physical survey of the land of promise, the Scriptures maintained a distinctive orderliness. God wants us to be orderly in every area of our lives. Besides, He did not give them all the land of the heathen world. He gave them the best but with set boundaries.

Question 3: Point out some lessons to be learnt from the way God appointed the boundaries of the land of promise for Israel.

There are some important lessons to be learnt from the way God appointed the boundaries of the land of Canaan. One, God appointed the boundaries of our habitation so that we may avoid unintended trespass into other people's territory and so that we may preserve and keep that which has been given to us. By fixing their boundaries, God wanted the children of Israel to distinguish the portion that was given to them and that which was not given; and to know those they should dispose and those they should not meddle with. As believers, God want us to know the things that He has freely given to us and to keep them. Two, to a modern observer, the land of promise may appear very small. The length was about 250 kilometers while

the breadth was about 80 kilometers. But it was God's own chosen portion for His beloved people and it was more than enough for their need. The fact that it was God's choice and His presence was in it made all the difference. Indeed, a song-writer captured this thought in a most appropriate way in the lyric: "little is much, when God is in it". The wisdom of God also informs us that "**Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right**" (Proverbs 16:8). From this we learn never to belittle, and also to be contented with whatever God graciously gives unto us.

Three, the children of Israel did not eventually possess the entire territory that God mapped out for them. This teaches us that God's provision far exceeds our needs, and men often fail to tap to the fullest their God-given resources. Four, God said the land across the Jordan was to be shared for the remaining nine and a half tribes who were yet to receive their inheritance. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had received their own inheritance on the east of Jordan; therefore, they were not to receive any portion on the other side of Jordan. This teaches us not to envy those who receive their own blessing before us. If we are patient, we will also receive our own blessings.

THE PEOPLE THAT WILL ALLOT ISRAEL'S INHERITANCE (Numbers 34:16:29; 13:1-16; Joshua 14:1; 19:51; Romans 11:22).

The Lord appointed those who should supervise the sharing of the land of promise among the children of Israel. Eleazar the priest and Joshua, the successor of Moses, would lead the exercise. Then one leader each from the nine and a half tribes would assist them. The names of these men were specifically mentioned by God so as to avoid any contest or discontent among the people. In God's plan, He expects those He calls to concentrate on their given roles and assignments. Therefore, there should be no carnal comparison or rivalry in God's service.

Though Moses would not be allowed to enter the land of promise, he was instructed to command the children of Israel on how to share the land. This shows the grave responsibility of true servants of God. Many times, they are expected to handle matters which, though will benefit others, may not give them any personal gain. In the case of Moses, he was neither bitter against God nor envious of the people who would inherit the land. In the same way, God expects the leaders to be selfless and sacrificial.

Question 4: *Mention other instances in Scripture when God mentioned the names of men for specific assignments.*

It would be recalled that on certain occasions God had specifically mentioned the names of some people whom He appointed to carry out specific assignments. For constructing the tabernacle, the numbering of Israel and the twelve spies to search the land of Canaan, God specifically mentioned those who were to do the work (Exodus 31:1-6; Numbers 1:4-17; 13:1-16). God knows each of us by name and He has assignments for us. It is the responsibility of each person to find out what God would have him do, and to ensure that he does his best to fulfill that assignment. In doing God's

work, we must also determine what should be done, assign the people to do it and give them clear instruction.

Question 5: *What do we learn from the mention of the names of Joshua and Caleb?*

As we look at the men whom God appointed to share the land for Israel, the names of Joshua and Caleb cannot but draw attention. They consistently followed the Lord whereas their contemporaries had perished in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion against God. The names of Joshua and Caleb were in the list of twelve spies that were sent to view the land while Israel was at Kadesh-barnea. Also, when the second census was conducted at the plains of Moab, they were the only ones, apart from Moses the leader, who remained alive from the whole congregation that left Egypt. This calls for decision and determination to be faithful and relentless in our walk with God. Because Joshua and Caleb were faithful, they were able to share the land for and with the people. If we are faithful to the end, we shall also share in the inheritance of God's children.

It is also worthy of note that some of the people appointed to share the land for Israel were leaders who had risen from among the new generation. They were princes or tribal heads who had qualified themselves for responsibility and were able to fill the vacancies left by the older generation. Young people should prepare and challenge themselves to take over from the older generation so that our godly heritage may continue. For, when Moses, David, and the apostles had served their own generations they went home to be with the Lord. Our concern should be to keep the gospel light shining from one generation to another until the Lord comes.

It is obvious from our text that the reason God appoints ministers over His people is to help them inherit all the blessing that Christ has procured for them through His suffering, death and resurrection. They must co-labour with God to make sure that everyone who comes under their leadership is blessed by Him. This is because everyone received a portion of his inheritance among the children of Israel.

THE PROMISED INHERITANCE FOR BELIEVERS (Ezekiel 20:6,15; 2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 2:9,10; John 14:1; 1 Peter 1:3,4).

The promise of inheritance in Canaan was the earnest expectation of all Israelites. They looked forward to the land which God called "**the glory of all lands**". But just as God planned a great inheritance for Israel, He also has a great inheritance prepared for those who believe in Jesus today. Believers have a great inheritance awaiting them both here and hereafter.

The scripture reveals that lots were cast during the Old Testament period and just before the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the early church. After Pentecost, there was no instance where Christians cast lots to clear doubts or determine who should possess or enjoy particular blessings in the kingdom. To cast lots in choice of marriage or business partner, in determining offenders in particular cases, in distributing material blessings or knowing the will of God, is dangerous as it is a rejection of Christ's

promised guidance through the Holy Spirit and a rejection of the word of God (John 16:12,13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

Question 6: *How can the sinner and believer enjoy God's inheritance?*

Everyone who is saved from sin and lives a godly life will enjoy the promise of life that now is and of that which is to come. While on earth, children of God are promised sanctification, power, protection, preservation from evil, peace of mind, supply of needs, among others. Hereafter, believers will inherit the earth: they will reign with Christ on earth during the Millennium. Christ has also gone ahead to prepare mansions for believers to inherit in heaven. Crowns of life, righteousness and glory are all waiting to be claimed by successful and faithful pilgrims.

To enjoy God's provision now and in eternity, sinners and backsliders need to repent to qualify to partake of these blessings. Believers who seek to fully enjoy God's inheritance on earth must be holy, prayerful, faithful, obedient, watchful, consistent and steadfast in serving God. We must live in continual consciousness of Christ's soon return. Only those who persevere to the end, like Caleb and Joshua, will receive the eternal inheritance which God has reserved for His own children. Entering the kingdom of God through the salvation experience qualifies us to enjoy the blessings of God but none of these blessings can compare with the inheritance reserved for believers in heaven. Getting to heaven should be the aspiration, pursuit and ultimate goal of every believer.

LESSON 445

THE PORTION OF THE LEVITES

Memory Verse: “Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them” (Numbers 35:2).

Text: Numbers 35:1-8

Our study concerns the portion that God commanded the children of Israel to give to the Levites when they finally enter the land of Canaan. The Levites were ministers who assisted the priests in the daily sacrifices and general services in the tabernacle. God had earlier said that they would not receive inheritance like other tribes because of the peculiar nature of their assignment and also because God said He is their inheritance (Number 18:20,24; Deuteronomy 18:1,2; Joshua 13:14,33). While Israel encamped in the wilderness, the Levites camped around the tabernacle and interposed between the people and the ark of God which was the emblem of God’s presence among the people (Number 1:47-53).

However, as Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan, the Levites would need cities to live in and open spaces to graze their flocks. For these reasons, God made provision before hand so that the Levites could concentrate on their task of ministering before the Lord on behalf of the people. The entire text shows the care and concern which God has for His chosen ministers and how He expects the people to honour and care for them.

Question 1: *What can we learn from the provision God made for the Levites?*

GOD’S COMMAND TO GIVE CITIES TO THE LEVITES (Numbers 35:1-5,7; Deuteronomy 25:4; Joshua 21:1,2; Acts 6:4; 1 Samuel 12:23; 1 Corinthians 9:7-11; Galatians 6:6; Hebrews 13:17).

God commanded the children of Israel to give cities to the Levites to dwell in and suburbs for their animals to graze. This command was given in anticipation of the settlement of the various tribes in their inheritance in the Promised Land. Each tribe was required to donate cities for the Levites so that every tribe would have Levites dwelling among them. This way, the ministry of the Levites would be dispersed all over the land and among the entire twelve tribes.

The Levites, together with the priests were responsible for teaching the people the word of God, being models and examples for the congregation to follow, ministering in the tabernacle and handling the daily offerings. Therefore, it was necessary that they be spread all over the land so that every Israelite would have access to them and enjoy their ministry. This arrangement would however be a disadvantage to the Levites if they were

not adequately provided for. That is the reason God commanded every tribe to give cities for them to dwell in.

Question 2: Explain the reason why God commanded the children of Israel to give cities for the Levites to dwell in. How many cities were they to give?

God directed that the Levites be given forty-eight cities by all the tribes of Israel according to the proportion of their inheritance. This is a scriptural principle which God expects His children to practise whenever opportunity comes to give for His work. Whenever God favours us with more resources, He expects us to give according to the proportion of our blessing. This is not only true of our substance but also of our time, talents and experience. The tribes that had more inheritance were required to donate more cities, while those that with less were expected to give less. **“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).

Question 3: What lessons can believers learn from the command to give cities and suburbs to the Levites?

From this command, we have the following lessons to imbibe. One, it was necessary to give the Levites opportunity to concentrate on their ministry of waiting on and serving in the tabernacle. It was not intended to give them holiday or encourage them to be idle; rather, it was designed to keep them from unnecessary distractions. Two, because the Levites did not have inheritance among the people, it was necessary that the congregation support them. In the same way, believers must take care of ministers of the gospel as well as full-time workers in the church, who can be classified as the Levites of our time. We should honour such men and women who sacrifice their career and entire life to serve in the ministry. If we expect them to give full, undivided attention to the work of the ministry, then they must be well provided and cared for. Apart from paying them well, the congregation should encourage them in every way so that they can give their best to the Lord.

Three, the cities that God granted the Levites were sufficient for their needs and much more, including cities for those seeking refuge from the avenger of blood. This teaches us that we must be generous in the provisions we give to our ministers. We should not only give them that which will be sufficient for their needs, so that others would not look on them with contempt, but enough to prevent them from abandoning their assignment in search of daily provision for their dependants. Four, by giving the Levites cities all over the land of Israel, the prophecy of Jacob that God **“will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel”** came to fulfillment (Genesis 49:7). However, when Jacob spoke, it was supposed to be a curse, because of the wickedness that Simeon and Levi perpetrated on the Shechemites. But the scattering of Levi among the Israelites turned out to serve a good purpose. Their curse was turned into blessing because they responded to the challenge of Moses to come to the side of the Lord (Exodus

32:25-29). When a person turns away from sin and comes to the Lord in genuine repentance and faith, he stands the chance of turning his curses to blessings.

Five, the Lord wanted the Levites to learn to depend on God and be satisfied in Him as their inheritance. By not giving them any inheritance among the Israelites, God would have His people know that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Therefore they were expected to be satisfied with such things as God allowed them to have. They were not expected to harbour greedy or materialistic disposition, but to be totally detached from worldliness and the possessive spirit. Even so today, believers should beware of the widespread evil of covetousness and materialism. Heaven-minded believers should be satisfied with what they have, and rejoice that God is their everlasting portion.

CITIES OF REFUGE AMONG THE LEVITES (Number 35:6,13; Deuteronomy 4:41; 19:2-7; 33:27; Joshua 20:2,7,8; Hebrew 6:18)

The Lord gave specific instructions that six cities be appointed for refuge among the forty-eight cities for the Levites. These cities were to serve as temporary asylum for **“the manslayer, to flee thither”**. The slayer will dwell among the Levites until his case is decided by the judges. If he is guilty of murder, having killed his neighbour presumptuously or out of hatred, he would be handed over to the avenger of blood. But if his offence was committed **“at unawares”** he is to remain in the city of refuge till the death of the high priest.

The wisdom of God for this choice is amazing. While it provides succour for the offender (if he is not guilty of outright murder) it will also afford him the benefit of dwelling with and being influenced by the lifestyle of the Levites who were ministers of their time. He also would be able to possibly learn more of the ways of the Lord from the Levites who were saddled with teaching the people the judgments and laws of God.

God did not only appoint cities of refuge for the manslayer, in several portions of Scripture, He reveals Himself also as our refuge and fortress, our shield and shelter in time of storm. No matter the fire and fury of the enemy, those who trust in Him shall surely be delivered (Deuteronomy 33:27; 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 9:9; 46:1; 59:16; Isaiah 25:4). Christ is our Refuge and Saviour. Sinners who flee to Him for salvation will not only be saved but enjoy continual protection under His love and care.

Question 4: *What does a sinner need to do to come under God's refuge?*

A sinner needs to acknowledge his sinful state, repent of his sin and accept Christ as Saviour to be able to enjoy the rest and protection He provides. It matters less where the individual is coming from or how bad his or her background: faith in Christ guarantees divine protection from the enemy. There is no salvation in any other and those who come to Christ will find rest, security and succour for their souls (Acts 4:12, Matthew 11:28-30).

GIVING ACCORDING TO ABILITY (Numbers 35:8; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15; Galatians 6:7-10; Jeremiah 3:16).

Question 5: *What are the basic principles that God outlined in the giving of the Israelites to the Levites?*

God specified the mode of giving to the Levites. These include what is to be given out of their possessions, need for every tribe to give, and equitable proportion to be observed in giving.

It is pertinent to note that every tribe is expected to give without any exception. They were to do it, not if they wanted but according to the will of God. Giving is a Bible-based injunction and is commanded by God to all believers. God Himself is the great Giver. He gave to the world the greatest gift, His only begotten Son so that all who believe in Him might have everlasting life. His injunction to everyone therefore is: **“My son, give me thine heart”**. The Macedonians **“first gave their own selves to the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 8:5) before they offered their gifts to Him. God will not accept gifts from sinners except they first give themselves to Him through genuine repentance from their evil deeds. Ministers who encourage worshippers to give their substance to the Lord without first persuading them to give their hearts to the Lord are not speaking the mind of God.

Believers, as custodians of the grace of God are expected to give God **“according to that a man hath”** (2 Corinthians 8:12). God has given to us gifts in diverse measures; therefore, He expects that the principle of proportional ability would guide us in giving. Those who barely give out of their storehouses because others offer little do not understand God’s word on giving. In like manner, people who fail to give at all are guilty of robbing God of what rightly belongs to Him. We are to give bountifully, cheerfully and willingly.

Question 6: *In what ways can believers give to God today?*

The word of God enjoins us to bring **“all the tithes to the storehouse”** that there may be **“meat”** in His house. We can also give freewill offerings, vows, and participate in specific church projects. We can give our time, talents, abilities and skills. However, faithfulness is required in all our giving to God.

Question 7: *What blessings will come to those who are faithful in giving to God?*

Multiple blessings await those who give to God. They will reap physically, spiritually and materially. There will be overflowing blessings of God on our endeavours as God has promised to rebuke devourers on our behalf. Giving should be part of our worship. Those who fail to give are not appreciative of God’s goodness and in fact they attract God’s curse upon themselves.

