

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 56

"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

716 Lesson

ISRAEL'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES

MEMORY VERSE: "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 7:1-17

The previous lesson described how the lords of the Philistines heeded the much delayed counsel of their priests and diviners to send back the ark of God to Israel. They had been terribly plagued under God's divine displeasure for their profanity. As the ark made its way back to Israel, Bethshemesh was the first port of call. Unfortunately, the handlers mismanaged the situation and the Lord "**smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD...**" (1 Samuel 6:19). Bothered by this development, they "**sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjathjearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you**".

This study opens with the acceptable return and reception accorded God's ark by the people of Kirjathjearim which led to Israel's repentance and restoration to the Lord and their eventual victory the over Philistines.

ACCEPTABLE RETURN OF THE ARK (1 Samuel 7:1,2; 1 Chronicles 15:2,13-15; Deuteronomy 31:9; Numbers 4:15; Job 34:31,32; Deuteronomy 5:32,33)

"And the men of Kirjathjearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD" (1 Samuel 7:1). Following the arrival of the ark of the Lord from the land of the Philistines, it remained in the house of Abinadab for twenty years till the nation began to long after it. This national feeling was a result of the absence of God's power and presence to defeat their ever-rampaging adversaries – the Philistines. The period of the absence of

the ark in the nation had been devoid of divine presence, revelations and prophecies leading to suffering and defeat in the hands of their enemies. The Lord had neglected them as an evidence of the decay in the land and their apathy to the ark. God's presence was lacking in the land till **“all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD”** (1 Samuel 7:2).

Contrary to the attitude of the people of Bethshemesh, the men of Kirjathjearim joyfully **“fetched up the ark of the LORD”**. They probably consulted Samuel, who appeared to be the custodian of the counsel of the Lord for direction and an acceptable mode of handling the ark, lest the fate of their brethren should also befall them. They avoided the mistakes of others in order to succeed. Those who learn from others will probably avoid their pitfalls; those who do otherwise will learn the hard way.

The ark of the Lord was a sacred structure, the construction of which was commanded by the Lord Himself (Exodus 25:10-22). It contained the tablets of stone on which the law was written, the mercy seat and the cherubims. Its presence meant a lot to the children of Israel: it was an assurance of divine presence and a consolation to them whenever they were challenged by their adversaries. It also showed that God was on the march with them whatever befell them. Thus, when the ark was captured by the Philistines, it was a sign that the presence and power of God was absent.

This sacred structure could not be handled anyhow, anytime by anyone. Its administration must follow proper procedure by the appropriate people. **“Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever”** (1 Chronicles 15:2).

Question 1: Why was there punishment for a breach in handling the ark?

Those whom God calls into His holy service must be set apart unto holiness in order to qualify for service. Isaiah declared: **“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).

The ark was brought into **“the house of Abinadab... and [they] sanctified Eleazar his son to keep”** it. They understood the sacredness of the assignment and promptly dedicated a qualified servant to attend to it. They remembered that there was judgment because they failed to follow the due order. **“For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order”** (1 Chronicles 15:13). Now that the proper steps were taken, the ark remained in Abinadab’s place for twenty years without an incident of plagues until the people desired it. They must have realized that God is just and that though He is the God of love, His love does not cancel His holiness. Their consciences reminded them that there has been a vacuum and a breach in their relationship with their Maker. They knew that the time had come to right their wrong.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SIN AND RETURN TO GOD
(1 Samuel 7:3-6; Psalm 32:3-5; 2 Chronicles 7:13,14; 15:1-4; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 15:17-20,24)

In the previous battle between the children of Israel and the Philistines, Israel had relied solely on the ark of God for victory, while ignoring an important ingredient for victory: their relationship with God. They vainly supposed that the ark of the Lord could save them when they had departed from the Lord of the ark through their wickedness and sin (1 Samuel 4:3,4). It was against this backdrop that Samuel admonished the people that **“... If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines”** (1 Samuel 7:3). The people needed to repent of their idol worship, neglect of the house of God, wickedness against one another and all that have affected their relationship with the Lord. It was not enough to hide under the guise of religion and religious activities without priority to a godly lifestyle.

The children of Israel must have been shocked at the utter defeat they suffered despite the presence of the ark among them (1 Samuel 4:5-10).

Question 2: Mention some ways people substitute religion for righteousness?

As a true prophet and servant of God, Samuel laid bare the conditions for divine intervention. He gave them the whole counsel of God. Every true minister of God must be true to the Scriptures by saying it the way it is, not the way they feel, what suits their fancy or what the people like to hear, feeding them with half-truths. First, Samuel admonished them to return to the Lord. This means retracing their steps from their backslidden state. **“Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers...”** (Jeremiah 35:15). Moreover, the Lord insisted that it must be done wholeheartedly **“with all your hearts”**. He will not have a half-hearted worship.

Second, they were to get rid of all idols. Idol worship is an aberration to divine service and a slap to divinity. It attempts to exalt the creature more than the Creator. Third, they needed to prepare their hearts to serve the Lord. Preparation is paramount to obedience. Ezra is a ready example (Ezra 7:10). Fourth, the children of Israel must serve the Lord **“only”**, not with any other personality, object or deity. **“I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no Savior”** (Isaiah 43:11).

Question 3: What practical steps must sinners and backsliders take to return to God?

The children of Israel got the message, acknowledged their transgressions and confessed that they **“have sinned against the LORD...”** They promptly **“put away Baalim and Ashtaroth and served the LORD only”**. They had deep sorrow and regret for their evils against the Lord. Those who desire forgiveness from the Lord must acknowledge their transgressions and be ready to forsake them. **“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my**

transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). This is always the way to go and the quickest way to receive divine favor and pardon.

“And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.” Samuel was the last among the judges in Israel and he administered the affairs of the nation. He heard and redressed their grievances, gave them ordinances, taught them how to reconcile and make their ways right before God. Besides, he did not fail in his responsibility of praying for the people. After leading them to repentance from sin, he prayed for them and his prayer brought victory to the nation. When we receive and obey God’s appointed leaders and ministers, our blessings are guaranteed. Israel’s attitude opened the floodgate to an abiding victory over the Philistines.

VICTORY OVER THE ARCH-ENEMY (1 Samuel 7:7-17; 2Chronicles 20:20-24; Isaiah 41:8-12; Job 17:9; Romans 8:31,32,35-37; 1 John 5:4,5,18)

“And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 7:7).

As a mark of genuine repentance, the children of Israel relied solely on God. Amidst fear over the approaching Philistines, they besought Samuel: **“Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines”**. They had strong confidence in the intercession of Samuel, because they knew he was a holy man of God.

<p>Question 4: What lessons can we draw from Israel’s request from Samuel?</p>

Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it for a burnt offering. This was in line with God’s requirement in the Old Testament. Then he cried unto the Lord and He heard him. God promised to answer all who call upon His name in truth and sincerity (Jeremiah 29:12; 33:3; Isaiah 58:9). He is willing and ready to play His part as soon as His people do theirs. Unlike Samuel’s

offering, believers today do not need any other sacrifice to approach the throne of grace. Jesus Christ is the perfect Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away our sins and to guarantee answers from God (Hebrews 10:5-8; John 14:14). The New Testament believer needs no other sacrifice, nor to anchor his confidence on the gods of this world.

“But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.” Those who leave the battles of their lives to God find that He cannot fail, no matter the size and number of enemies involved. As Israel went after their enemies only to gather spoils, believers who trust the Lord for victory in life will live to raise an “Ebenezer” to God.

Samuel had a very successful ministry in Israel. Born and consecrated to the Lord at a tender age, his whole life was devoted to service of God and his nation. He was the architect of restoration and revival in Israel. During his day, genuine repentance was established, the nation was brought back to the way of the Lord, people longed to serve God, righteous living was instituted, the arch-enemy of Israel was defeated and put to perpetual submission and the nation experienced long peace. Besides, he was an effective and a diligent leader who **“judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places”** (1 Samuel 7:15,16; Romans 12:8). Above all, with an altar built for the Lord in his house, Samuel personally served and worshipped the Lord all the days of his life.

Question 5: Highlight some of the qualities that marked Samuel out among the judges in Israel.

In conclusion, we learn from the passage that first, righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34). Second, when repentance is wholehearted, God forgives, pardons and even blots out the consequences of sin (1 John 1:9). Third, every true child of God should leave their battles to God because victory comes from Him alone (Exodus 14:14; 1 Samuel 17:47). Fourth, when God is involved in our

battles, victory will be permanent (Romans 8:31,37; 1 Samuel 7:13,14). Fifth, we should maintain an attitude of gratitude to God for the victory He gives us in battle (1 Samuel 7:12). Lastly, in order not to short-live our victory, we should be devoted to the service of the Lord, like Samuel, who **“judged Israel all the days of his life”** (1 Samuel 7:15).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	Mark	11-12	2 Samuel	3-4
TUE	“	13	“	5-6
WED	“	14	“	7-8
THUR	“	15	“	9-10
FRI	“	16	“	11-12
SAT	Luke	1	“	13
SUN	“	2	“	14

717 Lesson

ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING

MEMORY VERSE: “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us” (1 Samuel 8:19).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 8:1-22

The previous chapter of the book of First Samuel ended on a victorious note with Samuel raising an Ebenezer to God. Under God’s leadership and Samuel as the last judge in Israel, the Philistines, who were the arch-enemy of Israel, were subdued. Israel also recovered lost territories and enjoyed a period of peace with her neighbors. Samuel was able to carry out an itinerant ministry of teaching, which took him in circuits from Ramah to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh on a yearly basis. Indeed, it was a period of rest and relative peace in the land.

However, the present chapter records the unfortunate turn of events in Israel, especially as Samuel began to show signs of old age. The Israelites approached him and requested him to choose a king who would govern them like other nations. Though Samuel protested, pointing out the dire consequences of having a king like other nations, the people insisted on having their way. God then told Samuel to overlook their rejection of Him and assent to their request. This study encapsulates an example of God’s permissive will to pacify a presumptuous and obstinate people, the perversion of the sons of Samuel, the prediction of the nature of human kings, and the pre-eminence of God as the only true King.

Question 1: What do you understand by the expression, “God’s permissive will”?

THE PRESUMPTION OF ISRAEL IN ASKING FOR A KING (1 Samuel 8:1-5; 10:19; 12:17; Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Hosea 13:9-11; Acts 13:20-22; Psalm 78:29-35; 106:15)

The elders of Israel approached Samuel requesting a king who would lead them like other nations. On the surface, they predicated their request on the evil ways of Samuel's sons. As he grew feebler with age, Samuel had appointed his two sons – Joel and Abiah – as judges to assist in the administration of justice in Israel. It was obvious he could not maintain his routine itinerary among the people. But his sons deviated from the path of righteousness; they **“turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment”** (1 Samuel 8:3).

Question 2: Why do children of godly leaders walk contrary to the faith of their parents and how can believers help them?

They did not follow the footsteps of their father who was free from covetousness or bribery (1 Samuel 12:1-5). It could be recalled that a similar thing happened between Eli and his sons. Highlighted in these instances is that faith and righteousness are not genetically transferred or inherited but obtained from the Lord on individual basis. Each person has to personally decide to serve the Lord. The sons of Samuel chose to walk in their own way despite the godly example of their father. Children of great leaders often wander away from the faith of their fathers probably because of the failure of their parents to give sufficient time and attention to their training and supervision. Samuel's itinerary and long absence from home to teach the Israelites God's word certainly took its toll on his family. The same is true about busy ministers and workers today. Satan targets their children in order to weaken their faith and ministry (Revelation 12:4). While Christian leaders must ensure that charity of soul-winning and discipline begins at home, the entire church who benefit from the ministry of these men of God must accept the responsibility of interceding fervently for the conversion and preservation of their children.

Question 3: Why is it dangerous for the people of God to desire to be like others who do not know God?

The children of Israel ostensibly used the perversion of Samuel's sons as excuse to demand a king. But their hidden motive was revealed in their request: **“now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”** (1 Samuel

8:5). Whereas, God’s plan was that **“the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations”** (Numbers 23:9), they preferred to be like other nations. Before this time, they had made an attempt to enthrone Gideon as king, but he rejected the idea.

Israel seemed not to value their being under a theocracy – the direct rule of God as King. They desired a system that would not demand faith and obedience to the word of God, but a human government full of pomp and colourful displays, comparable to those of the surrounding nations. However, they did not realize that by their action, they had rejected the Creator and would replace Him with mortal man. The implication was that they would rather trust man whom they could see, no matter his weakness, than the Almighty whom they could not see. They had forgotten that they defeated many nations in battle despite their kings; neither did they realize that God wrought great victories for them in all manners of challenges they had faced without a king. Why then would they want to change a winning formula without direct instructions from God? They wanted the presence of a charismatic leader, yet it was the presence of God that they needed and that was what they rejected.

Question 4: What can believers learn from Israel’s demand for a king?

Israel’s request for a king portrays a number of lessons for believers today. First, we must realize and cherish God’s reign in our lives. We should ensure He is enthroned as King over us and not allow anyone or any pursuit to dethrone Him. We must never see anyone as a worthy alternative to God’s rule over our lives. His message to Israel on this matter of asking for a king is very instructive: **“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?”** (Hosea 13:9,10).

Second, believers must beware of sinful imitations and carnal comparison. Israel was fond of comparing themselves with other nations and looking down on

the great heritage they had. The danger of comparing ourselves with the world is that we may end up losing focus of our peculiarity and the eternal purpose of God for our lives. Third, we must avoid the error of belittling what we have because of secret envy for what others have. Believers are sons of God and are peculiar, holy, separated and sanctified. Fourth, as believers, we must not have any desire to be like the world around us. A believer is called out of the world to belong to God.

