

Volume 34

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JOSHUA APPOINTED TO SUCCEED MOSES

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation” (**Numbers 27:15,16**).

TEXT: Numbers 27:12-23.

In the last study in the earlier part of this chapter, the focus was on the peculiar situation which gave rise to inheritance by female heirs in Israel with Zelophehad and his daughters as points of contact. Prior to that incident, the issue of inheritance was an exclusive preserve of male heirs in the Jewish law. However, after their plea to Moses, there was a paradigm shift as God commissioned Moses to revise the laws on inheritance in favour of female heirs in Israel.

In this latter part of the chapter, God told Moses to get ready to die because he would not be allowed to enter Canaan. As a result of this development, there was need to appoint a successor to replace Moses, and lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan.

Question 1: *What challenge does the account of transfer of leadership in Israel pose to believers in our present day?*

The transfer of leadership was smooth and solemn as Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses. God directed every detail and the people of Israel remained united under His divine leadership. The appointment of Joshua completed the transition of leadership which began when Eleazar succeeded Aaron as the High priest. On both occasions, there was no rancour or complaints among the children of Israel.

MOSES' PREPARATION FOR HIS RITE OF PASSAGE (Numbers 27:12-14; 20:9-13; Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-7)

As the new generation of Israel prepared to enter the land of Canaan, God told Moses to prepare for death. By this time he was already 120 years old and, concerning his state of health, the scriptures says “**his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated**” (Deuteronomy 34:7). Having led the children of Israel for forty years, he had witnessed the death of all the older generation that came out of Egypt, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. He had seen the death of his sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron. Then as he stood at the verge of Canaan, it was his turn to die. Despite his sound health and success in ministry he had to keep his inevitable appointment with death.

Question 2: *What necessary steps must a person take in order to be fully prepared for death?*

Certainly as Moses watched other people die, he knew that one day it would be his own turn to die. And as it was with Moses, so it is with us today. Every

time we witness the death of our relations and neighbours, we should remember that one day it will be our turn to die (except, of course, if the Rapture takes place and we go to meet the Lord in the air). Then, the question is: are we prepared for that inevitable day of death?

Many people react to the subject of death in various ways. Some are afraid of death and they don't like to talk or hear about it. But there are also others who are so preoccupied with the thoughts of death that they do little or no good while they live. Both extremes are wrong. The proper attitude is to prepare for death by ensuring that we have a sound relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We must repent from all sin and live a holy life through the power of the Holy Spirit; and also ensure that we are busy working for God, doing His will from our heart. Even though God told Moses that he would soon die, that knowledge did not hinder him from carrying out the duties that God appointed him. He was fully prepared to die.

God told Moses to go up to mount Abarim and view the land of Canaan before he would die. Mount Abarim was a mountainous stretch which consisted of many hills. One of these was mount Nebo, also known as Pisgah. This was the very spot God told Moses to climb in order to view the land of Canaan (Numbers 33:47; Deuteronomy 3:27; 32:49; 34:1). From this elevated position, Moses saw the land of Canaan from afar, since his eyes were not dim and probably because God gave his sight a miraculous boost to see beyond natural limits. Though Moses was being denied physical entrance into Canaan, because of his sin at the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, God allowed him to see the Promised Land from Pisgah. In this, we see the display of God's severity and goodness, the manifestation of God's mercy even in judgment. The severity of God's judgment prevented Moses, the meekest man who knew God face to face, from entering Canaan because of his sin, yet His mercy and goodness allowed him to see the land before dying.

Question 3: What lessons can a believer learn from God's judgment on Moses?

There are important lessons to learn from the severe judgment of God against Moses. One, sin is awful and terrible in its effects. Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan because of sin. At the waters of Meribah he was provoked and he spoke unadvisedly (Psalm 106:32,33). God said he did not honour Him before the people and because of that he was barred from entering the land of promise. We must beware of sin and get rid of it completely from our lives lest it hinders us from entering heaven. Two, God is not a respecter of persons in His judgments. Though Moses was dearly beloved and God had declared him to be his faithful servant, when he sinned God judged him severely. No matter our spiritual experiences or attainment in the faith, if we sin against God, He will discipline us. Three, God is merciful and gracious. Even when He judges our sin, He tempers justice with mercy. Four, as Moses saw the land of Canaan from afar before his death, believers now can also view the heavenly Canaan by faith. Even though death may take us or our loved ones before the Rapture takes place, we are assured that we will get to heaven and rest forever.

MOSES' PRAYER FOR A SUCCESSOR (Numbers 27:15-17; 1 Kings 19:15,16; Jeremiah 3:15; 23:1-4; Acts 1:21-25).

After God had given Moses the final verdict that he would not lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan, he began to intercede that God would appoint another leader to replace him. He prayed, **“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd”** (Number 27:16,17). In this prayer, we see a pattern for leadership. Prayer should be the preoccupation of leaders in every situation and it should precede every decision or action we take. Second, a principle of openness and impartiality: Moses did not nominate or recommend anyone for God to appoint as a leader. Rather, he asked God to choose and appoint. Third, the purpose of leadership: it is so that the congregation will not be as sheep without a shepherd.

Question 4: Point out some sterling qualities of Moses that were reflected in his prayer.

A close look at the prayer of Moses for a successor reveals some sterling qualities that made him an exemplary leader. One, the concern of Moses to leave behind a successor. He did not want to die without leaving someone who would continue to lead the children of Israel. He wanted to ensure that there would be no leadership gap after his death lest the purpose of God for Israel be frustrated. This is a good example to emulate by all cadres for leadership. In fact, it is often said, “leadership is a failure if it has no successor”. Therefore, we must ensure that we recognize, select, train and develop prospective leaders who can competently carry on the work we are doing in the Church whenever we are no more on the scene.

Two, we see the absolute surrender of Moses to God’s will. The moment God rejected his earnest plea to go over Jordan into Canaan, he submitted himself to God’s verdict. He did not grumble, complain or charge God foolishly. Instead, he prayed that God would immediately appoint someone to take over the leadership. It is very important that believers learn this lesson well so that they will not be guilty of fighting against God’s purpose in their lives and thereby injure themselves spiritually. Once a person knows the will of God for his life, even though it may be hard or difficult, he should submit himself to it and allow God to have His way.

Three, we observe the selflessness of Moses. Rather than being pre-occupied with his own plight, he was much concerned about the welfare of the congregation as well as the protection of God’s interest. So long as the needs of the children of Israel were met, and God’s glory remained intact, Moses was content. This selflessness of Moses was especially borne out of the fact that, though he would not enter Canaan himself, he was willing to prepare the ground for a successor who would lead Israel into it.

Four, Moses manifested an attitude of total dependence upon God. In the matter of appointing a successor, he deferred to God and asked Him to choose whom He would. Even though Joshua had been his assistant all along, he did not presume to appoint him as Israel’s new leader. In the same way, leaders

should not depend on their own understanding or experience when it comes to appointments in the Church. Rather, they should depend on God and ask Him to choose whoever He wills.

Five, Moses' prayer reveals the qualities to seek for in the people we appoint to leadership position. He requested for a man who would be able to go in and out before the congregation; and would be able to lead them out (in battle) and lead them in (in victory). This implies that a true leader should be a model or an example to the people; a goal-oriented and people-oriented person who will both care for the needs of the people and also achieve set goals. Such a leader, like a shepherd who leads the flock, must be available, full of compassion, selfless, gentle and patient. We need such leaders in the Church today.

THE PRESENTATION AND COMMISSION OF JOSHUA AS ISRAEL'S NEW LEADER (Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9; 1 Kings 19:15,16,19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-15).

In response to the prayer of Moses, God directed him to appoint Joshua as his successor. He was instructed to take Joshua, lay hands upon him before Eleazar the High Priest and the entire congregation. He was also asked to give Joshua a charge in their presence, that is to say, he should publicly commission him as the new leader of the people. Through this ceremony, Moses was to transfer his authority to Joshua so that the entire congregation would begin to obey him even before the death of Moses. Then God directed that whenever guidance was needed on any matter, Joshua should consult Eleazar the High Priest who would determine God's will by means of the Urim and Thummin. It is important to note that Moses did as God commanded him.

Question 5: *Mention some lessons to learn from the choice of Joshua to succeed Moses.*

There are important lessons to learn from the choice of Joshua as a successor to Moses. One, the choice of Joshua was by divine directive and not through political manipulations. There were no campaigns, pressure groups or elections to push Joshua as the leader. Instead, Moses prayed and God answered by expressly asking him to appoint Joshua. This teaches us that matters of appointment in the Church should be handled prayerfully and done according to God's leading. We should not base appointment to spiritual leadership on carnal considerations such as friendship, tribalism, family relationship, education, etc.

Two, there was no dissension or protests from the congregation as a result of Joshua's appointment. Caleb, who was the contemporary of Joshua, was not envious, neither did the younger generation reject the appointment of Joshua as their new leader. They did not grumble or attribute a negative motive to the action of Moses who had, all along, been grooming Joshua as a possible successor. In this, there is a great lesson for members of Bible-based Churches. There should be no commotion or protests when God, in His wisdom, appoints a person to leadership position. Rather than criticize or rebel we should prayerfully submit to God's will and support His work, no matter the human agent He uses to direct us.

Three, though Joshua had gifts and good qualities of leadership, he waited until God appointed and commissioned him. It should ever be remembered that it is one thing to be gifted and qualified but it is quite another thing to be chosen and commissioned. This is the basic lesson that those who struggle and compete for leadership position often miss. Whereas all those who struggled against the leadership of Moses, such as Miriam, Aaron, Korah, Dathan, Abiram received divine chastisement or even death, Joshua who never showed any ambition to become a leader was appointed to be his successor.

Four, even though Joshua would lead Israel into Canaan, a thing Moses could not achieve, his leadership would be inferior to that of Moses in a very significant manner. Joshua would commune with God through the High Priest, unlike Moses who spoke with God directly. This teaches us that different leaders have their own distinctives or peculiarities, therefore there is no profit in comparing ourselves with others.

Question 6: What are the qualities in Joshua that qualified him to be a leader?

As we look at the choice of Joshua as Moses' successor, we observe interplay of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Though God, in His sovereignty, had chosen Joshua to take over the leadership from Moses, it was obvious that Joshua had to develop himself and qualify for the task. What then are the qualities that made Joshua fit for leadership? First, he had faithfully served as Moses' personal assistant and he was with him on some crucial occasions: on the mount when Moses went to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:13; 32:15-19); in the tabernacle during the appointment of the seventy elders (Exodus 33:7-11).

Second, he was a man of faith. He was one of the twelve spies that searched the land of Canaan. Whereas the majority, walking by sight, brought an evil report, Joshua and Caleb walked by faith and brought a good report of the land (Numbers 14:6-9). Third, he was "**a man in whom is the spirit**". That means he had the Holy Spirit. Fourth, he had courage. This was manifested on many occasions, for instance, when he led men to fight against Amalek (Exodus 17:9-14) and when he stood against the evil report of the majority of the spies, even at the risk of being stoned (Numbers 13:16; 14:6-10,30).

Fifth, he was entirely consecrated and followed God wholeheartedly (Numbers 32:12). Sixth, he did not get angry when rebuked for what appeared to be a religious zeal without knowledge (Numbers 11:25-29). Only those who know how to endure rebuke and yield to correction can make good leaders, Seventh, he was patient and could endure hardness. While Moses tarried for forty days and nights on the mount, Joshua waited in the background. His patience became more evident as he waited for almost forty years to receive the fulfillment of the promise that he would enter the Promised Land. Even though he was not party to the evil report of the spies, neither did he rebel with the congregation, he endured the hardships of their wilderness wanderings for about forty years before he eventually entered Canaan as Israel's new leader.

As believers we need the qualities that Joshua manifested. We must be faithful in serving one another, live by faith and be filled with the Spirit. We must be courageous and do God's will no matter the risk involved. Also, we must be consecrated to God, submissive and yielded when rebuked or

corrected. Then, we must be patient and allow God to fulfill His good promises in our lives. Though after the defeat of the Amalekites, God had earlier given a hint that Joshua was being groomed to be Moses' successor: **"And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven"** (Exodus 17:14), however Joshua waited and allowed God to fulfill His purpose for him. In a similar way, God has spoken many good things concerning our lives and we need patience to see their fulfillment. We are to run the Christian race with patience. **"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise"** (Hebrews 10:36).

FEASTS AND THEIR OFFERINGS

MEMORY VERSE: “Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season **(Numbers 28:2)**.”

TEXT: Numbers 28:1-31; 29:1-40

After the appointment of Joshua as Moses’ successor as discussed in the previous lesson, God commanded Moses to recount the code of worship to the children of Israel. The two chapters that form our text of study contain a summary of some regular sacrifices and offerings which God prescribed for the children of Israel to observe. A preview of these sacrifices and offerings reveal four categories, namely: the daily sacrifices (Numbers 28:3-8), the weekly offerings (Numbers 28:9,10), the monthly offerings (Numbers 28:11-15), and the yearly offerings to mark the annual feasts (Numbers 28:17-31; 29:1-39). Though these sacrifices and ceremonial offerings are no longer relevant in the New Testament dispensation, there are veritable lessons believers can learn from them in the course of this study.

Question 1: *What basic instruction can present-day believers learn from the study of Old Testament offerings?*

The appointment of these offerings shows that there is a price believers need to pay in sincere and God-glorifying worship and service. And the requisite price is a token of our appreciation to God for His redemption benefits enjoyed. Though we can never repay all the goodness and mercies that God bestows on us day by day, we can reciprocate His kindness by giving what He requires from us. The first thing He demands is our life and heart to be surrendered to Him. **“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways”** (Proverbs 23:26).

Besides, He demands loving obedience to His word which prescribes righteous and holy lifestyle for all Kingdom citizens. This naturally translates into an acceptable giving of our substance and resources to God as a mark of absolute surrender and an acknowledgement of His sovereignty over our lives.

We note, however, that these feasts and their offerings serve as types and figures of the New Testament dispensation. While they lasted, they painted a picture of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ and its universal blessings for humanity. It is that final sacrifice of Christ that grants sincere seekers access to God and qualifies them to have fellowship with Him.

Besides, we learn also that divine command does not fade into insignificance with any generation of people who did not practise it. As God is eternal, so is His word. His word outlives man. Those who obey His word are blessed while those who disobey suffer.

DIVINE COMMAND CONCERNING THE SOLEMN FEASTS AND THEIR OFFERINGS (Numbers 28:1,2; 29:39,40; Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 23:4-44).

In our text, God instructed Moses to “**command the children of Israel and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season**” (Numbers 28:2).

The details of the solemn feasts and their offerings had earlier been given to the children of Israel shortly after the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 23:4-44). But at His time, God commanded them to offer the prescribed sacrifices in their due season.

Question 2: *Why was it necessary to repeat the laws of sacrifices to the children of Israel and what do we learn from this repetition?*

The repetition of these laws became necessary because of the human tendency to forget essential truths. The older generation of Israel, who received the law originally at Sinai, had died in the wilderness. Therefore, the new generation might be ignorant of these laws perhaps because they were not properly taught, or because they had not witnessed them being practised in the wilderness. This is most probable because, with the exception of the Passover, the children of Israel did not offer these sacrifices during their wilderness wanderings. This is why God later asked them rhetorically, “**Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?**” (Amos 5:25). Because the sacrifices were omitted from their worship for a long time it became necessary for God to rehearse them so that they would be observed when the Israelites entered Canaan.

From this, we learn the importance of teaching our young ones the basic truths of our faith. We should teach our children and youths the basic doctrines, the principles and practice of the Christian life. They should learn not only the precepts but also observe practically our life of devotion and absolute dependence on God. This will enable them to remember and continue in them, even after we have gone.

DETAILED REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SOLEMN FEASTS AND OFFERINGS
(Numbers 28:3-29; Exodus 29:38-42).

The offerings God commanded the Israelites to bring at specific times were many. One of these was the daily offerings which consisted of morning and evening sacrifices. Each morning and evening, they were to offer, for a burnt offering, a lamb accompanied with meat offering (meal offering) and a drink offering (Numbers 28:3-8). The daily sacrifice was described as a continual burnt offering because it was offered every day regardless of other periodic sacrifices that might come up on some days.

