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## OFFERING FOR DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR

MEMORY VERSE: "And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar" (**Numbers 7:10**).

TEXT: Numbers 7:1-89

Moses had taken delivery of the tabernacle, erected it and consecrated it (Exodus 40:13-17; Leviticus 8:10,11). Here, we observe Moses' faithfulness to God, His word and His calling (Exodus 25:40). This should serve as a lesson for all believers to be faithful to God in all circumstances. In this chapter, however, we see the dedication of the altar and offering that followed. The offerings were in two parts, one was for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, offered by the princes of the children of Israel on the same day (verses 2-9) and the other was for the dedication of the altar, offered by the twelve tribes of the children of Israel over twelve days, one tribe each day.

**Question 1: *What lesson can we learn from the princes' persistent attitude of giving?***

While the tabernacle was under construction, the princes were very generous in giving. **"And the rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate"** (Exodus 35:27). Now that the tabernacle was fully set up, they brought more presents (six wagons and twelve oxen) for the service of the tabernacle. The tribes also gave liberally for the dedication of the altar. What a demonstration of love and generosity for the house of God! Believers need to give generously to God whenever we are called upon to do so, no matter what we have given before. We must not be weary in well doing but labour with love, sacrifice and faithfulness knowing full well that our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

**VOLUNTARY OFFERING AT THE DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE** (Numbers 7:1-9; 4:1-33; Romans 12:1,2).

The twelve princes of the children of Israel brought their offering before the Lord, six wagons and twelve oxen before the tabernacle. These princes (leaders) demonstrated true leadership spirit as they led the people by example, in giving to God. Likewise leaders, by their calling, are expected to go before and beyond others in everything that is good, acceptable and perfect in the sight of God. Christian leaders in particulars should also lead by example in all things. It will be grossly hypocritical for leaders to demand from followers what they themselves would not do (Matthew 23:4). Those in position of leadership should use their privilege to demonstrate the presence of the Spirit of Christ by being zealous in serving God and edifying the people. Besides, the more opportunities we have as Christians, the more we should utilize it to make Christ known.

The offering of the tabernacle provided the means for carrying the tabernacle components on a journey, two carts for the hangings of the tabernacle and four carts for the carrying of the boards and frames of the tabernacle.

**Question 2: Identify useful lessons from the disposition of the princes to the dedication of the tabernacle?**

We observe that these offerings, first, were not made until the tabernacle was fully set up though they had earlier given materials towards the construction of the tabernacle. They waited until the tabernacle was completed and consecrated. Taking heed to observe all the commandments and statutes of God must take precedence over freewill offerings. Second, the offerings were purely voluntary and spontaneous; they discovered the need and made provision for it without any request from Moses. How we need to discover needs in the house of God and meet them without much entreaty. Third, portrayed a spirit of cooperation, unity and fellowship. We need to see how to always cooperate together to accomplish great things for God. Fourth, emphasized the need to guard and protect sacred things against desecration; they brought “covered wagons” (Numbers 4:6-28). We also need to see how to guard jealously and properly maintain church equipment, materials, gadgets, furniture and so on. Fifth, portrayed the transient nature of life as provisions were made for the removal of the tabernacle immediately it is set up. We need to be so careful not to be settled in this world that we forget the imminence of the rapture.

It is worthy of note that Moses was not presumptuous in accepting the offering from them. He adhered strictly to the injunctions he had received from the Lord to build according to pattern until God commanded Him to take it from them. The reaction of the Lord, however, to the offering was that of acceptance showing that the givers have the right motives and holy zeal for the house of God.

**Question 3: What do we learn from God’s reaction to the offering of the princes and His instruction for their use?**

God’s reaction shows that: one, He is interested in the protection and right conveyance of the parts of the tabernacle. We should also protect and guard all sacred materials in our custody jealously. Two, God cares for His ministers and will not overburden any with any work beyond his capability neither will He give any assignment without divine assistance. For every service He calls us into, He gives commensurate ability and provides the means to carry it out. God gives greater strength to those who have greater work to do for Him and greater grace and anointing for greater service and ministerial demand. Three, it is dangerous to dabble into what God has not called us into.

It also shows that the offering was pleasing unto God and suitable for His service. The offering is to be specifically used for the service of the tabernacle and to be distributed to the Levites according to their service. Two wagons were given unto the sons of Gershon who carry only the curtains, coverings and hangings (Numbers 4:24-26) while four wagons and eight oxen were given to the sons of Merari since they had the boards, bars, pillars and sockets of the tabernacle to carry (Numbers 4:31-33), a far greater burden than that of the Gershonites. The Kohathites had no wagons at all because they only had the sacred carriage (Numbers 4:1-20); therefore they were to carry their charge upon their shoulders with honour, care and veneration. The way the wagons and the oxen were shared is instructive to believers today. They were not shared equally and yet the Levites did not complain or envy each other since the instruments were given according to the levels of their service for God.

**ORDER OF OFFERING FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR** (Numbers 7:10-88; 1 Corinthians 14:33,40; Exodus 25:2; Numbers 31:50).

**Question 4: What lessons do we learn from the manner of presentation of the offering by the princes of the tribes?**

According to the Lord's directive to Moses, each tribe was to offer for a whole day, each prince on his own day, for the dedication of the altar (verse 11). To use a whole day for offering for a tribe when they could do it all in one day is neither a waste of time nor an occasion to occupy time. There is nothing more productive to do and be acceptable than to serve God on His own terms. They also followed a certain order as they were positioned round about the tabernacle in their groups of threes starting from east to the south, the west, and terminating in the north. Every group of six verses from verses 12-83 provides the exact description of items as were brought by each tribe. Day 1: Judah led by Nahson (verses 12-17); Day 2: Issachar led by Nethaneel (verses 18-23); Day 3: Zebulun led by Elias (verses 24-29); Day 4: Reuben led by Elizur (verses 30-35); Day 5: Simeon led by Shelumiel (verses 36-41); Day 6: Gad led by Elisaph (verses 42-47); Day 7: Ephraim led by Elishama (verses 48-53); Day 8: Manasseh led by Gamaliel (verse 54-59); Day 9: Benjamin led by Abidan (verses 60-65); Day 10: Dan led by Ahiezer (verses 66-71); Day 11: Asher led by Ocran (verses 72-77); and Day 12: Naphtali led by Ahira (verses 78-83).

There are several lessons to learn from the manner of the presentation of the offerings:

(i) **Priority of rank:** They were to offer as they were ranked in the camp not according to the order of birth as listed in the book of Numbers chapter one. Judah who had precedence assigned to him was to present on the first day. This was in fulfilment of Jacob's prophecy: "**Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise... thy father's children shall bow down before thee**" (Genesis 49:8). Leadership in the church is not by age but by divine design.

(ii) **Picture of solemnity:** Service to God is a solemn, serious and sober business; the modern trend of hilarious, lousy festivity in churches are foreign to Bible-believing patterns.

(iii) **Prevention of hurry and disorderliness:** The service was orderly as the people were not in a hurry. God deserves our utmost attention and quality of our time. Hence, we

should not be in a hurry to leave the presence of God like others who are always in haste when they come to worship the Lord and serve in His presence. All things must "**be done decently and in order**" (1 Corinthians 14:33,40).

(iv) **Purpose of repetition:** Though the offerings were the same, they were repeated for each of the tribes. This should not be taken as vain repetition but to show that God takes record of our commitment and service by name and He will give reward on individual basis. It is also to encourage us that God has an appointed time for each of us and will never forget our labour of love though we may not be noticed by man. Our good deeds are in the good books of God and He keeps a detailed account of our works of faith. The things that were offered included burnt offering, sin offering and peace offering.

(v) **Parity in offering:** Each of the twelve tribes brought the same gift equal in quantity and quality indicating that each was under equal obligation and had the same share in the altar as well as equal interest in the sacrifices that were offered upon it; they expected equal honour and recognition as well.

(vi) **Paramount measure in giving:** The tribes of the children of Israel gave after the shekels of the sanctuary (Leviticus 27:25; Numbers 3:47). The shekel of the sanctuary had the highest value. The best and the most valuable of our gift must be given to God. More so, we note that other shekels are measured relative to the sanctuary shekel: our service will always be measured in the light of eternity (sanctuary value). Our service may seem

much in the eyes of the people now but they will eventually be judged by its ultimate value in eternity. Those who build with wood, hay, stubble shall suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). How will your commitment, consecration, giving, fare in the light of eternity?

**Question 5: *How can every believer make the advancement of God's kingdom a reality?***

The sum total of all the offerings is given in verses 84-88. This shows the delight of God as He beholds the offerings of His obedient children. It reveals how great the contribution we can make to the kingdom of God if every believer plays his little part. The offering involved all families. How all of us need to give sincerely, selflessly, scripturally and sacrificially towards the work of God. The course of the kingdom of God will be greatly advanced if every believer in every place at all times will contribute their own quota through Christlike charity, deep devotion, personal purity, sincere supplication and sacrificial giving.

## Lesson 366

### CLEANSING OF THE LEVITES

**TEXT: Numbers 8:1-26**

In the seventh chapter of the book of Numbers, we considered the various offerings (of heads of families in Israel) for the dedication of the altar. The tabernacle and the vessels to be used had already been set up, sanctified and anointed. The focus, in our lesson today, shifts to the cleansing of the Levites before their engagements in the service they were called to render to the Lord.

### **Question 1: *How can a sinner/backslider become useful in the hand of God?***

It could be recalled that the willing, wholehearted and prompt response of the Levites to the call to repentance and restoration after Israel's massive descent into idolatry (Exodus 32) endeared them to God. It marked the beginning of their coming to limelight and usefulness in the service of God. If anything, it gave them the privileged position of replacing the firstborn of all Israel. This dealing of God with them assures backsliders that there is hope of restoration to a lost favour with Him if only they, as prodigal sons and daughters, return to Him. No sinner or backslider is useful in the service of God or can be engaged by Him in sacred service until he repents. Call to repentance and cleansing precedes call to service. Good enough, He still calls with a promise of bestowing His grace on all who respond positively. He says, **"Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever... Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings"**

Jeremiah 3:12). Christ still receives sinful men: there is no need to die in sin and perish eternally. He loves you. The Levites in our passage represent true believers who have repented of their sins, separate themselves from the world, and maintain a current relationship with God.

God's command to cleanse the Levites before their engagement in the service of the tabernacle reveals that He places a high premium on the quality of life His servants lead. His all-time demand for purity of life as condition for service is reiterated. The Levites to be cleansed were to serve in a well-lit tabernacle to fulfil God's purpose. Invariably, God does not appoint children of the kingdom of darkness to serve in His kingdom or vice versa.

**LIGHT IN THE TABERNACLE** (Numbers 8:1-4; Leviticus 24:1,2,4; 1 John 1:5; John 1:9; 8:12; 12:35,46; Ephesians 5:14; Revelation 21:23; Matthew 5:16; James 1:22; Philippians 2:15,16).

### **Question 2: *What is the relevance of the lighted lamp in the tabernacle to the sinner/backslider and believer today?***

God commanded Moses to instruct Aaron to light the seven lamps specially made to illuminate the tabernacle. He took the light from the golden altar to light the middle lamp. Then from it, he lighted the others, each one borrowing its light from the others. This literal light in the tabernacle pointed to the spiritual light Christ sparks in the human temples of God which believers are. Jesus is the source of light and knowledge, He is **"the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"** (John 1:9). He transmits His light to those who come to Him, repent of their sins and receive Him as Saviour and Lord.

God appoints ministers purposely to save people from the darkness of sin through the light of the gospel (Acts 26:14-8). Believers must selflessly shine so that men can see the distinct goodness in the life they lead and be attracted to it. Your life, as a Christian, must give clear expression to the truth of the word of God so that people can receive divine illumination on all issues of life and be duly influenced to please God in all things. This is only possible when the believer is guided and diligently walks by the light of the word of God (Proverbs 6:23; 2 Peter 1:19). God is Light. And we cannot worship, walk with, and work for Him when we are in darkness. Darkness

demobilizes and enslaves but light gives illumination and freedom. **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). There is always a separation between light and darkness, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness. God ordained it so right from the beginning when He decreed, **“Let there be light: and there was light”** (Genesis 1:3). Literally, we must ensure that the house of God where believers meet for fellowship is well-lit as was in the tabernacle.

The seven lamps were to give light over against the candle stick. That is, they were to give light not to themselves but to the other side of the tabernacle where the table and shew-bread were. This implies that the church as a candle stick in the New Testament sense, occupies a vantage position in this dark world and should be a place where the light of God’s knowledge is radiated to the world.

**THE CEREMONIAL CLEANSING OF THE LEVITES** (Numbers 8:5-14; 3:5-12; Isaiah 52:11; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Timothy 2:19,21; Hebrews 9:14; Leviticus 20:7,8).

The Levites were not only to be separated from the other Israelites, they were to be cleansed. Meanwhile, their separation from the generality of Israel had won them the honour to be chosen for cleansing in the same manner God appoints everyone who responds to the message of the gospel positively to be cleansed and conformed to the image of His dear Son. No one can come near God or claim to be serving Him without being cleansed from sin and unrighteousness. **“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”** (Ephesians 2:13). The sinner is smeared with sin and to be received by God, he must be cleansed. This illustrates the priority and prerequisite of cleansing before fellowship with God.

**Question 3: Enumerate the various rites involved in the cleansing of the Levites and point out their significance to the present-day believer?**

The thrice-holy God would not allow the Levites to enter and serve in a sanctified temple with sanctified and anointed vessels without cleansing. The rites and ceremonies of their cleansing were to follow divine order and to be carried out meticulously.

First, Moses was commanded by God to sprinkle the water of purifying upon them. This water was specially prepared for their separation and purification. This should not be misunderstood or misinterpreted to mean washing with any “special water” for cleansing today. It only foreshadowed the application of the blood of Jesus by faith for cleansing from outward and inward sins. Reference to the sprinkling of water for purification in the book of Hebrews 9:14 signified the application of the blood of Jesus for believers’ purification from an evil conscience so as to be able to serve God acceptably. The Bible also compares the cleansing effect of the Word to water (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

Second, the Levites were required to shave. This was similar to what a leper was to do after he had been pronounced clean by the priest (Leviticus 14:8). The mode prescribed here for shaving the flesh was to shave off all the hair to remove every form of defilement that would not wash off. They were also to wash their clothes so as to be totally free from pollution both from themselves and from the environment. Though the believer no longer indulges in ceremonial cleansing as required by the Old

Testament law, it is unhygienic to be unkempt. Cleanliness, it is popularly said, is next to godliness. Unclean and uncut finger nails create room for germs that are harmful to the body while dirty clothes and environment also constitute health hazards that the believer must avoid.

Obviously, God does not only care for the believer's heart but also his outward look. Therefore, believers must separate themselves from unbelievers not only in lifestyle but also in outlook and dressing. They must consecrate their entire life to God.

Third, the Levites were required to take a young bullock with fine flour mingled with oil for meat offering and another young bullock for sin offering. Moses was asked to bring them before the Lord in a solemn assembly of the children of Israel. There, the children of Israel would put their hands upon the Levites not as ministers having the power to ordain but as their brethren showing their willingness to part with them (as when you wave your offering before God) and acceptance of their choice in lieu of their first born to render holy service unto God. They, by this rite surrendered them unto Aaron who was to offer them before the Lord.

Fourth, the Levites were to lay their hands upon the heads of the two young bullocks provided for the two sacrifices. Aaron was commanded to offer the bullocks for both the sin-offering and burnt offering unto the Lord to make atonement for them. By so doing, they declared their unworthiness to engage in God's service till atonement was made for sin.

Fifth, the Levites were set before Aaron and his sons to be offered for an offering unto the LORD. After submitting themselves to these cleansing rites as ordained by God, only then would God declare His acceptance of them by calling them His own. Thus, they were separated from the rest of the children of Israel and set apart for divine service (Numbers 8:14). This teaches that whatsoever is sincerely offered to God shall be graciously owned and accepted by Him.

God has divine ownership of all things and all men. He owns believers by creation and redemption. We need to choose to absolutely surrender our lives – past, present and future – to Him because of His great love for us. **“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again”** (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). The resolution of Paul, the apostle, **“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”** (Philippians 1:21) is worth emulating.

