

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 51

"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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BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

651 Lesson

THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH OF SAMSON

TEXT: Judges 13:1-25

MEMORY VERSE: “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and beareth not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3).

The previous chapters of the book of Judges marked a period of recurrent backslidings, servitude and deliverances in the history of the children of Israel. After the death of Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pirathonite, the Scripture records that “...**the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years**” (Judges 13:1). This period was the longest servitude of the recorded events in the book of Judges (Judges 3:8,14; 4:1-3; 6:1; 10:6-8). Each period of servitude reflects cycles of sin, judgment, repentance and deliverance. The penalty for disobedience to the commandments of the Lord had been emphasized by Moses, the servant of God after the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 28:15-28).

Question 1: What lessons can sinners and backsliders learn from the servitude of the children of Israel?

All men on earth are created by God and the uniform testimony of the scriptures is that all have sinned and come short of His glory (Romans 3:23). Just like the children of Israel were sold into bondage to the Philistines because of the transgression of God’s commandments, sinners are held captive by the devil through sin (1 John 3:8).

In the chapter under consideration, an angel of God was sent to the household of Manoah to announce the miraculous conception and birth of Samson, whose

primary mission “...**was to begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines**” (Judges 13:5). Today, the Lord has made provision for the salvation and deliverance of sinners and backsliders who are under the yoke of Satan if only they acknowledge their sins, repent and believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ (Romans 10:13).

THE PROPHECY OF SAMSON’S BIRTH AND MINISTRY (Judges 13:1-7; 1 Samuel 1:1-18; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 1:5-17; Genesis 18:9-15; 25:20-25)

Israel’s propensity for backsliding at the time of the Judges reared its ugly head again. They “**did evil again in the sight of the LORD**” and He delivered them into the hand of their Philistine neighbors to oppress them. It was during this forty-year servitude that the angel of the Lord appeared to the family of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan from Zorah on the western slope of the mountains of Judah to foretell the birth of the next deliverer.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3).

For Manoah’s wife, “**a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit**” (Isaiah 54:6) on account of her barrenness, this was cause for excitement and joy. And, for the oppressed people of Israel, the prophecy of a coming deliverer provided hope and confirmation that the Lord had not forgotten His people. Though He was displeased with the cause of their oppression and captivity, His soul was grieved because of their affliction.

The challenge of childlessness is not strange to God’s people, either in Bible days or in contemporary times. But the Lord is mindful of such “**that didst not bear**” and “**didst not travail with child**”. At the appointed time, He visits and takes away the reproaches of such that have been afflicted. He told aged Abraham when all hope was lost, “... **I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life: and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son...**” (Genesis 18:10); afterwards, Isaac was born. The Lord hearkened to the voice of Isaac when he entreated Him for his wife who was barren, and they

had twin boys. The same happened to Hannah and Elizabeth, and others. Those in expectation of divine visitation today should not lose hope. **“For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off”** (Proverbs 23:18).

It is of note that children delivered after a period of waiting on the Lord become notable people. The Lord always gives special gifts to those who wait on Him. Consider Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist. They excelled, did exploits for the Lord and fulfilled the purposes for which they were born. Believers who are confronted with the challenge of childlessness are expected to wait on the Lord and not compromise their faith until the Lord visits them with the needed miracle. In the words of Matthew Henry, a Bible commentator, “Mercies long waited for often prove signal mercies, and it is made to appear that they were worth waiting for, and by them others may be encouraged to continue their hope in God’s mercy”.

Question 2: What lessons can expectant couples learn from the family of Manoah?

The announcement of Samson’s birth was immediately followed with the details of his orientation, lifestyle and ministry. The woman was to abstain from all liquor and all such things that would invalidate the vow to which the child would be subjected. She was also lectured on what to avoid in the course of the pregnancy in order not to jeopardize the life and ministry of the coming deliverer. She was warned to **“...drink neither wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing”** (Judges 13:4). Here, the Scripture unveils the fact that maternal nutrition and lifestyle have influence on the physical and mental health of their babies. If a child would fulfill his/her God-given potential, the mother must take extra measures during pregnancy. Medical scientists have also proven that maternal consumption of alcohol leads to a high prevalence of malformation of the bodily organs during pregnancy. Pregnant women are advised to avoid medications, drugs, and food supplements that are not prescribed by certified health professionals.

The promised child was to be a Nazarite from birth so the mother was subjected to the law of Nazarites since the unborn baby was to receive nourishment from her. The law of Nazarites was that of exemplary consecration in the land of Israel. Such consecration was required for extraordinary ministry, total surrender and commitment to the service of the Lord. Those who gave themselves up for such vow were expected to be set apart for divine service (Numbers 6:1-13).

Today, every child of God is expected to be given to divine service because they have been chosen and redeemed. **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). God demands entire consecration of our spirit, soul and body. Entire consecration and holiness are required from all saints who desire to be used by the Lord for extraordinary exploits. All saved children of God are called unto holiness. This second work of grace – sanctification – has two parts. The part of the believer is to desire it, consecrate to the Lord who has shed His blood for our sanctification, and He will do it (Romans 12:1,2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

THE PRAYER AND SACRIFICE OF MANOAH (Judges 13:8-21; 6:37-40; Genesis 18:1-8; Hebrews 13:2)

“Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born” (Judges 13:8).

After the visitation of the angel to Manoah’s wife, she told her husband all that transpired between them. It is instructive that Manoah prayed after the report of his wife. It was not enough to have heard the revelation of the coming miracle; he prayed over it. He had a pure and sincere motive and the Lord answered him and the angel appeared again unto the family. We note that it is important that he confirmed the personality behind the revelation. The scripture warns us to beware of **“false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ... for Satan**

himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:13,14). It admonishes us to “...**believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1).

Believers should subject all dreams, visions, revelations and instructions to the revealed word of God to avoid the prevalent spiritual deceptions of these last days. Second, it was in the absence of Adam that the serpent beguiled Eve and deceived her into eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1-6). Had Eve’s husband been around, perhaps, she would have escaped the deception of the serpent (1 Timothy 2:14). Third, Manoah needed a firsthand encounter to boost his faith in the prophecy. It is important that every believer have a personal encounter with the Saviour in order to strengthen the basis of their faith. It is not enough that the wife changed denomination or religion to join the husband in his church; she must have a personal experience of salvation in order to overcome sin and get to heaven. Fourth, Manoah wanted guidance so as to know “**what we shall do unto the child that shall be born”**.

Question 3: What can you learn from the attitude of Manoah about child training?

When he appeared again, he repeated the same message as he did aforetime: how the mother should avoid strong liquor or any unclean thing. He also emphasized that the child would be a Nazarite from birth. Manoah also prepared to entertain the angel according to the admonition of the Scriptures (Genesis 18:1-8) and prevailing custom. It was a pronounced practice among Oriental people not to allow strangers pass by without being entertained. Believers too should be in the habit of being hospitable at all times (Hebrews 13:2).

To prove however that the Messenger was divine, he commanded that the gift should be offered to the Lord. “**So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on”** (Judges 13:19).

PANIC DUE TO SCRIPTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING

(Judges 13:22-25; 6:22,23; Numbers 17:12,13; Matthew 8:25; Luke 8:24; Matthew 10:30,31; Isaiah 43:1-5; 35:4)

Manoah expressed fear that they would surely die because it was a common and an erroneous belief among the ancient Jews that anyone who sees God or his angels must die. But the wife countered him with scriptural reasoning: **“If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these”** (Judges 13:23). Oh child of God! Be assured that He who gave His only begotten Son to redeem thee from eternal perdition would surely take care of thee. He will not allow the enemy to destroy thee; much less allow thee to perish as long as you abide in the love of His Son. Manoah’s wife once again displayed the attribute of a godly companion. Her manners are solid examples of submission, humility and maturity for today’s Christian women.

Gideon also expressed similar fear but was reassured by the LORD **“...Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shall not die”** (Judges 6:22,23). Sometimes we entertain fear where there was none. Believers in Christ need not fear so long as they abide in the Lord. He has assured us that He would always stand by us in times of danger, persecution or opposition (Isaiah 41:10-14; 43:1-3). Fear has rightly been described as **False Experiences Appearing Real**. However, every sinner or backslider have cause to be afraid (Psalm 53:5; Proverbs 28:1).

Question 4: *What challenges does the life of Manoah’s wife pose to believing wives today?*

At the appointed time, God visited the family of Manoah and Samson was born. **“And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him”** (Judges 13:24). The Scripture was silent on the interval between the initial visitation and the birth of Samson. In the eyes of the Lord, it is immaterial so long as the promise is fulfilled. Believers need to trust in the Lord. Whatever He has promised, He is able also to perform. **“...Hath he said, and shall**

he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Matt	19	Psalm	81
TUE	"	20	"	82
WED	"	21	"	83
THUR	"	22	"	84
FRI	"	23	"	85
SAT	"	24	"	86
SUN	"	25	"	87

652 Lesson

SAMSON'S INORDINATE AFFECTION

MEMORY VERSE: "Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well" (Judges 14:3).

TEXT: Judges 14:1-20

The preceding chapter introduced the unusual story of Samson, the last of the deliverers recorded in the book of Judges. The events recorded in that chapter distinguished Samson from his predecessors whose history all commenced with their call to ministry.

The birth of Samson, like that of our Lord Jesus and John the Baptist, was announced by an angel of God. He was a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. The implication of his Nazarite status was that he must remain holy and separated unto God and touch no unclean thing, even the carcass of a dead person. He was also required neither to take a heathen as wife nor drink any strong drink all the days of his life.

Samson was raised by God for a special purpose of emancipating the children of Israel from a 40-year long oppression by the Philistines. At the commencement of his ministry, the Spirit of God descended upon him mightily to enable him accomplish his commission. Looking at his unique birth and call, one could only anticipate an exemplary life and uncommon success in ministry. But this was not so for Samson as this study shows that he had a God-ordained ministry but marred it with a character defect. Through inordinate affection he went into compromise with the heathen. In this regard, the study also considers the consequences of compromise and inordinate affection and how believers can overcome it.

SAMSON'S MISSTEPS IN MARRIAGE (Judges 14:1- 4; Exodus 34:15,16; 1 King 11:1-4; Deuteronomy 7:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

Question 1: Why did God warn the children of Israel against marrying a heathen?

Disregard for godly parental counsel and infatuation made Samson to disregard God's strict warning that none of the children of Israel should enter marriage relationship with the Canaanites. His choice of a marriage partner came at a critical time of Israel's oppression by the Philistines, a time he would commence his ministry of delivering them from servitude.

Though there were many spinsters among the Israelites, **"Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said... now therefore get her for me to wife"** (Judges 14:1,2). Realising that he went to look for a wife among the enemies of God, his parents sought to guide him by asking a thought-provoking question that is still relevant for every Christian bachelor/spinster today. **"Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?"** This question was based on their knowledge of the divine instruction prohibiting marriage of any Israelite to the seven Canaanite nations occupying the Promised Land (Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:3,4). The outcome would be that **"they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods."** Though the Philistines were not among these seven nations, the reason for this prohibition was also applicable in this regard. It could be recalled that Solomon's harem of wives and concubines turned his heart from following after God.

There are two kingdoms to which all the peoples of the world belong: the kingdom of God and that of Satan. For anyone controlled by God and His laws to seek to enter a lifelong marriage relationship with another who is controlled by Satan is suicidal. This was where Samson

erred. The unchanging warning of the Scripture for all Christians is, **“Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”** (2 Corinthians 6:14). But many Christians today, like Samson, go into unholy marriage because of covetousness. For others, desperation to get jobs or become rich by all means make them go into unequal yoke with unbelievers in business or even take up appointments in alcohol or tobacco manufacturing companies. Due to delay in childbirth, some Christians go to false prophets, herbalists, soothsayers and other questionable places of worship to seek solution. For filthy lucre, some so-called Christians collaborate with unbelievers to loot government treasuries. These are worldly practices that the Scripture forbids (1 John 2:15-17). Our love for God, His cause and glory will make us exercise self-control and live within the boundaries set by Scripture.

Question 2: What lessons can believers learn from Samson’s moral weakness?

For crossing scriptural boundary to marry from the enemy camp, Samson had an obvious moral weakness. However, he was still mindful of the divine purpose for his life, seeking opportunities to remove the yoke of oppression by the Philistines from Israel. In Samson, we find the contradiction of character and charisma, morality and ministry. It is clear that a holy calling with an unholy marriage relationship do not match.

