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LOVE AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway”
(Deuteronomy 11:1).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 11:1-32

Moses’ exhortation to Israel in the preceding chapter ended on a solemn note as he charged them to fear the Lord and cleave to Him because **“he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen”** (Deuteronomy 10:21). He also reminded them that they were very few at the beginning but the Lord had multiplied them as the stars of heaven (Deuteronomy 10:22).

In today’s text, the prophet continued his historical rehearsal of God’s great deeds to Israel. He reminded them of His peculiar provisions and care during their journey to the Promised Land. On the basis of these blessings, the only way they could reciprocate His goodness was to love and cleave to Him in absolute obedience. He pointed out the consequences of disobeying the commandments and cautioned them on the danger of making a wrong choice as well as the possibility of falling away from favour with God. The same admonitions are applicable to us today as we look forward to entering the heavenly Canaan.

Question 1: *How best can believers express their gratitude to God?*

GOD’S DEMANDS AND DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (Deuteronomy 11:1-7; 10:12,13; Mark 12:28-33; Micah 6:6-8; Exodus 20:5,6; 2 Samuel 22:26-28; Romans 11:22)

“Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway” (Deuteronomy 11:1). God demanded from Israel unalloyed love and consistent obedience to all His commandments. The chapter begins with the word **“therefore”** and conveys God’s demand for obedience in consequence of His favour and dealings with Israel. God had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, destroyed the ferocious Egyptian army in the Red Sea, preserved and provided for them in the dreadful wilderness and now He is taking them to the Promised Land. No doubt, He has done so much for them and the only way to show their gratitude was to love and obey Him. When we also reflect on our past, we will come to appreciate the notable blessings we have received from God and the debts of love and obedience we owe Him.

Question 2: *Mention some great blessings Israel enjoyed from the Lord.*

God is neither an indulgent Father nor is He a respecter of persons in judgment (1 Samuel 2:22-25; Psalm 50:16-22). Moses reminded Israel of the high integrity and

awesome power of God. He is able to defend the church from the terror and threat of enemies or external aggressors as He did for the Israelites in the wilderness (Matthew 16:18; Isaiah 59:19). The great acts which God demonstrated were for the primary purpose of bringing the hearts and lives of the people to a state of perpetual obedience to His word. Moreover, as God could deliver and fight for His people, He could fight against His own if they rebel against Him; He did not spare rebels like Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:1-4,29-35). Divine chastisements produce godly fear which keeps men away from sin and promotes righteousness (1 Timothy 5:20; Isaiah 26:9, 10). In summary, God is the Governor among the nations and rules in the kingdoms of men (Psalm 22:28). He upholds law and order and metes out punishment and reward to those who neglect His word.

GRACIOUS DIVIDENDS FOR OBEYING HIS WORD (Deuteronomy 11:8-15,21-25; Exodus 19:5,6; 23:22-27; Psalm 81:13-16; John 15:16)

Question 3: *What is the purpose of the promises of God?*

God has promised a great deal of blessings to those who obey Him. To Israel, He promised supernatural strength to go in and possess their possessions (verse 8,24). Two, they would have long life and lasting enjoyment in the land (verse 9). Three, the first and the latter rain would come in their seasons for bumper harvests (verse 14). With hills, valleys and abundance of rainfall unlike Egypt where much of agriculture was made possible through irrigation and hard labour, Canaan was to be a land of opportunities and privileges for the children of Israel.

Four, they would have adequate provision for their cattle. Five, obedience to God's law would ensure that they had the days of heaven upon the earth (verses 21). Six, there would be victory in battle over greater and mightier enemy nations. Seven, God promised to make them a formidable and dreadful nation to nations around them. These promises were to serve as incentives for Israel to obey God's commandments and cleave to Him. Today, these promises and many others are available for all believers in Christ (Galatians 3:13, 14; 2 Corinthians 1:20) and we can claim them for our welfare and success. Consequently, true Christians should be inspired by God's exceeding great and precious promises and be holy and truly committed to His word and will (2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 7:1).

GREAT DANGER IN BACKSLIDING AND IDOLATRY (Deuteronomy 11:16-20; Joshua 23:11-16; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Psalm 119:9,11; Acts 20:32; Colossians 3:16)

Moses reminded the Israelites of the ever present danger of falling out of favour with God through sin and compromise. He affirmed the scriptural teaching which supports getting saved, remaining saved and enjoying the benefits of salvation as being conditional. Likewise, it should be emphasized that it is possible for a Christian to turn aside into sin through careless handling of legitimate activities. This descent from grace is usually a gradual process that starts when the heart is deceived. No wonder, the Bible commands the Christian pilgrim to keep his heart with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23).

Question 4: *What are the consequences of backsliding? How can believers watch against backsliding today?*

Sin, compromise and backsliding provoke divine wrath with dire consequences. Closed heaven, drought, fruitlessness or barrenness and death are some of the results of backsliding. Moses therefore, persuaded Israel to lay hold on the greatest weapon of defence against backsliding: the word of God. They were to internalize the word, display it in their houses and also teach their children. They were commanded to make God's word pre-eminent and prominent in all their discourses. Many Jews took this command literally and tied phylacteries. Phylacteries, also called "signs", "reminders" or "**frontlets**" are small, black cube-shaped leather boxes containing parchments on which the ten commandments and other biblical passages had been written. Some also attached small wooden or metal containers known as *mezuzoth* to the door frames of their houses. These practices were to remind them of God's deliverance and of their duty to remain faithful to His commandments. This underscores the importance of biblical study/teaching aids. In the New Covenant however, God has promised to write His law in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10-13).

Question 5: *How can we perpetuate our love and obedience to God?*

It is pertinent to state that godly parenting should be the foremost concern of everyone. One way parents could express their love to God is to help their children to develop a relationship with Him. Children who were brought up in the way of the Lord, such as Samuel, Joseph, Esther and Daniel did great exploits for Him possibly beyond their parents. Godly training of a child is thus, a divine-human investment that yields great dividends in time and eternity. Consequently, no effort should be spared to promote the training of our children. However, parental example is indispensable in driving home the gospel message.

GODLY DECISION FOR A GLORIOUS DESTINY (Deuteronomy 11:26-32; 28:1-20; 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Ruth 1:14-19; Isaiah 1:18-20; John 3:14-19; 6:67-69; Matthew 27:21-25).

Question 6: *What is that single but essential decision that determines the eternal destiny of all men?*

Having laid bare the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience before the children of Israel, Moses now calls them to decision (verse 26-28). Man was created as a free moral agent capable of acting with reference to right and wrong. He is legally responsible for his actions and choices. Any denial of these facts is but a futile attempt to deny man's inherent nature as designed by God. God is just and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Psalm 92:15). He would not punish anyone for his wrong choices if he was not created with the ability to choose otherwise. Also, God will not ask or plead with man to choose between options if he was not endowed with the ability to do so. The conclusion of the whole matter is, man must decide to repent of his sins and accept Jesus as Lord and personal Saviour before the redemptive miracles of remission of sin and regeneration can be wrought in his soul. It is this singular but essential decision that determines the eternal destiny of all men.

Finally, the Lord desired to keep the children of Israel in constant remembrance of the blessedness of obedience and the dire consequences of disobedience. He therefore commanded Moses to present before them a permanent object lesson when they cross over to the Promised Land on the other side of Jordan. He said: "**And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou**

goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal” (Deuteronomy 11:29). Thus, the blessings and curses were publicly proclaimed upon mount Gerizim and mount Ebal with all the people answering, Amen (Deuteronomy 27:11-27; 28:1-68). It is said that mount Gerizim and mount Ebal are separated by the valley of Shechem, 600 feet apart, and that mount Gerizim was beautiful and fertile while mount Ebal was barren; thus, each by nature is depicted as blessing and curse.

Question 7: State some useful lessons modern preachers can learn from the way Moses concluded his message to Israel in our text.

Moses concluded his message on a positive and assuring note. He fixed the mind of the people on the Promised Land by making reference to mountains across Jordan. The fact that he has not been to the Promised Land and yet graphically described the exact location of these landforms is a cogent proof of the inspiration of the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21). Ultimately, he declared with undisputed assurance that Israel shall pass over Jordan to possess the land and they shall observe to do His statutes and judgments (verses 30-32). Ministers of the gospel should not give up on their congregations knowing fully that it is God’s will for them to live, possess their possessions and eventually make heaven (Jeremiah 29:11).

LAWS OF WORSHIP AND SERVICE IN THE SANCTUARY

MEMORY VERSE: “But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23,24).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 12:1-32

As the children of Israel were about to enter the

Promised Land to settle permanently, Moses, in the previous chapter, exhorted them on steadfastness and unreserved obedience to God. The consequences of rebellion and disobedience were re-emphasized as he reminded them of the matter of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. He set the blessings and the curses before them consequent upon their keeping of or violating the righteous laws of God.

The laws God makes for His children to keep are meant for their good. And He always makes sure divine directives are clear and specific. **“These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth”** (verse 1).

Question 1: What can the believer learn from the laws God gave to the Israelites to keep preparatory to their inheriting the Promised Land?

The Lord who had been so gracious to redeem the children of Israel from Egyptian captivity needed, as part of His everlasting love, secure their future happiness by giving them divine codes of conduct that would make them enjoy the Promised Land they were to inherit.

Disobedience to God’s word after inheriting the land was to lead to forfeiture of the inheritance. Strict observance of God’s statutes always attracts blessing to the obedient (Proverbs 3:1,2). Obedience begins with prompt response to God’s call to salvation. Saved, the believer must take all His **“...precepts concerning all things to be right...”** (Psalm 119:28).

God’s instructions on worship and service in the sanctuary as we shall consider in our text today reiterate, and that more elaborately, His commandment not to have or worship any other gods (Exodus 20:3-5).

COMMAND TO DESTROY FALSE GODS AND THEIR RELICS (Deuteronomy 12:1-3; 7:1,2,5,25; Judges 6:25,27,28; Acts 19:18,19; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Romans 1:25; Psalm 115:4-8; Revelation 21:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)

Question 2: Why was it necessary for Israel to destroy the false gods of Canaan; what does that portend for the New Testament believers today?

The Lord's command to the Israelites was to destroy false gods and their relics from Canaan. The command to wipe out idolatrous objects of worship and their names from the land was with such severity and tenor as the words 'destroy, overthrow, break, burn, hewn down' used to articulate it suggest. Places, altars, groves, graven images and their names are mentioned by God Himself as things to be destroyed. God would not want His people to worship these false gods or copy their monuments and systems of worship. Besides, the inhabitants had polluted the land and God would not dwell in a polluted land with His people. Sin and its sources had to be dealt with. Everyone who believes in Christ will do well to not only do away with their idols and idolatrous objects but also with anything that glorifies idols. God created and redeemed us to show forth His praise.

The command to destroy idols has a deeper meaning for New Testament dispensation. Believers are not expected to fanatically go about forcefully dispossessing people of their idols and shrines in the guise of obeying this command. Rather, they need to obey the command to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Those who turn from their idols to serve the true and living God must be admonished to submit their objects, images, altars and shrines to be destroyed. Everyone who believes and receives Christ must surrender his idols to be destroyed as done by believers in the early church (Acts 19:19). Following that example, all repentant cultists, occultists, idolaters and magicians must confess and renounce all materials used in their gatherings in obedience to God's words (2 Corinthians 6:17). All forms of unscriptural emblems of worship – rings, talisman, amulets, charms, garments, tattoos and other related materials must be destroyed; human philosophies, ideologies, superstition, necromancy and deifying religious figures (dead or living) are all to be discarded. **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24). The true God cannot be worshipped in the way and manner idols are worshipped and served. Therefore, all forms of present-day trado-Christian hybrid worship are impure and sinful before God.

God hates idols because they take His place in the minds of idolaters. Idolatry provides a platform for men to worship Satan, the god of this world who seeks to be worshipped instead of God. He is the personality behind the objects that men worship and make animal and human sacrifices to. Blinded by him, idolaters shamefully deify dumb and dead objects as gold, silver, brass, wood, stone (carved or crafted) which they carry and position in places they want to worship them. Such images can be made to represent stars, spirits, men, animals, rivers, plants and other base elements. Idolaters worship creatures rather than the Creator. Added to these professing idol worshippers are professing Christians who deify the crucifix or other paintings of saints and angels. Anything or person who takes the place of God in a believer's heart becomes a god. Christians should avoid ungodly attitudes comparable to idol worship, namely, covetousness, stubbornness, and love of money (1 Samuel 15:23; Colossians 3:5; Isaiah 31:7). He is to enthrone Christ in his heart by faith. God is unchanging and so is His verdict concerning all sinners, that, **“the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”** (Revelation 21:8). This revealed awful end of sinners and backsliders should compel every believer to reach out to them with the gospel so that they can be saved.

DIVINE ETHICS IN TRUE WORSHIP AND SERVICE (Deuteronomy 12:4-22; Leviticus 18:3,4; John 4:19-24)

After commanding that all forms of heathen practices be expunged, the Lord gave definite instructions about the place, people, property and pattern of true worship in the sanctuary. Israel was instructed not to learn or practise idol worship; they were not to even try to worship the true God the same way these heathens did. **“Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God”** (Deuteronomy 12:4,31a). Adopting idolatrous principles is as evil as using their means of worship.

As peculiar people, Israel was required to adhere to divine precepts concerning acceptable worship to the Lord as follows: One, the Lord Himself would choose the place where He should be worshipped. There, He promised to put His name and presence. Two, the place should be a holy place, sanctified to the Lord. Three, they were to bring their tithes, freewill offerings, vows, and sacrifices to the place of worship. Four, they were not to eat their offerings within their gates. Five, they were to come to the place of worship along with their children and servants with rejoicing.

The Church today has no such rule on the place of worship. Once Christ inhabits the sanctuary of our hearts, we can worship Him anywhere, for we are the temple of the Holy Ghost (John 4:21). However, we still need to come together in local assemblies for regular worship so that we can be edified and have organized way of contributing to the evangelization of the world. The physical place of worship, though important, should not be the primary focus but Christ, who is our Lord and Saviour.

Question 3: Why did God instruct the Israelites to congregate in an appointed place of worship?

The mode and quality of worship rests upon the shoulders of the leadership of the local church and the cooperation of the membership. It is the responsibility of the local church leaders to stick to the righteous and pure standard of worship that is acceptable to the Lord. It is also important to watch against unscriptural methods such as the use of prayer books, sacrifices, burning of incense and so on.