**THE SERVICE OF PURIFIED LEVITES** (Numbers 8:15-26; Titus 3:7; 2 Timothy 3:17).

God clearly shows that the cleansing of the Levites is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Attached to the privilege of cleansing by God and communion with Him is the responsibility to serve faithfully in His kingdom. God chose and cleansed them so that they could serve Him. This is God's purpose for our redemption: **“That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the**

**Question 4: What lessons can we learn from the service appointed for the Levites in the tabernacle?**

God demanded that the Levites be given to Him as an offering, and Aaron did (verse 11). It is important to note that God gave the Levites back to Aaron (verse 19). They were to serve under the priests and to assist them in the service of the tabernacle. They were to complement and not compete with the priests. God assigns clearly defined roles to all His servants; and it is His design for many of his servants to serve under appointed spiritual leaders.

The Levites were to do the service of the children of Israel and to do that which would preserve the honour, safety and prosperity of the whole nation of Israel. They were to preserve them from outbreak of epidemics among them, maintain the approved pattern for worship and guard the tabernacle to preserve it from either being plundered or profaned. Similarly, believers should watch and guard against intruders and peddlers of false doctrines who would want to sneak into our midst and pollute the sound doctrine. The priests were to make atonement by sacrifice, thereby making peace with God. The Levites also were to meticulously uphold the divine standard for the maintenance of the tabernacle and its sacred use so as to preserve the fellowship between God and His people. Christian servants need to relentlessly and tenaciously hold on to the standard of God's word in all spiritual matters so as to avoid physical or spiritual plagues among the people of God.

Finally, the clause "**And the LORD spake unto Moses...**" as recorded in verses 1, 5 and 23 occurred because Moses had both a listening ear and an obedient heart. Prompt and absolute obedience is associated with humility, as a proud heart does not take instructions. Obedience, like that of Moses in passing divine instructions to Aaron and the people, and their promptness in carrying out divine commands (verses 3, 4, 20, 22) is to maintain their relationship with God and those who want their services to be rewardable. Some Christians can no longer hear from God because they have grieved the Spirit having not obeyed the instruction. Though the Levites were to enter into their appointed service at the age of twenty-five, they were not to carry the tabernacle and the vessels therein until they were thirty years old (Numbers 4:3). God's instruction to Moses on the choice of the Levites to wait upon their service teaches us that only the best is good enough for God. Many people prefer using their spare time, money and materials for the Lord. To such people, active service must wait until they are retired or due for retirement as, according to them, the prime of life should not be 'wasted' on full-time service unto God. They are unlike David who said: "**Neither will I offer a burnt offering unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing**" (2 Samuel 24:24). What God requires from us is not our spare but our precious time, talent and treasures.

#### **Question 5: *What does the time frame of the Levites teach us about service?***

The Levites' years of active service were from twenty-five to fifty years. After this age, they would be exempted from strenuous service that required exertion of much strength. Yet, they were to minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation to keep the charge of the tabernacle. It is obvious that old age may not accommodate the stress and strains of hard-work. Therefore, we are to serve God more when we are young and our bones and muscles are firmer and stronger. It is wrong to wait until retirement age before committing our lives to God's work. Christ's command to His disciples is "**Occupy till I come**". We must keep on serving the Lord until the end of our lives or till Christ comes for us at the rapture. There is no age limit for service in God's temple. No matter our age, we can still render useful service in the

kingdom of God. Eli, Joshua, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon, Anna the prophetess, Paul the Apostle served the Lord unto their old age. All Christian servants must continue in His service no matter the challenge they face and hardship they experience since **“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”** (Hebrews 6:10).

### DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING					EVENING
MON	Hebrews	6-7	Ezekiel	17-18	
TUE	“	8-9	“	19-20	
WED	“	10	“	21	
THUR	“ 11		“ 22		
FRI	“	12-13	“ 23		
SAT	James 1-2		“ 24-25		
SUN	“	3-5	“	26-27	

## THE FIRST COMMEMORATION OF THE PASSOVER

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season” (**Numbers 9:1,2**).

TEXT: Numbers 9:1-14

The inauguration of the Passover in Egypt was an exciting historical experience, an event that later became a national distinctive for the nation of Israel. The first celebration was a symbol of the physical deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Now in the book of Numbers, a year after the initial event, God commanded Israel to commemorate the event. This command indicates that the celebration had more than an historical significance. It was to keep God’s ability to deliver fresh in their memory. This is because of the fact that the human memory is short and that there is always a tendency to forget important spiritual truths. The commemoration was to help them avoid falling into the danger of forgetting what they ought to remember. In the same way, God expects us to see every event of His move in our lives beyond its immediate significance, and to draw essential lessons that would ultimately guide us to the land of promise. **“And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no”** (Deuteronomy 8:2).

**THE COMMAND TO COMMEMORATE THE PASSOVER** (Numbers 9:1-5; Exodus 12:1-13,14,25-27; Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 26:21-23; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 11:23-26). God had earlier instructed that the Passover be commemorated as a national ordinance for the children of Israel. **“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations...”** (Exodus 12:14). The first event of the Passover, took place in the last night in which God brought the last plague on Egypt to force the deliverance of Israel, His people, out of the bondage of obstinate Pharaoh. On the night, the Lord God planned the consummation of his punishment on Egyptians through the killing of their own first born and their beasts. Meanwhile, for His people He had a different plan, namely, to ensure that the angel of death **“pass over”** His people and slay the firstborn of their enemies, the Egyptians. At the same time, God, in His omniscience, foresaw that the Egyptians under intense anguish would be **“urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste”**. So, He gave them rules of readiness, so that nothing would hinder them from leaving without delay before His wrath fell on Egypt’s firstborn. Now at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord commanded Israel through Moses to commemorate the Passover, a year after the initial event.

### **Question 1: *Why were the children of Israel to commemorate the Passover?***

God had previously commanded that the commemoration should start when they enter the Promised Land (Exodus 12:25). But God's command to Moses on this occasion was enough reason to perform the ordinance. When God commands something, there is no need to seek any 'higher' or fresher mandate. The command should simply be obeyed, and that promptly. God was explicit in the first instruction concerning the initial ordinance in Egypt the previous year, that the Passover was to be a continual ordinance in Israel. Secondly, the commemoration of the event was to keep God's act of deliverance fresh in Israel's memory, so as to avert the dangers often associated with man's tendency to forget spiritual things, and the weakness, decline, defeat, loss of vision, disobedience, backsliding and at times, outright apostasy that follow such forgetfulness (Psalm 78:40-42). Thirdly, it was to keep the remembrance of God's mighty delivering power in view, so that the new generation of youths and children, would be encouraged to know about these great acts of mercy and put their faith in God. **"That the generation to come might know them even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments"** (Psalm 78:6,7).

### **Question 2: *What New Testament ordinance represents the Passover and what should be the believer's attitude to the ordinance?***

It is important to note that for Christians in the New Testament, the Passover actually foreshadowed the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son that delivered us from the house of bondage to sin and Satan. Jesus Christ is our paschal Lamb whose substitutionary death on the Cross brought us pardon and salvation. In order to keep the event of this great sacrifice in view, the Lord also instituted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on the eve of His arrest, trial and crucifixion. It is instructive that the Lord looked forward to the commemoration of that last supper in the consummation of His Kingdom. **"And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God"** (Luke 22:15,16). Paul, the apostle, by inspiration and revelation, added, **"as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"** (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The Israelites of old kept the commemoration of the Passover as it was delivered to them without missing out its details. We cannot do less. Today, we should partake in the Lord's Supper, following its details of observance of personal holiness, and use of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. Keeping to the ordinances of God as passed on to us by those who went before us in the faith, and abiding by prescribed details is a sure way to find rest for our souls (Jeremiah 6:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 11:23-26). On the contrary, departing from the law and the testimony is certain evidence that spiritual illumination is lacking (Isaiah 8:20), a sign of damnable pride (1 Timothy 6:3,4), and an invitation to damnation (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

Some men in the camp of Israel at that time could not participate in the celebration of the Passover because they had had contact with a corpse and so were ceremonially defiled. However, God did not lower His holy requirements of participating in the ordinance. His standard of holiness was maintained and the men were not allowed to

participate thus upholding the unchangeability of God's standard. But these people, with sincere contrition told their leaders their shortcoming and sought their counsel.

**Question 3: *What do we learn from the action and attitude of those who could not participate in the Passover because of defilement?***

From the action and attitude of these people, we learn some very important lessons. First, we should avoid secret sin since it disqualifies us from enjoying God's benefits. These people could not take part for being defiled. Those who are defiled cannot partake on the Lord's Table. To qualify to partake, there must be not just ceremonial but practical purity. Second, we should be sincere enough and be ready to expose any error, sin or transgression in our lives without being forced to do so. These people neither hid their condition nor came into the camp presumptuously to join the congregation in the celebration of the Passover as though nothing had happened. Third, we, as church members should seek counsel or clarification from leaders on doctrinal issues or before taking decisions that border on things that are of eternal consequences. Fourth, we should make divine counsel the ultimate of all our decisions. Fifth, true contrition, as opposed to brazen-faced presumption, is the way to secure God's pardon and abiding presence. Contrition makes a sinner or backslider to confess his sins rather than covering them up and forsake evil ways rather than cleaving to them. These men did not only expose their disqualification, but they also sought counsel in a language that showed a deep willingness of heart to conform to God's demand to keep the Passover. Their question was positive, expectant of cleansing, hopeful of remission. **"And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?"** (Numbers 9:7).

**Question 4: *How should God-ordained leaders deal with sincere inquirers today?***

Moses in our text, meeting this type of situation for the first time went to seek God's face. This is a great challenge to leaders to ensure that they are in tune with God constantly. When specific questions arise in the course of counselling genuine inquirers, leaders should wait to obtain God's counsel and mind on the issue before answering, especially when the inquirer's case requires balancing of scriptural truth in sensitive cases, and if it is a case that has no precedent. Like Moses, leaders should use wisdom and prayer to reach workable solution in every logjam. God has promised to guide us if we commit our ways unto His hands, and as we do this, we would enjoy overflowing peace like a river (Romans 8:14; Psalms 32:8-9; 37:5,23; Isaiah 48:18).

It is worthy of note that God permitted these men to keep the Passover exactly a month later (i.e. on the fourteenth day of the second month). However, they were to observe the details also as did those who kept the feast in its normal season. This teaches us that though God accepts sincere seekers in love and does not cast out those who come to Him, yet He expects all His people to keep the same standard of holiness.

It is interesting to note from scriptures that what happened to these men became a reference point to the whole nation of Israel. As a result of the enquiry of these men, light was thrown into an aspect that was hitherto unknown. Today, sinners who come

to God in contrition, seeking the cleansing that flows from the wounded side of the Saviour are sure to receive.

**CONVERSION TO, CONFORMITY AND TRUE IDENTIFICATION WITH GOD'S FAMILY** (Numbers 9:13,14; 2 Chronicles 30:1-6,13-20,22,27; Romans.16:17; 2 John 9,10).

**“But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin”**

**Question 5: *Explain the hard stance against deliberate disobedience to God's instructions on observance of the Passover?***

This hard stance was necessary in order to prevent men from taking advantage of the special concession granted these men to keep a supplemental Passover in order to suit their own convenience or interest. The only two reasons that could absolve a man from keeping the Passover alongside others were if he were unclean and if he embarked on a journey and had not returned home. Those who, out of brazen display of disobedience, refused to participate in the national rite were to be severely sanctioned: such were to **“be cut off from”** the nation of Israel to bear the consequences of their sin of disobedience. Since they, by choice, missed the benefits of propitiation and remission, were to bear the heavy burden of their iniquity. Today also, all who reject the free gift of salvation obtainable through the sacrifice of Christ as preached in the Gospel will be cut off from enjoying the benefits of salvation. **“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”** (John 3:36). Therefore, we should be careful lest we trifle with spiritual truths about Christian experiences.

Genuine conversion makes and keeps the believer teachable and obedient to God's instructions in spite of the number of years he has spent in the faith or the height he has attained. Knowledge of the doctrines of Christ should, rather than make us swollen-headed, help us to be more humble and obedient. Those who devise their own ways and separate themselves from the fellowship of genuine believers show their lack of genuine conversion. Whatever their reason, the Bible enjoins us to **“consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”** (Hebrews 10:24,25). Often, backsliding starts with seemingly harmless steps as habitual lateness, inconsistency in attending fellowships, abstinence from participating in the Lord's Supper and holding on to strange ideologies. Little by little, hardness of heart sets in. We should watch against those little foxes.

**Question 6: *How should the believer live his faith in the presence of strangers so as to draw them to Christ?***

Strangers among the Israelites who desired to participate in the Passover were to, first, be circumcised as one law was applicable to both those who were **“homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you”** (Exodus 12:48,49), and then fulfil all the other details of the ordinance. This emphasizes the fact that God has no double dealing in

His relationship with man. In the same breadth, God certainly looked forward to the inclusion of the Gentile world in His redemption plan. The fact that rooms were made for strangers to participate in the Passover celebration means a lot for the Christian family today. One, it means that members of individual Christian family should not feel any inhibition in living out their Christian convictions based on God's word and endeavour to extend the benefits of the redemptive grace to their friends and neighbours by preaching the gospel to them. Two, we should resist the temptation to change our convictions owing to influence of strangers. Three, we should see the intrinsic goodness in our conviction clearly and practise them conscientiously enough so that our earnestness would influence others. Four, we are to ensure that our lifestyle does not contradict our profession.

#### DAILY BIBLE READING

MON	1 Peter	1-2	Ezekiel	28-29
TUE	"	3	"	30-31
WED	"	4-5	"	32
THUR	2 Peter	1-2	"	33
FRI	"	3	"	34-35
SAT	1 John	1-2	"	36
SUN	"	3-4	"	37-38

## Lesson 368

### THE CLOUD AND PILLAR OF FIRE

**MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night” (Exodus 13:21).**

TEXT: Numbers 9:15-23

After the Israelites were freed from the Egyptian servitude, there arose the need to lead them to the promised land. It was only God who knew the way through the wilderness and the intent of the hostile nations whose territories Israel would pass to their destination that could handle this task. It's only God who could order their movement and rest such that they would be led out of harm's way. For a multitude that numbered over six hundred thousand, it would take supernatural means to so lead them. Hence, the Lord's use of the pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to signal when it was safe to move, tarry or stop to rest.

**“And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night” (Numbers 9:15,16).**

The cloud and pillar of fire was a token of God's presence to lead and guide the Israelites throughout their forty-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. This divine leading was peculiar to Israel as a nation redeemed by God (Romans 9:4,5). The cloud covered that part of the tabernacle where the ark of testimony was, and settled upon the tent or its covering.

**Question 1: *What qualifies a person to receive divine guidance today?***

The people of Israel, under the leadership of Moses constructed and set up the tabernacle according to the pattern God revealed to Moses. When the tabernacle was reared up as instructed, the pillar of cloud settled on it during the day, and the pillar of fire covered it by night. Obedience to divine instruction is significant in enjoying and sustaining the presence of God. The appearance of the pillar signified the presence of God and His approval of the setting up of the tabernacle. It also marked the beginning of a new level of guidance for Israel on their journey. The obedience of the children of Israel in the present circumstance was so significant that it was noted in the scripture (Exodus 39:32).

**GOD'S PRESENCE SYMBOLIZED BY THE CLOUD AND PILLAR OF FIRE (Numbers 9:15-17; Exodus 33:9-11; 35:14,15; Isaiah 4:5, Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:20).**

The presence of God among His people was pre-eminent. The first time the tabernacle was pitched in the thirty-third chapter of Exodus, its greatest attraction lay in the way God met Moses face to face inside it as symbolized by the cloudy pillar. **“And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend...” (Exodus 33:9-11).** God still assured Moses of His presence by a clear promise: **“And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Exodus 33:14).**

When Moses again reared up the tabernacle, God manifested His approval to this act of obedience by coming down on it in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.

**Question 2: What are the benefits of God's presence among His people?**

God did not appear in the cloud and fire just to speak to Moses alone. His appearance in these two elements served a number of purposes. One, it was to signify the visible presence of the Lord and assure their hearts that they were not alone in the wilderness. Two, the cloud provided the people some cover from the scorching sun in the wilderness. Three, the pillar of fire served to ward off and frighten Israel's enemies who might want to attack the people at night. Four, it was to be a guide to them, day and night to lead them in the way. Five, this visible symbol of God's presence must have created fear, awe and reverence in their hearts. Israel's experience was a figure of God being the same to His Church and people. **"And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence"** (Isaiah 4:5).