PREDICTION OF THE TYRANNY OF HUMAN RULERS: (1 Samuel 8:6-18; 10:25; 14:25; 2 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; 4:7,22-28; 9:22,23; 10:26; 12:4; 21:7; 2 Chronicles 26:10-15)

The request of Israel grieved Samuel and he was sorrowful, but he took the matter to God in prayer. He was displeased not so much because they rejected him as their leader but that their request signified a rejection of God's rule. His response showed he was a good leader. He was not primarily concerned about his own personal honor, neither did he attempt to defend or make excuses for his wayward children; rather, he prayed. Good leaders pray when they are criticized or assaulted by those they are leading or when the people go astray. Samuel was a man of prayer worthy of emulation (1 Samuel 7:5-10; 8:6; 12:16-23).

In answer to Samuel's prayer, God told him to listen to the people because their request was another facet of their self-will. **"And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them"** (1 Samuel 8:7). However, God instructed Samuel to announce to them what to expect from an earthly king. In essence, He told them that instituting a monarchy would bring about a form of tyranny and oppression which Israel had not known before. Their kings would conscript their men and women for personal profit (1 Samuel 10:25; 14:52; 1 Kings 9:22,23; 10:26; 12:4). This would be inevitable because of the need to maintain an army, personal security and guard and who else would do that but their young men and women who were used

to tilling the field? Besides, God predicted that the rule of kings would also bring oppression in form of forceful acquisition of property, forced labor, taxation and loss of personal liberty. All these eventually came to pass (2 Samuel 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; 4:7,22-28; 21:7; 2 Chronicles 26:10-15).

When Israel asked for a king, obviously they did not consider the negative consequences and responsibilities associated with it. Human kingdoms inevitably lead to tyranny, selfishness, injustice and unfairness. Only those who fear God and rule others according to His precepts can overcome the pitfalls associated with human authority. No believer should rule like an earthly monarch whenever they are placed in a position of authority. Jesus taught that leaders should comport themselves as servants. **“And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve”** (Luke 22:25,26).

THE PERMISSIVE WILL OF GOD IN GRANTING ISRAEL A KING (1 Samuel 8:19-22; 12:1,13-19; Isaiah 66:4; Hosea 13:9-11; Psalm 106:15)

Despite the disadvantages in having a human king, the children of Israel insisted that Samuel should choose one for them. **“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us”** (1 Samuel 8:19). The people were determined to have their way and God told Samuel to agree with them. **“And the LORD said to Samuel, Harken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city”** (1 Samuel 8:22). Here, we see God again granting the desire of a difficult people. He had done so before when the children of Israel lusted for meat in the wilderness (Numbers 11:31-34; Psalms 78:29-31; 106:15). God gave them their desire but sent leanness to their soul. They got what they wanted but there was no blessing of God in it. Failing to learn from their past missteps, they fell into the same error again.

Question 5: Point out the dangers of living in God's permissive will.

Believers should recognize the dangers of living in God's permissive will. It gives a false sense of security and deceives a person into a fake assurance of God's favor. Though Israel got their desire, God was not pleased with them. Later, He said concerning this event: "**I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath**" (Hosea 13:11). Most of the kings in Israel were evil and a stumbling block to the nation rather than a blessing. They regretted their obstinacy and learned the hard way.

If Israel had remained patient under God, He would still have given them a king after His own heart. It had been part of God's plan for Israel to have a king. He promised Jacob that kings would be among his descendants (Genesis 35:11). There were other instances when God spoke about kings coming up in Israel (Genesis 36:31; 49:10; Numbers 24:7-9; Deuteronomy 28:36). But it was presumptuous of Israel to initiate, rather than wait for God to appoint a king for them. God's perfect will also has a perfect timing attached to it, for He makes all things beautiful in His time. However, if we rush ahead, we may mar or complicate matters and the consequences may be dire. We must learn to wait for God.

Concluding this important study on Israel's demand for a king, we are instructed: one, to avoid the terrible mistake of Israel which many people are repeating today by rejecting the rule of Jesus Christ over their lives. Two, we must also check our motives and desires to ensure that even when we seek to make Jesus the King of our lives, we are enthroning Him for the right reasons. In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, certain Israelites attempted to force Jesus to be their King, so He could supply them bread. But when He told them that He is the Bread of life, they rejected Him. Three, the attempt and tendency to force God's hands over any matter pushes a person out of God's perfect will and should be avoided. Four, it is presumptuous to insist on receiving, before due time, what God intends to keep in

trust for us till an appointed time. Five, learning from Israel’s mistake, the best step a person should take is to enthrone Jesus Christ as King over one’s life. He is the only worthy King who is able to fight our battles without exploiting us.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	3	2 Samuel	15
TUE	“	4	“	16-17
WED	“	5	“	18
THUR	“	6	“	19
FRI	“	7	“	20-21
SAT	“	8	“	22
SUN	“	9	“	23-24

718 Lesson

SAUL SEEKS THE LOST ASSES

MEMORY VERSE: “And the asses of Kish Saul’s father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses” (1 Samuel 9:3).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 9:1-27

In the preceding chapter, the elders of Israel had demanded a king from Samuel to judge them like other nations. This turn of event represented a dislike of God’s supreme reign in their national life. However, God granted their request but on a permissive note.

In this lesson, God chose Saul, Kish’s son, who was **“a Benjamite, a mighty man of power”** to be Israel’s first king. Saul was **“a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people”** (1 Samuel 9:2). He was a responsible young man prompting his father to commission him to search for his lost asses. His dutiful discharge of this responsibility circumstantially led to his meeting with Samuel and consequent choice as Israel’s first king. Obviously, believers’ prompt response and commitment to the great commission to rescue lost souls of men gladden God’s heart and attract His blessings.

SAUL’S SEARCH FOR THE LOST ASSES (1 Samuel 9:1-10; Jeremiah 50:6; Luke 15:3-10; Matthew 10:5-7; 15:24; Luke 16:1,2,10-12; Mark 16:15)

The asses of Saul’s father had wandered away from Kish, their owner. This informed his commission to go find them. His command was, **“arise, go seek the asses”**. Saul accepted the commission to seek the lost asses. Though Kish had other children (1 Chronicles 23:22; 24:29; Esther 2:5), it was Saul’s sense of responsibility that made his father to entrust this all-important task into his care. With the attitude of prompt obedience, he **“passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through**

the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not” (verse 4). He searched at different places and mobilized his most dutiful servant to assist him with the task. He was determined to find them at all cost. His doggedness to find the lost animals is worthy of emulation.

Question 1: What challenge does Saul’s persistence to find the lost asses pose to us as Christians?

The entire human race is lost and damned eternally. It is the lost condition of the souls of men that informed Christ’s advent into the world to seek and save us. He reveals that the value of one lost sheep is enough reason to send a search party or go to **“the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray”** because **“it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish”** (Matthew 18:12-14). He further clarifies that searching for a lost sheep will continue **“until he find it”** (Luke 15:4). It was for this reason His Father **“sent”** Him to find the lost sheep and bring them into the fold under one Shepherd (Matthew 15:24; John 10:16; Luke 4:43). Like Kish, Christ has commissioned all believers to **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). Like Saul, all believers must arise and leave no stone unturned to ensure that lost sinners are found, converted and established in the Kingdom. We must deploy all our resources and commit the best manpower to this Great Commission.

“And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us” (verse 5). Although Saul’s persistence yielded no fruit, he was mindful not to let a worse thing happen to his father as a result of their delayed return.

Meanwhile, Saul’s servant suggested that they seek counsel from a prophet on the way forward.

Question 3: What should be our attitude when seeking counsel?

From the disposition of Saul and his servant, they were dependable, obedient and willing to endanger their lives to find the lost asses. Two, they were determined to go the extra mile. Three, they were dogged and willing to find solution to the challenge rather than throw in the towel. Four, Saul was resolute to take counsel only from a genuine man of God.

SAUL SEEKS GUIDANCE ON RESCUING THE LOST ASSES (1Samuel 9:11-14; Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 19:20,21; 1 Samuel 30:8; 1 Kings 12:6-19)

After a little persuasion, **“Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was. And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?”** (1 Samuel 9:10,11). As soon as they arrived the city, they found some young maidens who directed them to the residence of Samuel, the prophet. True, the steps of a good man are directed by the Lord. The Lord knows the way of man and He will direct it to fulfil His purpose and program. From the events that followed, it was true that God was in the affairs of Saul to direct him to the place of the fulfillment of His program for his life.

Moreover, the decision of Saul and his servant to seek counsel and direction is commendable. Sometimes, life may present us with challenges and decisions that we need to seek direction from our leaders. At such times, wisdom dictates that we have recourse to mature godly leaders and pastors. The Scripture says, **“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”** (Proverbs 11:14). Unlike other people who would rather seek counsel from sorcerers, false prophets or diviners, Saul was determined to seek a true man of God for directions.

In seeking counsel, it is important to examine the character and values of the counsellor. Is he/she godly, spiritually sound and mature? Seek advice from people who know and love God and His word (1 Kings 12:6- 19). Two, evaluate the merit of their counsel from the word of God. Any counsel from any person, no matter their

status or position – pastor, bishop, overseer, apostle, etc. – contrary to the word of God should be discarded. Three, although seeking counsel is a sign of maturity and humility (Proverbs 1:5), the counsellee should be willing to do the will of God.

Reference is made to “**high place**” five times in the text (verses 12,13,14,19,25). This repetition shows the sanctity of the sacrifices made to God at the appointed place. Worthy of note is the obedience and patience of the children of Israel when dealing with a priest as they “**will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that he bidden**”. More so, Samuel’s humility to come down from the high place to meet Saul and his servant is worthy of emulation. Note that neither Kish nor Saul had any inkling that God was using this challenge of finding the lost asses to unwittingly bring the latter to the knowledge of his divine appointment as king. Obedience, indeed, brings blessings.

SAMUEL DIRECTED TO ANOINT SAUL KING (1 Samuel 9:15-22; 16:1,4-13; Exodus 30:30; 1 Kings 1:32-34,39; Acts 8:26-31; Genesis 12:1-4)

“Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel...” (verses 15,16). God spoke directly to Samuel that he should anoint the person He would send to be captain over His people. God was unmistakable about the timing and details of the individual for anointing. Though Kish and Saul did not perceive any divine operation in the loss of the asses, the turn of events to seek advice from the seer and God’s directive to Samuel showed that they were divinely arranged. The Scripture affirms that God rules in the affairs of men and that all things work together for the good of His children.

As Saul approached Samuel, the Lord ministered to Samuel that His choice for anointing as king had arrived. The meeting, orchestrated by God, proves that He truly leads His own.

Question 4: Mention instances in the Scripture where people received divine directives from God.

The Scripture is replete with instances where God led His people. Abraham received instruction from God to go to an unknown land where he would be blessed and become the father of many nations (Genesis 12:1- 4). Jacob was instructed to go up to Bethel to make an altar unto God (Genesis 35:1; 32:30). God spoke to Moses frequently on how to lead the Israelites to the promised land (Exodus 33:11). Samuel was called by God as a child and was showed what would befall Eli's household (1 Samuel 3:1-14). The wise men from the East received divine direction on the birth of Christ and where He would be found (Luke 2:9-12). Philip was instructed to join an Ethiopian eunuch's chariot where he led him to salvation (Acts 8:26-31).

In response to Saul's enquiry, Samuel introduced himself but also instructed him to go up to the high place to dine with him. He promised to release him the following day to his people. He also comforted Saul about the plight of the lost asses after which he spoke of the matter of his divine appointment.

“And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?” (1 Samuel 9:20,21). The words from the man of God relieved Saul in no small way. Benign words from ministers comfort the dejected and discouraged (1 Samuel 1:17,18). This conversation revealed the humble disposition of Saul and the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit by Samuel. While humility qualifies the believer for elevation, spiritual gifts help Christian servants to be effective in spiritual service.

SAUL DINES WITH SAMUEL (1 Samuel 9:23-27; Matthew 22:4)

To authenticate Saul’s appointment as king, Samuel took him to the high place **“and made [him] sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons”**. Before Saul’s arrival to the city, Samuel had made necessary arrangements to honor him among the divinely favoured. **“And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee ...And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day”** (verses 23,24). Samuel was a good planner who ensured that proper arrangements were made before their meeting. Planning and preparation (physical or spiritual) are paramount if we want to succeed.

The discreetness with which Samuel communicated the matter of the kingdom to Saul is noteworthy. He communed with him **“upon the top of the house”** where there would be no interruption. While accompanying him to the outskirts of the city the following morning, Samuel made Saul to send his servant forward as discussion on his divine appointment continued. Where necessary, Christian leaders must give sensitive counselling sessions the privacy required.

Question 5: As Christians, why is it necessary to be discreet when handling sensitive matters?

DAILY BIBLE READING				
MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	10	1 Kings	1
TUE	“	11	“	2
WED	“	12	“	3
THUR	“	13-14	“	4-5
FRI	“	15-16	“	6
SAT	“	17-18	“	7
SUN	“	19	“	8

719 Lesson

SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL KING

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?” (1 Samuel 10:1).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 10:1-27

The event recorded in the text is significant in Israel’s history. It marks the nation’s transition from theocracy to monarchy and highlights the encounter between Saul and Samuel which culminated in anointing the first king for the nation. It also throws light into the personality of the new leader, his selection process, its implications for a nation founded by the Lord Himself and the conflicting reactions of stakeholders to the emerging king.

Saul’s anointing was obviously in answer to the nation’s request for a change in leadership. Though God did not foreclose an eventual institution of the monarchy, the nation’s demand was ill-advised (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). Owing to the unyielding posture of the elders of Israel, Samuel was instructed to anoint Saul. God still answers prayers, but whether the answer agrees with His perfect will is a different thing altogether. There are times an answer to a person’s request negates His perfect will (Numbers 11:4-6, 18-20, 31-34; Psalm 106:15; Ezekiel 14:4; Hosea 13:9-11).

With reference to the incident under consideration, it is clear that the Lord’s consent was purely permissive. In making our request, we should not be “**unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is**” (Ephesians 5:17). It is as we make scripturally acceptable requests that we shall be able to receive enduring answers and be spared the pains of future regrets.

