

Search The Scriptures

VOLUME 60

"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

768 Lesson

SAUL CONSULTS A WITCH AT ENDOR

MEMORY VERSE: “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?” (Isaiah 8: 19).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 28:1-25

David’s short excursion into the camp of the Philistines was no doubt indicative of his waning faith in God’s ability to continue to protect him. It opened the door to more temptations, sin and embarrassments. He had to lie to king Achish by claiming he and his troops invaded southern Judah whereas he had invaded the Geshurites, the Gezrites and the Amalekites without any justification or provocation (1 Samuel 27:6-10). King Achish then invited him to join forces with him against Israel. However, divine intervention stirred up his rejection in the Philistine camp (1 Samuel 29:3-7). David would have found himself in an awkward situation of fighting on the side of Israel’s enemies in a war where Saul, the first king of Israel, would be killed. Alternatively, he would have been guilty of betrayal and disloyalty to king Achish at the most critical moment, having been granted asylum that shielded him from Saul’s sword. This was a double dilemma created by a short-lived departure from the walk of faith by David.

As for Saul, his deep misery and hopelessness in his last days shows that those who refuse to be primed by God’s goodness and longsuffering to repentance will certainly come to a painful end (Romans 2:4). If sinners waste away their days of grace, they will come to a point where they shall **“call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me”** (Proverbs 1:28). Saul’s disregard for God’s word and disobedience

which began to manifest early in his kingship, finally came to roost in a miserable and horrible end.

Question 1: From the text, what can saints and sinners learn from the experiences of David and Saul?

DESOLATION AND MISERY OF DIVINE DISCONNECTION (1 Samuel 28:1-6; 16:14; Judges 16:19-21; 2 Chronicles 30:7; Romans 3:16)

Saul's spiritual condition at the time he ascended the throne as the first king of Israel contrasts sharply with his condition in his last days. After he was anointed king, **"God gave him another heart"** and **"the Spirit of God came upon him ..."** (1 Samuel 10:9, 10). Unfortunately, instead of taking advantage of God's grace to consolidate his walk with Him, he relapsed into self-management and disobedience to God's perfect will. Consequently, **"the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul..."** (1 Samuel 16:14). This represents a clear refutation of the doctrine of eternal security. The spiritual security of the believer lies in his continuity in the faith. **"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence (faith) steadfast unto the end"** (Hebrews 3:14). Saul's failure to abide by God's command turned his bright prospect into a horrible nightmare, despondency, hopelessness and misery.

"And the Philistines gathered themselves together and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa" (1 Samuel 28:4). This was a recurring event between Israel and the Philistines. However, Israel was always at advantage to overcome their enemies because God was their defence and Defender. They were not to be afraid of the enemy since the Almighty would fight for them.

But Saul had led the nation into disobedience and victory was no longer guaranteed. **"And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled."** Sinners and backsliders

always tremble and fear when their enemies confront them. **“And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets”** (1 Samuel 28:6). Saul had lost relationship with God, hence his disconnection from divine source of power, courage and victory. Samson walked a similar path of disobedience, self-will, false security and opposition to godly counsels and ended his life and ministry abruptly. Born at a time the nation needed a deliverer from the hands of their enemies, he was a child of destiny and a notable judge in Israel. He had the prospect of securing a perpetual peace and deliverance for his nation from the Philistines, but he blew the opportunity through his unguarded lifestyle and fraternity with women of easy virtue. Believers need to be careful and prayerful not to bungle their opportunity and privilege of being used of the Lord to deliver souls from the captivity of the devil. Saul’s glide to his miserable end is very instructive.

One, he plunged to the level of not only contemplating but actually consulting a witch. Two, he could not return to God even when faced with imminent death. Those who continue to live in sin hoping that it will be easier or more convenient at some future time to repent and become born again miss the point. They do not reckon with the paralyzing effect of sin long indulged in or the deadness of a conscience whose rebuke has been constantly ignored or the deceitfulness of sin when it becomes deeply rooted. The conscience can become so dead that God’s Spirit ceases to strive with it. It is for this reason that the Scripture calls everyone to **“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”** (Isaiah 55:6,7).

<p>Question 2: Why is the decision to repent and reconcile with God a wise one for everyone?</p>

THE DANGER OF SEEKING HELP OUTSIDE GOD (1 Samuel 28:7-18; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Proverbs 1:24-29; 13:15; Exodus 22:18; Galatians 5:19-21; 2:17,18)

Unable to get help and direction from the Lord, **“Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor”** (1 Samuel 28:7). Saul went down a dangerous precipice in consulting and seeking help from a witch contrary to the word of God. His request to have a discourse with the dead (necromancy or spiritism or divination) is expressly forbidden by the Lord who commanded the children Israel: **“There shall not be found any among you any one that... useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer”** (Deuteronomy 18:10, 11). His decision to consult a witch was informed by the ignorant supposition that by some other means other than turning to God, he could still survive his dark hour and sustain the kingdom when God was no longer with him. This deceptive notion may have fueled his disobedience and continued impertinence. The truth however is that only conformity in act and spirit with the word of God can guarantee true and enduring prosperity. No other device, invented or suggested by the living or the dead can give real comfort or bring respite to a self-willed and impertinent sinner or qualify him for the reward reserved for the obedient and holy.

Though Saul disguised himself by putting on a strange apparel before visiting the witch because he knew his action was wrong, he was still exposed, and it became a witness against his misadventure. People who cover up their evil deeds will one day be found out.

Question 3: How can a sinner avoid a fate as tortuous and miserable as that of Saul?

What made Saul's stray into witchcraft more reprehensible was his earlier religious zeal against this

evil for which he **“hath cut off those that have familiar spirit and the wizards out of the land...”** (verse 9). By thus building again the thing which he once destroyed, he had made himself a transgressor (Galatians 2:18). As an abomination, one, his action carried the wrath and indignation of God. Two, it presupposed that there are other powers greater than the power of God. Three, it was capable of stirring up divine jealousy from a God who would not share His glory with anyone. Four, it demeaned the power and authority of God over the believer’s life. Five, it amounted to a denial of the principle of divine ownership since we are all created by God and no other being should lay claim to our lives. Moreover, the New Testament classifies witchcraft among the works of the flesh. **“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are there; Adultery, fornication... idolatry, witchcraft ...”** (Galatians 5:20) (see also 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Chronicles 33:6; 2 Kings 9:22; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4). God frowns at His people who forsake Him to seek help elsewhere.

“And Samuel said unto Saul, why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me ... therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do” (verse 15). Please observe that nothing in the discourse between Saul and Samuel should be interpreted as indicating divine approval of the evil practice of witchcraft and spiritism. The fact that Saul was acting against the revealed will of God even casts a shadow on the authenticity of the personality in the apparition. It should also not be inferred from what transpired that a witch or a wizard can call back the spirit of the departed, much less the spirit of a righteous dead. If, as nothing is impossible with God, He permitted late Samuel to truly appear, it was to affirm His earlier judgment against disobedient Saul (1 Samuel 15:26; 28:18). On the other hand, God in His sovereignty overruled the witch and prevented her from deceiving Saul. After all, a recalcitrant and greedy Balaam was used to prophesy of Israel’s future and an ass spoke with human voice to warn him (Numbers

22:28-30; 24:3- 9). The pronouncement was to seal his doom because he would not repent of his evil. It was quite appropriate that Saul's doom should come from the mouth of Samuel whose word he rejected when he was alive. Had he heeded his counsel and advice, God would have made him a prosperous and an abiding king.

Question 4: Mention some alternatives sought by sinners in their search for joy, security and hope instead of turning to God through repentance.

THE DOOM AND APATHY OF THE UNREPENTANT SINNER (1 Samuel 28:19-25; Isaiah 58:5; Romans 2:16; Hosea 6:1)

“Moreover, the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 28:19).

Saul's disposition at the pronouncement of the doom that awaited him, his sons and the whole nation was disappointing. With a picture of eternal doom, utter destruction of lives and property and ignominious defeat from the enemy, he still failed to do the needful; that is, a simple but sincere repentance and faith in God. If he had fallen upon his face in deep contrition and repentance, perhaps, the Lord would have repented of His judgment on the nation and forgiven them. Worse still, that the witch brought food **“before Saul, and before his servants; and they did eat”** is indicative of his hardness of heart and apathy concerning the impending calamity. Indeed, the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15).

Let us examine his catalogue of woes and learn: one, he had to confront enemies which were more in number and better equipped than his own troops. His condition was akin to a natural man contending with satanic forces without Christ on his side. Two, he was fasting (verse 20) but it was futile because fasting alone without

godliness will avail nothing (Isaiah 58:5). Three, he suffered the pain of conscience, knowing that his steps to the house of a witch was perverse and sinful. He therefore disguised himself and went under the cover of darkness. **“For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved”** (John 3:20). His disguise failed as he was eventually identified by the witch. Sinners and saints alike will do well always to remember that **“all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”** (Hebrews 4:13). Every disguise of a sinful heart using the garment of false or pretended religion shall avail nothing **“in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ”** (Romans 2:16). Four, his lamentation, that **“the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me”**, contains some elements of self-rebuke. He knew long before this invasion that God had departed from him but did nothing about it. Similarly, sinners who, in their time of seeming peace and prosperity, forget God may remember Him when it is too late, when the enemy of their souls close in upon them with his evil forces. Their frantic prayer for divine intervention at that time may receive no response from God (Proverbs 1:24).

Five, it was all sad news for Saul in his last days without a speck of comfort. **“So, Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it”** (1 Chronicles 10:13). For today’s sinner, there is yet hope. The word of God still lovingly pleads, **“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten and he will bind us up”** (Hosea 6:1).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	23	Genesis	30
TUE	“	24	“	31
WED	John	1	“	32
THUR	“	2-3	“	33
FRI	“	4	“	34-35
SAT	“	5	“	36
SUN	“	6	“	37

769 Lesson

DAVID'S VICTORY OVER THE AMALEKITES

MEMORY VERSE: "And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives" (1 Samuel 30:18).

TEXT: 1 Samuel 30:1-31

David's flight from Saul and sojourn in the Philistine's country had been the theme of some lessons in the preceding chapters to the text. It would be recalled that he and his men enlisted in the Philistine army to fight against his own people, but for divine intervention that inspired his rejection by the lords of the Philistines. Though David deceived Achish to believe he was as an angel of God, the princes of the Philistines could not be persuaded to trust his loyalty during warfare against Israel. He was thus sent back to his base in Ziklag, where he had been granted asylum.

However, before David and his men could return to base, the Amalekites, possibly on a revenge mission for the earlier unprovoked destruction of a part of their tribes (1 Samuel 27:8,9), had struck and carried away the defenseless women and children and set Ziklag ablaze. This was a deadly blow to David and his men and brought emotional distress to them. Thus, the invasion of Ziklag by the Amalekites and the expedition of David and his men to recover their wives, sons, daughters and properties form the focus of this study.

DAVID AND HIS ARMY DISTRESSED BY THE AMALEKITES (1 Samuel 30:1-6; Joshua 7:1-12; 8:1-29; 2 Chronicles 7:11-16)

While David and his men went to the north to join the Philistine army, their own city was left unguarded. The Amalekites took advantage of the defenseless city, attacked and razed it to the ground. David and his men returned on the third day only to discover also that

“their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives” (1 Samuel 30:3). Tired and hungry, their dream of returning to the warm embrace of their families and comfort of their houses was dashed.

That the Lord restrained the Amalekites from killing all the women and children showed His great mercy. However, the attack explains the need for believers to be watchful because the enemy takes advantage of our unguarded moments (1 Peter 5:8).

Question 1: What is the importance of watchfulness in the believer’s life?

It was indeed an awful moment for David. He wept, not only because everything and everyone was lost, but for knowing that he was responsible for it. First, there was a natural feeling of disappointment after a long and weary march. Second, there was intense pang in every heart caused by the carrying off of members of their families **“... because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters”** Third, the troops were so fearfully disappointed in David that they spoke of stoning him. The very men who had lately approached him with the beautiful salutation: **“peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee”** and whom he trusted threatened to stone him.

This disaster and shock of the situation drove David back to God to trust in His mercy and grace, and he **“encouraged himself in the LORD his God”** (1 Samuel 30:6). He was strengthened because, first, at this point of total loss, he perceived the love of God in the rejection of the Philistine leaders that enabled them return home early before greater damage was done to their people. Second, he remembered God’s past deliverances out of danger and he trusted Him to help him out of the current predicament. God was beginning to cure his servant by a bitter dose of distress and the evidence of the cure was that he encouraged himself in the Lord.

Question 2: How should believers respond to challenges in life and ministry?

In moments of rejection, crisis or difficulty, we must learn to put our trust in the Lord, His word, power and providence and be rest assured that “...**all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.**” David’s experience also shows that believers and Christian leaders can always find succor in God as a result of their relationship with and total confidence in Him.

DAVID’S RETURN TO GOD AND PLEA FOR GUIDANCE

(1 Samuel 30:7-10; Joshua 7:7-13; 8:10-29; Psalm 37:3-7; Jeremiah 29:11-14)

David asked Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod with which he made enquiries from the Lord saying, “**Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all**” (1 Samuel 30:8). Since David was granted asylum among the Philistines, this was the first recorded case of his seeking the face of God. Now in great distress, he would not take any step without God’s approval and direction. An ephod was a special apron that priests wore to cover their clothing so that the sacrificial blood would not splash on their clothing. It is likely this was the ephod of the high priest which had the breastplate of judgment attached to it (Exodus 28: 15,28). The breastplate had in it a pouch with two stones, known as the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30). In seeking God through these, David relied on His word for guidance.

Prayer is a vital weapon to surmount challenges in the life of every believer. If we desire to make progress in our spiritual and secular engagements, we must resort to God in prayer, depend on His Word and counsel from genuine and mature Christian leaders. As children of God, the Lord will surely answer us when we sincerely ask Him for direction in the choice of a marriage partner, business deals, life-long career, etc.

