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Lesson 417

PRESERVATION OF A RIGHTEOUS NATION FROM EVIL

MEMORY VERSE: “How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, *whom the LORD hath not defied?*” (Numbers 23:8)

TEXT: Numbers 23:1-30; 24:1-9.

Balaam was called upon by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse

Israel. Balak considered Israel, who had just defeated Sihon, the king of Amorites, too strong for him to be engaged in physical battle. The children of Israel were on their way to the promised land, and had passed through several nations they overcame in battles. Being very close to Canaan, they pitched their tent on the Northern side of Moab. Bible history reveals that Moab was of the lineage of Lot, the nephew of Abraham who separated himself and settled in Sodom. Moab, at this time, was ruled by princes and Balak was their king. Several things made Balak decide to use spiritual weapons against Israel rather than physical combat. What an innovation! The numerical strength of Israel, their destruction of Sihon, who refused them passage, their determination to reach the promised land, the lack of information regarding who they were and the fear of the unknown made Balak consult Balaam who was a respected and gifted prophet. Balaam was recognised for the notable effectiveness of his pronouncements.

While Balak can be easily condemned, Balaam’s covetous attitude calls for serious rebuke. Christian youths today should learn a lot from these. Balaam had been cautioned twice by God and forbidden to go with Balak. However, he persisted until he got God’s permissive will which made him set forth to go with the king’s representatives to curse Israel. However, God told him in clear terms not to curse Israel as any attempt to do so would be futile¹. Balak tried to convince Balaam to destroy Israel to no avail. Conclusively, Balaam pronounced these powerful words concerning Israel saying “... **Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee**” (Numbers 24:9).

PURSUIT OF EVIL BY THE REBELLIOUS AND GREEDY PROPHET (Numbers 23: 1–7, 11–17, 25–30; Psalm 10:3; 37: 12–14; 2 Peter 2: 13–17).

Balaam, hired by Balak tried to curse Israel. He requested that Balak build an altar for him where he could listen to the words of God and get anointing to be able to utter curses that would render the Israelites powerless. In spite of the clear injunction from God regarding the children of Israel, Balak tried again and

again to see if there could be any contrary prophecy concerning Israel. We learn some lessons from the efforts of Balaam and Balak as follows: (i) the enemies, even though not seen, are always plotting for the downfall of believers. (ii) The enemies never give up in their wicked plots and evil pursuits. Believers should always take the world as a battle field. (iii) Greed² can make the greatest of men join hand with the wicked to do evil. Christian youths should not allow promises of any success, wealth or friendship to make them join hands with the wicked like Balaam did (Exodus 23:2). (iv). Balaam should be condemned for telling half truth to the princes of Moab (Num 22:12-14). No matter the situation, youths should always tell the whole truth. (v) Balaam's continued association with Balak finally led to his death as he was killed in the battle against the children of Israel while fighting on Balak's side (Numbers 31:8). (vi) Balaam's great and good history of being a respected prophet that listened to God and spoke to the people what the Lord said was not remembered because of his continued efforts to do evil.

The actions of Balak are symbolic of the devil and his agents today. They seek several ways to bring the downfall of the children of God. The scripture describes the devil as **“your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Peter 5:8).

Question 1: Why do some youths go into evil association with the unbelievers?

The action of Balaam in associating with the wicked because of gains is also symbolic of serving the mammon¹ of which Jesus Christ warned. **“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”** (Matthew 6:24). Like Balaam, some Christian youths go into unequal yoke with unbelievers today because of (i) worldly gain, (ii) worldly appreciation, (iii) praise of men, (iv) fear of hurting others. We are, therefore, cautioned that **“...they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness”** (1 Timothy 6: 9 – 11).

PERPETUAL PRESERVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS (Numbers 23: 8–10, 18–24; Acts 28: 1–6; Psalm 121: 1–8; Jeremiah 36:26; Daniel 6:22,23; 2 Timothy 4:16–18; Psalm 91:1–16)

“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his” (Numbers 23: 8 – 10). Balaam had come expecting to receive the go-ahead to curse Israel after he constructed altars supposedly to the God of heaven. Balak had expected Israel to be

completely removed from the earth, destroyed in all their generations and subdued by the acclaimed¹ power and spiritual prowess² of Balaam. However, God revealed His intent and desire to preserve and increase Israel who, at this time, was walking in the way of God.

Question 2: *Why will God not allow Israel to be cursed?*

Balaam, in his utterances, explained why God was so passionate about preserving Israel. He stated that “...**He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them**” (Numbers 23:21). Godliness is a preservative that will ensure that youths who put their trust in God are not ashamed. The Psalmist exemplified this in his prayer when he said, “**The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower**” (Psalms 18:2). God preserved Israel and upturned the devices of the wicked because they believed in Him and did not join the idolatrous nation to go into evil. God is, constantly, involved in preserving the souls of those who walk with Him in truth and in spirit. Youths are, therefore, encouraged to continue to walk with the Lord, put their trust in Him, depend on His ability to guide them through the vicissitudes³ of life, and they will surely be protected for the “... **name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe**” (Proverbs 18:10).

Question 3: *Under which condition can a Christian youth be eternally secured?*

We need to sound a note of warning, however, that the protection and preservation of God remains only as long as Israel walked with God. Several times in their journey, Israel backslid and went into several sins and they lost the preservation. There is nothing like eternal security with God. God only walks with the righteous, and those who go back become enemies of God.

PROPHETIC PROCLAMATION OF THE REDEMPTION OF GOD’S PEOPLE
(Numbers 24: 1 – 9; Genesis 12:3; 27:29; Isaiah 53:3-12; Daniel 9:24; Matthew 1:21)

Balaam, finally, accepted the will of God regarding the children of Israel when he discovered that there was nothing he could do to change the heart of God regarding them. Even though Balak and the princes of Moab still desired him to try to see what he could do, we are told that “**he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face towards the wilderness**” (verse 1). He decided to go and further see the people that had defied all his attempts to curse them and his eyes were opened by God and he started prophesying concerning the children of Israel and the victories they were to get.

Balaam, in his praises to the working of God’s power in the mission of Israel to the promised land, referred to Israel as having goodly and orderly tents contrary to the statements of Balak, the king of Moab, that they were a crowd of people (verse 5). Israel had multi-coloured tents that were properly arranged in

an order that showed the various tribes. They moved in the order which God stated that they should, and this order displayed the very high discipline of a great multitude that God instilled¹ in them through Moses and the elders. Balaam discovered that God had destined Israel for exploits. He described Israel as (a) *valleys that are spread forth*, displaying their vastness² and numerical strength and spread; (b) *gardens by the river's side*, showing the fruitfulness and beautiful order of the camp of Israel in the arrangements of their tents according to their tribes, positioning of the tabernacle and the Levites and orderly movement regardless of their great number; (c) *the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted*, which accounted for their being favoured and a prized treasure to God and (d) *cedar trees beside the waters* showing forth their majesty, goodness and strength. Balaam further prophesied concerning the future exploits of Israel both on land and in water and stated that the kingdom of Israel shall be greater than that of Agag who was the king of Amalek which were the most powerful kingdom at that time. His prophecy also pointed to the coming of the Messiah who shall be the most powerful King. Therefore, the desire of Balak, king of Moab, was disappointed.

Question 4: *What must sinning youths do to be redeemed from sin and its consequences?*

Today, every sinner remains an enemy of God and would be definitely punished except they repent and come to God. God desires everyone to come under His protective arms and be part of the Kingdom of Christ which is the greatest of all kingdoms. Youths that desire this protection and preservation need to repent from all sins and follow the Lord. Believers need to be faithful to the Lord, serving Him with all their hearts.

Lesson 418

BALAAM'S PROPHECIES

MEMORY VERSE: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Numbers 24:17).

TEXT: Numbers 24:10-25.

The chapter before us contains an interesting event that

will bring some serious lessons. From our text, there are two main human characters – Balak and Balaam. Balak was the king of Moab (22:1-4). He decided and determined to curse the people of God. He would never accept failure for any reason (Numbers 23:3,6,11-15,25,27-30). However, God in His unchangeable faithfulness made Balaam to confirm the fulfillment of every word of His promise to Abraham many years ago (Genesis 12:1-3; Numbers 23:8-10,19,20).

Question 1: Who was Balaam?

Balaam was a true prophet who heard the words of God, had the knowledge of the most High, saw the vision of the Almighty but turned back from the Lord because of covetousness (Numbers 24:15,16; 2 Peter 2:15,16). At a later end of his life, he became a wicked counsellor, a compromiser, covetous man who loved the wages of unrighteousness (Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14; 2 Peter 2:15,16; Jude 11). He perverted¹ his spiritual life and ministry and earned God's judgement (Numbers 31:8). The scripture says: "**It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes**". "**For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another**" (Psalms 118:8,9; 75:6,7).

RELIANCE ON THE CREATOR FOR PROMOTION (Numbers 24:10-13; Jeremiah 17:5-10; Isaiah 30:1-5; 31:1-3; Psalm 146:3-6; Isaiah 51:11-13).

"And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times" (Numbers 24:10). Balak was angry and disappointed by the utterances of Balaam. He, therefore, sent him away for not cursing the children of Israel. Balak then said: "**I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour**". The Christian youth should know that it is dangerous to trust and have confidence in creatures (men) instead of

the Creator (God). The admonition of the Scripture to us is: **“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD”** (Jeremiah 17:5).

Question 2: *What are the consequences of putting our trust in men?*

“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!” (Isaiah 31:1). The consequences of putting our trust in men include: disappointment, distress, discouragement and defeat. It might lead to backsliding, shame, failure, fruitlessness, prayerlessness and powerlessness (Jeremiah 17:5; Numbers 24:11). However, examples abound in the Bible of those who trusted in the Lord and were not disappointed. These include Abraham (Romans 4:19-21), David (Psalm 28:7), Daniel (Daniel 6:20-23), Paul (Acts 27:22-25) and many others. Our prayer should be: **“Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man”** (Psalms 108:12).

“If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak?”(Numbers 24:13). From Balaam’s statement, he knew the word and the standard of God that it was not right for him to accept this evil assignment.

Question 3: *What was the cost of Balaam’s compromise?*

Balaam was a compromiser (Numbers 22:7-13,15-22). His desire for gain led to his loss of everything. He received no reward from Balak, because he had not cursed Israel. Also, he received no reward from God, because he had wished to curse God’s people. It is the same thing with those who are church-goers and ungodly but have affections for unrighteous allurements of the world. They miss earthly reward as well as the reward of eternity in glory, because of their double-standard life. This is the cost of compromise. The only solution is to repent and live a life free from sin (Ephesians 5:3-7).

REVELATION OF CHRIST THROUGH BALAAM’S PROPHECY (Numbers 24:15-19; Genesis 49:9-12; Jeremiah 48:42-47; Daniel 2:44,45; 4:3,34; 7:13,14,17,18, 26, 27; 9:24; Isaiah 9:6,7; Revelation 11:15; John 3:3,5).

As stated earlier, Balaam was a true prophet before he backslid (Numbers 24:15,16). Even though he was not having current spiritual experiences and good relationship with the Lord, yet, he was still prophesying. This should not surprise you. God can choose to use any channel to fulfill His purpose and will (Numbers 22:21-28; Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10; Revelation 17:12-17). However, to ensure our Christian experiences are current and our relationship with God remains fresh, we must abide in Christ, obey His word and pray for grace daily.

“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth” (Numbers 24:17).

Question 4: With scripture references, who does the “Star” and “Sceptre” stand for in Balaam’s prophecy?