The second category of offerings were the weekly offerings which were made every Sabbath day (Numbers 28:9,10). The Sabbath offerings consisted of two lambs of the first year without spot, sacrificed as burnt offering together with the meat and drink offerings. It is worthy of note that the Sabbath offering was twice as much as the daily offering and was not previously commanded the children of Israel. In the time of Ezekiel, the Sabbath offering was greatly increased to six lambs and one ram (Ezekiel 46:4,5). Third, there were the monthly sacrifices (Numbers 28:11-15). These were offered at the beginning of

each month and it consisted of two young bullocks, one ram and seven lambs as a burnt offering, together with their respective meat and drink offerings. Apart from the burnt offering, one kid of goat was also offered as sin offering at the beginning of every month.

Question 3: *Mention the annual feasts of the Jews and the offerings associated with them.*

The fourth category of offerings were the yearly or seasonal sacrifices. These were offered during the annual feasts of Passover, unleavened bread, first fruits, trumpets, day of atonement and tabernacles. These feasts were moments of joy and commemoration of special events in the history of the Israelites. From the fact that they were to offer sacrifices on such occasions we learn that our times of joy should also be marked with great sacrifice and offerings of our substance to God.

The feast of Passover was held on the 14th day of the first month (Abib). During the feast, the Passover lamb was sacrificed as prescribed by God. It is noteworthy that our text did not repeat the instructions or details of the Passover offerings probably because the Israelites had celebrated it in the wilderness, and the new generation must have witnessed it.

Next to the Passover was the feast of unleavened bread (Numbers 28:17-25) which lasted for seven days, commencing on the 15th till the 21st of the first month (Abib). On each day of the feast, they offered two bullocks one ram and seven lambs together with their meat and drink offerings. Also, one kid of goats was offered for a sin offering. The total offerings for the feast of unleavened bread were seven times as much as the monthly offerings.

After the feasts of unleavened bread was the feast of first-fruits (Numbers 28:26-31). The burnt offering for this feast consisted of two bullocks, one ram and seven lambs with the respective meat and drink offerings.

The fourth feast was the feast of trumpets which took place on the first day of the seventh month (Numbers 29:1-6). The burnt offering for this feast consisted of one bullock, one ram and seven lambs. The meat offering and the drink offerings accompanied the burnt offering as usual except that for the meat offering of the lambs they used less measure of flour. One kid of goat was also sacrificed for sin offering during the feast of trumpets. It should be noted that on every feast of trumpets, at least three offerings coincided. These were the daily sacrifices, the monthly offering (being the first day of the month) and the annual festive offering.

The fifth feast was the Day of Atonement which took place on the 10th day of the seventh month (Numbers 29:7-11). The burnt offering for this feast was one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs with their usual meat and drink offerings. A goat was also offered as a sin offering. But apart from the offerings, the participants should fast and hold a holy convocation.

The last yearly offering was the feast of tabernacles (Numbers 29:12-38). The feast lasted eight days, from the 15th till the 22nd of the seventh month. The burnt offering for this feast was the largest and most costly of all the seasonal offerings. A total of 71 bullocks, 15 rams and 105 lambs plus their respective meat and drink offerings were sacrificed during the feast of tabernacles. On the first day, 13 bullocks, 2 rams and 14 lambs were offered. Then, each succeeding day till the seventh, the number of bullocks diminished by one,

while the number of rams and lambs remained the same. On the seventh day, 7 bullocks, 2 rams and 14 lambs were offered, but on the last day one ram and 7 lambs were offered.

Question 4: *What is the significance of freewill offerings and what lessons can believers learn from them?*

In addition to the specific offerings which were mandatory, the children of Israel were expected to bring freewill offerings, as well as special offerings to mark the fulfillment of their voluntary vows to God (Numbers 29:39). In the time of king Hezekiah, we see an example of such freewill offering given generously to God (2 Chronicles 30:23,24). This kind of voluntary offerings signified personal devotion and a willingness to go an extra mile in serving God. It was also an evidence of personal gratitude and absolute surrender to God. From this believers should learn that apart from fulfilling the obligations of corporate worship, God expects them to engage in acts of personal devotion as well. For instance, apart from giving tithes and offerings in the Church, which is mandatory as a demand of corporate worship, believers should still give to those who have need and help support the work of God in other areas. Apart from participating in corporate worship on fellowship days, believers should still have private devotion for personal development of their spiritual lives. The public duties in Church should not displace or substitute the private duties of the believer at home and in the neighbourhood.

DEFINITE LESSONS FROM THE SOLEMN FEASTS AND THEIR OFFERINGS
(Numbers 29:40; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16).

It is very instructive to note what Moses told the children of Israel according to all that the Lord commanded him. Whatever any Israelite might think of the message, Moses faithfully delivered all that God told him to tell them. This is a mark of faithfulness which God expects from all His servants. No one who is a spokesman for God should be found altering the word of God. There should be no addition to or subtraction from the word of God.

Question 5: *Point out some important lessons to learn from the Jewish feasts and their offerings.*

Looking at the solemn feasts and their offerings, there are some important lessons believers can learn. One, giving offering to God is an integral part of true worship and devotion. Believers should learn and maintain the habit of worshipping God and giving offerings to Him daily, weekly, monthly and seasonally. Those who claim to worship God but are stingy when it comes to providing material resources for His work are not sincere. Two, the Sabbath offering was twice as much as the daily offering. This was because the Sabbath was a special day of rest for the Israelites. But for Christians today, the Lord's Day (Sunday) is a special day because it commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. On such a day, it is necessary for a worshipper to increase his/her devotion and service to God more than other days. Therefore, it is important to

give more time and attention to hear God's word, to sing His praises and offer to Him more substance on the Lord's Day.

Three, God commanded the children of Israel to bring the offerings regularly and continually, even though they were costly. This teaches us that in showing our commitment to God, we need to offer Him something special and we should do it continually – without a break and without getting tired. Like David, we must be so committed to God and determine not to give offerings unto God of that which cost us nothing (2 Samuel 24:24b). Four, we learn that offerings must be given according to God's ordained rules. The word of God teaches that we must give voluntarily, liberally, cheerfully, regularly, without ostentation, with enthusiasm and purpose of heart to support God's work (Matthew 6:1-4; Luke 21:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9:1-11).

Five, we note that there were more feasts and offerings in the seventh month for the Jews. This was probably because the seventh month in their calendar was actually the first month according to civil reckoning. Besides, this month fell between the harvest and the next planting season. Therefore, it was a time when the Jews, who were mainly farmers, would normally have more time to attend to spiritual matters with less distraction. This teaches us that holidays and free time, when we are off from daily work, should not be frittered away, but spent for devotion and spiritual profit. Also, the beginning of each year should be a time of drawing closer to God and for the renewal of our commitment and consecration to Him.

Six, we also observe that the daily sacrifices must still be made despite the weekly, monthly or yearly sacrifices. In fact, if any or all these sacrifices coincide on a particular day, each of them must be offered and none should be omitted. Thus, we learn that we should not look for excuses to escape our religious obligations but remain consistent and committed in whatever God has assigned us to do. Sometimes in the Church, it may happen that some financial obligations coincide. Perhaps we need to give for a particular project and then there is the demand for tithes, offerings as well as giving for special programmes like crusade, retreat, etc. God expects us to fulfill those obligations without substituting one for the other.

In conclusion, God wants us to serve Him according to the pattern He has laid down in His word. There is a pattern of scriptural worship. Just as Israel must offer the sacrifices of the Lord in their due season, New Testament believers are expected to serve God after the due order. The annual feasts of the Jews were marked with holy convocations and solemn assemblies. In a similar way, our worship must be characterized with solemnity and reverence to God.

As we observe the solemn feasts and their offerings, we cannot but notice the rituals and rigour of service it entailed both for the priests and the worshippers. Yet, in spite of these elaborate and scrupulous services, the sacrifices were not able to perfect the worshippers. But under the New Testament dispensation, Jesus has been offered, once and for all, as the perfect sacrifice unto God for the perfection of those who put their trust in Him. Now we don't need to sacrifice bullocks, rams, lambs, flour or drinks to God before He can accept us. We are free from those Old Testament laws of sacrifices and rituals. What God desires from us now is to have faith in the finished work of Christ, turn away from sin and live holy lives and then serve Him daily by offering our substance and ourselves a living sacrifice unto Him.

LAWS CONCERNING VOWS AND OATHS

MEMORY VERSE: “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay”
(Ecclesiastes 5:4,5).

TEXT: Numbers 30:1-16.

As the children of Israel encamped at the border of the land of promise, God directed Moses to repeat the instructions on sacrifices and offerings to them. They were mandated to strictly adhere to the precepts and procedure of giving both their daily and seasonal offerings to God in due season. Moses had to make it clear to them that the daily offerings, as well as the weekly, monthly and yearly offerings were mandatory and could not be omitted.

However in our text, Moses dealt with the matter of voluntary vows and oaths so as to indicate some conditions that could affect their fulfillment. Though vows were voluntary, God would have His people know the sacredness of vows and oaths once they were made. Non-voided vows and oaths are binding on persons who made them and such people must ensure that the conditions are fulfilled. Before the account in our text, God had given directions by which vows were to be regulated, as to their objects and how to fulfill them (Leviticus 27:1-33; Numbers 6:1-21). The children of Israel had already known that they could pledge material things such as animals, land, crops and even persons unto God and that such things could also be redeemed by paying a ransom. But in our text, God was dealing with the conditions upon which vows might not be fulfilled and yet the person who made the vow would not be held guilty.

THE SACREDNESS OF VOWS AND OATHS (Numbers 30:1,2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5).

The Lord commanded Moses to reiterate to the people of Israel the sacredness of vows and oaths. None of them was expected to make vows or oaths and not keep them. This was necessary lest the Israelites should trivialized making vows or oaths to God or going about it in a frivolous manner. Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of Israel what God had commanded concerning vows and oaths. He said, **“If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth”** (Numbers 30:2).

To begin with, a vow is a voluntary promise to perform a specific duty unto the Lord. It could be positive, promising to give something or do a particular thing for God, in return for some benefits expected from Him. It could also be a promise to abstain from something as a mark of extra devotion to God. However, it should be noted that it would be wrong to make a vow to do something which God has forbidden. Similarly, it would be wrong to vow to abstain from a thing that God has commanded. For instance, the vow of the

mother of Micah to dedicate eleven thousand shekels of silver to make an idol was a wrong vow (Judges 17:2-4). God forbids making graven images, therefore the vow to make one was a sinful vow and must be repented of.

Question 1: *What is the difference between vows and oaths?*

Oath is defined as the invoking of a curse upon one's self if one fails to perform a particular duty, keep a promise or tell the truth. In effect, oaths were used to prove the sincerity of either a vow or a declaration. Examples of oaths in Scripture are Saul's oath (1 Samuel 19:6); David's oath (2 Samuel 19:23) and Peter's oath (Matthew 26:74). Examples of vows are Jacob's vow (Genesis 28:20-22); Jephthah's vow (Judges 11:30); Hannah's vow (1 Samuel 1:11); Absalom's vow (2 Samuel 15:7,8); the vow of the heathen mariners (Jonah 1:16); Paul's vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23,24).

In the scriptures, no one was compelled to make vows because it was not a religious duty as such. Failure to make vows was not a sin, but making them and not fulfilling them was (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). It is better not to make a vow than to make it and fail to fulfill it. As a matter of fact, believers do not need to make vows before their prayers are answered. Rather than vow, all a believer needs do is to exercise faith in God's promises.

Question 2: *Why was it necessary to emphasize the sacredness of vows to the children of Israel?*

It was necessary to affirm the sacredness of vows to the children of Israel because of the human tendency to utter vows in the time of crisis or when one is desperately in need of a particular favour from the Lord. However, when the crisis is over and the desire is granted, there is the likelihood of forgetting the vow. Therefore, to avoid making careless and frivolous promise to God, He had to tell them that once a vow was made, then it became compulsory to fulfill it. In effect, God wanted His people to avoid making thoughtless, careless utterances and rash promises.

In the New Testament, Jesus condemned the abuse of vows (Matthew 15:4-6; Mark 7:10-13). He rebuked the Pharisees for using the law of vows as an excuse for avoiding their duty to their parents. This was because the Pharisees felt they could avoid giving material things to their parents by saying they had dedicated that property or money to God. This was known as the law of Corban, a vow wherein a person would dedicate to the temple all the money or materials which he would have given to his parents. It was a wrong vow because it involved breaking God's command which required a person to honour his parents. We must not neglect our parents and our immediate family members on the pretense that we are serving God. The scriptures say **"but if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"** (1 Timothy 5:8).

Apart from the condemnation of wrong vows, Jesus also prohibited oaths or swearing (Matthew 5:33-37). He taught that a believer's word should be enough to affirm the truth. Promises made to God or men must be kept. If a believer says 'Yes', let it be 'Yes' and if he says 'No', let it be 'No'. There should be no need to support his/her word with any curse. This requires therefore that the

believer should be mindful of what he says at times of excitements, anger or stress.

THE DISRUPTION OF VOWS AND OATHS (Numbers 30:3-16; Ephesians 5:22,23;6:1-3).

After affirming the sacredness of vows and oaths to the children of Israel, Moses gave some special conditions under which vows of unmarried and married women could be disrupted. First, the vow of a young woman who was still under the authority of her parents could be disrupted by the father as soon as he knew about the vow. However, if the father heard the vow and kept quiet about it, then his silence would be counted as an affirmation of the vow. In that case, the vow would stand. This shows that the vow of a young girl who had not yet married was subject to the approval of her father.

Then the vows of married women could be disrupted in different ways. A woman might come into marriage bringing a vow which her father had allowed to stand while she was a spinster, or else she could make a vow after being married to her husband. In both cases, as soon as the husband hears of the vow he can disallow it and the woman shall be free from the consequence of not keeping the vow. However, if after hearing of the vow, the husband keeps silent concerning it, then the vow would stand, the woman must fulfill the vow and her husband can no longer annul it. If the husband after upholding the woman's vow by his silence, should prevent her from fulfilling her vow then the consequence of not fulfilling the vow would be upon the man rather than the woman.

The third category concerned the vows of divorced women and widows. If a woman made a vow while in her husband's house and he allowed it to stand, then if the husband died or the woman got divorced, her vow would still stand. However any vow that a woman made after she had become a widow or divorced from her husband would stand. No father or husband could make such vows void.

Question 3: *Mention the conditions that could disannul the vows of women in Israel.*

DIVERS LESSONS FROM THE LAWS OF VOWS AND OATHS (Numbers 30:16; Ephesians 5:22,23; 6:1-3; Psalm 89:34; Matthew 5:33-37; Ecclesiastes 5:4,5).

There are many lessons to learn from the law of vows and oaths. First, we are warned against rash vows and careless promises. This is important because we live in days of gross frivolities and vanities. These days, people are unmindful of their words. They make promises which they do not intend to keep and unfortunately, they bring that to religious profession also. We should be very careful and thoughtful before we make promises either to men or God.

Second, God wants people to be as good as their word. We should keep our promises to God. For instance, when we promise to serve God and devote all we have to Him, especially at the outset of our Christian lives when we probably have little treasure or talents, we should ensure that we keep that promise even later in life after God has blessed and multiplied us. Whenever we make

pledges to give something to God, we should fulfill it. But not only should men keep their promises to God, they should also keep their word to one another. One quality of the man who will have fellowship with God is that he swears to his own hurt and changes not (Psalm 15:4b). That means even when it is hard to keep the promise he has made, he still keeps his word. Business partners should keep their words. Married people should keep their vows. The husband should love his wife and the wife should submit to the husband as they vowed during their marriage ceremony. The promises that they would care, cherish and nurture one another and that they would keep away from other men or women should not be broken.

Three, no person should break God's commandment on the excuse of voluntary religious devotion. For instance, children should obey their parents, wives should submit themselves to their own husbands and parents should provide for their children and train them. No self-imposed religious obligation should be allowed to hinder the fulfillment of those God-ordained roles. From both our text as well as Christ's rebuke of the Pharisees concerning the law of Corban (Matthew 15:4-6), it is very clear that obedience to the laws of God should be rated higher than any self-imposed religious sacrifice, no matter how plausible the expression may be. Four, we should not make unlawful vows, and if we have ignorantly made any, they should be annulled. People who have ignorantly made bad vows or covenants before knowing the Lord should recognize that such vows are void and cannot stand. When a person gets born again, he/she becomes a child of God and He has the authority to cancel any unwise or hurtful vow that has been made in the past. In such cases, the individual should pray and God shall set him/her free from the consequences of such broken covenants.