The evidence of true worship is the spiritual sacrifices that believers offer to God. This order is still relevant today as our worship is not complete without giving offerings to God. The offerings must be brought to the appointed place of worship where we receive spiritual nourishment. Believers cannot divert their tithes and offerings for any other use. Withholding tithes amounts to robbing God and it attracts a curse from Him (Malachi 3:8,9). Tithes and offerings are mandatory in the worship of the Almighty God. Therefore, everyone should give generously in gratitude to God for our redemption and the great favour He has shown to us (Deuteronomy 14:22-26).

Question 4: State the scriptural principles of giving offerings during worship.

Worship in the sanctuary did not exclude any member of the family of the children of Israel. And the Levites were always in charge of the worship service. The parties in worship and service in the sanctuary included all the members of our household: father, mother, children, servants, maids and the strangers. It is the responsibility of the head of the family to endeavour to carry along members of his family to all gatherings of the church. Abraham was a great example in this area (Genesis 18:19).

Question 5: *Mention some lapses created by family heads which encourage absenteeism of family members from fellowships.*

Parents and adult members of the family should not engage maids and servants in the shop to sell or in any other kind of work during Christian programmes like retreats, crusades and other services. It is also important to provide the necessary logistics such as transportation, Bibles, jotters, hymn books, etc. to enable family members participate fully during services and special programmes. Attitudes of regular late-coming or leaving services midway can be a source of discouragement to children, servants and maids.

Fellowship time is a time of scriptural feasting and rejoicing in the presence of God. This can be achieved by leadership preparation, members' interest and participation in the worship service. Leaders are expected to organize the service in a lively, interesting and captivating manner to attract attendance. All the ministers must prepare spiritually, physically and mentally to render effective service in the sanctuary. Members should actively participate in the worship service by giving attention to the word of God during messages, spending quality time to pray on the messages after service and seeking counsel from the minister, where necessary.

Question 6: *How can worshippers prepare to get the best during worship services in the church? Mention spiritual benefits of worship services.*

Worshippers are to come with humble and obedient spirit to accept the bread of life, contribute to the provision of physical infrastructures of the worship centre like building, public address systems, musical equipment and welfare of the ministers of God (Deuteronomy 12:18; 14:27,29). In addition, there must be love and unity among the worshippers. Where there is love, God's presence will be felt. Hatred, evil speaking, pride, mudslinging and backbiting destroy the spirit of true fellowship among the brethren.

The children of Israel were commanded to feast upon their "**hallowed things**" before the Lord. This signifies that the time spent before God in worship is a time of spiritual nourishment. In His presence, there is renewal of the mind through the grace of God, increase in knowledge and faith, expression of our devotion and affection for Him, confirmation of our commitment to God and growth in love towards one another.

They were also commanded to "**rejoice before the Lord**". Worship and service of God should be rendered cheerfully. God is not happy with all those who cover His altar with tears of sorrow (Malachi 2:13). In the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy. Services rendered in bad mood gives others the impression that God is cruel – and could treat them so. Ministers should learn to settle offences before ministering (Matthew 5:23,24). They should also learn to lay down their burdens on Christ before taking up ministerial assignments.

EATING OF BLOOD AND UNGODLY IMITATION FORBIDDEN (Deuteronomy 12:16,23-32; Leviticus 7:26; Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; Exodus 23:2; Jeremiah 10:2)

Question 7: *Mention the heathen practices we should avoid in worship.*

The command on the rules of worship specifically forbade the eating of blood. The reason was clearly stated: the blood is the life of the animal. God is against anyone who feeds on blood. Believers should shun anything that has to do with the shedding,

eating and sprinkling of blood and making of covenants or any such worship that involves such rites. It is satanic.

Israel was also cautioned against making any enquiry about the heathen gods and their worship system. They were not to fear their gods. Finally, they were commanded not to be involved in heathen practices, but to obey the Lord completely. The reason for exhortation to obedience is that **“it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee for ever, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the LORD thy God”** (verse 28). Believers must not imitate the world in worship. Modifying or changing divine precepts concerning worship of God is sinful, allows infiltration of demonic spirits and works of the flesh, results in desecration of the altar of God and attracts divine judgment. True worship begins with repentance and restoration of sinners and backsliders. Superstitious beliefs and worldly practices must be jettisoned as we follow and hold on to scriptural principles.

WARNING AGAINST IDOLATRY

MEMORY VERSE: “Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise” (Deuteronomy 12:30).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 13:1-18

In continuation of his admonition, Moses again forewarned the children of Israel against the consequences of forsaking the true and living God. On many occasions he had warned them of the danger of idolatry and turning away from the Lord. The warning became more compelling because the Canaanites whose land they were about to possess were avowed and devoted idolaters. And, as a leader, he knew the danger posed by false prophets. As a matter of fact, he had encountered the magicians of Egypt in the course of bringing Israel out of their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 7:10-12; 8:7,18; 2 Timothy 3:8). The text brings to the fore the seriousness and danger of idolatry.

Moses would not take chances, but spelt out the punishments to be meted out to anyone or groups of people found to be involved in idolatry. The inhabitants of any city that would descend into this crime were to be wiped out without pity and the city reduced to heaps never to be rebuilt. This severe punishment was to serve as deterrent to others. This teaches us that divine instructions should not be handled with levity but emphasized for people to understand. God is impartial: if Israel would descend into idolatry like the Canaanites, the same fate that befell the Canaanites would happen to them.

WARNING AGAINST FALSEHOOD AND IDOLATRY (Deuteronomy 13:1-8; 7:1-5; 1 Kings 13:1-24; Matthew 7:15-23; 24:4,5,11,24; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; 1 Timothy 4:1).

We must heed God’s warning because He is a consuming fire and all those who indulge in idolatry will not go unpunished.

Question 1: Describe modern idolatry.

In this modern time, idolatry goes beyond the worship of carved images, wood or stone. It also includes placing men, money, position, power or possession, and so on, on the same pedestal with or above God. It involves giving more attention to charisma than character and conduct. An idol is anyone or anything revered above God. It is

disheartening today to see multitudes that profess Christ, religion and learning, worship or adore images of saints and angels.

Israel is also cautioned against the evil activities of false prophets. They may perform signs or wonders such as predicting future events accurately. It must be made clear that signs and wonders are not conclusive proofs of being true servants of God. Believers need to test the spirits behind such miracles (Matthew 7:21-23; 1 John 4:1).

Deception can also come in form of dreams through which many often derail from their God-ordained destinies. In the days of Jeremiah, many prophets of Baal caused many people to err through their false prophecies and dreams (Jeremiah 23:11,13). In this end times, activities of false prophets have increased. Their goal is the same: to exploit the ignorant and draw them away from the true God. Wherever there are true prophets of God, false prophets usually emerge to deceive the undiscerning minds. God commissioned Moses to perform signs and wonders in Egypt. As Moses stood before Pharaoh, the magicians of Egypt also attempted to replicate some of the signs and wonders performed by him so as to deceive Pharaoh to trust in his idols though they eventually acknowledged the finger of God (Exodus 8:19).

False prophets would seek to give credibility to their pernicious ways through signs and wonders. This is the reason believers are cautioned against believing **“every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1). Our Lord Jesus, as well as His apostles, warned believers of the activities and danger of false prophets (Matthew 24:11, 24, 25; 2 Peter 2:20,21).

Question 2: *How can believers escape the snares of false prophets and dreamers?*

In order to escape deception by false prophets and dreamers of dreams, believers are to be grounded in the faith and in the word (Colossians 1:23; 3:16), remain committed to the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), make getting to heaven their priority (Matthew 6:33; Mark 8:36, 37), and prove every spirit (1 John 4:1). They must also **“give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip”** (Hebrews 2:1).

DECEPTION OF FALSE PROPHECIES AND DREAMS (Deuteronomy 13:5,9-11; Joshua 23:15,16; 2 Chronicles 15:12,13; 2 John 9-11; Galatians 1:6-9).

The sin of idolatry is a gross violation of the commandments of God. Once idolatry sets in, spiritual death becomes imminent. In this regard, those who introduce idolatry attracted the severest punishment. God commanded that those who lure others into idolatry should be stoned to death. **“And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God... So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee”** (Deuteronomy 13:5). In the old covenant, idolatry was treasonable and was punishable with death seeing God was considered the King of the Jews.

Strictness was necessary because of the force and power which seducers wield in corrupting the minds of men. In other words, the punishment was to express divine wrath against the crime and serve as deterrent to others who would think of

committing the same offence. However, the death of such people was to follow laid down rules, not arbitrarily. Those who were found guilty were not to be killed in a hasty or private manner but after such persons had been appropriately tried and convicted.

The New Testament is no less strict when it comes to denouncing idolatry. Paul, the apostle, in his epistle to the Galatians did not hesitate in placing curses upon anyone who preaches another gospel with the intention of drawing men's heart away from the almighty God (Galatians 1:8,9).

Question 3: *What should believers' attitude be towards false prophets and their activities?*

In the New Testament, though we are not to kill false prophets or anyone, Jesus warned us to beware of them (Matthew 7:15). Also, of the church in Ephesus He said, **"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication"** (Revelation 2:14). Our attitude towards false prophets, false teachers and their likes should be to avoid them and their assemblies (Romans 16:17), expose their false teachings and protect our members from their delusive influence. Though idolaters may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord will not allow them to escape His righteous judgment.

DIVINE JUDGMENT AGAINST FALSE PROPHETS AND DREAMERS (Deuteronomy 13:12-18; Exodus 22:20; Joshua 6:24; 8:28; Isaiah 17:1; 25:2; Jeremiah 49:2; 1 Kings 9:6-9)

God's standard of judgment on idolatry remains firm. In keeping with this, the leaders of the people were expected to be vigilant in order to detect any deviation from pure worship. This was a means of preserving the form of pure worship amongst God's people (1 Corinthians 5:6,7).

Question 4: *Why did God command the children of Israel to destroy the inhabitants of a city who went into idolatry?*

The children of Israel failed to obey this commandment. They became so permissive and compromised that even their kings who were to enforce the law became instrumental in introducing idolatry into the land. **"...Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin... So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day"** (2 Kings 17:21,23). But God in His mercy sent His servants who declared His wrath against idolaters. **"I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me"** (Jeremiah 35:15).

When they refused to repent and return to the Lord, judgment eventually came upon them and many of them were destroyed while the remnants were carried into captivity. To further register His holy indignation against idolaters, God commanded them to **"gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt**

burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again" (Deuteronomy 13:16). God declared that everything in an idolatrous city is accursed and His people should not touch any of it. Idolatrous cities were to be wiped off and never to be rebuilt.

Question 5: *What is the remedy for those who have gone into false doctrine?*

Individuals and congregations that have departed from the true gospel unto falsehood should urgently cry out to God in genuine repentance, make necessary restitutions and return fully to the Lord while the door of mercy is still open (Isaiah 55:6,7). Believers who are still standing should hold firm to God's word and not give Satan and his agents any room to lure them into false doctrine. They should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

485 CLEAN AND UNCLEAN ANIMALS

MEMORY VERSE: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 14:1-29

Our text focuses on two major issues: the separation

of the children of Israel from heathen practices and their devotion to God. In the first case, God through Moses taught them to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbours both in their mourning rites and in their meat or food. In order to leave no room for speculations, some animals were grouped as clean and others as unclean. They were permitted to eat freely of all the clean animals but were prohibited from eating the unclean ones. In the second case, they were also taught to devote themselves to God.

As a token of their devotion to God, they were to give Him dues out of the produce of the land, as their yearly tithes. Besides, every third year, they were to gather the tithes for the maintenance of their religious feasts, the Levites, the poor, the strangers, the fatherless and the widows within their gates.

The chapter clearly states the reason or basis for these divine requirements and instructions: **"Ye are the children of the LORD your God... For thou art an holy people unto the LORD your God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar**

people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:1,2). This indicates that the commandments of God which are designed to regulate our behaviour are intended for our good. As our Maker, God knows what is best and most appropriate for us. He also knows those things we need to avoid because they are harmful to us either physically or spiritually. Therefore, when we obey God’s laws, we enjoy spiritual and physical health, but when we disobey, we reap the consequences.

Question 1: *Why did God give laws to regulate the life of His people?*

UNGODLY MOURNING RITES FORBIDDEN (Deuteronomy 14:1,2; Leviticus 19:27,28; 21:5; Philippians 3:2; Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1; Deuteronomy 32:18; Romans 9:4; 1 Peter 2:9; 1:14-16).

Moses told the people that the basis of the divine dealings was because God had chosen them as a special people, with three distinguishing privileges. First, is their adoption: **“Ye are the children of the LORD your God”** (verse 1). This implies that they were formed and owned by Him as **“a people near unto him”**, than any other group of people. Second, is their election or choice: **“the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself”** (verse 2). He chose them to be a peculiar people to Him above other nations, not on the basis of their merit, but of His love and grace. Third, they were sanctified or set apart: **“thou art an holy people unto the LORD your God”** (verse 2), a people separated and devoted to His service, designed for His praise, and governed by His holy law.

Question 2: *What lessons do we learn from the demand of God on Israel to distinguish themselves from other nations?*

On the basis of their peculiar and privileged relationship, the Lord told them to distinguish themselves from all the nations that were round about them. By reminding them of their relationship with God, Moses seemed to tell them to conduct themselves in the manner that befits their status as God’s peculiar treasure. They should do nothing to betray the honour bestowed on them and forfeit the privileges of that relationship. The truth revealed here is that as God’s children, we are under serious spiritual responsibility and duty to ensure that we live up to our calling and election. Our special relationship with God carries with it both a sense of privilege and responsibility.

The children of Israel were required here to distinguish themselves in the area of mourning for the dead. **“Ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.”** It was the custom among the Canaanites to cut their flesh to demonstrate sincerity in worship and earnestness in prayer to their gods (1 Kings 18:29). This was more often done for the dead (Leviticus 19:28; 21:5). It was also a custom in certain nations to cut the hair in a certain way or cut it off and dedicate it to their gods in mourning for the dead. Israel was forbidden from emulating them. In the same way, believers are forbidden from afflicting themselves with inordinate grief for the loss of near relations. Our hope in the God of all comfort and our expectation for heaven should be sufficient reasons to remain unmoved in the face of the perplexities of life (1 Thessalonians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 7:29,30).