<p>Question 3: Why should Christians seek divine guidance before taking important steps in life?</p>

Worthy of mention is David's strong faith in God. Although he needed all his men to go along with him in pursuit of the Amalekites, he was forced to drop a third part of them by the way because they were so fatigued that they could not pass the brook Besor. This was a great trial of his faith, yet in total dependence on God's word, he proceeded with only four hundred men. David's tenderness to his men at such critical moment shows that when people we trust to help eventually disappoint us, we are not to resent them or apportion blame; we should exercise faith in God's ability and power to meet every need.

DAVID'S MARCH TOWARDS THE PROMISED RECOVERY (1 Samuel 30:11-20; Isaiah 58:6-14; Joel 2:15-27)

As David and his men pursued the Amalekites, they came across a man who had collapsed in the wilderness because he was sick. **“And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water”** (1 Samuel 30:11). Upon interrogation, he provided them with needed intelligence and his explanation suggested that he participated in the raid of David's people. Their act of kindness paid off as the young lad conducted them to the camp of the Amalekites after they had assured him of his safety.

David's compassion on the Egyptian is commendable. Our love for others must be devoid of tribal or religious coloration. Though he had reason to think he was one of those that had helped to destroy Ziklag, he generously relieved him. Despite the fact that they were in haste to rescue their abducted families, they would not **“forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death”** (Proverbs 24: 11). As believers, we should not shut up our bowels of compassion from people in distress. The result of our deeds of kindness to people, including so-called enemies, could be the key to our own success or fulfilment of God's plan for our lives. **“Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of**

fire on his head” (Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:4). Our compassion for sinners who are drowning in sin should compel us to reach them with the gospel message. Apart from this, our love and willingness to share with them can attract them to the Saviour and turn them to useful instruments of spiritual revival and recovery.

Question 4: What lessons can contemporary believers draw from the compassion of David on the Egyptian?

The Amalekites who **“spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah”** were caught off guard by David and his men. **“And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away.”** In reference to the spoil, David and his men actually ended up with more than they had lost because they were able to capture the spoil that was taken by the Amalekites from the Philistine cities. Everything the enemies had carried off were fully recovered.

Today, believers can recover both their physical and spiritual inheritance because victory is the portion of God’s people who seek, trust and obey Him. His promise is, **“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm... And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you ...And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed”** (Joel 2:25-27). Abraham, the father of our faith obtained victory over the confederate kings that took Lot captive (Genesis 14:12-16); Moses defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:24; Deuteronomy 3:2,3). Also, God raised judges to deliver Israel from oppression (Judges 1:4; 2:18; 3:10). Christ has conquered the devil and given every New Testament believer victory and power to continually enforce the enemy’s defeat (Luke 10: 19; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:11-18; James 4:7; Revelation 12: 11).

DAVID'S LIBERALITY AND PRINCIPLE OF FAIRNESS

(1 Samuel 30:21-31; Ephesians 4:7,8; Psalm 68:18; Acts 20:33-35; 2 Kings 7:1-18; Matthew 28:18-20)

After the victory over the Amalekites, **“David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor”**. Then, those who returned from battle with him objected to sharing the spoil with those that did not go, **“save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart”** (1 Samuel 30:21,22). The reaction of these **“wicked men and men of Belial”** showed that they failed to realize that although their brethren tarried behind, it was not for want of goodwill to the cause but because they had no strength to keep up with their pace. Also, they had previously engaged in battle and done their part. Besides, they rendered a good service by staying with the supplies to keep them from marauders.

In response to their protest, David established an important principle which became a statute and ordinance for Israel unto this day. **“But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike”**. Today, it takes several people to provide support services needed for soldiers in battle. And those who support frontline soldiers are as important in any victory as those who directly engage the enemy in battle (see Numbers 31:27). In the church, we should not neglect the people who provide support services, people who are not visible but provide behind-the-scene support for frontline ministers of the gospel. People who do not go to mission fields but contribute to the success of soul-winning in home and foreign lands will also be rewarded by the Lord if they remain faithful till the end. The ministry of **“helps”** is scriptural and cannot be neglected (1 Corinthians 12:28; Acts 6:1-6; Romans 16:3,9; 3 John 1,5-8). Believers who are committed and faithful in rendering support services for the progress of the gospel will not lose their rewards (Hebrews 6:10). Courtesy demands that we reciprocate or acknowledge the kind gestures of other people.

When Jesus triumphed on the Cross, He won the greatest battle and now shares the spoil with everyone. **“When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men”** {Ephesians 4:8). As David sent messengers with gifts to diverse people in many cities, the Lord Jesus Christ is also sending us forth as His reliable ambassadors to take the gift of life and spread it throughout the whole world (Mark 16: 15).

Question 5: How can believers reciprocate God’s faithfulness in their lives today?

Finally, when God grants us victory in life’s battle, we must not abandon the fellowship of believers but return to praise and worship Him. Believers need to rejoice in the Lord for His care and intervention and further show gratitude by rededicating their lives entirely to serve Him.

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	7	Genesis	38
TUE	“	8	“	39-40
WED	“	9	“	41
THUR	“	10	“	42
FRI	“	11	“	43
SAT	“	12	“	44-45
SUN	“	13-14	“	46

770 Lesson

THE TRAGIC DEATH OF SAUL

TEXT: 1 Samuel 31:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: “So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together” (1 Samuel 31:6).

The text gives a vivid account of the tragic death of Saul, the first king of Israel, in a battle with the Philistines. This sad end was a culmination of repeated acts of disobedience, attempts to thwart God’s will with impunity and unwillingness to wholeheartedly repent of sin. The Scripture affirms as well as warns present day counterparts of Saul that: **“He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”** (Proverbs 29: 1).

Death, a fact of life, brings transition to another world of timeless bliss or blight. Those who are redeemed by Christ will be ushered through death into an endless joy with God while sinners and backsliders will pass on to an irrecoverable and endless misery in hell. With the absence of divine guidance and his straying to consult a witch without any recorded moment of genuine repentance before going into this battle, Saul’s death was a miserable and an ignoble one. Without repentance, hell is the destination of all sinners.

SAUL’S DELUSION AND BACKSLIDING (1 Samuel 31:1; Joshua 7:8-12; 1Chronicles 10:1-3; 28:9,10; 1Chronicles 15:1,2; Psalm 33:16-22)

Question 1: What counsel is appropriate for those who live in sin today?

Saul’s downward course which started some years back was coming to a fatal end. **“Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell down slain in mount Gilboa”**

(1 Samuel 31:1). The size and armory of the Philistine's army, the absence of David who became a champion by killing Goliath of Gath, and more importantly, the departure of divine presence from Saul predisposed Israel's army to a colossal defeat. When the battle commenced, the enemy had the upper hand and **“The men of Israel fled”** Just as Achan caused Israel's defeat at Ai, Saul was responsible for this national disgrace on mount Gilboa. His incessant disobedience, even in the face of rebuke, had ruptured his relationship with God and created a big gulf which eventually led to a permanent severance.

Question 2: Describe Saul's spiritual state at this time as it relates to contemporary believers.

Though still actively occupying the prime political position in the land, he had become estranged from God. He could no longer receive the support and directive necessary for a theocratic monarchy he was supposed to run. Though he started well by displaying commendable humility and evidence of Holy Spirit influence, he soon veered off and became a fiend against self-perceived but non-existence foes. Believers must not allow past successes or virtues to delude them.

Question 3: Outline some of the marks of backsliding believers must avoid.

Believers must quickly deal with any of the following telltale marks of backsliding before they lead to destruction. One, being filled with one's own ways (1 Samuel 15:14-23; Proverbs 14:14; Jeremiah 44:16,17).

Two, holding to deceit, error or false doctrine (Job 31: 1-5; Jeremiah 8:5). Three, trusting in material possessions and might rather than God (Jeremiah 49:4; Revelation 3: 17-20). Four, justifying one's misdeeds instead of admitting one's sinfulness (Jeremiah 3:11,12). Five, wandering to spiritually condemned places where there is no help (Jeremiah 31:22; Galatians 2:18). Such people need to urgently repent of sin to avert divine judgment.

SAUL'S DEATH IN BATTLE (1 Samuel 31:2-10; 1 Samuel 13:13,14; 1 Chronicles 10:3-10,13,14; 1 Kings 13:20-26)

The Scripture is silent on the cause of the war. It did not state whether it was a routine or statutory battle. But it was so explicit on its cost for Israel. They fled **“And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul’s sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers”** (1 Samuel 31:2,3). Realizing that the end had come and hating to be killed by the ‘uncircumcised’ Philistines, Saul requested to be slain by his armour-bearer who declined for fear of desecrating the Lord’s anointed. At last, Saul sealed his own doom by committing suicide. This was unwise as the pursuers did not get to where he was until the next day. Believers ought not to be fidgety or impulsive like Saul. We should rather act in full consideration of available and reasonable options with faith in God.

Question 4: What striking lessons does Saul’s tragic death teach the church?

The armour-bearer declining his master’s ungodly request teaches us that regardless of the personality, any sinful request or ungodly order must be refused, and the believer must choose to **“obey God rather than men”** (Genesis 39:7-9; 1 Samuel 22:16,17; Daniel 3:16,17; Acts 5:29). Probably unsure of how to manage the consequences of the unfolding reality, the armour-bearer compounded the situation by committing suicide alongside his master.

The murder of oneself is the worst kind of homicide and the highest expression of mortal folly. It implies co-operating with one’s chief enemy to destroy one’s soul (2 Samuel 17:23; Matthew 27:5). Of all the deaths in our text, this is the worst and most condemnable. Those who through the use of illicit drugs or unwholesome living unwittingly cut short their lives also share in the same

condemnation. Believers must never consider it an option under any circumstance to harm themselves or take their own lives (2 Samuel 17:23; Job 2:4; Acts 16:27).

Questions often arise as to the fate of Jonathan in this case: why do good men like Uriah, Naboth, Stephen, and many other martyrs die ‘prematurely’. Such deaths do not imply a reneging of God on His promise, neither does it suggest His inability to preserve His saints. God still keeps the distinction between His beloved children and others. Though such deaths may be painful to men, they are precious to God and serve their purposes in His perfect, omniscient plan (Psalm 116:15; Luke 16:22). **“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness”** (Isaiah 57: 1,2).

Though it was shameful that the uncircumcised Philistines beheaded Saul, placed his stripped armour in the house of Ashtaroth their god and hung their bodies to the wall of Bethshan, it afforded them only a fleeting pleasure. As Christians, we know that whatever is done to a corpse has neither positive nor negative significance to the dead. Like God, our Father, we place more value on the souls of men than their mere bodies. **“For dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return... what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (Genesis 3:19; Matthew 16:26). Besides, the glorying of the Philistines was short-lived as the men of Jabesh-gilead soon came to take the bodies of their fallen state men away.

STEADFAST DECISION BY THE BRAVE (1 Samuel 31:11-13; 1 Chronicles 10:11,12; 1 Samuel 24:1-6; Romans 15:3,4)

“All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons... and burnt them there... and buried them under a tree at Jabesh” (1 Samuel 31:12,13). The action of the

men of Jabesh-gilead is commendable. It was a manifest respect for the slain leader who at the commencement of his reign had rescued them from king Nahash of the Ammonites, saving them from deep degradation and tyranny (1 Samuel 11:1-3,11). Today, bravery is shown in the Kingdom by laboring for the Lord and His people, and believers are admonished to “... **hold such in reputation**” (Philippians 2:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13).

Question 5: Comment on the action of the men of Jabesh-gilead.

In any case, the cremation was only partial, and they were so careful as to preserve the bones from being burnt in order to make them available for burial. It is noteworthy that no one from Saul’s family, the priesthood, or even David, the new king and Jonathan’s longtime friend raised eyebrow against the way the valiant men handled the corpses. Everyone seemed to appreciate the effort and risk they took, understand the spirit behind their brave decision and the fact that they acted out of a common concern for the honour of the land of Israel. Learning from the valiant men of Jabesh-gilead, believers should take necessary risks and steps to preserve the honour of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords at all times. We should defend the integrity of our spirituality by projecting the interest of God’s kingdom through consistent holy living on earth. In obedience to Christ, we should proclaim his death as the basis of reconciliation with God.

As the study concludes, we are reminded of the tragic end of a man favored by God with promising potentials but had a pitiable ending. It started with complacency and loss of relationship with God, continued with self-confidence or righteousness, preoccupation with the mundane over the spiritual and outright idolatry until death. “**Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	John	15-16	Genesis	47
TUE	"	17-18	"	48-49
WED	"	19	"	50
THUR	"	20-21	Exodus	1-2
FRI	ACTS	1-2	"	3-4
SAT	"	3	"	5-6
SUN	"	4	"	7-8

771 Lesson

DAVID MOURNS THE DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN

TEXT: 2 Samuel 1:1-27

MEMORY VERSE: “Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword” (2 Samuel 1:11,12).

Barely three days after David’s successful rescue and recovery mission over Ziklag, a sycophant and self-professed war escapee travelled about 125 kilometers to meet him with news of the death of Saul and Jonathan (1 Samuel 22:1,2; 23:16-18). His action reminds one of the desperation of the ungodly in anticipation of personal gains.

The build-up to this study stems from David’s characteristic concern for the people of God. **“And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, how went the matter? I pray thee, tell me”** (2 Samuel 1:3,4). Like him, Christians should show maximum interest in the condition of God’s people and projects, even if, like in this case, they are not directly involved. Such concern should result in empathy with the suffering, provision for the needy, supplication and contribution for successful execution of issues of God’s interest.