THE SUPER POWER OF A DELIVERER (Judges 14:5-9,19,20; 1 Peter 5:8; Acts 1:8; 2:39)

In pursuit of fulfilling his marital obligations, Samson went on a visit to his in-laws to-be with his parents. While in transit, by the vineyards of Timnath, a young lion threatened to kill him. **“And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done”** (Judges 14:6). Apart from the angelic visitation that brought to light the life and ministry of Samson, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him to confirm and

empower him for extraordinary exploits. If anything, the killing of the lion assured him that he could overcome the most lion-like Philistine. There's little present-day believers can do without the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The attack from the lion shows that people who have great soul-saving ministries are always the target of the devil who tries to assault them before and during their service for God. And since the devil is compared to a roaring lion seeking who to devour, believers will do themselves a world of good to not only get saved and sanctified but also get baptized with the Pentecostal power to continually overcome him. With the slaughter of a lion with bare hands, he went with his parents for an interactive session with his in-laws.

After the first visit, Samson also brought the bride to know his family (verses 8,9). It was at this time that Samson checked the carcass of the slain lion and **"behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion"**. From it, he harvested honey: he ate and also shared with his parents.

At another time when Samson needed to fulfil the obligation of a riddle he put forth at his nuptials, **"the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle..."** The Spirit baptism which Christ promised is for **"you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call"** (Acts 2:39; 1:8).

CONSEQUENCES OF COMPROMISE AND INORDINATE AFFECTION (Judges 14:18; Genesis 12:10-13; 34:1-5; 1 King 11:1-4; 2 Chronicles 18:1,2,31; 2 Timothy 4:10)

In the run up to the exploit of killing the Philistines, an assignment he was ordained to accomplish, Samson went with his father for the marriage ceremony (verse 10). Disaster loomed large toward the end of the seven-day feast as the Philistines could not interpret the riddle he had put forth. They threatened death if the bride would not entice Samson to divulge the meaning to them. The enticement was anchored on the hook of love Samson professes for her. It was a combination of fair

speech and tears that broke Samson's will and attitude of non-disclosure of the sensitive information. **“And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.”** The act of enticing people is old but still being used against unsuspecting targets today. So, believers must be watchful.

From the foregoing, Samson compromised his Nazarite vow by touching a lion's carcass. He was vexed and deceived by the strange wife. His alliance with the Philistine in marriage also plunged him into the heathen practice of riddle (Judges 14:12-18). Samson also lost his legally married wife to his best man. The manner in which he lost the wife also showed that anger was a problem in his life in addition to lust and a leaking mouth. Having revealed the meaning of the riddle composed from his first Spirit-empowered exploit – **“What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?”** – Samson angrily departed without taking his wife. And she was given to his best man.

Unrighteous relationships always live a sour taste in the mouth. Abraham's descent into Egypt because of famine made him tell a lie and almost lost his wife but for God's swift intervention (Genesis 12:10-13). Dinah, the daughter of Jacob went out to see the daughters of the land and she was eventually defiled (Genesis 34:1-5). King Jehoshaphat went into an unholy alliance with backslidden King Ahab for which he nearly lost his life (2 Chronicles 18:1,2,31). Despite the acclaimed wisdom of Solomon, his inordinate lust of the flesh drew his heart after strange women (1 Kings 11:1-4). Unchecked appetite for the things of the world tilted Demas into backsliding and eventually consumed his faith (2 Timothy 4:10).

Question 3: Mention some Bible characters that went outside God's will and the consequences of their action.

The consequences of teaming up with unbelievers in friendship, fellowship, business or marriage include shame, loss of investment, spiritual and physical death (Proverbs 14:12).

CURE FOR INORDINATE AFFECTION (Judges 14:3; Deuteronomy 30:8; Job 22:23; Jeremiah 3:12,22; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7; 5:22; Genesis 39:11,12; Matthew 5:28-30; Daniel 1:8; 2 Corinthians 6:17,18; Romans 12:1,2; Colossians 3:1-5,16; Psalms 119:9,11; Galatians 5:16; Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 27:4; Proverbs 11:14; Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 9:27)

Question 4: How can a believer overcome inordinate affection in his or her life?

Salvation and restoration are fundamental experiences to dealing with lust and other sins in life and ministry. Since lust is inbred, sanctification experience brings freedom from it. This experience of holiness must be maintained as it can be lost. Maintaining a pure heart requires discipline in refraining from all appearances of evil (pornography in pictures, film, Internet, magazine, books, etc.) and closeness to the opposite sex. Application of Joseph's method of taking to one's heels from defilers is indispensable for all heaven-bound saints. Believers should be decisive in separating from persons/objects of temptation (Matthew 5:28-30) and consecrate entirely to the Lord. They should set their affections on spiritual, heavenly things while trusting God for preservation and deliverance from seducers. Daily crucifixion of self and the flesh and giving priority to God and His word in everything will shield them from sin (Psalms 119:9,11). Every believer needs to live and walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfil the desires of the flesh. Constant fellowship with other saints will provide the opportunity of admonition, correction, edification and rebuke where necessary to keep them in the fear of God. Counsel from godly parents and ministers should not be ignored. Christians should pray for grace to obey all revealed will of God and be content with what they have. They must be watchful and wise because doing exploits for the Lord is one thing and preparing to get to heaven is another. But it is possible by grace and mercy to serve God in righteousness and holiness and to enter heaven, the place He has prepared for those who love and serve Him (John 14:1-3).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Matt.	26	Psalm	88
TUE	“	27	“	89
WED	“	28	“	90
THUR	Mark	1	“	91
FRI	“	2	“	92
SAT	“	3	“	93
SUN	“	4	“	94

653 Lesson

SAMSON'S VENGEANCE ON THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: “And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure” (Judges 15:3).

TEXT: Judges 15:1-20

In the previous chapter, we saw Samson carry out his mission without regard to the commandments of the God of Israel on separation from the heathen nations. God had expressly commanded: **“Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son”** (Deuteronomy 7:3). The law of Nazarites (to which he was dedicated from birth) was that of exemplary consecration to the God of Israel but we see Samson going into unequal yoke in marriage to a daughter of the Philistines.

Today’s text shows the return of Samson to his wife with a kid, or perhaps a fawn, as a present with the intention of making reconciliation. But much to his chagrin, his wife had been given to his friend. Disgruntled by this betrayal, he vowed to **“do them a displeasure”** (verse 3).

Question 1: What are the pitfalls in the life of Samson that believers should avoid?

DISTRESS OF AND REVENGE ON THE PHILISTINES
(Judges 15:1-13; Romans 12:18-21; Matthew 5:13-16, 38-48; 1 Corinthians 6:1-7)

“But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in” (Judges 15:1). Samson’s visit to his wife after a while was perhaps to reconcile with her. His effort at making peace was however futile as his father-in-law denied him access and announced that he had given her out

to his companion. This action infuriated Samson and he set the corn field of the Philistines ablaze. When they reacted by killing his wife and father-in-law, he ruthlessly slaughtered many of them. Samson's action was taken by the Philistines as an open declaration of war. Consequently, the army of the Philistines went up and camped in Judah. The sight of the Philistines triggered fear in the hearts of the people of Judah. **“Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them”** (Judges 15:11). The comment of the men of Judah implied their lack of appreciation of the ministry of Samson.

Question 2: How should believers and ministers relate to unbelievers and fellow brethren?

Although Samson was consecrated as a Nazarite since birth, his lifestyle was contrary to the demands of a Nazarene. He was raised up to deliver the people of Israel, yet his fellow Israelites rebuked him for invoking the wrath of the Philistines. The remarks of the men of Judah are similar to that of the Hebrew who said to Moses **“...who made thee a prince and a judge over us...”** (Exodus 2:14). Contemporary believers should radiate the life of Christ in obedience to the Scripture.

“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). We must desist from any deed or attitude that could expose other people to danger. If we truly claim to be God's children, we should be careful to maintain good works as our lifestyles could affect other people.

Question 3: What are scriptural injunctions against retaliation? Quote Scripture verses to support your answers.

Believers are not to seek revenge for ills done to them by fellow believers or unbelievers; neither are they to engage in legal battle against fellow pilgrims. Rather, they should:

- (i) Yield themselves to God who declares: “...vengeance is mine; I will repay...” (Romans 12:19);
- (ii) Love their enemies and bless those that curse them (Matthew 5:44);
- (iii) take wrong and allow themselves to be defrauded to protect their salvation experience (1 Corinthians 6:7); and
- (iv) take the steps prescribed by the Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile with such a brother or a sister (Matthew 18:15-17).

However, Samson was raised to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage to the Philistines. In this context, his actions were deemed to be contrived in achieving this goal and purpose of his birth. He was always looking for opportunities to avenge his people’s suffering.

That Samson allowed the people of Judah to bind and hand him over to the Philistines is instructive. **“And they spoke unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands”** (Judges 15:13,14). To save the people of Judah from the wrath of the Philistines,

Samson surrendered himself to the people of Judah to bind him. This could not have been done successfully without Samson’s consent but he yielded himself to be bound and delivered to the enemies. In the same way, our Lord Jesus Christ surrendered Himself by the will of God to be arrested, bound and crucified on behalf of mankind (John 3:16). As believers, we should be willing to render selfless service to God and humanity by sacrificing our personal comfort, time, skills, talents and wealth for the salvation of the souls of sinners and backsliders.

DEFEAT AND ROUT OF ISRAEL'S FOES (Judges 15:14-17; Exodus 14:23-28; 1 Samuel 17:45-50; 2 Chronicles 20:20-23; Romans 16:20; Acts 4:31)

“And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith” (Judges 15:14,15). The Philistines were sworn enemies of Israel. They had oppressed them for forty years before Samson was born. No wonder, the angel of God that visited Samson’s parents stated that: **“...he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”** (Judges 13:5). It is not surprising therefore, that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him to help him defeat the Philistines. The empowerment of Samson is not an endorsement of his wayward lifestyle. God had in the past spoken through a donkey to fulfill His purpose (Numbers 22:28-33). Only salvation, holiness and obedience to God’s word can guarantee a believer a place in heaven, not wonderful works in the name of the Lord (Matthew 7:21-23).

God is always in the business of fighting for His people. And each time He is on the battlefield with His servants, only insignificant weapons are required, and sometimes nothing is needed. In the case of Samson, it was the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:15) that he used to slay a thousand men and brought to fulfillment the promise: **“One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you”** (Joshua 23:10). When God was to defeat Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea, only the stretching of the rod of Moses was required (Exodus 14:16,26). To bring down the war veteran, Goliath of Gath, only a sling and a stone in the hand of David were enough (1 Samuel 17:50). And only a song on the lips of king Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah set Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir against one another until they were completely routed (2 Chronicles 20:21-23).

Question 4: How can sinners and backsliders overcome sin?

Under the new dispensation, sin is the greatest enemy of man. And all who desire supernatural assistance in their battle against sin and other works of the devil must exercise faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Sinners and backsliders must acknowledge and confess their sins (Romans 3:23; Psalm 51:5,3), repent and forsake them (Acts 3:19), accept Christ as personal Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9,10), and continue to follow Jesus (John 8:31,32). Children of God need not worry, but put their trust in the Lord. **“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...”** (Romans 16:20) because **“...it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you”** (2 Thessalonians 1:6). Threats from opposing forces should not deter us from doing the will of God. Persecutions and troubles could not stop the early apostles from preaching the word of God. They were basking in their new found faith, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and working wonders in the name of Jesus when the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees apprehended and threatened them not to obey the Lord. But the Holy Ghost came, filled and gave them boldness to continue the work of the Lord in spite of their foes (Acts 4:1-3,21-24,31).

It is instructive that the Holy Spirit came upon the Old Testament saints only each time there was a divine task to accomplish (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 20:14). But under the new dispensation, there is Holy Ghost baptism whereby the sanctified believer is endued with power and is continually filled to live and serve the Lord.

The importance of the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the life of a believer cannot be overstressed. Among other things, the Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to preach the gospel (Acts 1:8); emboldens him before the enemies of the gospel (Act 4:31); comforts him in trying times (John 14:18); teaches and reminds him of God's words (John 14:26); guides him into all truth (John 16:13), and helps him in prayer (Romans 8:26).

To be baptized in the Holy Ghost, the believer must possess a pure heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:25), strongly thirst and desire the experience (Isaiah 44:3; Proverbs 10:24; Mark 11:24), fervently pray and trust God for it (Luke 11:9-13), and open his mouth in faith to be filled (Psalm 81:10). The initial evidence of the Holy Ghost baptism is speaking in an unknown tongue (Acts 2:1-4).

DESPERATE REQUEST OF THIRSTY SAMSON:
(Judges 15:18-20; Matthew 7:7; Philippians 4:6,19; 1 Peter 5:7; Jeremiah 33:3)

“And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?”
(Judges 15:18).

Shortly after he had recorded a great victory through the help of the Spirit of God, Samson was thirsty and needed water desperately. All he did was to call upon God. He cares for His own people and will never forsake them. Like Samson, we must **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”** (Philippians 4:6). In his prayer, Samson attributed the victory over the Philistines to God before making request for the present need. Our prayer life shows the level of our dependence on God. Christians and ministers of the gospel must be grateful to God for all He has done and is doing for them and through them. They must be humble enough to return all the glory to Him for what they are and are able to accomplish.