SAUL’S PRIVATE ANOINTING BY SAMUEL (1 Samuel 10:1-9; 16:13; 24:6; 26:11; 2 Samuel 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:21)

The emergence of Saul as king was in phases. The first was between him and Samuel alone. This secret anointing was to personally intimate Saul of God's interest in him ahead of his unveiling to the public. **“Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?”** (1 Samuel 10:1). This act was in obedience to divine directives and set Saul above others, made him commander-in-chief of the army, and a representative of God to enforce righteousness in the nation.

Question 1: State the purpose of Saul's anointing.

Saul's anointing was proof of his divine selection and approval. Anointing a person or thing was a practice in ancient times to set such apart and as a mark of honor (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 8:12). It was to show that the individual or thing thus anointed had a special and sacred purpose to fulfill. Two, they became sanctified vessel and perhaps untouchable for harm or malevolence (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9; 2 Samuel 1:14). Three, it was believed that the act transferred the holiness and virtue of the deity in whose name the individual was anointed. Therefore, Samuel's act was to affirm that Saul was now a different person. Four, it was also believed that anointing a person in the name of the Lord imparted a special presence of the Spirit of God on the recipient (1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1). Five, New Testament saints enjoys this privilege through the coming and outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:27).

To support this divine selection and approval, Samuel gave Saul three signs which were designed to enhance his faith in his new estate, encourage his heart and prepare him to conform to the arrangement of God for his administration. While the first sign was to confirm Samuel's earlier declaration that the lost asses had been found, the second was to confirm his anointing (verses 2- 4). He was to receive what was offered as homage in recognition of his new status as the Lord's anointed. The third was to prove to him that God was with him to divinely empower him for the task ahead (verses 5,6).

Samuel further instructed Saul to **“tarry”** till his coronation was complete. He was not to run ahead into his new office without proper directive and leadership. Those who lay claim to calls into the spiritual ministry should be patient and wait for the Lord’s, lest they be guilty of running ahead of Him; **“...he that believeth shall not make haste”** (Isaiah 28:16).

“And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day” (1 Samuel 10:9).

<p>Question 2: What was the significance of the fulfillment of the signs Samuel gave to Saul?</p>
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The fulfillment of the signs was proof that Samuel was a true prophet of God (1 Samuel 3:30; Deuteronomy 18:22). Secondly, they were to encourage Saul to earnestly depend on God for every enablement required to execute the divine purpose of his appointment and new assignment. Thirdly, to set Samuel as a worthy mentor who must be accorded utmost deference.

SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT FOR THE NEWLY ANOINTED (1 Samuel 10:10-16; Joel 2:28; Acts 1:8; 9:3-17; Numbers 27:15-20; 2 Kings 2:9,10)

Aside of those devoid of godly fear, every leader appointed by God had always been sealed by His Spirit. Saul was no exception. **“And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them”** (1 Samuel 10:10). In fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy and divine confirmation, Saul took on a new heart and spirit in preparation for leadership. A new zeal, passion and aspiration were needed to lift him above the ordinary Israelite. Saul was no longer concerned about the mundane asses; there was now a nobler cause, something sublime and more honorable – the challenge of leading a great nation like Israel. His world-view changed from that of a mere shepherd or ass-searcher to a statesman.

God-ordained leaders must not be bugged down with mundane affairs of life that conflict and hinder their

calling to serve. Those who will serve the Lord and fulfil His program must of necessity purge themselves from the love of the things of this world. **“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”** (2 Timothy 2:4).

Saul’s experience also emphasizes the importance of the Holy Ghost baptism for effective ministry. The work of the Kingdom cannot be done in the energy of the flesh but through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Christian ministers need to be endued with the Spirit’s power and endowed with divine gifts in order to excel. God promises to pour His Spirit upon His children (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 1:8).

Question 3: Why is it important for Christian leaders to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

The influence of the Holy Spirit was also to endow Saul with divine wisdom and direct his thought pattern, ability and response. However, his encounter and display with a prophetic company in singing, worship and eulogy of God was incredible. The reaction of his acquaintances revealed that Saul was not hitherto inclined to such religious expressions. **“And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”** (1 Samuel 10:11).

In spite of his unenviable past, the Lord chose to exalt him to the highest office in the land and favored him with an indisputable encounter of His Spirit. This is reminiscent of the later grace poured on Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament (Acts 9:26). The incident underscores what grace can accomplish in a person’s life. Moses was picked from the backside of the desert to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land. David was a shepherd boy when God anointed him to be king over His people. Amos said he was not in the lineage of the prophets, but a fruit gatherer before God’s lifting hands picked him to be a prophet in Israel (Amos 7:14).

Regardless of how irreligious, corrupt or sinful a person may be, an encounter with Jesus brings a great change (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The vilest of sinners who truly believes will become a specimen of godliness. Likewise, a weak and spiritually anaemic believer can be empowered to do exploits for God.

Question 4: Highlight specific lessons from the fact of Saul's choice for the exalted office in Israel.

Like Saul, no one qualifies on his/her own merits. Everyone chosen by God for any privileged position is a product of grace (1 Corinthians 1:26).

As Saul eventually headed home, he met his uncle who “...said, **Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you**” (1 Samuel 10:15). Though the questions were directed at the duo (Saul and his servant), Saul wisely took the lead to respond. His answer revealed divine wisdom and circumspection. He revealed only the part that was needed to answer the question. While a believer must not be evasive or deceptive, we should be discrete to keep classified information until they are due for public use. Since the inquiry was not directly about the issue of the kingdom, divulging it would be unwise and self-serving. “**A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards**” (Proverbs 29:11). Besides, his response might be a reflection of his humility and modesty. After all, he hid himself among the people when he was to be unveiled to the whole nation (1 Samuel 10:21,22).

SOLEMN NOMINATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF SAUL (1 Samuel 10:17-27; Numbers 17:2; Judges 7:14-26; Proverbs 18:18; Romans 13:1,2)

“**And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh**” (1 Samuel 10:17). The purpose of this convocation was to present the new monarch to the nation. Samuel's initial protest against their wrong choice hinted that God was not happy, though He appeared to have consented. It only showed that the consent was a permissive will which carry dire consequences (1 Samuel 8:6-20; Psalm 78:29-31; Hosea 13:9-12). The Lord reminded them of His numerous benevolence: His

deliverance from Egyptian bondage, conquest of enemy kingdoms, freedom from their oppressors, salvation from all adversities and tribulations, and supply of their needs. He added, but **“ye have this day rejected your God... and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us”** (1 Samuel 10:19). Believers should be grateful to God always, **“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s”** (Psalm 103:3-5).

In spite of the attitude of the children of Israel, God led Samuel to solemnly guide the selection process of a king and the lot fell on Saul who withdrew to hide among the stuff.

Question 5: What can we learn from Saul’s withdrawal from the general assembly?

Though already sure that the lot would fall on him, Saul did not present himself. When he considered his lowly background, social status and perhaps, his wealth of experience, he felt inadequate to lead a nation like Israel with so many challenges. This is always the attitude of people who understand that leadership is about service and not exploitation; it is to minister and not be ministered unto (Exodus 3:11; 1 Kings 3:7-10; Mark 10:45). However, the New Testament believer needs not shrink from a call to service since Christ had promised to abide with us and strengthen us with the power of the Holy Ghost to do the will of God (Acts 18:10; Philippians 4:13).

When he was eventually sought out from the stuff, Saul’s physique coupled with Samuel’s commentary won the applause of the majority who prayed: **“God save the king”** (1 Samuel 10:24). Believers should continually make **“supplications, prayers, intercessions ... for kings, and for all that are in authority... (1 Timothy 2:1,2).**

Samuel proceeded to tell the people the terms of the new leadership and kingdom: the kings’ rights and

limitations as well as the people’s duties and obligations. Thus, Israelite kings were not to be absolute rulers but theocratic monarchs, recognizing the supremacy of God over the king and his subjects. After the pronouncement, Saul returned to Gibeah with a band of men induced by God to offer themselves to honor and protect him.

But there were some people, properly described as “**children of belial**” who despised Saul. But he displayed such magnanimity that is commendable to all leaders: that they are not to use their power and authority to oppress others. His reaction also showed that not everyone would be in agreement with us at all times, yet we should be fair to all. Humility, self-abasement and desire to serve should characterize us at all times; thus, shall we be able to go far with God and fulfill His purpose for our calling.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Luke	20	1 Kings	9
TUE	“	21	“	10
WED	“	22	“	11
THUR	“	23	“	12
FRI	“	24	“	13
SAT	John	1	“	14
SUN	“	2-3	“	15

720 Lesson

VICTORY OF JABESH OVER AMMON

MEMORY VERSE: “And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together” (1 Samuel 11:11).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 11:1-15

The request of the children of Israel for a king who would lead them like other nations was granted in the preceding chapter. Saul was thus anointed king over Israel to lead and defend them against external aggression. Shortly after his selection, the Ammonites laid siege on Jabeshgilead, a territory of the Israelites. As it were, this challenge and the accompanying victory confirmed the choice of Saul as divine. God appoints leaders to solve problems, fight and win battles and lead His people on the path of righteousness.

Question 1: Why does God appoint leaders over His people?

Jabesh-Gilead, a town on the east of Jordan, was located within the portion of the half tribe of Manasseh (Judges 21:8; 1 Samuel 11:1; 31:11; 2 Samuel 2:4; 21:12). This town, it could be recalled, was sacked by the Israelites’ punitive expedition for refusing to join in chastising the tribe of Benjamin at Gibeah for shielding some rapists from being penalized. After its sack, four hundred virgins were captured from there and given to the surviving Benjamites as wives so their tribe might not suffer extinction (Judges 21:8-25). Now bereft of valiant men that could defend it, Jabesh-Gilead was thought to be an easy prey by Nahash, king of the Ammonites who laid siege on it. An irony however played out at this time of siege: the people of Jabesh-Gilead who did not see any reason to join forces with other tribes previously, now rode to victory on the strength of a united force of the entire tribes of Israel. Living in isolation brings defeat. Believers should unite forces to

win souls before the devil destroys them.

NAHASH'S SIEGE ON JABESH-GILEAD (1 Samuel 11:1-3; Revelation 12:9; 1 Peter 5:8; Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 10:10)

Question 2: What can believers learn from the unprovoked siege of Nahash and the Ammonites on Jabesh-Gilead?

“Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-Gilead...” Nahash, which means serpent, was the king of the Ammonites at the time Saul was anointed king over Israel. Like a real serpent, he was cruel and oppressive. He attacked Jabesh-Gilead unprovoked. He behaved like Satan, the age-long serpent that has been terrorizing and oppressing humanity. This unprovoked attack and siege shows the present-day believer that the world is a battleground; that the devil, like a roaring lion, is seeking whom he may devour. And it does not matter whether you provoke him or not. In any case, your decision to make Christ your Lord and serve Him the rest of your life, which brought peace and other blessings into your life and family grieves him.

Meanwhile, the discipline meted out to the people of Jabesh-Gilead by other tribes of Israel left them weakened and defenseless. To forestall hostility and destruction, **“all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee”**. Unfortunately, their offer of voluntary servitude based on their acknowledged weakness was rejected. It was wrong in the first place to suggest making a covenant to serve a heathen king. God does not want His people to serve their enemies (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8). And when that happens, He intervenes to deliver His people.

Perhaps, the men of Jabesh-Gilead thought the other tribes would be unwilling to help, in retaliation for their previous uncooperative attitude. They made concession without knowing their enemy would not stop at making them slaves but also inflict a permanent injury on them. With no milk of mercy, Nahash stoutly gave a tall order, **“On this condition will I make a covenant with you,**

that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel". To make all the people one-eyed was a most awful condition for a covenant of 'peaceful slavery'. This condition was as grievous as it was dehumanizing. It also revealed a broader perspective of the intent of the Ammonites: to bring "**reproach upon all Israel**".

Question 3: From the real purpose of the siege in our text, what is Satan's aim of attacking believers today?

Many people still live in similar horrible conditions today contrary to the word and will of God. Sin and Satan have enslaved them. "**Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**" (John 8:34; Ephesians 2:2). These twin enemies blind the mind of sinners and prevent them from seeing their wretchedness and from seeking the Savior for freedom. The devil's attack, siege and oppression are designed to steal, kill and destroy, and thereby bring reproach to God and His people.

Unwilling to accept this affliction, the people of Jabesh-Gilead requested seven days of respite that "**we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee**". Many people are suffering one form of oppression or the other today having not heard or read the words of Jesus who said: "**I am the way...**" (John 14:6) out. In a bid to find solution, some wanderers get initiated into occult groups while others accept dehumanizing conditions in life. Every believer, therefore, needs to make themselves readily available to give the message of hope and deliverance to all people.

SAUL PREPARES ISRAEL FOR BATTLE (1 Samuel 11:4-8; Ephesians 6:12; Proverbs 21:31; Acts 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 1:8; 2:38,39; John 14:16)

The elders of Jabesh-Gilead sent messengers to Gibeah of Saul and the people wept since none of them could challenge the enemy. It was this agony and weeping that drew the attention of Saul who was returning from tending his flock. Since he was anointed king by Samuel, he had not been confirmed and installed as king. The confirmation was necessary because some of the people did not agree that he was the best choice for the throne.

Question 4: From the text, state the purpose and power of the Holy Spirit in a believer?

Saul's confirmation came with the descent of the Spirit of God upon him. He was filled with holy anger at the cruel conditions the Ammonites gave. God's Spirit also inspired him to assemble three hundred and thirty thousand men at Bezek in preparation for battle. Following his invitation to the people to come "**after Saul and after Samuel**", "**the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent**". The Spirit did not only inspire fear and unity among them but also the strategy for battle.

