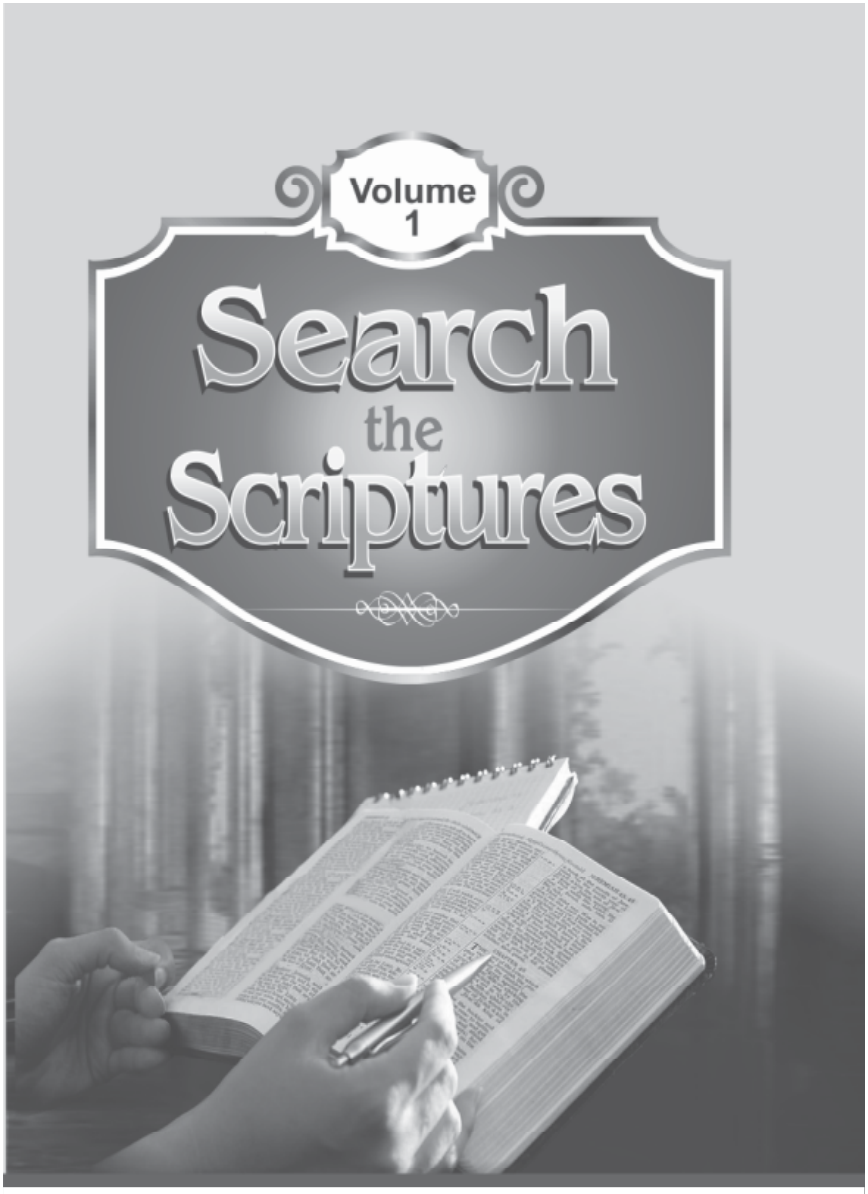

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Volume I
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON			PAGE
		Preface	7
		From the General Superintendent	9
		Guide to Teachers	11
		SECTION I	
		OLD TESTAMENT	
1	-	Creation and Origin of Man	13
2	-	The Fall of Man	22
3	-	The Flood and its Aftermath	30
4	-	God's Call and Covenant with Abraham	38
5	-	The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	47
6	-	Abimelech Restores Abraham's Wife	56
7	-	The Birth of Isaac, Heir of Promise	64
		NEW TESTAMENT	
8	-	Genealogy and Birth of Christ	71
9	-	The Ministry of John the Baptist	78
10	-	Temptation and Commencement of Christ's Ministry	84
11	-	Sermon on the Mount	91
12	-	Jesus, the Healer	99
13	-	The Cost of Discipleship	105
		SECTION II	
		OLD TESTAMENT	
14	-	God Tests Abraham	113
15	-	Isaac Marries Rebekah	119
16	-	Esau Sells His Birthright	126
17	-	God Prospers Isaac	133
18	-	The Treachery and Flight of Jacob	140
19	-	Jacob Sojourns in Laban's House	148
20	-	Jacob Prevails at Jabbok	155

NEW TESTAMENT

21 - Jesus Sends Out the Twelve 162
22 - Christ's Testimony of John the Baptist 170
23 - Christ's Teaching on the Sabbath 179
24 - Warning against Evil Speaking 188
25 - Sundry Parables of the Kingdom 195
26 - The Death of John the Baptist 201

SECTION III

OLD TESTAMENT

27 - Dinah's Defilement Avenged 210
28 - Jacob Returns to Bethel 217
29 - The Plot against Joseph 226
30 - Judah's Moral Slip 234
31 - Joseph's Interpretation of Dreams and His Elevation 242
32 - Joseph's Encounter with His Brethren 248
33 - Jacob Moves to Egypt 254

NEW TESTAMENT

34 - Christ Feeds the Multitudes 261
35 - Christ's Power over Nature 268
36 - Christ Exalts God's Commandments over Traditions 274
37 - Peter Confesses Christ 281
38 - The Transfiguration of Christ 289
39 - Christ Teaches on Forgiveness 296

SECTION IV

OLD TESTAMENT

40 - Jacob's Last Days on Earth 304
41 - Israel's Multiplication and Oppression in Egypt.. 312
42 - The Birth, Call and Commission of Moses 319
43 - Divine Judgment on Egypt 326
44 - The Passover and Israel's Exodus 334
45 - Israel's Miraculous Passage through the Red Sea 342

46 - Israel's Murmuring and the Divine Intervention 351

NEW TESTAMENT

47 - Christ Prohibits Divorce 359
48 - Proper Perception of Riches 366
49 - Parable of the Labourers 374
50 - Triumphal Entry and Cleansing of the Temple 380
51 - Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen .. 386
52 - Jesus Confounds the Sadducees and Pharisees.. 392

Preface to the New Version

It is a common saying that scriptural truths do not lie upon the surface for casual readers to grab, but are within the reach of diligent and sincere seekers. Therefore, the task of studying the Bible and profiting from its treasures requires a systematic approach, a thematic focus and a guided effort under the help of the Holy Spirit.

With the aid of appropriate tools and rules, this new version of *Search the Scriptures* will offer the people of God the opportunity to study the Bible in a structured, topical and textual style. A product of intense prayer and extensive scholarship of God's word, it is designed for use as a Sunday School manual, as well as for individual or group study.

Over the years, the church had published its STS material in smaller volumes quarterly. But the vision to cover the whole Bible within a specified period of time gave birth to this expanded version. It is anticipated that this new work will enable every committed disciple of Christ the opportunity to study the Old and New Testaments of the Bible in a sustained manner.

In this series, there are twelve volumes. Each volume has fifty-two studies, which are divided into four sections, comprising seven Old and six New Testament topics each. Each study or lesson is approached in an expository manner aimed at helping the believer understand the message of the Scripture. It offers proper interpretation and application of God's word. The studies are subdivided into separate points with appropriate references to enhance readability and comprehension. Commentaries on the Bible from holiness preachers and other biblical resources were consulted in the course of the project to ensure balanced scriptural interpretation and application, which conform with the cardinal doctrines of God's word. Questions are provided at the end of each study for evaluation and comprehension of the subject. There is also a scheduled Bible reading programme every week to help everyone read through the Bible in a single calender year.

This work is thus presented to readers, groups or churches as a comprehensive guidebook to navigate the Scripture. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use the studies to teach and transform all those who commit themselves to getting the best from God's word.

November, 2021

From the General Superintendent

From the outset of the Deeper Life Bible Church, I have been very passionate about imparting the knowledge of God's word to members of the congregation. I have striven, by the grace of God, to ensure that the people of God receive a balanced and an indepth teaching of the Word. This is because of my firm conviction that "**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, throughly furnished unto all good works**" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). And, *Search the Scriptures* session has been a veritable and core means of achieving this goal during our Sunday worship sessions.

Over time, I had contemplated the possibility of studying the whole Bible - Genesis to Revelation - through the *Search the Scriptures* session such that worshippers who attend church regularly can achieve this feat within a specified period of time. With grateful thanks to God, I am delighted to acknowledge the help of God and of committed members, who have been able to work out an annual version that would come in twelve volumes for this purpose.

Like the Berean Christians who "**...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so**" (Acts 17:11), my counsel to every reader, group or church who prayerfully use this Bible help is to do, at least, three things in order to derive maximum benefits from each study in the volumes:

One, **Mark it.** As you read through its rich commentaries and references, mark or highlight the portion that applies to your life.

Two, **Memorise it.** The Scriptures we remember become ready tools in times of need. Learn to memorise portions of the Bible as part of your commitment to obeying God's word. By memorising it, the "**word of Christ** [will] **dwell in you richly**". Each study comes with a memory passage.

Three, **Mention it** (to God). You cannot search the Scriptures as a committed disciple of Christ without realising the need to pray. Therefore, do not hesitate to mention your desires, needs, shortcomings, failures or past disobedience to God with a promise to grow in grace.

Finally, I implore you to arrive early for Sunday worship service so that you do not miss the teaching session.

My prayer for you is that the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Word, will illuminate each study, make it profitable to your life and transform you to a better follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

William F. Kumuyi
General Superintendent

Guide to Teachers of *Search the Scriptures*

The teaching ministry is unique to our Lord and the health of His Church. A group of people taught in the Word probably stands a better chance of being fruitful and faithful disciples of Christ who can contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

That there is a dearth of the knowledge of God's word and its teachers, even in Bible churches and Christian assemblies today, is not in doubt. Therefore, it is a great privilege to be appointed by the Lord to teach the deep truths of Scripture and lay them line upon line, precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:10). This task puts a weight of responsibility on our shoulders and it demands that we do not only possess sound Christian experiences, but also demonstrate good and profound knowledge of the truth.

It is mandatory, first, that *Search the Scriptures* teachers take time out to study the subject diligently and understand the literary and scriptural meaning, and message of each topic.

Second, teachers should examine the text with a view to discovering its theme, thrust or central proposition. Third, they must pay careful attention to the commentary, interpretation and application of the main and supporting texts.

Fourth, teachers should generate a separate outline from each write-up, detailing the subtopics or divisions with supportive texts in conformity with the exposition.

Review questions are provided at the end of each study and should be used appropriately within the body of the outline (not at the end) with a view to taking responses from the congregation in the course of the teaching. This, without doubt, will make each teaching session interactive, participatory and lively.

May the Lord depend on you as "**a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15)!

SECTION I

LESSON PAGE

OLD TESTAMENT

1 - Creation and Origin of Man 13

2 - The Fall of Man 22

3 - The Flood and its Aftermath 30

4 - God's Call and Covenant with Abraham 38

5 - The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah 47

6 - Abimelech Restores Abraham's Wife .. 56

7 - The Birth of Isaac, Heir of Promise 64

NEW TESTAMENT

8 - Genealogy and Birth of Christ 71

9 - The Ministry of John the Baptist 78

10 - Temptation and Commencement of Christ's Ministry 84

11 - Sermon on the Mount 91

12 - Jesus, the Healer 99

13 - The Cost of Discipleship 105

CREATION AND ORIGIN OF MAN

MEMORY VERSE: "**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth**" (Genesis 1:1).

TEXT: Genesis 1:1-31; 2:1-25

The first book of the Bible is aptly called Genesis or the book of beginnings because it tells the story of how all things began. It is a concise narrative of the beginning of time, life, sin, salvation and the human race and a synopsis of four major historical events: the creation, the Fall, the Flood and the dispersion of nations. It further records the history of four great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Although the book does not give a complete explanation of the process of creation, it reveals everything a person needs to know in order to worship God and appreciate His awesome power and infinite wisdom.

Genesis begins with God because He predates all creation. It does not open with the beginning of God because He has no beginning. He is eternal, self-existent, perfect in essence, infinite in knowledge and boundless in wisdom. He is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient, the Master Creator, and Source of all things, visible and invisible. There is no other concise, complete or authoritative declaration about the origin of the universe and man than the Scripture statement: "**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth**" (Genesis 1:1).

The revelation of God as Creator disproves man-made theories that either dispute or distort the biblical creation story. There are several unfounded theories about God and His creation. *Atheism* says there is no

God. *Polytheism* teaches that there are many gods. *Omnitheism* believes in all gods. *Materialism* declares that there is nothing in existence beyond what is physical. *Evolution* argues that higher forms of life were not created but evolved from lower ones. *Fatalism* postulates that there is no definite purpose in creation but that all things are subject to inevitable fate. *Pantheism* suggests that there is no personal being called God, but God is the universe and the universe is God. *Deism* asserts that there is a Supreme Being who is neither interested nor ever intervenes in human affairs, but He only created the world, like a watchmaker, and left it to run on its own. *Agnosticism* says there may be a God but there is no sufficient evidence to prove He exists. In effect, the agnostic declares: 'there may be, or there may be no God, I am not sure'.

But all these theories, and several others like them, are wrong. They are products of man's finite mind and futile attempt to find God through human reasoning and the so-called scientific approach. But God cannot be found out by research except through revelation in response to genuine faith. Anyone who desires to know God or come to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who diligently seek Him (Job 11:7; Hebrews 11:6).

The book of Genesis boldly asserts the fact of God's existence and points out the works that testify of Him. The psalmist affirms: "**The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge**" (Psalm 19:1,2).

THE PROOF AND REALITY OF CREATION (Genesis 1:1-31; Psalms 33:6,8,9; 90:2; Exodus 20:11; Isaiah 45:18; 1 Samuel 2:8; Deuteronomy 4:32; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 11:3)

"**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth**". This is the first given fact and information every human being should accept. No other statement is more assertive, affirmative and authentic in relation to the reality that God is the creative Being behind all matter.

Every tenet of genuine faith rests on the fact that He exists and He is the Maker of the heavens and the earth. Nothing else is self-existent, apart from God. The singular fact that we all originated from Him makes Him most deserving of our devotion, submission and reverence.

In creating the material universe, God said, "**let there be...**", and there was. The psalmist affirms it. "**By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast**" (Psalm 33:6,8,9). The same word of God is still as powerful and effective today to meet all the spiritual and physical needs of His people.

In six days, God made the visible universe and formed man whom He appointed to be the head of His creations. "**For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it**" (Exodus 20:11).

On the first day of creation, God commanded light to dispel the darkness that pervaded the earth. The lesson here is that the first priority for every darkened, troubled or tormented heart is the entrance of Christ, the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). The light of salvation and knowledge of God must first come to those who sit in darkness of sin and ignorance before other benefits such as prosperity and healing can truly profit them. It is definitely out of order to specialise in ministering temporal blessings to sinners without leading them to genuine salvation. Also, God created light and separated it from darkness, thereby teaching believers the principle of separation from the world of darkness. True Christians are children of light and should "**have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**" or unbelievers who are children of darkness (Ephesians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

On the second day, God created the firmament called the atmospheric heaven. He caused a great expanse of space to separate the waters above from the waters

below. Then, on the third day, dry land and seas were created. God also commanded plants to appear on the land. Here, it is important to observe the perfect order of God's creative work and how the activities of the first three days correlate with the last three days of creation. In the first three days of creation, God set the stage in preparation for the actual creatures He was to bring forth.

On the fourth day, God created the sun, moon and stars and fixed them in the heaven which He had earlier created. Next, on the fifth day, fishes and fowls were created to inhabit the waters and the firmament. Finally, on the sixth day, God created land animals and man. Then, God looked upon all He had created and He was satisfied. He said they were "**very good**".

On the seventh day, God rested, not as a result of tiredness but because He had completed the work of creation. He also wanted to give mankind a perfect pattern of the work-rest cycle. After our routine tasks and work, we should rest and renew our strength. This also anticipates the future rest that believers will enjoy in heaven after their labour on earth is ended. We must labour to enter this final rest (Hebrews 4:1).

THE PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MAN IN GOD'S CREATION (Genesis 2:1-17; 9:2; Psalm 8:3-8; Proverbs 6:4-11; 19:15; Ecclesiastes 10:18; Hebrews 2:6-8)

Early in the book of Genesis, God revealed the plurality of the Godhead. The statement, "**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness**" reveals the tri-unity of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost at creation. The Bible teaches the Trinity of the Godhead (Genesis 1:26; 11:7; Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 48:16; Matthew 3:16,17; 1 John 5:6,7).

Man is the crown of God's creation and he was made to rule and dominate the earth. God blessed man to be fruitful and multiply like He did to other lesser living creatures. He desires us to be fruitful in our physical bodies and spiritual endeavours. In the ordering of creation, man was the last to be created. In other words,

he was created after other features and creatures that would make the earth convenient, conducive and habitable for him have been put in place.

It is significant to note that man was not spoken into existence like other creatures but a product of painstaking exploit of the Almighty. He was intricately fashioned according to the design of the Creator (Psalm 139:14). The account in the first chapter of Genesis states the fact and chronology of man's creation. However, the second reveals how he was made. Both accounts are not contradictory but one explains the other. God formed man's body from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life so he could become a living soul.

The breath of God in man makes him unique in all of creations. It corresponds to the invisible spirit component God placed in man that makes him a morally conscious being. The spirit eventually goes back to God when man dies. "**Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it**" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Realising that we were made from the dust of the earth, we should be ever humble. Also, it is unwise to spend all our days on earth labouring for the dust at the expense of our precious never-dying souls.

God made man in His own image. This does not necessarily mean a physical image, but one that is of spiritual and moral likeness. Man had the righteousness and nature of God ingrained in him so he could have fellowship with his Creator. This is the greatest exclusiveness of man and makes him not only higher than every creature but absolutely unique. It is necessary therefore, to be conscious of the fact that every human being, no matter how lowly or highly placed, is an image of God and should be treated with dignity, honour and love. This is also one reason God prohibits murder and considers killing a human being a capital offence.

God has a purpose for creating man. "**And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed**" (Genesis 2:8). God gave man the responsibility of dressing and keeping

the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). This implies that He detests idleness and laziness but commands and cherishes industry and profitable labour. In these days where many people despise hardwork and undermine the dignity of labour, it must be pointed out that man was appointed to gainful labour even before the fall. It is a grave error to think that it was the fall of man that warranted normal work. Those who are idle under the pretext that they cannot find employment in corporations or offices should consider working in fields and gardens. There is blessing upon enterprising and creative people (Psalm 128:2; Isaiah 65:21-23).

Secondly, man was assigned the duty to give names to all the animals that God created. "**And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof**" (Genesis 2:19). Giving names to a person or object is one way to exercise authority. That was the motive behind the common practice of changing the names of captured land or people to indicate they are under a new authority. What an awesome liberty and power to name everything God has put under our charge! Man was expected to be creative and employ his physical and mental powers in carrying out his duties in a responsible way.

Thirdly, man was created to show forth the glory of God. "**Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him**" (Isaiah 43:7). This implies that man's life must reflect the glory, honour and power of God. He must exude righteousness and a holy lifestyle that bring glory to God.

It is interesting that God made adequate provision for man's upkeep, welfare and sustenance in the Garden of Eden. "**And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil**" (Genesis 2:9). God gave man free access to enjoy all the pleasant plants that grew in Eden,

including the tree of life. The only prohibition, which was designed to test man's obedience, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Divine provisions are by far more than His purposeful prohibitions and men ought to be thankful. God's instruction to man was very simple and clear. He was free to eat of every tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The consequence of disobedience was equally stated in clear terms: "**for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die**" (Genesis 2:17). This was the first test God placed before man to prove his obedience or otherwise.

Man is a free moral agent with the capacity and freedom to make personal choices; we will be held responsible for our decisions and their consequences. Everyone has to decide whether to obey or disobey God. But we must remember that our decisions will surely determine our destiny (Deuteronomy 30:15,16).

PRECEPTS AND REASON FOR THE MARRIAGE INSTITUTION (Genesis 2:18-25; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:21-33)

God created a male and a female and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. The origin of marriage, the first great institution He gave to man is revealed in the text. The man was created first, then the woman was formed out of the man. However, it should be emphasised that the making of the woman was deliberate, not an afterthought or a necessity that arose simply because the first man lacked a helper among the lesser creatures. God knew beforehand that man would need a suitable helpmate to fulfil His purpose and responsibilities. Of course, there was no way Adam could be naturally fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it, without a help meet. The formation of the woman was part of God's original design. He took a rib from the side of man to form a wife for him. When God brought the woman to Adam, he was pleased with her. "**And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man**" (Genesis 2:23).

God instituted the marriage institution; therefore, it should not be trivialised, abused or desecrated. He instituted marriage for partnership, procreation, preservation of purity, pleasure and protection. It is meant for companionship, comfort, care and chastity (Genesis 24:67). It also serves as a pattern of the relationship between God and His people (Ephesians 5:22-33; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14).

From God's original model of marriage, it is very clear that monogamy, one man marrying one woman, is the scriptural precept to follow. This excludes remarriage while the lawful spouse is still alive. Polygamy or multiple marriages, in whatever form, are unscriptural. Also, lesbianism, gay, bi-sexual or transgender marriage (otherwise called LGBT) and bestiality are condemned in the Bible (Leviticus 18:22,23; 20:13; Romans 1:27). Marriage is ideal for mature people only, not for immature boys and girls who cannot manage its intricacies. It takes a man and a woman to marry and become one flesh. God also prohibits unequal yoke in marriage for His children. Anyone intending to marry should pray for God's guidance to get the right partner and be prepared to follow the scriptural guidelines.

Another crucial precept on marriage is that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife. "**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). The word 'cleave' implies a welding, gluing or blending together in so much that any attempt to separate would cause serious damage. This would demand the exclusion of third parties and a determination to remain bonded with one's spouse till death. Jesus reiterated this in the New Testament: "**...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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder**" (Matthew 19:4-6). Marriage is for a lifetime and only death can separate the couple, not even a court of competent jurisdiction.

The marriage union is strengthened when both spouses are open and transparent with each other. This demands mutual trust, confidence and love. It also requires readiness to confess, apologise, forgive and forbear one another when offences or misunderstandings arise in the relationship. The world, and indeed, the marriage institution can never endure unless man recognises the divine precept and abide by it. Only then shall the world be a better place for mankind.

Questions for review:

1. Why are the various human theories about God and creation wrong?
2. How can an unbeliever receive the light of the gospel?
3. What is the significance of God resting on the seventh day of creation?
4. What are the reasons God created man and put him in the Garden of Eden?
5. List the purposes for which marriage was instituted by God.
6. What is God's standard concerning divorce and remarriage?
7. How can believers strengthen the marriage institution?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING	
SUNDAY:	GENESIS 1 - 3
MONDAY:	GENESIS 4 - 6
TUESDAY:	GENESIS 7 - 10
WEDNESDAY:	GENESIS 11 - 13
THURSDAY:	GENESIS 14 - 16
FRIDAY:	GENESIS 17 - 20
SATURDAY:	GENESIS 21 - 23

Lesson 2

THE FALL OF MAN

MEMORY VERSE: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

TEXT: Genesis 3:1-24; 4:1-26; 5:1-32

At creation, God, in His infinite love and care placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden, Eden, where they enjoyed His presence, fellowship and perfect relationship. However, their intimacy and fellowship with God was shortlived when they disobeyed His command by yielding to temptation and deception masterminded by Satan. The disobedience of Adam, the first man, had grave consequences on humanity generally. God, however, intervened and held out a life-line for man.

Before this account of man's fall, Satan had fallen from his exalted position as God's anointed cherub in heaven. He became God's archenemy and set out to oppose and attack every project of God. Satan introduced sin into the human race; thereafter, the contagious nature of sin and its ripple effect continued to manifest from generation to generation. Any act of disobedience to God's clear commandments attracts grievous punishment. Adam and Eve were consequently expelled from the Garden of Eden underscoring the fact that we can lose any privilege through sinful acts and lifestyles. The only way to keep whatever blessing God has bestowed on us is to continue in total trust and obedience to His word.

THE ENTRANCE OF SIN AND CURSE INTO THE WORLD (Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12,14-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-19; 1 Timothy 2:14; Revelation 12:7-9,12)

Our text opens with the serpent who engaged Eve in a mischievous conversation in the Garden of Eden. His approach was subtle and designed to make her sin against God. It is important to state here that being tempted is not a sin, but yielding to it. Anyone, regardless of age, colour, race, social or spiritual status can be tempted. Even our Lord Jesus Christ was tempted.

The Scripture identifies this serpent as Satan or the Devil (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). Satan was previously known as Lucifer, a covering Cherub, who was in the presence of God in heaven but was cast out as a result of pride and rebellion. The fact of Lucifer's rebellion and downfall is stated in God's word without the actual timeline or when it occurred (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-19).

Satan "**said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?**" (Genesis 3:1). The question was meant to shake Eve's confidence in God's word. Then, he went further to accuse Him of deceiving them so that their eyes would not be opened. He eventually moved from the use of subtle doubt to outright denial of God's word, portraying Him as a liar. Satan said: "**Ye shall not surely die**" (Genesis 3:4). He deceived Eve to think that eating the forbidden fruit would make her better, wiser and independent. He entrapped her by concentrating on three major areas of temptation: sight, flesh and self. "**And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food...**"; this is otherwise termed, lust of the flesh. "**...And that it was pleasant to the eyes**" – lust of the eyes; "**...and a tree to be desired to make one wise**" – pride of life. The enemy uses what people see, hear, desire or crave to tempt them (James 1:14,15). Christians should be wary of what they gaze upon, crave or desire lest the enemy makes it an object of strong temptations for them. Eventually,

Eve succumbed to the temptation, ate the forbidden fruit and persuaded the husband also, and he did eat. That was the fatal, final fall of man which plunged humanity into eternal condemnation (Romans 5:12-19). By disobeying God's command, Adam and Eve voluntarily relinquished their authority and sold mankind to Satan.

Satan still uses the weapons of doubt, deception and denial of God's word in his attempt to make believers sin against God in their unguarded moments. He makes sin appear very attractive, harmless and beneficial to his targets.

There are steps to take to overcome deception by Satan and escape his wiles. First, avoid getting into a conversation or debate with him concerning God's commandments. Eve's response gave Satan a foothold into her life and weakened her confidence in the Lord. The word of God admonishes us to rather resist him and he will flee (1 Peter 5:8,9; James 4:7). Second, refrain from listening to talks or words that contradict the Bible because they weaken godly convictions. Third, never loiter, either physically or in your imagination, around the things God prohibits. Fourth, do not doubt the integrity and love of God, even when you do not fully understand His dealings. Believe that He is working for your good all the time. Fifth, do not add to or subtract from the word of God (Proverbs 30:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

The consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience were immediate and far reaching. Though their eyes were opened and they had knowledge of good and evil, they lost everything – the divine nature, favour and privilege. In their place, they forfeited access to the tree of life, lost their fellowship with God, divine presence, comfort of the Garden of Eden and incurred eternal condemnation, among others. Above all, their act of disobedience brought eternal curse on the whole human race. Man became morally deformed, took on the nature of Satan and was estranged from God. He also forfeited his freedom and dominion and became a captive of Satan. Man lost his innocence and became a slave of an

evil conscience while guilt, fear and shame took over. "**Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned**" (Romans 5:12). The sin of Adam, the fountain head of the human race, made all his offspring sinners by nature. Adam and Eve suddenly realised they were naked and attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves, a symbol of self-righteousness. When God finally confronted them with their sin, they offered nothing but buck-passing and blame-game. This is what happens when a believer backslides; he blames others but hardly admits his own faults.

However, God responded to the fall of man in a most gracious manner. First, He came seeking him. He asked Adam, "**where art thou?**" God still seeks out sinners and backsliders so as to bring them to repentance and restoration. Second, God clothed Adam and his wife. He made coats of animal skin to cover their nakedness. This typified substitutionary atonement since the blood of an innocent animal must have been shed before the skin could be used. Animal skin covers nakedness more permanently than fig leaves. This is an example of the enduring righteousness that Christ gives. A sinner or backslider can receive this righteousness through repentance from sin and faith in the cleansing blood of our Lord Jesus, the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29).

Third, God promised redemption for man. In what is often called the "*proto-evangel*", God declared that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. "**And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel**" (Genesis 3:15). The seed of the woman is none else but Jesus Christ. Fourth, God drove man out of the Garden of Eden lest he should eat of the tree of life in his fallen condition and become irredeemable.

The fall of man gave room for the revelation of God's redemptive attributes of grace and holiness. God's grace dealt mercifully with sinful man, but His holiness

judged his sin with severity. Curses were placed upon the serpent, Eve, Adam and the earth. The trio – Satan, sin and curses – are always together. Anywhere Satan is allowed, sin would thrive and ultimately, there will be manifestation of all manner of curses and calamities. Despite the excuses of Adam and Eve, judgment came upon them. No excuse will be acceptable enough to liberate any unrepentant sinner from God's judgment.

AN EMBLEM OF ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE AND REJECTION OF CAIN'S OFFERING (Genesis 4:1-26; Hebrews 11:4; Deuteronomy 15:19; Leviticus 9:3; Matthew 26:28; 1 John 3:12)

After their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain followed by Abel. Being offspring of the fall, they were sinners. In process of time, they brought offerings to God. Cain took of his farm produce, but Abel brought a choice firstling out of his flock. In response, God accepted the offering of Abel but rejected Cain and his offering. The New Testament explains that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and followed God's acceptable pattern. Therefore, he was counted righteous by God (Hebrews 11:4; Matthew 23:35). In contrast, Cain's offering was rejected because he approached God on his own merit and not by faith. Also, his sacrifice consisted of his own works (farm produce) instead of life wherein there is blood (Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:14). The Bible says his works were evil (1 John 3:12). Cain's response to God showed that he was not disposed to right living. There are people like Cain, who would rather offer sacrifice to God than obey Him. Making fat contributions to sponsor religious programmes or church projects, without obeying God's call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, will not guarantee acceptability before Him. "**But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect**" (Genesis 4:5). Notice it was not only the offering but Cain, the offerer, himself was rejected by God. His heart was not right with God and he manifested his evil nature when he was corrected. The negative reaction of Cain to his rejection

and divine correction should be avoided.

"**And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?...**" (Genesis 4:6,7a). Cain did not do well and he refused to respond to the divine call to repent. He could have learnt from Abel, but instead got angry and became envious. Those who desire to grow spiritually should cultivate the habit of learning from other believers who are doing well. Cain expressed his anger and hatred against God by killing his innocent brother. Thus, he became the first murderer, and Abel the first martyr, recorded in the Bible. He portrayed the nature of Satan which he had inherited from Adam.

"**...Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?**" (Genesis 4:9). Cain lied and answered God defiantly. He refused to take responsibility for his action and thereby shut the door of mercy against himself. Consequently, God placed a curse on him and declared that he would be a fugitive and vagabond on the earth. Curses are perpetuated by sinful lifestyles but they are broken through faith in God. Some people act like Cain. They are defiant in sin; they reject God's gracious entreaties and offer of mercy. Being often reproved, they harden their necks and would be destroyed without remedy (Proverbs 29:1). But believers are expected to be teachable, tender in heart, and be their brother's keeper.

"**And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city...**" (Genesis 4:16,17). The descendants of Cain continued a system of civilisation. They built cities, manufactured iron and bronze products, developed and played musical instruments, but not without signs of degeneracy. They demonstrated great skills and creativity but lacked moral uprightness. For example, Lamech took two wives and boasted about killing a man. Ever since, the same trend of moral retrogression has characterised the human race despite great advances in science and technology. This is an

indication that civilisation and advancement can never replace the necessity of regeneration through Christ. Every unconverted person will definitely betray the depravity of the human heart without salvation.

EXPOSITIONS ON THE GENEALOGY OF ADAM (Genesis 5:1-32; Luke 3:23-38; Romans 5:12; Ecclesiastes 3:1,2; Hebrews 9:27)

"**This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him**" (Genesis 5:1). The Scripture provides a clear but concise detail of the ancestry or genealogy of the human race. The ultimate purpose of Bible genealogies is to trace the descent from Adam to Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman. Notice that the tracing of genealogies ended with that of Jesus in the New Testament. It is also plain that Bible genealogies are selective to exclude names or family lines that are not relevant to the set objective.

A striking observation in this genealogy is that human lifespan became shorter from one generation to another as sin began to take its toll on humanity. It is significant also that Cain was not mentioned in the genealogy of Adam. Sin displaces and causes a person's name to be erased from the Book of life. To have one's name written and remain in the Book of life, one has to walk consistently with God to the very end.

It is very instructive to note that in this genealogy, the phrase, "**And he died**", ended the life of everyone, except Enoch who walked with God and did not taste death. The lesson here is that we overcome death by walking with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Whosoever believes in Jesus will pass from death to life and will have victory over death (John 11:25,26; 1 John 3:14).

Of particular note was Enoch's translation. "**By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God**" (Hebrews 11:5). This serves as a preview

of the rapture of true believers. At the rapture, bodies of saints would be changed and become incorruptible and immortal. Death would be vanquished and it would be victory at last (1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

If we walk with God in righteousness and true holiness in this perverse and degenerate world, we shall be taken away to be with the Lord at the rapture and shall reign with Him forever and ever.

Questions for review:

1. What is the secret of keeping God's blessings in our lives?
2. Explain what led to the Fall of Man.
3. How can believers avoid Satan's deception?
4. What is the acceptable sacrifice for sin and what must sinners do to be accepted by God?
5. How can believers be their brothers' keepers?
6. Enumerate the lessons believers can draw from the genealogy of Adam.
7. How can we recover from the Fall?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	GENESIS 24 - 25
MONDAY:	GENESIS 26 - 28
TUESDAY:	GENESIS 29 - 31
WEDNESDAY:	GENESIS 32 - 34
THURSDAY:	GENESIS 35 - 37
FRIDAY:	GENESIS 38 - 40
SATURDAY:	GENESIS 41 - 44

THE FLOOD AND ITS AFTERMATH

MEMORY VERSE: "And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:7,8).

TEXT: Genesis chapters 6 to 11

The fall of man in Eden through disobedience resulted in total depravity and corruption which made the entire human race liable to God's wrath and judgment. Despite the punishment He brought upon individuals for their wrongdoing, man continued his descent into wickedness and corruption. The universal wickedness of man came to a point where God decided to destroy the earth because He "**saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**" (Genesis 6:5). However, He found Noah, the only righteous person in his generation, with whom He entered into a covenant. "**And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation**" (Genesis 7:1). Eventually, flood destroyed everything on earth, including all humans who did not respond to Noah's invitation into the ark of salvation and deliverance.

After the flood, man had the opportunity for a new beginning as the family of Noah began to repopulate the earth. But sadly, man's sinful nature resurfaced and humanity failed God again. This time, rather than

destroy man, the Lord divided and dispersed them upon the face of the earth. That was the beginning of nations and different languages in the human race.

DECADENCE AND JUDGMENT OF THE UNGODLY (Genesis 6:1-22; 7:1-24; 18:20,21; 19:13,28,29; Numbers 16:1-5,25-35; Job 11:20; 21:30; Psalm 9:17)

As humans began to reproduce and increase in the earth, the sin nature which Adam transmitted to all his descendants began to manifest through various degrees of wickedness till the Lord looked down and saw nothing but sheer corruption (Genesis 6:5). He was disappointed and He decided to destroy all the wicked from the earth. A particular aspect of man's depravity that grieved God was his perversion of the marriage institution. Within a short time, there was population explosion with man crossing the divinely set boundaries in marriage. "**...The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose**" (Genesis 6:2).

The sons of God mentioned in the passage referred to the godly line of Seth, while the daughters of men were the ungodly line of Cain. Their intermarriage violated the principle of separation between the carnal and the spiritual; between the godly and the ungodly; and between light and darkness. The term "**sons of God**" is used for godly men and angels in Scripture (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Hosea 1:10; John 1:12; Romans 8:19; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:1,2). But in this context it describes men, not angels, because there is no gender difference mentioned of angels in the Scripture, and Jesus indicated that angels do not marry. He answered the Pharisees, "**Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels of God in heaven**" (Matthew 22:29,30).

The Lord said His Spirit would not continue to strive with men. That means the wickedness of men had reached a point where the Holy Spirit was so grieved that He had to stop convicting the people, and judgment

had become inevitable. Sinners and backsliders should not take the forbearance of God for granted. There is a point where a person crosses God's redline and mercy gives way to judgment.

"**And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold I will destroy them with the earth**" (Genesis 6:13). But in the midst of this perversion, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Like Enoch, Noah was a righteous man who "**walked with God**" before the flood (Genesis 5:24; 6:9). The lives of these two men prove that the wave of corruption blowing in these last days is not an excuse for ungodliness or backsliding. No matter the prevalence of corruption in the society, the believer can still be preserved and kept pure. Noah heard from God and received instructions from Him, despite the noise and din of evil around him. Contemporary believers can enjoy such close communion with God if only they separate from the world and devote their lives to Him.

As the wickedness of man increased on earth, God's judgment became imminent. Before the destruction, Noah was instructed to make an ark for the salvation of his house and other animals. He moved with godly fear and obeyed by faith (Hebrews 11:7). Meanwhile he preached and called the people to righteousness, but they spurned the warning and refused to take heed (2 Peter 2:5). In due course, "**In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights**" (Genesis 7:11,12). The flood came and the wicked were swept in its tidal waves to death. It is very dangerous to ignore the warnings of preachers sent by God. Without further delay, sinners should come to Christ for salvation.

In the present dispensation, the ark signifies our Lord Jesus Christ. Like Noah, believers must preach the gospel to every creature with zeal and earnestness. "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he**

that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). It is worthy of note that Noah entered the ark with his wife, his sons and his sons' wives. God's promise of salvation is for us and our household (Acts 16:31). Believers should emulate the examples of Abraham, Joshua, Rahab, Cornelius, Lydia, Philip the evangelist and Crispus, who ensured their household came to know the Lord (Genesis 18:19; Joshua 2:12,13; Acts 10:24; 16:15; 18:8; 21:9). Joshua said "**...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD**" (Joshua 24:15).

DELIVERANCE AND BLESSING OF THE GODLY (Genesis 8:1-22; 9:1-29; Proverbs 10:2; Isaiah 26:20; 2 Peter 2:7)

"**And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged**" (Genesis 8:1). God delivered Noah from perishing with the wicked. He knows how to deliver the righteous while the wicked are judged for their sins. Believers will not partake in the coming judgment upon the world of sinners. They will be taken away in the rapture before the wrath of God is poured on the earth. Noah and his family were preserved, so long as they remained in the ark. Our continued security as Christians is for as long as we abide in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the water assuaged, Noah checked up to know if it was safe to come out, but he waited until the Lord told him to "**Go forth of the ark**" (Genesis 8:16). In all situations, a believer must wait on God for guidance (Proverbs 3:6). After the deliverance from the flood, Noah built an altar and sacrificed unto the Lord out of the clean beasts (Genesis 8:20).

Furthermore, God made a fresh covenant with Noah and repeated the blessing which was pronounced upon Adam at the beginning. "**And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth**" (Genesis 9:1). He promised never to destroy the earth again with a universal flood and that the regular seasons of life would never fail.

The rainbow was set as a sign of the Noahaic covenant, and obedience to God remained the condition to enjoying these benefits. As God has pronounced fruitfulness, abundance and multiplication physically, so He expects every believer to be fruitful spiritually. Fruitlessness and stagnation are never His will. We are to multiply disciples and churches as we spread the light of the gospel.

The statement, "**These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread**" (Genesis 9:19) is very instructive. The survivors of the flood were only eight and they repopulated the earth because each of them continued to reproduce. This is an indication that the law of multiplication does not require large numbers. If believers adopt this model of reproducing themselves, as a strategy for evangelism and church planting, there would be unprecedented growth in all our churches. Invariably, it is not the small number of workers or members in our churches that keep us from growing, it is the failure of each member to reproduce.

After the flood, Noah engaged in profitable labour as a farmer. Though he enjoyed God's favour, he needed to work. "**And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard**" (Genesis 9:20). Everyone should learn to work instead of depending on charity from the church or other believers (2 Thessalonians 3:10). There are people who have great physical challenges and still overcame all odds to make a living for themselves rather than being burdensome to others. It is therefore, inexcusable for people who are healthy and strong to beg for daily needs or engage in theft of other people's properties.

However, the privilege of a new beginning that Noah and his descendants enjoyed after the flood was soon marred by sin. Noah became intoxicated with wine and exposed his nakedness. Then, his immodest behaviour became a cause for one of his sons to be disrespectful to him. "**And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without**" (Genesis 9:22). When Noah became sober and learnt of what had happened, he placed a curse upon

Canaan, the son of Ham.

The fall of Noah serves as warning to believers who consider themselves 'veterans' in the faith. Noah had walked with God for centuries, resisting and overcoming the temptation of a corrupt world. God Himself bore testimony that he was the only righteous man in his generation. But sadly, he fell into drunkenness in his own tent. "**Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Ham did not do well by gazing at his father's nakedness and did worse by talking about the indecency before others. God forbids nudity and pornography. We must also avoid any style of dressing that reveals delicate parts of the body. Care must be taken lest we make others stumble. It is also important that believers stay away from locations and programmes where nudity is on display. Honour to parents is also enjoined in the Bible (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:2). The other two sons of Noah – Shem and Japheth – were blessed because they covered the nakedness of their father. If any believer is overtaken in a fault, others should join hands to ensure restoration instead of spreading the sad story.

DESCENDANTS OF NOAH AND DISPERSAL OF MAN (Genesis 10:1-32; 11:1-32; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 5:12,13; Psalm 33:10; Luke 1:51)

God fulfilled His promise to Noah and his sons and they became fruitful; "**...of them was the whole earth overspread**". Through Shem, Ham and Japheth, "**are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood**" (Genesis 10:32).

"**And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech**" (Genesis 11:1). But the people chose to unite against the will of God. Instead of replenishing the whole earth as God had commanded, they decided to build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven and make themselves a name, "**lest** [they] **be**

scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). The people embarked on a selfish project contrary to the purpose of God, but He confounded their language and they were unable to carry out their enterprise.

Although man's rebellion at Babel was condemnable, God commented on the power of unity among the people. He said "**nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do**". There are great lessons from this. One, believers have an awesome power at their disposal if they unite in prayer. Two, unity and cooperative effort in evangelism will produce more fruits. Three, if we are united in building our churches, they will be completed quickly. Four, we must be united in defending the truth and standing against error, insisting that scriptural standards be followed always. Five, the battle against the devil will be won in favour of the Church of God if believers unite in prayer and holy living.

The confusion of language and scattering of the people at Babel resulted in the formation of nations. As the sons of Noah multiplied and developed into different races of people on earth, so the wickedness of man intensified and multiplied. God then decided to reveal His plan of raising a particular nation through which the Messiah would come. Again, God needed a man who would be the fountain head of that prospective nation. The closing verses of our text are devoted to tracing the family tree of Abraham, the man whom God chose.

Questions for review:

1. Why did God decide to destroy man with a flood?
2. How can believers walk close to God and keep hearing from Him in this corrupt generation?
3. In the face of looming destruction awaiting the unrepentant, what should backsliders and sinners do?
4. What is the condition for benefitting from God's covenant?
5. What virtue can we learn from the unity of the men who attempted to build the Tower of Babel?

6. Noah found grace with God before the flood overthrew the world. How can we find grace with God before His imminent judgment?
7. What constitutes the 'ark of salvation' today?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	GENESIS 45 - 47
MONDAY:	GENESIS 48 - 50
TUESDAY:	EXODUS 1 - 4
WEDNESDAY:	EXODUS 5 - 7
THURSDAY:	EXODUS 8 - 11
FRIDAY:	EXODUS 12 - 16
SATURDAY:	EXODUS 17 - 19

GOD'S CALL AND COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

MEMORY VERSE: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis 12:1,2).

TEXT: Genesis chapters 12 to 17

The first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis give an account of the creation and failure of man before and after the flood. At the end of that era, which lasted about 2,000 years, God decided to raise a special nation through which the Messiah would come. The next section of Genesis, beginning with the twelveth chapter, introduces God's call and covenant with Abraham, the man whose descendants would form the chosen nation of Israel.