LESSON 446

CITIES OF REFUGE

Memory Verse: “**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble**” (Psalm 46:1).

Text: Numbers 35:9-34

In the earlier verses of this chapter, God commanded the twelve tribes of Israel when they enter the land of Canaan and receive their inheritance, to contribute forty-eight cities for the Levites to dwell in, since they did not have any territory allotted to their tribe. Out of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites, they were to set apart six to be cities of refuge where someone who has killed another person unintentionally could run to for protective custody until his cause was determined by the judges.

Our text here presents further details on the administration of the cities of refuge. In it, we can see the provision for refuge (verse 15), the purpose of the cities of refuge, the qualification for admission into the city of refuge (verse 16-25), and the required evidence for the conviction of murder (verse 30).

Question 1: *In what way does the city of refuge symbolize Jesus Christ?*

God’s gracious provision of cities of refuge, to save the unwitting villain of manslaughter from cruel revenge, paints a clear picture of salvation that a sinner can find only in Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can give true refuge to those who run to Him in genuine repentance and faith. Therefore, the cities of refuge were actually pointing to Christ who saves from the wrath of God. **“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). When sinners flee from the wrath to come and take refuge in Jesus Christ, they receive eternal life instead of eternal damnation.

THE CONCEPT OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Numbers 35:6-15; Exodus 21:13; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:2-7; Joshua 20:1-9; Hebrews 6:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 91:1-16)

God commanded the children of Israel to designate as cities of refuge six out of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites. Three of the cities of refuge were to be located within the territory of Reuben, Gad and half tribes of Manasseh; while the other three were to be located across Jordan to serve the remaining tribes. These cities were to be well spread and strategically located such that a person fleeing for refuge from anywhere in the land could reach the one nearest to him in time. God also commanded that the roads leading to the cities of refuge be kept in good state and free from

obstructions so that someone fleeing from the avenger of blood would not be hindered (Deuteronomy 19:2,3).

Question 2: Explain the ideas of “Avenger of blood”, and “city of refuge”.

For a proper understanding of the concepts of “refuge” and “avenger of blood”, it is necessary to know about the jurisprudence of those ancient times as it concerns murder and revenge. In Hebrew culture, it was the duty of a nearest kinsman (properly known as kinsman-redeemer) to protect the family rights of his relative. In a case where a relative becomes poor and is sold into slavery, it is the responsibility of the kinsman to pay a ransom to secure his freedom and restore him to his property. In that case, the kinsman-redeemer was called a “restorer of life” (Leviticus 25:47-49; Ruth 3:2,13; 4:1-15).

But on the other hand, if a person was killed, it was also the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to avenge his murder by killing the murderer. In such a case, the kinsman-redeemer was called the “avenger of blood”. Hebrew law prohibited murder but permitted a nearest kinsman to avenge the death of his slain relative. However, God made a distinction between premeditated murder and accidental manslaughter (killing someone unintentionally). Whereas, the willful murderer must be put to death by the avenger of blood; the accidental manslayer could run to the city of refuge nearest to him. Once he got to the city of refuge, the avenger of blood should not harm him until his case was properly decided by impartial judges.

Question 3: Point out the purpose and the guidelines for maintaining the cities of refuge.

The provision of cities of refuge was a way of preventing people from carrying out cruel revenge on a person who had killed someone unintentionally. It would be a sin for the avenger of blood to kill a manslayer who did not premeditate the murder of the victim. That would amount to unnecessary blood-letting. Therefore, to save the manslayer from undeserved death and to prevent the avenger of blood from sinning against God, the cities of refuge were appointed.

Immediately a person kills another man by accident, the manslayer must flee to the city of refuge nearest to him. He had no time to waste thinking of possession or business in his own home, but he must begin his flight at once so that he could reach the city of refuge before the avenger of blood could catch up with him. If they judge him qualified for asylum in the city, then they kept him in safety until a proper trial is conducted. For the trial, the man would be taken, apparently, to the city where the offence was committed, and two or three witnesses were examined for his conviction or acquittal. If it was confirmed that he did not kill the victim willfully, then he was returned to the city of refuge and lived there till the death of the high priest. After the death of the high priest, he is free to return to his own city.

The provision of the cities of refuge highlights the justice of God that should apply to our social life. Though He does not condone sin, He does not

want the sinner to die without trial. This provision speaks loudly against extra-judicial killing that some law enforcement agents engage in. Life is sacred – God does not want it to be taken at will. It is ungodly to raid innocent citizens and herd them into prison. The prison house is not meant for innocent and law-abiding citizens but for suspects and criminals. To swap innocent citizens raided from the streets with unrepentant but wealthy criminals for monetary gain is dastardly and cruel. So also is miscarriage of justice in any judicial system. We need to note that God is the ultimate Judge before whom everyone, including law enforcement agents, must appear for trial. Even at the final judgment, His righteousness will be in display as He would not send anyone to the lake of fire without trial. His impeccable pattern of justice is for all men to emulate the world over.

CONDITIONS FOR SAFETY IN THE CITY OF REFUGE (Numbers 35:15,26-28; Joshua 20:6; Jeremiah 18:9,10; Ezekiel 3:20,21; 18:24-32; 33:12-20; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 2:1-4; 12:15)

God stipulated that a person would be qualified for admission into the city of refuge only if he was not guilty of willful murder. And even after the manslayer has been offered asylum in the city of refuge he must still fulfill some basic conditions to enjoy his safety and protection from the avenger of blood.

Question 4: *What basic condition must the manslayer fulfill to remain secure in the city of refuge?*

For the manslayer to remain safe, he must abide in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. After the death of the high priest he would be free to return to his possession. But if the manslayer gets out of the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city and kill him, then he (the avenger of blood) would not be guilty of murder. Therefore, the manslayer would only be secure if he fulfilled the condition of abiding in the city until the death of the high priest. He must abide by the regulations of the Levites who kept the city of refuge and submit himself to them. He must also exercise self-control and discipline to resist all temptations to go out of the city of refuge. The implication of this was that, no matter the interest he had in his own city, he must sacrifice and forego them so that he could remain safe.

The case of Shimei during the time of Solomon was a clear illustration of this principle (1 Kings 2:36-46). He was given a condition to remain in Jerusalem so that he would be safe from revenge due to wicked attitude to David. But Shimei, after three years, went out of the city in pursuit of a legitimate course. As a result he was put to death. If he had remained in Jerusalem, he would have been safe.

The conditional security of the manslayer in the city of refuge points to the conditional security of believers in Christ. A Christian is secure and safe in Christ on condition that he continues to abide in Him. When a sinner comes to Christ for refuge, such is taken in and covered by the grace of God through faith. On account of the death of Jesus, the sins are forgiven, and

he is justified and made a new creature. But if such a person goes back into sin, he is like the manslayer outside the city of refuge. He is in danger and unless he quickly repents and returns to the Lord, he stands the risk of being lost forever. This shows that the doctrine of unconditional security of believers is erroneous and no believer should be misled by it. Those who live in sin and yet claim that they are children of God because they believe in the false doctrine of eternal security, should genuinely repent and come to Christ for true salvation.

Question 5: Point out some key lessons to be learnt from God's appointment of the cities of refuge.

There are some key lessons to be learnt from the appointment of cities of refuge for the manslayer. First, we learn that God distinguishes between willful, presumptuous sinners and unwitting offenders who are repentant and seek a way of escape from sin. For the presumptuous sinner, there is impending judgment, but for the repentant sinner there is provision for mercy and pardon. This is borne out of the fact that the accidental manslayer was admitted into the city of refuge, but the willful murderer was not. Second, God did not want His people to carry out cruel revenge on offenders indiscriminately. It was likely the avenger of blood, under the passion of revenge, would not distinguish between an intentional murderer and an accidental manslayer, because **"the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"** (James 1:20). Therefore, God made provision for cities of refuge where an offender could run for safety until impartial judges consider his case.

Third, the cities of refuge being positioned such that there was one within reasonable distance from every Israelite, and the fact that the highways to the cities of refuge were made free of impediments teach that God gives every person access to His refuge. God's salvation is near those who are repentant and ready to take refuge in Him. He says: **"cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people"** (Isaiah 57:14). God has brought His salvation near to mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if any Israelite became a victim of the avenger of blood, it would not be for want of refuge or a way to get there. Similarly, if any one is not saved today it is not for lack of a Saviour but a result of willful refusal to run to Him for salvation. Fourth, the death of the High priest guaranteed the freedom of the manslayer to return to his own city. Undoubtedly, this was a picture of the death of Jesus Christ which secured the freedom of mankind from sin.

Fifth, God did not discriminate in His gracious provision of refuge but made it an equal right for all, including strangers, the rich and the poor in Israel. As far as the administration of refuge was concerned, all Israelites as well as strangers were treated equally. This is the reason God disallowed anyone guilty of manslaughter from paying a ransom, but rather he must flee to the city of refuge. This provision placed the rich and the poor on equal terms. Otherwise the rich would, rather pay a ransom and remain in his own inheritance, whereas the poor would be at a disadvantage. Thus, we see that God is never in support of discriminatory policies that favour the

rich against the poor. Sixth, we learn that salvation is a divine-human affair. Though God provided the place of refuge, an Israelite must run there and abide by the rules to ensure his safety. He must seek admission into the city and submit himself to the administrators there. Similarly, God has provided salvation for mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has opened the life gate so that whosoever will may come in. However, the sinner must play his own part. He must repent and exercise faith in Christ. He must remain in Christ to the end and obey all that God instructs him, and then he will be saved.

THE CONVICTION AND PUNISHMENT OF WILLFUL MURDERERS
(Numbers 35:16-34; Exodus 20:13; 21:12-14; 29:45,46; Deuteronomy 17:6-13; 19:15; Matthew 18:16).

God commanded that a person who was guilty of deliberate murder should not be admitted into the city of refuge but be put to death. He gave some clues to distinguish between accidental manslaughter and willful murder. For instance, the weapon used and the manner it was used to kill the victim could be a pointer to the real intention of the killer. The killer was presumed guilty of willful murder if one, he smote the victim with a lethal weapon such as iron or stone (verse 16,17); two, he smote the victim with a dangerous wooden weapon (verse 18). Three, he stabbed the victim in hatred (verse 20); four, he laid ambush and hurled at the victim (verse 20); five, in enmity he struck him with his hand (verse 21). In these cases, the manner in which the victim was killed could be determined. The killing was judged to be accidental if the killer did not lay ambush or hit deliberately at the victim. The absence of hatred, malice, or deliberate execution was regarded as proof of unintentional murder. An example of such accidental killing was **“as when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live”** (Deuteronomy 19:5).

Question 6: *Why was it necessary to have more than one witness before a suspect was convicted of murder?*

In carrying out the trial, God stipulated that there must be witnesses who would testify against or in favour of an accused person. No man should be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. This was to avoid a situation where an innocent person would be victimized by the false testimony of a lone witness. But with two or three witness, who should be examined separately, the truth would most likely be established. In this provision, we see the justice of God and His jealous concern to preserve innocent persons from undue punishment. It should be remembered that it is not a trivial matter to victimize an innocent person, either through false accusation or careless miscarriage of justice. Therefore, we should always endeavor to investigate all accusations properly before pronouncing a verdict upon an accused person.

Once the trial was concluded, the willful murderer was convicted and handed over to the avenger of blood who would put him to death; whereas the accidental manslayer was taken back to the city of refuge where he would remain secure till the death of the high priest. God stipulated that no ransom should be accepted either for the life of a person who was guilty of willful murder or the unwitting manslayer, in an attempt to avoid living in exile in the city of refuge. In consequence of killing someone, the deliberate murderer must forfeit his own life, while the accidental manslayer must also forfeit the privileges of his own personal inheritance for a while. Obviously, this was intended to impress upon the people the sanctity of life and the gravity of taking it. It would also forestall the possibility of the rich opting to pay a ransom to get off the hook, whereas the poor, having nothing to pay, would either be subjected to the vengeance of the avenger of blood or forced to live in exile in the city of refuge.

In conclusion, God told the children of Israel to avoid polluting the land through blood letting. They were reminded that God's presence was among them and as such they should keep the land free from pollution. This is very instructive for believers today. The main reason we keep our lives free from every form of pollution is because God dwells in us. His presence in our lives, rather than the fear of discipline and chastisement, is the real motivation for holy living. If we know that God dwells in us and we want to retain His presence in our individual lives and in the church, then we must avoid all kinds of pollutions of sin.

LESSON 447

KEEPING EACH TRIBE'S INHERITANCE

Memory verse: “Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance” (Numbers 36:9).

Text: Numbers 36:1-13

Our text is the closing chapter of the book of Numbers and it is sequel to the subject of giving inheritance to daughters in Israel which was recorded in the twenty-seventh chapter of the book of Numbers. Earlier, the daughters of Zelophehad had presented the case of their father who died without a son to inherit him as the practice was in the nation. They had requested that the inheritance of their father be transferred to them. Moses took the matter to God and it was resolved in favour of the daughters. From then on, God made it a statute in Israel that the inheritance of those who died without leaving an heir should be given to the heiress (Numbers 27:1-11).

However, this new law, which obviously was intended to solve an exceptional problem, gave rise to new concerns among the people. The chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, of the tribe of Manasseh, where the daughters of Zelophehad belonged, were concerned that should such daughters who inherit tribal property marry into other tribes, the inheritance of their tribe would no longer be secure. They anticipated that it would result in the crossing of inheritance from tribe to tribe, to the detriment of the ancestral tribe of the heiress and to the favour of the tribe she marries into. Moses, as his manner, took the matter again to God and was directed so that the inheritance of each tribe would be preserved.

CONCERN OF THE GILEADITES FOR THEIR INHERITANCE (Numbers 36:1-5; 27:1-11; Leviticus 25:9-13; 1 Kings 21:1-3; Ezekiel 46:18).

The family heads of the Gileadites came to Moses and the princes in Israel to express their concern over the ordinance that granted rights of inheritance to daughters in cases where a man had no heir. They envisaged that if the daughters of Zelophehad marry into other tribes, they would take with them their inheritance to join those of their husbands. Eventually, the inheritance of these daughters would be taken over by their children, who would naturally belong to their father's tribe. If this was permitted, the ancestral tribe of the heiress would lose part of their inheritance to the receiving tribe. Moreover, in future, there would be confusion and contest over inheritance among the tribes and then the law of inheritance would no longer be sacrosanct.

Question 1: *Point out the basic lessons to be learnt from the way Moses and the leaders in Israel handled the complaint about the inheritance of daughters in Israel.*

The manner in which Moses handled this problem and God's response teach believers that whenever a person has genuine concerns over a matter, he or she should make it known to the leadership. This is a nobler step and a preferred option to murmuring or fault-finding. Two, in expressing our sincere concerns to the leaders, we should be specific, explicit and honest. We should not be critical or confrontational. Three, leaders should respond promptly and appropriately to authentic concerns of the people whenever it is brought before them. They should not regard such concerns as a challenge or an attack on their leadership. Four, it should be noted that whenever an exceptional step is taken to handle some exigencies (like the case in question), there might also arise a need to make some adjustments. In such cases, all parties involved must be ready to give what it takes to ensure peace and harmony.