Question 5: What is the place of prayer in the life of a believer?

Rather than grumble and complain, needy brethren ought to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer. The Lord said: **“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”** (Jeremiah 33:3). Prayer opens the gate of heaven, moves the hand of God and supplies every need. Individuals, families and church assemblies should pray because prayer is powerful enough to tear down

the strongholds of Satan against our peace, progress and prosperity. Believers in need of basic necessities of life – food, shelter and clothing – should take advantage of the privilege that prayer offers and the God that feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies will meet their needs (Matthew 6:26-28). Those in need of healing and health can come to Jesus, the Great physician, and He will arise to rescue them (Exodus 15:26; 1 Peter 2:24). Those who are under security threats can call upon God. The Scripture says: **“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked”** (Psalm 91:7,8).

In response to the prayer of Samson, **“God clave an hallow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: Wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day”** (Judges 15:19). Our Lord is the God of possibilities and He knows how to meet the needs of His trusting servants.

Samson drank the water which was exclusively meant for him. Although he was refreshed, the water that Jesus gives satisfies the soul and gives everlasting life. This water is for whosoever is willing to drink. Sinners can come to Christ, drink of this water and be saved. Backsliders can drink and be restored and believers can drink of this water and be strengthened. **“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:13,14).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Mark	5	Psalm	95
TUE	“	6	“	96
WED	“	7	“	97
THUR	“	8	“	98
FRI	“	9	“	99
SAT	“	10	“	100
SUN	“	11	“	101

654 Lesson SAMSON'S LUST AND FALL

MEMORY VERSE "And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah" (Judges 16:4).

TEXT: Judges 16:1-21

Samson had been a thorn in the flesh of the Philistines. He had been greatly used of the Spirit of God to inflict judgment on the enemies of God's people. Using mere three hundred foxes, he had set fire to consume the standing corn of the Philistines. This, and other exploits, perhaps, triggered the Philistines into alternative strategies to capture and overcome him. They must have been convinced that no amount of physical and military combat could defeat him. The secret of his power was unknown to them. However, they soon discovered his sinful indulgence and unbridled desire for sensual pleasure. With this, they decided to set a trap for him using a harlot.

Samson seems to be beset with lust for women. His body language and utterances suggest that he could not put his fleshly desires under the control of the Spirit. Lust can be described as an inordinate desire for something, especially sexual immorality which gratifies the flesh. Its end result is always ruinous. Believers are warned in several Scripture passages to keep away from anything that leads to lust. **"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"** (2 Timothy 2:22). **"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"** (1 Peter 2:11). **"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"** (1 John 2:15,16). We are

enjoined to keep our **“heart with all diligence”** to avoid harbouring habits that would eventually ruin our faith (Proverbs 4:23). Our passions, desires, ambitions and aspirations should be kept under control by the Spirit. **“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”** (Romans 13:14).

Question 1: Why did the Philistines use women as traps to catch Samson?

THE BANE OF SAMSON’S LIFE (Judges 16:1-4; 14:1-3; Matthew 5:28; Proverbs 6:25-29; Galatians 5:19-21; Job 32:9; James 4:4)

“Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in into her. And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah (Judges 16:1,4).

The spectacular events surrounding the birth of Samson would have been sufficient to propel him into an unbroken relationship with God. His divine appointment as a judge over Israel by God notwithstanding, Samson was careless in his relationship with the opposite sex. He should have known that he was a gift to the nation of Israel; he was specially sent to be a deliverer and to execute the purpose of God for His people. Samson should have known that he was not an ordinary person whose life mattered but little. As a man of special pedigree, conception, birth and prophecy, and on a special mission for God, Samson should have been cautious, careful, discreet, holy and righteous. But he threw caution to the winds and allowed the demands of his flesh to have the mastery of him. From the events of his life, women became the ruin of his life.

Simply put, Samson exhibited inordinate affection for women. Back in Judges chapter 14, it would seem that as soon as he was of age, he ignored divine injunction that the children of Israel should not marry from the heathen nations (Deuteronomy 7:3). Even the objection and godly counsels of his parents were not enough to checkmate his infatuation.

It is against the will and word of God for believers in Christ to marry unbelievers. The negative implications of this action are legion. **“For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly”** (Deuteronomy 7:4; 1 Kings 11:2). Secondly, it results in unequal yoke in relationship and godly service. **“For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?”** (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Thirdly, it is an invitation to sin and all manner of compromise. Solomon discountenanced these warnings and ruined his relationship with the Lord and also canceled an earlier promise that God made to him (1 Kings 11:2,31-35).

A man of unearned and unmerited favour before God, Samson was driven by lust until he jettisoned the commandment of God, crossing the forbidden territory. He was indulgent, permissive, relying on his strength instead of on the Lord and listening to the counsel of his parents or seeking God’s face for guidance. His forgetfulness of the conditions for his call and assignment as a judge in Israel and his affection for illicit lust ran through his life and ministry. These, no doubt, must have severed him from fellowship with God.

Question 2: Why did Samson drift into lust?
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The lustful life of Samson has some lessons for contemporary believers. One, Samson displayed unusual strength in setting on fire the Philistines’ standing corn, but was consumed by the fire of his own lust (Judges 15:3). Two, lust brings sins and death. This means that lust is capable of flushing out the life of Christ in a believer. **“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”** (James 1:15). As lust firmly took hold of Samson, he did not realize when God left him. Three, it is dangerous to render service to God in the atmosphere of self-indulgence. Four, Samson could

single-handedly destroy a mighty lion, but was overthrown by a so-called “weaker vessel”. The implication of this for believers is that wisdom is better than strength. Samson could easily break the bonds and shackles that men put on him but fell easily to the string of lust. The world has no regard or affection to believers who patronize its seductions either secretly or in the open. **“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”** (Isaiah 52:11).

Question 3: What are the spiritual lessons believers should learn from the life of Samson?

BAITS TO SUBDUE AND CAPTURE SAMSON (Judges 16:5-15; Nehemiah 13:26; Proverbs 6:26-28; James 1:15; Judges 14:3; Galatians 5:16; 1 Corinthians 6:16-18)

“And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver” (Judges 16:5).

Convinced that Samson had an unrestrained passion for women, the Philistines arranged with his new found ‘killer’ mistress to entice him to disclose the source of his strength. Their bait? **“eleven hundred pieces of silver”**. Delilah was Satan-sent into Samson’s life to destroy his life and ministry and he did not realize it. Instead of being sober and vigilant against the adversary, he let off his guard and sunk into her laps. As Delilah was baited with the **“silver”** money from every lord of the Philistines, so was Samson baited with voluptuous Delilah. While she was greedy of the gain of money, Samson was blinded by lust. She was willing to go the hog till Samson disclosed the source of his strength in hope of collecting the reward of iniquity. Whenever people permit covetousness and greed to overtake them, they lose every sense of morality and godliness. How like Balaam! **“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of**

Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” (Jude 1:11).

Samson became careless, frivolous and silly with the way he toyed with God’s great gift of strength in his life. In his silliness, he lied a number of times to Delilah about the source of his strength. But because **“the adulteress will hunt for the precious life”**, she did not give up until she had achieved her goal. Today’s world is filled with such hunters for the precious soul, **“having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children”** (2 Peter 2:14). Our Lord calls on all His children to watch and pray lest they be taken in the snare of sin and cords of iniquity.

THE DOWNFALL OF SPIRIT-FILLED SAMSON: (Judges 16:16-21; 2 Samuel 11:2-4; 1:19,25-27; 1 Corinthians 10:12)

The knowledge of the consequences of lust should refrain all believers from lustful tendencies and guide them against wasting their lives on sensual things. Many mighty men and women of God in Bible days as well as in contemporary times had fallen from grace and ruined their ministries. How are the mighty fallen!

A number of factors sealed up the doom/fall of Samson. First, he was a lone ranger. Samson was not found in company of godly friends, peers, mentors and counselors. He seemed to have so much confidence in his own ability to overcome the enemy alone. He felt he could deal with every situation all alone because of his extraordinary power. How mistaken! Had he individuals that were close confidants and fellowship members, perhaps, they would have prevailed on him against the dangerous road he was travelling.

Second, he despised the counsel of his parents (Judges 14:3). Even when he was sharply rebuked for his illicit escapades, he shrugged them off with a snub: **“get her to me for wife”**. Besides, his attitude to the counsel of his parents showed that he was self-willed which is one of the paths to destruction. Third, he submitted the control of his life to the dictates of his flesh (Galatians 5:16).

Fourth, he rejected the application of spiritual principles that moderate the lifestyle of believers. **“What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body”** (1 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Samson drifted so much into spiritual slumber that the words of Delilah neutralized his consecration and Nazarite vow. His spiritual strength of immunity and resistance to temptation completely collapsed on the laps of a strange woman. **“And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death. That he told her all his heart”** (Judges 16:16,17). **“And she made him sleep upon her knees, and she called for a man and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him”** (Judges 16:19). Daughters of Jezebel abound within and without the church today. As such, the saints of God should beware (Revelation 2:20-22).

When we sleep, our spiritual enemies are wide awake scheming wicked devices to ensnare us. Believers are enjoined to be sober and vigilant putting on the whole armour of God so they can stand against the wiles of the devil and his agents (Ephesians 6:11). Samson’s eyes were the inlets of his sin and predicament (Judges 16:1). According to Matthew Henry, “the best way to preserve the eyes therefore is to turn them away from beholding vanity”. It was one of the things the Philistines got rid of after they captured him.

<p>Question 4: List some factors that led to Samson’s fall and how close believers can be to the opposite sex.</p>

The fatal fall of Samson is a big lesson for all believers that champion and cherish holiness. The Bible declares, **“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”** (1 Corinthians 10:12). As believers, we should take heed to the principles of the Scriptures and its teachings, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, to abstain from all appearances of evil (1

Thessalonians 5:22), not to despise the counsel of godly people (Deuteronomy 5:16), not to forsake the company of believers (Hebrews 10:25), praying without ceasing and to be vigilant and watchful. Finally, we should imbibe the Job-like decision: **“I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”** (Job 31:1).

Question 5: What can believers do to avoid falling into Samson-like temptation?

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING		
MON	Mark	12	Psalm		102
TUE	“	13	“		103
WED	“	14	“		104
THUR	“	15	“		105
FRI	“	16	“		106
SAT	Luke	1	“		107
SUN	“	2	“		108

655 Lesson

SAMSON'S FINAL EXPLOIT AND DEATH

MEMORY VERSE: "And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28).

TEXT: Judges 16:22-31

Samson was raised by God to deliver Israel from oppression by the Philistines. With the continual decent of the Spirit of God upon him, he was able to do exploits. From the previous chapter, we see Samson praying for provision of water and receiving instantaneous answer. Already highlighted in previous lessons on Samson was his problem with lust from which he was not cleansed or delivered until he got into problem. Besides, Samson remained unmarried for several years after the demise of his legally married wife. These, perhaps aggravated his problem making lust to mushroom and led him into unbridled sexual immorality with a harlot in Gaza. Eventually, Samson landed on the laps of Delilah where his life and ministry were terminated.

Samson's craving for pleasure with women would have been satisfied in a godly marriage if he had heeded divine injunctions and the counsels of his parents. He would have spared himself the reproach of defeat and the pain of dismemberment which he horribly suffered in the hands of the Philistines.

The fate that befell Samson is a great lesson to pilgrims on the way to heaven and ministers or servants of God. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes that he made. We cannot open our eyes and unwittingly walk into the enemy's traps. As seen from Samson's misadventure, anointing and divine exploits are no substitutes for a godly marriage established on scriptural principles. Every believer who seeks to be fulfilled in life and ministry

needs to stay within the confines of Scripture in relating with the opposite sex. Aside pleasure, procreation and partnership, marriage promotes purity (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:1,2; 1 Corinthians 7:7,8; 1 Timothy 5:11,12,14). Irrespective of our spiritual status as marriageable adults, including widows and widowers, God says it is not good to be alone.

SERIES OF SAMSON'S PREVIOUS EXPLOITS (Judges 14:6,9,19; 15:5,15,18,19; 16:3; Romans 11:29; Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 10:20)

Question 1: Mention some exploits of Samson in spite of his besetting sin of lust.

Empowered by the Spirit of God, Samson did supernatural exploits. These include rending a young lion with bare hands (Judges 14:6), beehive management and honey harvest (Judges 14:9), massacre of thirty Philistines at Ashkelon (Judges 14:19), destruction of the standing corn and shocks owned by the Philistines (Judges 15:5), slaying of 1000 men of the Philistines (Judges 15:15), emergence of a miraculous oasis through prayer (Judges 15:18,19) and uprooting the city gates of Gaza and carrying same to a hilltop (Judges 16:3).