Abraham was born and brought up in a city known as Ur in Mesopotamia. Historians say the city was large, secure and prosperous during Abraham's time. But Ur was basically idolatrous and Abraham had to come out of its influence in order to enter a fresh covenant with God. It takes faith and courage to leave the known for an unknown, certainty for uncertainty. God promised that He would make of Abraham a great nation, give him a great name, vast land and bless all the earth through his seed. Abraham believed God and responded to His call. "**By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing**

wither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). Like God called Abraham, He calls sinners to repent and come out of their old lifestyle and association. Those who obey His call become covenant partners with Him and great blessings await them in this world and in heaven.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM AND HIS RESPONSE OF FAITH (Genesis 12:1-20; 13:1-18; Joshua 24:2,3; Acts 7:2-4; Hebrews 11:8,9)

"**Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing**" (Genesis 12:1,2). God appeared to Abraham and specifically asked him to get out from his idolatrous family and community (Joshua 24:2,3). It is not God's plan for anyone to continue in idolatry and ungodliness after encountering the true and living God. The divine call to Abraham was essentially to salvation and separation. He needed to renounce idolatry and put his trust in God. He must also separate from his country, kindred and father's house because they were idolaters and would constitute a distraction and temptation to him.

Ur of the Chaldees, the land Abraham was called to leave, was the most developed and attractive place of his time. He was called to leave and go to an unknown land, leaving family, friends and the security of a comfort zone behind. Indeed, it demands faith to obey the call of God. However, Abraham responded in faith but took along his father, Terah, and his nephew, Lot; and they settled in Haran rather than Canaan as God had instructed. Abraham did not get to Canaan until after the death of his father (Genesis 11:31,32; 12:1; Acts 7:2-4). Here we observe the danger and encumbrance of undue family ties while responding to the call of God. Except our relatives have personal encounter with God, they will constitute a burden to us in the walk of faith. Truly, Abraham went out of his

country as God instructed, but he took his kindred along with him. Aside from Terah tying him down to Haran, Lot became a source of distraction later on.

After the death of his father, Abraham finally moved to Canaan and his faith was tested in many ways. The first challenge was that he did not meet the land vacant. The Canaanites, who were renowned for their cruelty and idolatry, were on ground. But God reassured him that his descendants would inherit the land. Abraham responded in faith by building an altar unto the Lord.

Shortly after his arrival, there was a famine in the land and he relocated to Egypt. As it turned out, the move was a carnal step. Abraham felt insecure because his wife, Sarah, was good looking and he anticipated that the lustful Egyptians might kill him in order to have her. Afraid for his life, he instructed Sarah to pretend to be his sister and not his wife. Abraham's fear of being killed was unfounded because the Lord had promised to give his descendants the land of Canaan, and that the whole earth would be blessed through his seed. Standing on God's promises, he should have believed that he would not die without a child. But fear is the greatest enemy of faith. Fear of imaginary danger pushed Abraham to lie about his marriage, though Sarah was truly his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). God condemns lying and deception. "**He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight**" (Psalm 101:7). "**A false witness shall not be unpunished... and he that speaketh lies shall not escape**" (Proverbs 19:5,9). Christians should not tell lies for any reason.

The carnality of Abraham exposed Sarah to the danger of being defiled by Pharaoh, who took her. It brought avoidable suffering to Pharaoh's entire household, and caused the heathen king to rebuke Abraham, the man of faith. It also dented the integrity of Abraham. Though he reaped great material benefits from the trip to Egypt, it affected his testimony badly. The exposure to Egypt left an indelible mark on Lot's mind so much that Egypt became a reference point, comparable to Eden in his estimation (Genesis 13:10,11). Then, most likely, it was

on this trip to Egypt that Abraham picked up Hagar, the bondwoman who later caused much trouble in his household. But God, in His faithfulness, helped Abraham in this moment of weakness. He protected Sarah and ensured Abraham went back with her to Canaan.

Coming back from Egypt to Canaan, "**Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together**" (Genesis 13:2,5,6). This caused strife between the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham's. "**And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren**" (Genesis 13:8).

Abraham solved the problem amicably and they agreed to separate in order to avoid further strife. In dividing the land, Abraham condescended by allowing Lot to make the first choice. This is a commendable virtue; he was prepared to pay the price for peace (Romans 12:18). Lot chose the better portion, leaving Abraham with what looked like a barren land. But the portion Lot chose was near Sodom, a very wicked city. Believers should be ready to make personal sacrifices for peaceful coexistence with others. The word of God says, "**Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14).

After Lot had separated, God appeared to Abraham and renewed His covenant with him (Genesis 13:14-17). Then Abraham relocated to Hebron and built an altar unto the Lord there. It is significant that wherever Abraham went in the land of Canaan, he built altar unto God. The only time there was no record of him building an altar was during the misadventure to Egypt. The altar primarily symbolised Abraham's worship and devotion to God. It was also a token of his faith that someday, God would fulfil the promise to give the land of Canaan to his descendants as heritage.

THE COURAGE OF ABRAHAM AND HIS COVENANT WITH GOD (Genesis 14:1-24; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; Jeremiah 32:40; Galatians 3:15-17)

After Lot separated from Abraham, he pitched his tent near Sodom. Shortly afterwards, he was caught up in a war between two opposing forces. This was the first war recorded in the Bible and it occurred as a result of ambition and struggle for supremacy among kings. At the end of the war, Sodom was defeated; Lot and his goods were taken by the alliance of four kings from Mesopotamia. When Abraham got information about the plight of his nephew, he decided to help out. This proved Abraham had forgiven and forgotten Lot's offence in choosing the more fertile portion of the land. Believers should not hold grudges or retain anger against offenders but learn to forgive and forget the past.

Abraham mobilised his 318 servants, assisted by Aner, Eschol and Mamre, and pursued the army of the alliance of four nations that captured Lot till he overtook them. That was a bold step and an indication that Abraham had good relationship with his neighbours. Someone told him about the misfortune of his brother, others went with him to battle. Believers should not live in isolation or at loggerheads with their neighbours. In the end, Abraham, with his servants and his allies overcame the kings and recovered Lot and all that were taken captive, including the women. Abraham had great courage to have pursued a coalition of armies with his home-trained militia. When he returned from the war, the kings of Sodom and Salem met him. "**And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God**" (Genesis 14:18). Melchizedek was a human king whose record of birth was not stated in Scripture, so he could be a type of Christ with regards to his office, as king and priest (Hebrews 7:1-11). He met Abraham with bread and wine, emblems of the Lord's Supper, and blessed him. Then, Abraham gave him tithe of the booty they brought from the battle. From the example of Abraham, Christians have a pattern of tithing before the law of

Moses. Giving of tithes is both a duty and a privilege. Any believer who understands Christian stewardship and accepts divine ownership of all things will not fail to give God at least a tenth of their profit. God promised to bless faithful givers (Malachi 3:10,11).

Whereas the king of Salem met Abraham and engaged him on spiritual essentials, the king of Sodom came to negotiate with him on carnal issues. The king of Sodom proposed that Abraham retain the property recovered from the war while he took away the people. But Abraham had vowed he would not take anything from the spoils. He was totally disinterested in any reward or gain coming from Sodom, though he allowed others to take their due portion. Meanwhile, it is surprising that there was no record of any move from Lot to retrace his steps, or the least appreciation coming from him.

"**After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward**" (Genesis 15:1). God was aware of Abraham's anxiety concerning the possibility of a counter-attack from the kings of the nations he defeated. Also, his decision not to take anything from the spoil of war might have portrayed him as one who laboured without reward. But God reassured him of protection and reward. Likewise, Jesus promised believers that as they overpower Satan and all his forces, nothing shall by any means hurt them. He also promised to reward His followers both in time and eternity (Luke 10:17; Matthew 19:27-29).

Abraham brought up the issue of his childlessness before God. He was concerned that his lack of children would affect the fulfilment of the promises of God (Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17). But God reassured him that he would have children and his steward would not be his heir. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. In the New Testament, the faith of Abraham on this occasion became a model of the doctrine of justification by faith. A sinner is justified and counted righteous before God the moment s/he believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Romans

4:3,4,17-25; Galatians 3:6-14).

God entered into a covenant with Abraham in line with the custom of his day. Abraham divided the sacrificial animals into two equal parts and arranged the pieces opposite each other. Then, he waited and watched until God, represented by a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, passed between the pieces. God repeated and enlarged the promises He had earlier made to him and gave him the rite of circumcision as the seal of the covenant. He also changed the name of Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah. Changing of their names signified a new beginning and the new thing the Lord would do for them. But God informed Abraham that part of the promise would not happen immediately because his descendants would first sojourn in Egypt and be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years as they developed into a great nation, but their oppressors would be punished and Abraham's seed would be delivered (Genesis 15:13-16).

At first, God's promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a child in old age appeared incredulous, so Abraham laughed. But at God's own time, the promise came to pass, thus proving that with Him, nothing shall be impossible.

THE COMPROMISE OF ABRAHAM AND GOD'S CONSIDERATION (Genesis 16:1-16; 17:1; Romans 2:25-29; 2 Corinthians 1:19,20)

Abraham and Sarah waited for God to give them a child as He promised, but after waiting for ten years, they contrived an alternative solution. Sarah gave Hagar her Egyptian handmaid to Abraham for a wife. Sarah's plan was to have a child through her as it was practised in their culture. Truly, Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael, but the outcome was far from Sarah's expectation. Hagar became unruly and despised Sarah because of her childlessness. In her frustration, Sarah blamed Abraham and dealt cruelly with Hagar until she fled from her. Believers are not expected to deal cruelly with anyone, no matter the provocation.

Despite the doubt and compromise of Abraham and his wife, God still intervened on their behalf. First, He took care of the complication arising from the Hagar and Ishmael factor. God made it plain that Ishmael would be blessed because he was Abraham's descendant but he was not the covenant child. Second, He called Abraham to a perfect walk. "**And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect**" (Genesis 17:1). God wanted him to overcome those carnal tendencies that were evident in his life. Already, he had shown signs of anxiety, fear, insincerity and self-management. All of these must be purged. God demands that everyone who would remain in a covenant relationship with Him be perfect. This underscores the necessity and priority of the sanctification experience for all believers subsequent to the new birth, whereby the adamic nature and the propensity to sin is dealt a death blow (Romans 6:6,7).

After his call to perfection, Abraham's name was changed from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many nations). Sarai, meaning princess, was also changed to Sarah (mother of many nations). Following this, God commanded the rite of circumcision as a token of this covenant with Abraham and his seed. He was to circumcise himself, all males in his camp and all baby boys eight days after their birth. Those who refused to be circumcised were to be cut off from among his people. However, the injunction of flesh circumcision is no longer binding on believers, but what matters today is the circumcision of the heart. "**But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God**" (Romans 2:29).

Questions for review:

1. What call did God give Abraham and what were the blessings attached to his obedience?
2. In what areas must believers avoid following the wrong steps of Abraham?

3. Why should believers settle misunderstandings amicably?
4. Why should Christians pay their tithes and offerings?
5. What does it mean to be justified by faith?
6. What does God require from Christians in order to fulfil His promises in their lives?
7. How can we answer God's call today?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	EXODUS 20 - 22
MONDAY:	EXODUS 23 - 25
TUESDAY:	EXODUS 26 - 29
WEDNESDAY:	EXODUS 30 - 32
THURSDAY:	EXODUS 33 - 36
FRIDAY:	EXODUS 37 - 38
SATURDAY:	EXODUS 39 - 40

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

MEMORY VERSE: "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Genesis 19:24,25).

TEXT: Genesis 18:1-33; 19:1-38

In Genesis chapter seventeen, the Lord had appeared to Abraham and called him to perfection. In this study, He again appeared to him, in company of two angels in human form, in the plain of Mamre. During the visit, Abraham demonstrated uncommon hospitality to the divine visitors, leaving us an example on how to treat strangers. The New Testament records it thus, "**Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality**" (Hebrews 13:2; Romans 12:13).

Abraham, being a friend of God, had a close communion with Him. "**And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do... Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know**" (Genesis 18:17,20,21).

God invariably revealed to Abraham that He would destroy the cities because of their wickedness. This made him to passionately intercede for the cities to avert the

impending judgment. However, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah had reached a point where divine judgment was inevitable. "**But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly**" (Genesis 13:13; Deuteronomy 32:32; Isaiah 1:9; 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; 50:40; Ezekiel 16:46-56; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9; Matthew 10:15; 11:24; Luke 10:12; 17:29; 2 Peter 2:6). Their judgment serves as warning to restrain anyone who would trifle with divine laws. "**Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire**" (Jude 7).

ABRAHAM'S HOSPITALITY AND INTERCESSION FOR SODOM AND GOMORRAH (Genesis 18:1-33; Ezekiel 22:30; Exodus 32:7-14)

While sitting at his tent door, Abraham saw "**three men stood by him**". Apparently, these were divine visitors. He ran to meet them, bowed "**And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree**" (Genesis 18:3,4). It was customary for people in Bible day to wash the feet of visitors (Genesis 19:2; 43:24). Abraham, on sighting the strangers, made haste to ensure the washing of their feet, as well as providing a meal. Abraham exemplified the virtue of hospitality to strangers, an act the Lord expects from His children. Jesus underscored the import of this virtue by saying, "**...I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in**" (Matthew 25:35). In his letter to Timothy, Paul the apostle admonished that widows could only be taken into the number "**...if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet...**" (1 Timothy 5:10).

In the course of His conversation with Abraham, God reiterated His promise that Sarah would conceive and

bear a son. Hospitality attracts divine blessings. "**And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him**" (Genesis 18:10). Sarah laughed within herself when she heard the Lord reaffirm His promise of a son to her, even in old age. Naturally, it seemed too late to have a son but God is a covenant-keeper and His power transcends natural limitations. He gave Abraham a son in spite of the "**deadness of Sarah's womb**" (Romans 4:19). There is hope for the barren or anyone who trusts in the Lord; for God is unchangeable (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

"**And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know**" (Genesis 18:16,20,21).

Abraham, having heard of the judgment that was going to befall Sodom and Gomorrah, stood in the gap to intercede for the cities. "**And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?**" (Genesis 18:23). The conversation between God and Abraham revealed the righteousness and mercy of God. He is ready to be entreated and unwilling that anyone should perish, though He judges sin because He is holy. In every generation, God seeks men, like Abraham, to stand as intercessors to avert His judgment (Ezekiel 22:30).

Abraham was a bold and an importunate intercessor, yet simple in faith. He did not charge God foolishly but interceded in humility and reverence. He said, "**Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?**" He knew that the judgment of God was based on righteousness. He might have thought that Sodom and Gomorrah should have at least fifty righteous people to justify their being spared.

But fifty righteous people could not be found, and as Abraham continued to reduce the figure, God condescended graciously to his pleas. From the beginning to the end of his intercession, God showed to Abraham and by extension to all mankind, that the Judge of all the earth will always do what is right.

Really, Abraham's concern in prayer was not only about sparing Lot, his nephew, but over the true nature of God's justice: "**Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ...That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**" (Genesis 18:23,25). God's response satisfied Abraham and reassured him that He is mindful of the righteous when He judges the wicked.

It is also clear that Abraham was a man of unprejudiced love for all people. He was very magnanimous in his request and pleaded for Lot and all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. This teaches Christians not to pray for their immediate family members only but extend the same to others. "**I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty**" (1 Timothy 2:1,2).

It is mandatory for believers to pray for: the unsaved (Romans 10:1), persecutors (Matthew 5:44; Acts 7:59,60), good governance in our nations (2 Chronicles 6:37-39), kings and rulers (Ezra 6:10; 1 Timothy 2:1-4), one another (James 5:16), the church (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and the gospel work (Colossians 4:3,4; Ephesians 6:18-20).

ASSAULT AND INORDINATE AFFECTION OF THE DEPRAVED SODOMITES (Genesis 19:1-11; Proverbs 14:12; 29:1; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Romans 1:18-32; 11:22; Jude 7; Revelation 21:8; Jeremiah 6:15)

"**And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and**

Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground" (Genesis 19:1).

Lot was sitting "**in the gate**" when the heavenly messengers arrived the degenerate city. Sitting at the gate was a sign of prominence and leadership (Deuteronomy 16:18; 21:19; Proverbs 31:23). So, Lot had moved from merely pitching his tent towards Sodom to settling in the city proper and getting involved in the running of its affairs. Evidently, Lot had mixed himself with the wicked men of Sodom, though he still retained some virtues he learnt from Abraham. In spite of his un-ceremonial departure from Abraham, he still kept to the ethics of entertaining strangers as he had been taught. However, he must have discovered to his chagrin that he had landed himself in a cesspit of spiritual and moral corruption by choosing to live in Sodom. His choice of prosperous-looking Sodom to sojourn ended up becoming a disaster. Pitching one's tent near "Sodom" could spell doom to any believer who chooses to associate with the world. Well has the Bible said, "**There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death**" (Proverbs 14:12).

Lot was willing to tolerate the evil men of Sodom and their ungodly way of life. This complacency brought tragedy to his family, just as it will to the family of any compromising believer. Like Lot, there are many believers who expose their families to ungodly environments and harmful influences simply because of material profit in business or corporate employment. Such believers are surely setting their families up for avoidable calamities. Consider, for example, the perverting influence of Sodom on Lot's family. First, Lot himself became complacent, unable to persuade anyone in Sodom to know God. Next, his wife, turned out to be a worldly, nominal follower of Jehovah. Finally, Lot's daughters became incestuous, shameless and ungodly, thoroughly schooled in the vices of Sodom. Christian parents should beware of exposing their children to the ungodly influences of the present age.

The rot in Sodom was pervasive. Men from all quarters

besieged Lot's dwelling in an attempt to perpetrate lewdness. Both old and young were involved and Lot tried in vain to restrain them from their evil intent. Sin knows no tribal, racial or occupational divide; nor was age a disincentive to iniquity and violence in this depraved city. They shamelessly insisted in committing sodomy with the visitors and called on Lot: "**...Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them**" (Genesis 19:5). This shows the abysmal level of depravity into which they had sunk. The men of Sodom, "**leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient**" (Romans 1:27,28). Lot's offer of his daughters to appease the Sodomites is to be condemned. We must never do evil so that good may come out of it (Romans 3:8).

"**And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door**" (Genesis 19:6,7,9).

Despite being under the danger of impending judgment, the immoral sodomites refused to repent. Not even when they were struck with blindness by the angels. They were hell-bent in their sin, and had reached a point of no return in evil. This marks the characteristics of sinners of all ages who, blinded and hardened by the deceitful glamour of sin, reject God's offer of mercy to continue in their wickedness.

ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED AND IMPENITENT SODOMITES (Genesis 19:12-38; Revelation 16:9,11; Job 31:3; Psalms 9:17; 11:6; Luke

13:2-5; Hebrews 2:1-3)

Seeing the impenitence and recalcitrance of the Sodomites, the angels instructed Lot to bring out his relations for rescue. This was a unique opportunity for evangelism given to Lot. It is also the command of a great duty which God has placed on every believer. Lot went out, at the angels' bidding, to see to the deliverance of those related to him. Unfortunately, the Sodomites' in-laws treated his warning with levity and scorn. To them, "**he seemed as one that mocked**." In like manner, many fail to respond promptly to the gospel forgetting that God's judgment is imminent. In evangelising the lost, our driving force and abiding motto must be that of the Master, "**I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work**" (John 9:4). Many who are repeatedly warned today by faithful ministers of God, but continue in their sins are rushing headlong into certain destruction.

Just as God had warned, payday finally arrived for Sodom and Gomorrah. But before the destruction descended, Lot, his wife and two daughters were delivered and urged to escape to the mountains. As soon as Lot was safely out of the way, "**...the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities...**" The ungodly and the wicked, fornicators and adulterers, idolaters and murderers, together with those who went after strange flesh were all destroyed by fire. Yes, God is infinite in mercy, slow to anger, eager to forgive, but when people toy with His mercy and continue in sin, He turns around as "**a consuming fire**" instead of a redeeming Saviour. For our world, Christ is the city of refuge. Penitent sinners can run to Him for safety.

In the overthrow of Sodom, though God did not find ten righteous people as Abraham assumed He would, the righteous was spared the fate of sinners. In like manner, saints will be taken out of the world, in an

experience called the rapture, before the great tribulation when God will rain down His fierce wrath on this present evil world.

It is remarkable that Lot and his family escaped the destruction of Sodom, but tragedy struck as they fled to the place of safety – "**his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt**" (Genesis 19:26). The calamity of Lot's wife proves right the axiom, "You can take a worldly person out of the world, but you cannot take the world out of a worldly person". Lot's wife became a pillar of salt because she was unwilling to break away completely from Sodom. She left Sodom, but Sodom was still in her heart. Her fate was recorded to warn us (Luke 17:32). From the example of Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked are warned to turn away from their unrighteousness, so also by the example of Lot's wife, the righteous are warned not to turn from their righteousness (Ezekiel 3:20; 33:13). Backsliding is perilous to the believer's soul. "**Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it**" (Hebrews 4:1). Instead of going back, we should, like Paul, make up our minds that we will press on to the heavenly prize (Philippians 3:14).

The disaster in Lot's family did not end with his wife's instant judgment; the daughters proved they were as depraved as the Sodomites. They barely escaped judgment because of God's mercy in response to Abraham's intercession. As Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and dwelt in a cave together, fearing they might not get husbands, they took turns to commit incest with their father, whom they made drunk prior to the act. Both of them conceived and gave birth to sons who became the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites respectively. These tribes turned out to be archenemies of Israel in later years, and were barred from God's congregation even to their tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3).

Lot lost everything – family, property and morals – which is traceable to his decision to separate from Abraham and pitch his tent towards Sodom. His case

was that of a righteous man polluted by mingling with the world. At last, Sodom left him a thoroughly ruined man. He was saved as though by fire (1 Corinthians 3:15). His fate is a warning to everyone to take right decision because it determines one's destiny.

Questions for review:

1. What is the spiritual significance of Sodom and Gomorrah to believers today?
2. Why was there a severe judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah?
3. Why is it necessary to intercede for others?
4. Enumerate the dangers of exposing our families to ungodly influence.
5. What should be our evangelistic motto?
6. What can we learn from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the fate of Lot's wife?
7. How can we remain unspotted in a corrupt society?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	MATTHEW 1 - 3
MONDAY:	MATTHEW 4 - 5
TUESDAY:	MATTHEW 6 - 7
WEDNESDAY:	MATTHEW 8 - 9
THURSDAY:	MATTHEW 10 - 11
FRIDAY:	MATTHEW 12 - 13
SATURDAY:	MATTHEW 14 - 16

MEMORY VERSE: "And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife" (Genesis 20:14).

TEXT: Genesis 20:1-18

From the gory sight of the destruction of Sodom and its environs, Abraham decided to relocate down south to the Philistine settlement in Gerar. In pursuance of his self-preservation policy, both he and Sarah gave the impression that they were mere siblings. "**And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah**" (Genesis 20:2). This information misled the heathen monarch into taking a wrong decision which exposed his entire household to divine wrath.

However, the study reveals the consistent faithfulness of God, His avowed aversion to sin, the efficacy of His strong restraining influence, His unchanging stance on restitution, and swift reversal of judgment upon human compliance with divine directives. Though the story ended on a positive note for Abimelech, it would have been much better if Abraham's role had been positively different. That God can do all things is not a license for believers to abdicate their responsibilities or become culpable in leading people astray, like Abraham did in the study.

REFLECTIONS ON ABRAHAM'S SELF-PRESERVATION POLICY (Genesis 20:1,2,11-13; 12:10-20; 26:7; Psalm 56:3,4; 1 Corinthians 10:12)

"**And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah**" (Genesis 20:2). Here, the couple manifested one of the traits of the old life. Unfortunately, this was not the first time they acted that way. Not long after God called him, Abraham made a personal but unscriptural policy to enhance his security among their heathen hosts. "**And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother**" (Genesis 20:13). Sarah's consent did not justify or mitigate the error. Rather, it risked her virtues, compromised the honour of her family and subsequently exposed them to needless ridicule.

One would have thought that they had learnt their lesson after the experience in Egypt in a similar circumstance (Genesis 12:11-20). But their fall to the same temptation after about twenty years later is proof that they had not overcome this self-management tendency. Believers must quickly deal with any spiritual problem as soon as it is discovered; otherwise, it can linger, fester and eventually destroy the negligent. Once a believer has fallen into a particular sin, it becomes easier to repeat it except through watchfulness and prayerfulness.

Abraham's self-preservation scheme had been premised on his fear that he could be killed by an enemy who might be interested in his wife (Genesis 20:11). However, the turnout of events, both in Egypt and in Gerar, proved that his fear was baseless after all. Walking by sight leads to the "**fear of man**" which "**bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe**" (Proverbs 29:25). Christians have comprehensive preservation from God on all sides. Buoyed by living promises of protection, deliverance and divine presence, there is no justification for subjecting ourselves to any

fear that can result in an ungodly disposition. Those who fear God need not fear what anyone may do against them (Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalms 5:12; 32:7,10; Hebrews 13:6).

Though declaring their identity as such was not completely false, it was not totally true as it is common knowledge that their marital relationship superseded any other. Half-truths are at best lies. The Scripture forbids lying of any size or form. "**Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him**" (Colossians 3:9,10). Besides, to abide with God in a blissful eternity requires that one "**...walketh uprightly... and speaketh the truth in his heart**" (Psalm 15:1,2). The incident warns of the possibility of faith icons doing things that could cause adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme or bring blame to the ministry (Genesis 9:20-23; Numbers 20:7-13; 2 Samuel 11:1-4; Matthew 26:69-75; Galatians 2:11-13). "**Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall**" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Instead of pointing Abimelech and the Philistines to God, the action of Abraham and Sarah encouraged their propensity to sin. Believers should always be careful not to "**put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way**", but rather be mindful to do "**things wherewith one may edify another**" (Romans 14:13,19; 15:2; 1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Ephesians 4:29; 1 Timothy 1:4,5). However, in consonance with His holy nature, God confronted Abimelech in a dream to intimate him of his error, caution and lead him in the right way.

REBUKE TO ABIMELECH ON HIS SELF-INDULGENT PRACTICE (Genesis 20:3-7; Psalm 105:14; Job 33:14-30; Psalm 39:11; Ezekiel 18:23,32; Jonah 3:10)

"**But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's**

wife" (Genesis 20:3). God appeared to Abimelech in the best way he could understand and revealed the truth about Sarah to him and warned him of the danger of keeping her. However, it must be stressed that, God does not always have to appear to every adulterer, drunkard or any sinner in a dream before they repent. This encounter was not because Abraham was so righteous or Abimelech so special. It was not even because either was hitherto, ignorant of God's will in this matter. Even though the law was not yet codified, it had been "**written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another**" (Romans 2:15). The Lord did it because of His sovereign resolve to give Isaac as a child of promise to Abraham through Sarah. Like in Egypt, He wanted to preserve the integrity of Sarah for the promised seed and lineage of the Messiah.

Two, because God is not interested in the destruction of anyone, He wanted to give Abimelech opportunity to escape the dire consequences of his ill-advised move. He still does so in contemporary times especially through the agency of gospel preachers, spiritual counsellors and soul-winners. As it was then, God can still communicate His will to humans through dreams. But dreams are not the only means through which God can reveal His will to mortal men. Other common avenues include the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, divine agitation on the human conscience, divine impression upon the heart, prophetic utterance, and His directly spoken word. However, the most reliable and easily discernible means is the written word of God – the Bible. All other sources of revelation must be tested and found to agree with it before they can be trusted or acted upon. Therefore, no one would be justified to limit divine communication to dreams. Indeed, anyone who continues in sin on the pretext of an absence of a personal dream encounter will have themselves to blame when God's judgment suddenly comes (Psalms 19:7-11; 119:98; Proverbs 6:23; Ecclesiastes 11:9; Isaiah 8:20; Micah 6:8).

"**But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife...**" (Genesis 20:4-7). This was the first and only time a Philistine would talk about righteousness and integrity in the Bible. But his claim was a result of a divinely-imposed hindrance. His lust that culminated in his taking Sarah as an extra wife already had condemned him. Guilt on an account of sin is condemned right from its conception before its consummation (Exodus 20:17; Job 31:1; Proverbs 6:25; 1 John 2:16).

The encounter further indicates that fatalism is not in tandem with faith. One can plead his case with his Creator and influence Him to change His mind on an unpleasant matter. God Himself encourages it. He also respects genuine and reasonable intercessions (Exodus 32:7-14; Job 23:6,7; Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 18:7-10; 26:13; Joel 2:13).

Three, God listened to Abimelech's submission, accepted his defence, dealt mercifully with him on the basis of his limited understanding of spiritual matters and showed him steps he must take to escape the consequences of his action. Millions of sinners and backsliders are guilty on account of their snubbing the remedy God has graciously given in Christ (John 3:18). Abimelech was much better than such people in that he agreed with God and followed through His recommended remedy.

Four, the fact that God seemed not to say anything about the matter to Abraham does not imply that He condoned his lie. A crime remains so whether the perpetrator is arraigned and interrogated or not. However, the resultant rebuke from repentant Abimelech should be so humiliating as to ultimately

provoke the ageing couple to be more earnest and forthright in their relationship with God.

RESTITUTION BY ABIMELECH IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S CORRECTION (Genesis 20:8-18; Exodus 22:17; Ezekiel 33:14-16; Matthew 5:23,24; Luke 19:8,9)

Early the next morning, Abimelech recounted his experience to warn all his servants. Then, he called Abraham and reprimanded him. Worthy of note is that despite the leanness of Abraham's excuse, Abimelech still went ahead to practice restitution as he "**took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife**" (Genesis 20:14). This is proof of the genuineness of his experience and encounter with God. Restitution, as practised here by Abimelech, is a cardinal trans-dispensational doctrine. It implies making amends for wrongs done, restoring things unlawfully acquired, making reparation for things carelessly handled or wickedly damaged, and confessing offences so as to have a clear conscience before God and humans (Exodus 22:1-7; Leviticus 6:1-7; Numbers 5:6-8; Luke 19:8,9; Acts 23:1-5; 24:16). Restitution is still required today. It proves the authenticity of one's reconciliation with God.

There are some lessons from Abimelech's restitution model. One, though he gave an open rebuke to erring Abraham, he quickly accepted his explanation and implemented God's instruction on the matter. Regardless of whatever anyone does, a true child of God must never lose focus of what is required in any situation. We must not displease God on account of someone else displeasing us. Two, he freely forgave the couple and allowed them residence anywhere within his realm (Genesis 20:15). Three, he recognised their lower level relationship as siblings without condemning or mocking them (Genesis 20:16). Four, he respected Abraham and submitted to his prayer which proved effective for his benefit (Genesis 20:17,18). For God who is no respecter of persons to have referred to Abraham

as a prophet and recommended that Abimelech seek his prayers suggests that Abraham must have realised his error, repented of the falsehood and renewed his spiritual relationship with God. Believers who are overtaken in a fault should not linger in their sin but quickly return unto God. Likewise, those who are spiritual should readily receive them into the fellowship as soon as they fully return from backsliding.

As the study concludes, a sinner must realise the fact of God's non-negotiable hatred for sin and His unchanging demand for repentance. Secondly, there is risk of unpleasant natural, diabolic or divinely inflicted consequences of sin even here on earth. Thirdly, there is possibility of freedom upon repentance and faith in Christ, restitution and a resolve of unflinching commitment to God's will as revealed in His word. On the other hand, a believer must be conscious that Satan does not respect the length or height of one's relationship with God: he can tempt anyone anywhere, anyhow. Therefore, "**Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**". Every believer must resist all satanic suggestions and manipulations and he will flee (1 Peter 5:8; James 4:7).

Questions for review:

1. What is the danger in giving wrong information about ourselves to others?
2. What is the antidote to fear and the tendency to tell a lie as a strategy of self-preservation?
3. Why did God deter Abimelech from his adulterous plan?
4. Outline basic lessons from Abimelech's encounter with God in the dream.
5. Highlight specific lessons contemporary Christians can draw from Abimelech's model of restitution.
6. Give other examples of restitution in the Bible.
7. Why must we seek counsel in very sensitive cases?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	MATTHEW 17 - 19
MONDAY:	MATTHEW 20 - 21
TUESDAY:	MATTHEW 22 - 23
WEDNESDAY:	MATTHEW 24 - 25
THURSDAY:	MATTHEW 26
FRIDAY:	MATTHEW 27 - 28
SATURDAY:	MARK 1 - 3

Lesson 7

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC, HEIR OF PROMISE

MEMORY VERSE: "And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Genesis 21:1,2).

TEXT: Genesis 21:1-34

God called Abraham for the purpose of being a channel of blessing to the whole world. In the call, He promised that "**in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 12:3). God planned to raise through Abraham, a nation that would know and keep His ways. From his family would come forth a chosen people through whom Jesus Christ, the promised Seed of the woman would emerge (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:8, 16,18).

To fulfil God's promise, Abraham needed to have a son. But Sarah, his wife, was barren for more than twenty years. At a point, Abraham seemed to have lost hope about the fulfilment of the promise. "**And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir**" (Genesis 15:3). He was in doubt whether the seed God had promised should be a son of his loins or a son in his house. But the Lord cleared his doubt and assured him that the heir to his house would come (Genesis 15:4).

In spite of this assurance, Abraham accepted Sarah's suggestion to take Hagar, their Egyptian handmaid, and go in to her (Genesis 16:1-3). Abraham fell into the temptation and its consequences still remain with us today. It takes a resolute faith and strong conviction to

know when a suggestion is from an enemy and to reject it. Children of God should be wary of ungodly counsels, pressures from parents or friends and stand resolutely with the word of God. They should wait patiently for the Lord to fulfil the promises He has made to them.

The text under consideration shows that, no matter how long it takes for God to fulfil His promise, in due time, it will come. "**For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise**" (Hebrews 6:13,15). God's promises are true and reliable, regardless of any opposing circumstances.

BIRTH OF ISAAC IN FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE (Genesis 21:1-8; 17:17; 18:10-14; Romans 4:19-21; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Luke 1:37)

Isaac was the promised heir born to Abraham and Sarah when they were very old in fulfilment of God's promise. Abraham was 100 years old while Sarah was 90 years. "**And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken**" (Genesis 21:1).

Once God has promised, He will surely fulfil it, no matter the delay. It is often said that "God's delays are His appointments". Therefore, believers should see delays in getting married, childbearing, securing a dream employment, financial breakthrough and healing, among others, as stepping stones to wonderful testimonies that would bring glory to God.

Abraham named his child whom Sarah bore to him Isaac, meaning laughter because "**...God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me**" (Genesis 21:6), said Sarah. Though the couple had laughed as a result of doubt, God, at last had turned their laughter of doubt to joy (Psalm 126:1-3; Job 8:20,21).

Christians should always rest upon God's promises and not be swayed by contrary opinions of men. The New Testament made reference to the faith of Abraham,

who, "**...being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform**" (Romans 4:19-21).

In line with his covenant with God, Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. Flesh circumcision was a token of the Abrahamic covenant. No matter how difficult and painful to the flesh, believers should learn to obey God.

THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON SENT AWAY (Genesis 21:9-21; 25:1-3,5,6; Galatians 4:22,23,25,28-30; Mark 12:6-9)

Ishmael, Abraham's first son through Hagar, was fourteen years older than Isaac (Genesis 16:16) and the only heir apparent until Isaac came. After Isaac was weaned, probably at age three according to Jewish culture, "**...Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac**" (Genesis 21:9,10). Sarah's stance at this time must not be mistaken for the cruel jealousy of a woman who did not want a rival. The point is, Ishmael was persecuting Isaac, the child of promise; and that amounted to an opposition to the covenant God made with Abraham. The New Testament sheds light on this in Galatians 4:22-30.

"**And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad; and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called**" (Genesis 21:11,12). God sanctioned Sarah's demand to send Hagar and her son

away, though it was grievous in Abraham's sight.

Ishmael was sent away in order to fulfil the promise God made concerning Isaac: "**...for in Isaac shall thy seed be called**" (Genesis 21:12). Abraham obeyed the Lord speedily and sent them away with provisions for their journey, as much as they would need, until they reached the next well or oasis. Believers should learn from Abraham's attitude of prompt obedience to God's command (Genesis 21:14; 22:3).

As Hagar and Ishmael travelled, the water they took got exhausted, Ishmael fainted under the hot desert sun and Hagar abandoned him in despair. But "**God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is**" (Genesis 21:17). The Lord is benevolent towards all the inhabitants on the face of the earth. Despite the fact that Ishmael was born outside the divine covenant God made with Abraham, He still took care of him. This shows that God cares for all His creatures on earth, especially man that was created in His image. Moreover, He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Christ died for the whole world; and all that come to God through Him will be saved.

Hagar was ignorant of God's care and concern for her and the young lad. While she despaired and hoped that they would both die of hunger and thirst, "**God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink**" (Genesis 21:19). The Lord was with them and protected them from all dangers in the wilderness. There is always solution to man's problem no matter the condition and situation we find ourselves.

BEERSHEBA COVENANT BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND ABIMELECH (Genesis 21:22-34; Psalm 86:17; Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 18:15)

"**And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto**

Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest" (Genesis 21:22). Abraham's favoured disposition is traceable to his decision to forsake the idols of his fathers and cleave to the God of heaven whom he had served with deep devotion. The testimony of Abimelech and Phichol is a confirmation of God's promise to protect, preserve and defend him wherever he went. "**And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 12:3). It is no wonder that even the heathen perceived the divine presence with him.

There are important lessons from the covenant between Abimelech and Abraham. One, it was a reflection of God's favour. God sometimes shows His people tokens for good that their neighbours cannot but take notice of (Psalm 86:17). Two, it is good to be in favour with those that are in favour with God. "**...We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you**" (Zechariah 8:23). We do well for ourselves if we have fellowship with those that have fellowship with God. Abraham and Abimelech proposed that there should be a firm and constant friendship between the two families, which should not be violated. This bond of friendship must be strengthened by the bond of an oath, in which God was appealed to, both as a witness of their sincerity and an avenger in case either side were treacherous (Genesis 21:23). Three, Abimelech requested that the covenant should extend to his people and posterity. Good men should secure alliance and communion with the favourites of heaven, not for themselves only.

Abraham was ready to enter into a covenant with Abimelech after finding him to be a man of honour, good conscience and one who fears God (Genesis 21:24). It is however necessary to note that New Testament believers are to be careful of going into covenant relationships with others to avoid unequal yoke. Abraham prudently settled the matter concerning the well about which Abimelech's servants had quarrelled with him (Genesis 21:25). What an instructive lesson to believers that when our brother trespasses against us,

we should settle the rift with meekness of wisdom (Matthew 18:15). Abraham accepted Abimelech's exoneration of himself in this matter: "**...I wot not who hath done this thing**" (Genesis 21:26). Many are wrongly suspected of injustice and unkindness who were innocent of the act, and we ought to accept when they clear themselves. The faults of servants should not be imputed to their masters unless they know and justify them.

Satan-motivated misunderstanding among brethren can be settled with love and humility. When a similar event happened between Abraham and Lot his brother, he settled it with maturity devoid of covetousness (Genesis 13:7-9). The strife that would have probably ended in battle against each other turned to a covenant relationship that brought joy to their generations. God calls us to "**Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14).

Abraham took care to have his title to the well cleared and confirmed to prevent any disputes or quarrels in the future. He presented to Abimelech that which was valuable and useful – sheep and oxen – in gratitude for his kindness and hospitality as a token of a hearty friendship (Genesis 21:27). Eventually, they ratified the covenant by an oath and registered it by giving a new name to the place – Beersheba, the well of the oath – in remembrance of the covenant (Genesis 21:31). Believers should always remember that they are in covenant relationship with God. Being conscious of this, they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

Questions for review:

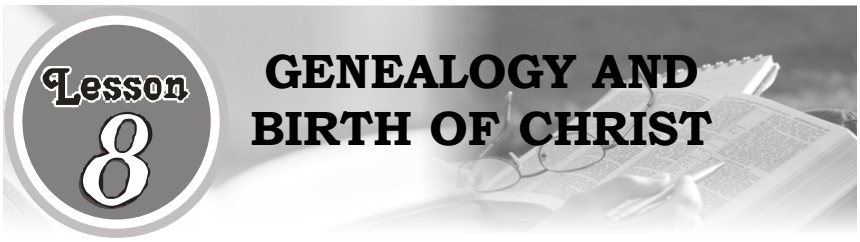
1. What should be a believer's attitude to different suggestions in time of pressing needs and problems?
2. What can a Christian learn from the fulfilment of the promised son to Abraham?
3. Why was it necessary for Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away?
4. What can we learn from Abraham's obedience to the

Lord though it was grievous?
5. What should be our role as brethren in the church when there is strife or misunderstanding?
6. What can we learn from Abraham's attitude of peaceful co-existence?
7. What can believers learn from the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	MARK 4 - 6
MONDAY:	MARK 7 - 10
TUESDAY:	MARK 11 - 13
WEDNESDAY:	MARK 14 - 16
THURSDAY:	LUKE 1 - 2
FRIDAY:	LUKE 3 - 4
SATURDAY:	LUKE 5 - 6



GENEALOGY AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

TEXTS: Matthew 1:1-25; 2:1-23; Luke 3:23-38

The Gospel according to Matthew opens appropriately with the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ with the names of Abraham and David to whom God gave the promise of the coming Messiah (Matthew 1:1). Of Abraham, the Lord said, "**And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice**" (Genesis 22:18). And to David, He said, "**Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations**" (Psalm 89:4). Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, made reference to the promise when he recapped in his epistle that: "**Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ**" (Galatians 3:16).

Since God has promised that the Messiah must be the descendant of Abraham and David, it becomes necessary to show, through records, that Jesus Christ had the proper genealogy to qualify Him as the Messiah. This underscores the significance of records of the acts of God and of the Holy Ghost in the midst of His people. Believers should learn to keep and preserve adequate records of Bible doctrines and teachings, special events, great experiences and testimonies for coming generation to show "**...to the generation to come the**

praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done... that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:4-7).

Moreover, Matthew wrote primarily to the Jews and he needed to convince them that Christ is indeed the Messiah that was promised in the Old Testament. It is worthy of note that the Jews never toyed with records and genealogy and were quick to exclude anyone from their tribes whose ancestry could not be established (Ezra 2:62; Nehemiah 7:64).

PECULIARITIES OF THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28)

"**The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham**" (Matthew 1:1). The names of Abraham and David were mentioned first in Matthew's account of the genealogy of Christ. This goes to show the significance and fulfilment of the covenant which God made with Abraham concerning the promised Messiah and His promise to David regarding his posterity were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The reckoning begins with Abraham because he is the progenitor of the Jewish nation. God had told him that if he left the idols of his people and turned to Him, He would make of him a great nation and all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3). He obeyed and this led to the establishment of what is known as the Abrahamic covenant. All through his sojourn and wanderings, the covenant was constantly renewed and re-established (Genesis 17:4; 18:18; 22:18; 46:3; Acts 3:25). The covenant God made with King David was in furtherance of His determination to fulfil His covenant with Abraham.

David, unarguably the most favoured king of Israel,

received further assurance that there shall be a Son from his loins that shall reign over the whole earth. "**Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever...**" (Isaiah 9:7). It was needful therefore, to establish the genealogy of Christ through these patriarchs to convince the children of Israel of its authenticity.

The two records establish Christ's absolute right to the throne of David, both by blood relationship through Mary and by title through Joseph, Mary's husband. The differences between Matthew's record and Luke's are obvious. Matthew began with Abraham and traced the history down to Jesus. Luke began with Jesus through Abraham to Adam. Matthew deliberately arranged his genealogy into three groups of 14 generations each (Matthew 1:17). He traced it through David's son, Solomon, whereas Luke went through David's son, Nathan, to Mary the mother of Jesus. The word "begat" is used of all the names down from Abraham to Joseph, but when it comes to the link between Joseph and Jesus, the statement was altered thus: "**And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ**" (Matthew 1:16) indicating that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus.

Although the two accounts look different, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the biblical record. The fact that there are variations in the record of Matthew and Luke shows that one, each of them had distinct purposes in writing. Matthew wrote from the Jewish perspective to the Jewish audience while Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile monarch. Two, Luke claimed to have thoroughly and carefully investigated and followed up everything to the source. Three, both records reveal that Jesus is truly the expected Messiah of Israel. Four, He is the only person qualified to be the Saviour of the world. Five, it is clear from both accounts that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, but that He was uniquely conceived by the Spirit through the virgin Mary. Six, Matthew focused on Jesus being the Messiah

and King of Israel by tracing His genealogy back through David to Abraham whereas Luke showed that Jesus is the unique Son of Man, Son of God and Saviour of the whole world.