Without the Holy Ghost, the stoutest of Christians with the best spiritual credentials will suffer defeat in battles of life. And if the Spirit of God helped them to win victory over their foes in physical battle, we have greater need of Him because ours is a spiritual battle. Without the Holy Ghost, how would Paul have overcome the demon-infested activities of sorcerers like Barjesus and the damsel that confronted him on the field of soul-winning? Christ commanded His disciples to tarry for the Pentecostal power before launching out to win souls. He has promised to grant every believer baptism with the Holy Spirit. "**But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8). With faith, heart-hunger and earnest prayer, every believer will be filled and indwelt by the Spirit, unlike His occasional descent on Old Testament saints for a specific task.

CONQUEST OF THE AMMONITES (1 Samuel 11:9-11; Galatians 6:2; 1 John 3:16; Isaiah 53:4,5; 1Corinthians 15:57; Luke 1:19; 8:9; Acts 8:5-8; Malachi 3:6)

Question 5: How can people win victory in life's battle today?

Saul sent a message to the people of Jabesh-Gilead concerning their readiness to rescue them. They were overjoyed and “**glad**” to receive mercy and promised intervention from other tribes who had previously commissioned a punitive expedition against them. The Scripture commands believers to bear one another’s burden and so fulfill the law of Christ. We could not conquer the devil, our age-long adversary but Christ conquered him through His crucifixion. He procured and promised divine intervention and victory to everyone who becomes a child of God. He is the Savior from every form of slavery and oppression. This is the “**glad tidings**” that everyone needs today. Believers must urgently take this message of deliverance, salvation and freedom from bondage to sin and Satan to their communities. It is the gospel that liberates and brings joy to people and communities under demonic siege (Acts 8:5-8).

While rejoicing for the promised deliverance, the people of Jabesh-Gilead sent a sarcastic message to the Ammonites that they were going to surrender to their cruelty. This message must have made the enemy soldiers not to prepare to fight anymore. Unknown to them, the scheduled day of surrender would be the day of deadly defeat of the cruel enemy.

Prior to the victory over the Ammonites, Saul divided the entire army into three operational groups. In a pre-dawn surprise attack, “**they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together**”. From this victory over the Ammonites, we learn the need to establish a relationship with God so that His Spirit can continually help us overcome temptations and battles the devil may bring our way. Two, oneness and unity among brethren enhance victory (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

Three, it is important to bear one another's burden. Four, faith and dependence upon the Spirit of God in spiritual warfare is non-negotiable. Five, it is important to participate in prayer vigils of the church: the timing of the surprise attack was "**the morning watch**". Six, the need for strategy cannot be ruled out. We need to establish prayer and evangelism groups to rescue souls. Seven, it is godly to forgive those who oppose our promotion/elevation and not to seek opportunity to revenge. Following their victory in battle, the people wanted to kill those who questioned the eligibility of Saul to reign over Israel. But Saul objected to taking vengeance. Eight, it is good to ascribe victory in life's battle to providence. God's Spirit was involved. Acknowledging this, Saul said: "**for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel**".

KINGDOM RENEWAL AT GILGAL (1 Samuel 11:12-15; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 103:1-3; Philippians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

Question 6: What should be the believer's attitude when God grants him victory in battles of life?

After this victory, Samuel, who had been part of the rescue team, called the people to celebrate it in God's appointed place of worship. It was a call to renew the kingdom before God. Three things happened at Gilgal. First, all the people made Saul king. Second, they offered sacrifices of peace-offerings. Third, Saul and all the people rejoiced there greatly.

When God grants us victory in life's battles, we must not abandon the fellowship of believers but return to praise and worship Him. It is pertinent to offer sacrifices of praise to God for granting us deliverance and peace. Believers need to rejoice in the Lord for His care and intervention and further show gratitude by rededicating their entire lives to serve Him.

The people of Jabesh-Gilead did not only praise God but also appreciated Saul's efforts at mobilizing the entire tribes to rescue them. In fact, they showed this gratitude forty years later by taking down the dead bodies of Saul and his three sons from the walls of Bethshan,

cremated and buried the bones under a tree near the city (1 Samuel 31:11-13; 2 Samuel 2:5). As Christian servants, we will only be remembered by what we have done.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING		
MON	John	4	1 Kings	16
TUE	“	5	“	17-18
WED	“	6	“	19-20
THUR	“	7	“	21
FRI	“	8	“	22
SAT	“	9	2 Kings	1-2
SUN	“	10	“	3

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

721 Lesson

BELIEVERS' ENRICHMENT THROUGH CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

TEXT: Ephesians 1:1-14

This epistle was written by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16). Though a prisoner, he was free to write letters. He began this epistle to believers at Ephesus by introducing himself as "**an apostle of Jesus Christ**". This was to establish his credibility in the readers' minds that he was not a self-styled or man-made apostle (Ephesians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

The key thought in this chapter is the Christian's wealth of blessings in Christ. While believers may be separated by geographical locations, they are all positioned "**in Christ**" spiritually. As such, each member of the universal Church has access to all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Prior to Paul's evangelistic efforts at Ephesus, the city was a popular one known for the goddess Diana, "**whom all Asia and the world worshippeth**" (Acts 19:27). On his first visit, Paul made a significant impression on them and they besought him to stay (Acts 18:19-21). Though he could not oblige to their request, he promised to visit them again. When he did, he spent about three years ministering and teaching (Acts 20:31).

While in Ephesus, some of John the Baptist's followers received the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:1-7). He preached in the synagogue for some time and later in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10); special miracles occurred (Acts 19:11,12) and the natives as well as the strangers received the gospel, and even many occult people were converted (Acts 19:17-20). This positive impact of the

gospel made Demetrius to galvanise the people to protest the potential loss of their business interests should they sit by and allowed Paul to fill the whole city with the message of Christ (Acts 19:23-41).

Without gainsaying, Paul's missionary activity in Ephesus wrested the city from years of idol worship and occult practices. This proves that the gospel of Christ can lighten the darkest vestige of idolatry and break down the most formidable obstacles in the way of reaching men's heart for salvation. As he wrote this epistle, the Apostle wanted the believers to be conscious of their status in God and lead a Christ-like life regardless of the prevailing circumstances around them.

CATALOGUE OF BELIEVERS ' BLESSINGS IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:1-10; John 1:12; Acts 13:48; Romans 9:23,24; Galatians 3:9; 2 Peter 1:3,4; Revelation 21:7)

“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2). The initial addressees of this epistle were the saints. The Apostle here corrects a wrong notion on the issue of sainthood. Becoming a saint is not a posthumous honor but a spiritual state of freedom from sin (Ephesians 2:1-10). That saints, people who are saved by grace and have peace of God in their hearts, could be found in Ephesus is a glowing testimony to the operation of the love and power of God through the gospel of Christ.

Paul wrote about blessings, inheritance, possession and riches in this epistle against the background that Ephesus was considered a depository of wealth and the bank of Asia. Some of the greatest art treasures of the ancient world were housed in Diana's temple. In this letter, Paul compared the Church to a temple and explained the great wealth that Christ has bestowed on it.

Question 1: Outline specific blessings a believer enjoys by virtue of his faith in Christ.

The blessings God **“our Father”** and **“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”** has bestowed upon us are numerous. One, He appointed us to salvation in Christ. This is a

special favor. Through His death on the cross, Christ bought us from slavery to sin and canceled the penalty and power of sin. Those who abide in Him shall also have a future redemption when He returns at the rapture to restore us to the full benefits lost in Eden. He chose us to have a part in His kingdom not because of who or what we were, but by grace and virtue of our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; John 6:37). Two, He has adopted us into His family and made us joint-heirs with Christ, His only begotten Son (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15,17; Galatians 4:4-7). This privilege should in no way evoke frivolity or pride in the believer but an eternally appreciative and humble reverence for Christ who accomplished it. Three, He has accepted us as His dear children on the merit of Christ despite the fact that we were odious, wicked and unworthy (Ephesians 1:6; Romans 3:22-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Four, He has revealed God's "**mystery**" to us (Ephesians 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 2:8-10). Ignorance has been responsible for many people's death and perdition in sin, but Christ is the Light that brought the knowledge of God and His salvation to us. Five, God has also given us His Spirit to keep us as His precious possession. The Holy Ghost thus approves, certifies and identifies us as belonging to God (John 3:33; 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Revelation 7:2; 9:4).

Question 2: What are the implications of divine blessings for a believer?

The inestimable volume and value of the eternal treasures in Christ make believers not to feel inferior to unbelievers whose earthly possessions are perishable. Unbelievers should be pitied because earthly resources are limited but spiritual blessings are unlimited. Besides, the tenure of enjoyment of earthly resources is transient while spiritual blessings are timeless and eternal. And, no matter how wealthy a sinner may be or how long he subsists on earth, he will end up in hell if he does not repent. It is also obvious that earthly wealth is vulnerable to attacks by nature, demons and robbers, but spiritual blessings are secured by the

blessed Trinity (Psalm 37:16-19; 84:11; Isaiah 32:17,18; Matthew 19:29). Though we may have moments of pain or lack, God has given us all blessings for a successful, satisfying Christian life. Therefore, whatever our present condition, we should rejoice that we are not spiritual orphans, pitiable objects or ridiculous creatures. Rather, we should rejoice at all times (Philippians 4:4-7,19).

BENEFITING FROM CHRIST'S TREASURES
(Ephesians 1:8,9; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:15-21; Ephesians 4:27-32; 2 Timothy 1:13,14; 2 Peter 1:3-10)

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Ephesians 1:9). God’s plan for the world could not be fully understood until Christ rose from the dead. His purpose for sending Christ was to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body with Christ as the Head. Just as God predestined Old Testament Israel to be His people by virtue of His covenant with Abraham, even so are New Testament saints adopted as His children through Christ. In a practical sense, no one becomes a member of God’s family by nativity but by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:15,16). Therefore, regardless of parentage, nationality or religious background, anyone can partake of these benefits as soon as he meets the terms and conditions.

Question 3: Highlight the conditions for partaking in Christ’s provision.

The blessings of God through Christ are not for nominal professors of religion. Partaking of them is not based on regular church activities, righteous deeds, fervent labour or morality (Galatians 1:13-16). They are meant for those who possess genuine experience of salvation. Though our reconciliation was initiated by God, everyone must key into God’s provisions in Christ through repentance from all sins and faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Besides, those who have appropriated God’s grace must be diligent to preserve it. To avoid losing the salvation experience, carelessness, over-confidence,

compromise, and sinful attitudes that grieve the Spirit must be kept at bay. Believers must live and serve God with fervent love in constant readiness and expectation of the Master's return (Matthew 24:45-47).

CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEVERS' ENRICHMENT IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:11-14; Isaiah 43:21; Luke 2:14; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; Philipians 1:11; 1 Peter 2:9; 4:11)

“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Ephesians 1:11,12). Christians must take cognisance of the nature, source and purpose of God's blessings. They are not expressible in terms of currency of any nation. Though it is not unscriptural for believers to physically prosper here on earth, the Apostle's emphasis in the text is on spiritual enrichment.

God is the Source of true riches and His purpose is that **“we should be holy and without blame before him in love”** (Ephesians 1:4). It is to reveal the possibilities of grace to the world so that God might be praised and men might submit to the offer of His grace.

“To the praise of his glory” appears to be a consistent refrain in the text. It is meant to extend the grace that transformed us to others to the intent that unbelievers too may be illuminated, liberated and justified to the glory of the Lord.

<p>Question 4: How can contemporary believers profitably deploy the riches of Christ?</p>
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As the Ephesian believers were **“...faithful in Christ...”**, so should contemporary Christians be. We should be faithful to keep the whole doctrine of the Bible and contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. As stewards of the manifold grace and riches of God, we should hold all we have in trust for Him.

Therefore, our primary concern must be to use our whole being and resources to project His purpose. We should give financially and materially to sponsor

programs that will expand God’s kingdom. We should also communicate our wealth of knowledge of His love, mercy and provision to others by participating in soul-winning activities.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	11	2 Kings	4
TUE	“	12	“	5-6
WED	“	13-14	“	7-8
THUR	“	15-16	“	9
FRI	“	17-18	“	10
SAT	“	19	“	11-12
SUN	“	20-21	“	13-14

722 Lesson

INTERCESSION FOR BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH

MEMORY VERSE: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17).

TEXT: Ephesians 1:15-23

As a divinely-ordained apostle, Paul was always in the habit of interceding for the church. He never hid his care and concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the brethren. This is revealed in many of his epistles to the churches, and it forms the thrust of our text of study.

The Apostle’s intercession for the spiritual welfare and growth of believers at Ephesus was not out of place when viewed against the backdrop of the city’s history. Ephesus was the capital and leading business center of the Roman province of Asia Minor (now part of present-day Turkey). It was a hub of land and sea transportation and ranked with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt as one of the great commercial cities on the Mediterranean Sea. It was said to be a center of black magic and occult practices. The people sought spells to give them wealth, happiness and success in marriage and business. Superstition and sorcery were commonplace. The temple of Diana or Artemis, the great goddess of fertility and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was domiciled in Ephesus. In spite of these damning features, when Paul “**assuredly [gathered] that the Lord had called [them] for to preach the gospel unto them**”, he set sail and became an apostle to the Ephesians (Acts 19:1-20).

Through Paul’s ministry, the Ephesian disciples were taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20); they experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7); from Ephesus, the word of God spread through Asia Minor (Acts 19:8-10); special miracles were wrought, deceivers were exposed and confounded (Act 19:13-17);

great revival, characterized with a tremendous growth of the word, broke out in the city (Acts 19:18-20).

Question 1: Why was Paul's intercession for the Ephesian believers' spiritual growth paramount to him?

THE CONSOLATION AND CONCERN OF THE APOSTLE FOR BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH: (Ephesians 1:15,16; 1 Corinthians 1:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:2-7; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2)

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Ephesians 1:15,16).

The Apostle was comforted to know that his labor was not in vain at Ephesus. Having heard of the brethren's faith in Christ, he was glad that the word of God they preached had produced **“fruits meet for repentance”**. These fruits were evidenced in their **“love unto all saints”**. Love is one of the proofs of genuine conversion and the fulcrum of true Christianity. No one can lay claim to genuine conversion to Christ without proof of Christ-like love. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 provide a fitting resumé of the properties of Christ-like love.