As believers, God's presence must be our greatest desire above other considerations. We will not be able to do much or succeed without the assuring presence of the Lord. In His presence, we are secure and free from fear of the enemy. God's mighty presence scares the devil and his hordes from carrying out their wicked devices. His presence provides comfort to us in spite of the troubles and tribulations in this world (John 16:33). God's presence brings the fulness of joy and lasting pleasure not only here but for ever (Psalm 16:11). It gives us rest, peace and tranquility of mind and also provides sure guidance and direction in the path of righteousness.

**Question 3: How can we receive and maintain God's presence in the Church today?**

The Lord Jesus Christ promised His constant presence with His disciples, so long as they continued to obey His commands. **"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen"** (Matthew 28:19,20). So long as the Church continues in the Lord's command on the Great Commission, persists in holiness, stands against every form of impurity, upholds the Great Commandment to love one another and eschew evil, His presence will remain with us.

To personally experience God's presence, a sinner must repent of his sin, turn away from them and confess Christ as Lord and Saviour. Sin separates from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). It acts as a wall of partition between us and God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and cannot look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13). The believer must shun evil and its appearance, maintain fellowship with God through constant prayer and study of His Word.

**GUIDANCE BY THE CLOUD AND PILLAR OF FIRE** (Numbers 9:18-20; Exodus 13:21,22; Nehemiah 9:19-22; Psalm 78:14-16; Matthew 2:9,10; Psalm 5:8; 25:5; 27:11).

God dictated and directed the movement of the children of Israel. At His command, they journeyed and at His command they pitched and rested in their tents as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle. They were guided by the pillar of cloud in the day and the pillar of fire in the night. It was very important for the Israelites to be on the look out for the lifting of the cloud and fire so that they do not miss the leading of

the Lord as the movement signified the direction He wanted them to take and also a test of their obedience. Whatever the number of days the cloud remained or tarried, they waited, whether it was convenient for them or not.

**Question 4: *In addition to being God's presence, what is the significance of the cloud and the pillar of fire?***

Apart from the presence and protection which the cloud provided, it was a guide to God's people on their journey to Canaan. In like manner, the leading of this cloud can be likened to the leading of the Spirit of God in His children today. The Holy Spirit is our Companion, Comforter, Revealer of truth and Guide on our pilgrimage to heaven as God has promised that He will not leave us without direction. **"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death"** (Psalm 48:14).

Children of God should depend on God for His leading and guidance in every area of their lives, whether in the choice of a marriage partner, career, business investments, undertaking a journey or selection of workers and leaders in the church. God has promised to guide us if we leave the choice to Him (Psalm 73:24).

God is keenly interested in guiding and leading His children today in their journey from earth to heaven. He knows that we are limited in knowledge. He knows that as human beings the knowledge of things to come can only come to us by the revelation of His Spirit. He knows that the way of man is not in himself; it is not us to direct our steps. The Lord knows that there are many dangers and pitfalls on our journey to heaven and we have the tendency to fall, hence, He is willing to be our guide through life.

**Question 5: *How does God guide His people today?***

God uses various means and methods today to guide and lead His children. They include His word. The Bible is one sure way we can have direction in the darkness of this life. In life's confusion, which is a common experience of men, the Word of God provides needed lamp and light to navigate to safety. The Psalmist says: **"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"** (Psalm 119:105). Second, through the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. Christ told His disciples that He was going to send them a Comforter after His departure whose roles, among other things would include guiding them into all truth (John 16:13). Thus, the Holy Spirit leads, directs, guides, teaches, comforts and counsels every born again child of God (Romans 8:14; Acts 8:29; 10:19; Galatians 5:18). God can also guide His children through dreams (which must necessarily conform to His written word), direct revelations, audible voice, Spirit-led counseling etc.

There are many lessons we can learn from the way God guided the Israelites through the cloud and pillar of fire in the wilderness. One, the decision to move or not was principally the Lord's. The people of Israel had no control over this. The same way, God owns our lives and determines our destiny. Two, **"at the commandment of the Lord"** they journeyed or stayed. And, to God's commandment, the children of Israel were obliged to obey. Obedience is the hallmark of true children of God. No one can be said to truly follow the Lord without obedience to His commands. Three, God has set a time table for doing His things; therefore, His children are expected to patiently wait for His leading. Here is where many children of God miss it: not many can afford to wait for God in these days of fast-lanes and quick fix. For the Israelites, if the cloud

tarried for two days, or a month, or a year upon the tabernacle, they had to wait. We, as believers, cannot do less today. The people of God must wait for God's time. Four, in waiting for the cloud's guidance, comfort and convenience had to sometimes be sacrificed. For instance, if the cloud moved when an individual was sleeping or resting, he or she had to forfeit it. We should not wait until it is convenient for us to obey the Lord. Fifth, the children of Israel kept their gaze on the object of their leading. Believers should fix their eyes on the Lord, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Sixth, we have to be sensitive to follow each step of the way. Seventh, as long as they followed the Lord it was never recorded that they missed their way. We can never miss our way when we follow the Lord closely. He will surely lead us to heaven.

**THE PRIORITY OF OBEDIENCE** (Numbers 9:21-23; Exodus 40:37,38; Genesis 3:1-7; 1 Samuel 15:22; Acts 5:29).

The priority of obedience is here highlighted as the basis of the partnership between Israel and God. The people were strictly controlled by the cloud and pillar of fire on their journey as long as they followed. They understood and interpreted the movement of the cloud as a message to be obeyed. Every child of God must give priority to obedience as our relationship and partnership with the Lord can only be sustained by so doing.

**Question 6: *Why should we make obedience to God a priority in our lives?***

God's relationship with us and continued blessings on us are predicated upon our obedience to Him. We cannot continue to enjoy the blessings and benefits of heaven if we slid back into our former life of disobedience and rebellion. As long as Israel obeyed the Lord through the leading of the pillar of cloud and fire, they were safe. In the same way, we are safe in His hands if we obey and do His will. It was obedience to the Lord's command that brought Israel the victory at the Jericho wall, guaranteed their passage through the Red Sea and Jordan river and gave them victory over their enemies (Joshua 6:20; 24:11). Disobedience always brings problem to man.

Moses was loved by God because He always waited on Him, built according to pattern, and carried out God's orders to the letter (Exodus 39:32). Obedience is central to God's heart and ensures we partake of His blessings (Isaiah 1:19).

**Question 7: *What lessons can we learn from the obedience of the children of Israel to their leaders?***

Our leaders in the church are appointed by God as His representatives and they are to provide guidance as they are led of the Spirit of God. We should in turn obey them according to God's Word as our spiritual and physical blessing or otherwise rest on our obedience to the commandments of God.

## DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 John	5	Ezekiel	39
TUE	2 & 3 John		“ 40	
WED	Jude		“	41-42
THUR	Revelation 1-2		“ 43	
FRI	“	3-4	“	44
SAT	“	5-6	“	45
SUN	“	7-8	“	46-47

TEXT: Numbers 10:1-10

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRUMPET SOUND

MEMORY VERSE: “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journey of the camps” (**Numbers 10:1,2**).

Israel encamped at Sinai from the third month after they departed from Egypt. While they encamped at Sinai, the Lord gave them several instructions, commandments and ordinances both to guide them in their journey and to moderate their behaviour in Canaan. The commandment to make trumpets was the last concerning fabricated instruments before the people left Sinai.

**Question 1: Point out the challenges we can receive from the fact that Moses did not make the trumpets presumptuously?**

The Lord directed that silver trumpets should be made to be used for communicating with or giving public notices to the multitudes of the people. This further instruction was predicated upon their previous obedience in the preceding chapter that, “**at the commandment of the LORD they rested ... they journeyed**”

(Numbers 9:23). Obedience makes the believer to receive more instructions and blessings from the Lord. Believers need, therefore, to be in tune with the Lord at all times to be able to receive instructions from Him.

Moses' unbroken communion with God predisposed him to hear from Him before making the silver trumpets. Like Moses, we need to wait for God to lead us in great

or small matters. We need God's guidance in all areas of our lives so as to live fulfilled lives (Romans 8:14). Like He spoke to Moses at various times, He still speaks today to His obedient children. He speaks through various means such as His Word, inspired messages, vision, the Spirit's voice, and so forth.

**THE TRUMPETS AND THEIR SIGNIFICATION** (Numbers 10:1-7,9,10; Joel 2:15; Jeremiah 4:5; Numbers 31:6; Leviticus 23:24; Psalm 89:15).

The Lord commanded Moses to make two trumpets of silver which were to be used for several things.

**Question 2: *List the specific signals to be given by the trumpets?***

The trumpet(s) were used (i) for calling of assembly; when one trumpet was blown, it called the princes to gather while two trumpets blown signaled the call of the entire congregation to the door of the tabernacle (verses 4,7,8).

(ii) To start or continue their journey of the camps: blowing an alarm once signified that it was time to break camp and to march forward (verse 5). This first alarm alerted the camp of Judah on the eastern camp to fall in line. Blowing alarm the second time alerted the camp of Reuben on the south side to advance. The remaining two tribes, Ephraim on the west and Dan in the north were to take their turns when the alarm was blown the third and fourth times respectively. It is instructive to note that Moses was to be continually in tune with God so as to know when the alarms were to be blown.

(iii) For war: they blew an alarm with the trumpets (verse 9) to encourage the armies when they went out to battle. It helped them to remember God's promise of victory. God also promised to remember and save them from their enemies that oppressed them when they blew the alarm. Blowing the alarm is similar to praying for God's help in battles of life and to seek deliverance from oppression by the devil. God has assured believers that He will answer when they call (Jeremiah 33:3).

(iv) During feast times: in the day of gladness and solemn feasts. They were to blow the trumpets during solemn feasts, over sacrifices and offerings (verse 10). The Lord had earlier talked about the feast of trumpets (Leviticus 23:24) to be observed by the children of Israel. They used these trumpets to proclaim the beginning of the civil or sabbatical year when they observed their holy convocation (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1) similar to believers' retreat today. They also used trumpets to proclaim their jubilee when slaves regained their freedom at no cost (Leviticus 25:9,10). The proclamation of the jubilee with the trumpets finds fulfilment in Christ's declaration in Luke 4:18 concerning freedom from sin and other benefits to be enjoyed in the gospel. The manner in which the believer must proclaim it is akin to the trumpet sound.

**Question 3: *What do we learn from the distinctiveness of the sounds of the trumpets?***

The pitch of the trumpets' sound was high and loud enough for the whole congregation to hear so that all of them might make meaning out of it and act accordingly. The distinct sounds of the trumpet(s) were intended to make the message clear enough so that the congregation could hear and understand the type of sound, its purpose and the required response. This was similar to Ezra's reading of the law distinctly, giving the sense and causing the congregation to understand the Word of God (Nehemiah 8:8). It is all about communicating God's mind effectively to people to achieve a desired end. God's word should be preached and taught with high-performance electronic devices where these are necessary. The use of rusty microphones, unserviceable amplifiers and sneezing loudspeakers hinder free flow and rich reception of God's precious word. Musical and public address instruments must be handled in a way as to give distinct sounds with meaning to be able to make desired impact just as the silver trumpets in our passage were blown to produce different sounds.

Paul, the apostle, applied this Old Testament ordinance to correct the erroneous practice of believers in Corinth who were speaking in tongues among the congregation. He said, "**And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air**" (1 Corinthians 14:7-11). Believers do not preach with unknown or unintelligible language. The preaching of the gospel must be clear and unambiguous. The message must be presented in simple and understandable language so as to draw the appropriate response from the hearers.

It is pertinent to note that the use of trumpets was not to be limited to the wilderness. God says, "**and if ye go to war in your land against the enemy**". This was predictive of the future time when Israel would have possessed the Promised Land. We, thus, see Israel using trumpets even after they had taken Canaan. God is faithful to His promises (1 Corinthians 1:20). Today we use trumpets in the music ministry to honour God and edify believers.

**THE TRUMPETERS AND THE AUDIENCE** (Numbers 10:2,8; 1 Chronicles 15:24; 2 Chronicles 5:12; Isaiah 58:1; 27:13; 52:11).

***Question 4: Outline the qualifications those who want to serve God acceptably need to possess.***

The Lord gave this assignment to the sons of Aaron (Eleazer and Ithamar). But we see that the number of the priests later increased. We recall for instance, when the priests blew the trumpets and the people shouted, the walls of Jericho fell flat under the leadership of Joshua. We also see priests blowing trumpets before God in the time of David. The Levites were allowed to use the trumpets in God's service during the time of Solomon. The ministry of these trumpeters was to the Israelites. In the same way, the Lord is calling on believers today to be His heralds and to blow the trumpet of the gospel for all to come to Him. We are to cry aloud,

calling all sinners to come to Christ. We are to share the gospel with all sinners, backsliders, the oppressed, the rich, the poor, etc. It is as they come to Christ that they will find fulfilment in life.

Apart from using our voices to warn the wicked of divine judgment and urging them to turn to God, we need to offer praises to God. The ministry of singing is valuable in winning souls for God and in praising the beauty of His holiness. We must not forget that though God wants people to proclaim the gospel, He uses clean vessels for His work (Psalm 50:16-20). Sin disqualifies the most earnest “preacher” of the gospel. To serve God acceptably, a sinner must first repent and be reconciled to God and the believer must make his restitutions and consecrate his life to the Lord.

**THE FINAL TRUMPET SOUND FOR SAINTS’ GATHERING** (Numbers 10:3,4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 24:42,44; 5:8).

For New Testament believers, the most significant thing about the trumpets’ sound is the rapture. At rapture, the arch-angel will sound the trumpet and true believers in Christ will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The trumpets being used to summon the whole congregation to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation or call the princes to gather unto Moses symbolized the calling of sinners into the fold of God through gospel-preaching and calling of believers to the Lord in the air. The Lord promised before departing this world that He would be coming to take His saints so that they might be with Him where He is (John 14:1-3). Jesus is coming back again.

**Question 5: *What is the rapture and when is it being expected?***

The rapture is the catching away from the earth of all living saints and all who died in the Lord. The rapture will take place any moment from now.

The sounding of the trumpets was not controlled by the Israelites, not even by the priests. The Lord decided when the trumpets were blown. This situation made all

the Israelites to be ready at all times. This is similar to believers’ expectation of the sudden sound of the last trumpet of the Lord when He comes to take saints to heaven.

**Question 6: *How should true believers prepare for the rapture?***

No one knows the day and the hour of the rapture. But the scripture tells us it will happen suddenly: **“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”** (1 Corinthians 15:52). It behoves all believers to be watchful and be awake. At that instant, any stain of sin will deafen the ears to the sound.

Therefore, the Lord Himself counseled us to **“watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”** (Matthew 24:42,44). While the trumpets’ sound in the wilderness were for the living only, the dead in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will hear the trumpets’ sound at the rapture. Blessed are the people who are prepared for the trumpets’ sound.

God wants us to be prepared and ready always with constant *prayer* (Matthew 26:41; Luke 21:36); consistent *purity* (Ezekiel 33:12,13; Isaiah 35:8; Psalm 15:1-5; 24:3,4; Acts 24:16) and *productive service* (Luke 19:13; John 20:21; Matthew 28:19,20; 2 Timothy 3:17; Titus 2:14).

In conclusion, the significance of the trumpets' sound – calling/inviting people to fellowship, guidance for heaven-bound pilgrims, proclamation of the gospel message in unambiguous language, spiritual warfare, prayer/praise and spiritual alertness for the rapture of saints – bring responsibilities on true believers to live a pure lifestyle, serve God faithfully and prepare to meet the Lord. But when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and the saints take their eternal flight through the air, where will you be?

Lesson 370

## CHRIST FORGIVES SIN

MEMORY VERSE: “She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (**John 8:11**).