DAVID’S REACTION TO THE NEWS OF SAUL’S DEATH (2 Samuel 1:1-12; Proverbs 24:17; Jeremiah 9:1; 1 Peter 3:8,9)

The response of the Amalekite escapee to David’s enquiry was not at all cheering. **“... And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also”** (2 Samuel 1:4). Considering the promise and power of the God

of Israel, such a defeat was usually an indication of divine displeasure or reprimand. David was genuinely distraught and distressed; he identified with his nation and expressed profound grief for Jonathan his friend and for the king of Israel. This is a classic legacy of patriotism, faithfulness and uncommon loyalty to leaders.

Question 1: Outline vital lessons from David's disposition to the death of Saul and Jonathan.

The text is an account of the grieving of the godly at the death of a self-avowed enemy. David displayed an uncommon virtue which only the grace of God can cultivate in a man. Under normal circumstances, the misfortune or death of one's enemy should elicit spontaneous rejoicing. For many, it would have been an occasion of celebration or making of uncomplimentary remarks on the failings of the enemy. But David's reaction reminds us that the fall of a pervert is not a license for the misconduct of the pious. It also teaches us that whether in a war situation or consequence of an ailment or accident or any other cause, death should evoke a sense of sympathy and rallying support for the bereaved.

Secondly, the spontaneity, unity and similarity of the reaction of his company speak volumes, not only on the impactful leadership qualities of David, but also on the integrity of his men. Christians should willingly and eagerly conform to the pattern of the godly lifestyles of their leaders. By so doing, spiritual oversight would not be a grievous function and the word of God will not be blasphemed (2 Samuel 1:11,12; Galatians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,7; Hebrews 13:7).

Though Saul had lost the battle even before it began, he did not eventually die alone. The catalogue of victims included the faulty and fretful, faithful and faultless, and the fit and fighting soldiers. Where one aligns often informs where one is consigned. David also felt for the many who lost their lives while faithfully discharging their duties to the nation under Saul who had exhausted

the limits of God's forbearance. However, where an occasion of death is unavoidably similar, the destiny of the departed may be different. The spiritual state of Saul before his death was particularly pathetic (1 Samuel 28:7; 1 Chronicles 10:13; Psalm 9: 17; Hebrews 9:27). Realizing therefore that hell is the eternal destiny of sinners, every individual should, as a matter of urgency, get reconciled with God by repenting of sin and appropriating God's offer of salvation through Christ before death strikes.

DIRE RECOMPENSE FOR THE SYCOPHANT'S DECEPTION (2 Samuel 1:13-16; Exodus 17:14; Numbers 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9; Proverbs 12:13,14; Ecclesiastes 10:12; 2 Peter 2:3).

Against the backdrop of the genuine account of the death of king Saul in a previous study (1 Samuel 31:4- 6), the report given by the Amalekite here is obviously false. The truth is that he had been somewhere close to the scene of the event, listened to the king's last conversation, and witnessed his last breath. Being opportune to have access to the corpses of Saul and his close aide ahead of the Philistines, he decided to take the royal insignia in hope of exploiting the situation for personal advantage. However, his hope was permanently dashed as he was recompensed with instant death for declaring his effrontery at laying his hands on the Lord's anointed (2 Samuel 1:14-16).

Question 2: What caution should Christians take in view of the character of the Amalekite in the text?

The Amalekite in the study was naive. One, he mistook David for a typically depraved individual who would delight in the demise of a perceived enemy. He was not aware that David had once and again refrained from such an act even when there were ample opportunities. It is heart-warming that David overcame the subtle temptation inherent in this encounter. Though the unregenerate may ignorantly or consciously present various grades and shades of allurements that can

smear the righteous, a genuine Christian must always be a living evidence of the massive change Christ's grace affords (Matthew 5:39).

Two, he was ignorant of a subsisting divine sentence upon him and generations of his descendants which disposed him to death (Deuteronomy 25: 17-19). Since the sins of his nation had not been expiated and God's wrath had not been mitigated, his visit to a divinely commissioned personality like David was a fatal miscalculation. Christians must be circumspect so as not to risk their lives needlessly in the enemy's territory (Matthew 10:23; John 7:1; 11:53,54).

The Amalekite died for misusing his tongue. **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof”** (Proverbs 18:21). He also thought he could profit from his calculated deception. It is unfortunate that though the act was not new, its negative consequence has not sufficiently deterred those that choose to perish for failing to heed scriptural injunctions against covetousness. **“He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house...”** (Proverbs 15:27; see also Numbers 31:8; Joshua 7:24-26; Matthew 27:3-5; 2 Kings 5:20-27; 1 Timothy 6:9-11). His courtesy to David was a common trademark of sycophancy, and all hands must be on deck to check this evil from thriving, even in the church.

<p>Question 3: How can we deal with sycophants in a Christian assembly?</p>
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As believers, care must be taken not to fall prey to those who may want to take undue advantage of us. **“And through covetousness... with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”** (2 Peter 2:3). Though a New Testament church cannot apply David's crude method, both leaders and members must ensure they destroy every carnal sentiment to which most sycophants appeal. An intimate relationship with the Lord, uncompromising holiness, continual fullness of the Spirit and possession of

appropriate spiritual gifts are vital for early detection. In addition, discovered sycophants must be denied their aim, reproved and disciplined with appropriate scriptural sanctions to deter others from being similarly inclined (Ezra 4:1-4; Acts 16:16-18).

David's handling of the impostor proved his innocence, absolved him of any possible supposition of complicity or contentment in the fate of the deceased king, impressed the people and endeared him to God who rewarded him for good, established his kingdom and gave him an enduring covenant (1 Samuel 24:19,20; Psalm 35:11-14; Matthew 5:43,44; Romans 12:14-17; 1 Peter 3:9-17). The moving dirge he composed further revealed the sincerity of his affection and the depth of his agony. Besides, it perpetuated his uncommon devotion to the nation's interest in the annals of history.

DIRGE RECORDED FOR THE NATION'S SORROWFUL DISPOSITION (2 Samuel 1:17-27; Joshua 7:5-13; Lam. 5:15,16; Proverbs 24:17; Isaiah 62:6; Galatians 4:19)

David's lamentation reflects the pulse of the nation which was in agony for the national defeat and disgrace, the loss of spouses and sons, and towns and settlements taken over by their triumphant enemies. The depth of his mourning and touching nature of the elegy he composed were quite uncommon. In it, he lamented their loss, wished the event would not be celebrated among the Philistines, placed a perpetual curse on the mountains of Gilboa (which have been sterile for so long after), and highlighted the commendable attributes of the departed warriors. However, while it may not be surprising for anyone to grieve for the untimely death of a very devoted friend like Jonathan, his genuine mourning of Saul is beyond the ordinary.

“(Also, he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.)” This parenthetical apposition shows David going the extent of preserving the *qeshet* i.e. the bow, which is the title of the song, for posterity. To have

encouraged its dissemination among his immediate kinsmen, to be sung in honour of someone who remained his unprovoked and implacable enemy till death was magnanimous and commendable as well as instructive to New Testament believers.

Q4: Comment on the content of David's composition.

The dirge recognized the strong points in the life of the deceased monarch. One, it reaffirmed the sanctity of his anointing which confers the right of honour on him. This challenges Christians to respect leaders on account of the divine angle to their appointment (2 Samuel 1:21; Romans 13:1,2; Titus 3:1,2; 1 Peter 2:13- 17). Two, it praised his valor, speed and strength which occasioned various battle victories for Israel during his lifetime. We should not minimize leaders' achievements on account of their vacating office. Three, it eulogizes Saul's economic policies which improved the living conditions of the people. Four, it was silent on Saul's mischief. This is a testimony to the complete forgiveness of David for all the wrong Saul did to him. This challenges contemporary believers to heed Christ's command to **"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:..."** (Matthew 5:44). Five, it says nothing of his piety and fidelity. Though these ranks higher than all other virtues, they were actually missing in Saul's life. We learn here that no matter how charitable a Christian may be, lofty credentials must not be imputed to flatter undeserving individuals.

It is noteworthy that the lamentation figuratively referred to Saul and his son as **"weapons of war"** and groaned over their peril. **"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"** (2 Samuel 1:27). Every born-again believer can be a potent weapon for the emancipation of humanity from the captivity of Satan, our archenemy. The battle against sin and its consequences must be won at all fronts. This is to be done by relentlessly proclaiming the tidings of the

saving grace of God through faith in Christ. Failure to deliver on this mandate implies a great wastage of spiritual weaponry and impeding peril. There is danger when a believer fails to act in obedience to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to carry out this divinely appointed assignment (Matthew 28: 18-20; 25:25-30, Job 20:4-7; Isaiah 41:15; Jeremiah 51:20; Ezekiel 3:17,18).

Question 5: What can Christians learn from the lamentation of David for Saul and Jonathan?

David’s dirge was commendable, but it did no good for the eternal state of Saul. Believers should rather lament for sinners who are physically alive but spiritually dead. We should seek to rescue them from eternal death through ceaseless labor and prayers that they may have **“repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil...”** (2 Timothy 2:25,26). We should travail in preaching and teaching, **“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith...”** (Acts 26: 18).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	5-6	Exodus 9
TUE	“	7	“ 10-11
WED	“	8	“ 12
THUR	“	9	“ 13
FRI	“	10	“ 14-15
SAT	“	11	“ 16
SUN	“	12	“ 17-18

772 Lesson

DAVID REIGNS OVER JUDAH AND ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. So, all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel” (2 Samuel 5:1,3).

TEXT: 2 Samuel 2,3,4,5

The turbulent reign of Saul eventually came to its end. David mourned the death of the king and his son, Jonathan. That the news of Saul’s death did not give David any cause to rejoice shows that he bore no malice in his heart. By his action, he fulfilled the New Testament obligations that require all believers to forgive their enemies, pray for them and overcome evil with good. In this study, however, we shall see how David ultimately became the king of Israel.

DAVID BEGINS TO REIGN OVER JUDAH (2 Samuel 2:1-7; 1 Samuel 13:11-14, 15:10-28; 16:11-13)

“And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron”. With the death of Saul and his sons, the way was basically clear for David to ascend the throne; yet, he was neither presumptuous nor in a hurry to become king over Israel. He sought God’s leading concerning what steps to take. As believers, we should learn to seek God’s direction before we take any step-in life. And we should be determined to do His will as we wait patiently for His appointed time (Isaiah 28:16).

Question 1: What steps did David take to become the king in Judah?

In answer to David's request, God directed him to go to Judah and then to Hebron. He gathered his household and others who have been with him and brought them to Hebron. There, the men of Judah came and anointed him king. One thing that Saul never wanted to happen finally came to pass. Though it took almost eighteen years from the time God first revealed that He had found a man after His own heart to replace Saul (1 Samuel 13:13,14), He ensured that His plan was fulfilled. As believers, we should not be afraid of the antics of the enemy. If we trust the Lord, He will fulfil His promises in our lives.

When David was made king by the house of Judah, he reached out to the people of Jabesh-gilead who got the body of Saul from the shrine of the Philistines and buried him. This was a generous and noble act which showed that though Saul was dead, David still recognized him as the anointed of the Lord. Meanwhile, the travails of David did not immediately end with the death of Saul as **"... Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel"** (2 Samuel 2:8,9). Now, Israel had two kings; David reigning over Judah and Ishbosheth ruling over the rest of Israel. This was the beginning of seven years conflict between the two sides until Abner and Ishbosheth were killed.

THE DEATH OF ABNER (2 Samuel 2:17; 3:17-32,37; 19:13; 20:8-12)

"And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David". Abner the son of Ner was the captain of Saul's army while Joab the Son of Zeruiah was the captain of David's host. Abner was the one who made Ishbosheth king over Israel after Saul's death. Both men led their men to war against each other. The men of David gave a thorough drubbing to the men of Israel, but they lost Asahel the brother of Joab who wanted to get a great honour by being the

one that could kill Abner. “And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner” (2 Samuel 2:19). **Abner’s appeal to Asahel to find another prey fell on deaf ears. At this point, he had no choice than to kill him. Though Asahel was fast-footed, he could not match the skill of Abner. He learnt too late that the battle is not always to the strong (Ecclesiastes 9:11).**

Question 2: What can believers learn from Asahel’s premature death?

The civil war continued until there was a major crack in Saul’s camp. **“And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father’s concubine?”** (2 Samuel 3:7). With this confrontation, Abner threatened to deliver the kingdom to David. Ishbosheth was afraid but there was nothing he could do. Abner was the commander of the forces and the one who made him king over Israel. He was not the Lord’s anointed. When we get positions or benefits contrary to God’s will, we become preys to our benefactors.

Abner, from that moment, began his moves to defect to David. He arranged a meeting with David to discuss the transfer of the whole kingdom to him. **“And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying... Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee. And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel”** on the planned unification (2 Samuel 3:12,17). He even spoke to the house of Benjamin to get their support.

We could see from the efforts of Abner that he was committed to bringing the division in the nation to an end. After getting all Israel to agreement, he went to meet with David with twenty men of Israel to perfect arrangements for the eventual handover of the whole kingdom to him. **“So, Abner came to David to Hebron,**

and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast... And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace” (2 Samuel 3:20,21).

Joab, the commander of David’s host, was not around when Abner struck a pact with David. He came from war with great spoils to learn that he had been around, and that David had sent him away in peace. He questioned David’s wisdom and accused Abner of coming to spy. **“Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest.”** After that encounter, without the knowledge of David, Joab sent messengers to get Abner back. He **“took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother”**. Did Joab really murder Abner because of Asahel or to secure his position in a united Israel? He revealed his real intention in later years when he also killed Amasa. He never wanted a rival (2 Samuel 19:13; 20:8-12). Leaders should observe people in their congregations who, like Joab, destroy others to protect their interests and positions and curtail their excesses. Meanwhile, David’s response to Abner’s murder pleased the people and helped to bring the nation together under him. It is ungodly for believers to celebrate the downfall of others. We should show concern and sympathize with other people when calamity befalls them. The Scripture enjoins us to **“rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”** (Romans 12:15).

Question 3: Assess David’s response to Abner’s murder.