Paul was glad at the news of the Ephesian brethren's conversion, steadfastness and faith, and these caused him continual thanksgiving and prayer to God. He was moved to make specific mention of them in his prayers.

Question 2: What challenge does the Apostle's lifestyle pose to present-day leaders and ministers?

Interceding for the brethren was part of Paul's ministry style. For the Corinthians, he said, **“I thank God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given to you by Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 1:4). For the Philippians, he prayed, **“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy...”** (Philippians 1:3,4).

Question 3: Point out how believers can be concerned for the spiritual welfare of fellow believers.

Rather than spend precious time gossiping and backbiting over the shortcomings of fellow brethren, believers should spend time to pray for one another. The devil and the world are at war against believers and the kingdom of God and the only way we can defeat them is to pray. We should spend quality time to wage spiritual war against the kingdom of darkness than busy ourselves doing the devil's business. Through prayer, we will not only ensure constant victory for the body of Christ, we will also be better armed for end-time harvest of souls.

THE COMMUNION AND CONTENT OF THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH (Ephesians 1:17-23; 3:14-19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Having taken it as a personal responsibility to pray for believers in Ephesus, succeeding verses of our text delve into the specifics of the Apostle's prayer and desire for the church, **"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"** (Ephesians 1:17). Wisdom is a necessity in the Christian walk. We need wisdom to defeat the enemy to his antics and escape his snares. Wisdom helps us to prioritize our lives and put emphasis on things that matter, both here and for eternity. It ensures that believers **"walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise"** (Ephesians 5:15), redeeming the time because the days are evil. Those who lack divine wisdom may take certain foolish decisions that may be injurious to their faith. We need to be indwelt with the spirit of wisdom. Wisdom is the principal thing (Proverbs 4:7).

Two, Paul speaks of a growing revelation of the knowledge of Christ. Believers need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. Deeper insight into the truth and mysteries of the kingdom will lead to deeper communion with Christ. It will ensure that we are stable, steadfast and sound, not deceived or led into error.

Three, there is need for enlightenment. When the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, we shall be able **"to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the**

love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:18,19). This will lead to knowledge of the hope of God’s calling and riches towards His children. It will further help us to understand the depth of spiritual power at our disposal.

Four, the Apostle prayed for an exposition of the saint’s inheritance in Christ. If only believers understood their exalted place and position in Christ, a privilege that places them far above principalities and powers, gives them dominion over situations and circumstances, grants them unfettered access to the commonwealth of Israel, admits them into the presence of the Almighty and offers them the benefits and blessings of Abraham, they would do greater exploits for God.

Five, building confidence in the exceeding greatness of the Saviour’s power (verse 19).

Question 4: What lesson can we draw from Paul’s pattern of prayer?

From the content of the Apostle’s prayer, we understand that emphases and priorities are misplaced today in the volume of prayers emanating from many pulpits. Our emphasis should be on the spiritual, not the mundane. We should desire more of the knowledge of Christ, not on mysteries of the kingdom of darkness which hold little profit. Revelation of the power, grace, glory and riches of Christ will imbue believers with strength, power and authority to run the race that is set before them. Knowledge of the workings of dark powers only engenders fear, timidity and cowardice. Christians should seek to know more of Christ than of Satan.

CHRIST’S EXALTED POSITION AND THE CHURCH’S STABILITY (Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9; Colossians 1:16-19; 2:8-10)

Christ’s resurrection from the dead placed Him **“far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”** (Ephesians 1:21). He became the mediator between God and man, in which state of exaltation He transacts all the affairs of His Church and rules the universe. He is

set at God’s own right hand in the heavenly places. This right hand is a place of honor, power and authority. **“All things are under his feet”** and the Father has given Him **“to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all”** (Ephesians 1:22,23). Christ is the Head of the Church. Through Him, every believer receives life and light. Saints must then be fully attached to Him in order to survive temptations, trials and challenges of life (John 15:5).

Question 5: In the light of this truth, how can the believer grow spiritually and become stable in Christ?

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is applicable to believers today. We can experience the contents of his desire if we abide in Christ, knowing that without Him we can do nothing. The Lord expects us to abound in the knowledge of His will, walking daily according to the revelation of His word, remain faithful, serving in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. As believers in God’s economy of grace, we are expected to grow in all ramifications and His abiding Spirit working in us to fulfill His will and purpose for our lives.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	1-2	2 Kings	15-16
TUE	“	3-4	“	17
WED	“	5-6	“	18
THUR	“	7	“	19
FRI	“	8	“	20-21
SAT	“	9	“	22-23
SUN	“	10	“	24-25

723 Lesson

SALVATION BY GRACE

MEMORY VERSE: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

TEXT: Ephesians 2:1-22

The truth that Christ is the Source of all spiritual blessings the believer enjoys in life and in eternity was the focus of the last chapter of the book of Ephesians. Without His sacrifice and subsequent resurrection, humanity would have been lost. It is obvious that no one can enjoy or be enriched with spiritual blessings without the foundational experience of salvation.

Salvation, in a general sense, means deliverance from evil, danger and destruction. The Scripture refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage and servitude in Egypt as salvation (Exodus 14:13). In a spiritual sense, it is deliverance or freedom from sin, its pollution, guilt and consequences (present and eternal) accomplished by Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary (Hebrews 2:3). Though the Scripture talks about a future, final salvation when redeemed people will be taken to heaven (Acts 15:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 9:28; Matthew 10:22), our focus in this study is salvation as a present experience (Luke 1:69; 2:30; John 10:9; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 5:9).

Question 1: Explain the meaning of salvation and grace.

Paul the apostle emphasized repeatedly in the text that God’s salvation is by grace. Grace means the infinite love, mercy, favor and goodwill God has shown to humanity by giving Jesus Christ His Son to die for our salvation. Though accomplished by Christ’s unmerited love for all people, salvation is an instantaneous experience that God grants only to those who genuinely repent of their sins (Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 11:6; Ephesians 2:5; Titus 2:11; 3:7). His word, the gospel, is the means of grace that brings salvation to everyone in the world (Titus 2:11,12; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:2; 2 Titus 3:15).

THE PITIABLE PLIGHT OF SINNERS IN THE WORLD: (Ephesians 2:1-3,11,12; John 8:34; Luke 15:24)

The Scripture states clearly that a sinner is spiritually dead and separated from God. This is different from physical death. Physical death is the cessation of all vital functions or processes in an organism or cell. And when this occurs, the dead is separated from loved ones; all means of interaction and fellowship are cut off. The father of the returning prodigal son affirmed this truth that one can be alive but spiritually dead. **“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”** This is how God still considers all sinners today. **“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”** (1 Timothy 5:6).

Question 2: How can believers identify people who are spiritually dead?

People who are spiritually dead live in sin; they indulge in habits that hurt them. Christ describes such people as servants or slaves to sin. **“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin”** (John 8:34). As slaves, they are controlled by the lifestyle of the world dictated by Satan, the god of this world. He, the **“prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”**, inspires evil thoughts, controls and influences them to act contrary to the will and word of God. This spirit of disobedience at work in the spiritually dead makes sinners see sin as good and pleasurable, having been blinded from seeing the deadly consequences ahead. Their minds have been infiltrated with ungodly passions and pursuit of the mundane things of life that they hardly think about God. Prior to salvation, Paul the apostle affirmed the universal sinful state of all men that: **“we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others”**. Sinners lust after the flesh, indulge in fleshly pleasures and mind self as **“children of disobedience”** who will, without repentance, become the **“children of wrath”**.

Worse still, sinners live without any hope of a blissful eternity. Their hopelessness stems from the fact that they live in this evil world without having God as Helper, Healer, Deliverer, Provider and Refuge in critical times of life. What a pitiable life of misery at the mercy of the cruel prince of this world!

SALVATION THROUGH GOD’S GRACE (Ephesians 2:4- 10,13; Romans 5:6,8;6:1,2,18,20)

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Ephesians 2:4,5).

The dead do not have power of life to resuscitate themselves. The same applies to those who are dead in sin. It was in this state of spiritual incapacitation, **“when we were yet without strength”** that divine love and benevolence manifested to revive us. **“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”**. Through His death and resurrection, He provided for the spiritual resurrection, quickening or regeneration of people who are dead in sin. The power that raised Christ to life is the same that enlivens sinners from deadness to life.

Considering the utter impossibility of the spiritually dead to free themselves from the power of sin and Satan, he concluded that **“by grace are ye saved”**. Grace has been spelt as *God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*.

Question 3: Why is salvation by the grace of God?
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Salvation is a gift fully paid for by Christ for everyone (Isaiah 55:1; John 3:16; 4:10; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 6:23; 8:32; 2 Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 2:8; Revelation 22:17). He invites all people irrespective of religious affiliations, social strata and race to receive it by faith. No one can save himself from sin and Satan; neither can the combined efforts of men achieve it. No sacrifice can appease Satan to release his captives.

Besides, there is no other sacrifice that can atone for man’s sins and fulfil the demand of God’s justice. Religious rites – partaking of sacrament, tithing, attending fellowship regularly, singing in the choir,

preaching the gospel, almsgiving, helping the needy, etc. – are works that cannot save anyone. It is only God that has power to save. **“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”** (Isaiah 45:22). All He requires is for the sinner to come the way he is, repent of sin, accept Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation, ask for pardon and cleansing by the blood of Christ and invite Him into his heart as personal Lord and Savior. Then, God will save him and lift him from the life of sin to the limitless liberty and privileged position in Christ. Though everyone needs it, it is only those who ask for the experience that will have it (1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalms 31:16; 54:1; 86:7; 106:4; 119:41; Acts 16:30).

Question 4: Explain the benefits of being saved by grace.

Saved by grace, God lifts the believer into a privileged position of freedom, favor and fellowship with Christ. **“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”**. He grants grace to those who are saved not to continue in sin and defeat but to live victoriously in Christ. Recipients of God’s grace reign in righteousness; they do not have remnants of sins they give excuses on why they could not overcome. United with Christ, believers sit in the exalted heavenly places in Him. They **“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God”** and **“Set [their] affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:1,2).

THE PURPOSE OF TRANSFORMATION BY GRACE
(Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 5:16; John 10:32; Acts 10:38; Titus 2:14; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 3:8)

Paul the apostle enlightened the Ephesian and present-day believers that God has a design for freeing people from bondage to sin and Satan. God **“created [us] in Christ Jesus unto good works, which [He] hath before ordained that we should walk in them”**. Everyone whom God saves by grace He empowers to do good works. He expects all believers to unceasingly do good works as evidence that they have tasted of His grace.

Question 5: What is God's purpose for saving us by grace?

Christ teaches that all believers should show good works so that men will be overawed by the power of grace and light and give glory to God. He demonstrated His message by showing us **“many good works”** (John 10:32; Acts 10:38). He died to redeem and purify us to be zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). The Scripture was given to make all servants of God perfect, **“thoroughly furnished unto all good works”** (2 Timothy 3:17).

Lest anyone claim ignorance of what constitute good works, Christ shows in Matthew 25:35-40 what God expects us to do. These include feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty physically and spiritually. It includes providing shelter for strangers and the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners and ministering to others.

In this regard, Dorcas was a model **“full of good works and almsdeeds”** (Acts 9:36). All women and widows who profess godliness must prioritize on showing good works such as upbringing of children, lodging of strangers, washing the saints' feet and relieving the afflicted (1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10). Wealthy believers are not exempted; they are to **“be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”** (1 Timothy 6:18). Ministers like Titus are admonished to be **“a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity”** (Titus 2:7). No believer is excluded. In fact, Paul the apostle who also did good works specifically instructed Titus to **“affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”** (Titus 3:8).

Believers need to challenge one another to love and good works which they must show with attributes of meekness, wisdom and knowledge (Hebrews 10:24; James 3:13). All believers must **“learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful”** (Titus 3:14). Without good works, the Christian life will be unattractive, abstract, barren and useless.

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE AND BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL PROGRESS (Ephesians 2:13-22; Romans 10:9,10,13; 5:9; Colossians 3:1-15; Acts 10:28; 20:32; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Romans 12:1,2; Hebrews 12:14)

Since the grace and salvation of God are for all people irrespective of tribe, race, gender and social status, Jews and Gentiles are now being saved only by faith in Christ. They are also cleansed by **“the blood of Christ”** and brought into relationship and fellowship with Him.

Question 6: Explain the meaning and implication of the “middle wall of partition” which Christ has broken down.

In God's past dealings, the Gentiles were considered distant, alien, **“far off”** while the Jews were close or **“nigh”** (Ephesians 2:1,12,17). Divine dealings with the patriarchs yielded the covenant of circumcision regarded as a mark of their peculiarity which, albeit, foreshadowed the better covenant in Christ. Besides, the law God gave the Jews distinguished them from other nations of the world. In line with this divine prescription or ‘middle wall of partition’, the Samaritan woman acknowledged while talking with Christ that **“the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans”** (John 4:9). Peter the apostle also affirmed to congregants in Cornelius' house **“...that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean”** (Acts 10:28). But now, God has collapsed the dividing line between the Jews and Gentiles. The point is that the long- standing physical, religious or spiritual wall of partition had been abolished by Christ. Furthermore, *all* redeemed believers have access to the Father by the same Spirit of Christ. Affirming the equal status of Jews and Gentiles on the same platform in Christ, he declared: **“ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”** (Ephesians 2:19). Once a person receives salvation by grace, he has the privilege of being built up. As he continues with regular intake of **“the word of his grace, which is able to build [him] up...”** (Acts 20:32), he grows to become **“an holy temple... for an habitation of God through**

the Spirit". God saves us by grace to make or build us up as holy temples He will indwell and empower to fulfil His purpose on earth.