These last prophecies of Balaam go far beyond the period of the kingdom and reign of king Balak. They pass through ages unknown and talk of the Saviour who was yet to be manifested. The prophecies reveal Christ as **“Star out of Jacob a Sceptre out of Israel”** (Revelation 22:16; Psalm 45:6; Hebrews 1:8). **“Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city”** (verse 19). The Star is a symbol of glory and great royalty (Matthew 2:1,2; Luke 2:11). Also, star gives light and Jesus is the great Light that gives light to the whole world (Matthew 4:15,16; Ephesians 5:13,14). The Sceptre symbolizes power and authority and Christ is **“the power of God, and the wisdom of God”** (1 Corinthians 1:24). Therefore, the essence of Balaam’s Messianic prophecies was that a King would come with great glory, power and authority. He would be a great Light to all men (Matthew 4:12-16). He will eventually have dominion over all; for He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Many centuries afterwards, Christ fulfilled these prophecies as the Star and the Light to the whole world (John 9:5). As a King, He will reign forever (Luke 1:32,33).

Question 5: How can a sinning youth receive Christ as the Light?

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). Accepting Christ by faith into our lives drives away spiritual darkness, defeat and damnation that should have come on us as result of evil and sin (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). **“Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city”** (Numbers 24:19). Balaam’s prophecy concludes that the Sceptre and the Star shall have dominion **“and he shall reign for ever and ever”** (Revelation 11:15). Today, allow Christ to reign and rule your heart and life and you will be allowed to enter His Kingdom (Luke 17:20,21).

REVELATION FROM BALAAM’S COMMENTS ON GOD’S PEOPLE (Numbers 24:14,20-25; Exodus 17:16; Deuteronomy 25:19; 1 Samuel 15:1-3; Numbers 31:16; 2 Peter 2:14-19; Jude 11-13).

Balaam also prophesied of the victory Israel would have over the Amalakites, Kenites and Assyrians (verses 20-24). The Lord has already pronounced in His word that He would have war with Amalak forever. **“For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation”** (Exodus 17:16). As children of God, we should hand over all our battles to Him in prayer and He will surely fight for us (2 Chronicles 20:14,15).

“And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days” (Numbers 24:14). When Balaam could not curse Israel, he counselled the Midianites on how to entice them into the sin of immorality (Numbers 31:16;

Revelation 2:14). This was because his heart was fixed on the reward of unrighteousness.

Question 6: *What lessons do we learn from Balaam's awful end?*

"...Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!". "And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; ...Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword" (Numbers 23:10; 31:7,8). He desired to die as a righteous man but he died as a backslider. If Balaam with great spiritual endowment, **"whose eyes are open", "who heard the words of God", who "knew the knowledge of the most High" and "saw the vision of the Almighty",** prophesied of Christ's first Coming but failed woefully and went into perdition, **"what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness"** (Numbers 24:15,16; 2 Peter 3:11).

Jesus said, **"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"** (Matthew 7:21-23). Are you born-again? Is your name still in the Book of life? Return to the Lord now in repentance and with a humble attitude before it is too late. **"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..."** (Hebrews 2:1-3a).

Lesson 419

ISRAEL'S DESCENT INTO WHOREDOM

MEMORY VERSE: “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab”(Numbers 25:1)

TEXT: Numbers 25:1-18.

In our last lesson, we have seen how both Balaam and

Balak were desperately doing everything they could to curse the children of Israel - the people of God. They had made three different attempts to curse the children of Israel. Rather than cursing them, God gave to Balaam a prophecy of blessings upon the children of Israel. As a matter of fact, Balaam told Balak, “**How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?**” (Numbers 23:8). He revealed why it was impossible for him to curse the people. “**He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him...**” (Numbers 23: 21). In a very clear term, when we live a life of holiness and obedience to God, no enemy can hurt us. “**No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord**” “**And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?**” (Isaiah 54:17; I Peter 3:13).

Question 1: Does the enemy give up easily in spiritual warfare on Christian youths?

Having tried so hard with no positive result, Balaam gave up cursing the children of Israel. He said, “**And now, behold, I go unto my people...**” (Numbers 24:14). Someone would have thought that that was the end, he actually resigned to try alternative method of destroying Israel. He advised Moab on how to make Israel sin. “**And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods**” such that, “**the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab**” (verse 2,1). Satan does not give up on anyone easily. If he tries one method and it does not work, he would seek for another (Luke 4:1-13). Unfortunately for the children of Israel, they fell prey to Balaam's trap (verse 3). Sin, if allowed in the life of a Christian youth, brings upon him the wrath of God and satanic oppressions.

THE MINGLING¹ WITH UNGODLY PEOPLE (Numbers 25: 1-3; 31:15,16; Revelation 2:14; 2 Timothy 4:10; Matthew 13:22; Hebrews 3:13; 1 Peter 2:11)

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (verses 1-3). The children of Israel got deeply involved in relationship with the people of Moab and committed immorality with their daughters. They honoured invitations to attend their idolatrous ceremonies which gave them the chance to fully partake in their evil ceremonies, during which they met those seductive² ladies they committed whoredom with, as it used to happen in ancient time. All these happened because they were beguiled² and deceived.

Question 2: *What is the danger of having close relationship with unbelievers?*

The daughters of Moab **“caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD...”** (Numbers 31:15,16). In literal sense, those ladies, enticed the children of Israel into immoral acts. A youth who has unchecked relationship with sinners, honouring every invitation, attending all ceremonies indiscriminately will be exposed to temptations that may overwhelm their minds. This will consequently lead to backsliding.

Demas forsook the Lord because he had mingled with and loved the present world. The things he saw caught his attention and won his affection. The word of God tells us that **“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful”** (Matthew 13:22). The riches of the world can so deceive godly people that they will forget or deliberately push aside all they have learnt and begin to mingle and compromise with the sinful practices of the world. The word of God warns believers to take heed so that their hearts are not deceived or become hardened (Hebrews 3:12, 13).

For a Christian youth to overcome in these last days, the following precautions must be taken. One, do not keep too close a relationship with opposite gender, whether they are Christians or not. Two, do not keep close relationship with sinners. (Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 1:10-15; 22:24,25; I Corinthians 15:33). Three, open your heart to scriptural exhortations (Hebrews 3:13). Four, do not allow the cares for earthly things rise above the demand for God’s word. (Matthew 13:22; Colossians 3:2, 3). Five, read, obey the word of God and pray always.

THE METING OUT OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT (Number 25:3-9, 14-18, I Timothy 5: 20; Deuteronomy 13: 6-11; 17:12,13; Titus 1:13; I Corinthians 10: 10).

When the Lord saw what was going on among the people, **“the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel”** (verse 3, 4). God cannot excuse sin at any time and in any dispensation, regardless of who commits the sin. (Habakkuk 1:13). Irrespective of the relationship the

sinner has with the people of God, a sinner will be punished for his sin if there is no genuine repentance (Proverbs 11:21, 16:5). So, for these people, God instructed that the heads of those who had pioneered and encouraged the evil should be hung. This would serve as a public lesson to every other person among the children of Israel that God did not want them to continue in the same sins. **“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”** (1 Timothy 5:20).

Question 3: *How should sin be dealt with in the Church today?*

Moses heeded God’s instruction and also got the judges involved, that they should slay **“every one his men that were joined unto Baal- peor”** (verse 5). While that was going on, one man of the tribe of Simeon, from a noble family, brought a Midianitish woman into the camp to commit immorality. Phinehas went after them in the tent and pierced both of them through with a javelin. All the leaders and members should join hands together to rebuke publicly, any form of sin. The arrow of the word of God should be employed and used to discipline the erring member, so that others who have tendency to do the same thing would fear. However, Christian youths are not expected to fight or physically assault the sinners. They should be cautioned and if they refuse to repent, youths are to report the sinner to the leaders in the Church for necessary action.

Question 4: *What is the danger of continuing in sin?*

How unfortunate it was for Zimri and his sin partner, Cozbi! They met death unprepared and went to hell. The only opportunity a sinner has to repent is now, because the next moment is not guaranteed. Ananias and his wife died while Peter was still admonishing them for lying (Acts 5:3-10). **“While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.... behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (Hebrews 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:2). So, all sinning youths should repent from their sins and come to God.

THE MARKS OF A DEDICATED BELIEVER (Numbers 25:6-13; Matthew 10:37,38; Luke 14:26,27; Daniel 12:3; Mark 10:28-30).

Zimri, in the sight of everybody who was weeping for the lives lost as a result of sin, brought in a woman, and Phinehas, whose grandfather was Aaron, rose from among the people to kill him and his girlfriend. Phinehas, an Old Testament priest, exhibited his anger at the sin of Zimri and the Midianitish woman by piercing them through with a spear and killed them. Children of leaders are challenged to live and stand for what their parents preach as any other members of the church is expected to obey the word of God.

Question 5: *What are the marks of a life dedicated to God?*

Phinehas and Zimri had the same great grandmother, Leah (Genesis 29:33,34; Numbers 25:11). But he put sentiments off when he needed to deal with sin. Although he saw the evil just like every other person who had seen it,

but did nothing. He dared to stand alone. He was zealous for his God. He knew his action was going to be painful but he still had to do it. When our lives are dedicated to God, we do not allow sentiments¹ for our family or friendship tie to stand in our way of executing divine justice. Also, we dare to be different and stand alone even if others are not willing. We are to use the word of God to condemn every evil.

Question 6: *Does God have a reward for those who are dedicated to Him?*

God was pleased with Phinehas that He made a covenant of peace and everlasting priesthood with him. God has rewards for all those who are dedicated to His course. **“My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name”** (Malachi 2:5). Be another Phinehas today in your society.

Lesson 420

NEW GENERATION OF ISRAELITES NUMBERED

MEMORY VERSE: “Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers’ house, all that are able to go to war in Israel” (Numbers 26:2)

TEXT: Numbers 26:1-65.

As the children of Israel progressed in their journey

to the land of Canaan, their enemies devised means of hindering them from possessing their God-given inheritance. The chapter, before this, gave an account of a sad incident in which the daughters of Moab and Midian enticed them to sin and twenty-four thousand were destroyed in the plague (Numbers 25:1-9). God frowns at sin and will always execute judgment whenever sin is committed. Notwithstanding, God continued with His plans for the faithful after destroying the sinning Israelites.

In this chapter, we see that God commanded Moses to take the number of the children of Israel. Only those who sinned among them were cut off from the plan of God. They will not be counted among God’s heritage.

Question 1: *Will sinning youths be part of the future plans of God for the Church?*

No doubt, sinning youths, like the fallen Israelites who were hindered from proceeding into the promised land, would be disallowed from partaking in the rapture and possessing eternal life. If they turn from their sins now without further delay, they shall be numbered among the saved boys and girls that shall make it to the City of gold (heaven). As we go through the study before us, we shall discover (i) how prompt Moses was in obeying God when He spoke to him;(ii) the faithfulness of God in preserving posterity¹ for Abraham as He promised; (iii) how He has greatly increased Israel and finally; (iv) the reason God commanded Moses to number Israel.

PROMPT OBEDIENCE TO DIVINE ORDER TO RE-NUMBER ISRAEL (Numbers 26:1-4; 1:1-3, 19; 12:6-8; 1 Samuel 3:8, 9; 15:22,23; Exodus 34:10, 11; Deuteronomy 6:24; Jeremiah 7:23; Acts 4:19).

“And it came to pass after the plague, that the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers’ house, all that are able to go to war in Israel” (Numbers 26:1, 2). The children of Israel had earlier been numbered by

Moses as commanded of God at Mount Sinai (Numbers 1:1-3). Now he is instructed to do the same thing again. He did not murmur nor question when God instructed him to repeat it. He obeyed and carried out the instruction of the Lord.

