

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 28

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).



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THE BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

352 Lesson

THE APPOINTMENT AND CONSECRATION OF THE LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him” (Numbers 3: 5,6)

NEXT: Numbers 3:1-51

In the previous chapter of the book of Numbers, God commanded Moses to order the children of Israel both in their camps and whenever they marched from one place to another in the wilderness. Moses and the children of Israel obeyed the Lord and did as He commanded. But we should remember that, all along, the Levites were particularly separated and exempted from the numbering and ordering of the twelve tribes. This was because God had a separate responsibility for them and so it was necessary to number them separately. In our text, God now shifted attention to the Levites; their ancestry, numbering, consecration and their appointed service in Israel’s camp.

Question 1: What are similarities between the consecration of the Levites and that of New Testament believers?

By looking at this study it is expected that believers will see a picture of the kind of consecration and absolute surrender that should characterize our service to God. The consecration of the Levites for service is a figure of how church members should be so consecrated and committed to the work of God. This fact was borne out of God’s claim that the Levites belonged to Him and that He gave them to Aaron for

service, By virtue of His divine ownership over the Levites, God had the exclusive right to determine both their service and the limit of their liberty. In the same way, Christ has a double claim of ownership over everyone that is born again. First, He made us and, as such, He owns us by creation. Secondly, He is our Redeemer who bought us out of the slave-market of sin and so, He owns us by redemption (Psalm 100:2,3; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Because of these reasons, we ought to realize that we do not own ourselves anymore and as such, we ought to serve God zealously with all our heart, mind and strength all the days of our lives.

THE APPOINTMENT AND ABSOLUTE SURRENDER OF THE LEVITES (Numbers 3:1-13; 1:50; 8:12-15, 22-26; 18:1-8; Leviticus 10:1-10).

After the consecration of the tabernacle, God directed Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests to minister in the sanctuary. Moses obeyed and he installed Aaron as the high priest while he consecrated and inducted the four sons of Aaron as priests. But shortly after their consecration as priests, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord. They offered incense without the Lord's command and they also used unauthorized fire. Because of that blunder, they were struck dead right in the tabernacle and in the full glare of Aaron, their father (Leviticus 10:1-10). After the death of Nadab and Abihu, only Eleazar and Ithamar remained to continue as priests. But because the children of Israel were so many, the priests needed helping hands to handle the tabernacle ministry. To this end, God commanded Moses to bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.

The phrase **“bring the tribe of Levi near”** means to present them as an offering unto God, just as an

offerer would present his sacrificial lamb to the priest. In this sense therefore, bringing the Levites near and presenting them before Aaron the high priest was an indication that they were being devoted unto God and consecrated for His service (Numbers 8:11). Though the Levites did not have to undergo a special rite of consecration like the priests, their consecration or devotion to God was total and complete. This teaches us that it is not the ceremonial rites or outward demonstrations of consecration that matter but absolute surrender of heart and mind to God. However, we see later in Numbers chapter 8, that the Levites had to undergo a special purification rite to make them and their service holy unto the Lord. What God is looking for is that His people should be totally yielded, consecrated and holy unto Him.

Question 2: In what ways did the Levites manifest the qualities of absolute surrender and consecration to God?

The Levites were set apart to minister unto Aaron the high priest. They were to be under the supervision of the priests and do the services of the sanctuary which should have been performed by the entire congregation. In other words, the Levites were representing the entire congregation. They were selected to replace the firstborn of every family, to perform the duties which those firstborn sons should have done on behalf of their respective families. The tribe of Levi manifested the spiritual qualities of absolute surrender and they accepted their responsibilities to serve under the priests. First, they did not choose their own place of service but they allowed God to choose for them. Second, they were contented to serve as assistants to the priests. Even though the Levites knew that no matter how long they served in the tabernacle, they could never become priests, yet they were ready to serve. They had the mind that they were serving God

and not man. It is however unfortunate that many church members lack this attribute of total surrender and consecration to God. They are unwilling to serve in seemingly small positions and, as they say, they don't want to play second fiddle to anyone. Some are even busy counting how many years they have been serving in their present position rather than making their years of service to count for eternity. Let us learn from the Levites, as a songwriter aptly corroborates, that **“little is much when God is in it”**. It is the quality of service we render to God that really matters and not the position or title we hold while rendering that service.

Three, the Levites were given in exchange for the firstborn to carry loads and do menial job in the tabernacle. They could not offer sacrifices or handle holy vessels. They carried them only after the priests had wrapped them up. But despite these limitations, the Levites did not consider their task an inferior or insignificant appendage to the priests' duties. Instead, they devoted themselves to the work that God assigned them. Being yielded to God means we are ready to do whatever He appoints us, whenever He asks us and wherever He wants us, irrespective of the human instrument He uses to direct us.

THE APPOINTED SERVICE AND COOPERATION OF THE LEVITES (Numbers 3:17-51; 1:49-53; 41-16; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

In our text, the Lord commanded Moses to count the children of Levi, all the males from one month old upward, according to their families. It will be recalled that the Levites were earlier exempted from the general census of the twelve tribes; but on this occasion, God told Moses to number them (or take their census) for two reasons. One, it was so that they could be properly exchanged for the firstborn of Israelites; and two, so that they could be distributed

to the work of tabernacle ministry for which they have been set apart. Moses obeyed the Lord and counted the Levites according to their families and appointed the location where each family would pitch their tents in the camp. He also appointed unto each family their respective leaders as well as their responsibilities. Generally speaking, the appointed duties of the Levities bordered on assisting the priests in carrying out their work in the tabernacle. One, they guarded the tabernacle and kept intruders away. Two, they were responsible for dismantling the tabernacle, carrying its various components while moving from one camp location to another. Three, they set up the tabernacle in a new camp location. Four, they carried out any function appointed to them by the priests. However, they were prohibited from touching or looking at the holy vessels before they are wrapped (Number 4:20; 18:3).

Question 3: State the responsibilities of each Levite division and the location of their encampment in Israel's camp?

The work of the Levites was divided among the three divisions that made up the Levite clan. Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath and Merari. The descendants of these three sons formed the three divisions of the Levites. The Gershonites pitched on the western side of the tabernacle and they were in charge of the tapestry or curtains of the tabernacle. It was their duty to take down and transport all the coverings of the tabernacle, door hangings and their cords. When the tabernacle was to be set up in a new place they were also responsible for laying the covering on the frame (Numbers 3:21:26). The Kohathites pitched on the south of the tabernacle and they were responsible for carrying the furniture and vessels of the tabernacle. They carried the ark, the table, lampstand, altars and the inner veil (Number 3:27-32).

The Merarites pitched on the northern side of the tabernacle and their lot was to dismantle, carry and erect the tabernacle frame, that is, the boards, the bars, pillars, sockets, the pins and cords. Moses and Aaron, together with the priests, (sons of Aaron) pitched on the eastern side of the tabernacle. The priests were also Levites (from the Kohathites division) and they were exclusively in charge of offering sacrifices.

Question 4: What lessons can we learn from the work and the cooperation among the Levites?

There are several lessons and challenges for us in the way the Levites carried on the work that God appointed them. In the first place, Moses made it very clear the work that each of the Levite divisions would do. He apportioned the work in such a way that everyone knew what to do and what not to do. It is very important that church leader make the members know their definite responsibilities. Secondly, the work of the Levites required cooperation and interdependence of one another. For instance, when the tabernacle was to be dismantled, the priests would pack and cover up the furniture and vessels for the Kohathites to carry them. Then the Gershonites would come and take down the tapestry while the Merarites would take down the frame (that is, the pillar, boards, bars etc). When the tabernacle was to be set up, the Merarites would first set up the frame, then the Gershonites would furnish the priests with the holy vessels and the furniture to put in it. This is how it should be in the church of God. The workers ought to complement one another in such a way that the great work of the ministry, broken down into parts, could be done by many people effectively and efficiently. We must cooperate with one another and work in unity in the vineyard of God. They should be interdependence

among members of the body of Christ. For a member to be effective to the extent he feels the service of other believers in God's work is not needed is an expression of pride and spiritual extravagance. **"For the body is not one member, but many... now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary... For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it"** (1 Corinthians 12:14, 18, 21, 24-26).

Thirdly, we see that the way God appointed the work of the Levites gave no room for rivalry or carnal comparison. Though they were all Levites, from the same ancestor and labouring for God over the same tabernacle, their responsibilities and calling in ministry were very different from one another. Indeed, it would be a useless and unprofitable exercise to probe or argue which division had the most important work among Levites. They were all important because, unless the priests packed the vessels the Kohathites removing the wrapped vessels the Gershonites could not take down the tapestry; neither could the Merarites carry the frames. As a matter of fact, if one bar, pillar or curtain be missing, the tabernacle could not be pitched. Therefore, the work of each person was very important and there was no basis for comparison.

From this we learn that in one church we ought not to compare ourselves with one another or engage in needless rivalry in ministry. Each person should just do his or her own part faithfully and let God be glorified. In fact, the Bible says; **“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”** (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Fourth, we must take note that the work of the Levites was quite laborious and seemingly humiliating. It was very hard to carry bars and pillars, curtains and vessels, together with their own personal effects, all through the wilderness. Any stranger, looking at the Israelites as they marched along, would not likely fail to notice a Gershonite carrying some heavy bars of wood or metals. That unlearned stranger might conclude that these burden-bearers were slaves or, at best, inferior citizens among the children of Israel. But despite the hard labour and apparent humiliation associated with their kind of work, the Levites were not ashamed to identify with their God-appointed task. As believers, we must not be ashamed to identify with Christ, even though He is little esteemed by the people of the world. We should preach the gospel and labour for the Lord in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. Also, whatever task we are called to do in the Church, we should joyfully apply ourselves to it. Moreover, it is better to earn a living doing menial jobs than live an idle life.

Apart from the appointment of work for the Levites, God also directed Moses to exchange them for the firstborn of Israel. To do this, the Levites were counted (using the same parameter) that is, from one month upward. After counting them, the number of the firstborn exceeded the Levites by two hundred

and seventy-three. This implied that there were 273 firstborn who have no Levites to substitute them, and for each of these, God demanded that a ransom of five shekels be paid. The ransom money was given to Aaron and his sons as God commended.

THE ACCEPTABLE AND SACRIFICIAL SERVICE OF CHRISTIANS TO THE LORD (Romans 15:4; 12:1-8, 16; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, 15:58; 2 Timothy 2:19-21; Philippians 2:3, 4; Psalm 100:2; Hebrews 12:28).

As we study the appointment, consecration and service of the Levites, it is important to remember that **“whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”** (Romans 15:4). Therefore, we ought to learn from the appointed tasks of the Levites and their total surrender to God.

Question 5: What are the necessary features that will make our service acceptable to God?

In the consecration of the Levites we see a vivid illustration of the believer’s consecration and need to render sacrificial service unto God. Just as the Levites were God’s own possession, so also believers in Christ are now God’s possession and we should be prepared to serve Him with all our talents and treasures. However, as we endeavour to serve the Lord, there are certain features which must characterize our service in order to make them acceptable unto God. One, we must be on the Lord’s side. The Levites came unto the Lord’s side when Moses gave the call after the unfortunate incident of the golden calf. At that time, Moses said: “Consecrate yourselves to day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day” (Exodus 32:29). Therefore, because the Levites responded and obeyed the invitation of Moses, they

qualified themselves for God's blessing. Those who are not born again cannot offer acceptable service to God. They need to repent of their sin first and put their faith in Christ. Two, believers must be holy and free from worldly entanglements. Like the Levites were separated unto God from secular engagements, we must separate ourselves from anything that would diminish our devotion unto the Lord.

Three, our service must be characterized by deadness to self and sacrificial living. In their service the Levites were only concerned about God's will and His glory. They did not seek their own honour or the praise of men, neither did they care that they were not given any tribal inheritance among the children of Israel. In the same manner, we should serve God with the glory of God in view, doing nothing with pride or for vain glory. We must also be selfless and willing to sacrifice anything and everything to serve the Lord. Four, we should be ready to whatever the Lord commands us, even if it is menial or seemingly insignificant.

Five, our service for God must increase from day to day. That means, we must not halve our service or diminish our devotion to God. Rather, we must abide in Him and in His service. **"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 15:58). Six, we are to serve God willingly and joyfully. The psalmist enjoins us to **"serve the Lord with gladness"** (Psalm 100:2a). Moses also said that one of the reasons that curses would come upon the children of Israel was because they do not serve God **"with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things"** (Deuteronomy 28:47). We must not serve God grudgingly or half-heartedly. Seven, we must avoid every form of rivalry or comparison with others

remember but work in unity with the body of Christ. Let us remember that the services we render unto God shall be tested by fire to reveal their quality and true worth. Only that which endures the purifying fire of God shall be rewarded (1 Corinthians 3:13). Therefore, let us ensure that we serve God acceptably.

Finally, the consecration of the Levites teaches us that, as believers we should consecrate our live unto God. This means we are to completely surrender everything to Him and live only by His word. What He bids us do we do, and what He forbids we refrain from. This is because we cannot really say that Jesus is our Lord unless we are ready to do all He commands, neither can we be happy in Him except we trust and obey Him. The challenge of the Levites compels us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	7	Proverbs	1-2
TUE	“	8	“	3-4
WED	“	9	“	5-6
THUR	“	10	“	7-8
FRI	“	11	“	9-10
SAT	“	12	“	11-12
SUN	“	13-14	“	13-14

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THE APPOINTED SERVICE OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

TEXT: Numbers 4:1-49

In the previous lessons, God has been emphasizing the separation of the Levites as well as their responsibilities in the camp of Israel. The Lord stressed the need for them to do their work as He commanded lest they should be found faulty and come under judgment, like Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire and were killed. However, while pointing out the works of the Levites, God also showed that the priests had a crucial role to play, and the success of the Levites in their work depended so much on the faithfulness of the priests in carrying out their own responsibilities. Both the priests and the Levites were jointly responsible for the work of the tabernacle. Whereas, the priests were exclusively in charge of the sacrifices and handling of the holy things, the Levites were to assist them as servants, especially to bear burdens and carry out specific functions as the priests might appoint. In our text, God pointed out the danger of incurring His displeasure or wrath if His ministers failed to carry out their assignments according to the due order.

Question 1: On what condition can a person obtain divine approval in God's service?

God's warning to the priests against carelessness or negligence in handling their appointed tasks, and the danger of incurring divine wrath while engaged in His service reminds us of a commonly forgotten truth.

we are reminded that God's work must be done in God's way before it can attract God's approval and blessing. Otherwise, if we do God's will in a way He does not approve then it ceases to be His will but our own self-will, and it will attract God's judgment. This is why we read of king Amaziah of Israel that **"he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart"** (2 Chronicles 25:2) and God was not pleased with him. Some people have the misconception that once they are doing whatever they do for God then it does not matter the means or method of doing it. However, we see from our lesson that this is not so. Contrary to this misconception, our works will only be acceptable to God when we pay attention to His instructions and comply with the details of His commands.

THE SERVICE OF THE KOHATHITES AND THE PRIESTS (Numbers 4:1-20; 2 Samuel 6:13; Numbers 7:9; 10:21; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 10:32).

God instructed Moses and Aaron to distribute work to the Levites according to their families. But it would be necessary to know the number of able – bodied individuals who would be useful in His service. Hence He ordered them to count the sons of Kohath between the age of thirty and fifty to be actively engaged in the work of the tabernacle. The Kohathites were responsible for transporting the holy vessels and the furniture of the tabernacle, but they could only carry these items after the priests must have covered them up.

The service of the Kohathites was placed under the supervision of Eleazar the son of Aaron. He was responsible for packaging the ark of God, the table of showbread, the lampstand, altars, laver and the inner vail before calling on the Kohathites to carry them to the next point of settlement in their pilgrimage to Canaan. **"And when Aaron and his**

sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation. And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof" (Numbers 4:15,16).

Obviously, there is work for everyone to do in a progressive Christian assembly that pleases God. As it were, God has appointed people to serve in different capacities in His church. And if there is any area of service where there is shortage of manpower in the vineyard of the Lord, it could be because God's appointees to man those duty posts have not yielded to the Spirit's call to serve Him. Or, perhaps the church has not prayed for God to send more labourers into His vineyard. It is worthy of note that all servants of God must necessarily come under His appointed leaders. All Christians must humbly accept their place in the service of God and wholeheartedly commit themselves to doing His will.

Leaders in Christ's church must not lord it over His people. They must lead and oversee His servants with Christ-like love, godly fear and diligence. Without fear or favor, they must reveal God's mind to His people, and that promptly. This explains God's warning to Moses and Aaron in our text not to cut off the tribe of the families of Kohath from among the Levites (Numbers 4:17). In other words, Moses and Aaron were warned not to allow any error on the part of the priests to expose the Kohathites to divine wrath and untimely

death. This could happen if the priests were negligent in their duties. For example (i) if they did not cover the holy vessels and the furniture of the tabernacle properly then the Kohathites, who bare them, might touch those holy vessels unawares and thereby incur God's wrath. (2) By allowing the Kohathites to enter the holy place and look at the holy vessels or furniture before they are fully wrapped up would amount to sinful inquisitiveness and undue familiarity with holy things. (3) If any of the Kohathites was made to carry a portion of the holy vessels that was not assigned to him, it could lead to his death. If such mistakes happened frequently, the priests could occasion the death of many Kohathites and thereby jeopardize the survival of their entire family. To avoid such cases, God commanded the priest to wrap each item of furniture and hand them over to the Kohathites so that there would be no mix up.

We learn from the warning that the Kohathites should not be cut off, that we should beware lest our negligence or thoughtless actions cause other people to sin. Especially as leaders and parents, the lives of other people depend on us to a large extent and we should be very watchful so as not to serve as stumbling blocks to them. Later in Israel, we see the execution of this threat against the Kohathites when Uzzah was smitten by God, because he touched the ark of God in an attempt to prevent it from falling when the oxen shook it. The situation that led to Uzzah's mistake arose because, contrary to God's instructions, they carried the ark on ox-cart rather than bearing it on the Levite's shoulders with its staves. When they realized their mistake and carried the ark in the proper way, there was no divine wrath and there was no untimely death (2 Samuel 6:1-15; 1 Chronicles 15:1-2,11-13; Exodus 37:5; Numbers 4:15; 7:9; 10:21). As it were, the failure of the leaders to follow the word of God

on the proper mode of transporting the ark led to the untimely death of Uzzah, a Levite. God is always a God of justice. Everyone who has suffered divine chastisement in the past as a result of his sinful actions will receive the mercy and forgiveness of God if he repents of his wrongdoing and begins to live right in Christ. **“But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby”** (Ezekiel 33:19).

Question 2: In what ways can a person be a stumbling block or bring divine wrath upon others? Give examples from the Bible

There are many ways a person can be an occasion for divine wrath and judgment upon others. One, in the family, parents may lead their children to commit sin either by direct indoctrination, negligence or through careless examples. Of course, God will judge the wicked parents as well as the sinful children but it will be on record that the parents caused the children to sin. Two, in the church the leaders, either by design or ignorance may lead the congregation into false doctrine. The leader who teaches false doctrine or the one who permits it is guilty before God and so also the people who follow such a leader. Three in a nation, civil rulers may cause the citizens to sin through bad examples and sinful decrees.

In the Bible, we see the examples of Achan who led his entire family into ruin because of his covetousness (Joshua 7:1-26), King Jeroboam and Manasseh also made Israel to sin (I Kings 12:25-33; 14:16; 2 Kings 21:1-17); and we read of Theudas and Judas of Galilee who led others into wrong doing and they all perished (Acts 5:36,37). There was also the case of some churches and their leaders who permitted wrong doctrine in their midst. The churches in Pergamos and Thyatira were rebuked for this and they were

threatened with divine judgment (Revelation 2:12-29).

THE DUTIES OF THE GERSHONITES AND MERARITES

(Numbers 4:21-33; 8:23-26; 3:25-37; Deuteronomy 10:12,20;11:13; Colossians 3:24; Romans 12:1,2,11; Ecclesiastes 12:1; John 9:4; Matthew 24:45-51).

After giving instructions concerning the work of the Kohathites God passed over to the duties of the other Levite families, the Gershonites and the Merarites. To start with, God directed Moses to take a census of each of the families. He was instructed to count the males whose age ranged from thirty years to fifty. Thus the age of discharge was fifty. **“And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service...”** (Numbers 8:25, 26). In our present day, age is not a barrier in God’s service neither should any believer expect to be discharged or retired from preaching the gospel until we see the Lord.

After numbering the Gershonites and the Merarites,

<p>Question 3: What lessons can we learn from the appointed service of the priests and Levites?</p>
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God told Moses the work he should assign to each of them. They were to serve the priests and also carry burdens whenever the children of Israel changed their camp location. The Gershonites were appointed to carry the tabernacle curtains, the covering of badgers skin, the hangings for both door and the court, their cords etc. Each person among the Gershonites was assigned a specific item to carry and they were all under the supervision of Ithamar the priest. On their part, the Merarites were assigned

wooden and metal frame of the tabernacle. They carried the boards, bars, pillars and sockets of the tabernacle. They also were under the supervision of Ithamar.

We learn several lessons from way God appointed different assignments for the priests and the Levites in our text. First, we learn that in the vineyard of God there is enough work for everyone. Though the works are different everyone who is qualified can find a suitable area of engagement and usefulness in God's service. A songwriter said

“Let no one hear you idly saying
There is nothing I can do,
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when he calleth:
Here am I; send me, send me”.

Second, we see that it was God, not Moses or Aaron that appointed the duties of the Gershonites and Merarites. Though God uses His servants to appoint our assignments, we should always have the consciousness that it is God who directs and leads those leaders to appoint us as He deems fit. If we have this attitude it will motivate us to obey and to work for God with zeal and commitment.

Third, the work of the Levites, which was basically to carry loads, might look so degrading and humiliating but God attached special honors and privileges to it. Because of their work, the Levites were in close proximity to God's tabernacle and they were remunerated and supported by the twelve tribes of Israel. This teaches us that the package of honors that God gives to his children often come in the wrapper of humility. Therefore, if we want God to exalt and

honor us, we must be ready to humble ourselves before Him. For example, during Retreats or special programmes we should not despise work areas such as washing, sanitation, carrying or serving food etc. Four, we see that the appointed age of serving for the Levites was thirty to fifty years. This was the best and most productive years of a person's life and they were to be devoted to God's service. Also, the work of the Levites was quite demanding and very strenuous; therefore they needed youthful vigour to carry their burden. This teaches us to give our best to the Master, to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, to work while it is day and to remember that a time is coming when we shall not be able to work again. Each of us has an appointed time to work and we should ensure that we do not waste those years of opportunity. However, except for some specific laborious work, there is neither age limit in nor retirement from God's service in this New Testament dispensation. We are to serve until we breathe our last.

Five, we learn that God has interest, and He is concerned, about every detail of His service; even in things that might appear trivial to the human mind. For instance, we observe that an inventory of all the items in the tabernacle was taken and those carrying them were noted so that whenever any item, whether a pin or pillar, was needed they knew who to ask. Also, we see that in wrapping the pieces of furniture of the tabernacle for transport, the art was distinct from all other. Whereas the outermost covering of all other furniture was the badger's skin, that of the ark was the blue cloth (*Numbers 4:5-14). This teaches us to pay attention to details in the service of God. Six, we see the need for unity and cooperation in the work of the Lord. Both the priests and the Levites had to work hand in hand to ensure that the tabernacle

was pitched, transported and maintained in Israel. Similarly, the workers in God's vineyard must be united and cooperate with one another.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEVITES FOR SERVICE (Numbers 4:3:21-34)

Moses numbered the Levites from thirty to fifty years old as the Lord commanded. The result of this numbering showed that the division of Merari were most numerous; being 3,200 in number, while the Gershonites were the least in number, being 2,630. But in the earlier census, when the Levites were numbered from one month old and above, the Merarites were the least (6,200) while Kohathites were the most numerous (8,600). This implies that though the Merarites were smallest in terms of numerical strength, they had more capable workers than other Levite divisions. More than half of their population could do service and for this reason they were put in charge of the heaviest burdens. On the other hand, the Kohathites were greatest in numerical strength but they had few capable workers. Out of 8,600 of them only 2,750 (less than one-third) could do the service of the tabernacle and because of this they were assigned to carry lighter burdens than the Merarites. Also the Geshonites, begin the smallest workforce among the Levites, were appointed to carry the tapestry of the tabernacle.

Question 4: What do we learn from the analysis and distribution of the levites workforce?

From the analysis and distribution of the Levite workforce we learn some important lessons and principles. (1) The number of workers in each Levite division was proportional to the work assigned to them. So we find there were more capable hands among the

Merarites simply because they needed more people either to take down the tabernacle frames or to bear them through the wilderness. The Kohathites and Gershonites had less Levite workforce and so their services were lighter. From this we see how just and equitable God is in the distribution of responsibilities. To whom much is given much should be required. (2) God knows our strength and He will never appoint us carry a burden beyond our ability. This is applicable both in our daily service to God and also in our daily walk with Him. He will never allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist. He knows our frame and remembers our weak constitution, therefore He regulates all the challenges we face. (3) In the Church of God, the principle of justice and equity should influence the distribution of workers for service. We should avoid a situation where some people are eased because they have surplus workers whereas others are burdened because of dearth of capable hands to do their work. This means on the part of the leaders, there should be a deliberate balance in the recruitment and training of workers to take care of the various units in the church. Then the members of the church and workers should complement the efforts of the leaders by working in any area that they are assigned. In fact other workers should be willing to volunteer and work in areas where there seems to be a shortage of manpower. (4) We also see that the size of a congregation is not the only measure of its strength. A large congregation where majority of the members cannot render useful service in the kingdom of God cannot be considered a strong church in the real sense. On the other hand a smaller congregation where most of the members are working for God, in the sight of God, is a strong church, and definitely God will commit greater responsibilities to such a people.

As we study the appointed service of the priests and Levites we are challenged to commit ourselves anew to the work of the Lord, spend and be spent in His vineyard. We must continue to abound in the work of the Lord knowing that our labour shall be rewarded on earth and in heaven. We should preach the gospel, edify the believers, give our talents and substance for God’s work. **“Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded”** (2 Chronicles 15:7).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	15-16	Proverbs	15-16
TUE	“	17-18	“	17-18
WED	“	19	“	19-20
THUR	“	20	“	21-22
FRI	“	21	“	23-24
SAT	“	22	“	25-26
SUN	“	23	“	27-28

354 Lesson

THE PRESERVATION OF HOLINESS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

MEMORY VERSE: “For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deuteronomy 23:14).

TEXT: Numbers 5:1-31

In the previous chapters of the book of Numbers, God dealt with the issues of physical organization of His people by counting and camping them for warfare. In that section of the book much emphasis was placed on their security and the maintenance of order in the camp, but in our text and the next chapter, God focused on their spiritual organization by commanding that they be cleansed for worship. Thus, the emphasis shifted from physical order to the maintenance of holiness and purity in their camps as well as in their individual lives.

The main point in our lesson is the fact that God abhors every form of defilement, be it ceremonial or moral, and He wants His people to remain free from their pollutions. To this end, God commanded that every leprous person or those who were defiled by reason of bodily discharge, or as a result of contact with a dead body, should be put out of the camp. This was intended to impress upon the Israelites the great importance and value which God placed on purity, and also to serve as an illustration of the necessary purging that would make the church, as well as individual believers, to continue to enjoy the presence of God.

Question 1: What does God's demand for holiness in Israel's camp typify for believers?

The demand for holiness which God illustrated to the Israelites by commanding them to purge their camp of all kinds of defilements typifies for believers the need to purge out impurities from their lives and live holily.

THE DIVINE DIRECTIVE AGAINST DEFILEMENT IN THE CAMP (Numbers 5:1-4; Leviticus 13:45-49; 15:2-33; 21:1-12; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 5:8, 13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 21:27).

God directed Moses to command the children of Israel that they remove from their camps anyone who had leprosy, bodily discharge, or who has been defiled by touching or mourning for the dead. Though this command had been given to the children of Israel before this time, God repeated it so that it could be carried out immediately. As at the time God instructed Moses concerning these precepts (Leviticus 13:45,46; 15:2; 21:1), the camp of Israel was not yet organized but after the ordering of the camp it became possible to enforce the law.

Question 2: Why was it necessary to remove lepers and those who were defiled from Israel's camp?

It was necessary to remove lepers and those who had one form of defilement or the other from the camp of Israel, one, because they constituted a health hazard, two, to serve as an emblem of purity and purging from sin. We have seen that leprosy was a contagious disease and a type or symbol of sin. It represented the way sin works before it eventually destroys its victims. Also the bodily discharges of men and women could equally be contagious and they also symbolized the oozing out of sin from the fallen nature of man. Then the dead was a source of defilement because it reminds us of the wages of sin, albeit the physical

death was only a picture of the spiritual and eternal death. These things then being an emblem of that which is mostly detested by God, had to be put out of the camp of the Israelites because God dwelt with them. It is very instructive to note the major reason why God commanded His people to avoid defilement: **“that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell”** (Numbers 5:3b).

Question 3: What is the main reason why believers should maintain holiness in their personal lives and in the church?

The main reason why God demanded holiness from the children of Israel, and by implication, from believers today is that He dwells in the midst of His people. The tabernacle that was pitched at the center of Israel’s camp was an emblem of God’s presence. So also the pillars of cloud, during the day, and of fire, during the night, were tokens of divine presence which gave Israel the assurance that their destiny was in the safe hands of the Almighty. But God wanted them to know that they would only continue to enjoy His presence on the condition that they remained free from defilement. Moses made it clear to the children of Israel that if God should see any unclean thing in them He (God) would turn away from them (Deuteronomy 23: 14). In a similar way, God dwells in the heart of each believer and also in the church. Jesus said: **“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”** (john 14:23). The Bible also makes it clear that the body of each believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit: **“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the**

temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16, 17). Moreover, Jesus said He is present in the Church: **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”** (Matthew 18:20). Therefore, in view of God’s presence among us we are commanded to be holy and avoid the defilements of sin.

Question 4: What lessons can we learn from God’s command that the children of Israel remove lepers and the defiled from their camp?

There are some lessons we need to learn from the directive to put defilement out of Israel’s camp. One, we learn that organization and orderliness in the church must be coupled with holiness. Though the camp of Israel had been well ordered and guarded using the best military tactics known at the time, yet we see that without holiness those peculiar and symbolic arrangements would avail nothing. This teaches us that holiness must be central in our lives, and also in our church, if we want God to manifest His presence among us. Two, we see that the Israelites would only be able to enjoy the right to pitch behind the standard of their families on the proviso that they remained free from defilement. In other words, an Israelite forfeited his position in the camp once he became defiled. This teaches us that we can only enjoy the right to be children of God on the condition that we continue in holiness. If a born again Christian falls back into sin he or she becomes defiled and loses the right of sonship unless he repents and gets restored to the Lord. The Bible says, **“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end”** (Hebrews 3:14). This shows there is no truth in the doctrine of unconditional security of believers. Three, it shows us the need for sanctification after our initial

experience of salvation. This is very clear because the children of Israel, being redeemed from Egypt, counted and camped around the tabernacle, gives us a picture of people who were saved and brought near to God. But despite this position there was the need to put defilement out of their camp before God could fellowship with them.

In the same way, after the initial experience of salvation, it is possible for a root of bitterness to spring up from a person's heart and defile many (Hebrews 12:15). Jesus also said that the things that defile a person do proceed out of the heart (Mark 7:20). For this reason there is the need for the second work of grace to uproot the remains of sin or the adamic nature from our hearts so that we can love God and have perfect fellowship with Him and His people. This experience of sanctification is obtained by consecrating oneself, thirsting and praying for it in faith. Four, we also learn the necessity of exercising church discipline so that those who stubbornly persist in sin could be put out of the fellowship lest they influence others with their negative lifecycle. The command that Israel put out of their camp every leper and the defiled corresponds to the New Testament charge that we put out of our midst anyone who is called a believer but indulges in sin and fails to repent. In fact, Paul's charge to the Corinthians was an antitype of the command to put the defiled out of the camp. He said: **"therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person"** (1 Corinthians 5:13b). Church leaders must be vigilant to identify and reprove such individuals whose presence in the church could be fountain of defilement to others. Five, it is very important to note that the children of Israel did what God commanded, **"as the lord spake unto Moses so did the children of Israel"**. We must be prompt in obeying God's word and we must not be hearers only but doers of the word.

THE DOCTRINE AND DEMAND FOR RESTITUTION

(Numbers 5:5- 10; Genesis 20:1-8, 14-18; Exodus 22:1-7; Leviticus 6:1-7; 5:15-18; Luke 19:8, 9; Matthew 5:23, 24; Acts 23:1-5; 24:16).

While commanding the children of Israel to remove the causes of defilement from their camp, God also reminded them of the need to repent and make restitution whenever anyone has done wrong against his or her neighbour. By this command, God would have Israel know that removing lepers and those who were ceremonially defiled was not the only way to preserve holiness in the camp, but that moral defilements also had to be purged and conflicts between people resolved. The law of restitution had been given to Israel before (Leviticus 6:1-7). God repeated the law and demanded that an offender confessed his sin and make necessary restitution.

Question 5: What is restitution and why is it necessary?

Restitution is the act of making right all wrongs done against our fellowmen. It involves the restoration of stolen properties to their rightful owners, paying debts, giving back that which has been taken by fraud, making confessions to the offended, apologizing to those slandered, uncovering wrong doings that were covered in the past e.g. pretence, lying, making right all wrongs concerning marriage, career and every area of life. Sometimes the restitution required is just to tender an apology to the offended, but in some other cases it may be so complicated that one will have to seek counseling from a godly, experienced and Bible-believing minister or leader. The purpose why we must make restitution even after repentance is that we may have a conscience void of offence towards God and before men. Our conscience cannot be clear if, after we say we have repented from sin, we

still hold on to stolen items (including a stolen wife or a stolen husband), wealth gotten by fraud, or a career based on falsehood, such as forged certificate. Before we can truly have a clear conscience before God we must make appropriate restitution as God demanded.

The doctrine of restitution is timeless because it spans all the dispensations of God's dealings with man. Before the dispensation of the law, Abimelech the king of Gerar had to restore Sarah, Abraham's wife, whom he had taken wrongly (Genesis 20:1-8, 4-18). During the time of the law God demanded restitution as we can see in our text. In the New Testament, Zacchaeus made restitution (Luke 19:8,9); Paul the apostle apologized before the Sanhedrin (religious council of the Jews) (Acts 23:1-5). In view of these, it is wrong for anyone to claim that the teaching on restitution is a relapse to legalism. It is equally wrong to claim that it has been abolished along with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. Restitution is part of the moral law and God demands that genuine repentance should be accompanied with appropriate restitution. This is because genuine confession and repentance towards God restores our fellowship with God whom we have offended by our sin. However, most sins that we commit against God also affect our neighbors one way or the other, and the very first evidence that we have truly settled with God should be the readiness to settle with our fellow human beings whom we have offended.

In our text, God added a further explanation to the law of restitution. He commanded that if the offended person has died, then the restitution should be made to his Kinsman (that is his relation). **“But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, the trespass be recompensed unto the Lord, even to the priest...”** (Numbers 5:8a). From this it

is very clear that after the experience of salvation God does not want us to retain any item we acquired in a wrong way. This is because even if the rightful owner is dead or his kinsman cannot be found we are still not absolved from making restitution. We must confess the crime to God and to His appointed representatives in the church, who will direct us on the practical steps to take so that our restitution will be in line with the standard of scriptures.

DEALING WITH THE DEFILEMENTS OF SUSPICION AND IMMORALITY (Numbers 5:11-31; Leviticus 18:20; 20:10; Job 24:15; Proverbs 2:16,17; 6:34; 30:20; Songs 8:6; Zechariah 7:10b; 8:17).

God directed Moses on how to deal with the defilements of suspicion and secret immorality in the camp. These sins are so serious in the sight of God that He commanded that they be searched out by what is commonly called a “trial by ordeal”. From history we learn that this kind of trial was commonly practised by the ancient people in the East, especially the Canaanites, among whom the children of Israel were about to enter, carried on this trail by ordeal with various idolatrous additions. But to keep the Israelites from the temptation of copying the idolatrous versions of this trail God gave them His own pattern of how to detect cases of secret immorality and to exonerate the innocent.

Question 6: Mention some reasons why God gave the law of trial by ordeal?

God commanded that if any man suspected his wife of committing adultery, then he should bring her to the priest to be tried so as to ascertain whether she was innocent or guilty of the crime. The priest would place the women under oath, and make her drink the prescribed water that was specially prepared for that

purpose. After drinking the bitter water the priest would offer sacrifices. The water was called bitter water not because of its taste per se but because of its effects on the guilty person. If the women actually committed adultery then her belly became swollen, her thigh rotten and she would become a 'curse among the Israelites'. The meaning of this phrase is that her name would become identified with infamy and disgrace (see examples of Zedekiah and Ahab – Jeremiah 29:22,23; and Lot's wife – Luke 17:32). However, we should note that the water was just a symbolic and divinely appointed procedure to try and deal with suspicion among the Israelites, but it is no longer valid for believers in the New Testament.

The Lord gave the children of Israel this law for several reasons. One, to avoid unnecessary suspicion or jealousy in the heart of the husband. Two, to expose the woman if she had truly committed adultery. Three, to exonerate the woman and clear her reputation if she was innocent of the crime. Four, to serve as a deterrent against immorality or spurious accusations among the children of Israel. Five, to let the children of Israel know that even a hint of immorality must not be permitted in their midst.

By making the women to undergo this fearful trial by ordeal, God was showing the Israelites the gravity of immorality and the danger of suspicion in the camp. The sin of adultery destroys the very foundation of marriage and it is a direct violation of the seventh commandment. The defilement of adultery must not be permitted in the camp of God's people. Any accusation or suspicion of it must be well investigated and dealt with; otherwise, if a person could commit immorality and get away with it then others would be emboldened to do so. On the other hand, if the accused person was actually innocent her reputation would be seriously damaged and if there was no investigation then the

stigma and reproach of the husband's accusations would continue to affect her. The husband too would continue to burn with jealousy and doubt her fidelity, and then the children could also suffer reproach or insults from others. Therefore it was necessary to try every case of suspected immorality so as to discourage marital unfaithfulness on the part of the wife and also to protect her from false accusation by the husband.

Question 7: Point out the lessons we can learn from the account of trial by ordeal in our text?

Looking at the method and procedure of the trial we can learn important lessons. One, God is sovereign; His ways are past finding out and He does what pleases Him in the camp of His people. In order to try cases of suspected adultery, God ordained a different method entirely rather than using the Urim and Thummin or any other conventional method. This teaches us not to depend merely on our past experience but to look unto God for fresh insight into His will day by day. Two, we learn that God hates immorality and it must be dealt with drastically. Three, jealousy or suspicion can defile a person and must be avoided. Jealousy is cruel as the grave therefore husband or wife must not give any room for their spouse to suspect them. This means we should avoid undue closeness to the opposite sex and avoid secret dealings with them. But, on the other hand we should avoid baseless or unnecessary suspicion of one another. The woman should be so full of virtue that the heart of her husband can safely trust in her (proverbs 31:11), and the man should also be so pure in heart that he does not imagine evil when there is no true ground for it. **“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled”** (Titus 1:15). Even in the church we must avoid the

negative tendencies of suspicion and jealousy. The Bible says, **“And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord”** (Zechariah 8:17). Four, we see the need to avoid every appearance of evil and live holily. Even the hint of immorality must not be heard among God’s people. The Bible enjoins us not to allow our good be evil spoken of and so, we must walk honestly and **“abstain from all appearance of evil”** (Romans 14:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22). Five, we learn that at all times whether in the family or in the church, we should **“prove all things and hold fast that which is good”**. Proper investigation must be made to verify all accusations so that the guilty can be punished and the innocent cleared. Six, we learn that God is omniscient and He knows the secrets of all men. He knows how to clear the innocent and also knows how to expose those sins that sinners and backsliders try so hard to cover. Though in our days, trial by ordeal is outlawed and no longer in force, God will expose and judge all the secrets of men. Just as the bitter waters penetrated the woman who was guilty of secret adultery, and eventually kills her, God said unto the secret adulterers: **“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”** (Revelation 2:22,23). God will certainly judge the whoremongers and adulterers both here in this life and in eternity (Hebrews 13:4). Seven, husbands should be faithful to their wives just as they expect their wives to be faithfully unto them. If the husband expect their wives to be faithful unto them. If the husband expects God

to judge his wife for her infidelity then he also must maintain innocency. In fact, later on God told the men of Israel that He would not punish their spouses in this way any more because they were guilty of the same offence themselves (Hosea 4:14). God says unto those who are guilty of sin and yet are accusing others: **“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, who ever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things”** (Romans 2:1).

Finally, we learn that if we are innocent nothing can harm us. Even curses cannot affect us if we are hold and pure. We see that if the woman was innocent, the bitter water and the curses which were pronounced did not hurt her, rather she became more fruitful and healthy. This should encourage us to live holily and not be afraid of curses, whatever their kind, because **“as the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come”** (Proverbs 26:2). If we do not live in sin God will bless and not curse us and as such, no man shall be able to place a curse upon our lives.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	24	Proverbs	29-30
TUE	John	1	“	31
WED	“	2-3	Ecclesiastes	1-2
THUR	“	4	“	3-4
FRI	“	5	“	5-6
SAT	“	6	“	7-8
SUN	“	7	“	9-10

355 Lesson

THE SEPARATED LIFE OF THE NAZARITES

MEMORY VERSE: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

TEXT: Numbers 6:1-21

Our study concerns the Nazarite vow and their separated life. Nazarite (properly pronounced as Nazirite) means someone who is separated unto God; a consecrated person or a devoted individual. The term Nazarite should not be confused with Nazarene which was a term used to describe Jesus because he dwelt in the city of Nazareth (Matthew 2:23), and which was also a derogatory term that was used to describe Christians in the early Church (Acts 24:5). Nazarite refers to a person who voluntarily separates himself to live only for God and serve Him. From this definition we can see that the Nazarite was an Old Testament illustration or type of deeper commitment and consecration to God. They symbolize for us what it means to go an extra mile for God and be more devoted than the ordinary, run-of-the-mill religious people.

Question 1: Who is a Nazarite and what does he symbolize for believers?

From our text we see that a Nazarite separated himself not just from the defilements of sin but even from legitimate enjoyment or pleasures which could distract or lessen his heart commitment and dedication to God. Like the Nazarites, God expects us to go an extra mile in our devotion to Him, not just for a period of time but all the days of our lives. This

would demand that we make special consecration and decision to serve God with all we have and all that we are throughout our days. We are called to separate ourselves from sin and the world into holiness and the service of God. In this lesson we shall see the peculiarities of the Nazarites, the procedure of their consecration and the practical implications of their vow to the New Testament believers.

THE PECULIARITIES OF NAZARITES (Numbers 6:1-8; Judges 13:3-5,7; 16:17; 1 Samuel 1:11,24-28; Lamentations 4:7; Luke 1:15).

The Nazarites were people who separated themselves completely to the service of God. They took voluntary vows to consecrate themselves and abstain from worldly enjoyments for a specified period of time. Among the Israelites, Nazarites were known for uncommon purity and absolute devotion unto God (Numbers 6:8; Lamentations 4:7).

Question 2: Mention the peculiar features of a Nazarite and Point out the significance of those features.

The Nazarites were peculiar because they had certain features that distinguished them from the average Israelite. One, they did not drink wine or strong drink (Numbers 6:3; Luke 1:15) Two, they were not allowed to eat or drink anything processed from the grapevine, that is, they could not eat the fresh grapes or dried raisins (skin) neither the seed of the fruit of the vine (grapes) (Numbers 6:3,4; Judges 13:14). Three, they left their hair uncut all through the period of their separation (Numbers 6:5; Judges 13:5; 16:17). Four, they must not go near a dead body or mourn for a dead person, no matter how close, not even for father, mother or siblings.

These features were very significant in that they set forth the high standard of holiness and absolute

surrender that God demands from those who profess real devotion to Him. The wine and strong drink represented carnal and sinful joy, while mourning for the dead symbolized deep earthly sorrow; both were prohibited for a Nazarite. He must not indulge in those things that could aggravate the base passions neither was he to allow anything that could defile him ceremonially. Strong drink was especially prohibited because it intoxicates and impairs the senses. It can pose a serious danger to true devotion and a holy walk with God as we can see from examples of Noah and the family of Lot. **“And Noah (after the flood) began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard; And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent”** (Genesis 9:20, 21). The drunkenness of Noah, though unintentional, led to the cursing of a whole race of people (Genesis 9:22-25). Also, the daughters of Lot used wine to sedate their father before committing incest with him (Genesis 19:31-38).

In the context of the Nazarite consecration, strong drink referred to intoxicating beverages while wine consists of the fresh, non-alcoholic juice pressed from the fruit of the vine (grapes). The fact that the Nazarite was forbidden to partake of either of them gives an indication that a person who wishes to devote himself fully to God should be prepared to give up, not only things that are obviously sinful, but even things that may be considered harmless, legitimate pleasure. This is because for a consecrated person the major consideration and the factor that decides all issues is not just whether this or that is sinful or not, but what God has said on the subject. For a true Nazarite, the issue was not a matter of whether it was right or wrong to drink wine, (fresh, unfermented and non-intoxicating) but that God has said they should not; and that settles it. The desire to do what God

has commanded and to please Him is the motivating factor behind all the actions of a consecrated person.

The same thing applied to other commands that God gave to regulate the Nazarite vow. The Nazarite must not defile himself for the dead. This implied that he could not participate in the funeral of father, mother, brother or sister. The funeral of departed loved ones must not affect his consecration and dedication to God. Also the Nazarite was to allow his hair to grow all through the period of his vow. That uncut hair was the outward and physical mark of his inner consecration unto the Lord. This teaches us then, that true devotion and genuine piety must not remain hidden but there should always be some outward manifestation to show that we truly have them.

Question 3: Mention some Nazarites in the Bible and point out the lessons a believer can learn from their consecration?

There were different kinds of Nazarites in the Bible. Some were Nazarites for life, consecrated by God Himself or by the parent. Such kind were Samson (Judges 13:5-7; 16:17); Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11, 24-28) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15). There were other Nazarites, not specifically mentioned by name, who took the vow of separation for a definite period of time (Numbers 6:2; Lamentations 4:7; Amos 2:11,12). Whichever kind of Nazarites, one major emphasis and the focus of their lives is holiness coupled with strict self-discipline and total separation unto God. They typified the absolute surrender of Christ as well as total separation that God expects from Christians (Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 6:17; James 1:27).

God used the lifestyle of the Nazarites to illustrate the high standard of holiness and commitment required of believers. They were living examples of dedication and devotion among the Israelites. They also exemplified practical deadness to the world,

self-denial and single-mindedness in the service of God. Their kind of separated life resembled that of the priests and Levites; and in fact the option of the Nazarite consecration held some advantages for the ordinary Israelite who might want to devote himself or herself to God on a level close to that of the priests and Levites. First, the Nazarite vow was open to all ages or tribes. Therefore, anyone who wanted to serve God on a higher plane than the ordinary Israelite could take the Nazarite vow.

Two, it was voluntary. Three, an individual could determine the duration of his or her vow. Thus, we see that though the ordinary Israelites could not function in the priestly office or a Levite, yet they could still dedicate themselves to God and serve as Nazarites. This teaches us that the Privilege to draw near God and be devoted to Him was not exclusive but open to all. It also shows that even if we do not have opportunity to serve in a particular area of ministry in the Church, we can always find another area where we can equally consecrate ourselves and our service unto the Lord. There are several areas where we can serve without being limited by age or gender.

THE PROCEDURE OF THE NAZARITE VOW (Numbers 6:9-21; Leviticus 21:10,11; Acts 18:18;21:23-26).

The consecration of the Nazarite commenced with a vow of consecration during which the prospective candidate would signify his or her intention to be a Nazarite for a specified period. Then he or she would vow not to drink wine, strong drink, vinegar or anything processed from the grapevine. He would also consecrate his head to God with a promise not to cut or shave off the hair until after the expiration of his vow. Lastly, the candidate would promise to abstain from defilements arising from touching dead bodies or mourning for the dead. Once the vows were

taken the Nazarite was bound to fulfil the days of his consecration.

However, if after taking the vow the Nazarite becomes defiled, for instance, if someone suddenly dies near him, then his vow has been interrupted. He must wait for seven days and then shave his head and on the following day, which is on the eighth day after his defilement, he would bring a special offering to the priest for his cleansing. This offering consisted of two young turtledoves or pigeons which he would hand over to the priest at the door of the tabernacle. Then the priest would offer one of the turtledoves or pigeons for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. After this offering the Nazarite would renew his vow and begin his consecration anew because all the days of his consecration before he became defiled were no longer counted.

Question 4: What lesson can a believer learn from the interruption of the Nazarite vow and the cancellation of their days of consecration by defilement?

From the examples of the Nazarites in their day of defilement we can see the awful effect of the defilement of sin in the life of a believer. When a believer falls into sin it makes all his past consecration and sacrifice to become as nothing, and unless he repents and gets restored to the Lord, those days would neither be remembered nor rewarded by God. This is exactly what God said to Ezekiel. **“But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die”** (Ezekiel 18:24 see also Ezekiel 3:20; 33:12, 13). Sin makes all our labour for

God to seem as nothing and it decimates every good thing we might have done for God. Judas Iscariot is an example of someone who labored but lost out because of sin (Acts 19:27-34; 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 4:14,15). Therefore, we need to jealously guard our consecration and avoid anything that can defile us in any way.

At the conclusion of his time of consecration, the Nazarite would be taken to the tabernacle to make sacrifices before being discharged from his vow. He would offer a year-old male lamb without blemish for a burnt offering, a year old female lamb for a sin offering, a ram without blemish for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes and wavers anointed with oil plus meat offerings and drink offerings. After the priest has ended the sacrifices, then the Nazarite would shave his head and put the hair in the fire of the peace offerings. After this, the priest would place the prescribed portions of the offerings in the hands of the Nazarite and wave them before the Lord. Those portions that were waved belonged to the priest. Then the Nazarite could, as a token of gratitude to God, add free will offering in addition to the normal requirements of his Nazarite vow. After this ceremony the Nazarite was released from his vow. After this ceremony the Nazarite was released from his vow and he was free to live as an ordinary person. The Nazarite had to offer the prescribed sacrifices at the end of his vow as a testimony that even though he had offered unto God his best services and consecrated himself yet he still needed the efficacy of the blood of atonement. The best we can offer to God will only be acceptable unto Him on the basis of Christ's atoning blood. Without faith in His shed blood, all our works are vain.

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NAZARITE SEPARTION FOR BELIEVERS (Romans 15:4; 1

Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Acts 5:41; 1 Corinthians 11:5,6,14:2 Corinthians 6:17,.18: Hebrews 12:1,2).

The separated life of the Nazarites teaches us several lessons on the kind of crucified life which we are called to live. The Nazarite may be regarded as an illustration of what a consecrated Christian life is all about. Though the sacrifices and rituals associated with their consecrations are no longer in force, because Jesus Christ has fulfilled what they typified, the Nazarites are models of true devotion and deadness to the world.

Question 5: What are the implications of the Nazarite vow to believers today?

We learn from the separated life of the Nazarites that one, Nazarites were examples and models of devotion to the children of Israel. In the same way believers should be examples to the world and the leaders in the church should be examples to the world and the leaders in the church should be models to the congregation. We should show by example what it means to be deeply consecrated and committed to God (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3). Two, the Nazarite vow was voluntary and our commitment and consecration to God should also be voluntary. We should not wait until we are pressed before we serve God. Like the Nazarites we should volunteer to go an extra mile in the service of God. We could consecrate ourselves to do some specific duty in the church such as cleaning, intercession, special evangelism, financial support of project or programme, driving, guard etc. Three, the consecration of the Nazarites was visible and in like manner, our devotion to God should be visible. People should see the evidence of self-denial and deadness to the world in our lives so that they too can be challenged to dedicate themselves to God. Four, the Nazarites maintained a very high level of

personal purity. They abstained not only from sin but even from the appearances of it. We also should be scrupulously holy and abstain from every source of defilement. A life of holiness is the best testimony of a genuine devotion of God, Five, by allowing his hair to grow long the Nazarite man accepted a practice that would bring reproach to him. Paul the apostle said if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him. From this we learn that the Nazarite was not ashamed to bear reproach for the Lord. He allowed his hair to grow, not caring for the reproach of men. In the same manner, believers must devote themselves to God unmindful of the reproach of men, and always in readiness to surrender their dignity or honor, if need be, in the path of devotion.

Six, from the Nazarites we can learn a lesson on total detachment from the world and a mastery over its joys or its sorrows. Because the Nazarites abstained from wine, a symbol of mirth and pleasure, as well as from the funeral of departed loved ones, they testified that they were unmoved either by mere earthly joy or temporal sorrow in the course of their devotion to God. In like manner, believers who long to be like the lord must be ready to gladly forfeit all earth's pleasure so that they can wear the perfect image of the Redeemer. Seven, we see that the Nazarite manifested a great deal of self-denial in their consecration to God. They restrained their appetites and controlled their emotions for the sake of their commitment to God. A Nazarite could not live carelessly neither could they compare themselves with ordinary Israelites who had no vow or consecration to protect. They would not drink wine, lament or participate in the funeral of father, mother or siblings. These prohibitions were tokens of absolute yieldedness and self-denial which believers are expected to manifest. Though ascetism does not necessarily constitute true piety, there can

be no true devotion without a measure of self restraint and sobriety.

From the Nazarites we receive the challenge to sacrifice anything that can get in the way of our consecration to God. Though we are not to neglect our responsibilities to our loved ones, whether living or dead, we must not allow that legitimate duty to displace our priority of serving the Lord wholeheartedly. But here is an area where many believers in our present time need to re-examine themselves. For instance, many of us would plan, labor and do everything possible to raise funds for the funeral of departed loved ones but when it comes to soul winning and sacrificing our resources for church building we are reluctant to deny ourselves. This is an evidence of misplaced priority and a gross miscalculation of what it costs to be a consecrated believer. A person who understands the real meaning and the true measure of consecration would put God's demands above his or her personal or family demands. God is calling us to renew our consecration, in case we have been defiled in any way, especially in these days when greed, materialism and the pursuit of worldly pleasure is most prevalent. The Nazarites willingly forsook things that others relished; we too must be ready to forsake anything for the sake of the gospel.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	John	8	Ecclesiastes	11-12
TUE	“	9	Song of Sol.	1-3
WED	“	10	“	4-5
THUR	“	11	“	6-8
FRI	“	12	Isaiah	1-2
SAT	“	13-14	“	3-5
SUN	“	15-16	“	6-7

356 Lesson

THE PRIESTLY BENECTIONS

MEMORY VERSE: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

TEXT: Numbers 6:22-27

Our study focuses on the form of priestly benedictions which God commanded Aaron to pronounce on the Children of Israel. In this short text, we see the command for special priestly blessings, the conditions for spiritual and perpetual blessings and the content and structure of the priestly benediction.

God commanded Moses to direct Aaron, the high priest, on how to bless the children of Israel. Traditionally, the benediction or blessing was pronounced at the end of the daily sacrifices and on other special occasions. In order to bless the people, the High Priest would stand and lift up both hands, then he would utter the words of this benediction upon the people (Leviticus 9:22; 2 Chronicles 30:27). This shows that God delights in blessing His people and He uses His appointed servants as the mouthpiece to pronounce the blessings which only Himself has the power to enforce.

Question 1: Point out the condition on which the priestly benediction would be fulfilled?

We observed that the command to bless the children of Israel was only put in place after they had obeyed the commands and instructions that God gave them. They had built the tabernacle and began true worship; they were also counted, camped, cleansed and consecrated unto God as Priests, Levites or Nazarites

before the priestly benediction was given. This teaches us that obedience to God and total consecration to Him are conditions for true and permanent blessings.

The content and structure of the priestly benediction was also very remarkable. The benediction contains three distinct and successive parts which cover every area of human needs, both spiritual and physical. Each part of the benediction begins with God's name and this is an indication of the Trinitarian doctrine and a pointer to the fact that all the three members of the Godhead are united in blessing the saints. In the priestly benediction, we see one, the blessing of God's goodness and His preservation; two, the benefits of God's grace and His presence; and three, the bounties of God's gifts and His peace. It is such an all encompassing benediction, profound, well compacted and which may as well be regarded as the Lord's Prayer of the Old Testament.

THE BLESSING OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND HIS PRESERVATION (Numbers 6:22-24; psalm 121:7; 128:1, 4; John 17:11; Deuteronomy 28:3-6)

The first section of the priestly benediction is "The Lord blesses you and keep you" (verse 24). In this pronouncement, we see the goodness of God in blessing His people and ensuring their preservation from evil. God is good to all and by virtue of His goodness; He supplies the needs of all His creatures.

Question 2: What is the meaning of "The Lord bless you" and what are the true measures of scriptural blessing?

In the Hebrew tradition, the word "barak" which is translated "bless" connotes the idea of God bestowing special favor upon His people. This implies that God would deliberately work in order to enforce His good will in the life of an individual. It also entails God creating the proper environment and putting in place all the necessary requirements for a person to thrive

both spiritually and physically. Therefore, for God to bless a person, He bestows good upon such an individual and increases him both spiritually and materially.

By looking at the lives of Bible characters whom the Lord blessed we can identify the things that constitute true scriptural blessing. For example, Abraham was blessed; and from his life, we can see; (1)fellowship and intimacy with God (2) Divine guidance, teaching and correction (3) material prosperity (4) domestic or family stability, fruitfulness and peace (5) security and divine preservation (6) positive influence on other people (7) answered prayer and fulfillment of God's promises. Indeed, no one can be said to be truly blessed without total freedom from sin and close fellowship with God. Material blessing without the spiritual blessings of salvation purity of heart and power of the Holy Spirit is incomplete.

Apostle Peter in his message after the healing of the impotent man at the beautiful gate, emphasized the fact that the true blessing begins with being saved from sin. He said, **“Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities”** (Acts 3:26). In fact, the general testimony of the scriptures is that only those, who repent from their sins, and believe in Christ are truly blessed (Psalm 32:1,2; 119: 1,2; 128:1,4; Revelation 1:3; 22:7). If we have truly repented and become children of God by faith in Christ, the Bible says God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). This means no true child of God should remain under any curse or yoke of Satan. By virtue of God's blessing upon us as believers, we should excel and live victoriously in every facet of life, and also be free from all the manipulations of Satan or his agents. Even Balaam in his backslidden condition recognizes the fact that a people blessed by God cannot be cursed by anyone. He said, **“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall**

I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Numbers 23:8,20).

Another aspect of God’s goodness and blessing is the preservation of His saints from anything that can harm them. The Lord keeps His children from the evil one. He keeps them in time of danger and from destruction. But then one may ask how does God keep His people? One, He keeps them by His word. **“Concerning the works of men, by the word of the lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer”** (Psalm 17:4). When we obey God’s word, we are kept from Satan’s path. Also, there is also a standing restraint in God’s word against satanic attacks on believers: **“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm”** (Psalm 105:15). Two, God keeps His people by His power. Peter described believers as people **“who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”** (1 Peter 1:5). Three, He keeps His children through His name. **“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe”** (Proverbs 18:10). For this reason, the Lord Jesus prayed that the Father would keep His disciples through His own name (JOHN 17:11). Four, God also keeps His people through the ministry of His angels. **“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways”** (Psalm 91:11). For instance, Daniel testified that God sent His angels to shut the mouth of the lions so that they could not hurt him. Five, by His overruling and overshadowing providence He shelters His saints. He used the pillars of cloud and fire to protect the children of Israel from the heat of the day and the cold at night all through their wilderness journeys. Six, the blood of the Lamb preserves and shields believers from being hurt by the enemy. While in Egypt the children of Israel were kept from destruction by the application of the blood of the paschal lamb. But in our present time believers are protected by the

blood of Jesus who offered Himself as a sacrificial Lamb for our sins. In view of God's keeping power and His provisions for our security, we need not fear but trust that God will preserve us from all evil forces and everything that can adversely affect our lives and interests.

THE BENEFITS OF GOD'S GRACE AND HIS PRESENCE (Number 6:25: Psalm 31:16: 67:1: 80:3,7,19: 119:135: Daniel 9:17).

The second part of the priestly benediction is, "**The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee**" (Verse 25). Here, the emphasis is on God's goodwill, unmerited favor and His abiding presence with His people. Literally, the Priest, by this benediction, was making request that God should smile upon His people and be happy with them. **The Lord make His face to shine upon thee**" implies that (1) He is present and pleased with His people (2) He guides and enlightens them so that they don't walk in darkness (3) He invigorates them just as the sunlight gives strength to the animate objects (4) He is gracious to His people and shows them favor. In other words, it was a plea that God should not be angry with His people but rather be merciful and favorable towards them.

Question 3: Why is it necessary to plead for God's grace and favor rather than depend on our own meritorious efforts?

By pleading for God's favor and grace, the Priest wanted the children of Israel to know that they could never approach God or receive any favor from Him on the basis of their own meritorious efforts. Certainly without the grace of God, the best human efforts will never be sufficient to earn divine approval or obtain the least of His blessings. This thought, that we are not worthy of God's favor and mercies, was the keynote of Jacob's prayer when he was about to face Esau, his estranged brother. **"I am not worthy of the least**

of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan: and now I am become two bands” (Genesis 32: 10). Before coming to this realization, Jacob thought he could depend on his own craftiness and ingenuity. But as the prospects of confronting the anger of Esau dawned on him, he realized that it was only the grace and mercy of God that had sustained him all the while.

As believers, we should also remember that we can do nothing except by the grace of God. We cannot relate with God on the grounds of our meritorious service but on the basis of His mercy and grace. Like Jacob, there are many things we have done in the past which, if not for God’s grace and mercy, would have prevented us from entering into God’s grace and mercy in the priestly benedictions, Paul, Peter, John and Jude all emphasized the centrality of grace, mercy and peace in their epistles to believers (Romans 16:20;1 Corinthians 1:3;2 Corinthians 13:14;1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

We are saved by grace, kept by grace and it is only by grace we shall enter heaven. However, we must not have a lopsided view of the grace of God. We must avoid the widespread antinomian notion that the grace of God permits a person to live just carelessly. We should never think that God’s grace will abound in our lives while we live in sin. If God’s grace is truly in our lives, it will enable us to live without sin and do all those good things which God demands of us and which we could not have done by our own strength alone. It is God who gives grace and we should ask Him to multiply His grace in our lives so that whatever situation we find ourselves, we will discover that this grace is sufficient for us.

THE BOUNTIES OF GOD’S GIFTS AND HIS PEACE (Number 6:26 Psalm 4:6-8; john 14:27,2 Thessalonians 3:16; Philippians 4:7;2 Peter 1:3).

The last part of the priestly blessing is, **“The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace”** (verse 26). This prayer was a plea for God to pour out His bountiful blessings upon the people, to show them His care and heartfelt love to such an extent that the people of God would neither lack nor get disturbed by anything. In practical terms, the High priest was directed to ask God to give His people everything that would make their lives satisfying and fulfilling, both in the present and future.

Question 4: Mention some of the bounties of God’s gifts which we have in Christ?

In the New Testament, believers are blessed and greatly favored in Christ. This means that through Jesus Christ, God has provided all that is necessary for life and godliness. In Him, we have unlimited provision, privilege, position, possibilities, partnership purity of heart, protection, pardon and peace with God (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6 ; 3:20 ; 4:12; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:14; 2:13-15; 2 Peter 1:3),

From the priestly benediction we learn some important lessons: One, we see how important it is for leaders to pray for their congregation. God said that when the High priest invoked the blessing in His name upon the people of Israel, then He would bless them. Leaders in the house of God should learn to pray for their congregation and bless them in the name of the Lord. Two we observe that the content of the priestly benediction pertain more to spiritual blessings than physical or material acquisition. The qualities of fellowship with God, pleasing Him at all times and enjoying His favor should occupy our attention more than the quest for material prosperity. We should remember to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and other necessary things shall be added unto us. Three, we, as believers are priests of God; and we should learn to bless people with our

lips. We should bless our children, spouse and fellow workers rather than criticize or curse them. Our mouth should pour out benedictions upon those who are close to us.

Four, the blessings of God will come upon us only as we live in obedience to Him and do all that are pleasing in His sight. The priestly benedictions could not avail for Israel when they backslid and turned away from God. In the same way, the apostolic benedictions and the popular phrase “God bless you” with which we greet one another cannot be meaningful unless we live in obedience to God and remain within the boundaries of His love. A person, who lives in sin, whether in secret or open, should not expect the blessings of God to continue to flow in His life unless he/she repents and turns to God wholeheartedly. This is because God is angry with the evil doer everyday and He has decreed that anyone who lives in sin will neither prosper nor enjoy peace (Psalm 7:11; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 57:21). The grim reality of it all is that there is no sinner in the church or outside that can hide from God who is the source of all blessings. Some people continue to suffer need and afflictions in God’s house because He knows the secret sins they commit that are hidden from human eyes. God is always righteous and He blesses the righteous. But if you live in sin, **“Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you”** (Jeremiah 5:25). The prodigal son knew better; he turned and repented. To begin to enjoy the blessings of God, repent of all your sins, receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour, retribute your ways and remain in unbroken fellowship with God in His word and with His people in the local assembly.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	17-18	Isaiah	8-9
TUE	"	19	"	10-11
WED	"	20-21	"	12-14
THUR	Acts	1-2	"	15-16
FRI	"	3-4	"	17-18
SAT	"	5-6	"	19-20
SUN	"	7	"	21-22

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

357 Lesson

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

MEMORY VERSE: “And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would” (John 6:11).

TEXT: John 6:1-21

In the previous chapter, Jesus gave His personal testimony and those of others to prove to the unbelieving Jews that He is the incarnate Son of God and the Messiah. He cited the miracles He performed, among others, as witness to His divinity. Peculiar to John’s gospel are Christ’s miracles of turning of water into wine (John 2:1-11), the healing of a noble man’s son (John 4:46-54), the healing of the impotent man (John 5:2-8), the healing of a man born blind (John 9:1-41) and the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46). In this lesson however, we are presented with two miracles of Christ recorded by John that are common to the four synoptic gospels. They are the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water.

Question 1: Mention two miracles of Jesus in our text and the reason John recorded them?

No doubt, these miracles support the purpose for which the fourth gospel was written; that is, to enable people know and believe in Jesus as truly the Son of God and not an ordinary man. He showed that Jesus is truly God the incarnate Son of God and the expected Messiah **“And many other signs truly did Jesus in**

the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30,31). The miracle of bread multiplication for instance, helps to drive home the message that Jesus is the Bread of life, whom if received, would give eternal life. The physical bread which people crave to satisfy physical hunger can only at best strengthen and sustain the physical body for temporal life. But Jesus declared, “ **I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”**(John 6:51).

CHRIST’S CONCERN FOR THE MULTITUDES (John 6:1-7; Matthew 14:13-16; Mark 6:32-37; Luke 9:1-13; Psalm 115:12; 40:17; Matthew 6:32; John 13:1; 1 Peter 5:7)

The twelve disciples whom Jesus sent for evangelistic outreach had returned and given their reports. The Lord knew that they needed rest and withdrew with them, passing over the Sea of Galilee. A great multitude who knew the direction they went followed from various villages because they had seen the miracles He performed in, Cana of Galilee. He had turned water into wine which manifested forth His glory. Jesus had become known for various miracles He performed. Again, as the Passover, one of the feasts of the Jews was drawing near, the people were eager to listen to religious discourse on the subject to prepare them for the Feast. Moreover, they knew that Christ would soon leave Galilee for Jerusalem to observe the Passover, so they wanted to obtain whatever miracles they could get from Him before His departure.

Jesus received them, preached to them of the kingdom of God and healed the sick among them (Luke 9:11). It is instructive to note that Jesus did not ignore them nor minister only to their physical needs, but He also **“spake unto them of the kingdom of God”**. This is a great lesson to ministers of God who spend most of their preaching opportunities in talking about miracles and prosperity without ministering to the spiritual needs of the people.

“And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples” (John 6:3). Our Lord Jesus kept His disciples close to Him wherever He went. He did not consider it degrading to sit with His own disciples on the mountain. As Christians, the Bible also says, He **“hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:6). We should be confident that as His disciples, He is also with us.

He cares for our daily spiritual and physical bread. Having ministered to the spiritual needs of the people and healed the sick, as the day wore on, the Lord looked and saw a great company. He knew they were hungry and should be fed. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a Shepherd who knows and can provide for all the needs of His flock. His compassions do not fail.

Some of Christ’s disciples preferred that the people be sent away hungry to buy food for themselves in nearby villages. However, the Lord pointed out that they should be fed there in the desert place. The Lord posed a question to Philip, **“Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”** The Lord knew what to do, but He wanted to test the faith of Philip.

Philip was of Bethsaida which was near where Jesus was ministering to the people. He had been with Jesus from the beginning before many of Christ’s disciples. He had seen many miracles performed by Jesus

especially that of turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee. The disciples of Jesus, including Philip, were reported to have **“believed on him”** after this miracle. Here was an opportunity for Philip to confirm that belief on Christ, but he missed it. He calculated that even if they could get two hundred penny worth of bread, it would not be sufficient for everyone of the multitudes to have a little piece. Answers to the Lord’s questions should be given in the light of His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. Job, Ezekiel and Peter all acknowledged this and made their submission on the basis of His divine attributes (Job 42:1,2; Ezekiel 37:3; John 21:15-17). The believer should emulate this.

Like many believers today, Philip had little faith. He was looking at things from the natural man’s standpoint. He forgot that the incarnate Son of God, the Messiah without whom **“was not anything made that was made”** (John 1:3), was by him. Could this same Jesus who had turned water into wine, healed the noble man’s son and the impotent man, among others, not also provide miracle food for the multitudes? When, as believers we are faced with a challenge like this, instead of doubting, we should say like Ezekiel in the vision of the valley of dry bones, **“O Lord God thou knowest”**(Ezekiel 37:3b). We should confess the possibility of all things with Him in times of difficulty and inexplicable adverse situation as we seek His help (Hebrews 11:6)

Andrew, the disciple who brought his brother, Simon Peter to Jesus, pointed out the means for the miracle. **“There is a lad here, which hath five barely loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”** (verse 9) Though his suggestion was a step to the miracle, his faith was no higher than that of Philip. His question ruined everything. Moses, during the wilderness journey had also questioned

the possibility of God providing enough flesh for six hundred thousand footmen. He said, **“Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?”** (Numbers 11:22).

Question 2: State the kind of attitude a believer should put up when in need and how he should react towards the needs of others?

God wants His children to walk by faith. In a world full of changes in natural phenomena, social, economic and political conditions, we must remember God’s promises and past providences to see us through. A child of God should be anxious for nothing. He who **“lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him”**, a company of hungry men and women, is still seeing His needy disciples today. If He was concerned about the welfare of the multitudes, many of whom were not really genuine seekers, He cannot be less concerned about His needy true disciples today. In times like these, the believer is admonished to cast all his cares upon the Lord who cares for him.

As the Lord felt the needs of the multitudes, so should all Christians feel for the hungry and needy around them. They must not only feel but spring into action by meeting those needs with substances from their pockets, bags, barns, bank accounts and wardrobes. Such friendly and brotherly gestures could go a long way in drawing men to Christ and establishing the believers. The Christians who meets the needs of the poor is ministering to Christ and shall be rewarded (Matthew 25:31-46)

CHRIST’ MIRACLE OF FOOD MULTIPLICATION

(John 6:10-15; Matthew 14:17-21; Mark 6:38-44; Luke 9:14-17; 2 Kings 4:42-44; Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; 37:25)

“And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would” (John 6:11).

It was a desert place, but the Lord got a grass site as the venue of His field outreach. He ordered that the people be made to sit down in companies of fifties for easy and orderly distribution of the food. The Lord had five loaves and two fishes for the meal to serve five thousand men with number of women and children not indicated.

It could only be by a miracle for the food to be sufficient for all. Jesus therefore took the loaves and gave thanks to God before distribution was made. The emphasis was on giving of thanks and not on praying to God for the food to be multiplied. He knew that the food was already multiplied because He was working in harmony with the Father (John 5:19). However, He expects the believer to ask in faith with a thankful heart in His name to receive from God.

Question 3: What lesson do we learn from the method of food distribution in our text?

The manner of food distribution was excellent. Jesus gave to the disciples and the disciples in turn distributed to the multitudes who were orderly seated in groups of fifties. Both the loaves and fishes were served in this manner and nobody was omitted and there was no complaint from any quarters. Everyone got as much as he needed. There are many lessons to learn from this. In a Christian home, the husband as the head of the home should make food available to the wife who would in turn distribute to the children. Also, during special church programmes such as retreats, where food has to be served to participants, we should follow the Lord’s pattern. If this is not done, there would be complaints as was the case in the early Church (Acts 6:1-3). Christian ministers also owe it a

duty to seek the face of the Lord to receive God's word and give it to their congregations according to their needs.

Question 4: Mention some instances in the Bible in which God miraculously provided food for His people?

God gives His creatures all things they need superfluously. He made food available for Adam and Eve even before they were created (Genesis 1:28, 29). He provided manna and quail for the Israelites during their wilderness journey to Canaan (Exodus 16:4-15; Numbers 11:31,32). The widow of Zarephath had her handful of meal and a cruse of oil multiplied to serve her household for a period of about three and a half years (1 Kings 17:8-16). Another widow also had her oil in a pot multiplied to fill many vessels through prophet Elisha. God also used Elisha to multiply twenty loaves of barley to feed one hundred men satisfactorily and there was a left-over (2 Kings 4:42-44). God never changes; He can still miraculously provide for His people in need of food or any other thing today.

Question 5: Why did Christ have to command that the left over of the bread and fishes be gathered?

“When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (verse 12). Though the Lord gives abundantly, He does not want anything to be wasted. Another reason is to teach accountability. We must take proper record of what is entrusted into our care. Whether in our homes or in the house of God, there should be proper inventory. Sometimes in some local churches, there might be serious lack of certain items while they are wasting away at other locations. These can be evenly distributed.

In all, twelve baskets were filled with the fragments of the loaves and fishes. The multitudes, when they saw the miracle, exclaimed that of a truth Jesus is **“that prophet that should come into the world”**. The miracle made them believe that Jesus is the promised Prophet or Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15). This realization made them to want to make Jesus their political king by force, but Jesus withdrew from them to pray alone in a mountain. This is a commendable attitude which believers should emulate in their lives when the world is trying to sway them from their spiritual goals. Like Christ, we must be dead to the world and the glories of it to be able to enter the kingdom of God. The goal of the god of this world, Satan is diametrically opposed to that of God whose interest the believer serves. And since it is not possible to serve two masters loyally, God warns believers of the danger inherent in doing so. **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lush of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”** (1 John 2:15-17).

CHRIST WALKS ON THE SEA (John 6:16-21; Matthew 14:24-33; Mark 6:47-53)

Jesus had sent away the multitude and constrained His disciples to go by a ship towards Capernaum before going to pray on a mountain. The ship however got into problem as the wind became contrary. Jesus, in the fourth watch saw them **“toiling in rowing”** and went to them, walking on the water (Mark 6:48).

The disciples were afraid when they saw Him, thinking that He was a spirit, but He calmed their fears saying, **“it is I: be not afraid”**. Therefore, they

willingly received Him into the ship and immediately they go to land. If you are toiling, trying to overcome the storms in your life, family, secular endeavour or ministry, be rest assured that Jesus will not leave you alone. So do not be afraid. He is the Lord of the oceans and seas. He who walked upon the sea also rides in the clouds. He is in control of the elements on land, in the sea and in the sky. With Him believer can take charge of all situations.

Question 6: How can a sinner enjoy the presence of the Lord and receive help in time of trouble?

For sinners and backsliders to enjoy the presence and help of the Lord in trouble, they must acknowledge, confess and forsake their sins and receive Christ into their hearts as Saviour and Lord. Jesus will not reject anyone who genuinely comes to God by Him (Revelation 3:20; Romans 10:8-13; John 6:37).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	8	Isaiah	23-24
TUE	“	9	“	25-26
WED	“	10	“	27-28
THUR	“	11-12	“	29-30
FRI	“	13	“	31-32
SAT	“	14-15	“	33-35
SUN	“	16	“	36-37

358 Lesson

CHRIST CHALLENGES THE MULTITUDE

MEMORY VERSE: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27)

TEXT: John 6:22-71

People’s perception of and reaction to divine interventions and miracles are determined by their spiritual condition. In the case of the multitudes in our text, the way they responded to the miraculous multiplication of the five barley loaves and two small fishes is typical of unconverted men. They viewed Christ as one who came to satisfy their natural hunger, and as such rejoiced at the great miracle of the feeding of five thousand. From Tiberias to Capernaum they traversed the land in search of the Son of God but not for eternal purposes.

Question 1: What should be our motive in seeking and serving the Lord?

The motive of their search was not hidden from the Master of men and angels who knows the thoughts and intents of every heart. He, before whom all actions are weighed, was not moved by their seeming zeal for Him, but was concerned about their shallow perception and carnal desires. How glorious it would be for men to reorder their priorities according to divine pattern by seeking first to enter God’s kingdom and to possess the requisite righteousness before all other blessings that can best be qualified as ‘additives’. Christ who sees the motives behind man’s religious zeal used the opportunity to correct the misplaced priority. The occasion provided Him chance to teach deep truths concerning the purpose of God in working

miracles, about His person and mission on earth.

THE MULTITUDE'S MOTIVES AND CHRIST'S CHALLENGE John 6:22-31; Joel 3:14; Ecclesiastics 1:14; 4:8; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 13:44; Mark 9:43-48; Isaiah 55:2).

Though their motive was less spiritual, the diligence and Zeal with which the multitude sought after Christ is striking. They had been treated to a delightful meal with only “five barley loaves and two small fishes”. Considering only the economic and material benefits they stood to reap should such a miracle worker as Christ become their leader and provider, they were urgent and zealous for Him. It was the hope of such benefits that drove them to linger at the place of the miracle in the belief that Christ was still on that side of the lake. However, when it became clear the next morning that Christ was no longer there, (having walked on water to join His disciples in their boat to the other side) they also “took shipping and came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus”. Their zealous and determined search for Christ yielded fruit, albeit, for selfish reasons.

<p>Question 2: What scriptural encouragement and assurance does a sincere seeker have about Christ?</p>
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Christ was always found by those who sought Him in sincerity – Whether it was Zaccheus who breached the crowd to seek Him (Luke 19:1-4); or Nicodemus who would only come in the night for fear of the Jews (John 3:1-2); or the Greeks who came to worship in Jerusalem (John 12:21). Christ never ignores anyone or fails to answer those who call on him. However, the uniform experience of all those who ever sought and found Christ teaches us that we must accomplish a sincere, not halfhearted search if we must find Him. Our sincerity in seeking Christ is more important to our time. **“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when**

ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

The multitude’s search for Christ was not only zealous but urgent. In their determination to find Christ, they were willing to forego their immediate comfort, endure some inconvenience, make some expenses and expose themselves to some risks. This is in contrast with the attitude of the slothful, half-hearted seeker who perceives all types of lions on the way that would lead them to the Savior (Proverbs 26:13). But earnest seekers are always willing to pay any price to have eternal life. **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field”** (Matthew 13:44). They could have, upon discovering that Christ was no longer on their side of the lake, deferred their quest in the hope that He would some other day appear in their country. It is such procrastination and delay that have ensnared many into never finding Him until death, thus sealing their eternity in hell. Because many good and critical decisions are not immediately acted upon at the right time, they have fizzled out of the mind and the benefits lost. It is no wonder that the Scripture admonishes that **“...To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness”** (psalm 95:7b, 8). Also, **“...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation...”** (2 Corinthians 6:2b).

If the notion of mere material and economic well being worked such zeal and determination and urgency in the minds of the multitude, believers should be more fervent in seeking God’s righteousness and grace to please Him. Misplaced values will make people to labour unnecessarily and in vain. Quest for

materialism is the bane of many churches that has done little to satisfy the spiritual hunger in the hearts of many worshippers today. Though it is not sinful to be rich, seeking it at the expense of one's relationship with God is evil. This covetous tendency has eclipsed the faith of many a believer and choked the Word, which is the means of sustaining the life of God in their hearts. Gehazi, Achan, Judas Iscariot and Demas are popular names in Scripture; but nobody wants to bear them because of their evil lifestyle. Obviously, anyone who chooses to live contrary to the will of God will suffer disgrace on earth and banishment from God's kingdom.

Question 3: What challenge did Christ give to the multitudes?

The challenge of the Lord on eternal values is of utmost significance. This is a divine imperative which when obeyed guarantees eternal joy and peace with God. Christ's challenge stems out of the ignorance and wrong motives with which the multitudes were searching for Him. He said to them: "**Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled**" (John 6:26). Instead of spending all their life and dissipating energy on temporal things that shall perish with this world, the Lord charged them to "**Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the son of man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed**" (verse 27). This challenge comes to all and sundry today when men are preoccupied only with what to eat and drink, when they spend their time for everything but God. Their waking and sleeping thoughts are steeped in the things the world can offer. Many are prepared go all out to find money, wealth, fame and pleasure at whatever cost. But the divine imperative for all

who know they are strangers and pilgrims here and seek and abode with God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Christ’s charge is the universal antidote for covetous practices and carnal avarice which have destroyed many souls and taken away others from the Kingdom of God. The pursuit of the demands of life, the search for insatiable riches and the quest to acquire wealth as much as possible have turned away the hearts of many from the fold.

Question 4: What are the purposes for which God works miracles in the church today?

Christ’s rebuke to the multitude teaches us that there was in the miracle more than the intention to satisfy the physical hunger of the people. Apart from portraying the love and compassion of God in relieving physical conditions, miracles done in the name of Christ are meant to convince people of God’s approval of Christ and His doctrine, and thus lead them to faith and salvation. It is to draw souls into the Kingdom of God. God, today, still uses the strategic medium of miracles to bring multitudes of people into His fold. Unfortunately, the multitude in our text failed to realize Christ’s design in performing this miracle. They still did not believe in Christ though they enjoyed His miracles.

The same spiritual blindness is common today. Some people receive divine miracles of healing, prosperity and deliverance from physical and spiritual dangers and yet do not exercise faith to receive Christ as Saviour. Others appreciate “good and inspired sermons” but would not obey its precepts by giving their lives to Christ so as to be born again.

By directing the multitude not to labour “**for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life**” the Lord did not mean that we should not labour for daily living. He did mean however that the physical food, conveniences and material well-being should not be the supreme care and concern of our lives. They should never be allowed to supersede godliness and spiritual pursuits.

Christ’s’ directive to labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life naturally prompted the question from the people: “**What shall we do that we might work the works of God?**” (verse 28). In other words, what are specific details of how to labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life? Christ’s answer was unmistakable and unambiguous: “**This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent**”.

CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE (John 6:32-59; Isaiah 55:2; Jeremiah 3:15; Ezekiel 34:14; 1 Corinthians 10:3,4; Deuteronomy 8:3; Revelation 2:7, 17).

Question 5: Why is Christ referred to as the Bread of Life?
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The true bread that guarantees our present and eternal satisfaction is Christ. He is the bread from heaven, the living bread that provides the desired satisfaction and peace with God. He explained that the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness was not given by Moses but was a divine supply by God for the sustenance and well-being of the people.

Eating of the flesh of Christ and the drinking of His blood are no doubt metaphors deriving from the multitudes allusion to manna as proof of God’s approval of Moses. The Lord therefore used the same metaphors of eating and drinking to illustrate the spiritual activities of faith in Him and the benefits of

His death. When Christ spoke of giving His flesh for us, He was referring to His suffering and death on the cross but the people understood it literally to mean the giving of his body to be eaten. We partake by faith and enjoy the benefits because God gives them on the basis of what Christ did for us at Calvary. Those who murmur and resist the truth reject the benefits of the cross and the divine blessing that abounds in Christ's death.

Faith is a requisite ingredient in receiving the Bread of life. It equally serves as the basis of sustaining the satisfaction and peace enjoyed in Christ as the bread of life. He is all that we need. The bread of life fills our hearts and souls with lasting and sustaining spiritual satisfaction.

Coming to Christ in full assurance of His sufficiency to meet all human needs now and throughout eternity will propel our love for Him. Promote our dependence on His grace and preserve our continual feeding on His Word. The more we feed on the word of God the better the life of God in us. For, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". Babes in Christ should "desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby"; young men in Christ should be painstaking in commitment to this truth that makes them overcome the wicked one; while fathers are enjoined to keep this eternal word and remain resolute in its search and study because they have known God that is from the beginning (1 John 2:12-14).

Question 6: What is the significance of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ?

The same wrong understanding of Christ's teaching is still held in some religious circles today. They teach that Christ's physical body and blood must be

ingested as condition for salvation. They further seek to give effect to this falsehood by affirming that the elements of the Holy Communion are miraculously transformed into real flesh and real blood of Christ to be eaten and drunk on performance of that ordinance. This belief is false and its practice devilish! The significance is found in 1 Corinthians 11:26 **“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come”**.

THE CONDITIONS OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (John 6:60-71; John 8:30-32; Mathew 16:24; Luke 14:23, 26; John 15:8).

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said this is a hard saying; who can hear it?” Jesus taught the depth of truth and conditions of peace and favor with God. The simple could not assimilate this truth and the multitude’s perception was divergent and irreconcilable to this word. The disciples also responded with such amazement because of their levels of perception and understanding of the truth.

In the confusion engendered by the lack of understanding, **“from that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him”** (verse 66). **“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away?”** Peter’s response to Christ’s question was most instructive and deeply rooted in faith in Christ **“Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God”**. Those who contemplate leaving Christ will do well to ask themselves where they will go from Christ.

<p>Question 7: Why did many of the multitudes turn away from following Christ?</p>

The burden of the teaching of this truth became too heavy to bear for the multitudes. Even some of the disciples who followed the Lord said, “This is a hard saying: who can hear it?” The saying was hard for them, not in the sense of lack of clarity but because it affected their judgment in the sense of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This was a manifestation of the shallowness of their understanding (Ephesians 4:14).

Many are offended as touching sound teachings of God’s word, and rather than repent of their evil, they revolt and resist the truth. We must realize the fact that the truth we reject today will stand against us on the judgment day. The teachings of God’s word on restitution, holiness, Christian marriage, and other cardinal truths of the Bible should not provoke anger and resistance in us. Rather, we should pray for grace to obey and be subject to God’s word. The response of the disciples to Christ’s question explains the condition for true discipleship.

Question 8: What are the conditions for true discipleship?

Christ emphasizes the condition for discipleship as continuity in His words. Those who turn away or backslide are not true disciples. Unflinching faith in His Word and willingness to go with Him anywhere and at all times are necessary if we want to continue to be Christ’s disciples. Those who drop their allegiance and loyalty at the slightest opportunity cannot be His disciples. In the course of following Him, challenges will arise, but the Lord wants us to remain steadfast and resolute to the end. **“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	17-18	Isaiah	38-39
TUE	“	19	“	40
WED	“	20	“	41-42
THUR	“	21	“	43-44
FRI	“	22-23	“	45-46
SAT	“	24-25	“	47-48
SUN	“	26	“	49

359 Lesson

JESUS SHUNS FAME

MEMORY VERSE: “Let nothing be done though strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3)

TEXT: John 7:1-13

Christ’s mission on earth was to reconcile the fallen man with the holy God. He had to contend with the devil, the world or its system that were bent on distracting Him. He would not allow the successes that attended His ministry to change the programme of God for His life and ministry either. It would be recalled that He had achieved great feats in such a short space of time in His ministry. There had been salvation for sinners, healing for the sick and deliverance for those oppressed of the devil. Just recently, He had repeated a feat which only one Old Testament prophet – Elisha – could achieve, namely the miraculous multiplication of the few loaves of bread and few fishes to feed thousands of people. This certainly had attracted the attention of many people who wanted to make Him their king. But knowing and sticking to His primary purpose here on earth, He ran away. Christians should emulate and toe this footstep of their Lord.

Question 1: Why must ministers and believers of the gospel watch against craving for popularity?

One of the many vices, which successful ministers of the gospel must watch against is crave for fame which most often than not is powered by pride. While it must be stated that there is nothing wrong with being popular, it must also be made clear that fame or

popularity can be a major distraction to successful ministrations if it is not well managed.

SUBTLE AND PERSISTENT TEMPTATION FROM SATAN (John 7:1-4; 6:11-15; Luke 4:5, 6,11; Matthew 4:1-11)

Satan never gives up on the believer until his sole aim of drawing the believer away from God is achieved. If he fails in one area, he attempts to come through another. Most of the times, he comes so subtly that the believer who is not vigilant may fall into his trap before realizing it. The temptation to crave for pride and popularity came early in Christ's ministry. At the outset of His ministry, the devil had come tempting Him to crave for popularity: **"And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it"** (Luke 4:5,6). This was immediately after His forty-day-and forty-night fasting. Bent on derailing Christ, the devil now speaks through the members of His family, desiring Him to make a showmanship of Himself to the world, **"For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be know openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world"** (John 7:4). In other words, they were saying, "as you claim to have supernatural power, demonstrate it for all to see at Jerusalem during the feast,"; "with the opportunity provided by the feast, get into prominence and limelight, and promote yourself." The subtle maneuvering of the devil is clear here.

The advice was a subtle temptation from the devil to substitute man's applause and demand for the divine will, to follow man's calendar rather than

God's appointed times, to do the right deed for a wrong reason. They wanted Him to seek earthly glory, esteem, fame, and greatness through His miracles and thereby distract Him, blur His vision and make Him compromise the divine assignment. But Christ was consistent in His resistance and victory over every temptation. He shunned popularity in order to do the will of Him who sent Him. Likewise, believers must be as consistent as the Lord in resisting Satan's temptation to crave for pride and popularity. It is a natural tendency to begin to crave for popularity once there is some noticeable progress. The propensity to impress people often makes some believers and leaders who started well in a humble way to end up derailing from the path of righteousness. Often, this is as a result of counsels or suggestions.

But believers must be wary of unsolicited counsels and always check up with God whenever they are given counsel. When Jethro counselled Moses, though the counsel was sound, he still asked him to check it up with God first. Even where suggestions appear reasonable, leaders must endeavour to still cross-check with God. When a minister of God begins to take the suggestions from men wholesale without cross-checking from God, he is bound to slip from the path of righteousness. Covetousness, greed and worldly competition will set in. That is why believers and leaders must be watchful, as the Lord has instructed.

TRIUMPH THROUGH WATCHFULNESS AND WISDOM (John 7:5-10; Matthew 26:41; Job 2:9, Matthew 16:21-23; Ephesians 6:18).

Question 2: What was the primary concern of the Lord, Jesus Christ?

Believers who are so close to their unbelieving relatives have lessons to learn from Christ's earthly

family. His life never contradicts His message. He once declared that those whose degree of loyalty, faith and love for their parents and siblings are more than they manifest towards Him are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). Such depend and lean more on the opinions and ideals of those who they revered or idolize in critical moments of life than on the word of God. This is the bane of the shallow-minded Christians: they take counsel from unbelieving relatives and friends wholesale without reference to scriptural counsel on the same subject. The danger in this is that the carnal man can give sincere counsel that is inspired by the devil. Any wonder then that the all-wise God says, **“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”** (Psalms 1:1-3).

Besides, Christian servants must be careful to practice what they preach to others. Thought born of the same mother, Christ’s brethren did not believe in Him. How then could they decide, influence, chart the course of His evangelistic work or determine the time to execute soul winning programmes. If Christ rejected their counsel, Christian servants who accept such counsels are outside the orbit of divine operations. Repentance and separation from the world and its lifestyles will bring those who have been derailed back to track in life and ministry.

The primary concern of Jesus Christ was to accomplish the Father’s will and to finish His assignment. He was so watchful that He was not distracted by material and worldly quests. Rather, He was focused

on accomplishing a set target –the salvation of mankind. The reaction of the people neither affected the content of His message nor influenced the tempo of its delivery. Fulfilling the father’s will sometimes requires taking difficult decisions and being watchful against temptations or distractions like the Lord who was fully determined, suffered and died to fulfill the Father’s will. Therefore, carnal, temporary and transient applause of men were a total negation of the heavenly assignment He was sent for. Paul, the apostle was another man who stuck to his gun in the fulfillment of the will of God. He was always on his watch that when he was almost being swept off his feet by his friends and loved ones he said, **“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”** (Acts 21:13). **“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24).

Question 3: What is the place of watchfulness and wisdom in the believer’s triumph?

Through temptations, Satan always attempts to take advantage of our weakness, desperation, frustrations and excitement. But because the Lord was watchful, He could not be taken unawares. He would not give in to suggestions that are not from God. Watchfulness occupies a conspicuous place in the believer’s triumph over Satan and his temptations.

Whenever he comes with seemingly harmless suggestions, it takes watchfulness to spot it. How apt are the words of a songwriter:

Christian! Seek not yet repose,
Hear thy guardian angel say;
Thou art in the midst of foes;
“Watch and pray.”

Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours;
“Watch and pray.”

One reason Christ gave for His unyielding stance in the use of His time is the ever-brewing hatred of the world against Him for testifying that **“the works thereof are evil”** . Believers and preachers of the gospel who declare the whole counsel of God will not be loved by all. Those who desire to remain in darkness will hate them. But it requires divine wisdom such as David manifested before Saul who harboured hatred against him (1 Samuel 18:5-15) to be able to escape falling prey to their evil machinations. Christ’s withdrawal to Galilee and to remain there while others were going to the feast (verses 1, 9) was an act of divine wisdom. He went afterwards, secretly. Lack of wisdom makes the believer to suffer unnecessarily in life and in the service of God .But we must ask for wisdom for living and ministry so as to escape the traps of the enemy. A wise man foresees evil and avoid them.

IDENTIFYING WITH CHRIST IN A SINFUL WORLD
(John 7:11-13; 9:21-23; Mark 8:38; Luke 9: 26; 2 timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 3: 11-13; numbers 23:23).

It is unfortunate that Christ’s message designed to expose evil works of man, and thus, bring him to repentance have become a means of offence. The message that elicited hate and murderous intention from Jews who sought to kill Him at the feast was the same message those who believed heard. At the feast, participants were divided in their opinions of Christ.

One school of thought says, He is a “good man” while the other says, His is a deceiver. Some accepted Him and other rejected Him. Note however that Christ is not a deceiver and He is more than a good man, as believed in many religious circles today. Jesus is Lord and the Saviors of the world. He died and rose again to save everyone who repents of his sins and exercise faith in Him.

That Christ attended the feast secretly reveals it was the will of God for Him to attend but not with the motive and in the manner earlier suggested by His brethren. While the emphasis of the people of the world is how to achieve celebrity status, the believer or minister of God should remain focused on doing God’s work in His own way. Everyone who “**saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked**” (I John 2:6). No true believer who seeks to please the Lord can afford to do otherwise and expect to receive his reward. We as believers are to identify with Him in all things. If , however, we fail to or are ashamed to identify with Him He will also disown us on the last day.

It is striking to note that the Jews who “ **sought to kill him**” at the beginning of our text continued their search for Him at the feast. It would be playing unnecessarily into the hands of the enemy to have gone to the feast openly to show ministry by killing Him before the cross would have succeeded if He had not live and worked with divine wisdom. Many ministers have fallen prey to Satan’s trap for not walking in wisdom like our Master. Be wise and avoid fallen into a similar trap of the devil.

SUNDRY LESSONS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY BELIEVERS (John 7:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

Question 4: What lessons do we learn from today’s study?

There are several lessons for believers in the study today. One we learn that Satan does not give up easily in tempting the believer to sin. After he had tempted the Lord, **“he departed from him [Christ] for a season”** And since he could stage comeback, there is need to be wary and watchful in times of extremes of our emotions. Two, we learn that the objective of the devil is to derail us from the path of righteousness, and he could go to any length to achieve this Three, We learn that however the number of times he may come with temptations, the grace of God is available for victory. Four, we learn that we should watch our family members against being used by the devil to tempt us. The experience of Job’s wife reinforces the fact (Job 2:9, 10). Constant watchfulness and prayerfulness will stop the devil and his temptation in his track. Five, we learn that if we concentrate and focus on our calling, we will be able to achieve perfect work and it will be difficult for the devil to sidetrack us from the way of righteousness. Six, we learn that believers or ministers who are in a hurry to be famous will easily fall prey to the machinations of devil. So, we should prayerfully wait for God’s time for our exaltation like Jesus who declared: **“My time is not yet come”**.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	27	Isaiah	50-51
TUE	“	28	“	52-54
WED	Rom.	1-2	“	55-57
THUR	“	3-4	“	58-59
FRI	“	5-6	“	60-61
SAT	“	7-8	“	62-63
SUN	“	9-10	“	64-65

360 Lesson

JESUS TEACHES IN THE TEMPLE

MEMORY VERSE: “Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught” (John 7:14).

TEXT: John 7:14-44

When the Jews settled in Canaan, they carried with them the feasts that God commanded them through Moses, albeit with self-serving inputs, additions and traditions of men contrary to God’s original design. Many of the rites became perfunctory, devoid of the spiritual implications for which God ordered them. The feast of tabernacles, in our text, is one of them and lasts for seven days, with an eighth added as a holy convocation (Leviticus 23:36).

Before this event, Jesus’ brethren, out of ignorance and unbelief had pressured Him to attend so that the people may know of his mission. The Lord did not yield to their pressure but delayed, as divine wisdom dictated, till the midst of the feast before attending.

Question 1: What should be our attitude to those who oppose the preaching of the gospel?

Here we learn how important it is for believers to work, walk and serve the Lord discreetly according to the leading of the Spirit, We should not allow undue pressure from any quarter to lead us contrary to the will of God for our lives. Many, out of blind zeal had walked into danger presumptuously and had their lives and ministries cut short abruptly, it is important that servants of God know where, when and what the Lord wants them to do lest they fall prey to the enemy’s plan.

As His manner is, Jesus arrives to the venue of the feast with the purpose of teaching and impacting divine knowledge to the people. However, the Jews misunderstand Him, oppose His teachings, Query His claim to deity and seek to eliminate Him. God's sovereignty however preserved Him because it was not yet time for Him to die. Jesus survives the Jewish plot and continues to do good and minister until God's appointed hour. This teaches us that no power can terminate our lives before God's appointed time. No man can set his hand upon the messenger of God.

JESUS, THE GREAT TEACHER (John 7:14, 15; Matthew 5:1,2; 13:54;7:29; Mark 4:2; 6:34; Luke 4:15;5:3; 19:47; John 3:2:8:2, Acts 17:2).

“Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (John 7:14,15). Jesus is the greatest Teacher that ever lived. He regarded teaching and preaching as His Father's business that He must be about. He taught the people unforgettable lessons on things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, both in parables and plain language. He expounded the Scriptures unto the people and removed the veil hitherto covering their eyes. His teachings were set in apples of gold, painted vividly and illustrated so that men of all ages, in every clime could understand. He taught like no other. No wonder the people often marveled at the depth of His wisdom and knowledge (Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32).

God had expected the priests to teach the people on this occasion and lay precept upon precept the book of the law of God (Nehemiah 8:17, 18). But the shepherds of Israel were encumbered with rites that have little profit at the expense of the word of God and neglected the weightier matters of the law.

They were busy with carnal sacrifices that could not make the people perfect (Hebrews 9:9). This is true of many places of worship today where ceremonies take the better portion of the worship time leaving the sermon as an appendix. Our worship services should not consist of trivial matters to the detriment of the teaching of the Word. Any attempt to do so and reduce our service periods to times of mere activities that have little benefit to our “innerman” will amount to working against the will of God and the spirit of true worship. It was therefore not surprising that as soon as Jesus arrived the scene, He immediately settled down to teach the people. When the shepherds of Israel failed to feed the people, it was necessary that the Chief Shepherd should step in to rescue the people from spiritual famine.

Question 2: What are the benefits of a teaching ministry?

Teaching and preaching should be accorded significant priority in every church. It should take the center-stage whenever the people of God gather together to worship the Lord. A people that are taught will learn to fear the Lord all the days of their life (Deuteronomy 4:10). They will learn to avoid sin, obey the Lord and command their children to do so. Teaching opens the eyes of the ignorant and makes them wise unto salvation. It enables the hitherto unlearned person discern between good and evil, holy and profane and between clean and unlearned person discern between good and evil, holy and profane and between clean and unclean (Ezekiel 44:23)

CHRIST’S DISCOURSE AT THE FEAST (John 7:16-29; Deuteronomy 32:2)

In our text, Christ’s encounter with these Jews raises a litany of controversies. He, however affirms the veracity of His doctrines, His deity or divinity, the Law of Moses and the living water. Concerning His

doctrine, He speaks on its origin. He declares: **“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself”** (John 7:16, 17). Throughout His earthly ministry, He preached no other doctrine but that which His heavenly Father gave to Him. He was always telling the people that He did nothing but by the commandment of God: He was a faithful ambassador of heaven in that He came to execute only that which is from God. In like manner, every servant or child of God must remain faithful to the sound word of God. No one who is appointed to serve the bread of life has the right to add or subtract from the holy word committed into his hand. To do otherwise is to court divine displeasure and being upon oneself the judgment of God (Deuteronomy 12:32; Revelation 22:18). It is expected that every minister of God be found faithful in his calling. Though not educated in the school of the prophets or at the feet of the rabbis, Christ preached and thought with power and authority. He was the Word personified. Even his hardest critics **“were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power”** (Luke 4:32).

Question 3: Why is doctrine important to the believer in Christ?

Doctrine to the church is what a foundation is to a building. It is the article of faith on which a believer’s faith is anchored. A believer’s steadfastness and stability in the Lord is dependent on his firm grasp of the truth revealed in the Bible (Ephesians 4: 13, 14). In a world filled with errors and deceit engineered by Satan and his hosts, a believer needs to be well grounded in the truth in order to be able to withstand the wiles of the enemy (Matthew 4:3,4).

Question 4: Outline the features of sound, scriptural doctrines?

Jesus noted that the acid test of a true doctrine is that it has its roots in the Bible. It finds expression and support from the word of God and can withstand its critical searchlight besides; it distills as the dew and refreshes the soul (Deuteronomy 32:2). It is pure and clean and gives men wisdom (Job 11:4). Those who know the doctrine of God shall come to understanding; they shall love God supremely and others as themselves (Isaiah 29: 24). It glorifies God and produces peace among men. Paul understood the centrality of Bible doctrines to Christian maturity, hence he counseled Timothy to take heed and hold firmly to them. Our steadfastness to the end is dependent on the understanding of the doctrines (1 Timothy 4:16) the strength or weakness of the church depends to a large extent on the member's understanding, attitude to biblical doctrines (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:15; Colossians 3:16; John 5:39; Deuteronomy 4:4-9).

The Lord also outlines the proof of true servants of God, saying: **“He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him”** (John 7:18). Jesus noted that true servants of God exalt God and seek His glory above self . They scarcely talk about their gifts, talents, ability or riches. Faithful ministers understand that no man can receive anything except it was given from above. **“For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”** (1 Corinthians 4:7) On the other hand, fake professors of religion seek their own glory, talk much about their God works and little about the unmerited favor and grace of God.

CHRIST'S DIVINITY CHALLENGED (John 7:30-36; Matthew 13:14)

The Scriptures have rightly stated that the carnal mind cannot understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is no wonder that though the Jews, Pharisees and the Scribes pride themselves as custodians of the truth, they are ignorant and bereft of the truth, They are astonished at Christ's doctrines and accuse Him of breaking the law, and in the interest of religion, thought that He should be killed. They misunderstand Him, misapply the truth He taught and turn around to persecute Him. For instance, when He challenged their disobedience to the law of Moses evident in their attempt to kill Him, they accused Him of being demon-possessed (John 7:20). When he healed a man on the Sabbath, they were angry; and on the claim that He is God-sent, they gave orders to arrest Him. And, finally, they concluded that He was not Christ, as the expected Messiah should not come from Galilee (verses 41, 42) . Unprintable lies are still being told about true ministers of God in an attempt to defame and weaken their resolve and obedience to preaching. True ministers should rejoice in identifying with Christ in suffering defamation of character. And like Christ, they must continue in God's service to be able to receive their rewards.

Those who lack divine light misunderstand the Word and wrest it to their own destruction. They listen to the truth but cannot understand **“and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, by hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive”** (Matthew 13:14). They practice ostentation in religion and feel they are better than other people. Yet, in works of righteousness, they are shallow, insincere, full of hypocrisy and self-conceit. Christ teaches that God demands total obedience to His Word. If we say we are Christians, we must show it by the life we live and

by total obedience to the word of God (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Lord accused the Jews and Pharisees of violating the same law they profess to respect and obey (John 7:19-23). Today, the religious world hates Christ and the gospel that sets sinners and captives free. They persecute Christians and even feel that if they kill them, they are doing service to God. Jesus was never discouraged by the negative attitudes of the Jews and Pharisees. In the same vein, we, as believers must never be discouraged by persecution and different forms of opposition, misunderstanding and misrepresentation that people give in the course of our spreading the gospel.

CHRIST, THE WATER OF LIFE (John 7:37-44; Isaiah 12:3;55:2; Joel 2:28; Matthew 3:11;20:22.23; Luke 24:49; John 14:12-17)

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (verse 37). According to Jewish tradition, the eighth day was called **“that great day”** because of certain traditional observances which they specially perform to round off the event, It was said that on the seven days of the feast they offer sacrifices for the sins of other nations, but on the last day they did so only for the nation of Israel. Therefore, this day was more highly esteemed than the previous days.

On this seemingly great occasion, the greatest Teacher of all time, **“stood and cried”**. He needed to stand so that all might see Him and cried so that all might hear Him. He who had already drawn the people’s attention to Himself by the depth of His wisdom and teaching, sent out a universal proclamation to all that are thirsty to come and drink the water of life freely. **“He, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye; buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk**

without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

The invitation to partake of eternal life is free to all who care. Those whose live as famished, destitute, dry and deserted can come to the fountain of living waters and drink to their satisfaction. The deepest cravings of the human heart and life can here be satisfied. He who is the Bread of Life is the Wellspring of Living Waters and is able to satisfy all who apply to Him. No one comes to Him and goes hungry or thirsty He fully satisfies. What an offer!

“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified”. (John 7:38, 39).

Those who believe in Jesus, not according to denominational dogma or traditional belief but as the scripture has said, which refers to Him as the Priest, Prophet, King, Redeemer and Savior, shall experience the overflow of living waters from within their soul. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s heart shall become a fountain issuing out a wellspring of blessings. As a true spring is ever supplied with water from the great deep, so shall the soul of the genuine believer be supplied with light, life, and love, and all the other graces of the indwelling Spirit, from the indwelling Christ.

Jesus here refers to the fullness of the Holy Spirit that is to be given to those who believe in Him after He is glorified on the Cross. This was also prophesied by Joel. **“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions”** (Joel 2:28).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible and God has offered this gift to everyone who believe in Jesus (Acts 2:38). Every believer needs this experience to be his or her best for the Master. Jesus Himself was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power and He went around healing, preaching and teaching the people. We can be anointed with the same power today if we fulfill the conditions.

Let all who read this not travel the same road with the unbelieving Jews who engaged in this discourse with the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us not behave like unconverted, carnal, religious people. Rather, let us not believe with the few who confessed: **“Of a truth this is the prophet”, “This is the Christ”** (Verses 40, 42) and plunge ourselves into the fountain of Living waters and drink until we are filled.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Rom.	11-12	Isaiah	66
TUE	“	13-14	Jeremiah	1-2
WED	“	15-16	“	3-4
THUR	1 Cor,	1-2	“	5-6
FRI	“	3-4	“	7-8
SAT	“	5-6	“	9-10
SUN	“	7	“	11-12

361 LESSON

THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: ““The officers answered, Never a man spake like this man (John 7:46)

TEXT: John 7:45-53

The manifestation of Christ’s divinity, particularly through diverse miracles He performed, drew souls to believe on Him (John 7:31). Recipients of miracles from Christ were convinced that the power the expected Messiah was supposed to wield was what they were witnessing and this the true purpose of Christ’s Miracles, namely, to manifest His person and power to save the world from sin and its consequences because of His love for man, He once appealed to religious leaders of His days to, among other things, believe in Him for His works’ sake.

Question 1: Why did the chief priests and the Pharisees order Christ’s arrest?

Rather than appreciate the positive impact of Christ’s teaching and miracles, the chief priest and Pharisees became envious and sought ways to eliminate him. Their contention bothered on the identity of the much anticipated Christ, which He claimed and which recipients of His teachings and miracles did affirm to be true. Embittered by this development which erodes their religious positions and credibility, **“the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him”** (John 7:32), the outcome of which is the focus of this lesson. The order to arrest Christ reveals not only the envy of the Jewish religious leaders but also the identity of persecutors and the persecuted. **“But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is**

now” (Galatians 4:29). However, the threat of arrest did not hinder Christ from continuing His ministry – and should not hinder the Christian from following, serving and worshipping the Lord. It is certainly not everyone that comes to a Christian assembly who seeks spiritual enlightenment and blessings. Some indeed do; others come for sightseeing; and yet others come with a plot to stop the revival through persecution or through devilish means to entrap Christian ministers. But they will not prevail as they cannot stop the work of God.

PROOFS OF CHRIST’S DEITY (John 7:45,46;1:1-3,14;Luke 1:30-35; Philippians 2:10,11; John 6:63,68; Luke 4:22,32; Mark 13:31; John 12:48; John 1:34;5:37,39; 15:26,27;5:39; Psalm 107:20)

Christ incarnated as a man, a perfect man, However, His humanity did not rob Him of His divine attributes. The officers who were sent to arrest Him were so enthralled and overcome by the power of His words that they reported to the chief priests and the Pharisees who had commissioned them that, **“Never man spake like this man”** (John 7:46). This was the reason they gave in answer to the question: **“Why have ye not brought him?”**. Though these emissaries saw Christ as a man, they declared that His words and His teachings were undoubtedly extra-ordinary. They knew that the words of their own masters who trained and commissioned them to arrest Christ could not match His. They attested to the divine origin and inspiration of His words. We learn that Christians can assess their leaders by the words they speak and by their preaching – whether they are inspired or not. And it is certainly not possible for gracious words such as Christ spoke to proceed from the mouth of the graceless.

Question 2: How is Christ both man and God?

Christ had the common experiences of all men the world over. These human traits include the natural birth, a physical body that suffered tiredness and hunger, natural growth, emotions of sorrow and joy, etc. (Luke 2:4-7,11,12,40; 4:2; John 4:6; Matthew 26:37; Luke 10:21; 8:23). But as divine, His words are incomparable to the words of men of all ages.

At the instance of His arrest latter in the scriptures, when He declared that He was the One assailants were seeking, they all fell down before Him. Saints on the way to Emmaeus affirmed that their hearts **“burned”** within them while He expounded the scriptures to them in one of His post resurrection appearances. His words of command **“go”** cast out demons from a demoniac, **“peace be still”** **calmed the stormy sea**, **“it is finished”** sealed His redemptive work for us as well as the doom of Satan, etc. The power of His words is excellent: it convicts, saves, heals, sacrifices, delivers, etc. The emblems of God’s word further reveal its unlimited power. His word works as light, fire hammer, sword, water and food wherever it is found. Christ’s words cannot be compared with those of men, not even those of Moses or angels. Moses with all other prophets and angels were created by Him and are His messengers (John 1:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6,13,14; 3:1-6). His words are divine, spiritual, life-giving, gracious, mighty, imperishable and instrument of final judgment. Believers must be diligent to acquire the word of God because **“that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good...”** (proverbs 19:2). Ignorance of its precepts and promises make the devil to cheat believers. For instance, the believer who cannot wield the sword of the Spirit as the Lord did during His temptation will be a weakling in battle against the host of darkness.

We must approach the Bible with humility, dependence and faith for God to reveal its truth to

us. It is important to know that Christ is the central figure in the whole of scripture. The purpose of Scripture is to authenticate the divinity of Christ, and thus, give knowledge of eternal life and hope to men. Our obedience however must correspond with the amount of truth revealed to us therein if we are to continue to be blessed by it.

Jesus Christ is the Word personified. Apart from His incarnation, His words, works and the testimony of those who heard Him, the witness of John the Baptist, the Father, the Holy Ghost, and the Old Testament scriptures reveal the divinity of Christ (John 1:34; 5:37,39; 15:26,27).

RELIGION WITHOUT RIGHTOUSNESS. (John 7:47-49; 9:13-34; 8:32-44; Luke 18:9-14)

The officers, instead of apprehending Christ, came to testify of His deity to the Pharisees and the Priests. This enraged them. The question they asked the officers, **“Are ye also deceived?”** reproved them. They also insinuated that Christ was a religious criminal, a deceiver. They would not allow even their own sincere servants to tell the simple truth they have observed from Christ. These religious leaders were bent on maintaining their own religious positions and legalism at the expense of the sound, clear and powerful teachings of Christ. This is pride which leads to destruction.

Question 3: Highlight some of the characteristics and practices of religious sinners today?

Many religious groups today do everything possible to keep their name and practices for the sake of religion instead of believing the true gospel of Christ that sets free from sin. They indoctrinate and instill prejudices in their members against the saving knowledge of Christ. Some even teach that it is their leaders that should read and interpret the scriptures to members

whom they claim do not have the authority to read it themselves. Thus, their leaders highlight truths that are convenient to self and their flesh. They gloss over passages that expose their evil deeds. So beguiled, their members believe whatever their leaders tell them without recourse to the scriptures. This is against the command of the Lord to every Christian to **“search the scriptures”** daily so as to be shielded from error. With their disciples exposed to rays of light that permeated from Christ’s teachings, the Jewish leaders used a combination of interrogation and anger to threaten any of their officers who dared believe on Him. Religious fanatics still employ this method today.

To insinuate that Christ was a deceiver is blasphemous. They once alleged that He was possessed by a demonic spirit, Beelzebub. Many people still speak blasphemously of the Son of God today without reference to what the Scripture says about Him. But their words will not change Him or His plan of salvation for all men; instead, those words would stand against them on the day of judgment unless they repent.

Vexed with the revelation of Christ’s deity, they also questioned whether any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on Him so such could be excommunicated like the man born blind whom Jesus healed (John 9:13-34). They were so furious that, though the officers who did not believe or Nicodemus who was a secret disciple of Christ did not answer, they deemed it fit to pass a curse on followers of Christ. It is futile to curse followers of Christ as “curse causeless shall not come”

Besides, the Pharisees and priests were the supposed teachers of the law who should have removed

the scourge of ignorance. But they took the key of knowledge away from the people (Luke 11:52). Ignorance that results in disobedience to the law as well as willfully breaking its tenets attracts a curse. Some people live in fear of being cursed by their parents or some cultic people who threatened to do so if they believe the gospel. But the scripture reveals that none can curse a child of God who lives a righteous lifestyle (Numbers 23:21,23; Romans 8:33,34). The rage of men should not prevent any from believing in Christ. The worst they can do is to persecute those who have received Christ, and it is better to suffer persecution as a result of your faith in Christ than remain in unbelief due to fear of man and suffer in eternal, unquenchable fire.

Question 4: Explain why religion without the righteousness of God cannot take anyone to heaven?

Christ has come to fulfill the demands of the law of God on our behalf through His sacrificial death at Calvary so we can have the righteousness of God imparted into us (Romans 3:21-30). In all ages, religious rituals such as prayer and fasting, church attendance, alms-giving, etc, for righteousness. Long after Christ's death, Jewish religious pride and legalism without the requisite righteousness of God. He prayed for their salvation (Romans 10:1-10), and believers need to pray for the salvation of religious people who are not saved and who also prevent others from being saved. The conversion of those who are religious but not righteous.

PREJUDICE AND SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS OF RELIGIOUS SINNERS (John 7:50-53; 2 Timothy 3:5-9; Matthew 22:29; Acts 2:37-47:2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15)

The priest and the Pharisees in their arrogance and pride usurped the position of God as judge in their pronouncement. But even in human courts of law, the dispensation of justice goes with fair hearing. The curse hurled on those who supposedly did not know the law was judgment passed before hearing by those who claimed to be custodians of the law but did not practice it. Nicodemus, who also knew the law raised this issue of justice (Deuteronomy 1:16; Exodus 23:1). “ Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” (John 7:51, 52).

Question 5: What lessons can believe learn from the question Nicodemus posed before the Sanhedrin?

Although he was part of them, he had earlier secretly encountered Christ. As one of Christ’s secret disciples (John 3:1-21), he challenged his fellow Pharisees on point of law as recorded in Deuteronomy 1:17 that they flouted. They deliberately ignored his question because it exposed their wicked machinations and disobedience to the law for which they judged others. Religious sinners of all ages are the first to condemn others for sins they also commit. An attempt to turn the searchlight on their questionable character usually meets with tough resistance. This was why these religious leader reproved Nicodemus with a question of whether he had got the “maddening stuff” with the Galilean believers. Besides, they urge him to “search, and look” while the truth he had searched and revealed was not applied.

Question 6: What is the danger of religious prejudice and how can we avoid it among Christians today?

The authoritative conclusion of the Pharisees that no prophet came or should come from Galilee was a display of their own ignorance or laziness in searching the holy writ. This is because the prophets Elijah, John, Nahum, etc. all hailed from Galilee (1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 14:25; Nahum 1:1). Moreover, they should have known that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not in Galilee. But their contempt for Christ together with prejudice and rage predispose them to distort facts of scripture as religious sinners still do today. Envy blinded their spiritual eyes to the truth about Christ's deity and origin. Those who are spiritually blind cannot see, understand or receive the things of the spirit. Truly, spiritual blindness and ignorance is the worst of all diseases, No wonder Christ cried bitterly that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would suffer avoidable devastation because of their spiritual blindness. The present condition and future plight of sinners and backsliders are not any different. This is because those who do not see any good in the gospel and their need of the savior are on the precipice of eternal doom. This invokes urgency on the Christian to arise and reuse the perishing.

Sinners and backsliders who repent of their sins and receive Christ as their personal Lord and savior must prayerfully cultivate the habit of daily scripture reading, meditation. They must also abide in the fellowship of their Christians so as to receive the sound teaching of God's word. This will shield them from erroneous and ruinous teachings that false prophets peddle. The power of Christ's words will abide in their lives through the word and make them live victorious Christian lifestyle as Christ did.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	8-9	Jeremiah	13-14
TUE	“	10-11	“	15-16
WED	“	12-13	“	17-18
THUR	“	14	“	19-20
FRI	“	15	“	21-22
SAT	“	16	“	23
SUN	2 Cor.	1-2	“	24-25

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

362 Lesson

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, First, he describes the city from the outside as he saw it descend out heaven; then from the inside, seeing it from within the gate of the 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 already citizens of the heavenly country; we are only ambassadors on earth (Philippians 3:20,21; 2 Corinthians 5:20). All that concern the believer are in heaven: his Father is in heaven; his Saviour is there, his name is there, his inheritance is there, his treasure is there, his affection

is there, and his citizenship is there. The truth is that, many people only have information about the heavenly city; only those who overcome will have the city as their inheritance. This is one reason everyone must strive to not only have idea of its unsurpassed beauty but to also be partakers of the inheritance.

THE NEED OF THE 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 angles 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: a home above that affords eternal fellowship with all saints and the Redeemer. 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 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 48:53)

Heaven generally describes the future state of 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. The description of the heavenly city reveals that it is 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 a new 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 eternal residence of the Bride of Christ and a=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 Pete 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 interesting 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 floor; there are 1,500 miles of additional floor 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. In fact, it is of such a superlative nature that its characteristic cannot be understood too fully by finite creatures. The appearance of the city reveals unparalleled beauty and grandeur. The size, 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. No 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 blind man about the beauty of colours. Admittance to the Holy City is strictly based on living holily here on earth for **“these shall in no wise enter into it ay thing that defleth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but that 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 practices abomination; whosoever makes, produces, speaks or acts out lies and refuses to repent, will be denied entry to that heavenly, holy, eternal city. No sinners will ever enter the holy city to stain or desecrate the city. 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 His holy city, 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?

In order to partake in this new inheritance of the glorious home, decision must be made. Sinners must decide to repent. Backsliders must decisively seek restoration. Believers must decide to live the overcoming life. We must overcome the world (1 John 5:4,5; 2:15-17) and Satan (Revelation 12:11). False prophets and sin must not have dominion over us. We must flee from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:17-21). Whether there be persecutions or temptations, we must overcome to be part of this great inheritance (Revelation 2:10, 26-28). He who overcomes is the one that prevails and triumphs over all the works of the devil. To get to heaven, there is the necessity for holiness, blamelessness, watchfulness, prayerfulness, and love down here on earth.

The sinner must thirst for righteousness and salvation if he is not to miss the glorious experience that being in the new heavens and the new earth affords. Christ promises to... **“give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”** (Revelation 21:6). Sinners must repent and backsliders must return to the Saviour immediately!

“But 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). There is punishment for the unrepentant and coward who would rather chose to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. They will suffer

torment eternally in the lake of fire. We have only one life to live (Hebrews 9:27), therefore the believer must remain faithful and steadfast in the Lord, the sinner must repent and be saved and the backslider must come back home and be restored. We should not miss the glories of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

It is certain that all believers with current experience of salvation shall appear with Him in glory and be like Him (Revelation 21:3; Colossians 3:4). It is your responsibility to avoid anything that is capable of robbing you of your heavenly inheritance. If you are a sinner, you must repent of all your sins. And if you are a believer, you must abide in Christ and remain focused and determined unto the end so you can like Paul, the apostle say, **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Cor.	3-5	Jeremiah	26-27
TUE	“	6-7	“	28-29
WED	“	8-9	“	30
THUR	“	10-11	“	31
FRI	“	12-13	“	32
SAT	Gal.	1-2	“	33-34
SUN	“	3-4	“	35-36

363 Lesson

THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

TEXTS: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11

In the whole gamut of scripture, nothing enjoys a greater mention than the rapture and the second Coming of Christ the subject of our consideration this week. The rapture of the saints which is heralded by Christ's appearance in the air at the trump of God is the first phase of Christ's Second coming. Though the rapture is also generally and freely referred to as the Second Coming of Christ, it is actually an initial phase since He merely appears in the air and raptures the ready saints.

Question 1: What is rapture and when will it take place?

The Rapture like the ultimate Second coming of Christ is imminent and certain. The Rapture will happen before the second coming of Christ. At the rapture, Christ will appear in the air. At the second coming, the feet of Christ will rest on the Mount called Olive. However, the rapture is the present expectation of the saints. It is the next event in the programme of God for the church age. Virtually all events prophesied concerning Christ's second coming have come to pass. Therefore, Rapture can happen any time from now and saints must prepare.

PREPARATION FOR THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8; Matthew 24:44; Mark 13:35; Luke 19:13. 1 Timothy 6:14).

We believe that nothing should be of greater importance to the true believer than the knowledge of the kind of character, life and conduct that will make and keep him ready for the Rapture. In almost all the areas of the Bible where the rapture is mentioned are accompanying warnings and instructions that border on readiness and necessary preparation. Actually, there is the ever-present need of watchfulness. Failure to be vigilant and consecrated to Christ is dangerous.

Question 2: How are sinners/backsliders and believers to prepare for the rapture?

Great stress and emphasis has always been laid on watchfulness as part of the 'saints' preparation for the Rapture. As saints prepare for the coming of the Lord, they must be sober and Watchful. Watchfulness and sobriety are most suitable to Christian character and privilege, as **"being children of the day"** because **"they that sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night"** (1 Thessalonians 5:5, 7).

The apostles repeated the commandment of our Lord on the subject of watchfulness. Peter admonished Christians: **"be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"** (1 Peter 4:7). John wrote: **"Blessed is he that watched"** and Paul exhorted: **"watch ye, stand fast in the faith, be strong"** (1 Corinthian 16:13). The duty of watching is of paramount obligation; for the night is far spent, the day is at hand, the Christian must not slumber or please himself with the shadowy dreams of early glories; for he must keep vigil, watching always. The warning to watch is for all men and for all times: **"What I say unto you I say unto all, watch"** (Mark 13:37).

Toiling or labouring is also part of the saints' preparation for the coming of Christ. His command

is: **“Occupy till I come”**. Working and watching go together; for we are to comport ourselves like the Jews of Nehemiah’s day who built the Walls of Jerusalem whilst they were armed and on their guard against the foes. Our Master has left us in the midst of dangers, not to depress our courage but to quicken our vigilance. All must work and watch that at the Lord’s return, it will be found that His charge has been kept.

We must also be sober. Christian sobriety is taking a serious and grave view of life. It is neither sadness nor gloom. The Christian should be both serious and happy, sober and cheerful. Peter wrote: **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer”** (1 Peter 4:7). The purpose of our preparation is that we will be found fit when He comes for His saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

There is a lifestyle peculiar to the saints who will be caught up at the coming of Christ. Those who are waiting for Him are the surrendered, serving and sincere saints. The Lord will not catch away fake Christians. Only true saints will be caught away. The Lord will not catch away loud, half-hearted, cold, filthy and fearful church goers. Only true saints will be caught away. Remember that the Lord is coming soon. **“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”** (1 John 3:3).

The future coming of our Lord naturally leads us back in thought to His first coming. The world waited long for Christ’s first coming. Patriarchs looked forward to it, but it was in faith; prophets saw it but it was in vision; saints sighed for His solemn approach but it was still a great way off and they died before the promise was fulfilled. And today, as the people of God look forward with eagerness and equal longing to the day of Christ’s Second coming, we look and long for it as the day of final and definite redemption. We expect

it as the time of ultimate home-gathering of all our brethren in the Lord. For **“other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring...”** (John 10:16). In anticipation of the blessed reunion with our Lord and savior, we all cry **“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”** (Revelation 22:20).

The Second Coming of Christ is the blessed hope of all blood-washed Christians – the church, the body of Christ. And every new day renews the expectancy of our Lord’s blessed appearing. There are some denominations that are reluctant to believe in the literal return of Christ. The great scholars and theologians of Jesus’ day refused to accept Jesus as the promised Saviour; yet, sacred history revealed that Jesus was the promised Redeemer sent forth to save the world of sinners. Obviously, several modern theologians will also be deceived.

To us, however, it should not be strange that Christ will come again literally and visibly. As the prophecies concerning His first coming were fulfilled so also will the Old and New Testament prophecies of His Second coming be fulfilled. A writer puts the subject of Christ’s Second coming thus: “Jesus will come again in just real and literal manner as He came the first time”. No other interpretation of the Second coming is consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Christ’s Second coming is imminent. In that sense, it may happen at any time. Christ could come at any time. This imminent return of Christ is the glorious hope of the church. One in every twenty-five verses in the New Testament pertains to the Lord’s Second coming. And there are more mention of the Second Coming than the subjects of personal salvation.

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST’S SECOND COMING
(1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17; John 14:1-3; Acts

1:10, 11; Daniel 7:13, 14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7)

Question 3: Cite scriptural proofs of the certainty of the Second Coming of Christ?

Jesus Himself, first assured His disciples of His coming. He comforted His troubled and sorrowful disciples with the message of His personal return and presence with them in the Father's abode. **"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"** (John 14:1-3).

Again, Jesus reassured His audience during His trial that He is coming again. This was a prophetic utterance from the lips of the Lord. He spoke with deftness and certainty. **"And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"** (Mark 14:62).

Added to the personal promise and prophecy of Jesus about his Second Coming is the announcement of angelic heralds at His ascension to heaven. Jesus, they said, **"shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"** (Acts 1:11). The message of the angel that Jesus shall come back in like manner makes the interpretation. Our Lord will certainly return!

The apostles, especially Paul, rounded off their teachings on Christ's coming. Paul solemnly declared that **"the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall**

rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). John the beloved apostle also talked about the coming of Christ. He was unequivocal about it: "**Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear, we shall be like him; for shall see him as he is**" (1 John 3:2).

THE SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING
(Matthew 24:27, 36; Luke 12:40; 1 Thessalonians 5:51-3).

Question 4: What does the Bible say concerning the time of the Lord's return and what lesson can believers learn from it?

The Spirit's choice of words on the subject of the second coming of Christ shows us the uncertainty of the time of His coming. "**For yourselves know perfectly that the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night**" says the Holy Ghost through Paul. His coming is likened to the attack of a thief in the night. Thus, as thieves usually come in the dead of the night when they are least expected, such will be the coming of the Lord.

To assure the Church of the imminence, suddenness and unpredictability of the time of the Lord's coming, Paul gives an analogy of a woman in travail. "**For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a women with child; and they shall not escape**" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). A pregnant woman knows she must travail to give birth but knows not the day or the hour it will happen so it is with the time of the coming of the Lord. We know the times and seasons of His coming but the very moment, the day, or the hour is known only to God.

THE SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING (Matthew 24:3-14; Luke 21:24-36; Timothy 3:1-5, 7)

Question 5: How do we know the coming of the Lord is at hand?

While we do not and cannot know the exact time of the coming of Christ, we certainly do know the season for the Lord's coming will be heralded with signs. Since Christ knows more about His coming than anyone else, we draw considerable knowledge from His words relating to the signs of His coming in the period that precedes the Rapture and the Great Tribulation in what is generally referred to as the last days or latter times.

Our Lord did not mean for us to be doubtful about His coming. "Lord prophetic discourses of Christ are recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke and the new details added by each indicate that the original discourses was longer than any of the accounts we have in the gospel" writes one Christian author.

While answering three great questions asked by His disciples, the Lord said "**because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold**" (Matthew 24:12). This description of the social conditions of the last days is both frightening and gloomy. Lawlessness (the literal English interpretation of iniquity), selfishness, greed, social injustices are the signs of Christ's coming.

Further social signs at the coming of the Lord are found in the epistles of Paul the apostle to Timothy. He talked about the drift in the world's social order when the coming of the Lord draws near. The "**perilous times**" Paul writes about are not products of his imagination. He penned the revealed knowledge of God. Love of self will characterize the last days. Those who love self do hate good people who insist on

living a lifestyle of righteousness and godliness. On the social setting, there will also be advanced learning and knowledge. There will be cultural, scientific and technological advancement while spiritual ignorance permeates the society. In spite of these admonitions and warnings from the Lord and His apostles about deceivers and signs of the last days, thousands have been entrapped in the web of false doctrines and sinful practices. In fact, the very wide-spread deception of nominal Christianity constitutes a greater danger that makes the ground slippery for those who sincerely seek to escape the damnation of hell as Paul the apostle noted in his epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:1).

Sinners and backsliders must return to the Lord and believers must abide in and constantly watch as the Lord's Second Coming can happen even now!

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Mark	9	Psalm	105
TUE	“	10	“	106
WED	“	11	“	107
THUR	“	12	“	108-109
FRI	“	13	“	110-113
SAT	“	14	“	114-118
SUN	“	15	“	119

364 Lesson

THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE ANTICHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: " For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

TEXT: Matthew 24:14-30; Daniel 9:24-27; Revelation 6:1-17; 13:1-18

The signs of the coming of Christ and the end of the world have been clearly revealed in Scripture. In the whole body of truth on "the last things", the teaching on the tribulation and the reign of the Antichrist stands out as an important event which all earnest Bible students should be thoroughly familiar with.

The Great Tribulation which will precede the final coming of Christ will not begin until after the Church has been raptured. In view of this, some believers may see no reason to be interested in the details of Tribulation period. But the fact that not all professing believers will be raptured and that those who miss the rapture of ready and earnest saints will go through the throes of the Great Tribulation should make us eager to know the suffering that await such careless believers. Again, acquaintance with the troubles that await unsaved men and women (among whom are our country men, neighbors, friends and loved ones) should move us to rise up and rescue the perishing while we may.

Question 1: What do you understand by the Great Tribulation?

DESCRIPTION OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION
(Matthew 24:14-30; Revelation 6:1-17; Jeremiah 30:6,7; Joel 2:11,31; Zephaniah 1:14; Revelation 13:2)

The Great Tribulation will be the most awesome event in human history. It is crystal clear from Biblical

evidence that the event will witness the most intense suffering in the history of the world. World wars I and II, inter-tribal wars, civil wars and all other wars in the history of human existence as well as all kinds of cataclysmic occurrence since the creation of man will fade into insignificance when compared with the Great Tribulation. It will be a period of unparalleled suffering, dreadful woe and frightening destruction. Although it is a time of universal trouble, yet the epicentre will be in Jerusalem and Palestine, which is why prophet Jeremiah referred to it as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). It will be the climax of God's cumulative and catastrophic judgment upon the world. The period is peculiarly the time when God's wrath and judgment will fall upon the earth. It is also a time when Satan and the Antichrist will unleash woe and wickedness upon the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 6:2-9).

The Great Tribulation has been called by Jeremiah, **"the time of Jacob's trouble"** and it will indeed be a time of great trouble for the Jews and all the inhabitants of the world. No one will be able to buy, sell or earn a living without relinquishing all independence to the Antichrist. All will submit themselves before him in awe and wonder. The Great Tribulation will be a time of intense persecution for Israel and those who will stand for God and against the heresy of the Beast. However, the Great Tribulation will usher in a time of triumph for the Lord and His people.

PERSONALITY OF THE ANTICHRIST (Daniel 8:23-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:8,9; Revelation 13:2-4)

The Antichrist will be the great personality behind the Great Tribulation. He is a personality that has been mentioned in several portions of the Scripture. Way back in the Old Testament, Daniel says: **"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the**

transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy the mighty, and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Princes; but he shall be broken without hand” (Daniel 8:23-25).

In the New Testament, we are told: **“And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”** (2 Thessalonians 2:8,9). John, the apocalyptic seer, was given a glimpse of the man of sin, the ultimate and the final Antichrist who will be controlled by Satan. **“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority”** (Revelation 13:2). Again, it says: **“And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”**(Revelation 13:4). The power of the Antichrist will make him the idol of the world; **“and all the world wondered after the beast”** (Revelation 13:3).

DANIEL’S PROPHECY OF SEVENTY WEEKS (Daniel 9:24-27; Nehemiah 2:5; Ephesians 3:5,6; Colossians 1:25-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-11).

The period of the Great Tribulation falls within Daniel’s seventieth week. Daniel’s prophecy spans a

period of seventy weeks. A week in Daniel's prophecy means seven years. Daniel's seventy weeks therefore means four hundred and ninety years. The seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy are clearly demarcated into three; 7 weeks of 49 years for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25), 62 weeks or 434 years from the completion of the building of Jerusalem (at the end of the 49 years or 7 sevens) to the time the Messiah is revealed, and the last or seventieth week of the last seven years which has also been divided into two periods.

Daniel's prophecy concerning the seventy weeks shows the accuracy of Biblical revelation on the teaching of eschatology. In the seven weeks or forty nine years, Jerusalem was to be reconstructed or built again. In the sixty two weeks or four hundred and thirty four years the Messiah would be cut off (that is, die or be crucified). Again, it was prophesied that the (wicked) prince that shall come shall destroy the city of Jerusalem. This happened in 70 A.D. when Roman soldiers under the leadership of General Titus invaded Jerusalem. Sixty-nine weeks (483 years) were to transpire between the edict to rebuild Jerusalem (after the Babylonian captivity) and the first advent of the Messiah. This prophecy was exactly fulfilled. From 445B.C. (Nehemiah 2:5) when Artaxerxes issued a decree concerning the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, at the appeal of Nehemiah, to the time of the public advent of Christ the Messiah was exactly 483 years.

Question 2: Explain the three periods of Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks?

Sixty nine weeks out of Daniel's seventy weeks have been fulfilled while the last one (or the seventieth week) is yet to be fulfilled. The age in which we live, that is, the church age, intervenes the time of the

Messiah being cut off (or the sixty-ninth week) and the seventieth week. It is important to know at this juncture that the Church age was not directly predicted in the Old Testament. God's own programme for the New Testament Church was unknown to the Old Testament prophets. The Bible calls the Church age programme a mystery (Ephesians 3:5, 6; Colossians 1:25-27). There are many prophets in the Old Testaments that predicted the two advents of Christ without throwing any light on the intervening of the two events between them. However, this does not make this present age less significant. This age is significant in the heart of God and it was known to Him from the foundation of the world (Acts 15:18).

God's programme with the Church will terminate at the time of the rapture and His programme with Israel will continue until the Second Advent of Christ.

Question 3: Describe the events preceding Daniel's seventieth week?

It is clear therefore that the Church age will usher in Daniel's seventieth week. Again, this shows the Rapture will usher in the period of the Great Tribulation and the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:6-11).

Though the period of the Great Tribulation will be the darkest hour in human history, we should remember that "it is always darkest before the dawn." The man of sin will be allowed to do his work before God's day of righteousness and glory dawns. Sin and evil will be highly promoted and enhanced during the Great Tribulation. But they will not last forever. We must not forget that the Lord will come to catch away His people before the Great Tribulation begins (Isaiah 26:20; Revelation 4:1-6, 7). This is why the Lord is seeking to save sinners and restore backslider into fellowship with Him so they escape this period of the Great Tribulation.

At the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. The Antichrist will enter into covenant with Israel. In the midst (middle) of this period, he will break the covenant to fulfil Daniel 12:11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-11. Thus, the Great Tribulation will start in earnest. The beast will then persecute the Jews in the Great Tribulation for three and a half years: **“it shall be for a time, times and a half”** or **“a thousand, two hundred and ninety days”** (Daniel 12:7,11).

Question 4: Why should everyone strive to make the Rapture and escape the Great Tribulation at all costs?

The suffering of the Tribulation will be so gruesome that no believer should go through it. However, the Bible teaches that backslidden and careless believers who miss the Rapture will go through the Great Tribulation (Revelation 7:14). Although the tribulation saints will eventually be saved, it will depend on their ability to endure untold sufferings of the tribulation period without compromise or denial of Christ. Those who are watchful today will be part of the bride of Christ and they will be enjoying the marriage supper of the Lamb while those who fail to make the Rapture but still profess faith in the Lord will languish in the tribulation here on earth.

THE ANTICHRIST AND THE APOSTATE CHURCH
(Daniel 11:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:4-12; Revelation 13:11-14).

Question 5: Who is the Antichrist and what will be his activities during the Great Tribulation?

The Antichrist will set himself as the only God and will demand worship of the people of the earth. Daniel prophesied: **“And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods...”** (Daniel 11:36). Paul the

apostle also predicted that the Antichrist **“opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”** (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

At the time of the tribulation, the apostate (backslidden) church will succumb to the beast’s regime. The false prophets will force the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the Antichrist (Revelation 13:12) in order to identify his followers and let the world know that he is being worshipped as God. The Antichrist will compel them to have his inscription stamped on their right hands or foreheads. Some may say that they will never receive the mark of the beast. But the scripture tells us that those who reject the gospel now will be deceived by the Antichrist and will accept the mark of the beast. **“And for this cause God shell send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness** “(2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

THE PRIORITY OF THE CHURCH (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Peter 2:10-14; Matthew 28:18-20: Mark 16:15-20; Revelation 14:15).

<p>Question 6: What responsibility has the knowledge of the Great Tribulation imposed upon the believer in Christ?</p>

True believer will not be present on the earth when the beast arises in full terror of his dictatorship. We are not looking for the coming of the Antichrist, but for the coming of Christ. The second coming of Christ is at hand. When sin has run its course, when mankind’s cup of iniquity is full and when Satan has done his worst, then God will unleash fiery judgment on all workers of iniquity and the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God (Revelation 11:15).

In view of all these, the church should accelerate its evangelistic programs as never before, to prepare saints for the coming of the Lord, to bring backsliders back into the fold, and to usher multitudes of hopeless, perishing souls, who are at the valley of decision into the church. Now is the time to prepare for the Rapture- live the Christian life, pray and join the Lord in the harvest of souls.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Colossians	3-4	Jeremiah	50
TUE	1 Thes	1-2	“	51
WED	“	3-4	“	52
THUR	“	5	Lam.	1-2
FRI	2 Thes.	1-3	“	3
SAT	1 Tim.	1-3	“	4-5
SUN	“	4-5	Ezekiel	1-2

END OF SPECIAL STUDIES

THE END OF THE STUDIES, BUT BE ADVISED THE WORD OF GOD IS TIMELESS (DOES NOT BECOME OBSOLETE AT ANY TIME). THEREFORE, ENDEAVOR TO KEEP THIS BOOK HANDY.

DISTRICT CHURCHES DIRECTORY

1. Bronx: 213 E. 144th Street (718) 292-7883
2. Brooklyn: 140 Saratoga Avenue (718) 919-1166
3. Queens: 188-21 Suffolk Drive, St. Albans, NY (347) 200-3301
4. New Jersey: 23-39 South 20 Street, Irvington (973) 202-3989
5. Staten Island: 909 Castletona Avenue (917) 238-2258
6. Spring Valley: 60 Madison Street, NY (845) 709-6058



ACKNOWLEDGE
your sinfulness
PS 51:3-5

REPENT OF YOUR SIN
Luke 13:3, Acts 3:19

CONFESS them to God
(not to Priest) 1 John 1:9

FORSAKE all known sin
Is 55:7

BELIEVE that GOD is true to his
promise to forgive and clean
you Jn: 6:37 1 Jn 1:9

RECEIVE JESUS into your heart
Rev. 3:20 Jn 3:17



DEEPER CHRISTIAN LIFE MINISTRY, USA

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DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

New Jersey	9:00 AM
Bronx/Brooklyn/Queens/Staten Island	9:00 AM
Rockland County	10:30 AM

TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Bronx/Queens/New Jersey/Rockland/Co-op City and Staten Island	7:00 PM
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WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Brooklyn	7:00 PM
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FRIDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

All the Church Locations	7:00 PM
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ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

Bronx – First Friday of Every Month	7:00 PM
Brooklyn – Last Friday of Every Month	1:00 PM
Queens – First Friday & Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM
New Jersey – Third Friday of Every Month	11:00 PM

Pastor W.F. Kumuyi – General Superintendent
Your Spiritual Welfare is our Concern