Another important lesson from the law of vows is that God desires the unity and survival of the family. His precept on vows affirmed the authority of the husband over the wife and the need for the wife to submit to her husband's authority. This is the uniform teaching of the word of God. Whatever religious obligation that a woman undertakes, it should be with the agreement of the husband. Similarly, children should be subjected to their parents. Any religious obligation that will affect or demand the input of the parent should not be undertaken without their permission. Six, our piety should not be limited to the precincts of laws and commands; it should extend to the frontiers of voluntary service as well. Though no one is compelled to make vows, those who make and fulfill them usually receive special blessings from God.

In conclusion, we see that if God commanded His people to keep their vows, certainly He will keep His own promises as well. God can never ask people to keep their words while He fails to keep His own. God is ever true to His word and we can rely on His promises. He said, "**My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth**" (Psalm 89:34). He has promised to save sinners if they will repent. Therefore sinners can depend on that promise and trust Him for salvation. Also, God has promised to deliver the oppressed, heal the sick, provide for the needy and keep those who come to Him. These and many other promises of God are "**Yea and Amen in**" Christ. All we need to do is to exercise faith in God because He keeps His word.

DEFEAT OF THE MIDIANITES AND DEATH OF BALAAM

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them” (**Numbers 25:16,17**).

TEXT: Numbers 31:1-54

Our text focuses on the war of revenge which God commanded the children of Israel to fight against the Midianites. It was a holy war and the very last that Moses led Israel to fight before his death. Through the help of God, the children of Israel won the battle and brought back much spoil. They killed five kings of Midian as well as Balaam who instigated the Midianites to cause Israel to sin.

The war against the Midianites became necessary because God had earlier promised that He would avenge the wickedness that the Midianites practised against the children of Israel (Numbers 25:16-18). Through the counsel of Balaam, they seduced Israel to commit immorality and to worship idols (Revelation 2:14). As a result of this, divine wrath came upon Israel and twenty-four thousand of them died (Numbers 25:9). But after God’s severe judgment on Israel, He commanded them to vex the Midianites and smite them.

It is interesting to note that the battle with the Midianites was not decided by Moses. It was God who spoke to Moses to “**avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites**”. So, it is God fighting the Midianites through the instrumentality of Israel. Mobilizing the people for this war, Moses challenged them to “**go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian**”. Observe however that God had purged Israel of sin before it became a battle-axe against the enemy nation. Cleansing from sin and holiness of life is indispensable for believers to be able to win in life’s battles. The believer who is pure and armed with the whole armour of God is a great weapon of spiritual warfare in the hands of God.

Question 1: *What basic warning can be derived from the judgment of God on the Midianites?*

From the account of the war against Midian and the death of Balaam, it is clear that God is Omniscient and knows what everyone does in the secret and in the open. And that is why He is impeccable in judgment which is according to knowledge. He knows those who give wrong counsel against His people as well as those who serve as stumbling blocks for their downfall. He will not spare but judge anyone who seeks to corrupt His people. Though the Israelites did not vex the Midianites immediately after their sin, the day of reckoning eventually came for them. Indeed, the mill of God’s judgment grinds slowly, but surely. Both the Midianites and Balaam, the brain behind their wiles, eventually reaped what they sowed.

GOD’S COMMAND AND MOBILIZATION OF ISRAEL FOR BATTLE (Numbers 31:1-6; 25:16-18; 10:8,9; Romans 12:19; Genesis 25:1,2).

God commanded Moses to tell Israel to fight the Midianites. He said, **“Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites.”** But when Moses spoke to the children of Israel, he said, **“arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianities, and avenge the Lord of Midian”** (Numbers 31:2,3). It was a war of revenge, not at Israel’s instance but God’s. It is God that said, **“vengeance is mine, I will repay”** (Romans 12:19).

It would be recalled that the Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah, the wife he married after the death of Sarah (Genesis 25:1,2). Jethro the father in-law of Moses, as well as Zipporah the wife of Moses were from Midian. In fact, it was in Midian that Moses received his call to go and deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 2:15-21; 3:1-10). However, after many years, the Midianites who lived towards the eastern side of Canaan went into alliance with the Moabites to oppose Israel. But a segment of Midian, the Kenites remained friendly with Israel despite the confrontation at this time.

The children of Israel mobilized for the battle one thousand men from each tribe, making a total of twelve thousands. They went to battle against Midian, with Phinehas leading the priests that accompanied them. The priests blew the trumpets as God had instructed Israel before (Numbers 10:8,9). It is noteworthy that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest became prominent in Israel after he had distinguished himself during the time Israel went into immorality with the daughters of Midian. In holy anger, he killed Cozbi and Zimri who were committing sin in a brazen manner at a time when the leaders in Israel were interceding to abate. God’s wrath upon the people (Numbers 25:6-9). Because of that act, Phinehas was counted faithful in a small thing and as such he was advanced to a greater responsibility in the congregation. In the same way, God expects believers to be faithful and manifest zeal for holiness. They should not condone sin in any way, either in their personal lives or in those over whom they have authority.

Question 2: What is the significance of God’s command to fight the Midianites for believers today?

The commandment that Israel should fight against the Midianites has important significance for believers in the New Testament. Though God would not likely ask believers to carry arms and destroy people whom they perceive as their enemies, yet there are certain principles that are clearly portrayed in this account of war against the Midianites. One, we learn that those who seduce us to sin, whoever they are and whatever our relationship with them, are the enemies of our soul. We are to avoid such people and refuse to have intimate relationship with them. Two, any habit or affection in our lives that predispose us to sin must be crushed. For the children of Israel, the Midianites were a physical source of enticement, but believers have a more deadly source of seduction which is not physical. These are the character traits that lean dangerously towards sin, the fleshly lusts that war against the soul, and they must be put to death (1 Peter 2:11; Colossians 3:5; Matthew 5:29).

Three, the fact that God judged Israel because of their sin, and now commands Midian, who caused them to sin, to be judged teaches us that those who commit sin will not escape God’s judgment no matter their excuse. But

also, those who lay the snare or stumbling block that cause others to sin will equally face God's wrath. Like Job said, both "**the deceived and the deceiver are his**" (Job 12:16b), therefore, God will certainly punish the wrong doer as well as those responsible for their wrongdoing. This is why believers are warned not to put any stumbling block before others (Romans 14:13). For instance, our dressing should not seduce others to lust and our action or inaction should not provoke others to commit sin (Proverbs 16:29).

THE GLORIOUS VICTORY OF ISRAEL AND THE DEATH OF BALAAM (Numbers 31:7-18; 25:14,15; 23:10; Isaiah 17:13,14).

The children of Israel defeated the Midianites even though they sent only twelve thousand men to fight. Obviously, the Lord helped them and gave them the victory. The army of Israel killed all the males in Midian, took the women and children prisoners of war, took much spoil and prey, and burnt their cities and beautiful castles. They killed five kings of Midian, including Zur, the father of Cozbi, the Midianitish girl whom Zimri brought into the camp of Israel (Numbers 31:8; 25:14,15). Balaam, was also killed along with the Midianites. Though he had earlier prayed that God would let him die the death of the righteous and that his end be like that of the righteous, his wishes were not granted. Rather, he died with the enemies of God. But one wonders what Balaam was doing in Midian at the time of this war! No doubt, God in His providence arranged it so that he should receive a just retribution for his unrighteousness. His fraternity with those who oppose God demanded that he suffered the same fate with them. How then should believers beware of evil association with sinners lest they share the same punishment with them.

Question 3: *What lessons can be learnt from the death of Balaam with the Midianites?*

The fact that Balaam was killed along side the Midianites serves as a great warning for believers today. First, it demonstrates the law of sowing and reaping. It was Balaam that taught the Moabites and Midianites to seduce Israel to sin and as such they both reaped what they sowed. They were joined in sin and so were they joined in judgment. This teaches us to avoid sowing evil lest we reap condemnation (Proverbs 28:10). Second, believers are warned against the common practice of pointing accusing fingers at others while neglecting the shortcomings in their own lives. Balaam had prophesied the doom and destruction of others but unfortunately, he did not foresee his own. We should beware lest after God has used us to preach to others we should become a castaway (I Corinthians 9:27). Third, Balaam foretold the happy end of Israel but he took no steps to share in it. Despite the good things he predicted about Israel, one wonders why Balaam, instead of joining with Israel should rather team up with their enemies. This is a warning that we should not just know the letter of God's word, we should be doers of the word.

Fourth, Balaam had prayed to die the death of the righteous and that his last end be like his (Numbers 23:10) but his wishes were not granted. It takes more than mere wishes or empty prayer to partake in the blessings which God has reserved for His saints in heaven. The desire and prayer must be backed with a righteous and holy living and a definite decision to do God's will. The beginning

of our Christian life is as important as the way we end it (Ecclesiastes 7:8). To finish the Christian race spiritually strong and well in the kingdom requires that we live and walk in the Spirit, watch and pray, and abide in Christ till the end.

After the defeat of the Midianites, the army of Israel returned “**and Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp**” (Numbers 31:13). Despite his age, Moses went out of the camp to meet the returning soldiers to congratulate them for the victory in battle and to acknowledge their courage. But when he saw the spoil and prisoners of war which the men of Israel brought back he was angry with the officers of the army. This was because they spared the women who could still be a snare to them in future.

Question 4: *What can we learn from the steadfastness of Moses even in old age?*

It is very instructive to note that the steadfastness of Moses and his sensitivity to the word of God did not diminish even in old age. Though he was about 120 years at this time, he still paid a scrupulous attention to the word of God. In the first place, he went to meet the army outside the camp because they were already ceremonially defiled by reason of their contact with the dead and for shedding blood. He did not allow the euphoria of victory in battle to deaden his sensitivity to God’s command which demanded that ceremonially defiled persons be shut outside the gate until they were cleansed. Secondly, he reproved the captains of Israel’s army for sparing the Midianitish women who were the actual cause of Israel’s misfortune. Most often, men are reluctant to destroy the very things that may prove to be their undoing in life. But Moses commanded that they all be killed except the virgins among them, who were innocent of the seduction for which the guilty ones were being judged.

The steadfastness of Moses and his commitment to the word of God pose a great challenge to believers as they fight their own spiritual warfare of faith. Believers should be very watchful and extra sensitive whenever they win spiritual victories. At such times, the joy of conquest may so overwhelm their mind that they miss out important details of God’s word. Moses ordered the women of Midian to be killed, because as an eminent Bible scholar said, “it is dangerous to let them live; they will be still tempting the Israelites to uncleanness, and so your captives will be your conquerors and a second time your destroyers”. For the same reason, believers should cut off from their lives anything that entices them to sin.

GENEROUS AND EQUITABLE SHARING OF THE SPOIL OF WAR (Numbers 31:19-54; Joshua 22:8; 1 Samuel 30:20-25)

After killing all the captive women that were not virgins, Moses commanded that not only the soldiers but also the spoils of war be cleansed before sharing them. The sharing was supervised by Moses and Eleazar as directed by God. The entire spoils were divided into two equal parts. One part was given to the twelve thousand men who went to battle, while the other part was shared among the congregation in the camp. Then, God demanded that the soldiers should pay Him a tribute of one in every five hundred (1/500) of their share,

while the congregation should give one in every fifty (1/50) of their share as tribute. The tribute from the share of the soldiers, being less, was given to the priests; whereas the tribute from the share of the congregation, being more, was given to the Levites.

Question 5: *Point out a basic principles to be derived from the way the Israelites shared the spoil of war after the defeat of the Midianites.*

It should be noted that the booty of war was shared with fairness and equity. And this teaches believers to be generous, and not selfish, in dispensing the resources that God gives to them. Because the soldiers went out as representatives of the entire congregation, therefore it was necessary that they shared the spoils with them. But then, the share of each soldier was greater because they risked their lives and laboured more than the congregation who remained in the camp. Apart from this, the tributes that God demanded from the soldiers was less compared to what was demanded of the congregation. Then, the tributes were also given to the Priests and Levites proportionately. The priests, being fewer in number than the Levities got the less tributes. In all these, we are made to see that God is fair and equitable in all His ways. As Christians, we should be just and fair in all our dealings.

But it should also be noticed that apart from the tributes that the soldiers gave to God from their own share of the booty, the captains of the army came to Moses bringing special oblation in appreciation of the fact that not a single soldier under them was lost in battle. It was a miracle, and in gratitude to God, they brought a freewill oblation to Him for sparing their lives. This action of the captains teaches us to honour God with our substance in appreciation for His mercies over us. Like the officers of Israel counted their soldiers and were surprised that no single man among them was lost in the war, we too must count our blessings and no doubt, it will surprise us what the Lord has done.

THE INHERITANCE OF REUBEN AND GAD

MEMORY VERSE: “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (**Psalm 119:111**).

TEXT: Numbers 32:1-42

After the conquest of the Midianites, the children of Israel continued to camp in the plains of Moab. This location was towards the east of Jordan, just at the border of Canaan and is sometimes called the Transjordan area. Israel had conquered the entire region and while there, they made preparations to enter the land of Canaan; Moses also was getting ready to be “**gathered to his people**”. But during this period, the tribes of Reuben and Gad came to Moses and Eleazar the priest and the princes of Israel requesting that they be given, as their own inheritance, the land that Israel had already conquered. This matter was an administrative challenge that Moses had to tackle before his death. How the thorny issue was amicably resolved forms the focus of our study in this lesson.

THE REQUEST OF THE TRIBES OF REUBEN AND GAD (Numbers 32:1-5).

The tribes of Reuben and Gad came to Moses, and Eleazar and the princes of the congregation with their request. Because they had a very great multitude of cattle and they saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead looked good for cattle they said to Moses: “**wherefore if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan**” (Number 32:5). They did not want to cross the Jordan with the other tribes but rather they wanted their own inheritance in the land of Jazer and Gilead which Israel had already conquered towards the east of Jordan.

Question 1: *Mention some features in the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad which believers must avoid.*

There are certain traits in the request of the Reubenites and Gadites which believers must be wary of. One, the request was motivated by what they saw rather than what God had said. They walked by sight rather than by faith. They felt that since they had much cattle and the place had good pasture then it must be their ideal inheritance. However, walking by sight and making decisions on the basis of rational or sense evidence alone can easily get a person into trouble. It can mislead a believer to settle for something less than God’s perfect will. This is the same mistake that Lot made when he chose for himself the plain of this very Jordan when Abraham gave him opportunity to choose a portion of the land (Genesis 13:10-13). Even Samuel the prophet, were it not for God’s intervention, would have made the same mistake while anointing another king to replace Saul (1 Samuel 16:6,7). From this, it should be noted that life decisions and choices should not be based on sense

knowledge alone. Before we make choices concerning marriage, business, friendship, location to settle or live in etc. we should pray and know the mind of God.

Two, the Reubenites and Gadites made their request without a due consideration for proper fellowship with their brethren and the emblems of God's presence among them. By choosing to settle in the land east of Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad were inadvertently cutting themselves from the majority of Israel who would have to cross the Jordan for their own inheritance. In other words, the tabernacle, the ark of God and the priests would be on the other side Jordan, while they remained a considerable distance away and also separated by a natural barrier, the river Jordan. They were not mindful of the fact that Jordan normally overflowed all its banks during the time of harvest and it would hinder their easy access to the tabernacle (Joshua 3:14,15). This shows that the two tribes did not account their spiritual welfare a greater priority than their cattle and herds. Like them, there are so many people today who consider material prosperity a greater priority above the welfare of their souls. Whenever they are making decisions on career, where to live, and the like, their only consideration is the material gain rather than spiritual development. This should not be so.

Three, they did not consider the effect that their decision and request would have on other Israelites. This is a kind of selfishness that is often seen among many professing Christians. They are so absorbed with their own self interest and fail to consider the interest or welfare of other people. But in all our decisions and actions, charity demands that we have consideration for the interest of other people. We are commanded, **"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"** (Philippians 2:4). Four, it shows the effect that close companionship can have on a person. If a believer is in close association with sinners or carnal believers, their tendencies will likely rub off on him/her. It should be noted that the tribes of Reuben and Gad were camped together on the southern side of the tabernacle. Also, the tribe of Manasseh, though camped on the western side of the tabernacle, part of them was in touch with the Gadites in the south. With this close arrangement it was easy for these tribes to blend and plan together. Besides, they were both rich in cattle and so they had a common interest.

However, the tribe of Reuben had a curse hanging on their neck because of the sin of incest committed by Reuben, their progenitor (Genesis 35:22; 49:3,4). As a result of this, the Reubenites lost their real inheritance which was the double portion that traditionally belonged to the firstborn. Rather than being concerned about their spiritual state and how to retrieve their lost inheritance they were more concerned about fending for their cattle. Unfortunately, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh joined them in all this. From this, we learn to be careful and not allow the negative influence of the worldly people with whom we are compelled to associate at work or in the community to deaden our spiritual perception and sensitivity.