Five, God always responds to the genuine concerns of His people and He is ever ready to give necessary guidance to resolve problems. Whenever a believer, prompted by a legitimate interest in God's work, points out areas of possible difficulties, God always provides solution. Six, the whole law of inheritance as it pertains to heiresses and the review of it, give us example of progressive legislation in Israel. Therefore, in handling civil matters in the church, it may be necessary to review and revise existing regulations as the need arises; regulatory laws that govern civil affairs and church administration may change or be reviewed from time to time. The only laws we must not tamper with are the moral laws of God which are clearly stated in Scripture.

Question 2: Comment on the attitude of the tribal head of the Gileadites and state the challenges believers can receive from them.

By bringing their request to Moses, rather than taking laws into their own hands, the heads of the families of Gilead displayed, first, great faith and assurance that the land of their inheritance would surely be given to them across river Jordan. Though the other half of their tribe had secured their own inheritance on the east of Jordan, the remaining half where the daughters of Zelophehad belonged, were yet to have their own portion as at the time they brought up this concern. Therefore, it was a concern expressed in anticipation of faith. Believers should also manifest faith in God and believe that His promises for them will be fulfilled.

Second, they did not intend to use their position, as heads of the family to oppress the daughters of Zelophehad or force on them their own personal solution to the problem. Rather than meddle in a matter on which God had spoken, they referred the case to Moses so that divine solution would be given. It is always best to refer difficult matters to God by allowing His leaders to give us counsel.

Third, they were concerned about preserving their tribal inheritance, hence, the quick step to forestall the anticipated infringement. As believers, we should be prudent and thoughtful enough to pre-empt anything that can infringe on our spiritual inheritance of salvation, holiness and faith. We must not allow anything to tamper with the undiluted truth and sound doctrines of God's word handed to us (Jude 3).

Fourth, these tribal leaders recognized the force and irreversibility of God's law. This is probably why they pointed out that the law of jubilee would make them to permanently forfeit any inheritance taken out in marriage into another tribe. The idea was that before the year of jubilee, such property could still be retrieved if the marriage of an heiress into another tribe was childless, or by buying it back. However, in the year of jubilee when all property reverted back to their original owners, such properties would be transferred to the receiving tribe permanently.

THE CONDITION OF KEEPING THE INHERITANCE (Numbers 36:5-9; 1 Chronicles 23:22; Isaiah 1:19; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:14)

Just as the daughters of Zelophehad had spoken well in making their request for inheritance, the elders of Gilead had also spoken well in demanding that their inheritance be preserved. Therefore, in order to ensure that the daughters were not denied and the elders, representing the entire tribe were not deprived, God gave a new directive. He commanded that the daughters be permitted to marry whomsoever they would but **“only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry”** (Numbers 36:6). This way, it would not be necessary to abrogate the existing law of inheritance or cause any tribe to infringe on the territory of others as a result of the amendment. In this new provision, these daughters were given a condition upon which they could keep their father's inheritance: they had to limit their personal liberty in order to keep their inheritance or else forfeit the inheritance in order to enjoy the liberty to marry from any tribe of their choice.

Question 3: *What principles can believers derive from the condition given to heiresses for keeping their fathers' inheritance in Israel?*

This ordinance limiting the daughters of Zelophehad and indeed all heiresses in Israel to marry from their tribe shows that, one, there are conditions to fulfill in order to keep our spiritual inheritance. There is nothing like unconditional security of believers, neither does God give unconditional promises. The security of believers as well as fulfillment of God's promises is conditional. Two, God is concerned for the congregation as well as individual members. As He listened to these daughters so He equally gave attention to the elders of Gilead so that neither the interest of individuals nor the corporate interest of the whole congregation would be jeopardized. In view of this, every believer should realize that they are important and special before God. Also, while we seek to protect the interests of the entire congregation we should equally ensure that the rights of individual members are protected.

Three, we see the principles of self-sacrifice in the demand that the daughters of Zelophehad marry from only their tribe. It shows that an individual must be ready to sacrifice his or her personal pleasure for the well-being of the entire family. They were required to sacrifice their personal liberty or desire to marry outside their tribe in order to preserve their father's inheritance and maintain the territory of their entire tribe. We

should not just seek our own personal happiness but consider the welfare of the larger Christian family. Four, though God gives us liberty, our liberty ends at the point where its exercise may infringe on the welfare of others. **“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another”** (Galatians 5:13). This paradox of limited liberty is often misunderstood by many people. A believer is free, but at the same time he is servant of all. He is at liberty in Christ, yet he must be subject to the laws of God and to civil regulations set by appointed leaders in the church. When properly understood and practised, there will be neither legalism nor licentiousness.

COMPLIANCE BY THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD (Numbers 36:10-13; 27:1-11; Joshua 17:3-6)

The daughters of Zelophehad obeyed the divine directive which confined them to marry within their tribe. They were willing to keep, through obedience and submission to God, the inheritance which they had obtained through a rare exercise of faith and courage. Their obedience holds some striking instructions to believers on how to keep spiritual blessings.

Question 4: *What can believers learn from the compliance of these daughters on how to keep their inheritance?*

First, we learn that whatever we receive from God through the exercise of faith, we can only keep and enjoy by living in obedience and submission to His word. After receiving divine blessing through faith, a believer should remain obedient and submissive to the word of God so as to continue to enjoy the blessing. Second, privilege begets responsibility. If not for their father's inheritance, the daughters of Zelophehad would probably not be subject to this restriction to marry within their tribe. Thus, whenever we enjoy certain privileges, we must be prepared to bear the responsibilities. Third, a believer must be willing to accept God's leading in the choice of a marriage partner, rather than insist on his or her own will. It is wrong for a believer to marry someone outside the household of faith (Deuteronomy 7:3,4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Fourth, the daughters of Zelophehad placed greater value on keeping their father's inheritance than the issue of where they choose their marriage partner. Believers should equally place greater emphasis on how to preserve their spiritual inheritance of salvation, purity of heart and Holy Ghost baptism. Heaven-bound Christians should be willing to gladly forfeit all of earth's treasures in order to wear the perfect likeness of Jesus and His power.

Question 5: *Mention some key lessons that you learned in the book of Numbers.*

As the book closes, we are confronted with the primacy of the commandments of God and the need to uphold them to guarantee peace and order in our lives. Here, the children of Israel were at the verge of the

Promised Land, Jordan alone separating them. They needed to be reminded that only obedience and submission to the word of God would ensure they enjoyed the mercy and faithfulness God promised them without interruption. Obedience to the commandments would ensure they had continual victory over their enemies. Moreover, the Lord had told them that Canaan spewed out her inhabitants because they polluted the land. If therefore the land would yield her best for them, they must uphold God's law as their basis of conduct and lifestyle. We too must ensure we uphold God's commandments to ensure our victory and continual blessing.

We also learn here that Moses did not slack in discharging his responsibility of teaching the people God's commandment as was delivered to him. As leaders, we are commanded to hear the word at God's mouth and give it without adding to or subtracting from it; thus, we shall both save ourselves and those who hear us (1 Timothy 4:16). Let us, as we move on to the heavenly Canaan, ask for grace to keep the commandments of God to the end. Those who respond to God in faith and total obedience will enjoy His forgiveness and unlimited blessings both here and in heaven.

LESSON 448

THE SIN AND DEATH OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:7,8).

TEXT: Acts 5:1-11

Since its birth at Pentecost, the early church has had an inspiring history. Through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, there had been remarkable miracles and mass conversions of sinners with seamless integration into the body of Christ. Besides, the young church exhibited remarkable unity of purpose and fellowship. Selfishness was swallowed up by overriding community spirit. Possessors of lands and houses sold them and brought the proceeds so that distribution could be made to meet individual needs of the members. With this sweet fellowship among believers in the early church, their leaders were able to focus on the most important aspect of the ministry: passionate commitment to the preaching of the gospel of Christ. In response to their faithfulness, “**God [was] also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and the gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his will**” (Hebrews 2:4).

However, a couple, Ananias and Sapphira attempted to bring a snag into the new revival and was strongly resisted by the Spirit of God. Thus, the hypocrisy and deception they attempted was immediately tackled. It must be noted here that it is surprising that there could be in such an assembly as the early church, a couple in whom there was an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Therefore, the severity of divine judgment in this lesson is a clear warning that the liberty of the gospel must not be taken as a licence to sin.

THE ROOT OF THE SIN OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (Acts 5:1,2; Hebrews 2:4; 3:12; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 14:12; John 12:42,43; Romans 2:28,29).

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet” (Acts 5:1,2).

Question 1: *What was the root of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?*

At the root of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira is the combination of a lack of faith in God and an inordinate crave for the praise and acceptance of men. Love of the praise of men often leads to the temptation of making oneself appear better than he really is. This is the attitude that defines hypocrisy. The couple must have been moved by the selfless generosity of Barnabas

and other land owners who sold them and donated the proceeds to alleviate the sufferings of the less-privileged ones in the church (Acts 4:34-36). This, of course, was a noble cause but the seeming good deed of the couple had ulterior motives which only the Spirit of God and Spirit-filled men could discern. The couple was out to impress fellow men rather than to cultivate and to manifest genuine faith in God. They must have coveted the commendation of the apostles and the admiration of the church. While the love of praise pushed them to give, the absence of true faith and grace pulled them away from sincerity and honesty. They contrived a means of enjoying the praise of men while actually counterfeiting their action. Such crave for acceptance and praise lead people to deny the Lord and falsify their faith. Concerning the Jewish rulers at the time of Christ, it was written that: **“among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:42,43).

This calls for a search of individual hearts to see if our motives for seemingly good deeds are driven by ulterior motives. A reputation founded on the sands of hypocrisy and eye-service usually collapses under the wind of the Holy Spirit’s scrutiny. Outward acts and behaviours which portray us before our fellow men as eminent church members must be subordinated to genuine acts of faith even if unnoticed.

Question 2: What lesson can church members and leaders learn from the incident that led to the death of Ananias and Sapphira?

This unexpected occurrence teaches us that the corporate reputation of the church should not preclude the need for individual self-examination. We are enjoined to examine ourselves **“whether ye be in the faith...”** (2 Corinthians 13:5). Notwithstanding the high spiritual standard of a church, individual members are going to be judged severally as a result of their own standards of spirituality. Each of us shall **“give account of himself to God”** (Romans 14:12). This same truth has implications for leaders in the church. They should never assume that **“all the congregation are holy, everyone of them and the Lord is among them.”** Church leadership must continue to emphasize the necessity of consecration and holiness constantly. And like the apostle Peter, they should regularly **“put [their congregations] in remembrance of these things...”** (2 Peter 1:12).

Question 3: Is it possible to have people like Ananias and Sapphira in the church today?

People like Ananias and Sapphira are still in the church today. In fact, some may have unfortunately found their ways to some level of leadership in the church. It will take spiritual discernment to discover such people. These are they who merely pretend to act Christian as a result of the absence of the Spirit of Christ in them. They are either without genuine salvation experience because they had never experienced the new birth or have lost the beautiful experience. Their “Christianity” consists only in outward shows

designed to impress men rather than God. They are not interested in acts of piety and consecration that will not draw the applause of men. They must sound their trumpet about how good, competent and hardworking they are in the vineyard of the Lord, or they will not get involved. The Scriptures, however says, **“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”** (Romans 2:28,29).

THE REVELATION OF CONCEALED SIN AND HYPOCRISY (Acts 5:3,4,7,8; Psalm 39:27; Numbers 32:23; Proverbs 28:13; 1 Kings 14:1-18; 2 Kings 5:15-27)

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” When he brought only a part of the money, Ananias thought that he would be commended as were others. He was sure that the plot to conceal the truth about the transaction was fool-proof. He, however, did not reckon with the spiritual gift of the word of knowledge operating in the apostles. It is a truth which men of all ages are ever so slow to learn that God is omniscient, knowing all things (Psalm 139:27). It may be easy to deceive the world by make beliefs, half truths or outright lies. Men can be deceived into mistaking our selfishness for self-sacrifice or thinking that we are devout when we are actually devoid of grace; they may think we are spiritual when we are carnal. The crucial question however is, how does God see you?

Question 4: *Why is hypocrisy and dishonesty utterly self-defeating and ultimately useless?*

Every sin is committed under the full glare of God’s all-seeing eye. This was why Moses warned the tribes of Reuben and Gad to **“be sure your sin will find you out”** (Numbers 32:23). It is possible for a sinner to cover up his tracks of sins but he cannot hide from God. Covering up sin is tantamount to self-deception and may lead to eternal damnation. **“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy”** (Proverbs 28:13).

Question 5: *Mention instances in the Scripture when attempts to deceive Spirit-filled men were foiled by the Holy Spirit and what we can learn from them.*

Apart from the case of Ananias and Sapphira, there have been other instances of men assaying to deceive servants of God but were exposed, rebuked and judged. In one instance, Abijah, the son of Jeroboam was sick and Jeroboam asked his wife to disguise to enquire from Ahijah whether the child would live or die. **“And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet,**

which told me that I should be king over this people” (1 Kings 14:2). But the plot was revealed to Ahijah. **“And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings”** (1 Kings 14:6).

In another instance, Gehazi the servant of Elisha went secretly after Naaman, the Syrian to collect gifts which his master had refused. **“But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow”** (2 Kings 5:25-27). Clearly, those who by whatever form of disguise think they can hide from God will be confounded on the day of discovery. So it is with sinners who disguise as saints in the church and are taken to be so by men.

The question we must consider is: what does Gehazi profit even if he deceitfully gains two talents of silver and two changes of garments but loses his health, his honour, his peace, and his privileges as a servant of the great prophet and bring a curse upon his generation? Thus, all who live the life of deceit and hypocrisy pierce themselves with both temporal and everlasting sorrows.

THE JUDGMENT OF SIN IN THE CHURCH (Acts 5:5,6,9,10; 1 Peter 4:17,18; Mark 7:21-23; Psalm 119:11; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 12:29)

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband” (Acts 5:5,10).

The entire conspiracy proved to be a great tragedy. With deception in their hearts, Ananias and Sapphira were severely condemned rather than commended. Both of them were struck dead within the space of three hours. The Holy Ghost did not only discover their fraud but also punished them severely for their sin. Those who, like Ananias and Sapphira, hide in the crowd to work against the interest of Christ and the church will certainly be fished out one day by the all-seeing God. Those who attempt to hinder the move of the Spirit in the church or constitute themselves into obstacles to the free flow of love, fellowship and holiness will not go unpunished. Those who engage in hypocrisy and deception and bring reproach to the body of Christ will be judged.

In the same vein, the hirelings and tares who, because they have stayed long in the congregation have found their ways into the hierarchy of leadership should not jubilate yet because God’s rod of judgment will soon catch up with them. That God has not judged them does not mean He will

not; in due time, He will. People should not take God's patience for granted. Sinners who have become hardened in sin in the church must bear in mind that **"judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"** (1 Peter 4:17,18).

When Satan first filled the couple's heart with a false notion of profiting by deception, they did not know that judgment would come suddenly. We must always bear in mind that our loving God is also a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29) and jealously guard against any thought that leads away from God and godliness. Accordingly, we ought to carefully watch over our thoughts which find expression in word or deed, since these determine our life. Defiling thoughts are veritable harbingers of defiling acts.