Essentially, people who have experienced the grace of God are no longer dead in sin; they are elevated into a privileged position in Christ where it is natural to live a righteous life and show good works; where peace, love, fellowship and unity reign; where there is unhindered access to God in prayer by the Spirit; and where it is possible for the believer to grow in holiness and be built up as a spiritual temple of God.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	11-12	1 Chronicles	1
TUE	"	13	"	2
WED	"	14-15	"	3-4
THUR	"	16	"	5
FRI	"	17-18	"	6
SAT	"	19	"	7
SUN	"	20	"	8

724 Lesson

MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH REVEALED

MEMORY VERSE: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:8,9).

TEXT: Ephesians 3:1-21

Paul the apostle established the truth that salvation is by God’s grace and can be obtained by both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9). As an erstwhile persecutor of the early church, he only merited God’s wrath. But after his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, he obtained mercy and became His servant. Though there were disciples and apostles before his conversion, God chose to reveal hidden truths of the Church to him. Obviously, God’s eternal purpose is always accomplished through whosoever He chooses.

Question 1: What can believers learn from Paul’s frontline position in the knowledge of the gospel?

Paul’s experience shows that our heavenly Father holds the prerogative of choice. He alone decides who to assign to fulfil His purpose on earth. He may appoint the younger to lead the elder if He deems it fit. Accordingly, the vilest sinner who repents and comes to the knowledge of Christ can aspire to become the best of His saints.

SELFLESSNESS AND TENACITY OF A DEDICATED APOSTLE (Ephesians 3:1,14; Romans 5:3; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 2:25; Titus 3:8; Matthew 6:33)

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (verse 1). The phrase **“for this cause,”** is a reference to what the Apostle had been saying in the preceding chapter concerning the new position of

privilege which believing Gentiles now occupy as a result of their faith in and union with Christ. By introducing himself as a **“prisoner of Jesus Christ”** instead of a prisoner of Rome, the Apostle portrays his unconditional loyalty to Christ and acceptance of the suffering his commission would bring. Christian workers who sometimes grumble because of the sacrifices their calling in Christ imposes on them should learn from the Apostle. **“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”** (Philippians 1:29).

Question 2: From Paul’s example, what should be the attitude of Christian servants who are suffering persecution?

Though written from a Roman prison, Paul’s letter does not portray any feeling of self-pity or defeat. On the contrary, it is an expression of a growing concern and prayer for the Ephesian believers. While under harsh conditions, he busied himself praying that the church might be enabled to live and behave as those who had received God’s grace. **“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (verse 14; Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2). His example teaches us that when we suffer persecution or other adversities, we should not quit praying for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers. The Apostle knew that all instruction, preaching or teaching would be ineffective and fruitless without God’s grace and power in the hearers. Therefore, those who would excel in winning souls for the Lord must excel in fervent prayers.

Sadly, the emphasis the word of God places on Christ-like conduct and character is not reflected in the ambition and prayer of many believers today. The craving for material blessings, financial prosperity, promotion, marriage, having children, etc. has taken over the place of priority in prayer that Jesus and Paul reserved for deep-seated spiritually and righteous character. Christ’s command is, **“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”**(Matthew 6:33).

While in prison, Paul also used the opportunity to communicate the gospel through his epistles, not only to his immediate audience, but the world. That was why he said, **“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound”** (2 Timothy 2:9). Believers suffering intense persecution should maintain their love and loyalty to Christ, pray for grace to maintain Christ-like disposition, intercede for other believers and communicate the gospel.

REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH:
(Ephesians 3:2-6; Isaiah 49:6; 56:6,7; Genesis 22:18; Acts 10:9-45; 11:118)

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery... That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promises in Christ by the gospel”(Ephesians 3:3,6). Almost everything recorded in the Old Testament centers on God’s dealing with Israel. They had an unrivaled privilege and advantage over other nations. To think that God would have as much interest in the Gentiles was inconceivable to any Old Testament Jew. Though there were types and pictures of the universality of God’s concern for man, His plan to bring both Jews and Gentiles on equal platform of salvation by grace through faith in Christ was kept hidden.

Some Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, did predict the call of the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6; 56:6,7) but it was not so clear that the Gentiles would be joint members of the same body with the Jews. The equality of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ was not an afterthought by God but was designed in His eternal counsel from the beginning. This all-inclusive purpose of God in Christ was part of God’s promise to Abraham. **“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice”** (Genesis 22:18). It however remained a mystery as the fact, manner, means and time of its fulfillment was not revealed until the New Testament dispensation.

Question 3: In your own words, explain the mystery of the Church.

The mystery of the Church is also called the mystery of Christ because it was revealed by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). It is “**the unsearchable riches of Christ**”, “**the manifold wisdom of God**” and “**the eternal purpose which [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord**” to make Gentiles beneficiaries of His unmerited favor and grace. The conversion and incorporation of the Gentiles into the body of Christ is a privilege for which we must be eternally grateful. For a people who had been sold to dumb idols, without God and hope, groping in darkness, to have a privilege of relationship with God is marvelous.

This mystery is the will and pleasure of God for which Christ died, rose and ascended to heaven (Ephesians 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:16). Its practical fulfillment is in sinners hearing and receiving the universal gospel and having Christ dwelling in them as Lord and Savior by faith (Colossians 1:27), living a godly life (Colossians 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:9,16), preaching the gospel to others (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3); and readiness for glorification through death or rapture (1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:51-53).

The crux of the revealed mystery is that every Jew who receives Christ is an equal member and equal partaker of God’s promise in Christ; “**For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him**” (Romans 10:12).

It is interesting to note also that Paul did not claim that he was the only person in the New Testament to have received this revelation. Concerning it, he says: “**Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, ...is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit**” (verse 5). It would be recalled that Peter’s visit and preaching at Cornelius’ house was predicated on the revelation from God that he should not call the Gentiles unclean and deny them the privilege of salvation through the gospel. However, he was at the forefront in transmitting it to the Gentiles of his day and to succeeding generation through his preaching and epistles.

MINISTRY OF A COMMISSIONED MINISTER:
(Ephesians 3:7-13; Acts 9:4-6,15,16; 26:13-20; 1 Timothy 1:12,16; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Mark 16:15,16)

The Apostle describes his ministry to the Gentiles and the special revelation he was given as a **“gift of the grace of God”**. He sees himself as highly favoured in being selected for this revelation and for disseminating its truth. His appreciation of the greatness of the grace of God led him to see himself as **“the least of the apostles”**. Paul’s sense of unworthiness and humility was deepened when he remembered his past misdeeds as a persecutor of Christ’s disciples (Acts 9:4). As he explained in his epistle to Timothy, this undeserved favor was to serve as a pattern of God’s willingness to save the vilest of sinners who genuinely repents (1 Timothy 1:16).

Question 4: What responsibility does knowledge of the mystery of Christ bring upon believers today?

The Apostle clarified that the mystery, now revealed, should no longer be hoarded or kept secret but be made known unto all men - Jews and Gentiles alike. Those who have received the revelation have a responsibility to share it with others. The Apostle said he was called by Christ, **“that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ”**.

Like Paul the apostle, every believer has been commissioned to spread the good news of God’s mercy and grace to people of all races (Mark 16:15,16).

INTERCESSION FOR IMPACT OF THE REVEALED MYSTERY ON BELIEVERS (Ephesians 3:14-21; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 1:4,9-11; Colossians 1:9-11; 4:12)

Concerns for the fruit of God’s grace and power of the gospel in the lives of believers in Ephesus drove the Apostle to his knees for intercession. From the content of his prayer, the following lessons are obvious. One, we can stand, kneel, sit or walk while praying provided our hearts are bowed in humility and reverence before God (verse 14).

Two, God has just one family comprising blood-washed saints in heaven and on earth. Three, prayer is made to God through Christ by His family members. Thus, the universal Church has a common dependence upon Christ, **“Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named”** (verse 15). Spiritual blessings are to be more earnestly sought after in prayers.

Four, spiritual strength that makes new converts endure adverse situations and overcome temptations should form part of our intercession. Five, faith of believers grow with the consciousness that Christ dwells in their hearts if we pray for them (verse 17). Six, the need for believers to grow in knowledge of the broad dimensions and depth of love of Christ is a crucial point of prayer (verse 19).

Seven, the abundant life **“filled with all the fulness of God”** is the reason Christ died and rose again. The desire and prayer of Christian ministers for their flock should be that they possess all spiritual experiences and blessings of genuine salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, gifts of the Spirit, utterance and boldness in evangelism, etc.

The Apostle’s prayer ended with the assurance that however great our needs or requests are, God is able to grant answers that surpass our expressed or unexpressed desires by His generosity, power and love. With this assurance, **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”**(Hebrews 4:16). The assurance of receiving answers to prayer should also make us to rejoice in God’s great power, praise and glory.

<p>Question 5: What do we learn from apostle Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church?</p>
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DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	21	1 Chronicles	9
TUE	"	22-23	"	10-11
WED	"	24-25	"	12
THUR	"	26	"	13-14
FRI	"	27-28	"	17-18
SAT	Rom.	1-2	"	17-18
SUN	"	3-4	"	19-20

725 Lesson

BELIEVERS' UNITY AND MINISTRY GIFTS

MEMORY VERSE: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-16

The epistle of Paul the apostle to the Ephesians reveals some striking metaphors about the church of Christ. He likened the church to a body (Ephesians 1:23), a temple (Ephesians 2:21), a new man (Ephesians 4:13, 24), a bride (Ephesians 5:25), and a soldier (Ephesians 6:11). The church consists of believers who are called out of the world to be like Christ and to belong to Him. This is the invisible church in our text illustrated with the human body to aptly explain unity in diversity and inter-dependence of all members.

In the first three chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul dealt with the doctrinal foundation of the new position and privileges of believers in Christ. But, as his usual practice, he shifted from doctrine to issues of practical lifestyle and responsibilities. He began by exhorting believers to endeavor to maintain unity despite their obvious and inevitable differences. In a normal body, all the members are not similar but they are connected and interdependent. Every part contributes something to the well-being and wholesome growth of the entire body.

In this study, the Apostle pointed out that the body, though composite in nature, gains its strength and maturity from the unity and contribution of its different parts.

Question 1: Mention some metaphors Paul used to describe the Christian church.

EXHORTATION TO A WORTHY WALK AND UNITY AMONG BELIEVERS: (Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10; 3:14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

The chapter begins with ‘therefore’. This is obviously in connection with the doctrinal revelations of the previous chapters where Paul explained God’s riches through Christ. In view of who believers are and what they have in Christ, they are exhorted to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. Believers have a new position and relationship in Christ. They have redemption, forgiveness of sin, adoption, sonship, nearness to God and they are now joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. But all these would avail them nothing except they manifest a corresponding lifestyle of godliness. Doctrinal truth must result in a practical life of Christ-likeness.

A man’s calling or vocation refers to his trade through which he is known and obtains his daily bread. Believers are called out of sin, slavery to Satan, sentiments of society into salvation and service of the Savior. This calling is described as a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9); high calling (Philippians 3:14), and heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1).

Question 2: What are the marks of a worthy walk by believers?

The Scripture shows that believers are to walk worthy of their calling by manifesting the virtues of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love. Lowliness is humility and meekness; it is synonymous with gentleness. Both virtues are opposed to pride and insistence on one’s rights (Proverbs 16:19; Psalm 138:6). Walking worthy before God demands freedom from pride and the tendency to insist on one’s rights. A lowly and meek disposition makes a Christian willing to submit to others without struggling for position or recognition. It makes a person happy and content even when he is not the one leading the pack or when things are not going his way. In the world, lowliness and meekness are associated with weakness and timidity but in Christ, they are evidences of inner strength; proofs that one has his ego under control and deliberately chooses to avoid chaos and division in the body of Christ. A lowly and meek believer will never overestimate his own contribution nor underestimate the contribution of others in the body of Christ.

Another characteristic of the worthy walk of believers is the virtue of longsuffering or patience with others. It goes hand in hand with tolerance and readiness to forbear with the wrongs or shortcomings of others. In the church, offenses are inevitable because of individual differences of the members. We are different because of cultural, racial and social background. Our functions in the body of Christ are also different in some ways. Yet, the friction that could result from these differences would be overcome if the members are patient and tolerant. The virtues of longsuffering and forbearance are essential ingredients of unity in the church because they enable believers to live and function together without grudges or retaliation. An eminent Christian leader defined longsuffering as “the Spirit that has the power to take revenge but never does”; rather it forgives and forbears with the offenses of others. In order to walk worthy, believers must have genuine love for one another, including those that appear to be unlovable simply because they are different or opposed to us. Love is the bond of perfectness and it is the binding force of lasting unity in the church. It covers a multitude of personal faults which would have resulted in fighting and division among the brethren. With the true love of Christ in the heart, believers can maintain the unity that promotes growth and effectiveness.

Question 3: Mention some forms of unity that are contrary to the Scripture.

When the Apostle enjoined believers to maintain unity of the Spirit, he is obviously not referring to unity in evil (Judges 20:12-14); unity in false doctrine and superstition; unity in achieving self-motivated goals, like at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9); unity in rebellion, like Korah, Dathan and Abiram; unity in political ambition or goals (2 Samuel 15:12); unity in covering sin like the family of Achan (Joshua 7:20-24); physical or artificial unity; or ecumenism – gathering all visible churches as one, regardless of creed.

The unity of believers is that which is based on truth, motivated by the Holy Spirit, in true love of God and for the fulfillment of His redemptive purpose. Unity that is

borne out of love for God will never breed sin or division in the church. It is only when one member is pursuing a selfish ambition that wars, divisions and chaos come up (James 4:1).

To maintain scriptural unity in the church is compulsory and will require the effort and sacrifice of every member. To endeavor means effort must be exerted. There are many obstacles that will attempt to hinder unity but, without compromising the truth, we must pay the price to maintain spiritual unity.

Question 4: What are the seven reasons for unity mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 4?