Question 2: *How do some boys and girls react when they are sometimes assigned a task more than once?*

Moses's disposition is different from what many youths display when given an instruction to do the same task more than once. This could be at home, Church or in the school. They murmur, grumble and complain. It is not godly but an act of disobedience. Even when the instruction is later carried out, it becomes imperfect obedience. **"And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart"** (2 Chronicles 25:2). We have an account of the young Samuel who thought Eli was calling him to be attended to at night, despite being turned *ba twicke*. It was his perseverance and faithfulness to his assigned task that marked him out. It was his persistent spirit that made Eli to realise that he must have been called by the Almighty with a message **"And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth..."**(1 Samuel 3:8, 9). Many youths forget that God wants them to always obey Him. Obeying God is keeping His commandments. He commands youths to obey their **"...parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord"** (Colossians 3:20). The same should be done to authorities in the society, school and Church (Romans 13:1-3).

Question 3: *What are the consequences of disobeying God's instruction?*

"And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22, 23). Youths should learn how to obey God, Disobeying God has terrible outcomes. It leads to loss of relationship with God, sickness, backwardness, failure, rejection and damnation in hell fire.

POSTERITY OF ISRAEL NUMBERED ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILIES (Numbers 26:5-51, 57-65; Exodus 32:32; Jude 5; Hebrews 3:8-13; Revelation 13:8; 20:12).

Though the Israelites had not entered into the promised land, God knew His ability to take them there and had started perfecting His plans on how the land would be distributed among them. **"Take the sum of the people, from twenty years old and upward; as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel, which went both out of the land of Egypt... Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names"** (Numbers 26:4, 53). The counting took this form: the descendants of the eldest

son of Israel, the Reubenites which comprises the family of Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi summed **43,730** (Numbers 26:5-8). The Simeonites comprised the family of Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin, Zerah, and Shaul which summed **22,200** (Numbers 26:11-14). The family of Gad comprised Zephonites, Haggites, Shunites, Oznites, Erites, Arodites, and Arelites which summed **40,500** (Numbers 26:15-18).

Others were the families of Judah which comprised Shelanites, Pharzites, Zarhites, Hezronites, and Hamulites which summed **76,500** (Numbers 26:20-22). The sons of Issachar after their families: Tola, Pua, Jashub, and Shimron totalled **64,300** (Numbers 26:23-25). Zebulun which comprised Sered, Elon, and Jahleel totalled **60,500** (Numbers 26:26, 27). Then the family of Joseph which was made up of the families of Manasseh: **“These are the families of Manasseh, and those that were numbered of them, fifty and two thousand and seven hundred” (52,700)** (Numbers 26:34). The Families of Ephraim consisted of Shuthelah, Becher, Tahan, Tahanites. The sons of Shuthelah: Eran, the family of the Eranites which summed **32,500** (Numbers 26:28-37). The sons of Benjamin after their families are family of the Belaites, the family of the Ashbelites, the family of the Ahiramites, the family of the Shuphamites, the family of the Huphamites. **“And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the family of the Ardites: and of Naaman, the family of the Naamites”** (Numbers 26:40). They are all together **45,600** (Numbers 26:38-41). We have the families of Dan numbered **64,400** (Numbers 26:43). The families of Asher are Jimna, Jesui, Beriah. And the name of the daughter of Asher was Sarah. The total of the families of Asher is **53,400** (Numbers 26:44-47). The sons of Naphtali after their families: family of the Jahzeelites, the family of the Gunites, the family of the Jezerites, the family of the Shillamites, they that were numbered of them were **45,400** (Numbers 26:48-50). **“These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty” (601,730)** (Numbers 26:51).

Question 4: *Why were some Israelites missing in the head count?*

Looking carefully into the families and names of those counted, the names of those destroyed in the wilderness for sin were missing, and they did not make it to the end! The Bible says, **“But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness”**. (1 Corinthians 10:5). The Levites were counted separately and summed **23,000**. They were not to have any inheritance because God was their part. The same way, records are kept in heaven of truly saved youths (Revelation 20:12). Is your name numbered among the redeemed of the Lord Jesus?

PURPOSEFUL ORDER AND PATTERN OF DISTRIBUTING THEIR INHERITED POSSESSION (Numbers 26:52-56; Ezekiel 18:25; Psalm 99:4; Acts 6:2, 3; Mathew 14:16-20).

“Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names” (Numbers 26:53). The reason God ordered the numbering of the children of Israel, at this time, was for the distribution of the land of their possession. In doing this, God designed a pattern to be followed by the leaders. The pattern is that, those who are many are to have more inheritance, and the

few should have less (Numbers 26:54). The land is to be divided by lot according to the names of tribes of their fathers (Numbers 26:55). From the pattern God gave Moses in distributing the land, we see one attribute of God as an impartial Judge. **“The king’s strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob”** (Psalms 99:4). Also, He is a God of order. In our own time, we do not cast lot when we have need to distribute anything among youths, but are given the Holy Ghost to guide us **“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business”** (Acts 6:2, 3). All the same, the pattern God gave them was necessary in order to avoid argument, discontent and strife.

Question 5: *Have there been occasions that prompted the need for distribution of anything among youths in our Church and how was it done?*

The retreat and success camp periods are times when we share together and youths are expected to sit down quietly till they are served their meal. It is always a time of caring and sharing together. Youths should always submit to the pattern of food, water and hostels distributions in all future programmes for them if the Lord tarries and divine blessings shall be theirs. **“Let all things be done decently and in order”** (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Lesson 421

THE LAW OF INHERITANCE

MEMORY VERSE: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father’s brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them” (Numbers 27:6, 7).

TEXT: Numbers 27:1-11

Our previous lesson exposed us to the command God gave Moses to number Israel. He specifically told him those to be counted. **“Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers’ house, all that are able to go to war in Israel”** (Numbers 26:2). It is challenging that Moses acted promptly to the Lord’s command and ordered the numbering of the children of Israel. In this, we learnt to obey God whenever His message comes to us without any delay. Today, we shall be considering the law of inheritance as ordained by the Lord. This is one of the reasons God commanded Israel to be counted.

Question 1: *What are God’s inheritance for Christian youths today?*

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). God’s inheritance for Christian youths include redemption, restoration, righteousness, revival, retentive memory and rewards in eternity.

THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD DESIRED AN INHERITANCE (Numbers 27:1-4; 26:33; 33:54; Genesis 17:1-8; Hebrew 11:8-14, 16; Deuteronomy 4:20; John 14:1-3; Ephesians 1:11-14, 18; Hebrew 9:15; 1 Peter 1:3,4).

The journey of the children of Israel from Egypt into the promised land was almost completed but many people had died. Among them was the death of Zelophehad. **“Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons”** (Numbers 27:3). As the practice was before now, only the male children were entitled to inheritance (Genesis 48:5,6; 31:14,15). This is because God ordered the land to be inherited according to the tribes of their fathers. **“Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their**

fathers they shall inherit" (Numbers 26:55). By implication, it means that his name would be erased from the generation of Israel since he did not have any son to possess his inheritance.

This was the concern of his five daughters and they presented their case before Moses, the man of God. The way and manner in which they did so is very instructive. These five daughters, at this point, had neither father nor brothers to inherit the land but had determination that they would not be left destitute¹. They went to Moses, the man of God, because they believed that God's words, through Moses, must be performed and they had inner conviction that He would give a right judgment.

Question 2: *What should youths do whenever they feel they are denied of their rights?*

Christian youths should be lovers of peace. The case of the daughters of Zelophehad made it clear that there might be some incidence in which the action taken by an individual is not very clear to you. It could also be that the perception of the parties involved in a matter differs. Whatever the case, scriptural due process of resolution should be followed. At home, youths should endeavour to present their cases before their parents. Such cases should be presented prayerfully with humility for consideration. When this is done, if it is God's will, be sure of a positive result. The same thing should be applied to similar cases in the school. As God's children, we should not partake in any violent means of getting our rights. **"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof"** (Romans 13:13, 14).

The daughters of Zelophehad did not murmur or show any act of discontent. Rather, they followed the due process. This is a very good example for boys and girls. The daughters of Zelophehad had: (1) faith in the power and promise of God and His ability to give them the promised land for possession (Genesis 17:1-8). (2) fervent desire for a place and name in the promised land (Deuteronomy 4:20). (3) firm respect and honour for their father whose name was dear to them, but had died (Exodus 20:12). Thank God that, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Church has designed and created the youth's ministry for proper and prompt care of youths. Like the daughters of Zelophehad, you have leaders in the Church who you can trust with your cases. You also have the opportunity of asking question after the teaching of the Search the Scriptures every Sunday from your Pastor through which you can seek for clarification on any issue bordering you.

Question 3: *What lessons do you learn from the attitude portrayed by these five daughters?*

Youths should show respect and honour for their parents, Church leaders, teachers in the school and elders in the community. They should remember their good counsels. Even when they have passed to glory, they should live in a way that brings praises to God. Also, they should have faith in the ability of God to fulfill all His promises to them in every area of life. He is God and with Him, all things are possible (Luke 1:37). No matter the conditions and privileges that

might be before you, you should desire strongly a place and a name in heaven where Christ is preparing mansions for you (John 14:1, 2; 1 Peter 1:4). The inheritance desired by Zelophehad daughters was earthly, perishable, corruptible, and yet they earnestly desired it.

Question 4: Seeing that our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, not fading away and reserved in heaven, how should youths prepare for it?

Youths should ensure they are fully prepared for this heavenly inheritance. Boys and girls who are not born-again should repent and surrender their lives to Jesus. Saved boys and girls should contend earnestly for the faith; fight against sin, the world, the flesh and Satan. Be watchful and prayerful, longing after heaven by setting your affections on the things above and not on the earth (Colossians 3:1,2).

THE DECISION OF MOSES TO KNOW GOD'S PRONOUNCEMENT (Numbers 27:5-7; Exodus 14:15; Numbers 15:33-35; Proverbs 3:5, 6; 1 Samuel 30:7, 8; Ezra 7:10; 1 Peter 4:7).

Moses' manner of life was that of seeking to know the will of God at all times and in all matters. He always guided against self-management. He realised that man only knows in part, so anytime he had any need or problem (personal or national), his habit was praying to God for solution "**And Moses brought their cause before the LORD**" (Numbers 27:5). The same thing happened when the Israelite had the problem of crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15). Also when a man was found gathering stick on the Sabbath, despising the word of the Lord, and the punishment to be meted on him was not clear, Moses put him in ward waiting for the decision from the Lord (Numbers 15:32-35). Moses' decision was that of seeking the face of the Lord to know his will. No wonder he succeeded and God testified to his faithfulness (Hebrews 3:2). For youths to succeed and be in the very will of God in life, they should follow the example of Moses.

Question 5: Why are some youths experiencing failures in their academic, spiritual and social lives?

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:5-7). Many youths have forsaken prayer in their success-drive. During devotion at home and services in the church, they do not pray. During examination period, they do not pray. Many youths choose careers without earnest prayer for divine guidance. This is why some youths have marred their future. Any youth who depends on his own understanding is bound to fail. Anyone who depends on self-management in taking vital decision in life and ministry will fail (Ruth 1:1-5). Saul, the first King of Israel, tried it and failed. Samuel almost tried it when David was to be chosen as the king and would have failed if not for divine intervention. When Moses sought God to know the right thing to do, He (God) directed his paths. "**And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren;**

and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them” (Numbers 27:6,7). Similarly, when we seek God’s guidance in any matter, He will guide us. (Psalms 25: 9, 12).