Question 6: *How can we preserve our hearts from being filled with satanic deceptions and lies which engender sinful actions?*

The surest way of preserving our hearts from satanic lies and deceptions is to fill it with the principles of the Word of God. **"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"** (Psalm 119:11). We must lay up God's word in our hearts as a highly valued treasure ready to be applied when needed. It is not enough to have the Word of God on stickers on our doors and cars or just in our heads: it must be in our hearts, the fountain of our thoughts, words and deeds. This will enable us to counter every satanic suggestion to sin. Had Ananias and Sapphira done this, they could have countered the thought to lie against the Holy Spirit and avoided the sudden judgment that came on them.

LESSONS FROM THE JUDGMENT ON ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRE (Acts 5:5,11; 1 Timothy 5:20)

Seeing that this deception was the first act of sin recorded in the early church and the judgment that followed, we deduce that the couple was justly judged to purge sin from the congregation. They would have set a bad precedent for others to follow had the sin gone unpunished. Their experience was a deterrent to others who would attempt to do the same. If the evil was allowed to go unpunished, the couple could have been emboldened to go further into other heinous sins. Besides, they could encourage or embolden others in the assembly to commit similar or even more heinous acts.

Second, the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira brought a renewed fear of God among the believers, thus making them realize how God seriously detests sin especially in the church and wherever it is committed. **"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear"** (1 Timothy 5:20). It must be noted that if one sin goes unchecked, many more are sure to follow. Third, this act and other acts of sin are judged harshly because hypocrisy, dishonesty, covetousness and greed are not only destructive but they prevent the Holy Spirit from working effectively in the congregation of God's people.

Four, the judgment upon the couple shows that both concealed sins and open scandals are punishable by divine judgment. Five, it shows that in a church where the power of God is in active manifestation through miracles of healing, provision and divine intervention, God also allows miracles of judgment to sanitize and purify His church. Six, God understands the motives of men. Some people who appear outwardly pious, upright, active and willing may as well inwardly have ulterior motives that they want to satisfy. Only the Spirit of God can reveal the motives of people. It must be added however, that not all who are up and doing in the work of God have ulterior motives. As people whose ultimate goal is heaven, we must daily subject our motives to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit so that our outward piety does not become a ploy to deceive the church.

LESSON 449

THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

MEMORY VERSE: “Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

TEXT: Acts 5:12-42

In our last lesson, we considered the instance of a miracle of judgment, a divine purge against an incipient hypocrisy and dishonesty in the early church. The immediate effect of that was a renewed sense of God’s presence and power in the church. A holy fear effectively kept away lightness of character and superficial profession of faith.

When God’s presence, power and fear prevail in any church, there will be spectacular conversions, growth, miracles, signs and wonders, on one hand, and on the other, persecution, opposition and resistance from the enemies of the gospel. In the case of the early church in Jerusalem, the adversaries were represented by the high priest, the Sadducees and Jewish council of elders. These people responded to the sweeping revival by arresting and imprisoning the apostles in order to contain their growing influence and acceptance of their message among the people.

The manner in which the apostles managed the situation provides us with enduring lessons in Christian comportment especially in times of persecution and also instructs us on how to handle cases where secular authorities and legislations run contrary to divine commandments and precepts.

REVIVAL AND MIRACLES AFTER JUDGMENT (Acts 5:12-16; 1 Timothy 4:20; 2 Samuel 6; 5-12; Acts 4:29,30; John 3:2; Revelation 19:20).

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (verse 12).

Question 1: *What were the effects of the divine judgment of Ananias and Sapphira on the early church? What can we learn from it?*

The timely rooting out of the seed of hypocrisy represented by the death of Ananias and Sapphira had salutary effects on the church. First, it ushered in a sense of solemnity among the believers and repelled those whose professions of faith were insincere. Second, the sense of holiness that followed in the wake of the judgment bound sincere believers together in singleness of heart and purpose. Third, it conferred respect on the apostles, for the people magnified them and held them as custodians of God’s power for the benefit of the people. Fourth, the people gave more diligence to the apostles’ doctrine. The experience of the early church shows clearly that a church that stands steadfast on the truth will attract to itself those who genuinely thirst and hunger for true righteousness.

On the other hand, there were those it was written about: **“And of the rest durst no man join himself to them.”** Those were they who, rather than be affected positively by a sanctifying fear of sin and its consequences, chose to abandon the fellowship in a defeatist fear. However, the divinely appointed way to effectively escape God’s judgment is not by distancing oneself from divine oracles and commandments, but by repenting from sin and accepting Christ as Saviour. The judgment visited upon Ananias and Sapphira is representative of discipline in the church today.

Question 2: *What purpose does discipline and rebuke serve in the church?*

The purpose of rebuke and discipline in the church is to instill **“godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation”** (2 Corinthians 7:10). **“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”** (1 Timothy 4:20). In spite of the temporary pain or shame of discipline or judgment visited on those who sin, we should consider the unspeakable blessings it confers on those who receive it with all sincerity of heart. The same hand that punished Uzzah’s presumptuous attitude to the ark of God rewarded Obededom for his humble reverence and blessed his household (2 Samuel 6:5-12).

Question 3: *What is the role of miracles in the preaching of the gospel?*

The apostles, while under the first wave of persecution that followed the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate prayed: **“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus”** (Acts 4:29,30). It was apparent that they reaped the harvest of their prayer as **“there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one”** (Acts 5:16). Miracles of God’s mercy have often attended the preaching of the word by God’s ministers. Such miracles serve important complimentary role in the gospel ministry. In the case of the apostles they proved the divine origin and approval of their doctrine. Two, they relieved the people’s sufferings and confirmed the scripture that **“godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come”**. Three, the apostles were encouraged and emboldened as a result to preach even more fervently in spite of the attendant opposition and persecution. Four, they helped to convince sceptics who would otherwise not come to the faith, by lending credence to their divine commission (Acts 8:6). Nichodemus said concerning Christ, **“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him”** (John 3:2). However it must be emphasized that miracles are not an end in themselves; they are meant to lead us to the saving grace in Christ. Christ’s miracles also set men free from afflictions and disabilities

so that they may serve and glorify God. Christ condemned the error of running after miracles without appreciating their deeper spiritual significance. He rebuked the Jews who benefited from the miracle of the loaves without the spiritual purpose. **“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, 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 6:26,27). Besides, not all seeming miracles are true and from God. A prayerful examination of the “miracle-worker’s” antecedents and lifestyle may help distinguish true servants of God from deceivers. For, **“Ye shall know them by their fruits”** (Matthew 7:16).

RESISTANCE AND OPPOSITION BY HERETICS (Acts 5:17-25; 2 Timothy 3:12; Luke 1:75; 2 Corinthians 1:10).

The spiritual gifts operating in the ministry of the apostles led to the conversion of many souls and a harvest of spectacular miracles. They also stirred up bitter opposition from the high priest, the Sadducees and the council of elders of the Jews (the Sanhedrin). **“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison”** (verses 17,18).

Question 4: *Identify the basic reason for the opposition of the gospel?*

The reason for opposing the gospel is basically the same at that time as it is today. Persecution often arises as a response to a perceived threat to the interest of the persecutor. The high priest feared that he would lose his authority, dignity and grip on the people if the doctrine of the apostles should gain ground. With him were the Sadducees whose stake was that the gospel ran contrary to their own doctrine because it promoted the concept of a world to come, the reality of resurrection, and the existence of angels and spirits, all of which they (Sadducees) did not believe. Their common fear was that embracing the gospel would lead to repudiating the tenets of their false doctrine and the loss of their religious authority. Today, the reason for the persecution of believers can still be located within the general compass of perceived threats to ungodly personal or partisan interests. Because the gospel is an eye-opener and turns people from the power of Satan to God, satanic agents would always stir up opposition against it. In the case of the apostles, they were arrested and confined to a prison. Their aim was to halt the spread of the gospel, intimidate the apostles and so check their growing influence among the people. God, however, sent an angel to effect their release from the prison.

Question 5: *What lesson can we learn from (1) God’s sending an angel to release the apostles? (2) The angel’s directive to go back to the synagogue to continue preaching?*

It is a great comfort to persecuted saints in all ages that God's care is over them even in the severest of trials. **"But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life"** (verses 19,20). Neither the bars of iron and brass nor the vigilance of the guards could stop divine help from reaching the persecuted apostles. They could not stop the resurrection of Christ and cannot stop our Christian witness today. The angel's charge to liberated apostles was a re-commissioning to do that which the high priest and the Sadducees aimed to stop. Similarly, when we receive divine healing, or deliverance from accident, it is not only so that we may merely enjoy those comforts but that we may by them serve God better. The scripture enjoins **"that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve him (God) without fear"** (Luke 1:75). This is however not a case for unnecessarily exposing ourselves to physical dangers but for prudent continuance in what we know to be the will of God, though we be threatened.

The high priest summoned the council of the Sanhedrin and the senate of Israel – a house of about one hundred and sixteen persons and sent for the apostles to be brought before them. The officers were confounded beyond words when upon opening the prison doors, they found that their prisoners were gone.

Question 6: *Mention at least two other instances in the Bible when God intervened to deliver persecuted believers. What lesson can those who are persecuted today learn from them?*

The consternation of the council of the Sanhedrin when the disappearance of the apostles was announced can be imagined. The lesson here is that God knows how and when to disappoint the expectation of the adversary. He did deliver Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from fiery furnace, Daniel from the lions and Peter from Herod's prison. Every persecuted believer today can equally expect God's power on his side. God who delivered them from so great a death and does still deliver, can be trusted to deliver us today (2 Corinthians 1:10).

RESPONSE OF THE REDEEMED TO PERSECUTION (Acts 5:26-42; Jeremiah 1:7; Isaiah 58:1; Hebrews 2:3).

It was written concerning the witness of the apostles that **"with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"** (Acts 4:33). But as we watch their conduct and comportment under fiery persecution it seems as if they exhibited even more divine grace and power in their suffering than in their preaching. Their conduct under persecution provides a good challenge to believers today. In obedience to the express command of the angel the apostles went back to the synagogue to preach to the people. It was from there they quietly, without resistance submitted themselves to arrest and arraignment when they came to arrest them. They were charged for disobeying the order prohibiting them from preaching

Christ. Peter and John had, when they were first commanded not to speak at all or preach in the name of Jesus, made it clear that, **“we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard”** (Acts 4:20). Now, on this second occasion the question was, **“Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us”** (verse 28). The apostles' answer was in the same tenor as before, **“We ought to obey God rather men”** (Verse 29). They followed up with an eloquent message to the council.

Question 7: *What salient lessons can we draw from the clear and concise answer by the apostles to the charge laid against them before the Sanhedrin?*

The reply of the apostles is highly instructive. One, it was precise and in consonance with logic and commonsense. They affirmed clearly their loyalty to the higher authority of the God's command which the Sanhedrin sought to contradict. Two, they were unequivocal in telling them the truth about their sin in killing Christ, although they knew that they would be unwilling to hear it. Jeremiah was commanded, **“Be not dismayed at their faces lest I confound thee before them”** (Jeremiah 1:7). Similarly prophet Isaiah wrote, **“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and show my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins”** (Isaiah 58:1). Three, their reasoning to justify obedience to Christ's commission was firmly grounded in the Old Testament scripture which the Sanhedrin themselves admitted. Starting from the point of common agreement they showed that what they preached and affirmed was what God ordained. The lesson in all this is the need to clearly articulate our Christian perspective whenever the need arises.

The response of the Sanhedrin to the eloquent exposition of the Gospel by the apostles was typical of hardened sinners.

Question 8: *In what way was the response of the Sanhedrin similar to that of many who reject Christ today?*

The Sanhedrin were supposed to be men of learning and reason, yet their response to the clear defence of the gospel by the apostles was disappointing. Like many today, they were angry to be confronted with the error of their ways. Rather than repent, they became angry and plotted to kill them. Some people would not examine the evidence of the gospel nor advance valid reasons to refute it just because it runs against the grain of their lives they reject it.

God indeed has many weapons in His armoury. In this instance, He raised an escape route for the apostles through the mouth of a member of the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel. He argued against the killing of the apostles and counselled them to let the apostles alone, saying that they would fizzle out if the movement be of human origin. If however, it be of God it would be tantamount to fighting God trying to suppress it.

In spite of the obvious injustice and indignity meted out to the apostles, they neither reviled nor threatened anyone. They meekly submitted their plight to God the righteous Judge. All their care was to preserve their soul in righteousness. They counted it an honour that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ. In it all, their passion for souls was not abated. What a challenge to us today!

LESSON 450

APPOINTMENT OF LEADERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out from among you seven men of honest report whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3).

TEXT: Acts 6:1-7

Today’s text opens with the record of murmuring - an age-long negative trait. The root cause of this undesirable development was a felt neglect of the Grecian widows in the daily ministrations of relief materials. It would be recalled that the feeling of commonness that prevailed in the early church had prompted affluent believers to willingly sell off their valuables, bring the proceeds (and other belongings) to the apostles’ feet and “...**distribution was made to every man as he had need**” (Acts 2:44,45; 4:35). As the church continued to grow, however, demand for the relief materials increased. The growing church had imperceptibly reached a new level requiring effective supportive administrative system. Unknown to the body, the simple administrative style used to run the erstwhile young church was not adequate for the needs of a continuously growing assembly. The result was that one group soon began to feel neglected.

Question 1: *What lesson can we learn from the growth needs in the early church?*

Without doubt, church growth usually comes with its problems and challenges. Growth makes expedient a departure from the simplicity that is usually characteristic of smallness. As an institution increases in size, there would be need for greater organization and better methods of doing things. In a growing church setting, there may be need to enlarge administrative structure from time to time without altering the Scripture or changing any of its doctrines. Decentralization of authority may be necessary in order to address diverse needs more effectively. However, care must be taken to avoid the temptation of making leadership to be commonplace.

Our text presents us with the danger of offences emanating from the fact of multiplication of disciples. It shows how the apostles remained committed to their primary responsibility despite the need to find solution to the problem. It also spells out the requirements for selecting quality workers and leaders in the church. Finally, it records the positive results of right decisions in the work of the ministry.

REACTING TO OFFENCES IN THE CHURCH (Acts 6:1; Philippians 2:14; Ephesians 4:26,27,29-32; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 10:10).

“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1).

Growth of the early church had brought together people from different backgrounds and culture. There were those referred to as “Grecians” who were supposed to be Jews scattered among the Greeks but had returned home and those called “Hebrews” because they dwelt in Palestine. For reasons best known to them, the former felt their widows had been **“neglected in the daily ministration”** of the church’s commonwealth. This led to murmuring and complaints as if there had been partiality in distribution of the relief materials.

In the light of Scripture, the Grecians could have resorted to scriptural methods of resolving misunderstandings instead of murmuring and complaining which are capable of destroying the church and sowing the seed of discord among the brethren. No matter how genuine their grievances, the Bible states that we should **“do all things without murmurings and disputing”** (Philippians 2:14). Murmuring has never helped or solved any problem, either within or outside the church.