Samson's ability to do exploits with a besetting sin of lust should not confuse present-day believers who stand on a higher dispensational ground of the full light and revelation of scriptures. It is possible to perform miracles and still miss heaven. That was why Christ admonished His seventy disciples who reported their exploits on the field of evangelism not to be carried away with the signs and wonders but to rather rejoice that their names were written in the book of life (Luke 10:17-20). Many Christian servants misplace the priority of ensuring that they retain their names in the book of life through purity of life with a ministry of miracles and deliverance. They focus on doing exploits but pay little attention to their character and conduct which qualify men for heaven. They have ignored that fact that where character fails, every other thing fails.

SAMSON, THE BLIND SPORTSMAN (Judges 16:21,23-27; Joshua 7:1-5; 1 Samuel 4:9-11; Acts 5:1-10; Romans 11:22)

Samson's gamble and compromise caused him the irreversible loss of his two eyes and his position as a judge in Israel. It turned him into a grinding prisoner instead of a reigning judge. His capture brought disgrace to God as the lords of the Philistines not only rejoiced but also offered sacrifices to Dagon saying, "**Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand**". When the people saw blind Samson, "**they praised their god: for they said, our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us**" (Judges 16:24).

Besides, Samson was brought into the gigantic shrine of Dagon filled to capacity with the jubilating Philistines. "**And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars**" (verse 25). More than the men and women who were in the house, about three thousand of their population also watched the 'blind sportsman' from the basement of the temple. His defeat led to a change of his divine calling and career. In him is fulfilled the Scripture, which says, "**by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life**" (Proverbs 6:26). His fall is a warning to all: "**Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

<p>Question 2: From Samson's experience, mention the consequences of besetting sin for those who fail to repent.</p>

SAMSON'S RECOVERY, DEATH AND BURIAL (Judges 16:22-31; Luke 15:11-24; 1 John 2:1,2; Hebrews 11:32-34; 2 Chronicles 26:4,15,16,19,20; 2 Chronicles 21:18,19)

While Samson was kept in prison, "**the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven**". His hair was a symbol of divine presence and the seal of God

upon his life. As long as he kept his Nazarite vow, God's presence and power was mighty in his life. But he lost everything when he fell for Delilah.

The weight of Samson's fall which included the removal of his eyes, subjection to slave labor in prison and mockery by his enemies had a humbling and sobering effect on his life. He remembered the God of Israel whom he had let down and he prayed. As his hairs began to grow, his faith in God peaked. He embraced the love and mercy of God. He remembered that God who answered his past requests would attend to his prayer of penitence and vengeance on the Philistines. **"And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes"** (Judges 16:28).

With faith in his heart that God would answer his prayer, Samson held the two pillars on which the entire house rested and pulled it down, killing the Philistines, their lords, and himself. Thus, **"...the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life"** (Judges 16:30).

Question 3: What lesson does the prayer of Samson teach sinners and backsliders today?

The answer to Samson's supplication is instructive to backsliders and sinners: that is, God is willing to forgive those who turn from their evil and come back to His ways (Luke 15:18-24). He is ever willing to pardon those who come to Him through genuine repentance. His promise for returning prodigal sons and daughters is, **"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him"** (Hosea 14:4).

The possibilities of prayer in the Christian faith cannot be overstated. The Scripture admonishes all saints to **"pray without ceasing"** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Through repentance and prayer, Samson found a place in the book of Hebrews' hall of faith. Samson was categorized among saints like David and Samuel because he called upon the God of Israel (Hebrews 11:32).

“And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life”

(Judges 16:30). Samson avenged his humiliation when he pulled down the theater structure, killing those that were present. However, warfare in the New Testament is different. Believers do not pray for vengeance on human enemies that Christ died to save. Vengeance belongs to God and He dispenses justice without fear or favour at the appropriate time.

It is certain that death is the inevitable end of every human being. However, such death should not be a shameful or violent one. Believers are to note that what matters is our final resting place in heaven and not the elaborate ceremonies carried out in the world today. It is the will of God that no sinner or backslider should die in sin but repent and be saved.

We need to examine ourselves constantly and maintain a high level of sobriety, discipline, holiness and humility so as not to be cast away. We must heed Christ’s counsel to avoid lusting against the opposite sex and sever relationship from every Delilah or Amnon (Matthew 5:27-30; 2 Samuel 13:1-10,15,20,22,26-29).

Success in life and ministry requires that every believer keeps **“looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2).

Samson is dead and gone. He accomplished the task of delivering his people from oppression by the Philistines. It is our turn to fulfil our ministry of preaching the gospel - the great commission of setting the captives of sin free through the power of Christ. We must carry out this assignment with great zeal and passion as Christ did. This is the exploit that God expects of every believer. Samson’s story ended with a testimony: that he, with others, **“through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises... out of weakness**

were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Hebrews 11:32-34). Believers should watch, pray and run with patience the race to heaven so as to obtain their final rewards.

Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the Scripture’s testimony about Samson?

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	3	Psalm	109
TUE	“	4	“	110-111
WED	“	5	“	112-113
THUR	“	6	“	114-115
FRI	“	7	“	116-117
SAT	“	8	“	118
SUN	“	9	“	119:1-32

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

656 Lesson

PAUL'S PASSION FOR GODLINESS IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Corinthians 2:4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 2:1-17

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul dealt with a peculiar problem of sin in the church. He was appalled that “**such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles**” (1 Corinthians 5:1) was found among them. And he was more dismayed that the leadership of the church condoned such misconduct. In his ruling, he recommended that the church should “**put away from among yourselves that wicked person**” (1 Corinthians 5:13). In response to his letter, the Corinthian church disciplined the offending brother and put him out of the church. Paul’s second letter was a follow-up to his first. In this chapter, he made a strong case for the restoration of the disciplined person.

Question 1: Identify Paul’s burden and passion for the church and the ministry.

In this plea, Paul revealed much of his personal conflicts, convictions, burdens and passions for the ministry. He demonstrated his love for God and his desire that God’s will be done. His love for Christ, his wish that Christ’s name be held in high esteem, his love for the Church, his passion that her purity be preserved, his commitment to see every man’s dignity preserved, his love for the truth and his labors to ensure that the truth is preached marked him out as a model for the body of Christ. We must take a cue from the life of this apostle if we profess faith in Christ and His word.

PRINCIPLES AND PATTERN FOR DISCIPLINARY MEASURES (2 Corinthians 2:1-5; 12:21; Romans 11:22; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:15)

“But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness” (2 Corinthians 2:1). Paul’s nobility in this statement is of note. He displayed passion and concern for the brethren. On one hand, he was eager to visit the Corinthian church and share in their fellowship; on the other, he was reluctant to meet them in such a state as would cause grief. **“And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed ”** (2 Corinthians 12:21). The apostle knew he would not be free to enjoy fellowship with the Corinthians while sin remained unrebuked, unexposed and unrepented of. He would rather abstain from fellowship than fellowship in sin.

Question 2: What guiding principles should regulate church discipline?

In dealing with the scandal in the church at Corinth, Paul demonstrated a balance between goodness and severity. He loved with firmness and rebuked with tenderness. He corrected in love and reprimanded with tears. He extolled fellowship but maintained truth and consistency. This should be the guiding principle in dealing with sin in the church. This pattern is consistent with the New Testament ministry.

Maintaining discipline in the church is a delicate responsibility of leadership. No doubt, Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians was a difficult letter to write. Though it cost him tears, the love for truth and maintenance of purity of the church made him to put in order the things that are wanting. A Christian writer captured it succinctly thus: “In any Church or religious society, there is the necessity to maintain godly and loving discipline if divine standards are to be maintained, especially in matters of soundness in the faith, morals and Christian conduct.”

However, to appropriately execute church discipline, the following steps should be taken:

- (1) there should be proper investigation and ascertainment of the offence.
- (2) It should be undertaken only if it can be demonstrated to be in the interest of the church and the individual
- (3) It should be implemented in the spirit of love and concern.
- (4) The ultimate restoration of the offender should be paramount.
- (5) It should be undertaken after much prayer.
- (6) It should be based on the Scriptures. When church discipline is applied in the right manner and in the right spirit, it will likely produce positive result.

Question 3: Enumerate the steps for successful church discipline.

PENITENCE AND PARDON FOR A DISCIPLINED MEMBER (2 Corinthians 2:6-11; John 21:15-17; Psalm 119:67; Hosea 11:8,9; 1 Timothy 1:20)

The brethren in Corinth implemented Paul's recommendation by putting the sinning brother out of the church. This severe punishment sobered the brother and brought him back to his senses. But the church was not in a hurry to restore him to the fellowship of the brethren. This prompted Paul to write a second letter to the church. "**Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many**" (2 Corinthians 2:6). Here, Paul made a case for the restoration of the offending brother. He argued that the man had suffered sufficiently enough having repented completely. Church discipline is not meant to punish the victim but as a means to effect his restoration. Even when Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan, it was to the intent "**that they may learn not to blaspheme**" (1 Timothy 1:20).

Question 4: How long should a brother or sister be kept under discipline?

Paul intimated that the brother should not be left under discipline longer than necessary. **“So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow”** (2 Corinthians 2:7). When a brother or sister under discipline shows sufficient remorse and repentance, the discipline should be reversed. This clearly shows that discipline is not meant to punish but to purify; it is not a tool to humiliate but to humble; it is not intended to crucify but to correct; it should not be employed to disown, discard and damn the offender but to lead him or her to genuine repentance.

The church has several obligations to a penitent brother or sister. In the first place, he should be *re-admitted* into the fold. During his excommunication, he was put out of the church. This exposed him to further attacks by Satan and evil spirits. After his repentance, he should be welcomed back into the church. Secondly, he should also be *re-integrated* into the fellowship of the brethren. This means that he should not suffer isolation. Thirdly, he should be *released* from censorship. His past mistakes should not be used against him. Fourthly, he should be *re-assured* of God’s love and the church’s forgiveness. People who fell shamefully sometimes find it difficult to forgive themselves. Paul insisted that this man should be comforted. Finally, he should be *restored* to his original estate and ministry. When Peter was restored, Jesus still gave him the responsibility to **“feed [His] sheep”** (John 21:16). A restored brother should therefore not be left redundant. He should be re-commissioned to fight the battle of the Lord.

<p>Question 5: What precautions should be exercised in the restoration of a disciplined brother or sister?</p>

However, there is a note of caution in the restoration of a disciplined brother or sister. While prolonged discipline should be avoided, hasty restoration should also be shunned because it will be injurious both to the backslider and to the cause of Christ. While prolonged discipline may lead to despondency and despair, hasty restoration without sufficient remorse may lead to hardening of heart **“through the deceitfulness of sin”**

(Hebrews 3:13). Both will give the devil an opportunity to take advantage of the church.

PURITY AND POWER OF A DYNAMIC MINISTRY (2 Corinthians 2:12-17; 7:5-7; 8:6,7; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Timothy 2:9)

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 2:12,13). Why was Paul particularly disturbed that he did not find Titus at Troas? It was because he was eager to get the news of the effect of his first epistle to the Corinthians from him. As such, a letter was written with pain and tears; he could not wait to get a feedback from Titus who delivered the epistle. We therefore understand his joy when he came to Macedonia to receive the news from Titus that the first epistle produced the desired effect on the Corinthians. **“Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more”** (2 Corinthians 7:6,7). This teaches us that while we break new grounds in ministry, we should endeavour to consolidate the fruit of our labors.

Question 6: What are the effects of effective declaration of the gospel message?

Paul had a remarkably successful ministry. The number of detractors and adversaries notwithstanding, he could testify of open doors of ministry. He informed Timothy that though he was compelled to preach the gospel even unto bonds, **“but the word of God is not bound”** (2 Timothy 2:9). Paul rejoiced at the ultimate triumph of the gospel. He declared that as long as the gospel is preached faithfully and consistently, it will prove to be a **“savour of death unto death”** or a **“savour of life unto life”**. There is no neutrality with the gospel. It is for the salvation of some and the damnation of others. Jesus came to give sight to the blind. But for the Pharisees

who claimed they had sight, their blindness remained. **“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”** (John 3:18). Paul therefore emphasized the importance of maintaining the purity of the word of God without corrupting it. A corrupted gospel has lost its double edges. It can neither convict sinners nor comfort the saints. **“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”** (2 Corinthians 2:17).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	10	Psalm	119:33-64
TUE	“	11	“	119:65-96
WED	“	12	“	119:97-128
THUR	“	13	“	119:129-160
FRI	“	14	“	119:161-176
SAT	“	15	“	120-123
SUN	“	16	“	124-126

657 Lesson

THE SUPERIORITY OF GRACE TO THE LAW

MEMORY VERSE: “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” (2 Corinthians 3:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

In this chapter, Paul was defending his apostleship and ministry against the accusation of false teachers from Judea whose life and teachings constituted a serious threat to the faith of the Corinthian Christians. Whenever and wherever the genuine exist, the counterfeit is bound to appear. No sooner did the gospel of God’s grace begin to spread among the Gentiles than a counterfeit gospel appeared: a mixture of law and grace. It was promoted by a zealous group of people often referred to as the legalists or Judaizers. They emphasized the need to keep the Law of Moses as an additional requirement for salvation. What they meant, in other words, is that faith in Christ was not sufficient to save the sinner.