Five, the Reubenites and Gadites, by their request, pre-empted the application of the sharing formula that God prescribed for the division of the land of Canaan. God had commanded that the land be shared proportionately by casting lot (Numbers 26:52-55). But as it were, the tribes of Reuben and Gad decided their own inheritance and sought to take it their own way. Six, they felt that there could be nothing better than the land which they desired on the

other side Jordan. That is why they said to Moses **“bring us not over Jordan”**. Even though they had not seen what laid on the other side, they concluded that what they had at hand was much better. This chain of reasoning is the foundation upon which many people build their faith today. They believe only in what they can see and so, they want all their inheritance on this side of heaven. They want all the blessings and material prosperity here and now, rather than wait for that which **“eye has not seen, nor ear heard; the things which God has prepared for them that love him”**. They forget that **“the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”** (1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:18). Believers should avoid this undue emphasis on present physical blessings to the detriment of their eternal future security. We should never attempt to make this world our own inheritance lest we be tempted to stop our spiritual journey halfway and eventually miss the proper inheritance. Like the Psalmist, we should be contented to say, **“Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: they are the rejoicing of my heart”** (Psalm 119:111).

Question 2: *In retrospect, what were the negative effects of settling on the east of Jordan by the tribes of Reuben and Gad?*

Though, Moses eventually approved the request of the Reubenites and Gadites, in retrospect it had some negative effects. First, it almost made the other tribes to stumble and fight unnecessary war when they (Reubenite, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh) later made an altar of witness, in an attempt to identify their territory with the rest of Israel who dwelt on the other side Jordan (Joshua 22:9-34). If they had settled together with the other tribes, there would have been no need for an altar of witness and there would have been no misunderstanding. Second, it brought a polarity between them and the other tribes. Those on the other side described their own territory as the **“inheritance of the Lord”** and considered themselves the **“congregation of the Lord”** (Joshua 22:19,32). Third, the Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh were the first to go into total idolatry and they were the very first to go into captivity. By the time of Ahab the King of Israel the Syrians had taken the land of Gilead (1 Kings 22:3; 1 Chronicles 5:25,26). This could be attributed to the fact that they were too close to the surrounding nations and as such they were quickly influenced by their corrupt practices.

THE RESPONSE OF MOSES TO THE REQUEST OF THE REUBENITES AND GADITES (Numbers 32:6-15, 20-24).

“And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?” (Numbers 32:6,7).

In response to the request made by the tribes of Reuben and Gad, Moses reacted with holy indignation. He rebuked the two tribes for their request, pointing out that such request smacked of selfishness and lack of brotherly consideration for the other tribes. He accused the Reubenites of seeking to discourage other Israelites from going over into the land which God has given them. Moses assumed that the Reubenites and Gadites had an ulterior motive

for making their request. He probably feared lest another rebellion should come up, especially because the tribe of Reuben (where Dathan and Abiram belonged) were involved. He said their request could discourage the other Israelites from going over Jordan probably because: one, the remaining tribes might feel cheated that the Reubenites and Gadites had settled in a land they all contributed efforts to win.

Two, once the tribes of Reuben and Gad settled down on this side Jordan, the size of the army would greatly reduce. Therefore, those who would fight to conquer the land beyond Jordan would be fewer and that could cause them to be afraid. It would be recalled that the number of soldiers from the tribes of Reuben (43,730) and Gad (40,500) totaled 84,230. If we add to that number half of the soldiers from Manasseh, that is 26,350, then a total of 110,580 would be diminished from the entire army. Three, their action could trigger a competition among the tribes to settle in each conquered territory rather than wait until the whole land was conquered before taking their inheritance.

Question 3: *From the response of Moses to the request of Reubenites and Gadites, what caution should believers take in relating with people?*

However, from the reply of the Reubenites and Gadites, it appeared Moses misjudged their intentions. This teaches us to be patient with people and not jump to conclusions about them. We should be very cautious, especially when someone has a record of wrong doing in the past, lest we judge them on the basis of what they had done before. It is better to wait until we have all the facts before passing judgment.

After the explanation of the Reubenites and Gadites, Moses agreed to give them the land they requested on the condition that they fulfilled their promise to accompany the other tribes to go and secure their inheritance beyond Jordan. Moses said unto them, **“If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war, and will go all of you armed over Jordan before the Lord, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, and the land be subdued before the Lord; then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the Lord and before Israel: and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out”** (Number 32:20-23). Here, Moses accepted the explanation of the two tribes and upheld their proposal to help the other tribes secure their own inheritance. But he also pointed out to them the consequence of renegeing on their promise – their sin would find them out.

Question 4: *What lessons can be learnt from the attitude of Moses and the two tribes?*

There are important lessons to learn from the attitude of Moses and that of the two tribes on this occasion. Moses changed his attitude towards the Reubenites and Gadites, the moment they clarified their intentions. He did not insist on his wrong opinion concerning them. Whenever we become aware of our mistake or wrong judgment about others we should be ready to make necessary adjustment. On the side of the Reubenites and Gadites we see their willingness to help complete the conquest even though they would not share in

the land to be conquered beyond Jordan. This is most commendable and worthy of emulation. Believers must be ready to help others even though they may not derive any personal benefit from the task. The agreement of Moses to give the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half tribe of Manasseh the land east of Jordan could be seen as God's permissive will. This is because (1) Moses entered this land. But the actual inheritance of Israel was the land that Moses was not allowed to enter. However he got into the land on the east of Jordan and from there he climbed mount Nebo to look at the good land which God gave to Israel (Deuteronomy 3:25). That means then that the land of Jazer and Gilead, which the Reubenites and Gadites desired, was a little short of the proper inheritance of Israel. (2) God had said unto Moses and Aaron: "**therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given thee**" (Numbers 20:12). The fact that Moses led Israel into the land east of Jordan and even lived there for a while should be a clear indication that it was not the inheritance of Israel proper. (3) It was Joshua, not Moses, who was appointed to share the land (Joshua 1:6) and it was to be done by casting lots. Therefore this land was probably meant to be a border line or a buffer zone (Numbers 34:10).

From this, believers are instructed to avoid being satisfied with peripheral blessings. Material blessings, miracles, so called breakthroughs, etc. are comparable to inheritance on the east of Jordan. They are not to be obtained at the expense of the real inheritance in heaven. It also warns us not to be contented to stay at the fringe of Christian experiences. Every one of us should desire deeper experiences of sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism and gifts of the Spirit.

THE REACTION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE TRIBES OF REUBEN AND GAD (Numbers 32:16-19, 25-42; Joshua 22:9-34; Proverbs 15:1; 25:15; Colossians 4:6).

When Moses challenged the motive of the Reubenites and Gadites concerning their request for inheritance on the east of Jordan, they responded in a graceful manner. They explained their intention to Moses and the leaders of Israel. Rather than reacting in anger or counter-accusation, they responded with meekness. They said that they did not intend to settle down immediately but that they would only build sheepfolds for their flock, settle their young ones, while the men would accompany the other tribes to go and secure their own inheritance beyond Jordan.

Question 5: *What can believers learn from the way the Reubenites and Gadites responded to Moses?*

The response of the tribes of Reuben and Gad teaches believers the proper way to respond to accusations and misrepresentation. Even the best of men can make a mistake as to the proper judgment of our intentions or motive. At such times when we are misunderstood or accused wrongly, we must learn how to use soft answer to turn away wrath. The scriptures say, "**A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger**" and "**by long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and soft tongue breaketh the bone**" (Proverbs 15:1; 25:15). The tribes of Reuben and Gad were very strong in this

area. They manifested the same attribute when Phinehas led the tribes on the other side to challenge them concerning the altar of witness. Despite the harsh words that were used against them, they responded gracefully with soft words (Joshua 22:9-34). It appeared that the tribes of Reuben and Gad were prone to being misunderstood, as to their intentions. But on their own part, they had the grace and patience to use soft words to turn away wrath. Gideon and Abigail were other examples of people who knew the art of using soft answer to turn away wrath (Judges 8:1-33; 1 Samuel 25:10-35). New Testament believers should learn from them and obey the scriptural injunction: **“let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”** (Colossians 4:6).

Though Moses accepted the explanation of the Reubenites and Gadites, he still gave a hint that he was suspicious of them. He warned them to be true to their word; otherwise their sin would find them out. In spite of this, the Reubenites and Gadites repeated their promise and resolve to go with their brethren over Jordan. Eventually, the land of Gilead was provisionally given to them but Moses directed Eleazar the priest and Joshua to revoke the grant if they failed to fulfill their word. It is important to note that as soon as the land was given to them, they rebuilt the cities, which were previously destroyed, and settled their young ones and cattle. The half tribe of Manasseh, who also got their inheritance there, went to conquer more cities and villages and annexed them to their own portion. They changed the names of those cities they rebuilt or conquered probably to reflect a change of ownership, and to remove any traces of idolatrous link.

Though the tribes of Reuben and Gad got their inheritance on the east of Jordan, the other tribes had to wait till they crossed the Jordan before getting their inheritance. That required that they should be patient and not envious of those who have got their share of the promised blessing. The Christlike believer need to maintain a similar attitude also as God is wise and gives to all those who ask Him liberally according to His will and time. More importantly, if you are a believer you have your inheritance reserved in heaven. It is an eternal inheritance which cannot fade away, but you must ensure that you persevere in the faith until you receive it because the things that are seen now are temporal but those things that are not seen are eternal (Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4; Psalm 37:1-3).

OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY GHOST ON EARLY BELIEVERS

MEMORY VERSE: “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**).

TEXT: Acts 2:1-13

The text records the most important incident that forms the basis of all the mighty miracles and exploits in the Acts of Apostles. It explains the transformation of the erstwhile fearful and feeble disciples into a team of faithful, fearless and formidable witnesses for Christ. It also accounts for the unprecedented spread of the gospel far beyond the Judea-Israeli coasts. Many ignorant and injurious characters have been saved by the instrumentality of this divine personality in the ministry of preaching across diverse climes and cultures.

Question 1: *What hope does this unique event present for believers of today?*

This event had been prophesied by Old Testament prophets who though were moved by the Holy Spirit, looked forward earnestly to the outpouring of the Spirit in a baptismal measure as recorded in our text. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost was in fulfilment of several prophecies as well as relevant promises of Christ recorded in the gospels. This shows God’s commitment and faithfulness to His word. Contemporary believers should therefore be assured of the veracity of scripture prophecies and promises. “**...Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come...**” (Habakkuk 2:3). Two, it shows that New Testament believers stand at a higher pedestal to their counterparts in previous dispensation. What remained a promise to them has now become a possession for us. Three, that Christ is not physically present due to His ascension need not diminish anything from God’s programme for His church. This is because the Holy Spirit is consistently present to execute God’s programmes and comfort, guide, enable and empower the church to achieve all that He has purposed for us (John 14:26,27). Therefore, the outpouring was a benefit to the initial recipients as well as subsequent generations of Christians. Four, the record of His mighty impact on many people and nations should stir us to further labour and intercede for our unsaved colleagues and communities.

PERIOD OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT (Acts 2:1; Exodus 23:14-16; Leviticus 23:15,16; Ezekiel 36:25-28; Joel 2:28-32; John 7:37-39; 16:7-15; Acts 1:4,5)

The outpouring of the Holy Ghost came after Christ had ascended to heaven. This agrees with His earlier declaration that after His departure, the Comforter will come. **“For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you”** (John 16:7). This promise became a reality only as the disciples conformed to Christ’s command to **“tarry in the city of Jerusalem”**. Since then, the baptism in the Holy Ghost has always been preceded by patient waiting and diligent praying. Those who haste away from intensive prayers cannot hope to partake of the experience.

Question 2: *What lesson can we learn from the timing of the outpouring of the Spirit?*

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come...” (verse 1). The great event took place on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish feast also called the feast of weeks. It comes up fifty days after the Passover. It was one of the three annual feast every adult male Hebrew was expected to attend (Deuteronomy 16:16). True to type, many of the Jews in diaspora and proselytes from different countries and continents had come to join their counterparts at home to serve the Lord at the feast. It was at such a time when so many people (strangers and foreigners) were present that God brought about this spectacular event. The promised influences of the Spirit were withheld until the greatest possible number of Jews should be present at Jerusalem at the same time, and thus an opportunity be afforded of preaching the gospel to vast multitudes in the very place where the Lord Jesus was crucified, and also an opportunity be afforded of sending the gospel by them into distant parts of the earth. How Christians need to make good use of such periods and locations which attract multitudes to declare the gospel. Festive seasons, sporting events, holiday resorts, and others should be used to publicise special programs, testify to God’s goodness and win souls for Christ.

In obedience to Christ’s command, the disciples remained in Jerusalem praying and waiting for the **“promise of the Father”**. Despite apparent diversities in many areas, they were in perfect harmony, “in one accord”, in an upper room (Acts 1:13). An upper room was usually a chamber built on the flat roof of a house. Though this location did not offer the grandeur of a cathedral or the sacredness of a temple, it was consecrated by the sanctity of the saintly disciples. The condition was right enough to attract the third Person in the blessed Trinity to their midst. Christians today can also enjoy the resident company of the Spirit into their homes and groups when, like the disciples in our text, they develop, maintain and manifest the qualities of transparent purity,

common commitment to Christ's cause, consistent prayer and resolute anticipation of divine promise.

PROOF OF THE SPIRIT'S INFILLING (Acts 2:2-4, Malachi 3:1-3, Exodus 19:16,18, Joel 2:28-30, Luke 24:49, Acts 10:44-46)

The way the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples at Pentecost was reminiscent of the experience at Sinai when God gave the law. **"There were thunders and lightening and a thick cloud ... Sinai was altogether on a smoke ...and the whole mount quaked greatly"** (Exodus 19:16,18).

Question 3: *What is the significance of the wind and fire at Pentecost?*

At Sinai, these elements proved the presence of the Almighty. They were signs that God had descended into their midst in His awesome majesty. The scene sent fears down the hearts of the children of Israel in the wilderness. No one could be frivolous at this time as every one trembled because of divine visitation. At Pentecost, the divine Personality descended with startling suddenness typified by wind and tongues of fire. **"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind ... and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire..."** (verse 2,3). Wind is indicative of life and activity (Ezekiel 37:9,10). One cannot remain dormant or inactive when he is filled with the Spirit. He becomes an active soldier bearing the banner of the cross wherever he goes. Fire is a consumer and a powerful cleansing agent. When the Holy Spirit fills a believer, He consumes all the chaff and takes him to a higher level of Christian service than at sanctification.

Question 4: *What difference does the Holy Ghost baptism make in the life of the Christian?*

The outpouring of the Holy Ghost was not done in secret. The incident at Pentecost was known to the beneficiaries as well as the spectators. A Spirit-filled Christian cannot be oblivious of his experience, and those around him cannot but notice the change in him. One, the Bible comes alive to him in a new way. The Spirit illuminates his heart and makes the written Word a living word. Faith increases and the Christian life becomes more fulfilling. Two, his seeming weaknesses give way to strength as he is enabled by the Spirit to do exploits for God where he had hitherto been ineffective. Three, the divine dynamite within his soul transforms him more and more into the image of his Saviour. Four, he becomes more passionately concerned for ignorant, hell-bound souls. His preaching becomes so piercing that it convicts, and so convincing that it converts. Five, the Spirit comforts and guides in every life situation, such

that the Spirit-filled believer enjoys uninterrupted stability in the face of life's vicissitudes.

“And they began to speak with other tongues ...” (verse 4). The “speaking in tongues” was the initial expressible evidence of true baptism. The use of language previously unknown and unlearned to be baptised has remained a consistent New Testament proof of the experience. It was not (and it is not supposed to be) a product of any didactic process: **“the Spirit gave them utterance”**. Any contrary notion about this is erroneous and dangerous. It is unscriptural to teach others, or submit oneself to be taught how to speak in tongue. Such monotonous ranting at best makes mockery of a divine and sacred experience. On the other hand, the genuine experience which issues from the true source is refreshing. It is intelligible and comprehensible to those who understand and speak the language. Also, it serves the purposes of the Almighty whenever it is in operation.