Murmuring is an outward manifestation of an inward ill-feeling or dissatisfaction against a person, programme or process. Like the text, it often results from an unhealthy apprehension about physical needs, quest for personal advantage or material possessions (Exodus 17:1-4; Matthew 20:11). Regardless of how right the cause might appear, it has never been justified in scripture. In a theocratic setting like the church, murmuring is rebellion against God. Whenever and wherever it fetters, it always leaves a bitter tale behind. For instance, the forty-year wilderness wandering of the Israelites was a direct consequence of murmuring. It would also be recalled that immediately after the rebellion of Korah’s company, about fourteen thousand people died as a result (Numbers 14:1,26-35; 16:41-49). As a work of the flesh, murmuring should be alien to the congregation of the godly. New Testament believers are warned against this evil trait **“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer”** (1 Corinthians 10:10).

Question 2: *How should believers express grievances in the church?*

Rather than murmur, believers should manifest maturity in all situations, bearing in mind that it is more scriptural to communicate than to complain. It is better to mind the many things that bind us together than the few things that seek to divide us. In the context of our text, the Hebrews were native Jews who were permanently resident in the Israeli territory. They conversed mainly in the Hebrew or Aramaic language. On the other hand, the Grecians were returnee Jews from Greek or Roman provinces who had imbibed the cultures and language of the foreign lands where they had lived or grown. In spite of these minor differences, however, both groups were descendants of Jacob, and as such were related by blood. Two, both groups were Christians saved by grace on the merit of Christ’s death: they were brethren by faith. Three, both groups were targets of Satan-orchestrated persecution from the unbelieving world. For the contemporary believers, the facts of our common faith, spiritual experiences, commitment to Christ’s cause, proneness to dangers from common foes and our common hope of a glorious eternity, should enhance our forbearance with one

another. They should also encourage us to live peaceably with one another in an atmosphere devoid of the cancerous habit of murmuring.

Question 3: *What dangers are inherent in murmuring?*

Murmuring implies the presence of a seed of bitterness. It is an ill-wind that does no one any good. It sows the seed of discord and polarizes the body into camps and factions thus weakening the church. Leaders can be distracted from taking adequate and effective oversight of the flock. It can result in massive backsliding of members. The door of salvation can be closed to prospective seekers. The church can be at risk of God's displeasure. Realizing the potential dangers of this ugly development therefore, the apostles took decisive steps to diffuse the tension that occasioned the problem.

Question 4: *What can we learn from the way the apostles reacted to this challenge?*

RESOLVE OF THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST (Acts 6:2-4; 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)

However, the apostles reacted or handled the looming danger with wisdom, caution and maturity. They did not allow the situation snowball and destroy the rising revival. They came up with two related resolves. One, unlike the Grecians who murmured, they chose to follow the Lord's recommendation on such matters. They did not underrate the problem or spite the complaints. Rather, they called all the stakeholders together to address the grievance with utmost sincerity and plainness. The challenge here is for believers to avoid pitfalls and errors committed by any person or babes in Christ. Our lives should be in continual conformity to the word of God in all situations. Two, the apostles refused to be distracted into a less important aspect of ministry. They believed that attending to this cause must never be at the expense of their primary apostolic responsibility. "...**It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables**" (Acts 6:2). They realized that to devote themselves exclusively to meeting the physical and material necessities of needy brethren was to imperil the spiritual life of the church. It would reduce the body to a mere social or charitable organization, rather than a church which Christ purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, they declared, "**but we will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word**" (verse 4).

Question 5: *What lessons can the contemporary gospel minister learn from the resolve of the apostles to stick to the ministry of the word?*

The contemporary church leader needs to understand, like the early apostles, that the word of God is the heart of the ministry. Two, for the ministry to be truly successful, freedom from distraction is peculiarly necessary. Three, if the teaching ministry languishes, or is in any way fettered, the congregation suffers greatly. All ministers must therefore live by the apostles' resolve: to persevere in prayer and in the ministry of the word.

These two activities sum up the life of a New Testament minister. By prayer he draws divine strength from heaven and in ministering the word, he gives forth what he himself has thus received. Without a prevailing prayer life, there can be no power to prevail over the hearts of men.

RECRUITMENT OF SUPPORTIVE LEADERS IN THE CHURCH (Acts 6:3; Exodus 18:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

Having determined to focus on the most essential aspects of ministry, the apostles gave reasonable and commendable counsel on the issue at hand. One, supportive leaders must be chosen. These should relieve the apostles of the pressure of the task that then seemed to threaten the unity of the assembly. It would also enhance their performance in the area of their primary focus. Two, those to be chosen must come from among the brethren in the church. Internal recruitment method is the consistent recruitment policy of the true church. Unbelievers are never qualified to be considered for either ministerial or administrative assignments in the church, regardless of their credentials, talents or experience (Acts 1:15-21; 16:40,41). Three, those to be considered for appointment must possess certain qualifications. **“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out from among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, who we may appoint over this business”** (verse 3).

Question 6: *Why are these qualifications important?*

The qualifications listed are basic requirements for any significant office in the New Testament church. The first in mention is honesty. This implies transparency and dependability; it implies sincerity and truthfulness. The nature of the assignment in question - disbursement of money and materials - required that the candidates must not be greedy or covetous. Likewise, those aspiring to church leadership positions must be free from deceitful practices and propensity to cheat under any guise. They must have **“a good report of them that are without”** (1 Timothy 3:7). They must rank blameless in this regard in the reckoning of all acquaintances, non-Christians inclusive. The second requirement is that they must be **“full of the Holy Ghost”**. This refers to the special endowment of God’s promised Spirit. In essence, it implies the residence of divinity in the life of redeemed mortals for heaven-assisted service to the Redeemer. The life of a Spirit-filled believer is characterized by prayerfulness, deep spirituality, active self-denying labours for the welfare of fellow Christians, and dynamism in the spread of the gospel (John 16:7-11; Acts 1:8). The third qualification is wisdom. Quite naturally, this could be a product of experience, observation and reflection. However, the secular, native or worldly wisdom that comes by education and training fails in the face of challenges in the ministry. The wisdom required for God’s work must be sought and sourced from the God of the work. **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him”**. As a gift of God, it upholds reverence and obedience to God as its first principle. Such wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy

and good works (1 Corinthians 1:19,20,25-29; James 1:5; Psalm 111:9; Proverbs 9:10; James 3:7).

“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas ...whom they set before the apostles: ...” (Acts 6:5). It is noteworthy that the new leaders were **selected** not elected. There was no record of campaign, lobbying or godfatherism. There was no consideration of the use of a quota system to reflect the characteristics of the various sections represented in the assembly. The challenge here is that national policy or administrative style need not dictate the operation mode of a true church. Moreover, these men were not aware of the prospects of any such appointment before now. Yet, they were all serious and zealous believers who built up their faith by making full use of grace to develop themselves in the knowledge of the Lord. Like them, genuine believers should diligently seek to boost their faith through the possession of additional Christian virtues - knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. **“For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off...”** (2 Peter 1:5-9). The lesson here is that any one occupying church position without these qualifications is at best a misfit or a potent danger. Such an incumbent might not make sufficient, if any, desirable impact. Therefore, it is very imperative for him to take up the challenge to seek these qualifications with utmost seriousness by earnest prayer and faith.

“And when they had prayed...” (verse 6). There was no record of any congratulatory message on their appointment. Neither was there any celebration to commemorate the event. This is an all-time pattern for appointees into Christian service. Appointment into church office does not call for frivolous ceremonies. What it requires is prayers for the appointees by the brethren. **“...They laid their hands on them”**. The event signified ‘ordination’ - a commissioning for special task or duty. The demand of the contemporary church requires more believers to earnestly seek to qualify for God’s use.

RESULT OF RIGHT DECISION IN THE CHURCH (Acts 6: 6,7)

“And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great number of priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

The Spirit-led approach of the apostles to the problem led to further increase of the church, and priests, who had hitherto been very conservative and resistant to the new faith came to embrace it. The situation would have been different had the problem at the start been left unattended, or the leadership had opted otherwise than they did.

Question 7: *What lesson can we learn from the resultant growth after the appointment of the new leaders in the early church?*

The secret of this increase was the right decision made by the apostles, and the acceptance of same by the body of Christ. This shows that every challenge in the church, if properly managed, could be a chance for further expansion of God's kingdom. If a church is driven by Christ-centred decisions, obstacles will become opportunities, and great walls of resistance to the gospel will become penetrable. If leaders are committed to living by the word, praying persistently with consistent teaching ministry, the gospel will spread with speed, stony hearts will melt with ease, the church will grow and the Lord will add to the church such as should be saved.

LESSON 451

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE AND MARTYRDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “**And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep**” (Acts 7:60).

TEXT: Acts 6: 8-15; 7:1-60

Today's text presents us with a new dimension in the persecution of the early church. Here, we have a record of the first disciple who sealed the testimony of Jesus with his life as his persecutors raised the tempo of persecution from ordinary assault to death by stoning. Obviously, persecution is the lot of all true Christians the world over. But Stephen's life, service, testimony and defence was the first to attract the dastardly act of martyrdom in the early church. The manner in which he died reveals that he was full of grace, not only to live for Christ but also to die for His testimony. We must note however, that martyrdom in itself is meaningless if the believer's life is not Christ-centred, virtuous, righteous and holy. On his part, Stephen led a life that pleased God as the scripture affirms that he was “**full of faith and power**”. Thus, it was his Christ-like life of faith and power that brought him to limelight for service in the early church.

Question 1: *What lesson can we learn from the life of Stephen?*

Every believer needs to learn that genuine salvation experience and consistent holy living precede service in the vineyard of God. Salvation comes through faith in the atoning work of Christ at Calvary. And everyone who exercises faith in Christ for salvation and receives Him as Saviour and Lord will have the initial deposit of God's power in his life (Ephesians 2:8,9; John 1:12). The believer needs the experiences of sanctification and Holy Ghost baptism to be full of faith and power.

Though full of power, Stephen was also humble. It takes one who possesses the virtue of humility to accept responsibility to do a menial job or render supportive service in the ministry. Faith, the spiritual eye that sees God and enlists His support through prayer, is indispensable in the life of every believer who seeks to be as useful in the kingdom of God as Stephen. Like many Christian servants would have done today, Stephen did not complain of being under-utilized. Rather, he was faithful in carrying out the task assigned to him wholeheartedly while at the same time developing himself to be able to excel in the preaching ministry. It is no wonder then that he “**did great wonders and miracles among the people**”. His life challenges every believer to the primacy of commitment to the Great Commission regardless of any other assignments or opposition we face.

THE TRIAL OF STEPHEN (Acts 6:8-15; 19: 8-12; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 1 Kings 21:11-14; Matthew 26:57-66; Mark 14: 53-65; John 19: 1-16)

The persecution of Stephen, or any believer is not a “**strange thing**”. Christ had foretold that the unbelieving world would hate, persecute and even kill his faithful disciples. “**These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service**” (John 16:1,2). Obviously, it is only believers who keep their Christian convictions and share them with others that suffer persecution. It was the powerful witness of Stephen that caused uneasiness among the zealous Jewish religionists.

“**Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen**” (Acts 6:9). All these antagonists were learned Grecian Jews. Yet, they could not withstand the power and wisdom of this Spirit-filled disciple (Luke 21:15). Therefore, they resorted to the use of force “**...and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council**” (Acts 6: 12).

Question 2: What similarities are there between the trials of Jesus and that of Stephen?

The trial of Stephen was similar to that of the Lord Jesus Christ in many respects. One, Stephen was brought to the same Sanhedrin that tried the Lord. Two, in both trials, bribes were used to subvert the natural course of justice. In the case of the Lord, “**when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye...**” (Matthew 28:12-15). Similarly, as they summoned Stephen, “**Then they suborned (bribed) men...**” (Acts 6:11). Three, false witnesses were set against both the Lord and this saint. Four, in both cases, the jury lost control to the crowd of accusers and consequently the guiltless was unjustly executed.

Stephen was arraigned on a four-related count-charge of blasphemy against God, Moses, the temple and the law. Blasphemy implies contempt, or irreverent talk about God or a sacred institution. For the average Jew, blasphemy against Moses was considered grievous because he was a highly respected personality. The nation first attained sovereignty under him and owes its sacred institutions and spiritual heritage to Moses’ ministry. The ten commandments as well as many of the ceremonial laws were handed down through him. More importantly, blasphemy against Moses amounted to discrediting his work, especially the Pentateuch which were essential and foundational books of the Scripture. The second count was blasphemy against God whom the Jews often considered as their national deity. He is to be revered on all counts at all times. Any profanity in regard to God or His name is summary blasphemy. To an Israelite, it is utmost insult for anyone to speak derisively of the heavenly Father. This sin carries the death penalty. “**And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death**” (Leviticus 24:10-16).

The third charge was blasphemy against the Law, which here refers to the whole Old Testament Scripture. Therefore, to blaspheme the Law is to challenge the authority of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Psalms and the Prophetic books. It is to challenge the validity of the national history it contains, discredit the truth and doctrines it teaches, and disregard the whole essence of the Scripture. **“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses”** (Hebrews 10:28). The fourth charge was blasphemy against the temple, considered to be the most important building in Israel’s national life. The one in reference was erected at the instance of Herod around 19 BC. Like the tabernacles and the earlier (Solomon’s and Zerubabel’s) temples that preceded this, it was dedicated to the worship of God. To blaspheme it was to denigrate the worship of the God of the whole earth. By proffering these charges, the accusers ostensibly appeared to be spiritual and zealous for the glory of God. As such, they erroneously thought that they were defending the cause of the Almighty. But actually, this was very far from the truth as Stephen’s later response clearly shows.

Stephen’s Christ-like comportment in the face of danger and death is worth emulating. He was never afraid to go the whole length to prove his love for his dear Saviour and Master. Rather than curse in retaliation, he prayed for his accusers and assailants. This is an evidence of the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit even in the darkest hour. **“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”** (1 Peter 4:19). God has promised to sustain His children who endure persecution and turn their trials to testimonies.

Believers need to note that they can suffer similar persecutions as Christ, Stephen and other saints in the Bible and in our contemporary times. Victory is sure when we manifest Christ-like attitude or fruit of the Spirit during persecution (Galatians 5:22,23). It was Stephen’s Christ-like attitude that pleased God and made Him shower his glory upon him in a visible form. **“And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel”** (Acts 6:15). For believers who suffer for righteousness’ sake, **“the spirit of glory and of God resteth”** upon them (1 Peter 4:14).

Question 3: What is the significance of Stephen’s face as seen by the Council?

That Stephen’s face glowed like that of an angel in his trial was a mark of divine approval of the disciple. Two, it gave divine backing to Stephen’s position in the matter in question. Three, it was sufficient proof that the charges against him were baseless in the reckoning of heaven. Four, the glory-filled face of Stephen was a gracious revelation to the Council to be careful with what they do to this earnest defender of the cross. Unfortunately, they neither understood its significance nor were justified in their subsequent actions. Five, an angel is a minister (messenger) of God who runs divine errands. This was to show that Stephen had a very important message from God for those present at the scene of the trial.

THE TESTIMONY OF STEPHEN (Acts 7:1-53; Genesis 37:18-20,27,28; 41:25-44; Exodus 2:11-14; Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 66:1).