DETAILED ORDER OF GOD TO THE REQUEST OF ZELOPHEHAD’S DAUGHTERS (Numbers 27:8-11; 36:5-8; 1 John 5:14, 15; 1 Kings 21:1-3; Hebrew 12:14-17).

The request of the daughters of Zelophehad did not only yield a positive result from God, but marked the beginning of perpetual law of dividing inheritance in Israel. **“And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter...if he have no daughter...his inheritance unto his brethren...have no brethren...give his inheritance unto his father’s brethren...his father have no brethren, ... give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses.”** (Numbers 27:8-11). From that time, inheritance of a man who dies without a son is to be passed to his daughter(s) who must marry from her father’s kinsmen. If he has no daughter, it will be passed to his brethren and so unto his kinsmen. In this we see that God is considerate and impartial, and His laws are meant for our good.

Question 6: *What should be our attitude towards our God-given inheritance?*

“And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee” (1 Kings 21:2,3). Here, Naboth held fast his inheritance and did not allow king Ahab to take it from him even though he lost his life in the process. This was unlike Esau who despised his (Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:15-17). Therefore, every Christian youth should hold fast their God-given inheritance till the end. **“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”** (Revelation 3:11).

Lesson 422

JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

MEMORY VERSE: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19).

TEXT: John 20:11-23; 21:1-14.

The chapter before this revealed, among other things,

how Christ, the Saviour of the world, was ignorantly crucified by the Jews in fulfillment of prophecies (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:1-8; Mathew 1:21; John 11:50-52; 1:29). This caused pains, sorrow and grief of heart to His disciples. They looked deserted.¹ The daily manifestations of the beauty of God revealed in Christ’s character of perfect love, now terminated through His death, made them weep. For they “**trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel**” (Luke 24:21). Due to the preparation for the Sabbath, Christ was buried at the sepulchre near where He was crucified. “**There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand**” (John 19:42).

“**And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him**” (Mark 16:1). When they got to the sepulcher, their Master was not there and they, supposing He was stolen, wept!

Question 1: *Are there conditions, today, that may make a youth weep?*

Certainly, there are situations of life that may make a youth to weep. The Bible says, “**Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble**” (Job 14:1). There is time for everything on the earth, a time to laugh and a time to weep. A sinning youth who is touched and made broken by God’s word should not think it strange to weep and repent of his sins. When a loved one is lost, as we saw in our text, it causes grief. When he experiences failure at home or school, he can weep (2 Corinthians 7:10). No matter the situation, don’t give up, for God must surely “**come and save you**” (Isaiah 35:4). The disciples, discovering that Christ was not in the tomb where He was laid, became hopeless (John 20:1-10). Christ’s appearance brought comfort and renewed hope.

CHRISTIANS' COMMITMENT TO CHRIST, THE DIVINE (John 20:11-18; Mathew 28:1; Mark 16:1-3; Mathew 27:55; Ruth 1:16, 17; 2 Samuel 11:10-13; Songs of Solomon 8:6; Judges 11:35; Romans 8:35-39).

“...surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be” (2 Samuel 15:21). The deeds of these women, as recorded in the scriptures were similar to the one shown by Ittai as quoted above. They were committed to Christ in life and death **“There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem”** (Mark 15:40, 41). Let us examine some of the deeds that revealed their true love and commitment to Christ. One, they were fearless. They came to the sepulcher at a time some disciples, in fear of the Jews, were in hideout. They did not fear what the guards and the Jews would do to them if they were caught. Two, they were willing to remove the stone which might be a hinderance for them (Mark 16:3). They were really consumed with love for their Master, that they did not see such task as impossible for them. Three, they came with spices to anoint Him. Five, they wept when they discovered He was not in the grave **“But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher”** (John 20:11). This is an expression of profound love for Jesus whose death was to fulfill the scriptures (Luke 24:44).

Question 2: *To what extent should Christian youths love and be committed to the Saviour?*

In these women, we see the depth of commitment and love Christian youths should have for the Lord. As their love and commitment to Christ defied all odds, so should Christian youths be. Though, Christ died a shameful death, they were not ashamed to be reckoned with Him both in death and in life. Many youths think it a shameful thing to identify with Christ and confess Him publicly. Rather, they should appreciate His love which was demonstrated through His death on the cross to ransom them from sins. Your commitment to Christ should have no bound. Whether in life or death, you should not allow anything to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. These women followed Him to the point where He was crucified, and to the grave where He was laid (Mathew 27:55; Mark 16:1-3). As you walk along with Christ, you might encounter some problems like ridicule, persecution, famine, tribulation, isolation, rejection, denial of legitimate rights. Know that Christ suffered such and even died for you. Be willing and committed to suffer for His name's sake. Have you opened your mouth and promised to serve Him to the end? Be faithful to the commitment you have made to the Lord no matter the condition. **“...for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back”** (Judges 11:35).

Question 3: *Mention a youth in the Bible with a firm commitment worthy of emulation?*

“And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16, 17). One good example is that of Ruth, though not a youth. God is still in search of boys and girls with the resolution¹ to go where He leads, lodge where He chooses, die as He purposes, and be buried with Him to sin and dwell with Him in righteousness and at last in the golden city on high.

CHRIST’S COMFORT AND CARE FOR HIS DISCIPLES (John 20:19,20; 21:1-14; Mathew 28:3-9; John 16:20-22; .14:18, 19; Psalm 23:4; 71:21; Isaiah 51:3; Zechariah 1:17; Mathew 9:22; Acts 9:31; 2 Corinthians 1:4; John 11:31-36; 1 Peter 5:7).

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19). Christ always comes at the right time; He is never late. The disciples had no peace since His crucifixion. All they experienced was trouble, fear, pain, anxiety and sorrow of heart. They did not know what was ahead, though Christ made it clear to them before His arrest. They have not understood the scriptures. **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you”** (John 16:20-22). At a time when they were most confused with the news that Christ’s body was not in the grave, although it was earlier revealed that He has risen, but some did not believe (Mathew 28:5-7). Then came Christ with an exhortation, **“Peace be unto you”**.

Question 4: *What do you think was responsible for the sorrowful state of Christ’s disciples?*

The disciples would have been very glad that Christ died if they had understood the scriptures. They would have understood that His death was intended to make man live eternally in heaven rather than in hell. They would have not been sorrowful if they had understood the sayings of Christ that after the third day, He would rise from the dead.

In the same way, many youths are suffering wrongly due to lack of knowledge and understanding of God’s words. **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children”** (Hosea 4:6). Some are facing persecution, or failure in ignorance. They do not know that only the diligent makes rich. Some who are dull of hearing and slow of understanding do not know or remember God’s provisions for them in the Bible, that **“the**

memory of the just is blessed". They often forget that, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). There are promises for the sick, oppressed and afflicted youths in the scriptures and only through searching you will discover and be liberated.

CHRIST'S COMMAND AND COMMISSION FOR HIS DISCIPLES (John 20:21-23; Mathew 28:18-20; Ezekiel 3:17, 18; John 4:35-38; Jonah 3:1, 2; Acts 26:16-19).

The time before Christ went to heaven was a wonderful one. He opened their understanding and taught them many things written of Him. He also gave them important instruction and command on an issue dear to His heart "**Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you**" (John 20:21).

Question 5: *What is the most important work dear to Christ?*

The everlasting love Christ has for lost sinners contained in this mission. He commissioned the disciples to preach the gospel to all creatures. He only laid the foundation of faith upon which they were expected to build. It was a mission the Father gave Him, which He passed over to them. Just as Christ obeyed the Father in actualising the mission, His disciples were expected to follow His example and truly they did. Christ sent them to extend His love to the world. As His disciples today, we, Christians, are expected to go and preach the gospel of salvation sincerely, selflessly, sacrificially and satisfactorily. Christ realised the great task ahead and "**breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost**" (John 20:22).

Question 6: *What role does the Holy Ghost play in evangelization of the world and what are the steps a youth should take before receiving Him?*

The disciples were sent to the hostile world, the world that has no interest in Christ and the message of salvation. They were sent into a religious world that thought they knew God. They were to go and preach to men of power, fearful looking and very corrupt. For them to be able to stand before these people who would even despise, scourge, beat or kill some of them, they needed the power of the Holy Spirit. The same is applicable to us today. The world has not changed; the same Satan is still controlling the world. He is still using the same methods and devices against the salvation of men. He makes them despise God's word and its preachers. You need the Holy Spirit. To receive the Holy Spirit's power in a measure, as the disciples received in John 20:22, you must be saved. However, to receive the Holy Spirit in a baptismal measure as the disciples received in Acts 2:1-4, you must be sanctified. You must also thirst, hunger and pray in faith for the baptismal experience. "**But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8).

Question 7: What are the consequences of not carrying out Christ's command?

“Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). The only means to save sinning youths from destruction in hell is through the gospel message. If we fail to preach the gospel, some boys and girls will be doomed in hell. How will you see your friends, neighbours, classmates and relations in hell fire? God will also frown at you and will require their blood from you. **“When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand”** (Ezekiel 3:18). Christ can come at anytime and sinners can die at any moment, so do not delay any longer. **“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest”** (John 4:35).

Lesson 423

JESUS REPROVES THOMAS

MEMORY VERSE: “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27).

TEXT: John 20:24-31.

Jesus Christ had visited His disciples in our previous study and said to them, “**Peace be unto you**” (verse 19). He showed them His hands and the side that were pierced to convince them that He had truly risen up.

At this point, Thomas Didymus was not with the other disciples. He was only told later all that happened. He considered it a fairy tale and said, “...**Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe**” (verse 25).

Question 1: *What is God’s disposition to those who doubt the divine truth?*

The Lord was not happy with this unbelief and He had to come back and reprove Thomas for it and said: “**be not faithless, but believing**”(verse 27). Many, today, still have unbelief and doubt the word of God. “**But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him**” (Hebrews 11:6).

DISPLAY OF DOUBT BY THOMAS (John 20:24,25; Hebrews 10:24,25, James 1:5-7; Mark 11: 22,23).

“**But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe**” (verses 24, 25). Others who saw the Lord when He appeared to them believed that He had risen. Their faith was made stronger. But Thomas who was absent from that gathering said, “**I will not believe**”. He did not have the same level of faith which others had at this point because he missed what others heard from the Lord.

Question 2: *What are the benefits of being consistent in the fellowship?*

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). It is as we hear and obey the word of God from time to time that our faith becomes developed. Missing fellowship would result to missing the inspired teaching that should have developed our faith. Apart from this, the fellowship is supposed to give room for exhortations that would encourage us in the time of weariness. **“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”** (Proverbs 27:17). The fellowship is expected to be a place where believers gather to challenge, build and support each other. Other things that we enjoy in the fellowship are the cooperate prayers to handle our individual challenges and problems. **“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 10:25).

DENOUNCIATION AND DANGER OF UNBELIEF (John 20:26-29; Psalm 19:7-13; 78:18-23; 106:24-26; Hebrews 11:6; Hebrews 3:12; 4:1,2).

“And after eight days, again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:26, 27). After eight days, Jesus came again to the disciples. Even though the door was shut, He appeared in the room because He was, and indeed is, a divine Personality who could not be hindered or restricted by physical barriers. He pronounced peace upon them after which Thomas was told to reach out and touch His hands. Jesus reprovved Thomas because he manifested unbelief. He told him, **“be not faithless, but believing”**.