The gospel of legalism tended to be popular since human nature enjoys achieving religious goals instead of trusting Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to work. But Paul rightly recognized these legalists as religious racketeers who preyed on ignorant people. He refuted the doctrine and practices of these legalistic false teachers by showing the surpassing glory of the ministry of the gospel of the grace of God. He contrasted the ministry of the old covenant (law) with ministry of the new covenant (grace) and proved the superiority of the new over the old.

Paul here presents an inspiring example of what it means, in part, to “**Fight the good fight of faith**” and to “**earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto to the saints**” (1 Timothy 6:12; Jude 3). No minister of the gospel can be said to be

truly loyal to his Lord who has sympathy for, or makes allowance (directly or indirectly) for false teachers and their damnable doctrines. Addressing the angel of the church in Pergamos the Lord said: **“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate”** (Revelation 2:14,15).

GRACIOUS TRANSFORMING POWER IN THE NEW COVENANT (2 Corinthians 3:1-3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 11:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7; John 7:37-39; 16:7-15)

In this epistle, the Apostle clearly distinguished himself from those **“which corrupt the word of God”**. He reminded everyone in Corinth church that, of all people, he should not need a letter of commendation to convince them of his integrity as an apostle or to accredit his ministry. The testimony of his transformed and exemplary life among the Corinthian Christians was enough commendation (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Question 1: What are the benefits of giving letters of recommendation to believers who relocate to other locations?

Letters of commendation are indeed very beneficial. When saints travel or relocate to another place, it is important for those in the churches they visit to know something about their faith and character. This is very much important nowadays because many fake brethren have entered the church. The practice is also helpful to protect the flock from **“wolves”**. Also, the church leadership will be able to prayerfully assign them into appropriate ministries to serve. But Paul did not need such a letter for the church in Corinth. He was not only known to the Corinthians, he was also their spiritual father through whom many have come to the faith. The legalistic false teachers who came in to deceive boasted that they carried letters of commendation from some important people in Judea and that Paul had no such credentials. Unfortunately, many of the Corinthian

believers followed the boastful false teachers and broke the heart of the man who had rescued them from legalism.

Ultimately, it is not a letter which distinguishes a true apostle from a false one; rather, it is a kind of divine certification and exemplary Christian living. No wonder Paul challenged the Thessalonian Christians: **“Ye are witnesses and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe”** (1 Thessalonians 2:10). He reminded the Corinthians of his accreditation and the kind of credentials which set the true preacher of the gospel apart from the false. And in so doing, he also contrasted the **“letter”** and the **“spirit”**, the old covenant and the new covenant, respectively.

Paul wrote these first three verses assuming his readers recognized that his imagery is biblical, based upon the promise of the new covenant in the Old Testament, its fulfillment in Christ, and its preaching by the apostles. Playing on the imagery of **“letter”**, he went on to say that these Corinthians were, themselves, a letter. They were the fruit of Paul’s service and of the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts, turning their stony hearts of unbelief into hearts of flesh. Paul wrote the same of the Thessalonians saints (1 Thessalonians 1:4-7).

<p>Question 2: Why was the letter of recommendation not necessary for Paul to Corinth?</p>

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS (2 Corinthians 3:7-10; Exodus 20:18-21; Luke 9:26; Luke 21:27; John 7:37-39; Ephesians 2:8,9)

Grace is the plan of God from eternity past, and truth is the doctrine that expresses it in time. This plan of grace is perfect because God is perfect. A perfect plan can only come from a perfect God. Therefore, the plan of God excludes man’s merit, ability and talent. The law came through Moses, grace came by Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39). The law is synonymous with Moses; grace is synonymous with Christ. Our relation to Christ is by faith in His atoning blood in the new covenant. Every unsaved man is under the law in that he is seeking to

establish righteousness of his own rather than to accept God's righteousness through Christ. To attempt to earn righteousness by keeping of the Old Testament Law or any other set of standards is to reject the principle of grace and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though the Mosaic Law was good, the main problem was that it was weak through the flesh. It told men what God required from them but could not empower them to obey it. But through the gospel of grace, the human nature of sin can be crushed and the heart sanctified to obey God. For the non-Christians, the only power they possess is the power of their sinful nature and they are thus helpless and hopeless, lacking the required strength to keep the law.

Question 3: Why is inward cleansing important to the Christian life?

Like Paul, we can be confident as we obey our Lord's command to proclaim the gospel to lost sinners. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in God, through Jesus Christ. This confidence in God strikes a death blow to all boasting in one's ability. Human potential, no matter how great, is not enough. The preaching of the gospel with power and the salvation of lost souls are humanly impossible tasks. Our adequacy is from God. He **“hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit”**.

The Judaizers were persistently emphasizing the keeping of the law as an additional requirement for salvation. They taught that anybody could obey the law and become spiritual. A legalistic ministry has a way of inflating the egos of people. But when we emphasize the grace of God, we make it clear to people that they cannot save themselves. The old covenant does not give life; it brings about condemnation and death. The Spirit of God, working in the dispensation of the new covenant, brings life.

The old covenant (the Mosaic Covenant) was given on Mount Sinai with awesome evidences of God's glory, such as thunder and lightning and trumpet-like blasts. No one was to get too close to that mountain, or they would die (Exodus 19:16-26). The people were so terrified that they pleaded with Moses to intercede with

God so He would not come to speak directly with them lest they perished (Exodus 20:18-21). Great glory was associated with the old covenant, even the *Shekinah* glory (Exodus 16:7,10; 24:16,17; 28:2,40; 29:43; 40:34), but the glory of the new covenant is far greater. Our Lord's incarnation revealed His glory (John 1:14). Men saw God's glory at our Lord's birth (Luke 2:9,14). Jesus revealed His glory to His three disciples at His transfiguration (Luke 9:31,32) and by means of His miracles (John 2:11). When He returns to this earth, it will be in all of His glory (Luke 9:26; 21:27).

Question 4: Differentiate between the Old and the New Covenant.

In 2 Corinthians 3:9,10, Paul showed that, logically, the glory of the new covenant must be greater than the glory of the old. The old covenant produced condemnation. The Law of Moses set a standard of righteousness which no one could meet, and thus it condemned men as sinners. The new covenant is the provision of God's righteousness for unworthy sinners, through Jesus Christ. If the old covenant had glory, how much more glory the new covenant has!

CHRIST, THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT (2 Corinthians 3:11-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Colossians 1:27)

When Paul took up the story about Moses' shining face, he filled in details not found in the Exodus account, which fit perfectly and explained why Moses veiled his face after he spoke with the people. Exodus 34 informs us that when Moses met with God, his face glowed. The people were afraid to approach him, but he called them to him. His face reflected the glory of God. Every time he was with God, his face would glow brightly. Moses would then come to the people to tell them what God had said. While he talked with the people, he veiled his face. When he went to speak with God again, he unveiled his face.

Paul's point was this, the glory Moses experienced in conjunction with the old covenant was a fading glory; in stark contrast, the glory which Paul enjoyed in conjunction with the new covenant is unfading: "**For if**

that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2 Corinthians 3:11). Moses needed a veil because the glory of the old covenant, as great as it was, faded away. The messengers of the good news of the gospel need no veil at all, because the greater glory of the new covenant never fades: **“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”** (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This new covenant glory is that which we see **“in the face of Jesus Christ”**. We recall that Moses begged God to **“see his glory”** (Exodus 33:18). God made it clear that Moses could see only a portion of His glory. Specifically, Moses could not see the *face of God* (Exodus 33:20,23). This greater glory, which we enjoy is the glory we see **“in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Question 5: How would you compare the glory experienced by Moses and that which is experienced by believers today?

The Spirit of God is the One who **“lifts the veil”** and enables us to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the instrument by which the greater glory of Christ, and thus of the new covenant, is beheld. The Old Testament spoke of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and of the ministry which the Holy Spirit would play in turning hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19).

It is the glorious nature of the new covenant ministry which gives saints such hope. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory (1 Peter 4:14), who causes us to rejoice in the midst of our suffering (see Acts 7:55). It is the Spirit of God in us who mediates the presence of Christ to us, and Christ in us is the **“hope of glory”** (Colossians 1:27). This glory we experience in measure now and in a greater measure than Moses. It is also the glory we shall experience to the full in eternity. This is why we are being transformed from (present) glory to (ultimate) glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). This **“hope of glory”** gives us great boldness in our proclamation of the gospel. Whether men receive us and the message of the gospel,

or whether they reject both the gospel and us, this must never dampen our spirit or reduce our confidence in proclaiming the gospel. We know the gospel ministry is a glorious one, now and for all eternity.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	17	Psalm	127-131
TUE	“	18	“	132-135
WED	“	19	“	136-138
THUR	“	20	“	139-140
FRI	“	21	“	141-143
SAT	“	22	“	144-145
SUN	“	23	“	146-147

658 Lesson

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S SERVANTS DURING TRIAL

MEMORY VERSE: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God " (2 Corinthians 4:1,2).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

In the previous chapter, Paul declared that he and his fellow laborers did not need letters of commendation to accredit their ministry. The glorious change in the lives of the Corinthian Christians through the gospel they preached was enough commendation and a testimony of the excellency of the gospel (the new covenant) over the law (the old covenant). While in the old dispensation, only Moses was privileged to speak face to face with God, now all true believers can behold Him with an open face. In view of the power of transforming grace through the gospel, the apostle and his fellow laborers are, in this lesson, constant, courageous and patient in suffering as they serve the Lord. A proper understanding of the gospel ministry, its power and excelling glory will help stabilize and strengthen the character and commitment of God's servants in the face of trials. This, however, will not be possible without faith which gives a strong conviction for excellence in the ministry.

RELENTLESS EFFORTS OF TRANSFORMED SOUL-WINNERS (2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Paul, in vindicating his soul-winning efforts, refers to the transforming power of the gospel. The gospel he and his associates preached first transformed their own lives before they were commissioned to preach it. Commissioned and entrusted with the gospel, they personalized it. "**Therefore seeing we have this ministry**". It was a glorious ministry that brought men

life, salvation and righteousness; a ministry that is able to transform lives. Such a ministry was a gift from God and the highest privilege under the sun. This, to a great extent, inspired them to constancy and perseverance in their labors.

Question 1: What should be the perception and attitude of believers to the work of God?

The way servants of God view their ministries will determine how they labor towards fulfilling it. If serving Christ is viewed as a burden rather than as a privilege and a great honor (Philippians 2:17), they will not be wholehearted in service or go the extra mile. If it is seen as a punishment from God, murmuring and complaints will set in and there will be no perseverance. Professing Christian servants who take serving God as a means of satisfying or promoting personal interest will always fall into temptation of deceitfulness and unfaithfulness (1 Timothy 6:9,10; Philippians 3:18,19). It is only when we adopt Paul's positive attitude to ministry that we can hope to have the testimony of a fulfilled minister.

Paul clearly shows that they received the ministry on the basis of God's mercy and grace and not on any personal merit. Writing to Timothy he said, **"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who had enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief"** (1 Timothy 1:12,13). Since it is by God's mercy and grace we are called to be saints and appointed into the ministry, it is by that token of grace we are enabled to remain faithful and persevering in the work of God with all diligence. So, all Christian servants must acknowledge this and wholly depend on God's mercy and grace to be successful soul-winners.

Question 2: What lessons can we learn from Paul's call and exploits as a soul-winner?

Believers owe all they are and have in life and ministry to the mercy and grace of God. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul declared: **"By the grace of God I am what I am"** (1 Corinthians 15:10). There is no room for

boasting or pride. Viewing success in life and service as human merit is capable of making us think more of ourselves and less of God's mercy and grace (Daniel 4:29-31).

Paul's wholesome attitude to the gospel ministry had some practical consequences in his life and work. It kept him from fainting and quitting (verse 1). With the divine calling came divine enabling. He knew that God would see him through. This wholesome attitude also helped him and his associates maintain undisguised sincerity in their work. **"We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"** (verse 2-4). They were quite different from false teachers who handle the word of God deceitfully and walk in craftiness. False teachers try to prove their doctrine by twisting the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of their own conscience. Paul had nothing to hide, either in his personal life or in his preaching of the word. Everything was open and honest. A steadfast adherence to the truth of the gospel will commend or accredit ministers of the gospel; and sincerity or uprightness will preserve their reputation.