THE MURDER OF ISHBOSHETH (2 Samuel 4:1-12)

With Abner’s death, Ishbosheth, the king of Israel became totally helpless. Abner was all the strength he had. He had no capability to move the people to his side; and he had no security cover. Therefore, he was vulnerable to attack from enemies as two Benjamites looking for favour from David conspired to kill him. **“And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab**

and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who lay on a bed at noon... and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night” (verses 5-7). They headed for David’s house expecting a reward, but they were disappointed as they paid dearly for their action with their own lives. **“And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the sepulcher of Abner in Hebron”** (2 Samuel 4:12). David’s response was in line with the word of God that forbids murder and decrees that whosoever takes another person’s life should be made to lose his own (Leviticus 24: 17). However, under the New Testament dispensation, believers are not to use this as an excuse to take anyone’s life. We should shun every form of murder today which includes abortion, backbiting, slandering, character assassination, etc.

DAVID BECOMES KING OVER A UNITED ISRAEL (2 Samuel 5:1-25; 1 Chronicles 11:1-3)

“Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. So, all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel” (2 Samuel 5:1,3). Note that David did nothing directly or indirectly to eliminate possible challenges to the throne. King Saul and his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua died in the battle with the Philistines. Abner, the commander of Saul’s army was killed by Joab, the commander of David’s army without his knowledge. Then Ishbosheth, the son of Saul who was made king over Israel by Abner was murdered by two Benjamites who were seeking reward for shedding innocent blood. David mourned the death of all of them, slew the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul as well as Rechab and Baanah who slew Ishbosheth; he also placed a five-fold curse on Joab for the murder of Abner. But he acknowledged and commended the people of Jabesh-gilead for recovering

the bodies of Saul and his sons from the land of the Philistines to properly bury them.

It is quite remarkable that after the death of King Saul, David had to wait for seven and half years to become king over the whole nation of Israel. He was patient; he waited for God's time. He did nothing to force his way to the throne. Believers should not resort to self-management to get what they want. Rather, they should learn to wait for God's time. **“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”** (Hebrews 10:36). David eventually became the king of Israel in spite of all odds according to the plan of God. Indeed, delay is not denial (Habakkuk 2:3).

David's way to the throne was strewn with many challenges. One, his father never really thought of him as a candidate for such exalted office. Two, his brethren felt ill-disposed towards him (1 Samuel 17:28). Three, King Saul whom he served faithfully sought every means to kill him. Four, the people of Keilah that he delivered from the Philistines were ready to deliver him to Saul (1 Samuel 23:11,12). Five, Nabal derided him by referring to him as a servant fleeing from his master (1 Samuel 25:10). Six, he feigned madness in despair (1 Samuel 21:13). Seven, after Saul's death, he spent another seven and half years allowing events to unfold. He knew that he was a mere shepherd boy who was picked by God to become king over His people. He also understood that God who chose him will enthrone him. So, he believed the Lord and rested on His faithfulness.

This was unlike Saul who destroyed many people to keep the throne. However, while David promptly killed those that killed Ishbosheth, he only cursed Joab, his army commander and the killer of Abner. He showed partiality and respect of person here probably because Joab was the son of Zeruiah, the sister of David (1 Chronicles 2:16). Believers cannot imitate David in this regard. The Scripture commands that there should be no respect of persons or partiality in the house of God (James 2:9). Whether in religious or secular engagements, we must

desist from every shade of tribalism or nepotism as it has the capacity to weaken the church or organization.

Question 4: What are the possible negative effects of partiality in the church?

Upon ascending the throne, David made Jerusalem the capital of united Israel after he subdued the Jebusites who were the original dwellers. As he settled down to strengthen his rule, Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers of goodwill with gifts to him, but the Philistines launched two quick attacks. After inquiring from the Lord on each occasion, he launched a counter attack and roundly defeated them (2 Samuel 5:17,19,22,23). David's action on these two separate occasions shows that we cannot assume God's position on any matter except it is expressly stated. Note that although it was the same enemy and the same place, God gave different directives and the methods were different. But where God's will is already expressly stated, we cannot ask for another counsel. The archenemy does not know a friend. That David had stayed in the land of the Philistines for sixteen months did not make him their friend; they still attacked him. Believers need to understand that Satan will not relent in his effort to bring them back to bondage. To keep defeating the devil and his agents, we must watch and pray; study the word of God and be saturated with it; avoid all appearances of evil and objects of temptation; be active in soul-winning; hold on to the promises of God and live every moment with the rapture in view. If we wait patiently while holding on to the promises of the Lord, we will inherit the promised blessings.

Question 5: How can believers maintain daily victory?

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	13	Exodus	19-20
TUE	“	14	“	21-22
WED	“	15	“	23-34
THUR	“	16	“	25
FRI	“	17	“	26
SAT	“	18	“	27-28
SUN	“	19	“	29

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

773 Lesson

TESTIMONIAL OF THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

MEMORY VERSE: “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The church in Thessalonica was founded by Paul with Silas on his second missionary journey from Philippi to Achaia. Thessalonica, a seaport town, was situated on what was called the Thermaic Gulf, and was the ancient capital of Macedonia. Though the Jews who were sojourners in this city rejected the gospel in general, a great multitude of the devout Greek believed and associated with Paul and Silas, and not a few of the chief women of the city embraced the Christian faith (Acts 17:4). But the Jews were displeased when they learnt that the gospel accorded the Gentiles the same privileges they were called to enjoy, without being obliged to submit to circumcision and other ordinances of the law. Thus, they persecuted these ministers of the gospel. Apostle Paul therefore escaped to Berea; from thence to Athens (Acts 17:5-15); and then to Corinth. While he abodes in Corinth, Timothy and Silas brought him news of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian converts in the faith. So, he wrote this epistle to comfort and encourage them, give further instruction on the doctrines of Christ and rectify some mistaken views relative to the day of judgment, which had been propagated among them.

Question 1: What should be the attitude of those who handle the word of God?

THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL OF CHRIST (1 Thessalonians 1:1-4; Romans 1:16,17; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Acts 10:34-38)

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1). The first epistle of Paul the apostle to the Thessalonians opens with a unique introductory greeting which is found in most of his epistles. He identified grace as the unmerited favour God freely bestows on the morally weak but repentant sinner by saving him from sin. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”** (Ephesians 2:8). Peace denotes that spiritual tranquility which everyone who is brought into relationship with God through faith in Christ enjoys (Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20). In a nutshell, while grace expresses the concept of divine favour bestowed upon the undeserving, peace is the effect of grace obtained from God within the soul.

Though Paul himself dictated this letter, he joined the names of Silas and Timothy because they had been with him at Thessalonica and were well known there (Acts 18:5). This simple act portrayed the humility of the Apostle which revealed the impact this same universal gospel had on his life. Paul’s expression of thanksgiving to God on behalf of the Thessalonian converts who had embraced the universal gospel was in recognition and appreciation of the influence and transforming power of the gospel on them. In spite of the much afflictions and persecution they faced, they were calm and steadfast in the faith, and these caused him much joy.

Question 2: Why is the gospel said to be universal?
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The gospel is universal and able to produce the same kind of fruits in the lives of recipients irrespective of their locale. Nothing else has the potency to convict and convert a lost soul like the undiluted gospel. Every sinner - educated or illiterate, young or old, rich or poor - is expected to repent of his sins and bear fruits of repentance. Once a sinner confesses and forsakes his sins, believe in Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross, he receives pardon. The gospel **“is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth;**

to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Therefore, **“whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”** (Romans 10:13).

THE UNDENIABLE PROOF OF GENUINE CONVERSION

(1 Thessalonians 1:5-9; Romans 1:1,7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:1,2; Philippians 1:3-6; Colossians 1:1-6)

“And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:6,8,9). The saints in the church at Thessalonica were careful in their holy conversation to imitate the good examples of the apostles and ministers of Christ; and by that, they became also followers of the Lord, who is our perfect Example. Upon receiving the gospel, they experienced a definite transformation. Their faith in Christ bore testimony to the power of the gospel as they disengaged and discontinued with the works of darkness. In the face of severe afflictions and persecutions, they were steadfast in the faith. Also, they renounced idolatry and served the living and true God. Believers who are truly converted have a complete break from the past. Their character at home, school, office, marketplace, etc., is a reflection of God’s grace. As such, they do not indulge in sin or evil practices in the world.

Question 3: What specific change occurred in the Thessalonians through the gospel preached unto them?

Since believers are expected to communicate the gospel and influence others through their lifestyles, their daily conduct should concretely reflect the image of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The saints in Thessalonica lived up to this expectation as they became **“ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia... not only**

in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.” They made good impressions and their conversation had influence upon other people. When a believer lives contrary to Christ and His word, he becomes a bad example that leads others astray and thus become an enemy of the Cross of Christ. So, we are to walk so conscientiously before God and man that our adversaries would not find any occasion to accuse us.

THE ULTIMATE EXPECTATION OF CHRIST’S IMMINENT RETURN (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 9:28; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Philippians 3:20,21)

“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”. Paul the apostle ended the chapter with instruction regarding the return of the Lord, whose advent signifies hope and comfort for believers. It is quite remarkable that he maintained this pattern in the concluding verses of other chapters. **“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord... “** (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:16,17).

<p>Question 4: Why are some people afraid whenever they hear messages on the Rapture or Christ’s Second Coming?</p>
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The teaching on Christ’s coming produced the desired result in the lives of the Thessalonians. They were not frivolous in their Christian living. The hope of Christ’s imminent return should comfort the hearts of true Christians who are bereaved, suffering, sick and

persecuted. It should also make us watchful and compel us to promptly reach out to sinners with the gospel as Christ's commanded.

Question 5: In view of Christ's return, what should be the pre-occupation of all believers today?

DAILY BIBLE READING				
	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	20	Exodus	30
TUE	"	21	"	31-32
WED	"	22	"	33
THUR	"	23	"	34
FRI	"	24	"	35
SAT	"	25	"	36
SUN	"	26	"	37-38

774 Lesson

EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

When Apostle Paul wrote that the church in Thessalonica **“became followers of us and of the Lord”**, he captured the depth of the transformation which caused the Christians there to turn from **“idols to serve the living and true God”** (1 Thessalonians 1:1,9). That statement underscored the Apostle’s ministerial success in that city, especially when considered against the very short time he spent there and the stiff opposition against the gospel by the unbelieving Jews.

Effective leadership or ministerial success cannot be properly defined without reference to the goal the leader sets out to achieve. Accordingly, the commission which Paul the apostle received from the Lord was **“to open their (Gentiles’) eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God... “** (Acts 26: 18). This objective was so realized in Thessalonica that the believers became **“examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia”** (1 Thessalonians 1:7). The spiritual gulf bridged by the gospel in the lives of the Thessalonians was an eloquent testimony to its power and message and reflected the effectiveness with which it was preached and modelled. If leadership is defined as the capacity to direct, guide and lead people to a defined goal, then Apostle Paul’s ministry at Thessalonica presents a good example and an appropriate case study for effective Christian leadership.

Question 1: With reference to the Great Commission, how would you define exemplary Christian leadership?

The ingredients of Apostle Paul's success in Thessalonica certainly included the inherent power of the gospel and the exemplary lifestyle of the preachers. The success itself can be correctly measured by the abiding effect their apostolic preaching produced in the hearers' lives.

THE COURAGE AND CONDUCT OF GODLY LEADERS
(1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Acts 4:13; 14:3; 2 Timothy 2:24; Corinthians 4:2; 2 Peter 2:3)

“For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention” (1 Thessalonians 2:1,2). Paul and his companions suffered as they were shamefully entreated at Philippi and there was much contention surrounding the preaching of the gospel. Intense opposition arose as these servants of God preached the gospel of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; yet they were bold to call sinners to turn from their idols to serve the living and true God. Besides, Apostle Paul's personal conviction about the truth gave him extraordinary courage and boldness in his drive to enlighten the Thessalonians. Christian leaders must be fully persuaded about their calling and the truth of their message. Such conviction and faith will imbue them with holy courage necessary to lead men out of satanic darkness and ignorance even in the face of opposition.

Question 2: What gave Paul and his companions boldness to preach in spite of the opposition?

“For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts” (verses 3,4). Apostle Paul and his team saw themselves as stewards graciously entrusted with the gospel and they ensured that they did not disappoint (1 Corinthians 4:2). Ministers and leaders must appreciate the honour and trust conferred upon them by the

stewardship of the gospel. They must constantly remind themselves that the gospel is not theirs but God's and as such, it is their duty to preach it only as God has commanded and allowed. In so doing, the inherent power of the gospel will be unleashed upon the hearts of men to their salvation.

Paul the apostle recognized that success in ministry is tied to character. A minister's or Christian's character is the whole capital he has for carrying on an eternally profitable labor. If it is lost, everything is gone and of no value. A careful examination of Paul's testimonial to the Thessalonian Christians reveals, one, that they were not deceitful in dealing with the people. Two, they maintained spiritual cleanness; holiness was their watchword. Three, they did not employ guile or craftiness to exploit the people. Four, recognizing that God had entrusted them with the mysteries of the gospel, they were faithful without putting the interests of men above God. Five, **"neither at any time used we flattering words"** (verse 5). Sixth, they denounced covetousness, even making God a witness to that fact. Seventh, he said, **"Nor of men sought we glory"** (verse 6). Instead, they were **"gentle among"** them, **"even as a nurse cherisheth her children"**.

The leader's personal lifestyle and conduct among the people have great influence on their success. In the case of Apostle Paul, he was so exemplary that he could, without fear of contradiction, write to the people among whom he lived and ministered, **"But we were gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children"** (verse 7). Gentleness, a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) involves tenderness and mildness in dealing with persons and issues. It implies a deliberate show of tenderness where one could have employed apostolic authority.