Of further significance and peculiarity in the accounts of both Matthew and Luke is that four women were involved in the Lord's genealogy. Of the four, two were Gentiles and two of very mean personalities. Rachab (Rahab) was a Canaanitess and described as a harlot; Ruth was a Moabite, of whom the Lord said that they shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3). Tamar and Bathsheba, though Jews, had questionable past. Tamar was involved in a moral scandal with Judah, her father-in-law (Genesis 38:13-25); and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah was involved in adultery with King David.

From the foregoing, we learn that in spite of the ugly past of these women, they found mercy and favour in the sight of God. Christ indeed, came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Secondly, although Jesus came through the Jewish nation, both Gentiles and Jews are included in God's redemptive plan. Christ is for the whole world – Jew and Gentile. "**For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him**" (Romans 10:12). Thirdly, God does not discriminate against any on the basis of their gender. "**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus**" (Galatians 3:28). Lastly, it means that the vilest of sinners who truly believe shall be forgiven their sins.

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Psalm 132:11; Luke 1:31-35,76; John 14:30; 19:4,6; 1 John 3:5; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22)

Many years before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, detailed prophecies about His birth were revealed. Isaiah said, "**Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,**

and shall call his name Immanuel." Angel Gabriel declared to Mary: "**...thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end**" (Luke 1:31-33). Micah said, concerning Christ's place of birth, "**But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting**" (Micah 5:2). The promise of David's throne and all that is involved is transferred to "**Jesus Christ, the Son of David**" (Matthew 1:1). The lineage that began with David has its consummation and actualisation in Christ.

One of the most important facts concerning Jesus Christ is that He was born of a virgin woman. God was the first to unveil the virgin birth when He referred to Him as the "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15). This was an allusion to the fact that Christ would be conceived by a woman who had never known a man. Luke recorded that angel Gabriel was sent to Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man (Luke 1:26,27). Matthew also narrated that after Mary had been espoused to Joseph, she was found with a child of the Holy Ghost before they came together (Matthew 1:18). The virgin birth is therefore unique to Christ alone. No other living soul will ever be conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The virgin birth of Jesus confirms His Deity and distinguishes Him as the only sinless man conceived without any taint of the sinful nature inherited by all men in Adam. He thus became the spotless Lamb of God found in fashion as a man. It is this distinctive spotlessness that stands Him out and qualifies Him to be the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. "**Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless,**

undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:25,26).

The birth of Jesus occurred at Bethlehem, the birthplace of David (1 Samuel 20:6) and wise men came from the East to pay Him homage. When they saw the young child, Jesus, they fell down and worshipped Him acknowledging His deity. Having fulfilled their mission, they did not go back to Herod because they had been warned by God that he was planning to harm the new Child. Feeling betrayed by the wise men, Herod ordered the slaughter of all children from two years old and under in hope that Christ would be among them. Before he carried out his evil programme, the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph to take the child Jesus to Egypt in fulfilment of another Scripture prophecy (Matthew 2:13-15). Having received the message from God through Angel Gabriel, Joseph took full responsibility to ensure adequate security of Mary and the child, Jesus. From this, we learn, one, that our protection depends on obedience to God's guidance. Two, we must respond promptly to divine guidance. Three, challenges and problems are inevitable facts of life. Four, God works all things for the good of those who love Him. Five, Satan is always working against the purpose and programme of God but His counsel will always stand (Proverbs 19:21). Six, God always watches over His children and knows how to deliver them. Seven, He permits certain things in a believer's life to accomplish His purpose.

After the death of Herod, Joseph and Mary returned with the child Jesus to the land of Israel and they dwelt in the city of Nazareth.

PURPOSE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

(Matthew 1:21; John 1:29; Acts 4:12; 5:31; Galatians 4:4,5; Hebrews 2:14,15)

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The angel who announced His birth said, "**And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus means "Saviour" or "Salvation of

Jehovah" or "Jehovah is Saviour". The purpose of Jesus coming into the world is to save mankind from the ruin of sin. This He accomplished through His vicarious death on the cross at Calvary. Anyone who repents from sin and comes to Him for salvation will receive pardon and cleansing through His blood, no matter how vile.

Questions for review:

1. What can a believer learn from biblical records?
2. What can we learn from the inclusion of Gentiles in the lineage of Christ?
3. Mention two Old Testament women in the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ.
4. What is the importance of the virgin birth to the Christian faith?
5. What can we learn from the way Jesus was protected from the murderous intention of Herod?
6. Explain why Christ came into the world.
7. What is the purpose of the virgin birth?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	LUKE 7 - 8
MONDAY:	LUKE 9 - 10
TUESDAY:	LUKE 11 - 12
WEDNESDAY:	LUKE 13 - 16
THURSDAY:	LUKE 17 - 19
FRIDAY:	LUKE 20 - 21
SATURDAY:	LUKE 22

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

MEMORY VERSE: "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matthew 3:3).

TEXTS: Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 3:1-22

The opening phrase of chapter three of the gospel of Matthew is worthy of note: "**In those days came John the Baptist...**" The period preceding the coming of John the Baptist constitutes the time called the silent years in Jewish history. After Malachi, there was no prophet or prophecy for about four hundred years till John the Baptist came. His ministry had long been predicted before its manifestation (Isaiah 40:3; Luke 3:4). His message was fiery, focused and effective and many people flocked to him in response to his message. John appeared with a stunning message of repentance to all the people to prepare the way of the Lord and make His path straight. Though his ministry could be described as short, it was fulfilled.

PROFILE OF THE MAN, JOHN THE BAPTIST (Matthew 3:1-4; 11:11,12; Luke 3:1,2; 7:28,33; Malachi 4:5)

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, born to them in their old age. The couple had been serving the Lord diligently in holiness and righteousness until the prophecy of the conception and birth of their son came. It seemed an impossible event

to Zechariah until the Lord gave him a sign of dumbness to affirm the impending miracle (Luke 1:5-20).

John's birth was a confirmation of the prophecy of Isaiah that the Lord was going to send a prophet before the advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. John was "**The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God**" (Isaiah 40:3). His birth was a testimonial to the power of God to do the seemingly impossible. Who would have thought that Zechariah who was, according to some writers, about ninety-nine years old and his wife about eighty-nine would still have a child? But God, who delights in performing the extraordinary and the incredible, proved that He could not be limited by any circumstance. Thus, to prove that John the Baptist was a special messenger sent to deliver a special message to a special nation, he was born to parents who were both "**stricken in years**".

There are many qualities in this prophet's life and ministry worthy of emulation. First, he was a frugal, conservative and disciplined preacher who exercised caution in his lifestyle. He was not flamboyant, ostentatious or pretentious but different from other preachers and religionists of his day. "**And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey**" (Matthew 3:4). This is a challenge to believers and preachers whose lifestyles are anything but moderate. Seondly, John the Baptist was a humble and self-effacing man who understood the limit of his ministry. When the people came to enquire about the prospect of Jesus' ministry, he said, "**One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose... He must increase, but I must decrease...**" (Luke 3:16; John 3:30). He would not contend for recognition and approval with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thirdly, he understood and accepted what he was sent to do and committed himself to fulfilling it. He uplifted Christ and pointed even his own disciples to Him. He said, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). Fourthly, he remained

where the Lord wanted him (in the wilderness) until his revelation to the multitudes in Judaea and beyond Jordan. Five, John the Baptist was focused. He fulfilled his ministry according to the purpose of God for his life until he was martyred (Matthew 17:12,13; Mark 9:13).

PURPOSE OF THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:2; Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; John 1:6-8,23,29)

The purpose of John's ministry was predetermined before he was born. Besides the angel's announcement of John's mother's miraculous conception, it was revealed that he would be the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. One, it was to prepare the way for Christ's mission and ministry. "**The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God**" (Isaiah 40:3). The nation of Israel had been without a revelation of the true God for about four hundred years after Prophet Malachi and the people must have lost hope of the coming of the promised Messiah. To renew their expectation, the Lord sent a messenger of good tidings. Two, John's mission was to prepare their hearts to receive Christ as the expected Messiah. Three, he was to point and commend Him to the nation. "**The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). Four, his mission was to rebuke evildoers and point them to the path of the law. Five, to warn the people of God's impending judgment and call them to repentance. "**And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire**" (Luke 3:9).

John was a distinct and an articulate voice in a nation that had long been without a prophet. "**And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**" (Luke 3:3). His ministry had daring characteristics that any preacher who wants to be fulfilled should possess. He

presented his message in a clear and distinct way that left his hearers stunned and convicted. He was a thorough and an unsparing preacher who did not mince words, as he directed relevant messages to all categories of sinners – tax-collectors, soldiers, lawyers, etc. The scope of his ministry was all the country of Judaea and region round about Jordan. In our evangelism outreaches, we must cover all lands from our immediate locality to faraway lands.

Of note was John's courageous and fearless preaching, whether to Herod or to the publicans. He did not allow the status of his hearers to affect the content of his message. He preached with conviction and passion and challenged fruitless professors of religion to bear fruits of genuine repentance. However, he balanced up his message with compassion by advocating works of mercy for the needy: "**He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise**" (Luke 3:11). It was not a surprise therefore that his message was effective and evoked positive response as different categories of hearers thronged him to ask what they needed to do to escape the wrath of God (Luke 3:10-14).

Repentance was the centre of John's message. He called the people to conversion and good works. Genuine conversion brings a change of life and character. It is not enough to profess repentance but to produce the fruits thereof. In like manner, repentance should be central in our gospel outreaches, for therein lies the hope of getting to heaven. Christ did not send us to amuse our listeners but to preach repentance and remission of sin in His name (Luke 24:47; Acts 20:20,21). We should not flatter the great nor compliment the rich. We should be like courageous preachers who put their lives on the line to remain faithful to their calling and be willing to pay any price to do the will of God.

THE PROMISE OF POWER THROUGH JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 3:16,21,22; Matthew 3:16,17; Acts 1:8; 4:33)

From the preaching of John the Baptist came the first mention of the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament. "**John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire**" (Luke 3:16). This enduement with the power of the Holy Spirit would later come from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (John 7:37-40; 14:25,26; 15:26; 16:12-15). At Christ's own water baptism by John, the "**...heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him**" (Matthew 3:16). This emphasises the need for the baptism and anointing of the Holy Spirit for every believer to be effective in ministry. No preacher can go very far in ministry without the power of the Holy Ghost. Christ challenged the disciples to wait until they were endued with the power of the Holy Ghost. "**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 descent of the Spirit of God like a dove upon Christ and the voice of God the Father who publicly declared: "**...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**" (Matthew 3:16,17), confirms the truth of the deity of Christ and the Trinity of the Godhead (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:7).

John the Baptist prepared the way for the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Christ will soon come again as He promised (John 14:3). Believers should prepare His way by reaching out to dying sinners, restoring backsliders, edifying the saints and multiplying disciples.

Questions for review:

1. What challenge does John the Baptist's life pose to ministers and believers?
2. Why was John sent ahead of the Lord Jesus Christ?
3. What can we learn from John's approach to fulfilling God's purpose for his life?
4. Mention the characteristics of John's message that contemporary preachers should emulate.
5. Considering the way John left no stone unturned in preparing the way of the Lord, how should believers prepare for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ?
6. How can a believer be a burning and shinning light like John?
7. What other virtues can we emulate in John?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	LUKE 23 - 24
MONDAY:	LEVITICUS 1 - 4
TUESDAY:	LEVITICUS 5 - 7
WEDNESDAY:	LEVITICUS 8 - 11
THURSDAY:	LEVITICUS 12 - 14
FRIDAY:	LEVITICUS 15 - 17
SATURDAY:	LEVITICUS 18 - 20

Lesson 10

TEMPTATION AND COMMENCEMENT OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

MEMORY VERSE: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

TEXTS: Matthew 4:1-25; Luke 4:1-44

In preparation for His earthly ministry, Jesus received a public approval from God at His baptism in river Jordan. Afterwards, He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The temptation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ foreshadows that all believers will invariably face temptations. The disciple cannot be greater than the Master (Matthew 10:24). But as Christ overcame the tempter and his temptations, so too will His followers overcome if they rely on His grace. He has promised to make a way so that they may be able to bear any temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Immediately after He overcame Satan's temptation, Christ began His public ministry by calling people to repentance. "**From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 4:17). Thereafter, He chose disciples whom He trained and sent forth into the ministry of soul-winning. His mission was to make ordinary people extraordinary and fishermen to become "**fishers of men**". In the same vein, all believers are called into the ministry of soul-winning.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATIONS AND VICTORY (Matthew 4:1-10; Luke 4:1-13; Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 91:11; Deuteronomy 6:13; Hebrews 4:15)

"**Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil**" (Matthew 4:1). Christ did not stray into temptation by way of enticement with the things of this world but was 'led up of' or permitted by the Holy Spirit to be tempted. First, God permitted this as an example to believers that temptations or tests would come irrespective of who we are. Second, it is proof that as Christ overcame the devil through the instrumentality of the word of God, so will believers. Third, it is to show that our Master was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. And, though He does not have a modicum of the sinful nature in Him, He went through this experience that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God (Hebrews 2:17). Last, it is to affirm that temptation comes to all and sundry.

Some Bible scholars have categorised Christ's temptation into three major areas: appetite, ambition and avarice. First, dwelling on Christ's immediate need of food, Satan wanted Him to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. "**And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread**" (Matthew 4:3). Jesus had fasted for forty days and was obviously hungry. In this temptation, Satan wanted Christ to doubt His Sonship which was earlier confirmed by the voice of the Father from heaven when He was baptised (Matthew 3:17). The devil also wanted to use the temptation to accuse the Son of God of using the gift and power of God to gratify Himself. Believers should be wary of using the gift of God in their lives to prove a point or indulge self, no matter how legitimately appealing. Our Lord responded to this temptation by using the Scripture to counter the enemy. "**But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**" (Matthew 4:4). This was a reference to Deuteronomy

8:3.

The second temptation as recorded by Matthew focuses on ambition. "**Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone**" (Matthew 4:5,6). The tempter wanted the Saviour to commit the sin of presumption and test the will of the Father. He instigated Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, hoping that the Father would send angels to protect Him. Again, our Lord perceived the evil intention of the enemy. Relying on the Scripture again, He said, "**...It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God**" (Matthew 4:7). To tempt the Lord is to deliberately put ourselves in harm's way and expect Him to protect us. It is a sin!

Third, Satan tempted Christ with avarice, to embrace the glory of the world thereby committing the sin of idolatry. This time, he used the Scripture to try to veil his mischief, albeit, incorrectly. "**Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me**" (Matthew 4:8,9). The devil assumed wrongly that he owns the wealth and glories of this world, yet the Scripture says that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1). Even before Satan's suggestion, Jesus had been promised a kingdom, but the way to possess it was divine and not as a gift from the devil. Again, Christ resisted him, this time, with a stern rebuke, "**...Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve**" (Matthew 4:10). When a believer accepts power, fame, gift or other offers from the devil, it is idolatry and amounts to bowing to him.

Satan brings temptations, no matter how fair or reasonable, to cause believers to sin against their God, yet he turns around to accuse and condemn them.

Believers are to beware of his enticements lest he takes away heaven's treasures from them and deny them entry.

After the Lord had successfully triumphed over the temptations, "**Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him**" (Matthew 4:11). We are sure of heaven's support when we resist the devil and refuse to yield to temptation.

The Scripture provides a solid weapon against temptations. Those who would defeat the devil each time he comes must be conversant with the provisions of the word of God. In each case, Jesus resisted the temptation by quoting directly from the Scriptures.

COMMENCEMENT OF CHRIST'S EARTHLY MINISTRY (Luke 4:14-44; Matthew 4:12-17,23-25; Acts 2:38; 10:38; Proverbs 28:13; John 3:19)

"**And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about**" (Luke 4:14). After successfully overcoming the temptations, Christ began His public ministry which was preceded by the anointing of the Holy Spirit during His water baptism. Genuine salvation, sanctification, baptism in the Holy Ghost and water baptism are compulsory Christian experiences for all believers who want to excel in the gospel ministry. Without the Holy Spirit, our ministry will lack unction, power and courage to declare the whole counsel of God.

As the Lord began His ministry, His practice was to go to places where people gathered. Since the Jews regarded attending the synagogue on the Sabbath day as a sacred duty, the Lord resorted thither regularly to preach and teach. In the synagogue at Nazareth where He was brought up, He was offered the opportunity to read the Scripture for the day, which coincidentally spoke of His mission and ministry. "**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set**

at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18,19). This passage defines the totality of Christ's ministry and He laboured throughout His earthly ministry to fulfil it.

Christ's public ministry was threefold – teaching, preaching and healing. He was anointed to call men and women to repentance from sin and dead works to faith toward God. "**From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 4:17). Believers should emphasise repentance in their preaching outreaches. Ministering and preaching to sinners should be done with the motive of bringing them to repentance so that they can turn from darkness to light (Matthew 3:2; Acts 2:38). There is a promise of forgiveness to those who respond and turn from their wicked ways (Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32:3). Through Christ, "**The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up**" (Matthew 4:16). Rejecting Him amounts to discarding the Light of the world and remaining in darkness. Unfortunately, many of the people who heard Him rejected the call to repentance. "**And** [they] **rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong**" (Luke 4:29). But He escaped from their midst because His time to die had not come.

As He was rejected at His birthplace of Nazareth, Christ came to Capernaum and there continued His ministry. The healing of a man with an unclean spirit crying with a loud voice as He was preaching and teaching on a Sabbath day brought Him to limelight. "**And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and**

hurt him not" (Luke 4:33-35). The miracles revealed Christ as the anointed One who had come to destroy all the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). What the Lord did before, He is still doing today; those who trust Him for healing will receive divine touch.

THE CALL OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES (Matthew 4:18-22; 10:2-4; John 1:40,41; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

"**And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him**" (Matthew 4:18-20). These brethren's response to Christ's invitation is instructive. The Lord expects prompt response to the gospel call. People who linger before becoming committed disciples of Christ risk missing the plan of God for their lives. Two, they willingly submitted everything to be transformed from being fishermen to "**fishers of men**". No treasure should be too great or relationship too dear to sever in order to answer the Master's call. "Leaving all", "selling all" and "forsaking all" are familiar scriptural terms and basic requirements to follow Christ as disciples. The early disciples were common men the world would not have reckoned with but were called by Jesus Christ. "**For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty**" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27). Three, the disciples' call included the ministry of soul-winning, fishing men and bringing them to the Lord.

"**And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people**" (Matthew 4:23). Christ operated a holistic and balanced ministry which provided solutions to the spiritual and physical needs of people.

As we join the ministry of soul-winning, let us seek the grace and gift to meet the needs of the people, physically and spiritually. By so doing, we shall haul multitudes of souls into God's kingdom.

Questions for review:

1. Why should a believer expect to be tempted by the devil?
2. How can a believer overcome temptations?
3. What is the most potent weapon against temptations?
4. Why did Christ accompany His teaching and preaching ministry with miracles?
5. What can we learn from Jesus' call of fishermen to be apostles in the early Church?
6. How can we answer Christ's call to discipleship?
7. How did the disciples respond to Christ's call?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	LEVITICUS 21 - 24
MONDAY:	LEVITICUS 25 - 27
TUESDAY:	NUMBERS 1 - 2
WEDNESDAY:	NUMBERS 3 - 4
THURSDAY:	NUMBERS 5 - 7
FRIDAY:	NUMBERS 8 - 10
SATURDAY:	NUMBERS 11 - 13

Lesson 11 SERMON ON THE MOUNT

MEMORY VERSE: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

TEXTS: Matthew chapters 5-7; Luke 6:17-49; 13:22-30

The Sermon on the Mount is a practical discourse which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to His followers and disciples. The setting was on a mountain, hence the title. Spanning Matthew chapters five to seven and considered the longest recorded sermon of our Lord, it consists of expositions of the doctrines of the kingdom of God, pattern of godliness expected of kingdom citizens and precepts for daily Christian living. It is an ethical or moral directory for all followers of Christ and constitutes the framework of the Christian life. Our Lord used both symbols and imagery to teach foundational truths about true Christianity so that believers may understand the demands of God's kingdom and requisite qualifications for heaven. The sermon contains instructions, commandments, promises, warnings and rebuke.

The whole discourse was a stark indictment on the scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day who specialised in misinterpreting and misapplying the law to the detriment of the people. The Lord describes them as "blind guides" (Matthew 23:24) misleading the people and making them twice children of hell than themselves. The sermon then is a copious interpretation of the Old Testament laws and a verdict on those who misunderstand them. Every preacher or believer in the

New Testament era must be acquainted with its message.

Beginning with the beatitudes – statements of what makes a person blessed and truly happy – the sermon teems with elements of the radiant Christian life, true perspective of some Old Testament laws and precepts for daily Christian living, etc. It is a pattern of a balanced message for preachers to emulate and for all to obey.

THE BEATITUDES AND CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE
(Matthew 5:1-16; Luke 6:20-23; John 18:20; Isaiah 66:2; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 3:14-17; 4:3-19)

Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry was a radical departure from what the people were used to. As truth personified, He taught, spread, exemplified and institutionalised the truth of the Scripture. This drew massive crowds to Him wherever He went. On one of such occasions, "**...seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them**". The Lord Jesus began to teach the people about life in the Kingdom (Matthew 13:54; 28:15; Mark 1:21; 2:13; Mark 10:11; Luke 4:15; 5:3; John 7:14). Church gathering is not for entertainment but to preach and teach the word of God. Bible-based preaching, one, brings sinners to repentance; two, it transforms lives; three, it matures young converts; four, it establishes believers and grounds them in the faith (Colossians 1:23).

The Lord's sermon on this mount began with what is generally referred to as the beatitudes. The word has been variously translated, 'blessed', 'happy', 'fortunate' or 'highly favoured'. It explains the spiritual state of those who practice the precepts and fulfil the conditions for blessings.

The first of the beatitudes teaches on poverty of the spirit. The poor in spirit are those who realise their sinfulness and inability to pay for its remedy. They are quick to acknowledge their sins, genuinely repent of them and turn to God with their whole heart. Such

humble minds, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) and the publican in Jesus' parable (Luke 18:9-14), received pardon from the Lord. The poor in spirit would not deny their wretchedness or cover up their sin (Genesis 3:9-12). They would not argue with God when confronted with the reality of their sinful deeds (Genesis 4:8-10). Acknowledging sin and genuinely turning away from it makes one a candidate of heaven.

The second beatitude focuses on those who mourn for sin. The mourner who is blessed is broken-hearted because they see the effect of sin in their lives. The condition of the lost multitude in the world calls for mourning; the rebellious system of the world revolting against God and His word calls for mourning; the deliberate attempts by the authorities to discredit the Bible and upend its teachings calls for mourning. Efforts to redefine God's precept on marriage, true worship and holiness cannot but make one to mourn. However, God's promise to mourners is that "**they shall be comforted.**"

The third is on meekness, a virtue that is highly valued in heaven. The meek possesses a mild temperament and does not retaliate or revenge when offended. God commended Moses for being meek (Numbers 12:3) in spite of the chiding by the children of Israel. God wants His children to be meek and gentle (Matthew 11:29). Fourth, "**Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**". "Hunger and thirst after righteousness" encourages us to pant after the nature of God and do things the right way. Seeking the will of God in all things and doing same should be a burning desire in the hearts of children of God. The fifth beatitude teaches about mercy. Believers should show mercy even to the undeserving, just like God showed us when we were sinners (1 Peter 1:3).

Sixth, purity of heart comes next. Holiness is a prerequisite for everyone who would get to heaven. God demands holiness because He is holy; heaven is holy; His deeds are holy (1 Peter 1:15; Revelation 21:27). Seventh, believers are also called to be peacemakers and to follow peace with all men. One who preaches to

reconcile sinners to God is a peacemaker. It is a ministry believers are to occupy themselves with until the Lord comes (2 Corinthians 5:19,20).

Lastly, "**Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**". Persecution is part of the Christian experience (Mark 10:30; 1 Peter 2:21); when it comes, we are to take it in good spirit. If anyone suffers as a Christian, he or she should rejoice because there is reward for such in heaven.

THE BELIEVER'S LIFESTYLE AND KINGDOM CHARACTERISTICS (Matthew 5:17-48; 6:1-34; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33; Ephesians 5:11,13)

The Lord teaches on the similitude of believers and compares them with various elements. First, He likens them to salt. As salt, our lives should possess its properties of being white and pure. The believer is also to prevent putrefaction, decay and corruption. Salt is a seasoning agent and believers should make their world a better place to live. Our Lord also refers to believers as the light of the world. Light shows the way (Nehemiah 9:12). We are to be examples of righteous living in our homes, workplaces and society. We are not to mingle with the world in its sinful practices, but be distinct to be able to point the way. Light also reveals, and invigorates. When light comes, it exposes things kept in the dark. "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven**" (Matthew 5:16).

The Lord corrected the erroneous belief that He had come to destroy the Law; He actually came to fulfil it. All the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament foreshadowed Him (Hebrews 10:1) and by His own sacrifice, He accomplished the Law's ultimate purpose (Romans 10:4). He is the perfect Lamb that was sacrificed for the sin of the whole world to fulfil the requirement of the Law (Hebrews 9:22). As a result of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the antitype of the Old Testament sacrifices, the ceremonial law had been abolished.

However, the moral law subsists and its commands are actually restated in the New Testament. And the Lord expects that we keep them as they are universal and perpetual: "**...whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven**".

PROPER PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW (Matthew 5:21-48; 6:1-34; 7:1-29; 15:19; 19:18; Galatians 5:19; Matthew 19:3-19; Luke 6:27; 11:2)

The Lord proceeds to interpret some Old Testament commands which the Pharisees, by their carnal and selfish interpretation, had corrupted and trivialised. As the Word personified, the Lord gave the true sense of the laws according to the mind of God and spoke with the authority of the Author of life. His interpretation of the Old Testament exposes the hollow and self-serving interpretation of the Pharisees and lays emphasis on the spirit of the Word rather than the letter. Each statement is preceded by, "**Ye have heard that it has been said by them of old time...**" to show the prevailing understanding and common opinion among the people at that time.

"**Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**" All killings have anger at their roots. Through anger, Cain slew his brother. Saul wiped out Nob, the city of priests because he was angry that Ahimelech the priest betrayed him (1 Samuel 22:13-19). To overcome the problem of anger, one must be born again and sanctified. Ability to have self-control and be under the influence of the Holy Ghost is equally significant. Anger must be dealt with before it brings the victim into danger.

The Lord talks about what constitutes adultery (Matthew 5:27,28). There is no actual adultery that is committed that does not bear the stamp of inward lust (James 1:14,15). Our Lord explains that those who committed the real act and those who did it through

mere thought are alike guilty before God. That also calls for a regeneration of the heart, a determination to mortify the deeds of the flesh through the Spirit (Romans 8:13), a decision to remove and refrain from objects that can inflame the passion like pornographic materials, or getting too close to the opposite gender with whom one has no marital relationship. It is in that sense that the Lord commands us to "**pluck**" out the eyes or "**cut**" off hands that can lead us to sin.

Besides, divorce and remarriage while the other partner is still alive constitutes adultery. "**It has been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery**" (Matthew 5:31,32; Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). In contradistinction to the prevalent practice of divorcing the wife for every cause, Jesus taught that marriage is a lifetime commitment and should not be tampered with. It is one man one wife without divorce, remarriage or unscriptural cohabitation (Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2; John 4:16-18).

Our Lord proceeds to correct the false interpretation on the law of swearing. Respecting the oath in Leviticus 19:12, people were forbidden to lie or swear falsely. But we are to "**Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne**" (Matthew 5:34). It is profane to swear with anything God has made or our life because it belongs to God. Rather, our words should be our bond; whatever we have spoken should be affirmed to be nothing but the truth.

"**Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth**" (Matthew 5:38). Though this was given as a rule to guide the judges in their dispensation of justice, it teaches non-retaliation for children of God. It should not extend to private conduct where individuals take the law into their hands. Turning the other cheek suggests that the believer should be ready to suffer or go the extra-mile for righteousness' sake (1 Peter 2:19,20).

The chapter wraps up with a message on love. "**Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies...**" To many, this is strange because enemies should be hated or set up for destruction. But in the kingdom of God, this is not so. Loving our enemies makes for the possibility of conversion (Romans 12:20). More so, it makes us to be like our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:44,45). Christ also denounced the prevalent emphasis on outward religious practices meant to attract people's commendation. He condemned this as hypocrisy.

Matthew chapter six closes with warning against avarice, worry and anxiety. "**Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?**" (Matthew 6:25). The Lord supported this warning with comparisons between His children and lesser creatures – birds of the air and lilies of the field. If God cared for them, He will care for us. Ours is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and other things shall be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

Moving to the third and last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ warns believers against being critical or judgmental (Matthew 7:1-5). "**Judge not, that ye be not judged**" (Matthew 7:1). Rather, we are to judge ourselves and make sure we are constantly looking forward to the coming of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:31; 4:5). Besides, when we get busy judging others, we ignore our own faults that should be corrected.

Then the Lord turns His attention to the subject of prayer. He had warned that it should not be employed as a display of outward piety or show but as a duty towards God. Here, He reveals prayer as a means of obtaining our requests from God. He said, "**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you**" (Matthew 7:7). The believer should come to God with a positive attitude of faith for receiving every request according to His will

rather than wallowing in faithless anxiety or fear (1 John 5:14).

Finally, the Lord draws attention to the danger of self-deception. Many hear the word of God but do not do it. "**Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock**" (Matthew 7:24). Those who hear but do not obey the word build their spiritual houses on sand. "**And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it**" (Matthew 7:27).

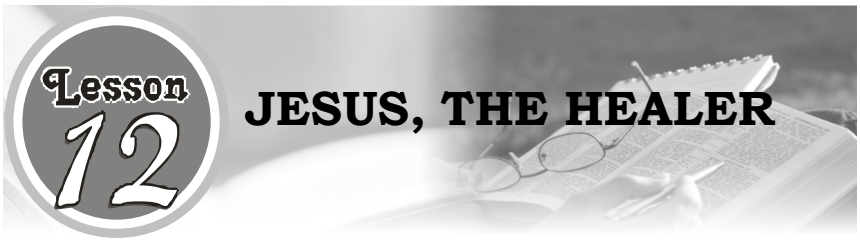
Questions for review:

1. Explain the poor in spirit.
2. How can a believer make peace between God and a sinner?
3. What is the antidote to lust?
4. Why should believers love their enemies?
5. What can we learn from the Lord's prayer?
6. How can we be free from worry and anxiety?
7. Explain the "golden rule."

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	NUMBERS 14 - 15
MONDAY:	NUMBERS 16 - 18
TUESDAY:	NUMBERS 19 - 21
WEDNESDAY:	NUMBERS 22 - 25
THURSDAY:	NUMBERS 26 - 28
FRIDAY:	NUMBERS 29 - 30
SATURDAY:	NUMBERS 31 - 32



JESUS, THE HEALER

MEMORY VERSE: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:16,17).

TEXT: Matthew 8:1-17,23-34; 9:1-38

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ engaged in a threefold ministry of preaching, teaching and healing when He was on earth. When people encountered Him during His many but inspired outreaches, He identified with them and satisfied their needs. Though He came to seek and save those who were lost, He did not fail to give comfort to the bereaved, heal the sick, feed the hungry and deliver the oppressed. His ministry of healing drew multitudes of people to Him wherever He went and complemented His mission.

Christ's preaching was designed to call sinners to repentance and salvation of their souls. He went about proclaiming to the people, "**Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 4:17). Those who responded and received Him became His disciples whom He taught and commissioned to follow Him. "**Follow me,** [He said,] **and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19). A threefold ministry is needed to meet the people's physical, spiritual and material needs and every minister or ministry that would fulfil heaven's mandate must mirror this (Christ's) model of evangelisation.

The chapters under consideration enumerate our Lord's many healing exploits which established the people's faith in Him as the expected Messiah and helped to bring multitudes of people into the kingdom of God. "**That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses**" (Matthew 8:17).

CATALOGUE OF HEALINGS BY CHRIST (Matthew 8:1-17; 9:1-8,18-34; Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:28-34; 12:10-13; 15:28; 17:14-18; Mark 1:40; Luke 8:26-35; John 5:1-9; 20:30)

There were innumerable miracles of healing Jesus performed as evident in all the gospels; some of them were not even recorded (John 21:25). But Matthew records many of them for our admonition, possession and fulfilment of prophecy (Matthew 8:17). Christ's ministry of healing cured both common and severe ailments. "**And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean**" (Matthew 8:2). Our Lord's response to this request shows that He is willing to heal those who come to Him for help no matter how serious their case may be.

Jesus also healed a centurion's servant who was sick of the palsy (paralysis) and grievously tormented. This is a lesson for believers on the power of faith. The centurion had demanded that Christ should speak the word of power to effect the healing of his servant (Matthew 8:8). "**And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour**" (Matthew 8:13). Distance is no barrier to the word of faith for a believing heart. God knows our problems and challenges; He expects His people to ask by faith. Recognition of God's presence everywhere strengthens believers' faith, prevents them from running helter-skelter during trials and makes them remain focused.

Then there was the healing of Peter's mother-in-law who was sick of fever (Matthew 8:14,15). Other miracles

of healing include the sick of palsy (Matthew 9:2); the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years, "**For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole**" (Matthew 9:21); the daughter of a ruler that was sick and died but was later brought back to life (Matthew 9:23-26); the healing of the two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31); a dumb man possessed with the devil; the lame of Bethsaida and many more. All these happened to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy. "**Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows... the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed**" (Isaiah 53:4,5).

The case of demon-possession is an extreme form of sickness that requires divine intervention (Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-35). Unlike some sicknesses that have medical remedies, only a spiritual solution can permanently cure it. Most often, victims are insane, uncoordinated, aggressive and extremely violent. "**And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way**" (Matthew 8:28). With the authority and power of the Son of God, the demons were sent out. The Lord has given the same power to His disciples to deal with such extreme cases (Mark 16:17).

Sickness is as old as sin and if Christ could remove sin, He is willing and able to take away our sicknesses as well. There are, however, other reasons an individual could be sick and they include lack of adequate rest, stress-induced weakness, unbalanced diet, unclean lifestyle, environmental factors, etc. Apart from living a holy life, believers are also enjoined to take preventive measures against sickness by observing healthy lifestyles. It suffices to note that none of the people that came to Jesus for healing left without solution to their problems. This should allay the fear of the sick and those who are being tormented by Satan and his cohorts that there is hope in Christ the moment the conditions, which include repentance and faith, are met. Jesus is the greatest, true and compassionate Healer. He will

heal and deliver whoever comes to Him in faith.

CHRIST CALMS THE STORMY SEA (Matthew 8:23-27; 14:22-33; Mark 4:35-41; Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 107:29,30)

With a mission to reach all creatures with the gospel and goodness of God, Christ took sail on His way to Magdala where He delivered the demon-possessed, and His disciples followed Him. It is a mark of true discipleship to follow the Lord wherever He goes or leads. As they sailed, "**behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep**" (Matthew 8:24). Perhaps, the tempest was designed to hinder the Lord from proceeding on His mission and denying the demon-possessed the needed deliverance. Paul the apostle said he was determined to go to Thessalonica to minister to the brethren but was hindered (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

From Christ and the disciples' experience here, we learn the following: one, there could be an unseen resistance to a missionary outreach and the preaching of the gospel of Christ, but we must persevere until the work is done. Two, in spite of the Lord being on the same boat with His disciples, there was still a storm. Three, though they were on their way to do the will of God, they still encountered a challenge. Believers should not expect that there would be no problem when they are in the centre of the will of God. It is reassuring, however, that we have nothing to fear when we sail with the Lord in life's boat. His promise is, "**Fear thou not... When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee**" (Isaiah 41:10; 43:2). Like the Lord, believers can be unperturbed in the midst of challenges.

Without current experience of salvation, unceasing prayer of faith and constant reading of God's word, many years in the fellowship and intimacy with the church leadership offer no remedy to challenges. We should be

grounded in faith, God's word and prayer to remain steadfast in every situation. Christ rebuked His disciples for being fearful and men of little faith (Matthew 8:26).

COMPASSION ON THE MULTITUDE AND CALL FOR LABOURERS (Matthew 9:35-38; Mark 1:41; 8:34; Matthew 14:14; 15:32; Luke 10:1,2; John 34-38)

"**And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people**" (Matthew 9:35). It was divine compassion that drew salvation's plan and brought it down to humanity. Therefore, when the Lord came and saw multitude of people roam aimlessly without knowing the fate that awaits those who die without in sin, "**he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd**" (Matthew 9:36). Compassion moved Christ to defy all odds to traverse cities and villages in search of the lost sheep of Israel. He associated with sinners and the sick in a bid to bring them out of misery. While the Pharisees were interested in outward cleansing of washing of hands and other religious activities, He was preoccupied with helping people and saving souls. To be like our Master, we must arise and do the same things. Christians' concerns for sinners should supersede their craving for worldly applause, political involvement, academic pursuit and determination to be rich in this world.

The task of soul-seeking and gathering is enormous, and there is so much to do in the kingdom of God; hence the call for more labourers. All hands must be involved in this urgent commission. "**Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest**" (Matthew 9:38). God has raised an army of committed, consecrated saints endued with power from above to confront the horde of demons inspiring men and women to commit gross idolatry, immorality and hauling them into perdition. We need to be moved with compassion and arise with passion to

seek and save as many as possible before it is too late. Souls are crying for help. Christ, the greatest Physician depends on believers to heal the sick, deliver the oppressed and prepare the Bride for the soon-coming Bridegroom.

Questions for review:

1. How can people benefit maximally from the healing ministry of Christ?
2. What was the provision made by Jesus for our healing?
3. What can we learn from the disciples' experience with the Lord on the boat?
4. How urgent is the task of soul-winning?
5. What should motivate believers to engage in soul-winning?
6. Who should engage in soul-winning efforts?
7. Mention some people Christ healed.

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	NUMBERS 33 - 34
MONDAY:	NUMBERS 35 - 36
TUESDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 1 - 3
WEDNESDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 4 - 6
THURSDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 7 - 9
FRIDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 10 - 12
SATURDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 13 - 16

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

MEMORY VERSE: "**If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:26).

TEXTS: Matthew 8:18-22; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35

A disciple may be described as a person who learns from a master, aims to be like him and often with the intention to teach others also. Discipleship is very central to Christian growth and witness. The test of a true Christian is in his commitment to being like our Lord, Jesus Christ: "**...every one that is perfect shall be as his master**" (Luke 6:40). Being a disciple of Christ involves an active process of learning, study and a prayerful exercise of self-discipline aimed at discarding an old lifestyle and imbibing the virtues taught and demonstrated by Him. The Lord reveals that discipleship has its costs and demands. His explanation of discipleship was not aimed at scaring those He called to follow Him but for them to be purposeful in their decision based on clear understanding of its price and prize before enlisting.

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP (Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 2:6; Hebrews 4:16)

"**But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead**" (Matthew 8:22). Christian discipleship begins with heeding the call of Christ to follow Him. A sinner must first awake to the truth of his

hopelessness and perdition without Christ. It is only after salvation that discipleship begins. "**Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light**" (Matthew 11:28-30). The yoke of Christ is lined by His grace and love. Christ commands everyone who has come to His saving knowledge to take His yoke and bear His burden which are comparatively easy and light. This requires that every disciple conscientiously conducts every detail of his life according to the precepts taught by Christ. He must manifest a willing and cheerful obedience to His commands.

The process of studying, learning and imbibing the teachings of Christ constitutes the practice of discipleship. In this sense, discipleship is a lifetime commitment to be like our infallible Master, because "**He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked**" (1 John 2:6). The implication is that the true disciple must learn Christ's example of total, unquestioning submission to God in all things. A sincere disciple seeks the help of the Spirit of Christ which he received at salvation and constantly resorts to "**the throne of grace** (where he) **may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need**" (Hebrews 4:16).

THE COSTS OF DISCIPLESHIP (Matthew 8:18-22; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 14:25-35; Hebrews 11:8,24-26; Galatians 2:17; Revelation 21:7)

"**Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me**" (Mark 8:34). Christ expects all who desire to be His disciples to first understand its implications. "**For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? ... Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him**

that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" (Luke 14:28,31). His intention, no doubt, is to prepare would-be disciples' minds at the outset, to toughen their resolve and ensure their eventual successful discipleship. Half-hearted followers, who have not counted the cost and who fail to understand that discipleship is not cheap, easily fall by the way side or get disqualified for not meeting its demands.

From Christ's teachings, discipleship entails: one, righteous lifestyle and humility to learn from Christ. Two, a readiness to endure material deprivation and willingness to get along with little physical and material comfort as serving and following Him may demand. One should never think of discipleship with an eye to material wealth or physical comfort. For the scribe who expressed determination to follow Him, Christ warned: "**The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head**" (Matthew 8:20). Three, inflexible resolution to always put obedience to Christ first. The disciple's love for Christ and submission to His will and doctrine must be topmost priority. His attachment and loyalty to his Lord must be stronger than the bonds of any human relationship. "**If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:26).

Four, discipleship requires a ready and cheerful willingness to part with any comfort or interest that stands as obstacle between believers and Christ. "**So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:33). This trait should be in the lives of those who have heeded God's call to salvation. "**By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went**" (Hebrews 11:8). Moses despised the comforts and prestige of Pharaoh's court in preference to suffering with the people of God (Hebrews 11:24-26). Five, a disciple must have a settled resolution that there will never be a

justification for denying or dishonouring Christ by his action or inaction, even if he stands the risk of being disowned by his parents, family, friends, relatives or business customers. "**Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels**" (Mark 8:38). Six, a disciple must have hatred for sin and willingness to forgo conflicting personal preferences, pleasures, ambitions and goals just to maintain his loyalty and commitment to Christ. "**If any man come to me, and hate not... his own life also, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:26).

The cost of discipleship taught by Christ should not discourage anyone. His purpose is to prepare our minds to persevere in times of hardship, suffering and temptation. That is why He illustrated the price of discipleship with building and prosecuting a war. The Lord also promised, "**He that overcometh shall inherit all things...**" (Revelation 21:7). When fully understood, this promise by Christ far outweighs any temporary sacrifice of His disciples. An intending disciple must consider both the cost and the benefits (Romans 8:18). Moreover, it is in following Christ, learning from, and acting like Him that we become useful as salt in seasoning our world.

Unwillingness to pay the price of discipleship displeases God and disqualifies one from His kingdom. Some have desire to "**inherit eternal life**" (Mark 10:17) but when Christ demands the price of discipleship by saying, "**go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me**" (Mark 10:21), they become sad. Lacking entire consecration, absolute surrender and total commitment to the Lord, the rich young ruler was disqualified. His problem was his wrong attitude to wealth, which is still the bane of many people today (Mark 10:25). Every believer should therefore, pray for grace to, one, shed the load of legitimate possessions that inhibits full loyalty and obedience to the Lord; two, open the

storehouse of his hoarded resources unto the poor (1 Timothy 6:18); three, overcome the temptation and snare of foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men into destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:9); four, trust only in the living God who gives us all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17); five, adjust his value system and re-order his priority in favour of heavenly treasures (Colossians 3:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:17); six, deny self, bear his cross daily and follow Christ as a disciple (Luke 9:23; Mark 10:21); and seven, be steadfast and unmovable in the service of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

COMFORTS AND HOPE OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES (Luke 9:57-62; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 3:12,21; 1 John 5:3; Matthew 19:27-29)

It will be a tragic misjudgment to decline to be Christ's disciple and deny oneself the glorious privilege of a close walk with the Saviour on account of the difficulties associated with it. All who make Christ their Saviour and acknowledge His lordship by living daily as His disciples will partake of His future glory. "**For I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**" (Romans 8:18). Whereas the discipline and rigours of discipleship are but light afflictions "**and for a moment**", they "**worketh** [for the disciple] **a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**" (2 Corinthians 4:17). The joys of those who devote their thoughts, words and deeds to ensure conformity to the precepts of Christ will surpass the sweetest and dearest comforts on earth. "**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**" (1 John 3:2).

Apart from the hope of glory in the next world, a disciple has the present pleasure of a vibrant spiritual life, the joys of answered prayers and miracles of divine intervention in his life and circumstances. There is nothing in the 'yoke' of discipleship that makes the life

of a disciple bitter or hurtful. The commandments of Christ are very reasonable in themselves and truly beneficial to the disciple both here and hereafter.

"**Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel**" (Matthew 19:27,28). From the words of Christ, it is clear that there will be more than adequate compensation to true disciples for suffering indignity or reproach in the course of allegiance to the doctrines of Christ. These exceedingly great and precious promises are not only for the first twelve disciples but for everyone who will be a true disciple (verse 29). Paul the apostle declared: "**Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him**" (1 Corinthians 2:9). For the believer who steadfastly endures till the end, there are crowns awaiting him. This should propel and motivate all believers to spare no effort, resource or relationship in defence of their faith and in the pursuit of the great commission, knowing full well that their "**work shall be rewarded**" (Jeremiah 31:16).