Besides, right attitudes kept them from promoting self. He says, **"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake"** (verse 5). They did not pass their own notions and prejudices for the word and will of God; neither did they seek to advance their own secular interests. But they preached Christ Jesus, the Lord. The Judaizers of their day enjoyed preaching about themselves and glorying in their achievements (2 Corinthians 10:12- 18). But Paul and his fellow laborers declared and conducted themselves as servants of the Church for Christ's sake. Ministers of the gospel should not be proud in spirit, lording it over God's heritage but conduct themselves as servants of Christ. And servants of Christ do not seek to please men in their service (Galatians 1:10).

The gospel is the transforming light of God. The soul of the sinner is filled with darkness. Through the gospel, the grace of God beams light in the soul that

those who were sometimes darkness are made light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). Paul revealed that they were just earthen vessels that God had chosen to make His glorious gospel known to mankind. God, the Author and Source of the transforming gospel, should be glorified. When a believer preaches and souls are converted, he must acknowledge that the power that transformed the lives of the people came from God who he must praise and glorify for it. Ministers of the gospel are frail creatures being used by God to transform lives.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S SERVANTS DURING TRIAL (2 Corinthians 4:8-12; Job 1:1, 8-19; Daniel 6:1-9, 13-17; Genesis 37:12-36; Acts 6:5,8-15; 7:59-60; 1 Peter 2:21-23; James 1:2-4)

Paul gave account of various kinds of trials they experienced as ministers of Christ. The attitudes and conduct of these apostles in the face of great suffering are quite challenging. They were troubled on every side, afflicted in many ways and met with all sorts of trouble but they were not distressed. They refused to be upset, worry or feel miserable. They knew they had liberty and access to God. They did not give in to depression or despondency. They knew that God was able to support and deliver them. So must we put our trust in God if we wish to succeed as God's servants and stewards.

The apostles affirmed that their suffering for Christ was continual. In that way, they were always bearing about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus, setting before the world the great example of a suffering Christ so that the life of Jesus might be revealed in and through them. From the trial of the apostles, we learn that all believers irrespective of their level of spirituality and ministerial calling should expect trials of faith in one form or the other. Trials of faith do not necessarily mean one has fallen out of favour with God. Job, Daniel, Stephen were men of sterling spiritual credentials and greatly beloved of God, yet they suffered trials and tribulations for their faith in God (Job 1:1,8-19; Daniel 6:1-9,13-17; Genesis 37:12-36; Acts 6:5,8-15; 7:59,60).

Jesus Christ, our Lord also **“suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow His steps”** (1 Peter

2:21). Second, God permits trials to fulfill His purpose in our lives. God's ultimate purpose for His children is to grow more and more into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Our faith will be made sure and durable through trials apart from developing our spiritual muscles and godly character (Romans 5:3-5).

Question 3: What challenge can contemporary Christian servants receive from the apostles' attitude and conduct during trials?

The apostles manifested strength of character. They did not faint or lose heart but maintained a steadfast spirit. Even in the worst of circumstances, they were unflinching in their commitment to Christ and the Church of God (Romans 5:4-8) while trusting God to support and deliver them. They courageously stood for and defended the truth of the gospel, maintained the divinely approved pattern of ministry in the face of false teachers who not only handled the word of God deceitfully but preached about themselves and gloried in their achievements. Even when the church did not reciprocate or respond with some measure of gratitude to Paul, he was determined to do more. He told the Corinthians: "**And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved**" (2 Corinthians 12:15). Through trials, believers are matured and brought to personal completeness in all aspects of Christian grace. Trials equip God's servants to minister effectively to others when in need of comfort and encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

The recurring phrase "**but not**" in 2 Corinthians 4:8,9 teaches us that in whatever condition the children of God find themselves and no matter how bad their circumstances, they cannot be crushed. We also learn that trials or suffering comes to God's people in varying degrees and intensity depending on their maturity, ability, experience and calling. When Paul said, "**so then death worketh in us but life in you**" (2 Corinthians 4:12), he did not mean that other Christians did not suffer at all; rather, he meant that what the generality of the people suffered was nothing in comparison with that of the apostle's. Believers, workers and ministers need not grudge or murmur and complain when they seem to suffer more than others. If we patiently and

joyfully endure, a greater purpose will be accomplished in the end.

Question 4: How can we explain why the trials or suffering of greater degree are permitted in some believers?

THE VISION AND TRIUMPH OF VICTORIOUS FAITH (2 Corinthians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4)

Paul explains why they did not sink in despair and faint during great trials. Whatever the burdens and troubles of God's faithful servants, there will always be a reason not to faint. Their faith kept them from fainting: "**we having the same spirit of faith**" (2 Corinthians 4:13). The apostle received inspiration from the psalmist who said: "**I believed, therefore have I spoken...**" (Psalm 116:10). True witness for God is based on faith in Him and this faith comes from the word of God (Romans 10:17). Nothing closes the mouth of a believer like unbelief (Luke 1:20). Faith sustains our conviction in the face of adversities. As Paul had the psalmist for an example, so he leaves us an example to emulate: "**we also believe and therefore speak**". As we receive help and encouragement from the good words and examples of others, so we should be careful to be exemplary in conduct to others.

Apart from faith in God, the apostles' hope of resurrection kept them from fainting. They knew that Christ was raised and that His resurrection was a guarantee or assurance of theirs.

The message of the early Church was Christ's victory over sin and death. This must be our emphasis too. Paul was looking at the future reunion of God's people when he said, "**...and shall present us with you**" (2 Corinthians 4:14). Death may separate us now but the resurrection and the rapture shall reunite us in His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Their assurance that their trials were not in vain kept them from fainting. They knew that God was using their trials to minister to the Church and bring glory to Himself (2 Corinthians 4:15). This should be the same reason for us to patiently and cheerfully endure suffering.

Question 5: What can believers learn from Paul's comparison of 'light affliction' and 'weight of glory'?

Apostle Paul presents a contrast between “**light affliction**” and “**weight of glory**”. Paul was weighing the present trial against the future glory and discovered that his trials were light afflictions which worked for him an eternal weight of glory. Ministers of the gospel must be able to weigh things aright on God's scales. Failure in this area may account for much discouragement, backsliding and desertion in ministry.

This was where Demas missed it when he fell for the fading glories of this world (2 Timothy 4:10). The apostles did not faint in their sufferings because the invisible world was real to them. We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. The great men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 achieved what they did because they saw the invisible by faith (Hebrews 11:10,15-19,27).

The unseen things are eternal while things that can be seen are temporal. By faith, we do not only discern these differences but also make unseen things our chief end and pursuit. We have the examples of the cloud of witnesses – the heroes of faith and our Lord Jesus Christ to inspire and strengthen us to persevere till the end.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	24	Psalm	148-150
TUE	John	1	Proverbs	1
WED	“	1	“	2-3
THUR	“	2	“	4-5
FRI	“	3	“	6
SAT	“	4	“	7
SUN	“	5	“	8

659 Lesson

PAUL'S HOPE AND LABOR FOR ETERNAL GLORY

MEMORY VERSE: "Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

In the preceding chapter, Paul emphasized his unwearied diligence and zeal at preaching the gospel despite the troubles and challenges that confronted him. Though the challenges he and other gospel ministers faced gradually weakened their outward man, their inward man was being renewed daily. Paul was not writing to discourage the believers but to prepare their minds not to be deterred by any challenge that may come their way. It is to enable believers maintain a clear conscience before God and men while faithfully carrying out their ministerial duties.

In the present study, Paul shared his hope and labor for eternal glory with the Corinthian brethren. There is a link between hope, the quality of service we render to God and our ability to endure challenges. The hope of eternal reward should make us render selfless service and endure trials that may confront us as we daily bear our cross, laboring in the vineyard of the Lord.

Question 1: What is the relationship between our hope and labor for God?

BELIEVERS' HOPE OF FUTURE GLORY (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 1:21-24; Titus 2:13,14)

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). The issue of eternal glorious body and heavenly home for believers is not a guess work or a mere human assumption. It is a statement of certainty

and assurance, based on the word of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said: **“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”** (John 14:2,3).

Referred to as the dissolving of our earthly tabernacle (body), death is not the end of life. At death, this present body returns to the dust. Then, we will be clothed with a glorious body to be with the Lord, **“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”** (Philippians 3:21). While we are in this earthly tabernacle, we groan due to trials and persecutions; we are also absent from our eternal home with the Lord. To die and be absent from the body means we go to heaven to be with the Lord. This should be the earnest expectation of every Christian.

At rapture, this transformation to a more glorious body will take place. **“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”** (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). To be partakers of this great event, we must be genuinely saved, sanctified and daily engaged in fruitful service for our Master.

Question 2: What will qualify an individual for the rapture?

BELIEVERS’ ENDEAVOUR TO PLEASE AND SERVE GOD (2 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 9:27; 15:58; Ephesians 4:11-16; 6:10-18; Philippians 2:12-16)

“Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). The desire to be with the Lord should spur every heaven-

bound saint to purify himself (1 John 3:3), labor to be accepted by the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9), and be diligent so as to be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Peter 3:14). This can be achieved through regular self-examination, watchfulness over our lives, language, ambition and actions. It will also involve resisting temptations that come our way, and enduring trials and persecutions from the devil and his agents. We are also to maintain closer fellowship with God and the brethren. Another reason we should aspire to maintain a spiritually sound life while we await the rapture is that **“...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”** (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is instructive that the believers’ judgment has taken place on the cross of Calvary. Our appearing before the judgment seat of Christ is to receive reward for all our labor while on earth. Those whose desire is to partake in the glorious appearing of our Lord and receive their reward must live holily and be willing to labor for the Master until He comes.

Question 3: Why should believers aspire to maintain holy lifestyle at all times?

As believers, the knowledge of our glory at the end of our stay here on earth and the reward awaiting all saints are enough stimulants to move us into the harvest field. For **“...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”** (1 Corinthians 2:9). Also, **“knowing therefore the terror of the Lord”**, seeing the miserable condition of sinners here on earth and the doom awaiting them in eternity, we must join hands with our leaders to **“persuade men”** to turn to the Lord. This persuasion involves using everything within our power to lead sinners to repentance. It involves preaching with passion, sharing tracts, giving out messages on CDs, DVD/VCD etc. It also involves interceding for them with a burdened heart and following up the converted ones.

Question 4: Mention and discuss the reasons believers must go out to persuade sinners to repent.

BELIEVERS' MINISTRY AS CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

(2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8; 26:19; Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1; 1 Peter 2:11,12)

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Everything that Apostle Paul and his fellow soldiers did was to honor God. The love of Christ controlled their lives. Like them, we should no longer live to please ourselves; we should spend our lives pleasing Christ who died for us and rose from the grave. As beneficiaries of His love, it will be wrong to keep mute and allow others to perish in their sins. Evangelizing sinners is not optional or something we do when we are less busy; it is a command from the Lord. **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”** (Matthew 28:19,20).

The prerequisite for engaging in the ministry of reconciliation remains the same. One must have been reconciled to God. Genuine salvation leads to newness of life, behaviour, ambition and lifestyle. **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17). At conversion, we are not merely turning over a new leaf; we are beginning a new life under a new Master. Therefore, having been transformed by the power of the gospel of Christ and living a life well pleasing to God, every believer owes it a duty to go out to reconcile sinners to God. Besides, sanctification experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit, prayerfulness and the knowledge of the Scripture are vital tools for effective soul-winning outreaches.

Question 5: Enumerate some prerequisites for engaging in the ministry of reconciliation.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

An Ambassador is a minister of high rank representing his country in another country as its mouthpiece. We are representing the Kingdom of heaven here on earth and our duties include reconciling sinners to God. Besides, as ambassadors, our conduct should reflect the values of our home country. We should never engage in activities that will bring dishonor to our nation, that is, our heavenly home.

Our personal interest must never override the interest of our home country. We are to live a glorious life that will invite sinners into the kingdom of God. We must preach Christ at all times, pointing sinners to the cross and prepare the saints for the coming of the great King.

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:1,2).

Question 6: What are our duties as Christ’s ambassadors on earth?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	7	Proverbs	9
TUE	“	8	“	10
WED	“	9	“	11
THUR	“	10	“	12
FRI	“	11	“	13
SAT	“	12	“	14
SUN	“	13	“	15

660 Lesson

PAUL'S SUFFERINGS AND FAITHFULNESS IN MINISTRY

MEMORY VERSE: "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses" (2 Corinthians 6:3,4).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

In the preceding chapter, Paul assures of the believer's hope at death or rapture, reminding fellow ministers of the day of accountability before the Lord. He emphasizes that knowledge of the certainty of God's judgment compels Christ's ambassadors to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God. He says, "**Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God**" (1 Corinthians 5:20).