TEXT: John 8:1-11

In the previous chapter, we learnt of the continuous emboldened opposition of the Jewish religious leaders to the ministry of Jesus. They had accused Him severally of being possessed with a devil, and thus, sought for an opportunity to kill Him (John 7:19,20). In spite of such stiff opposition, Christ remained committed to the ministry God had committed into His hand. His commitment to the Father's will explains His action of going to the temple to preach and teach the people “**early in the morning**” after the feast of Tabernacles where He faced opposition. Though the feast had just ended and others would feel it was time to go on vacation, He remained focused, determined and committed to His Father's business. He once told His disciples, “**My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work**” (John 4:34). So long as there was yet a soul to be saved, He would not slack on His line of duty.

**Question 1: *What challenge do we receive from Christ's commitment to His calling?***

From the attitude of Jesus to His calling, we learn that believers should not seek repose while the harvest of souls remains unfinished. We must be busy for the Master and win souls while we have opportunity. Therefore, in this time of spiritual harvest, no true believer should be idle. **“He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame”** (Proverbs 10:5). We must preach the word and labour for the Master **“in season and out of season.”** But while preaching the word, we must emphasize the forgiveness and pardon which Christ offers to all sincere seekers who come to Him, and not take after the scribes and Pharisees who did not know the highway that leads to the heavenly city.

**ACCUSATION AND TEMPTING INQUIRY OF RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITES** (John 8:1-6; Matthew 19:3; 22:16-18; Mark 8:11;10:2-6; Luke 10:25; 11:53; 20:20-23; 1 Corinthians 10:9).

While Jesus taught the people, the scribes and Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in adultery. In the real sense, they did not bring the woman before the Lord for official trial but to get the opinion of Christ on the Law of Moses. In other words, it was a trap set by the religious leaders. If Jesus had declared that she was guilty and allowed them to stone her, they would have accused Him before the Roman government for inciting murder. And if He had acquitted her on the grounds of mercy, they would have branded Him a blasphemous fellow who did not accept the position of the Mosaic Law. These religious bigots in an attempt to entrap the Lord, flouted the law by arresting the woman without the man against the directive of the Law.

One thing that stands out here is the hypocrisy of self-righteous, religious people. Though the scribes and Pharisees were not free from sin, they were zealous in bringing another sinner to trial. Their action would have been commendable had they dealt with the sins in their lives. All religious people must therefore lay aside every self-righteous and hypocritical attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, and deal with the sins in their lives so that they will be qualified to deal with sin in other people's lives.

The subtle approach of these religious hypocrites made them look innocent. They came gilded over with a facade of sanctity, as if they were great lovers of chastity, and haters of uncleanness. One that had not been familiar with their lifestyle of hypocrisy would wrongly conclude that they were holy, honest and conscientious. But Christ knew their ulterior motives. Though they had a beautiful religious appearance, they lacked corresponding godly character. They had beautiful outward form of religion without fruits of righteousness. This is vain before God as their outward righteousness did not measure up to God's standard and so incurred the Lord's rebuke. Like the Pharisees, all false professors of religion who do not possess corresponding Christian character will incur the wrath of God except they repent.

**Question 2: Name religious activities that make people think they are of God?**

One may know about the privileges, promises and position that abound in Christ like the scribes and Pharisees knew about the Decalogue, and yet, not be part of the body of Christ. It is not everyone who identifies with Christianity that is a member of the body of Christ. The Jews supposed that they were all God's people simply because they were natural descendants of Abraham and because of their circumcision. In the

same way today, many people think they are part of the body of Christ because of: (i) water baptism. (ii) The ceremony of confirmation. (iii) Regular church attendance. (iv) Having a name in the church register. (v) Partaking in the Holy Communion. (vi) Tithing, offerings, almsgiving, etc. (vii) Involvement in charitable, social and philanthropic work. (viii) Being a good neighbour. (ix) Living a respectable, responsible life that never hurts others. (x) Fighting for justice and the cause of the poor.

Though the woman deserved the capital punishment which the Law prescribed for the sin of adultery (which is as grievous as any other sin), the Lord did not excuse her sin. He only bid her accusers look inward and examine their consciences to see if they were not equally guilty of the same or even greater sin. It is a false zeal to have an eagle-eye on others' fault but turning a blind eye to one's faults. Some people, who are wicked themselves, are often most skillful in spying out other people's faults and failings.

**UNIVERSALITY OF SIN AND THE HELPLESSNESS OF MAN** (John 8:7-9; Romans 3:23; 5:12-17; Psalm 51:5; Job 14:14; Mark 7:21-23; Ephesians 2:1).

The story of this woman is an awful testimony to the enslaving power of sin. The fact that she could go into sin soon after the feast of Tabernacles, a period of sober reflection and self-humiliation reveals that sin is a terrible slave master. Besides, her story reminds us that sin is universal. Man was created in the image of God – righteous and holy – but since the Fall, sin has rendered sinners sinful, defiled, deformed, and subject to God's wrath and condemnation. Many people do not like to address the issue of sin. A great barrier between man and God, sin pervades the universe. It compares to the venom of a snake and the stench of a corpse. Sin can be described as missing the mark of God's high standard of acceptable thoughts, deeds and words; as going the opposite of God's way. One may hit the mark of man's good moral standard and yet be a sinner before God. Those who have not tasted of Christ's finished work of atonement do not have the power to go against the trend of the world because sinners are victims of vile desires. They have no capacity to walk contrary to the world's sinful system because they are under the direct influence of Satan.

**Question 3: *Mention some of the effects of sin on a sinner?***

Sin has strong effects. (i) Sin is defiling; it has a polluting effect. It is filthy, staining the souls of men, blotting out God's image. (ii) Sinful acts alienate from the life of God. (iii) Sin deadens the conscience. (iv) Sin is a disease which attacks its victim imperceptibly and then overpowers and dominates the will, mind and affection. It brings the sinner under the control of Satan and makes him an object of God's infinite wrath, subjects him to all miseries of life and separates him from God and consequently damns his soul in hell for ever.

The sinner is on the wide and broad road where multitudes tread in self-will and self-gratification. It is wide because those in it do not recognise restraints. It is broad because it is an easy road to the flesh – it does not require repentance, restitution or restraint. It is easy because it is all downhill. It is a crowded road: all are admitted there by birth. It is a deceptive road as many do not know the end of it. Unfortunately, it is a fatal road: it leads to eternal destruction. Pleasant as it may seem to the flesh and popular as it may seem to the masses, it ends in unalterable doom.

**Question 4: *What lesson do we learn from the woman's experience?***

The degradation that sin brings upon its victims is evident in the story of the woman. Because of sin, she lost her dignity; she became a subject of public ridicule. Likewise, sooner or later sin will bring its victims to open shame. Sinners should repent now before it is too late. Satan may present sin as harmless, attractive, popular, desirable and pleasurable. But God's word remains unchanging: the wages of sin is death. The Bible commands everyone – single or married – to flee immorality, namely, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lewdness, masturbation and impure desires (1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:3; 2 Timothy 2:22).

The response of Christ to the tempting question of the religious leaders is very instructive. One, His answer reinforces the fact that He did not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. Two, there is need for the gift of discernment so as to proffer appropriate solution to problems. Three, Christ's response reveals that He is the Defender of the weak and the Restorer of the fallen. Jesus Christ makes it abundantly clear that more than man-made conditions will be required to be fulfilled before sin can be forgiven.

**FORGIVENESS OF CONTRITE, PENITENT SINNERS** (John 8:10,11; John 3:3-6; Matthew 18:3; Acts 3:19,26; James 5:19,20; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 2:3; Psalm 51:1-8).

The woman knew the position of the law on the sin of adultery and the fact that she was guilty. She did not engage in self-defence or rationalization of her sin. She knew that she deserved whatever verdict Christ would determine against her. She resigned to her fate but to her surprise, Christ's offer of salvation became hers. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for our redemption, forgiveness and salvation. He gave His life and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, for the removal of our guilt, for the cancellation of our condemnation, and the erasure of the enmity between God and us. That Jesus died for our sins to be forgiven should make the sinner see the need to repent and believe in Him whose death brought about pardon, salvation and reconciliation with God. By His death, condemnation and eternal judgment awaiting sinners and backsliders who repent of their sins are taken away. Christ's sacrifice is universal: it is for the salvation of all men. However, the sinner who hears the gospel must repent and believe if he is to partake of the blessings procured by Christ's sacrifice.

While God is ready to forgive every sin, the sinner must show readiness to forsake his sin by his contrition and penitence. It is not enough to come to make confession when he is not willing to dismantle the structure of sin that he has built in his heart and abode.

#### **Question 5: *How can a sinner escape sin and enter the kingdom of God?***

Jesus came so that those who were stained and ruined by sin will be redeemed and cleansed, saved and made alive. Christ declares, "**Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28). To come to Christ means that the sinner or backslider turns his back on the world and forsake all cherished sins and turn to Christ. The sinner who comes to Christ for salvation must forsake all sinful pleasures and worldly companions and receive Him as Saviour and Lord.

The Lord told the people to strive to enter. Becoming a Christian is more than raising hands in a meeting or signing a decision card. It is by repentance – severing oneself from sin and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by radically abandoning the broad road. It is turning around from sin and self-pleasing lifestyle unto holy living. It is not enough, therefore, to hear the word of God; effort must be made deliberately to enter through the straight gate. The straight gate is the only avenue of admittance into the way that leads unto life; and all who do not enter by it are eternally barred from the presence of God.

There are some practical steps which a sinner must take if he is to be saved. The sinner must (i) acknowledge his sins (1 John 1:9). (ii) Repent and confess his sins to God (Act 3:19,21; Romans 10:9,10). (iii) Forsake his sins (Proverbs 28:13). And (iv) receive Christ as his Saviour.

**RIGHTEOUSNESS: EVIDENCE OF GENUINE CONVERSION** (John 8:11; 5:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17,21; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:6-9; Ephesians 2:8-12).

**“She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”.**

#### **Question 6: *How can a genuine convert be identified?***

The evidence of grace in a life is the righteousness it brings into it. As soon as a sinner is saved, the evidence is the manifestation of righteousness in him. Where there is the new birth experience, there must be visible evidence of righteousness. God’s standard does not change. Therefore, anyone who lays claim to being born again but has no evidence to back up his claim is treading the path of self-delusion. Even sinners know that **“if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”** (2 Corinthians 5:17). Wherever there is a new birth experience, there is (i) forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:18; Luke 7:48,50). This is the first thing God does for the new believer. It is God, through His Spirit, who forgives sins and gives assurance of salvation; it is not a matter for the individual to assume he has been forgiven. There must be the witness of the Spirit within the person who is forgiven.

(ii) Freedom from sin (John 8:32,36; 5:14; 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:34; 1 John 3:5-9; 5:4,18). Those who are not free from the activities of the flesh and the power of sin are either yet to be saved or have backsliden. The evidence of genuine salvation and grace in a life is the cessation of sin. Having been forgiven, the individual is to **“go and sin no more”**. Those who ask for forgiveness of sin every time do so either because they have not experienced freedom from sin or they have no assurance of salvation. When Christ comes into our life, He destroys sin. This is why those who are born of God do not have the desire or plan to go into sin. (iii) Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). The works of the flesh are absent in the lives of those who are truly converted. They bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Grace does not condone sin; God forgives sin because of His mercy. The mercy of God makes Him not to give us the punishment we deserved while grace makes Him to give us what we did not deserve. Mercy holds back God’s judgment; grace releases His forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. Mercy withholds wrath; grace releases forgiveness. Mercy pities us; grace pardons us. Grace produces good works in us. It is important to stress that we are saved, not by good works, but unto good works. Saving faith is not only fruitful but also abounds in good works; it enables the possessors of grace to endure trials, resist the devil and overcome the world. It enables us to follow

Him. It makes us to not just claim the promises of God but to submit our lives to Him and to obey His precepts.

Christ's choice of words is very instructive. He did not tell the forgiven adulteress, 'Go, and commit adultery no more'; but, "**Go, and sin no more**". What this implies is that she was not only to abstain from the sin that got her into trouble but from every sin. Paul, the apostle, adds by saying "**Abstain from all appearance of evil**" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). True believers are new creatures who will never prefer sin to holiness, self to Christ or the world to God.

## Lesson 371

### THE DIVINE SONSHIP OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**).

TEXT: John 8:12-59

Christ's teaching effort in the temple had been rudely interrupted by the holier-than-thou attitude of the Pharisees who brought a woman caught in the act of adultery in our last study. And having effectively shamed them because of their hypocrisy, He resumed His important assignment of preaching and teaching. The Lord would not

allow the actions of the scribes and Pharisees distract His focus from teaching the people. As servants and ministers of the Lord, we should not permit the actions of others shift our emphasis from what is important and of eternal value. In our gospel outreaches, we should stay focused and not be carried away by questions or arguments that lead away from the important subject of repentance and faith in Christ.

Our study focuses on the controversy between the Jews and Christ about His origin and divinity. Jewish leaders have been uncomfortable with His claim to being the Son of the living God. Yet, the gospel according to John itself testifies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 20:31). The book presents Christ as the incarnate Word and the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18). These references refer to the period of Christ's public ministry to the Jews where He gives us a personal witness to His divine origin and Sonship. In the course of answering their questions, He sheds more light on His relationship with the Father, His deity and eternity.

**DEFINITE TRUTHS ABOUT CHRIST'S DIVINITY** (John 8:12-29; Matthew 3:17; John 1:1,2,14; 10:30; Romans 1:3,4; Hebrews 1:1-3).

The divine Sonship of Jesus Christ is a core teaching of the Christian faith. The truth it conveys forms a central point of the foundation of Christianity and the veracity of the salvation that God offers to the world. If Jesus were not God's only begotten Son; if He were not the sinless second Personality of the Godhead, then His death on the cross would have served no redemptive purpose. Then, He would be regarded as any other natural man, conceived and born in sin and unqualified to save sinners.

Therefore, our understanding of Christ as the Son of God is critical to the validity of our faith and the genuineness of our claim to salvation which comes only through His name.

Jesus declared to the people: **"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"** (John 8:12).

**Question 1: What does Jesus mean by referring to Himself as the light of the world?**

In the discourse that followed, Jesus lays claim to His deity and declares Himself as the only Source of true spiritual illumination and fountain of spiritual understanding. Without Him, all is darkness, confusion and chaos. Only through Jesus can men be free from the power of the darkness of this world and have access to the light that lightens everyone that comes into the world.

The scribes and Pharisees could not understand Christ because they were carnal while Christ's words are spiritual (John 6:63; 1 Corinthians 2:14). The unconverted man cannot understand the things of God because **"the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"** (2 Corinthians 4:4). Until a sinner is converted, he or she cannot have the light of life but would continue to stumble at the truth of the Scripture.

In addition to being the Light of the world, Jesus pointed to Himself as **"I am..."**, an expression that was associated with God in the Old Testament, thus, confirming His deity (Exodus 3:14). He said: **"I am the bread of life"** (John 6:35); **"I am the door of the sheep"** (John 10:7); **"I am the good shepherd"** (John 10:11); **"I am the resurrection, and the life"** (John 11:25); **"I am the way, the truth, and the life"** (John 14:6); **"I am the true vine"** (John 15:1).

The Pharisees attacked Jesus for making such claims about Himself. They said: **“Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true”** (John 8:13). However, Jesus gave them three reasons why His record about Himself is true. One, because of His divine direction. He said: **“I know whence I came and whither I go...”** (John 8:14). Unlike other so-called religious leaders who were not sure of where they were coming from or going, Jesus was categorical about His claim. Two, because of His divine relationship with His Father. He said: **“... I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me”** (John 8:16). Three, because of His witness and His Father’s. The Mosaic law, which the Pharisees believed, accepted the testimony of two or three witnesses as a confirmation of truth in any matter (Deuteronomy 17:6). Jesus gave witness to His divine personality as the Son of God. God also bore testimony to this through a direct message from heaven (John 8:42; Matthew 3:17).

### **Question 2: *What is the danger of disbelieving Jesus as the Son of God?***

It is instructive to mention that despite the evidence of the deity of Christ, the Pharisees chose to be skeptical by asking: **“Where is thy Father?”** (verse 19) and, **“Who art thou”** (verse 25). Christ’s answer to the questions is a warning to us on the danger of unbelief. However, people’s refusal to believe does not change the truth that Jesus is from heaven (John 8:24). Doubters, skeptics and unbelievers who refuse to accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord also risk dying in their sins and going into eternity without hope.