Question 5: *What are the prerequisites for the Spirit's infilling?*

At Pentecost, all the one hundred and twenty believers were filled. Gender, age, social or economic consideration did not constitute any constraint to any of them. This agrees with Joel's prophecy: **“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...”** (Joel 2:28). Today, as many as have similar spiritual credential of salvation, sanctification, thirst, faith and prayerful expectation are all eligible for the Spirit's baptism. It is also noteworthy that the baptism was limited to only those in the upper room. They all separated themselves from the allurements of Jerusalem in order to fully concentrate on seeking the Lord. Each passing day, they consecrated themselves, forgetting self and preferring God to all else. Such separation from worldly distraction and unalloyed loyalty are still basic requirements for the experience today.

PURPOSE OF THE SPIRIT'S FILLING (Acts 2:5-13; Matthew 9:36,37; Acts 1:8)

The peculiarity of the setting and the presence of the tarrying disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost was more than a coincidence. The eagerness of God for the salvation of the world was not in doubt. Christ had full knowledge of the extent of man's depravity, the devil's great wrath against mankind, the inadequacy of physical or mental might for the task and the fact of the cross being the sole remedy for every human malady. So he commanded His disciples to tarry to be filled with power from on high. As soon as they were baptized, they had indescribable courage and power to carry on Christ's commission. Their weakness and timidity gave way to strength and boldness. They could no longer live like chained, caged prisoners **“for fear of the Jews”**. Under the Holy Spirit's

influence, they prayed so much and so loud that they attracted attention of people – men and women, Jews and proselytes, devout and deviants.

Question 6: *Why were the believers baptised at Pentecost?*

One major purpose of the baptism was to publicize Christ through believers: to make Christ known to hearts which have not known or received Him. The event “**was noised around**” to gather people to the place where people could hear the gospel preached to them full and free as “**the multitude came together**”. Two, it is to equip ordinary Christians to do the extra-ordinary. “... **Behold, are all these not Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongues, wherein we were born?**” Galileans were usually looked down upon as rustic and unlearned. Yet in spite of the negative ascriptions, God used them beyond their natural abilities. No matter how unimpressive your background, if you can tarry to be Spirit-filled, you could become a mighty weapon for mighty exploits. Three, seeming impossible things become possible through the operation of the Spirit’s gifts. The sick are healed, the oppressed are delivered, the impoverished are prospered, human secrets are miraculously revealed and demonic deeds are destroyed (Acts 3:1-8; 2 Kings 6:12; John 4:16,18,29; Acts 16:16-18). Four, it was to praise the Lord, to declare His goodness and glory in such a way that His creatures will come to adore Him and submit to His authority.

“**Others mocking said, these men are full of wine ...**” (verse 13). This is evidence of the characteristic lack of discernment among those that are still in the flesh. Those who are devoid of Christ’s saving grace are often prone to misinterpret spiritual things, and at times they slight Spirit-filled ministers. Unfortunately, such stand the risk of suffering eternal punishment for blaspheming against the Holy Ghost. Beware, lest you be caught in such an evil net. “**Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God ... the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee**” (Acts 8:22).

The Holy Ghost baptism is the secret behind the growth of the church, in spite of various challenges and unrelenting adversities. It is the power behind genuine and effective gospel ministers. It is not intended as a once in a lifetime experience. Scripture records continuous outpouring, infilling and refilling after Pentecost. It further promises a continuing rehash for subsequent generations of believers, including ours (Acts 4:30,31; 2:39).

PETER PREACHES WITH PENTECOSTAL POWER

MEMORY VERSE: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

TEXT: Acts 2:14-47

In our last study, we examined the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the waiting disciples at Pentecost which marked the dawn of a new dispensation. As the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples, they began to speak in new and previously unlearned languages. Bewildered, the native speakers of those languages who heard the disciples speaking in tongues, sought for an explanation to the new thing that had happened. In fact, some of them had actually started adducing wrong reasons for what had happened and what they were hearing and seeing. But Peter rose to the occasion.

In this first post-Pentecost sermon, he explained the incident as a fulfilment of prophetic promise made in the Old Testament. In fact, he proved through the newly acquired power, that all Old Testament prophecies had been fulfilled in Jesus because Jesus is the Messiah (Christ); that Jesus is pre-eminent; that Christ is God’s exalted Prince; and that because He resurrected, Christ has power to save all sinners who repent of sins. The speech had significant effect on the audience. Many of his hearers surrendered their lives to Christ, submitted themselves for water baptism, and became part of the Church – the family of God. In a nut-shell, the details and effects of this sermon form the heart of our study this week.

PERSONALITY OF THE PENTECOSTAL PREACHER (Acts 2:14; John 1:40-42; Matthew 4:17-20).

Peter “**was a man subject to like passions as we are.**” He was a sinner saved by grace. Salvation is a non-negotiable experience for a gospel minister. An unsaved preacher is a saviour of death unto death. He who must bring others to Christ must first have been brought to Him. Peter had come to Christ at the invitation of Andrew, his brother. He had been called, as a fisher of men, to preach the gospel. He had been part of a successful preaching expedition when Jesus sent the twelve apostles out (Luke 9:1-5). Yet, Peter had sometimes been at low ebb. He had an unenviable record of being rash and boastful (Matthew 16:33). He thrice denied the Lord at Caiaphas’ palace (Matthew 26:69-75). He led seven other disciples to abandon the ministry for his previous secular preoccupation (John 21:1-17). He had been forgiven and restored. This was a new Peter: humble but bold. His confidence stemmed from the Pentecostal power that just descended on him and other disciples which has turned him into a powerful and dynamic preacher. This is why in our text, he preaches with supernatural unction.

Question 1: *What can we learn from the positive change in Peter’s life?*

The change in Peter's life is a credit to Christ. The Lord's forbearance and compassion are quite noteworthy and challenging. Despite various evident weaknesses, Christ identified the willingness in Peter's spirit. He had noticed the 'stone' character in him, and had laboured to rid him of undesirable elements (John 1:40-42). Being conscious of Satan's desire to sift this beloved apostle, Christ had personally prayed that Satan might not have the last laugh over him. He sent His angel to notify Peter, in particular, of the resurrection (Mark 16:7). This was to douse the impact of the apostle's grief for this horrible denial of his beloved Saviour and Lord. It was also meant to be an avenue for reconciliation and re-commission. Christ also sought for him (and his company) at the sea of Tiberias. There he soothed his weary, hungry soul. At last, the Lord's love paid off. The result was the erstwhile errant apostle's thrice contrite pledge of reciprocal love and life-time commitment to the Saviour's cause. How mature believers need to bear with weak brethren! Sincere intercessory prayer support can go a long way in defeating Satan's schemes against believers' lives. Practical care can also help to establish the unsteady. Those who have been unstable are here encouraged that they can be forgiven and stabilized in the faith by the power of God if they return sincerely. And in spite of how low you have sunk, God can forgive and make you useful to His kingdom.

Like Peter, beneficiaries of such thoughtful concern can grow up to become earnest contenders for the faith and effective defenders of the gospel. Two, Peter's life proves that the scope of a Christian's future success is not conditioned on his past failures. The prerequisites are current spiritual experiences, consecration to receive heaven's bestowals and readiness to respond to divine promptings. The Scripture is replete with cases of those who were fraught with faults but were later mightily used by God. Moses, Jonah and Jeremiah are notable characters who overcame their initial reluctance to become mighty agents for execution of divine projects. The lesson here is that those with records of failings or feelings of inadequacy should put the past behind them and prepare to work for Jesus with Pentecostal power.

Question 2: *What are the marks of a true Pentecostal preacher?*

A true Pentecostal preacher is one who has been filled by the Holy Spirit. Having tasted of God's grace and been baptized by the divine flame, he is ever ready to fearlessly testify of Christ (Acts 9:17-20). Two, he is committed to continual prayer and ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Three, he is sensitive to God's leading and willing to move or stay at His bidding (Acts 16:6-10). Four, he is totally yielded to the Lord and willing to be used in any capacity the Lord approves (Acts 5:15,16). Five, he is ready to joyfully suffer for Christ's cause (Acts 5:41). Six, he contemns any present gain that may stand in the way of eternal rewards (Philippians 3:7,8).

PORTRAIT OF PENTECOSTAL PREACHING (Acts 2:15-36; Acts 17:16-34; 26:24,25).

Apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost paints a true picture of messages influenced by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary that the message be closely examined against the backdrop of quite a lot of wrong notions people have of Pentecostal preaching. Many modern day preachers and believers equate Pentecostal preaching with acrobatic agility in the pulpit area, rhetoric or theatrical prowess. Some even take it to be weird or eccentric pulpit manners. For others, it is tongue-speaking

during sermons or imitating foreign preachers even in the most local settings. Pentecostal preaching is basically Christ-centred.

Question 3: What are the features of genuine Pentecostal preaching?

Our text shows six features of Pentecostal preaching. These are calm response to situations, complete reliance on Scriptures, convicting rebuke for sin, clear reference to the Saviour, call to repentance from sin and call to separation from the excesses and lust of this present evil world.

One, calm response to situations. Despite the wrong accusation by some mockers, Peter was not provoked. His response was calm. **“For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day”** (verse 15). His justification for his assertion was logical. The Jewish day usually started around six in morning. As at the time of this incident (around nine in the morning), pub houses and booze shops were yet to be opened: **“they that be drunken are drunken in the night”** (1 Thessalonians 5:7). His defence was not offensive or insulting to the audience. This teaches that the pain, agony and anguish of Spirit-filled believers subsume under the overriding interests of God. The Holy Spirit comforts the saint and gently convicts the sinner. Therefore, whoever He indwells, cannot be violent against any.

Two, complete reliance on Scriptures. **“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ...”** (verse 16). Here Peter began to appeal to relevant Old Testament scripture prophecies. He quoted both Joel and the Psalms, off hand. This is proof that he was an avid reader of God’s word. This is a challenge to those who can not memorise scripture verses correctly. **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15). Jesus Christ Himself validates and relied heavily on Scriptures (Matthew 5:17,18). Reading and studying from it must be a daily Christian duty. Preaching without reference to Scriptures is like trying to wash without water. **“Faith cometh by hearing ... the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). The preacher and believer must rely completely on the Bible because it is the final authority on every matter.

Three, convicting rebuke for sin. Every preacher must ensure that this is done in their messages. On no occasion must a preacher eulogize any act of sin. Sin must be correctly labeled and not be called by any other euphemistic name. There are occasions, however, where the preacher must be careful to draw a line between convicting rebuke for sin and being abusive or uncouth.

Question 4: What is the focus of Peter’s preaching?

Four, clear reference to the Saviour. Peter skillfully linked his sermon to Christ. The point he made was that the promises foretold by Joel was fulfilled through Jesus. **“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he has shed forth this, which ye now see and hear”** (Act 2:3). As a build up to this however, he summarized Christ’s miracle and their guilt for complicity in unjustly crucifying Him (Act 2:22,23). He also spoke of Christ’s resurrection, ascension and future coronation. As he drove the point home, he proved that Christ was more excellent than David, Israel’s best king (Act 2:24-36). By these he showed that Christ is an unparalleled, incomparable Character. He made it very clear that Jesus was the long expected Messiah and Lord of all. For any preaching to be effective or profitable, Christ must

be the central theme, the core around whom every speech, allusion or illustration revolves (Luke 24:47).

Apostle Peter's sermon also included a call to repentance from sin and separation from the excesses and lusts of this present evil world. It is not enough for a preacher to rebuke sin or paint it in darkest colour; sinners must be called out of it. Until this is done, the business of preaching is incomplete. Messages that do not emphasise calls to repentance and separation from sins are patently unfinished jobs. Preachers and soulwinners must bear in mind that when they preach, they must also call sinners to repentance from sin and separation from the excesses and lusts of this present evil world.

EFFECTS OF PENTECOSTAL PREACHING (Acts 2:37-41; 16:30,31; Luke 3:10; Psalm 119:105).

As the audience felt the powerful effect of the message, they sensed an imminent danger if nothing was done about their load of guilt. So, with contrition they implored "...**what shall we do?**" (Acts 2:37). This is the essence of every preaching effort: to prick the heart of the audience, to make them uncomfortable in sin, to make them to seek pardon, to draw them to Christ the Saviour. The summary of the effect of Peter's preaching was that about three thousand people made commitment to the Lord. A contemporary example of the effect of Pentecostal preaching is the one that was felt by sinners in the audience when Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon titled, '*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*'. Testimonies abound that during and immediately after the sermon, sinners rushed to surrender their lives to Christ for fear of dropping into hell.

Question 5: What are the effects of true Pentecostal preaching?

The truth is that true Pentecostal preaching cannot leave the sinner the way he was. It leads the sinner to repentance. True Pentecostal preaching brings illumination to the sinner's mind. That the sinner is cut to the heart and realizing that he is not where he should have been are evident in the questions, "**What shall we do?**", "**What must I do to be saved?**" and "**What shall we do then?**" It must be emphasized here that when sinners are asking these questions, they are being convicted by the Holy Spirit. They must not be left to themselves at this critical stage; they must be led to repentance.

Two, it seeks to prepare the penitent for further spiritual blessings: "**ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 2:38). Three, Pentecostal preaching emphasises separation from this present evil world (Acts 2:40; Galatians 1:4; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17,18). Four, it stirs the audience's faith to receive heaven-sent solutions to human needs and debilities (Acts 14:8-10). Five, it paralyses the power of Satan and his agents, thus setting people free from demonic captivity.

POSSIBILITIES THROUGH PENTECOSTAL POWER (Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 51:11-13; Ezekiel 37:1-10; Luke 4:18,19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

The Holy Ghost is the Universal Superintendent of the Church on earth. He directs and oversees its activities in Christ's stead in accordance with Christ's will. He brings the authority of divinity to bear on human efforts in God's cause.

Question 6: What are the effects of Pentecostal power in the church?

With Pentecostal fire, wonderful, extra-ordinary successes will be recorded in Christian living and ministry. One significant effect of Pentecostal preaching is the preservation of converts in the faith. That the converts sought common edification and gave diligent attention to the apostles' doctrine was proof of the genuineness of the conversion (Acts 2:42). Till date, compliance with Christ's teaching is the acid test of the authenticity of any claim to salvation experience. Two, it leads to a deep sense of unity among the brethren, and fosters co-operation among the leaders. Certainly, Peter could not have baptized the three thousand converts in one day, all alone.

Members and leaders in contemporary church setting should complement, not compete with one another in the work of the ministry. Three, with the Pentecostal fire burning, brethren will delight in fellowship as it was in the early church. They will meet together for service as well as prayers. They will also willingly part with personal property to meet the needs of others with like precious faith. Four, there will be manifestation of divine presence and power. The gifts of the Spirit will be in operation, and many signs and wonders will be done (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18,19). Five, with the Holy Ghost in action, hearts of stone will melt and many will find irresistible attraction in the church. The outcome of this will be that souls will be added to the church daily (Acts 5:14). Six, there will be no hiding place for the antics of the devil (Acts 5:1-11; 16:16-18). His secrets will be discovered and his efforts thwarted by the Spirit's anointing.

The outpouring of the Spirit is of immense benefit to the church. Early believers experienced great breakthroughs through His operation. The church of our time cannot do without Him. Each believer has a responsibility to ensure that he does not, in any way, impede the move of the Holy Ghost. Rather, we should all strive to keep our lives, families and churches in such a saintly state that will attract His divine power and keep Him perpetually resident in us and working through us.

THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

MEMORY VERSE: “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**).

TEXT: Acts 3:1-26

Chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles deals with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Christ on the day of Pentecost. As a result of that experience, they were empowered to preach the gospel and do many miracles. Their preaching led to the conversion of multitudes of people who came together to form what is commonly called the early Church. Our text details the first account of a miracle of healing performed on a cripple by the apostles. Therefore, it gives believers a pattern for ministry and a yardstick to measure the genuineness of signs and wonders. This account also reveals the misery and helplessness of men due to disease, the power of God to turn hopeless situations around, the message of salvation and its power to save from sin, sickness and Satan.

THE MASTER KEY THAT UNLOCKS HEAVEN’S DOOR (Acts 3:1; Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Acts 6:4)

Our text opens with Peter and John going to the temple to pray at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. At this time, the disciples still used the temple as their meeting place; therefore they participated in the regular prayers. Traditionally, Jews pray three times a day (Psalm 55:17). Peter and John were often mentioned together in the book of Acts and at this time, they were seen going to pray. It is good when believers are associated together in a noble cause. The idea of having prayer partners, evangelism partners etc is still useful and helpful today.