Understandably, no ambassador has any agenda of his own but that which he has been commissioned to carry out. It is on this note that the text opens with Paul's declaration that they, as gospel ministers, work together with God in seeking the salvation of souls. Accomplishing this task of the great commission requires that ministers possess godly virtues and spiritual experiences as Paul enumerates in the text so they can succeed in ministry in spite of challenges and obstacles that may cross their path. The paradox of diversified experiences of Paul in ministry in our text will validate as well as clear doubts as to the strangeness of such in any ministry where they are being re-enacted. Paul states that it is for the salvation of souls and consistent living in the grace of God that informed their godly conduct, relentless labor and painful suffering. And believers who understand this truth of ministers' labor for their spiritual welfare ought to reciprocate by their commitment to godly principles and conduct.

PARTNERING WITH GOD IN SOUL-SAVING MINISTRY (2 Corinthians 6:1,2; John 15:5; Matthew 28:20; Titus 2:11,12; Romans 6:1,2; 1 John 3:10; Isaiah 49:8; 1:18)

Christ revealed that without Him, the oratory and charisma of any gospel minister can do nothing. Thus, He promised: **“lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:20) after giving the great commission to the Church. Paul expresses their partnership with God as a present reality to highlight the gravity of the plea that they should not receive the grace of God in vain. He was inspired to make this plea because the Corinthian church had been bedeviled with spiritual problems that did not show they were bearing desirable fruits of righteousness and grace which they profess.

Question 1: What is the evidence of the grace of God in any professing believer?

The Scripture affirms that, **“the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”** (Titus 2:11,12). Paul’s concern for the brethren at Corinth is that the gospel of grace should be reflected in their lives: those who have received the grace of God should not live in disgrace. Or, **“shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”** (Romans 6:1,2). There is a marked difference between those who have never received or lost the grace of God which they received and those who have a current experience of it. **“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother”** (1 John 3:10). It is on this note that Paul alludes to Isaiah 49:8 to call the religious who is bereft of grace of God to salvation in Christ. Believers and Christian ministers must be careful not to arrive at a cheap conclusion that everybody in the church is born again. Irrespective of status, where evidence of grace is lacking in anyone or

group of people, the call to salvation experience is the most appropriate message to be preached. Apart from making reference to appropriate scriptures, we must endeavour to show sinners the time of salvation and readiness of God to save those who repent of their sins and exercise faith in Christ (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 86:5; Matthew 11:28; John 6:37; 1 John 1:9).

PURE CONDUCT AND BLAMELESSNESS IN MINISTRY
(2 Corinthians 6:3,4; Philippians 2:15; 1 Timothy 3:2,10; Titus 1:6,7; 2 Peter 3:14)

Apostle Paul reveals that while partnering with God to win souls into the Kingdom and encouraging them to continue in the grace of God, he and his fellow ministers also strived to lead exemplary graceful life so that the ministry should not be blamed. He acknowledges that it is the wrongdoing or offence of individual members and ministers of the gospel that bring blame on the ministry. Therefore, all believers and ministers of the gospel of Christ must be blameless and impeccable in character. He emphasizes in his epistles to Timothy and Titus that these are indispensable qualities and virtues that all ministers of the gospel must possess. The reasons for this are obvious. First, that in addition to our unflinching commitment to rescuing the perishing with the gospel, we must also live out the gospel practically for the world to believe our good news. Second, inconsistency in our Christian life do bring setbacks to the task of evangelism. Third, since the ministry is liable to criticism and attacks of the people of the world, the ministers of the gospel must be very careful to live above board. Christ's counsel in this regard to all His servants in Matthew 10: 42 is "**Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves**".

Question 2: From our text, why should all believers and ministers of God live a blameless life?

It is possible to live the blameless life as some saints did in scriptures. Noah lived a blameless life in his crooked generation and Joseph lived an impeccable life that made Pharaoh and the people of Egypt to acknowledge

the supremacy of the Almighty God. So also were the three Hebrew children. For the innocence and obedience of Daniel, the heathen King Darius declared: **“I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end”** (Daniel 6:26). Zacharias and Elisabeth walked before God blameless (Luke 1:60). Paul also challenged the Thessalonians how he and his companion ministers behaved themselves holily, justly and unblameably among them (1 Thessalonians 2:10). Following these examples, especially those of Christ our Lord and Saviour, we too must be blameless and spotless to be successful in the ministry of reconciliation. This is imperative because a Christian life preaches louder than his profession. No one can live a blameless life without transformation by the grace of God and the accompanying salvation experience.

PERSEVERANCE AND STEADFASTNESS DURING TRIALS (2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 4:8-12; Matthew 5:11; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Corinthians 11:23-30; 2 Timothy 2:12; 3:12)

There are challenges in ministry. To this truth, Paul agrees and shows how true ministers of the gospel must conduct themselves so as not to become a stumbling block to the gospel they preach. Though they are making genuine efforts to save the lost, he and his partners in service also took care of the character and conduct: **“... In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God...”** (2 Corinthians 6:4). Since all saints are called into the ministry of reconciliation, we must all live worthy of the gospel we preach.

Questions 3: Identify the trials and sufferings mentioned by Paul in our text and saints who went through them in Scripture.

Though the gospel of Christ brings peace, hope and joy to the world through His messengers, the people of the world will not all receive it; some will resist it and persecute the preachers (Matthew 24:9). The trials that accompany preaching of the gospel require doggedness

on the part of every believer and minister to overcome. Paul says, **“in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God”**. They proved to be true ministers of God **“in”** much patience, afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watchings and fastings. Note that most of these items are pluralized to show frequency of occurrence. So, if our experiences are similar to that of Paul and his fellow ministers, there is no cause for alarm. We must remain dogged and faithful so as to fulfill our ministry the way Paul did.

In verse 6, Paul changes the preposition to **“by”** to reveal the spiritual qualities that make a suffering minister excel and triumphant in ministry. We secure divine approval and triumph in ministry **“by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”** (2 Corinthians 6:6,7). Sufferings and afflictions are part of the gospel (Matthew 5:11; 1 Peter 2:21).

<p>Question 4: Why must believers patiently endure sufferings for the sake of the gospel?</p>
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The Bible is replete with examples of many servants of God that faithfully suffered for the sake of the gospel. Apart from Apostle Paul who recounted his fiery trials in Scripture (2 Corinthians 11:23), Moses preferred to **“...suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”** (Hebrews 11:25). Prophet Micaiah was imprisoned and afflicted for telling King Ahab the truth (1 Kings 22:27). Daniel was thrown into the den of lions while Nebuchadnezzar threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the burning fiery furnace for not worshipping his image. The Apostles were beaten and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus again, but were happy to suffer shame for His name and kept on preaching daily (Acts 5:40-42). Stephen was stoned to death for speaking the truth.

Suffering for Christ for the gospel's sake may come in forms of hunger on mission field, persecution of the gospel ministers by the enemies of the gospel through killings, destruction of places of worship, denial of land to build churches, etc. A true minister of God will not be moved by these transient sufferings and afflictions. Apostle Paul considered the supreme love and incomparable price paid for him by Christ as sufficient reason to endure suffering for the gospel. He says, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**" Since the present afflictions cannot be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, we must remain patient and steadfast. The Bible says, "**If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us**" (2 Timothy 2:12). The present sufferings must be patiently and faithfully endured so that we will not lose our rewards.

Verses 8-10 present contradictory statements that are real in every soul-saving ministry. These contradictions exist in the world; Satan and his agents also work hard to discredit such ministries and bring them down.

Apostle Paul says they approve themselves as ministers of God, "**By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things**".

EXHORTATION TO GROWTH IN CHRIST-LIKE LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP (2 Corinthians 6:11-13; Exodus 17:11,12; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Philippians 4:18)

Having made clear the demands of God from his ministers to the Corinthian believers, Apostle Paul challenges them into love and affection for the faithful, caring and loving ministers of God. He reminded the believers at Corinth that "**...our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged**" (2 Corinthians 6:11), meaning that they have spoken to the Corinthians freely and related to them with an open heart. Such fellowship is required in the church today for genuine revival to be experienced. The Spirit of God admonishes the believers to "**lay aside**

all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1) for spiritual growth.

Question 5: In what areas can church members demonstrate affection to God’s ministers?

Paul expected a similar response in fellowship from the brethren: **“Now for a recompense in the same (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged”** (2 Corinthian 6:13). Just as the ministers of God labored on the flock, they must reciprocate this with practical affections for them. This kind of mutual and reciprocal love for faithful ministers is demonstrated by the Macedonian Christians. **“Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”** (2 Corinthians 8:4).

Also, the Philippian saints communicated with Paul as concerning giving and receiving for which he pronounced an apostolic prayer upon them. **“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:19). For the church of God to be triumphant against the gates of hell, the role of obedience and submission to leadership cannot be over-emphasized (Hebrews 13:17).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	14	Proverbs	16
TUE	“	15	“	17
WED	“	16	“	18
THUR	“	17	“	19
FRI	“	18	“	20
SAT	“	19	“	21
SUN	“	20	“	22

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

661 Lesson

HOLINESS WITH HOSPITALITY

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

TEXT: Luke 10:30-37

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

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

Question 1: What is the nature of true holiness?

As the church awaits the rapture of the saints, a re-examination of the elements of true holiness appears indisputable and expedient. In this parable, generally called “the parable of the good Samaritan”, the Lord sets forth two kinds of holiness - one outward and the other deeply rooted in the heart. One practical, imbued with

grace and love, the other is theoretical, only resident in the head. One is professed and the other is warm, hearty service. The one spurious, the other genuine. Spurious because it is dry and holds no feelings for anyone, especially those who are suffering. It is wont to “pass by” on the other side of duty and service. It is unfortunate that the Levite and the priest, two officially ‘holy’ ministers of the Jewish temple, fell into this category.

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

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

Question 2: Who is your neighbor?

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

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

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

“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31,32). It is unfortunate that “religious men”, those in the service of the Great King, and by obligation expected to manifest His gracious caring attributes, should be charged with indifference. It is a contradiction in terms! Ministers of the gospel

– house fellowship leaders, zonal leaders, women representatives, coordinators and pastors – are by virtue of their office and calling obliged to serve others. They are not to close their eyes to the physical and spiritual plight of those they are charged to lead and feed.

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

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

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

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

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

Whatever their reasons, their actions are inexcusable. But before we slam the door of judgment against them, are Christians in the House Caring Fellowship system not guilty of the same? They feel that their sanctification will diminish if they dine with the sinner or stoop low to serve. They think they will be less Christian if they weep and commiserate with the bereaved.

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

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

THE COMMENDABLE ATTITUDE OF THE SAMARITAN
(Luke 10:33-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:16)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The lawyer, who had sought to justify himself through certain “good” works and had feigned ignorance of who a neighbor is, could not but testify to the excellent spirit exhibited by the good Samaritan. The Lord closed His message with a charge to the lawyer and by extension

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

Question 5: How can we demonstrate holiness with hospitality?

“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise” (John 21:13). Simon Peter and the rest of the disciples had abandoned the Great Commission He gave them. They had forgotten the magnitude and the urgency of their task and were set to pursue a different goal. One wonders whether these disciples, who had been with the Master, learning and beholding His mission to the world, thought of the consequence of their action. Grave as it might be, the loving Lord brought them back to duty through love.

The Lord’s strategy in bringing them back to their primary assignment presents a great challenge to all who would practise holiness with hospitality. Our hospitality (in contrast to compromise) can help backsliders back to the narrow way. Those who are weary in life’s battle can be strengthened to lay hold on the sword of the Spirit again. If we will not see the Lord without holiness, we will not even get near the pearly gate without hospitality.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	21	Proverbs	23
TUE	Acts	1	“	24
WED	“	2	“	25
THUR	“	3	“	26
FRI	“	4	“	27
SAT	“	5	“	28
SUN	“	6	“	29

662 Lesson

SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

MEMORY VERSE: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Romans 12:10).

TEXT: Romans 12:9-13; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Paul’s discourse on the essential teaching of Christian living glides from vital Christian service and ministry within the body of Christ to daily practical Christian relationship that underscores Christian brotherhood. These teachings are put forth with an obligatory tone leaving no place for excuses or exemptions. This present body of teaching zeros in on the life of love and its full- blossomed fruits. Unfeigned love produces selfless, unpretentious and excited service one to another in the Church. Love is more important than all the spiritual gifts exercised in the church today. Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, and miracle-working power produce very little without love. Love makes our actions and gifts useful. This is the hub of Christian life and relationship. If we have all things and lack in love, we have nothing. All the activities and ministry we engage in, in the Church are unprofitable if the love of God is not at its foundation. Although people have different gifts, love is available for everyone.