Gentleness is an attribute of God that shines throughout the Scripture in His dealing with man. The imagery of a nurse and her children conjures up loving care and kindness. Christian leaders should learn from our heavenly Father that gentleness with people, even erring

ones, could accomplish in their hearts and lives what the show of power and authority may not. The word of God by itself alone, has enough inherent power to convict and correct errors in men's mind if administered in love and prayer. This does not however rule out the necessity of church discipline, when necessary (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The word of God admonishes Christian leaders: **“And the servant of God must not strive but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient”** (2 Timothy 2:24).

The Apostle's gentleness and care for the Thessalonians found expression in (i) an affectionate desire for their spiritual and eternal welfare. This is contrary to the attitude of false teachers and leaders who fleece the people (2 Peter 2:3); (ii) willingness not only to impart the gospel but also to run hazards and take risks in preaching; (iii) undertaking physical and mental labors in order to enrich the quality of their ministry without making it expensive or burdensome to the people. The practical implication of this is that leaders and ministers must work hard for the salvation of souls. It does not however follow that they will always be obliged to preach and labor freely without necessary upkeep; (iv) their holiness was so transparent that the Apostle invited not only the personal witness of the Thessalonians but God's also. The Thessalonians could observe their public, outward conduct, but God would witness for their behaviors in secret, as well as the motives that drove their actions. (v) Informing and reminding them frequently of their duties under God and motivating them to do the same. Ministers and leaders ought to be careful to walk worthy before God and before the people they assay to lead out of the blindness of ungodliness. They must always live and act in the consciousness that they are answerable to God who has committed to their trust the care of precious souls for whom Christ died.

The Apostle's motive was pure, not tarnished with any desire for personal gain or any unclean selfish purpose. He avoided the temptation to flatter men in their sin in order to keep their followership. He gave them no false hope to curry their favour or to remain popular. His purpose did not include self-enrichment, vain glory or

personal ambition as do false teachers. On the contrary, he and his team denied themselves of their legitimate rights, esteem and even due wages in order to ensure that nothing stood as an obstacle to the faith of the people they had led to the liberty of Christ. They only coveted the honour that comes from God.

As a mother cares and nurtures her children without seeking the praise of men, so Paul fed, nourished, taught and led the disciples without seeking material gains. He did all things with transparent and transcending love; he never stood to any degrading method of flattery or insincerity. Seeing therefore, the level of his sincerity and transparency, he called the believers to a holy walk. **“That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory”** (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

<p>Question 3: In what practical ways can Christian leaders and ministers show gentleness, kindness and care for the people?</p>

THE CONVERSION AND COMPORIMENT OF GODLY MEMBERS (1 Thessalonians 2:13,14; 4:1,2; 1:7,8; Romans 6:4; Ephesians 4:1; 1 John 1:7)

In his apostolic mission to lead the people away from idolatry and ignorance, the Apostle had a most effective tool in the gospel. The divine power in it more than anything else, can change lives and situations. As far as a Christian leader's objective is to break the shackles of ungodliness and ignorance and lead the people to Christ, he will find the gospel most efficacious and **“profitable for doctrine, for reproof and for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (2 Timothy 3:16). On the contrary, vain and idle philosophies of men, no matter how eloquently canvassed soon lose their hold on people's minds as their falsity comes to light. Because Apostle Paul's exhortation was not in deceit or of uncleanness nor of guile, it stamped its validity through the experience of sincere seekers among his audience. Apostle Paul's ministerial success among the Thessalonians had definite and abiding evidence in their lives. **“For this cause also thank we God without**

ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (verse 13).

The depth of transformation which the Thessalonians had was so deeply rooted that they could partake with the **“church of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus”**. To lead a people who had no knowledge of or reverence for the word of God to the acknowledgment of its divine origin and power is to arm them with constantly available source of enlightenment, wisdom and knowledge.

Question 4: What is the place of the word of God in effective Christian leadership?

THE CONDEMNATION AND DOOM OF UNGODLY PERSECUTORS (1 Thessalonians 2:15-20; Philippians 1:28; Romans 1:18; 2:5-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:4,5)

In spite of Paul the apostle’s exemplary lifestyle and leadership, there were some who did not believe in his message, but would rather oppose, attack and persecute him. Prominent among these ungodly persecutors were the Jews **“Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God and are contrary to all men”** (1 Thessalonians 2:15). They did not only reject the gospel, they prevented others from accepting it **“to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.”** Equally condemnable are those who hear the word and receive it as they would the word of men. They only judge and admire the style, composition, voice, accent and the manner in which the word is preached. We should receive the Word as coming from God with the reverence worthy of the holiness, wisdom, knowledge and power of its Author. To do otherwise is to forsake our own mercy.

Question 5: What is the fate of those who reject the word of God?

The impact and effect of the word of God in the lives of those who receive it sincerely is undeniable. In such people, the Word proves itself to be the power of God by the results it produces. It converts the soul, enlightens the mind and rejoices the soul of people who rightly receive it. Such is the tremendous power available to a true Christian leader for use to guide, liberate and deliver people from satanic ignorance and superstition. If we would be successful as Christians and ministers of the gospel, we should match our message with our manners.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	27	Exodus 39
TUE	“	28	“ 40
WED	Romans	1	Leviticus 1-2
THUR	“	2	“ 3-4
FRI	“	3-4	“ 5-6
SAT	“	5-6	“ 7
SUN	“	7	“ 8

775 Lesson

CONCERN FOR BELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL GROWTH

MEMORY VERSE: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Apostle Paul expressed his affection for the Thessalonian believers whom he left abruptly during his missionary itinerary in the preceding chapter. It would be recalled that after receiving the Macedonian call, his missionary team came to Philippi where they had a successful ministry that culminated in their being thrown into jail (Acts 16:9-40). After their release, they came to Thessalonica, which was the capital city of the entire province of Macedonia to preach the gospel. With a hurried departure due to intense persecution, it was natural for the Apostle to be concerned about the brethren's spiritual stability and growth in the faith. From his example, believers learn the need for personal sacrifice and consecration for the maturation and stability of new converts and the need to endure suffering while interceding for others.

Question 1: Why was Paul so concerned for the spiritual state of the believers in Thessalonica?

ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF NEW BELIEVERS (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5; Acts 15:36; Corinthians 2:13; 11:29; Philippians 2:16; Galatians 2:2; 4:11; Proverbs 27:23)

After Paul was expelled from Thessalonica, his persecutors did not allow him to stay in the province of Macedonia and he had to go to Athens. He left Timothy and Titus in Berea but on getting to Athens, he sent for them to join him (Acts 17: 13-16). However, despite the challenge he faced in Athens and the need for the companionship of Timothy, Paul was still concerned for

the Thessalonian believers. When he could no longer bear the anxiety over the faith of the new converts, he decided Timothy should go and visit them.

Question 2: What practical steps should believers take in showing their concern for the spiritual welfare of others?

Paul demonstrated a strong passion and concern for the spiritual stability and growth of his converts. His correspondence, actions and prayers on their behalf proved he really cared. True concern for the spiritual welfare of others can be shown in the following ways: One, checking up on them, making inquiries and willingness to make personal sacrifices for their spiritual progress. Two, calling or visiting the brethren. Personal visits, phone calls, text messages, e-mails or delegating trusted assistants to visit them. Three, comforting them in trials or persecution. Four, interceding and crying unto God on their behalf. Five, challenging them to keep growing spiritually. Six, ministering continually to them to perfect whatever is lacking in their faith. Seven, commending them in areas where they are doing well. Apart from the Thessalonians, Paul the Apostle had concern for other churches and his fellow workers. Writing to the Corinthians, he said, **“Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?”** (2 Corinthians 11:29). He empathized with his converts and was only at rest when they did well in the faith. At a point, he said, **“I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia”** (2 Corinthians 2:13). He expressed similar concern for the churches at Philippi and Galatia (Philippians 2:16; Galatians 2:2; 4:11). We should have this kind of deep concern for the welfare of other believers.

Question 3: What should be the major focus of our concern for other believers?

It should be noted however, that Paul’s major concern was the faith of his converts, not just their prosperity, comfort or happiness. He was most interested in their spiritual stability and strength to weather the storms

of persecution. He feared lest Satan had seduced them from the faith while under the pressure of affliction; therefore, he sent Timothy to establish and encourage them (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Our priority as we disciple new believers should be their spiritual development. Although God is interested in the physical and material prosperity of His children, He is most concerned about their spiritual progress. The vogue in present-day evangelism and discipleship, which places undue emphasis on prosperity at the expense of real stability in the faith, is one major reason many believers are weak, materialistic and shallow in their spiritual lives.

Paul also addressed the issue of afflictions or persecution as an integral part of a normal Christian life. He reminded the Thessalonians that while he was with them, he used to tell them that believers in Christ would suffer afflictions in this present world. That prediction came to pass in the experience of the Thessalonian brethren.

Paul prepared the minds of his converts concerning difficulties. But there are preachers who present the Christian life as a bed of roses to heaven. They give the wrong impression that Christians should experience a fair weather all through their earthly journey. However, the Scripture does not give us such a false assurance.

It is essential that believers have a proper perspective about afflictions lest they feel discouraged or count it strange when they experience diver's kinds of storms in their lives (1 Thessalonians 3:2; John 16:2- 4; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Timothy 3:13; Acts 9: 16; James 1;2-4). Persecutions are inevitable, and they come, not by accident but by divine appointment; believers are **“appointed thereunto”** (1 Thessalonians 3:3). Two, Satan is the chief agent behind all kinds of afflictions that come to believers, but he can only operate at God's permission and within the divinely-appointed limits. Three, Christians should not be surprised or discouraged when they face different kinds of trials and temptations; these are allowed to prove the genuineness of their profession. Four, Satan often exploits the season of suffering or time of trial to seduce and tempt believers

away from Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Five, there is need to rally round those who are facing challenges of life in order to checkmate Satan's attempts to destroy their faith. Six, every believer can overcome persecutions. Even young converts can be strengthened by God to withstand afflictions. Therefore, believers should exercise faith and depend on the Lord for the courage and strength to overcome. Seven, when we endure trials and persecutions, we become a reference point and an encouragement to others (2 Thessalonians 1:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:4); our faith grows, and the dross is removed from our lives (Job 23:10; Romans 5:3).

Another issue worthy of note is Paul's concern about Satan's subtlety on new converts, so that his labor would not be in vain (1 Thessalonians 3:5). It is possible for a believer to be lured away if proper safeguards are not put in place. For this reason, new converts should be diligently disciplined, and all believers should learn to be their brother's keeper. Then, each believer should take responsibility of watching over their own personal lives, keep using all available means of grace (prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other believers, witnessing, Christian service), and avoid secret or perpetual backsliding which may lead to apostasy.

ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL STABILITY OF NEW BELIEVERS (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8; 2:19,20; 3 John 3; 2 John 4; 2 Corinthians 7:6,7,13; Acts 11:20-23)

Timothy returned to Paul with glowing testimonies about the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8). The report centered on spiritual essentials among the brethren rather than mundane and non-essential traditions. He testified about their faith, charity and positive disposition towards their spiritual mentor. The report brought relief, comfort and encouragement to Paul in his own affliction and distress. **“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country”** (Proverbs 25:25). The news of abiding fruits of ministry is a great consolation to Christian ministers. Apostle John expressed this kind of consolation and joy in his epistle

to Gaius. **“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”** (3 John 1:4). It is necessary that believers forward such good reports to cheer the heart of our spiritual leaders.

Question 4: What are the guidelines for scriptural reporting and the benefits?

Notice some important features of the report Timothy gave about the Thessalonians. One, it was a good report. Though there were things to perfect in the faith of these young believers, Timothy did not focus all attention on them. Like Caleb and Joshua, he brought a balanced report that emphasized what God has done in the lives of the people. That is not to say we gloss over the inadequacies or blunders of new converts, but we should magnify what the grace of God has done and trust Him to perfect whatever is lacking. Two, the Thessalonians were growing in faith and love. These are two basic virtues to measure a healthy Christian life. In most of his epistles, Apostle Paul mentioned “faith and love” as evidence of genuine conversion and growth in grace (Ephesians 1:15; 3:17; 6:23; Colossians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; **1 Timothy 1:14**; 2 Timothy 1:13; Philemon 1:5). Three, the Thessalonians were as eager to see Paul as he also was to see them. That report showed mutual affection and reassured Paul that his converts did not believe the false reports the Judaizers raised to smear him. Believers should remember that **“the light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat”** (Proverbs 15:30).

The good report about the Thessalonians gladdened the heart of Paul and he commended them. This will be a kind of positive reinforcement to their faith and push them to be more faithful. Expressing our joy and satisfaction over the spiritual growth of others has a multiplier effect of building more confidence and determination in them to endure to the end.

EXAMPLES OF SCRIPTURAL SUPPLICATION FOR NEW BELIEVERS (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Luke 22:31,32; Acts 20:32; Romans 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15,16; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3,9)

The church of the Thessalonians was a model one in several respects. They were the elect of God (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5); evangelistic in outlook, seeking the lost (1 Thessalonians 1:8); energetic in labor (1 Thessalonians 1:1-3); exemplary in love (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7) and expectant of the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). But despite their growing faith and love, Apostle Paul still prayed for them to increase more and more.

Question 5: Why is intercessory prayer necessary for new believers and what should be the focus of such prayers?

No believer should ever have the Esau-kind of attitude that says, “I **have enough**”. Regardless of how sound our Christian experiences are or how effective we are in Kingdom service, there is always room for growth. This is where intercessory prayers for fellow believers come to focus. We should continuously intercede for the spiritual stability and growth of all believers, especially new converts.

Intercessory prayers intercept and interrupt Satan’s attempts to make believers fall from grace. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 21:31,32). Paul prayed often for all his converts and fellow workers (Romans 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15,16; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3,9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). It is not enough to preach and teach the word of God, there must be prayer support for the Word to take root in the hearts of the hearers.