**FREEDOM THROUGH CHRIST** (John 8:30-36; 1 John 3:8; Luke 10:17-20; Romans 6:14; 7:24,25; 8:1,2; 1 John 5:18).

Although the Pharisees manifested unbelief, some people still believed in Christ. This had always been the trend, that some will believe and others will not (John 12:42; Acts 17:4; 28:24). This should be an encouragement to preachers of the Word that even in the midst of oppositions and open display of unbelief, the word of God should still be preached because God has other sheep which He must bring (John 10:16).

### **Question 3: *How is a true disciple of Jesus Christ known?***

Jesus made it clear to the Jews who believed in Him that mere mental assent or superficial belief in Him as the Son of God is not enough to make someone His disciple. The condition and mark of true discipleship is continuation in God’s word. **“... if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31,32,36). Continuity in the word of Christ will eventually result into freedom and deliverance from sin, Satan, the world and the flesh.

The response of the Jews to the subject of being set free through the knowledge of the truth indicates that the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit. Moreover, the Jews understood the issue of bondage only from the physical perspective.

However, from the spiritual angle, anyone who commits sin is a servant of sin and needs to be set free (John 8:34; 1 John 3:8). A sinner is in bondage to Satan no matter his religious, political, socio-economic background, status and present church affiliation. Those who claim to have connection with religious leaders but live in sin

should repent in order to avoid God's judgment. As Abraham could not save any of the Jews, neither would any religious leaders save their followers.

**DIVINE SONSHIP OF CHRIST CHALLENGED** (John 8:37-50; Luke 3:22; 22:69,70; John 1:18,34-36; Mark 15:39; John 3:16; 5:20-23; 6:68,69; 11:27)

**Question 4: *Why did Jesus regard Satan as the father of the Jews in this passage?***

Jesus recognized that the Pharisees and the Jews, in general, were the descendants of Abraham's spiritual standing with God. Nevertheless, in His conversation with them, He drew a clear line of demarcation between His own Father and Satan their own father. Jesus maintained that He spoke what He has seen with His Father, while the Pharisees lived by the dictates of their own father, the devil. The fact of the matter, according to Jesus, was that a child will naturally exhibit the character traits of his father. He said: "**Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do...**" (John 8:44).

Apart from alluding to what Jesus had seen with the Father, He gave other reasons to substantiate the fact that His own Father is God.

**Question 5: *Give reasons why Jesus referred to God as His Father?***

One, Jesus spoke about the Father always being with Him because He was sent by Him. Two, apart from His own testimony about Himself, the Father also bore testimony of His Sonship.

Three, unlike His hearers who were earthly, Jesus is from above. Four, all He did were as a result of what He was taught by His Father (verse 28). Five, the presence of His Father with Him was because He always did those things that pleased His Father (verse 29). Six, the Father was the Source of His message. Seven, He told them the truth which He had heard from His Father (verse 40). Eight, He did not come to the world on His own but the Father sent Him to accomplish the work of redemption (verse 42). Nine, He lived a sinless life that nobody could convict Him of sin (verse 46). Ten, He honoured and glorified the Father. He did not seek His own glory in anything He did (verses 49,50). Eleven, the honour He had came from His Father (verse 54).

The challenge to believers today is that as children of God, we should pattern our life after Christ. As Jesus Christ lived a life of holiness and sought only God's honour and glory, so must we do today. The command to every true believer is to be perfect as his heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48).

**Question 6: *How can we identify a child of the devil and what can he do to become a child of God?***

When Jesus distinguished His Father from that of the Pharisees, they understood the implication and quickly reacted. They maintained that since Abraham was their father by physical descent, God was also their Father. However, Jesus categorically told them that the devil was their father. This implies that whoever commits sin is not only a servant of sin and a sinner, he is also a child of the devil (John 8:34; 1 John 3:8).

Many people today, like the Pharisees, claim that they are children of God because they pray and fast, pay tithe, give offering, sing in the choir, work as ushers, bear Christian names, are baptized in water, or have gone to Jerusalem on holy pilgrimage, but those activities are nothing if such people still exhibit the nature and characteristics of Satan. Anyone who lusts, hates, steals, lies, fights, cheats, deceives, commits immorality, smokes, drinks and practises other forms of evil, belongs to the devil. The good news today is that sinners can be forgiven their sins and become children of God if they repent.

**THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST** (John 8:51-59; Luke 22:69,70; John 10:37,38; 12:45; Colossians 1:13-17).

At the climax of the discourse, Jesus declared to His audience that any man who kept His saying would not see death (verse 51). To this, the Jews felt that Jesus was ascribing too much to Himself since respected patriarchs like Abraham and the prophets of old all died despite their spiritual attainment. They were of the view that if Abraham and the prophets died Jesus had no basis for saying that anyone who believed in Him would not die. But Christ's claims were meant to make the Jews realize that He is the Messiah and the Saviour of the world. He wanted to establish His divinity. Christ did not give a direct answer to their question but out of humility and wisdom told them: "**If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me...**" (John 8:54).

**Question 7: *What lessons can we learn from Christ's response to the question regarding His status?***

We should never compete for position, recognition or honour. God is the only one who promotes and He has His own way of doing it. A true child of God waits for the honour that comes from God alone at His own time. Blowing our own trumpet about our achievements in life is not modest. It is the honour that comes from God alone that we should seek. "**For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but who the Lord commendeth**" (2 Corinthians 10:18). Like Christ, the life of a true child of God should be characterized by humility.

As Jesus was rounding off His conversation with the Pharisees, He seemed to have offended them more when He declared: "**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad**" (John 8:56). To the Jews, this was blasphemy by someone who had not been born when Abraham died. Christ said this to further affirm that He had been from the beginning. He is immortal, invisible, eternal, infinite in existence. Jesus has no beginning and no ending. Before Him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3).

Jesus is not just the Son of God, He is God. Of His divinity and deity, He said: "**I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty**" (Revelation 1:8). A true understanding of the divine Sonship of Christ should strengthen our faith and embolden us to declare Him everywhere as Lord, Master and Saviour of the whole world. He is the Sovereign and Eternal God who alone exist of Himself and lives for ever and ever.

## CHRIST HEALS A BLIND MAN

MEMORY VERSE: “And He said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, sent). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing” (**John 9:7**).

TEXT: John 9:1-41

The Lord Jesus continues His journey after the treasury discourse having divinely escaped the murderous attempt on His life at the temple. This was by the spiritually proud and conceited Jews who felt that their ancestral link with Abraham was enough to qualify them as God’s children.

Along the way, Jesus saw a man that was born blind. The disciples wanted to know who was responsible for the man’s predicament, his parent or the man himself. While stating that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, He used the opportunity to restate His mission on earth to be the light of the world. Having cleared the disciples’ mind on the source of the man’s problem, He went further to demonstrate His omnipotence by healing the blind man. **“For with God nothing shall be impossible”**.

*Question 1: What is the consequence of manifesting unbelief in Jesus?*

Christ Jesus has the power to heal all kinds of diseases and deformities. As He restored the man’s sight, He still give spiritual and physical sight to all who come to Him. He also used the occasion of the healing of the blind man to further warn the Jews of the consequences of their sins, if they do not believe in Him as the Saviour, they would be damned. What a great warning to those who will not believe in Jesus as their Saviour. Their damnation is inescapable (John 3:8).

**CHRIST’S COMMITMENT TO MAN’S TOTAL WELFARE** (John 9:1-7; Luke 4:18,19; Isaiah 53:4,5; Jeremiah 32:27; Matthew 4:23-25; 9:35).

This chapter focuses on one of the many miracles of Jesus – the healing of the blind man. It is the monumental testimony of God’s unchanging power. Long-standing problems, incurable diseases, family knotty issues, insurmountable mountains, mysterious and negative circumstances, congenital health complications and all other situations over which men generally give up in despair are cured when Jesus steps in. The Bible declares, **“Behold I am the LORD, the GOD of all flesh, is there anything too hard for me?”** (Jeremiah 32:27). None should ever feel that his situation is so bad that there is no hope of a miracle. God is still in the business of healing and deliverance today. Jesus still cares even when we experience inexplicable problems or pains in life.

The physiological problems of man and other related human needs are opportunities for God to manifest His power and show that things that are impossible with men are possible with God. Therefore, every perplexing situation should be brought to the Lord for He alone **“knoweth all things”** (John 3:20). It is a common knowledge among the disciples that sin brings terrible consequences. It was sin that drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). Sin made the children of Israel go into captivity. But in the case of this man, Jesus emphasized a different thing. **“Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him”** (John 9:3).

**Question 2: What should be a believer’s attitude to sicknesses that defy medical solutions?**

Taking the case in our study as an example, sicknesses and diseases that defy medical solution provide the Lord with an opportunity to demonstrate His authority over all the problems that plague men and women. Therefore, sick believers should first, put their faith in God for healing. Second, the believer should pray and expect the miraculous intervention of God. However, as the sick seek for healing they should examine themselves for the presence of any sin and make their confession where necessary before they pray for healing (James 5:14-16).

**Question 4: How should a believer react to confrontation that emanates from sharing his testimonies with unbelievers?**

Believers should be composed and courageous when faced with confrontation from skeptics. It should be borne in mind that God in His wisdom often allows dissenting voices to defeat enemies of the gospel. He often takes the wise in their craftiness in order to fulfill His plan and purpose. God has often turned enemies of the gospel into facilitators of the same message they oppose. He has also turned an avowed persecutor of God's people into a strong preacher of the word of God (e.g. the case of Paul the Apostle). Even in Jesus' days, there were men like Joseph, Gamaliel, and Nicodemus who were useful tools for the gospel. Threats, hatred and plans of those who may be occupying positions of authority against God's people will all fizzle into nothingness when God decides to turn their ploys and sinister schemes into His instruments for blessing and victory of His elect.

**Question 5: Why do people today find it difficult to come out of their dead religion in spite of revealed truth in the scripture?**

The blind man who was healed by Jesus was cast out of the temple by the Pharisees. His excommunication did not affect him in any way. This courage of the man contradicts the cowardice of his parents who preferred to be anonymous on the miraculous act of the Lord Jesus Christ. Two reasons could be advanced for their cowardly act: (i) fear of man; and (ii) fear of excommunication from the Synagogue. They felt that if they swarm against the tide of opinion, particularly of the religious leaders, they would be excommunicated. As believers, we are to have the "**faith of our Lord Jesus**", not the fear of man as "**the fear of man bringeth a snare**" (Proverbs 29:25).

The loss of privilege, parental or spouse's affection or friendly love should not make us to deny Jesus for "**whosoever, therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven**" (Matthew 10:32,33). We should not be afraid or hesitate to leave an assembly where the truth is not taught.

**Question 3: What lesson do we learn from the way Jesus was zealous about the work of the Father?**

Having cleared the issue of sin as not being responsible for the man's blindness, the Lord says, "**I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the**

**night cometh, when no man can work”** (John 9:4). The Lord talks about the works that God the Father has sent Him to do: preaching, teaching and healing (Matthew 9:35). The work of healing was at hand presently. He, therefore, made clay of spittle and anointed the eyes of the man with it, telling him to “**Go and wash in the pool of Siloam**” (verse 7). The man went and did as the Lord had said and came back seeing.

The zeal that the Lord demonstrated here is a great lesson for all. We should be prompt to serve the Lord whether it is convenient or not (2 Timothy 4:2). We should demonstrate uncommon zeal as Christians in fulfilling this three-fold ministry of Christ: preaching, teaching and healing.

### **CONFRONTATION BY THE JEWS AND CONFIRMATION OF THE BLIND MAN’S HEALING** (John 9:8-34; 8:33-41).

The Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the rabbinical rules of the Sabbath though His act had always been in perfect harmony with the spirit and letter of the Mosaic Law. The Lord healed on the Sabbath day to demonstrate the triumph of grace over the law and to remind us that He was indeed the Lord of the Sabbath. The Pharisees, who held tenaciously to the letters of the law, were aggrieved and in their blindness accused Him of desecrating the Sabbath. Indeed, they had omitted the weightier matters of the law while trying to keep the tradition of elders. “**Therefore said some of the Pharisees, this man is not of God, because He keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said, how can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them**” (John 9:16).

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**CONVERSION OF THE BLIND MAN** (John 9:35-41; Matthew 8:3; 21:31; Luke 7:29; 7:47; 8:11; 15:2; 23:43).

When the Pharisees saw that they could not make the man to deny the Lord, they cast him out. Jesus sought for him when He knew he had been cast out. Identification of the Lord with the excommunicated man is quite instructive to all believers today. Believers who are suffering similar persecution as the blind man who received healing should know that when their parents forsake them, "**then the Lord will take [them] up**" (Psalm 27:10). Besides, those who have been in the Lord should seek out the young converts who are being persecuted and teach them on the supremacy of eternal benefit to physical blessing. From this text, we can infer that Jesus knows all that we are passing through individually. The Lord is our helper in the time of trouble. "**So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man can do to me**" (Hebrew 13:6).

After the Lord had found the man, He revealed Himself to him as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. The man believed and worshipped Him. Here then is a pattern for believers and preachers of all ages. The Lord, in doing the work of Him that sent Him, healed and preached salvation to the man, and he experienced both. This teaches that while we are concerned with the physical condition of the sick, we should not neglect their salvation as part of the works of Christ. Secondly, our emphasis should not be on the physical, temporal things to the neglect of the spiritual needs of the people. Healing is a temporal blessing while salvation has eternal value.

#### **Question 6: *What fate awaits those who reject Jesus?***

In an apparent reference to the Jews who have seen His work and would not believe Him, the Lord said, "**For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind**" (John 9:39).

This is a denunciation of the willfully ignorant Jews. He had come to save them. They "**heard His words**" and saw "**His miracles**", yet, they rejected Him. Therefore, their sins remained. Actually, Isaiah had prophesied **about the willful ignorance of the Jews (Isaiah 6:9,10)**. **To remain willfully ignorant is to court the judgment of God. But sinners and backsliders still have the opportunity to receive the salvation of the Lord if they will repent of their sins and receive Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Lord is gracious, "good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Psalm 86:5).**

## Lesson 373

# JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

MEMORY VERSE: "I am the good Shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine" (John 10:14).

TEXT: John 10:1-42

In our last study, the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked the Jewish religious leaders for their blindness and ignorance of spiritual things in spite of their acclaimed knowledge of the law. In actual fact, the reprimand lies in the fact that they were actually empty of grace which leads to salvation. Christ, in this chapter, convinces them that they were blind leaders though they considered themselves as guides and teachers of the people. In contrast, He declares to them that He is the Good Shepherd who is ready to sacrifice His safety for the protection of the sheep and His life for their salvation. He uses the relationship between a shepherd and the sheep to explain deep and practical eternal truths about Himself and His followers.

**THE SHEEPFOLD AND THE GOOD SHEPHERD** (John 10:1-18; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:1-31; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4)

The responsibilities of a shepherd in the Middle East were very burdensome. In the morning, he led the flock from the pen to the spot where they were to be pastured. He watched and cared for them all day, ensuring that none of the sheep strayed, and if any did, he sought for it diligently till he found and brought it back. Knowing that in those lands sheep required to be supplied regularly with water, and the shepherd has to guide them either to some running stream or to wells dug in the wilderness and furnished with troughs. At night, the sheep were often gathered into a sheep pen to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The shepherd often slept in the pen to protect the sheep. Just as the shepherd cared for the sheep, Jesus, the Good Shepherd cares for His flock. Ezekiel, prophesying about His coming as the Messiah, called Him, a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

In the Old Testament, God compared His people who had covenant relationship with Him to His sheepfold. He referred to their spiritual leaders, prophets, teachers and priests as shepherds or pastors of His people (Psalm 78:52; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1; Ezekiel 34:30-31; Zechariah 9:16). In the same vein the redeemed people of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, in the New Testament, constitute the flock of God (Luke 12:32; Acts 20:28,29; 1 Peter 5:1,2). Jesus asserted that anyone who refuses to enter into the sheepfold by the door but climbs in some other way, is a thief and robber (John 10:1).