Question 3a: *Is unbelief pleasing to God?*

3b: *What are the dangers of unbelief?*

Unbelief and doubt are the evidences of a life that is not consistent with the Lord and they do not make God happy. Unbelief causes fear which results in unanswered prayer. It can,also,result in disappointment, discouragement, depression, and lead to death. God wants every Christian youth to walk in faith, trusting His word. To overcome unbelief, Christian youths should do the following: one, study the word of God daily and regularly; two, gather with other believers regularly; three, have an open disposition to God’s word and; four, pray regularly for the Lord’s strength.

DIVINE PURPOSE OF SIGNS AND WONDERS (John 20:30,31; 21:24,25; Joshua 2:8-11; Acts 8:4-8; 13:12).

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30). John, the author of this book, said that many things Jesus did were not written because even the whole world might not contain all the books that should contain the detailed account of all that Jesus Christ did. This does not mean that the Scripture is not

complete. **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”** (2 Timothy 3:16). God has reserved in the scriptures things that are necessary for our salvation, edification and eternal wellbeing.

Question 4: *What is the purpose of signs and wonders in the fellowship?*

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (verse 31). The purpose of signs, miracles and wonders is to lead people to Jesus, the Saviour (Acts 3:6-26; 4:4; 13:12). We should pray that God should confirmed His word with signs and wonders in our fellowship (Acts 4:29,30).

Question 5: *What should be the purpose of our preaching?*

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28). It is not enough for any preacher to preach a long and an endless message without making its purpose very clear by directing the people to the main reason for the message, which is to make people fear God and to keep His commandment. Jesus Christ and His atoning work at Calvary is the reason behind every chapter of the Bible. **“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”** (Luke 24: 27). Therefore, read the Scripture, believe and preach it to others.

Lesson 424

JESUS RESTORES PETER

MEMORY VERSE: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

TEXT: John 21:15-25.

Christ’s appearance at this time was one of the various appearances after His resurrection. After He had dined with the disciples at the seashore of Tiberias, He started a conversation with Peter who was supposed to be the pillar among others. Seeing that his mind was not steadfast, He challenged him to “**feed my lamb**”. This He said repeatedly, and in various ways, to emphasize the importance of holding fast and feeding the church of God. Though Peter was distracted by what Jesus would do with John, Jesus still kept him focused on the importance of doing what He had instructed him to do.

Question 1: What does God do with our past confessed sins?

As we look at Peter’s discussion with Jesus, we learn several lessons. When a youth repents from his sins, all his past sins are forgiven and forgotten by God and there is no remembrance of them anymore (Micah 7:19). Jesus did not consistently blame Peter like many believers would have done today, but spoke of what was ahead. We should also learn to forgive and forget when others offend us as that is the way to be Christ-like. Peter was given another opportunity to fulfill his role in the ministry by Jesus Christ, after he had stated that he still had love for God. Recall that Peter had gone to fishing in despondency¹ after the death of Jesus Christ, instead of encouraging the brethren who he was expected to lead. The Scripture tells us that Peter eventually fulfilled the role of establishing the New Testament Church and was used by God mightily to spread the gospel in obedience to the words of Christ which says “**...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**” (Acts 1: 8; 5:6,10; 12:13).

PASSION: A PRE-REQUISITE FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE (John 21: 15 – 17; Romans 5: 8; 1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 13; 16:14; Colossians 3: 14; 1 Peter 4: 8; Matthew 9: 36).

Jesus Christ highlights the requirement of Christian service as he asked Peter a question that would reflect the purpose of Peter’s call. Jesus asked Peter, “**Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?**” Jesus needed to ask him this question to see if he were more interested in the work of God than in the secular

work he had gone back to, after His crucifixion. The question, also, shows the deep passion for the flock which Christ had. He did not want the work to be carried out by those with lesser passion. Today, there are many youths who attend the church and may even get involved in evangelism and other assignments in the Church, but do not have real passion for God and His work. Without love, no one would be able to offer acceptable service unto the Lord.

Question 2: *What is the place of Christlike love in our service to God?*

Looking at the question asked by Christ, we can see the importance of putting God first in everything. Youths are not expected to love anything more than God. Love for God is the foundation of a believer's life. Scriptures emphasize the need to put God first. **"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"** (Matthew 6:33). Doing otherwise is idolatry. Today, the same question comes to all of us. Do we really love Christ? Are we able to place God above every other thing in our lives?

Question 3: *What are the features of true love?*

True love for God is active. It manifests itself in various ways when it comes from a sincere heart. It is sacrificial, steadfast and selfless. Jesus wanted Peter to manifest all these characteristics in his love to God. Peter answered the question of Jesus Christ positively twice by saying **"...Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee"**. However, the third time Christ asked Peter the question, **"...Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee"**. We learn the following lessons from Peter's responses. First, we see the sincerity of Peter. Even though Peter had gone back to fishing rather than evangelising, his statement shows that he still had passion for souls. He knew that Jesus Christ is Omniscient and could see if he was sincere. He, therefore, told Christ that **"thou knowest all things"**. He knew that Christ also knew the level of love he had. Christ did not deny Peter's love. He knew it was a sincere love which later manifested in several sacrifices and selfless service in the Kingdom as Peter went on to be a major pillar in the Church. Christian youths, in ministering the gospel, are not expected to minister with fear or favour. They are to preach the sound gospel to all.

Jesus, after confirming the sincerity of his love, told Peter to feed the lambs. Christ wanted him to selflessly give his best for the work of the Lord. He was to ensure that the sheep was well tendered like a shepherd does to his flock. Peter was to carry out oversight duties on the flock and make them fit for the kingdom of God. He was not to lord it over the sheep or treat them as slaves. He understood the assignment given to him properly and that was why, when he grew old and had to handover the work given to him by Christ, he stated: **"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"** (1 Peter 5: 2 – 4). Peter has fulfilled his ministry. The challenge today before everyone of us is the need to ensure we love and serve God with all our hearts as that is the only way we can be blessed.

PRIORITY OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (John 21: 18 – 23; Genesis 39: 1, 11 – 13, 20; 40: 1 – 3; 41: 14, 39 – 41; Daniel 3: 13, 20, 26; Acts 20: 18 – 28; 1 Corinthians 10: 13; 2 Corinthians 12: 15)

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me” (John 21: 18,19). After Peter was commissioned, he accepted the call but Christ explained some of the sacrifices he would need to make in fulfilling the call. Christ told him the manner of death he would face. Peter did not reject the call because of the sufferings associated with it. He still forged ahead and decided to follow Christ. This shows commitment. Many youths today are giving up on Christ because of persecution, sufferings, trials and temptations. **“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Question 4: *Should believers continue to serve God in troublous times?*

Believers are expected to serve wherever God sends them and they should ensure they give their best to the Lord at all times no matter what lies ahead. Jesus Christ also in the prophecy stated that Peter would get old and still continue preaching the gospel. Scriptures and history of the Church tell us that this was fulfilled. Peter, while writing to the elders, stated that he also was an elder. **“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”** (1 Peter 5:1). In spite of being imprisoned and enduring several persecutions, Peter was preserved. He was delivered from prison and from the persecutors and lived to do the work of Christ even when he was old. History also tells us that Peter, at his old age, died a painful death and was crucified as a martyr of the cross upside down. He gave priority to the service of God despite his sufferings.

Question 5: *Mention examples of those who served even though there was suffering.*

No matter what trials and suffering that may come along the way in the service of the Lord, God has a reward for all who willingly and faithfully serve Him. His ways are past finding out and you may not understand why you are permitted to go through some sufferings. Scripture is full of people that went through sufferings and were delivered in the midst of the hard times, to bring greater glory to God than they would have ever done, if they had not gone through the suffering. Joseph got to the prison before he was able to get into the palace. Ruth passed through the loss of her husband, yet she became one of the great grandmothers of David and Jesus Christ. Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego got into the burning fiery furnace but came out without any burn and made the idolatrous king proclaim the greatness of God. God is always there and He comes in always at the right time. Do not give up before your breakthrough. Be preoccupied with the service of the Master and He will duly reward you.

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that

he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (John 18: 21 – 23). Peter left the assignment he had just been given and focused attention on another person. The Bible warns everyone to desist from such acts. **“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”** (2 Corinthians 10:12). Carnal comparison and distracted focus do not help youths achieve their God-given goals and potentials. When people concentrate on assignment of others and make a carnal sizing of the achievement of others with the intent of ensuring they are not cheated or overworked, they introduce discord into the Church. Jesus had to immediately caution Peter and warned him to focus on his assignment and allow the other disciple to get his own assignment from Him directly.

Youths should, therefore, walk and work with a purposeful vision. When you are given an assignment, do your best and do not wait to see what others will be told to do. We have different gifts and talents and we are given tasks based on the talents and gifts that we possess. God understands our strength and while He rewards those who are faithful, those who fail to properly utilize their talents would be condemned.

PROFILE OF MIRACLES OF CHRIST, SUMMARISED (John 21: 24, 25; Acts 10: 38, 39)

In coming to the conclusion of the book of John, the writer stated **“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen”** (John 21:25). Jesus Christ had done so many miracles and John had been a witness of them. John was a witness of Christ’s life, ministry, trials, sufferings, judgement, crucifixion, death, resurrection, appearances to the disciples, ascension to heaven and still witnessed the ministry of the people that continued the work after Christ left.

Question 6: *Mention some of the works done by Christ while on earth?*

“And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak” (Mark 7:37). In summarizing the works of Christ, John stated that they were so many and that they could not all be written in one book. Christ lived a short but very eventful and fulfilling life. It is not how long one lives that matters but how well. Christ affected many people in His generation and in generations after, including ours, with the goodness of God. He touched and still touches so many lives today and the world is a living testimony of the remembrance of the work He came to do. Questions you need to ask yourself today include: Do you have the right relationship with God? Are you living in line with God’s plan for your lives? What will you be remembered for? How many lives have you touched? What will be written about you by your friends and fellow sojourners on earth when you have gone? What does God say about you? **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 15:58). A song writer says:

Fading away like the stars of the morning,
losing their light in the glorious sun,
thus would be pass from the earth and its toilings.
Only remembered by what we have done.

Lesson 425

THE POST- RESURRECTION DISCOURSE & ASCENSION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

TEXT: Acts 1:1-11.

The Acts of the Apostles is a very important book to the

Church today. It gives the history of the early church from the ascension of Christ to the period of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. It provides the link between the Gospels and the Epistles. This book goes beyond the record of the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus our Lord which the gospels deal with. The Acts of Apostles provides the knowledge of how the church of Christ is to be united, administered and organized to accomplish the task of evangelizing the world. The focus of the book is the place of the Holy Spirit’s power in the church for the purpose of witnessing for Christ (Acts 1:8). The book sets forth the divinely chosen method of the work of the ministry – evangelising, teaching, preaching, healing, caring and the appointment of qualified ministers. As we come to this book, our prayer should be that the Holy Spirit will give us understanding of the mystery of His will and the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Question 1: Who was the writer of the book of Acts?

It has been affirmed that Luke, the physician, was the author of Acts of the Apostles. He also wrote the book of Luke. This is because both books were dedicated or written to “**most excellent Theophilus**” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Theophilus was a man of high rank in the Roman world but a convert of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1-4). The purpose of Luke’s writing was “**That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed**” (Luke 1:4).

In this introductory lesson, we shall look at Christ’s resurrection and its proof, Christ’s command and the promise of the Holy Spirit’s power and Christ’s ascension and His imminent return.

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION AND ITS PROOF (Acts 1:1-3,6,7; Matthew 27:66; 28:1-8; Luke 24:36-48; John 20:19,20; Acts 2:31-33; 3:14,15; 4:1,2; 5:29-32; 7:55,56; 10:39-41; 26:19-23; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

The Christian life starts with faith in Christ's death and resurrection, and those who believe should systematically be taught all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27; Matthew 28:19,20). Theophilus believed and Luke systematically declared the whole counsel to him "... **of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:**" (verse 1-3). Our Christian faith should rest on the truth about Christ's resurrection.