Paul explained that there are strong reasons believers must remain united in Christ. First, **One Body**: The church is the body of Christ and each believer must be joined to remain a member of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 5:30; John 15:1-5). Second, **One Spirit**: The same Holy Spirit saves and indwells every true believer (1 Corinthians 12:4). If we are indwelt and led by the same Holy Spirit, then we must be united. Third, **One Hope**: The ultimate hope of the believer is to be with the Lord forever and that should motivate us towards the same goal.

Fourth, **One Lord**: We serve the same Lord, Jesus Christ and there should be no conflict in service (1 Corinthians 12:5). Fifth, **One Faith**: All believers contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints and, as such, they should be on the same side with Jesus (Jude 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Timothy 4:7). Sixth, **One Baptism**: Every believer is baptized into the body of Christ (Romans 6:3,4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27,28). Seventh, **One God** who is the Father of all (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:6). Children of the same Father belong to the same family and must be united.

EXPLANATION OF MINISTRY GIFTS AND THEIR PURPOSE (Ephesians 4:7-12; Psalm 68:18; 1 Corinthians 12:27,28)

The Apostle continued the exposition on unity of believers by pointing out that God appointed some

ministry gifts in the church for the specific purpose of growing and maturing the body of Christ. He alluded to the victory of Jesus and His glorious ascension to heaven as the basis of the gifts He shared to believers. It was customary for victorious army commanders to distribute gifts to their soldiers after a conquest. Jesus conquered His foes and released those whom Satan held in captivity. He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. In this case, the gifts are actually ministers who are endowed with special abilities to nurture and develop the body of Christ.

Question 5: State the purpose of the ministry gifts in the church.

The ministry gifts are somewhat different from personal spiritual gifts. They are often referred to as the five-fold ministry gifts – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. These gifts are ministers and offices which the Holy Spirit gives to the church to develop the members and help them discover and use their personal spiritual gifts. The apostle, evangelist, prophet, pastor, teacher are gifts to the church for the purpose of edification, equipping for the work of the ministry, growing and maturing so they will no longer be spiritual babes, and fostering unity among believers.

The gift of an apostle refers to certain men called directly by Jesus Christ and they are given special authority to lay doctrinal foundation in the church. The basic qualification is that such must have ‘seen’ the Lord and received a direct commission from Him (Acts 1:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). The original twelve apostles occupy a special class. But there were other apostles also (Acts 1:26; 14:14; Romans 16:7). An apostle manifests virtually all the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12; 15:7.

The prophet basically is a person who is gifted to speak unto men to edification, exhortation and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:1, 3-6; Romans 12:6). But in addition, prophets have supernatural ability to receive and declare a revelation from God about future events. So then, the ministry of a prophet includes speaking forth and foretelling (Matthew 13:14; 2 Peter 1:20-21;

Revelation 1:3; Acts 11:28-29; 21:10,11). The ministry of a prophet should not be confused with clairvoyance, fortune-telling, and predicting future events by guess work or merely looking at the possible turn of events.

The evangelist is specially gifted to point sinners to Christ and challenge fellow believers to win souls. Though, evangelism is the ministry of every believer, the evangelist stands out in this area of ministry. They are more passionate, extraordinary and more successful in soul-winning (2 Timothy 4:5; Acts 8:4-12, 26-40; 21:8).

The pastor/teacher is endowed with a supernatural ability to communicate and clarify the details of God's word very clearly, and to lead the flock of God (2 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28). A pastor-teacher combines the qualities of a shepherd and the extra-ordinary skills of a trainer. He cares. He is able to teach and not likely to give up on any believer under his care. All teachers may not necessarily be pastors, but all pastors must be teachers.

EXPERIENCING GROWTH AND MATURITY THROUGH UNITY (Ephesians 4:13-16; Colossians 1:28; 2:4-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-5; 14:20; 2Peter 3:18; 1Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 John 4:1; Hosea 14:5-7)

The ultimate purpose of God is for every believer to grow and become mature in faith and in the knowledge of God. That is why He appointed the ministry gifts and endowed each believer with spiritual gifts for mutual edification. The gifted ministers are appointed to nurture, motivate and consolidate believers in the faith. Clearly then, the ministry gifts are not intended for showmanship or to promote rivalry among ministries; neither are they meant to throw up certain individuals as super heroes in the church. God's plan is that the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers will edify the believers and prepare them to do the work of the ministry. In other words, the believers are the ones to do the work of the ministry, while the ministers are to facilitate or lead them to discover, develop and use their gifts. Every member of Christ's body should function and contribute something to the growth and maturity of the entire body. No believer is useless,

except those who refuse to discover or use their gift to benefit the church.

Question 6: What are the signs of spiritual immaturity and how can believers grow or mature in the Lord?

The evidences of immaturity are clearly implied in our text and stated in other parts of the Scripture. They are: inability to do the work of the ministry, disunity with other believers, instability, shallowness in the knowledge of God, indecision, lack of discernment and following every religious fad, blown by every wind of doctrine. When believers who ought to be teachers are still in need of tutelage, divided over mundane things and unnecessary traditions; or are unable to receive strong doctrine of God's word, they are manifesting spiritual immaturity (Ephesians 4:12-14; 1Corinthians 3:1-5; Galatians 4:1-3; Hebrews 5:12).

But God wants His people to grow and come to **“the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:13). The goal is that we all attain the full stature of Christ-likeness and become productive members of Christ's church. This growth will be achieved when the members unite in love, and stop deceiving or tearing one another down. **“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”** (Ephesians 4:15,16).

No member can grow by remaining individualistic or severed from the body. Growth and maturity will take place only when believers remain united and contribute their own quota to the welfare of the Church.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Romans	5-6	1 Chronicles	21-22
TUE	“	4-8	“	23-24
WED	“	9-10	“	25-26
THUR	“	11-12	“	27-28
FRI	“	13-14	“	29
SAT	“	15-16	2 Chronicles	1-2
SUN	1 Cor.	1-2	“	3-4

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

726 Lesson

VISION FOR MISSIONS

MEMORY VERSE: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

TEXT: Acts 16:1-15

The need for vision for missions is great in the Church today. A church without a vision is a church without a mission. A man of vision is the hope of the mass of lost sheep who await the good news of salvation.

Question 1: Why do we need vision for missions today?

All members of the church should be thoroughly and explicitly taught the subject of missions. We need to have a vision for missions today. The church needs to be a missionary church. The work of the church is not restricted to its immediate environs. It extends to “wherever there’s sun...”. Jesus died for the whole world; and the gospel is for the Greek, the Jew as well as the Barbarian. God wants every nation and culture reached. He expects converts from “**all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues**” (Revelation 7:9).

Question 2: What place should missionary outreach occupy in the ministry of the church?

The church should be a missionary church. God expects every Christian to be a missionary either involved with home or foreign missions. The church should be a witness of the saving power of Christ all over the world. The Christian faith is born out of missions, spread through missions and advanced through missions. A church that relegates missions to the background is without doubt in the woods as regards what constitutes the whole counsel of God.

Real Christianity is expansive not exclusive. The church that is not missionary will only succeed in building an

empire around itself; it cannot grow. A church that has no vision for the salvation of the world cannot enjoy the full blessings of the Lord. The church that reaches out to foreign field is the church that knows and does the perfect will of God. Obviously, not all may be called to the mission field but all can participate in the church's missionary project.

A MISSION'S COMMISSION (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19; Acts 9:15; 26:16,17)

Question 3: How central is a mission to the Great Commission?

Central to the ministries in the Bible is missions – a cross-cultural ministry to people in their own cultural and geographical setting. Mission is central to the charge of the Lord, generally called the Great Commission. The Church is commissioned to **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”** (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

God recognizes no national boundaries. He commands the Church to seek the lost either far or near. The Lord, before His ascension, was deeply concerned for His sheep who were outside the fold. He looked ahead to a fold composed of all people, races and tongues under one Shepherd. Paul, a man of no mean commitment, evinced a missionary spirit when he said: **“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel... at Rome also”** (Romans 1:14,15). Today, there are “Macedonian calls” from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Australia. And the Lord is saying, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** (Isaiah 6:8).

THE CHURCH ON MISSION (Acts 10:9-22,34,35; 13:1-3; 15:40,41; Galatians 2:8)

In the early Church, the Lord showed His commitment to mission. He sent principal workers or key leaders out on missions. Paul's call and commission portray a strong

passion for missions. Right from his conversion, the Lord unequivocally directed his mission to the conversion of the Gentiles. **“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel... But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee”** (Acts 9:15; 26:16,17).

Paul was sent as a veritable missionary to the Gentiles. The call was revitalized when later an angel of God appeared to him in a dream and directed him to go to Macedonia and there preach the gospel unto them (Acts 16:10).

Peter the Apostle, one of the pillars of the early Church also had a missionary call. Though he exclusively spent his life and ministry amongst the Jews, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and directed him to a Gentile community of Caesarea, the house of Cornelius. God has expressly shown His burden for missions by directly sending one of the apostles to the Gentiles.

Christ, in His post-resurrection manifestation, displayed great burden for souls outside His immediate geographical environment. He sent the Church not only to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria but also to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). When the Holy Spirit spoke to the Antioch church and asked for the separation of Saul and Barnabas, it was for the purpose of mission.

Paul was essentially burdened for the churches scattered all over the Gentile world and he mentioned this time and again. The unevangelized are yearning for an opportunity to hear the gospel message. The field is ripe and ready for harvest. Two thousand years after Jesus had shed His blood, billions of people are still in darkness. Will the church therefore sit on a rocking chair and fold her arms? That would be costly!

Communists, for example, do not shrink from making great personal sacrifices in the light of their assured

future victory. They believe that they are seeking the good of mankind and therefore, are prepared to sacrifice anything for the realization of their ambition. Ruskin, a secular art critic and writer, struck the right cord when he said: “He who has knowledge that is essential to the welfare of his fellow men is under solemn obligation to convey that knowledge to them. It makes no difference who those men are, or where they live, whether they are conscious of their need or how much inconvenience or expense he may incur in reaching them”. What a challenge!

A truly spiritual church generally sees beyond her local borders. The Scriptures clearly teach that the gospel message should be taken to the whole world. Every recipient of the redemptive grace of God is indebted to those who are yet to be evangelized. “Saved to serve” should be the slogan of every member of the church.

PLANNING FOR MISSIONS (Acts 9:3-9,15-20; 11:22-27; 13:1-3; 16:15)

The need for a carefully planned and wisely executed missions program cannot be over-emphasized. There is need for a comprehensive and vigorous missionary strategy in the church today.

A good proportion of the church’s fund should be expended on missions. A church’s vision for missions will determine its missionary burden and its missionary burden will determine its missionary budget. Christians who have been in their home countries all their lives may have to sacrifice leaving family, friends, acquaintances and bright prospects. The church too may often be faced with the choice of either retaining workers who have proven ability and dependable personality in their headquarters church, or sending them sacrificially to the mission field. Whatever is given for the cause of missionary outreach cannot be too costly. God had an only Son, yet He sent Him to the world as a missionary. When the church’s vision for mission is brightened, God will begin to direct the leadership of the church to set apart men for the work of mission as He did in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2-4).

<p>Question 4: List important qualifications potential missionaries must possess.</p>
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The believers who will bear the gospel to the ends of the earth should be people of deep commitment and persuasion. A true missionary does not go to another land out of desire for adventure, travel, new experiences or for the praise that comes to those who make unusual sacrifices. These motives will not sustain a missionary for a long period. Those who give to support missions should not be motivated by a spirit of competition or desire for praise. To do consistent and enduring missionary work, one needs to be committed to God, His cause, His Word and the Church. It is not enough to go out as a result of ecstasy or excitement about going to a foreign land. There is need for an unwavering purpose, a definite call and a Christ-centered motive in order to go through the vicissitudes of the mission field.

CALL TO THE MISSION FIELD (Acts 13:1-3; 16:9,10; 11:22-26; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:5; Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17)

Question 5: How can a believer receive the call to the mission field?

A believer could receive God's direct call to the mission field. Observe the Lord's dealing with Paul who was one of the greatest missionaries in Church history. **"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them"** (Acts 16:9,10).

Another method of perceiving a missionary call is through the church leadership (Acts 13:2-4). The Lord can direct the persons that are to go to mission field through spiritual church leaders. Beside personal revelation and the Spirit's leading through church leadership, one can have a persistent desire for or conviction as regards being called to the mission field. God can use any of these methods in calling us to the mission field.

Question 6: What are the consequences of neglecting missions?

The commitment to missions cannot be traded off. The Lord cannot tolerate a church that despises mission. There are grave consequences for neglect of missions. Jonah typifies one who neglected missions. He had no compassion for souls beyond his national borders. But God insisted on a missionary outreach to the over one hundred and twenty thousand souls at Nineveh. He showed Jonah that if he would go out on missions, the heathen will turn to Him in repentance. However, where His Church or ministers drag their feet or refuse outrightly, God frowns at it. A whale swallowed Jonah and only spewed him out after three days. Today, neglect of missions attracts the frown of God and unanswered prayers.

To faithfully carry out the work of missions, the Church should be committed to a consistent systematic and well-rounded missionary program. God will bless the church that has a worldwide vision towards reaching millions of people on the mission fields.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	3-4	2 Chronicles	5-6
TUE	“	5-6	“	7-8
WED	“	7	“	9-10
THUR	“	8-9	“	11-12
FRI	“	10-11	“	13-14
SAT	“	12-13	“	15-16
SUN	“	14	“	17-18

727 Lesson

FOLLOW-UP AND DISCIPLESHIP

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

TEXT: Acts 14:21-28; 15:35,36,41

Follow-up is an important and an inseparable part of the Great Commission. Yet, many believers do not appreciate the depth of Christ’s command to “**go ye therefore, and teach all nations**” (Matthew 28:19). According to authorities in the Greek language, the original translation actually reads “**go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations**”. This Great Commission does not terminate with winning souls; rather, it continues with teaching and training them until they become mature enough to stand and teach others.