**Question 1: *Mention the characteristics and activities of thieves and robbers within God's sheepfold today?***

Today, the story is not any different as there are still thieves and robbers within the sheepfold. A thief is one who silently and secretly takes away other people's property, and a robber is one who takes away other people's property by violent means. All those in position of leadership in churches who are influenced not by love for Christ but motivated by the benefits of the office, ambition, love of power, wealth or ease; those who come, not to promote the welfare of the church, but their own economic interests, can justly be described as thieves and robbers. It is noteworthy that in the

contemporary days, a lot of pastors, preachers and religious leaders who profess to lead the flock of God are robbers and hirelings. This is because they exploit the sheep for material gains instead of ministering to their needs. Such are false preachers who confuse people rather than comfort them, exploit rather than edify them, lord over rather than lead them aright, pollute rather than purify them. The activities of the hireling is such that he does all he has to do to earn his monthly wage. Any activities which he is sure not to derive some form of personal benefits are carefully avoided.

**Question 2: *Mention the characteristics of Jesus the Good Shepherd that should make you entrust your life into His hand?***

In the sheepfold, the shepherd functions as both the gate and the protector-gatekeeper. In the same way, Jesus is the gate or way to God's salvation. He offers access to the believer's safety and security. He is the believer's protector. Some other characteristics of Jesus as the Good Shepherd are revealed in the passage: (i) He is the Shepherd who calls His own sheep by name; and leads them to green pastures (verses 3,4). (ii) He gives His life for the sheep (verse 11). (iii) He knows His sheep and He is known by His sheep (verse 4). (iv) He brings the sheep together under one fold and one Shepherd (verse 16).

Besides, David, in the Shepherd's Psalm, that is, twenty-third Psalm, prophesied of the coming of Jesus Christ. Practically, this prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus Christ because all the traits of the shepherd of the sheep described in the Psalm stand out clearly. The True and Good Shepherd does so much for the comfort and safety of the sheep. Amongst others, He (i) provides for the sheep (Psalm 23:1). (ii) Feeds the sheep with green pastures (Psalm 23:2). (iii) Leads them beside the still waters (Psalm 23:2). (iv) Restores the soul of the sheep (Psalm 23:3). (v) Leads the sheep in the path of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). (vi) Protects and comforts the sheep (Psalm 23:4). (vii) Promotes the sheep in the presence of enemies (Psalm 23:5). (viii) Prepares super-abundant blessings for the sheep (Psalm 23:5). (ix) Preserves the sheep in the house of the Lord for ever (Psalm 23:6).

**Question 3: *What should be the responsibilities of believers as the flock of Christ?***

The goodness, greatness and sacrifice of Christ should elicit a response of appreciation from His sheep. In fact, His care and protection lay a weight of responsibility on believers as sheep in the fold. One, knowing that they have a Shepherd who is always ready to sacrifice anything for their comfort, believers do not have any moral right to stray away from the sheepfold. There may be some distracting elements around the believer but bearing in mind what His Good Shepherd has done and still willing to do, the believer should abide in Him. Two, believers in Christ should constantly seek to hear the voice of their Good Shepherd, learn to understand Him when He speaks and closely follow Him. Hearing the voice of the Shepherd is an act which every believer should endeavour to perfect in their daily walk with God. Three, the strange voices of the world and sin which lead astray are always there, believers must be watchful and avoid them. Four, believers should, like the Good Shepherd, be involved in the service of helping to bring other sheep outside the sheepfold back into the fold. Six, leaders, as under-shepherds, should pray to be more Christlike in their care and concern for the sheep in their flock (Acts 20:28,29; 1 Peter 5:15).

**CONDITION OF SECURITY IN CHRIST, THE GOOD SHEPHERD** (John 10:19-31; John 6:59-71; Romans 8:35-39).

Christ's revelation about the religious leaders being thieves, robbers and hirelings as contrasted with His being the Good Shepherd raised a lot of dust among His Jewish audience. Some of His hearers flagrantly disbelieved His teachings and blasphemed by saying that He had a devil. But that could not dissuade Christ from the work He has been called to. This should be an encouraging truth for soul-winners and faithful preachers of the gospel. Though God desires the salvation of all men, not all men believe the gospel or are saved. Some people believed and respond positively while some may blaspheme and turn it down. Yet, that should not stop the preaching of the gospel. The mandate of the Lord to all His workers and ministers in spite of the challenge is to preach the word "**in season and out of season**" (2 Timothy 4:1).

In the midst of controversies among the audience of Christ, some asked Him: "**How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly**". This question is obviously not a sincere one. Christ had told them over and over again that He was the one sent from the Father but they did not believe. Having deliberately refused to believe, no amount of persuasion would sway them. Like the religious Jews, many people ask for proof for the wrong reasons. Many of those who were asking questions were not ready to follow Jesus in the way that He wanted to lead them. They had their own agenda: they wanted a political messiah who would deliver them from the shackles of the Roman government. But Christ had a spiritual mission to fulfill. They did not believe because they were not part of His sheep. The sheep of Christ normally hear His voice and follow Him.

It was evident that these religious leaders were not part of His sheep since they were not willing to hear the word of God, receive it and follow the Lord. People who argue with sound doctrine and pick a quarrel with the standard of holiness and righteousness preached by true ministers of Christ, only confirm that they are not the sheep of Jesus Christ. In contrast, there are those whom Christ referred to as His sheep. This category of people hears the voice of Christ; He knows them; they follow Him; and He gives them eternal life.

**Question 4: *What are the conditions for the believer's security in Christ?***

Christ gives eternal life to those who hear Him and such people "**shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**" (John 10:28). What a great consolation and encouragement to the steadfast disciples of Christ! However, it need be stressed that this verse has been grossly misunderstood by many people to mean a promise of eternal security. To them, regardless of what a man does in respect to his relation to God, he is eternally secure. But that is a great error. What this verse actually means is that there is nothing outside a man that can destroy him while he abides in Christ. A Bible commentator puts it this way: "If man falls at any stage in his spiritual life, it is not from want of divine grace, nor from the overwhelming power of adversaries, but from his neglect to use that which he may or may not use." The believer is only sure of his relationship and blessing in Christ here and in eternity if he abides in Christ till the end. Just like a shepherd protects his sheep, Jesus protects his people from harm. Satan cannot harm their souls or take away their eternal life so long as they abide in Christ. For all who choose to follow Christ in spite of the

challenges of life, there is safety. As believers “**give diligence**” to make their “**calling and election sure**”, “**an entrance shall be ministered unto [them] abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**” (2 Peter 1:10,11).

**THE PHARISEES’ RESPONSE TO CHRIST’S CLAIM OF EQUALITY WITH GOD**  
(John 10:31-42; 5:17-34; 17:1-8; Hebrews 4:2; 3:18; 13:20; Matthew 13:3-7).

**Question 6: *How should listeners respond to the message of Christ?***

Jesus made the clearest statement on His divinity. His claim to be God was unmistakable. The religious leaders, rather than accept the truth that could have saved them, picked up stones to kill the Good Shepherd. They could not be persuaded that Jesus was the Christ. While this revelation strengthens the assurance of the believer, the religious people, as usual, misunderstood the deep truth inherent in it, seeing it as blasphemy. What a lesson! Except listeners prepare their hearts to hear, they may not benefit from Christ’s teaching.

Some people today like the unbelieving Jews of old teach and argue that Jesus is not God. Some teach that Jesus is just a prophet contrary to the established biblical truth that Jesus Christ is pre-existent, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent just like God the Father (Isaiah 6:7; John 1:1-3; Philippians 2:5-9; Titus 2:13). Therefore, “**all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him**” (John 5:23).

There should be no more controversy on whether Christ is the Good Shepherd. He is the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). Jesus, in oneness with His Father, gathers the sheep together in God’s sheepfold which is the church (John 17:1-4; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:20). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will eventually gather His sheep together through the rapture to be with God forever in His eternal kingdom (John 14:1-3; Ephesians 5:25-27).

## JESUS RAISES LAZARUS FROM DEATH

MEMORY VERSE: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25,26).

TEXT: John 11:1-46

The passage under consideration narrates a story of the sickness and eventual death of a certain man named Lazarus, and the demonstration of Christ's power to raise him from death. The miracle here is considered to be the last of the signs recorded by John in our Lord's ministry. The writer's main focus is to point all men to Jesus, the Son of God so that men can believe in Him; and that those who believe in Him would not die spiritually but have eternal life. The miracle is a preview of Jesus' resurrection from death (and ours too) and a proof that death has no power over true children of God. Christ declares: "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death**" (John 8:51).

**Question 1: *What lesson can we learn from the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from death?***

The account shows that Christ has power over death and holds the keys to life and death. Second, it proves that if we believe in Him, though we die physically, we shall rise again. Third, Jesus identifies with our situations and shares in our grief and sorrow.

**DISTRESS CALL TO THE MASTER** (John 11:1-6; Psalm 50:15; Matthew 11:28-30; Philippians 4:6,7; Hebrews 12:1,2; James 5:14-18).

Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary had been sick and the two sisters sent a special message to acquaint Christ of their brother's degenerating condition. They were concerned for his affliction and pain and would not keep silent while he suffered. How we need to emulate the actions of these two sisters in respect of our fellow brethren. We should not hesitate to report their conditions in the court of heaven for help. We can lift up holy hands for those in distress, affliction, bereavement, and grief. Or how else can we demonstrate our love to our brethren, loved ones and acquaintances if not through praying and ministering to them?

Lazarus' experience is a universal problem of man. It can happen to anyone as a result of the curse, fatigue, overwork or failure to observe the laws of hygiene. Anyone could be sick due to any of these reasons and in some cases lead to death, as was the case of Lazarus. But we need to realize also that it is also possible to enjoy divine healing and health through Jesus Christ our Lord (Luke 4:18; 3 John 2).

Jesus did not immediately go to Bethany, the town of Martha and Mary (Lazarus' sisters) but waited for two days before returning to Judea. Though He knew that Lazarus would have died before He arrived Bethany, He was sure that a greater miracle would happen in its place.

**Question 2: What does the request sent by Lazarus' sisters teach us about approaching God in faith?**

As the sickness of their brother grew worse, Mary and Martha turned to Jesus for help. They believed in His power to heal their brother. Our faith in Christ many times dictate the action we take in difficult times.

We learn some important lessons from the phrase, "**he whom thou lovest**". One, the sisters of Lazarus did not approach Christ on the merit of their own love for Him but on the strength of Christ's love for the family. We should know that the love of God for us is the basis of receiving any benefit from Him. Two, the fact that God loves us or we love Him does not preclude us from facing challenges. Though we are following Jesus and we love Him wholeheartedly, we may encounter difficult times of sickness or trials. However, God has promised to deliver us during our time of adversity. Any trial faced by any believer should ultimately bring glory to God because He can bring something good out of any bad situation.

No doubt Jesus loved this family and knew of their problem ahead of time. His delay had a specific purpose in order that God might be glorified. Besides, God is never in a hurry as He knows the right time to meet our needs in order to fulfill His best purposes. Believers therefore should learn how to wait patiently for Him to do according to the counsel of His own will.

The Lord declared that the sickness was "**not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby**" (verse 4). Jesus abode two days more in the place where He got the news of Lazarus sickness. No one can question His decision to delay His visit to the sorrowful family. Whatever our situations and conditions, God can be glorified in them. He makes all things "**work together for good to them that loved**" Him (Romans 8:28).

**DIVINE WISDOM DEMONSTRATED BY THE MASTER** (John 11:7-16; Romans 14:8,9; 2 Corinthians 8:5).

After news of Lazarus' sickness reached the Lord, He waited two days and afterward told His disciples it was time to "**go into Judea again**". The disciples felt that such a move could be suicidal and tried to talk Him out of it. But Jesus explained that the work of saving souls must continue in spite of the dangers that sometimes might attend it (verse 9,10). Jesus knew that if the appointed hour for Him to lay down His life for the sin of man had not come, no man could kill Him. In like manner, no one can cut short our ministry before God's time. Storms might arise while we are doing the will of God, but it is certain that God will not leave us to the will of our adversaries.

If Jesus had been with Lazarus during the final moments of his sickness He might have healed him and prevented his death. But Lazarus had died so as to show the power of Jesus over death. Divine wisdom chose to delay the visit to ailing Lazarus and opting for Judea where His life would be in jeopardy in the course of reaching the lost. He allowed Lazarus to die and be buried before going to raise him up. The way of the Lord is past finding out. Instead of preventing the fire, God sometimes allows us to get into it before He rises to deliver us. He may prefer that we get into the den of lions where He will demonstrate His power over them than prevent us from getting there.

**Question 3: *What should be our response when we don't understand why the Lord has permitted certain situations in our lives?***

The disciples could not alter their Master's itinerary; so, they surrendered their will and went with Him. They knew the danger of going with Him and agreed to go and die with Him. They may not have understood why Jesus would die but they were loyal to Him because they knew Him as a loving true Leader. We must consider the cost of following Jesus as there may be some dangers on our way as we serve Him. Our love for the Master will make us to continue to follow on, even though we may not understand all that is happening around us. How many believers today are willing to go with the Master through thick and thin?

**DELAY NOT EQUAL TO DENIAL** (John 11:17-24; Daniel 10:12-14; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Matthew 7:7; Ephesians 6:18).

Jesus arrived Bethany four days after Lazarus had died and was received by Martha whose reaction was, "**Lord, if thou had been here, my brother had not died**" (verse 21). The same words were spoken by Mary when she met Christ and show her disposition to His delay. They believed that their brother would have been healed if the Lord had arrived earlier. Even when the Lord assured them that their brother would rise again, they understood it to mean resurrection on the last day. But Christ also meant that He has power to raise him up from death and bring comfort to their hearts.

**Question 4: *What should be our attitude when the answer to our prayers seems delayed? Mention what could some times lead to delay.***

Sometimes, it seems prayers are not answered as quickly as Christians expect. Yet, such delays do not mean denial of the Christian's requests. A delay might appear to make the problem seem more difficult to solve. But whatever the situation, God's power knows no limitation. In fact, sometimes, when God seems to have delayed the answer to prayer, it is because He is working out the miracle. Daniel prayed and fasted for 21 days before answer came. Yet, God told him that He had answered from the first day he began to pray (Daniel 10:12). Daniel did not know that a battle was being fought on his behalf; but he kept on praying till the answer came.

When we experience delayed answer to our prayers, we should behave like Daniel and keep on praying, believing that the Lord will not fail. The more difficult our problems, the greater the power of God to solve them. Although Lazarus had died, Martha still believed that Christ could ask God to do anything and He will answer Him.

**CHRIST: THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE** (John 11:18-32; 5:28,29; Romans 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:15-32, 54-56; Job 19:25,26).

Jesus Christ revealed that believers in Him shall live forever. This truth is a source of hope for all children of God. Death, when it comes at the appointed time, shall be a means of our transition to eternal glory.

**"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth**

**in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"** (John 11:25,26). Here Jesus declares Himself the Author of resurrection and life; He has power to raise from the dead. What a comfort to true believers that the grave is not our goal. Though our faith in Jesus would not prevent death from doing its bidding (since it is appointed unto men once to die), but we shall rise again.

The hope of resurrection in Christ is a cardinal point on which the Christian faith rests. If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christianity is in vain and there would be no need to deny ourselves of the pleasures of this world, consecrate our lives to serve God or resist temptation. For then, it is better to eat and drink because we shall soon die without any hope of life beyond the grave (1 Corinthians 15:15-32). But now, we know that Christ is risen from the dead as the firstfruit of God and has given us hope that though worms devour this temple, we shall see God at the end if we believe in His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus rekindled Martha's dwindling hope at the situation in her family by declaring, **"Thy brother shall rise again"**. With our God there is a terminal date for every problem. He can always rescue any situation (Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37).

**THE DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE AND POWER** (John 11:33-46; Matthew 9:18-25; Mark 9:31).

The Lord is concerned about our estate and welfare. Whatever touches us touches Him. Here He demonstrated His sympathy with the grieving family. **"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old"** (Isaiah 63:9). He showed love, compassion and concern for this family and shared in their grief and sorrow. He was so moved with their grief that we are told: **"Jesus wept"**.

Christ put on flesh and blood in order to share in our estate. That He felt hungry, thirsty, weary and sorrowful are all evidences of the fact that He truly assumed the human form for our sake. **"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same..."** (Hebrews 2:14).

Christ's love for humanity was not merely in words but in deed and in truth. He laid down His life to redeem us from eternal perdition. His affection for Lazarus and his sisters manifested for all to see to the extent that His critics testified: **"Behold how he loved him"**. Our love should not be in words only but be seen through our godly acts of service to the brethren and our neighbours. We cannot be said to truly love if we do so only with our lips. **"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"** (1 John 3:18).