Question 2: *What are the proofs that Jesus Christ rose from the death? Support your answers with scriptures.*

Christ's literal appearances, within the post-resurrection forty days, and the activities He engaged in stand as infallible¹ or undeniable proofs of His resurrection. He appeared to His disciples at different times in different places (Matthew 28:7-10; Luke 24:13-16; John 20:11-17; 20:26-28; 21:1,4-14). Paul also said that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6). Much later, He appeared to Paul the Apostle (1 Corinthians 15:8). All these proved the comments of the chief priests that His disciples stole Him away in the night to be false (Matthew 28:11-15). However, His resurrection gave opportunity for His disciples to ask questions about His kingdom.

In verses three, six and seven of our text, Christ's conversation with His disciples was on "**the kingdom of God**" and not on "**the kingdom to Israel**". Jesus' special instructions to the disciples, at this period, were pertaining to the kingdom of God, which "... **is not meat and drink but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost**" (Romans 14:17). The Kingdom of God is eternal and therefore greater than the earthly kingdom. Today, allow Christ to reign and rule in your heart and this will afford you the privilege of staying with Him forever. This is a spiritual kingdom of Christ (Luke 17:20,21). The physical kingdom is when He will rule and reign without a rival (Isaiah 9:6,7; Revelation 20:1-7).

Question 3: *How can a youth be part of Christ's Kingdom now?*

To be a part of Christ's Kingdom, a youth must repent and believe the gospel of the kingdom. However, the truth of Christ's instruction on the kingdom to the disciples was not understood quickly and clearly. The disciples thought of this kingdom to be a political one and expected a military Messiah who would break off the Roman bondage. This was because the children of Israel had lost the temporal power of David's throne for centuries. The disciples expected the kingdom to be restored to Israel after the resurrection of Christ (verse 6). They could not understand the fact that His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). However, He told them that it was not for them "**to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power**" (verse 7). Therefore, we learn: one, we should cheerfully submit to the will of the Father. Two, how God sets limits to our knowledge or action and expects us to be contented within these bounds. "**The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our**

children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Our citizenship is in heaven. Our desire and preparation should be on how to get there instead of fighting for earthly kingdom. **“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”** (Philippians 3:20,21).

CHRIST’S COMMAND AND THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 1:4,5,8; Luke 3:16; 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 2:1-4,38,39; 10:44-48; Luke 11:13).

The importance of the Holy Spirit’s power to individual believer, as well as to the Church as a whole, cannot be over-emphasised. To receive this power demands biblical preparations. **“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me”** (Acts 1:4). The mission of Christ and that of the church is to seek and save souls (Luke 19:10). To effectively fulfill this mission, there is need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Before Christ left the disciples finally, He commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the promised power from the Father (Luke 24:49).

Question 4: What does it mean to “wait” according to Acts 1:4?

To wait means holding on in prayer with earnest expectation to receive the promised power. As John the Baptist preached repentance and baptized those who believed through his preaching, Christ will baptize those who are saved, sanctified, surrendered, separated and steadfastly waiting for the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11).

Question 5: What is the purpose of being baptized in the Holy Spirit?

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The main purpose of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is for a believer to **“be witnesses unto me** (Christ)”. The ministries of the Holy Spirit are: directing evangelistic outreaches, confirming the word, guiding into all truth, teaching, inspiring and filling with joy, peace and boldness. He also comforts, counsels and intercedes for saints. Verse eight of our text reveals the strategy of carrying out the Great Commission for the Church. The Lord revealed that the witnessing should start in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria and **“unto the uttermost part of the earth”**. The early church followed this plan and pattern as given by the Lord and fulfilled the Great Commission in their time. It is now our turn and time to reach out to our schools and society with the gospel. Pray for the in-filling of the power, love, vision, compassion, commitment and zeal to reach the lost youths around you. **“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”**

CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND HIS IMMINENT¹ RETURN (Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The clear teaching of the Scripture is that Jesus Christ ascended from the earth into heaven. The ascension signified two things: one, it demonstrates the heavenly nature of Christ and the divine nature of His ministry on earth. Two, the ascension is our assurance of His Second Coming. At that time, He shall return to the earth in the same manner. **“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen”** (Revelation 1:7). The teaching on the Second Coming of Christ is important in scriptures. It is the expectation and final hope of believers. The Second Coming of Christ has two phases: the Rapture of the saints and the Second Coming of Christ. The rapture is the catching away of the saints to meet the Lord in the air. However, the dead in Christ will rise first. **“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”** (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Just like the ascension was sudden, the rapture will also be sudden, without any warning.

Question 6: *What is the purpose of the rapture?*

The purpose of the rapture of the saints include: one, to gather all the saints together to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:1-11); two, to receive the reward for their labour (2 Corinthians 5:8-10); three, to take the saints to Himself (John 14:1-3); four, to change the bodies of living saints from mortality to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-58); five, to take the saints out of this world before the Great Tribulation commences (2 Thessalonians 2:1,7,8); six, to resurrect all the just and righteous people who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16); and seven, to fulfill Christ's prophecy and promise to the saints (John 14:1-3). At the Rapture, every true Christian living righteously, walking in the light will be **“caught up”** to be with Christ. To be a partaker of this glorious event, one must be saved, maintain a holy walk in Christ up to the time of the Rapture or death, have supreme love for and be involved in the service of the Lord, especially soul winning (1 John 3:1-3; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14; John 9:1-4). This is the time to prepare to meet your God (Amos 4:12).

The Second Coming will be as real and physical as the ascension was. The Scripture says, He **“shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”** (Acts 1:11). It shall be visible; for **“every eye shall see him”**. Finally, the Second Coming will be a glorious and triumphant one just as Christ triumphed over all things in His ascension (Revelation 5:5). Then He shall usher in His eternal reign as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The final triumph of the Lord in His glorious appearing signifies believer's glorious triumph. It is in the light of this glorious hope that Apostle John comforted and counselled us thus: **“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath**

this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1John 3:2,3). The church is waiting for the rapture. Most of the signs for the Second Coming have been fulfilled. The end is at hand. Are you ready for the coming of the Lord?

Lesson426

READINESS FOR THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren” (**Acts 1:14**)

TEXT: Acts 1:12-26

Just as special preparation precedes special visitation, the disciples, in total obedience to Christ’s charge went to the upper-room in Jerusalem, prayed and waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. **“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren”** (verse 14). However, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there was need to replace Judas Iscariot with someone to take over his ministry, according to the scriptures. **“For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take”** (verse 20). Barsabas and Matthias were appointed but Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:23-26). This is the focus of our study today.

REQUEST THROUGH PRAYER (Acts 1:12-14; Joel 2:28; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1-4; 4:31; Luke 11:13; Isaiah 44:3).

“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day’s journey” (verse 12). The Lord had just ascended to heaven after His resurrection. After Christ’s departure, the eleven apostles with other disciples numbering one hundred and twenty, went to the upper-room in Jerusalem. The action of obedience exemplified by the disciples, is a pattern for all Christian youths today. Obedience to the Lord’s command precedes divine blessing. To receive anything from the Lord we must meet His conditions.

Question 2: *What are the conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit?*

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” In readiness for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the disciples spent time in **“prayer and supplication”**. They were also in **“One accord”**. This implied that they were united; an evidence that Christ’s prayer for their sanctification had been answered (John 17:17,20). From the above, we learn that in readiness for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Christian youths need: (1) Purity of heart and life. A polluted heart and life is not fit for the gift of God. (2) Persistence in

prayer. (3) Perseverance in pursuit. The world of today is a fast-running world. Yielding to this trend will make us miss heaven's gift. We must be patient in God's presence. (4) Purpose of heart. A clear understanding of the Lord's intension for pouring out His Spirit will determine whether we partake of the promise or not. The disciples in the upper-room knew why they were waiting. The Holy Spirit is given for effective witnessing. The Holy Spirit is still relevant to us today. We, must, therefore seek the Lord **"Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest"** (Isaiah 32:15).

REFLECTION ON JUDAS' ACT OF BETRAYAL (Act 1:15-19; Psalm 41:9; Mathew 26:14-16,47,48; 27:3-10; Jeremiah 32:6-9; Zechariah 11:12, 13; Galatians 6:7, 8).

"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry" (verses 16,17). Here, Peter reflected on the final scene in the life of Judas Iscariot. He made reference to what the Holy Spirit had inspired David to pen down in the book of Psalms. He referred to the Psalms as **"this scripture"** pointing out that the book of Psalms is part of the inspired word of God and not just a literary collection as some scholars claim. **"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."** **"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"** (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

From our text, two things are made very clear concerning Judas and his act of betrayal. First, his act was remembered. Second, his act was repaid. When Judas came with a band of soldiers to take the Lord, none of the disciples detected his prank¹. But now Peter said, **"Judas, which was a guide to them that took Jesus."**

Question 3: *What lesson can we learn from this?*

God is not mocked. Whatever a youth sows that will he also reap. There is nothing hidden that shall not be eventually made known. Secret sins are open scandal in the court of heaven. It is just a matter of time; all secret works of evil will be made plain before all. Concerning Judas, **"For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry."** But he backslid to the point of becoming a **"guide to them that took Jesus."** This calls for a sober reflection!

Question 4: *What was Judas' reward for his act of betrayal?*

"Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" verse 18. This speaks of the price of betrayal as well as the suicidal death that followed, being the retribution for Judas' act of betrayal. **"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

"And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of

blood" (verse 19). All that happened to Judas was a fulfillment of scripture. Jeremiah the prophet had earlier prophesied concerning Judas' actions. **"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me"** (Matthew 27:9,10). This implies that all that Christ has said will surely come to pass. **"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"** (Matthew 24:35).

REPLACEMENT OF JUDAS, THE BETRAYER (Act 1:20-26; Psalm 109:8; 69:25)

"For it is written in the book of Psalms, let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take". The prophecy concerning Jesus' betrayal was already predicted in scriptures, but the person to betray Him was not mention. However, Judas, one of the twelve chose to fulfill negative prophecy. Although he was saved but backslid later to the point of betraying his Lord and Master. There is no eternal security for backsliders and apostates. No one can be eternally saved neither can any one eternally keep his God-given position, who forsakes the Lord and strays back to the world.

Question 5: *Why was Judas Iscariot replaced?*

Judas betrayed his Master and committed suicide which made his ministry desolate. He was replaced, not by Peter, but by the Lord Himself. His replacement was predicted before its fulfillment because the Lord knew ahead of time that he would be a traitor. Hence, his retribution and replacement were predetermined. Peter was only an agent of replacement. God does the same in the Church today. Anyone who goes into sin cannot keep his place, position or privileges in the Kingdom of God except he repents and comes back to the Lord.

Question 6: *Who replaced Judas Iscariot?*

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection?" The principle applied in replacing Judas is instructive to the Church today. The choice or appointment was based on conversion, continuity, commitment and constancy in following the Lord. The disciples looked for people with both past testimony and present experience. Both are exceptionally important for any youth that wants to be useful in the Church, School Fellowship, Youth Home Success Fellowship and Christian service in general. Joseph called Barsabas and Matthias were **"Men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us"** and they continued **"unto that same day that he was taken up from us."**

"And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Mathias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." Christ was not physically present in their midst at this time, yet, there was neither disunity nor strife among

them. Every body accepted the choice of Matthias' replacement for Judas without argument and envy. They remained in "**one accord**" even after the exercise (Acts 2:1). This shows that they were truly ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit to visit and revive the Church today, we must be in unity with the leadership and accept his decisions without any form of rebellion and strife. There must be no agitation¹ in Christ's Church. Neither should we envy those whom God has directed leadership to appoint for one service or the other. Only then shall we experience the outpouring and revival of the Holy Spirit. The disciples cast lot in choosing the replacement of Judas. However, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they did not depend on casting of lot to take decisions any more. Rather, on the leading of the Holy Spirit they depended (Acts 6:1-4). As believers, we do not depend on any other means in taking decisions but on the leading of the Holy Spirit. "**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**" (Romans 8:14).