UNCLEAN AND CLEAN ANIMALS AND FOOD (Deuteronomy 14:3-21; Leviticus 11:2-44; 20:25,26; Genesis 1:20-25; Psalm 119:128; 1 Corinthians 10:3; Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10:9-16; Romans 14:13-23; 1 Corinthians 8:8-13; 10:31; 1 Timothy 4:3-5).

The animals were classified into two: clean and unclean. The distinctive features which qualify each group of animals to be either clean or unclean are made clear by God. The list reveals three categories of animals. The first category is the land animals. These are made up of the four-footed ruminants and the crawling animals such as reptiles, mouse, snail and mole (verses 2, 29, 30). The second is the aquatic or water creatures such as fish (verse 9). The third is the flying animals such as birds and insects (verses 13,23).

A four-footed land animal is to be regarded as clean, only as it both chews the cud and parts the hoof. Any animal in this group that has either of these features without the other or has neither of them would be regarded as unclean. The aquatic creatures also must have both fins and scales before they could be regarded as clean. In case of the flying creatures, God mentioned some specific ones that must not be eaten without any general rule as in the other categories. These were mostly scavengers and carnivorous birds. The eagle, hawk and kite are predators; the vulture is a carrion eater. Some prohibited birds have wings but do not fly; then, the bat is not really a bird but acts like one; others, like the owl, pelican, ravens and cormorant are solitary and live in dark places (Psalm 102:6; Isaiah 34:11).

Question 3: *On what grounds can we explain or apply the law of clean and unclean animals?*

We may explain the law of clean and unclean animals in at least two ways, namely, on the basis of health or hygiene and spiritual principles. Certain kinds of food are most suitable in each respective climate. In addition, diet may be determined by race, occupation, etc.; therefore, God knowing what was good or detrimental for His people gave these laws.

Some of the animals which God forbade to be eaten are known for their dirty habits. The swine, for instance, is associated with wallowing in the mire which makes it to carry some disease-causing organisms. Also, its meat is very fatty. As at the time God gave the laws to Israel, sanitation was still poor in most nations and diseases could easily spread from poor handling of these animals.

Secondly, the law was intended to teach some important spiritual principles. One, the principle of holiness (Leviticus 11:43-45; 20:25,26; Deuteronomy 14:2,3). Just as an animal could not pass as clean if it merely chewed the cud without parting the hoof; or in case of fishes, if it had scales but no fins, a person cannot be considered clean before God unless he is made righteous and also practises righteousness. In simple terms, he must have the double mark of inward and outward purity.

Two, the principle of separation from the world (Daniel 1:8; Deuteronomy 14:23). God gave His people the law so as to mark them out from other nations who had no control over their appetites or diet. The nations that surrounded the Israelites were idol worshippers and they were notorious for their weird or strange diets. Therefore, it was necessary to legislate for the children of Israel what to eat and what not to eat so that they would be peculiar and distinct from those idolatrous nations.

Three, it was to teach the spiritual principles of obedience, absolute surrender and yieldedness to God's command. By telling them what to eat or not, God wanted them to know that their personal opinion must be yielded to His supreme law and precepts.

Even if an Israelite considered a particular animal to be a harmless delicacy, he had to refrain from eating it once it falls in the category of those which God called unclean.

Four, it was to teach the Israelites that God is interested in every aspect of their lives and, whatever they do must be to the glory and pleasure of God. Even in their eating, they were to be conscious of God's presence and glory.

Question 4: *Why is the law concerning clean and unclean food not binding on New Testament believers?*

The Old Testament law of clean and unclean animals is no longer binding on New Testament believers. Jesus Christ has fulfilled its demands and so believers are no longer subjected to the scruples about meat. This was made very clear to the disciples at the time of Christ's earthly ministry and to Peter in a vision (Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10:9-16). However, the spiritual principles that the law teaches are still binding on believers today.

Question 5: *What major principles can believers draw from the law of clean and unclean animals?*

One, we must separate ourselves from every uncleanness, works of darkness, pollution of the flesh and of the spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1). God expects us to be holy in every area of our lives. So, we must be free from unclean things such as immorality, idolatry and pornography (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 2 Timothy 2:19). The clean animals in the water had scales to protect their flesh. We must also have the grace of God to keep us from the evil influence of the society.

Two, we are to be guided by love and discretion in the way we use our liberty on diet. A believer cannot eat just anything and everything. We must avoid things that are harmful or unwholesome. There are some meats or foods which are inseparably linked with idolatry in some localities. Others are connected with spiritism and divination. A Christian must exercise self-control not only in avoiding harmful foods but also in the use of legitimate ones. **"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any"** (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Three, looking at the clean animals, we observe that they chewed the cud and parted the hoof. For the believer, chewing the cud is a picture of meditation and digesting the word of God. But then it was not enough to chew the cud, a clean animal must also part the hoof. That means that the word of God we hear must affect our walk, guide our feet and affect our lifestyle in general. In order to please the Lord, we must practise what we learn. **"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"** (James 1:22).

Historians tell us that most of the animals that God prohibited in the Old Testament were used by idol worshippers either in sacrifice or as objects of worship. For instance, the swine was highly valued in the superstitious worship of Venus, the owl in the worship of Minerva, etc. They also used some of the birds to interpret omens. They associated some birds with good luck and tried to follow their flight, while they connected others with evil. But as believers, we must steer clear of any of these appearances of evil and idolatry. Like Daniel, we must purpose in our hearts not to defile ourselves (Daniel 1:8; Acts 15:29; 1 John 5:21).

Four, believers are the salt and light of the world. We are to avoid all kinds of evil which those prohibited animals signified. We must avoid the cruelty and barbarity of

the predatory birds, the morose and solitary lifestyle of the raven, the love of darkness by the owl, love for uncleanness as seen in the swine, and hypocrisy and double life exemplified by the bat.

Finally, we must live to the glory of God. Whatever we do: eating, drinking, dressing, working or re-creating, must be to the glory of God. The marked distinction between the Israelites and the strangers is strikingly presented in verse 21: **“Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself... for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God.”** For a Christian to participate in the vanities of this sinful world would be likened to an Israelite eating that which had died of itself. Many things may be convenient for a worldly man but they cannot be for a true Christian.

“Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk” (verse 21). The fact that this command is repeated here shows that God’s people must carefully avoid everything contrary to nature. It is improper that what was intended for a creature’s nourishment should be used to seethe or boil it. God’s word gives prominence to what is according to nature or what is comely. **“Doth not even nature itself teach you...”** (1 Corinthians 11:14). While the Spirit of God may lead us beyond and above nature, He never leads us against it. In its spiritual sense, God’s word, which is our spiritual milk, should not be corrupted, mutilated, diluted, modified or handled carelessly.

UNCOMMON PRECEPTS FOR THE FAITHFUL (Deuteronomy 14:22–29; Leviticus 27:30–33; Numbers 18:21–32; Deuteronomy 26:1–15; Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:24,25)

“Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always” (Deuteronomy 14:22,23). Here, we find some uncommon practical instructions concerning tithing and works of charity or mercy. They were directed on how to dispense of it in works of piety and charity. Every third year, they were to **“lay it at home within thy gates”** to be given to the poor, **“the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates....”**

Question 6: *Why must believers pay their tithes faithfully?*

The import of this practice of tithing to the people of Israel is that both they and their land belong to God. They held the land only as tenants or caretakers under Him. They are called to bear testimony to this truth through tithing faithfully. It was a kind of homage, a grateful acknowledgment of God’s ownership and benevolence. Likewise, believers should remember that all that we have belonged to God. Our tithe (one-tenth) is the minimum we can give to God. A true child of God should not forget, delay, defer or totally neglect to pay his or her tithes. This would amount to deliberate disobedience and robbery which attract stern divine punishment (Malachi 3:8,9). This practice also teaches us that besides our normal tithes, we should also be ready to give our resources to support the work of the Lord, sponsor Christian programmes and projects. Moreover, we should not neglect works of charity whether in the church or outside of it. Believers must make provision for charity besides their normal tithes and offering.

Connected to the instruction on tithing was the periodic gathering in the place where Jehovah has chosen **“to place his name”**. This was a privilege for all Israelites.

From here we learn that God attaches great importance to the periodic gatherings of His people. He delights to see His beloved people in His presence.

Question 7: *How can we identify the place God has chosen today?*

In the face of the multiplicity of worship centres today, the simple identifying mark of God's place is where His word is preached without fear or favour; where righteousness is practised and holiness is their watchword. True worshippers are to assemble where God has chosen to make His word and presence known. Believers are exhorted to regularly assemble together with others in fellowship and worship (Hebrews 10:24,25; Acts 24:42-47; Psalm 122:1). Moreover, we must endeavour to make our fellowship and worship a refreshing and an edifying one where frivolity and light-heartedness are eschewed (Psalm 16:11).

LAWS CONCERNING DEBT AND SLAVES

MEMORY VERSE: “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee; therefore I command thee this thing today” (Deuteronomy 15:15).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 15:1-23.

Moses, in the previous chapter, taught Israel the need to understand their peculiarity as a holy people unto the Lord. Being peculiar, they were required to be totally devoted to God and honour Him with their tithes and offerings. In so doing, provision was made for the Levites and their poor brethren. In our text today, Moses continues to charge Israel concerning their duty to the poor who are so impoverished that they are unable to pay debts owed their brethren. Such debts owed to a fellow Israelite were to be repudiated on the seventh year called the year of release. Also, slaves who have served their masters up to six years were to be released in the seventh year unconditionally. These kernels of the lesson today are to be so observed “**because it is called the LORD’s release**”. Obedience to these commandments was demanded from them if they were to fully enjoy God’s promised blessings in the land of Canaan. For us today, Christ has released us from the great debt of sin into freedom and riches of His glory. It is incumbent on us to obey Him in all things for our blessings.

Question 1: *What is the law of release and why does God require Israel to observe it?*

RELEASE FROM DEBTS (Deuteronomy 15:1-6; Exodus 23:10,11; Nehemiah 5:1-12; Matthew 6:12,14,15)

The law of release was that the seventh year or the sabbatical year in Israel was to be observed as a year of release in which debts owed the brethren by fellow Israelites were to be forgiven. During this sabbatical year, land remained uncultivated (Leviticus 25:2-7). Crops that grew on their own were meant for the poor, strangers and beasts of the field, and not for the owner of the land. God required Israel to observe this law essentially for the benefit of the poor: to give them relief and cause the land and the servants to rest.

Debt is any obligation (moral, material, monetary) owed another person. C.H. Spurgeon painted a painful picture of a borrower or debtor, “without debt, without care; out of debt, out of danger; but owing and borrowing are bramble bushes full of thorns”. A debtor or borrower is a servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7).

In Israel, God required a debtor to pay his debt. Defaulters risked losing their domestic animals, land and other items of property (Job 24:3). If he becomes insolvent and it was established that he could not pay, creditors seized him to become a slave to pay with his labour. Where a debtor died, the creditor took his children as slaves (2 King 4:1). The Mosaic law gave parents the right to give out their children for payment of their debts. In cases of extreme poverty, the law allowed them to sell themselves or surrender to serve the creditor in lieu of the debts owed. Isaiah alluded to this kind of enslavement through debts when he enquired, **“which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves”** (Isaiah 50:1).

Christ also referred to this practice among the Jews in the parable of an insolvent debtor while teaching on the necessity of forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. **“Forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded Him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had”**. Whereas the Israelite debtor was released in the seventh year and freed from indebtedness, the stranger in the land was still required to pay. Also the law requires those who are financially buoyant to pay. It is only the poor who were not able to pay all through six years that had their debts cancelled. How God loves and cares for the poor!

Question 2: What is the greatest debt mankind owes God and how can man pay it?

Loss of status and freedom come with not only financial but also spiritual bankruptcy. **“Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves”**. The greatest debt any man can ever owe is the debt for sin. All men are debtors to God by reason of their sinfulness and willful disobedience to His laws. No man can ever pay the debt for his own sin or the sin of another. But Christ paid it all. He is the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins (John 1:29,36). But we need to appropriate the mercy of God for forgiveness of sins committed. Pardon and freedom from sin are provided through faith in the atoning blood of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Question 3: How do people get into debt today and how can one live a debt-free life?

Many people today get into debt through indiscipline, lack of contentment, covetousness, idleness, inability to manage resources, natural disaster, demonic oppression, poverty, etc. To live a debt-free life, the believer must avoid materialism, trust God as provider in every situation, work hard and renounce unchristian attitudes towards money and riches. It is God’s will to prosper His people and keep them free from debt (2 John 3; Philippians 4:19; Job 36:11).

Question 4: What should be the Christian’s attitude to borrowing?

Though it is no sin to borrow, it is advisable for a Christian to avoid borrowing as much as possible. Again, C.H. Spurgeon’s counsel on borrowing is apt: “always live a little below your means, never get into debt, and remember, he who goes a borrowing, goes a sorrowing”. Refusal to pay debts owed another when the debtor is financially buoyant is an act of wickedness (Psalm 37:21). As part of restitution, God requires the believer to pay just debts, loans, and in case of employers, wages or salaries of employees.

This command of the Lord for debt cancellation to the kind-hearted Israelite who had lent money to his poor fellow came with His promise of blessing. The obedient will be enriched by the Lord. And since God is so good and cares much for the poor, everyone in this condition needs to pray earnestly for supply to Him who lifts the poor from the dunghill and sets him among the princes (Psalm 109:21-27).

CAUTION ON CHARITABLE LENDING (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Matthew 5:42; Luke 6:38; 14:14; Romans 13:8; Proverbs 3:28)

Moses warned the people: **“Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother”** (verse 7). Refusal to lend to the poor on the ground that the year of release is at hand or to avoid losing money would amount to wickedness. The Scripture clearly admonishes against refusal to help a brother in need (Proverbs 3:28). However, it is advisable that a Christian should be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading when embarking on any charitable exercise.

Question 5: Give reason(s) why a New Testament believer should lend to the poor among us.

The children of Israel were commanded: **“open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth”** (verse 8). These are the same words of our Lord Jesus Christ: **“Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away”** (Matthew 5:42).

It is a dreadful thing to hear the cry of the poor among us and harden the heart, for God’s ears are open to such cries (Proverbs 21:13). The Lord expects us to give generously to the poor because He cares about their state.

Givers should give lovingly, liberally and cheerfully.