In verse 39, Jesus came to the grave and instructed them to take **"away the stone"**. By speaking the word only, the stone could have been removed but He chose to request human assistance on this occasion. There is a lesson here. God can do all things without any assistance from anyone but He sometimes chooses to use man or angel as instruments to accomplish His purpose.

**Question 5: What is the significance of Christ's power over death to the believer?**

The Lord here gave prior demonstration of what He Himself was later to accomplish in His resurrection – the conquering of death. By this also, we know that God can do everything. There is no situation beyond His power.

After the Lord brought Lazarus back from death, He commanded them to “**Loose him and let him go**”. This is similar to the redemption of people who have been dead in sin and trespasses. Like Lazarus, they must be loosed from all encumbrances of past sins. They must be taught, counseled and helped on restitution, praying, overcoming temptations, and how to live victoriously by faith.

Miracles alone can not help free people from the hold of their sins. This is why the message of salvation must necessarily precede healing and other works of miracles. Miracles of healing or raising the dead will not take people to heaven without the accomplished work of salvation through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

### **Question 6: *Mention some blessings we will receive when we obey God?***

When we obey God, we are going to receive answers to our prayers from time to time. There were two instructions Christ gave to the people at the grave of Lazarus which they promptly obeyed: “**Take ye away the stone,**” and “**Loose him and let him go**”. The argument of Martha could not hold.

Secondly, obedience to the Master’s command will always bring great blessings. Our reasoning can give rise to hindrances to receiving the best from Him. Many people advance a lot of arguments to support their disobedience. But when we allow God to have His way in our lives, our excuses will disappear and His blessings will be poured on us.

Thirdly, our obedience will bring God’s glory to our lives. Jesus saith unto Martha “**said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God**”. When we believe the Word of God and obey His commandment then His glory will shine upon us.

Fourthly, prompt obedience brings deliverance to our lives. Immediately they loosed him, he was set free. It is the word of God that sets free. If we believe and preach it, we shall be blessed.

In the last two verses of our text, we see two different effects of the miracle. Many of the Jews believed as a result of what they saw and this underscores the major purpose of Christ’s miracle. In fact, Christ had predicted that the miracle would be for the glory of God (John 11:4). But on the other hand, some of the Jews reacted in a way that indicated that they were not comfortable with Christ. They went back to report to the Pharisees. These two different reactions of the people depict the responses of people to Christ today. True seekers come to Christ and when they see God’s work, they believe, get saved and even receive miracles. But doubters and skeptics go away empty.

## THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

MEMORY VERSE: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (**Hebrews 9:27**).

TEXT: Revelation 20:11-15

The subject of judgment is not strange to the minds of mortals. Since it is in the nature of human beings to err, it is common in every sphere of life to see men being tried and punished accordingly. The common practice and experience in homes, schools, offices, courts and many other places is to see someone give a verdict after trial for some wrongdoing. The guilty is almost always given some punishment. This practice underscores the need and importance of justice and fairness in relationship.

### ***Question 1: How are earthly judgments different from the Great White Throne Judgment?***

Our study deals with the final judgment that God will bring upon those who reject His word and live as they pleased. This is called the Great White Throne Judgment. In this study as in other studies of the events of the last days, the Lord is graciously revealing unto us His programme for this present evil world. The doctrine opens our eyes to the time when all wicked and ungodly people (the living and the dead, small and great) who neglected God's salvation will face the final and terrible judgment of the living God (Roman 14:12). It is important that we approach the study with the seriousness it deserves and not with doubtful disputations or view it as a fable or fiction. These things are written for our learning and admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11).

**JUDGMENT IN THE SCRIPTURE** (Isaiah 53:4-11; John 3:15-18; 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11; 1 Timothy 5:24; Jude 6).

That judgment is certain for all men is clear in every part of the inspired Word of God. "**And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27). However, contrary to general assumption of a single judgment at a given time for sinners and saints alike, a number of separate judgments are clearly taught in Scripture for different classes of people and at different times. The Lord God has always been acquitting the innocent as He did in the case of the antediluvians, Sodom and Gomorrah and Korah's company. Since He never changes (Hebrews 13:8), He will keep to the same principle in the future, final judgment.

### ***Question 2: Mention the various judgments found in the Scripture, supporting your answer with references?***

It is clear from the scripture that believers have been judged in respect of their sin. This took place on Calvary's cross when Jesus became the sinner's Substitute (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 3:18; Roman 8:1,2). Sin must be judged either in the sinner's substitute or the sinner himself. And Christ has already borne the punishment for the sins of humanity in the hope that men would acknowledge His love and sacrifice and accept it so they can be acquitted. When the penitent sinner personally appropriates this vicarious sacrifice, reposes his faith in the Saviour and accepts His Lordship, he is declared justified by grace. This is the first type of judgment.

Then, as he lives the Christian life, he daily judges (or examines) himself in the light of God's Word (1 Corinthians 11:31,32; 1 John 1:7) to make sure he continues to abide in Christ. This is the second type of judgment. Failure in the same may bring temporary physical suffering or chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The third type of judgment will be experienced also by believers at the "Bema" seat of Christ (Roman 14:10; Revelation 22:12). This will be after the rapture and the purpose will be to distribute rewards for "**the things done in the body**". No believer at this judgment will be condemned, for all are saved. But rewards will differ and the works of some will be burnt (1 Corinthians 3:14,15).

The other types of judgment will be with the intent of punishing sin. These include the judgment of Israel during the Great tribulation (Ezekiel 20:33-44; Jeremiah 30:3-11; Matthew 24:4-25) and the judgment of the (living) nations at Christ's Second Advent (Matthew 25:31-46). Israel will be judged (for her many centuries of rebellion against God) by the cruel hand of the Antichrist. At the end of the ordeal, "**all Israel shall be saved**" (Roman 11:26) as they shall "**look upon me whom they have pierced**" (Zechariah 12:10). The judgment of angels for rebellion against God is identifiable as another type of judgment in Scripture (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6,7).

**THE GREAT, TERRIBLE AND FINAL JUDGMENT** (Revelation 20:11-15; Daniel 7:9,10, 12:2; Matthew 11:20-24; John 5:25-30; Acts 24:15).

The Bible clearly presents the order of events preceding the Great White Throne Judgment and constantly urges us: "**He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches**" (Revelation 2:7).

The world is corrupt and polluted. The fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden brought mankind to shame, guilt and condemnation. From Adam, sin came into everyone that was born into the world. God made provision for the salvation of man but humanity has generally preferred to turn away from God's call to repentance and pardon. Man has remained rebellious and disobedient. And it pains God that He made man on the earth for every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart has been evil continually (Genesis 6:5,6). God promised judgment and punishment for the wicked. His word declares that "**the soul that sinneth it shall die**" and that "**the wages of sin is death**" (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23).

**Question 3: Highlight past judgments of sinners in the Bible and the lessons believers can learn from them?**

God has been judging sinners over the ages. He judged the world in the days of Noah when He destroyed all living beings with the flood with the exception of eight

persons (Genesis 6:17,18; 7:10-13,21-24). He poured out His wrath and indignation upon Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed all that were in them except Lot and his two daughters (Genesis 19:13,24-26). On other occasions, He brought judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram with their supporters and punished the Egyptians for refusing to let God's people go. At various times, He brought judgment on Nadab and Abihu; on Uzzah; on Sennacherib and his 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (Isaiah 37:36-38); and on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). However, in the Great White Throne Judgment all those who were destroyed in all those cases will still be judged.

What then is this judgment? It is the last and final judgment. It is the judgment that concludes the affairs of this present evil world. At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, the devil will be released from the bottomless pit for a while (Revelation 20:3,7). He will go out to deceive people again and will gather multitudes to fight against Christ and His saints. This is referred to as the Battle of Gog and Magog. Satan and his people will be defeated. Fire will come from God out of heaven to devour them. After this Satan shall be cast into the lake of fire; the stage then becomes set for the final judgment of sinful men.

#### **Question 4: Describe in detail the make-up of, and proceedings at the Great White Throne Judgment?**

Let us look carefully at the details concerning the setting of the judgment.

(a) **The Throne:** The great God of heaven and earth, who is a great King cannot but sit on a throne. It is White and it represents His purity. The setting is magnificent and of great splendour and glory that befits the eternal King.

(b) **The Judge:** The Judge is God Almighty, the Omniscient and Omnipresent. He knows everything and so there will be no miscarriage of justice. He is everywhere so all things are open unto Him. His sight will be so terrible because it is judgment time.

(c) **Those to be judged:** ( Revelation 20:12,13). All those who died in sin from the time of Adam till the time of the Great White Throne judgment will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15). They will all stand before God for judgment. These include:

(1) All categories of sinners, living and dead, small and great, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, male and female, the rulers and the ruled, will be judged for neglecting the salvation of God (Hebrews 2:3).

(2) All backsliders who denied the faith of God who once redeemed them (Exodus 32:33; Hebrews 10:26-30,38,39). (3) All those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ (John 3:18,19). (4) All religious hypocrites who are like "**whited sepulchres**" (Matthew 23:27). The sea, death and hell will give up the dead in them. The bodies of all the dead will be united with their souls and spirits to stand before God to receive the just reward for their ungodly lifestyle. It will be a very great and sober gathering.

(d) **The Judgment:** Everyone will be judged according to his works (verses 12,13). It will be done in righteousness. It will be open and everyone on trial will know why he or she is going to the lake of fire. It will be to judge (1) all unrighteous deeds of men (1 John 5:17). All unrighteousness that was not cleansed by the blood of Christ before then will bring condemnation, including unrighteous feelings and imaginations. (2) The secret deeds of men which others may not have known of, done in darkness: secret bribery, immorality, pornography, drunkenness, abortion, whispering, etc. will be judged. The words of men – every idle word, gossip, backbiting or slander will be brought to judgment; all foolish and unedifying words; corrupt, graceless, defamatory and abusive words will be judged (Matthew 12:36,37; Ephesians 5:4). God's judgment

will be fair, just and without partiality or respect of person. **“For the Lord God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward”** (Deuteronomy 10:17). No one can influence or bribe Him.

(e) **The books:** (verse 12) **“...and the books were opened”**. These are the books of records that will contain everything done by men while on earth. It is according to the records written in these books that judgment will be delivered. This will remove all possibilities of arguments. There will be no room to say the sentence given was based on hearsay or guesswork. All things will be documented, and these, in many books.

(f) **The book of life:** only one book (verse 12) **“...and another book was opened, which is the book of life”**. This is the book that contains the names of all those who are born again, those who have been washed in the blood of Jesus. Their sins had been judged earlier at Calvary when they repented of their sins, confessed them and received Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. We must endeavour to make sure our names are in this book. All saints in all ages, from the time of Adam to the time of the judgment, have their names written in the book of life. Oh, what a thrill it is to have the assurance and be able to sing with Frank Davis:

*“My name’s written there  
On the page white and fair  
In the Book of God’s Kingdom  
My name’s written there.”*

**THE ETERNAL ABODE OF THE CONDEMNED** (Revelation 20:10,14; 19:20; 14:10,11; Mark 9:43-48; Matthew 25:41).

**Question 5: Describe the plight of the condemned in the lake of fire.**

**“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:15).

An awful end awaits all those that have to appear before God in the Great White Throne Judgment for **“...God is a consuming fire”** and **“it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 12:29; 10:31).

The lake of fire is the eternal abode of the devil and his angels (Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41). The lake of fire was not meant for man but all those who rejected God and sided with Satan, by committing sin. They will have no choice than to share in their master’s destiny. Death and hell (the abode of demons and evil spirits will be cast into the lake of fire (verse 14) where the beast and the false prophet had originally been thrown (Revelation 19:20). The fire will never go out; it cannot be quenched. It will burn forever and ever (Revelation 14:10,11; 20:10). Worms do not die in it. How then is annihilation of human beings possible in it as advocated by some groups? Between Revelation 19:10,11 and 20:10 is a period of over 1,000 years, yet the beast and the false prophet had not been consumed by the fire. The fire does not destroy but continuously torments. It is a terrible thing.

Whosoever was not found written in the book of life will suffer forever in the lake of fire. His companions, neighbours and co-tenants will be Satan, the beast, the false prophet, demons and evil spirits. What a company! The scripture does not in any way support annihilation or purgatory but eternal burnings of all sinners condemned to

hell. There is, however, the possibility of escape from judgment through repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**ESCAPING THE DOOM OF THE CONDEMNED** (2 Peter 3:9-14; 1 Peter 4:7; John 3:3,5, 16; Mark 1:15; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 1 Timothy 4:16).

God gave His only begotten Son that “**whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life**”. The will of God is that all should repent, believe the gospel and be saved (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; Mark 1:15).

### **Question 6: *How can one escape the Great White Throne Judgment?***

Knowing that all ungodly people shall be brought to judgment “**what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness**” (2 Peter 3:11). To escape the Great White Throne judgment, you need to repent of all sins, confess them to God and receive Jesus as your Lord and personal Saviour. Genuine salvation through repentance and faith in Christ is demanded from anyone who hope to escape. Other conditions include living a holy life, making restitutions, following peace with all men and avoiding every appearance of evil. But for those who refuse to repent there will be weeping and wailing as they will be condemned to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Lesson

## **HELL: THE DESTINY OF SINNERS**

MEMORY VERSE: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (**Revelation 20:15**).

TEXT: Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:3-15

The fact and reality of hell are recurring, and thus, important themes in the Scripture. It is vividly captured as the ultimate place of agonizing torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire for those who reject the offer of salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ. Yet, the teaching on hell is not popular in many religious circles of the world. Many people have tried to rationalize the truth of the Bible on this subject due to the frightening credentials of the teaching on hell. Against the attempts of many philosophers to make men believe that hell is not a material place of life after death but a phenomenon of the present, the scripture provides unambiguous and ample illuminations of the fact that hell is the indisputable abode of sinners. That the unregenerate, mortal man does not find the knowledge of a certain divinely ordained eternal punishment a convenient subject to face is pitiable. The Scripture truly affirms that **“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

**Question 1: What is the essence of teaching the doctrine on hell?**

It should be emphasized, however, that the essence of the teaching of the doctrine on hell is not to scare or frighten hearers but to get them adequately prepared to avert the danger that is inherent in being in that terrible place throughout eternity.

**WRONG NOTIONS ABOUT HELL** (Psalm 9:17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1:18,21,23;

It is unfortunate that fearsome as hell is, erroneous and unscriptural views of false teachers have largely interfered with the essence of the message, that is, to forewarn wayfarers of the danger that lies ahead. Even in religious circles, Bible-carrying individuals are not spared this assault.

**Question 2: Mention some erroneous beliefs of religious sects about hell?**

Chief among these false ideas about the eternal doom of the wicked are the doctrines of purgatory and annihilation. The doctrine of purgatory has it that there is an intermediate state between death and appearance before God in judgment where the unrighteous dead stays for a while to suffer during which his concerned saviours can “atone” for his sins and “qualify him for heaven”. The second false doctrine – annihilation – states that sinners will be burnt up in hell at once. These doctrines are as false as they are unbiblical. But strange enough, most of the congregations that uphold them believe that there is a place of blessedness where the righteous will live in full consciousness for ever after death. The future punishment of the wicked is eternal while the sinner at death automatically receives an express translation into hell **“where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”** (Mark 9:48). The needless controversy over the reality of hell is not strange. Actually, no man believes in hell because he simply wants to; he believes in hell because he is compelled to do so.

**THE FACT AND REALITY OF HELL** (Psalm 9:17; Matthew 7:15-19; Revelation 14:10,11; Matthew 5:22,29; 10:28; 18:8,9; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5; 16:19-31; Matthew 25:41-46; James 3:6).

It is true that eternal punishment is not a pleasant subject for discussion; yet, it is a fearful reality, an awful and tragic fate of those who fail to appropriate God’s provision for their salvation here on earth. Since God is holy, sin must be punished. To speak otherwise is to **“speak not according to this word... because there is no**

**light in them**" (Isaiah 8:20). Even commonsense agrees that 'If there be a paradise for virtues, there must be a hell for crimes.'