Question 1: *Why is prayer an absolute necessity for true followers of Christ?*

After the ascension of Christ, the disciples had evidently learnt their lesson on the need to pray without ceasing. They had come to realize that prayer is the master key that unlocks heaven. This could be attested to as they gathered in the upper room, awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Ghost as promised by Christ (Acts 1:8, 14; Luke 24:49). Even after their enduement with power by the Holy Ghost, they continued in prayer daily with one accord in the temple (Acts 2:46). In fact, the apostles considered prayer a major duty, because they believe by so doing they would be able to sustain ministry fire, power and passion and still manage crises, solve problems and keep the fellowship of the brethren.

Rather than lose focus, they appointed men to serve tables while they gave themselves “**continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word**” (Acts 6:4). This teaches believers the necessity of regular fervent prayers if we are to succeed in preaching the word and the task of world evangelization.

Not much can be done without effectual fervent prayers. It was at the time Peter and John were going to pray that the miracle in our text took place. Also, Peter had the vision to reach out to the household of Cornelius while on the housetop praying (Acts 10:9). Without prayer, the Church will lack vision for its programmes and the power to execute them. Consequently, her mission in the world will become virtually impossible. Therefore, believers must develop effective prayer lives so that they will be able to accomplish all that God has appointed them to do.

It is very instructive that the early Church continued “**instant in prayer**” before and after their experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit. They did not consider prayer a tool to be used and discarded when the object desired had been obtained; rather, they took it as the life wire of their fellowship and ministry. In like manner, believers should pray regularly and fervently to renew their spiritual power and receive daily freshness from God.

Though it is not mandatory to go to a particular place or fix a particular time to pray before God answers, yet it helps when we have a ‘closet’ we can resort to for regular prayers. It also helps when we discipline ourselves to observe regular prayer periods. It is often said that “a prayerless Christian is a powerless Christian”; and, certainly, “he that has no place and time to pray will soon cease to pray altogether”.

THE MIRACLE OF HEALING BY PETER AND JOHN (Acts 3:2-10)

As Peter and John were about to enter the temple through the gate that is called Beautiful, they saw “**a certain man lame from the mother’s womb**” at the gate begging for alms from those that come to worship in the temple. The condition and position of the lame man hold some useful instructions to believers.

Question 2: *Point out some useful lessons believers can learn from the condition and position of the lame man.*

First, it portrays the misery and helplessness of mankind at the effect of the fall. The man’s misfortune was not in any way the result of his own personal sin. It was a condition he was born with and a case of congenital abnormality which could have affected any one of Adam’s race (John 9:1-3). Second, this man sat to beg within the precincts of the temple but the religious leaders were totally powerless to heal him. In a similar way, there are so many people today in religious assemblies who are spiritually paralyzed but their leaders are unable to help them in any major way. If anything at all, the best they do is to toss a few temporal blessings into their hands while they remain in their spiritual predicament. This shows the great need of believers with anointing and power of the Holy Ghost to meet the needs and challenges that confront men in this generation. The world’s needs and challenges are so enormous that human efforts and ingenuity will not suffice except the power of God from on high.

Third, the strategy of the lame man or of those who positioned him at the Beautiful gate is to enable those coming in and going out of the temple to see him. Jewish worshippers place great value on giving of alms. Fourth, believers can also learn from the constancy and diligence with which this man begged alms. He was laid daily at the temple gate, probably for a good part of his over forty years of life (Acts 4:22). Do we come daily to God's throne of grace to receive help in time of need? Fifth, the condition of the lame man reminds believers of their duty to the needy and those who are physically challenged. Those who profess faith in Christ must be generous and charitable towards others. On the other hand, those who believe in Christ should not see their physical challenge as a disability. It is wrong to allow physical deformity to crush the human spirit to the extent that one becomes a total liability to others. By the operation of God's grace a physically challenged person can do great things for God and live a fulfilled life.

When the lame man saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked them for alms. Then Peter and John **"said, Look on us"**. They said this in order to get his full attention and secure his cooperation for what would follow. As expected the lame man gave attention to them, expecting to receive something. Then Peter said, **"silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"** (Acts 3:6). Peter took the man by the hand and immediately he was healed. As a result of the miracle, multitudes of people came together full of wonder and amazement. Now healed, the lame man also entered into the temple, leaping, walking and praising God.

Question 3: What are the lessons to learn from this notable miracle through Peter and John?

From this recorded miracle through Peter and John, we learn that God can use us today to perform signs and wonders in the church. Second, those who are sick or infirm can expect much more than physical help from the church and receive healing for their infirmities. The lame man asked for money but got healing instead. Third, genuine miracles, signs and wonders, are still part of God's programme for the Church age. Fourth, the gift of miracles is a God-given credential of true ministers of the gospel who are baptized with the Holy Ghost. Though all believers may not perform miracles, there are some who are gifted to work miracles (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28-30).

Fifth, there is power in the name of Jesus to do exploits. Before He left, Jesus gave believers the authority to use His name in service and prayer (John 14:13,14; 15:116; 16:23,24). The Christian power of attorney confers on him the right to carry on gospel work on behalf of Christ. However, it should be noted that the name of Jesus should not be used as a mere appendage to prayer. Mere pronouncement of the name without genuine faith and personal commitment to the person of Christ will not bring the desired result (Acts 19:13-17).

Sixth, the lame man went into the temple together with Peter and John, leaping and praising the Lord. We must give God glory and praise for every blessing received from Him. Seventh, the miracle presented Peter and John the opportunity to preach the gospel to the multitude that gathered to witness the

demonstration of God's power. This shows the real purpose of signs and wonders in the gospel ministry.

Question 4: *What is the real purpose of miracles in the gospel ministry?*

God uses miracles to set men free from the hand of the enemy and as a strategy to draw souls to Himself. Miracles also confirm the message of the gospel. As in the case of the lame man, miracles also exalt Christ and demonstrate His power over the enemy. It is God's plan that miracles should not be an end itself but a means to an end. It should be a forerunner to prepare the way for the gospel message. Believers should therefore avoid the age old error of seeking after miracles. Rather, they should seek after righteousness, godliness, faith love, patience, meekness (1 Timothy 6:11).

PETER'S MESSAGE TO THE MULTITUDE (Acts 3:11-26; 2:14-36)

As a result of the healing of the lame man, Peter seized the opportunity to declare the gospel of salvation as he did on the day of Pentecost. It is important to note the way the early disciples seized every opportunity to preach. In the same way, we should use every opportunity we have to declare the truth of the word of God.

Question 5: *Point out the major points in Peter's sermon after the healing of the lame man.*

In his message, Peter emphasised that it was not his own holiness or power that made the lame man whole, but faith in the name of Jesus. True servants of God do not exalt self or draw people's attention to themselves but to the Saviour. They give God glory for every manifestation of His power. Peter emphasized Jesus as both Saviour and Lord and One in whose Name the miracle had been wrought. Though he wanted them to feel the guilt of their sins, he was equally forthright and passionate in inviting his hearers to repent and be converted so that their sins could be blotted out. He wanted them to have faith in God.

To convince his hearers, Peter also made reference to Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ from where he showed them that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. His sermon was not to entertain his hearers, but a solemn and an awakening appeal to draw their souls out of sin to the Saviour. As believers, if we are going to win the lost to Christ, our messages must feature the basic truths of the gospel. Like Peter, we must emphasize repentance from sin and faith in the atoning work of Christ at Calvary (Acts 3:19-21).

PERSECUTION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (**Matthew 5:10**).

TEXT: Acts 4:1-22

After the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples at Pentecost, they seemed to have had a brief favour with the Jewish people. This was especially so because the disciples still used the temple as their meeting place and participated in the daily prayers (Acts 2:46; 3:1). However, as soon as they began to openly preach the gospel, placing emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus, they were persecuted by the religious leaders who felt their religion was in jeopardy. They felt that the disciples had no right to preach without recourse to them as custodians of the law and religious authority. At first, the persecution came in form of warnings, threats and beatings, but later graduated to imprisonment and outright martyrdom. Unfortunately for these enemies of the gospel, their persecution became opportunity for greater exploits for the disciples.

Our text opens with one such persecution occasioned by the healing of the lame man at the gate that is called Beautiful. And, as usual, Peter and John seized the opportunity to preach and point men to the resurrected Christ. This did not go well with these religious leaders and captain of the temple who promptly ordered their arrest and put them on trial before the Council.

Question 1: *Why were the Sadducees in lead of the persecution against the early Church?*

It is on note that during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, the Jewish religious leaders opposed His teachings vehemently. Among the sects that often spearheaded the opposition were the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Moreover, the declaration of Jesus as the coming King offended them because they were wealthy and favoured by the Roman government. In an attempt therefore to keep their influence and power, they resisted any doctrine or movement that threatened their authority. For these reasons, they became the major sect that began the persecution of the disciples.

ARREST OF PETER AND JOHN (Acts 4:1-4; 5:17,25; 8:1; 12:1).

In their message, Peter and John proclaimed Jesus as the crucified and resurrected King. They preached that He is the Prophet coming to set up His everlasting Kingdom and had been spoken of by Moses and other prophets. For this they invited men to repent and believe in His atoning work for the remission of their sins. These claims however, gave the religious leaders great distress and concern who ordered them to be taken into custody because they taught the people without rabbinical authority.

Question 2: *What is the main reason for the persecution of believers?*

Though Jesus had predicted that His disciples would be persecuted by the people of the world, it is curious that it began here from the religious leaders. In the same way, it is common to find in churches today that those who stand for the truth and oppose ungodliness and sin are persecuted by so-called church leaders. Believers who decide to obey Christ's command on the great commission are given names and are sometimes excommunicated because they would not compromise the truth of the Scripture. This implies that Christians can only avoid persecution when they refuse to obey the Lord or live in compromise with the world. Persecution becomes inevitable therefore for those who must stand for the truth. **"Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Question 3: *Mention different kinds of persecutions believers can face today and the outcome.*

The persecution of believers can take different forms. For Peter and John, in our text, it came in form of arrest, imprisonment, and threat (Acts 4:3,17,18,21). Persecution can also come in form of insults and evil speaking (Matthew 5:11), contempt and abuse (John 8:48), excommunication from the synagogue or temple (Luke 6:22; John 9:22, 34; 16:2); destruction of property, denial of right and death (Acts 7:57-60; 12:1,2). At different times, persecutors devise new strategies to oppress Christians through torture, scourging, burning at the stake, throwing to lions, dragging to death, and so on.

The aim of persecutors is to stop the gospel from spreading further (Act 4:17) but instead its spread was accelerated (Acts 8:1,4;11:19-21). In God's own wisdom and contrary to the expectation of the persecutors, persecution has often accelerated the spread of the gospel. As a matter of fact, the persecution of believers led to the fulfillment of the great commission such that the disciples spread the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Someone rightly said: "that which threatens to destroy the Church often become the instrument of its promotion and expansion". Despite the persecution of Peter and John, over five thousand people were converted to Christ through their message.

During persecution believers are given opportunity to preach the gospel to their persecutors both in words and by action because they are able to demonstrate their Christ-like nature in practical terms. At such times the persecutors are able to witness the peace, serenity, boldness, determination and total commitment of believers to Christ and His message.

Apart from accelerating the spread of the gospel, persecution also tests and refines the faith of true believers. Like sift, it separates the chaff from the grain, superficial professors of faith from true believers. In time of persecution, those who are in church because of temporal benefits are easily swept away, leaving those who are genuinely committed to Christ. Above all, Jesus said: **"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake"** (Matthew 5:11).

THE APOSTLES' DEFENCE BEFORE THE COUNCIL (Acts 4:5-12; 5:27-33; Matthew 10:18-19)

After their arrest, Peter and John were put in detention till the following day because it was already evening and the religious court would not sit at night. The following morning, the Jewish Council or Sanhedrin questioned the source of their power and authority to preach. On this Council were Annas and Caiaphas, two notorious figures involved in trying Christ. Peter, empowered by the Holy Ghost, declared that it was through faith in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they killed but raised from the dead that the lame man was made whole. Without being apologetic, he told them that Christ is the stone which the builders rejected which God has made the head of the corner. Then he affirmed: **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

Question 4: *What lessons can we learn from the boldness of Peter before the Council?*

From the boldness of Peter believers see the need for courage to obey and fulfill the great commission. In the face of serious opposition and intimidation, believers must be courageous to declare the truth. Second, Christians can only face the challenges of preaching the gospel to a hostile world by being empowered by the Holy Ghost. This can be noticed in Peter who before now was timid and fearful, unable to stand for His Master but is now bold and courageous because of the experience at Pentecost. Every believer should seek to receive the power of the Holy Ghost for effective Christian life and ministry. Third, the teaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central message of the gospel. It was a recurring message of the apostles and it should be our emphasis as well.

Fourth, like Peter, believers must not hesitate to emphasize that Jesus is the only hope of salvation for the world. Fifth, we should not be afraid when we are persecuted for the sake of the gospel. Learning from the case of Peter and John, we should trust God to give us inspiration when responding to our persecutors' interrogation. Sixth, though Peter and John were uneducated by Jewish standards, they confounded the religious Council with their wisdom, courage and Scripture knowledge. This teaches us that God uses weak instruments to achieve His great purposes. In doing God's work, no one should despair or feel inferior because of little academic qualification. The most important and indispensable quality is to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

THREAT AND INTIMIDATION FROM THE SANHEDRIN (Acts 4:13:22; 5:34-40)

When the Council saw the boldness of Peter and John, and recognizing that they were uneducated men, they were amazed and concluded that their power and boldness must have come from their association with Jesus. **“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13). Here is a great challenge to those who profess personal relationship with Jesus. People

must see clear evidence of transformation in our lives if we truly belong to Christ. The surest way to convince others and make them believe in Christ is to let them see the change that Christ has made in us.

Though some hardened persecutors may be willingly blind to God's grace in a believer's life, as in the case of this religious leaders who themselves testified that a **"notable miracle hath been done"**, people should have convincing proofs of a Christian's conversion and transformation.

Question 5: *From the action of the Jewish religious Council, what lessons can we learn about some people's unbelief and Satan's ploy to hinder the gospel?*

Members of the religious Council found themselves in a dilemma. They were confronted with convincing proofs of Christ's resurrection and manifestation of His power through the apostles. These, the Council admitted that they could not deny. The reasonable response would be to believe in Christ as Saviour, but they were unwilling to do so. Therefore, they embarked on a futile effort to hinder further spread of the gospel. They said **"But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name"** (Acts 4:17).

From the action of the religious leaders, it is evident that unbelief is not basically due to ignorance of the facts but a willful, deliberate decision to reject the truth. Second, the main target of the devil is to prevent the spread of the gospel. Therefore every believer should ensure that they do not cooperate with him. Third, a major strategy of Satan is to use the weapon of threats and fear to keep believers from venturing into evangelism. But Jesus warned us not to fear those who can only kill the body but cannot kill the soul. We should not allow fear impede our efforts to reach out to the dying world. Our resources, gifts and faculties should be deployed to winning souls for the Master without fearing the devil's counter-efforts because the Lord is with us **"always, even unto the end of the world"**.

Question 6: *From Peter's response to the threat of the religious leaders, point out an important principle about exercise of authority?*

The Sanhedrin eventually called Peter and John to the Council and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. **"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"** (Acts 5:19,20). In this answer, Peter and John pointed out an important principle in the exercise of authority. Even though God has placed men in different positions of authority, whenever human authority conflicts with God's, the former should give way. It is an abuse of privilege when men attempt to overrule God's prerogative. This is true, whether in the church, home or office. The authority of parents over their children, or that of the husband over the wife can only be obeyed so long as they are in conformity to God's authority. If there is violation of God's law in a demand, no matter from which quarters, it should be disobeyed. We must obey God rather than men.

Being an adult of over forty years of age, and with the crowd jubilating and glorifying God for the miracle, the religious leaders were confounded and had to

release the apostles. They were unable to harm the apostles, partly because the lame man stood by them and mainly because the Lord is their Shepherd. This teaches believers that God knows how to handle our persecutors and silence our adversaries. All we need do is to remain faithful and steadfast in our commitment to Him.

Persecution can not stop the work of God. Rather, it helps in the spread of it as believers endure, apply godly wisdom and do not compromise godly standards. Jesus Christ was persecuted. And saints like Paul the apostle, James, Stephen, among others who suffered imprisonment, ridicule, chastisement, threatening, withdrawal of privileges, etc. did not stop serving God until they passed on to enjoy their eternal rewards.