RELEASE OF SLAVES WITH ABUNDANT PROVISIONS (Deuteronomy 15:12-18; Exodus 21:2-11; Leviticus 25:39-46; Jeremiah 34:14; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 4:1)

The children of Israel were commanded to keep servants or slaves of their brethren for six years of service and to set them free at the seventh year. It means that the slave was to be freed even if the year of release happened before the expiration of the six-year service. This demand from the Lord challenges us today to treat our servants or wards with fairness and kindness. Servants who faithfully serve as apprentices for an agreed period of time should not be sent away empty.

Today, the spiritual Israelite (the believer) is not in slavery to sin, Satan and sickness. He is liberated by Christ. Therefore, we should treat one another with brotherly love and kindness, irrespective of social status.

Question 6: How can a sinner be free from slavery and servitude?

The most important and greatest freedom any person can enjoy today is freedom from sin. True freedom is freedom from the debt and burden of sin, made possible through Christ’s vicarious death on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead. A

sinner can be free from slavery and servitude by appropriating the merits of Christ's death. He or she needs to acknowledge His atoning sacrifice by faith and ask for cleansing from sin.

Moses added that the freed slave must not **“go away empty, but thou shalt furnish him liberally”**. God prospers the generous and multiplies His blessings upon those who obey Him (Proverbs 19:17). However, the slave who chooses **“not to go away”** on the ground that he loves his master, was made to undergo some ceremony such as the piercing of the ear to mark his perpetual and wilful service to his master. One aspect of voluntary service of the believer today is to willingly consecrate himself to the service of his Lord and Master. This kind of life-time commitment and loyalty to Christ our Master is ably captured by a hymnwriter, who wrote: **“I love, I love my Master, I will not go out free!”** By application, full-time Christian service should be a willing service borne out of love for God, not out of compulsion, or pursuit of material wealth. And everyone who is led to serve in that capacity should have a strong Christian conviction.

The sabbatical year had its antecedent from Genesis when God rested on the seventh day after the creation of the heavens and the earth and gave it as rest to His people from their labours and to be observed in Israel as a holy day unto the Lord (Exodus 20:10,11). The sabbatical year therefore belongs to the Lord and was to be honoured as such. For the church today, the seventh day is the first day of the week (Sunday) being the day of resurrection of Christ from the dead (John 20:1-9).

With the land lying fallow, debts forgiven and slaves released except for those who chose perpetual servitude, everybody in Israel was to depend on divine providence. Thus, this seventh year of release typifies the period of grace through the gospel for which Christ proclaimed that He was anointed to release captives from their slave masters of sin, sickness and Satan (Luke 4:18). Therefore, everyone who repents of sin and believes the gospel will receive forgiveness from sin and release from the bondage of Satan.

CONSECRATION OF MALE FIRSTLING OF ANIMALS (Deuteronomy 15:19-23; 26:2; Numbers 3:13; Nehemiah 10:35-36; Exodus 13:2, 15; Genesis 9:4)

Moses ended this canon by enjoining Israel to dedicate to the Lord every first-born male of their cattle. **“Israel shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep”** (verse 19), but such should be eaten **“before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household”**. The reason for the consecration of the first-born male is in remembrance of and thankfulness to the Lord for sparing Israel's first born males in the land of Egypt on the night the angel of death went out and slew the first-born of all the Egyptians (Exodus 13:2,15). This law shows divine ownership of all things (Ezekiel 18:4; Psalms 24:1; Leviticus 25:23). Believers need to acknowledge God's ownership of their lives and everything they have. The implication of this revelation is to daily live for Christ and submit all we are and have to Him for use to His glory.

Question 7: Why were the children of Israel commanded to offer their male firstlings and forbidden to offer blemished animals to the Lord?

Moses instructed Israel not to present any blemished firstling to the Lord. This typifies the offering of the blameless and only begotten Son of God. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God without blemish or without spot (1 Peter 1:19; Exodus 12:5). As God

required Israel to give Him the unblemished male firstling of their cattle, we are equally required today to offer ourselves as, “**living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service**” (Romans 12:1). Also, we are to render to Him the best of our talents, time and treasures as first-fruits unto God. The best of our strength and comfort are to be ploughed back into His service and glory.

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CEREMONIAL LAW VERSUS GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: “**But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they**” (Acts 15:11).

TEXT: Acts 15:1-35

Our recent studies in this book reveal that Paul and

Barnabas had serious challenges and oppositions from the Jews in virtually all the places where they preached the gospel. Certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium even persuaded the people to stone Paul (Acts 14:19). But the apostles never allowed the conflicts to deter them from revealing the mind of God to the people.

Our text focuses on the subjects of grace and faith: two dominant themes of apostolic teachings both to the Jews and Gentiles. Wrong interpretations and application of these concepts are however, at the root of denominational differences within the Christian fold.

Question 1: *What led to the doctrinal controversy in the early church?*

A clear perspective on the interface between the ceremonial laws and grace is essential to the spiritual health of the church and her members. In the early church, the Jewish Christian converts strove hard to unite the law and the gospel and make salvation dependent on the ceremonies of the law. The Jews had held the Mosaic law in high esteem for many centuries before the advent of the gospel. They could not easily give up the institution of circumcision even after they had been converted. This explains their desire to impose circumcision as a condition for salvation on Gentile converts. This led to much controversy between the Jewish believers and the Gentile counterparts in the early church.

Many Jewish believers freely indulged in the Mosaic ceremonies such as the seasonal feasts, regard for clean and unclean animals and ceremonial cleansing and

washing. They did not seek the endorsement or adoption of their doctrinal position by the Apostles but imposed it on Gentile Christian converts. This led to the disputation that warranted Paul and Barnabas going to consult the Apostles at Jerusalem in an effort to resolve the matter.

DISPUTE ABOUT CIRCUMCISION (Acts 15:1-5; Galatians 2:11-14; 5:2,3; Mark 7:1-8; Luke 11:37-41; Colossians 2:16-23)

The claim of the Judaizers was sharp and resolute. Placing circumcision above grace by these men from Judea was like moving from the Spirit into the flesh (Galatians 3:3); from the principles of internal spiritual work of grace to that of external observance of the law. Peddlers of this error spared no efforts in their subtle and pernicious indoctrination and spread of their false teachings.

Question 2: *What is the challenge facing the Christian church today with regards to false doctrines?*

But Paul and Barnabas took a very firm stand on the question. They stoutly resisted the attempt to declare that saving grace could be found in formal ordinances or ceremonies. Thus, they contended for sound doctrine with as much zeal as they had laboured for the salvation of souls on the missionary field. If this had not been challenged it would have led to the re-establishment of the ceremonial laws and relegation of grace as the condition for salvation.

The action of Paul and others in confronting this error is commendable and should be an example to Christian leaders and workers. They should be ready at all times to fight against falsehood in the church whenever it is noticed. No matter how insignificant, false doctrine must not be left to thrive as it is capable of sweeping out the faith of undiscerning believers.

Question 3: *What must Christian leaders do to avoid doctrinal error in these last days?*

Christian leaders are to take heed to themselves, the doctrine and the flock (1 Timothy 4:16; Acts 20:28), and “**earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**” (Jude 3). To accomplish this duty effectively, they must so teach the sound doctrines that the people will have no appetite for false doctrines. The Lord’s command to teach the truth is part of the great commission. “**Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen**” (Matthew 28:20). Solid teaching of the precepts, commands and doctrines of the word of God is important for the confirmation of new converts.

Also, Christian leaders should emphasize the essentials of the gospel tenets which include faith in Christ’s sacrifice for salvation, forgiveness of sins and justification since it is the very foundation of our Christian faith. Other Christian experiences and doctrines should be taught also. Besides, Christian leaders must be eagle-eyed in detecting unwholesome or unbalanced presentation of the gospel. They should watch over the flock committed to their care (Acts 20:29,30).

Moreover, leaders must guide against imposition of personal opinions on others. The word of God should be the standard at all times because it is greater than dreams,

visions, revelations and prophecies. They must also watch against the intentions and activities of false brethren from within and without.

CONSULTATION OF THE APOSTLES CONCERNING THE DISPUTE (Acts 15:6-21; Ephesians 2:8,9; John 1:17; 1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 3:24,25; Genesis 6:8; Acts 10:9-16).

Question 4: *Why was it necessary to consult the elders and apostles in tackling this doctrinal controversy?*

Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained" (Ephesians 2:10).

Grace is the unmerited favour of God towards fallen man for the sake of Christ. Consequent upon Christ's suffering on the cross, salvation is free for all irrespective of colour, race, social status, education or position. All that the sinner needs is to confess his sins and place his faith in the atoning blood of Jesus to cleanse and reconcile him back to God.

Question 5: *What is grace? Give scriptural proofs that grace and faith, not the law, are the means of salvation.*

The law was to show the awful state of man and to demonstrate man's inability to live up to the ideals of the law and his need for a Saviour. This removes every hope of salvation through self-effort and brings man to the point where he casts himself on the merits, grace and righteousness of Christ who satisfied the demands of the law on the cross (Galatians 2:21).

THE CHURCH'S RESOLUTION AND DETERMINATION OF THE DISPUTE (Acts 15:22-35; Galatians 1:7; Exodus 18:22; Numbers 36:1-10).

The Apostles and elders could have settled this question without so much disputing; but it was good to permit the objecting parties free speech and to answer the arguments by proving that the requirement is needless and unscriptural for the Gentiles.

Question 6: *What can we learn from the decision of the Council at Jerusalem?*

James, like a true Jew, referred to the writings of the prophets as a guide to the interpretation of the revelation of the gospel. Nothing could be more relevant to James' argument than to show from the words of Amos the prophet that God's present purpose of taking the Gentiles to be his people was like all other works, formed from the beginning of the world (Amos 9:11,12). The way the apostle handled the issue with humility should serve as a guide to Christian leaders. The word of God must be our perfect reference point in all matters of life and doctrine. It is no wonder that the final verdict finds general acceptance among the other apostles, elders and the whole church. They decided to write their resolution and send this by the hands of Paul and Barnabas and two others specially delegated from Jerusalem to Antioch. The unity of the church was thus preserved and the Apostles returned to their duty post.

In view of the successful handling of this most serious controversy that had ever risen, this first Council of the church stands as an example for all ages and time. The council set the pace for brotherly love and wisdom. Without taking these steps, the

Judaizers in Antioch and elsewhere would have remained unchecked and left to pursue their own divisive programme. By this step, a new bond of sympathy and affection was established between the Jewish and Gentile brethren.

Converts in a Bible-believing church should also be careful not to import traditions, customs, practices and norms of their former religion, tribe or society into the blood-washed assembly thereby becoming agents of corruption and decay in the body of Christ. Controversies do not call for a stop to the gospel enterprise. Rather, they should be resolved while the gospel ministry goes on.

In an age when the peace of the church is so much threatened by controversy, intrigues, schemes, plots and counterplots; when much violence is indulged in by those who wish to enforce their views, it is important to study carefully the history of this great and trying controversy which was eventually resolved through the wisdom of the Spirit and firmness of the Apostles. These same virtues are needed today in the body of Christ so that we can achieve the Lord's goal for His church and prosecute successfully the project of world evangelization.

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PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

MEMORY VERSE: "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36).

TEXT: Acts 15:36-41

The issue of missions is important to all who love the

Lord and desire the extension of His kingdom. Paul and Barnabas undertook their first missionary journey after their call and commission by the Holy Ghost and they were successful in their outreach despite the challenges from the agents of Satan and the unbelieving Jews. It is worthy of note that opposition and persecution from the enemy did not deter them from prosecuting their ordained assignment "**and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed**" (Acts 13:48).

As a result of their success, Paul declares his readiness to undertake the second missionary journey with his companion, Barnabas. Their love, faithfulness and concern for souls left them with no option than to embark on the second journey. God's glory and the promotion of His kingdom was their primary concern. No wonder they laboured tirelessly for the conversion and stability of souls and the strengthening of the body of Christ. They were ready at all times and under all circumstances to labour and suffer for the gospel. Their commitment to the great commission is a great

challenge to believers today in spite of their divergent views on choice of team members.

THE PROPOSAL AND PURPOSE OF THE SECOND

MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Acts 15:36-39;13:4,13-15,51; 14:1,6,24,25; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:24)

Paul made a proposal to Barnabas in respect of the work earlier undertaken among the Gentiles. They needed to go back and evaluate the work to ascertain the progress that has been made. Thus, they determined to visit all the places they had earlier ministered, distance, risk, difficulties or inconveniences notwithstanding.

Question 1: *What scriptural principles do we learn from Paul's decision and proposal?*

Believers and Christian workers almost always have need of one another. Aside of both being partners-in-mission, Paul and Barnabas needed to undertake the journey together. Throwing light on the significance of scriptural partnership, the Bible says: **“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up”** (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10). When sending out His disciples during His earthly ministry, He sent **“them forth by two and two”**. When we walk and work together, there will be the benefit of companionship and counsel, united stand against enemies that rise against us and the privilege of being strengthened in times of weakness. It is therefore necessary that believers and Christian workers cooperate with one another or give helping hands to ensure our individual well being on one hand and the progress of Christ's kingdom on the other.

Question 2: *Why is follow-up necessary in evangelistic outreach?*

Paul's decision to **“go again and visit our brethren”** teaches us that we should not only be zealous in carrying out fresh outreaches but also ready to revisit the places we had previously ministered to assess the condition of the work. This is to ensure the conservation of the souls that had been won to the Lord so that our labours will not be in vain. Secondly, Paul's proposal reveals his concern for the welfare of the brethren. Pastoral responsibility demands that gospel ministers show tender concern for those they had preached to in order to avoid losing their sheep to the roaring lion and his agents (1 Peter 5:8), thereby labouring in vain (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Just as caring doctors follow up on their patients to avoid possible relapse, so should soul-winners. Such visits must be purposeful, relevant and spiritually beneficial (Romans 1:11).

Finally, Paul's concern was for every city where they had preached the gospel, not minding whether they were many or few, lovely or hostile. Therefore, contemporary soul-winners should not be partial, narrow-minded or selective in their follow up activities. Children, youths, adults, aged, rich or poor, educated as well as illiterates should enjoy equal attention of the soul-winner. Follow up is an essential aspect of the great commission which aims at conserving and maturing the precious souls won for the Lord.

In spite of Paul's noble proposal however, there was a sharp disagreement between him and Barnabas over the inclusion of John Mark, his nephew (Colossians 4:10) for this journey. **"But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work"** (verse 38). The argument that ensued led to the separation of these pioneer pillars of missionary work of the early church. Christian believers, workers and leaders should play down on issues that divide us.