Questions for review:

1. Who is a disciple and how does a person become a disciple of Christ?
2. Identify some character traits in the lives of any two saints that enabled them to serve God successfully.
3. Why does Christ underline the costs and sacrifices involved in being His disciple to intending disciples?
4. Enumerate the costs of being a disciple of Christ.
5. Mention some benefits of being a disciple of Christ.
6. How can a disciple remain faithful to the end?
7. What is the hope of Christ's disciples?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 17 - 20
MONDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 21 - 24
TUESDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 25 - 27
WEDNESDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 28 - 30
THURSDAY:	DEUTERONOMY 31 - 34
FRIDAY:	JOHN 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	JOHN 4 - 5

SECTION II

LESSON **PAGE**

OLD TESTAMENT

14 - God Tests Abraham 113

15 - Isaac Marries Rebekah 119

16 - Esau Sells His Birthright 126

17 - God Prospers Isaac 133

18 - The Treachery and Flight of Jacob 140

19 - Jacob Sojourns in Laban's House 148

20 - Jacob Prevails at Jabbok 155

NEW TESTAMENT

21 - Jesus Sends Out the Twelve 162

22 - Christ's Testimony of John the Baptist 170

23 - Christ's Teaching on the Sabbath 179

24 - Warning against Evil Speaking 188

25 - Sundry Parables of the Kingdom 195

26 - The Death of John the Baptist 201

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2).

TEXT: Genesis 22:1-24; 23:1-20

Tests and trials are instruments God uses to determine the strength and genuineness of our faith. It has always been a medium of evaluation to prove the authenticity of our claims on God. Spiritual tests have severally been used to determine the transparency, truthfulness, faithfulness and commitment of God's people to do His will. The Lord has, on purpose, used tests to demand an unusual sacrifice from Abraham (Genesis 22:1); lead Israel in a difficult way through the wilderness to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:2); determine Solomon's heart disposition in his personal request or choice (1 Kings 3:5); propose a hard task in order to test the faith of His disciples (John 6:5,6); permit His disciples to go through persecution and suffering when in the pathway of duty (Acts 16:23); allow diverse temptations and trials (James 1:2,3); and prove the condition of the heart of His people (Exodus 20:20).

Here, God tried Abraham, not to lead him to sin, but to discover the quality, strength and genuineness of his faith and love for Him. God gives man the freedom of choice and action. As a free moral agent, Abraham had the choice to reject or accept God's request. Man is solely responsible for all his actions whether they are good or evil. The word of God says, "**See, I have set**

before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15,19).

COMMAND TO OFFER ISAAC AND ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE (Genesis 22:1-10; 18:19; Deuteronomy 8:1-3,16; Isaiah 48:18; Hebrews 11:17-19)

In spite of the testimony of God concerning Abraham previously (Genesis 18:18,19), He still commanded him to offer as a sacrifice, the dearest possession he had – his only son. No reason was given and no alternative was demanded, yet God's promise to Abraham was that in Isaac shall his seed be called. God was to prove what was in Abraham's heart through this test. Recall that Abraham had, in his previous dealings with God, been consistent in obedience. In his first encounter with the Lord when he was asked to move out from his kinsmen into an unknown land, he obeyed without hesitation (Genesis 12:1). Then there was strife between his herdsmen and Lot's and he chose the humble path and allowed Lot to make the first choice. The Lord seemed to have been training him in the path of obedience. This time, it was a higher test that demanded higher commitment and yieldedness, especially considering his challenge of delay in child-bearing. But again, he acquitted himself in an unquestioning obedience to God's express command. We have a lot to learn from our father in the faith. God allows us to face difficulties and challenges sometimes to confirm our love for Him and lift us up to greatness.

Abraham journeyed for three days to the land of Moriah, the place God had chosen for the sacrifice. He had all the time to think over his action but he did not allow human reasoning or the opinion of others to prevent him from obeying God. The reality of losing his only son if he obeyed God or the annulment of the covenant He made with him loomed large on him, yet he walked by faith and overcame all the suggestions to

disobey God. He did not allow the emotional attachment to Isaac or the consideration of Sarah to deter him. Such uncompromising and resolute stance on matters of obedience to God is exemplary. Abiding faith weathers every storm and in the end, enjoys the sweet savour of victory in the battles of life. We must strictly watch out against those who persuade us to take easy but ungodly ways to solve our problems or to success in life. Sometimes, God's way may be the hard way, but it will always end in blessings.

On getting to the place of sacrifice which the Lord had showed Abraham, Isaac posed a daunting question to his father: "**...he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**" (Genesis 22:7). Abraham's response provides a window into the state of his mind and the level of his faith. He said, "**God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering...**" This is to say, first, he was unfazed at the prospect of losing his beloved son. He knew God who gave had the right to take or bring back to life again (Hebrews 11:19). Second, he believed in the sovereignty and integrity of the almighty God, that He would not make an unreasonable demand. Third, he had faith that his sacrifice would turn out to be a blessing. Fourth, he was goaded on by a feeling of assurance that there might be a last-minute miracle of divine provision for the sacrifice. Fifth, as a prophet, he foresaw that both of them would return to his servants even though he did not know how this would happen. He had told them: "**...Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you**" (Genesis 22:5). Sixth, his action speaks volumes about his readiness to lose the child in order to gain the Lord's favour. Seventh, he had reached a point of no-going-back in his walk with God.

Abraham's test of obedience provides some further lessons for believers. One, God wanted to know if he valued the gift more than the Giver. Isaac was the most precious gift Abraham had having waited for his birth for more than twenty years and with Ishmael already sent away with his mother. Two, it was a test of his

consecration and readiness to surrender all no matter how precious for the sake of heaven. Three, as his only son, Abraham's sacrifice prefigured our heavenly Father's gift of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Lamb, the Sacrifice whose blood atoned for the sins of mankind. Abraham's obedience and sacrifice paid eternal benefits as God commended him.

COMMENDATION OF ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE AND COMMITMENT (Genesis 22:11-19; Galatians 3:9-19; Psalm 31:23; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Revelation 2:10)

The Lord's response, as soon as it was established that Abraham remained true to his commitment, showed that the Lord only wanted to test his faith. And, having passed the divine test, He said, "**...now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me**" (Genesis 22:12). God said, "**now I know**", not because He did not know, but He meant that Abraham had now shown substantial evidence. His action of faith and total surrender earned God's commendation and blessings.

The faithfulness of Abraham and his trust in God was rewarded first by the provision of a ram as an alternative for the sacrifice. The lamb symbolises Christ as the substitute for all men. He died in our place so that we may be free from eternal death and hell if we accept Him as our Saviour (Isaiah 53:4-12; Matthew 20:28; John 6:51; Romans 4:25). Christ's death was our discharge from damnation. As a result of Abraham's obedience, God said: one, in blessing, He would bless Abraham. Obedience to God attracts divine blessings. Two, Abraham's descendants would be as the stars of heaven and the sand by the seashore for multitude. Three, Israel would overcome their enemies by possessing their gates. It is on record that many nations have attempted to wipe out Israel but have always failed. Four, through Abraham, humanity shall be blessed. The Messiah who would be the Saviour of the world shall come through his loins (Galatians 3:16).

After this divine encounter, good news of the blessing

of Abraham's younger brother, Nahor, reached him as though he (Nahor) had also had some delay in having children. In all, it was cheering news for Abraham and his extended household. Abraham's son, Isaac would later marry Rebekah, Nahor's grand-daughter.

DEATH OF SARAH AND ABRAHAM'S COMPORTMENT (Genesis 23:1-20; Romans 6:23; Psalm 90:12; Ecclesiastes 3:1,2; 8:8; Numbers 23:10; Revelation 14:13; Hebrews 9:27)

Physical death, the temporal end of all humans, eventually came to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Obviously, she had finished her course on earth as she passed away at a very advanced age of one hundred and twenty-seven years. Abraham and his wife served the Lord together when they left Ur of the Chaldees in obedience to God's call. Abraham could not have succeeded and be called the father of the faithful without his wife's support.

Mother Sarah was homely, hospitable and a help meet for Abraham (Genesis 2:18). She was an example of godliness for all women of faith and an example of scriptural submission in the home. "**Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement**" (1 Peter 3:6). With her husband, they entertained angels unawares.

Sarah's death was a test case for Abraham but he handled the situation maturely. The affection he had for her could be seen in the way he mourned her passage. But he overcame the grief and gave his wife a befitting burial. The inhabitants of Hebron agreed to give him a burial place because of the great respect they had for him and his behaviour among them (Genesis 23:5,6). A believer's conduct among unbelievers must be one without reproach (Matthew 5:16).

Burial time should be a period of sober reflection on the brevity of life and the eternal destiny that it ushers in. "**And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27). The righteous

have a glorious end while the unrighteous shall suffer throughout eternity (Matthew 25:46). Everyone should prepare for this inevitable end by turning away from their sins and believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Saviour. Afterwards, we should live holy lives every day in preparation to meet the Lord.

Questions for review:

1. What is the implication of Abraham's test to believer?
2. Why does God allow us to face difficulties and challenges in life?
3. How can we describe Abraham's level of faith?
4. What is the best evidence of our fear and reverence for God?
5. What are the rewards of Abraham's obedience?
6. How should a believer prepare for death?
7. How did Abraham handle his wife's death?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JOHN 6 - 7
MONDAY:	JOHN 8 - 9
TUESDAY:	JOHN 10 - 12
WEDNESDAY:	JOHN 13 - 15
THURSDAY:	JOHN 16 - 18
FRIDAY:	JOHN 19 - 21
SATURDAY:	ACTS 1 - 2

Lesson 15

ISAAC MARRIES REBEKAH

MEMORY VERSE: "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:67).

TEXT: Genesis 24:1-67

The text presents Abraham as a concerned father who showed godly care for his son, Isaac, in the area of marriage. He instructed his servant, Eliezer, to seek out a wife for Isaac in consonance with divine instruction regarding separation from the people of Canaan. The faithful and prayerful conduct of Eliezer in carrying out this assignment brought Rebekah into the life of Isaac. This account of marriage contracted in Abraham's family after he was called by God presents useful lessons for singles, intending couples and married believers today.

ABRAHAM'S GODLY CONCERN FOR ISAAC'S MARRIAGE (Genesis 24:1-9; Deuteronomy 7:3,4; Nehemiah 13:25-27; Leviticus 21:7,14; Judges 14:3,20; 16:21,30; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

The chapter opens with the summary of God's goodness to Abraham. He was blessed by God "**in all things**". His was a rare combination of prosperity and piety from the time he knew God until his old age. His attributes of love, obedience and faith in God were displayed in his concern to perpetuate a godly heritage and posterity. He was not only concerned about the fact that Isaac needed to marry but also to do so

according to the will of God. Christian bachelors and spinsters should be rest assured that, beyond the concern of earthly parents, our heavenly Father is ever mindful of who they marry and every aspect of their needs. He saw the need in Adam's life and gave him "**an help meet**" (Genesis 2:18,20-24). This and other divine interventions in marriages in Scripture, especially Christ's presence at a marriage ceremony in Cana of Galilee, reveal God's desire, plan and programme for the unmarried and married.

Godly and spiritual parents have a great responsibility of ensuring that marriages of children of God under their care are patterned according to the word of God as Abraham did. He insisted that Isaac's spouse must not be chosen from the Canaanites on the one hand and that Isaac should not on the other hand go back to the land from which he was called out in his bid to marry. "**And I will make thee swear by the LORD... that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac... Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again**" (Genesis 24:3-6). This is a solemn rebuke for Christian parents who, in their efforts to care for their children, forsake biblical instructions earlier imbibed. God's irrevocable command and guiding principle for believers who seek to know God's will in marriage is: "**be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?**" (2 Corinthians 6:14). God forbids a believer from marrying an unbeliever, a divorcee (whose spouse is still alive), a relative and one who is of the same gender (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Leviticus 18:16-29; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Matthew 19:4-6). Abraham's action should not be taken as basis for racial, ethnic and tribal prejudice being practised by carnal Christians today. God has one "tribe"; every believer should marry from the "tribe" of Jesus – those who are washed by His blood (Mark 3:32-34; Ephesians 3:14,15; Revelation 7:9).

God's instructions on marriage are for our peaceful and fulfilled life on earth and successful pilgrimage to heaven. Samson disobeyed divine precept on marriage to his own peril. Everyone who is saved has received grace to obey God's commands. However, we must be cautious not to follow the example of Abraham who made his servant swear to secure his loyalty and faithfulness to the given instruction. We are now under a new and better dispensation of grace in the New Testament. Thus, Christ's command is, "**Swear not at all... But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil**" (Matthew 5:34,37). Though parents should guide their children on the scriptural principles of making the right choice, they should avoid playing the role of God, our Matchmaker.

ACCEPTABLE SCRIPTURAL PROCESSES FOR BELIEVERS' MARRIAGE (Genesis 24:10-58; Psalm 37:5; Hebrews 10:36; Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Psalm 119:105; Romans 8:14; Proverbs 20:27; Acts 16:6-9; 10:10-17; Job 33:15; Isaiah 30:21; Song of Solomon 8:6,7)

Realising the enormity of his assignment as well as the importance of choosing the right partner for Isaac, Eliezer committed his mission unto God in prayer. Choosing a marriage partner is one of the most critical decisions in life. Our happiness, fulfilment and even possibility of making heaven at last are all impacted by our marrying the right person. Thus, the right choice is always the outcome of earnest prayer, faith and sensitivity to the Spirit of God. Choice of a marriage partner borne out of pressures and carnal considerations underpin instabilities being experienced in homes globally today. Approaching the choice of a partner casually undermines the seriousness and purpose of marriage. Eliezer prayed, "**O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to**

draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master" (Genesis 24:12-14). Seeking God's face for His intervention and guidance in the choice of a life partner is indispensable. However, New Testament Christians do not cast lot or set fleece as means of divine guidance. What Eliezer did was acceptable for his dispensation. For present-day believers, the Scripture says, "**Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...**" (John 16:13).

Thus, believers can know the will of God in marriage through the word of God, inner voice of the indwelling Christ, intuitive perception, inward witness of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's confirmation or restraint, direct revelation, dream, vision, audible voice of the Spirit and divinely-imparted love (Psalm 119:105; Romans 8:14; Proverbs 20:27; Acts 16:6-9; 10:10-17; Job 33:15; Isaiah 30:21; Song of Solomon 8:6,7). The answer to Eliezer's prayers came almost immediately, but we know that this might not be the situation in all cases. Thus, the Scripture enjoins us to "**Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him**" (Psalm 37:7). Even when Eliezer perceived that his prayers had been answered, he waited a little to prove or confirm the leading. "**And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not**" (Genesis 24:21).

The actions and the utterances that followed showed that Eliezer had conviction that Rebekah was God's choice for Isaac: "**And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren**" (Genesis 24:26,27). Believers who are seeking the will of God in marriage should pray and wait until they receive the needed conviction and

confirmation. It is also important to note that Rebekah's parents' consent was sought and obtained. "**And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good**" (Genesis 24:28,50). The procedure is still the same in the New Testament Church: spiritual and physical parents have critical roles to play in the marriage of their children.

Moreover, marriage is not by coercion. Rebekah was not forced to marry Isaac. She was asked, "**Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go**" (Genesis 24:58). Times and dispensations have changed. Finally, the marriage process was not concluded until Eliezer gave precious things to the family of Rebekah and received parental blessings. Payment of bride price today seals every marital transaction. It is sinful to elope or take someone's daughter without their consent and bride price. Every marriage contract must be consummated with the blessings of spiritual and physical parents.

APPROVED CHRISTIAN CONDUCT: REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (Genesis 24:15-20,59-67; Isaiah 54:5; Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7-9)

Rebekah exemplified the characteristics of a virtuous damsel. Seeking the right person starts with being the right person. The Scripture describes her as being "**very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her**". Aside beauty and chastity, she was obedient in running errands for the family, which brought her into contact with Eliezer. Young persons who are disobedient to their parents always miss this kind of blessing that dot the path of the obedient. Rebekah's virtues of hospitality and charity were on full display by her willingness to give Eliezer and the camels water to drink. Though she had never seen Eliezer, she served him with cheerfulness and respect. "**And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had**

done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking" (Genesis 24:18,19). She was not the lazy type of damsel who prides self only on beauty and what it can bring. As a hardworking lady, she went the extra mile to fetch water for all ten camels. The typical one-bumped camel common in the Middle East can drink between 25 and 40 gallons (100-150 litres) of water at once. To have gone all the way to satisfy ten camels and further provide water for all the men to wash their feet was proof of her diligence and hospitality. This makes her compare favourably with the biblical virtuous woman (Proverbs 31:10-27).

When they approached Isaac's abode, Rebekah alighted from the camel when she saw him and covered herself with a veil. These signify honour and respect for her husband. Wives are commanded in Scripture to respect and submit to their husbands. Gender equality of women with men, promoted by the unregenerate that is trending globally is unscriptural and account for high rate of divorce and broken homes today. Partners in marriage have complimentary roles in the home and the common denominators are mutual love, respect and submission (Ephesians 5:21-30). Though the lifestyle of Isaac has been somewhat obscured in this study, the closing verses give us a glimpse of it. "**And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death**" (Genesis 24:63,67). Successful marriages are made with husbands who cultivate the habit of scriptural praying, meditation and daily devotion. It is expected that the man should secure a suitable apartment that is devoid of interference for his family. He is commanded to show Christlike love to his wife. "**Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it**" (Ephesians 5:25).

Questions for review:

1. Why should we show concern for our children's marriage?
2. Mention categories of people a Christian cannot marry and the consequences of doing so.
3. Mention things to avoid while seeking God's will in marriage.
4. Highlight some ways God leads His children to know His will in marriage.
5. How can the New Testament Christian explain Abraham's instruction to his servant to go to his people to pick a wife for Isaac?
6. What are the attributes of a godly husband and a virtuous wife?
7. What are the requirements for successful Christian marriage?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	ACTS 3 - 4
MONDAY:	ACTS 5 - 6
TUESDAY:	ACTS 7 - 8
WEDNESDAY:	ACTS 9 - 10
THURSDAY:	ACTS 11 - 12
FRIDAY:	ACTS 13 - 14
SATURDAY:	ACTS 15 - 17

ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT

MEMORY VERSE: "And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob" (Genesis 25:32,33).

TEXT: Genesis 25:1-34

The marriage of Isaac to Rebekah in accordance with God's instruction was the theme of the preceding chapter. Aside the fact that Isaac received great comfort through that union after the demise of his mother, God blessed the couple with fruit of the womb, as this study reveals. The need for companionship might have led Abraham also to remarry after the death of Sarah. Meanwhile, after twenty years of barrenness, Rebekah had a set of twins – Esau and Jacob – who were two distinct personalities in nature and attitude to life. As it were, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, a barter of patriarchal heritage for pottage of lentils. This underscores his preference for physical satisfaction over a godly heritage.

TWILIGHT OF ABRAHAM'S LIFE (Genesis 25:1-18; 35:29; 1 Chronicles 1:32,33)

After the marriage of Isaac was consummated with Rebekah, Abraham decided to settle for a new family. His marriage to Keturah produced six children (Genesis 25:1; 1 Chronicles 1:32). This should serve as an encouragement to those who have lost their spouses. Remarriage is scriptural and attracts spiritual and

physical blessings if it is done according to God's word and will. Ruth remarried after the demise of her first husband (Ruth 3:1; 4:13). Apostle Paul admonished Timothy to encourage young widows to marry (1 Timothy 5:11-14). However, it is important that such marriage should be handled with much prayers and patience.

In spite of Abraham's new family life and responsibilities, he did not forget that God's covenant with him was to be fulfilled through Isaac. Thus, Abraham put his household in order before he died. "**And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country**" (Genesis 25:5,6). This meant that Abraham made Isaac the heir of his estate by reserving the covenant blessings for him. He then gave gifts to Ishmael and the six children of Keturah before they were sent away. Brethren who remarry must not forget their covenant with God nor neglect the children they had with their late spouse. Parents should know that they ought to lay up or bequeath material blessings to their children and be wise to make this known before their demise to avoid bickering and infighting among siblings.

God gives common blessings to every creature but reserves covenant blessings for those who are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Sinners can only enjoy general blessings such as rainfall, sunshine, air and many others that the Lord allows so as to lead them to repentance. However, God makes His regenerated children to be joint heirs with His Son, Jesus Christ. Although only Isaac enjoyed the covenant blessings without any opportunity for the other sons of Abraham to be heirs, the new covenant leaves admittance to become heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ open to whoever wills.

"**And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people**" (Genesis 25:7,8). Abraham later

died at the age of 175 and was buried by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Much could be learnt by looking closely at the family life of Abraham, our father of faith. One, he resumed normal life after the death of Sarah. Believers should accept the reality of death and not continue to sorrow as those who don't have hope. Two, it is always good for families to make plans for the days after their departure. Abraham planned for the marriage of Isaac and the financial stability of all his children. He also planned for the continuation of covenant blessings through Isaac. A writer once said, "it is not enough to know the will of God, it is equally important to know, plan for and do God's will in all situations".

Like Abraham, parents must ensure that they provide for their children as those who fail in this regard are worse than infidels. "**But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel**" (1 Timothy 5:8).

THE TWINS: ESAU AND JACOB (Genesis 25:19-26; Hosea 12:3; Romans 9:10-12)

After their nuptials, Isaac and Rebekah had no issue for twenty years. As a man of prayer and meditation, he did not try to solve the problem the way his parents did. They kept waiting and trusting the Lord. "**And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived**" (Genesis 25:21). Similarly, Zacharias and Elisabeth were "**both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years**" (Luke 1:6,7). Hannah also had delay in childbearing. Delay in childbearing in these cases was for a while; God eventually gave them children. Thus, believers should avoid resorting to unrighteous means of having children. God knows our needs and He is more than willing to grant them if we persist in righteousness, prayer and

faith in Him. Isaac prayed and God answered him by giving Rebekah a set of twins. Therefore, believers should cultivate the habit of praying without ceasing and fainting, and God will grant all their requests. "**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened**" (Matthew 7:7,8).

While Rebekah was pregnant, the children struggled within her. Then, she decided to enquire from the Lord. "**And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger**" (Genesis 25:23). The prophecy gave the picture of the lifestyle of the twins right from birth.

Esau and Jacob grew up to be two distinct personalities. "**And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents**" (Genesis 25:27). Indeed, there were great differences between them in the areas of body structure, disposition, character and profession (Genesis 25:25). Esau was the father's darling and Jacob the mother's favourite (Genesis 25:28). Isaac was not a hunter but he loved to enjoy the benefits of his son's vocation. Esau knew how to please his father: he often gave him venison and that earned him the affection of his father. Rebekah, on the other hand, loved Jacob.

Esau and Jacob became enemies despite being children of the same parents. Christian parents are to beware of undue preference of any child in the family. Every child should be appreciated and given fair treatment by both parents. Joseph, the favourite son of Jacob, suffered in the hands of his siblings partly because of parental preference. Preferential treatment of children breeds conflict, animosity, enmity and division among the children and can turn the home to a battleground. Such enmity can be passed down to subsequent generations of such families.

THE TRAGEDY OF ESAU SELLING HIS BIRTHRIGHT
(Genesis 25:27-34; 27:3,5,6,19,36; Hebrews 12:16,17)

The right and honour of the first born in Israel was a special one. The honour included a double portion of the family inheritance together with becoming the heir after the death of the father (Genesis 49:3; Deuteronomy 21:17; 2 Chronicles 21:3). However, in a situation where the oldest son despises his birthright, he loses both the headship position and the privileges attached. Jacob had interest in the birthright and seemed to value it more than Esau. The former struggled with the latter for it right from the womb. An opportunity to get the birthright eventually came when Jacob noticed that Esau was very hungry. He promptly dangled the bait: bread or birthright? Surprisingly, Esau preferred bread to his birthright when "**Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright**" (Genesis 25:31).

"**And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob**" (Genesis 25:32,33). This was a bargain between Jacob and Esau on the birthright, which was Esau's by providence but Jacob's by barter. Jacob demanded an oath for confirmation and Esau "**sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright**" (Genesis 25:33,34). By this action, Esau traded off the invaluable benefits of his birthright for an immediate pleasure of food. He acted on impulse by satisfying his hunger for food without any flicker of thought about the future consequences of his choice and action.

The second birth or salvation brings a believer into God's family and sanctification makes him possess inward righteousness through Christ. It is this entrance into the Kingdom and possession of God's righteousness that qualifies an erstwhile sinner to inherit inexhaustible blessings in life and eternity. Thus, it is

profane for any believer to trade off his Christian experiences for fleeting pleasures and transient blessings such as securing a job, earning promotion, winning a marriage partner or making money in business. Those who do such disqualify themselves from God's kingdom. It was for sinful pleasure (incest) that Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob, also lost his birthright (1 Chronicles 5:1).

The fall of Esau is a warning to all believers to avoid similar pitfalls (1 Corinthians 10:6). The devil has always capitalised on man's need for food in designing temptations to make him fall. Adam and Eve fell for it. He also approached Christ when He was hungry to demand that He turn stone to bread to satisfy His hunger. But Christ overcame by quoting the word of God that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). To overcome similar temptation, do not exaggerate or rate your need above your spiritual experiences, relationship with God and obedience to His word. Esau's claim that, "**I am at the point to die**" did not mean he would have died if he ate no food that day. Esau's thought and undisciplined personality betrayed him. He fell headlong and lost divine endowment. It was better for him to suffer hunger and retain his birthright with all accruing blessings than despise it to earn disgrace, dishonour and denial of the blessings of the firstborn. He sold his precious inheritance and did not budge after the deal unlike Peter who wept bitterly in penitence after denying the Lord. Those are the characteristics of a profane person. Esau later sought for it with tears but it was too late.

Christians are admonished to beware, "**Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears**" (Hebrews 12:16,17). Believers should flee from all appearances of evil. Every urge to mortgage our spiritual inheritance, the doctrines of Christ and hope of heaven

for any earthly benefits must be resisted vehemently by all heaven bound believers. We must know that our soul's salvation and inheritance here and hereafter are priceless. Above all, we must abide in Christ, put on the whole armour of God in these last days and engage the enemy in spiritual warfare to continue to enjoy our God-given victory until the end.

Questions for review:

1. Mention one blessing of marriage in the text.
2. How should a believer handle the loss of his/her spouse?
3. List three virtues in the life of Abraham that godly parents should emulate.
4. How did Isaac handle the delay in childbearing in his family?
5. What does it mean to sell one's birthright?
6. Mention some steps believers should take to avoid being profane like Esau.
7. What should Esau have done to avoid the tragedy of selling his birthright?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	ACTS 18 - 19
MONDAY:	ACTS 20 - 21
TUESDAY:	ACTS 22 - 23
WEDNESDAY:	ACTS 24 - 25
THURSDAY:	ACTS 26 - 28
FRIDAY:	ROMANS 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	ROMANS 4 - 6

Lesson 17

GOD PROSPERS ISAAC

MEMORY VERSE: "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great" (Genesis 26:12,13).

TEXT: Genesis 26:1-35

This chapter opens with the problem of famine in Beersheba where Isaac lived. The challenge of survival during famine with his wife, twin sons (about fifteen years) and his servants was daunting. Recall that he was the heir of God's promises and covenant with Abraham. Faced with adversity, his initial response was relocation to Gerar. Our covenant keeping God, who always intervenes in times of need, appeared to warn him against going down to Egypt because of the famine. He obeyed divine instruction and received the fulfilment of God's promised blessings to Abraham. Amidst trials and temptations, Isaac grew in prosperity as detailed in this lesson. Believers should seek the mind of God in times of hardship so as not to take rash decisions with disastrous consequences. God is faithful and keeps the obedient even during famine.

THE GOD-GIVEN PROMISE TO ISAAC (Genesis 26:1-11; 12:10-20; Psalms 33:18,19; 37:18,19; Genesis 12:1,4; 17:1; 22:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Joshua 1:5-8; Hebrews 11:9,13,16; Acts 7:5)

"**And there was a famine in the land...**" (Genesis 26:1). The reality about life is that there are wet and dry seasons, summer, winter, spring and autumn. In

human life, there could be a season of abundance and at other times, scarcity. Food is one of the most important and common need. It has a direct link with our health. Famine, a season characterised by the absence of food, be it physical or spiritual, is a state of dryness and dearth. It can lead to spiritual or physical death. Thus, "**Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar**". He might have toyed with the thought of going to Egypt for greener pasture. But "**the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee...**" (Genesis 26:2,3).

God is always ready to guide His people. He uses His omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence to guide, preserve, establish, strengthen and bless His children. Ignorance of this truth brought disastrous consequences to the family of Elimelech and Naomi. God assures those who fear and trust Him and lead upright lifestyle by faith in Christ of divine sustenance during famine. "**Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. The LORD knoweth the days of the upright... and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied**" (Psalms 33:18,19; 37:18,19).

God renewed the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac. "**Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws**" (Genesis 26:3-5). He highlighted the obedience of Abraham underpinning this covenant for Isaac to emulate. Abraham obeyed God's call to salvation, entire consecration, sanctification and supreme love (Genesis 12:1,4; 17:1; 22:2,3). Isaac, no doubt, obeyed God. The Scripture affirms that "**Isaac dwelt in Gerar**" (Genesis

26:6). He heeded the instruction of God and abode in the land. Prompt and complete obedience pleases God. He demands practical obedience to His word in our daily living, relationship, secular engagements, marriage plans, family and spiritual service. Obedience is better than sacrifice and opens the door of divine blessings.

As Isaac dwelt in Gerar with his wife, a common temptation to lie surfaced. Instead of trusting the sheltering power of God, he decided to deceive Abimelech and his people out of fear by calling Rebekah his sister. Lying was a besetting sin in Abraham's family as it is in many lives today. The unchanging word of God reveals that "**the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimestone: which is the second death**" (Revelation 21:8).

When Abimelech discovered that Isaac lied to deceive him, he was displeased and rebuked him. Fear of man or death enslaves, but faith in God sets free. Believers should trust in the Lord for the protection of their lives, loved ones and properties. He has all the power and means to protect His children (Psalm 105:14,15). Those who yield to pressure to lie or cover up the truth should urgently return to the Lord, repent and forsake their sins and exercise faith in the cleansing power of Christ's blood for their salvation or restoration. Believers should be "**blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world**" (Philippians 2:15). Children, successors and new generations can continue to enjoy the benefits of the good promises and covenant God made with their parents and predecessors so long as they continue in the path of obedience to His word (Joshua 1:5-8). Heaven is our goal; eternal inheritances are stored up for us there. Only the transformed, truthful, trusting and triumphant believer will enter heaven and possess the divine blessings.

THE GROWING PROSPERITY OF ISAAC (Genesis 26:12-23; 31:6-12; Proverbs 22:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 27:4; Isaiah 65:13,14; 1 Corinthians 3:6,7)

"**Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him**" (Genesis 26:12; Isaiah 1:19). He was industrious and enterprising. Laziness, idleness, slothfulness or procrastination had no place in his life and household. He got everyone occupied. The Lord's blessing came on all of Isaac's endeavours, including his flocks and herds. It is instructive to remember that this bumper harvest came at the time of famine in Gerar. Those who labour must remember that it is God who gives the increase. Therefore, the diligent and industrious must not edge God out of their enterprises.

The prosperity of Isaac inspired envy and jealousy from the heathen around him. "**And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him**" (Genesis 26:13,14). The Lord rapidly increased him from a handful to a hundredfold. This became unbearable for the unbelieving Philistines. They, therefore, conspired to stop him. However, we should remember that "**The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it**" (Proverbs 10:22). The man that God has blessed cannot be cursed or stopped by mortals. Isaac, in his characteristic manner, demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit when the wells which his father's servants dug were all covered with earth by the Philistines (Genesis 26:15). He did not retaliate in consonance with the word of God that a servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle and meek towards all men.

Despite the trial, God multiplied his possession to the extent that Abimelech confessed: "**Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we**" (Genesis 26:16). Isaac therefore moved away to the valley of Gerar. There, his herdsmen dug two wells named *Esek* and *Sitnah,* meaning 'contention' and 'hatred' because they were violently taken from them. These two vices characterise

our world today but they must not be found among the children of God. As light of the world, we are peacemakers and loving people. Isaac moved away from there and dug another well, which they did not strive for. He, therefore, called it "**...Rehoboth ...For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land**" (Genesis 26:22).

This account of Isaac's prosperity teaches us: one, the faithfulness of God; two, total obedience to God's word; three, diligence and hard work (Hebrews 6:12); four, perseverance in the face of provocation; five, faith in God in difficult times; six, divine favour and preservation; and seven, the virtues of gentleness and meekness. As a man of spiritual understanding, Isaac knew the envy of the Philistines only helped to move him far away from them to "**Rehoboth**" where God made room for him. He was given a land for his flocks and herds, and his wife and household were protected. In like manner, though envied by his brothers and sold into slavery, Joseph understood that God sent him ahead of them into Egypt and promoted him to preserve their lives. So, "**All things** (persecution, trials, envy, attacks, and so on) **work together for good**" for those who love, trust and obey God (Romans 8:28; 12:17-19).

THE GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE TO INHERITORS (Genesis 26:24-35; Exodus 23:30; 32:13; Psalm 25:13; Proverbs 9:11; Matthew 19:29; 25:34; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 3:13-17,29; Revelation 21:7)

After God had settled Isaac and his household in the valley of Gerar, He reappeared to reassure him of the Abrahamic blessing and His presence. "**...I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake**" (Genesis 26:24).

Obedience to God qualified Isaac to be heir of the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord there. God's love, care, benevolence and providence should drive us to the altar of salvation, restoration and consecration. Sinners and backsliders should turn away from all sins to Christ in penitence and faith. God will then make them heirs

and joint heirs with Christ. "**And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**" (Galatians 3:29). Our final inheritance is in heaven which Christ has gone to prepare for us.

Afterwards, Abimelech came to Isaac in the company of Ahuzzath and Phichol, having discovered the mighty presence of God with Isaac. Isaac challenged and rebuked them for their contention and hatred towards him and his household. "**And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee**" (Genesis 26:28). They could not withstand the God of Abraham and Isaac. Therefore, they came to make peace. They even called him "**the blessed of the LORD**" (Genesis 26:29). Being a peaceful person, Isaac entered into a covenant with them after which they parted in peace (Genesis 26:30,31). This is an evidence of the grace of God in the life of Isaac. He received his enemies and persecutors, entertained them and made covenant of peace with them. Every believer should emulate this virtue in the life of Isaac in relating with their enemies and persecutors (Hebrews 12:14). Another well, Shebah, was dug by the servants of Isaac (Genesis 26:32,33).

It should be noted that the growing prosperity of Isaac did not becloud his spiritual sensibility and sensitivity to God and His word. Esau's marriage to two women, Judith and Bashemath, who were Hittites contrary to the word of God brought grief to his parents, Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26:34,35). Believers should always grieve when there is flagrant disobedience to God's holy standard in marriage and other areas of life (Matthew 5:4).

It is obvious that Isaac's life and experiences in this chapter bear some similarities with that of Abraham in chapters 12,20 and 21. Both went through famine (Genesis 12:10; 26:1); had encounter with Abimelech the king of the Philistines (Genesis 20:1,2; 26:1) had wives that were fair to look upon (Genesis 12:11; 26:7); lied about the status of their wives for fear of being killed (Genesis 20:1,2; 26:7); were rebuked by Abimelech for deception (Genesis 20:9,10; 26:10); had covenant relationship with God (Genesis 12:2,3; 26:3,4); suffered

opposition as wells were violently taken away from them (Genesis 21:25; 26:15,18,20-22); received affirmation of the divine presence with them by Abimelech and his people (Genesis 21:22; 26:28); entered a non-aggressive pact with their host communities (Genesis 21:22; 26:26-28) and built altars unto the Lord after encounter with Him (Genesis 12:7,8; 26:24,25). Both were also prospered by God.

Believers need to watch and pray to avoid reliving negative experiences of parents and predecessors. We should emulate the virtues of saints of old and claim the promises of Scripture by faith in Christ. Above all, Christ is our perfect Example in all things.

Questions for review:

1. What do we learn from the intervention of God when Isaac sought a place of plenty during famine?
2. How should believers handle seasons of adversity?
3. What is the secret of enjoying continual blessings from the Lord?
4. Identify some salient virtues in Isaac that are worthy of emulation.
5. How can wealthy saints maintain their integrity in Christ?
6. What do we learn from the common life's experiences that happened to Abraham and Isaac?
7. Why did Isaac prosper in a strange land?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	ROMANS 7 - 9
MONDAY:	ROMANS 10 - 12
TUESDAY:	ROMANS 13 - 16
WEDNESDAY:	JOSHUA 1 - 4
THURSDAY:	JOSHUA 5 - 7
FRIDAY:	JOSHUA 8 - 10
SATURDAY:	JOSHUA 11 - 14

Lesson 18

THE TREACHERY AND FLIGHT OF JACOB

MEMORY VERSE: "And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him" (Genesis 27:22,23).

TEXT: Genesis 27:1-46; 28:1-22

Jacob committed sins of deceit and treachery against God, his father and twin brother. Acting on the ungodly counsel of his mother, he deceived his father to get the blessings meant for his brother, Esau. It needs be highlighted that there is nothing wrong for children to crave the blessings of their aged, dying parents. It is a common practice in Bible day and in contemporary times for dying parents to bless their children and give a parting charge. This may be in form of bequeathing assets, offering prayers or giving final instructions. It could be recalled that Abraham gave gifts to his children from his concubines, "**and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived**" and "**gave all that he had unto Isaac**" (Genesis 25:6,5). This was what Isaac tried to do in the text which would also serve as a pattern for succeeding patriarchs (Genesis 49:1,33). "**A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children**" (Proverbs 13:22).

However, the Lord frowns at obtaining such blessings by fraud. "**Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked**" (Proverbs 20:17; Isaiah 57:21). The text reveals that there was

absence of peace and a looming tragedy in Isaac's family that was averted, albeit temporarily, through the flight of Jacob to Padanaram on the counsel of his mother. Sin always generates crises that can destroy the sinner. God calls on all present-day counterparts of Jacob who are on the run for any crimes they committed to seek His mercy and forgiveness through Christ. "**Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin**" (Ezekiel 18:30).

JACOB'S TREACHERY AND BETRAYAL OF ESAU (Genesis 27:1-40; 25:31-33; Leviticus 19:11; Psalm 5:6; 101:7; Proverbs 12:22; 21:6)

"**Isaac was old**" and "**his eyes were dim**." Weakness and loss of sight often come with old age, although Moses enjoyed unparalleled strength in old age (Deuteronomy 34:7). At this time, Isaac was close to the end of his life on earth. Knowing that death could come at any time, he made arrangement bestow the paternal benediction on Esau, his older son, whom he also loved for the venison treats. He directed Esau to prepare a savoury meat, such as he loved before the solemn bestowal of the special blessing on him.

However, the plan to deceive Isaac was conceived and initiated by Rebekah. While pregnant, the babies had struggled in her womb. Worried, she had inquired of the Lord what the outcome would be for her babies. The promise was clear and unmistaken: two manners of people are in your womb, differing in their dispositions and destinies; "**the elder shall serve the younger**" (Genesis 25:23). The revelation was not intended to make her help God fulfil it. He is able to fulfil His word without any human instrumentality as the all-sufficient One, except where and when He chooses to. Even then, He does not inspire people to employ unrighteous means to accomplish His righteous purposes. Jacob initially had a prick of conscience and feared that his father could discover his impersonation and pronounce a curse instead of blessing on him. "**And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my**

brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (Genesis 27:11,12). Rebekah assured him of her readiness to bear any curse that came from the deceit. Encouraged by these words, Jacob hatched the plot. Ungodly influence of parents on children can derail and ruin them. The Scripture's command is to bring them up in the way of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6).

Isaac was surprised and suspicious that the savoury meat was ready earlier than expected. "**Who art thou, my son?**" Isaac asked. "**And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn**" (verses 18,19). This was a clear case of impersonation. To his father's question on how he was able to make the venison quicker than expected, "**he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me**" (Genesis 27:20). Jacob lied, this time, against God (Exodus 20:7). He used the name of God to establish his lies and deception. Like him, many religious people swear in the name of God to obtain official documents, deceive marriage partners, pastors, friends and fellow Christians. The Scripture forbids Christians from swearing or using the name of God and Christ in vain. God expects our 'yes' and 'no' to be truly so in speech and writing (Matthew 5:33-37; Revelation 21:8). In the same vein, those who prophesy lies in the name of the Lord without being sent by Him are workers of iniquity who will be barred from the Kingdom of heaven. Thus, believers are commanded to try every spirit to avoid being deceived.

Isaac grew up with the boys and knew their voices. Doubting the identity of the impostor, he said further, "**Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not.**" His conclusion was that the voice was that of Jacob but the hands those of Esau. Before eating the special meal, he still enquired: "**Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am**" (Genesis 27:24). Jacob sowed deceit and got the blessings; he sowed the wind and would later reap the whirlwind.

After the meal, his father pronounced blessings on him. "**...See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee**" (Genesis 27:27-29). The blessings were temporal and spiritual. They contained, first, fertility of land: "**dew of heaven**," "**fatness of the earth**," "**plenty of corn and wine**." Second, numerous and powerful descendants (verse 29). He would be preeminent among his kindred and other nations of the world. Third, invincibility before foes: he could not be cursed, defeated or enslaved. The blessings pronounced were perpetual and irrevocable.

As soon as Jacob received the blessings, Esau returned. He felt undone by the betrayal, especially as they were irretrievable. Thus he cried, "**Hast thou but one blessing, my father?...**" With a lamentable voice, he pleaded: "**bless me ...also**." When it became obvious that the blessing would not come, he "**lifted up his voice, and wept**" (Genesis 27:38). His father blessed him also saying, "**Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck**" (Genesis 27:39,40). The Bible warns against profanity such as Esau displayed by despising and selling his "**birthright**" for temporary satisfaction from food. "**...For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears**" (Hebrews 12:16,17).

Our spiritual birth came at a high cost: the death and resurrection of Christ. With this experience, we are entitled to the inexhaustible blessings of God in life and hereafter. To mortgage this spiritual experience of

salvation for employment, admission into educational institution, scholarship or any other privilege, opportunity or favour is profane. It is obvious that birthright is inseparably connected to inheritance of blessing. Any believer who loses his salvation experience will be disinherited from the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Hebrews 10:38,39).

JACOB FLEES FROM CANAAN TO HARAN (Genesis 27:41-46; 28:1-9)

Parental preference causes trouble in the family. From this account, it appears that Isaac and Rebekah lacked unity of purpose in their children's upbringing as each parent had a favourite. Parental favouritism, domineering nature of the wife and tractability of the head of the family have grave consequences in parenting (Genesis 37:3,4). Christian parents must avoid these pitfalls and diligently heed the Scripture's admonition: "**And, ye** [parents]**, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord**" (Ephesians 6:4).

Treachery and crookedness beget strife. Esau brewed with anger and hatred over the loss of his birthright and blessings. Incensed by his brother's betrayal, Esau devised a plan to eliminate him. His plot to kill Jacob filtered into the ears of his mother. She advised Jacob to flee to Laban her brother, calculating that distance and time would soothe Esau's anger. But "**A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle**" (Proverbs 18:19).

Jacob's flight was meant to be for "**a few days**," until his brother had forgotten "**that which thou hast done to him**" (Genesis 27:44,45). Instead of just a few days as his mother thought, Jacob ended up spending twenty long years in a foreign land. He later learnt that time and distance would not atone for sins against God and fellow man as Esau still harboured murderous intention against him. Forgiveness and reconciliation come to those who truly repent of their evil deeds. God will

overlook past sins when we heed His universal command to turn away from them (Acts 17:30; 3:19). Those who fail to repent of their sinful lifestyle will surely be judged (1 Timothy 5:24).

Isaac came to realise that the paternal benediction flowed from the Spirit of God (Genesis 27:37). He had also come to accept that it was divine providence that willed the blessing to Jacob. He therefore called for Jacob, blessed him and gave him a command. "**And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan**" (Genesis 28:1). The seriousness with which the patriarchs adhered to divine instructions and passed them to their descendants is worthy of emulation. Recall that the seed of the woman was to come through the lineage of Jacob. God's charge to believers of all ages is to marry "**only in the Lord**" (1 Corinthians 7:39) and not be "**unequally yoked**" with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). After hearing the charge his father gave his brother concerning marriage, "**Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife**" (Genesis 28:9).