THE EARLY CHURCH RENEWED

MEMORY VERSE: “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness” (**Acts 4:31**).

TEXT: Acts 4:23-37

The preceding verses to our text reveal that the Jewish religious leaders could not sleep over the new wave of spiritual revival that drew multitudes to the Lord. And as they began to persecute the early church in order to contain the revival, these religious leaders discovered that it was only by their association with Christ could Peter and John, crass “**unlearned and ignorant men**”, perform miracles and speak with such irresistible boldness.

Question 1: *Explain how God can make a natural man a useful vessel in His vineyard.*

True, no man ever encounters Christ experientially and remains untransformed. Apostles Peter and John, who were at the forefront of events that heralded this revival, were fishermen before they responded to Christ’s call. But God who made good His promise to “**make**” them “**fishers of men**” is still the same today. What God did with the apostles, He is still able to do with the believer today (1 Corinthians 1:27). Sinners and backsliders need to repent of their sins and exercise faith in Christ’s atoning blood for cleansing and believers who seek to be instruments of revival must desire and possess current and genuine experiences of sanctification and Holy Ghost baptism. The necessity of unbroken communion with God is indispensable, not only for continued usefulness in the hand of God but also for surviving challenges that our obedience to the great commission brings. The reaction of the apostles to the expressed opposition to the work of God as we shall see in this lesson is a study we must learn for us to be able to enjoy spiritual renewal they enjoyed.

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF PRAYER IN CHURCH RENEWAL (Acts 4:23-30; 1:14; 6:4; 12:5; 2 Kings 19:14-19; Matthew 26:36, 39-42).

After their release from the Council, Peter and John returned to the brethren and gave report of all that happened before the Sanhedrin. The response of the entire Church to the persecution by the Sanhedrin was to lift up their voices to God in prayer. The primacy of prayer during persecution is here underscored. The right response to threat and

opposition is prayer. Rather than conspire to revenge or cause sedition, the disciples resorted to fervent prayers. Their prayer which is a pattern for believers today, is scriptural and balanced. One, they were united in their prayer: there was no internal wrangling (Acts 4:24; Psalm 133:1-3; John 17:21). Two, they acknowledged the sovereignty of God (Acts 4:24). Three, they relied on the scriptures (Matthew 6:9; Acts 4:25,26; Psalm 2:1). Four, they were specific in their request (Acts 4:29,30; Matthew 6:7; 1 Kings 3:10) and also did not use vain repetitions. Five, they sought the glory of God in their service (Acts 4:29,30).

Question 2: *Point out lessons that we can learn from the way the disciples prayed.*

God expects us to pray. Prayer is the means that God has provided for His children to get the necessary strength and courage when in difficult situations. Those who find time to pray will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). The disciples' prayer was that of continued commitment to God's will. They requested for boldness to speak God's word and for God's support through performance of signs and wonders. They did not pray that the persecutors should die or that their persecution should stop, rather they prayed for grace to do God's will regardless of what their persecutors did.

Question 3: *Of What value are signs and wonders to effectiveness of the gospel in the light of John 4:48?*

It is important that believers pray that the ministers of the word might not be intimidated by persecutors but that they will keep on declaring the word with all freedom of expression, boldness, openness and faithfulness in private and public.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE HOLY GHOST IN THE RENEWED (Acts 4:31; 2:1-4; 1:8; Micah 3:8; 1 John 5:14,15; 1 Corinthians 2:4).

The prayer of the disciples was answered instantaneously. The place where they prayed was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and boldness. When prayer is made rightly according to the will of God, He always answers. Though the disciples had previously been baptized with the Holy Ghost, they were filled again for further service. This is a basic factor in Church and personal renewal. Believers must ever seek fresh infilling with the Holy Ghost.

Question 4: *Why is it necessary for believers to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?*

The answer to the prayer of the believers was God's approval of their request and it was to encourage and empower them to continue in God's service. The Holy Spirit is the power of God to do God's service effectively. When believers preach by the Holy Spirit's unction the people's faith will not stand in the wisdom of man, sinners will be converted and God's name will be glorified. The disciples had prayed that God will give them "**boldness to speak God's word**" (Acts 4:29). The answer to the request was that they "**spake the word of God with boldness**" (Acts 4:31). Christians are to speak God's word faithfully (John 23:28,29). Human opinions, traditions and ideologies of men should not be mixed with the word of God. Ministers are to be occupied with the ministry of God's word (Acts 6:4).

THE PROMINENCE OF LOVE AMONG THE RENEWED (Acts 4:32-37; Romans 15:5,6; 1 Peter 3:8; Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Acts 2:44-46).

The visible result of answered prayer in the Church was the boldness to preach the gospel as well as the renewal of the disciples. The evidence of their renewal was the prominence of love and unity among them. Their prayer strengthened the unity that they manifested earlier (Acts 1:14; 4:24). When believers are united, they become strong and invincible to Satan and his cohorts. However, when disunity and party spirit manifest in Christian assemblies, it leads to weakness and ineffectiveness (James 3:16).

Question 5: *What are the effects of disunity in the Church?*

The witness of the resurrection of Christ by the apostles continued with great power. This proves the futility of men's effort to stop the preaching of Christ. Also, there was a manifestation of practical love among the disciples. They were able to share their possessions with the needy; those who had property sold them and laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet so as to meet the needs of those that lacked among them. They preferred the care of the brethren to accumulation of earthly wealth. This kind of charity and communal living in the early Church poses a challenge to believers and Churches today.

It is futile to try to have the kind of fellowship that prevailed in the early church if we do not possess the spiritual experiences that sustained them. It should be noted that as the people were sacrificial in their giving so were the apostles selfless in dispensing what was kept in their trust. They did not embezzle the proceeds that were laid at their feet. And can we be as sacrificial and selfless today as they were? What about those who embezzle or misappropriate church funds; or the tendency to acquire and accumulate material wealth which is very common among professing Christians today? These tendencies will not

allow the kind of fellowship that obtained in the early Church to exist in our churches today. The early church was renewed and that was the reason they did all that made them a model Church. The disciples gave sacrificially not because of any passionate appeal or “fiery message” on giving and sharing, but because the Holy Spirit filled them.

Believers should ensure that they do not constitute a stumbling block in the way of Church renewal. Rather, each of us should seek the fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit and become agents of renewal in the Church.

Question 6: *Mention the name of a disciple who was singled out due to his love for the brethren and what he did.*

In the midst of the renewal in the early church, we are introduced to a man surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, a Levite from Cyprus. This man is a model for believers today because he distinguished himself in acts of generosity and giving for the needs of the brethren. He sold his land and brought the money to the apostles’ feet. He was so identified with the ministry of helps and giving to the needy that the apostles changed his name from Joses to “**son of consolation**”. We need many sons of consolation in our local assemblies today.

Eventually, Barnabas got involved in the ministry of follow-up and encouragement of new converts (Acts 11:22-29). He was also given greater responsibilities in the Church and he was instrumental to the acceptance of Saul of Tarsus (who later became Paul) by the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28). After many years, Paul and Barnabas were appointed by God into the missionary assignment (Acts 13:1-3). By then he had become a gifted minister of the gospel whom God could send to reach foreign lands with the message of salvation. This shows God’s procedure of progression in ministry. As a believer begins to use the grace and gifts he has, then, (if he is faithful), God will lead him to higher responsibilities. Barnabas grew in grace and knowledge of Christ, so must every Christian desire to grow. If we pray and seek God’s face, we will experience spiritual renewal in our personal lives and in the church; souls will be saved, the needs of the people will be met and God will be glorified.

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

MEMORY VERSE: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (**Romans 10:9**).

TEXT: Matthew 1:21; Romans 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:8,9

Salvation is so vital that the whole Bible is full of plain teachings on the subject. Events recorded in the Bible all point to the very fact of salvation through the grace of God. The Jewish history shows God’s plan of salvation. The prophets in the Old Testament had the same truth to emphasise and to remind the children of Israel. Jesus Christ, the Son of God also spent His ministry, explaining and teaching, both in plain language and in parables salvation through grace. The epistles are taken up with the same theme. If salvation is so important that it occupies almost every page of the sacred writings, it becomes necessary to study the subject in-depth so as to know what to do to have the plan of God fulfilled in our lives.

Question 1: *Why is salvation such an all-important subject?*

Salvation is so basic and so profound an experience that without it, all religious activities will be eternally worthless. But while some have unshakable assurance of salvation, others there are who are not so sure they are saved from sin. They are troubled with doubts concerning the experience, hence the need to look at the scriptural basis for the assurance of salvation. It is important to study the scripture with the help of the Spirit of God so that we can settle it beyond any shadow of doubt that we have real conviction concerning our salvation.

The Scripture is so clear about the meaning, significance and assurance of salvation that no one needs remain in darkness or confusion. False assurance is deceptive and will eventually damn the soul whereas true witness of the Spirit of God and of the Scripture will produce an abiding assurance in the soul. How can one know whether he is saved from sin or not? Can we confirm the assurance from the scriptures? If a person doubts whether he is saved or not, how can we help him? How can one overcome the attempt by the devil to confuse him? If, on the other hand, a person has false assurance, how can we help him from the Word of God?

SALVATION AS FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES (1 Corinthians 3:11; Psalm 62:7; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 6:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:19).

Salvation is the foundation of all other Christian experiences. It is the first experience one must have in order to be called a Christian. Whatever we have, whatever we do and whatever we receive from God, if we don’t have salvation, we are of all men the most miserable. The church-goer, religious person must not be satisfied until he understands, appropriates and claims salvation

through grace. To be healed and not to be saved is to go to hell eventually. To have dreams that are continually being fulfilled, to have special revelations that come to pass without salvation is to live on earth with no tangible purpose. To read the Bible and to memorise its verses without the experience of salvation through grace is to live on earth as if one never really read the Bible.

If God counts salvation so important, then preachers ought to spend more time examining the Word of God to be able to preach the message of salvation clearly. The very reason the Lord preserved the events recorded in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is to make us understand that we can only be saved through grace. It is not enough to understand how to cast out devils, deliver the oppressed, heal the sick or bring fire from heaven, if we do not understand salvation. Salvation is the foundation and the pillar of Christian teaching.

Salvation from sin is made possible through the grace and love of God. We cannot get saved from sin through our works but by exercising faith in what Christ has done to redeem us. The thief on the cross could not do anything except to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 2: How is salvation compared to deliverance, divine healing, prosperity, promotion and miracles?

THE MEANING OF SALVATION (Luke 1:71, 77; 19:9; Philippians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; Romans 1:16; Acts 15:6-11; Matthew 24:12,13; Romans 10:1,9; Matthew 1:21; Titus 2:11-14; Acts 4:12).

Salvation can be defined as forgiveness of sin, deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God which comes as a result of repentance from sin and faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Salvation is different from healing, joining a church, renouncing idol worship or changing name. Salvation from sin is so essential that you must be sure you have it to avoid being disappointed on the last day. We are not saved by feeling but by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Outward moral change alone cannot substitute for salvation. Salvation includes freedom from the guilt of sin, the power of sin and the consequence of sin.

Salvation is aimed not to make us turn a new leaf but to make us live a new life. The grace of God teaches us to deny all ungodly acts or behaviour and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11). Salvation makes it possible to live a godly life in the face of temptation, corruption and evil.

Some religious people try to preach God through human merits like prolonged fasting, animal sacrifices, religious festivities and pilgrimages, almsgiving to the less-privileged. They try to work their way through to salvation. But there is no salvation in any other except Christ (Acts 4:12).

Question 3: What is the difference between genuine salvation and other religious experiences?

THE PLACE OF GRACE AND FAITH IN THE WORK OF SALVATION: (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 10:13; Revelation 22:17; James 4:6; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Acts 4:33; 1 Peter 4:10; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 9:14).

Salvation is not dependent upon regular attendance to church or doing the best we can. **“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8,9).

God’s offer of salvation is by grace. Faith is the spiritual mechanism through which man receives salvation. Grace means the favour of God which we receive without any merit or work. Grace is the provision of God for mankind. It is help for the helpless. It is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Right attitude to the grace of God makes us receive the salvation He provides. Salvation is the object of grace.

We do not have to feel good or better to receive salvation. No one earns forgiveness and remission of sins by anything he does, any rule he keeps or by belonging to a religious assembly. This is one of the major differences between Christianity and other religions. Salvation is not obtained by keeping the law of Moses. Someone rightly said, ‘grace is the provision of God for mankind who are so fallen that they cannot help themselves, so corrupt that they cannot change their nature, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, so dead that He Himself must open their graves and bring them to life.’

There are physical traits we inherited from our parents such as height, facial appearance, complexion, colour of the eyes, but salvation does not flow in the blood. We do not become saved because we are the son or daughter of a pastor or because our father is born again or our mother is the leader of the women fellowship in the church. It cannot be passed from husband to wife, from wife to husband, from parents to children or from children to their parents.

To benefit experientially from what Christ has done for you on the cross at Calvary, you need to, one acknowledge and repent of your sin; two, renounce Satan and all his activities; three, receive Christ as your Saviour and, put your faith in His atoning work, not in your good morals or good works; four, rely on God to live a victorious life. It is only Christ that can make one a new creature. This brings the inward assurance that you are no more the same as before. Then there is a change of character and conduct.

Question 4: Of what significance is faith in the experience of salvation and how can we benefit from the atoning sacrifice of Christ at Calvary?

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION (John 5:24,39; 3:36,15-19; 6:47; Acts 10:43; 13:39; Romans 10:9,10; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-5; 3:10,14; 4:15; 5:1,10-13).

Many people unfortunately have not been able to enjoy the Christian life because they lack assurance of salvation. Many struggle with the flesh and sin, rising and falling and are unable to live the victorious life because of their inability to appropriate grace to conquer through faith. **“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”** (1 John 5:4).

Assurance of salvation basically means a firm and confident understanding that one’s sins are forgiven. It means to be sure that one is born again and is a

child of God. Christ came into the world and died to save sinners but many are not able to have the joy of salvation because they lack the assurance that their sins are forgiven and that their names are written in the book of life. Anyone that lacks this assurance cannot overcome sin, Satan, the world and temptations. Assurance of salvation is like a title deed. A man who does not have a title deed to a property cannot make a sure claim to the property.

The reason many people confess sin everyday is because they lack assurance of salvation. Others form the habit of answering the altar call every time because they are not very sure that their sins have been forgiven. To them the Christian life becomes difficult and laborious.

The problem with people who lack assurance of salvation is that they place their confidence on feeling rather than on faith. Many think, to be sure, one must have a certain kind of feeling. Others feel they must be happy always. Others believe in working their way to salvation through human self-effort like shedding of tears or a great deal of prayer. While genuine salvation experience could produce some of these experiences, they are only the outcomes, not the basis or condition.

Salvation is not by feeling but by faith in the atoning work of Christ. It is based on genuine repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles and even the Old Testament prophets all preached it. Salvation becomes ours when we repent of our sins and receive pardon, power and grace that Christ gives to those who believe in Him (John 1:12). We must believe that He is the Son of God sent to die for our sins. We must confess with our mouth what we believe in our hearts. If we do, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

It is noteworthy that the Bible does not base that forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness on crying, rolling on the ground or feeling happy. There must be express faith in the Word of God (John 5:24; Romans 8:1; 1 John 5:11,12). By way of analogy, the evidence of the ownership of a property is not one who feels he is but one that has the title deeds, written and sealed with the seal of authority. So is faith in regard to the assurance of salvation. But it is not a dormant, inactive faith but a dynamic faith which produces not only assurance of salvation in our hearts but also fruits of righteousness in our lives.

Question 5: *What is assurance of salvation and how can one have it?*

FRUITS OF SALVATION (Matthew 3:8; Philippians 1:11; 2 Timothy 2:6; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:9; Ephesians 4:17).

The first fruit expected of a truly born again Christian is the fruit of repentance. **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”** We show that we have been saved from sin by dispensing with ungodly habits. The places of sin we used to visit, we do not go there anymore; the dresses that expose our nakedness which we used to wear, we get rid of them; the indecent and obscene words we used to speak no longer come out from our mouth. We begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (self-control) (Galatians 5:22,23). There is also

the fruit of righteousness and holiness. A real child of God will not continue to live in sin.

Just as you cannot see the root of a tree because it is buried beneath the surface of the earth, so also your experience may be hidden beneath the soil of time and date. People will eventually come to know it through the fruits of your salvation.