CHRISTIAN LOVE: THE BASIS OF SERVICE (Romans 12:9, 10; John 13:34, 35; Philippians 1:9; Romans 13:10; Hebrews 13:1)

The Lord took extra pain to teach and show the disciples the new commandment – love. This is the only virtue that could help them to reach the uttermost parts of the earth. It is the propelling quality that could fire our zeal. The desire to serve one another is fulfilled when the heart is rich in love. We cannot give any excuse of being too busy or too occupied so much as not to be concerned about the physical and spiritual needs of our

brethren. God who looks at our disposition, thoughts and hearts. He who protects and keeps us and our motives, **“and shall render to every man according to his work.”**

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

Question 1: What is the place of love in Christian service?

What articulates and loudly declares our relationship with the Lord is not our preaching, ushering or singing in the choir. It is our life of love that tells the world that we are disciples of Christ. The measure of our love should be the measure of the love of Jesus for us. The strange thing amongst believers is that Christian activities seem to drown the love of God in our heart. The more activities we get engaged in, the less of love we have for the brethren. True fellowship always dies where love ceases to exist. This is the reason many fellowship centers are witnessing low turn out.

But here, Paul the Apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit strives to reverse the trend. He laces up Christian business and fervency with a life of pure love. The order, therefore, is that our love must not decrease and our Christian engagement must always increase. Besides, our love must be pure and unfeigned. It is disheartening that most of us have learned how to pretend to love others – how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them. Some are even skilled in pretending to be moved with compassion when they hear of others needs, or to become indignant when they learn of injustice. But God calls us to real and sincere love that goes far beyond pretence and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. Because of the prevalence of feigned love among believers, Peter the apostle had this to say: **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying**

the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

Question 2: How is love best expressed?

Our society today confuses love and lust. Unlike lust, God’s kind of love is directed outward toward others, not inward toward ourselves. It is utterly unselfish. This kind of love goes against our natural inclinations. It is possible to practice this love only if God helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so that we can give love while expecting nothing in return. Thus, the more we become like Christ, the more love we will show to others in the body of Christ. Our love must not be smiles covered with bitterness and hatred. Our love must be devoid of lust. It must not be one that loves the opposite sex and excludes his gender from his deeds of love. Covetousness must be stripped off our life of love. We should not love because of what we stand to gain or enjoy from the relationship.

Again, our love must be impartial – free and full; love for all without discrimination or ulterior motive. Our love must be one that is fervent, not passive or disinterested. Some say: ‘I love people but I don’t know how to show it’. But they err. Love is expressed in actions of affection, kindness, consideration and empathy.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Love overlooks the mistakes of others, forgives others very readily even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. When we do this, we are really following God (Ephesians 5:1). The Lord wants us to manifest love in our actions and relationships with one another. In fact, this is the very basis and foundation of our activity in the Church and ministry in the body of Christ.

Our love must not approve of sin. We must eschew or run away from any act or conduct that has the stain of sin. Gossips, backbiting, negative criticism must be abhorred. We must not be party to anything that would discourage or put down a brother or a sister.

On the contrary, we should cleave to that which is good. Remember the golden rule always and live by it. **“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12).

If you want people to love you, you should love them first. If you want people to forgive you, appreciate you and speak well of you, do the same to them. If you want your mistakes and oversights to be overlooked, do the same to others too. If you do not want false stories about you to be peddled, do not do that to others too. This is the foundation of our service.

COMMITMENT AND ZEAL IN GOD’S SERVICE
(Romans 12:11,12; Acts 18:25; Psalm 69:9)

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:11,12).

Question 3: Mention six things that should characterize our Christian service.

Six things are noted in these two verse as characteristics of our Christian service. **First**, not slothful in business; **second**, fervent in Spirit; **third**, serving the Lord; **fourth**, rejoicing in hope; **five**, patient in tribulation; and six, continuing instant in prayer. All these must be carefully considered and cultivated if we want our service to be acceptable to the Lord.

The charge to eschew slothfulness in business applies both to our daily private pursuits and our Christian service. **“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies”** (2 Thessalonians 3:10,11). We should be diligent in the daily execution of our secular work. A true believer must provide for the need of his family members. God places a very high premium on dignity of labor.

Besides, women also should not be slothful in domestic business. The home of Christian women should not

be left untidy or their personal body unkempt with the excuse of a heavy load of Christian service to bear. Again, believers who are involved in the work areas of the Church are here addressed not to be slothful in business. The preacher in the Church must create time to study and read the Bible through and through before ministering to God's people. If you will be a member of the choir in your church, you must be prepared to give the hours of long and arduous practice required to minister in songs to the people of God.

Fervency of Spirit involves some personal internal motivation and desire to carry on a given task. This is described as zeal. It strips our service of every form of lukewarmness and passivity. **“For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me”** (Psalm 69:9). Serving the Lord in whatever capacity – cassette/literature distribution, hospital visitation, prison outreach, etc., must be performed with cheerfulness and zeal. **“Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”**. Our service must be **“as unto the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 4:23,24).

THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE AMONG THE BRETHREN
(Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18; Galatians 5:13)

“Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

<p>Question 4: How and what can we distribute to meet the needs of other believers?</p>
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Here we have the commandment of the Lord concerning our service. It is a responsibility for all – ministers, members, young and old members of the Church. Some feel they are so penurious that they have nothing to distribute. But they miss it. In fact, the reason why we must give is because we don't have. While we may not have something tangible or material to share, we can speak kind words to comfort the sorrowful and encourage those who are discouraged. **“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our**

prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father”

(1 Thessalonians 1:2,3). Our love should not be partial and passive. Our profession of love should not be a mere theory. We must show mercy to the needy and give to meet the needs of other saints. **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him”** (1 John 3:16,17).

Supreme love for God and love for our fellow men attracts blessings from God whose injunction we have obeyed. There will be divine supplies when we are in need. Besides, God’s favour will be upon us, there will be answers to prayers when we call upon Him and He will continue to fulfil His promises in our lives and endeavours. He will make our days like **“the days of heaven upon the earth”** (Deuteronomy 11:21). We must happily lay down our resources and material things before the brethren if we say we love the brotherhood. This is the New Testament commandment. It is the summary of the law and the prophets put together. We must serve one another in love.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	7	Proverbs	30
TUE	“	8	“	31
WED	“	9	Eccl.	1
THUR	“	10	“	2
FRI	“	11	“	3
SAT	“	12	“	4
SUN	“	13	“	5

663 Lesson

DIVINE HEALING AND HEALTH

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

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

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

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

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

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

Healing was easy in the old covenant but it is even much easier in the New Testament. This is because God had revealed Himself as **“the God that healeth”**. It was so easy that Naaman almost lost the opportunity of being healed. He did not expect getting healed to be so easy. He was told by the prophet Elisha to just go to Jordan, dip himself seven times into the water and he would be healed. That was not to take that much time. As he went and dipped himself in the water **“according to the saying of the man of God”** he came out clean. The instruction was simple but his healing was complete. He was healed, not by river Jordan, but by the power and authority in the Word of God through His ordained servant.

Healing and obedience to the instructions of God and His ordained servants are inseparable. While venomous snakes were biting the children of Israel and many of them were dying, they were told to obey a simple instruction: look up and be healed. This same principle applies also in the New Testament. We are to look up to Jesus Christ who died on the cross (John 3:14).

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

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

During His earthly ministry, Jesus healed people in cities and villages of His day. As there were no hospitals as we have them today, they lived in primitive conditions that there were a lot of sicknesses and diseases among the people. In His characteristic style, Jesus would teach in

their synagogue, preach the kingdom of God and heal those who were sick among them. This was His three-piece method: teaching, preaching and then healing. As the people came to listen to His teaching and preaching, they applied what they were taught to their lives and it generated faith in them (Romans 10:17) and they were healed.

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

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

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

However, believers should also bear in mind that there are others that are sick who need healing. By praying for those who are sick, believers can share their health with them. **“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up**

serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17,18). This healing bread should be shared with one another.

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

The believer does not rest his hope on medical science for his healing and health. He trusts God for perfect health from day to day. When he is sick, he depends on the armour of prayer and faith (1 John 5:14,15; Matthew 7:7). However, it is not sin to receive help from the practice of medicine that has nothing to do with invocation of evil powers. Besides, certain cases like child delivery, caesarean section, orthopaedic surgery, etc., require the skill of trained medical personnel in hospitals, maternity and clinics. We should afford ourselves of all God-provided opportunities for health and longevity. God has made every provision for our healing and health. And we should live daily in the realisation of His provisions.

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

and the church the agony of running from one hospital to another. Let us be wise.

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

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

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

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

There is no doubt whatsoever as to the power and willingness of God to heal all who are sick and turn to Him for help. The cases of Abimelech, Miriam, Naaman

and many others are testimonies of God's willingness to "save the sick" when He is called upon with simple faith. It was a common phenomenon with Israel of old that diseases and evil characterised rebellious times (Deuteronomy 28:15-29,58-61) but after repentance, obedient times became healthy times! (Exodus 23:25,26).

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

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

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

God's name, love and mercy all make us to know also, that we need not remain under the curse of the law today. God's revealed redemptive names are seven in number: and they are: Jehovah Shamma (Ezekiel 48:35), Jehovah Shalom (Judges 6:23,24), Jehovah Ra- ah (Psalm 23:1), Jehovah Jireh (Genesis 22:14), Jehovah Nissi (Exodus 17:15), Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6), Jehovah Rapha (Exodus 15:26) signifying presence, peace, shepherding, provision, banner, righteousness and healer respectively. Nothing

sets forth the validity of God’s willingness and ability to heal His people and keep them healthy more aptly than the last on the list of His redemptive names, namely, Jehovah Rapha or Jehovah Ropheka: **“I am the LORD that healeth thee”** or **“I am the LORD thy healer”** (Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 53:4,5; Matthew 8:16,17; 1 Peter 2:24). As if that was not enough, He **“anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil”** (Acts 10:38). Of course, this was to declare that healing and health are His will and to show His readiness to do His people good. Love gives to the needy and relieves the suffering while mercy withholds suffering from those who rightly merit it. God is all-loving and merciful. Sicknesses and diseases are therefore definitely not from Him. They are from the devil (John 10:10; 1 John 3:8b).

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

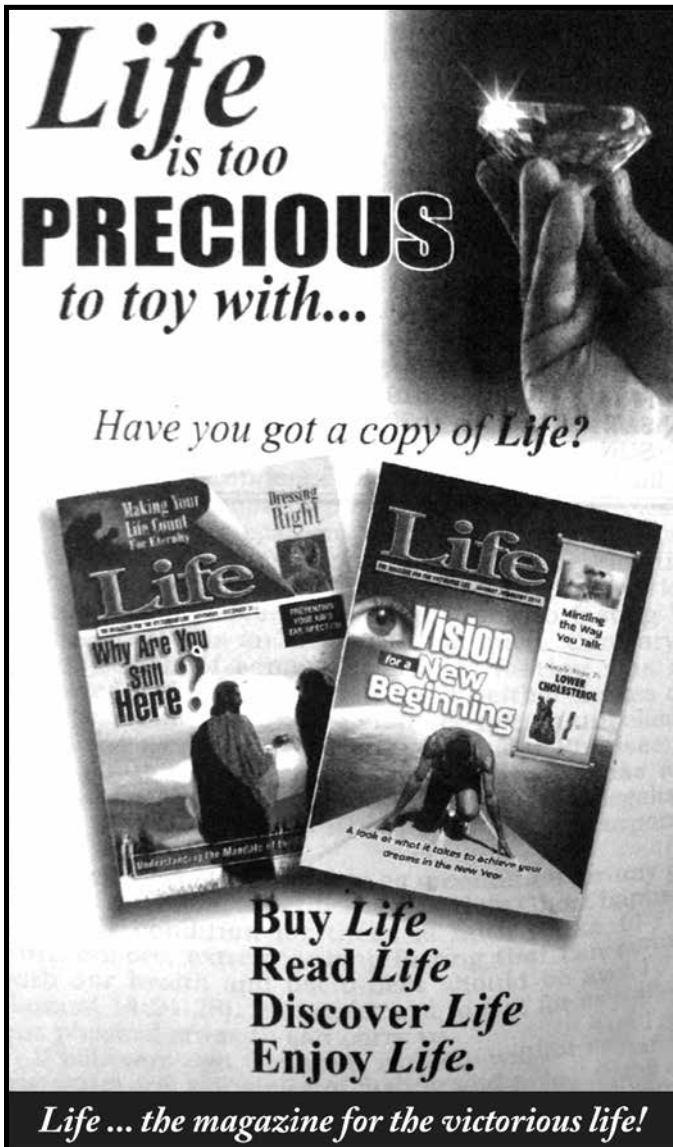
DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Acts	14	Eccl.	6
TUE	“	15	“	7
WED	“	16	“	8
THUR	“	17	“	9
FRI	“	18	“	10
SAT	“	19	“	11
SUN	“	20	“	12

**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	7:00 PM
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All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

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

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