JACOB ENCOUNTERS GOD AND RECEIVES THE PROMISE OF BLESSING (Genesis 28:10-22; 48:3; Numbers 23:10; Hosea 12:3; Malachi 3:10)

Although Jacob had employed ungodly means to accomplish his scheme, Esau was unworthy of the blessings for despising his birthright without genuine repentance (Hebrews 12:16,17). Jacob's deceit and treachery led to his flight from home. His initial fear of bringing a curse upon himself did not happen as the betrayal was successfully hatched. He was however not free from the guilt and loneliness it brought. On his way to Haran, Jacob encountered God. In a dream at night, he saw a ladder from earth to heaven, on which angels ascended and descended. "**And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of**

Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:13-15). This encounter with God at Bethel was life-changing. The Lord affirmed the Abrahamic covenant with him and promised to bless, protect and bring him back safely.

Filled with awe at the divine presence and the angelic hosts, Jacob declared that Bethel was the gate of heaven. This was the first time he would have any direct revelation of God and relationship with Him. He responded positively by erecting a stone of memorial to God. Besides, "**Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee**" (Genesis 28:20-22). It is not enough to have godly parents, we must have personal encounter with God to receive salvation and other blessings He has for us. Like Jacob, believers should reciprocate divine benevolence by devoting their lives to serve God as well as honour Him with their tithe and offering (Proverbs 3:9; Malachi 3:10).

Questions for review:

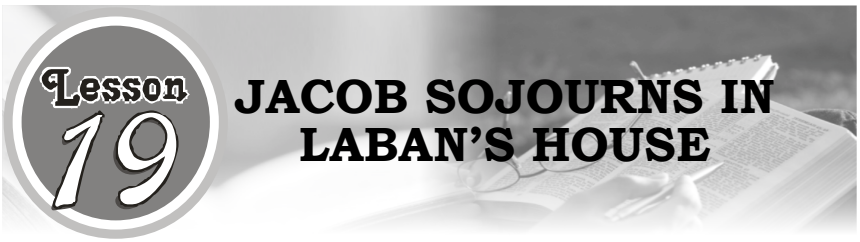
1. What does God expect persons who are on the run for crimes they have committed to do?
2. What were the immediate consequences of Jacob's deceit and treachery?
3. Explain how Jacob was able to obtain the blessings of the firstborn.

4. What blessings were pronounced on Jacob?
5. Give reasons for Esau's unworthiness for the rights of the firstborn.
6. What can believers learn from Jacob's encounter with God?
7. What is the meaning of Bethel?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JOSHUA 15 - 18
MONDAY:	JOSHUA 19 - 21
TUESDAY:	JOSHUA 22 - 24
WEDNESDAY:	JUDGES 1 - 4
THURSDAY:	JUDGES 5 - 7
FRIDAY:	JUDGES 8 - 10
SATURDAY:	JUDGES 11 - 13



Lesson 19 JACOB SOJOURNS IN LABAN'S HOUSE

MEMORY VERSE: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

TEXTS: Genesis chapters 29 to 31

Jacob's encounter and experiences with Laban confirm the law of sowing and reaping clearly articulated in Galatians chapter six verse seven. Nothing can shield the unrighteous from reaping the wages of sin except there is genuine repentance. Jacob reaped the wages of his treacherous acts in the hands and house of another deceptive mortal. The place that his parents dreamed would shelter him from the wrath of Esau turned out to be a nest of many troubles. There is only one refuge for a guilty sinner seeking peace; and that is at the cross where Jesus Christ died for the remission of sins. Jacob's days in Laban's house laid the foundation of his turbulent polygamous family life. As it were, Rebekah who thought the flight of Jacob would be for a few days did not live to witness his return and Isaac, who seemed to be nearer the grave, outlived her.

WAGES FOR DILIGENT SERVICE (Genesis 29:1-20; Ruth 2:4; Deuteronomy 6:11; John 4:36,37; Leviticus 19:13)

Jacob arrived Padanaram to meet shepherds (male and female) at a well where they led their flock to drink water. His enquiry and their reply revealed he was at the right place. That was where he met Laban's daughter, Rachel who "**came with her father's sheep: for she kept them**". After lending a helping hand to

water his uncle's flock, he thereafter met him. Laban received Jacob warmly into his house. Believers, male and female, need to appreciate the dignity of labour and get engaged in legitimate productive endeavour (Proverbs 14:23). It is important to exchange greetings and have mutual respect for one another (2 Corinthians 13:12).

After a month of his sojourn, Laban hinted at the impropriety of Jacob serving him for free. Responding to his uncle's enquiry on acceptable wages, he said, "**I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter**" (Genesis 29:18). It is important that employees are paid wages that are commensurate with the labour or service rendered. Those who delay, cheat or rob them of their remunerations incur the wrath of God on their endeavour and household (1 Timothy 5:18; James 5:1-6).

When the planned short visit to Padanaram was extended, Jacob began to plan for his family life. His marriage to Laban's daughters has many lessons for saints. One, he sought the consent of the parents. Two, he fulfilled the eastern obligations of paying the bride price. Three, he had no premarital carnal knowledge of any of them before the parents formally gave them to him in marriage. Though Jacob lived in the same house with Laban and his daughters, he did not defile any of them. It is unscriptural for so-called Christians to start living together as husband and wife before obtaining their parents' consent and fulfilling all the rites of marriage. Marriage is honourable but the bed must be undefiled; for God will judge adulterers and adulteresses. Premarital carnal knowledge of partners yet to be joined together is sinful in God's sight and must be reproved.

WAGES OF DECEITFUL SEED (Genesis 29:21-29; 1 Corinthians 5:8; Matthew 19:4-6; Malachi 2:14-16)

Jacob fulfilled all the requirements to be joined to Rachel in marriage. Laban however, outwitted Jacob by presenting Leah instead of Rachel to him on the night of the nuptials (Genesis 29:16-30). This is reminiscent

of the way Jacob, with the help of his mother, deceitfully obtained the covenant blessings from Isaac. What a twist of fate! Just as he used the cover of Isaac's partial loss of sight to deceive him, Laban also used the cover of darkness to deceive him. Christians must be conscious of God's law of sowing and reaping and determine to sow good seeds in order to reap good fruits (Galatians 6:7-9; Judges 1:6,7).

When confronted by Jacob, Laban claimed to have acted in good faith and in accordance with their custom, a secret he did not reveal to Jacob until after the nuptials. Expectedly, Jacob was outraged and in a bid to pacify him, Laban mindlessly proposed to offer Rachel to him as a second wife for additional seven years of service. And Jacob agreed, served and also married Rachel.

Jacob's type of marriage is against the uniform teaching of Scripture, which commands monogamy. Our Lord confirmed this truth. "**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). The Scripture also frowns at separation and prohibits divorce (Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:6). This scriptural position is what every heaven-bound believer should uphold.

Polygamy and all forms of unscriptural marriage are bedeviled with ruinous crises. Besides, deviation from divine blueprint on marriage will damn the souls of the rebels. Polygamy plunged Jacob's family into much strife and painful competition. There was incessant rivalry between the two sisters. "**And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali**" (Genesis 30:8). Though polygamy was permitted in the Old Testament dispensation, this should not be taken as standard practice by any New Testament believer. Those who have married wrongly need to repent and make restitution if they hope to get to heaven.

WARNING AGAINST UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGES (Genesis 29:30-35; 30:1-43; Matthew 7:7-11; Jeremiah 3:23)

Jacob was not only a polygamist, his was a rare brand. He was married to two siblings. The Mosaic Law was to later forbid his brand of polygamy. "**Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time**" (Leviticus 18:18). Having been entangled in unscriptural marriage, he was not spared the troubles, rancour, rivalry, petty squabbles, frustration and tension characteristic of all polygamous marriages. He had all these in good measure. Leah was hated and envied. There was Rachel's exasperating cry: "**Give me children or else I die**" (Genesis 30:1) and his frustrating reply, "**Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?**" (Genesis 30:2). Jacob could, at least, have prayed like Isaac did for Rebekah in a similar circumstance (Genesis 25:21). Merely complaining and despairing at our misfortunes or afflictions serves no purpose. Believers should learn to pray when there is problem. However, what Rachel could not get by impatience and trust in man, she later got through patience, prayer and confidence in God (Genesis 30:22-24). In answer to her prayer of faith, she also conceived and gave birth to a special son, Joseph. All believers looking unto God for the fruit of the womb should learn to pray through like Rachel. God answers prayers (Matthew 7:7-11).

Jacob was blessed with children. Leah gave birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah; her maid, Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher; Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin and her maid, Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali.

God desires that we also bear spiritual fruits. The Lord reveals that our fruitfulness is God's will and brings glory to Him (John 15:1-8). The fruits Christians are expected to bear are of two types: the fruit of the Spirit and evangelism (Galatians 5:22,23; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). It is unfortunate that many believers

do not evangelise today because of economic difficulties, lukewarmness, material pursuit, shyness, crowded church programmes and insecurity of life. Some also claim that their inadequate education and insufficient knowledge of the Scriptures inhibit them from witnessing. No matter the blessings we seem to have, if we remain fruitless, we are not fulfilling the purpose of our existence of bringing glory to God. "**Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples**" (John 15:8). This is the time to cry: "Give me spiritual children or I die" like John Knox prayed: "Give me Scotland or I die".

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob requested to be sent forth with his wives and children. Laban objected on the acknowledgment that, "**...I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake**" (Genesis 30:27). He persuaded Jacob into tending his flock for six more years. To his request for a renegotiation of remuneration, Jacob said, "**...if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock: I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire**" (Genesis 30:31,32). Jacob's strange but extremely effective management of the flocks, to which he got Laban to agree, resulted in his becoming far wealthier than his uncle. "**And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses**" (Genesis 30:43). This is not surprising because of the testimony of the divine presence with him coupled with his diligence, faithfulness, negotiation skills and tact. These qualities are required of believers who seek to excel in their endeavours.

WISDOM IN PEACEFUL PARTING AMONG BRETHREN (Genesis 31:1-55; Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:10)

After twenty years with Laban, Jacob had to return

home. It seemed that the growing hostility toward him there was becoming no less dangerous than what he might find back home with Esau. "**And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before**" (Genesis 31:1,2). Within this time, Laban changed his wages ten times (Genesis 31:39,41). Aside defaulting on his own side of the bargain, he ensured that Jacob paid for any animal torn by beast or stolen.

In this ensuing crisis, God spoke to Jacob to return home. He discussed his travails and the divine instruction to depart with his wives and they agreed to go with him (Genesis 31:4-10,14-19). He left without notifying Laban and had gone three days before his uncle knew it. On receiving the news of Jacob's departure, he pursued after him with other members of his family and overtook them east of Jordan in the land of Gilead. Prior to catching up with them, the Lord warned Laban in a dream: "**Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad**" (Genesis 31:24,29). Employees should learn to give required notice of disengagement rather than abscond. Similarly, employers should do the needful when laying off their employees. Christian employees and employers should allow principles, peace and holiness to regulate their labour relations.

Laban confronted Jacob for leaving without notice and stealing his gods. He spoke peacefully with Jacob, having been warned by God in a dream (Genesis 31:25-30). Though Jacob chode with Laban on the issue of the stolen gods, he was unaware that they were with Rachel. God sees and knows the secrets of men and will open them up on the day of judgment (Romans 2:16). Jacob and Laban resolved their differences and entered into a non-aggression agreement. Stones of memorial were heaped up for a witness that neither party would cross over to harm the other.

God brought Jacob's many years of oppression and

exploitation to an end and generously rewarded his hard work and perseverance. This is a message of hope for those who are being oppressed that they will be delivered and rewarded by God if they remain faithful, diligent and steadfast.

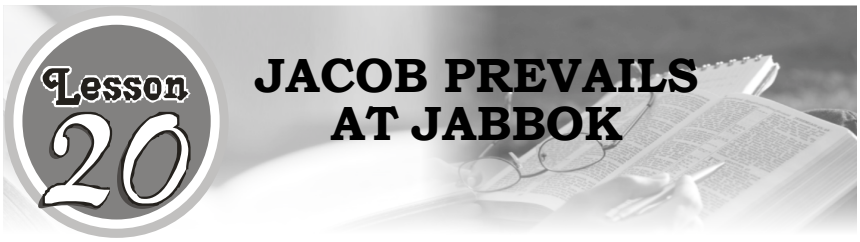
Questions for review:

1. Why is dignity of labour key to Christian living and child training?
2. List scriptural steps to seeking and securing a husband/wife.
3. What is the position of Scripture on polygamy, separation and divorce?
4. How did the law of sowing and reaping play out in Jacob's life while he was with Laban?
5. How should believers handle delay in child bearing?
6. What can believers learn from issues associated with Jacob's departure from Padanaram?
7. Why should we follow peace with all men?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JUDGES 14 - 17
MONDAY:	JUDGES 18 - 21
TUESDAY:	1 CORINTHIANS 1 - 4
WEDNESDAY:	1 CORINTHIANS 5 - 7
THURSDAY:	1 CORINTHIANS 8 - 11
FRIDAY:	1 CORINTHIANS 12 - 14
SATURDAY:	1 CORINTHIANS 15 - 16



JACOB PREVAILS AT JABBOK

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

TEXT: Genesis 32:1-32; 33:1-20

After sealing a non-aggression pact with Laban, Jacob continued his journey homeward. He met "**angels of God**" on his way and recognised that "**This is God's host**". Since he obeyed divine instruction by departing Padanaram, God also ensured his protection and preservation through the ministry of angels. That, notwithstanding, Jacob sent a message of appeasement to his twin brother, Esau. The feedback that his brother was coming to meet him with 400 men of war brought fear and distress. He came to his wit's end; danger loomed large and near in his thoughts and imagination. His conflict resolution skills and gifts could do little to pacify Esau. Death and destruction would soon be unleashed on the women, children, servants and flock. The wealth acquired for twenty years was soon to be plundered and wasted. It was this painful premonition that drove Jacob to pray with unparalleled intensity and wrestling with a divine personality at Jabbok.

The outcome of this encounter was impressive and teaches a vital lesson on the power of importunate and fervent prayer. Esau's heart that was filled with hatred and murderous intention was melted. Rather than hurt Jacob with his four hundred men, Esau embraced and kissed him. At last, both of them wept over each other's shoulders and Esau accepted Jacob's presents and went

away with his men in peace. God answered his prayer by turning his aggrieved brother to a friend. The account teaches the benefits of obeying God, absolute dependence on Him at difficult times and the possibilities of effectual, fervent prayer of importunate seekers of divine intervention. God is a very present Help in trouble. Life's challenges will turn to testimonies to the glory of God if we tread the path of obedience and pray with fervency.

JACOB'S DISTRESS AT THE NEWS OF ESAU'S ADVANCE (Genesis 32:1-21; 17:7; Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-18)

Jacob's goodwill message of his sojourn with Laban and his peaceful return with wealth was of no value to his offended brother. His servants returned with frightful news of Esau's coming to meet him with four hundred men. "**And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him**" (Genesis 32:6). Time does not always heal hurts and injuries done to our neighbours. What is the use of gifts without repentance and restitution? Scriptural principles must be followed to mend soured relationships (Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-18).

Jacob responded to the imminent calamity by dividing the people that were with him, including the flocks, herds and camels into two bands; "**And said if Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape**" (Genesis 32:8). Who would adjudge his fear unnecessary though he had left Laban for home on the strength of divine directive? The Lord had recently graciously mollified Laban from executing his cruel intent against him. And Jacob had recently had a vision of angelic host around him. All these, coupled with the divine support he had consistently enjoyed, should have emboldened him to move on without fear. But they could not because of a lingering reconciliation he was yet to carry out. Saints are enjoined to exercise themselves "**to have always a**

conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). The word of God commands that we should follow peace with all men.

There is no amount of scriptural promises and assurances, coupled with living testimonies of various deliverances, that will hide us from God's wrath if we are guilty of wrongdoing against our fellow men. Confession, repentance and full restitution must be done in order to be reconciled with the offended person before we can enjoy the promises of victory and protection from the Lord. Restitution is an act of making amends for wrongs done against our fellow men, restoring stolen items to their rightful owners, paying debts, giving back where one has defrauded, making confession to the offended and apologising to those slandered to have a conscience void of offence towards God and men (Genesis 20:1-8; Leviticus 6:1-7; Matthew 5:23,24; Acts 23:1-5; 24:16; James 4:17).

Unsatisfied with his strategy, Jacob resorted to praying. This is a commendable response in the light of Scriptures (Psalm 56:3). When faced with challenges, believers should pray as Jacob did. In his prayer, he acknowledged God's covenant relationship with Abraham and Isaac and His instruction that he returned home. The believer in Christ has God as Father by virtue of adoption through Christ (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5). Jacob was humbly thankful as he expressed his unworthiness of God's favours that, "**...with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now, I am become two bands**" (Genesis 32:10). He asked God to deliver him and his family from being wiped out by Esau. "**Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children**" (Genesis 32:11). His prayer was hinged on God's promises. The realisation that gifts would not pacify Esau drove him to the place of prayer.

JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH AN ANGEL IN PREVAILING PRAYER (Genesis 32:22-32; Hosea 12:3-5; Matthew 15:22-28)

Jacob rose up that night and sent his wives and children over the ford Jabbok. He also sent over all that he had. "**And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day**" (Genesis 32:24). His resort to prayer teaches us that if a godly desire has not been met, we should pray more and depend on God. There is no alternative for a child of God. Jacob's prayer was more resolute, concentrated, intense and involving. As a result of his importunity, he received an unexpected guest, a divine touch and an eventual divine intervention (Genesis 32:25; Hosea 12:4; Isaiah 63:9). The identity of this personality who at different times was referred to as 'man', and 'angel', was actually divine, despite his human physique (Genesis 32:30; Hosea 12:4,5).

The prayer encounter offers valuable lessons for New Testament believers. One, though Jacob had received divine promises and assurances, this encounter was necessary to transform and purge his life and character of any trace of crookedness. God always desires perfection in those He favours. Two, the Lord was not in a hurry to bless Jacob. Recall that Abraham waited a long time before the promised child came. David waited for some years before his anointing culminated into his coronation; the disciples waited some weeks after Christ's ascension before the promised Holy Spirit baptism was manifested. Contemporary believers have need of patience to inherit the promises (Isaiah 30:18; Habakkuk 2:3; Mark 14:34; Luke 24:49; Hebrews 6:11,12; 10:35-37; James 5:7,8). Three, the wrestling was tough and long; it lasted till daybreak. This man was desperate for divine blessing and elevation.

Four, the divine wrestler weakened Jacob physically and left him with a dislocation of his hip; "**...he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him**" (Genesis 32:25). It was also to indicate that lasting victory is not won on the basis of physical strength or human schemes: we must overcome in the strength which God Himself bestows (Psalm 33:16; 2 Corinthians 12:10). Five, it appeared the angel attempted to leave

without dropping the much desired blessing but Jacob would not let go. Believers must learn to be purposeful in their quest for divine intervention in life and ministry (2 Kings 2:1-14; Luke 24:28,29).

Six, the angel asked a pertinent question: "**What is thy name? And he said, Jacob**". His response was not required for information but for contrition and confession. Recall that Jacob's answer to a similar question about twenty years earlier was a calculated falsehood through which he deceptively obtained blessings from his father. Christians must tell the truth at all times. God had unilaterally determined that the covenant blessing was meant for Jacob. Claiming a different appellation was only a shortcut to needless delays, suffering and lifelong insecurity. The grace of God is primarily meant for the unworthy. Poverty of spirit and prayer for mercy make sinners and backsliders appropriate His provision of salvation. Seven, having been considered successful in the night encounter, the Lord blessed Jacob, changed his name and commended him. "**...Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed**" (Genesis 32:28).

JACOB'S MEETING AND RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU (Genesis 33:1-20; Proverbs 17:8; Hosea 12:4)

Having met God in prayer, Jacob was then prepared to meet Esau physically. As Esau approached with his four hundred men, Jacob marched straight to him. "**And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother**" (Genesis 33:3). It is obvious that he obtained the virtues of humility and absolute faith in God. He discarded all arrangements he had put in place out of fear. Jacob lifted his eyes and saw Esau approach with his men. His warm embrace, hug, kiss and tears were evidence that God had softened his heart (1 Samuel 26:2,25; Proverbs 16:7). Although Jacob knew he could not buy his way out, he still prevailed on Esau to receive his presents. He accorded him the honour of a superior

both in his word and mien. Esau was pleased and Jacob's family and flocks were spared. The lesson here is that God's favour is upon the meek. And when we pray for grace, there would be strength to carry out difficult but necessary restitution.

After the reconciliation, Esau offered to leave some of his men as escort for Jacob, but the latter considered it unnecessary. He politely declined. "**Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir**" (Genesis 33:14).

In conclusion, we learn that the Lord knows how to deliver those that depend on Him and seek His help, provided they are resolutely committed to obeying Him (Psalms 18:2,3,17-19; 22:5; 34:4; Numbers 20:19-21; Deuteronomy 2:32,33; Psalms 68:30; 140:1-4). Tarrying in prayer unto God for precious blessings like sanctification of the heart and Holy Ghost baptism should last until the answer is given. We should learn to pray until the fire fall.

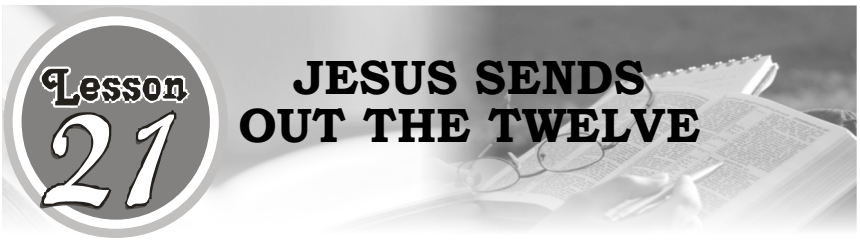
Questions for review:

1. Why is it necessary to pray before reconciliation and restitution?
2. Why was Jacob afraid of Esau?
3. How important is restitution in our walk with God and fellow men?
4. List some lessons from the encounter of Jacob with the heavenly visitor.
5. What can believers learn from Jacob's prevailing prayer and reconciliation with Esau?
6. Why is prayer indispensable to believers?
7. Give examples of other men of God who prevailed through prayers.

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 CORINTHIANS 1 - 4
MONDAY:	2 CORINTHIANS 5 - 9
TUESDAY:	2 CORINTHIANS 10 - 13
WEDNESDAY:	GALATIANS 1 - 3
THURSDAY:	GALATIANS 4 - 6
FRIDAY:	RUTH 1 - 2
SATURDAY:	RUTH 3 - 4



Lesson 21

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

MEMORY VERSE: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7,8).

TEXTS: Matthew 10:1-42; Luke 9:1-10; 12:1-12

The divine objective of rescuing perishing souls remained the driving force and focus of Christ's earthly ministry from the beginning to the end. It was for this purpose He "**ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach**" (Mark 3:14). Having called and assembled His disciples, He taught them by example what to preach and how to present the saving gospel message. "**From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 4:17). In today's text, Christ sent out the twelve to further train them in the art of 'soul-fishing'. His instructions to them reveal the content of the message and empowerment of the disciples for effective and fruitful soul-winning. Every believer is saved to win souls. There should be no idle hand in the Kingdom. Like Christ, adult believers should embark on evangelism and endeavour to mentor new believers to do same.

CHRIST'S COMMISSION TO HIS DISCIPLES (Matthew 10:1-15; Luke 9:1-5; John 10:37,38; Matthew 28:19,20; John 4:48; Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38; 3:19; Romans 4:24,25)

"**And when he had called unto him his twelve**

disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matthew 10:1).

Prior to this commission, Christ called His disciples to follow Him and learn to become fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). Right from the commencement of their call, Jesus repeatedly taught them the purpose of His advent that, "**...the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). For instance, immediately after the call of Peter, Andrew and the two sons of Zebedee, "**Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people**" (Matthew 4:23). Thus, He taught the disciples by example what to preach and how to present the gospel before sending them out to the field (Matthew 4:17; 10:7). Christian leaders need to emulate Christ's model of mentoring for fruitful soul-winning.

Having exemplified His teaching before the disciples as a pattern to emulate, Christ empowered and commissioned them to preach the gospel. The manifestation of divine power as a necessary accompaniment of the gospel was established from the beginning. The incidence of miracles, signs and wonders serve as evidence that the doctrine preached is of God and therefore, give credence to the gospel message. Christ told His incredulous Jewish audience, "**If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him**" (John 10:37,38). The miracles which Christ performed were always incidental to His preaching, and provided confirmation that He was "**a teacher come from God**". Christ forgave sinners, healed all manner of sicknesses and raised the dead. Similarly, the power He conferred on the disciples encompassed both physical sicknesses and spiritual conditions. It includes restoration of liberty to those who were enslaved by sinful habits and lifestyles, and the recovery of spiritual life to those who were dead in sins and

trespasses. Christ always associated the preaching of His gospel with the demonstration of God's supernatural power.

Before His ascension, Christ prefaced His gospel commission to His disciples with the reassurance, "**All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth**". It was on this basis that He gave the commission: "**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**" (Matthew 28:18,19). Preachers today should therefore demonstrate faith in the word of Christ by praying and expecting divine power to manifest in their preaching ministry. The demonstration of Christ's forgiving mercies, miracles and power helps the faith of those who would come to Him for salvation and healing. As Christ said, "**except** [some] **see signs and wonders** [they] **will not believe**" (John 4:48). It also robs sceptics of excuses and serves as encouragement to soul-winners to boldly preach and pray for the physically and spiritually sick and afflicted. "**And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen**" (Mark 16:20).

The content of the message which the apostles were commissioned to preach was not different from that which the Lord Himself had preached. "**From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 4:17). To His disciples He commanded, "**And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 10:7). Repentance is the keystone of Christ's message to the lost world He came to redeem. It means sincere turning away from all sins to God in penitence and forsaking past sins with utter revulsion. God requires genuine repentance before He grants the sinner's prayer for forgiveness and cleansing. It was equally emphasized by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. "**Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 3:2).

The unchanging gospel remains the same today in its message, power and emphasis, as in every

dispensation. In the early Church, the emphasis was on repentance from sin as a necessary precondition for the remission of sin. "**Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 2:38). On another occasion, after the miracle of the healing of a man born a cripple, Peter declared, "**Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord**" (Acts 3:19). The undue emphasis some preachers now place on material prosperity, earthly and social promotion at the expense of genuine repentance towards God and righteous living is therefore, misplaced. Apostle Paul warned against deviation from the gospel as preached by Christ and His disciples. "**But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed**" (Galatians 1:8).

Every believer is called to "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.**" Our emphasis must be on: one, the need for repentance from sin by personal acknowledgment of sins committed; two, godly sorrow for sins committed; three, man's inability to save himself or please God by his own good works and self-righteousness; and four, faith in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, "**Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification**" (Romans 4:25).

While sending out the twelve, Jesus commanded them to rely on the generosity of the people in the towns that they would visit: "**And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece**" (Luke 9:3). This is however, not necessarily a lack of faith to raise money for missions before embarking on it instead of relying on help from unbelievers and people of doubtful characters. The Lord only applied what was the practice of His time. Travellers in the ancient near East could count on strangers to show hospitality and put them up for one night or

longer. He further gave them specific instructions on the mode of preaching, their manner of comportment and also cautioned them against persecutors they were bound to meet.

CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMISSION (Matthew 10:16-39; Luke 9:6-10; 12:1-12; John 16:3; Titus 3:3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:10,11)

The words spoken by Christ as He sent out the twelve reveal that He anticipated resistance, even hostility from the people against the gospel. "**Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues**" (Matthew 10:16,17). The Master never hides the truth from His disciples. He clearly declares that gospel preachers will face opposition the same way He did (John 15:20). These words were meant to prepare their minds against opposition and put them on their guard against the subterfuge and misrepresentation of unbelieving men. Rejection and hostility against the gospel, and persecution against gospel preachers is the result of ignorance of the unspeakable love of God manifested in Christ. "**And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me**" (John 16:3). Instead of allowing persecution, hostility or rejection to dampen our passion for the perishing, we should be constrained by the love of God to persist in evangelism and remember that: "**we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another**" (Titus 3:3). Also, remember that the sinner is under the influence of powers beyond his control and understanding. The Scripture reveals that: "**the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**" (2 Corinthians

4:4). This revelation should engender sympathy and patient understanding in believers rather than despair in gospel-preaching. Thus, withholding the preaching of the gospel is tantamount to consigning our families, friends and communities to the everlasting torments of hell.

Christ's commission contains great encouragement for His obedient disciples. He promised divine intervention and protection for every disciple who is committed to preaching the kingdom of God. "**And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows**" (Matthew 10:28,30,31; Luke 12:4). Apostle Paul's testimony that: "**thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me**" (2 Timothy 3:10,11) confirms God's faithfulness in protecting His servants who are committed to bringing souls to His Kingdom.

Effective evangelism and fervent prayers go together. The preacher needs the help of the Holy Ghost to guide him and bring conviction and contrition into the sinner's heart. The preacher's prayer should include the opening of the spiritual eyes of the people to the unspeakable, horrendous and everlasting danger of dying in sin, without reconciling with God through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament portrays a true Christian labourer as one who serves God without reservation or fear of oppositions. He is consecrated and committed to the Lord, His Kingdom's demands and to spreading the gospel. He has only one goal: to be what God wants him to be, go where God wants him to go and do what God wants him to do. He devotes the only one life he has to the preaching of the Gospel. What a worthy life! A life that is wholly yielded to the work of soul-winning is worthy, well-spent and profitable. For "**He that findeth**

his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). Consequently, the early disciples carried out evangelistic works without fear. They demonstrated to believers of today that it is possible to live for Christ by working for the salvation of sinners. Today, every Christian must labour for the salvation of souls in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2).

CHRIST'S REWARD FOR OBEDIENT DISCIPLES (Matthew 10:32,40-42; John 15:14,16; Luke 15:10; Daniel 12:3)

Christ's faithful disciples have His words of promise and comfort to spur them on. "**Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.**" It is certainly an honour, greater than we can imagine or understand for Christ to confess us before the almighty and everlasting God. That is why we must do everything to avoid being disowned by Him before God. What danger we court by absconding from His commission to preach the gospel or in any other way to disown Him by our action or inaction!

Preaching the gospel confers on us the great privilege of friendship with the Son of God. "**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you**" (John 15:14). Our obedience to the great commission endears us to the Lord as His friends. He also promises that our efforts by the power of His grace shall be fruitful and the fruits thereof shall abide. "**Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you**" (John 15:16). Christ promises to answer the prayers of His willing disciples. What great joy the repentance and conversion of sinners bring to believers and heaven! (Psalm 126:6; Luke 15:10). The preaching of the gospel turns people from sin unto righteousness and from eternal damnation to everlasting life. Those who preach the gospel to sinners always have

the joy of turning many to righteousness. They have a special glory reserved for them in the kingdom of God. They shall shine as the stars forever and receive everlasting crowns (Daniel 12:3; 2 Timothy 4:8).

Questions for review:

1. What was Christ's preoccupation on earth and what should be the believer's?
2. What purpose does the incidence of miracles and signs serve in the preaching of the gospel?
3. Explain the content and emphasis of a true gospel message.
4. What should be a believer's attitude in the face of hostility and why?
5. What are the rewards of faithful disciples in life and eternity?
6. Explain what the cross symbolises in the life of a New Testament disciple.
7. Why is evangelisation called the great commission?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 SAMUEL 1 - 2
MONDAY:	1 SAMUEL 3 - 5
TUESDAY:	1 SAMUEL 6 - 7
WEDNESDAY:	1 SAMUEL 8 - 9
THURSDAY:	1 SAMUEL 10 - 11
FRIDAY:	1 SAMUEL 12 - 13
SATURDAY:	1 SAMUEL 14

Lesson 22

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

MEMORY VERSE: "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11).

TEXTS: Matthew 11:1-30; Luke 7:18-35

The life and ministry of John the Baptist remain a challenge to every believer. From the circumstances of his birth to his ministerial life at a time when Israel was bereft of sound teaching of God's word, to his martyrdom, John the Baptist presents rich lessons. Christ's testimony concerning him reminds us that the quality of our spiritual life, the dedication we bring to bear on our services and ministries as well as our motives are all known and noted by God. "**Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do**" (Hebrews 4:13).

To testify about John the Baptist, Christ asked three rhetorical questions in our text. First, He confirmed John's steadfastness in ministry as "**The voice of one crying in the wilderness**", with the question, "**what went ye out to the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**" (Matthew 11:7b) Next, Christ points to John's simplicity of lifestyle and ruggedness of personality: "**But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses**" (Matthew 11:8). Finally, Christ enunciates John's position in the echelon of

God's prophets: "**But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet**" (Matthew 11:9). Christ's rating of John as more than a prophet was predicated on the fact that, whereas other prophets predicted the advent of the Messiah, John actually saw and announced the actual arrival of "**he that is to come**" (John 1:29-36). In other words, Christ's topnotch rating of John: "**Among them that are born of women**" lay in the fact that it was John that began to preach the dawn of the kingdom of God and the need for repentance and remission of sin for the penitent.

IMPERATIVE OF EVANGELISM AND THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST (Matthew 11:1-6; Luke 7:18-23; Mark 3:14; Matthew 4:19; 10:1-8; Mark 16:15; Genesis 3:15; Deuteronomy 18:18; Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 4:12)

"**And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in the cities**" (Matthew 11:1). The preaching of the gospel of repentance and salvation was always the topmost priority in Christ's earthly ministry. Having commissioned the twelve in the preceding chapter and given them both guidelines and specific terms of reference, He moved over to other cities also to preach. It was for the purpose of being instrumental to the divine purpose of reaching all men with the gospel message that Christ chose the twelve apostles. "**And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach**" (Mark 3:14). Christ described the preaching to save souls as fishing for men when He said, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19). By His allusion to fishing, Christ intended His disciples, past and present, to deliberately lead their fellow men to a penitent consciousness that they have walked astray from God's will and purpose. They (Christ's disciples) were to reveal the horrifying and eternal doom that await all who die in their sinful state. The disciples themselves, having first repented, appropriated God's gift of salvation

and understudied Christ the Teacher come from God, were here given the opportunity to preach to others. After His resurrection, just before He returned to heaven, Christ commissioned every true believer to "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature**" (Mark 16:15). From Christ's personal example, purpose in calling, training and deploying His early disciples, and His most solemn valedictory commission to all believers, it becomes very clear that believers who neglect or downplay the imperative of obedience to Christ's commission to preach the gospel to sinners do not please God.

"**Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?**" (Matthew 11:2,3). The question posed by John was one that carried the weight and importance of eternal consequences so far as it has to do with the identity of the Messiah. The knowledge of Christ's identity is too important to be neglected by any man. The Jews had long expected His coming. God Himself first spoke of the coming of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15) and later by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18), and was confirmed by the prophets in Scripture. Because of their lack of understanding and neglect of the Scripture, the Jews could not reconcile their wrong expectations concerning the Messiah with Christ's humiliation, humility, lack of pomp and finally crucifixion.

They expected, contrary to the Scripture, that the Messiah would manifest great external pomp and physical power. Even the disciples of Christ also manifested the same misconception about the manner and nature of His ministry at His first coming. However, the Old Testament Scripture "**...testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow**." (1 Peter 1:11). Christ Himself rebuked His disciples, "**O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?**" (Luke 24:25,26).

John the Baptist's question and Christ's comment

on it seem to show that John, in his prison experience, thought that Christ did not meet his interest and expectation. He therefore, sent to receive a reassurance. John's question throws up the importance of being conversant with what we may expect on this pilgrimage as children of God. If our expectations are informed by the truth of God's word, we may not feel disappointed or "**...think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try** [us]**, as though some strange thing happened unto** [us]" (1 Peter 4:12). The Baptist's question concerning Christ showcases the need for believers to have their minds and spirits constantly renewed by the word, to keep a lively faith always.

In response to his question, Christ sent back to John using the most reliable confirmation of His identity as the Messiah namely: the verifiable fulfilment of scriptural prophecies concerning Himself. "**Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me**" (Luke 7:22,23). John the Baptist knew that since the testimony of Christ's activities and ministry were according to specific prophecies in Scripture, that He was the long-expected Messiah (Isaiah 8:20).

INSPIRING TESTIMONY BY CHRIST CONCERNING JOHN (Matthew 11:7-15; Luke 7:24-29; John 1:36; Luke 16:16; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11; Matthew 14:3-10)

As soon as John's disciples departed to take the words of Christ to him, Christ turned to the crowd and poured praise and encomium on the Baptist. "**Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...**" (Matthew 11:11). Christ, by speaking so glowingly of John only after John's disciples had departed teaches us to avoid the common tendency of men, who in order to curry favour would flatter their fellow men always to their hearing. While He praised John, Christ did not want

those praises to be reported to John. Men are sometimes derailed by hearing their own praises. We may praise to encourage, but avoid situations and circumstances where such praises are likely to stir up vain glory and pride. On our part, we must not be so solicitous of the praise of men as to displease God or allow such praises to becloud our sense of fairness. Also, we should not see the praise of men as certificate of perfection, thereby, excluding self-examination and self-recrimination.

Christ's rhetorical question, "**What went ye out into the wilderness to see...?**" was meant to deliver compliment to John's ministry, which at the present time was ebbing. People flocked to hear John because his messages were fearless and embodied a godly conscience. As a true servant of God, John did not seek to please men (Galatians 1:10). The tractive force of truth drove men in their droves to him, even in the wilderness. Christ asserted that John was more than a prophet. He rated him highest "**Among them that are born of women**" (Matthew 11:11).

However, Jesus statement that "**...he that is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he**" shows that Christ's rating of John was not based on his personal character of eloquence or power of persuasion. It was based on his positional privilege as the prophesied forerunner of the Saviour.

Among the prophets, John was the only one who saw the Messiah and "**looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God**" (John 1:36). John's greatness was therefore, rooted in the proximity and incidence of his ministry to the manifestation of the Saviour that was promised from the foundation of the world. We should learn from this that our true greatness resides in our relation to Christ. The more intimate our fellowship with Him, the greater our position in the sight of God.

John's resolute preaching not only attracted large followers of sincere seekers but also won Christ's commendation because he stayed true to the call of God. He was not like a reed pandering to popular

applause. He would not be swayed even by the rage of Herod (Matthew 14:3-10). The more Christ-centred our preaching and the more Christlike our conduct, the more will be our true greatness in God's reckoning.

Christ testified to the exemplary life of John the Baptist for us to emulate. He had a relationship with God, godly parentage and heritage, was filled with the Spirit of God right from his mother's womb and he accepted God's ownership of his life (Luke 1:5,6,13-15,59-66,80). He was consistent in his walk with God. His ministry in the wilderness of Judea revealed his consecration and abstinence from worldly engagements (Luke 1:80). He was humble and expressed this when religious leaders thought he should be concerned about Christ's growing ministry. He said, "**He must increase, but I must decrease**" (John 3:30). He was a fiery, fearless and fruitful preacher of the Word (Matthew 3:1,2,5,6; Luke 3:3,7-9). "**He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light**" (John 5:35). He was so Christlike in life and ministry that "…**the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not**" (Luke 3:15).

However, the Lord also placed some limitations on His high commendation of John the Baptist; "**but he that is the least in the kingdom is greater than he.**" This implies that though John was great and good, he came short of the perfection of the least of triumphant saints, "**the spirits of just men** [already] **made perfect**", whose places in heaven are already eternally secured. Nothing, not even the great honour of announcing the arrival of the kingdom of heaven or teaching men how to press into it, can compare with our actual presence and participation in that eternal Kingdom.

"**And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force.**" The violence the Lord refers to here is a holy violence. He was alluding to a great influx of people into the kingdom of God which had its emergence in John's ministry, when he preached the imminence of the kingdom of God and called men to

repentance. Christ likened the large number of people pressing into the Kingdom to an army storming with violence into the city. The number and the vibrancy of the people's faith were not comparable to what obtained under the law and the prophets. "**The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it**" (Luke 16:16). John served the Lord till the point of death. His courageous rebuke of King Herod, who had snatched his brother's wife, is worthy of emulation. The heroic martyrdom of John the Baptist heralded his triumph and victory over sin, self, society and Satan, as the Scripture affirms, "**O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

INESCAPABLE REPROACH AND WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF (Matthew 11:16-30; Luke 7:30-35; Matthew 1:21; Jude 7; John 3:36)

Christ did not only commend John's ministry for the large harvest it yielded, and the foundation it laid to the full emergence of the gospel of salvation, He also berated those who would not allow themselves to benefit from the gospel because of unbelief. Those who did not embrace John as the forerunner of Christ would not be ready to own Christ as the promised Saviour. Christ denounced the people's unwillingness to be affected by any of the different appeals through which divine love sought to reach them. Christ illustrates the intransigence of men by a parable of children in their play, who would respond neither to the joy of piping nor the sombre call of mourning. Christ's parables set forth the different approaches to the same end, represented by Christ's and John's ministries. John's austere and secluded lifestyle fitted the message he preached but, it did not move them to repentance. On the other hand, Christ came eating and drinking, relating familiarly with all sorts of people, devoid of John's austere and strict lifestyle; yet, His approach would not bring them to the faith of the gospel. One would have thought that those who were put off by

John's reserved lifestyle would be endeared to Christ's inclusive friendliness and sociability. The Scribes and the Pharisees refused to accept either the forerunner or Christ. They accused the Baptist of being demon-possessed and Christ of gluttony and drunkenness.

However, Christ's claims and divine approval were verifiable in the unprecedented miracles He performed, the perfection of His life and the transformation His doctrine made in the lives of those who believed: "**...wisdom is justified of her children**" indeed. Though many in today's world refuse to acknowledge Christ as the Saviour sent by God to "**save his people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21), the holy lives of true believers provide eloquent testimony of the truth and the power of the grace of salvation in Christ.

In the days of Christ's earthly ministry, no city had more privilege of hearing His teachings than the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Caperneum. Notwithstanding, they stubbornly clove to their sinful ways in unbelief. The Lord warned that those cities that rejected Him would, on the judgment day, receive worse punishment than Tyre and Sidon or Sodom and Gomorrah, cities which were "**set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire**" (Jude 7). Unbelief or the refusal to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour will give men over to the torment of eternal burnings (John 3:36).

To escape God's judgment, everyone must heed Christ's call to "**Come unto me**", repent of sin, receive Him as Saviour and thereafter, continue to learn from Him on how to please God and live with Him in heaven forever.

Questions for review:

1. State the attributes Christ commended in John the Baptist's life.
2. Explain why believers' love and obedience to Christ and their knowledge of the eternal fate of sinners should compel them to win souls.
3. How can we dispel doubts and uncertainties on important truths and prevent errors and

misunderstanding arising from our earthly experiences?

4. What can believers learn from the all-surpassing greatness which John's ministerial relation to Christ confers on him?
5. Based on Christ's rating of the least in the kingdom of heaven above the greatest of men, what should be the attitude of sinners and believers to the gospel?
6. How can a sinner escape the everlasting torments of hell?
7. Why was John a bright and shining light?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 SAMUEL 15 - 16
MONDAY:	1 SAMUEL 17 - 18
TUESDAY:	1 SAMUEL 19 - 20
WEDNESDAY:	1 SAMUEL 21 - 22
THURSDAY:	1 SAMUEL 23 - 24
FRIDAY:	1 SAMUEL 25 - 26
SATURDAY:	1 SAMUEL 27 - 29

Lesson 23

CHRIST'S TEACHING ON THE SABBATH

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:11,12).

TEXTS: Matthew 12:1-21; Luke 6:1-16; 13:10-17

The sacredness of the Sabbath and its relevance in the New Testament dispensation has engaged the attention of Christians in contemporary times. While a school of thought denies any obligation to the Sabbath's observance by New Testament believers, another school profess continued relevance of it. It is important as believers to study the Scriptures with sincere heart and willingness to understand its nuggets, and stay within the confines of the Holy Writ.

The Sabbath dates back to the time of creation when God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh (Genesis 2:2,3). God intended the principle of one day of rest in every seven to be followed by man when He commanded through Moses that: "**...To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning**" (Exodus 16:23). During their forty-year wilderness journey, the Israelites were required to gather on the sixth day "**twice as much bread...**" in order to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 16:22). God later entrenched

the law of Sabbath in the Decalogue as the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). The Sabbath was dedicated for worship and rest from labour. The sacredness of the Sabbath was one of the unique identification marks of the Jewish nationality during the long stretch of their history and it was a glad reminder of their perpetual covenant with God. The prophets of the Old Testament often reminded the Jews of the fourth commandment, the neglect of which was regarded as an indication of spiritual backsliding (Isaiah 58:13,14; 56:4-7).