Lesson 427

WATER BAPTISM

MEMORY VERSE: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16)

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-17; Acts 8:26-40.

Water baptism is one of the cardinal doctrines¹ of

the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one of the ordinances instituted by the Lord and made compulsory on all believers, including Christian youths. A careful study of the Scripture will reveal that water baptism is an inseparable component of the great commission. Obedience to the Great commission of our Lord will not be complete without observance of the ordinance of water baptism. Christ clearly stated, “**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**” (Mathew 28:19). All genuine ministers of the gospel and true disciples of Christ must, therefore, obey the Lord’s mandate in this regard as any contrary view or opinion will amount to disobeying the direct words and instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ.

MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF WATER BAPTISM (Matthew 3:1-8; Act 8:35-37; 2:37-41; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27).

“**And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?**” (Acts 8:36).

Question 1: *What is water baptism?*

Water baptism is a spiritual ordinance. It is a process by which a new convert to the Christian faith openly and publicly identifies with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (Colossians 2:12, 13). By observing this scriptural ordinance, the believer unashamedly declares that he is now in Christ. It is an outward demonstration of what has taken place inwardly (Galatians 3:27).

The word ‘baptize’ is a Greek word ‘*baptiso*’ which means to immerse, ‘*dip inside liquid*’. This shows the proper form of baptism by immersion.

Question 2: *What is the significance of water baptism?*

Immersion in water signifies identification with the burial of Christ while rising out of the water signifies rising up with Christ in newness of life (Roman

6: 3-5). In baptism, the believer shows his faith that Christ died for his sins and rose again for his justification.

Moreover, a careful study of the Scripture shows that water baptism is ONE and not THREE immersions. **“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him”** (Matthew 3:16). In Matthew 3:13-16, both Christ and John the Baptist went into river Jordan where He was immersed ONCE. In Acts 8:38, 39, both Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch went into the water, where he was immersed ONCE.

THE MANDATE OF THE SAVIOUR ON WATER BAPTISM (Matthew 3:15; Mark 16:15; Acts 8:35-39; 1 Crinthians 1:14-16)

Question 3: *What should be the response of Christian youths towards the ordinance of baptism?*

“And Jesus answering said unto him, suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be demand” (Matthew 3:15; Mark 16:15).

All truly converted youths should obey the Saviour’s mandate and submit themselves for water baptism. Refusal to be baptised after salvation experience will amount to deliberate disobedience to the word of God. Water baptism is to be done in accordance with the commandment of Jesus: **“...in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”** (Matthew 28:19).

Question 4: *Mention some erroneous practices in water baptism*

The erroneous practices (i) include three immersions, (ii) sprinkling of water; (iii) making people to squat in water; (iv) infant baptism; (v) baptism of the dead; (vi) making the sign of the cross with water on the participant’s face or pouring water on the participant; and (vi) baptizing only in the name of Jesus. The opinion of man should not contradict the stand of the scriptures. The practice of water baptism should be upheld today in the Church as it was in the early church. Converts were baptized in water as soon as they were saved (Acts 2:41; 8:37, 38; 16:30, 31, 33).

MARKS OF SALVATION BEFORE WATER BAPTISM (Luke 24: 46, 47; Mark 16:15, 16; Matthew 3:5-8; Acts 8:36, 37; 2: 41, 42; 8: 5, 8, 12)

Water baptism is not the same as salvation. It does not grant salvation or freedom from sin. Water baptism is a practical demonstration of the salvation already experienced. As a matter of fact, salvation is the condition for water baptism. This was why, in our text, John the Baptist demanded for clear cut marks of salvation or repentance from the Jews that came to him to be baptized. **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for**

repentance” (Matthew 3:7, 8). A sinning youth needs to repent of all known sins before water baptism can take place.

Question 5: *What is the danger of baptizing unsaved youths and infants?*

Baptizing youths who have not been truly converted is contrary to the Scripture and is not acceptable to God. Also, infant baptism is unscriptural because infants are innocent and have not practised sin to be repented of. Therefore, they cannot be baptized in water. Water baptism follows a definite experience and assurance of salvation from sins.

After hearing the gospel and receiving Christ as Lord and personal Saviour, with obvious marks and evident proofs of the new life, the converted youth is to present himself for scriptural water baptism. All unscriptural forms of water baptism previously done must be corrected hencefort because **“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned”** (Mark 16:15).

Lesson 428

SOWING AND REAPING

MEMORY VERSE: “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 9: 1-15.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for

whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). The teaching of the scriptures on sowing and reaping is clear. If you sow, you will reap. If you give to God, you will reap not the exact amount of what you have given, but more. Malachi puts it in another way, **“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”** (Malachi 3: 10).

Sowing is planting. It can be illustrated with a farmer who gets seeds to plant on his farm. The act of planting the seed is called sowing, while the act of harvesting what has been sown is called reaping. In the scriptures, sowing and reaping is used to explain how we give to and get from God.

EXHORTATION TO SOWING AND REAPING (2 Corinthians 9: 1-5; 1 Corinthians 16: 2; Proverbs 11: 24, 25; 2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 7; Hosea 10:12)

“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness” (2Corinthians 9:5). Paul, the apostle, here motivated and exhorted the Corinthian Church to give towards the work of God. This underscores the need for every believer to be involved in giving towards the service of the Lord. God blesses both our manner and motive of giving. Giving should not be done reluctantly, but cheerfully. It is one of the greatest challenges of the Christian life and one of the greatest privileges that we enjoy as believers. However, many are yet to enjoy the great potentials in giving because of how they give. The Church often runs short of money because of lack of giving on the part of the members. Church projects and evangelistic outreaches are often abandoned, delayed or hindered as a result of lack of funds. Why is it so? It is because many are yet to understand Bible doctrine of stewardship and Biblical principles of giving. Lack of money is not the problem but lack of clear understanding of our responsibilities as stewards of God’s money.

Ministers of the gospel who have surrendered their lives for the spiritual benefits of members of the Church should be supported. The missionary outreaches of the Church should also be supported. This can only be possible if we give heartily and continuously. A proper estimate of the benefits that we enjoy from a faithful ministry and true Bible Church should propel us to give cheerfully: it is not a secret that spiritual benefits cannot be quantified. The only way of showing appreciation for what God is doing in and through the church is to give sacrificially, cheerfully and consistently towards the progress of His work. According to our text, our giving should be characterized by bountifulness. Giving should be done willingly with an open and generous heart.

Question 1: *What are the Lord's condition for giving and to what extent can a believer give?*

Giving is not measured by the amount of money we give. The Macedonia believers, in spite of their poverty, gave to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:2). There are cases of individuals who made pledges to God without really knowing how to fulfill the pledges but soon found that God gave abundantly above what they had pledged and they were able to pay their pledges. God is faithful, and giving is a venture of faith. The Bible says **"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"** (1 Corinthians 16:2). Does God expect a wealthy believer to pay his tithe? How about those who have little or no money? The unchanging word of God is the same for all and sundry: **"Let everyone of you lay by him in store..."**. Whoever you are and whatever your position, make conscious efforts to always pay your tithes promptly. Those who are poor are not exempted from giving and the rich also should make conscious efforts to give. We should all give.

Question 2: *What is the most important thing you can give to God and why should it be given first before anything else?*

For God to receive your tithe and offering, you must first have given your life to Him. If you are a sinner or backslider, you must repent of your sins, confess them to God, forsake them and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, otherwise the Lord will not delight in your giving and He will not reward you. (Micah 6:8). God loves your soul more than your substance. He does not take delight in the sacrifice of fools. Saul believed more in sacrifice than in obedience to God's word and he lost everything including his life. **"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"** (1 Samuel 15:22). Offerings and tithes of sinners are abomination to the Lord. Sinners need to first give their lives to God, then, they can give their substance to the greatest Giver.

THE SECRETS OF PROSPERITY (2 Corinthians 9: 6, 7; Luke 6: 38; Acts 20: 35; Deuteronomy 28: 1- 6; Malachi 3:9, 10)

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (verse 6). Both in the Bible and in contemporary times, there have been inspiring testimonies of people who have been blessed as a result of giving unto God. The practice of tithing and offering is more than a duty that one does under compulsion. A business enterprise does not expect the bank to pay interest on money that was not deposited with it. Yet some Christians expect God to bless them financially when they are not committed to Him financially. Many youths, today, sing “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold”, only to be reluctant each time they have opportunity to demonstrate their love and commitment to God in the area of giving. In the economy of God, to receive you must give. The mistake made by many youths is to want to receive without attempting to give. Many people desire and pray for prosperity but refuse to make use of the divine key to enjoying prosperity: SOWING.

Just like farmers who expect to reap must sow; so also believers who expect to reap blessings of prosperity must sow by giving to God. Paul the Apostle said **“let every one of you lay by him in store”**. No one in the membership of the Church is excluded. Junior and Senior Secondary School students, Ex-students, undergraduates, adults and all men are expected to give to the Lord. If we sow, we shall all reap. Giving is like investing in God’s bank and it is, indeed, a spiritual sacrifice that brings fruit into the account of the giver. When you give to God, you reap untold blessings from Him.

Although God is in heaven, He works actively here on earth. You may not see Him physically, but you know that the work of the gospel is His major concern on earth. The local Church or Christian ministry is likened to the store house in the Old Testament. We can gladden the heart of God today by entering into partnership with Him and giving our tithes and offerings regularly: so that there can be meat in His house. Evangelistic crusades, Christian literatures (books and tracts, etc), school fellowships, Success Camps, Church projects and other evangelistic activities are carried out by the Church. God will not send funds from heaven in order to advance His cause on earth. He expects His people to play the role of His partners on earth. He rewards those who are faithful. You must obey the word of God if you want Him to prosper you.

Question 3: *In what way can one give to God?*

Although there is economic depression and it may be difficult to get all we need sometimes, God still showers prosperity on those who keep to the divine blueprints for financial prosperity. In the scriptures, prosperity, wealth and abundance are promised to the obedient (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2). What a blessing! Youths can give to the Lord from their pocket money, gifts, time, and talent and in several other ways. Just as God will bless the obedient, the word of God clearly reserves curses for the disobedient (Deuteronomy 28:15; Malachi 3:9). To prosper financially, you must obey the word of God on giving or else you suffer for not being obedient.

Question 4: *Why is it necessary to give bountifully to God?*

God’s material and financial assets have been put in a believer’s charge and he is called to give out of them to the progress of God’s work on earth. This kind

of giving is over and above the tithe. All believers must cultivate the habit of giving. Jesus said, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”**. One does not get into prosperity by hoarding. Many saints are incurring debts and finding difficult to be balanced financially because of their failure to give. Many youths also find it difficult to get gifts and support because whenever they have, they fail to sow by giving to the Lord and others. (Proverbs 11: 24, 25).

BENEFITS OF SOWING AND REAPING (2 Corinthians 9: 8 – 15; Malachi 3: 10 – 12; Luke 6: 38)

Question 5: Explain the law of sowing and reaping.