However, we learn that there is the possibility of non-doctrinal differences cropping up among believers and gospel ministers. Secondly, we should guard against partiality in our dealings with one another. What should matter in Christianity is a new creature, not who we are or where we come from (Galatians 6:15). Tribal, ethnic or cultural sentiments as well as respect of persons should not be allowed to influence our relationships. We should also be watchful of the 'so-called little things' because they can get in our way and deny us the necessary cooperation and fellowship which we need to be able to overcome the church's arch-enemy. Paul and Barnabas who could not be separated by peculiar missionary challenges parted ways because of differences in opinion. Finally, the glory of God and the interest of His kingdom should be our reference point in every situation.

Missionary work requires mature believers who are strong in faith, visionary and able to endure hardship as good soldiers of the Lord. For instance, while in the field during their second missionary journey, Paul and Silas found themselves in prison for proclaiming Christ. They accepted their condition in good faith, prayed and sang praises to God. Therefore, those aspiring to serve the Lord on the missions field should commit themselves to God, ready to do His will. Disagreement among gospel ministers is unhealthy for the church because it affects ministers and their ministries negatively. However, it is possible to avoid such unnecessary disagreements if ministers of the gospel are willing to pay the price of unity.

The major platform for unity here is our readiness to abide by the Scriptures, enabling it to be the final authority in all matters. Moreover, the body of Christ is enjoined to have the same mind and mind the same things (Philippians 2:5; 3:16). Armed with the mind of Christ, ministers can relate with each other with the Christ-like qualities of forbearance, humility, selflessness, love etc.

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION IN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES (Acts 15:40; Mark 16:15,19-20; 2 Timothy 2:19,21).

Question 3: *How do we avoid unnecessary disagreements among gospel ministers?*

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was a matter of principle and was not allowed to hinder the work of the Kingdom. It is commendable that in spite of what happened God's work still progressed. Unable to agree, both missionaries chose new partners and moved in different directions.

The importance of preparing church members for home and foreign missionary activities cannot be overstressed. This is in view of the fact that there are willing and ready persons like Silas to step in and go. There are several ways that the church leadership can prepare their members and workers for this assignment. Since it takes the experience of regeneration to carry out the great commission, members who are not born again should be challenged to give their lives to Christ. Other members should be encouraged to seek other Christian experiences. Moreover, there should be

deliberate emphasis on the subject to remind church members of their responsibilities towards missions.

Question 4: *Identify practical ways through which church workers and leaders can participate in mission-related activities and programmes.*

There are several direct and indirect avenues through which church members and leaders can participate in missionary outreaches. Those who have been adequately motivated and led should respond to the missionary call and reach out. Church leadership can also be led to appoint those they believe are spiritual and mature enough to go on missions in foreign lands. We can also participate by praying regularly for our missionaries and supporting them with finance and other materials as may be necessary. Finally, while giving our indirect support to missionaries, we should remember Christ's charge to believers to occupy till He comes. We are to keep ourselves busy through active service to the body of Christ as well as preaching the gospel wherever we find ourselves. This could be done through direct preaching, literature distribution, invitation of sinners to church programmes, etc.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF PRAYER IN FRUITFUL MISSIONARY OUTREACHES (Acts 15:40; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2-4; Ephesians 6:18-24; Colossians 4:2,12)

Prayer plays an indispensable role in the accomplishment of missionary outreaches and goals. Little wonder therefore that Paul and other Christian missionaries constantly requested for prayers from the brethren. Before Paul and Silas departed for their second missionary journey, the church prayed for them, committing them to the grace of God.

Question 5: *Why is it necessary to pray for our missionaries and gospel outreaches?*

Challenges in the mission field are so numerous that individual Christians and missionaries need all the prayers that the church can offer. Efforts of our missionaries would yield very little or no fruits if people will not give themselves continually to prayers. Regular and fervent prayers for our missionaries will result in open doors where gospel penetration has been difficult, mass conversion of souls and restoration of backsliders and powerful ministrations, signs and wonders. Other benefits include availability of committed missionaries needed for home and foreign missions and protection and preservation of missionaries and their families as well as provisions of their needs.

In these last days every church member is expected to cooperate with the church in her effort to occupy till Christ comes. The church should respond positively to the promptings of leadership by way of prayer, evangelism, follow up and continued financial support to her mission fields.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

MEMORY VERSE: “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us”

(Acts 16:9).

TEXT: Acts 16:1-15

Paul had embarked on his Second Missionary Journey

that began when he paired with Silas, following the misunderstanding that led to his separation from Barnabas. Paul and Silas travelled through “**Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches**” (Acts 15:40,41). Our text opens with Paul in Derbe and Lystra where he enlisted a young disciple named Timothy who would become a life-long fellow-worker in the kingdom.

As Paul’s company travelled through Phrygia and Galatia, they delivered the decrees from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and strengthened the churches. “**And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily**” (Acts 16:5). Paul wanted to carry the good news of the saving grace into Asia but the Holy Spirit did not permit him (verse 6). He moved on to Mysia and tried to go into Bithynia but the Spirit of God again, would not allow him either (verse 7). Following the leading of the Holy Spirit, Paul and his companions came down to Troas (verse 8) where he received the Macedonian call. The run of events on this missionary journey, his response to the Macedonian call and its glorious outcome are the focus of this study.

SELECTION OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS (Acts 16:1-5;

Isaiah 30:21; Romans 1:14,15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; John 1:47; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Corinthians 4:1)

Question 1: *What spiritual qualifications must gospel ministers possess today?*

There are some spiritual qualifications which aspiring workers must possess. First, they must be saved and have been discipled. Timothy was a disciple, that is, a follower of the faith and footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who work with gospel men of vision and virtue must be fit for the office. Also, they must have good report, be humble and submissive. In his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, Paul listed the sublime requirements for appointing Christian ministers and workers such as righteousness, blamelessness, honesty, integrity and contentment (1 Timothy 3:1-14; Titus 1:5-9). Paul’s choice of Timothy and the recommendation of the brethren reveal his humility and sensitivity to both the Holy Spirit and the local churches in his selection of co-workers.

Question 2: *What is the difference between Timothy’s circumcision and the one urged upon all converted Gentiles by the Jews?*

Timothy's circumcision was not by compulsion nor was it done as a means to have him saved. He was already saved and "**well reported of by the brethren**". The circumcision was to give Timothy added advantage of universal acceptability. Paul knew the importance of such advantages as he had used language and his being an ex-Pharisee to break barriers to the gospel (Acts 15:24,28; 21:17-26; 22:1-2; 23:6,7). We thus learn that we can make righteous concessions for the sake of accelerated gospel outreaches. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ exemplified the same principle when He, the Creator and Owner of all things submitted to paying tribute to His creature (Matthew 17:24-27) and when He submitted Himself to John's baptism (Matthew 3:11-15).

The world is changing and except ministers of the gospel vary their approaches while maintaining uncompromising stance on the doctrines of Christ, many sectors of the society may never be reached. A dull old-fashioned cathedral, priestly sermon may not arouse youths in the campus community. So is obsolete teaching style void of the Spirit's power. While the gospel remains firm, constant and pure, the delivery methods and mechanisms must vary with changing societal systems. This also includes self-improvement by the minister who must "**study to show [himself] thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Cultures that are induced by profession, peculiar weather and other natural features should be distinguished from fetish idolatrous and satanic customs. Every pastor and leader in the church should promote church programmes and aim to reach every person in their locality and beyond. The Internet has changed the world completely. The use of present-day technology can help us pass the gospel to those we have never met and may never meet in life. There are crowds of people glued to the television and Internet who never attend any church service. The satellite locations of the church should be multiplied and, if possible, located on every street. We must reach the people where they are in a timely manner. For instance, the nomads who move from place to place in the course of their vocation can be reached through adequately planned evangelism in their temporary settlement.

SENSITIVITY TO GOD'S LEADING AND THE MACEDONIAN CALL (Acts 16:6-10; 8:26-29; 1 Samuel 9:15-17; Luke 24:25-32; Matthew 10:19-20; Psalm 32:8; John 10:27)

God has always led and guided His people in both the Old and New Testaments in definite directions He wanted them to go. He led Abraham's servant in discovering God's unique will for Isaac; Samuel in choosing a king for Israel; Peter, concerning His plan for the salvation of the Gentiles starting with Cornelius and his household.

Question 3: *Mention scriptural means by which the Lord leads His children and preachers today.*

God uses different methods to lead His people at different times and in different situations. The assurance believers have therefore is that His leading is always clear and definite. God could decide to lead in any or a combination of the following ways: the word of God (Psalm 119:105,130; 2 Timothy 3:16,17); when we are under anointed

teaching of the word (Isaiah 30:20,21; Ephesians 4:11,12); some scriptures strongly impressed in the heart by the Holy Spirit when praying (John 14:26; Psalm 119:130); the voice of the Holy Spirit - prompting, directing, influencing or checking (1 Samuel 9:15-21; Acts 10:1-21); direct revelation or dream (John 16:13; Acts 9:10-15); Spirit's confirmation of series of events; special God-given love that cannot be quenched by temporal contrary circumstances (Songs of Solomon 8:6,7).

Question 4: *What practical lessons do we learn from Paul's Macedonian call?*

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9).

It is instructive to note that God did not give Paul this vision immediately he set out for this outreach. He allowed him to draw his ministry schedule and itinerary which did not include Macedonia, and even permitted him to start implementing the schedule to a point. Thereafter, God asked him to put on hold his planned outreach to Asia and Bithynia, allowing him to pass on to Troas where he received the call. The lessons from this are that, God has the prerogative to stop us from a previously planned assignment and give us another at His will. Two, God's leading is progressive and gradually unfolds as we take steps to obey Him (Hosea 6:3). God did not declare His commission to Moses until he first hearkened and drew near to observe the burning bush. Three, those on the path of obedience have no difficulty discerning God's voice or interpreting their visions and dreams. **“And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”** (Acts 16:10). Four, persistent obstructions to God's servant in the course of a particular divine duty or project could sometimes be a divine instrument to direct us to His perfect purpose (Romans 8:28).

PROMPT RESPONSE TO THE MACEDONIAN CALL (Acts 16:10-13; Mark 16:15,20; John 15:16)

Paul's prompt response to the Macedonian call is very commendable. The call to save souls demands prompt response and it must be done **“while it is day”** (John 9:4). Those who linger after getting a call to God's service because of mundane, personal projects should learn from the spiritual alertness of the early church fathers.

Question 5: *What should believers do with the vision of soul-winning?*

The Great Commission is a mandate for all believers and leaders. We must go to the harvest field for it is **“white already to harvest”** (John 4:34,35). Neglect of this all-important task that God has committed into the believer's hand is disobedience that can jeopardize his chances of getting to heaven. He therefore expects every believer who values his salvation to take the gospel message to others for their salvation. God's call to special ministry like pastoral or full-time work may take time before maturation. Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Philip and some contemporary saints passed through such periods. Such developing time may be attended by proving tests, trials and trainings. Those with dramatic call and perceived great heights in gospel ministry should start from somewhere – the presently available ministry opportunity in the church, immediate community, school or place of work – but not to fold their

hands in expectation of when angels would set the stage for their full-blown ministry. We are not to despise the days of little beginnings (Zechariah 4:10) for “**though your beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase**” (Job 8:7).

Arriving early at the river side where people usually gathered, the apostles spoke to the few women they first met. Believers and ministers must not wait for a church building before they can gather people together to hear the gospel message. The choice of the Sabbath day to reach out to souls is worth emulating. How we need to make good use of such free days of ceremonies and public holidays to reach out to people where they will normally gather.

Question 6: *In what ways do Macedonian calls come to us today?*

Today, in virtually every church, there is a great imbalance in the distribution of Christian workers with over-concentration in the cities while the work in the suburbs and rural areas keeps suffering. Philip the evangelist was led to leave the revival in Samaria into the desert for only one Ethiopian Eunuch. Apostle Peter was equally instructed to leave the comfort and warmth of the Jerusalem headquarters fellowship to go as far as Caesarea to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:9-21). In the same vein, the gospel got to us because some missionaries left the comfort of their homes, traversing land and sea, exposing themselves to harsh weather, some dying in the process, all in their efforts to reach us.

Macedonian calls ring aloud all over us today as souls of men and women pine away to godless eternity in our communities and in many lands far away on the mission field. Millions of adults, youths and children are crying out for help in our cities, schools, colleges and even in the churches for people to reach them. Unfortunately, church workers are struggling for limited adult pulpit positions while untold numbers of people perish without care.

CONVERSION AND HOSPITALITY OF LYDIA (Acts 16:14,15; 8:30-36; 9:38-40; 10:7-9, 19,20,33-45; 16:27-33)

THE IMPRISONMENT OF PAUL AND SILAS

MEMORY VERSE: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psalms 34:19).

TEXT: Acts 16:16-40

Having received and heeded the Macedonian call,

Paul and Silas continued their fruitful missionary outreaches. Theirs was a formidable team even when challenges came. God foresees the future and pre-arranges the best companion for His servants, whether in ministry, in marriage or other aspects of life. The pair had one mind, faith, focus and fortitude: necessary ingredients in ministry. Apart from these, their lives epitomized strict discipline in prayer and consistent study of the Word of God.

Similar lifestyles of consecration and prayer were the hallmarks of the life and ministry of the early disciples, apostles of Christ and past heroes of faith. Indeed, it is no understatement to assert that the life and ministry of any gospel minister will rise and fall in consonance with the quality of his prayer life. Prayer is pivotal in the life and ministry of every sincere gospel minister because it is the life-wire of and means through which great exploits are wrought and the kingdom of Christ advanced to the detriment of the gates of hell. It is no wonder therefore, that much is heard of the exploits of Paul and Silas and their ability to cast out the spirit of divination from a damsel who met them on their way to a prayer meeting.

Question 1: *Of what significance is the choice of a companion and the place of prayer in the life and ministry of a Christian?*

SAINTS' SUFFERING AND IMPRISONMENT (Acts 16:16-24; 1 Peter 4:14-16; 3:14-17; Matthew 5:10-12)

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:16,18). When the masters of the demonized lady realized that they had lost their means of **“gain”**, they were furious. They raised persecution against Paul and Silas through false accusation. The charges they levelled against them were serious. First, they resorted to racial prejudice, saying, **“these men, being Jews...”** Second, that they **“do exceedingly troubled our city”**, something the Roman government would not tolerate; and third, that they **“teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe; being Romans”**. Judaism had been acknowledged by the Romans as a legitimate religion; but not the new faith, Christianity, propagated by Paul and Silas. Therefore, the Apostles were beaten, ill-treated as criminals and cast into prison without trial. Persecutors’ strategy remains the same today. They instigate others against believers through deceit, false reports and accusation and appeal to ethnic or racial sentiments.