When a sinner dies, his soul immediately proceeds to hell where, with full consciousness, he tastes the excruciating pain that hell offers. The story of Lazarus and the rich man best illustrates the eternal punishment awaiting sinners (Luke 16:23,24). Hell is also a place where the memory of the damned comes alive. The rich man recalled his riotous living while on earth as well as his five brothers that were yet unsaved. Beside the acute discomfort of hell, the regret of an error of judgment while on earth on the part of the unsaved, presents an everlasting torment on its own.

**Question 3: *What does the emphasis in the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ teach us about the reality of hell?***

The word of God is clear with respect to the teaching on hell. Every part of Scripture makes it clear that hell is a place of everlasting torment in unquenchable fire. The regular usage of hell in scriptures, apart from the allusions drawn to it by the Lord and other Bible characters, lend enough credence to its reality.

The Lord Jesus Christ spent considerable time lending credence to this reality. He warned the city of Capernaum, for instance, that it would be turned into hell because of its iniquities (Matthew 11:23,24). He did not mince words as He warned repeatedly on the danger of hell and the need for His listeners to steer clear of it (Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; Luke 12:5). He made it clear that there was everlasting punishment and an eternal abode for all sinners who die unsaved (Matthew 7:15-19; 18:9; Revelation 14:10,11; Matthew 25:41-46). He also repeated three times the fact that, in hell, **"their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched"** (Mark 9:43-48).

The Apostles were also united in their warning against the danger of hell as an eternal place of doom for sinners (Romans 2:5-9; Hebrews 10:26,27; James 3:5,6; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude 7,23). John the Baptist was very clear on the issue and made it plain that **"trees that bringeth not forth good fruit"** shall be **"cast into the fire"** (Matthew 3:7-10). Therefore, the church cannot take a less specific position on the teaching. Those who know the truth (and perhaps taught others) but fail to live righteously should bear in mind that God is no respecter of persons and that **"the soul that sinneth it shall die"** (Ezekiel 18:20) and shall have its **"part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone"** (Revelation 21:8).

**ESCAPING THE DANGER OF HELL** (Matthew 7:14; Isaiah 52:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1; Revelation 21:1-8,27; 22:14).

**Question 4: *To avoid hell, what does God command the sinner and the believer to do?***

It will be utter foolishness for anyone to deceive himself for any reason and trifle with sin and its consequent eternal doom. Everyone – within and outside the church – must live with the consciousness that **"the wicked shall be turned into hell"** (Psalm 9:17) irrespective of age, sex, social status, educational background, nationality or tribe.

Those whose nature and lifestyle can be described as unclean, those who are beastly and those who are not on the highway of holiness are on the roadway to hell. The way to hell is broad because it has a lot of latitude. In it there is no restriction,

self-denial, submission to God's will, sacrifice or consecration. Fornication, homosexuality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, lying are some of the sins that characterize the lives of people on the Broadway. The destiny of everyone who remains obstinate in sin is hell.

But everyone who seeks to escape from hell must be free from every sin. Those who will escape hell must have a definite change of life, character and aspirations. They must come over from the Broadway to the narrow way where they can serve God in holiness, remain uncompromising, follow the totality of God's word the rest days of their lives. God wants us to be clean, holy and righteous to be able to get to heaven. Continuity in the narrow way requires separation from unbelievers to avoid being smeared by unclean, sinful lifestyle. God's express command to everyone is to come out of defilement and sin into the highway of holiness; the sinner must repent of his sins and exercise faith in Christ's blood for cleansing. And those that have entered must not only pray for sustaining grace to continue on the path of holiness and righteousness that leads to the heavenly city, but must also help others to come into this narrow path.

## Lesson 377

### VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (**James 1:12**).

TEXT: Luke 4:1-12; James 1:12-16; Jeremiah 35:1-10

Salvation from sin, the blessedness of it, the moral agency of man, the purpose of Satan at thwarting the will of God for the redeemed and the possibility of believers spiritual downfall make the subject of temptation a crucial one to consider. To begin with, Satan does not want anyone to be saved from sin. So, he wages war against everyone who is saved from sin to make sure he does not continue in the real experience of salvation, and thus, disqualify him from enjoying the benefits of salvation here and in heaven. But since he cannot force the Christian to sin, he takes advantage of the free moral agency of man to make choices. He coats wrong, sinful practices in living and attractive colours, and urges man to choose and damn the consequences which he hides from him.

God however urges the Christian who seeks to enjoy abundant life to align his choices with His. "**See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil**" (Deuteronomy 30:15). This is because in His goodwill, He has ordained that believers be conformed to the image of His dear Son and walk according to the guidance of His all-knowing-seeing-powerful Spirit. Unfortunately, most believers are "blind" and "deaf" in a sense that they do not see and know who is behind some subtle suggestions that appear to be good. "**Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?**" (Isaiah 42:19; Job 33:14). Note that temptation is not sin; it is when the believer yields to temptation that he sins.

**Question 1: *What is temptation and how do sinners and backsliders fare during temptation?***

Temptation is a common experience of all men - saints and sinners alike. In our lead text, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ was not spared. Just as it was with the Lord, temptation is an enticement or a suggestion (in thought, feeling or action) to sin or do evil. Temptation cuts across age, race, social class, colour, spiritual level or estate in life. No saint lives long enough or grows enough in grace to get rid of it.

Pitiably however, sinners and backsliders do not have the power and strength with which to overcome temptations. This is because they, by their lifestyles, are of and controlled by the devil (1 John 3:8; John 8:44; Ephesians 2:2). Sin weakens and robs the sinner of spiritual energy to resist continued indulgence in it. The only way to receive the initial deposit of divine strength with which to live and maintain a righteous life is salvation through Christ. The sinner/backslider must repent of his sins, confess them to God and receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord. "**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**" (John 1:12). Although temptations, like the circumstances around them, may differ from one person to another, the believer needs to know the different sources of temptation to be able to overcome them.

**SOURCES OF TEMPTATION** (James 1:14; Matthew 4:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; Genesis 3:6; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 2:11).

**Question 2: *What are the sources of temptation?***

Satan is the source of temptation. He and his spirit or human agents delight in bringing temptations in the pathway of Christians with the purpose of making them to fall.

God is never the Author of temptation or sin. **“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”** (James 1:13,14). He can never be blamed for sin though men in their desperate attempt to break loose from responsibility for their actions often heap blame of their failure on God.

What then is God’s place in the spectrum of temptations? The Apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, posits that temptation begins with man’s desire which may be perfectly legitimate by itself, but which leads away from God-appointed goals to baser, inferior and transient ideals. Indeed, the devil tempts the believer with what he is craving for. It, therefore, means that the first and greatest source of temptation is the heart. The enemy within – pride, lust, revenge, envy, etc. – is greater, fiercer, more ravenous than the enemy without. No wonder the Bible in Proverbs says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9). And Christ in the New Testament notes: **“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man”** (Mark 7:21-23). Temptation comes when one **“is drawn away of his own lust...”** Satan, however, is he who does the ‘drawing away’. Satan sees the propensity to sin in the heart and then fans the smouldering coal into a full-blown flame. This is the first source of temptation.

Second, the flesh is another source of temptation. The inordinate cravings of the flesh in the areas of appetite and immoral urge lead men to temptation. Undue closeness between opposite gender especially amongst students, often spark unholy, carnal feelings of lust and uncleanness. Third, apparently close and indispensable pals like neighbours, relatives or even parents can be sources of temptation. A neighbour can impress some unscriptural idea, practice or sentiments on our mind and evoke the base nature in us. Relatives can craftily edge us out of the counsel of God and set our feet on the quicksand of sin. Parents, non-christians, can lead us into wrong marriages, get us into unscriptural or even sinful work environment, gently blow the breeze of spiritual coldness on our heart and make us lose grip of our consecration.

Fourth, overconfidence or being self-opinionated more often than not, proves a source of temptation. Fifth, looseness during courtship between intending couples leads to temptation. Sixth, the believer’s weakest point, his besetting sin is a sure spot for or source of temptation. Seventh, greed and inordinate ambition is another source of temptation. The craze to get-rich-quick or sit tightly close with the opposite sex on a bike-ride is a modern source of temptation a believer must avoid.

**Question 3: *Mention some Bible characters who fell into temptation. How and why did they fall?***

The fall of some Bible characters, which flags the teaching of eternal security as false, highlights pitfalls believers need to avoid. Quest for new, higher knowledge or spiritual enlightenment and willingness to learn from any source – even from Satan – without consultation with her husband made Eve to fall. Quest for greener pasture and independence without counting the cost made Lot to pitch his residence near a city doomed for destruction. Willingness to satisfy the appetite at whatever cost was Esau’s undoing. Achan, Gahazi, Balaam, Judas Iscariot and Demas are in the same class with the covetous: their apparently blossoming life and ministry hit the rocks as a natural consequence. David, Amnon, Solomon, Samson all committed immorality because of their lust-filled eyes. For restlessness, wandering carelessly and aimlessly in the company of the ungodly, Dina also committed sexual immorality. Besides, unequal yoke in marriage was what made Samson’s fall more terrible (Genesis 3:6; 13:10-13; 25:29-33; Joshua 7:21; Judges 14:17; 16:17; 1 Samuel 13:12; 1 Kings 11:1,4; Mark 10:35-37; 2 Peter 2:20; Genesis 34:1,2; Hosea 7:9; Proverbs 22:24,25; Joshua 25:12,13).

**THE PURPOSE OF SATAN IN BRINGING TEMPTATION** (John 10:10; 1 Chronicles 21:1-4a,7,14; Job 1:8-11; 2:9; Luke 22:31; 2 Corinthians 11:13,14; Daniel 8:25; 11:21,24,32a; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

The ignorance of some saints in scriptures concerning the purpose of Satan in orchestrating their downfall made him to achieve his devices against them. But the word of God exposes his purpose for bringing temptation to Christians. **“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). The devil plans, calculates and develops strategies to carry out his devices in a well structured and organized manner. Whatever God stands for, Satan stands against; whatever God loves, he hates; whatever God appreciates, he devalues; whatever God builds, he wants to destroy. When **“Satan stood up against Israel”**, David was ignorant of his devices. David became his target because God found him a man after His own heart. The same way Satan hates and seeks to destroy the believer who has a similar testimony of divine approval. Rather than provoke physical warfare through another Goliath in which David would have brought his experience to bear, he came through an unfamiliar terrain. He **“provoked David to number Israel”**. Through this unrecognized method, he achieved his aim of destroying seventy thousand Israelites. Numbering the people of God is not a sin if it is commanded by God. But it is Satan’s device to influence the believer to do what is good but not commanded by God. Believers need to know therefore that anything that does not originate from God is from satan.

When God testified of the godly private and public life of Job, Satan told God that Job would **“curse”** Him if the divinely bestowed blessings were taken away. God, knowing that the devices of Satan will not always succeed against committed believers, proved the devil wrong. He brought suffering upon Job for him to blame or **“curse”** God. When Job did not do that as Satan expected, he inspired his wife through a suggestion that he should **“curse”** God but Job held to his integrity. The point here is that Satan operates through demon-inspired suggestions. Obviously, when God exalts a man, Satan wants to pull him down; if He blesses a man, Satan wants him to lose that blessing; when God saves a man, Satan will want him to backslide.

Seeking to prevent a glorious experience such as Peter had at Pentecost and his usefulness thereafter, Satan sought to sift him like wheat. When Peter sliced off the ear of the high priest's servant and denied the Lord thrice before the little maid, he did not know Satan was subtly behind the scene. Sometimes, he comes in a cheerful way as an angel of light. Crafty and deceptive, some agents of Satan appear peaceful, generous, profitable and cheerful with the purpose of destroying the believer. They also use flatteries and miracles that originate from the devil to deceive believers. But we must determine to overcome.

**VICTORY FOR THE CHRISTIAN** (Matthew 4:1-11; Genesis 39:7-13; Proverbs 22:24,25; James 1:16,19,21; Jeremiah 35:5-10,12,14,18,19).

Whatever form or shape a temptation may take, the joy of heaven is to see a believer come forth victorious. And true enough, some Christians always enjoy victory in times of temptations. Others struggle under strain and stress without overcoming.

**Question 4: *How can a believer be victorious over temptation?***

The cause for such a miserable spiritual life is a result of living too near to the border line. One who persists in walking near a precipice is in far greater danger of tumbling over than one who seeks to tread on sure ground. The Lord was victorious because, first, He did not rush with a light heart into temptation, nor shirk it. He confronted it bravely when he must face it. It is only in such a spirit that we can hope to resist temptations successfully. If we handle temptations prayerfully, victory is sure. The defeat of the devil, the tempter, in his encounter with the Lord in the wilderness assures us that we will overcome him if we resist him through the power of the Spirit.

The second secret of victory in temptation is single-minded devotion to do God's will. Anything less than a whole-hearted determination to please God regardless of the cost would give the enemy an edge in the battle. Joseph's victory in Potiphar's house and in prison were the results of single-minded devotion to do God's will. Essentially, victory in temptation is obtained through knowledge of and obedience to the word of God (Psalm 119:9,11).

Besides, there must be a strong passion for Christ to do His will, to keep a vital, living relationship with the Lord and to always exalt and honour Christ in word and deed. Genuine endowment with the power of the Holy Ghost gives us victory over temptations in doctrinal pollution, worship adulteration and false fellowship.

**Question 5: *What principles must a believer bear in mind during temptation?***

Victory is secured as we carefully and prayerfully follow some biblical principles especially the ones derived from the acrostics, "victory" – vigilance, integrity, circumspection, trust, obedience, righteousness and yieldedness. In summary, the Christian pilgrim on his way to heaven will have victory over every temptation as he rejects evil (Proverbs 1:10-15); lives righteously (Proverbs 4:20-27; Isaiah 33:14-17; Titus 2:11,12), obeys God (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 27:10; Acts 5:29), lives by faith (Hebrews 10:38), endures in times of temptation (James 1:12) and depends on divine help during temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Dallying with the devil is disastrous. To overcome temptation, we must “**Resist the devil and he will flee from you**” (James 4:7). We must “**fight the good fight of faith**” (1 Timothy 6:12). And above all, we should take the shield of faith, with which we can quench all the fiery darts of the devil (Ephesians 6:16). To take sides with the devil or his agents is to invite defeat. It is important to note that the spiritually lame or sick cannot muster enough strength to fight or resist evil; so is the spiritually sin-sick. Thus, it is the pure in heart who triumphs.

The scripture offers some practical helps on how to overcome temptations and the tempter. (i) Abstain from all appearances of evil – do not go to places (brothels, bars, etc.) where you can be tempted. (ii) reject legitimate offers/favours that lead or predispose you to sin, like the Rechabites did. (iii) Flee outright from persons who want to coerce you to sin like Joseph and Christ did. (iv) Like Christ, quote relevant scripture verses to counter those who misinterpret and misapply the scriptures to lure you into sin. (v) Part with sinful friends because they can influence you to do evil (vi) Depend on the Spirit of God to show you God’s way out of temptations.

**PRESERVATION FROM TEMPTATION AND THE OVERCOMERS’ BENEFITS**  
(Hebrews 2:18; 4:14-16; James 1:2-4, 12; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 4:18)

**Question 6: *What are the benefits believers who overcome temptation and the tempter enjoy?***

The devil designs temptations to destroy God’s children but God’s grace is abundant to make them overcome. The saints who were most used by God were also those who were most severely tempted. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and Paul all had their fair share of severe temptations but they overcame by the grace of God.

When we overcome temptations, our Christian character is developed and strengthened. If there were no temptations, we would lack the toughness of spiritual fibre needed to forge ahead. It takes the heat of fire to refine gold.

God permits temptations as a trial for the perfecting of the Christian’s spiritual life. But He limits Satan in the temptation he thrusts on His faithful servants (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Corinthians 10:13). He also overrules those temptations which are permitted to fulfil His own glory to the edification of the saints and the humiliation of Satan.

Victory is sweet for those who endure and overcome temptation. The believer’s faith in Christ is strengthened so as to keep overcoming in subsequent temptations. “Each victory will help you// Some other to win”, says a songwriter. Besides, the believer who overcomes in temptation knows more about the way and faithfulness of God and His unfailing promises. For standing firm and consistent, he bears fruits to the glory of God. He also ultimately receives a crown of life at the end of life.