As time went by however, Jewish teachers and leaders imposed many other restrictions to be observed on the Sabbath, having lost sight of the divine purpose of the law. For example, it became a crime to carry about anything on the Sabbath or to walk more than 2,000 cubits (about 2 kilometres) on the Sabbath day. While they applied the moral laws loosely, they became fanatical and hypocritical on ceremonies and observance of the Sabbath to the detriment of the good of man and glory of God. The Lord therefore, inspired His prophets to denounce their evil. "**Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths... I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts**" (Isaiah 1:13; Hosea 2:11). The misapplication of this law even at the time of Christ underpins the events in the texts being studied.

The incidents in our text provide a good opportunity to learn from the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine intention and what should be the believer's attitude towards the Sabbath. Because He gave the law in the first place, Christ is the most qualified to rightly interpret the same.

CONTROVERSY OF THE PHARISEES WITH CHRIST'S DISCIPLES (Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5; Matthew 23:23; Psalm 19:7,8; 1 Samuel 21:6; Leviticus 24:5-9)

"**At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through**

the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:1,2). The Pharisees omitted the weightier matters of the law – judgment, mercy and faith and became self-appointed watchdogs of the observance of Sabbath. In spite of the rigid observance of restrictive rules on movement and behaviour, they would feel compelled to lift up their animal that fell into a ditch or even take them out for grazing and circumcise their male children on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:11,12; Luke 13:14-16; John 7:21-23). It is obvious that their ignorance interwove with hypocrisy as they turned law which was intended to refresh man's spirit and body into a tool of malevolent vindictiveness. Thus, they used it widely against Christ and His followers (Matthew 12:1-12; Mark 1:21-27; 2:23-28; 3:1-7; Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-9; 7:22,23; 9:1-16).

The law of Moses permitted the Israelites who are hungry to help themselves with grains from their neighbours' fields, as long as they did not use the sickle nor carry the grains away in a container (Deuteronomy 23:24,25). The quarrel was therefore not with stealing corn. In the scribes and Pharisees' strict interpretation, the picking of the grain was equivalent to harvesting corn; rubbing it in their hands was adjudged as threshing and separating the grain from the chaff as winnowing. Whenever the loving purpose of God's commandment is misunderstood, men will either live in self-hurting disobedience or their so-called obedience will degenerate into mere soulless, hollow and sterile formalism that neither glorify God nor serve the welfare of man.

The formalistic adherence to the letters and the neglect of the true spirit of divine laws and ordinances has their manifestations in many ways today. Many people attend church but are not born again; others think that giving material donations to religious bodies and projects can assuage their sins before God. Outward forms of religion without transformation of life and

character through faith in Christ displease God.

In defending the actions of His disciples, Christ referred to an incident in the life of David, when he and his distraught men ate the shewbread which was normally reserved for the priesthood only. Christ inferred that such acts of dire necessity on the Sabbath were justified before God. The Lord also reminded the Pharisees that the priests in the temple on the Sabbath did servile works such as killing and burning sacrifices which ordinarily would have been regarded as an infraction of the fourth commandment. Such works done on a Sabbath were justified on grounds of the demands of temple service. If temple service was a justification for the priests to do servile work on the Sabbath, the service of Christ would more rightly justify what the disciples attending to Him did on the Sabbath. The temple was the symbol of God's presence, the meeting point between God and man, the place of instruction in piety and righteousness. Christ is the express Image of God. Like the Pharisees of old, many today have left the substance of true worship; namely, the reverence of God and true righteousness in Christ while chasing empty shadows of formalistic religious observances. From the response of Jesus, we learn that He justified the action of the disciples who were on the path of duty. Believers should carry out their actions within the confines of the law of God whether they are maligned or not.

Throughout the Scripture, Christ performed many miracles of mercy, forgiveness and healing on the Sabbath. God intended the Sabbath to be dedicated for His worship and glory, not for mundane, commercial and fleshly concerns. The Lord's Day should not become a day of idle or selfish pursuit of our own pleasure and material gains (Isaiah 58:13,14). New Testament believers observe worship service on the first day of the week, scripturally called the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). This is patterned after Christ and the early Church. One, Jesus resurrected triumphantly from the grave on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7). By this singular action, the Lord exalted the finished work of grace above the religion of Jewish

Sabbath worship. Two, Christ's post-resurrection manifestations to His disciples were on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1,13-15; John 20:1,19,26). Three, the Holy Ghost chose the first day of the week to fill the 120 disciples in the upper room with power for service. The Holy Ghost descended on the day of Pentecost which was the first day after seven Jewish Sabbaths (Acts 2:1-4; Leviticus 23:15-21). Four, the early Church kept the first day of the week as the day of worship (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9; John 20:1,19,26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). Five, Jesus had a remarkable encounter with John the beloved at the isle of Patmos and gave him Revelation on the first day of the week (Revelation 1:10). Christ and His apostles in their sermons and exhortations spoke on the believers' freedom to worship anytime and anywhere (Matthew 12:1-8; Romans 14:5,6; Colossians 2:16).

Christ declared that He had not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17-19). As a result, the New Testament believer is expected to maintain a godly and devotional attitude in the observance of the Lord's Day (Isaiah 58:13; Psalm 118:24; Exodus 20:8,9; Acts 20:7; Psalm 100:1). The Lord's Day must not be profaned by engaging in business either by selling or employing others to do the same except in a case of strict necessity and charity (Exodus 20:9; Matthew 12:12). We should observe it with a solemn attitude of looking forward to the heavenly rest (Hebrews 4:9-11).

CONFIRMATION ON THE LAWFULNESS OF WORKS OF MERCY ON THE SABBATH (Luke 6:6-10; Matthew 12:9-21; Luke 13:10-17; Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 10:24,25; Galatians 1:10)

"**And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him**" (Luke 6:6,7).

Christ healed the man with a withered right hand, the "**woman which had a spirit of infirmity**" and performed other miracles on the Jewish Sabbath day (John 5:5-9; 9:6-14). He did them in a manner so unabashedly contrary to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. His intention, no doubt, was to free the fourth commandment from all the falsehood and corruption forced on it by the Jewish religious leaders. "**Think not that that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil**" (Matthew 5:17). His rhetorical question, "**Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?**" and His rebuke to those at the healing of the woman with the spirit of infirmity reveals non-prohibition of good works or acts of mercy. Works of mercy to end human suffering or distress are lawful on the Sabbath. It was also an appeal to their consciences and compassion upon their fellow men. Christ's healing of the sick, in spite of the heartless opposition of the scribes and Pharisees, teaches us not to be deterred from pleasing God by the opposition we encounter from men, "**...for if** [we] **yet please men** [we] **should not be the servant**[s] **of Christ**" (Galatians 1:10). His purposeful action to redeem the Sabbath law from corruption implies that He wants it to be observed by His Church. There would have been no need for Christ to explain the correct application of a law which was to end with the Old Testament dispensation.

Christ's presence in the synagogue every Sabbath day is also very instructive. One of the reasons "**the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it**" is to promote His worship in a public assembly. As believers, we are enjoined not to forsake "**...the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...**" God's word administered on the Christian Sabbath day refreshes, heals and enlightens us in our walk with Him. Besides public worship, it provides opportunity for both private congregational prayers and fellowship.

Man is terribly incapacitated by sin and sickness. The soul of a natural man is dead in sins and trespasses. It is only by the power of the grace of Christ that we are

transformed, empowered and enabled to become useful to God, ourselves and others. Like those healed in the text, we must respond to Christ's offer of redemption through obedience and faith. The universal command to all is: "**Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28).

After the healing of the man with a withered hand, the scribes and Pharisees "**were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus**" (Luke 6:11). Christ, on His part, went into a private prayer. "**For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer**" (Psalm 109:4). Christ prayed to renew His spiritual power to respond to the threat of the scribes and Pharisees, and to be guided on the important task of selecting His disciples. The Lord invites us to "**come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need**" (Hebrews 4:16).

CHRISTIAN SABBATH ON THE LORD'S DAY (Luke 6:5; John 20:1,19,26; Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10; Hebrews 4:9)

The Hebrew word "shabbath" which is translated as "Sabbath" means repose or cessation from work, not "seventh". It is the cessation from work that makes a day Sabbath; it has even been observed on different days other than the seventh (Leviticus 23:39). Moreover, Sabbaths in the Scripture have been of different durations, such as one day as it is in Exodus 16:23-29, two days in Leviticus 23:6-8, one year in Leviticus 25:4, seventy years in 2 Chronicles 36:21 and for eternity in Hebrews 4:9,10.

The Christian Sabbath is the first day of the week which the early believers called the "Lord's Day". "**I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet**" (Revelation 1:10). Most landmark events in the New Testament church were delivered on the first day of the week. These include: one, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:1). As the first creation by God was commemorated

by the seventh day Sabbath, so the new creation in Christ was commemorated on the first day Sabbath. Two, Christ met with His disciples on the next two Lord's days (John 20:19,26). Three, the Holy Spirit was given on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1). Four, the early disciples met on the first day of the week to break bread in remembrance of the Lord's death and resurrection. Five, the first day of the week was appointed by God for Christians to set funds aside for God's work (1 Corinthians 16:2).

From Christ's teaching, the prohibition of work on the Lord's Day does not apply to the service of God, deeds of necessity or mercy. The ritualistic ceremonial observance of the Sabbath which some Jews sought to introduce into the early Church was not commanded for the New Testament believers. "**Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days**" (Colossians 2:16). Christians do not earn salvation by keeping the Lord's Day. Rather, it is a day of devotion to the One who gave Himself for us. The resurrection of Christ marks a new beginning for mankind, and the Lord's Day, the first day of the week is a symbol of the new beginning.

Questions for review:

1. Why did God give the Sabbath as a law in the Old Testament?
2. Why is it important to understand the intention and purpose of divine commandments?
3. What major principles relating to the observance of the fourth commandment did Christ lay down by His defence of His disciples?
4. What practices are forbidden by God on the Lord's Day?
5. Explain how anyone can benefit from Christ's redemptive work.
6. Explain why Christians observe the first day of the week for worship and rest.
7. How does the Sabbath affect New Testament saints?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 SAMUEL 30 - 31
MONDAY:	2 SAMUEL 1 - 2
TUESDAY:	2 SAMUEL 3 - 5
WEDNESDAY:	2 SAMUEL 6 - 7
THURSDAY:	2 SAMUEL 8 - 10
FRIDAY:	2 SAMUEL 11 - 12
SATURDAY:	2 SAMUEL 13 - 14

WARNING AGAINST EVIL SPEAKING

MEMORY VERSE: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37).

TEXTS: Matthew 12:22-50; Luke 11:14-36

Christ's earthly ministry drew multitudes of sinful, sick and oppressed folks who were saved, healed and delivered. As it were, these miracles of mercy always drew the anger of the Jewish religious leaders of His day. The Pharisees' envy and hatred made them unwilling to receive the divine blessings or acknowledge His ministry as divine. Rather, they deliberately and maliciously spoke evil of Jesus and the Holy Ghost who empowered His ministry. Not satisfied with that alone, they also sought signs of divine approval from the Lord for the work He was doing. Jesus then drew the attention of His hearers to the danger of the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Ghost as well as hypocritical sign-seeking. The study therefore, warns all to refrain from speaking evil to avoid committing the unpardonable sin and prescribes the attitude God expects of all.

DANGER INHERENT IN SPEAKING EVIL (Matthew 12:22-37; Luke 11:14-23; Hebrews 6:4; 10:26; 1 Peter 3:10; Numbers 12:1-10; 1 Samuel 25:4-11,38; 2 Kings 7:1,2,16-20; Jude 15)

On one of the occasions when the Lord Jesus preached in the synagogue, people brought to Him a

man that was possessed with a blind and dumb spirit; and immediately, the Lord healed him. While the people wondered at the demonstration of such power, the Pharisees were unwilling to acknowledge such divine manifestation; rather, they attributed the healing to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Why did the Pharisees resort to this blasphemy? One, they were envious of the power of Jesus. Their own religion was in outward form only, hence could not attract divine power and approval such as manifested in the ministry of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Bible warns against "**Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...**" (2 Timothy 3:5). Two, they were gripped with the mortal fear of losing their followership among the Jews, their prestige and leadership position in Israel to Jesus (John 11:48). Believers are to beware of position-seeking in the church. Some engage in character assassination in order to unseat others from privileged position so they can take their place. Three, they were equally afraid of losing the perks and privileges attached to their office. We are not to serve the Lord for pecuniary purposes, but be contented with what the Lord has given us. We must yield ourselves totally to serve the Lord who has promised: "**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee**" (Hebrews 13:5).

The Lord refuted the allegation of using the power of the devil by making them understand that if He were from the devil, He would not be destroying his works, and that it was actually the power of the Holy Spirit that was at work in His ministry. He therefore, warned that blasphemy against Him would be forgiven, but that against the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven "**...neither in this world, neither in the world to come**" (Matthew 12:32).

Blasphemy refers to speaking evil of, insulting or cursing God. In the Old Testament, it was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:14-16). Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven: eternal damnation awaits culprits. Why is this so? The Holy Spirit is the One who enlightens the mind of people so that they can come to God. When people deliberately close their minds to the

influence of the Holy Spirit or attribute to Him the power of demons, how can such receive illumination that they can be saved? For blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to occur, it must be a deliberate contemptible action. The Pharisees, in their sober moments, knew that Jesus came from God and that the power He exercised was from Him. Nicodemus, the Pharisee that came to Jesus privately to ask Him question said, "**we** [Pharisees] **know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him**" (John 3:2). So it was a deliberate act on their part to attribute the power of God to demons. As believers, we are warned against evil speaking.

Speech or ability to speak is a faculty given by God. The Lord created the tongue to be used for good and not for evil. Everyone can decide to use it for good or for evil (Proverbs 18:21). The unregenerate speak evil because that is their nature. Jesus taught that, "**For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh**" (Luke 6:43-45). But we should know that "**every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned**" (Matthew 12:36,37).

It should be sobering to think that God listens to all that men speak and records all idle words. All useless or unprofitable words, dirty jokes, slander, blasphemy, curses, railing, hard and vulgar speeches and other unprofitable words will be requited by God. The consequences of evil speaking are dire. Just like the fornicator will be judged for misusing the body, the slanderer, flatterer, backbiter, deceiver, imprecator or one who abuses will face the judgment of God for misusing the tongue. "**Whoso keepeth his mouth and**

his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23). Miriam got into trouble through backbiting: she became leprous. A lord on whose hand the king leaned lost his life through unguarded speech (2 Kings 7:1,2,16-20). What then is the way out? The sinner should seek regeneration and be saved. Also, believers need to be sanctified. The sanctified heart will not utter corrupting or evil words because the thoughts are pure. Another antidote to evil speaking is meditating on the word of God. The Bible makes us to understand that the word of God is pure (Proverbs 30:5). Besides, we need to pray that God should help us sieve the thoughts or ideas that come to mind before speaking them out. In the natural, raw materials are processed before they become useful; useless and unwanted parts are thrown away. The same goes for thoughts that come to our minds; they must be processed using the filter of the Holy Spirit and the word of God. Only a fool utters all that come into his mind (Proverbs 29:11). The Scripture instructs us to "**be swift to hear, slow to speak**" (James 1:19). The right prayer in this regard is, "**set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips**" (Psalm 141:3). It is also important to ask some rhetorical questions before uttering anything: Will this glorify God? Will it minister grace to the hearers? Will it edify the individual? Can I say it if the Lord were physically present? Is what I want to say true or of good report (Philippians 4:8)? Silence is golden if the answers to these questions are negative.

Everyone who has spoken evil must repent and make necessary restitution. There must also be a firm resolve to refrain and resist every temptation to speak evil.

DENUNCIATION OF SIGN-SEEKING (Matthew 12:38-45; Luke 11:29-32; Deuteronomy 13:1-11; Mark 13:22,23)

The Pharisees sought proof or sign that Jesus came from God by saying, "**Master, we would see a sign from thee**" (Matthew 12:38). Jesus rebuked their unbelief. Describing them as an evil and adulterous generation,

He told them that no other sign would be appropriate than that of Jonah. As Jonah was in the whale's belly for three days and three nights, He would also be buried and resurrect on the third day. Christ's resurrection is the greatest sign God has shown to humanity about His love and power to save, heal and deliver.

The Bible warns against sign-seeking as that can lead to deception. There are agents of the devil who show signs to deceive and "**seduce, if it were possible, even the elect**" (Revelation 13:11-14; Mark 13:22). The word of God is superior to signs; it abides forever. Truly, God performs miracles so that people can believe (John 4:48). He however does not want us to hinge our faith on signs but on His word, which is "**a more sure word of prophecy**" (2 Peter 1:19).

We should know that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is an incontrovertible proof of His Sonship. It affirms the fact that it is He whom God has chosen to judge the dead and the living at His appearing and His kingdom (Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1). It is an assurance to the believer that they too will resurrect to die no more. It is the bedrock of the Christian faith. To show that the Pharisees were never serious about believing Christ, when He resurrected on the third day, they gave money to soldiers guarding His tomb to lie that it was His disciples that came to steal Him (Matthew 28:11-13). Many religions today deny the resurrection of Christ. All believers must affirm the truth, "**that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures**" (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). This is the only truth that saves.

DIVINE APPROVAL FOR THE OBEDIENT (Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 11:24-28,33-36; Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 7:21-27)

"**While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.**" Someone in the audience called Jesus attention to the fact that His mother and brothers were

outside seeking to have audience with Him. He asked rhetorically, "**Who is my mother? And who are my brethren?**" He stretched forth His hand and declared, "**My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it**" (Luke 8:21). What the Lord says here underscores the fact that Kingdom relationship is unlike filial relationships. One retains his status as a child of his natural parents whether he obeys them or not. This is not so in the kingdom of God. Conversion, hearing and obeying God's word make us His children.

When the children of Israel "**...rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight**" (2 Kings 17:15,20). People who are unwilling to hear and obey the word of God deceive themselves by claiming that they are God's children. The Lord denounces people who "**...draweth nigh unto me with the mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me**" (Matthew 15:8). Many profess to love God but deny Him in their lifestyles at home, school, marketplace and office. It is when we do the will of God in all situations and circumstances that we are regarded as the children of God and serve as lights that lead others in darkness of sin to Christ.

Questions for review:

1. Why did the Pharisees speak evil of Christ and what can believers learn from that?
2. Highlight the danger of evil speaking.
3. What is the unpardonable sin in the Scripture?
4. What are the antidotes against evil speaking?
5. What is the danger in seeking signs instead of believing the word of God?
6. Who are those God regard as His children and why?

7. How can we guard against evil speaking?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 SAMUEL 15 - 16
MONDAY:	2 SAMUEL 17 - 18
TUESDAY:	2 SAMUEL 19 - 20
WEDNESDAY:	2 SAMUEL 21 - 22
THURSDAY:	2 SAMUEL 23 - 24
FRIDAY:	EPHESIANS 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	EPHESIANS 4 - 6

Lesson 25

SUNDRY PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

MEMORY VERSE: "**And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given**" (Matthew 13:10,11).

TEXT: **Matthew 13:1-58**

The ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ has been characterized by unwavering passion for sinners' salvation and edification of saints. He did not waste any moment or opportunity to declare the word of God and teach His followers the truth. During His lifetime, many people followed Him for different reasons which included healing, deliverance and material provision. However, there were sincere seekers who wanted to know more about the Kingdom. Following Christ should be for enduring purpose of the Kingdom and not for mundane things of this world which will perish with time. Therefore, as we eagerly follow Him, we should place priority on obedience to the word of God, not miracles. Also, like Christ, we are not only expected to meet the physical needs of those around us but also attend to their spiritual welfare. When Jesus saw great multitudes, He repositioned Himself in a place where He could teach effectively. "**And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore**" (Matthew 13:2). He employed parables in teaching them. Parables are earthly narratives or events which illustrate deep spiritual truth. Jesus taught with

many parables in the course of His earthly ministry, most of which we shall examine in this study.

REVELATION THROUGH CHRIST'S PARABLES (Matthew 13:1-9,18-33,36-50; Luke 13:6-9; John 4:34,35; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8)

Jesus taught with many parables based on the background and experiences of His audience. The parables were packed with eternal truths bordering on different aspects of believers' life. The parables associate into four categories namely, parables bordering on fruitfulness, parables bordering on preciousness of the gospel, parables bordering on the growth of the Kingdom and parables bordering on final separation in the Kingdom.

Parables bordering on fruitfulness include; the parables of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23) and that of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). The parable of the sower is plain. The farmer sows the seed which fell upon four different types of soil producing different results. The road side, rocky ground, thorny and the good soils represent different hearts of men in response to the seed which is the word of God. The road side soil represents those who hear the message, but do not understand it, thus allowing Satan to steal it from them. The rocky soil represents those who have no deep conviction and thus drop out upon encountering persecution or trouble. The thorny soil represents those who allow the cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches and lust to choke the word. The good soil represents those who sincerely accept God's word and bring forth abundant fruits in their lives.

God anticipates the fruit of repentance - fruit of the Spirit - in the lives of believers, as well as fruits of righteousness and soul-winning (Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:22,23; Romans 6:22; Proverbs 11:30).

The parable of the hidden treasure and that of the merchant seeking goodly pearls emphasize the preciousness of the things of the kingdom of God. The hidden treasure illustrates the fact that the kingdom of God should be sought after at every cost. In other words,

no sacrifice should be too great for us to make in order to be a partaker of the Kingdom. Although salvation and other Christian experiences are free and by grace, we must consecrate and pay the necessary price before we can obtain and retain them.

The parables of mustard seed and the leaven illustrate the inherent power in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though Christ started the Church in a small way with few disciples, the influence and the effect of the gospel is currently global. This is in consonance with His word that: "**...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18). The lesson from this is that the kingdom of God will grow and expand when believers evangelize. As believers, we are expected to influence the world for Christ through the power of the gospel and indwelling Spirit.

The last set of parables focuses on the final separation in the Kingdom at the end of the world. The parable of the wheat and tares explains a farmer who planted good seeds in his field, but later learnt that his enemy secretly sowed tares among the wheat. He knew that if he attempted to pull out the tares, he would also destroy the wheat. Consequently, he had to wait until harvest time when the wheat will be sorted out from the midst of the tares. The tares will then be gathered and burnt. Jesus gave a clear interpretation of this parable. The sower is Christ while the enemy is the devil. The field is the world and the good seeds are believers. The tares are unbelievers. While the harvest is the end of the world, the reapers are the angels.

The parable of the net that was cast into the sea which gathered all kinds of creatures is similar in meaning to that of the tares. Christ presents the world as the sea and men like the mixture of the good and bad. The net represents the gospel which has the power to catch different men. As the fishermen sorted the good from the bad, so shall it be at the end of the world. True believers will be separated from sinners, backsliders and hypocrites. They will reign eternally with Christ in heaven while evil doers will be cast into hell where they

shall suffer forever.

A song writer captures it thus:
There's a great day coming, a great day coming,
There's a great day coming by and by;
When the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left;
Are you ready for day to come?

Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for the judgment day?
Are you ready? Are you ready?
For the judgment day?

REASONS FOR CHRIST'S PARABLES (Matthew 13:10-17,34,35; 11:25,26; Mark 4:33,34; Luke 8:10; Psalm 25:8,9,14; Isaiah 6:9,10)

"**And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?**" The response of our Lord Jesus Christ to this question reveals why He taught in parables. For the disciples, He spoke to them in parables because thereby, the truth of the Kingdom was made plain. Jesus knows sincere seekers, and would spare no effort at making bare to them the mysteries of the gospel. Receptivity and adherence to the revealed word of God open doors for more revelation and understanding. The gift of God's word bestows on the hearers the responsibility to live thereby.

However, speaking in parables which was meant to be a blessing for sincere seekers, became an instrument of obscurity of the truth to the hypocrites and rebellious. Jesus identified three reasons people do not benefit from the teachings of God's word: "**For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them**" (Matthew 13:15). The three reasons include: hardened hearts, dull ears and closed eyes.

Believers must therefore, consider it a privilege to have the word of God taught and exposed to them. Christ said, "**...blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them**" (Matthew 13:16,17).

RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S PARABLES (Matthew 13:51-58; 15:15; Luke 8:9)

"**Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.**" Jesus asked a pertinent question at the end of His parable, showing that He is concerned not only about our hearing the word but more importantly, our understanding of it. Believers should spare no effort to read and understand God's word. This is because obedience is impossible without understanding. Preachers of the Word should take a cue from Christ. They should endeavour to help their listeners understand the word of God and be ready to answer their questions. That Christ asked them if they understood these things shows He was still willing to teach them again, if necessary.

The disciples' response in the affirmative to Christ's question shows that they had a perfect understanding of the teaching. Likewise, believers should enhance their understanding of the Scripture by asking questions and seeking counsel when necessary from God-approved leaders who believe in the totality of His word. The disciples demonstrated the desire to know more by asking Christ to declare plainly the meaning of His parables. This depicts healthy appetite and hunger for God's word. This is the response that God expects from sincere seekers today. The Bible says, "**Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**" (Matthew 5:6).

Meanwhile, Jesus said, "**...every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a**

man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." Here, Christ presents a skilful, faithful minister of the gospel as a scribe who is well versed in the things of the gospel and able to teach the followers. The Lord compares him to a good householder. Our place is at Christ's feet, and we must daily review lessons on the journey and learn new ones. Also, we should make proper use of what we learn from the Scripture and faithful ministers of the gospel. Those who neglect Christ's message or that of His faithful servants because of familiarity or unbelief will miss His blessings; and they will not escape God's judgment except they repent.

Questions for review:

1. Why should believers value hearing the truth of the word of God more than seeking after miracles?
2. What are the causes of unfruitfulness in the hearers of God's word?
3. What can one do to obtain the hidden treasure of the kingdom of God?
4. What is a parable?
5. Explain the parable of the tares.
6. As hearers and teachers of the Word, what is the place of clear understanding of God's word?
7. What will be the end of sinners and those who fail to heed Christ's warning?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PHILIPPIANS 1 - 4
MONDAY:	COLOSSIANS 1 - 4
TUESDAY:	1 KINGS 1 - 2
WEDNESDAY:	1 KINGS 3 - 4
THURSDAY:	1 KINGS 5 - 7
FRIDAY:	1 KINGS 8
SATURDAY:	1 KINGS 9 - 10

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

MEMORY VERSE: "And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother" (Matthew 14:10,11).

TEXT: Matthew 14:1-13

This text gives account of the martyrdom of John the Baptist. The ministry of John had effectively prepared the way for Jesus Christ as prophet Isaiah had earlier prophesied: "**The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God**" (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4). As the ministry of Jesus increased, that of John the Baptist was gradually coming to an end. But the focus of this study is on the death of John the Baptist and his burial. Death is certain for every man, except for believers who will go to meet the Lord during the rapture. There is no need to fear or worry because of death; rather, we should be adequately prepared such that whenever and however God allows us to die, we shall enter eternal bliss with Him. Genuine experiences of salvation and holy living are necessary for anyone to face death triumphantly. However, the Scripture holds a message of comfort to those who are bereaved of their loved ones who died in Christ. Regardless of how they died, the Lord will bring them again at the rapture. But those who died in unbelief or a backslidden state have no hope. That is the more reason we ought to preach the gospel and intercede earnestly until our relatives and loved ones get saved.

JESUS' PERVADING INFLUENCE AND HEROD'S MISCONCEPTION (Matthew 14:1,2; Mark 6:14-16; 7:37; Luke 9:7-9; John 3:30)

The ministry of Jesus Christ which started humbly eventually reached everywhere in Palestine and beyond. Many who received His miracles and those who were exposed to His teachings helped spread the fame of His good works far and near. John had earlier prophesied concerning the ministry of Jesus that "**He must increase**" and truly, He did with the gospel. The gospel which is compared to a mustard seed and yeast has great power to expand the kingdom of God. Believers should not despise the day of small beginnings. Preaching to small congregations who appear not to be making expected progress should be encouraged. The sending out of Christ's disciples to various towns and villages doubtless contributed to making Him known in the country. The news of His extraordinary ministry soon got to Herod's hearing. This teaches that the great value of publicity cannot be over-emphasised in gospel work.

Publicity is the dissemination of information to the public so that they can respond and take necessary action. The brethren of Jesus, though sarcastically, made a valid statement on publicity. They said: "**For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world**" (John 7:4). The gospel is like a lit candle which must not be kept under a bushel but on the candlestick so that others can see and benefit from it. The great wonders that God is performing in the church should be heralded everywhere so that more people can be drawn to know the Lord and put their trust in Him.

The fame of Jesus was eventually brought to the palace. While the identity of those who brought the news was not revealed, it was nonetheless a good thing. Our goal in gospel work is to make Christ and not ourselves known.

"**At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus**" (Matthew 14:1). This passage identifies Herod

the tetrarch, also known as Herod Antipas. The title 'tetrarch' signified a person who ruled over a fourth part of a country; but it was applied to governors who ruled under the Roman Empire. Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the great, the king who ruled Palestine at the time Jesus Christ was born. After the death of Herod the great, his three sons shared the kingdom. Archelaus took the southern and central regions (Judea and Samaria), Herod Antipas took the northern part and eastern Jordan area (Galilee, Decapolis, and Perea), while Herod Philip took charge of Ituraea and Trachonitis (Luke 3:1).

Herod Antipas divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias who was the wife of his brother, Philip, but John the Baptist rebuked him for this wrong marriage. Violation of God's standards on marriage must not be condoned in the church. Like John, preachers should be fearless and unapologetic in declaring God's holy standard and rebuking those who go into unscriptural union. John the Baptist was bold in confronting Herod with his sin even though he was imprisoned and later killed as a result. But it is far better to die for the truth than to live in cowardice.

The information concerning Christ's ministry got to the hearing of Herod Antipas and his response revealed several lessons. One, the information reactivated Herod's memory of his cruel treatment of John the Baptist. Here, we see the power of a violated conscience at work. Though John was killed, the conscience of Herod would not let him rest. Sooner or later, all the deeds of men shall be brought to remembrance and judged at the end of time. Even before the final judgment, the violated conscience of sinners and backsliders will trouble them because there is no peace for the wicked. Two, he erroneously ascribed the work of Jesus to John. Our impression of Jesus and His ministry will affect our response to Him. Some people took Jesus for a mere prophet and as a result, they failed to obtain His benefits of salvation. Jesus is not just a miracle worker but the Saviour of mankind. Three, Herod confessed to the reality of resurrection. In this

regard, he was better than the Sadducees who say that "**there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit**". Four, Herod had a wrong knowledge of scriptural resurrection. He believed in reincarnation whereby a previously dead person will come back to life embodied in another form.

The idea of reincarnation is not scriptural. The doctrine of purgatory is also not rooted in Scripture. The Bible teaches that, "**it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27). There will be resurrection of the just and unjust. The just will resurrect to eternal life (not to post-humous ministry) while the unjust will be damned.

Although Herod's conscience was definitely troubled at the news of Jesus and His mighty works, it is sad that he did not repent of his wrong deeds. At best, he had remorse. It is not enough to merely hear the word of God; we must give the "**more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip**". Hearing instructions without appropriate response will eventually lead to hardness of heart.

JOHN'S IMPRISONMENT AND TRAGIC DEATH
(Matthew 14:3-13; Mark 6:17-29; Luke 9:9; Ecclesiastes 3:1,2; Exodus 20:13; Proverbs 15:12; Isaiah 29:20,21)

"**For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.**" The narrative of John's martyrdom is here presented with the attendant lessons for the heaven-bound pilgrim. John was a fearless and famous preacher. He confronted Herod with his adulterous marriage to Herodias; and for that, he was imprisoned. Herod had earlier thought of John as a just man and holy, but his lust for Herodias corrupted his sound conviction and would not allow him to repent or make necessary restitution. Sin hardens the heart and turns a person from the path of sound judgment. Herod heard John gladly and "**did many things**" but the only thing needful for salvation he failed to do. He was obedient

only in part to John's mentoring as he did not correct his wrong marriage to Herodias. That failure to separate from an illegal marriage partner gave the opportunity for the woman to plot the death of John. God expects total obedience to all His laws. "**For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all**" (James 2:10).

The reproving message of John did not go down well with Herodias. It was odious to her and the king. Herod's marriage to Herodias was unlawful because it negates God's law that states, "**Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness**" (Leviticus 18:16). Apostle Paul said: "**So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man**" (Romans 7:3). God still keeps the sanctity of marriage.

The ungodly detest reproof. Therefore, it was no surprise that Herod and Herodias had serious hatred for John because they loved their sinful relationship. Consequently, she looked for an opportunity to kill John. Preachers of truth should not be discouraged by the negative reaction of their hearers. According to the Scripture, having itching ears is one of the signs of the end-time.

Herod's immediate reaction to John's rebuke was to lay hold on him and put him in prison. He treated him like a common criminal. Remember that Jesus was also unjustly treated and humiliated. Therefore, believers who are suffering unjustly should take solace in God.

On the day the king celebrated his birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced so well that Herod was pleased with her. He then made a rash promise, with an oath, asking her to request anything she wanted, even up to half of the kingdom. Imagine such a promise to a young girl. The girl, having been counselled by her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist. To save his face, Herod decided to honour her request; he sent an executioner to behead John and gave it to the girl

who passed it on to her mother.

We should learn from Herod's mistake not to make rash promises. We must also beware lest we become bad models for our children like Herodias who counselled her daughter to make a wicked demand. Her influence was like that of Athaliah (2 Chronicles 22:2,3). Christian parents should not influence their children to do evil. But in a case where the parents are ungodly or backslidden, their godly children should not walk in their wicked counsels (Psalm 1:1).

It is necessary to also ponder on the result of the celebration of Herod's birthday and the tragic death of John the Baptist that was associated with it. Remember that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, also celebrated a birthday feast that was linked with the killing of his chief baker (Genesis 40:20-22). Carnal festivities promote all kinds of evil. Wild partying, revelling, drunkenness, lasciviousness, lusts and banqueting are associated with such sensual feasts and they are condemned in Scripture (1 Peter 4:3; Galatians 5:19-21). Worldly entertainments pervert the use of music and dancing. Some Christian assemblies engage in such sensual activities, and they consider them as evidence of revival. But these things actually promote carnality and deny worship the expected solemnity and orderliness.

After the death of John, his disciples took his body for burial and they went and told Jesus all that had happened. The disciples of John associated with him even at death. They showed their commitment and were not ashamed of their master even when it appeared evil had prevailed against their cause. They informed Jesus about his death. The reasons the disciples of John informed Jesus could be the following: one, John's ministry was connected to Christ's. He was a herald. Two, they possibly needed consolation by Christ. Three, to warn Jesus of possible danger to His life in view of His uncompromising ministry like that of John. Four, Jesus and John were relatives and also as a mark of respect for Jesus. Believers should learn to tell Jesus all their challenges because He is ever present to help

in time of trouble.

BELIEVERS' PERSECUTION IN PERSPECTIVE (Matthew 5:10-12,44; Psalm 119:86; John 15:20; Romans 12:14; 2 Timothy 3:12)

John the Baptist was a victim of cruel persecution for the sake of righteousness. He was imprisoned and martyred because he spoke the truth and stood for it. Believers are to be uncompromising in their stand for righteousness. We are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints. But in so doing, we must be prepared to face various kinds of persecution from those who hate the truth.

Persecution has been described by a writer as treating someone cruelly or unfairly especially because of their religious beliefs. The Scripture says: "**Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution**" (2 Timothy 3:12). Persecution dated back to when Cain persecuted Abel, his brother because his works were evil while that of Abel was good. Several reasons can be adduced for Christian persecution. However, it could come in form of ridicules, scorn, deprivation, physical harm or even death. Saints down the ages had suffered persecution. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour was also persecuted.

But we must maintain proper attitude during persecution. This includes forbearance (Matthew 5:38-42), mercy (Romans 12:20), love for persecutors (Matthew 5:44), expectation, hope, faith and realization that great reward awaits us from God. Blessed are those who endure persecution till the end because they will surely wear a crown. Therefore, those suffering persecution should commit their souls to God in well doing, be steadfast in the faith and expect eternal rewards.

Questions for review:

1. Why should believers not be afraid of death and how can a person face death triumphantly?
2. What is publicity and what are the forms and effects of good gospel publicity?

3. What is the stand of the Scriptures on reincarnation and what is the correct biblical teaching on resurrection?
4. What are the reasons for divorce and remarriage and what is God's attitude to such?
5. How can you define persecution?
6. What should be the believer's attitude during persecution?
7. How can we remain victorious during persecution?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 KINGS 11 - 12
MONDAY:	1 KINGS 13 - 14
TUESDAY:	1 KINGS 15 - 16
WEDNESDAY:	1 KINGS 17 - 18
THURSDAY:	1 KINGS 19 - 20
FRIDAY:	1 KINGS 21 - 22
SATURDAY:	2 KINGS 1 - 2

SECTION III

LESSON			PAGE
		OLD TESTAMENT	
27	-	Dinah's Defilement Avenged	210
28	-	Jacob Returns to Bethel	217
29	-	The Plot against Joseph	226
30	-	Judah's Moral Slip	234
31	-	Joseph's Interpretation of Dreams and His Elevation	242
32	-	Joseph's Encounter with his Brethren	248
33	-	Jacob Moves to Egypt	254
		NEW TESTAMENT	
34	-	Christ Feeds the Multitudes	261
35	-	Christ's Power over Nature	268
36	-	Christ Exalts God's Commandments over Tradition	274
37	-	Peter Confesses Christ	281
38	-	The Transfiguration of Christ	289
39	-	Christ Teaches on Forgiveness	296

DINAH'S DEFILEMENT AVENGED

MEMORY VERSE: "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall" (Genesis 49:5,6).

TEXT: Genesis 34:1-31

Sinful curiosity, careless wandering and quest to explore new grounds of friendship contrary to the Scripture have great and damnable consequences. Dinah's quest to see and interact with the daughters of the land, in a heathen nation, led to the incidence of defilement and the accompanying punitive genocide of innocent people in the text. The Scripture clearly states that "**...evil communications corrupt good manners**" (1 Corinthians 15:33). It will be absurd for people who have covenant relationship with God and live by His laws to have interest in or seek to imbibe the lifestyles of sinful people around them (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Wandering to and around people who have a low moral standard is deadly. Aside the exposure to defilement, wandering exposes the wanderer to the danger of kidnapping, ritual killing, armed banditry, cultism, harlotry and human trafficking. Wanderers are hardly innocent. "**And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not**" (1 Timothy 5:13). This study contains useful lessons on how to maintain moral chastity that

will help prevent similar incident of defilement and gruesome murder (Titus 2:5).

DANGEROUS EXPLORATION OF UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY (Genesis 34:1-4; Proverbs 7:6-27; Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Timothy 3:6; Titus 1:11; Luke 15:11-24; Psalm 140:5; 1:1-4; Proverbs 4:14,15)

Dinah was oblivious of the evil tendency in unregenerate hearts. Her visit was on the pretence of going "**to see the daughters of the land**". Recall that her father, Jacob who had just returned from Padanaram, was a wealthy and God-fearing man. Thus, it was not for want of food or any material need that she embarked on the strange adventure. In the process, Shechem, the son of Hamor and prince of the country of Canaan "**saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her**" (Genesis 34:2). A similar account in Proverbs 7:6-27 reveals the deadly present and eternal condemnation of wanderers.

Young people and strangers in a new environment are often prone to exploring new areas and interacting with people whose ways of life are different from theirs. It is curious that Dinah went on her exploration when her brothers were on the field shepherding their father"s flock. Perhaps, she felt nobody should limit her freedom of movement. Bitterly however, she learnt the benefit of parental tutelage/control and the truth that freedom has limits. Similarly, was for ungodly friendship that Samson lost his eyes and life prematurely. Careless visitation and unguided sightseeing are dangerous to believers in Christ (Proverbs 25:17). All members of the family should endeavour to make the home a haven for all.

The Scripture reveals that Satan inspires aimless wandering because it serves his purpose to steal, kill and destroy. He is a wanderer himself. "**And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered... From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it ...your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom**

he may devour" (Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8). He influences children to abandon their families and run from pillar to post; inspires carnal believers to move from one fellowship to another without settling down in one; causes the married to change marriage partners with or without cause; urges ministers who are not watchful to rove around in different ministries and churches just to waste their lives and talents and empowers false teachers and prophets to roam from house to house with damnable falsehood (Proverbs 21:16). Like the prodigal son, God expects every wanderer to return home. A songwriter aptly captures it thus: *Have you wandered away from your Father's care, Heavy-hearted and sad do you roam? There's a sweet gentle voice calling now to you – Wand'ring child, wand'ring child, O, come home.*

Observe that Shechem was not rebuked by his father for his evil deed probably because it was an acceptable practice for the prince to act with impunity. He even went further to ask his father to arrange for marriage with Dinah. Shechem and his people however learnt that sin will not go unpunished whether they are committed by the high or the low. It is detestable to sin against people who have come under our roof or land on the basis of our pledged hospitality as friends, acquaintances, visitors or house helps (Genesis 19:1-8). Christians must avoid careless visitation as it can lead to numerous other evils. It is ungodly to defile or be defiled before marriage.

MARRIAGE PROPOSAL AND DECEITFUL OFFER (Genesis 34:5-24; Deuteronomy 22:27-29; 7:1-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 1 Peter 2:9)

Jacob heard about what happened, held his peace and waited for his sons (Proverbs 18:13). Before the family of Jacob could come up with the next line of action, Hamor brought marriage proposal, not only between Dinah and Shechem but also for the people of Hamor and the children of Jacob. This meant intermarriage between heathens and the people of God.

Hamor highlighted the benefits that would accrue to his kinsmen by intermarrying with Jacob's family. Even Shechem promised to give whatever would be demanded to marry Dinah.

Here is a grand absorption scheme being orchestrated by Satan to terminate the covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whereas the patriarchs have been careful with the marriages of their sons because of their covenant with God, here comes a scheme to absorb or corrupt Israel. Some believers who are being tempted often fail to see the grand design of the enemy to frustrate the divine plan not only for them but also for their future generation. We need to watch and pray to see the larger picture of God's plan for our present and future life in order to escape the snare of the fowler. Marriage proposals from unconverted persons should not be accommodated by godly parents. Their father, the devil, is the adversary of God, His cause and people. However promising the union might be in terms of religious, economic and social benefits, we must not consider their proposal or propose to them.

The answer of the sons of Jacob in verse 14 should be the response of godly parents: "**And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us**". Parents who give their children to the unconverted, and godly children who go for the ungodly in marriage bring reproach to themselves and the household of faith (Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 1 Peter 2:9). Many Christian families and congregations are suffering from the plagues of mixed multitude occasioned by unequal yoke in marriage.

The sons of Jacob hatched a plan and offered the suitors a deceitful proposal. "**But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people**" (Genesis 34:15,16). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew the impropriety of their children marrying the uncircumcised and idolatrous inhabitants of the land.

The family of Hamor agreed to the terms of marriage given by the sons of Jacob. Since the proposal was for all the inhabitants of Canaan and not just for Shechem, the king used his position to influence his people to key into the scheme. It is obvious the ungodly would be willing to submit to any Christian rites to achieve their purpose. They can change church, dress and act like Christians, though without conversion, just to get what they want. Though the rite of circumcision was required to benefit from the Abrahamic covenant, that would not have made the Canaanites forsake their idols. So, those who promise to marry the ungodly on the condition that they join their congregation delude themselves by thinking they can profit from a relationship that God forbids (Galatians 6:7). Believers should examine all things in the light of the Bible and with the help of the Holy Spirit before doing them. Hamor's influence on his people brought them destruction. Hamor and Shechem did not escape the sword; so shall the sensual, deceivers and the deceived be judged. The wages of sin for all, both the high and the low, is death. Shechem did not know that his youthful exuberance, power to rape and enjoy sinful pleasure would lead to death and destruction of the entire city where he would have reigned later as the heir apparent. Sin terminates destiny.

BARBAROUS AND BLOODY ACTS UNDER THE SANCTION OF RELIGION (Genesis 34:25-31; 49:5-7; Psalm 1:1-4; Proverbs 4:14,15)

Shechem was wrong for their dealing with the daughter of a stranger who had dwelt with them for over seven years, thereby violating the rules of hospitality in the then world. Unknown to them however, the terms of intermarriage was designed to render them easy prey for massacre. "**And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and**

Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out" (Genesis 34:25,26). This genocide was barbaric and cruel.