New believers must be completely cared for and helped until they are brought to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. If every believer will resolve to respond to the Lord’s command to the Church, the work will be done within a short time. Indeed, the Great Commission demands that new converts, who have just come to the kingdom, be nourished and trained in the Scriptures for the establishment of their faith and full integration into the body of Christ.

What then is follow-up? Follow-up has been described as the conservation, maturation and multiplication of the fruits of evangelism. It is an essential part of church planting aimed at conserving new converts through consistent exposure to the truth of God’s word. It is affirmed to be the “spiritual paediatrics” of parenting in soul-winning, that is, the parental care given new converts to bring them up to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. During follow-up, soul-winners are able to stand side by side with their converts and teach them the fundamentals of the Christian faith until they grow to maturity.

Question 1: Explain what is meant by 'follow-up'.

NECESSITY OF FOLLOW-UP (Matthew 28:19; Acts 15:36; 14:21,22)

The new-birth experience is, no doubt, a marvelous one. But just as natural babes need feeding for growth and training for maturity, so do babes in Christ require the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2; Proverbs 4:11-13). For new Christians to attain the spiritual height that the soul-winner yearns for, they need to be **nourished** (John 21:15) with the word of God. It is the responsibility of the soul-winner to feed these “**lambs**” and “**sheep**” of Christ. Another is **encouragement** (Acts 14:21,22) during persecutions, because of their decision to follow Christ and times of harsh realities of life. They also need **guidance** and **instruction** (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) on how to overcome temptations. Although most of the converts’ questions may sound childish to mature believers, the soul-winner should be around to answer them. New converts also require **training** (Proverbs 22:6) on the fundamentals of the Christian faith and how to develop good Christian habits. One of the characteristics of new converts is the tendency to seek clarifications on various subjects regarding their new-found faith in areas such as choice of friends, restitutions, time-management, etc. They need to be guided appropriately because “**Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety**” (Proverbs 11:14).

Moreover, new converts need **intercessory prayer** (Luke 22:31,32; Colossians 1:3,4,9-11), an aspect of follow-up that must never be overlooked. Prayers must be offered without ceasing for these new babes. Paul’s letters to the new churches reveal the importance he placed on personal intercession. “**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers... Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?**” (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:10). If we fail to pray for new converts, the enemy may take advantage of their ignorance. Finally, they need **fellowship** (Acts 2:42) even after they are established

in the faith.

Follow-up takes time, attention and love. Each soul-winner is expected to give whatever it takes to conserve, mature and integrate each soul won to Christ. Every believer is called into the ministry of soul-winning and must not only win souls but also disciple them to become truly mature Christians.

Question 2: Why is follow-up very important to Christ and the Church?
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METHODS OF FOLLOW-UP (Mark 3:14; Acts 14:21,22; Philippians 2:19-22; 1 Thessalonians 3:10)

Jesus Christ, the greatest soul-winner, evolved the best follow-up and discipleship methods. He kept His converts for a period of three-and-a-half years and taught them the word of God. Moreover, He trained them on various methods of evangelism. By this, we understand that after conversion, the soul-winner must endeavor to teach and train new converts so as to mature them and turn them to vessels for the expansion of God's kingdom. He or she can delegate the work of the ministry to them in areas they can be involved, but with close supervision to ensure that they do not derail.

Paul, the great soul-winner and church-planter, declared: **“But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us”** (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8). From his follow-up and discipleship training methods, we observe, first, his use of personal contact (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8; 3:10). He knew, like a parent to a new-born babe or a shepherd to the flock and a teacher to his students, that personal contact is essential. The closer the soul-winner is to his converts, the safer they are and the farther the wolves will be from them.

Second, intercessory prayer was another method adopted by the early church (Acts 12:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6; 3:10). In his ministry, Paul spent much time interceding for new believers. Also, as Jesus prayed for

Peter that his faith should not fail (Luke 22:31,32), we should pray for new converts. A man of God once said that it is better to spend ten minutes praying for them everyday than to spend one hour praying for them in their crisis situation. Third, personal representatives (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-24) can be sent to new converts where the soul-winner, their spiritual father or mother, is not able to personally reach them. For example, whenever Paul was unable to personally visit new believers, he would send a trusted personal representative, like Timothy, to help him do the necessary follow-up. The representative must be someone who shares the same vision and can convincingly pass the message to the young converts. However, that there could be delegation does not mean that the soul-winner should abdicate his or her responsibility. Fourth, in these days of information and communication technology, we can reach our converts through the electronic mail (e-mail), Internet, telephone, short-message-service (SMS), social networks and so on. Finally, letter-writing can be used to encourage, teach, warn and guide new converts (Acts 15:20,23-29; 2 Corinthians 13:10; 2 Peter 3:1; Luke 1:3,4). As parents are responsible for loving, feeding, protecting and training their children until they reach the age of maturity, so should soul-winners and church-planters handle new converts.

ESSENTIALS OF FOLLOW-UP (Matthew 25:34-40; 1Thessalonians 2:7,8,11)

Shallow spiritual life and low standard of Christian living are the products of dearth of doctrinal teaching in many Christian assemblies. There are marked differences between a convert and a disciple. Our visitation therefore, must be purposeful and goal-oriented.

To instruct, nurture and mature new converts in the faith, firstly, we must make them understand the word of God that their sins have been forgiven and that they are now children of God if they have sincerely repented and accepted Christ (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:16). Secondly, we must teach them how to live the new life and the principles of spiritual growth (Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:1-3). Thirdly, we need to guide them on how

to maintain a personal, private devotion (Quiet Time) everyday (Mark 1:35; Joshua 1:8). Fourthly, we need to encourage them to share their testimony with others (Mark 5:19; John 1:40-46; 4:28-30). Fifthly, we need to show them the importance of attending church services regularly (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42-47). Moreover, we need to teach them the importance of maintaining a regular prayer life for strength and victory (Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18).

Besides, follow-up progresses on the wheels of visitation and caring. It should not be done only when new believers come to church. Rather, we are to meet them where they are – home, work place, hospital wards or prison – and show genuine love and concern for their spiritual growth and physical welfare (Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Thessalonians 2:7,8,11).

As soon as the salvation of the new convert is ascertained, he must be shown the importance of getting baptized in water. The new believer must be taught the significance of water baptism from the Scriptures. He must be made to realize that it is God's ordinance and command to be observed after conversion (Matthew 28:19; 3:13-17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 8:38,39; Romans 6:4,5). Every new convert therefore should be enjoined to yield to this important injunction.

Question 3: Why is it important to baptize new converts as soon as possible?

CHURCH GROWTH THROUGH FOLLOW-UP AND DISCIPLESHIP (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2:1,2; Acts 11:25,26)

Follow-up and discipleship training have multiplier effects on the church; they equip members for the task of rapid evangelization. The urgent call for world evangelization will be mere day-dream without giving serious consideration to discipleship training. Only well-taught, serious-minded and heart-committed disciples can shoulder the responsibility of leading others and pastoring the church. We cannot have capable hands to handle our new church locations except we give serious attention to the subject of discipleship.

Follow-up, if properly done, will lead to the multiplication of disciples. If, for example, each of us wins a soul and trains the convert to go out and win another soul every six months, in five years we would have evangelized our communities for Christ. If a hundred dedicated Christians in a community individually and devotedly preach the gospel to just one person and follow-up the converts vigorously for six months, at the end of the sixth month, there would be two hundred dedicated believers. If these two hundred dedicated Christians would, as well, get one convert each and disciple the same within six months, at the end of one year, there would be four hundred devoted Christians in that community. If this process of one person winning and discipling another person in six months were continued, at the end of the five years, the number would have grown to 102,400 membership without embarking on expensive religious crusades. Although souls that may be won from this method of evangelism might not seem to be many initially, the growth will be phenomenal if it is sustained. In the Scripture, John the Baptist led Andrew to Christ (John 1:35-40), and Andrew, in turn, led Peter to Christ (John 1:40-42), and Peter, at Pentecost, led 3,000 to Christ (Acts 2:37-41), and those converts of Peter led multitudes to Christ (Acts 11:19-21). It is only when we get to heaven that we will be able to ascertain the number of converts that came into the Kingdom through the ministry of John the Baptist.

Question 4: What are the benefits of follow-up and discipleship?

The mission of multiplication, evangelization, and gospel saturation can only be realized through the vision of disciple-making. Apostle Paul in his missionary endeavours, exemplified the challenge of discipleship and breakthrough in evangelism (Acts 19:9,10). Spiritual training is a lifelong process. After the disciple has been integrated to the service of the Lord, this should not be seen as an end in itself. Further training for constant improvement will definitely be necessary.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	15	2 Chronicles	19-20
TUE	“	16	“	21-22
WED	2 Cor.	1-2	“	23-24
THUR	“	3-4	“	25-26
FRI	“	5-6	“	27-28
SAT	“	7-8	“	29
SUN	“	9-10	“	30-31

728 Lesson

THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND THE ANTICHRIST

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Great Tribulation will be the most awesome event in human history. It is crystal clear from biblical evidence that the event will witness the most intense suffering in the history of the world. World wars I and II, inter-tribal wars, civil wars and all other wars in the history of human existence as well as all kinds of cataclysmic

occurrence since the creation of man will fade into insignificance when compared with the Great Tribulation. It will be a period of unparalleled suffering, dreadful woe and frightening destruction. Although it is a time of universal trouble, yet the epicenter will be in Jerusalem and Palestine, which is why prophet Jeremiah referred to it as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). It will be the climax of God’s cumulative and catastrophic judgment upon the world. The period is peculiarly the time when God’s wrath and judgment will fall upon the earth. It is also a time when Satan and the Antichrist will unleash woe and wickedness upon the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 6:2-9).

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

PERSONALITY OF THE ANTICHRIST (Daniel 8:23-25; Thessalonians 2:8,9; Revelation 13:2-4)

The Antichrist will be the great personality behind the Great Tribulation. He is a personality that has been mentioned in several portions of the Scripture. Way back in the Old Testament, Daniel says: “**And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand**” (Daniel 8:23-25).

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

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

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

Daniel’s prophecy concerning the seventy weeks shows the accuracy of biblical revelation on the teaching of eschatology. In the seven weeks or forty-nine years, Jerusalem was to be reconstructed or built again. In the sixty-two weeks or four hundred and thirty-four years, the Messiah would be cut off (that is, die or be crucified). Again, it was prophesied that the (wicked) prince that shall come shall destroy the city of Jerusalem. This

happened in 70 A.D. when Roman soldiers under the leadership of General Titus invaded Jerusalem. Sixty-nine weeks (483 years) were to transpire between the edict to rebuild Jerusalem (after the Babylonian captivity) and the first advent of the Messiah. This prophecy was exactly fulfilled. From 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:5) when Artaxerxes issued a decree concerning the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, at the appeal of Nehemiah, to the time of the public advent of Christ the Messiah was exactly 483 years.

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

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

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

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

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

Though the period of the Great Tribulation will be

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Antichrist will set himself as the only God and will demand worship of the people of the earth. Daniel prophesied: **“And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods...”** (Daniel 11:36). Paul the apostle also predicted that the Antichrist **“opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”** (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

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

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

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

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

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

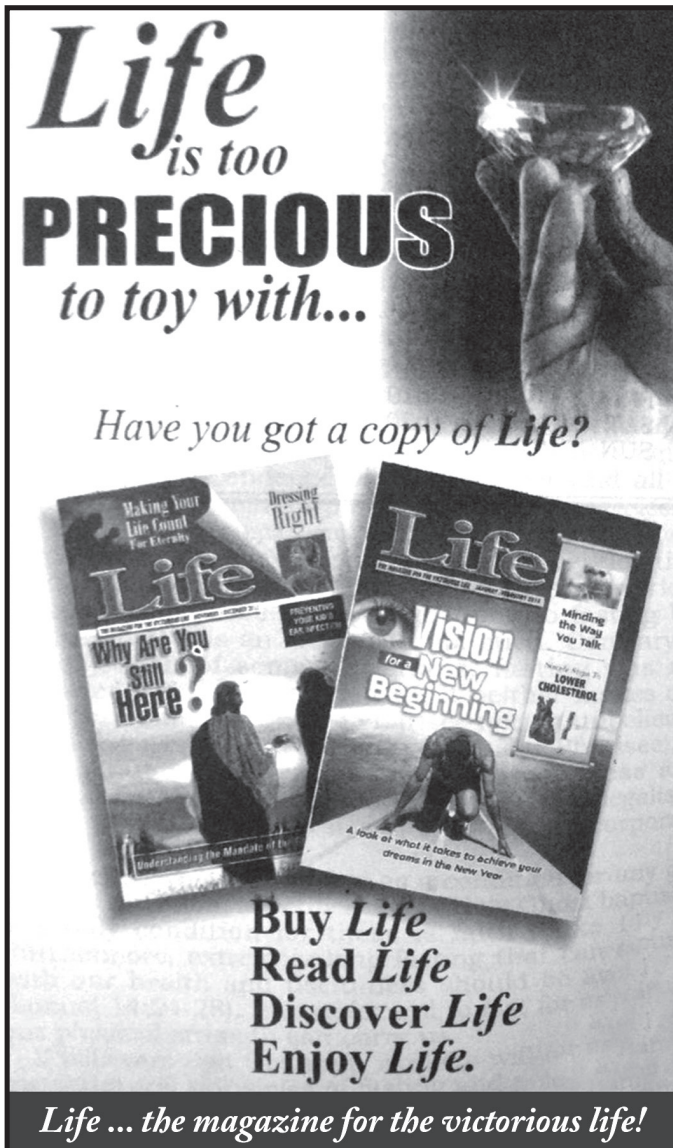
DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Cor.	11	2 Chron.	32
TUE	“	12-13	“	33-34
WED	Gal.	1-2	“	35
THUR	“	3-4	“	36
FRI	“	5-6	Ezra	1-2
SAT	Eph.	1-2	“	3-4
SUN	“	3-4	“	6-6

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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DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

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

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

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

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

All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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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