Question 6: *How can a believer bear the fruit of righteousness?*

THE TRAGEDY OF NEGLECTING SO GREAT SALVATION (Hebrews 2:2,3; 10:28,29; 1 Corinthians 10:3-12; Jude 5; Hebrews 4:1,11; 1 Timothy 4:14).

There is great danger in sinners neglecting so great salvation. The believer is, likewise in great danger if he neglects to give diligent heed to make his calling and election sure. Our loss will be incalculable and unbearable if we neglect the message of full salvation preached by Christ and by those who received it directly from Him. You can know all there is to know about Jesus Christ and still go to hell if you do not receive Him as your Saviour and experience the moral transformation that faith in Him brings.

We should guard against letting God's word slip from us whether in times of suffering, deprivations, poverty, sickness, oppression and persecution or joy, progress, prosperity and sound health. If we allow our souls to be driven by circumstances, we will not be able to stay on course.

To reject Christ is to reject salvation and, to reject salvation is to reject everlasting fellowship with God in eternity. We need to be careful that we do not allow anything to hinder us from believing the totality of the Word of God. To neglect to watch and pray is to stand in danger of losing those things we have got from the Lord. There are some who claim to be saved but who neglect the warnings of the Scripture, to watch, pray, resist temptation, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Others forsake the "**assembling of ourselves together**" while some neglect God's provisions for Christian growth and maturity. Through neglect, our souls can be lost and there can be serious cracks in our spiritual walls. We may become weak and even backslide. We need to watch.

Fierce punishment and judgement await the unsaved and backslidden. Sinners and backsliders who die neglecting the blazing light of the gospel will suffer greatly in hell. Hell belongs to those who have rejected the gift of eternal life.

Question 7: *State the consequences of neglecting the great salvation of God offered through Christ.*

HOLINESS WITH HOSPITALITY

MEMORY VERSE: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

TEXT: Luke 10:30-37

The scripture teaches that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God is holy. He demands practical holiness from every believer in Christ. But He detests holiness without love and compassion. There is a lack of charity on the part of believers today.

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). The parable was a product, an answer to a lawyer’s question on works necessary for heavenly citizenship. Every sincere seeker must desire to know the nature of holiness that will get him to heaven. From Jesus’ answer the necessity of our study is underscored. He talks about the necessity of absolute love (which of course includes holiness) for God and service to our neighbours. But the lawyer, feigning ignorance of the true meaning and interpretation of the law and “willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). In Christ’s answer, we find the truth of holiness with hospitality set forth.

Question 1: *What is the nature of true holiness?*

As the church awaits the rapture of the saints, a re-examination of the elements of true holiness appears indisputable and expedient. In this parable, generally called “the parable of the good Samaritan”, the Lord sets forth two kinds of holiness - one outward and the other deeply rooted in the heart. One practical, imbued with grace and love, the other is theoretical, only resident in the head. One is professed and the other is warm, hearty service. The one spurious, the other genuine. Spurious because it is dry and holds no feelings for anyone, especially those who are suffering. It is wont to “pass by” on the other side of duty and service. It is unfortunate that the Levite and the priest, two officially ‘holy’ ministers of the Jewish temple, fell into this category.

TRUE CHRISTIANITY AND THE ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE (Luke 10:37; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 6:9,10; 1 John 3:16).

The Lord calls the victim of the bandits, “**a certain man.**” The fact that the victim of this gruesome act is a human being qualifies him to be “thy neighbour.”

Question 2: *Who is your neighbour?*

Many there are who have been wounded by sin and left half alive. There are others who are wrestling with the troubled sea of life within and outside our fellowships, calling for a helping hand.

If we would show practical Christianity we must help them. The Lord enjoins us to do good to all men. But it calls us with a stronger appeal to be kind and good towards those who are the household of faith. Necessity is laid upon the brethren to care for one another, pray for one another, visit one another and love one another. Your Christian brother is your immediate neighbour regardless of racial, social or tribal differences. We should do for them what we would do for Christ if He were physically present with us.

THE CONDEMNABLE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE (Luke 10:31,32).

“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31,32). It is unfortunate that “religious men”, those in the service of the Great King, and by obligation expected to manifest His gracious caring attributes, should be charged with indifference. It is a contradiction in terms! Ministers of the gospel – house fellowship leaders, zonal leaders, women representatives, coordinators and pastors – are by virtue of their office and calling obliged to serve others. They are not to close their eyes to the physical and spiritual plight of those they are charged to lead and feed.

The priest’s office is a sacred one. They were chosen and set apart as holy vessels unto God (Exodus 28:1-3). By virtue of their calling they are to stand between God and the people. In the Old Testament economy the priest is to offer up prayers, thanksgiving and sacrifices for people. He becomes the people’s representative in **“things pertaining to God”** (Hebrew 5:1). By the same token one would have expected the priest in this parable to discover in the ugly incident, a call to duty, a privilege to help the helpless. Unfortunately he did not. Coming down from the services at the temple, he forgot the acts of mercy, ignored the half-dead man’s wants, and passed by on the other side. He steeled his heart against the charitable impulses, which the occasion should have evoked. He must have thought that as a priest, a touch on the half-dead would defile him. He forgot that the law was made for man and not man for the law.

Question 3: *Why couldn’t the Levite and the priest stop by to help the victim of the robbers?*

“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). Many times believers allow protocols and the call of duty to hinder them from rendering services to people in need. We are apt to give a tract more than a cup of tea, a message than a morsel of bread. Jesus was disappointed by the action of this priest. And the Levite was no better!

The Levite toed the path of the priest though he came near to behold the victim of the bandits. One would have thought at first sight that for him to have made effort to go near, he was persuaded to help. But no sooner had he come near **“and looked on him”** than he went his way. What could have been his reason? After all, he came near, saw him, and beheld the damage done to his life!

The priests and Levites, by their calling and service, were to preserve the laws of Jehovah in all its integrity and purity. They were to see that its requirements were duly complied with, dispense justice in accordance with its injunctions and pass on the law to posterity (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 17:18; 31:1-13). It is shocking therefore to see these ministers in the Levitical priesthood fall short of the requirement of the law. Whatever their reasons, their actions are inexcusable.

But before we slam the door of judgment against them, are Christians in the House Caring Fellowship system not guilty of the same? They feel that their

sanctification will diminish if they dine with the sinner or stoop low to serve. They think they will be less Christian if they weep and commiserate with the bereaved.

The New Testament saints, like a Levite and a priest, are the called of God and are expected to exhibit Christlike love. **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”** (1 Peter 2:9).

God delights in mercy. He exalts service of love and justice above sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3). There are people who lay claims to sanctification and holiness but are devoid of God’s true love which finds expression in service and good works.

THE COMMENDABLE ATTITUDE OF THE SAMARITAN (Luke 10:33-35).

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” The attitude of the Samaritan is a symbol of practical Christianity (hospitality blended with holiness). In this **“Samaritan,”** a tribe generally hated by the Jews because of their so-called mixed blood, is found a striking lesson for saints in every generation.

Although the nationality, religion or age of the victim is not disclosed, this Samaritan cast aside racial or religious prejudice and discrimination and stopped to help him. He did not discountenance the victim on ground of not being a member of his family or close acquaintance; he offered needed help. Underneath his action is a thick layer of compassion. He was moved by it. How he manifested a virtue seen in the Saviour! **“But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd”** (Matthew 9:36). He did not just profess to have compassion; he translated it into action as he **“went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine”** (Luke 10:34).

Question 4: *What lesson can we learn from the action of the “Good Samaritan”?*

How many people are waiting in our churches and neighbourhood today, wounded by adverse circumstances of life, waiting for us to pour in the oil and wine of good mercy to mollify their wounds!

The oil and wine he poured into the man’s wound were best remedies; one was to dress the wound, and the other to heal. He gave his best. How wonderful will the body of Christ be if we, with the availability of grace, minister to our brethren in their hours of need? Instead of piling up excuses on why we cannot help, we should go the extra mile to assist one another both physically and spiritually. The great cry for practical love cannot be louder than it is now.

THE CONVINCING APPLICATION BY THE LORD (Luke 10:36,37; John 21:1-13,16; 13:14; Galatians 6:2,10).

The Lord, having convincingly driven home His message, then put this question to the enquirer: **“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?”** (Luke 10:36).

The lawyer, who had sought to justify himself through certain **“good”** works and had feigned ignorance of who a neighbour is, could not but testify to the excellent spirit exhibited by the good

Samaritan. The Lord closed His message with a charge to the lawyer and by extension to the New Testament saints to **“Go, and do thou likewise”** (Luke 10:37). The church of God stands to profit tremendously if we heed this commandment of the Lord in these days of hypocrisy and falsehood. In the Lord’s call to holiness and hospitality lies the secret of a growing church. A church which would make this call its watchword stands to profit tremendously, numerically and spiritually. Jesus Himself demonstrated it.

Question 5: *How can we demonstrate holiness with hospitality?*

“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise” (John 21:13). Simon Peter and the rest of the disciples had abandoned the Great Commission He gave them. They had forgotten the magnitude and the urgency of their task and were set to pursue a different goal. One wonders whether these disciples, who had been with the Master, learning and beholding His mission to the world, thought of the consequence of their action. Grave as it might be, the loving Lord brought them back to duty through love. The Lord’s strategy in bringing them back to their primary assignment presents a great challenge to all who would practise holiness with hospitality. Our hospitality (in contrast to compromise) can help backsliders back to the narrow way. Those who are weary in life’s battle can be strengthened to lay hold on the sword of the Spirit again. If we will not see the Lord without holiness, we will not even get near the pearly gate without hospitality.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

MEMORY VERSE: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (**1 Corinthians 11:26**).

TEXT: Matthew 26:17-30; I Corinthians 11:23-34

Two major ordinances are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to be carried out physically by all believers. The first, water baptism, is a once-for-all ceremony symbolising the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. This is to be submitted unto after an individual has repented, exercised saving faith in Christ's atoning blood and received the grace to live a life above sin. The second ordinance is what we have for our study this week - the Lord's Supper, a perpetual observance instituted by the Lord Himself and commanded for all born again believers.

Question 1: *What are the two major ordinances left by Christ for believers' observance in the dispensation of grace?*

A careful study of the gospels reveals that the most outstanding issues of the Christian faith are those recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who wrote each from different perspectives of the Saviour's life. It is important to note that all the four evangelists kept a record of this important event in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, Paul, the apostle who got converted some years after the ascension had a revelation about this and kept the record (I Corinthians 11:23,24).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PASSOVER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER (Exodus 12:1-36,41-47; Matthew 26:17-19,26-30; Luke 22:14-20)

It was the practice of Christ to observe the yearly Jewish Passover, which was a commemoration of the great deliverance of the children of Israel. The ceremony was a pointer to the anticipated vicarious sacrifice of the Messiah. Not much record is kept of these occasions during the first two years of the Lord's ministry but the last Passover is of such unforgettable significance that its record rings through the gospels and the epistles.

Question 2: *What is the correlation between the last Passover and the Lord's Supper?*

The Lord's Supper was instituted during the course of the Lord's last Passover with the disciples. This is because there is a correlation between the two. The Passover was kept as a remembrance of God's great deliverance that brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt. The high point of this momentous event, the Passover, was the slaying of a paschal lamb without blemish which symbolically and typologically occupies the place of a substitutionary sacrifice. This was about three millennia ago. The Lord observed this ordinance more than two millennia ago and reiterated its significance. On that night, He intimated that a Great Sacrifice, the actual Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world would soon be made. He therefore initiated the Lord's Supper and brought it in the place of the Passover. Henceforth, we are to remember Christ's substitutionary sacrifice and that through the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:14-20). And the Lord's Supper unlike the Passover is not once a year but "**as oft as ye do it**" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The Lord's Supper is to be kept in remembrance of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. After Christ's passion, an end was to be put to the observance of the Passover as with other Old Testament ordinances (Hebrews 10:1,14-20). The Lord's Supper is now to be celebrated perpetually by the redeemed in remembrance of the Lord's death.

THE SCRIPTURAL OBSERVANCE (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19,20; John 13:1-4; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34).

Question 3: *What emblems are to be used for the Lord's Supper and what do they symbolise?*

Two emblems are to be used for the Lord's Supper, namely unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Leaven means yeast. Yeast, from the Old Testament times, has always been symbolic of sin. The unleavened bread is symbolic of the sinless body of Christ "**which is broken**" for us. It will therefore be wrong to use bread baked with yeast to serve the Lord's Supper. However, the unleavened bread is not the actual body of Christ; it is only representative.

The fruit of the vine is symbolic of the blood of Christ which was "**shed for many for the remission of sins**" (Matthew 26:28). Jesus gave this to the disciples after He had blessed and given them the unleavened bread. Again, this is representative; it is not the actual blood of Christ. It will be wrong to substitute the vine juice with fermented or intoxicating wine, black currant, any other artificial juices or water. In fact, the fruit of the vine will still be used when we have the supper with the Lord after the rapture at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Matthew 26:29). These are the only two emblems approved for use by the Lord.

Christ commanded the perpetual observance of this ordinance "**till he come**" (1 Corinthians 11:26). And every believer ought to partake of the same on a regular basis (1 Corinthians 10:16,17). The early church

did this (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7). There is, however, no law in the New Testament on the frequency of the observance of the Lord's Supper by any group or assembly.

Question 4: *What are the purposes of the Lord's Supper?*

The purposes of the Lord's Supper are: for remembrance (Luke 22:19), to show His death (I Corinthians 11:26), and to anticipate His promised return (I Corinthians 11:26; John 14:1-3). In partaking, believers look upward to heaven, back to Calvary, and forward to His coming and our eternal fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 5:6-8; Revelation 19:7-9).

Question 5: *How should believers approach the Lord's Table?*

Basic as the Lord's Supper is in the church and for the Christian, it cannot be approached carelessly, listlessly or presumptuously. It should always be preceded by a personal preparation just as the Old Testament Passover was preceded by seven-day abstinence of leaven from the home and bread of the Jews. New Testament Lord's Supper is essentially preceded by a lifetime adherence to holiness and abhorrence of sin and evil. Whoever would come to the table for the observance of the Lord's Supper must of necessity examine himself or herself lest he eats unworthily. Whole self-examination – life, conduct, character, word, thought, heart and even motives – cannot be traded off with the zeal to partake at the Lord's Table. Second, a church whose membership is rife with suspicion, ill-feeling, mud-slinging, backbiting, hypocrisy, bootlicking and acrimony should not come to the Lord's Table without confession, repentance, restoration and renewal.

CONSEQUENCE OF PARTAKING UNWORTHILY (1 Corinthians 11:27,29,30).

Question 6: *What are the consequences of partaking unworthily in the Lord's Supper?*

The consequence of partaking at His table unworthily is disastrous both on the church and her individual membership. **“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep”** (1 Corinthians 11:27,29,30).

First, the irreverent partaker is guilty of violating the sacredness of the institution of the Lord's Supper. He is guilty of despising the body

and blood of Christ. He profanes the ordinance and in that respect crucifies the Saviour once again. And instead of being cleansed and healed by His blood, he is guilty of it. This is a contract with death and doom. It is sowing in the flesh, and reaping corruption. It is a great hazard he courts: he eats and drinks judgment and damnation unto himself. He provokes God and will, doubtlessly, bring punishment upon himself.

Sad enough, the punishment could take the form of death – physical, spiritual and eternal. And in its mild form it could be sickness or infirmity. **“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep”** (I Corinthians 11:30).

Should this divine ire against irreverent, deter fearful, holy and earnest believers from attending at this holy ordinance? Certainly not. Watchful, waiting and holy Christians are encouraged to attend the Lord’s table and enjoy the blessings thereby but not without examining themselves.

SELF EXAMINATION BEFORE PARTICIPATION (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). Self-examination includes trying and approving oneself in the mirror of the word of God. In this wise, the communicant should consider the sacredness of this holy ordinance and compare his own thought, conscience, motive and general lifestyle. Such self-examination is both necessary and helpful when the Christian is contemplating participating in Lord’s Supper.

For the worthy communicants and churches the blessings are numerous. The ordinance brings unity and love among believers and in the process stifles division and strife (I Corinthians 10:16,17). The Lord’s Supper, when administered with all its spiritual import, brings the fulness of life and grace to communicants. The benefits procured by the death of Christ and all other gospel benefits are refreshingly delivered again by the remembrance evoked at the Lord’s Table. If eating unworthily attracts sickness, certainly true believers who worthily go to the table will receive healing, health, spiritual vitality and other blessings.

Question 7: *Why do you think that a considerable portion of the New Testament contains a record of this event in Christ’s life?*