Persecution is not a new phenomenon to the Christian faith. The Lord Jesus Christ was persecuted. Leaders and members of the Early Church were persecuted and imprisoned. In contemporary times, many Christian believers are still being persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and killed. This is the reason Peter admonishes believers to ensure that their persecutions are not engineered by sinful acts.

Question 2: *What was the immediate cause of Paul and Silas' imprisonment and what were the accusations levelled against them?*

SUPERNATURAL SIGNS THROUGH PREVAILING PRAYER AND PRAISE (Acts 16:25-29; Luke 6:22,23; Acts 5:40-42; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Psalm 22:3; 2 Chronicles 20:1-30)

Instead of grumbling and complaining because of the false accusations, stripes, imprisonment or separation from loved ones, the apostles prayed, sang and praised God. The incident that follows is one of the glorious memorials to the triumph of Christianity in human history. What an example to emulate when faced with persecution, ridicule, malicious slander, false accusation, destructive criticism, miscarriage of justice, undeserved discipline, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, rejection and opposition from neighbours and brethren (1 Peter 2:21,23). In response to their exemplary conduct under trial, God came to their rescue. Suddenly, there was an earthquake which opened all the prison doors and broke their shackles. The jailer, presuming that the inmates had fled, "**drew out his sword**" to take his life. But Paul averted this by crying out, "**Do thyself no harm: for we are all here**" (Acts 16:28). God still answers prayers today especially, when we pray and praise Him under all conditions and circumstances. This is a spiritual weapon that is mostly neglected by battle-weary saints today.

Question 3: *What spiritual weapons were employed by Paul and Silas to secure their freedom?*

SINCERE SEARCH BY THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER (Acts 16:30-34; Jeremiah 29:13; Acts 8:26-34; John 3:3-5)

The salvation of the Philippian jailer was divinely arranged. God ordained it through the instrumentality of the apostles' suffering. God, sometimes, uses human instruments to effect His plans. In this case, the sufferings, prayers and praises of the apostles were the catalyst needed to bring about this. The multiple miracles: earthquake, opening of the locked prison doors, breaking of the bands from the hands and feet of the prisoners, preservation of all the inmates in spite of opening of locked prison doors were enough to convince and convict the jailer of his dire need for salvation. He realized that the apostles were the human instruments used by God to occasion these miracles. In submission, he enquired, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**"

The simple way the apostles presented the gospel to the jailer should serve as a guide to contemporary preachers of the gospel. There was no element of ambiguity in the presentation. Their message which was simply expressed: "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved...**" elicited prompt response from the jailer. When we

fail to present Christ to sincere seekers, it could be frustrating as we may never get the desired result.

Question 4: *How can holy living, prevailing prayers, praises, signs and wonders help in evangelistic outreaches today?*

STEADFASTNESS AND SECURITY OF PERSECUTED SAINTS (Acts 16:35-40; Psalm 34:19,20; Romans 8:35-39; Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Isaiah 43:1-5; 54:17; Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:13)

Paul and Silas' insistence that the magistrates should come personally and effect their release was necessary since they were previously manhandled and treated as criminals before the believers and the general public without proper recourse to fair hearing and the law as entrenched in the then Roman system. They wanted their judges to publicly demonstrate their innocence before all so that this will foster hope in the new Philippian believers that they were not criminals. He also wanted to protect the other believers from the treatment they had received from these magistrates.

Question 5: *Why did Paul and Silas insist on being released from the prison by the magistrates?*

In conclusion, we see that our calling to the gospel work can often land us in danger of misrepresentation, maltreatment, fierce attacks and even at times imprisonment; all coming from the vast forces of darkness holding men's souls in bondage. Though the enemies may roar and rage at our efforts toward delivering men's souls from their grip, we should remain undaunted and unrelenting like Paul and Silas. In the midst of persecution, they took solace in the fact that He who called them into His holy service knows how to make "**all things work together for [their] good**" using often perceived misfortunes to bring succour and salvation to the lost. His promise therefore remains sure: "**the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers... And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?**" (1 Peter 3:12,13). As we get busy in the field, gathering souls into His kingdom, the Lord will surely secure and preserve us for His glory.

Question 6: *What consolation can gospel ministers and Christian workers draw from the experience of Paul and Silas when doing the will of God?*

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PAUL PREACHES AT MARS' HILL

MEMORY VERSE: “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

TEXT: Acts 17:1-34

The life of Paul, the apostle, is an inspiration and a challenge to those who have been called and commissioned to the ministry. He, through his numerous examples, showed where ministers of the gospel and believers in Christ should place their priorities. In spite of the persecution that befell him and his companion at Philippi, he would not be deterred. He not only remained steadfast, he also encouraged those who would have been discouraged by such persecutions to remain focused. His display of leadership qualities stabilized his followers in the faith. If leaders are able to show commitment, fortitude and steadfastness during crises, followers will find it easy to stick to the truth through thick and thin. If leaders are able to lead the way, there will be followers who will be willing to lay down their lives to follow. Courageous leaders produce courageous followers while weak leaders will give birth to spineless followership.

In the text, Paul spares no time reflecting on his bitter experience or pain of the stripes laid on him and Silas. Rather, he headed westward to Thessalonica in furtherance of the fulfilment of the heavenly vision. Persecutions or trials of faith should not overshadow our resolve to take the gospel to the dying world.

Question 1: *How did Paul handle opposition to his preaching?*

A fruitful evangelistic outreach at Thessalonica provoked a jealous uproar which sent Paul and his companions to neighbouring Berea. Another commotion in Berea masterminded by the same group of unbelieving Jews at Thessalonica further sent them to the city of Athens. At Athens, Paul observed the littered monuments of idolatry and was moved to reach out to the inquisitive but superstitious Athenians. On invitation to Mars' Hill or Areopagus, Paul engaged in a discourse with the idolatrous Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. His message focused on Jesus as the Messiah, pointing out His resurrection as the evidence of this revelation. The objective of this sermon was to lead them to repentance. What an example to those who reach out to heathen communities!

PATTERN OF PAULINE MINISTRY IN THESSALONICA (Acts 17:1-9; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:5,14; Romans 12:1,2; 1 Timothy 4:7,8)

“And Paul as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2). Paul had a ministerial habit akin to the Lord Jesus Christ’s in going out to present the gospel. It was Christ’s manner to reach out to sinners both within and outside the synagogues (Luke 4:16). This should be the life pattern of all Christians. There were oppositions and persecutions, yet he would not let that change what the Lord required of him.

Believers should develop similar habits that are relevant and profitable to the furtherance of the gospel and ministry such as regular prayer schedules for self, families and the church. A deliberate practice of such a habit will have a lasting effect on the lives of individuals and the church. Another area such a practice should be cultivated is in the area of preaching the gospel regularly and bringing sinners to the Lord. This should be followed by conservation of souls including members of the church.

Question 2: *What can we learn from Paul’s pattern of presenting the gospel and what should be the focus of our ministration?*

In Paul’s ministry and preaching in Thessalonica is a solid pattern which all gospel ministers can emulate. First, Paul’s ministry was non-discriminatory. He did not discriminate against any city or people and his ministry responded to people, places and positions. He followed the Lord Jesus Christ’s instruction to cover Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Also, his ministry was marked with consistency. Second, his preaching was scriptural. He reasoned with the people out of the scriptures. He was a student of the scriptures; he lived the scriptures; he preached the scriptures and he defended the scriptures. Moreover, he gave the ministry all the time it requires. He preached for long enough time to win souls and disciple them. He reasoned with them three Sabbath days and within that space of time many people flocked to him.

Besides, his advocacy was Christ-centered. He preached on the importance of Christ’s birth, ministry, death, burial and resurrection. Like Paul, every preacher of the gospel must be Christ-centred in his preaching. In Paul’s ministry, the preaching of Christ’s resurrection was given prominence. There is also an appreciable harvest of souls in Thessalonica. The converts came from a wide strata of the society - Jews, devout Greeks (Gentiles) and chief women not a few. Whenever the gospel is preached tenaciously in the power of the Holy Ghost there will be a harvest of souls. In the face of opposition and daunting obstacles preachers can, like Paul, go on to fulfil their ministries and win souls. Finally, there is reasonable follow-up. Paul and Silas took time to counsel and follow-up the new converts in order to strengthen their faith. Paul was methodical, systematic, painstaking and thorough.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOSPEL BY BEREAN BELIEVERS (Acts 17:10-15; 20:24; Isaiah 34:16; John 5:39; Proverbs 4:18)

The success story in Thessalonica was, however, followed by persecution stirred by unbelieving Jews. The uproar forced Paul and his company to be relocated to Berea where they continued with the work. The previous experiences of persecution could not halt Paul’s ministry. If persecutions and trials mar the ministerial track, it was not

that of Paul who understood the mandate of his commission to the Gentiles. They made their public appearance in the synagogue as soon as they were in Berea. But something interesting happened. The brethren took pious care of Paul and Silas. They did what was expected of them for their leaders' preservation. The devil seeks nothing so seriously as the lives of true gospel ministers. This he does because he knows that getting the head of the group like Paul would mean getting the group itself. When the enemy king went into battle against the Israelites, he strictly commanded his soldiers to get the king. To him, the king was worth more than a dozen of the people (2 Chronicles 18:30-32). But God in faithfulness to His word always finds ways and means to preserve His ministers, to reserve them for further work and service.

At Berea, the audience received the gospel better than those in Thessalonica (Acts 17:11). The Berean mission recorded a higher success rate than that of Thessalonica because the listeners had prepared hearts, willingness to dig deeper and a hunger for more of God. The only means by which the hearts of sinners can be receptive as those of Berea is to engage in wholesome prayer.

Question 3: *Point out the lessons from the Berean believers.*

The Berean believers did not casually receive the scriptures, they searched it until it was ingrained in them. **“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”** (Acts 17:11). Also, they believed. They had received the gospel with readiness of mind, had searched the scriptures tenaciously and the result was that many of them believed (Acts 17:12). For all sincere believers, a diligent reading and daily searching of the Holy Scriptures is a duty.

The persecution that had forced Paul to Berea was replayed by the same mischievous unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica who went over to cause another stir when they had knowledge of Paul's presence and the fruitful work in Berea. It is necessary to note that persecution is a trans-national exercise. Believers and ministers of the gospel must bear in mind that as Christ sends His ministers, so the devil sends his messengers from one place to another; and as the ministers of Christ are never weary of God's service for the good of souls, so persecutors are restless in seeking the destruction of the gospel and its proclaimers. Like a Bible scholar noted, agents of Satan 'will compass sea and land to harass and drive the faithful ambassadors of Christ from city to city, and if it were in their power, to banish them out of the world.' However, Satan's attempt to quench the gospel fire only helps to spread it further and faster. The persecution moved Paul to Athens where he also reached the sinners with the word.

PAUL'S PASSIONATE PREACHING AT MARS' HILL (Acts 17:16-34; 1 Peter 3:15; Psalm 119:46; 138:1; Matthew 10:18-20; 1 Corinthians 1:20-25; 9:19-22)

Athens was a city of much learning but it was wholly given to idolatry. Paul was concerned about their wholesale enslavement to idols and the lack of the knowledge of God in a sophisticated university city where men flocked for scholarship. Despite their human philosophies, the Athenians were ignorant of the knowledge of the gospel of Christ. Paul went to the synagogue of the Jews and used the opportunity to present Christ. We also should explore opportunities of presenting the gospel in places where there are restrictions.

Paul's approach and language were perfectly respectful in spite of the fact that his heart had been deeply affected by their idolatry. A run-down through his remarkable speech to this gathering of philosophers and thinkers shows the quality of the discourse as being calm, grave, scholarly and logical. He understood the character of his audience and as such did not commence by being judgmental towards them in the belief that they would be won by mere dogma. Rather, he adapted his message to suit his audience.

Question 4: *How should preachers of the gospel approach ministering to sophisticated audiences?*

The focus of Paul's sermon at Mars' Hill was to bring them to the knowledge of the true and living God. He showed them that they had also given occasion to declare the true and living God by setting up an altar to an unknown God. He told them that the God that he preached to them was the one they did already ignorantly worshipped. Also, he confirmed the doctrine of the living and true God by the works of creation and providence; asserting that He is the God that made the world and all things therein. He corrected their wrong impression that God was not involved in the affairs of men and was near and within reach of those who seek Him. To make them feel at home with his sermon, he cited the works of their own poets about dependence upon the providence of the living God and Creator. Steering those pagans from their form of false worship, he told them that the Godhead was not to be likened to gold, silver or stone. He brought them to the climax of the sermon and showed them their need for repentance from idolatry and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 5: *Mention some necessary preparations before ministering to our audience.*

Paul did not approach preaching his message to these philosophers in a manner that suggested that he was unprepared. Addressing an intellectual gathering or academic community should be approached with all sense of seriousness and a high sense of preparedness. Many of the people to be addressed may just be hearing the gospel for the first time and may never have opportunity to listen again because of their busy and tight schedules. Moreover, a good impression should be created in them because first impression matters a lot. Therefore, no stone should be left unturned in preparation. In the course of preparation, efforts must be made to have fair background knowledge of the audience. Knowing the number of people expected in the gathering, their calibre, the time allotted for the speech, etc. may help here as such knowledge will assist the speaker to be in tandem with the listeners. It also helps to ensure that appropriate diction is employed such that the preacher does not speak above them or use pedestrian language that will tune them off. Beside the fact that his language must match the occasion, he must also dress appropriately. There must be mastery over the topic.

Question 6: *Enumerate some lessons that the soul winner can learn from Paul's preaching.*

From Paul's sermon, it is clear that he was observant of the spiritual conditions of his target audience. Also, he began his address from the known to the unknown. We

must, in our presentation of the gospel, learn to link what our listeners know with the spiritual lessons we want them to learn.