When Jacob confronted Simeon and Levi, they justified their murderous and bloody act with the cloak of religion (Genesis 34:30,31). The dastardly act brought great distress to Jacob. "**And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house**" (Genesis 34:30). It is callous to commit genocide for the sin of one person. God is righteous and just. He did not spare Simeon and Levi for killing innocent people (Genesis 49:5-7). When Haman wanted to wipe out all Jews in Shushan because Mordecai who offended him was a Jew, God intervened because the punishment was not proportionate to the offence committed. Human life is sacred. Those who hide under religion or use it as cloak to perpetrate all kinds of evil, including murder, shall not escape the wrath of God except they repent.

Children of God should not tread the ensnaring path of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1-4; Proverbs 4:14,15). The events in this passage underscore how people lose precious blessings and virtue. Dinah lost her chastity while Simeon and Levi forfeited the covenant blessings Jacob would have pronounced on them on his dying bed. We must abide in holiness till the end lest we forfeit the promise of entering heaven. Sinners should repent and be saved to avoid perishing like Shechem and the inhabitants of the land who lost their lives.

Questions for review:

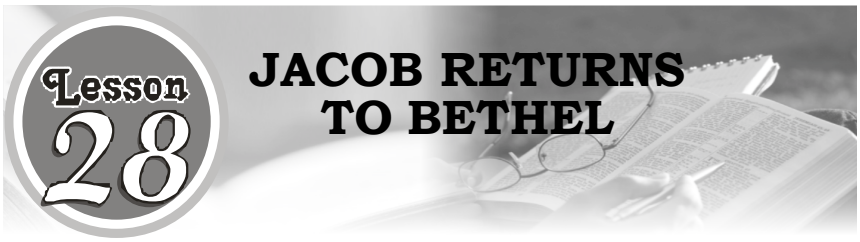
1. What can believers learn from Dinah's wandering?
2. Describe the guidelines for godly marriage.
3. How should believers treat marriage proposals of unbelievers?
4. What is the danger of unequal yoke in marriage?
5. Why was the act of the sons of Jacob condemned?

6. Give examples of useless visitations.
7. Why should Christian ladies be wise in the presence of unbelieving young men?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 KINGS 3 - 4
MONDAY:	2 KINGS 5 - 6
TUESDAY:	2 KINGS 7 - 8
WEDNESDAY:	2 KINGS 9 - 10
THURSDAY:	2 KINGS 11 - 13
FRIDAY:	2 KINGS 14 - 15
SATURDAY:	2 KINGS 16 - 17



MEMORY VERSE: "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother" (Genesis 35:1).

TEXT: Genesis 35:1-29; 36:1-43

The preceding chapter ended with the gruesome murder of the Canaanites by Simeon and Levi which brought great distress to Jacob, their father. He was perplexed by the heartless act and the consequent risk of extermination looming on his life and family (Genesis 34:30). While at crossroads, God commanded him to return to Bethel. Recall that Jacob made a vow of reciprocal devotion, worship and service to God at Bethel if He would preserve his life and provide for him while on self-imposed exile and flight from Esau. About twenty years later, he was reminded in a vision prior to leaving Padanaram that, "**I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred**" (Genesis 31:13). God expected that he would return to Bethel and promptly fulfil his vow. As it were, Jacob returned and dwelt in Shechem for many years without complying. The command to return to Bethel is, therefore, a solemn rebuke for delay in fulfilling his vow as well as a call to spiritual renewal and restoration to first love, fervency, devotion and faithfulness (Revelation 2:4,5; 3:15-19). These also apply to the present-day believer, as "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is**

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We must not delay or renege on fulfilling our vows to the Lord to avoid accompanying distress and afflictions (Jonah 2:9,10). However, God still rescues from trouble and afflictions when we repent and return to Him wholeheartedly. Thus, the text focuses on Jacob's return to Bethel and his unique encounter with God there.

JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD (Genesis 35:1-4; 28:1,2,5,10-22; Exodus 19:10,14; Joshua 24:15,18,21; 1 Samuel 7:3)

"**And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.**" Bethel is significant as a place of prayer, consecration, spiritual renewal and covenant with God. The command to return to Bethel and dwell there came with a reminder of a previous encounter. The Lord reminded Jacob of his vow at Bethel while in distress when he fled from his brother, Esau. Jacob had promised that: "**...If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee**" (Genesis 28:20-22). The Lord who is always faithful to His word answered his prayer. Jacob had been given not only bread and raiment but an estate; he had become two bands (Genesis 32:10; 33:1,2,5,11).

While the Lord had performed His part of the bargain, we have no record of Jacob performing his. The Scripture affirms the sinfulness of making a vow or consecration to the Lord and reneging on the same. "**When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for**

he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed" (Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4). The Lord knows the danger that human beings face when they get so enamoured with material prosperity that they forget the Source of their wealth. Hence, He warned the children of Israel to beware "**when thou ... have eaten and be full... lest thou forget the LORD**" (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). Jacob, the fugitive who once had a stone for his pillow, was now a man of great wealth, having flocks and herds, camels and asses (Genesis 28:11; 32:5,13-15). He became so preoccupied with the care of his estate and wealth at the expense of his relationship with God. If anything, divine benevolence is designed to elicit gratitude and commitment from recipients. No one or thing merits our devotion or should be given priority above getting connected and maintaining our relationship with God.

Jacob's promptness in obeying the command to return to Bethel is heartening. Bethel was a place of divine encounter with God. The solemnity of the occasion required adequate preparation. God is holy; therefore, they must appear before Him clean and pure. Jacob knew that righteousness and holiness pleased God. Hence, He exhorted his household to "**...put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments**" (Genesis 35:2). God gave the same command, through Isaiah, to the children of Israel: "**Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes**" (Isaiah 1:16). Like Jacob, pastors, parents and teachers should use their privileged positions to promote purity at home, in the church, at school or workplace.

Observe that Jacob commanded his household to put away "**strange gods**". It is important that we set our hearts and house in order before appearing before God. Aside strange gods, everyone who seeks to be in fellowship with God forever must do away with strange women or men, apparel, doctrines and all other things the Scripture reveals He hates (1 Kings 11:1,8; Ezra 10:10; Zephaniah 1:8; Hebrews 13:9; Proverbs 6:16-19). Godly parents and spiritual guides should focus on the total

well-being of those under them to avoid compromise and backsliding. Jacob's promptness in heeding the divine command to return to Bethel shows the importance he attaches to God's word. Believers should obey God's word without delay. Jacob's instruction also covers cleanliness and change of garments. A shabby appearance does not befit God nor does it show reverence for Him. It is also abhorrent to see all kinds of strange, night club garments that so-called believers wear to places of worship today. We must always dress well and comport ourselves with reverence for God and His house.

Of note is the response of the women who gave to Jacob "**all their earrings which were in their ears**" (Genesis 35:4). Jacob buried the images and earrings where no one would have access to them, highlighting the necessity of complete separation from all objects of sin (2 Corinthians 6:17; Isaiah 2:20). None of the women prized the earring above fellowship with the God of heaven. Spiritual revival or reformation is often preceded by repentance and separation from sinful objects. "**And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver**" (Acts 19:18,19). Having removed the objects of defilement, Jacob and his family were now ready for their journey.

God calls all lukewarm believers who have left their first love and reneged on their consecration to Him to remember their initial encounter with Him and their vow. He wants them to repent of their ingratitude and unfaithfulness and part with objects of defilement. He wants them to renew their consecration, fulfil their promise to live in holiness, righteousness, obedience and serve Him throughout their lifetime.

JACOB'S JOURNEY BACK TO BETHEL (Genesis 35:5-29; Psalm 93:5; Proverbs 12:28; 16:7; 2 Samuel 14:14; Psalm 90:10,12; Acts 9:1-6; 13:9; 2 Timothy 2:19; Deuteronomy 27:20; 22:30)

"**And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob**" (Genesis 35:5). The inhabitants of the surrounding cities were restrained by the divine presence and power from attacking Jacob and his household. There is great profit in separating ourselves from all forms of defilement of the flesh and spirit. This is the condition for becoming God's peculiar children (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). As believers, we are assured of divine protection while we live in holiness and walk in the will of God. With God on our side, we are assured of victory over Satan and his wicked agents (Proverbs 16:7; Romans 8:31). Thus, as Jacob journeyed to Bethel in obedience to God's commandment, he enjoyed divine protection.

Jacob and his family finally arrived Bethel safely. There, he built an altar of worship unto the Lord and called it Elbethel, meaning, the God of Bethel (Genesis 35:6,7). By this name, he was making a grateful recognition of God's favours and intervention at the time of his distress. Believers should always appreciate God for His past mercies and His promises of continual blessing and protection. Jacob's example in erecting an altar unto the Lord is an encouragement to all believers to have designated places for corporate worship and fellowship. Christian worship centres should be commodious, neat and befitting. God is not honoured when our church buildings are decrepit and dilapidated.

Three funerals of Deborah (Rebekah's nurse), Rachel and Isaac (Genesis 35:8,16-19,29) took place while Jacob was in Bethel. These instances of bereavement show that death is a common experience of all humans and it can even occur while in transit. Since no one knows when or where death will come calling – whether at home, work or place of worship – let us always be ready. Jacob's handling of Deborah's burial needs special mention. Deborah was a nurse/maid to Rebekah (Genesis 24:59). Now old and dependent, she was adopted into Jacob's family. While at Bethel, she died and was buried at a place called Allon-bachuth, meaning, "the oak of weeping." Jacob was kind-hearted

and honoured the old maid the way a son would do to a departed parent. Jacob's action towards Deborah teaches us that old faithful and helpful servants in the family should be treated with care. Besides, Isaac who was thought to be nearer his grave, outlived Rebekah who did not live to witness the return of her son, Jacob from the house of Laban. The lives of God's faithful children are in His hands; He is the ultimate Decider of when they depart this world.

While at Bethel, God appeared to Jacob to comfort and bless him. He also confirmed the change of his name from Jacob to Israel, as earlier announced by the angel that wrestled with him (verse 9; 32:28). Believers need to seek confirmation of whatever revelation they receive. The name 'Jacob' means heel-catcher, supplanter or deceiver; his new name 'Israel' means the prince of God or one that has prevailed or will rule. The change of name was a confirmation of his transformed life and character. Anyone who seeks to walk with God must first be converted and become a new creature in life and conduct. Many in our world today claim to be following Jacob's example by changing their heathen names to Christian ones without any corresponding change in their lives and character. Remember, "**every one that nameth the name of Christ** [must] **depart from iniquity**".

The Lord revealed Himself to Jacob as God Almighty, El-Shaddai, the all-bountiful or all-sufficient One who is able to make good His promise in due time and supply every need (Genesis 35:11; Philippians 4:19). God also renewed the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob by saying, "**... the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land**" (Genesis 35:12). The Lord is ever faithful to His covenant and will surely perform His promises in our lives, families and endeavours. So, we must repose our faith in Him.

No doubt, Jacob led his family into personal cleansing in the bid to renew their relationship with God. But some of his children were unaffected by this spiritual revival. While still smarting from a recent barbarous

murder of the Shechemites by two of his unrepentant children, Reuben worsened Jacob's distress by committing incest with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). This was the meanest thing to do in the wake of spiritual revival. "**Doth not even nature itself teach**" of the vileness of the act? The Scripture affirms that even Gentiles detest such abominable act (1 Corinthians 5:1). Great judgment awaits those who practice such wickedness. "**Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen**" (Deuteronomy 27:20; 22:30).

Adultery and fornication are condemned in Scripture and will damn the soul in hell if there is no repentance. Saints are commanded to flee fornication and all sins and maintain purity of heart and life that please God (Genesis 39:12; 1 Corinthians 6:18). Like Esau, Reuben failed to rule his passion but allowed his lust to ruin his destiny. He would later smart for his action as his father cursed him for his incest. Thus, the right of the firstborn was withdrawn from him and given to Joseph (1 Chronicles 5:1,2). Sin may titillate the flesh at its inception but it will surely leave a sore taste of misery and woe in the mouth in the end.

While at Bethel, Jacob visited Isaac, his aged father in Hebron (Genesis 35:27). Jacob's action teaches us not to fail in our filial duties to our parents when they are alive. The command to all children of all ages is, "**Honour thy father and thy mother**". This includes visiting them from time to time as may be appropriate. Filial love and honour for parents attract longevity of life with prosperity (Exodus 20:12).

ESAU'S GENEALOGY, MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUAL DESTITUTION (Genesis 36:1-43; 25:29-34; 27:30-40; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Malachi 1:1-4; Hebrews 12:16,17)

The text furnishes us with the names of sons and dukes who are descendants of Esau. The greatness and material wealth of his descendants show the fulfilment

of the blessings Isaac pronounced on him. It proves the impartiality and love of God for all; "**...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust**" (Matthew 5:45).

However, we find a pitiable example of spiritual destitution in Esau and his family. There is no record in Scripture of Esau erecting an altar of worship to God as his brother often did. His indifference to spiritual heritage which initially manifests with sale of his birthright to satisfy his hunger and consequent loss of the blessings of the firstborn became a habit during his adult life. Consequently, he became a sad commentary in the history of the patriarch. The Scripture warns of the danger of such a lifestyle. "**Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears**" (Hebrews 12:16,17). Esau was a profane person – secular, irreverent and irreligious; he was reprobate because he placed no value on relationship with God (Hosea 8:12).

The Bible warns believers against passion for carnal things and reminds us that "**...we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.**" Therefore, we need to prioritise on the spiritual above the mundane (1 Timothy 6:7; Psalm 62:10).

Questions for review:

1. What danger does material prosperity pose to our commitment to God?
2. How should believers respond to God's call to spiritual restoration and consecration?
3. What is incest and how can we prevent it in our family?
4. In the light of the certainty of death, how should saints lead their daily lives?
5. What are the exemplary actions of Jacob towards his parents and Deborah?
6. What do we learn about the choice of Esau and its toll on his descendants?

7. Why is Esau not a good example of a follower of Christ?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 KINGS 18 - 19
MONDAY:	2 KINGS 20 - 21
TUESDAY:	2 KINGS 22 - 23
WEDNESDAY:	2 KINGS 24 - 25
THURSDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 1 - 4
FRIDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 5 - 8
SATURDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 9 - 11

THE PLOT AGAINST JOSEPH

MEMORY VERSE: "And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him" (Genesis 37:21).

TEXT: Genesis 37:1-36; 39:1-23

The narrative in our text reveals how different incipient character-traits later diverge into different experiences in both temporal and spiritual spheres. On the one hand is young, innocent and God-fearing Joseph. On the other are his more elderly delinquent brethren. Between the two is their common father, Jacob, who is to be affected at least on the temporal sphere by the events emanating from the spiritual conditions of his children. In the end, the truth played out that righteousness brings exaltation, and sin a reproach (Proverbs 14:34).

Worthy of note is the special love that Jacob reserved for Joseph which he signified by the coat of many colours he made for him. The tension between Joseph and his brethren was because he reported their misdeeds to their father, and was evidently loved by him. His brethren's correct extrapolation of his dreams made the tension worse. On the other hand, Jacob's affection towards Joseph was a natural product of Joseph's filial submission and obedience to his father.

THE DANGER OF ENVY AMONG BRETHREN (Genesis 37:1-36; Acts 7:9; Proverbs 14:30; 1 Samuel 18:7-9; 1 Peter 1:17; Ephesians 6:9; Matthew 5:44)

Envy is a sin which is provoked in the heart of a sinner by perceived superiority, excellence or success of others.

"**And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him**" (Acts 7:9). Envy is a double-edged sword of wickedness, which if unchecked, has the capacity to destroy both its subject and object. The Scripture describes it as "**the rottenness of the bones**" (Proverbs 14:30), metaphorically portraying its spiritual, mental and physical debilitation, in contrast to the healing and health sustaining effect of a sound, contented heart. Envy signposts the unregenerate heart and is a veritable expression of lack of faith in God and the absence of His Spirit. It was envy that drove Saul's hatred against David and fuelled his plot to kill him. In the case of Joseph and his brethren, we cannot but notice that Jacob unwittingly contributed to the pains caused by division and envy in his family. "**Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours**" (Genesis 37:3).

The evil of envy in Jacob's family which later caused him the agony of a broken heart was fuelled by his preference of one child over others. We must avoid such attitude in the administration of the family or the church. We should rather learn from the perfect example of our heavenly Father who "**without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work...**" (1 Peter 1:17). By giving His Son to "**taste death for every man**", God, our heavenly Father, made no distinction with respect of race, gender, economic or social status. Division, whether in the family or church, is counter-productive and destructive. Parents and ministers should therefore be careful not to appear to favour any person or group of persons above others. On the contrary, those attitudes and actions that emphasise love, inclusiveness and unity should be deliberately cultivated.

Meanwhile, Joseph's narration of his dreams to his already envious brethren was ill-advised and only made them to hate him the more. Believers should understand that it is the discretion of the wise to defer or withhold information which may create hatred, cause disaffection or inflame sinful or destructive passions.

It is instructive that Joseph obeyed the instruction of

his father to go and "**see whether it be well with** [his] **brethren, and well with the flocks**" at Shechem. Although he was aware of the hatred and envy that lurked in the heart of his brethren, he obeyed his father's command. Children should respond to the love and care of their parents by being obedient and honouring them. The Bible says, "**A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master...**" (Malachi 1:6).

That Joseph obeyed his father and went to Shechem to know the state of his brethren in spite of their hatred for him is a lesson for contemporary believers. If those we are related to in the family, in marriage or in a community fail in their duty of care, love and affection to us, we are not discharged from our duties to them under Christ. Christ Himself says, "**Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you**" (Matthew 5:44).

Joseph gave proof of his godly love for his hateful brethren by his wholehearted and diligent search for them; going from home to Shechem and from Shechem to Dothan, exposing himself to danger until he found them. Indeed, "**Charity suffereth long... endureth all things.**" However, the hatred and envy in the hearts of his brethren birthed a murderous conspiracy. "**They said one to another... Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him**". The Scripture warns that "**Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him**" (1 John 3:15). The sinful world may regard hatred with levity but God equates it with murder – a gross wickedness that shuts out the sinner from the kingdom of God if not repented of. Hatred is evidence of lack of salvation.

Joseph's brethren planned to murder their own brother and to cover their sin with another sin – lying. The Scripture warns that "**all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death**" (Revelation 21:8). Reuben, with a mind to effect Joseph's eventual release, prevailed

on his brethren to cast him into a pit. Judah later convinced them to have him sold into slavery to the Midianites merchants who in turn sold him to Potiphar, the Egyptian head of Pharaoh's guards.

THE DOGGED PROSPERITY OF THE RIGHTEOUS (Genesis 39:1-20; Luke 10:42; John 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Proverbs 6:23-29; James 1:12)

Our Lord Jesus Christ while in the house of Mary and Martha taught that, "**one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her**" (Luke 10:42). The new birth experience with its attendant grace of the omnipotent and omnipresent God is indeed the one thing needful for every man's success and safety in life; and which no enemy can violate. This was demonstrated in the life of Joseph. Although his brethren stripped him of his coat of many colours, they could not touch his fear for God and the attendant virtue and wisdom. They separated him from his earthly father and family but his heavenly father's presence and care was more than a replacement. The presence of God with Joseph in his Egyptian slavery meant that his righteousness, industry, honesty, divine favour and prosperity were never removed. Potiphar soon became so impressed with his conduct that he "**left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat**" (Genesis 39:6).

The coming of Joseph into the household of Potiphar was a great blessing. The grace of God in his life soon made an undeniable difference. It was a testimony to the fact that a Christian is a light to his world; lighting up wherever he is planted by circumstances.

Joseph's industry, honesty and godly virtues, coupled with other manifestations of God's grace made all that he did to prosper (Genesis 39:3). Similarly, the influence we wield for Christ in our community can be measured by our righteous influence and wisdom in turning many to righteousness in Christ; making saints out of sinners. The example of Joseph as a slave in a foreign land

rebukes all who, though not constrained by any hindrance, produce no discernible impact on the family or community, year after year.

The expectation of Christ is "**that** [we] **should go and bring forth fruit, and that** [our] **fruit should remain...**" (John 15:16). The quality and quantity of our spiritual harvest is a true index of our commitment to Christ and the quality of our spirituality.

"**And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me**" (Genesis 39:7). Every soul that truly loves God in this sinful and adulterous world is bound to face temptation at some point or another. Accordingly, the path of life that led Joseph from his obscure place in a humble family to the great prominence of a prime minister in Egypt was not void of a fiery temptation. The temptation personified in the wife of Potiphar, who pressured him incessantly with the temptation to commit fornication. All circumstance of this enticement considered, Joseph was indeed assaulted with a severe temptation. But he countered the fiery temptation by the strength of his cultivated reverential fear of God. Thus, he said: "**...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?**"

Fornication, like its twin counterpart, adultery, is indeed a great wickedness. The shame and reproach inherent in the sin of fornication and adultery are monumental. The Scripture vehemently abhors this horrendous transgression against self, fellow men and the almighty God. God warns: "**Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body... neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind** (homosexuals and lesbians)**... shall inherit the kingdom of God**" (1 Corinthians 6:18,9,10). Other Scriptures reserve the strongest condemnation for the sins of fornication and adultery; describing their destructive consequence as a fire in the bosom, a hot coal under the feet, sins that bring the sinner to an extreme state of spiritual and material poverty. Those

who indulge in these sins without repentance will lose their precious souls (Proverbs 6:23-28).

Through the grace of God, Joseph was able to overcome the temptation by fleeing from the temptress with determination. The subsequent glory and other blessings that attended his life following this signal victory testify to the truth of the word of God that "**Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him**" (James 1:12).

Potiphar's wife presented Joseph's coat which he left in her hands as evidence that he had attempted to rape her. Lying and falsehood cannot be separated from sinners until they come to Christ. Potiphar, without proper investigation, cast Joseph into prison. "**But the LORD was with Joseph.**" The great power and comfort of God's presence in Joseph's life, beautifully amplifies the comfort of God's presence in every believer's life.

THE DOMINION OF GOD-CENTRED FAITH (Genesis 39:21-23; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 34:14; Hebrews 10:36)

The light of God's presence in a man's life will distinguish him in any situation. Joseph was a remarkable example of this truth. What natural gift, intellectual superiority or persuasive oratory conferred this dominion over all circumstance upon him? Our text provides the answer which we will do well to take note of. "**But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison**" (Genesis 39:21). As we trace the path Joseph traversed from the moment he set out on his father's errand to his incarceration in Potiphar's prison, we discern the hand of God guiding and working behind the scene on his behalf. According to the Scripture, "**...the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him...**" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Joseph could indeed have been preyed upon by a wild beast as he was wandering in the field in search of his hateful brethren. His brethren could have executed their original scheme to "**slay him, and cast him into some pit**". He could have suffocated to death in the dry pit into which he was eventually cast at the instance of Reuben. Potiphar could have executed him instead of imprisoning him. He could have been kept in a prison other than the one meant for Pharaoh's prisoners. But God intended to fulfil the dream he gave to Joseph and since he retained his faith and righteousness, He would never have lacked the means of fulfilling His design for his life. It does appear that Joseph understood the imperative of maintaining his integrity before God, and resting in the comfort of His word that "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all**" (Psalm 34:19).

The Lord made whatever Joseph did to prosper, whether in the house of Potiphar or in the prison. Although he was in chains because he was pursuing God's will and righteousness, his faith in God still kept him above the water of despondency and loss of faith. He was never upset or disappointed; neither did he relent in the right ways of the Lord. When we are tempted or have to endure adversity because of our faith, we should always remember that God does not forget His children. Like Joseph, we "**...have need of patience, that, after** [we] **have done the will of God,** [we] **might receive the promise**" (Hebrews 10:36).

Questions for review:

1. What lesson can you draw from the opposite emotions towards Joseph by his brethren? Do you see any spiritual parallel?
2. Give an example of the ruinous effect of envy from the Scripture.
3. What can leaders and parents do to discourage the spirit of envy and hatred in the church and family?
4. From the obedience and diligence manifested by Joseph to his father's command, what should be a believer's attitude to the great commission?

5. How did the experience of Joseph demonstrate the truth that salvation is the most important possession of every man?
6. Why is the sin of fornication and adultery a great wickedness? Mention its consequences in this present life and in eternity.
7. What can we learn from the way God's invisible hand guided Joseph safely out of all the dangerous possibilities he passed through?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 12 - 15
MONDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 16 - 20
TUESDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 21 - 24
WEDNESDAY:	1 CHRONICLES 25 - 29
THURSDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 1 - 4
FRIDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 5 - 8
SATURDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 9 - 12

JUDAH'S MORAL SLIP

MEMORY VERSE: "And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more" (Genesis 38:26).

TEXT: Genesis 38:1-30

The chapter under consideration is a parenthesis introduced here as an actual picture of the sin, darkness, corruption and self-will of Joseph's brethren during the period of his absence from them after being sold. The writer of the book of Genesis was inspired to pause here in the account of Joseph's life in order to focus on Judah, the fourth of the twelve sons of Jacob. This chapter on Judah, though not chronologically placed, is intended to teach a number of lessons. One, it vividly portrays the immoral character of Judah in contrast to the moral character of Joseph in the following chapters. Judah's lack of integrity resulted in family deception and defilement in chapter thirty eight while chapter thirty nine shows how Joseph's integrity and wise choices reflect his godly character which was eventually rewarded. The lesson here is that as believers, we can be lilies in the mire, no matter how morally bankrupt our environment is. Our character should be moulded by God's word and not our sinful environment. Two, worldliness, wickedness and any form of wantonness have grave consequences on individual lives and families. The moral lapses of Judah brought death to some members of his family and disgrace to him as a person.

Three, we are made to see the possibilities and

triumph of God's grace over sin and shame. Divine grace triumphed over Judah's moral weakness and he was chosen as the fountain head of the tribe through which our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. Tamar, the Gentile seducer and adulteress, was eventually crafted into the ancestral lineage of Jesus Christ. God's grace is amazing and limitless in forgiving those who truly repent and come to Him.

JUDAH'S UNGODLY MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE (Genesis 38:1-11; 26:34,35; 28:1-9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; James 4:4)

Judah's moral lapse was as a result of his friendship with the world. "**And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah**". Judah's closeness with this Canaanite was the beginning of his moral decadence. The Bible warns: "**Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?...**" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Believers, who partner with unbelievers in businesses, marriages, etc., will definitely court God's displeasure. We cannot claim to be God's children if we are still friends of the world. "**Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God**" (James 4:4). If we want to please the Lord in this end-time, we must dissociate ourselves from intimate fellowship with the ungodly. "**Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners**" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

The first evidence of moral slip of Judah was his marriage with a Canaanite woman. He should have followed the footsteps of his great grandfather, Abraham, who instructed his eldest servant thus: "**thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife**

unto my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:2-4). By marrying a Canaanite, Judah walked in the way of Esau (Genesis 26:34,35). He rejected the godly examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who insisted on marital separation from the Canaanites. Believers who seek marriage partners should learn from the mistake of Judah. They should, therefore, pray for God's leading or direction before embarking on the marital journey. Marriage with unbelievers or so-called believers who do not share the same belief and behaviour based on sound doctrine is a step into backsliding, misery and woes. For Judah, there was no prayer in seeking God's will in marriage. He chose by sight and reaped a lot of sorrow in his marital life. So also was Samson whose life and ministry were cut short as a result of wrong choice in marriage (Judges 14:1-3).

Judah's wife gave birth to three sons but two of them were wicked and the Lord slew them. The sons of Judah obviously lacked godly parental influence. Their mother, being a stranger to the Abrahamic covenant, lacked the knowledge and depth of faith required in child training (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Their father, though from Abraham's line, was carnal; therefore, he could not make any meaningful moral impact on them. Er, Judah's firstborn, was slain shortly after marrying Tamar. Though the Bible gave no details of his wickedness, it was heinous enough to earn him the death penalty.

The second son, Onan, was asked to marry his brother's widow to raise up seed for him. This practice, known as levirate marriage (the marriage of a dead man's brother or next of kin to his wife), was common in ancient times because of the strong emphasis placed on the continuity of the family name. However, in the New Testament dispensation, there is a shift of emphasis. Rather than mere perpetuating of the family name, believers should endeavour to preserve their names in the Book of life. Bachelors, spinsters, widows and widowers under the new covenant are free to marry whom they will, in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Onan resented the idea of raising a child in Er's name

but he did not openly declare it. He resorted to wicked devices for which the Lord slew him also. We see in him the hypocrisy and wickedness of the human heart. He should have openly rejected the levirate marriage, like the unnamed kinsman of Ruth (Ruth 4:5-8). The latter openly declared that he did not want to mar his inheritance by marrying Ruth to raise a child to his dead relative. Even though it brought ridicule, it was far better to be sincere than face divine wrath against hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is wickedness and it always attracts divine displeasure and judgment.

JUDAH'S UNGODLY MANNER AND FLESHLY LUST (Genesis 38:12-23; 1 Corinthians 10:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

The death of Judah's first two sons in succession must have frightened him so much that he made no move to give his third son, Shelah, to his widowed daughter-in-law as earlier promised. "**Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house**" (Genesis 38:11). Eventually, Shelah grew up but Judah neither fulfilled his promise to Tamar nor gave her the freedom to remarry. Here we see selfishness, insincerity and insensitivity to the needs of others. God frowns at it when we make promises which we do not intend to keep, not minding how it hurts others. Those who deceive others in the area of marriage commit a great crime against God and the brethren.

When Tamar realised Judah's insincerity towards her, she reacted by luring him to commit adultery with her. "**And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.**" Obviously, she could predict Judah's moral laxity and she capitalized on this. Were Judah to be morally stable like Joseph, all the 'seductive Tamars'

of Canaan could not have so cheaply tricked him into such a disgraceful act. He thought her to be a harlot and was taken in the snare. Judah's fall into fleshly lust began in the eye. He saw her and was enticed. This incident throws up some vital lessons. One, though Tamar seemed to be driven with the intense desire to have children and Judah was driven by lust, neither case was morally justified. Both Judah and Tamar were guilty of adultery. There is no excuse for immorality. Widowhood, disappointment by one's fiancé, delay in marriage, temptation, social pressure and other excuse that men proffer are not tenable before God. God detests adultery and fornication (Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4). Adulterers and whoremongers will spend eternity in hell except they repent (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15). Two, ladies should not seduce the opposite gender or make them to lust after them either through careless dressing or any suggestive behaviour (Proverbs 7:6-23). Three, Judah allowed what he saw with his eyes to affect his heart. This was the same case with David, the man after God's own heart, who fell into adultery after seeing the object of temptation and was enticed (2 Samuel 11:2-4). As believers, we need to make a covenant with our eyes and turn them from beholding vanity (Job 31:1; Matthew 5:28). Four, Judah's friend supported him in this immoral and disgraceful act just like Jonadab was an accomplice in Amnon's rape of his half-sister (Genesis 38:12,20-23; 2 Samuel 13:3-5). Indeed, evil communication or friendship corrupts good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33). Shun evil and immoral friends but be a companion of them that fear the Lord (Psalm 119:63). Five, when you are tempted to commit adultery or fornication, do not yield (Proverbs 7:24-27; Hebrews 12:16,17). Be determined like Moses who chose to "**...suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season**" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Tamar requested for Judah's legal token of authority and identity which are comparable to our modern day passport, identity card or official stamp. Yet, Judah

surrendered all. That he was willing to part with anything for the gratification of his lust shows the level of his depravity. It is instructive that what he thought would be a casual relationship with a harlot led him into disgrace.

By the time he sent the promised kid to Tamar, the supposed harlot, she could not be found at the former place of contact. "**And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed...**". He lost his jewels by the bargain; he was content to lose his signet, bracelets and staff and forbids any further inquiry lest he be ashamed. It is sad that he expressed no concern about the sin; he was only particular about the disgrace and was unwilling to face the shame of being exposed. Like Judah, sinners and backsliders often devise ingenious ways to cover their sins. Yet, no one can truly put his sins behind until he/she is ready to face them through proper confession and necessary restitution.

JUDAH'S UNGODLY JUDGMENT BUT FAITHFUL LAMENTATION (Genesis 38:24-26; 2 Samuel 12:5-13; Romans 2:1-4; Proverbs 28:13)

Judah was quick to condemn and judge Tamar of adultery and harlotry as soon as he got the news that she was pregnant. "**And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.**" King David acted in similar way after he killed Uriah and took his wife. God sent Nathan to confront him with his wicked and adulterous act. After listening to Nathan's story, David was furious. "**And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die**" (2 Samuel 12:5). It is a common thing for men to be severe against those very sins in others which they allow themselves. By judging others, they condemn themselves (Romans 2:1; 14:22).

Tamar accepted her guilt but presented the evidence

of Judah's involvement in the act. At last, Judah's sin was exposed. It was then left for him to either acknowledge his guilt and repent or deny and be hardened. Good enough, he chose a more honourable path by admitting his fault. Exposure of sin by God should be recognised as an act of grace. God's purpose is not to ridicule or disgrace the sinner. Rather, it is to lead him to repentance and restoration (Romans 2:3,4). The sinner's or backslider's part is to respond in genuine repentance instead of adding to his sin through falsehood, excuse-making and further wickedness. The attitude of Judah, in contrast to that of King Saul, should serve as a lesson to believers.

JUDAH'S UNMERITED MERCY AND FAVOUR FROM THE LORD (Genesis 38:27-30; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 55:6,7; Acts 3:19)

Genuine repentance always attracts God's mercy, forgiveness and favour. Judah confessed his guilt by saying, "**She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son...**" (Genesis 38:26). As an evidence of true repentance, "**...he knew her again no more.**" In order to receive God's mercy and enjoy his grace, a sinner must repent and forsake his/her sins.

The manifestations of God's mercy and grace on Judah were manifold. One, he was forgiven and restored. Two, he became the leader of the kingly tribe in Israel (Genesis 49:9-12). Three, our Lord Jesus Christ "**sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood**" (Hebrews 7:14). Christ descended from the line of Pharez, one of the twins born by Tamar (Matthew 1:3). Thus, it could be truly said of Judah that he "**...prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler**" (1 Chronicles 5:2).

In conclusion, we see the glorious triumph of God's grace over man's sin. No matter how dark and ignoble one's past life was, divine grace can turn everything around. In God's plan of salvation, circumstance of birth is not a limiting factor. All it takes to have part in God's redemptive plan is to repent, forsake sin and accept

Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour (Mark 1:15; John 1:11,12; Matthew 16:24; Acts 2:37,38). As the Lord chose Judah, Tamar and Pharez, He accepts those who come to Him by faith in Christ Jesus (Psalm 65:4; John 6:37).

Questions for review:

1. Highlight key lessons in the story of Judah's moral slip.
2. Why is it necessary for believers to seek God's will in marriage?
3. What are the likely consequences of marrying outside the will of God?
4. How do people deceive others in the area of marriage?
5. What excuses do people give as reasons they indulge in adultery and fornication?
6. What should be done when God exposes one's sin?
7. What encouragement can sinners and backsliders derive from the choice of Judah, Tamar and Pharez as links in the Messiah's line of descent?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 13 - 17
MONDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 18 - 21
TUESDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 22 - 25
WEDNESDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 26 - 29
THURSDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 30 - 33
FRIDAY:	2 CHRONICLES 34 - 36
SATURDAY:	1 THESSALONIANS 1 - 5

JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS AND HIS ELEVATION

MEMORY VERSE: "**And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou**" (Genesis 41:39,40).

TEXT: Genesis 40:1-23; 41:1-57

Joseph had been in prison for an offence he did not commit. But while in prison, his character shone. He carried out his prison duties with distinguished faithfulness. Adversity could not break his spirit or change his character. In him was fulfilled the Scriptures: "**The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger**" (Job 17:9). Also, God's presence with him endeared him to the prison keeper who made him the chief prisoner, charged with the care and welfare of other inmate, and to uphold prison orders.

In the process of time, Pharaoh's chief butler and baker were remanded in the prison where Joseph was for offending their lord, and Joseph was charged with their welfare duties. He interpreted their dreams which they had the same night with precision. The butler was restored to his duties while the baker was executed. The butler later remembered Joseph when Pharaoh had a puzzling dream, and was troubled for lack of an interpreter. He informed him about Joseph, and Pharaoh called for him. It is instructive that Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream with utmost meekness, confidence and

exactitude, and further gave an ingenious counsel on vital steps to take to bring the positive scene of his dream to reality and avert the negative part. The king was impressed with Joseph. Therefore, he elevated, empowered and commissioned him for the task. Truly, "**A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth**" (Proverbs 17:8).

JOSEPH INTERPRETS CO-PRISONERS' DREAMS (Genesis 40:1-23; Job 33:14-17; Acts 16:9,10; Isaiah 8:20)

Pharaoh's chief baker and butler were sent to the prison where Joseph was. The experience reminds us that the guiltless may be consigned to unpleasant circumstances. For example, considering the clear evidence of Joseph's integrity and moral uprightness, there was no justification for his incarceration. Nevertheless, his life challenges Christians who may be so consigned to maintain a godly character with a lively hope of God's deliverance (Romans 5:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:12). Besides, he was committed to his prison duties, maintained commendable interpersonal relationship and was committed to the welfare of fellow inmates. This was why he quickly offered to help his friends who presented a sad countenance due to the disturbing dream each of them had. "**And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you**" (Genesis 40:7,8). He interpreted their dreams correctly. However, we need to realise that although God sometimes communicate His mind through dreams, it is not the only means He can use. Dreams can come from other sources too. Some of such can be misleading. Therefore, a believer should rather test every dream with the word of God before considering it valid (Job 33:14-17; Ecclesiastes 5:3,7;

Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 23:28,29; Acts 16:9,10).

There are salient lessons to learn from Joseph. First, his compassion and tenderness toward his fellow prisoners won their confidence to narrate their dreams to him. Believers should be tender and compassionate toward sinners in pitiable conditions to enhance their receptivity to the gospel. Second, he pointed them to God as the sole Interpreter of dream. Third, he interpreted the dreams without altering the positive message for the Butler or the negative message for the Baker. As believers, we must be faithful as stewards of the manifold grace of God, and deliver the full gospel content without adding or subtracting from it (1 Corinthians 4:1,2).

JOSEPH INTERPRETS PHARAOH'S DREAMS (Genesis 41:1-36; Deuteronomy 29:29; Daniel 2:27,28; Job 33:14,15,23,24)

God allowed two full years to pass after Joseph interpreted the chief butler's and baker's dreams before Pharaoh had his dream that eventually necessitated his interpretation. The chief butler forgot Joseph because man cannot be absolutely trusted (Psalm 118:8,9). Besides, God might have wanted Joseph to be perfectly moulded in the prison before the next task that brought him to national prominence. God, sometimes, uses adversity to prepare His vessels for exploits (Psalm 66:10-12).

Obviously, Pharaoh's dream was given to him by God (Genesis 41:25); hence, the magicians of Egypt were unable to decode its details (Daniel 2:27,28). Puzzled by the dream and the apparent disappointment by Pharaoh's magicians, the chief butler remembered Joseph, narrated to Pharaoh his encounter with him, and the credibility of his gift of dream interpretation. Pharaoh quickly sent for Joseph on the basis of his credentials as given by the butler. Truly, "**A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men**" (Proverbs 18:16). However, Joseph's humility came to the fore as he responded, "**...It is not in me: God**

shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16).

It is noteworthy that God does not speak to His children in coded language of dreams or parables but plainly. Yet, if He did, He would give the key to understanding of the intended message (Mark 4:11). However, He speaks to the heathen (kings or subjects) and the ignorant in coded language to humble and lead them to an interpreter (God's messenger) who would unveil God's message and His way of salvation (Job 33:14,15,23,24). Two, to warn the ignorant of the danger of sin and His fierce judgment (Genesis 20:3,7; Job 33:14; Daniel 4:4-33). Three, to restrain the ignorant from his purpose (Genesis 20:4-7; Job 33:15-17; Matthew 1:18-21; 2:12). Four, God may speak through dream to a ruler if he has a role to play in His scheme of events (Genesis 15:13,14; Daniel 2:31-45).

As Pharaoh narrated his dream, Joseph immediately had a deep insight of the interpretation (Genesis 41:38; Job 32:7-9; Isaiah 11:2,3; Daniel 5:11,12; John 16:13; Acts 1:8). Christians have a greater privilege today, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to help sinners out of their puzzles, and lead them to Christ. Joseph emphasised three cardinal things in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. One, seven years of agricultural fruitfulness were imminent in Egypt. Two, seven years of severe famine and devastation would immediately follow. Three, there was need for a visionary leader to organise or gather excess food for storage to guarantee food security ahead of the season of famine.

Pharaoh's dream and the interpretation are applicable to the current state of the world. We are presently in an era of grace and presence of the Holy Spirit's power for soul-winning and fruitfulness by the gospel. The time is short; hence, we must harness all the privileges available to save sinners (Matthew 28:18,19). A period of great tribulation is imminent (Matthew 24:21). There is need for visionary men and women like Joseph who would take advantage of the current era to labour and harvest souls into the Kingdom.

JOSEPH'S ELEVATION, LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS
(Genesis 41:37-57; Proverbs 10:4; 12:24; 22:29)

Pharaoh and his servants were pleased with Joseph's interpretation of his dream and wise counsel. The dream did not only convey the imminence of two challenging seasons but spells responsibilities and serious-minded leadership. It was therefore no surprise to hear Pharaoh say to his servants, "**Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?**" In the language of Pharaoh, no man was better qualified for the job than the man that God has given the insight. God's fashioned men are always better men: be it Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Paul, Peter, etc. Therefore, Joseph was elevated to the post of a second ruler in Egypt. The king said to him, "**Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou**" (Genesis 41:40). This event in Joseph's life teaches us the following lessons: First, God reigns in the affairs of men, and gives the kingdom to whom He will. Second, when we cooperate with God as clay with the potter, He fashions us to be enviable vessels.

Joseph did not waste his precious time for celebration his elevation. He employed discretion, decisiveness, discipline, devotion, diligence and determination as vital ingredients for success. First, he scanned through the land, obviously to identify men, materials and methods to achieve his mission. Second, he made and selected workers, shared the vision, and empowered them to the task. Third, he designed strategies for sowing, harvesting and storage both in the cities and in the fields. "**And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number**" (Genesis 41:49). Fourth, when the famine eventually came as envisioned, the nation was considerably cushioned from the effects. Fifth, other nations benefited from his industry and prudence. Six, despite the enormous task, he had a stable family and was blessed with children.

The gospel work demand no less commitment. We

must enlist and train workers, foster cohesive leadership with soul-winning and discipleship vision.

Questions for review:

1. What should be the attitude of a believer in times of adversity?
2. What should be the Christians' attitude to dreams, and what caution should they exercise about it?
3. Why does God speak through dream especially to the heathen?
4. Mention the three essentials in Joseph's interpretation and counsel.
5. What is the similarity in the light of Pharaoh's dream and the current state of the world?
6. Mention some success qualities in Joseph and how you will apply them to the task of soul-winning.
7. How did Joseph overcome his adversaries?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 THESSALONIANS 1 - 3
MONDAY:	1 TIMOTHY 1 - 6
TUESDAY:	2 TIMOTHY 1 - 4
WEDNESDAY:	EZRA 1 - 3
THURSDAY:	EZRA 4 - 6
FRIDAY:	EZRA 7 - 10
SATURDAY:	NEHEMIAH 1 - 4

JOSEPH'S ENCOUNTER WITH HIS BRETHREN

MEMORY VERSE: "And Joseph said unto his brethren... I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:4,5).

TEXT: Genesis chapters 42 to 45

The previous chapter reveals how God used Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream after all the magicians and wisemen of Egypt could not interpret the dream. It also brings to the fore his wise counsel to the king, elevation to the post of a second ruler in Egypt, diligence and prudence as "**he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt**" against the seven years of severe famine. Consequently, "**all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.**" Jacob and his family were not spared of this famine. Therefore, he sent his ten sons to Egypt to buy corn.

In this study, we shall see the condemnation that brought contrition upon Joseph's brethren, his humility and forgiveness. It was divine providence at work that made Joseph's dream a reality and even preserved his family from being consumed in the prevalent famine that followed. Truly, "**Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world**" (Acts 15:18).

PREVALENCE OF FAMINE AND THE SUFFERING OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN (Genesis 42:1-24; 43:1; 12:10; 26:1; 41:54-57; Psalm 105:16-21; Ecclesiastes 9:1,2; Acts 7:11-13; 11:28)

"**...Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die**" (Genesis 42:1,2). Jacob came to the realisation that the only way to salvage his family from the prevailing famine over the whole earth then was to go to Egypt and buy grains. Famine is characterised by scarcity, dryness and shortage of food, where multitudes compete for the scarce commodity in the land. Both in Bible days and contemporary times, famine often come as a result of gross disobedience to God (2 Chronicles 7:13; Proverbs 26:2; Psalm 119:67). Where idolatry, occultism, immorality and shedding of blood for rituals are the order of the day in any society, the wrath of God is incurred and this makes people to suffer in the hand of the devil.