However, our prayer for others must not center on material needs but spiritual values: that the people of God will be holy and ready for the rapture. Paul prayed that God would give him opportunity to see the Thessalonians, so he could perfect their faith. Perfection

of believers was the major focus of his prayers and labor (Colossians 1:28,29). Present-day believers should emulate this example of scriptural intercession. When Christian leaders neglect the duty of prayer or get distracted and concentrate their prayers on materials and temporal blessings, believers under their care will most likely get weak and lose spiritual focus. Our intercession for other believers is true evidence we are genuinely concerned for their spiritual welfare.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Romans	8	Leviticus	9-10
TUE	“	9	“	11-12
WED	“	10-11	“	13
THUR	“	12-13	“	14
FRI	“	14-15	“	15
SAT	“	16	“	16
SUN	1 Cor.	1-2	“	17-18

776 Lesson

CALL TO HOLINESS

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

MEMORY VERSE: “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

Paul the apostle wrote the first epistle to the church at Thessalonica in order to strengthen and encourage them in the faith. While encouraging believers, he still found it necessary to instruct them on the imperative of holiness and living to please God. Believers are commanded to be holy regardless of the situation or society they found themselves. This became necessary because the city of Thessalonica was notorious for immorality and idleness. Like in most cities of the Roman Empire, their standard of moral behavior was very low. Added to this was the fact that many of the Greeks in the city considered themselves to be of noble birth; therefore, they looked down on those who did menial jobs. They waited endlessly for white collar jobs while depending on the generosity of others. Against this backdrop, Apostle Paul instructed believers not to conform to the immoral and idle lifestyles of those who do not know God. True holiness entails that we lead quiet lives, mind our business, work with our hands and not sponge on the liberality of other hard-working people. In effect, God expects His children to live differently and not condescend to the prevailing evils in the society.

Question 1: In practical terms, what does the call to holiness mean to believers?

THE CALL OF BELIEVERS TO HOLINESS IN A POLLUTED SOCIETY (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 1 Peter 1:13-16; Leviticus 11:44; Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:8; Corinthians 6:18)

“Furthermore, then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received

of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Apostle Paul exhorted believers to walk according to the commandment given to them and live to please God. The new converts had been taught and shown the basic rules of the Christian life. Their new life in Christ demands total obedience to God’s commandments and a change of lifestyle to conform with their new calling. Learning from Paul the apostle, our method of mission work must comply with Christ’s Great Commission which demands that converts should be taught to obey all that Christ commanded after baptizing them in water (Matthew 28: 19,20).

Question 2: What is the will of God concerning sinners, backsliders and saints?

Believers should live to please God (Romans 15:1-3; Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:22; 2 Timothy 2:4). A life that pleases God is that which fulfils His will. And the will of God is clearly stated in Scriptures. For sinners and backsliders, the revealed will of God is that they repent and be saved lest they perish (1 Timothy 2:3,4; 2 Peter 3:9); and for believers, it is that they should be sanctified. **“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Sanctification is synonymous with holiness. It means to set a thing apart for a holy use or to make a person holy completely. A sanctified believer is consecrated, cleansed and completely free from all uncleanness. Sanctification comes after the salvation experience. At salvation, a sinner repents, receives pardon and the righteousness of God. But at sanctification, a believer experiences the removal of the adamic nature, and receives the ability to love God and neighbors as never before.

To be sanctified, a believer must thirst after purity of heart, consecrate himself to God and pray in faith. Sanctification experience is not obtained by struggling or suppression of the old nature. The same way a sinner repents and trusts in Christ’s finished work at Calvary

for salvation, a believer consecrates and exercises faith in Christ for sanctification. Jesus prayed for our sanctification and paid the price for it (John 17:17; Hebrews 13:12,13). God has promised to give a new heart and spirit to those who ask Him (Ezekiel 36:26,37; Matthew 7:7-11).

The unmistakable fruit of entire sanctification is increased love for God and for others. Sanctified believers are able to go the extra mile in loving God and in making any necessary sacrifice to live peaceably with fellow men. They **“follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”** (Hebrews 12:14). They are also enabled to live above all forms of sins, especially the besetting sin of sexual immorality. These believers with idolatrous background were already exposed to fornication as part of their religious worship because temple prostitution was a common practice among the pagans. To such converts, the pull of their old life might prove difficult to resist. So, Paul the apostle had to remind them that **“God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness”**.

Question 3: How should believers respond to the changing moral standards in the world?

Sexual impurity is a common vice in all culture because it appeals to the base passion of man. However, believers are called to exercise self-control. Apart from possessing their vessels in sanctification and honour, they are also expected to help others maintain their chastity by refraining from any act that could defile them. God forbids fornication or adultery of any kind, and people who indulge in such practices will incur His wrath. The standard of morality for believers derives from the authority and teaching of Jesus Christ. True Christians do not allow the changing moral standards of the world to mold their lifestyle. Although the world may tolerate or even encourage vices such as fornication, adultery, divorce, prostitution, polygamy, homosexuality, pornography and incest, believers are to avoid them.

By demanding holiness from everyone who would walk with Him, God is not asking more than is reasonable from mortal men. Rather, His demand for holiness is consistent with the new nature and His deposit of the Holy Spirit within us.

THE CONTINUATION OF BROTHERLY LOVE AMONG PURIFIED SAINTS (1 Thessalonians 4:9,10; 1:7; 3:12; John 13:34,35; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 2:17; 4:8; 1 John 4:7,8)

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” The call to holiness is closely connected with the subject of brotherly love among believers. We are here exhorted to demonstrate practical love for one another. Christian love is undisguised, unpretentious, selfless and genuinely committed to the welfare of others.

Question 4: Why is love so central in the Christian life and how can believers grow in it?

Love is the hub around which all other virtues revolve. It is the hallmark of our Christian life and we are called to daily live in it. In our text, the Thessalonians were encouraged to increase more and more in love. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul the apostle prayed **“that [their] love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment”** (Philippians 1:9). Other apostles also highlighted the centrality of love in the Christian life (1 Peter 2:17; 4:8; 1 John 4:7,8). Our Lord Jesus Christ actually summarized the entire commandments of God in two simple laws: **“•••Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 22:37-40). The point is, if we love God, we will keep His commandments and if we love our neighbor, we will not do them any harm (Romans 13:10). The real proof that we are Christ’s disciples is that we love one another.

Our love should not be limited to those in our immediate environment. We should be able to reach out to others in faraway lands. The entire region of Macedonia could feel the impact of love manifested by the Thessalonians, yet Paul exhorted them to grow more and more. As believers, we are to increase the influence of our love to reach the mission field where sinners are yearning for the true gospel. There are also those who are persecuted and impoverished. Our love can bring relief and encouragement as we sponsor missionaries and send relevant material aids to them. Indeed, our love can grow to the point it crosses cultural barriers and reach new frontiers.

THE COMMAND TO PROFITABLE LABOR, PRODUCTIVITY AND SOBRIETY (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:11; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Ephesians 4:28; Titus 2:4-8; 3:14)

In the latter part of our text, Paul the apostle addressed a practical issue that affected the church in Thessalonica in particular, which is also relevant to present-day believers. Some people in the church were idle and wandered from house to house, spreading all sorts of gossip and idle tales. Such people could cause disaffection and divisions among the brethren if left unchecked (1 Timothy 5:13). To solve the problem, the Apostle instructed them to “...**study to be quiet, and to do [their] own business, and to work with [their] own hands... That [they] may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that [they] may have lack of nothing**” (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12).

Three major points stand out clearly in this admonition. First, study to be quiet. This is a call to soberness. Believers should display meek and quiet disposition without being frivolous, talkative or noisy. Second, do your own business. In modern parlance, we would say “mind your own business”. Believers are to face their own businesses with diligence and not to be busybodies or meddlers in affairs of other people. But that should not be misinterpreted to mean we are to live in isolation and

be unconcerned about the welfare of others. Though we are expected to be our brother's keeper, we must draw the line between this legitimate duty and the needless meddling that is prohibited here. Third, work with your own hands. Prevailing negative economic situations should not be used as excuse to remain idle. To avoid any form of reproach, we are to engage in profitable and productive labor.

Question 5: How can we help believers who are idle?

The admonition to be involved in gainful labor became necessary because many of the new converts might be tempted to continue in their old lifestyle of idleness and dependence on others for livelihood. Among the Greeks, the aristocrats counted hard work as a curse from the gods. Consequently, most of them would rather prefer to remain idle than engage in manual labor. Recall that some of the Thessalonian converts were aristocrats or of noble descent, and they needed to change their world view (Acts 17:4). Coupled with their faulty orientation, Paul's teaching on the imminent coming of the Lord might be taken as an excuse to refrain from work.

To correct these wrong notions the Apostle taught them to work with their own hands and be productive. He taught by precept and example as he worked with his hands as a tent maker among them. Contemporary believers should learn from the teaching and example of Paul. God's commandment is that everyone should work and take responsibility for their lives. There is dignity in labor and the Scripture condemns laziness. Some people are idle because they cannot engage in menial work. In fact, when God created man in the beginning, he was given the responsibility to tend the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15).

God's design is that man should work to earn his living. To act as parasite or depend on others negates the principle of love. Although it is scriptural to help needy believers, we must not encourage those who are unwilling to work with our liberality. The best help we

can render to people who are idle is to assist them to get employed so that they can be self-supporting. When we are diligent in our work, we will not lack, family needs will be met, we will not be a burden to others, unnecessary temptations would be avoided, we shall be able to assist those in need and unbelievers will have no reason to reproach our God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	3-4	Leviticus	19
TUE	“	5-6	“	20-21
WED	“	7	“	22
THUR	“	8-9	“	23
FRI	“	10	“	24
SAT	“	11	“	25
SUN	“	12	“	26

777 Lesson

RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS

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

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

The Rapture is the catching away or ascension of dead and living saints to meet the Lord in the air for an endless reunion. This painless, glorious exit of people whose names are written in the book of life from this present world will be heralded by a sudden sound of the archangel’s trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52). It is understandable then that Paul the apostle exhorted the Thessalonian believers to holy living prior to his admonition on rapture to enlighten some believers who sorrowed over their loved ones who died in the Lord as if they had perished. Being the first phase of the Second Coming of Christ, the rapture will signal the end of the church age and the dispensation of grace. It is the hope of all believers.

Question 1: What do you understand by the word ‘rapture’?

THE HOPE OF RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Genesis 5:22-24; 2 Kings 2:11,12; Acts 1:9; John 14:1-3; 1 John 3:1-3)

The hope of Christ’s coming to take the redeemed to heaven is the whole essence of the Christian faith. The Scripture’s prediction of His Second Coming to take the redeemed to heaven at rapture is the basis and strength of the believers’ hope to meet the Lord and live with Him forever. It will be a time of reunion with our Lord and our departed loved ones who died in the Lord. Ignorance of this truth made some Thessalonian believers behave like unbelievers during bereavement. But the Apostle undertook to enlighten them that the hope of rapture is a

lively and lovely one as it offers comfort and consolation to the hurting and the bereaved. **“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope”** (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It is comforting because the rapture marks the end of all suffering and stigmatization because of our faith. Having been saved from sin and the accompanying **“wrath to come”** (1 Thessalonians 1:10), rapture lifts us onto eternal rewards for faithful service rendered to the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10,11).

Believers must live in the light of the Scriptures and allow its truth to guide their behaviors even in times of grief, pain, disappointment and reverses of life. Christians who die in the Lord have not perished; they have been translated into the presence of God to receive their rewards. While they are rejoicing for being in heaven, we should not indulge in overmuch sorrow. Though the severance of relationship with our loved ones may be hard to bear, the consolation of the Scripture and the Spirit of God is that we shall see them again if we abide in Christ till the end. **“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”** (1 Corinthians 15:19). While abiding, we must keep maximizing lifetime service opportunities for the Lord by ministering the gospel to **“others which have no hope”** of rapture.

The rapture is not strange in Scripture. Selected individuals like Enoch, Elijah and our Saviour Jesus Christ have been translated literally to heaven without dying. This fact of its previous occurrence before the Law, in the dispensation of the Law and the Prophets, and even in the New Testament should douse any doubt on the veracity of the doctrine.

Question 2: Identify the unique features of the expected rapture.

The rapture is unique in many ways. One, it will be a universal experience for all believers in Christ. **“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling**

of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Two, this resurrection of dead Christians and their instantaneous translation with all living saints everywhere assures a wonderful transport that none of earth’s treasures can afford, as we will be airborne against gravity and *every* other limiting influence without the agency of any natural or mechanical device.

Three, this event will shake the world, change its order, and finally pave way for a period of unprecedented affliction, hardship and tribulation for those left behind (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12). Four, it portends grave implication for unrepentant sinners and backsliders. Whoever misses the rapture, will be caught up in the throes of the Antichrist and his team who will enforce false religion, persecute ‘non-conformists’, and make the receipt of his mark a condition for any kind of decent living, with a frightening consequence of eternal damnation in hell fire.

Every sinner has the responsibility to **“flee from the wrath to come”** by accepting Christ’s free offer of salvation. **“For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved”**, and **“how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...?”** (Luke 3:7; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 2:3).

THE HOUR OF HIS RETURN (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8; Matthew 24:42,44; Mark 13:29; Luke 21:34; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 10:37,38; 1 Peter 4:7-10; Revelation 3:3)

Like other eschatological events, the rapture is certain but more imminent than any other. In answer to His disciples' questions, Jesus gave the conditions and signs that would precede His coming to earth. These are already evidently manifest in the world.

Question 3: Comment on the implication of fulfilled prophecies on end time events.