Paul's speech was calm, dignified and logical. He sought to establish a rapport by commending them for their zeal in worshipping the unknown God. From scriptural narration, it shows that his presentations were logical, systematic and expository. For a sermon presentation to make impact, most of the time **“precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line... here a little, and there a little”** (Isaiah 28:10). Anything less is not enough. We must not seek to downgrade our hearers or leave a vacuum that will be difficult to fill again. We too must cease from being judgmental in the presentations of the gospel. However, we must not fail to point out sin as the bane of man before God and the urgent need to repent and exercise faith in the Lord Jesus.

Question 7: *What does the Athenians' response teach preachers of the gospel?*

The success of Paul's brilliant sermon should not be measured by the number of respondents to the message. Though some members of his audience mocked and others were undecided, the truth nonetheless had been declared and only heaven knew the far-reaching implications of that message. Some of the hearers took prompt decision and believed. That a former member of the Areopagus and a number of others became followers of Paul was a pointer to the effect of the message. They gave their lives to Christ, cleaved to Paul, wanting to continue in the way.

EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

MEMORY VERSE: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (**Jude 3**).

TEXT: Jude 3-13

The Church has many adversaries. Notable amongst them are the devil, sin, the world, principalities, powers in some cases, institutional bodies like the government. Other religions of our time also militate against the Church. Faced with all these odds, the Church is always in the business of contending, struggling, fighting and resisting oppositions. Ours is not a fight against flesh and blood; it is not a struggle over temporal, perishable things of life - money, land, possession or material things. The fight is one orchestrated by the devil and designed to sift from us our great pearl, treasure, the imperishable word and revelation of the Almighty. This, in Scripture, is succinctly called the faith. It is the totality and entirety of all that we believe.

Question 1: *What are the odds or forces against the Church?*

The devil, his false prophets, principalities, powers, idolaters, our flesh, the human depravity and other agents of Satan labour tirelessly to take the faith away from us. Our singular business is to contend against them.

OUR CALLING AND CONDITION FOR CONTENDING (Philippians 3:4; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; Luke 22:32; Mark 4:12; Matthew 18:3; Luke 5:32).

Before we can engage the contending forces against the faith once delivered to us, we must meet certain conditions.

Question 2: *Mention the conditions we must meet before we can contend for the faith.*

The first of these is conversion – a definite and unmistakable break from sin. Conversion is a change of heart from evil one to a righteous and Christ-like life. At conversion, the Christian receives “**the power to become the son of God**” and to “**go and sin no more**” (John 1:12; 5:14). The strongest of men without conversion is mince meat for the devil in the contest for faith. The weakest of men, with conversion, is a terror to him and his host. Peter, in his message on the day of Pentecost, alerted his audience on the need to “**repent and be converted**”.

Besides conversion, the soul contending for the faith must be called. All the apostles and disciples in the Acts of the apostles were called by God. The called ones are those taken out of the world and transfixed in the body of Christ for fellowship, worship and ministry. Christ came to call the world to repentance. Moses, David, Elisha, Peter, Paul, Andrew, John and Matthew were all called. God calls men because He is not willing that any should perish but that all should have life eternal. Christ came to call sinners to repentance. After we have heeded the call then, we can start contending for the faith.

Question 3: *Mention three descriptions of the call of God on our lives.*

The Bible qualifies the calling God gives us in these ways. First, it is described as a high calling – one higher than any other calling we could ever have on the face of the earth. It is higher than a call to serve in government, foreign service or to enjoy an overseas’ scholarship. The highest call we can ever have is one coming from heaven above. Paul the Apostle puts it this way: “**I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**” (Philippians 3:14). Paul here sees his call as one higher than being a Pharisee.

Second, it is described as a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9). It is a call that only the Holy Spirit can explain, interpret and impress on a person. Third, it is a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). It comes from heaven and opens the gate for us into the presence of the Father.

Our call is further pictured in different ways in the Scriptures. Each of the descriptions shows details of the benefits accruing to us as a result of our response to the call of God. In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul described our call as one to the fellowship of His Son (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Many of those who profess to have partaken of the redemptive grace of God do not know that we are called into the great riches of Jesus and into partnership with Him. In this relationship, we drop our destitution, lack, dryness and we get into the riches, power and grace of God. Jesus, through this relationship lifts us up from our prostrate position of servants unto His side on the right hand of the Father. He is calling the suffering, sorrowful and sad ones to come and share in His fellowship and enjoy His glory, majesty and joy.

We are also called to eternal life and holiness (1 Timothy 6:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:7). The call of God on us not only brings us into the kingdom, it also sanctifies us and preserves us in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). The translation sequel upon our call is one to a realm where Satan, witches, wizards and powers of darkness cannot reach or operate. This preservation touches our soul, spirit and body. There is a hedge, an impenetrable wall around all the redeemed of the Lord who have responded to the call of God.

COMPROMISE AND CONTEMPT FOR THE FAITH (Acts 13:8; 2 Corinthians 2:17; Jeremiah 5:31; 1 Timothy 1:19; Galatians 2:18)

We are called to contend for the truth and fight the good fight of faith. From the record of the Bible, there are people who, though called, did not remain within the hedge where God placed them.

Question 4: *How does the devil entice people and make them compromise?*

The devil usually dangles alluring carrots of false hope and opportunities in order to draw saints out of the kingdom since he cannot gain access to them. He once tried this with the Lord. He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world with the glory therein at a glance. His condition was just a bow and worship. It was an attempt to draw Jesus out of the will of God but He overcame; and we will also overcome. **“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”** (2 Corinthians 2:17).

But some Christians compromise their faith. They have contempt for the faith and degenerate to a state whereby they mutilate, corrupt, dilute, weaken and decimate the Word of God. False prophets and congregations with itching ears are compromisers who also have contempt for the faith.

Question 5: *What is the influence of false doctrines on Christians?*

False teachings always lower the standard of righteous living, lightens the demand of God’s laws, removes fear of damnation of the soul, sears the conscience and takes away responsibility both to God and man. Those who love false teaching to create some comfortable spiritual environment for themselves are compromisers. The Lord surely frowns on any fellowship, partnership or relationship with agents of compromise. We should avoid the agents of the devil who make believers to compromise and backslide like we also do to known witches or wizards. Their goal is to make standing believers make a shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:19).

Question 6: *How can a compromising Christian be identified?*

All those who were born again before but have now gone back to the use of incense in worship, candle burning, turning the Bible into an armlet rather than a Book worthy of the most serious and earnest study are once again building the things they had destroyed. They make themselves transgressors. Those who once knew the Lord but have now gone back into carrying the crucifix in their pockets for protection, or the photographs of a so-called preacher, or wearing amulet are showing signs of contempt for the gospel, calvary and the blood of Jesus. **“For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor”** (Galatians 2:18).

CHRISTIANS CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH (Jude 3; Nehemiah 13:23-25)

Question 7: *What must we do to keep contending for the faith?*

To earnestly contend is to strive tenaciously to keep something that Satan is labouring to take away from us. We contend earnestly, diligently, courageously,

consistently and honestly. Our strength, life, and our all must be involved in the struggle against anyone or anything who wants to take the faith away from us.

As we contend for the faith, we must effect a clean separation from all those who compromise the faith even if it would result in persecution, deprivation or misconception. Nehemiah set an example of such a position as he contended for the faith. **“In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves”** (Nehemiah 13:23-25).

So must we also do when people go contrary to the Word of God through immorality, adultery or speak disparagingly about the Word of God. Second, we must refuse the invitation of agents of people whose design is to overthrow our faith. Third, have no fellowship with false prophet or anyone who has departed from the faith. We must evade Demases, Gehazis, Dathans, Korahs, and Abirams. Fourth, all messages and literature channelled by the enemy through his agents must be avoided. Fifth, we should preach the truth forcefully and with conviction. We need to be more earnest and aggressive in our preaching than the perpetrators of evil. Sixth, publicly rebuke any member who departs from the faith and glide into false doctrine. This corrective ministry is not just for the local pastor, overseer or leader alone; it is the duty of every sound Christian who has a precious living and dynamic relationship with the Lord. Seventh, we are to live the uncompromising life that will challenge and convict the unstable. Eighth, we are to support faithful pastors and Christians who preach the Word of God sincerely without any compromise. Ninth, we need to train others who will be able to stand and effectively teach the whole counsel of God to the whole church, and live by it. The whole church must rise and contend for the faith, conquer and subdue the enemy and raise up an enduring standard in the church.

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THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

MEMORY VERSE: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (**Hebrews 9:27**).

TEXT: Revelation 20:11-15;

The subject of judgment is not strange to the minds of

mortals. Since it is in the nature of human beings to err, it is common in every sphere of life to see men being tried and punished accordingly. The common practice and experience in homes, schools, offices, courts and many other places is to see someone give a verdict after trial for some wrongdoing. The guilty is almost always given some punishment. This practice underscores the need and importance of justice and fairness in relationship.

Question 1: *How are earthly judgments different from the Great White Throne Judgment?*

Our study deals with the final judgment that God will bring upon those who reject His word and live as they pleased. This is called the Great White Throne Judgment. In this study as in other studies of the events of the last days, the Lord is graciously revealing unto us His programme for this present evil world. The doctrine opens our eyes to the time when all wicked and ungodly people (the living and the dead, small and great) who neglected God's salvation will face the final and terrible judgment of the living God (Roman 14:12). It is important that we approach the study with the seriousness it deserves and not with doubtful disputations or view it as a fable or fiction. These things are written for our learning and admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11).

JUDGMENT IN THE SCRIPTURE (Isaiah 53:4-11; John 3:15-18; 2 Corinthians 5:10,11; 1 Timothy 5:24; Jude 6).

That judgment is certain for all men is clear in every part of the inspired Word of God. "**And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27). However, contrary to general assumptions of a single judgment at a given time for sinners and saints alike, a number of separate judgments are clearly taught in Scripture for different classes of people and at different times. The Lord God has always been acquitting the innocent as He did in the case of the antediluvians, Sodom and Gomorrah and Korah's company. Since He never changes (Hebrews 13:8), He will keep to the same principle in the future, final judgment.

Question 2: *Mention the various judgments found in the Scripture, supporting your answer with references.*

It is clear from the scripture that believers have been judged in respect of their sin. This took place on Calvary's cross when Jesus became the sinner's Substitute (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 3:18; Roman 8:1,2). Sin must be judged either in the sinner's substitute or the sinner himself. And Christ has already borne the punishment for the sins of humanity in the hope that men would acknowledge His love and sacrifice and accept it so they can be acquitted. When the penitent sinner personally appropriates this vicarious sacrifice, reposes his faith in the Saviour and accepts His Lordship, he is declared justified by grace. This is the first type of judgment.

Then, as he lives the Christian life, he daily judges (or examines) himself in the light of God's Word (1 Corinthians 11:31,32; 1 John 1:7) to make sure he continues to abide in Christ. This is the second type of judgment. Failure in the same may bring temporary physical suffering or chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The third type of judgment will be experienced also by believers at the "Bema" seat of Christ (Roman 14:10; Revelation 22:12). This will be after the rapture and the purpose will be to distribute rewards for "**the things done in the body**". No believer at this judgment will be condemned, for all are saved. But rewards will differ and the works of some will be burnt (1 Corinthians 3:14,15).

The other types of judgment will be with the intent of punishing sin. These include the judgment of Israel during the Great tribulation (Ezekiel 20:33-44; Jeremiah 30:3-11; Matthew 24:4-25) and the judgment of the (living) nations at Christ's Second Advent (Matthew 25:31-46). Israel will be judged (for her many centuries of rebellion against God) by the cruel hand of the Antichrist. At the end of the ordeal, "**all Israel shall be saved**" (Roman 11:26) as they shall "**look upon me whom they have pierced**" (Zechariah 12:10). The judgment of angels for rebellion against God is identifiable as another type of judgment in Scripture (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6,7).

THE GREAT, TERRIBLE AND FINAL JUDGMENT (Revelation 20:11-15; Daniel 7:9,10, 12:2; Matthew 11:20-24; John 5:25-30; Acts 24:15).

The Bible clearly presents the order of events preceding the Great White Throne Judgment and constantly urges us: "**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches**" (Revelation 2:7).

The world is corrupt and polluted. The fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden brought mankind to shame, guilt and condemnation. From Adam, sin came into everyone that was born into the world. God made provision for the salvation of man but humanity has generally preferred to turn away from God's call to repentance and pardon. Man has remained rebellious and disobedient. And it pains God that He made man on the earth for every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart has been evil continually (Genesis 6:5,6). God promised judgment and punishment for the wicked. His word declares that "**the soul that sinneth it shall die**" and that "**the wages of sin is death**" (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23).

Question 3: Highlight past judgments of sinners in the Bible and the lessons believers can learn from them.

God has been judging sinners over the ages. He judged the world in the days of Noah when He destroyed all living beings with the flood with the exception of eight persons (Genesis 6:17,18; 7:10-13,21-24). He poured out His wrath and indignation upon Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed all that were in them except Lot and his two daughters (Genesis 19:13,24-26). On other occasions, He brought judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram with their supporters and punished the Egyptians for refusing to let God's people go. At various times, He brought judgment on Nadab and Abihu; on Uzzah; on Sennacherib and his 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (Isaiah 37:36-38); and on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). However, in the Great White Throne Judgment, all those who were destroyed in all those cases will still be judged.

What then is this judgment? It is the last and final judgment. It is the judgment that concludes the affairs of this present evil world. At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, the devil will be released from the bottomless pit for a while (Revelation 20:3,7). He will go out to deceive people again and will gather multitudes to fight against Christ and His saints. This is referred to as the Battle of Gog and Magog. Satan and his people will be defeated. Fire will come from God to devour them. After this Satan shall be cast into the lake of fire; the stage then becomes set for the final judgment of sinful men.

Question 4: Describe in detail the make-up of, and proceedings at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Let us look carefully at the details concerning the setting of the judgment.

(a) **The Throne:** The great God of heaven and earth, who is a great King cannot but sit on a throne. It is White and it represents His purity. The setting is magnificent and of great splendour and glory that befits the eternal King.

b) **The Judge:** The Judge is God Almighty, the Omniscient and Omnipresent. He knows everything and so there will be no miscarriage of justice. He is everywhere so all things are open unto Him. His sight will be so terrible because it is judgment time.

(c) **Those to be judged:** (Revelation 20:12,13). All those who died in sin from the time of Adam till the time of the Great White Throne Judgment will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15). They will all stand before God for judgment. These include:

(1) All categories of sinners, living and dead, small and great, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, male and female, the rulers and the ruled, will be judged for neglecting the salvation of God (Hebrews 2:3).