“Then said the high priest, Are these things so?” (Acts 7:1).

This was clearly a chance for Stephen to defend himself. But his response was rather a testimony of the faithfulness of God to His promises all through the history of the nation. It also showed the unfaithfulness of the people in spite all the opportunities they had. Finally, it proved to be an indictment of his accusers for failing to be faithful to the sacred institutions they profess to defend.

Question 4: Identify the salient points in the testimony of Stephen.

Stephen gave a summary of the history of Israel beginning from the call of Abraham to the time of Christ. His speech proved that he was more conversant with the Greek version of the Old Testament. Notwithstanding, his response adequately provided convicting reply to the charges made against him. It proved God's faithfulness to His promises. Citing Joseph and Moses as God's choice agents of deliverance at different times, he showed that their earlier rejection by the people did not prevent divine programme. The point is that though rejected and crucified out of envy by the Jews, Christ became the Messiah, Redeemer and Saviour of our dispensation (Matthew 1:21; Psalm 2:1-12; 118:22,23; Acts 5: 29-31).

Second, he tried to correct the wrong notions the Jews had about the temple (Acts 7:33; Exodus 3:5). This implies that God cannot be limited to residing in any temple. In any case, while Solomon's temple remained, God rejected the Israelites and ceded them to captivity because of idolatry, among other sins (Amos 5:25-27). By these references, Stephen proved that the temple was neither a necessary requirement nor a guarantee of the true worship of God. This also agrees with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ **“...ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father... and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:21-24).

Three, he showed how the ministry of Moses prescribed obedience to Christ. Moses delivered Israel with great power, signs and wonders in Egypt, the Red Sea and in the wilderness. He later prophesied of another leader who must be obeyed. **“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken”** (Deuteronomy 18:15). No other person matched Moses on all counts. Most prophets who wrought miracles did not deliver Israel from captivity or bondage like Moses did. Those who were instrumental to the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity were not known miracle workers. The only personality who matched Moses on both counts is Jesus Christ who was an acclaimed miracle worker as well as Saviour not only of Israel but of the whole world. While Moses wrought physical deliverance for Israel, Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. God Himself testified of Christ to this

effect commanding people, like Moses did, to hear Him (Acts 10:38; Matthew 1:21; 17:15). Christ is the expected Prophet that Moses prophesied of.

Four, he traced the lingering national history of rebellion against the Law and the Prophets. **“Saying unto Aaron, make us gods to go before us...”** (Acts 7:40). By this the Israelites rejected Moses and God in preference for self-made idols in the wilderness. Even after they had settled in Canaan, the possession of the law neither prevented nor preserved Israel from rebelling against God (Acts 7:48; 1 Kings 18:17-22). Five, Stephen showed that the Jewish generation of his time was in no way better than their fathers who persecuted and killed the prophets in that they too had betrayed and murdered Christ. Stephen was so full of the scriptures, an indictment to believers who do not read and study the Bible.

THE TRIUMPH OF STEPHEN (Acts 7:54-60; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Luke 23:34; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 4:12-16).

The logical conclusion of Stephen’s submission was that his accusers, rather than himself, were guilty of the charges. They were due for the death penalty they plotted against him. Again, Stephen proved superior to his accusers. Not only were they convinced of this, they were also convicted. **“When they had these things, they were cut to the heart...”** (Acts 7:54a). This conviction should have led them to a desperate desire to seek for pardon, which Stephen would have faithfully done by pointing them to Christ. Unfortunately, they were filled with murderous intention as **“...they gnashed on him with their teeth** (Acts 7:54b). It is quite interesting that even at this time, God still granted a triumphant vision to His ready martyr. **“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God”** (Acts 7:55). As Stephen reported the vision, the angry accusers cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord and cast him out of the city and stoned him to death (Acts 7:57,58).

It is noteworthy that there was no judicial pronouncement of his guilt, neither was there any sentence. Yet, the council was so helpless that they did nothing to prevent this jungle justice. The members of the Sanhedrin were as incompetent as so many judges today who still pervert the cause of justice.

Question 5: *What is the significance of Stephen’s last vision?*

The last vision Stephen had is important for the contemporary believer. One, it was a revelation of the glory of God. It is quite comforting that in the midst of adversaries, the earnest believer can enjoy such divine revelation. In whatever condition, God never forsakes His children. Two, he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. ‘Right hand’ signifies affection, honour, dignity and power. This further proves that despite the hatred the Jews had for Jesus, God has placed Christ in a position of eternal majesty and authority. Three, that Jesus stood rather than sit at this instance, implies divine recognition of this heaven-bound faithful servant of God. It was an acceptance of a fulfilled life returning home for a well-

deserved reward. It also shows the kind and magnitude of respect the Lord has for his faithful servants at the point of their final service. The fourth point of victory was the undying love of this dying man for his cruel countrymen. This led him to a Christ-like prayer for their acquittal in spite of their sadistic attitude against him. What a challenge to believers to always **“overcome evil with good”!**

THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO SAMARIA

Memory Verse: “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:4,5).

Text: Acts 8:1-25

In the preceding chapter, Stephen’s act of obedience to the great commission infuriated his hearers and the Sanhedrin and culminated into his being martyred. The last we read about this event was that, “**devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.**” What a horrifying scene for Christians in Jerusalem to see a faithful disciple dragged out of the city and stoned to death! One can only imagine the terror that must have struck the Christians as the Jewish leaders had not only put Jesus to death, but also killed one of their evangelists. However, the attitude of the early believers had since changed after Christ’s cruel crucifixion to dogged preachers of the gospel even after Stephen was stoned to death. Pentecost made the difference. This is what believers need today to make a success of their life and ministry.

Question 1: *Why were the Jewish leaders not able to stop the spread of the gospel?*

Though the aim of persecutors is to stop the spread of the gospel, the outcome of persecuting the early believers was beyond their control. This situation highlights the wisdom of God in allowing persecution of His servants. The power of God that backs up the gospel makes it all too impregnable. Even the learned Gamaliel cautioned these Jewish persecutors that they could not stop the preaching of the gospel if it originated from God (Acts 5:39). The encouragement we receive from this is that no man can stop the spread of the gospel.

PERSECUTION – CATALYST FOR REVIVAL OF SOULWINNING (Acts 8:1-4; 1 Timothy 1:1,13; Acts 1:8; Exodus 1:12).

Question 2: *Who was the mastermind behind the first major persecution against the early church and what was his strategy?*

Our text opens with the name of a chief persecutor of the early church called Saul of Tarsus. He vigorously fanned the fire of persecution against the early church. “**As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.**” After his conversion, he revealed that he persecuted the church out of ignorance and unbelief. Believers then must not back-down in living and preaching the gospel because persecutors of Christians are ignorant of the word and will of God. As it were, this great persecution eventually turned

out to be a catalyst for gospel revival to the hitherto unreached regions of Judea, Samaria and the Gentile world.

The apostles had been told that they would take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). But for a considerable time, their concentration was limited to Jerusalem. The rough hand of persecution was then divinely permitted to scatter the church, and dispersed the members throughout Judea and Samaria, spreading the gospel across borders. The enemy unfortunately outwitted himself when his fire of persecution, meant to annihilate the church, turned out a trigger for revival and expansion of the gospel. Wherever the disciples went, they preached the word.

The tide of evangelization in Samaria resulted in one of the most interesting accounts of conversion in New Testament times. For the early church, the evangelization of Samaria was not just a matter of an evangelist's proclamation and people's response. It also involved the acceptance of these new converts by the mother church in Jerusalem hence the sending of Peter and John to Samaria to confirm the souls and extend Philip's ministry.

Question 3: *What immediate effect did this persecution have on the believers in Jerusalem and early church at large?*

Like the 'church in Egypt', the early church experienced radical growth each time the fire of persecution burned hotter. Though many church leaders were captured and executed, this fact did not hinder church growth. Properties were frequently destroyed or taken away from Christians, but did not prove to be an impediment to the spread of the gospel. It is paradoxical that though hundreds of Christians were tortured and martyred for the faith, it did not discourage the preachers nor hindered men from turning to Christ. Justin Martyr in AD 25 declared, "Though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but, the more such things happen, the more do others in larger numbers become faithful."

PHILIP – INSTRUMENT OF REVIVAL IN SAMARIA (Acts 8:5-8,12; 1 Kings 18:17-40; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5).

Philip, who went to Samaria in our text, was one of the seven disciples earlier appointed to distribute food in the early church (Acts 8:40; 21:8). He preached in Samaria and in the desert to the eunuch, and became an evangelist, having his home in Caesarea.

Question 4: *What should be the main thrust of our evangelistic message from Philip's example?*

In Samaria, Philip **“preached Christ unto them”**. There cannot be any other message to reconcile lost men with God other than the gospel

(Acts 4:12). The subject of the gospel message is Christ and His work of atonement on the cross at Calvary. If the believer will make impact and be effective in winning the lost today, he must be faithful to preach Christ (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul preached the same message as he received it. **“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). It is the pure gospel preached in the power of the Spirit that brings conviction and conversion of sinners and backsliders. The message must be simple and understandable for hearers to respond appropriately.

Positive response to the gospel and the experience of salvation gained after genuine repentance results in a change of loyalty. Simon was a negative force in Samaria before the arrival of Philip but when the people saw the power of God through Philip, they turned to the true God.

Question 5: *What is the secret of power evangelism today, and what are the likely positive effects?*

Certainly, the church needs good leaders like Philip today. Such men may not be the high-profile preacher we know today but men of character, consecration, unbroken covenant and unwavering commitment. Church buildings are wonderful and useful but they remain mere monuments without Spirit-filled men occupying their pulpits. Fiery men are urgently needed to bring men on their knees for Christ. Philip’s ministry was to those who did not know Christ. As a result, **“there was great joy in that city”** (verse 8). The people had real needs, and Philip ministered to them. Today, there are innumerable opportunities for the church to bring healing to our sin-sick world. There are those who are hurting physically, emotionally and spiritually who need the touch of Jesus. Let us bring the whole gospel to the whole world so that men may be transformed (verse. 12).

Our failure to carry out the great commission has left many people in the hold of Satan and his cohorts like Simon the sorcerer. It has also made these captives to deify agents of the devil as some great power ruling in their locality while believers idle away their time in no soul-saving activities. As God’s heart aches for the believer’s disobedience, lack of vision and excuses, a question is asked: **“If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?”** There is a price to pay for negligence to win souls into the kingdom of God.

It is unfortunate that many Christians have been scattered by the wind of persecution, new employment, job transfer, Sabbatical leave, inter-tribal/racial marriage, natural disasters, war, etc. and have refused to preach the gospel to the people in their community. They keep mum from

day to day in disobedience to the Lord's command to preach, thus denying the people the privilege of hearing the gospel and getting saved. Lukewarm and negligent believers should repent, consecrate and commit themselves to the preaching of the gospel so that sinners and backsliders can be saved from sin. The task is urgent because life is brief; the time of harvest of souls is short and almost spent.

Question 6: How did the Samaritans react to Philip's message, and how can we achieve such results today?

The men and women in Samaria rightly responded to the gospel message. **"And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women** (Acts 8:6,12). They first gave heed and also believed the gospel.

It is important for us to see here that men and women were baptized. Thus, infant baptism is not found in the scriptures. The Samaritans believed Philip and were baptized, both men and women. They showed their faith in Christ by carrying out the terms of His commission. Those who claim they were baptized in infancy need to be baptized again if they become born again (Acts 19:3-5).

Believers need to preach the gospel everywhere. It is the power of the word and Spirit of God that bring conviction upon sinners. God is always faithful to His word. Those who obey the Lord by going to preach the gospel will discover that He confirms the preaching of His word with signs and wonders. By Philip's instrumentality, evil spirits were cast out of those who were demonized; the paralytic and lame were also made whole. **"For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed."** The salvation, healing and deliverances experienced brought great joy to the inhabitants of the city. Like Philip, every believer is saved to be an instrument of joy to the lost.

CONTINUITY OF CONVERTED SAMARITANS IN THE FAITH (Acts 8:13-25; Romans 6:1,2,11-13,18,22; 1 John 1:9; 3:8-10)

Continuity in the faith is the will of God. Converts need to be followed up and taught basic principles of the Christian faith so they can be established in Christ. They also need to be encouraged to seek higher Christian experiences of sanctification and Holy Ghost baptism. This was the reason the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John, who on arrival prayed for the converts to receive the baptism with the Holy Ghost. And genuine converts there received the Holy Ghost when these apostles laid hands on them.

Striving to remain relevant in Samaria, Simon offered the apostles money in exchange for the gift of the Holy Ghost and Peter rebuked him

sharply. It is clear from his motive and action why many people in the house of God have not received the baptism with Holy Ghost. One, his motive was impure and pecuniary. He had always believed that power had to be manifested for gain as he had hitherto done with the power of sorcery. He most probably was seeking power with which to continue to dominate the Samaritans. Two, his heart was not right with God. His perception and attitude to God were wrong. Three, he was still wicked at heart as the thoughts of his heart were evil. Four, **“he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity”**. His humiliation through the gospel preached by Philip must have made him bitter as oppressive men do not want to lose their power over men. Five, he was also thinking of service – how to lay hands on people so they can also receive the Holy Ghost, instead praying for grace to live a righteous life.

Salvation can be lost. Simon had believed and was baptized having received forgiveness of his sins. He was following after Philip constantly and observing all that Philip was doing. But he fell back into sin. Sins committed after we become disciples of Christ sever us from God. Peter bluntly told Simon that he had sinned. We must make bold to tell backsliders in the fold their sins with love so they can repent and be restored. The fact that salvation can be forfeited through sinful actions, discredits the doctrine of eternal security of believers. If we choose to be disobedient after coming to the Lord, then we sever ourselves from God.

Simon was told to pray to God for forgiveness. He is the One who forgives sins. And **“If we confess our sins** (of sorcery, fornication, lying, stealing, lust, covetousness, etc.), **he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9).

It should be noted that his request for money, **“Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost”** (Acts 8:19), should jolt the passive believer into earnestness in seeking to be baptized in the Holy Ghost. He probably knew what the power of God was because he had, in the wake of the revival in Samaria, lost his evil power. Yet, some believers are sleeping over spiritual weakness in presenting the gospel effectively. With the power of the Holy Ghost, the apostles were unflagging in their commitment to the preaching of the gospel. While returning to Jerusalem, they still **“preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans”**. What a challenge!

JESUS' PATTERN OF SOULWINNING

MEMORY VERSE: **"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord"** (Matthew 10:25).

TEXT: Matthew 4:17-25; 9:9-13

As Jesus went about fulfilling His ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, Bible scholars note that He covered about 240 cities and villages. His passion for souls not only drew multitudes of sin-sick minds from the valley of despair, His style of evangelism also presented challenges and a pattern to all His disciples in a hitherto uncharted course.

The call of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew presents a platform from which to look at the Lord's pattern of soulwinning. Here, the authority, greatness, love, compassion of our Chief Shepherd not only shine, the dramatic change of character and conduct of a life exposed to divine love is clearly set forth.