Current realities indicate that the rapture is near. **One**, for the first time in many centuries, the Jews now have a national existence in their own promised homeland. **Two**, many other nations are emerging in fulfilment of the shooting forth of other prophetic trees (Luke 21 :29-31). **Three**, there is the prevalence of religious formalism without godliness (2 Timothy 3:5). **Four**, the ecumenical movement of apostate religious bodies warming up for the formation of a global church in fulfilment of prophecies concerning Babylon the great (Revelation 17: 18). **Five**, increased interest in spiritism and idolatry in many parts of the world (1 Timothy 4:1,2; 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4). **Six**, increasing support for moral decadence through national policies and legislations (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). **Seven**, violence, civil unrest and lawlessness abound in homes and nations (2 Timothy 3:1-4). **Eight**, increasing hostility among nations. **Nine**, incessant experiences of cross-country epidemics. **Ten**, earthquakes, and many other natural disasters in diverse places (Matthew 24:6,7). Actually, these events were prophesied in respect of the Second Coming of Christ to reign on earth seven years after the rapture of the saints. Their fulfilment therefore clearly indicates that the rapture is imminent. **“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh”** (Matthew 25: 13).

Aside its imminence, the exact time of the rapture is not stated in Scripture. Several predictions as to its timing have all failed and will continue to fail because it is clearly unscriptural for any mortal to make any predictive or prophetic pronouncement in that regard (Matthew 24:36). **“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then**

sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2,3). Its suddenness will especially surprise the unprepared who are usually occupied with mundane affairs at the expense of issues of eternal concern. The combined facts of its imminence and lack of exactitude of occurrence call for urgent preparation and continual readiness.

Question 4: In view of the suddenness of the rapture, how should a believer prepare?

Every believer who is expecting the rapture must be watchful and sober, taking a grave view of life. He is not gloomy but serious, avoiding needless frivolities and exercising godly restraint so as not to be overwhelmed by any fleeting earthly glories. The admonition of the Scripture in view of the imminence of the rapture is: “... **be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer**

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong... What I say unto you I say unto all, watch” (1 Peter 4:7; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Mark 13:37). Two, we must eschew every clandestine activity as “**we are not of the night, nor of darkness”** (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Three, we should bear about our protective spiritual breastplate of “**faith and love”** (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Love is the basis of our faith in Christ. Without the love of God, we would not be pardoned, preserved, purified or empowered (John 3:16; Romans 5:6,8; Titus 3:4-8; 1 John 4:19). Love must also be the most eloquent evidence of our faith as we express this to Him in our worship and loyalty. We must also allow Him to express it through us as we eagerly seek to reach perishing souls with the precious gospel of salvation. Four, a life of consistent holiness, purity of actions and intentions is an indispensable qualification for the rapture; “**every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”** (1 John 3:3).

THE HONOUR AND HUNGER FOR THE RAPTURE (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11; 2 Timothy 2:19-21; Matthew 11:28; Isaiah 26:19-21).

It is an unmerited privilege and a great honour to be called up to meet the Lord at the rapture and to dwell with Him forever. This privilege distinguishes believers in Christ as the beloved and peculiar children of God. Though many saints are not popular in the world, rapture will bring the best form of recognition, highest honour and greatest rewards any human can have. Above all, it will translate us to see Jesus, be with Him and share in His eternal inheritance. Every serious minded person needs to make adequate preparation to partake of this all-important one-time event.

Question 5: How can one qualify to partake in the rapture?

The Lord is not willing that any should miss the rapture or perish. However, this glorious translation is for those who desire and commit themselves to obtaining the requisite spiritual experiences that guarantee entry. The sinner must repent, and the backslider must return to Christ. **“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel”** (Isaiah 55:7; Jeremiah 3:22,23).

Readiness for the rapture requires being ransomed by faith in Christ (Genesis 15:6; Matthew 11:28), being teachable and available for sincere spiritual service in obedience to His command to **“Occupy till I come”** (Job 34:3; Philippians 2:18-21), pleasing the Father in all things (John 8:29; 2 Corinthians 7:1), transparency in life and ministry (1 Samuel 12:3,4; Acts 24: 16), unblameable and un-reproveable lifestyle (Colossians 1:22; Peter 3:13,14), resourcefulness in fulfilling the purposes of God in spite of challenges (2 Samuel 12:7; 1 Corinthians 15:10) and enduring opposition, affliction, deprivation and indeed all things for Christ’s sake (2 Timothy 2:10-12; 4:5). Since the rapture is imminent,

now is the time to reflect, return and rightly reposition yourself for the final flight to our eternal home.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	13-14	Leviticus	27
TUE	“	15	Numbers	1
WED	“	16	“	2
THUR	2 Cor.	1-2	“	3
FRI	“	3-4	“	4
SAT	“	5-6	“	5
SUN	“	7-8	“	6

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

778 Lesson

LOVE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH

MEMORY VERSE: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

TEXT: John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:7-12,16-21; Psalm 133:1-3.

The Bible declares that God is love. He lived up to His name by giving His only begotten Son to die for man’s salvation from sin. And those who taste of this incomparable love through repentance and faith in Christ’s sacrificial death do not remain the same: they are regenerated, and by implication, called out of sin and the world to live a new life of righteousness by the grace of God. This spiritual transformation makes the erstwhile sinner who has a current experience of salvation a member of the body of Christ, referred to as the Church. The Church is a group of people called out of the world through the experience of salvation in Christ’s death and resurrection.

THE CORD AND POWER OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

(John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:7-12, 16-21; Romans 13:8,10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:10,11,15; 4:7; Galatians 5:22,23)

Question 1: How can the sinner have the love-nature of God?

Redeemed, believers have the love-nature of God imputed to them. And the manifestations of practical love among the brethren will naturally result in unity. This is because as new creatures in Christ, they have the implanted spiritual capacity to demonstrate love. Without this spiritual experience, life will be barren, expression of love will be carnal, and unity will be superficial.

God's love is the expected standard of the believer's love for fellow brethren. His love is unconditional (1 John 4:8-16). It is sacrificial, eternal and enduring (Ephesians 3:19; John 3:16; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 14:4; John 13:1). Christ stirred up the hearts of believers to practically get into the life of loving one another selflessly, unconditionally and wholeheartedly. The kind of love our Lord enjoins is not a product of the old nature which manifests itself in suspicion, malice and envy, but a disposition which reveals itself in goodwill, confidence and mutual helpfulness. We are to love one another the way Christ loves us. He loves us with a constant, consistent and forbearing love. He sacrificed Himself in love. At the Cross, He displayed the meaning of true love. He is love in bold prints, plainly written upon the pages of history and readable by all men in all ages. As He loves us, so He expects us to love one another. He says, **"As I have loved you that ye also have love one to another"** (John 13:34).

The practical life of love among brethren gives rise to unity. Having endowed us with this spiritual capacity, we are to obey His command and **"love one another with a pure heart fervently"**. This requires that every believer and member of the church carry out his responsibilities of love towards other brethren who are sick, lonely, jobless, poor, etc. It is unfortunate that many avoid or refuse to carry out their responsibilities of love towards other brethren in the home and in local assemblies where they worship. Yet, they complain that there is no unity in the church. They have forgotten that love is interactive: as they expect others to love, so should they themselves. A church that understands true and scriptural definition of love and practices the same in the fear of God will experience biblical unity.

Love is essentially a manifestation of the multi-dimensional fruit of the Spirit. And where the believer loses his first love for God, his love for the brethren will also be flagging as it is difficult to love the brethren without a blossoming and fervent love for God. The case of Peter going to fish after Christ's death and His probing question on his love for Him illustrates this point. Peter,

for instance, left feeding of the lambs and sheep of God - his responsibility of love for God towards others - in search of the mundane. He could not keep the lambs and sheep of God together. But Christ restored him; and everyone who has abandoned his service of love that enhances the unity of the church needs to pray for restoration today.

Question 2: Why is love essential in the Church?

Love is vital amongst brethren in the church because it is the true proof of Christian discipleship. According to Christ, love is one of the virtues that convince the world that we belong to Him. Unbelievers understand little or no doctrine, creed or meetings of the church. The life of love, sacrificial giving, unconditional care and shared concern among brethren is all they care to see. **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”** (John 13:35). Love is the acid-test of a genuine salvation experience. The love that prevails in our Home Caring Fellowship has, often made observers proclaim, “These are Christians indeed, for they love one another.” Love makes for fruitful service for there is no obedience without love and no service without obedience. Thus, Christ warns: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments ... If a man loves me, he will keep my words... he that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings”** (John 14:15,23,24). The real test of love is obedience to Christ, submission to His will and a readiness to spend and be spent in His service.

THE SCOPE OF SCRIPTURAL UNITY (Psalm 33: 1-3; Romans 12:16; 15:5,6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 3:16; 1 Peter 3:8; Matthew 18:19; Luke 10:1,17)

The Bible did not leave us in the dark concerning areas of scriptural unity. Since Christ’s death has removed all cause of separation, the divine imperative is for believers to be one. Therefore, those who maintain racial, tribal and ethnic divides in the church are not doing the will of God. They have, by their actions, rejected the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross where **“there**

is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

God expects believers to be one in fellowship, caring, doctrine, worship, prayer, evangelism, etc. The church that is thus united is always a threat to the kingdom of darkness. The forces of darkness to which believers are constantly engaged in battle are, according to the Scripture, organized in a united hierarchical order. And they work through their human agents on earth against the Church (Ephesians 6:10-17). Though Satan imitates the triune God, the diligence with which forces of darkness do evil throws a challenge to the believer who sees no reason in cooperating with God in fulfilling the great commission.

Inspired by Satan, some sons of belial bound themselves together with an oath not to taste anything until they had killed Paul. Co-operating to do evil and hinder God’s work and word is outside the will of God. Believers should out-perform these sadists through unity in carrying out divine imperative to save men from sin and eternal destruction.

We need to have the mind of Christ so as to be united in doing His will. The building of the Tower of Babel became an abandoned project because it was contrary to the plan of God for man. Many people still become spiritually bankrupt because they are united outside the will of God.

THE NATURE AND PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS’ ONENESS (Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; 17:21-23; Ephesians 2:14-18; 4:3,4,13; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12-26; John 10:16)

Question 3: What is the standard of believer’s unity?

The unity in the Godhead remains the perfect picture of oneness that is expected of believers. Christ, on several occasions, referred to the Father as working through Him. Besides, He declares that He and the Father are one. He reveals in His prayer for sanctification and

unity of the church, **“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”**

Apostle Paul, in his epistles, used the members of the body to illustrate the kind of unity that God expects of believers. He says, **“we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another”** (1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:20,27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:25). The implication of this is that anyone who hurts a member is doing so to all the members of the body of Christ as evident in His revelation to Saul on the way to Damascus. As united, we share a common joy, pain, goal, aspiration, etc.

Question 4: Give reasons why unity is necessary in the church.

The believer needs to seek to obey God’s command to be united with other brethren. A song-writer highlights the common spiritual experience of all believers in his piece:

*“Elect from every nation,
Yet one o’er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.”*

Since there is one God, one faith, one baptism, there is no room for disunity in the church and family of God. Any wonder then that Christ prayed for the unity of the church! He knows that the church that enjoys unity in aim and spirit is animated by the same desire to promote the glory of Christ.

Unity is indispensable in the church of God today. The Bible says two are better than one: if one falls, the other will lift him up. In the battle against the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur supported and held Moses' hand up to ensure Joshua's victory, a picture of what co-operation and intercessory prayers offered on behalf of missionaries on the battlefield for the Lord can do in the church today. So, we need to be united to win the victory in life's battles, advance and initiate positive changes for the good of the kingdom and edification of the body of Christ (Exodus 17:12; Judges 20:11; 1 Samuel 14:6,7; 2 Kings 6:1-3; Ezra 10:4; 1 Chronicles 12:38).

MAINTAINING LOVE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH

(1John 4:7-12, 16-21; Psalm 133:1-3; 1 Corinthians 1:13; Galatians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; 4:2; Colossians 2:2; 1 Peter 3:8; Nehemiah 4:1-23)

Question 5: How can you, as a believer, maintain love and unity in the church?

Unity is not an idle dream: individual members of the church have a part to play if the church is to remain united. **“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (Ephesians 4:3). Apart from current and genuine experiences of salvation, sanctification and Holy Spirit baptism, the believer needs to pray for the rich experience and manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit if there is to be practical love and unity in the church. We need special grace to live the life that brings about love and unity by constantly triumphing over the sinful nature. Quarrels and disagreements can be settled among the brethren easily where all seek to live the selfless, Christ-like life. We must bear the inadequacies of one another as we seek to perfect the body of Christ. We must instruct in righteousness and rebuke/correct those who sow seeds of discord through gossip, jealousy, malice and other carnal behaviors in the church. It is important also for individual members of the church to practice restitution towards those that have been offended or hurt by their words or actions

inadvertently. Leaders should be prompt in handling genuine grievances and complains of neglect among the brethren like the early church (Acts 6: 1-7).

Unity and love are so essential in the Church that no surrender of our own preferences can be too great to secure it. For nothing should we pray for more earnestly than Jesus' prayer that **"they all may be one."** We must all work at diffusing and permeating the church with a peaceful spirit by promoting and provoking love and unity which is the unvarying condition of all real success. The fulfilment of the function and force of the Church also requires unity. Therefore, each believing Christian must esteem the other better than himself. Unity calls for mutual esteem and affection. This can only be attained by a disposition that seeks to identify and place high premium on the good qualities in others.

Unity, like an exquisite fragrance, attracts people. Unity in the Church is a constant invitation, though voiceless, yet influential and effective. Through unity in the Church, many souls will be won, and backsliders restored to the faith. It is as we are so united in love, fulfilling the divine purpose that God's blessings will be immeasurably showered upon us. The scripture testifies that where love and unity existed among brethren, **"there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore"**. Victory over adversaries and progress in the service of God, such as Nehemiah and the Israelites had while doing His work, will be a mirage without love and unity in the church. God's anointing flows and His presence abides unceasingly with believers who are united in Christ. **"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you"** (2 Corinthians 13:11). Christ has prayed and died to make us one; we also need to pray and continue to make sacrifices of love to maintain unity in the body of Christ to the glory of God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Ephesians	3-4	Numbers	16
TUE	“	5	“	17-18
WED	“	6	“	19-20
THUR	Philipians	1	“	21
FRI	“	2	“	22
SAT	“	3-4	“	23
SUN	Colossians	1	“	24-25

779 Lesson

SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

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

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

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

CHRISTIAN LOVE: THE BASIS OF SERVICE (Rom. 12:9,10; John 13:34,35; Phil. 1:9; Rom. 13:10; Heb. 13:1)

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

concerned about the physical and spiritual needs of our brethren. God, who looks at our disposition, thoughts and hearts, who protects and keeps will know; **“and shall not he render to every man according to his works?”** (Proverbs 24: 12).