(2) All backsliders who denied the faith of God who once redeemed them (Exodus 32:33; Hebrews 10:26-30,38,39).

(3) All those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ (John 3:18,19). (4) All religious hypocrites who are like "**whited sepulchres**" (Matthew 23:27). The sea, death and hell will give up the dead in them. The bodies of all the dead will be united with their souls and spirits to stand before God to receive the just reward for their ungodly life-style. It will be a very great and sober gathering.

(d) **The Judgment:** Everyone will be judged according to his works (verses 12,13). It will be done in righteousness. It will be open and everyone on trial will know why he or she is going to the lake of fire. It will be to judge (1) all unrighteous deeds of men (1 John 5:17). All unrighteousness that was not cleansed by the blood of Christ before then will bring condemnation, including unrighteous feelings and imaginations. (2) The secret deeds of men which others may not have known of, done in darkness: secret bribery, immorality, pornography, drunkenness, abortion, whispering, etc. will

be judged. The words of men – every idle word, gossip, backbiting or slander will be brought to judgment; all foolish and unedifying words; corrupt, graceless, defamatory and abusive words will be judged (Matthew 12:36,37; Ephesians 5:4). God’s judgment will be fair, just and without partiality or respect of persons. **“For the Lord God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward”** (Deuteronomy 10:17). No one can influence or bribe Him.

(e) **The books:** (verse 12) **“...and the books were opened”**. These are the books of records that will contain everything done by men while on earth. It is according to the records written in these books that judgment will be delivered. This will remove all possibilities of arguments. There will be no room to say the sentence given was based on hearsay or guesswork. All things will be documented, and these, in many books.

(f) **The book of life:** only one book (verse 12) **“...and another book was opened, which is the book of life”**. This is the book that contains the names of all those who are born again, those who have been washed in the blood of Jesus. Their sins had been judged earlier at Calvary when they repented of their sins, confessed them and received Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. We must endeavour to make sure our names are in this book. All saints in all ages, from the time of Adam to the time of the judgment, have their names written in the book of life.

THE ETERNAL ABODE OF THE CONDEMNED (Revelation 20:10,14; 19:20; 14:10,11; Mark 9:43-48; Matthew 25:41).

Question 5: Describe the plight of the condemned in the lake of fire.

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). An awful end awaits all those that have to appear before God in the Great White Throne Judgment for **“...God is a consuming fire”** and **“it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 12:29; 10:31).

The lake of fire is the eternal abode of the devil and his angels (Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41). The lake of fire was not meant for man but all those who reject God and side with Satan, by committing sin, will have no choice than to share in their master’s destiny. Death and hell (the abode of demons and evil spirits will be cast into the lake of fire (verse 14) where the beast and the false prophet had originally been thrown (Revelation 19:20). The fire will never go out; it cannot be quenched. It will burn forever and ever (Revelation 14:10,11; 20:10). Worms do not die in it. How then is annihilation of human beings possible in it as advocated by some groups? Between Revelation 19:10,11 and 20:10 is a period of over 1,000 years, yet the beast and the false prophet had not been consumed by the fire. The fire does not destroy but continuously torments. It is a terrible thing.

Whosoever was not found written in the book of life will suffer forever in the lake of fire. His companions, neighbours and co-tenants will be Satan, the beast, the false prophet, demons and evil spirits. What a company! The scripture does not in any way support annihilation or purgatory but eternal burnings of all sinners condemned to hell. There is, however, the possibility of escape from judgment through repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ while still here on earth.

ESCAPING THE DOOM OF THE CONDEMNED (2 Peter 3:9-14; 1 Peter 4:7; John 3:3,5, 16; Mark 1:15; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 1 Timothy 4:16).

God gave His only begotten Son that “**whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life**”. The will of God is that all should repent, believe the gospel and be saved (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; Mark 1:15).

Question 6: *How can one escape the Great White Throne Judgment?*

Knowing that all ungodly people shall be brought to judgment “**what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness**” (2 Peter 3:11). To escape the Great White Throne Judgment, you need to repent of all sins, confess them to God and receive Jesus as your Lord and personal Saviour. Genuine salvation through repentance and faith in Christ is demanded from everyone who hopes to escape. Other conditions include living a holy life, making restitutions, following peace with all men and avoiding every appearance of evil. But for those who refuse **to repent there will be weeping and wailing as they will be condemned to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.**

HEAVEN: THE DESTINY OF SAINTS

MEMORY VERSE: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"

(Revelation 21:27)

TEXT: Revelation 21:1-27

While on the isle of Patmos, John, the Apostle, saw

the vision of heaven, the holy city. The apostle gives a graphic description of the heavenly city. From his description, the heavenly city is a place of happiness without sorrow, life without death, contentment without crying, pleasure without pain, fellowship without separation, satisfaction without disappointment, gladness without sadness, perpetual health without sickness or weakness. God, through him, draws the curtain aside for us to see the glimpse of our eternal inheritance. This is the place which God has prepared for all who love and worship Him in spirit and truth, the dwelling place for all saints of all ages (Isaiah 64:4; John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

True believers are strangers here: heaven is their home. As believers, we are citizens of the heavenly country but God's ambassadors on earth (Philippians 3:20,21; 2 Corinthians 5:20). All that concern the believer are in heaven: his Father, Saviour, name, inheritance, treasure, affection and citizenship are there. Though many people have information about the heavenly city, only those who overcome will have the city as their inheritance. Everyone must strive to not only have idea of its unsurpassed beauty but to also be partakers of the inheritance.

NEED FOR SAINTS' ETERNAL RESTING PLACE (Revelation 21:1-7; John 14:1-3; Isaiah 65:17)

The subject of heaven has always been the source of strength for the faith of true believers since the early days of the church till these last days. The reason is not far-fetched.

Question 1: *Why is it necessary for the saints to have an eternal resting place?*

The present age, also known as the Church age, is marked by evil, the dominion of Satan, darkness, ungodliness, lust, murder, lying and all manner of sin (Ephesians 6:12; Galatians 1:4). It is characterized by a denial of God, Christ, faith, sound doctrine and Christian living (1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:3,4; 3:1-8). The land is under a curse (Genesis 3:17). The devil and all his fallen angels walk to and fro the

whole earth. The atmospheric heavens are polluted by the activities of Satan. Believers today groan under the harsh and hard conditions of the earth. They look forward to a change; a time when there will be a **“new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”** (2 Peter 3:13) and holiness. God also plans to replace this polluted earth and atmospheric heavens with a new earth and a new heaven that will match His glory, holiness and righteousness (Revelation 21:1-7). **“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”** (Isaiah 65:17). The present earth and heavens including all that may be called beautiful edifices and empires today shall melt away in fervent heat (2 Peter 3:7,10-14). Having redeemed us, Christ has also prepared for us a place called heaven. He told His disciples, **“I go to prepare a place for you. ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”** (John 14:2,3). What thoughtfulness!

Question 2: *Of what use is the hope of heaven to believers?*

The blessed hope of the believer is that of spending eternity in heaven with God and with Christ. When Christ's disciples were troubled and sorrowful, His finest and most comforting message to them was the reality of heaven, His personal return and personal presence with them in that eternal abode. Likewise today, the thought of heaven soothes the troubled, comforts the sorrowful and encourages the discouraged among the saints. This blessed expectancy spurs the believer to more earnestness, endurance and commitment; it keeps the believer watchful in victorious living, diligent in labour and unselfish in service. The blessed hope and joyful anticipation of heaven's glory also keeps the believer's mind on things above and not on mundane things. This hope of heaven is not an illusion. Rather, it is one that is sure, steadfast and true. It is based upon the unfailing promise of the Lord who Himself came from heaven, went back to prepare a place and promised to be back (John 14:2). Every believer ought to be fully persuaded of the absolute certainty of our eternal hope. This will go a long way in making the believer's faith wholesome and vibrant, and his Christian life victorious.

Heaven is more than a reward for the believer. It is the consummation of the redemptive work of God. The purpose of our redemption is to have fellowship with God as it was before the fall. It is only in heaven that we can fully enjoy full fellowship with God. As long as we are on earth, our purchased privilege is not fully explored. In heaven, our toils, trials, and trauma will be over. In heaven, our redemption will be consummated and we will receive rewards for our faithfulness, sacrifice and selfless service on earth.

THE DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM (Revelation 21:11-26; 22:3; Leviticus 26:11; Ezekiel 48:35)

Heaven generally describes the future state of the blessedness of the believer. However, heaven is more than a state; it is a place beyond description; a place beyond man's fondest dream; a place more than he could ever imagine. It is a place of beauty and glory. In our text, John the Beloved, the apocalyptic seer, describes the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city as lavishly magnificent.

Question 3: *What do you learn from John's description of heaven?*

As God created the present heavens and earth, so will He create the new heavens and earth that will be new both in quality and in time. This new creation will be entirely free from any taint of sin and therefore the consequences and effects of sin will be absent. Indeed, all things will be new: **“Behold, I make all things new”**. There, Christ and all the saints, from all ages will reside forevermore. This great, holy, eternal city is called **“the bride”** because of its virgin beauty; it is unstained with sin, untouched by Satan, undefiled by sinners and unchanged by satanic agents. It is the eternal residence of the Bride of Christ and of all the saints of the ages. God Himself is the Builder and Maker of this celestial city, which is described as being full of His blazing and brilliant glory. Everything there is transparent – **“clear as crystal”**, **“like unto clear glass”**, **“as it were transparent glass”**, **“the gates shall not be shut at all”**, and there will be **“no night there”**. In heaven, there is neither death, sorrow, pain, tears, nor separation from God (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:4). The great, holy and eternal heaven will have New Jerusalem as its capital. Its beauty is beyond human description.

Question 4: Describe the life of the redeemed in heaven.

The life of the redeemed in this eternal city will be glorious. It will be a life of fellowship (1 Corinthians 13:12), rest (Revelation 14:13), full knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:12), holiness (Revelation 21:27), joy (Revelation 21:4), service (Revelation 22:3), abundance (Revelation 21:6), glory (2 Corinthians 4:17) and worship (Revelation 19:1; 7:9-12).

The Holy City, New Jerusalem, is a material city not a mystical one. The city is laid out as a cube in dimensions. Each side of the city is 12,000 furlongs (1,500 miles) in measurement. This glorious eternal city is 2,250,000 square miles in one layer of mansions! And the streets rise up over streets 1,500 miles! Millions of intersecting layers of avenues are there. The ground floor alone would provide enough living space for far more people than have ever lived in the history of the world. And this is just the first floor; there are 1,500 miles of additional floors above it! The heavenly city is big enough for all who seek, find and walk in the narrow way (Matthew 7:13,14). The streets are made of pure gold, as clear as glass. With walls of jasper and its twelve foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones, it has twelve gates of twelve pearls. The entire city wall is pure gold, as clear as glass and without any temple. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. **“And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof”** (Revelation 21:23).

The redeemed of all the earth shall bring their glory and honour into the city. The gates of the city are never shut (Revelation 21:16-26). The pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb, while the tree of life by the sides of this river bears twelve manner of fruits monthly. The fruits and leaves are for the healing of the nations. **“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever”** (Revelation 22:5). Heaven, the future abode of the believers, is so glorious and resplendent in beauty that our earthly language is inadequate to describe it. The appearance of the city reveals unparalleled beauty and

grandeur. The size, the combination of vibrant colours and the layout of the city make it glow as a brilliant gem in the sky. What a city!

It need be stressed that heaven is not reserved for only 144,000 as some sects erroneously teach (Revelation 7:9). Such half-truths are aimed at turning people away from the path of righteousness. We all must be wary of such false doctrine.

EXCLUSION FROM THE HEAVENLY CITY (Revelation 21:3,8,27; 20:11-15; Matthew 25:46; 7:21-23; Luke 13:24-28; Proverbs 29:1).

Question 5: *On what basis is admittance to the heavenly city made?*

Of course, not everyone will be in that city. Not even everyone who lays claim to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Teaching the unconverted about the beauty and glory of heaven is like telling a blind man about the beauty of colours. Admittance to the Holy City is strictly based on living holily here on earth for **“there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”** (Revelation 21:27). This is a strong indication that every defiled person or those who render their lives or those of others unclean will be excluded from the holy, heavenly city. It declares the absolute exclusion of all who are unrighteous, unholy, or sinful from the eternally holy city. Anyone who defiles; whosoever works or practises abomination; whosoever makes, produces, speaks or acts out lies and refuses to repent, will be denied entry to that heavenly, holy, eternal city. No sinner will ever enter the holy city to stain or desecrate it. All sinners will be forever banished from the presence of God and from the holy city. Only those whose names **“are written in the Lamb’s book of life”** will enter and live forever with the Lord in the New Jerusalem. No one, however close to the pure, will be able to enter into the heavenly city by proxy. Those who know the truth but turn blind eye to it; those who fail to avail themselves of the opportunities of being saved or being restored will be excluded from the city.

Those who foolishly reject God’s offer of salvation just because of worldly gain, and those who would prefer to miss the beauty and glory of heaven because of clinging to earthly din, dung and dross will be excluded from heaven. Nobody can be said to have made a good choice who has chosen chaff instead of wheat. **“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Mark 8:36,37).

PARTAKERS OF THE HEAVENLY INHERITANCE (Revelation 21:1,3,7; 2:7; 22:2,14; John 3:1-5; Proverbs 28:13)

Question 6: *How does one qualify to enter into the heavenly city?*

To partake of this glorious inheritance requires living the overcoming life. The believer must overcome the world (1 John 5:4,5; 2:15-17), Satan (Revelation 12:11), false prophets and evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:17-21), persecutions or temptations to be part of the saints to enjoy this great inheritance (Revelation 2:10,26-28). He must also possess and maintain the requisite experiences of salvation, holiness and blamelessness through continual prayer and watchfulness to be admitted into heaven.

All believers in the world who are thus qualified have the hope of translation and meeting with the Lord (Revelation 21:3; Colossians 3:4). Since you have just one life to live, and it is the Father's good will to grant you entrance into the kingdom, you have the responsibility to choose to be in heaven. You need then to repent of all your sins and receive Christ as Saviour and Lord. The backslider who returns will also receive pardon and restoration from the Lord. Saved, you must abide in Christ and remain focused and determined unto the end to enter heaven, receive reward and live with God forever.