Liberal and cheerful giving, though forgotten by the giver who may not let his left hand know what his right hand is doing, is never forgotten by God. Those who are giving cheerfully will reap abundant fruits. The short-sighted individuals always feel that giving means losing and that saving in the bank or some other way means gaining. But the Bible says **“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty”** (Proverbs 11:24). Anyone who gives will get; those who sow little will reap little. It becomes clear, therefore, that in the providence of God, liberality in giving is the way to prosperity.

Other benefits of giving include being loved by God (2 Corinthians 9:7). Also, the Pastor and other ministers of God will glorify God for your liberality and their prayers for you will bring great blessings (2 Corinthians 9: 13, 14). God will bless you materially when you give to Him. He will also bless you spiritually. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: ... Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God”** (2 Corinthians 9:8, 11).

If God expects you to give, then you need to give priority to giving to Him. As you get anything from anyone or as you see your talents, you must cultivate the habit of giving to God first (Proverbs 3: 9, 10). God expects you to give the first fruits of your income or gain to Him. In practical terms, that means you give to God before you start spending what God has given to you. Many people who are convinced and are willing to give often fail to pay their tithe and offering. This is because they often want to delay their giving without knowing that they are also delaying their benefits and rewards. Unfortunately, they end up spending these monies on some other fleshly expenses without fulfilling their obligation to God. You should give to God first before doing any other thing. Remember that what you sow is what you reap. Give to the Lord and in so doing, plant a seed so that He can bless it and multiply it back to you many times. Finally, expect a miracle, believe that the windows of heaven will be opened and God will pour blessings of prosperity on you. Have you ever heard of a farmer who labored tirelessly but refused to gather the proceeds at harvest time? That will be strange. As you give, expect God to give you. If you desire to give and you are not born again, why not give your life to Christ this moment. This is so that you can give and reap the blessings from giving to the Lord.

Lesson 429

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE OF CHRISTIANS

MEMORY VERSE: “**Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge**” (Hebrews 13:4).

TEXT: Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 5:22-33.

The study before us today is one of the important

institutions in life. Marriage is a holy union. It is a precious relationship that needs tender care. The marriage institution is the idea of God, “**What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder**” (Matthew 19:6). Therefore, marriage is part of God’s plan for human race. Through this, Christians can raise godly seeds (Malachi 2:14-16).

Question 1: *What is marriage?*

“**And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?**” (Matthew 19:4, 5). Marriage is the joining together of a man (not a boy) and a woman (not a girl) in a holy wed-lock which signals the beginning of family life until death parts the couples. Christian teaching on marriage can only be accepted and practised by faith. Christian marriage must be guided by the word of God. Wherever the teaching of God’s doctrine on marriage is neglected or modified, the consequence is painful. It is sad today to observe that the guiding scriptural principles of marriage are deliberately neglected by the young people in the Church and the Bible’s position on family life has been relegated to the background. This has resulted into great spiritual losses, humiliation, frustration, sorrow and painful separation for even couples joined in the church.

As growing boys and girls, it is important to know that marriage is for life. The Bible does not permit divorce, separation or re-marriage. “**For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously**” (Malachi 2:16). This is why a clear unmistakable teaching on marriage and family life is very significant. It is for the health and spiritual wholeness of the Church. The questions for us are: Why did God establish marriage? What are the necessary preparations for marriage? Are there pitfalls to avoid while preparing for marriage? What will be

the consequences if we do not take care? Is courtship necessary? How should we conduct our engagement and wedding? What are the biblical standards for family life after wedding? These are some of the issues that will be addressed in this study.

PURPOSE AND PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 2:18,21-25; Ephesians 5:31-33; Psalm 32:8,9; Isaiah 30:18-21).

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). From the Scripture, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ gave approval to marriage. Hence, we learn over the years through experience, observation and scriptures the reasons for marriage.

Question 2: Give scriptural reasons why God instituted marriage and family life.

“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:5,6). The purpose of marriage and family life include: one, plan and provision of God for man (Genesis 2:18). Two, preservation of purity and holiness in the Church and community. **“Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband”** (1 Corinthians 7:2). Three, procreation – Marriage complements the work of God on procreation to fill the earth (Genesis 1:27,28; Psalm 128: 3). Four, Partnership – Marriage provides the needed fellowship, comfort, companionship and partnership. **“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?”** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11). A man and a woman are mutually dependent for: **“neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 11:11). Five, pleasures (Proverbs 5:15-20). Six, power and victory in life (Deuteronomy 32:29,30).

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Marriage journey begins with a desire of the need for a partner with whom you will share your heart intimately. Maturity and an inner urge (or a compelling overwhelming feeling) inform this need. As part of the preparation and maturity for marriage, we must be ready spiritually, physically, academically, financially, emotionally, socially and psychologically. The need to marry can be met through prayer. As we will pray earnestly, sincerely and expectantly, God, through one or several ways, would communicate with our hearts.

Question 3: Mention some ways through which God reveals His will in marriage to us.

“The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant”. “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psalms 25:14; 32:8). Some of the ways through which God reveals His will to us are His word (Psalm 119:105,130), the inner voice of the Holy Spirit- promoting, directing, influencing or checking us (John 10:4,5,27), direct revelation (Job 33:14-18), or special, God-given love that cannot be quenched by temporal and contrary circumstances. As an individual Christian, learn and know how God, your Father, speaks to you. Whatever channel God chooses to communicate with us, two things are clear: one, the channel will be consistent with His usual regular method through which He has been speaking to you in your day to day decisions; two, it must be consistent with the written word of God. If any revelation we receive contradicts the scriptures in any way, we must reject the revelation, vision or dream. To be sure of God’s leading, there are four principles of testing God’s will in marriage. One, promise test – you should see whether your decision is based on faith or assumption, feeling or presumption. Does the promise of God cover the revealed will? Two, purpose test- will the prospective partner help you to fulfill the purpose and objective of God for your life? Three, peace test – does the decision give you peace of mind? Four, Pastor’s test – tell your Pastor of your decision. Our attitude as Christians should be to **“prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”** (Romans 12:2).

PITFALLS AND PROBLEMS TO AVOID BEFORE MARRIAGE (Deuteronomy 18:9; Jeremiah 10:1,2; Exodus 34:12-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Ezra 9:1,2; Nehemiah 13:23-28; Malachi 2:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Proverbs 31:30; Judges 14:1-3).

“When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations” (Deuteronomy 18:9). As we seek to know the will of God in marriage, there are some pitfalls to avoid.

Question 4: *What are the pitfalls to avoid in seeking to know the will of God in marriage?*

The Holy Bible is the final authority in every matter for heaven-bound youths. Therefore, let everyone take heed not to turn to the right or to the left, as we discover God’s will in marriage. Some of the pitfalls are: (1) do not walk by sight (Genesis 6:2-5). To go by what you see such as material possession and secular position of a believer is to walk by sight. It is the possession of a godly heart that makes a good home. (2) Remove every idol from your heart. Your idol may not be God’s will for you (Ezekiel 14:3, 4, 7). (3) Do not marry an unbeliever. God does not allow unequal yoke in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15, 16). (4) Avoid the carnal practice of those who allow others to pick partners for them. (5) Do not choose a life partner based on infatuation¹ (Genesis 34:1-4).

“For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Malachi

2:16). It is necessary to be guided by God in such an important issue of life as marriage. However, where some refuse to follow the word of God in this area of marriage, the consequences can be unbearable. The problems of disobeying God include disappointment, dissatisfaction, disgrace or even divorce and premature death. **“He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”** (Proverbs 29:1).

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE TO FOLLOW BEFORE MARRIAGE (Genesis 24:49-52; Proverbs 24:27; Philippians 4:4,5; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Corinthians 10 31; Psalm 128:1-4; Proverbs 31:10-31; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8).

After knowing the will of God, the first step to take is to see your local Pastor who will direct you on the other necessary scriptural guidelines for a happy marriage. He will direct you to appointed leaders in the Church charged with the responsibility of guiding young brethren in marriage. This group of leaders in our Church is called the Marriage Committee. The Marriage Committee is not for only the workers and it is to assist couples-to-be to do things **“decently and in order”**. Parents’ consent is vital and needs to be obtained. It gives the Church the authority to allow the intending couple to begin courtship.

Question 5: *What is courtship and why is it necessary?*

Courtship is a period for the intending couple to learn and know each other through regular discussions which prepares the couple towards their future family life. During the courtship, holiness must be the watchword. Openness needs to be their mutual principles. Prayers should be made the centre of the period. Problems, mountains and oppositions are dissolved through prayers. Also, provisions are brought down from heaven through prayers. During the courtship, each of the intending couple should have his/her expectations guided and moderated. Neither of the two should impose his or her ideas and make the other the dumping ground of thoughts. If a difficult problem is discovered, seek counseling from your Pastor; mature, dependable Christian family; or the Marriage Committee. Do not cover sin or evil because you want to marry by all means. Remember, a broken courtship is better than a broken marriage.

To ensure courtship period is free from sin, here are some scriptural helps on how to keep you pure. One, the place of meeting must be open: where other people can see you. Where it becomes necessary to discuss anything outside the schedule period or to travel together, always involve a matured third party. Two, the posture of the intending couple must not be one that can play on your partner’s emotion. Three, plan and prepare for the things you would like to discuss in your meeting. Four, Purity of heart and life should be your watchword. **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Five, Prayer should be given the right place during courtship. Six, there should be complete dressing.

After courtship, Christian engagement and wedding follow. These two occasions should be delightful and desirable but should not turn into a place of displaying worldliness. **“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand”** (Philippians 4:4,5). At our engagements and weddings, no form of deception

should be allowed. We must also avoid compromise in the areas of what we do or give as part of the engagement requirements. Anything that has to do with idolatry must be avoided. During these events, worldly adornments, practices and dressing should also be avoided. **"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"** (1 Corinthians 10:31).

After the wedding, family life begins. It is a learning experience that can only be terminated by death. There is need for adjustments by both husband and wife. These initial adjustments will work only in an environment of humility, love, patience and temperance. Fellowship and affection in the family can be kept alive through the following: (1) Fervent love for one another (1 John 3:11-18); (2) Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25); (3) Kindness to each other (Ephesians 4:32); (5) Peace for each other; (6) Comfort for each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18); (7) Praying for each other (James 5:16); (8) Forgiving each other (Colossians 3:13); (9) Bearing each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2); (10) Submitting to each other (Ephesians 5:21); (11) Speaking no evil against each other (James 4:11); (12) Grudging not against each other (James 5:9) etc. Remember little things matter and little things hurt.

There are many areas of conflicts in the home. Some of them are: giving place to the devil through the third parties, worldliness, carnal comparison, lack of love and affection, childlessness, lack of submission by the wife and lack of money. Whatever the problems are in the family, the word of God has solutions. God instituted marriage and He has adequately provided for the happiness in our families. God's will for every family is that they live the days of heaven here on earth. This is attainable if we will allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and prayerfully commit ourselves to work towards a happy, healthy and holy home. As young boys and girls, we should prepare, pray and be patient till we are matured for marriage. Be ready to obey God, learn to hear from Him now and your family will be blessed.

Question 6: In the light of today's study, answer TRUE or FALSE:

- a). Boys and girls should stop going to school but plan for marriage now.**
- b). Girlfriend and boyfriend relationship should be encouraged since there is intention to marry one another.**
- c). Christian youths should pray for God's guidance before choosing a life partner in the future.**
- d). The Bible does not encourage Christians to marry unbelievers.**
- e). God has a good plan, purpose and promise for every Christian youth concerning marriage.**

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).