Going down to Egypt to buy grains by Jacob's sons would soon burst the burble and reveal the whereabout of Joseph. They had been living with a terrible secret for close to twenty years. They never talked about it and it never left them. Every sinner needs repentance and not remorse. The need for contrition that leads to conviction and genuine conversion cannot be over-emphasised (Psalm 51:1-5; Proverbs 28:13). Such is expected to approach the Lord with a humble heart and pray sincerely like the psalmist for total deliverance from secret faults (Psalm 19:12). For the brothers of Joseph, they had no peace of mind because of being enslaved by their un-confessed sin.

In these last days, our land is famished of the truth because of sin. The rat race for riches at all costs is the devil's strategy to derail believers from the truth. The only way out is to "**Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee**" (1

Timothy 4:16; Jude 3). Doing this will always keep believers nourished and ready for the imminent rapture of saints.

It is instructive that Pharaoh told the people to go to Joseph for provision of food (Genesis 41:55,56). Today, the only lasting solution to our lack and need is Jesus Christ; He is the Bread of life (John 2:3-5; 6:35). Therefore, we must come to Him with faith and readiness to do all that He commands us.

PROVISION FOR JOSEPH'S BRETHREN AND PROGRESSIVE PROOF BEFORE REUNION (Genesis 42:15,25-38; 43:1-34; 44:1-34; 37:7-9; Romans 12:18-21; Revelation 3:9)

The need for survival during the famine made Jacob to send his sons to Egypt to buy grains. This was God's providence for Joseph and his brethren to reunite and restore their relationship. It brought provisions and succour for the entire family of Jacob. Like the encounter with Joseph and his brethren, there is no encounter with Jesus the Saviour of the world without a lasting testimony. As soon as Joseph sighted his brothers, he recognised them, but they did not.

In God's providence, all the actions of men towards believers, whether good or bad, work together to further and fulfil His good plans for them (Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28). That does not excuse man's evil but it means that God's wisdom and goodness are greater than man's imaginations.

Meanwhile, Joseph interrogated his brethren to validate their sincerity. He made them to give details of their progeny. Their statement exposed their guilty conscience. It was a revealing process. A guilty conscience sees every trouble as sin's penalty. It was God's guided events; therefore, they openly revealed their wickedness before Joseph made himself known to them. "**And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon**

us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required" (Genesis 42:21,22).

Jacob's sons went back to their father and told him all that they experienced in Egypt. They told him how the young man in charge had requested that Benjamin accompany them on their return journey. Their father was unwilling and refused. But after Judah guaranteed Benjamin's safety, Jacob finally agreed to let him go with them. Upon arriving Egypt the second time, Joseph sent his brothers to his personal house, where food was lavishly prepared for them. Here, we see the charitable and benevolent attitude of Joseph to his earlier wicked brethren. This is worthy of emulation. The Bible says, "**Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him...**" (Romans 12:19,20).

REVELATION OF JOSEPH BY HIMSELF AND PLAN OF REUNION FOR HIS FAMILY (Genesis 45:1-28; 43:30,31; Isaiah 42:14; Jeremiah 20:9; Matthew 14:27; 18:15; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:13; 9:5; 10:41; 1 Corinthians 13:4,5; 2 Corinthians 2:7,11)

"**And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life**" (Genesis 45:3-5).

Joseph had the grace of God to forgive as he narrated his ordeal before his exaltation as a means of fulfilment of God's programme for him and his people. His attitude revealed that he had the fear of God from his youth as he was trained in the way of the Lord. This is a lesson for parents to train their children properly in the way of

the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). It is noteworthy that Joseph was a man who had a compassionate spirit, loved to please God, gave situations or challenges of life positive approach, had no vengeful spirit, forgave heartily, led others to godly sorrows and made provision for others' survival and prosperity. He exhibited the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit in handling his brethren (Galatians 5:22,23). With wisdom, he extracted necessary truth from them and got tangible proofs of their changed nature. He did not demonstrate any revengeful spirit for their wickedness; instead, he wept and forgave them. What a lesson to self-acclaimed believers who wish that their so-called human enemies perish! Rather than wish our enemies to die, we should be most desirous of their salvation (Matthew 5:43-48).

After this great encounter with his brethren, Joseph sent for his father in Canaan and provided for their journey while Pharaoh was fully informed. Upon hearing that Joseph was alive and seeing the wagons that he sent, Jacob's spirit was revived. "**And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die**" (Genesis 45:28).

Today, Jesus Christ is our link to all heavenly resources. Unlike Joseph who was limited while in Egypt, Christ the Lord and Author of our life is never limited (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-10; Titus 2:11-14; John 14:1-3). God now counts on Christians to bring others to Him for reconciliation so they can secure a place in His Kingdom.

Questions for review:

1. What should characterise the life of believers for their God-given visions to be fulfilled?
2. What is the major cause of famine in any society?
3. What is the way out of spiritual decline in these last days for heaven-bound saints?
4. What do we learn from the way Joseph treated his brothers?
5. What must believers do to rescue perishing souls around them?
6. How should we treat those who have offended us?
7. What did Christ say about offences?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	NEHEMIAH 5 - 7
MONDAY:	NEHEMIAH 8 - 10
TUESDAY:	NEHEMIAH 11 - 13
WEDNESDAY:	ESTHER 1 - 5
THURSDAY:	ESTHER 6 - 10
FRIDAY:	TITUS 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	PHILEMON 1

JACOB MOVES TO EGYPT

MEMORY VERSE: "I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" (Genesis 46:4).

TEXT: Genesis 46:1-34; 47:1-31

Joseph had revealed himself to his brethren in the previous lesson. He did not remonstrate with them neither did he vilify nor condemn them for the obvious evil they had done to him. He had reassuringly told them: "**Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life**" (Genesis 45:5). He had subsequently invited his father and brethren to move down and sojourn with him in Egypt because of the biting effect of the prevailing worldwide famine at that time.

In this study, we see Jacob with his entire household going down to Egypt at Joseph's request. They took their journey and encamped at Beersheba, a city of about twenty-five miles from Mamre. This was where Jacob communed with the Lord and offered sacrifices to the God of his father, and in acceptance, God renewed his covenant of preservation and abiding presence with him. God assured him that his journey to Egypt was His will for him. He said, "**...I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation**" (Genesis 46:3). Eventually, Jacob and his entire family arrived Egypt and were put in a choice part called Goshen. Also, we see Joseph showering love and affection on his father and brethren.

JACOB'S DESCENT AND JOURNEY TO EGYPT
(Genesis 46:1-7; 15:13,14; Psalm 119:89; Colossians 3:16; Acts 7:5; 2 Timothy 1:5)

The migration of Jacob and his household to Egypt undoubtedly brings to the fore the beginning of the fulfilment of God's prophecies for Israel. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His word will not pass away. God had foretold Abraham saying: "**...Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance**" (Genesis 15:13,14).

When he heard the good news that Joseph, his supposedly dead son was still alive, Jacob was eager to move down to Egypt to go and see him. "**And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation**" (Genesis 46:1-3).

Jacob commenced his journey from Mamre to Egypt. On getting to Beersheba, he took time off to worship and sacrifice to the Lord who had been merciful and gracious to him, as a mark of gratitude. He desired God's guidance in the journey. This attitude of raising altar to God for fellowship and communion was a practice passed down from Abraham, his grandfather. We, as Christian parents should allow our children learn righteousness, piety and true devotion from us just as young Timothy had imbibed unfeigned faith in his grandmother Louis and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5)

As Jacob embarked on this journey, he was not self-confident neither was he presumptuous. Instead, he depended absolutely on God and sought His face in prayers. Beersheba has a historical background which highlighted the significance of the altar that Jacob raised. It was at Beersheba that God spoke to Hagar

about a well where she got water for herself and her son, Ishmael while she was fleeing from her mistress, Sarah (Genesis 21:14). It was also at Beersheba that Abraham made a covenant with the princes of Philistine while he sojourned there (Genesis 21:32-34). Every believer should therefore, cultivate the habit of personal retreat where he can encounter God afresh and also deepen his relationship with Him (Romans 12:1,2; Colossians 3:16).

In response to his prayers and worship, God said, "**I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt ...I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again...**" (Genesis 46:3,4). The Lord promised to go with Jacob because he committed his ways unto Him.

Jacob migrated to Egypt with his entire household, together with their cattle and possessions. The same thing happened when the Israelites left Egypt for the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. They left with all their children and even their cattle and other possessions (Exodus 10:24-26). This was similar to what Joshua told the Israelites. He said, "**...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD**" (Joshua 24:15). The Philippian Jailer believed the Lord with his entire household (Acts 16:31-34). Therefore, believers should ensure that all members of their household – parents, spouse, children, brothers, sisters and other relations – are saved. It is not scriptural for a believer to leave any member of his family behind when he goes to a place of worship.

JACOB'S DESCENDANTS AND TIME IN EGYPT (Genesis 46:8-34; 47:1-12,27,28; Isaiah 60:22; Zechariah 4:10; 2 Corinthians 6:17,18; 1 Peter 2:9; Proverbs 14:23; 20:29; Job 8:7)

"**All the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.**" This was actually the beginning of the nation of Israel. The small number of Israel in Egypt serves as an encouragement to our faith. It was from that small company that the Lord

fulfilled His promise to make of Abraham a great nation whose number would be as the sands upon the seashore for multitude. No matter how small our congregations may be today, God has promised growth and enlargement if we faithfully continue in supplication and soul-winning. He has promised that: "**A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time**" (Isaiah 60:22).

Jacob's time and sojourn in Egypt presents a glorious moment in his life. His joy at seeing Joseph alive knew no bounds. The meeting between the aged Jacob and his supposedly dead son was indeed the fulfilment of divine promise that God gave him at Beersheba. "**And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive**" (Genesis 46:29,30). Joseph went to meet his father in Goshen and embraced him. He fell upon his father's neck and wept. This brought to an end Jacob's long sorrow and agony of missing his beloved son. God has divinely brought a loving father together with his beloved son. Again, Joseph secured Goshen, the best part of the land of Egypt, for his father and brethren. This is clear evidence that he was committed to their welfare. He was not vindictive or retaliatory. He had totally forgiven his brethren for selling him into slavery. This is Christlike nature that all believers should crave to possess.

Israel's sojourn in Goshen was not accidental; it was a divine arrangement. First, Goshen was the best part of Egypt. Second, that section of the land of Egypt was best for grazing. Third, God did not want them to mingle and inter-marry with the Egyptians. Fourth, God foresaw His judgment on Pharaoh who would not allow Israel to leave the land at the appointed time and had to separate His people so that they might escape His wrath upon Egypt. Here, we see how special believers are in the sight of God. "**But ye are a chosen generation, a royal**

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Joseph was not ashamed of his brethren. Therefore, he identified fully with them (Genesis 47:1,2). It is not biblical for a believer to disown his brethren or family members on account of civilization, social status, education or spiritual attainment. Also, our vocation should not negatively affect our self-esteem.

JOSEPH'S DISCRETION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE FAMINE (Genesis 47:13-31; Proverbs 11:26; Galatians 6:10)

Joseph's prudence as a governor in Egypt showcased strong and virile leadership. His leadership pattern also corroborated the loyalty of the Egyptians to Pharaoh.

"**And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine**" (Genesis 47:13). Joseph was tactful in the management of the famine. Through the grace of God, he was instrumental in preserving lives in Egypt. He was a type of Christ who came to preserve lives both physically and spiritually. Because of the soreness of the famine and its biting effect on the Egyptians, they were desperate to exchange whatever possession they had for food in order to stay alive. After spending all their money, they voluntarily relinquished their flocks and lands. At the end, they gave themselves to become the servants of Pharaoh for their survival. Similarly, believers should be willing to make necessary sacrifices to fulfil their spiritual desires.

The faithfulness of Joseph made him to surrender all the resources of Egypt into the national treasury. He delivered all into the hands of Pharaoh who appointed him. "**And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house**" (Genesis 47:14). This

is unlike many public office holders of today who would rather embezzle or divert public funds into their private accounts and impoverish the people. Joseph was selfless and wise. He did not hoard the grains to create artificial scarcity. Rather, he sold them to the people as soon as he saw the need.

It is also worthy of mention that Joseph was not oppressive or tyrannical to the people. He was fair to all. In his wisdom, he made a law "**...over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's**" (Genesis 47:26).

It is instructive that Joseph took proper care of his father and brethren. He publicly identified with them and gave his aged father all the necessary attention he needed. As believers, we should be kind to everyone and take proper care of our parents even at old age. We should be careful in order not to change the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set.

Jacob's request that he be buried alongside the Patriarchs showed that his focus on eternal inheritance and the promise of a better country was not beclouded by the temporary affluence that he enjoyed in Egypt. Believers should be conscious of heaven at all times irrespective of their enjoyment and success in life.

Questions for review:

1. Why should believers seek the face of God in any life's decision?
2. What historical significance has Beersheba in the Bible?
3. What encouragement can believers derive from Israel's multiplication from a small number to a mighty nation?
4. What can believers learn from the way Joseph heartily forgave his wicked brethren?
5. Mention four attributes of faithfulness believers can emulate in Joseph's handling of the Egyptian crisis.
6. How should believers carry out their business and relate with people generally, including our

persecutors?
7. How was Joseph able to overcome his temptations and trials?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JOB 1 - 4
MONDAY:	JOB 5 - 10
TUESDAY:	JOB 11 - 16
WEDNESDAY:	JOB 17 - 21
THURSDAY:	JOB 22 - 25
FRIDAY:	JOB 26 - 30
SATURDAY:	JOB 31 - 34

CHRIST FEEDS THE MULTITUDES

MEMORY VERSE: "And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full" (Matthew 14:20).

TEXTS: Matthew 14:14-21; Luke 9:11-17; Mark 8:1-26

After Christ was told of the death of John the Baptist, He left the city and went into a desert place. Although He must have felt bad about his death, He was never disheartened at the awful disclosure. He was still going to minister to the multitudes who had always loved to hear Him preach. This spontaneous resolve of Christ to minister in spite of the demise of John the Baptist, His forerunner, is full of instructions for contemporary believers. While the Scripture does not forbid Christians from sympathizing with the bereaved, we should however, exercise restraint and not brood over the departure of our loved ones for a long time. John the Baptist could be said to have finished his course and it was time for him to exit the world having fought a good fight of faith. Death is a price that must be paid by mortal beings. That is why the Scripture commands us thus: "**Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest**" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Before death catches up with a believer, he or she is expected to have been fully prepared. Like a traveller whose travel documents must be made ready, every serious minded Christian must ensure that his or her Christian experiences are intact and up-to-date. A believer who is worth his salt owes it a duty to also get

his sinful neighbours prepared by letting them know that death, being a sudden occurrence, is coming with equal certainty upon every mortal being and when it strikes, careers of great achievement will end immediately. However, this study focuses on the people's resolve to hear the gospel, Christ's compassion and supernatural provision.

THE PEOPLE'S COMPELLING RESOLVE AND CHRIST'S TIMELY MESSAGE (Matthew 14:14; Luke 9:11)

"**And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing**" (Luke 9:11).

The resolve of the multitudes to be exposed to the gospel of salvation is highly commendable. It would be recalled that Christ had earlier visited Nazareth, His own country, where He was rejected. Were it not for their refusal, He would have performed miracles of various sorts in Nazareth. However, people's sentiment and misgiving in His own country did not deter Him from preaching the gospel. He did circumvent their apathy and went where God's word would be highly esteemed. The prompt readiness of the multitudes to be fed with the word fostered in Christ an unprecedented attention towards their felt needs. The energy He could have dissipated on the critically minded folks back in His country was profitably expended on sincere seekers whose preoccupation was to really discover God's blueprint for their lives.

The contemporary world which could otherwise be referred to as a field of harvest is littered with different categories of people; there are those whose lives are entirely opposed to Christ; there are people who profess godliness without having experienced the new birth; there are also those whose motives are purely selfish and materialistic. The people who profess godliness without God's required corresponding grace are sometimes found on the streets preaching heresies. They

often resort to the media with a view to projecting their fallacies and distortion of Christian truth. This they do quite enthusiastically not minding the impending consequence. But Paul the apostle minced no words when he told Titus that their "**...mouths must be stopped**" (Titus 1:11).

The resolve of the multitudes to hear Jesus preach to them was met with His spontaneous preparedness to urgently open their spiritual eyes to the needful. Believers need to imbibe passion for the lost and feel touched with their infirmities. A number of them are being fed with junks and not with meals that are nutritious for their spiritual renaissance in their various places of worship. Many of them have had their lives infested with worldly orchestrated ideals. It is therefore expected of every born again Christian in whose hand the real seed of life is to conscientiously and passionately dispense it without expecting to be cheaply rewarded. "**For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!**" (1 Corinthians 9:16). However, the preacher of the undiluted word of God must "**Study to shew** [himself] **approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).

CHRIST'S MATCHLESS COMPASSION DISPLAYED (Matthew 14:14-16; 9:36; Mark 8:1-4; Luke 9:12,13; John 6:5-7)

"**And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick**" (Matthew 14:14). The life of Jesus was full of activities targeted at people's spiritual and physical wellbeing. He stressed the urgency of the task thus: "**I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work**" (John 9:4). Our Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect example of what a leader should be. He forfeited His convenience and got preoccupied with the need of the

people. If Christian leaders are to follow the Master's work of snatching souls out of the hand of the devil, they will lead the way while others follow. Christ's sense of alertness was unequalled. In the same vein, believers who are compassionate must be prepared to forfeit their convenience and pleasure in their search for souls. Each moment of intimate sharing should be seen as a golden opportunity to preach the gospel of salvation to sinners.

Compassion was the compelling force in the heart of Jesus Christ that made Him seek the lost (Matthew 9:36). Compassion is not sympathy. We may sympathise with people but do nothing to help them. It is not being sentimental. Many people often express sympathy and feel touched by the needs of others, yet do nothing to meet those needs. Compassion always moves one to take prompt action, to pray and witness until souls are brought in multitudes to Christ.

"**And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals**" (Matthew 14:15). The submission of Christ's disciples at this crucial period indicates a lack of trust in Christ's ability to provide food for the multitudes. Although they were logically right to have expressed their apprehension, their sense of logic was miles apart from Christ's supernal and enduring tenderness which made Him concentrate on feeding the multitudes with the word of life at the expense of His comfort. The believer's love for God is subsumed in his total submission to the revealed will of God. It is not enthusiastic fellowship activities, charitable works, hospitality without true conversion and upright living. Love for God is not some sort of hypocritical service. It attracts no eternal reward when feigned. This love is demonstrated perfectly when the double ownership right of God over the believer (as our Creator and Redeemer) is understood. The believer's practical responsibility is "**to preach the gospel to the poor... heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised**" (Luke 4:18).

Unfortunately, many believers appear to have lost their initial passion and zeal for evangelism with its attendant grave consequences on the lost around them. When the gospel is not preached by the redeemed of the Lord, the unexpected becomes a regular feature; people get blatantly sold out to Satan; sinners become a lot more hardened; there is overwhelming upsurge in crime; false profession of faith increases and sinners get perpetually enslaved to sin. The believer is the only hope the world has. The lamentable voice of the lost is heard each day with their attendant solitary beckon on the believer to quickly rescue them from perishing.

Sadly, in many religious assemblies, evangelism has been relegated to the background; de-emphasised in their fellowship programmes and substituted for praise worship. This is tantamount to disobedience to the great commission and will doubtless attract divine displeasure. The negative effects of the last days are being felt on daily basis. Half-hearted service will not endure nor stand the test of time. Therefore, there is need to be wholly committed to our ministry and endeavour to fulfil it.

SUPERNATURAL PROVISION FOR THE MULTITUDES (Matthew 14:17,18; Mark 8:5-26; John 6:8-13)

"**And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me.**" The supernatural provision and feeding of the multitudes show that Christ is interested in both our spiritual and physical wellbeing. In this miraculous provision, we observe the following: one, the orderliness and obedience of the crowd. They were instructed to sit on the grass which they did without questioning. Believers who seek to maintain an intimate walk with Christ and experience His blessings must do away with pride and be ready to obey Him and His faithful ministers at all times even when they do not understand the reason behind their decisions. Two, the blessing of the loaves and fishes. In His prayer, Christ revealed His total

dependence on His heavenly Father to provide His needs. Thus, He praised God for the provision they had, and prayed to Him to bless it. His attitude is an acknowledgment of the Father from whom all blessings flow. From His example, it is important that we give thanks to God at our meals and fully depend on Him for our daily provisions. God's provisions for our daily needs must be received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4).

Three, that Christ "**...brake** [the bread]**, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude**" shows that He recognised His disciples as working together with Him to achieve the Kingdom purpose. As they faithfully dispensed the physical food to the multitudes, we should also be faithful in dispensing spiritual food to the world. However, unless Christ first fills our hearts with the right message, we can never fill the people's hearts with the life-saving and edifying message of the gospel. As faithful ambassadors of the gospel, the Lord wants us to feed multitudes of sincere seekers with the full gospel. Four, the multiplication of the meat. It is worthy of note that the meat multiplied as the disciples obeyed their Master and distributed it. According to a Bible commentator, as the widow's oil increased in the pouring out, the bread increased in the breaking. Thus, grace grows by being acted, and, while other things perish in the using, spiritual gifts increase in the using. 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).

"**And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.**" It is amazing that the multitudes ate to their satisfaction and there were still leftovers. Truly, our God is a great Provider. If we obey Him, He can transform our lives with the little we have as there is no limit to what He can do. It is also instructive that He asked the disciples to gather the fragments in baskets. If we are true followers of Christ, we must be prudent in the management of human and material resources in our

homes, churches and workplaces.

Questions for review:

1. How did Jesus respond to the yearnings of the multitudes in our text and how should a believer, entrusted with the seed of life, dispense it?
2. How would you define Christlike compassion and how can it be demonstrated today?
3. What lessons can we draw from Christ's feeding of the multitudes?
4. What should a believer do in time of want?
5. Why should believers be prudent in the management of the resources in their care?
6. In what ways can a believer show compassion to those in need?
7. Explain how believers can be like Christ.

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JOB 35 - 38
MONDAY:	JOB 39 - 42
TUESDAY:	PSALM 1 - 10
WEDNESDAY:	PSALM 11 - 18
THURSDAY:	PSALM 19 - 25
FRIDAY:	PSALM 26 - 33
SATURDAY:	PSALM 34 - 42

Lesson 35

CHRIST'S POWER OVER NATURE

MEMORY VERSE: "And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm" (Luke 8:24).

TEXTS: Matthew 14:22-36; Luke 8:22-25

The text gives an account of how Christ commanded calmness to the raging sea. The disciples were amazed that at His command, there was a great calm. This narrative is very revealing about a perfect persuasion of Christ's deity as they said, "**...Of a truth thou art the Son of God**". The manifestation of Christ's authority in calming the storm is instructive to contemporary Christians as it shows how God is able to bring peace in difficult times. It is therefore, needful for believers to exercise their faith in God when confronted with challenges of life. The storms that could seem to overtake them even in frightening and life-threatening situations could easily be taken away by God's omnipotence. Jesus also manifested the power as a Mentor by sending His disciples ahead to every place He Himself would come.

The entire Bible, especially the gospels inspired by the Holy Ghost, shows that Jesus has power and sovereignty over nature. His presence with the disciples gave them the privilege of experiencing supernatural miracles. In addition to calming the storm, He also manifested His authority over all sicknesses at several instances and contexts. It is a confirmation that with God, nothing shall be impossible. The manifestation of His power in all circumstances is still a possibility today regardless of the views of cynical communities and people

(Psalm 62:11; Isaiah 40:28-31; John 14:12).

CHRIST'S PATTERN OF REACHING SOULS (Matthew 14:22,23; Luke 8:22; Mark 6:45)

"**And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away**" (Matthew 14:22). Christ gave the pattern of spiritual leadership with the vision to fulfil His earthly ministry. Here, He irresistibly urged His disciples to get into a ship and go before Him "**unto the other side**". This signifies His approach of reaching as many as possible with the gospel of the kingdom of God. Christian leaders should not be comfortable with the immediate success or ministerial achievements in one location but should broaden their vision and plans to reach all nooks and crannies of their world. He sent the multitudes away and moved to the other side because "**...this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations**" (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20; Mark 16:16-20; Acts 1:8). Therefore, believers must leave their comfort zones and develop strategies for the evangelisation of the world. We have the mandate to "**Go... therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**" (Matthew 28:19).

While the disciples were on their way to the other side, Christ withdrew Himself unto a mountain apart to pray. This emphasises the importance of prayer. In his epistle to Timothy, Apostle Paul said, "**I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting**" (1 Timothy 2:8). There are instances in the Scripture where prayer is strictly enforced on all believers for ministerial breakthrough (Psalm 2:8; Luke 6:12; Ephesians 6:10,18; 1 Timothy 2:1-4). Prayer is a means appointed by God in drawing and moving the divine hands for all-round blessings and breakthrough in gospel outreaches.

While the disciples were on the right path in obedience to the Lord's command, there was a storm

against their journey. This reveals that being righteous and doing the will of God does not immune any believer from the storms of life. But the fact remains that God will deliver the trusting, prayerful believer. The Scripture says, "**Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all**" (Psalm 34:19).

Believers can learn a lot from Christ and His disciples in reaching sinners. One, it is a compelling mandate (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15). Two, it is to cover the whole world. Three, it is a compulsory task. Four, it is time-bound. Five, it must be done in communion with God through the Son by His Spirit. Six, it is faced with challenges from powers of darkness. Seven, victory and harvest of souls to the kingdom of God are certain.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE STORM (Matthew 14:24-33; Luke 8:23-25; John 16:33; 6:20; 14:1-3; Acts 23:11; 27:20,23,24; Isaiah 41:10)

While the disciples were inside the ship, there was a raging storm. The situation was becoming hopeless and frightening. This made them suppose that Christ was a spirit when He appeared to douse the tension and calm their fears. Challenges of life can make believers to be full of doubts. Suppositions are like a canker that replaces faith with fear. The language of such is changed to negative. These can make friends appear as foes, helpers as hindrance and developers as destroyers. The uniform counsel of the Scripture is to look unto Jesus at such a time (Hebrews 12:1,2; 13:5,6). The Lord assures, "**When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee**" (Isaiah 43:2).

Christ's walk on the sea is against gravitational force in natural law. Indeed, He is supreme over nature, kingdoms and authorities (Ephesians 1:19-23). At His command, the rain falls; the sun, moon and all the constellations are subject unto Him. His deeds are the

confirmation of His omnipotence from creation to redemption and till the consummation of all things (Psalm 135:6,7; Isaiah 41:4; 43:11-13; 46:10; Daniel 4:35).

The Lord is always at hand to manifest His power in the life and situations that challenge the faith of saints. While the disciples were troubled, fearful and frightened in supposition, Jesus came as the Omnipotent to pronounce calmness and the wind obeyed. This is a confirmation of the Scripture that: "**He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still**" (Psalm 107:29). Peter who desired to walk on the sea like Christ soon became afraid when he looked away from the Saviour. Yet, His touch brought him up. Every believer should be assured of Christ's abiding presence and deliverance in times of trouble. The Psalmist appreciated this fact and confessed thus: "**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me...**" (Psalm 23:4).

The presence of Christ establishes His sovereignty and assures us of overwhelming victory in all challenges of life. Therefore, we should not be discouraged or afraid when confronted with unpleasant situations because of His presence with us; two, His possession of us; three, His programme for us; four, His purpose for us; five, His protection for us; six, His promise for us; and seven, His power over us (Matthew 28:20; 1 Peter 2:9; Acts 23:11; 27:24, 25; Hebrews 10:23; Ephesians 3:20). These should give us the persuasive confirmation that through Him, we can do exploit. Like Apostle Paul, we should always be positive by affirmatively confessing that, "**I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me**" (Philippians 4:13).

CHRIST'S POWER OVER SICKNESSES (Matthew 14:34-36; 4:24,25; 9:20,21; Mark 3:8-10; 2:1-12; 6:54-56; Luke 6:19; Acts 19:11,12; Hebrews 4:15,16)

The explosion of different kinds of miracles through Christ which extends to healing of all kinds of infirmities is a confirmation of His absolute power over man and

nature. This gives calmness instead of crisis, peace instead of pandemonium and life for the dead. It is an all-round healing: to the weak He restores strength; to the poor He bestows blessing and enabling grace to be fulfilled in ministry for all believers. The power to do exploit in His name is for everyone who believes in Christ. "**...But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits**" (Daniel 11:32).

God has promised through Christ to heal and keep us healthy. His promise cannot fail. As believers, we should appreciate the fact that God is an ***efficient*** Healer. He puts His own Omnipotence into operation when He heals and no disease can resist His power. Two, He is a ***practical*** Healer. His healing is not merely an internal, invisible healing which cannot be felt or verified. He gives practical relief and healing to the sick. Three, He is a ***universal*** Healer. There are cases which every physician will decline to handle because they know that nothing can be done. But our God knows no such cases. There are no geographical or temporal limits to the manifestation and operation of His power. Four, He is a ***permanent*** Healer. No earthly physician will give his patient the assurance that the disease from which he has suffered shall never return to him. But it is not so with our heavenly Healer. He undertakes to make His healing perfect and permanent as long as the beneficiaries keep the conditions of the healing covenant. Five, He is a ***glorious*** Healer. Most physicians are satisfied if they can restore their patients to the condition in which they were before the disease seized upon them. But the Lord is able to restore the sick, not only to the normal state before the sickness, but to one much better than that. What a great Physician we have!

Every believer must recognise that the Lord has given him power to heal the sick. He said, "**Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you**" (Luke 10:19). However, we need faith to appropriate these promises in our lives. To experience Christ's power over the challenges of life, sinners must reflect on His word, repent and believe

the Lord as Saviour while backsliders must come back to the Lord for full restoration.

Questions for review:

1. From our text, what convinced the disciples about Christ's deity?
2. Itemise some pertinent lessons from the command of Christ to His disciples to get to the other side.
3. Identify the elements believers ought to deploy in the task of reaching sinful souls with the gospel.
4. What is the significance of the presence of Christ in a believer's life?
5. How can contemporary Christians do exploits for the Lord?
6. Give examples of storms in a believer's life.
7. How should believers handle storms?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PSALM 43 - 50
MONDAY:	PSALM 51 - 58
TUESDAY:	PSALM 59 - 64
WEDNESDAY:	PSALM 65 - 69
THURSDAY:	PSALM 70 - 74
FRIDAY:	PSALM 75 - 78
SATURDAY:	PSALM 79 - 84

MEMORY VERSE: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8,9).

TEXT: Matthew 15:1-39

The previous study focused on the demise of John the Baptist, the miraculous feeding of multitudes by our Lord Jesus Christ with mere five loaves and two fishes and Peter's empowerment to walk on the sea by faith.

In this study, we shall examine how the Pharisees in Jesus' day perfected the habit of misrepresenting and substituting God's word with their ideas and preferences. They prided themselves in mere external religious observances rather than strict adherence to His commandments. Seeking men's admiration and acceptance rather than God's approval, they sought to redefine true religion and worship. But Christ, the Author of true religion and worship, laid out what is acceptable to God. This study, therefore, underscores the preeminence and primacy of God's word over established practices of human institution and religious leaders.

THE EVIL OF MAGNIFYING HUMAN TRADITION ABOVE GOD'S WORD (Matthew 15:1-9; 7:3; 23:25; Exodus 20:12; 21:17; Deuteronomy 27:16; Revelation 22:18,19; Romans 10:1-13; Matthew 5:18; 1 John 2:17)

The scribes and Pharisees made themselves perpetual antagonists of the Lord. They accused His disciples of eating with unwashed hands contrary to their tradition, "**saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.**" From their accusation, it is obvious that they were critical and censorious. Their interest was not the defence of God's word and glory but their tradition. To point out what is wrong or contrary to the word of God is not out of place (it is even encouraged and instructed in the Scripture and often attracts divine approval if done with humility and sincerity - (Leviticus 19:17; Galatians 6:1). But the Pharisees' action fell short of scriptural standard. They magnified other people's fault while they closed their eyes to theirs. The Scripture says, "**And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?**" (Matthew 7:3).

To understand the Pharisees better, we need to know who they are. They belonged to a strict sect within Judaism, which came into prominence during the inter-testament period in the second century B.C. They were formalists and fanatics who often put on a 'holier-than-thou' attitude. They appeared righteous in their own eyes while they despised and disdained others. The Pharisees were hypocrites who appeared outwardly moral and righteous (Matthew 23:25). The scribes, on the other hand, were called lawyers and teachers of the law. They were theorists of the law which the Pharisees aimed to obey religiously. They were also record-keepers, theologians and jurists who specialised in copying out the law for the people. Ezra, a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, was a scribe (Ezra 7:6).

Rather than answer the question on "**the tradition of the elders**", the Lord asked, "**Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And**

honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:3-6). Jesus pointed out the priority and superiority of the law of God over traditions of men. In support of His assertion, He gave an example of the violation of the fifth Law of Moses by their tradition. The Law of Moses taught people to respect and care for their parents but the Jews had added a tradition that enabled them to ignore them. By their tradition, they contradicted the plain teaching of the law and made the commandment of God of none effect (Mark 7:9-13).

It is unscriptural for believers not to respect and take care of their parents, especially when they are old. The Bible says, "**Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee**" (Exodus 20:12). The truth is, tradition, popular idea, cultural norm or pharisaic attitude can make people religious but not righteous, sanctimonious but not saved, hypocritical but not holy, legalistic but not loving and traditional but not transformed. Christ called the Pharisees and Sadducees "**hypocrites**" who draw near God with "**their mouth, and honoureth** [Him] **with their lips; but their heart is far from** [Him]". Their religious worship and service were worthless in the sight of God; He said, "**in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men**". Those whose religion is a hybrid of tradition and Christianity, who combine superstition, fetish rites, taboos and norms with regular church service, deceive themselves. Adding human traditions to God's law or removing any portion of the Holy Writ adulterates it and incurs His wrath (Revelation 22:18,19). Paul warns against giving heed to "**Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth...**" (Titus 1:14). Those who exalt tradition above the word of God lack genuine spiritual experiences of salvation, sanctification and Christlike living required for entry to heaven. They will not only perish but also cause their followers to be damned.

It is unfortunate that many professing believers still live or act like the Pharisees. They, one, excuse in themselves what they condemn in others; two, lord their personal lifestyle or opinion over others, claiming that it is the word of God; three, condemn those who sincerely need spiritual help; four, prefer establishing their own righteousness rather than the righteousness of Christ; five, love the praise of men more than that of God; six, focus on the external rather than internal transformation. The same judgment that Christ pronounced on the Pharisees of His day awaits their present-day counterparts.

EXPLANATION AND APPLICATION OF THE PREEMINENT WORD (Matthew 15:10-20; Colossians 2:18-22; Isaiah 29:13,14; Proverbs 4:23; 1 Corinthians 8:8,9; 10:20-22; Ezekiel 33:31,32; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Acts 15:29)

Christ invited the multitudes to hear and understand the explanation and application of the preeminent Word, which the religious leaders of His day tried to corrupt. He said, "**Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.**" Christ reveals here that the defilement the Pharisees ought to fear was not what entered their mouths as food, but what came out from their mouths. The Lord taught Peter the same truth in a vision before he went to preach in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:9-16).

Having revealed from the prophecy of Isaiah earlier that the hearts of the Pharisees and Sadducees were "**far**" from God, He now emphasises the corruption in their hearts and those of all men, which highlights the need for transformation. Unfortunately, they took

offence instead of seeking salvation and cleansing from these defilements that always manifested in their attitudes to the Lord and towards others. Like the Pharisees, some contemporary Christians still frown at rebuke or correction from their faithful leaders. Such incorrigibility or hardness of heart attracts divine judgment (Proverbs 29:1).

"**But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up**" (Matthew 15:13). The Church is the vineyard of the Almighty and every vine is planted for a purpose. Christ made it clear that whatever and whoever would compromise His word and purpose for the Church through addition or subtraction from His word will be uprooted. All Christian servants must be watchful to identify and expunge doctrines, beliefs, teachings and religious practices that are false.

Though we must not judge people for what they eat, we are not at liberty to eat just anything. "**But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak**" (1 Corinthians 8:8,9). It will be wrong and unscriptural for a believer to consume alcohol or take hard drug under the guise that one is not defiled by what comes into the mouth. The Scripture declares that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. "**If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are**" (1 Corinthians 3:17). The Bible also forbids believers from eating foods sacrificed to idols. "**But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils...**" (1 Corinthians 10:20-22).

BENEFITS OF SINCERE WORSHIPPERS AND SEEKERS OF THE TRUTH (Matthew 15:21-39; Mark

7:24-37; 8:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; John 15:3; Hebrews 13:8)

Though the scribes and Pharisees who came to Christ in the text were adherents and defenders of human tradition and were unwilling to heed His word and be transformed, there were many other sincere worshippers and seekers of the truth in the text. God is always pleased with those who gladly receive His word. The Word transforms as well as builds the lives of sincere seekers and sets them free from bondage to sin and Satan. The truth received produces faith for victorious living and miracles. "**So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**" (Romans 10:17).

God always manifests His presence and power in the lives of sincere worshippers and seekers of the truth (John 14:21). Christ went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon where a Syrophenician woman besought Him to heal her daughter of demonic possession. Her persistent cry, reverence, confession of faith in the lordship of Christ and admission of her unclean lifestyle brought the needed miracle. Following this incident, Christ went to a mountain near the sea of Galilee where "**great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them**" (Matthew 15:30). These multitudes were amazed at the miracles and "**glorified the God of Israel**". These were not just half-hearted seekers as they continued to hear the teachings of Christ for three days without food. Christ said, "**I have compassion on the multitude... lest they faint in the way**" (verse 32). Thus, He multiplied seven loaves and a few little fishes to feed four thousand men beside women and children.

Christ is still the same. He is the Source of spiritual and physical needs of every individual, family, multitude of people or assembly of those who exalt His word above the traditions of men. He is our Saviour, Healer and Provider. Sincere and wholehearted seekers of His redemptive benefits will always have cause to glorify God.

Questions for review:

1. Who were the scribes and Pharisees?
2. Why are we forbidden from adding or subtracting from the Scriptures?
3. What are the characteristics of today's Pharisees?
4. What lesson(s) can believers draw from the way Jesus rebuked the Pharisees?
5. According to the teaching of Christ, what actually defiles a man?
6. Mention some traditions of men which believers must avoid.
7. What can believers learn from recipients of miracles in the text?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PSALM 85 - 88
MONDAY:	PSALM 89 - 91
TUESDAY:	PSALM 92 - 100
WEDNESDAY:	PSALM 101 - 104
THURSDAY:	PSALM 105 - 106
FRIDAY:	PSALM 107 - 109
SATURDAY:	PSALM 110 - 118

PETER CONFESSES CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

TEXTS: Matthew 16:1-28; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-27; 18:31-34

The opening verses of Matthew chapter 16 deal with Christ's warning against sign seeking and the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. However, in the concluding part, Peter makes a confession of Jesus as "**the Christ, the Son of the living God**". Peter's confession was in response to a question posed by Jesus to His disciples: "**But whom say ye that I am?**" Jesus had initially inquired from them about the general perception the people had of Him. Their response showed that people had different erroneous thoughts of His true and actual Person. Then Jesus asked His disciples of their own opinion concerning Him. Peter, perhaps speaking on behalf of the other disciples, declared that Jesus is the Christ. The Lord then affirmed that such clear and comprehensive knowledge of Him could not have come from any human source but by divine revelation. Knowing Jesus and confessing Him as Christ are foundational to salvation and possessing eternal life (John 17:3).

Apostle Paul also agrees that knowledge of who Christ is, is fundamental to our salvation. "**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved... and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**" (Romans 10:9,10). Many people still have a confused understanding of who

Jesus is. A number of religious persons who go to church regularly and claim to be His followers only know Him as Healer, Provider or Giver of solution to problems. They do not know Him as Saviour, the Christ and the Son of the living God. Knowing and confessing Christ only in terms of what logical reasoning could reveal will limit our consecration and commitment to Him.

After Peter's confession, Jesus gave the disciples more revelations concerning the building of His Church upon the rock, the suffering He would undergo before His glorification and the conditions for true discipleship. Ironically, Peter, who had made a spectacular confession of Christ, unwittingly became a stumbling block as he sought to discourage Him from the idea of going to the cross. Jesus responded with a sharp rebuke that had double reference, partly to Peter who spoke out of human empathy and to Satan who actually elicited what Peter said. Believers must be on guard at all times lest Satan take advantage of them.

REBUKE OF INSINCERE SIGN SEEKERS (Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 8:11,12; John 2:18; Jonah 1:17; 3:4,5)

The Pharisees and Sadducees came with an evil intention to tempt Christ. The wonderful words Jesus spoke, the rare manifestation of God's power through Him and the casting out of demons from the afflicted were enough signs that He was the promised Messiah. Jesus then drew their attention to the course of nature. If a careful observation of the sky could lead them to accurately predict the weather, He reasoned that happenings around them should have pointed them to Him as the One they were expecting. Jesus rebuked their unbelief and wickedness: "**A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed**" (Matthew 16:4).

Jesus reminded them of the incidents surrounding the ministry of Jonah the prophet. After refusing to obey God, Jonah was swallowed up by a great fish and

spent three days and three nights inside its belly. The prophet repented afterwards and preached a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Likewise, Christ would die on the cross, be buried and remain in the earth for three days, after which He would rise again. The miracles performed by Christ could not convince the Pharisees and Sadducees. People who are still sceptical about the lordship of Jesus despite the miracles and signs performed in His name by His servants are not different from the Pharisees and Sadducees.

CAUTION AGAINST THE LEAVEN OF HYPOCRISY (Matthew 16:5-12; Job 8:13; 15:34; Matthew 6:2,5,16; 23:1-5; Luke 12:1; Mark 8:15)

Jesus did not only reveal the truth about God and the acceptable standard of worship to the multitudes, He also warned them against the influence of false teachers. "**In the mean time... he began to say unto his disciples first of all, beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy**" (Luke 12:1). He described their action figuratively as when leaven (or yeast) is cast into the flour, making it to swell. In the Scriptures, leaven always stands for something bad or sinful. The only exception was when Jesus used it in the parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13:33) to depict the spread of God's kingdom. Like a leaven, hypocrisy in the little band of disciples could destroy the teachings of Christ they had received and eventually pollute the church.

The disciples were slow to understand the figure of speech used by Christ, so He told them plainly what He meant: "**How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees**" (Matthew 16:11,12).

False teaching and hypocrisy are not limited to the time of Christ: they are widespread today. Erroneous doctrines are being disseminated by modern-day Pharisees and Sadducees. So, we must beware and tenaciously cling to the truth revealed in the gospel so as to safeguard our spiritual life from the leaven of hypocrisy.

REVELATION OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST (Matthew 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21; Deuteronomy 18:15-18)

When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi – an ideal location where He could be away from the multitude – He asked the disciples, "**Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?**" (Matthew 16:13). He asked the disciples this question in order to lead them towards a true knowledge of Him. "**And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets**" (Matthew 16:14). The people thought Jesus was: one, John the Baptist who resurrected from the dead (Matthew 14:2). This is especially so because the message of Jesus, like that of John, emphasised repentance from sin and harped on the coming kingdom of God. Two, Elijah – the Jews believed and expected that one day, Elijah would return to the earth after his translation (Malachi 4:5). Three, Jeremiah – Jesus was a much-rejected preacher like Jeremiah. Therefore, certain people confused Him with the prophet. Four, one of the prophets. Many people considered Christ as a random Prophet. However, they failed to recognise and accept Him as the Messiah and the Son of God.

But if other people had a wrong perception of Christ, He expected His own disciples to know Him. Therefore, He asked them who they thought He was. Simon Peter answered, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16). This is an acknowledgment of Jesus as the anointed One of God, the great Prophet, Priest, King of kings, Bridegroom of the Church, the long awaited true Messiah and the Son of God (John

11:27; Matthew 14:33; John 6:69; 11:27; Hebrews 1:2,5; John 4:19,29). Jesus commended Peter and pointed out that this revelation was divine and not derived from mere reasoning or natural observation. People may find it unreasonable to call Him Lord and accept His deity merely by looking at His appearance because, "**...he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him**" (Isaiah 53:2). But it takes more than natural knowledge to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Anyone who comes to Him must accept Him as Lord and Saviour to be saved.

REVELATION OF HIS PURE CHURCH (Matthew 16:18-20; