

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 46

"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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OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

586 Lesson

SEVEN TRIBES RECEIVE INHERITANCE

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God” (Joshua 18:6).

TEXT: Joshua 18:1-28; 19:1-51

So far, Canaan had been allotted to five of the twelve tribes of Israel. We recall that two and a half of the tribes settled on the eastern portion of river Jordan. Their settlement on the western side, however, did not occur at the same time but in two phases. The first comprises the tribes of Judah and Joseph – Ephraim and Manasseh – at Gilgal (Joshua 14:6-15) while the second happened at Shiloh for the remaining tribes (Joshua 18:1-19:51).

While the selection of Shiloh and subsequent assembling of the nation there had necessarily interrupted the process of assigning portions to the last seven tribes, they were slack in going to conquer the remaining land in Canaan. Joshua had to challenge the people as well as commission a team of surveyors to describe the land into seven parts in preparation for its division.

The division of the land into seven parts, the specific description of their borders and Joshua’s own inheritance at the end of the whole exercise form the discourse of this study.

THE CHARGE TO DESCRIBE THE LAND (Joshua 18:1-9; 13:7-14; 1:2-6)

“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them” (Joshua 18:1).

The camp and the tabernacle of the children of Israel had been in Gilgal since their passage over Jordan. The land now subdued at the end of the war of conquests, they needed to move the tabernacle of the congregation to a more central location. The setting up of it in Shiloh, as we shall see, is not a coincidence as it bears significance to the will and Program of God for His people. First, prophecy had gone before that there shall be the assembling together of the children of Israel unto Shiloh (Genesis 49:10); and the word of the Lord must be fulfilled irrespective of prevailing circumstances.

Second, Shiloh, which means 'peaceful', signifies the deliverance and rest which the Lord promised to give the children of Israel from their enemies. Third, this spot, chosen through divine directive is central to all the tribes making it accessible for worship and sacrifice. The tabernacle remained there with its contents throughout the time of the Judges until it was captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:3, 4). It is equally interesting to note that Shiloh, at this time was near Jerusalem (about 15 miles and nearly at the center of the whole land) where it would have its permanent residency in time to come.

Having found peace, the children of Israel was slack in claiming the remainder of God's promises for them. But Joshua was quick to challenge them not to be carried away by the conquests until the task of full possession is accomplished (verse 3). Here, we observe in Joshua a leader's ability to remain focused. He had received a divine mandate to divide the land among the twelve tribes of Israel (Joshua 1:2-6); he would not be carried away by this partial success. Christian pilgrims learn here that they are not supposed to put down their sword until the battle for the souls of men is won. Our Lord has charged us to go into all the nooks and crannies of this world to seek men and women drawn unto death so that they can be delivered. We are expected to traverse every land and cross every river in search of the lost sheep until the Lord bids us come home for the final rest. That there is considerable success in our outreaches should not cause us to lay down our sickle for the harvest of souls.

In order to accomplish his mandate towards all the tribes, Joshua commanded the people saying, **“Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and they shall come again to me”** (Joshua 18:4). He ensured that he completed this task as he had been commanded.

Question 1: What can Christian leaders and workers learn from Joshua’s commitment to seeing that all the tribes enter their possession?

Believers must be committed to finishing the unfinished task of evangelism. They must do everything necessary to reach those that the Lord has sent them to. Moreover, those who are privileged to lead or pastor the congregation of the Lord should labor to lead God’s people into their promised possessions through teaching the whole counsel of God. It is not the will of God for His people to be ignorant of what rightly belongs to them while suffering unnecessarily. This aptly conveys a rebuke to Christians who are satisfied with present attainments when there is so much to do. The believer must get back to the word of God and arise and go through the land with holy passion to possess it.

The surveyors were to be three men out of each of the seven tribes. The matter was thus preferred equally that there might be neither partiality used in making up the seven lots. Again, after surveying the land and dividing it accordingly, the allotment was to be by lot, as in previous instances (chapters 14-17). Reasons for this are not far-fetched: that there might not be favoritism in allocation, or arguments bordering on partiality, but that all might be satisfied with whatever fell to them as the perfect will of God.

“And the men arose, and went away: and Joshua charged them that went to describe the land, saying, Go and walk through the land, and describe it, and come again to me, that I may here cast lots for you before the LORD in Shiloh” (Joshua 18:8). When the army of the Lord rises in obedience to do God’s will, victory is guaranteed. Great progress is recorded when the leader and the led cooperate together in carrying out divine assignments. Success is the

result and reward for Christians who unite together to do God's will without looking back. No power can withstand the force of such people and no agent of the heathen can stop them. The church of God will triumph consistently if we learn to cooperate with our God-ordained leaders in carrying out divine assignments.

As the surveyors traversed the land, they brought back to Joshua in a book the exact description of the land into seven portions. Obviously, they defined the boundaries of each tribe according to their terms of reference. It was a job well done! The way they carried out the assignment simplified Joshua's work of casting lots and allocating the land. A dedicated and obedient workforce makes the job of the overall leader easier and simpler. It helps in achieving what is in the best interest of the organization.

There were several reasons for establishing the well-set boundaries instead of turning the Promised Land into a single undivided nation. First, the boundaries gave each tribe ownership of an area, promoting unity and loyalty. Second, they delineated areas of responsibility and privilege which would help them develop and mature them. Third, they would reduce conflicts that might arise if everyone were left to choose where to build and reside. Fourth, the boundaries fulfilled the promised inheritance to each tribe that began to be given as early as the days of Jacob (Genesis 48:21-22).

CASTING LOTS TO DIVIDE THE LAND (Joshua 18:10; Numbers 26:53-56; 1 Chronicles 25:8; 26:13, 14)

“And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions” (Joshua 18:10).

Earlier, Moses had given Joshua some guidelines on how the land should be shared among the various tribes (Numbers 26:53-56; 33:54; 34:13). Joshua was also committed to carrying out this divine directive to share the land by lot. In our text, we see the account of his obedience and full compliance. He did not add or diminish from all that God through Moses had commanded him.

Casting lots was an ancient practice of seeking divine position on a matter. When a case could not be settled by mutual compromise among parties, a lot was cast to decide it and the parties submit to the outcome, bringing an end to any strife.

Question 2: Why is it improper for believers in the New Testament dispensation to cast lots in seeking guidance from God?

Although, the Scriptures did not state explicitly how the lots were cast, the important thing is that God used this method to guide His people in those days; and they respected the outcome as His verdict (Joshua 19:10, 32-39). Consequently, each tribe inherited the portion allotted to them. However, in the New Testament dispensation, believers cannot revert to such means of guidance because now, we have the full Canon of Scripture to read and take instruction. **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (2 Timothy 3:16). Besides, the Holy Spirit is given to every born again Christian to guide and reveal the mind of God to His children. And, there will always be harmony between the written Word, the Holy Spirit and whatever other means – dream or revelation – that the Lord decides to use to lead His people.

Today, a believer who wishes to know the mind of God or receive guidance on important issues like choosing a life partner, choice of career, profession, or business, should pray, read the word of God and listen to the Holy Spirit. God is willing to lead His children to take the best decisions for their lives. Failure to consult the Lord can result in avoidable regrets and sorrows. We should develop a regular devotional habit, study God’s word and listen to His Holy Spirit in order to enjoy divine directive and discern His leading in our situation.

APPORTIONMENT OF INHERITANCE TO THE SEVEN TRIBES (Joshua 18:11-28; 19:1-48; Genesis 49:7)

As soon as the description and definition of the land was concluded, Joshua wasted no time in sharing it. The tribe of Benjamin came first in the arrangement. They occupied the heart of the land and possessed within its borders

the first fruits of Israel's labors in Canaan. Their border stretched from Jericho and the wilderness of Bethaven to the north, Kirjathjearim to the south, and Jordan to the east and Kirjathbaal, a city of the children of Judah to the west.

The second lot went to Simeon (Joshua 19:1-9). Simeon's inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the tribe of Judah. It seems that Judah's land was so large that some was assigned to Simeon. This also fulfils Jacob's prophetic word concerning Simeon that God "...**will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel**" (Genesis 49:7).

The third lot went to Zebulun (Joshua 19:10-16). The description starts on the south side, and looks first west, then east and north with all the cities and villages described. "**And their border went up toward the sea... And turned from Sarid eastward toward the sun rising...**" (Verses 11, 12).

The fourth lot was for the tribe of Issachar (Joshua 19:17-23). Their territory stretched from Mount Tabor on the west to the southern top of the Sea of Galilee, including in its area the valley of Jezreel. The fifth lot went to Asher (Joshua 19:24-31). The coastal region stretched from Mount Carmel in the north to Tyre and Sidon. The sixth lot was for Naphtali (Joshua 19:32-39). Naphtali was located in the eastern upper and lower Galilee.

Finally, the lot of Dan was located between the territory of Benjamin and the Mediterranean (Joshua 19:40-48).

Question 3: Explain some of the qualities found in Joshua as a minister of God and a leader of God's people.

Joshua's great assignment of leading the people to Canaan and ensuring that they got their inheritance ended on a worthy note. With him came rest and recompense after the labor and rigor of battle. But his manner of accepting the recompense was a great example in selflessness, sacrifice and humility. He was first in labor but last in reward. He was the leader but he did not reach forth for choice portions of the land first. It was only after his work was done and the children of Israel had received their allotted portions that Joshua thought it right to take his own inheritance. "**When they had made an end of dividing**

the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them: According to the word of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnathserah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein" (Joshua 19:49,50). What an unselfish conduct! How like Christ who gave His best to obtain the best for humanity.

Joshua shone brightly in the hall of fame of men of selflessness, sacrifice, submission to the will of God and dedication to duty. He exemplified the Scripture injunction: **"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"** (Philippians 2:3, 4).

Joshua's life teems with tons of lessons for the believer. **First**, he completed his assignment and fulfilled his ministry. He proved faithful to his calling till the end without wavering. In him, Christian leaders behold courage, consistency, commitment and consecration. He threw himself unreservedly into the service of humanity and obedience to God.

Second, he did his job with diligence and handled all matters arising from the division of Canaan with tact and wisdom of the Holy Ghost. He attended to those with complaints with patience, understanding and godly admonition. For example, when **"the children of Joseph spake unto [him], saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?"**, he challenged them to arise and defeat the Canaanites though they had chariots of iron. As they hesitated, he reminded them that they were **"a great people, and hast great power"**. He was a competent and charismatic leader.

Third, no one could accuse him of favoritism or partiality in the discharge of his duties. Though he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, he did not do anything to favor them above other tribes in the distribution of the land. Fourth, his faith in and faithfulness to God were made manifest to

all; hence, he was able to challenge all Israel towards the end of his life to serve God (Joshua 24:15). He was also a good example in how to have faith in God in the midst of difficult situations. Fifth, he was a lesson in submission to leadership. All the days he served under Moses, he was humble and obedient.

Question 4: Beyond earthly possessions, what is the hope of believers?

God has ordained a spiritual inheritance for His people. A portion of this inheritance is to be enjoyed now while on earth and others in eternity. At present, we can enjoy the privileges of using the name of Jesus in prayer and spiritual warfare; we can claim the benefits of Christ’s redemptive works of salvation, sanctification, protection, provision, divine guidance and communion with God. As children of God, we can affirm: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”** (1 Peter 1:2-4). God has given us all things richly to enjoy. In eternity, we shall have crowns and stars as well as rewards for our labor on earth. We shall be with the Lord forever. Although, the children of Israel shared the land of Canaan, the inheritance of the believer is eternal and that which shall not be taken away.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Timothy	1-2	Deuteronomy	1
TUE	“	3-4	“	2
WED	“	5-6	“	3
THUR	2 Timothy	1-2	“	4
FRI	“	3-4	“	5
SAT	Titus	1-3	“	6-7
SUN	Philemon	1	“	8-9

587 Lesson

RENEWED CHARGE TO APPOINT CITIES OF REFUGE

MEMORY VERSE: “THE LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses” (Joshua 20:1, 2).

TEXT: Joshua 20:1-9

The appointment of cities of refuge to which the manslayer could flee was one of the judgments (rule of law) that God gave to Israel through Moses. The first reference to such cities was made in the book of Exodus after the commandments were given (Exodus 20:3-17; 21:1, 12-14). Subsequently, the operation of this institution was clearly laid-out by the Lord (Numbers 35:6-33; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; 4:41-43).

Moses was dead and Joshua was in charge of the affairs of the nation. Under Joshua’s leadership, Israel had conquered the enemy nations and all the tribes had possessed their portions of inheritance, as explained at the end of the previous chapter.

It was therefore important that they should be reminded of this aspect of God’s law which would prevent their land from being defiled or polluted by blood with the consequent forfeiture of God’s presence (Numbers 35:30-34). The timeliness of the charge is also important in that the cities of refuge were all to be cities of the Levites who were about to be given their dwelling cities out of the inheritance of other tribes (Joshua 21:1-42). The reminder will help the children of Israel to appoint cities that would meet God’s requirement (Deuteronomy 19:2-6).

The focus of this topic is that God’s commandments – the doctrinal landmark – are sacred and must be preserved, practiced and preached passionately even when the founding leader is no more and times have changed.

Question 1: What is the focus of our topic of study today?

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD’S COUNSEL (Joshua 20:1, 2; Matthew 5:17; 18; 24:35)

“The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses” (Joshua 20:1, 2).

It is rightly said that nothing on earth remains constant or permanent except change. But this is not the case with the Almighty God because the doctrines of His word and the righteousness of saints do not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 119:89; Revelation 22:18-19; Proverbs 24:21).

Presently, the vision of *DAWN* (**D**isciplining **A** **W**hole **N**ation) has been passed to us by our leaders; we cannot rest on assumption that we have attained a level of victory in the past. We need to continue working with the leadership on every revealed strategy to actualize this vision. Truly, the counsel of the Lord shall stand (Proverbs 19:21). People who attempt to change the word of God in order to boost their personal ego (like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat) will face God’s devouring anger and hot displeasure (Isaiah 46:10; Job 9:4; 1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:7-11, 14-16; Galatians 1:6-9).

<p>Question 2: (a) Point out what we can learn from God’s mandate and leadership change. (b) Enumerate some reasons men change or compromise the word of God.</p>
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But why would mortal men, limited in knowledge, time and power, decide to change the wise counsels of the Omnipotent God? A careful study of the Bible reveals some of the reasons as: (i) fear of man (1 Samuel 15:24); (ii) desire to keep one’s position by all means (1 King 12:26-33); (iii) wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15,16; Numbers 22:5-22); (iv) deception by false or backslidden prophets (1 Kings 13:11-22); (v) ungodly pressure from the congregation (Exodus 32:1-4); (vi) unscriptural counsel from trusted subordinates (Joshua 7:2-4; Number 27:18-21); and (vii) respect of persons (Jude 16; James 2:1-4).

Question 3: Why was it necessary at this time to renew the earlier charge of appointing cities of refuge?

At last, Israel had entered Canaan after several successful military campaigns against the inhabitants of the land, led by Joshua; normal socio-economic and religious activities had already begun for a long time.

The Lord therefore gave new responsibility to Joshua to have the cities of refuge appointed or named, as He told Moses. Furthermore, God gave this command to Israel at a time when the land was newly-surveyed and they had settled after the battles with the enemies. We learn therefore that past victories or accomplishments in life or ministry should not be a yardstick to exempt ourselves from carrying out other assignments from the Lord.

The purpose of the new responsibility was to draw the people of God to the path of obedience. This is because believers tend to forget the counsel of God when they may have attained some level of victory or blessing (Psalm 106:13; Deuteronomy 32:20). It is therefore needful for leaders at every level in the church to constantly remind their congregations to renew their consecration and commitment to the will of God. The importance of constantly reminding God's people on this issue was captured by Peter, when he said: **"I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth"** (2 Peter 1:12).

INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Joshua 20:3-6, 9; Exodus 21:13, 14; Numbers 35:6-33; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-13)

Our text and other passages clearly reveal divine instructions on the appointment and operations of the cities of refuge. Like many Old Testament events and institutions, the cities of refuge symbolize the relief that the gospel provides for repentant sinners and their protection from the curse of the law and the righteous indignation of God (Hebrews 6:18; Romans 8:1).

Question 4: What are the equivalents of the cities of refuge and what do they typify in the gospel era?

The following are some of the instructions concerning the cities of refuge. **One**, all the six cities of refuge were to be cities of the Levites (Joshua 20:2; Numbers 35:6). This provision gave the manslayer on exile the privilege of associating with the Levites and receiving the much needed teaching and comfort for his spiritual sustenance. The best companions on earth are God's ambassadors. This is because they are the channels through which God sends His blessings of salvation and deliverance to men in their time of need (Job 22:29, 30; John 20:23; Acts 16:25, 26; 27:21-25; Daniel 2:10-19).

Two, the cities of refuge were meant only for the protection of those who killed any person unintentionally (verses 3-5). Those who killed as a result of temporary passion or premeditated malice were to face the consequence of their action – death (Exodus 21:13, 14; Numbers 35:15-25). The manslayer was to flee urgently to a city of refuge without delay, to prevent the blood-avenger from pursuing and killing him (Deuteronomy 19:5, 6). When the avenger of blood pursues the manslayer into the city of refuge, the elders had the responsibility to protect him from the avenger. This implies that the elders such as pastors and leaders have the primary responsibility of ensuring that converts do not stray or backslide into the territory of the avenger (the devil). The elders can do this through consistent intercession, prayers, follow-up and visitation.

Three, the manslayer, if proved innocent by the judges, was to dwell in the city of refuge. This foreshadows the justice of God that should apply in the organized social setting. By this appointment, God disallowed extra-judicial killing by any person or institution. Irrespective of social status, nobody was permitted to take the laws into their hands by prompting or instigating extra-judicial killings. The accused person deserved protection and fair trial until found guilty. However, if he was found guilty, he faced appropriate judgment (Numbers 35:9-11). The manslayer forfeited the privilege of immunity the moment he ventured beyond the border of the city of his refuge (Numbers 35:26-28). The believer can only enjoy protection from the power of sin, sickness and Satan as long as he abides in Christ.

Four, the death of the High Priest secured the complete

deliverance of the manslayer from his sin. This symbolizes the freedom that the death of Christ secures for the sinner who trusts in Him (Numbers 35:25; Hebrews 9:14, 15; 2:14, 15). Unless by death of the High Priest, the children of Israel were instructed not to release the manslayer for any reason (Numbers 35:32). This confirms the truth that lost humanity cannot be redeemed from the bondage of sin with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 2:18, 19; Psalm 49:6-8; Mark 8:36, 37).

Five, the children of Israel, the stranger and whosoever killed any person unawares had the same right to the benefits of the cities of refuge (Joshua 20:9; Number 35:15). This shows that God's provision of salvation through the vicarious suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is for all men (John 3:16; Romans 1:16; Acts 10:34, 35).

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE OF GOD'S CHILDREN (Joshua 20:7, 8; Genesis 22:1-19)

We note the obedience of the children of Israel to the renewed charge to appoint cities of refuge. God had first spoken to Moses while he was their leader. Now, the command came to Joshua, Moses' successor, and the people believed in their new leader and went ahead to appoint the cities in obedience to God. Church members should trust and obey God through His servants, the leaders. It is important for believers to understand that the basis of their prosperity is continual obedience to the revealed will of God (1 Chronicles 20:20). In the case of Abraham (for example) obedience of faith was his secret to receiving all blessings associated with the covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18).

Question 5: Mention some qualities of acceptable obedience to God as implied in the obedience of Joshua and the children of Israel.

Joshua and the children of Israel's response to God's commandments is highly commendable and worthy of emulation (Joshua 20:8, 9; Hebrews 6:12). Their obedience was acceptable to God because it was:

(i) **prompt** – no time lag or delay between the period God gave the commandment and their action of obedience;

- (ii) **sacrificial** – the children of Israel were to give forty-eight cities with their suburbs out of their inheritance to the Levites from which six would be used for refuge (Numbers 35:2, 3, 6-8; 2 Samuel 24:24);
- (iii) **Complete** – they gave all that was demanded and necessary. It is complete obedience that enables a believer to attain supernatural blessings and prevail in spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Samuel 15:1-3,7-23);
- (iv) **unquestioning** - there were no records of questions, doubts, complaints, arguments and murmurings (Philippians 2:14, 15);
- (v) **Loving** – they gave out the cities which were best for the purpose. The cities were on mountains, therefore making them suitable for use as cities of refuge because they could be seen from a far distance (Isaiah 33:15-17; Matthew 5:14);
- (vi) **voluntary** – they were neither compelled by thrilling promises of blessing nor threatened by punishment; and
- (vii) **Balanced** – their obedience was comprehensive and based on the Scripture. It took into consideration all other related instructions concerning the cities of refuge. Most often, zeal without knowledge leads to disappointment, despair and destruction (2 Samuel 6:1-10; 1 Chronicles 15:2-4; Hosea 4:6; Romans 10:1-3).

These cities of refuge bear striking significance to Christ, our eternal Refuge. Kadesh signifies separation or holiness. And Jesus is a “**high priest who is holy harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens**” (Hebrews 7:26). Shechem signifies the shoulder, and the government shall be on the shoulder of Jesus (Isaiah 9:6; 53:4). Hebron is fellowship. And, believers are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). Bezer signifies a fortified place or fortress. The Lord is our Fortress. Ramoth signifies an exalted or high place: God has highly exalted Christ and placed Him above the whole earth (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; Philippians

2:9). Golan means joy or rejoicing. Christ is the joy of the whole earth.

The cities of refuge were positioned in such a way that there was one located within reasonable distance, making it easily accessible. This teaches that God gives every person access to His refuge. God's salvation is therefore available to the repentant. Jesus proclaimed, "**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest...**" (Matthew 11:28). This is the effect and advantage of the cities' proximity to the people. In like manner, the house-church system of the DAWN vision will help get the gospel nearer to the people, more especially to those who would not, for one reason or the other, travel long distances to attend church services or crusades. It will also motivate believers to see the people in their neighborhood, know their predicament and be inspired to rescue them from perishing. Moreover, God has brought His salvation near to mankind through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Question 6: (a) What is the pictorial significance of the names of the cities of refuge to Christ? (b) What do we learn from the strategic positioning of the cities of refuge?

As we compare the cities of refuge with the provisions of the gospel of Christ, the following points are worthy of note: (i) The slayer at the city of refuge is admitted on the basis of the profession of his innocence, but it is the full admission and confession of our guilt that grants us entrance into the kingdom of God through Christ (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 10:1-3). (ii) The cities of refuge afforded only a temporary protection for the body while the gospel affords full salvation for the whole man forever (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 7:25). (iii) The protection which the cities of refuge afforded cuts off from the manslayer the privileges of fellowship with his family and temple worship, but the gospel ensures both privileges (1 John 1:1-3). (iv) The manslayer could only flee to any of the designated six cities for protection, but the gospel is available to all in every place and needs no toilsome pilgrimages (John 4:21-24; Romans 10:6-11).

Question 7: In what ways are the provisions of the Gospel of Christ different from the protection afforded the manslayer in the cities of refuge?

Finally, all sinners should urgently run to Christ, repent and renounce all known sins. Failure to do this will make the justice and vengeance of God to overtake them in death.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Heb.	1-2	Deuteronomy	10-12
TUE	“	3-4	“	12
WED	“	5-6	“	13-14
THUR	“	7-8	“	15-16
FRI	“	9-10	“	17-18
SAT	“	11	“	19-20
SUN	“	12-13	“	21-22

588 LESSON

INHERITANCE OF THE LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them” (Joshua 13:33).

TEXT: Joshua 21:1-45

In our previous study, God renewed His charge to the leaders of Israel (Moses and Joshua) to appoint cities of refuge as safe haven for the unwitting manslayer. The provision of these cities of refuge purely at God’s initiative demonstrates His deep sympathy and understanding of man’s frailties, the need for considering the motive behind an offence when justice is administered, and the protection of the innocent.

Our text here focuses on the inheritance of the Levites, one of the tribes of Israel entrusted with the service of the sanctuary and duty of instructing and educating all other tribes in the law of the Lord. It is instructive to note that Levi was one of the sons of Jacob, who, along with Simeon, was involved in a cruel revenge against the Shechemites when they defiled Dinah, their sister. Because of this cruelty, Jacob cursed both Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5-7). People like Simeon, Levi, Achan, Cain, Herod, Pharaoh and a host of others brought severe judgments upon themselves because of sin.

However, it is important to emphasize that the grace of God can deal with the sin problem, creating a way for every man to escape its consequences when he repents and turns to God (Exodus 32:25-28).

The Levites had a turning point in their lives after the Golden Calf episode when Moses made an altar call. **“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’s side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him”** (Exodus 32:26). This decision by the Levites exempted them from God’s judgment. Instead, they were given the

privileged position of replacing the first born in ministering in the sanctuary.

Question 1: What can we learn from the transformation, divine upliftment and inheritance of the Levites?

From the history of the tribe of Levi, we learn that there is no limit to what the grace of God can do in a person's life. God's grace can so transform a man and uplift him from the valley of sin and its consequences to the pinnacle of God's glory. This transforming grace of God can break all yokes, eliminate curses and bring a person into fellowship with God. It is available today for all who will decide like the Levites to follow Him irrespective of their sinful past.

GOD-APPORTIONED INHERITANCE FOR THE LEVITES
(Joshua 21:1-8; 13:33; 14:3; 18:7; Colossians 1:12; Psalm 47:4; 16:5; Acts 20:32)

The Levites were allotted no territorial inheritance of their own at the time the land was divided because the Lord was their inheritance. **“Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him”** (Deuteronomy 10:9). The Levites were composed of three notable families: the Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites, with the family of Aaron presumably the fourth. The priests who were chosen from Aaron's family were also Levites; however, not all Levites were priests. The Levites were divinely assigned to assist Aaron, the high priest, and his sons in the priestly duties in keeping charge of the sanctuary.

It is instructive to note that the Levites were the last to receive their portion of the inheritance. This was so because they were not to occupy any distinct territory, but certain selected cities among the tribes. It was against this backdrop that the heads of the tribes of Levi came to Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest, to make their claim on their inheritance based on the command of the Lord. From the action of the Levites, we learn that though an inheritance has been provided for believers, they must ask in faith to receive (Matthew 7:7-11; James 4:2, 3). The response of the children of Israel to the demands of the Levites was

prompt as they cheerfully obeyed the divine command. **“And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs”** (Joshua 21:3).

The prompt response of the children of Israel to the request made by the Levites is quite commendable and worthy of emulation by believers in all issues pertaining to the word and will of God. Whether convenient or not, God’s word and command must be obeyed implicitly, promptly and wholeheartedly. It is in our obedience that we can enjoy the fullness of His blessings.

Like the Levites, ministers of the gospel should shun covetousness and unbridled quest for power and position. They should desire to be **“last of all, and servant of all,”** following the steps of Christ. Ministers and leaders should serve without any prospect of earthly gain or reward. This is not, however, an excuse for believers to neglect their duty in the upkeep of ministers and servants of God and those on full-time service. To do so will be contrary to the tenor and teachings of the Scripture. As God commanded that the Levites should be well provided for, so also, those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:7, 14; Galatians 6:6).

<p>Question 2: State the main difference between the inheritance of the Levites and believers in Christ.</p>

Though the inheritance of the Levites was temporal, the believer’s inheritance in Christ is eternal and enduring in substance that **“fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”**. Believers can only enjoy in part their inheritance on earth, while they hope for the rest in eternity (1 Peter 1:3, 4; Ephesians 1:11, 14). At present, they can enjoy the privilege of using the name of Jesus in prayer and spiritual warfare; claim the benefits of Christ’s redemptive works of salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost power, protection, provision, divine guidance and communion with God. However, in eternity we shall inherit all things; we shall receive mansions, thrones, crowns and dominion. We shall be with the Lord forever and ever (John 14:1-3). To prepare for the heavenly inheritance, believers need to hold fast their righteousness (Job 27:6); maintain a

steadfast, consistent and holy walk with the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Peter 1:15,16); demonstrate implicit and unwavering faith in God and obedience to His word; be regularly pre-occupied with soul-winning, sacrificial and consecrated service in the house of God (Mark 11:22; Romans 12:1,2; 2 Timothy 4:1,2).

Question 3: What preparations should believers make for their spiritual inheritance?

GRACIOUS DISTRIBUTION OF THE INHERITANCE OF THE LEVITES (Joshua 21:9-42; Numbers 35:1-8; 1 Chronicles 6:54, 57, 61-67, 71; Psalm 47:4; Acts 20:32)

Our text gives a definite account of the distribution of the cities of the Levites among Aaron's lineage and the three major families of the tribe. A total of forty-eight cities were given to the Levites. The family of Aaron, the priest, received thirteen cities with their suburbs (verse 19); the families of Kohath had a total of ten cities out of the tribe of Ephraim. The families of Gershon had their lot in Golan in Bashan with her suburbs. They had a total of thirteen cities. The families of Merari had their lot out of the tribe of Zebulun with their suburbs. Their cities were twelve in number. Six of the cities of the Levites were designated as cities of refuge.

Question 4: Why were the Levites dispersed into all the tribes of Israel?

The distribution shows that the Levites were dispersed into all the tribes of Israel. Their mixing therefore became necessary for proper performance of their sacred duties of ministering to the whole nation, teaching the law of God and preserving the sanctity of temple worship. The service given to the Levites is a challenge to believers today. God does not want our consecration to make us indifferent, isolated from the people or make us resort to a secluded life.

Every tribe had its share of the cities of the Levites. Thus, God graciously provided for preserving true worship among them and ensuring that the word of God was in all parts of Israel. In the same way, believers have been dispersed

in the world to preach the gospel to every creature. We are to live among the people and win them to the Lord. Believers are to be scattered abroad for the evangelization of the world in order to fulfill the *Discipling A Whole Nation* (DAWN) project (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 8:4).

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT AND LAWS (Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14; Luke 21:33; Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Kings 8:56; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Psalm 89:1; Hebrews 10:23; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 19:11)

“There failed not aught of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:45). God is faithful to His word, plan, purpose and promise to His people in all ages. He has all the resources of the universe at His command to fulfill His promises; He is the unlimited, Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent God who can never fail. In Him, there is **“no variableness, neither shadow of turning”** (James 1:17).

However, God may not always fulfill His promises the way and time we expect. By His sovereign prerogative, He does fulfill His promises at the appointed time. It is important to note that the fulfilment of God’s promises and the enjoyment of His blessings are conditional, hinged on our faith, faithfulness, character, conduct and obedience. There is the divine part as well as the human part.

Question 5: Upon what conditions are the promises of God fulfilled in our lives?

The task of possessing the land of Canaan was accomplished, though the Canaanites still dwelt in certain parts of it. God did not however promise the Israelites the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites. They were to be driven out gradually (Exodus 23:29, 30; Deuteronomy 7:22).

In conclusion, all the promises were fulfilled. For **“...all came to pass”**. The sea was crossed; the desert had its food and water; Bashan was subdued; Jordan was crossed; and the whole land possessed. This is an encouragement to believers today that however impossible the fulfilment

of God’s promises might seem, they will be fulfilled at the appropriate time. He is **“able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”** (Ephesians 3:20). God is the same today as yesterday. His word cannot return to Him void. Heaven and earth may pass away, but His word shall not pass away. In Christ, **“all the promises of God are yea and amen”**.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	James	1-2	Deuteronomy	23-24
TUE	“	3	“	25-26
WED	“	4-5	“	27
THUR	1 Peter	1-2	“	28
FRI	“	3-4	“	29-30
SAT	“	5	“	31
SUN	2 Peter	1-2	“	32

589 Lesson

THE ALTAR OF WITNESS

MEMORY VERSE: “And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to” (Joshua 22:10).

TEXT: Joshua 22:1-34

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had the east side of Jordan after the Israelites conquered Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan. Moses consented on condition that their men of war support the remaining tribes to possess their own land in Canaan (Numbers 32:33). The reason for their request was that **“the place was a place for cattle”**, they being cattle-rearers by occupation.

Having fulfilled their promise to help other tribes get their inheritance, the two and a half tribes were released to return to Gilead to take full possession of their own inheritance. Our text deals with their return, the decision to build an altar of witness, the misunderstanding of their action by the Israelites and the resolution of the impasse.

Question 1: What can we learn from the way Moses handled the request of the two and a half tribes?

RETURN OF THE TWO AND HALF TRIBES TO THEIR INHERITANCE (Joshua 22:1-9; 1:10-18; Numbers 32:1-42; Deuteronomy 3:12-20; Psalm 145:19)

“Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you... therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan” (Joshua 22:1-4).

The battle to conquer Canaan has ended and the Reubenites, the Gadites and half of Manasseh have fulfilled their promise to cooperate in fighting to possess the whole land. They stood by their brethren to defeat all their enemies. The land had also been shared among the remaining tribes. Now, it is time to return to their desired inheritance having paid their dues. We learn here the importance of keeping our promises. If we have pledged something or made an oath, we should not default. It is unscriptural to make a promise and along the line, renege. Rather, it is an act of righteousness for one to swear to his own hurt, and change not (Psalm 15:4). The Scripture enjoins us to stand by our words, promises, oaths and vows (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4). Time does not cancel oaths. Believers should cultivate the habit of keeping to agreements, contracts or pledges which they had willingly entered into irrespective of the time it was made.

Joshua saw no reason to keep these tribes any further having accomplished their assignment. More so, he was a witness when Moses agreed with them and gave them their inheritance on condition that they help their brethren to possess their inheritance.

Question 2: What should be our attitude toward pledge redemption?

In demobilizing these tribes, Joshua admonished them to **“take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul”** (Joshua 22:5). The importance of keeping the word of God cannot be overstressed in every situation and circumstance. Wherever we go or stay, obedience to God is the only panacea for peace, prosperity and progress. Joshua did not mince words in letting the people realize that their future can only be guaranteed based on their faithfulness to the law which Moses delivered to them.

After the admonition, Joshua blessed them for their faithfulness and commitment to the welfare of other tribes.

Church leaders should not only be prompt to chide their subjects; they should be ready to appreciate, commend and bless them openly when they do what is right.

THE REASON AND RESOLUTION OF BUILDING THE ALTAR (Joshua 22:10-29; Proverbs 14:17; Amos 5:13; Isaiah 56:3; 1 Corinthians 10:18; 1 Timothy 5:21)

The two and a half tribes returned with joy and excitement to their families which they had left for many years. On getting to Jordan and in keeping with Joshua's charge, they decided to build an altar. Though the altar was to be a replica of the one in Shiloh, its purpose was different. It was meant to be a witness and a memorial of their relationship with mainstream Israel. They feared that upcoming generations of their brethren might deny their affinity and common ancestry in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For them, the altar was to be a symbol of unity to remind their brethren that they are united in faith, worship and commitment to the God of Israel despite the geographical separation. In other words, the altar was to serve as a bridge to keep up their fellowship with other tribes in spiritual matters.

However, they erred on such a sensitive project in not consulting with other tribes. This is very instructive to us today. If we hope to enjoy the support and cooperation of our leaders, we need to carry them along in planning, executing church Programs and seeking counsels, where necessary.

Question 3: Mention the dangers in failure to seek counsel in spiritual matters, where necessary.

The holy jealousy of the other tribes of Israel for the honor of God and His altar at Shiloh would not allow them look away from the action of these tribes. They had supposed that their brethren were attempting to introduce idolatry into the worship of God. **“And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them”** (Joshua 22:12). In a swift reaction, they notified the princes of Israel and mobilized themselves against the Reubenites, the Gadites and a half

tribe of Manasseh.

However, the leaders in Israel were also hasty in judgment. They did not establish the purpose for building the altar before deciding to take up arms against their brethren. How leaders need to be patient and careful in handling sensitive issues. In matters that require acting, especially where life is involved, we are admonished to investigate and make diligent inquisition. This is important where there is need for sanction or discipline on those who have supposedly erred in the faith (Deuteronomy 19:18). Leaders need to balance up their zeal and holy indignation with facts so as not to destroy the characters they are trying to build. Some innocent people have been affected negatively due to undue haste in judgment. Therefore, caution should be exercised in every matter before any form of disciplinary action is taken against anyone within and outside the church.

Also, suspicion must not be allowed either in the natural family or the family of God. Any assembly where suspicion is rife cannot enjoy the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It's always a cankerworm that destroys the fabrics of love, trust and confidence, and leaves in its place hate, apprehension, mistrust and misgiving.

<p>Question 4: What can we learn from the assumption of the leaders in Israel on the erection of the altar?</p>
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In this dispensation of grace, we should be earnest in building trust in the body of Christ and strengthening the bonds of love. The common goal of Christians is heaven. Let us therefore concentrate on helping one another to get there. We should emphasize the message of holiness that is central to the Christian faith irrespective of denominations. Ours is battle against the devil, his cohorts, corruption, moral filth and sin in general, not against one another.

RIGHT APPROACH TO CONFLICTS RESOLUTION AMONG BRETHREN (Joshua 22:30-34; Genesis 13:1-18; Psalm 133:1-3; Matthew 5:22-24; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

It is instructive that the princes of Israel had a rethink and took a discreet step before the proposed war against their

supposedly wrong brethren. It was a right step towards conflict resolution. **“And the children of Israel sent unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one was an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel. And they came unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half tribe of Manasseh, unto the land of Gilead...”** (Joshua 22:13-15).

The approach by the leaders of Israel affirms Christ’s teaching in the New Testament. He says, **“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother”** (Matthew 18:15). This effort is to be repeated till the matter gets to the leadership of the church (Matthew 18:16, 17). This shows that accusation or retaliation is not the first option wherever there is misunderstanding among the brethren.

Question 5: From the conduct of the Phinehas-led delegation, what lessons do we learn in conflict resolution?

Phinehas and his company’s message to leaders of the two and a half tribes shows their disposition towards them: **“Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD? Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD”** (Joshua 22:16, 17). They alluded to earlier occurrences of rebellion and the grave consequences they brought on their nation to support their decision (Joshua 22:18-20).

However, those that will make good decisions and judgments must learn to get all the facts, be receptive to new information and listen to the aggrieved parties before reaching a conclusion. Nicodemus’ question to the Jews

regarding the way Jesus' case was handled is apt in this regard: **"Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"** (John 7:51).

As presumptive and caustic as the message of these emissaries, the congregation of the two and half tribes delivered their response in such a tone that did not ignite the already inflamed passion. How true that **"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger"** (Proverbs 15:1). There will be less arguments and frictions in families, Christian assemblies, organizations, if people learn to respond to criticisms, accusations and allegations with meekness and gentleness. **"Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh answered, and said unto the heads of the thousands of Israel, That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require it"** (Joshua 22:21, 23).

Unfortunately, many assemblies and churches today are filled with victims of misrepresentation, character assassination and injustice without anyone to defend them or grant them fair hearing. If we are to sustain brotherliness in our fellowship groups or families, we must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace where members are free to worship the Lord without fear of intimidation or subtle victimization. Only by such can we curb grumbling, murmuring and resentment which are inimical to true fellowship.

Question 6: What do we learn from the comportment of the accused tribes and their eventual reunion with Israel?

Though falsely accused for an otherwise sincere motive, they kept their calm until God vindicated them. Their mature reception and response devoid of retaliatory statements are indicative of their inner strength of character. They placed positive construction on the false accusation and looked at Israel as being sincerely misled in their assessment. Such should be the conduct of followers of Christ, **"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;**

when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23)

Opportunity came for the two and a half tribes to react to the allegation and they did it graciously. Regarding the altar, they claimed that River Jordan created a barrier between them and other tribes with the possibility of being stigmatized by subsequent generations. Also, the altar being patterned exactly after the altar of the Lord in Shiloh would serve as a witness between them and other tribes in time to come. **“And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them”** (Joshua 22:30). Thus, both the visiting delegation and the falsely accused congregation were brought to a reconciliation, open confession and restoration of trust.

In conclusion, we see that people and nations should learn to first dialogue about their differences, rather than resort to war. Nations should explore diplomacy to resolve issues; taking up arms against one another should not be the first option. Countless lives would be saved if people learn to hold round-table conferences. Our families, fellowships, factories and society would be a better place to live if we handle issues this biblical way.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Peter	3	Deuteronomy	33-34
TUE	1 John	1-2	Joshua	1-2
WED	“	3-4	“	3-4
THUR	“	5	“	5-6
FRI	2 John & 3 John		“	7
SAT	Jude	1	“	8
SUN	Rev.	1-2	“	9

590 Lesson

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL MESSAGE

MEMORY VERSE: "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left" (Joshua 23:6)

TEXT: Joshua 23:1-16

In our studies in the book of Joshua, we notice the work and results that God achieved through Joshua. In this chapter, we have the record of the climax of the exploits of this general. **"And it came to pass a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about..."** (Joshua 23:1). At this point, Joshua was very old and ready for eternal rest and reward (Joshua 23:1, 14). However, as a man of vision, he needed to hand-over the mandate to the next generation of leaders. The chapter before us therefore captures a short but complete record of the charge he gave the leaders of Israel. In this kind of address, the usual practice is to encourage the next generation on the need to focus on appropriate actions and attitude that will put them on the right path that would enable them attain the expected glorious destiny.

In the Scripture, various leaders (before and after Joshua) had given such message to succeeding generations. For instance, in the Old Testament, Jacob addressed his children before his death (Genesis 49:1, 2); Moses charged Joshua and Israel before his death (Deuteronomy 31:1-8; 33:1); Samuel addressed Israel when Saul was appointed as king in Israel (1 Samuel 12:1-7); David did the same to Solomon when he was about to die (1 Kings 2:1-4). In the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ addressed His disciples before He went to heaven (Matthew 28:16-20). The charge of the Lord Jesus to the disciples, also called the Great Commission, is meant for all believers (Matthew 28:18-20). He wants us to occupy till He comes. **"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come"** (Luke

19:13). Paul the apostle also gave such address to the elders of the Church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-21, 28) and the church at Philippi and by extension, to all believers to be united in living out and spreading the gospel (Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Question 1: Mention at least three biblical examples of farewell messages.

One may ask why Joshua gave Israel this farewell speech or message. From past examples and cases listed above, the reasons for such a message include: (1) to communicate God's will to the people; (2) to leave example for on-coming leaders; (3) to ensure continuity in the purpose and mission for the nation; (4) to challenge the people to be faithful to God; (5) to caution the people against unfaithfulness to God; (6) to create a sense of direction on the way forward; (7) to remind the people of God's faithfulness; and (8) to refresh their memory on the promises of God for the future of the nation.

Question 2: State the significance of Joshua's farewell message/address to the children of Israel.

The scope and content of Joshua's address can be divided into three areas. These include review of God's past goodness to Israel under his leadership, God's promises for future exploits and Israel's responsibility for enjoying and sustaining God's goodness.

REVIEW OF GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT PROMISES (Joshua 23:3,4,9,14; 11:23; 21:43,44; 22:4; Deuteronomy 31:28; Psalms 89:34,35)

“And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you. Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward” (Joshua 23:3,4). God promised that Abraham's descendants would inherit the Land of Canaan. Even though many generations have been part of the history

of the nation of Israel, God's promise has not changed. However, He has been renewing it. The review in our text is necessary and important for Joshua, Israel, as well as the church (Romans 15:4). For Joshua, it served as a testimony of God's faithfulness and power in his life and ministry. It shows that the effort and dedication he put into his leadership role were not in vain, and that he had the assurance of a great reward.

There were striking victories and achievements. For the elders of Israel, this review is meant to remind them of God's power and readiness to see them through their various challenges, though Joshua was about to depart from them. Moreover, it was to let Israel know where they needed to start from and where they should go after Joshua's departure. Change in leadership in any local assembly will be hitch-free where the leader has faithfully and dutifully prepared successors for future responsibility. We need to bear in mind that **"we are laborers with God"**.

Question 3: Why should church leaders do proper handing over when leaving for a new station? What should be the content and manner of presenting it?

We also learn about humility from Joshua's attitude when he was doing this review. One, He did not fault Moses his predecessor, give excuse or apportion blame for the remaining unconquered territories. Two, he attributed all the victories to the power of God. In his words **"ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you"** (Joshua 23:3). He gave God all the credit. Three, he reminded Israel that God did it all for them, not for him as a leader.

We learn that leaders should always give God the glory for their successes and teach the people to rely on God. This attitude has a lot of advantages. One, it saves the leader from pride and judgment of God. Two, it helps the people to put total faith in the eternal God who is their true and eternal helper; people should not put their confidence in man. Three, it opens the way for future victories through faith in the unchanging God. Leaders who take credit for God's work and draw away people's attention usually end

as failures because of lack of continuity and faith in God. Besides, it can attract God's judgment, as in the case of Herod. **“And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, it is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost”** (Acts 12:21-23).

Question 4: What are the dangers of unduly attracting people's attention to the human leader instead of God?

In summary, we see that the benefit of such review is to show God's faithfulness, inspire faith in Him and strengthen the relationship of the audience with God the author of miracles.

REITERATION OF GOD'S PROMISES FOR FUTURE CONQUESTS (Joshua 23:4, 5, 9 10; Obadiah 17; Isaiah 41: 10-16; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Jeremiah 1:9-10; 34:11; Joshua 13:6)

Having reviewed the past exploits of Israel through God's power and reminded them of the fact that God did it for their sakes, Joshua went ahead to exhort Israel that the Lord God would help them in conquering the remaining territories. **“And the LORD your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land as the LORD your God hath promised unto you”** (Joshua 23:5). Joshua was given this same promise during the period of his commissioning and he had seen it fulfilled. Now he is confidently passing it on to his successors.

The content of the promise is very great. It is a promise of total dispossession of the Canaanites of their lands and the complete possession of the same land by Israel. Actually, the unconquered territories were not left because of lack of power, but the wisdom of God for Israel to possess the land in bits (Exodus 23:30, 31). God did not want the Canaanites to be removed at once so that the land would not be mismanaged for lack of use due to the disparity between the population of the Canaanites and that of

Israel. We learn here about the wisdom of God. Enduring success usually comes step by step, not suddenly. Whatever the Lord does not allow you to have now, you should understand that (in His wisdom) He will reserve it for you so that you can possess it at the appropriate time. You should therefore not attempt to run ahead of God, **“he that believeth shall not make haste”**. No wonder a writer once said, ‘it shows the sign of unbelief to ask why and how of what God does’. We should therefore not be in a hurry to blame God, the Church, family members or the Pastor, perhaps because of a temporary delay in getting the things we expect. Such issues may range from marriage, child bearing, and job to finance.

Question 5: In view of the assertion that “enduring success is gradual”, differentiate between impatience and indolence as regards pursuing our expectations in life.

As God promised to drive out the heathen out of Canaan in order to enable the Israelites to possess the Land, He will help us remove all the enemies and barriers to our progress. However, we must understand that the **“weapons of our warfare are not carnal”; “we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities...”** (Ephesians 6:10-12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6); and our obedience must be full before we win in this battle.

Having reminded Israel of the promise of God, Joshua went ahead to tell them of their responsibilities in inheriting the promise. He said, **“Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside there from to the right or to the left”** (Joshua 23:6). This is an exhortation to obedience which is the secret of blessing. There are two aspects of the believer’s responsibility for obtaining God’s promises, namely, courage to fight the good fight of faith and caution to follow the Lord truthfully.

A similar statement was given to Joshua at the inception of his ministry by Moses (Joshua 1:5-9) and since then, he kept to it. It is also obvious from the address that he led Israel in the same way until this time (Joshua 23:8); but as he was about to depart, he needed to encourage Israel to continue in it since it is the only secret of victory. His

emphasis here is not just on the courage to fight but courage to stand firm on the law of the true and unchanging God. Today, believers need courage to stand in the truth. There are many objects of distraction that can make us deviate from obeying the word of God. However, we cannot afford to lose God's favor as a result of disobedience (Revelation 22:18-20).

Question 6: What is the secret of believers' victory in this corrupt world?

REASONABLE WARNING AGAINST THE FOLLY OF COMPROMISE (Joshua 23:11-13,15,16; Deuteronomy 5:32,33; 7:2-6; 10:20-22; 13:4-11; 18:9-14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

The second aspect of the exhortation was to caution them against the danger of compromise. We learn that it is not enough to fight; we must also protect ourselves from the wiles of the devil, which is deception. Thus, after exhorting Israel to be courageous in obeying the Law of Moses, Joshua warned them against slipping into idolatry and unequal yoke. He told the people to keep the law, avoid compromise with the heathen worshippers and warned against unfaithfulness in worship (Joshua 4:23, 24). As preachers, we must maintain a balanced approach in preaching the word of God to sinners and believers in our congregations.

In this section of his message, Joshua revealed the downward steps to idolatry and its consequences. The steps and actions that amount to idolatry, according to Joshua 23:7 include: (1) attending the meetings of idol worshippers; **“come not among these nations”**. As true believers, we cannot attend idolatrous ceremonies, syncretic churches or occult meetings. (2) Mentioning the names of their deities or idols. The Bible says **“neither make mention of the name of their gods”**. Thus, a believer should not carelessly call or sing the names of the heathen gods; (3) affirming statements or swearing by heathen idols. In the same vein, we should not cause others to swear by them. The Bible says **“nor cause to swear by them [the idols];** (4) serving the idols, **“neither serve them”**. To serve here includes giving money to promote or

propagate the idols of the heathens; (5) bowing down to the idols “**nor bow yourselves unto them**”.

Believers must be very careful about the places they go, the songs they sing, the books they read, the music they listen to, movies they watch, the things they eat and the places where they worship in order to avoid unequal yoke with idol worshippers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). If you are already a victim, flee for your soul. Repent and follow the admonition to cleave to and love the only true God (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Question 7: Enumerate the various ways of getting involved in idol worship.

It is instructive to note that Joshua also warned the Israelites against unequal yoke in marriage. “**If ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you**” (Joshua 23:12, 13). This has been and is still the consistent teaching of the Scripture. Believers who get involved in unequal yoke will open the door of backsliding. Why was Joshua very strict in warning Israel against idolatry and unequal yoke in marriage? The answers are clearly spelt out.

There are grievous consequences for involvement in unequal yoke and idolatry. “**Then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you**” (Joshua 23:16). The Israelites and, by extension, all believers who slip into idolatry and compromise will suffer defeat in the hands of enemies. “**God will no more drive any of these nations from before you**”. Once they compromise with evil, they forfeit enjoyment of God’s favor and promises. Also, they will fall into snares and traps of afflictions. Enemy nations “**shall be snares and traps unto you and scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes...**” Sin will ruin the sinner. So, repent, be saved and abide in Christ till the end to be able to enter heaven.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Rev.	3-4	Joshua	10
TUE	“	5-6	“	11-12
WED	“	7-8	“	13-14
THUR	“	9-10	“	15
FRI	“	11-12	“	16-17
SAT	“	13-14	“	18
SUN	“	15-16	“	19

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

591 Lesson

EXHORTATION TO CHRIST-LIKE LIVING

MEMORY VERSE: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

TEXT: Romans 15:1-22

Having already covered quite some grounds in this epistle to the Romans, the concluding chapters show how Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to believers of all ages what should characterize their lifestyles. It is clear from these chapters that the New Testament believer is expected to live like Christ, in purity, righteousness and true holiness. In all he does and says, he is to pattern his life and conduct after Him.

Question 1: Itemize some scriptural exhortations to New Testament believers from our text.

Paul had previously exhorted the believers in the preceding chapters to be doers of God’s word; walk in newness of life; be dead to sin; yield themselves unto God as instruments of righteousness; be free from sin; bring forth fruits unto God; mortify the deeds of the body; be not high-minded; continue in His goodness; be a living sacrifice; be not conformed to this world but be renewed; think soberly; be kindly affectioned one to another; be of the same mind one toward another; be not wise in their own conceits; recompense to no man evil for evil; live peacefully with all men; avenge not themselves; be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good; be subject to higher powers; pay tribute and render to all their dues; owe no man anything but love one another; love their neighbors; put on the armor of light; walk honestly; live unto the Lord; and follow after the things that make for peace (Romans 2:13; 6:4,7,8,11,13,22; 7:4; 8:13; 11:20,22; 12:1-3,10,16-19,21; 13:1-7,9,12,13; 14:7,8,19). He summed it up as follows: **“For even Christ pleased not**

himself: but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:3, 4).

EDIFYING OTHERS THROUGH CHRIST-LIKE SUCCOUR AND SUPPORT (Romans 15:1-7; 14:1; 1 Peter 3:18; Luke 22:31, 32; John 18:8, 9)

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1).

At a time when there is insecurity, economic meltdown and great challenge, some believers may be tempted to become individualistic, selfish and secluded. The inspired apostle exhorts believers to look away from their challenges and to care, love passionately and succor the weak brethren. The ‘weak’ referred to in this passage includes those who are spiritually unable to understand, appreciate and discern the will of God correctly; those who are discouraged, disappointed and distressed; those who are undergoing intense persecution; those who are overwhelmed with grief and sorrow; those who are abandoned, isolated and left to fate; and those who are destitute, sick and living in fear (1 Samuel 30:10-13).

Question 2: Point out people represented as weak and how believers can help bear their infirmities?

Believers are to follow the example of Christ in seeking and supporting all grieving, afflicted and troubled souls wherever they are, as this will edify, comfort and bring hope to them. Citing the reproaches that Christ endured, Apostle Peter says, **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit”** (1 Peter 3:18).

Apostle Paul restates the purpose of this great epistle and indeed the whole Bible thus: **“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”** (Romans 15:4). In this vein, he calls on

all mature believers, workers and leaders to support all weak brethren in prayer, protection, provision, personal visitation, profitable partnership, and positive and receptive attitude (Luke 22:31,32; John 18:8,9; Philemon 22; 2 Corinthians 8:6; Philemon 17; Romans 15:7). Such Christ-like disposition towards the weak will naturally produce joy, encouragement and gratitude both to the weak and strong believers alike as they both will “...**with one mind and one mouth glorify God**” (Romans 15:6).

ESSENCE OF CHRIST-LIKE LIVING AND SALVATION OF SOULS (Romans 15:8-16; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 2:10, 11)

“Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy...” (Romans 15:8, 9).

The grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior to the Gentiles brought joy and celebration among them who were considered unworthy, unfit and therefore undeserving of eternal life. Though least expected by the Jews, reconciliation, adoption and salvation are now available also to the Gentiles.

Question 3: Highlight the responsibility of recipients of the grace of God.

Having been given this great opportunity, hope and grace, the Gentiles must reciprocate with corresponding attitudes of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saved from sin and Gentile abominations, the believer radiates unending joy and hope. Also, he constantly enjoys abiding and abounding peace, though he lives in a tumultuous world (John 14:1, 27; Jeremiah 29:11; Isaiah 26:3). Saved by grace, we are to reach out to the sinning world and win them to Christ through the gospel.

Question 4: Enumerate the components of Christ-like living.

In a nutshell, Christ-like living entails a life of sobriety, righteousness, godliness, pleasing God, glorifying God, faith, honesty, holiness, transparency, being conscious

of eternity, and preaching the gospel (Titus 2:4,12; John 8:28; Matthew 5:16; Hebrews 10:38; 2 Corinthians 8:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:10; Hebrews 11:13,14; Matthew 9:35).

EXAMPLES OF COMMITMENT TO CHRIST-CENTERED SERVICE (Romans 15:17-22; Acts 9:16; 20:22-24; 21:11-14; 2 Corinthians 11:20-30; 12:9-11)

In spite of the challenges he faced in ministry, Apostle Paul maintained a cheerful and an exultant spirit at every point as he says “... **I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ** ...” (Romans 15:17). This gallant soldier of Christ bore indescribable suffering, persecution and lived under continual threat to his life. Yet, he referred to them as light afflictions.

Paul endured, among other things, *perils* of shipwreck twice (2 Corinthians 11:25), *perils* of robbers, *perils* of Jewish fanatics, *perils* of Gentile idol-worshippers, *perils* of insecurity, injustice and indignity from his fellow countrymen and the Gentiles, *perils* of false, fake and spurious brethren, and finally the *perils* of hunger. But he gallantly resolved that “**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 5: Given the challenges of our day, how are believers expected to pursue the DAWN project in their locations?

Unlike some believers who soft-pedal, follow the Lord from afar, recoil, compromise their faith or even backslide in times of fierce persecution, Paul was resilient and brave. He did not only overcome the storms; he forged ahead in ministry and made progress under challenging and difficult situations.

As he traversed the wide and wild Gentile communities, reaching where no other preacher had reached, sinners were won to Christ; the blind received their sight; the oppressed and tormented souls were delivered and captives of Gentile superstitions and vain philosophies were also freed. “**Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem,**

and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (verse 19). This is the purpose of the Great Commission given by Christ to every believer. And it is the main thrust of *Discipling A Whole Nation* (DAWN) project of the church.

From Paul, we learn the following lessons on how to execute the *DAWN* project in our locations, districts and communities: (1) daring in attempt to win our near kinsmen and women; (2) decisive in advancing walled neighborhoods; (3) direct and aggressive in witnessing to the neglected and needy; (4) resolute in defeating the adversary’s wiles and networks to preach the gospel and plant churches in our suburbs and territories where men are not willing to go.

Finally, seeing that we are already in the last days, we must rise to our Master’s command and advance His course in spite of threats to life and terrorizing activities of Satan and his agents. The Lord’s command remains unchanging: **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Rev.	17-18	Joshua	20-21
TUE	“	19-20	“	22
WED	“	21-22	“	23-24
THUR	Matt.	1-2	Judges	1
FRI	“	3-4	“	2-3
SAT	“	5	“	4-5
SUN	“	6-7	“	6

592 Lesson

PAUL'S PLAN TO VISIT ROME

MEMORY VERSE: "And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:29).

TEXT: Romans 15:23-33

In our text, Apostle Paul outlines his plans to visit the Christians in Rome. For many years, he had desired to do so but had not been able due to the demands of his missionary engagements in Greece (Romans 15:22). Having accomplished his assignments in the eastern regions, Paul now proposes to do a pioneering work in Spain and to visit Rome on his way. He equally sought their commendation and backing for the Spanish mission. Apparently, he hoped that the Roman churches would provide assistants and general support for his western campaign.

However, his planned visit to Rome was to come after his journey to Jerusalem to deliver the collections from the Gentile believers for the poor saints. Although Paul was a free-born Roman citizen, he had never been to Rome, the capital of the then Gentile world; he had only heard of the church in Rome. In our text, he affirms the purpose of his visit which is, to communicate to believers in Rome "**the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**"

PAUL'S PASSION AND PLAN TO VISIT ROME (Romans 15:23, 24, 28, 29; 1:10-15; Acts 23:11)

"But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you" (Romans 15:23). Paul here declares his intention to see the Christians in Rome. In pursuit of his tireless ministry, he provides a sketch of his itinerary to include ministering to the poor at Jerusalem and proceeding to Spain. Paul's schedule challenges us to prioritize our Programs in order to maximize the use of our time and life. Considering that the time is short, with much work to

do to serve the Lord and humanity, we do not have time to waste. We need to plan our lives in a way to give our best to the Lord. Structuring our lives will give no room for frivolities and less-essential activities.

**Question 1: What was responsible for Paul's delay in visiting Rome?
What can we learn from this?**

Paul could not visit Rome earlier because he had much work to do for the Lord elsewhere (Romans 15:22). God had opened doors of ministry for him in other places and he labored as the Spirit directed (Acts 16:6-8). The gospel does not come by chance to any place, but by the will and counsel of God. He alone knows the ripened and ready fields (Matthew 9:36-38; John 4:35). We should therefore lose no single moment to “**thrust in the sickle, and reap**” whenever God opens gospel doors in any given mission field. We must not allow such opportunities of fields that are white unto harvest to slip; if we do, we might never regain them. We must allow God to plan our lives for us according to His own purpose and Program.

We also learn that the apostle displayed godly prudence by bestowing his time and labor where there was much need. He sought the purpose and will of Christ more than any other thing. He gave priority to God's will and work. Had he considered his own personal comfort and interest above the will of God, he would not have fulfilled His timing for the brethren in Rome. We are to do that first which is most needful according to the will of God. Christians should give priority to preaching of the gospel over academic, business or economic opportunities which would limit their commitment to the Great Commission. Unfortunately today, many believers scramble for such opportunities even at the expense of their personal Christian lives.

Paul had intended a missionary journey to Spain after his great success in Asia Minor. Although it is not certain whether he ever fulfilled his purpose to visit Spain, his proposal was with a submission to the will of God. He said, “**I trust to see you**”. Eventually, he came to Rome but as a prisoner. Like Paul, we must make all our plans and proposals with submission to the will of God.

Question 2: For what purpose was Paul eager to visit Rome?

We are equally challenged by the purpose of Paul's visit to Rome which is threefold. First, he expects them to bring him on his way towards Spain, counting on their assistance in his expedition. Second, he desires their company, conversation and refreshing communion and fellowship. Although Paul himself was a man of great attainments in knowledge, grace and spirituality, he still delighted himself in the thoughts of good company. He did not live the isolated life of scholars and philosophers or the secluded life of hermits or ascetics. Third, he expects to come to them in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Paul hoped that God would bring him to them, loaded with blessings. **"And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ"** (Romans 15:29). He said earlier: **"...that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established"** (Romans 1:11). The blessing of the gospel of Christ is the best and most desirable blessing. It is always a happy meeting between members and ministers when ministers are fully prepared to give out and members are fully prepared to receive.

Paul would only labor in ministry to offer life-giving blessings to others. Time did not run him down. Much work did not make him ineffective. Here is the picture of an approved servant of God. Like springs of fresh water, he always refreshed people under his ministry. In like manner, we must not allow people to be spiritually famished under our ministry.

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF RECIPROCAL SERVICE IN THE CHURCH (Romans 15:25-27; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 6:1; 13:1-3; Galatians 5:13; 6:2, 9, 10)

Before setting out for the west, the apostle had to take the proceeds of charity for the poor in the church at Jerusalem. At the time of writing this epistle, he was on his way to Jerusalem **"to minister unto the saints"** (Romans 15:25). He was taking with him a contribution which the Gentile Christians of Macedonia and Achaia had made for their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem, who at this

time were in poverty (Romans 15:26). While recognizing his missionary work among the Gentiles, James, Peter and John had asked Paul to “**remember the poor**” (Galatians 2:10). Since then, Paul had encouraged the churches of Greece (Macedonia and Achaia) to contribute to a relief fund. Actually the churches of Asia and Galatia also contributed (Acts 20:4; 1 Corinthians 16:1). They had willingly complied with his fervent appeals (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Brethren in Macedonia (Philippians) and Achaia (Corinthians) gave generously to the poor and needy in Jerusalem so that mutual dependence of Christians upon one another might be maintained.

Questions 3: How should Christians relate with (a) one another and (b) gospel ministers?

The Apostle uses the occasion to state that this act of giving cheerfully was indeed a Christian duty. “**It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things**” (Romans 15:27). According to the Apostle, the Gentiles are greatly indebted to the Jews and are bound by gratitude to be kind to them. The Gentiles are made partakers of spiritual things as they received the gospel of salvation from the Jews. It is therefore their duty to minister to them in carnal (material) things. All Christians also ought to cultivate this attitude of love, kindness and generosity towards one another. Though the saints at Jerusalem were at a great distance from them, they extended their bounty to them. This act of charity gave practical proof of the mutual sympathy between Gentiles and Jewish Christians. This teaches us to stretch out the hand of charity to all that are of the household of faith.

Question 4: What lessons can Christians learn from the collections from Gentile churches to the saints in Jerusalem?

In addition to relieving the poverty that existed among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, the collection is also a means of cementing the relationship and fellowship

that ought to be maintained between Gentile and Jewish believers or the Jerusalem and Gentile churches (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8,9). Through this, Paul wanted to promote unity between the Gentile and Jewish Christians. On one hand, it represents the love of Gentile believers for the saints in Jerusalem. On the other, it may be a form of duty owed by these brethren to their mother-church in Jerusalem. The presence of Gentile believers with him in Jerusalem was a token that Paul's apostleship thus far had not been in vain.

THE POWER OF PRAYER SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTERS (Romans 15:30-33; Ephesians 6:18, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 3:1, 2)

Paul expresses earnestly his desire for the prayers from the Romans for a prosperous journey to Judaea. Here is a good example of what Christians should be doing for their leaders and for one another. We are to always strive together in prayer for a cause. The reason for his request is **“for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit...”** (Romans 15:30).

Questions 5: What is the secret of Paul’s success in ministry?

One of the secrets of Paul’s success in life and ministry is his humility which always found expression in requests for intercessory prayer from the churches. We should learn to value the effectual fervent prayers of the righteous. Paul had prayed much for them and it was now their turn to reciprocate his kindness and love for them. **“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints”** (Romans 15:30, 31).

In soliciting for prayer, Paul discussed why they must pray for him, how they should pray for him and what they should pray for (Romans 15:30-32). Their prayer is a proof of the love which the Holy Spirit inspires and imparts in our heart towards one another (Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 5:14). On the how, he enjoins them to

“strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”. We must pray with faith and fervency, not only when praying for ourselves, but also for others, especially gospel ministers. He gave three petitions: (i) the dangers he was exposed to: **“That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea”**. These constituted a prospective source of trouble for Paul in his journey. It is proper to pray against persecution. (ii) His services. They are to pray **“that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints”**. As we need to seek the face of God for the restraining of the will of our enemies so also must we seek His face for the preservation and increase of the goodwill of our friends. (iii) His journey to Rome. They are to pray that he will come to them with joy, by the will of God, regardless of his experiences. All our joy depends upon the will of God.

Question 6: From Paul's experience, how would you assess the power of prayer?

It is significant to note that the prayer of the Roman Christians made Paul to experience a mighty deliverance from the hands of the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. Without their earnest intercession, he may not have escaped the life-threatening experiences and plots in Jerusalem. This is the power of united prayer.

Paul concluded the chapter with prayer for the same people he requested prayer from. Both the church leadership and laity, ministers and members, preachers and the people have a responsibility to pray for one and another. Leaders have the duty of setting forth the example of intercession for members under their pasture from which the flock takes a cue to reciprocate. As leaders and members join in prayer for one another, great shall be the success and progress of God's work here on earth.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Matt.	8	Judges	7
TUE	"	9	"	8
WED	"	10	"	9
THUR	"	11	"	10-11
FRI	"	12	"	12-13
SAT	"	13	"	14-15
SUN	"	14	"	16

593 Lesson

SALUTATION OF SAINTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:3, 4).

TEXT: Romans 16:1-16

Paul, the apostle brings the epistle to the Romans to a conclusion with expressions of love and affection for the saints. He begins this expression of love in his benediction at the end of the last chapter. **“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”** To have a wonderful mix of great spiritual knowledge of the mystery of the gospel such as the apostle dispensed in this epistle and endearing love for saints is by grace.

Spiritual knowledge without genuine affection for saints is empty, barren and worthless. Paul underscores this truth while writing to the Corinthians that: **“though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge... and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away”** (1 Corinthians 13:2, 8). Love for God, His word, people and cause is the unfailing virtue every believer and Christian servant must possess. The apostle lived by the word of God he preached. He recommends affectionate treatment of every believer with good testimony by others; greets individuals as well as couples by name and acknowledges the sacrifices others have made in advancing the cause of Christ. Believers need to emulate this.

From our text, we see some standard church practices to emulate. The first is Paul’s instruction on how to relate with a member from another local church. Paul recommends Phebe to the church in Rome and solicits assistance for her. The second is Paul’s commendation

of other faithful brethren among whom are Priscilla and Acquila, Epaenetus, Mary, Andronicus, Junia, Amplias, Urbane, Apelles, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Aristobulus and a host of others. Christians should be challenged by Paul's Christ-like attitude of love, care and appreciation of fellow believers. Such commendations lead to the spiritual stability, steadfastness and growth of the individual believer and the church.

Question 1: Mention some Christian attitudes that believers need to emulate in our text today.

RECOMMENDATION OF CHRIST-LIKE BELIEVERS

(Romans 16:1, 2; Malachi 3:5; Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34)

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also”. (Romans 16:1, 2).

From the above passage, Paul, led by the Holy Ghost, recommended Phebe, a bona fide member of the Church in Cenchrea. She is simply described as **“a servant of the Church”**. As a visitor and stranger in the Church at Rome, Phebe needed the acceptance, encouragement, comfort and assistance of the brethren in her new environment.

Question 2: Why is it necessary to take care of visitors, newcomers and strangers in our Churches?

Today, it is not uncommon to find visitors and new comers to church fellowships and Programs unnoticed, uncared for and unattended to by members. This practice has negative effects on the Church.

Generally, taking care of strangers is a scriptural principle emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. In Exodus 22:21 and Leviticus 19:34, the Jews were strongly warned to **“neither vex a stranger nor oppress him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as**

thymself..” . In Malachi 3:5, judgment is pronounced on those **“that turn aside the stranger from his right”**. In the New Testament, Christ declares that on the last day, He would demand: **“I was a stranger, and ye took me not in”** (Matthew 25:35). This implies that attention and affection shown to the stranger is regarded by the Lord as shown to Himself. Christ-like attitude to visitors and strangers who come to church will encourage them to continue in the Lord and in fellowship. This practice will enhance spiritual and numerical growth of the members and the church.

Furthermore, when the church gives urgent attention to strangers who come in for worship and fellowship or have relocated from another local church, confidence and a sense of belonging will develop and this will in turn lead to love, unity and mutual co-existence of members with each person contributing positively to the overall development of the body of Christ. We also find that encouragement, sympathy and guidance are offered to visitors or strangers who are in trouble or perplexity. This will engender in them joy and fulfilment in life and ministry. Such visitors will become stable, active and committed members of the body of Christ. Some may even become future leaders in various arms and ministries in the church.

Question 3: In what practical ways can the church render help to her visitors?

Visitors and strangers who come to the church should be warmly welcomed by the pastors and officiating ministers of the church they are visiting. They could be counselled and prayed for at the end of the service. Committed church members, workers and leaders should be assigned to them for follow-up purposes. They could be temporarily accommodated after presenting their letters of introduction from their pastors.

WOMEN MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH (Romans 16:1, 2, 6, 12; Exodus 15:20; Acts 16:13, 14; Titus 2:3-5)

Scriptural instances show that women are important and relevant in the church. If adequately provided with an enabling environment, born again women can be a force to

reckon with through the supportive services they render to the Lord and to the saints.

Question 4: List any three godly women in the Bible and briefly explain the role they played in promoting the work of God.

There are many women in the Bible who, through one deed or the other, contributed tremendously to the progress of God's work. Phebe who was described as "**a servant of the church which was at Cenchrea**" was a succourer of many, including Paul. Priscilla was a helper of Apostle Paul. She served as a selfless and sacrificial worker in the Roman church. Mary bestowed much labor on the Apostle and his team. Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis and Julia are all reckoned to have labored much in the Lord. This is indeed a challenge to many women in some of our local assemblies today who give themselves to idleness, talkativeness, tale-bearing and worldliness of all sort.

The encouragement we have from today's lesson is that all born again women, whether young or old, educated or illiterate, married or unmarried have a place and a significant role to play in the service of God.

Question 5: Highlight the various ministries that are available for women to fulfill in our local churches today.

There are many duties, roles and ministries that are available for godly women to carry out or fulfill in our Churches today. Such ministries include teaching younger women (Titus 2; 3-5); interceding for saints (Acts 16:13-15); providing succor to the weary; ministering to the distressed; reaching out to the sick; reaching out to souls in schools, hospitals and prison custodies; serving in units such as the choir, ushering, security, etc.; and living a life that is above reproach at home, in the Church and in the workplace. "**If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them**" is our Savior's prescription to all believers (John 13:17).

LESSONS FROM PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF THE SAINTS (Romans 16:1-16; Hebrews 10:24; Philippians 4:3; Colossians 4:8, 9, 12)

Saints who distinguished themselves in the Roman and Corinthian churches through devoted and sacrificial services to God and the brethren were all cherished and fondly remembered by Paul the apostle. The activities of these exemplary saints reminds us of the biblical injunction to “**consider one another to provoke unto love and good works**” (Hebrews 10:24).

Paul remembered these brethren for the enduring work they did for the Lord and His kingdom. This acknowledgment reminds us of a song writer’s declaration: ‘*Only remembered by what we have done*’. For what would you be remembered when you have gone to glory or relocated from your present local church assembly?

It is quite unfortunate that while some believers are dutifully engaged in the service of the Lord, others prefer to remain idle in the house of God like some nobles in Nehemiah’s day. “**And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord**” (Nehemiah 3:5). The Scripture clearly reveals that indolence, indifference and eye-service in God’s work attract curse and divine punishment while diligence, sacrifice and faithfulness bring commendation and reward from the Lord (Judges 5:23; Colossians 3:23, 24). In view of the final commendation and reward from the Lord, “**my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord**” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Question 6: What do we learn from the way Paul recalled the names of the saints at Rome and his companions in Corinth?

From Paul’s roll call of devoted saints in Rome and Corinth, several lessons could be learnt. **First**, we discover from his presentation that Paul himself was not lazy. He went about his work with zeal, interest and devotion. He knew the state of his flock in various Churches and could account for their spiritual state. Though he never visited the Church in Rome, he was in touch with the happenings in that assembly. What a challenge to our church leaders today!

Second, the presentation of a long list of these devoted saints portrayed Paul as a loving minister. It was the Christ-like love in him that propelled him to speak so affectionately about the saints in question and their deeds.

Third, he mentioned many names of male and female saints who were faithful to God and the church. This means that he possessed uncommon ability for remembering names which is an essential quality in Christian leadership.

Fourth, there is no gender bias in the service of God. He did not overlook the contributions of godly women in the church for the furtherance of the gospel. It is obvious that men and women whose names are in the Book of Life are qualified to serve the Lord on the field of evangelism as well as in the local assemblies. There should be no bickering and trampling on others based on gender disparity because we are members of the same body of Christ. **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

In conclusion, Paul’s acknowledgment and appreciation of the good works of saints in the Church is a clear indication that he possessed a grateful heart and spirit. How grateful are we to God for His mercies and to men for their favors?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Matt.	15	Judges	17-18
TUE	“	16-17	“	19
WED	“	18	“	20
THUR	“	19	“	21
FRI	“	20	Ruth	1-2
SAT	“	21	“	3-4
SUN	“	22	1 Samuel	1

594 Lesson

SCRIPTURAL ATTITUDE TOWARD FALSE TEACHERS

MEMORY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

TEXT: Romans 16:17-27

In the preceding verses of this chapter, Paul the apostle sent commendations to some particular friends among the people to whom he wrote. Although he was not at Rome at this time, he still remembered the church on a daily basis. His heart was full of care, love and affection for the brethren. He must have observed the infiltration of false teachers who could influence them negatively and mar their brotherly love. False teachers in Galatia, Corinth and elsewhere who had always sought to corrupt the young believers from the simplicity of the gospel also crept into the church in Rome, especially as the obedience of the Roman Christians had come abroad to all men. This informed the need for Paul to caution the Roman believers, which is the pivot of our text in this study. As he tried to unite the brethren through his endearing salutations, it was also proper to caution them to take heed of people whose principles and practices were destructive to Christian love.

SCRIPTURAL COMMAND CONCERNING FALSE TEACHERS (Romans 16:17, 18; Matthew 5:19; 1 Timothy 1:6, 7; 4:2; 6:3; Titus 1:11; 1 John 4:3)

A false teacher is simply a person who breaks God’s commandments and teaches men so (Matthew 5:19). In other words, he is someone who compromises the standard of the word of God by his life and teachings. Going by this, it is clear that there are many false teachers around us who have infiltrated the body of Christ with their errors.

Question 1: Who is a false teacher?

A casual Bible reader or a nominal Christian cannot easily detect false teachers because of the high level of pretense they put up. This is the reason Christ warned believers to beware of those who come to them in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15, 16).

Question 2: Mention some of the characteristics of false teachers.

The following are some of the characteristics of false teachers: (i) they serve their own belly, seeing the work of God as a means of survival. Therefore, they tailor their messages to suit their selfish interests. (ii) They are covetous and through feign, pretentious words make merchandise of the people (2 Peter 2:3). (iii) They teach commandments of men in place of the sound doctrines of the Bible. Their teaching has no scriptural basis; their messages are more of human psychology, men's philosophy that tends to only motivate. (iv) They are backsliders who are now swerved and turned aside unto vain wrangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, but understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm. (v) They speak lies in hypocrisy. (vi) Their conscience is seared with a hot iron. (vii) They are proud and ignorant. (viii) They teach for pecuniary gain. (ix) They are influenced by demons.

Question 3: What methods do false teachers adopt to achieve their goals and what should be the believer's attitude towards them?

False teachers do not appear apparently false. They put up deceptive and appealing attitude to allure the unsuspecting public. Jesus said, "**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves**" (Matthew 7:15). Moreover, false teachers may capitalize on the prevailing economic situation by employing material baits and financial inducements. Other methods used by them include false miracles, false promises of liberty and claims to hidden knowledge and special revelation (2 Peter 2:17-19; Colossians 2:8, 18).

Apostle Paul knew the danger posed by these false teachers and warned the saints concerning them. "**Now I beseech you, brethren mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned**

and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Although we are to love and forgive one another as Christians, compromise and hypocrisy in the church must be dealt with according to scriptural standards. False teachers who cause trouble through their selfish interests are not to be received into the local fellowship. The church is commanded to “**mark**” and avoid them. We are to keep an eye on “church tramps” who run from one church to another, causing trouble and divisions. With their fair speech, they deceive the simple; but the discerning saint will see through their disguise.

Paul’s counsel to Titus on how to treat such false teachers is worthy of emulation by contemporary believers. “**For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers... whose mouths must be stopped...**” (Titus 1:10, 11). We are not to listen to such false teachers; neither should we give them place in God’s service.

Question 4: How does obedience to God relate to victory over Satan?

It pleases the Lord when the Church stands on His undiluted word in spite of distractions and other activities of Satan and his agents. Believers are to take their stand and hold on to the truth in spite of seeming adversities. It is only on that ground that we can be sure of God’s intervention. Our absolute obedience to God’s word gives us victory over Satan and his cohorts. “**For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf... And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...**” (Romans 16:19, 20).

SUCCESS THROUGH FAITHFUL COMPANIONSHIP
(Romans 16:21-23; Acts 17:5-9; Philippians 2:19-22; Revelation 2:12, 13)

One of the secrets of Paul’s success in life and ministry was the company of people he kept. As a dutiful minister of the Word, his companions were fellow laborers in the Lord. “**Timothy my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother**” (verses 21-23). What a list of veterans! As a

wise master-builder, he did not keep the company of fools. Paul loved these companions. No wonder he took time to convey his greetings to these brethren, thereby giving them a sense of apostolic affirmation. It is instructive to note that with the support of these faithful companions, Paul recorded huge success in ministry.

Question 5: What lessons do we learn from the faithfulness of Paul's companions in spite of the activities of false teachers?

The danger posed by the false teachers and their destructive tendencies notwithstanding, Paul had faithful companions who did not allow themselves to be swept away. They were like the brethren in Pergamos of whom Jesus said: **“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith...”** (Revelation 2:13).

SUNDRY BENEDICTIONS TO STEADFAST BRETHREN
(Romans 16:24-27; Numbers 6:23-27; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Jude 24)

Ministers in all dispensations have the responsibility of pronouncing blessings on God's people. In closing this epistle, Paul bestowed on the brethren God's benevolent grace, wishing them His fortitude and sustaining power in life and ministry. **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Now to him that is of power to stablish you...”** (Romans 16:24, 25). This was a specific directive to Aaron and his sons: **“Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, 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. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them”** (Numbers 6:23-27).

The blessing we offer will not only help those who receive it, it will also demonstrate love and encouragement, and provide a model of caring to others. In keeping to this, Paul here blessed the brethren, counting on God's keeping power to sustain them in grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Matt.	23	1 Samuel	2
TUE	“	24	“	3-4
WED	“	25	“	5-6
THUR	“	26	“	7-8
FRI	“	27	“	9-10
SAT	“	28	“	11-12
SUN	Mark	1	“	13

595 Lesson

COMMENDATION AND EXHORTATION TO UNITY IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

In the last chapter of his epistle to the Romans, Paul the apostle exhorts the brethren to a practical life of unfeigned love as befitting saints. He accomplished this by sending Phebe, a dedicated and committed succourer to the church in Cenchrea, a sea-port located at Corinth (Romans 16:1). Through her, Paul posits standard scriptural guidelines that should characterize mutual relationship among brethren. He highlights the role of women ministry and vehemently warns against the infiltration of false teachers.

In this epistle to the Corinthian Church, Paul the apostle acknowledges the effective work of grace in their lives and their endowment of charismatic gifts but then addressed the teething challenges of cleavages and divisions which could pose a stumbling block to the fellowship among brethren. He therefore exhorts them on the dire need for profound unity.

The natural man has the tendency to divide humanity along the lines of class, race, tribe, etc. This human trait had crept into the spiritually vibrant Corinthian Church founded by Paul during his missionary endeavors. It is this issue of schism, among other problems, that prompted the apostle to write the epistle.

Paul’s epistle under consideration was addressed to the Church in Corinth. The church in question is not a physical building nor a denomination, but *ekklesia*, a Greek word for the ‘called out’ which refers to the legislative body of citizens of the Greek republic called out from their communities to serve the country. In the New Testament, however, the Church generally refers to the

universal body of Christ which comprises: (i) all genuine born again believers of all ages (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 3:10), (ii) the local church which is composed of Christian believers identified with a constituted body worshipping in one locality (Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:16; Acts 14:23), and (iii) the House churches, which were an assembly of brethren in Christian homes (1 Corinthians 16:19; 14:23; Colossians 4:15).

Question 1: What is the meaning and significance of the Church?

By virtue of the fact that the church is a company of ‘called out’ saints (2 Corinthians 6:17), it therefore behooves contemporary believers to live a separated and holy lives unto God (2 Corinthians 7:1; Isaiah 52:11; Romans 12:11); shine as light to the world (Matthew 5:16); influence their neighborhood positively as the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13); and preach the gospel to save the lost with the mind of Disciplining A Whole Nation (DAWN) (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:19,20.)

THE PURPOSE OF GODLY COMMENDATION (1 Corinthians 1:1-7; Matthew 25:14,15,19-23; Revelation 2:2,3,8,9; 3:7-9; Philippians 2:19,20,25-30; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Proverbs 12:8; Luke 7:9; Mark 12:41-44)

At the time Paul the apostle wrote this epistle, it appeared that there were some at Corinth who now questioned his apostleship (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2) and vilified his person and ministry (2 Corinthians 10:10). It is worthy of note that faithful and dedicated ministers are not immune to contempt. Thus, Paul began by challenging this defective character as he asserts **“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...”** He made it clear that he had not taken this honor unto himself but by divine commission; it was therefore proper for him to magnify his office (Romans 11:13) when false teachers and their followers relished in running him down. This should not be misconstrued as pride on the part of Paul, but faithfulness to maintain his apostolic authority.

The apostle’s salutation of grace and peace is a reminder of the patriarchal benediction in Numbers 6:22-26 which points to the favor of God. It is instructive to observe that

though this Corinthian Church was ridden with a lot of irregularities that needed to be corrected (1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:1-4; 5:1-3; 7:5; 8:1-5; 10:1-10; 11:29-32), Paul began with an appreciation of their steadfastness, wisdom, charismatic gift and continual waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Commendation, therefore, is a seal of approval on the positive performance of a particular saint and also a sense of acknowledgment.

Question 2: What role does commendation play in Christian service?

Commendation in Christian service serves the following purposes. One, it is evidence that the believer's service is being acknowledged either by the Lord or one's spiritual leader (Revelation 2:2; 3:7, 8; Matthew 25:20-23). Two, it is a source of encouragement to the believer, prompting him to do more in the Lord's vineyard. Three, it presupposes the certainty of reward for an accomplished task. Four, when a faithful believer is being commended, it sends a warning signal to the callous and nonchalant brethren to wake up from their slumber. Commendation, however, must be laced with wisdom and sense of maturity so that a novice will not be lifted up with pride and be condemned.

THE PATTERN OF SCRIPTURAL EXHORTATION (1 Corinthians 1:8,9; Acts 2:40; 11:22,23; 13:15; 27:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:3,4,11; Jude 3; Hebrews 3:13)

After thanking God and commending the Corinthian brethren for their unwavering faith, perseverance and charismatic gifts, apostle Paul went further to exhort them on the need to cultivate the spirit of unity (1 Corinthians 1:10). He also identifies the faithfulness of God (1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:13; Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24). Every true exhortation must be based on God's word (Psalm 119:89; Acts 27:22, 25). Believers are commanded to exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:13; 13:22).

Question 3: What is exhortation? Enumerate its functions among believers today.

Exhortation is a life-transforming admonition often used to build up the faith of believers. It could also be used as a soul-winning tool. It aims at strengthening believers with their walk with God. It is one of the gifts of the Spirit

(Romans 12:6-8). A prayerful exhortation has the capacity to accomplish the following: (i) convert sinners (Acts 2:40,41); (ii) motivate brethren to continue in the faith (Acts 11:22-24; 14:22); (iii) reproduce the mind of Christ in believers (Philippians 2:5); (iv) steer up the gift of the Spirit that is latent in saints (2 Timothy 1:6); (v) equip believers to become law-abiding citizens (Titus 2:9); (vi) make believers to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); (vii) warn the unruly in the church and help them to be disciplined; (viii) stir up believers to intercede for the nation and secular leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4); (ix) prepare believers for a blameless life in readiness for the rapture (1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 John 3:1-3); (x) maintain constant fellowship among brethren (Hebrews 10:25; Malachi 3:16), among others.

THE PRIORITY AND POWER OF SCRIPTURAL UNITY (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Ephesians 4:3; Romans 16:17; 1 John 5:6,7; Philippians 1:27; Galatians 3:28; John 17:21,23; Psalm 133:1-3; Matthew 12:25; 18:19; 1 Peter 3:8-11; Ephesians 4:16)

Believers in Christ are bound together in one brotherhood by ties of the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart. Hence, true believers may be separated by time, space, status, nationality or color. But as members of the same household of faith, they are bound together by the same spiritual or moral laws.

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). The unity of the body of Christ is not negotiable. The apostle sought to resolve the divisions found in the Church when he questioned rhetorically, **“Is Christ divided?”** From Paul’s teaching and the uniform testimony of the Bible, we see that the unity of believers in Christ is a divine mandate.

Any Church member, therefore, who tries to divide the church along the lines of ethnicity, race, class or culture, is going contrary to the Scripture. Every leader in the Church must, like Paul, fight for the unity of the Church. Disunity in the Church is always the evidence of corruption, worldliness, backsliding and imperfect

Christian experience.

Question 4: Give reasons for the importance of unity in the body of Christ.

The importance of unity in the Church cannot be over-emphasized. One, it is exemplified in the Trinity or the Godhead. Two, it is perfectly expressed in the two ordinances of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17), and water baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13). Three, it was demonstrated in the early Church as a pattern for all Christians in all ages (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-35). Four, Christ prayed and paid for it (John 17:21-23).

The responsibility of every believer is: **“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (Ephesians 4:3). While we wholeheartedly believe that without a saving relationship with Christ there is no salvation, we are not to think that our relationship with Christ minimizes the importance of Christ's church. Today, there are people who claim to be Christians; yet, they regard membership of a local church as an additional burden.

Question 5: How can members maintain unity in the body of Christ?

To maintain unity in the church, members must experience a purging of the heart from all divisive tendencies of bigotry, tribalism, superiority/inferiority complex, class consciousness etc. Church leaders and members must mark those who cause divisions and avoid them. Again, we must recognize our need of one another. We must be willing to submit to one another, share our burdens and resources together and pray for one another. We must also remove barriers to unity such as fear of loss of prestige, suspicion, fear of exploitation, pride and arrogance, unforgiving spirit and prejudice.

Psalm 133 extols the beauty of unity among brethren. However, it is important to note that this unity is not the same as unification, uniformity or ecumenism and the unequal yoke these may engender. Christian unity is the situation where our differences and diversities are swallowed up by the love of God in the believers' hearts so that each member finds and takes his rightful place in the

body of Christ, knowing that **“there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:28).

Question 6: (a) Differentiate between Christian unity and human organizational unity (b) State the basis of true unity.

Man’s attempt to bring together all those who profess faith in Christ into one human organization with multitudes of people who know nothing about being born again and freedom from sin is not the Bible unity which Christ prayed and died for.

Christian unity can only be realized when we are truly saved and sanctified. True believers cannot find unity with those who hate the Lord (2 Chronicles 19:2). We are to be united in doctrine, fellowship, worship, prayer, and in our common goal in the service of the Lord, especially in preaching the gospel to the world of dying men.

Christ’s vision and mission for the Church is for her to occupy in the business of saving the lost through the power of the gospel and presenting a most formidable force against the kingdom of darkness and the present evil world. If the church will ever achieve the purpose of its existence, unity is very essential.

Question 7: What are the benefits of Christian unity?

Unity is the greatest proof of holiness and sanctification that presents to the world and the Christian a glimpse of heaven on earth. It provides grounds for the function, expression and manifestation of God-given gifts and abilities. It provides security and satisfaction. Other benefits of believers’ unity include corporate power and anointing for victorious living and ministry, effective ministry within the body, growth of the body and blessing of eternal life with Christ in heaven (John 17:24).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Mark	2-3	1 Samuel	14
TUE	“	4	“	15
WED	“	5	“	16
THUR	“	6	“	17
FRI	“	7	“	18-19
SAT	“	8	“	20
SUN	“	9	“	21-22

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

SPECIAL STUDIES

596 Lesson

JUSTIFICATION

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

TEXT: Acts 13:38, 39; Psalm 32:1, 2; Romans 3:20-26

Justification is the act of God’s grace through which one receives forgiveness and remission of sins and is counted righteous before God through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus. Having thus been cleared of every guilt of sin, the regenerated person stands before God as though he had never sinned, not on the basis of any personal merit but in the light of what Christ had accomplished for mankind by His substitutional death on the cross at Calvary (Psalm 32:1,2; Isaiah 1:18; Micah 7:19; Acts 13:38).

Question 1: Explain the Christian doctrine of justification.

God provided for man’s justification because the latter is spiritually helpless and hopeless. It is this utter weakness of man that makes us to fully appreciate the benefits of salvation in Christ. Being sinful and weak, man is incapable of changing his eternal destiny of damnation by paying the requisite price for his redemption. **“The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace”** (Isaiah 59:8). His weakness however does not excuse or exonerate him from the consequences of his sin, which is death.

DIVINE PROVISION FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION
(Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 3:24, 25; 1 John 2:2; Acts 4:12; Isaiah 44:22; Romans 5:9; 1 Peter 2:24)

Question 2: How has God provided for man’s justification?

God is righteous and He wants all men to be righteous. For losing the nature and likeness of God through acts

of sin, man fell from grace to grass. To meet the standard of divine justice, due price needed to be paid. Man lacked both the capacity and purity to afford this. It therefore requires the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God to pay the necessary ransom with His blood for the expiation of man's sins.

Question 3: In what ways do people try to obtain justification?

It is instructive here to note that the nature of sin is not such that man could handle on his own or by the merit of his works. Just as circumcision cannot justify the Jew nor water baptism the Gentile, so can church membership or confirmation not justify anyone by the standards of God's righteousness and holiness. Only faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross can assure a penitent soul of full justification. So, redemption and justification is only by the blood of Christ.

Question 4: Mention four Scripture references on justification.

Though physically present in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve died spiritually and became alienated from God and from the commonwealth of His kingdom, after eating the forbidden fruit. Christ therefore became the sin-Bearer, based on the fact of God's provision and promises of the Scripture (Romans 3:24, 25). And He is **"the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world"** (1 John 2:2; Acts 4:12). By Christ's finished work of grace, solution was provided to the problem of sin to ensure man's reconciliation with God (Isaiah 44:22; Romans 5:9).

Christ suffered, died and rose again for our forgiveness and justification. **"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. [He] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being**

dead to sins, should live unto righteousness..." (Isaiah 53:11; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 3:18; 2:24). It is clear that justification is by grace and through the merit of Christ's sacrifice for humanity.

Question 5: What are the conditions a sinner must meet to be justified?

REQUIREMENT FOR JUSTIFICATION (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 4:2)

Although Christ's atonement on the cross guarantees universal provision of salvation for all mankind, this could only be appropriated on personal basis through faith in Christ Jesus. The sinner who seeks salvation must acknowledge his/her sinfulness, repent, exercise faith in Christ's blood and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. Apostle Paul gives proof of it in his epistle to the Romans. **"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1). And to the Jewish Christians he writes, **"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"** (Hebrews 4:2). Faith is not only the requirement for justification but also the evidence of it. The Scripture says that the just or justified people of God shall live by faith.

PROOFS AND CLARIFICATION OF JUSTIFICATION (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22, 23; James 2:14-26; Romans 4:2-14)

Question 6: What are the proofs a person has been justified?

Having been saved through faith in our Lord Jesus, the redeemed becomes a new creature: old habits and lifestyle of sin are all gone. He does not continue the same way he lived in the past. Before he was justified, the sinner was plagued by the works of the flesh such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, partying, etc. (Galatians 5:19-21). All these sinful traits give way to the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of

people who have been made a new creature. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law”** (Galatians 5:22,23). Therefore, in lifestyle, speech, conduct and disposition, the redeemed is more like Christ, having been quickened by the Spirit of God.

The misleading conception of justification by works as an article of man’s religion is opposed to justification by faith because it denies the grace of God and dishonors the blood of Christ. The reference in the General epistle of James 2:14-26 may be interpreted amiss by a cursory reader of Scriptures, where it asks: **“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”** The underlying point being stressed by James is that ‘works’ as referred to, in this context are complements of justification by faith. Whereas Apostle Paul’s epistle in Romans chapter 4 is doctrinal and providing the basis for Christian practice, that of James is essentially practical.

So, though in one sense a man is justified by faith without works, in another sense, we see **“how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”** Justification is by faith before God but by works before men. Properly understood, none is really mutually exclusive.

BLESSEDNESS OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH CHRIST
(Psalm 32:1,2; Romans 5:1-11; Psalm 85:7-13; Luke 23:44-46; Ephesians 3:8; 1:7; 2:1-18; Hebrews 10:19-25; Romans 8:35-39; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 7:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10; 5:8-10)

<p>Question 7: What are the benefits of justification by faith through Christ?</p>

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

King David describes everyone who is justified as **“blessed”** for obtaining forgiveness which comes through repentance and faith in Christ. He is blessed because sins are washed

and covered by the blood of the Lamb out of God’s sight. He is blessed because He has no account of sin to give before God. God does not impute his sin but righteousness unto him. All guilt and condemnation are gone. Freed from sin, he now lives a righteous life. He is a genuine Christian **“in whose spirit there is no guile”** because he lives a righteous lifestyle. Justification by faith in Christ makes us have **“peace with God”** as against the crisis that characterizes the sinful lifestyle. Condemnation and guilt are also gone as God imputes His **“righteousness”** in the justified believer. Everyone who is justified, both Jews and Gentiles, have **“access”** to God to enjoy His inexhaustible riches of grace. Justification makes us receive grace to live the Christian life on earth. The justified are saved from the **“wrath to come”** (Romans 5:9, 10). Justification brings joy of freedom from guilt, the gift and abiding presence of the Spirit, fellowship with God, special knowledge and revelation, assurance of answers to prayers and leading by the Spirit. Through justification, saints become objects of God’s love, grace, power and purpose (Colossians 1:26; Romans 8:14; Ephesians 2:4; 1:18-20, 11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9). They are also made fit for the inheritance of the saints since their names are written in the Book of Life.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Mark	10	1 Samuel	23-24
TUE	“	11	“	25
WED	“	12	“	26
THUR	“	13	“	27-28
FRI	“	14	“	29-30
SAT	“	15	“	31
SUN	“	16	2 Samuel	1-2

597 Lesson

FREEDOM FROM WITCHCRAFT

MEMORY VERSE: “And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers” (Micah 5:12).

TEXT: Acts 16:16-19; 1 Samuel 28:7-19; Deuteronomy 18:9-14

Alongside all the teachings, instructions and commands of the Lord in the Scripture is the mention of some forbidden heathen practices. For the avoidance of doubt, the Bible lists such practices which the people of God should steer clear of. One of these is witchcraft.

Some people try to deny the reality of these practices, yet the Bible, the Holy Spirit and experience have proved their reality. Indeed, to deny the existence of these heathen practices simply because of the effects of education and modernization is to be the proverbial buffoon who learnt nothing and forgot nothing. His life becomes a vicious circle and a horrible spectacle as he goes through harvests of failures, daily facing defeats and disappointments.

Believers must be scripturally informed concerning the activities of Satan, the arch-enemy of their souls, so that they can wage effective spiritual war against him. This is why this study is very important.

Question 1: Mention some heathen practices forbidden in the word of God.

DIVINE WARNING AGAINST WITCHCRAFT (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6, 27; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8; 22:15)

Witchcraft is the practice of relating with evil spirits with a hideous, fiendish motive. It is also called sorcery. Witches or wizards are human agents of the devil who have entered into covenant with the devil and are so supernaturally endowed to carry out assignments for him, manipulating and wreaking havoc on people's health, business, family or

anything that catches their fancy. God forbids and warns us against this occult practice.

God wants His people to be free from the scourge of witchcraft. Though it has become pretty pervasive these days, the Christian should be enlightened, come to know his position in Christ and the authority God has vested in him, and take a stand against witchcraft in all its ramifications.

Believers ought not to be afflicted by the activities of witches and wizards, neither should they be part of them. Saul, the king of Israel, as well as Manasseh were strictly punished by God for dabbling in witchcraft (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14; 2 Chronicles 33:6). Under the Old Testament dispensation, witches or wizards were to be put to death. Even today, involvement in witchcraft attracts the penalty of spiritual, death and **“they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”** (Galatians 5:21).

DIABOLICAL WAYS OF SNARING MEN INTO WITCHCRAFT (Deuteronomy 18:9; Numbers 25:2, 3; Isaiah 8:19, 20; Jeremiah 10:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21).

“When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, THOU SHALT NOT LEARN to do after the abominations of those nations” (Deuteronomy 18:9).

One of the reasons why witchcraft is so prevalent and pervasive in these last days is the simplicity and ease of initiation into it. The devil, kind of, made the qualification for initial entry into witchcraft so low to the extent that some even wander into it unawares. This is because Satan is so determined to ensnare as many as he can.

Some people dabble in witchcraft out of curiosity, prying into the secret knowledge of the spiritual world. Not being contented with the simple revelations in the Bible, they make a dash into witchcraft and get hooked. This is why the word of God warns believers not to learn the way of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2). This may happen through reading books or watching occult scenes in drama or movies and home videos and by making a conscious effort to practice what is read or seen. This could also take place while carelessly browsing strange websites on the Internet.

Another way people get initiated into witchcraft is through demonized food: eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:20, 21). Some people, while they embark on a desperate search for power to protect themselves or to have success in one area of life or the other, find themselves in the center of use of charms. Some get initiated through careless social intercourse with occult people. Others get hooked into witchcraft through consulting spiritualists in their effort to solve life's problems, while there are also those who deliberately and willingly offer themselves to become Satan's agents so that they can exercise power and dominion over others or to make money (Acts 16:16-19).

Though strange, it is still true that some people are congenitally initiated. When desperate women, in search of the fruit of the womb, go to native or witchdoctors for help, conception got in that process might result in congenitally possessed babies. Sexual immorality with possessed partners, may also lead to initiation. The devil also gets people hooked through music with satanic undertones. In general, repeated backslidings and continuous sinning can open the door for all manner of evil spirits to possess a person (Matthew 12:43-45).

Question 2: Mention some ways by which Satan entraps people into witchcraft.

DESTRUCTIVE WORKS AND EVIDENCES OF INVOLVEMENT IN WITCHCRAFT (Numbers 22:6, 7; 23:8, 19-23; Acts 16:16; 1 Kings 19:1, 2; 18:4; 2 Kings 9:22; Acts 8:9-11)

In a general sense, there are some manifestations common amongst those who are involved with witchcraft. But we need mention clearly that an occasional manifestation of any of these does not automatically imply involvement in witchcraft. In the first place, a New Testament believer is not supposed to be afraid of being harmed or secretly initiated into witchcraft since he is seated together with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

When one notices a strange diabolical power of fulfilment backing up his words and this forms a pattern in his life, it might be helpful to probe the presence of the spirit of

witchcraft in his life. Besides, there are some whose mere imagination (generally evil, sinister ones) are unusually backed up with the power of fulfilment. Even those who can manipulate and remotely control the decisions and actions of other people, irrespective of how far away they are must be operating with the power of witchcraft (Acts 13:7-10). This is quite different from the effect of intercessory prayer for people who are far off.

When one notices he generally takes flight to designated places where he meets with other people in his dreams, it might not be unconnected with witchcraft. An unusual delight in wickedness and a deep rejoicing at evil occurrences gives signals of connection with witchcraft. When one detests prayers, seeks to almost always evade anointed power-backed corporate prayer of authority, and shows a hardness of heart and stubbornness that is beyond the normal, involvement in witchcraft may not be altogether ruled out. So also is the ability to predict secret or future events without a personal relationship with God. This is not mere guessing or occasional accurate prediction but a consistent and regular pastime such as the case of the Philippian damsel in Acts 16:16.

Question 3: Mention some manifestations common among those who are involved in witchcraft.

People involved in witchcraft cannot be idle else they will earn the wrath of their master, the devil. They must be busy for him. The devil is a hard taskmaster and he saddles them with uncanny, wicked assignments. These assignments form the activities of their lives and they are faithful to them until One stronger than the devil comes to set them free. The first and primary activity is to initiate others into witchcraft and prevent people from exercising true faith in Christ (Acts 13:7-10). They also cause mysterious bloodletting accidents through the blood sucking spirits indwelling them. Some of them place curses on people and work at destroying lives. Destruction and disintegration of families hitherto happy and joyful is their stock-in-trade.

Some witches are assigned to seduce the opposite sex as many as they could get. Others oppress their neighbors at night, tie up the wombs of married women, wreck the

businesses of others, cause delay in marriages, hinder progress and at times cause mysterious disappearance of money. Still, it is essential to emphasize that an abiding Christian should not and cannot be the subject of these attacks and operation of the devil. Even if witches and wizards target the believer, their weapons do not prosper (Isaiah 54:17; Jeremiah 1:19). The essence of witchcraft is to have the devil accomplish, through a human agent, what he would have done directly. But the Bible says “...**God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...**” (Romans 16:20). If Satan, the master of witches, wizards, familiar spirits, magicians, necromancers, is bruised under our feet, his human agents have no power over us. This is the joy and confidence of believers.

Question 4: List some wicked effects of witchcraft.

DEFENSIVE WEAPON FOR FREEDOM FROM WITCHCRAFT (Psalm 91:1-4; Numbers 23:21; Zechariah 2:9; 1 John 4:4; 5:18; Acts 19:18, 19)

There is divine protection for true believers in Christ. So long as they live holy lives by the grace of God, Satan cannot touch them. They are the apple of God’s eye, highly treasured and preserved from all harm.

The believer should be free from the fear of witchcraft. And those outside Christ who are held under the power of witchcraft against their wish can also be freed through repentance and faith in Christ. “**When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils**” (Luke 11:21-22) Jesus Christ has spoilt (defeated) Satan and his cohorts. “**And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it**” (Colossians 2:15).

Question 5: What is the basis of the believer’s assurance of liberty and victory over witchcraft?

Christ’s victory on the cross is the basis of freedom and deliverance from Satan and his cohorts (Colossians 1:13).

Therefore, for those who genuinely desire to be free from witchcraft, deliverance is sure. All they need do is genuinely repent of their wickedness, expose their deeds, renounce Satan and all he offers, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work at Calvary and abide in Him till the end.

DAILY BIBLE READING

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

598 Lesson

BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF THE HOME CARING FELLOWSHIP

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exodus 18:25).

TEXT: Exodus 18:13-24

During the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, multitudes attended His meetings and at times stayed with Him for more than one day. The Apostles of the early church too had ministries that had large following. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand thronged the throne of grace, got born again and were added to the church. Shortly after that, five thousand accepted the Lord, and so grew the church in leaps and bounds. This same feat in growth had been seen also in contemporary times.

Question 1: Which is more important to the spiritual well-being of the believer: the home caring fellowship or the general church assembly? Give reasons for your answer.

These large meetings, especially in present times, make the church lose sight of the significance and function of small groups within the large assembly. Significantly, large gatherings diminish with time. This then makes a re-directing of focus from the large groups to small groups within the large assembly necessary. The church cannot afford to continue to neglect the age-long principle of small groups within the large body. The truth is that the strength of the large crowd is in the small group. And the stability of the small group is in the large assembly. One cannot trade off the other. The small groups, when they are worth their salt, account for the dynamism, growth, spirituality, unity and impact of the large congregation. Yet, that small group cannot be stable, established and firmly rooted except the large assembly is still maintained.

BIBLICAL PICTURES OF SMALL GROUP (Exodus 12:3, 4; 16:16-18; Joshua 7:14; Acts 18:24-26).

“Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb” (Exodus 12:3, 4).

Question 2: Supporting your answer with Bible references, how can you prove that the church as presently structured is Biblical?

The occasion of the Passover in Egypt and its execution shows forth the pattern and profitability of small groups. The whole nation was to mark the occasion but it was done or accomplished through **“the house of their fathers”**. Each house (manageable unit) formed small group of people. At that level, the head of that house will convincingly and satisfactorily handle the questions of any member of the group.

In the organization and administration of the children of Israel, in small or great matters, the principle of the functioning of small groups is given prominence. In observing the Passover, in gathering the manna and in the administration of justice, the nation was grouped into small manageable units (Exodus 18:25, 26).

The way Achan was discovered, after he took of the accursed thing, convinces us of the strength and significance of the small group amongst the Israelites. To identify Achan, God started with the **“church in the wilderness”**, Israel. He then dealt with them, first, according to their tribes; second, according to their families; third, according to their households, and fourth according to their persons - “man by man”. These levels of groups ease off the burden of leadership and get rid of the facelessness of a large assembly. This certainly informs why we have our churches or congregation in units of groups ranging from Districts to Zones to Home fellowship locations and finally to individual members. The small group without any doubt, helps in clarifying members of the larger congregation of anything that is not properly understood. There is always that interpersonal relationship that exists between the

leaders and members. Misconceptions are straightened out in the house fellowship.

SMALL GROUPS: AN ENDURING STRATEGY (1 Samuel 10:19; Acts 16:15; 2:46, 47)

Question 3: Why is small group like the Home Caring Fellowship system important in the church set-up such as ours?

The use of small groups as we have seen was particularly central to the organization and administration of the children of Israel in the wilderness. In the times of Moses and Joshua, the groups were used to advantage in resolving problems. After Joshua, a dozen judges reigned, and later Samuel saddled the leadership of the nation. One would imagine that the hundreds of years between Joshua and Samuel would have swept off the concept of the small groups among the people. But it did not. The benefits of a small group endeared itself to the heart of Jewish leaders and it kept on being the primary and core method in the administrative, political and judicial procedure of the nation.

The procedure of choosing a king was yet through the small groups. The process started at the tribal level, then it scaled down to the family level, then to the household level and finally to a single person. Significantly, the much that is said and observed on the natural setting of geographical entity called Israel can be said of the spiritual Israel - the church. Through the small group setting, many families have been blessed and brought under the influence of God. These people in turn, serve as a direct link in reaching out to their neighbors and winning them for Christ.

SMALL GROUPS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (Mark 3:14, 15; Acts 12:12; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19)

Multitudes followed the Lord Jesus Christ. But in this milling mass of faceless seekers, He had to organize them into smaller groups of hundreds, and fifties. This He did to achieve effectiveness in ministry. This was striking in the administration of the followers especially when the five thousands, first, and later the four thousands, had to be fed. While Christ dealt with, reached and helped the multitude generally, He resorted to small groups in mobilizing for effective evangelization. At a broader level, He

had a group of twelve whom He called and commissioned to **“be with him”** and gave **“power to heal sicknesses and to cast out devils”**. This choice of twelve, a small group of ministers were chosen from the multitude that were obedient to the doctrine and had been baptized in water.

Question 4: How did the Home Caring Fellowship concept function in the New Testament?

But still at a closer circuit, Jesus still chose three out of the twelve who were privileged to relate with Him more intimately. These three, Peter, James and John eventually emerged as a small group and their role and significance persisted throughout the New Testament. In the second chapter of Acts, Peter, one of the three rose up and preached. In the third chapter, Peter and John were at the gate called Beautiful where a miracle of healing was wrought on the lame, and there was a stir among the people. In the fourth and fifth chapters, Peter and John were arrested, released by an angelic ministry, re-arrested and arraigned and then released again. James, one of the three was beheaded but in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, another James was appointed. And Paul referred to this small group of three apostles as **“the pillars in the church”** (Galatians 2:9).

MINISTERING THROUGH SMALL GROUPS (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37, 42; Luke 10:1; 2:42-44; Matthew 26:37, 38)

Christ’s method of ministry was bequeathed to the first century Church and later to other ages through the small inner circle of Peter, James and John. They were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration where they saw a glimpse of His glory and had a confirmation of both His Sonship and divinity. The raising of the dead was done in the presence of Peter, James and John in Mark’s gospel. And in the early church, Peter followed the same pattern he found in the Lord when he was faced with raising dead Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42).

Again in the evangelization of the nation, Jesus still mobilized the small groups. Of the multitude that followed Him, out of whom He chose twelve disciples to carry on

with the ministry of evangelizing and healing all that were sick (Luke 9:1).

PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS (Acts 6:1-3; 2:42, 44-46)

Question 5: What is the purpose of the house fellowship system, and what can we do to have it revived?

With the small groups, recognition or discovery of the needs of individuals in the church is easier and faster. A strong emphasis on the doctrines, dynamic prayer ministry within the church, and powerful preaching, cannot eclipse the fact that there are felt needs among the membership. Problems are nipped in the bud, reasons for murmurings and complaints are discovered at the earliest times, and suffering saints are singled out in the small groups for assistance, the same way neglected widows in the early church were attended to. In the church today, there are other small groups too that need help. Such groups are the young married couples, young parents, up-coming businessmen, ageing spinsters and bachelors, the sick brethren, the lonely, the widows and the bereaved.

Again, the small group makes us see methods whereby needs can be identified. After needs have been identified, it logically follows that a plan to address the needs be put in place. This implies correlating the total needs into Programs with an eye on overcoming the hindrances in the provision of the needs and concretely supplying or meeting those needs.

Closely following the planning is the organization. This is bringing up of concrete, specific methods that would help in solving the problems at hand. It is the mobilization of all the members of the small unit in order to solve the problems of suffering members. This makes the small groups very vital in the church just as they were in Israel. The functions of small groups make them indispensable in the present day church.

What then are the functions? First, small groups are problem-solving oriented. The leader in the group is there to solve problems, help the people out, and remove hindrances before the brethren. The leader is, therefore, an answer to the problems of people. Second, small groups

are meant to know the thinking of the people, their felt needs and where they ache. Third, small groups gather for profitable Program planning. Every member then should have a say and dictatorial spirit must be kept out of the group. Fourth, members of small group desire to see a change in their lives, situations and circumstances as a result of the prayer, fellowship or membership in the small group. This is perhaps the singular factor that would make them to keep coming. Fifth, small groups provide stability. Membership of these small groups gives the people a sense of belonging. This offers emotional stability in a large group where the superintending leader does not know everyone. The members are satisfied when they observe the group leader's interest in them and their welfare. They feel at home, discover meaning in life and enjoy the personal recognition accorded them.

PRINCIPLES IN A SMALL GROUP (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:11, 12)

Question 6: Explain with practical examples how we can apply the principles of small group to make our Home Fellowship grow and be what it ought to be.

In every small group, the leader must communicate a sense of belonging. All the members must be heard and supported. The group must shun a task-centered approach. Fellowship, sharing and caring must have high priority in the group and this must be pursued vigorously. In doing this, the leader must learn to listen passionately to the people and in the process seek to make sense out of their narration. He must watch for the existence of the real situation or problems at hand. Third, there must be a consciousness of the goals of the group. This is what keeps an athlete on the track. If there were no goal, he would drop out. This is what keeps a student focused in school, and a wife in the home. The group's goal is always a rallying point. The leader must be clear in communicating these goals to the members of the group. It might be the goal of evangelism growth, fellowship and assistance. Fourth, there must be the dual role for every small group. Every activity must be double-pronged: aiding and enhancing the growth and fulfilment of every member, and the well-being of the entire group. There must be continuous

assessment and constant evaluation of the performance of the group.

Fifth, there must be deliberate effort to assist members of the group to meet their personal needs. These are not the petty, selfish, mundane needs. Rather, they are the deep-seated desires or eagerness for fulfilment in ministry, usefulness in the house of God, and walk with God or experiences with the Lord. The small group, therefore, should provide opportunities for members to do those things they cannot do or accomplish on their own. The small group should give the members the liberty, power, desire and drive to do what they cannot do on their own.

Sixth, every person in the group brings many impressions from other groups. This blending of impressions and ideas imposes a greater demand or challenge on the leader to lead each person towards the greatest height their capability can attain while the ideals of the larger group is unadulterated.

Finally, without any doubt, small groups make for efficiency and maximized profitability both for the individual members and the group at large.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	8	2 Samuel	14
TUE	“	9	“	15
WED	“	10	“	16-17
THUR	“	11	“	18
FRI	“	12	“	19
SAT	“	13	“	20-21
SUN	“	14	“	22

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.

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Rockland County	10:30 AM

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

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

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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FRIDAY (REVIVAL SERVICE) FAITH CLINIC

All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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Bronx – First Friday of Every Month	7:00 PM
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