THE PLACE OF PREACHING AND HEALING IN SOULWINNING (Luke 4:17-28; 24:25-27; John 2:23; 10:25, 41,42; Acts 19:11,12).

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23).

The two words, "preaching" and "healing", provide the clue to the outstanding success experienced by Jesus in the business of soulwinning. In preaching and teaching, He demonstrated an astonishing authority and mastery of the scriptures; in healing, miracles, signs and wonders, an awesome power.

Question 1: *Why do we need the demonstration of healing miracles, signs and wonders today in the business of soulwinning?*

Actually, His success in soulwinning derives from these two sources: vast knowledge of the scriptures and dynamic power evangelism informed by a consistent prayer life (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:1-14; 6:12; 10:21; 22:39-44; John 17:1-26). Together, they present a model through which to look at His pattern of soulwinning. In teaching, He taught with authority and wisdom. And He did because He was a man of prayer and a man of the Scriptures. It is doubtful whether anyone could make much progress who is not given to much prayer and deep study of the Scripture. The biblical injunctions, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1), "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17), "study to shew yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) perhaps hold true in soulwinning than anywhere else. No one hopes to make a success of the job who is not a student of prayer and scriptures; not only prayer but also prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21).

Jesus shows by His approach that a result-oriented soulwinning venture must of a necessity be accompanied by demonstration of the power in healing the diseased, the sick and the demon-oppressed. Society, as presently structured, with rampant outbreak of diseases and demonic afflictions needs that the gospel be presented with demonstration of God's power.

Question 2: How can a soulwinner acquire the power to minister to the sick, the diseased and the oppressed?

As demonstrated by the exploits of the Lord in the field of soulwinning, consistent prayer life and holy living are the two cables through which a soulwinning strategy can tap into the vast divine power for miracles, signs and wonders. Here the truth sticks out like a sore finger: with all thine getting, get power. Actually, there is a limit to what we can do without the backing of God's power. Notice that more souls were won to the Lord through healing, miracles, signs and wonders than through hard-core preaching. For instance, "In Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did" (John 2:23). In another instance, "many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracles: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there" (John 10:41,42).

DIVERSE AUDIENCE, DIVERSE APPROACH (Matthew 10:1-7; 13:1-34; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 10:25-37; 15:1-32; John 4:4-30; 8:1-11; Acts 13:13-44; 17:16-34).

The Lord's approach differed from person to person. Situation and wisdom dictated his method of approach. In Matthew's case, for instance, He not only ate with him, His disarming comment silenced, even if momentarily, the bitter criticism of religious bigots. In Christ's time, prejudice evidently trudged the land of Palestine. The scribes and Pharisees versus the Publicans and the Gentiles. The Sadducees versus Pharisees. The Samaritans versus the Jews. Deep-seated animosities ruled and guided interactions among the sets. These animosities ensured that none paid attention to the inner yearnings of their hearts. Christ's pattern of soulwinning was to change all that. Wisdom dictates that he varies his approach then according to the level of His audience's understanding. He was sensitive to the man-made barrier as he was determined to break the middle wall of partition existing among them. Successful soulwinning demands diverse approach since understanding and temperaments differ from person to person.

Question 3: Why do we need wisdom in soulwinning?

People, place and circumstances determined the slant of Jesus' message. Parables, conversations, questions, comment on current happenings all came in handy as a means of driving home a point. They were thought-provoking as they were witty. He wielded them like a rapier. With them feelings were gauged, motives unmasked, thus leaving the sinner with no place to hide from the searching glare of God's word. But in all, wisdom supervised and guided the appropriateness and preferences of the use of each. Soulwinning opportunity can be lost when wisdom is not allowed to decide the appropriateness of the use of words or method!

For instance, to an ordinary eye, it would appear that Jesus has some axe to grind when, in a rare expression of holy indignation, He pronounced "woes" on the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, impenitence and unbelief (Matthew 23:13-33). Yet, in one instance, He honoured a dinner invitation from a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and in another praised a scribe for his sincerity (Mark 12:28-34). He was not caught in the prejudice that exists between the Pharisees and the publicans. He related with them equally. His life was ruled by one maxim: charity towards all, malice towards none. He was swayed by neither the hermitism of John the Baptist (Luke 7:33,34), the hospitality of the Pharisees nor the egocentrism of his disciples (Luke 9:55). He related with His audience with understanding and firmness. Successful soulwinning demands that reason be separated from emotion.

Nothing erodes confidence as when preconception is allowed to rule and guide interaction between a soulwinner and his subjects.

Commendation or condemnation should come, as occasion demands it. Notice the tactful use of commendation in the conversation between Jesus and the scribe: "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Tact is also evident in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. "Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband" (John 4:16,17). In dealing with souls, there might be need to commend a kind act done or word said by a seeker. In some cases, this might turn out to be the only means of getting him to accept the gospel.

THE SINNER'S FRIEND (Matthew 9:9-13; John 8:1-11; Luke 7:36-50; Romans 5:8,19; 1 Timothy 1:15).

In associating with Matthew, a certified sinner in the Pharisees' mind, Jesus showed Himself a true Friend of all spiritual wretch. His condescension that started with His incarnation acquired a new meaning as well as become redefined as He reaches out to sinful men. Criticism, rather than bring about change of behaviour in a sinner, will only harden his heart.

Ordinarily, a publican suffered from a poor public image. He was, on account of his activity as a tax-collector, shunned as a stooge of the Roman empire. Besides, the demand of his duty, an intimate relationship with the Gentiles placed him in bad light among the Jews.

Question 4: *Why were the Publicans so despised in the eyes of the Pharisees?*

By interacting with publicans widely regarded as the sinners and scorn of the society, Jesus set his divine mission on a collision course with the prejudice of His time. It was no wonder therefore that the Pharisees took His disciple to task: "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?"

In asking this question, however the Pharisees betrayed their ignorance of the Messiah's mission on earth: "I am not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). It is instructive that Jesus answered them out of their own scripture. Christ's answer must have sounded like a new note in the tradition and religious practice of the day.

The religious people who regarded Jesus' association with men of "questionable occupation and character" as scandalous undoubtedly have a wrong assumption of what constitutes acceptable service to God. While they were very particular about religious formality, they neglected the very essence of the Law. The much-despised publican and the sinner are probably nearer the kingdom of heaven than the self-righteous Pharisee. "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 21:31).

Question 5: *What do you learn from Jesus' association with the publican and sinners of His day?*

But we should not forget the lesson being driven at here for every soulwinner: to be a successful soulwinner you will need to show yourself friendly to people whose souls you aim to win for Christ. Your disposition is as important as your message, if not more. In fact, in some cases, it has sometimes turned out to be the entire message a sinner needs to surrender his life to Christ.

One of the interesting features of Christ's passion for souls is His practice of taking the gospel to the seekers' abodes. Homes, towns, cities, streets, roads,

seashores, desert, and synagogues – none proved a no-go-area in pursuance of this objective. He condescended to the level of His audience. He identified with their agonies and pains. Doubtless, in the offices, in the neighbourhood, in schools, in the small circle of acquaintance and relations, in the larger society, are people who don't care about the salvation of their souls, about the life hereafter; self-contented and probably snobbish sometimes they are. But any soulwinner who hopes to be like his Master must look beyond the demeanour and character of people. He will need to warm up to the snobbish and cheer up the downcast.

HIGHLIGHTS OF A PASSION

Christ's passion for souls is not one without some highlights. One, He is as much grieved over the spiritual state of multitude as He was "over one sinner". Before His encounter with Matthew He had preached the gospel in Galilee, Capernaum, Nazareth, Bethsaida, Jericho. Yet He was as excited with one seeker as with crowd of them. With both He exuded the same warmth, love, kindness and compassion.

Two, His passion for souls recognised neither place nor time. Every place or time was just alright insofar as people were willing to give audience to His message. People's homes, places of work, deserts, synagogues, seashores, wilderness all provided a cozy place to address men on the subject of repentance and faith towards God. Three, every situation, circumstance and contact with people became an opportunity not only to experience the wonderful power of God in bodily healing but also the marvellous grace of God in repentance, redemption, and regeneration of life.

Four, only one theme ran through His messages: repentance from sin and faith toward God. Little wonder this evangelistic fervour, tenacity and zeal passed on to His disciples who constitute the nucleus of the early church. Later Peter was to re-iterate, "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20) while the early disciples "scattered abroad" by intense persecution went "every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). And through it all one theme stood out: "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

CONVERSION AND COMMITMENT TO EVANGELISM (Matthew 9:9,19; 10:1-3,5,6; John 4:28,30,39-42; Acts 2:47b; 8:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8,9; 4:1,2).

Matthew honoured the Lord and His disciples not only to commemorate his spiritual rebirth but also to create opportunity for seekers to meet with the Saviour. Of course being young in the faith, he could not preach to the people. He left the job for Jesus. Therein lies an unforgettable lesson for new converts: you can share your testimonies with and invite your acquaintances and intimate friends to fellowship and church services. You can organise a forum where a minister of God or a more experienced church leader can minister to them. This was the same principle applied in the disciples meeting with "certain Greeks" who came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of the Passover (John 12:20-22).

Question 6: In fishing for souls, how may we employ Matthew's method?

An unfamiliar face sitting by our side during worship or fellowship session could be a visitor waiting to be won for Christ. Striking up conversation with the person after service might prove to be the ideal thing to do. Every believer is called to be a soulwinner. And what an excellent pattern the Lord has left for us to follow.

One, avoid popularity-seeking and see in every man or woman you meet a unique creature whose soul is as important as any other in the sight of God. Two,

let seekers see in you the love, compassion and understanding which the society around them seemed to have denied them: let them know through your conduct and character that he that cometh to God He will, in no wise cast out. Three, give no respite to your passion for soulwinning but recognise in every contact with people an opportunity to reach out to them with the gospel; to suffer some inconveniences and to share in their pains and agony if need be. Lastly, keep to the message that can save the soul from eternal damnation: repentance from sin and faith toward Christ.

Our willingness to be commissioned into the task of soulwinning is the true test of our conversion, either by deeds or by words. Conversion and evangelism go together. Where there is real conversion there must, of a necessity, arise zeal to take the gospel to the unreached by all possible means.

THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY GHOST

MEMORY VERSE: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37).

TEXT: Acts 2:1-40

The Holy Ghost power Jesus calls all believers to experience in our memory verse is as sure and real as heaven and earth. In the New Testament, it is a common requisite experience for every believer. Surprised at the weakness and fruitlessness of some ignorant Ephesian believers, Apostle Paul asked, **“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost”** (Acts 19:2). The question, by extension, comes to the individual believer today. And for enlightenment, the Baptism with the Holy Ghost is a definite Christian experience, subsequent to sanctification, whereby the believer is anointed with the power of God and energized for service. It is one of the cardinal doctrines of the word of God.

Question 1: *Why is the baptism with the Holy Ghost important?*

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit plays a very vital role in the spiritual life and service of every believer. This third work of grace is vital and central to victorious Christian living and effective Christian service. Filled with power from on high, the feeble believer becomes dynamic, the lukewarm becomes aggressive in evangelism while ordinary believer becomes a mighty instrument in the hands of God.

Without this experience a good number of people have tried to live the Christian life in the energy of the flesh. Some who started in the spirit are now relapsing into formalism. Even believers who started out with enthusiasm, great expectations and “iron hot” zeal are now fagged out. They need spiritual (re)activation through the Holy Ghost baptism.

REVELATION CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:1-4, 17,18, 38; Romans 8:14,9; Jude 19; Ephesians 4:30-32; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; Romans 8:2; 1:4; 1 Corinthians 12:8; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 10:29; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Peter 4:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18)

Question 2: *Who is the Holy Ghost? And what work does He do in believers?*

The Holy Ghost is the third Person in the Trinity. He has a distinct personality as God. He thinks, teaches, talks, leads and can be grieved. As such, He, the Spirit of God leads and guides the sons of God the way they should go. This same Spirit that worked supernaturally in the life and ministry of Christ is also with us. He can also work in believers who receive Him. He is called the (i) the Spirit of God (ii) the Spirit of Christ (iii) the Spirit of truth (iv) the Spirit of life (v) the Spirit of holiness (vi) the Spirit of faith (vii) the Spirit of power (viii) the Spirit of love (ix) the Spirit of grace (x) the Spirit of promise (xi) the Spirit of glory (xii) the Spirit of the Lord. These titles of the Holy Spirit reveal more of His impact, work and ministry in believers' lives and service.

As indispensable as He is, sinners and backsliders do not have, and cannot receive, the Spirit of God except through repentance. And He does not continue to abide in the believer who grieves Him. Likened to a dove in gentleness, His character conflicts with sinful attitudes like bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and malice; and He does not dwell in any heart which harbours them. He is the Spirit of truth who is opposed to error. He does not energize those who

perpetrate error. **“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth”**. He quickens as well as dwells in the believer with the principles of life because He is the Spirit of life. He leads and inspires children of God to live a holy lifestyle. He is holy. Immorality does not originate from him. But as believers, we do have the Spirit of faith who produces faith in our hearts to be healed, received miracles and hold on to the promises of God. We receive Him as the Spirit of power when we pray to receive His baptismal measure of power.

He is the Spirit of love who helps us to demonstrate Christ-like love. Those who claim they are Spirit-baptised but who devise how to hurt others lie and need God’s forgiveness. As the Spirit of grace, He does not only help us to know more about the grace of God but also gives us the grace we need as believers for every challenge that we face and in every situation. He is the same Spirit that Christ promised believers and by which they are sealed. The Spirit of God is also called the Spirit of glory. He reproduces the character of the Lord in us so we can be conformed to the image of the Lord. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is of great value. This is because it is through Him that we have a lively and enriching relationship with God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we live as victors as our prayerful life is also enriched by the Lord. The life of the believer who has the Spirit of God dwelling in him is positive, practical, purposeful and powerful.

POWER THROUGH THE SPIRIT’S BAPTISM (Acts 2:1-11; 1:8; Luke 4:18, 19; Acts 10:38; John 20:22; Acts 20; 4:19, 20)

Our text centres on Pentecost, one of the most important events in the history of the early Church and in the Book of Acts. It was that momentous event that precipitated all the acts which we read about in the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples were all prepared for the enduement with power from on high **“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”** (Acts 2:4).

This same power that they received was what Jesus received before the commencement of His public ministry. The anointing of the Holy Ghost He received made Him to do mighty works of healing and deliverance by the power of the Spirit. He affirmed that, **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord”** (Luke 4:18,19). **“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him”** (Acts 10:38). It is an idle dream for the believer in this dispensation to do similar works without experiencing baptism with the Holy Ghost. That was why the Lord told His disciples: **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”**. The word translated “power” in the original is “dunamis”. It is from this word we got the English word for powerful engine – Dynamo. The statement means that you will receive the dynamite of God that will make you an effective and powerful witness of the Lord’s saving grace. When they were baptized and endued with power on the day of Pentecost, the disciples knew that it was in fulfilment of the promise of the Lord. **“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”**.

When the early disciples were filled with Holy Ghost, the initial evidence was speaking in a previously unlearned tongue. Wherever the Holy Ghost is, He reveals Himself through supernatural utterances and manifestations. His utterances are not taught in the schools of men. He is God. To speak in tongues without any visible manifestation of His power in life and ministry is questionable as the

experience is for fruitful service in God's vineyard. **"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"** (Acts 1:8).