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

Question 1: What is the place of love in Christian service?
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What articulates and loudly declares our relationship with the Lord is not our preaching, ushering or singing in the choir. It is our life of love that tells the world that we are disciples of Christ. The measure of our love should be the measure of the love of Jesus for us. The strange thing amongst believers is that Christian activities seem to drown the love of God in our hearts. The more activities we get engaged in, the less of love we have for the brethren. True fellowship always dies where love ceases to exist. This is the reason many fellowship centers are witnessing low turnout.

But here, Paul the apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, admonishes that our love must be pure and unfeigned. It is disheartening that most of us have learned how to pretend to love others - how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them. Some are even skilled in pretending to be moved with compassion when they hear of others' needs, or to become indignant when they learn of injustice. But God calls us to real and sincere love that goes far beyond pretense and politeness. Sincere love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. Because of the prevalence of feigned love among believers, Peter the apostle had this to say: **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”** (1 Peter 1:22).

Question 2: How is love best expressed?

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

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

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

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

Remember the golden rule always and live by it. **“Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 7:12). If you want people to love you, you should love them first. If you want people to forgive you, appreciate you and speak well of you, do the same to them. If you want your mistakes and oversights to be overlooked, do the same to others too. If you do not want false stories about you to be peddled, do not do that to others too. This is the foundation of our service.

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

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

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

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

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

Besides, women also should not be slothful in domestic

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

Fervency of Spirit involves some personal internal motivation and desire to carry on a given task. This is described as zeal. It strips our service of every form of passivity. **“For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me”** (Psalm 69:9).

Serving the Lord in whatever capacity - literature distribution, hospital visitation, prison outreach, etc. - must be performed with cheerfulness and zeal. **“Not with eyeservice, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”** Our service must be **“as unto the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 4:23,24).

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

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

<p>Question 4: How and what can we distribute to meet the needs of other believers?</p>
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Here, we have the commandment of the Lord concerning our service. It is a responsibility for all believers. Some feel they are so poor that they have nothing to distribute. But they miss it. While we may not have something tangible or material to share, we can speak kind words to comfort the sorrowful and encourage those who are discouraged (1 Thessalonians 1:2,3). Our love should not

be partial, passive or theoretical. We must show mercy to the needy and give to meet the needs of other saints. **“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother has need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him”** (1 John 3:16,17).

Supreme love for God and for our fellow men attracts divine blessings. There will be divine favour and supplies to meet our needs. God will answer our prayers and fulfil His promises in our lives and endeavors when we pray. He will make our days like **“the days of heaven upon the earth”** (Deuteronomy 11:21).

So, we must happily lay down our resources for the good of the brethren if we say we love the brotherhood. This is the New Testament commandment. It is the summary of the law and the prophets put together. We must serve one another in love.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Cor.	9-10	Numbers	7
TUE	“	11	“	8-9
WED	“	12-13	“	10
THUR	Galatians	1-2	“	11
FRI	“	3-4	“	12-13
SAT	“	5-6	“	14
SUN	Ephesians	1-2	“	15

780 Lesson

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

TEXT: Revelation 21:1-27, 22:1-5

MEMORY VERSE: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Revelation 21: 1).

The present age in which we live is referred to in the Scriptures as the **“last days”** (Hebrews 1:1,2). The series of events in these last days predicted in the Bible is often referred to in theology as “eschatology”. Eschatology is the branch of theology concerning final events such as death, judgment, heaven, hell and the end of the world. The focus of this study is the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The New Heaven and the New Earth **“wherein dwelleth righteousness”** will be made by God where the redeemed shall dwell with Him forever (Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:12,13; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2,3; Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5). This present, sin-polluted earth will pass away after the Great White Throne Judgment (Psalm 102:25,26; Isaiah 51:6; 65:17; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21: 1). No unclean thing will be found in the New Heaven and the New Earth. There, we shall know each other, our knowledge having been perfected. There will be no more curse on anything or night, but the glory of the Lord will be the light thereof. It is a place everyone should look forward to as we toil here below.

Question 1: What is the revelation of the Scripture concerning the New Heaven and the New Earth?

UNPLEASANT STATE OF THE PRESENT EARTH: (Genesis 3:17-19; 1 Samuel 15:23; Job 5:7; Ecclesiastes 1:2,3; 2:23; Isaiah 24:5,6; Romans 8:20-22; Job 31:40; Revelation 8:13)

This present earth has been polluted by sin. And this can be traced to Adam's disobedience to God's commandment in the Garden of Eden. As a result, the earth came under a curse (Genesis 3:17-19) and this has greatly impaired its fertility. In other words, the earth has since been unable to reach its potential. Besides, man's efforts are visited by blasting, mildew, insects, wet weather, and floods because of the curse thereby cutting off all expectations of full happiness while he labors here on earth.

Question 2: What necessitates the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth?

This present age, also called the Church age, is marked by evil, the dominion of Satan, darkness, ungodliness, lust, murder, lying and all manner of sin. The Scripture refer to the present world as an **“evil world”** where the believer wrestles **“against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”** (Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 6:12). That effectively makes the earth a battleground in which the Church is not left out. There is a continuous denial of God, Christ, faith, sound doctrine and Christian living (1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:3,4; 3: 1-8). The devil and all his fallen angels walk to and fro the whole earth. The atmospheric heavens are polluted by their activities as they roam all over the world to spread woes and sorrow among God's creation.

Believers today groan under the harsh and cruel conditions of the earth. There is mutual and universal grief or intense agony and continued suffering. The inhabitants of the earth are in a world of misery and death, and all people in every age have experienced it. They look forward to a change - a New Heaven and New Earth wherein dwells righteousness and holiness.

STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1-7,16-26; John 14:1-3; 2 Peter 3:7,10-14)

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth:

and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” God’s plan is to replace this corrupted and evil earth and atmospheric heavens with a new earth and a new heaven that will match His glory, holiness and righteousness. This gives a good picture of what shall become of the present earth and heavens. All what we may call beautiful edifices and empires today will melt away in fervent heat. The glories of men and all the so-called “wonders” of this world shall not stand the fervent heat. The New Heaven and the New Earth are secure and safe and entirely free from any taint of sin. Therefore, the consequences and effects of sin are absent in it. Thus, there is no death, sorrow, pain, tears, or separation from God (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:4). As God created the present heavens and earth, so will He create the New Heaven and the New Earth which will be NEW in quality and in TIME.

The great, holy and eternal heaven will have New Jerusalem as its capital. This is the capital of the eternal state called the “Bride” because of its virgin beauty and unstained state. Here, Christ and all the saints, from all ages, will reside forevermore. Indeed, all things will be new. This is the place Jesus spoke about when He said, **“if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”** (John 14:3).

Question 3: Describe the beauty and blessedness of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The Holy City, New Jerusalem, is a material city and not a mystical one. Its beauty is beyond human description. About 1,500 miles each in length, breadth, and height, the streets are made of pure gold, and as clear as glass. With walls of jasper and its twelve foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones, it has twelve gates with twelve pearls. The entire city wall is pure gold, as clear as glass. There will be no temple there; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

“And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof”. The redeemed

of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into the city. The gates of the city shall not be shut, day or night. The pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb. The tree of life by the sides of this river bears twelve manners of fruits monthly and the leaves are for the healing of the nations. **“There shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever”** (Revelation 22:5).

Life and living in this eternal city will be glorious. It will be a life of fellowship (1 Corinthians 13:12), rest (Revelation 14: 13), full knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:12), holiness (Revelation 21 :27), joy (Revelation 21 :4), service (Revelation 22:3), abundance (Revelation 21 :6), glory (2 Corinthians 4:17) and worship (Revelation 19: 1; 7:9-12). Words are insufficient to describe this new creation.

<p>Question 4: Describe the life of inhabitants of this eternal city of God.</p>

INHABITANTS OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (Revelation 21:7; 2:10,26-28;3:12,21; Zechariah 8:8; Hebrews 8:10; 1 John 3:2,3; 5:4,5; 2:15-17; 2 Peter 3:11-14; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Knowing that life in this eternal city will be glorious, it is important to know those who will be in that city and what it takes to partake of this divine provision.

The Scripture is clear on the kind of people that will inherit the New Heaven and the New Earth. Inhabitants of this glorious city are those who overcome sin, Satan, the world and its din. So, sinners must repent and be saved while believers must continue to overcome sin to be there. **“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son”** (Revelation 21 :7; 12: 11). This victory is one that is habitual. **“He that overcometh”** implies one who daily maintains his victory over sin and Satan. To be an inhabitant of that city, there must be a current experience of salvation. Those with historical salvation will not be able to make

it. This simply means that backsliders must return to the Saviour immediately and not rely on testimonies of yesteryears. All who will dwell with Him in that city must be like Him (Revelation 21:3; Colossians 3:4).

Question 5: Who is qualified to be in the New Heaven and the New Earth?

False prophets, sin and evil must not have dominion over us if we hope to inhabit that great city. We must flee from all appearances of evil. In times of persecutions or temptations, we must overcome to be part of this great inheritance (Revelation 2:10,26-28). The overcomer is the one who prevails and triumphs over all the works of the devil. The overcoming life begins with genuine repentance and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

PUNISHMENT OUTSIDE THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH (Revelation 21:8;1Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; Hebrews 2:3; 9:27; 12:14; Revelation 20: 14, 15; 22: 15)

There is punishment awaiting the unrepentant who chooses to ignore Christ's sacrifice and continue to live in sin. The Scripture is not silent on the eternal misery of the wicked. It reveals that they will be banished from the new city and cast into hell. They will suffer torments eternally in the lake of fire.

Question 6: Describe the plight of those who miss the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The truth that everyone has only one life to live (Hebrews 9:27) should make the believer remain faithful and steadfast in the Lord, the sinner should repent and be saved and the backslider to return to the Lord for restoration. Neglect of this **“so great salvation”** will be visited with divine wrath. We must live consistently holy lifestyles so as not to miss the glories of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

God has the ultimate plan to judge sinners who remain obstinate to His call to repentance. **“And whosoever**

was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20: 15). Having seen what is ahead, the need to prepare adequately for that glorious world cannot be overemphasized. And the time to prepare is now!

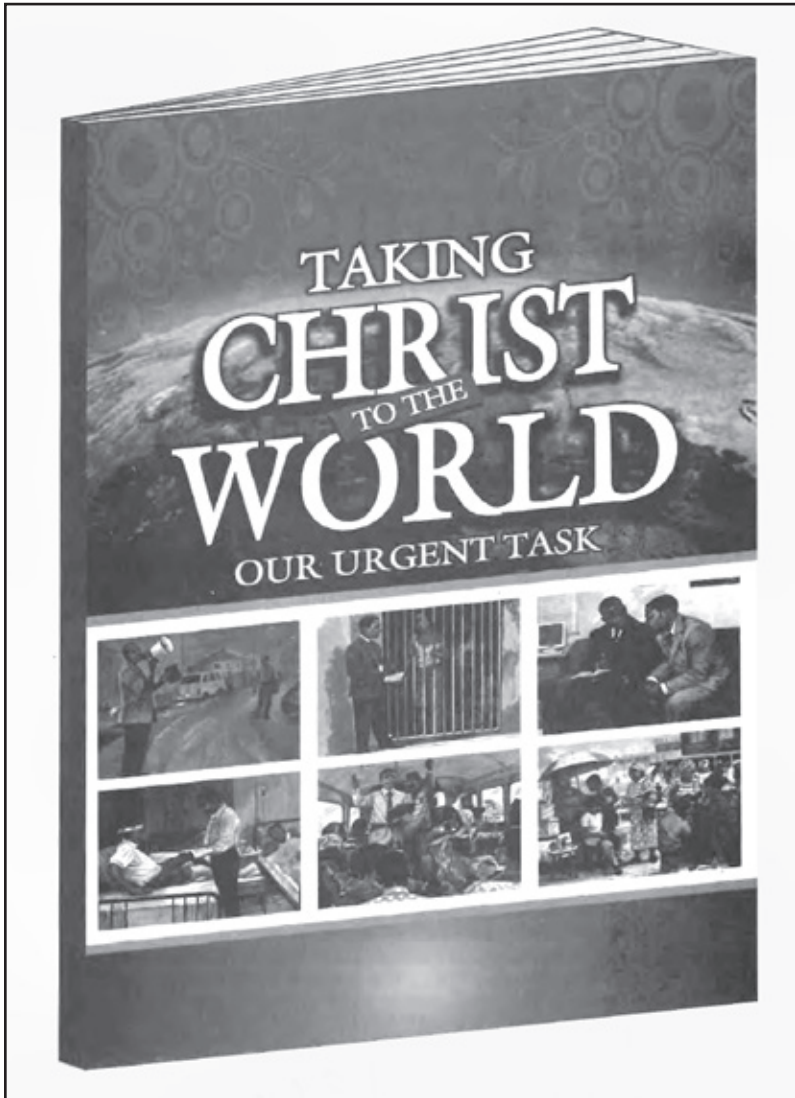
DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Colossians	2	Numbers	26
TUE	“	3-4	“	27-28
WED	1 Thess.	1-2	“	29
THUR	“	3-4	“	30-31
FRI	“	5	“	32
SAT	2 Thess.	1-2	“	33-34
SUN	“	3	“	35-36

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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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
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