Question 3: What difference did Holy Ghost Baptism make in the life of the early disciples?

The point is that baptism with the Holy Ghost comes with accompanying supernatural manifestation of power. For instance, Peter, one of the disciples who had just received the Holy Ghost spoke with power, fresh anointing and unusual Spirit-imbued boldness. He made all the people - **"Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians"** - who were present in Jerusalem to worship God to understand that it was in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that the Spirit of God descended on the disciples. Thus, the early Church was launched with dynamic Christian living and ministry. The Baptism with the Holy Ghost made a great difference in the life of the disciples of the Lord in that they were transformed into different men and women after the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. Before Pentecost, they were seen huddled together behind closed doors **"for fear of the Jews"**. But they could not even be kept behind prison doors after they received the Pentecostal power as they became as bold as lions and stood before their persecutors in the power of the Holy Ghost (John 20:19; Acts 5:17-20; 4:19, 20).

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SPIRIT'S BAPTISM
(Acts 2:12-21; Ezekiel 37:25-27)

Question 4: Mention pitfalls to be avoided when seeking to be baptized in the Holy Ghost?

Peter's defence was in response to the misconceptions of worshippers about the Holy Spirit's baptism due to their spiritual ignorance. **"And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine."** Newly filled with the Holy Ghost, he clarified that it was in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy and the faithfulness of God.

As it were, there are unscriptural extremes and fanaticism in some circles regarding the Holy Ghost baptism necessitating a balanced teaching on the subject. There is need for caution among Pentecostals on the doctrine of baptism with the Holy Ghost. We should go only as far as the Bible goes and no further. Our experiences and practice must conform to the principles and teachings of Scripture. There are Pentecostals who profess to be baptised with the Holy Ghost without its accompanying power. The "tongues" of some people are too monotonous, repetitive and shallow to be classified as the powerful evidence of the Spirit's baptism. Some even go as far as copying the pattern of other people while others "speak in tongues" in such a way that is completely unintelligible. Although those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit are supposed to speak in an unknown tongue yet this does not mean that every "speaking in tongues" is genuine, powerful and refreshing. Many people profess to be baptized in the Holy Ghost but are as cold as ice in their spiritual lives perhaps because they do not continue in and build up themselves in the Holy Ghost.

Many people only have testimonies of once-in-a-life-time experience when their hearts were warmed by the Holy Ghost. They have not discovered the marvels of the refreshing power of the Spirit of God. There is more to the dynamics of the Holy Ghost than a once-in-life-time baptismal experience. Baptized believers should strive to dig deeper and enjoy the inexhaustible treasures of the Spirit baptism.

Question 6: *What important Christian experiences must you possess before seeking Holy Ghost Baptism?*

It must be stated that baptism with the Holy Spirit is not the same as salvation or sanctification experience. There are those who deceive themselves by claiming that baptism with the Spirit happen automatically at the instant one receives salvation experience. It is also wrong for anyone to feel that because he has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit that he has not been saved. The New Birth experience is different and distinct from baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that their names were written in heaven which means that they were saved. Yet He told them to tarry in Jerusalem so that they could receive the Holy Ghost.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is different from sanctification. Sanctification removes the Adamic nature. It brings about purity of heart, intention and purpose whereas the Holy Spirit baptism brings power from on high for service. And truly we see that this mark of unity was manifested in the lives of the apostles after they were sanctified, in Acts 2:1: **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place”**. One accord means unity of mind, judgment, intention, consideration for sacred things and for the service of the Lord.

PRE-REQUISITES FOR THE SPIRIT’S BAPTISM

(Acts 2:22-40; Ezekiel 36:24-26; Acts 2:8; John 7:37; Luke 11:13; Matthew 7:8).

The Spirit baptism is a gift of God’s grace for His children. To receive this experience then, the sinner and backslider must repent of their sins and be saved. It is also indispensable to seek the experience of sanctification as the Holy Spirit does not descend into an ‘unholy’ life and heart. God has promised to grant these gracious experiences of salvation and sanctification/circumcision of heart to everyone who wholeheartedly seeks. **“For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”** (Ezekiel 36:24-26). So, be sure that you are saved and sanctified before you ask for baptism with the Holy Spirit. When you are sanctified, you will have the unity of the Spirit with believers. There will be no envy or jealousy; there will be nothing within you that defiles. Your heart will be pure and your life will conform to what the Bible teaches. The believer must of necessity live a practical life of obedience to His words and be passionate to win souls with a pure motive of bringing glory to God.

Finally, you must also thirst for this experience, for Jesus says: **“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink”** (John 7:37). Are you thirsty? Do you want the Lord to fill you? Then call upon the Lord and you will receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Have faith in God. Jesus said: **“If ye then, being evil, know**

how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Luke 11:13; Matthew 7:8).

DIVINE HEALING AND HEALTH

MEMORY VERSE: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17).

TEXT: Matthew 8:1-17; Exodus 15:26; 1 Peter 2:24; 3 John 2

The scriptural doctrine of divine healing and health has been viewed from different angles by believers of different ages. This has always been as a result of their perception of the ‘limit’ of God’s power, mercy and love. However, from time immemorial, believers have always been receivers while sceptics have received nothing. Similarly, if we believe today, all divine blessings including healing and health can be ours (John 11:40; 2 Peter 1:3). A survey of the length and breadth of the chequered history of God’s dealing with man, reveals that healing is God’s will. God is a good God and it is His will that His children live in good health as well as enjoy divine healing throughout their days on earth. This thought is unequivocally stated by John the beloved in his epistle: “**Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth**” (3 John 2). It is not the will of God that any of His children should remain in sickness, oppression or diseases.

There are one hundred and forty-five occurrences of the words heal, healed, healer, healeth, healing, healings and health in the Bible, which is an indication of the divine plan concerning our healing and health. Since Old Testament days, healing has always been an integral part of God’s covenant with His people; God has always included it as a part of His blessings upon those who are obedient to His word (Exodus 15:26; 23:25,26; Deuteronomy 7:12-15).

Question 1: *How do you prove that healing and health are integral parts of God’s covenant with His people?*

INCIDENCES OF HEALING IN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS (2 Kings 5:1-14; Exodus 15:26; Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 103:1-3; 2 Kings 20:1-7; 1 Samuel 1:9-20; Matthew 15:26-28; 8:16; 4:23,24; Acts 28:1-9).

Healing was easy in the old covenant but it is even much easier in the New Testament. This is because God had revealed Himself as “**the God that healeth**”. It was so easy that Naaman almost lost the opportunity of being healed. He did not expect getting healed to be so easy. He was told by the prophet Elisha to just go to Jordan, dip himself seven times into the water and he would be healed. That was not to take that much time. As he went and dipped himself in the water “**according to the saying of the man of God**” he came out clean. The instruction was simple but his healing was complete. He was healed, not by river Jordan, but by the power and authority in the Word of God through His ordained servant. Healing and obedience to the instructions of God and His ordained servants are inseparable. While venomous snakes were biting the children of Israel and many of them were dying, they were told to obey a simple instruction: look up and be healed. This same principle applies also in the New Testament. We are to look up to Jesus Christ who died on the cross (John 3:14).

Question 2: *How does the brazen serpent typify the Lord Jesus Christ?*

Hannah who, because of her barrenness, was in bitterness of soul had her situation changed for life as a result of just an eighteen-word pronouncement of Eli the man of God. **“Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him”** (1 Samuel 1:17). It was that simple. If you are barren, the Lord can heal and make you fruitful if you can believe the words of God and stop fretting yourself.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus healed people in cities and villages of His days. As there were no hospitals as we have them today, they lived in primitive conditions that there were a lot of sicknesses and diseases among the people. In His characteristic style, Jesus would teach in their synagogue, preach the kingdom of God and heal those who were sick among them. This was His three-piece method: teaching, preaching and then healing. As the people came to listen to His teaching and preaching, they applied what they were taught to their lives and it generated faith in them (Romans 10:17) and then were healed.

HEALING: THE CHILDREN’S BREAD (Matthew 15:26-28; 4:24; 8:16; 9:35; 4:23,24; 15:21-28; 7:9).

A clear understanding of what the Bible teaches on healing and health ensures a continuous state of soundness for the believer. Healing and health belong to the children of God. A careful study of God’s words deepens the truth in the believer’s hearts and helps him to apply it in his life. This, in turn, generates and increases faith in his heart (Romans 10:17). Healing is not needed in heaven, as there is no sickness there. It is for God’s children on earth and they should expect to be healed any time they are sick. Just as whenever children are hungry, parents always make bread available so also, whenever a child of God is sick, God always makes healing available for him. If you are sick, God can heal you. Every morning, children ask bread of their parents without doubting. They believe that their parents are able to provide for them so they are not afraid. Believers are to come to God for healing with that same confidence. They should realize that healing is their bread and it is available for them.

The healing and health that unbelievers enjoy are crumbs that fall from the children’s bread. It is worthwhile to remember that after Jesus had fed the five thousand, there were still twelve baskets remaining. For every crumb of healing and health that unbelievers enjoy from God, there is abundant provision for His children to enjoy.

However, believers should also bear in mind that there are others that are sick who need healing. By praying for those who are sick, believers can share their health with them. **“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover”** (Mark 16:17,18). This healing bread should be shared with one another. If you see other people that are sick in your office or school, pray for them and they will be healed in Jesus’ name.

Question 3: What are the believer’s responsibilities towards enjoying continuous divine health today?

The believer does not rest his hope on medical science for his healing and health. He trusts God for perfect health from day to day. When he is sick, he depends on the armour of prayer and faith (1 John 5:14,15; Matthew 7:7). However, it is not sin to receive help from the practice of medicine that has nothing to do with invocation of evil powers. Besides, certain cases like child delivery, caesarean section, orthopaedic surgery, etc, require the skill of trained medical

personnel in hospitals, maternity and clinics. We should afford ourselves of all God-provided opportunities for health and longevity. God has made every provision for our healing and health. And we should live daily in the realisation of His provisions.

With all the provisions that God has made for the believer to enjoy healing and health, it is still necessary for him to adequately look after himself. This is the part he has to play if he is to continue to enjoy good health. He should, as a matter of duty, ensure that his feeding habit is proper and his diet balanced. He should also maintain good personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness, appropriate physical exercise, and total avoidance of harmful habits that are capable of damaging his health. Right intakes of fruits, fibres and other nutritious foods promote good health while wrong feeding such as intakes of junk food only clog the system without commensurate nutritional values. The good thing about our heavenly Father is that He has made these things. Fruits and vegetables are not only available all year round but are also affordable to as many as are willing to utilize them, so that there is no room for excuses. If the money wasted on junk food is thoughtfully expended on what will build up body immunity against illness, we will be saving our family and the church the agony of running from one hospital to another. Let us be wise.

Sin and sickness are close pals, so are holiness and health. Without doubt, God has an unfailing healing and health plan for mankind but there are millions of people who, by virtue of the fact that they have not come into covenant relationship with God, do not know the blessedness of enjoying these provisions. A close look at biblical history shows that people who obey God are made and kept healthy by Him. The contrary goes for children of disobedience. Theirs is a life of turmoil, pestilence and disease. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Jesus Christ, Peter and John are names that do not go hand in hand with sickness. Biblical records of sickness often go with such names as Abimelech, Manasseh, Naaman and Elymas, the sorcerer, to mention a few. Hard-hearted Egyptians had a good toll of plagues and pestilence, while the children of Israel had divine prosperity and health according to God's promise.

Question 4: What is the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the believer's healing and health?

Sickness came as a result of the curse of the law for disobedience to God's command. On the contrary, God entrenched healing as an integral part of what Jesus procured for us on the cross of Calvary (1 Peter 2:24). "**Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us**" (Galatians 3:13a). Therefore, if you are lost in sin, He is waiting to save and to change you. All you need to do is to take the initiative and come to the Lord and be saved. He forgives sin and saves sinners. He changes sinners and gives them power to live as the very sons of God. He restores the invalid to health and strength. He cures the incurable and delivers the oppressed.

GOD'S HEALING POWER AVAILABLE BY FAITH (Exodus 15:26; Matthew 7:7; Romans 10:17; Hebrew 11:6).

There is no doubt whatsoever as to the power and willingness of God to heal all who are sick and turn to Him for help. The cases of Abimelech, Miriam, Naaman and many others are testimonies of God's willingness to "save the sick" when He is called upon with simple faith. It was a common phenomenon with Israel of old that diseases and evil characterised rebellious times (Deuteronomy 28:15-29,58-61) but after repentance, obedient times became healthy times! (Exodus 23:25,26).

Question 5: *What is the place of God's Word, power and will in our healing today?*

It is clear from God's Word that all can be healed and kept healthy today. Diligent meditation on God's Word will assure our heart of the possibility of sound health "**all the days of our life**". God's Word is a word of power and has an innate potency for the miraculous (Romans 1:16; Psalm 107:20). Besides, the power of God is unlimited. Generally, the Bible highlights two types of power – the dynamic power and the legal power (in Greek: "dunamis" and "exousia" respectively). The first connotes ability, energy and strength, the second, authority, right and attorney. The Father gave both to the Son. The Son has, in turn, given them to the believers (Luke 9:1; 10:19-21). "**Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?**" (Acts 26:8). The same power that God had since eternity is still at work today for the believer. But only those who would dare believe receive. God's will is clear on healing and health, and it is His will that you enjoy them. He has made ample provision for this (3 John 2; Matthew 6:10; Isaiah 33:24; Deuteronomy 7:15).

Question 6: *Which of God's redemptive names signify that He is our Great Physician?*

God's name, love and mercy all make us to know also, that we need not remain under the curse of the law today. God's revealed redemptive names are seven in number: and they are: Jehovah Shamma (Ezekiel 48:35), Jehovah Shalom (Judges 6:23,24), Jehovah Ra-ah (Psalm 23:1), Jehovah Jireh (Genesis 22:14), Jehovah Nissi (Exodus 17:15), Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6), Jehovah Rapha (Exodus 15:26) signifying presence, peace, shepherding, provision, banner, righteousness and healer respectively. Nothing sets forth the validity of God's willingness and ability to heal His people and keep them healthy more aptly than the last on the list of his redemptive names, namely, Jehovah Rapha or Jehovah Ropheka: "**I am the LORD that healeth thee**" or "**I am the LORD thy healer**" (Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 53:4,5; Matthew 8:16,17; 1 Peter 2:24). As if that was not enough, He "**anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil**" (Acts 10:38). Of course, this was to declare that healing and health are His will and to show His readiness to do His people good. Love gives to the needy and relieves the suffering while mercy withholds suffering from those who rightly merit it. God is all loving and merciful. Sicknesses and diseases are therefore definitely not from Him. They are from the devil (John 10:10; 1 John 3:8b).

The Spirit of God indwells the believer (Romans 8:14). This is the same Spirit through whose agency He made the world and everything that is therein, at the completion of which everything was very good (Genesis 1:31). It will give no credit to the Lord for the third Person in the Godhead to co-habit the same temple (our bodies) with Satan's agents such as sickness and diseases. For this cause also, the child of God can and should remain healthy.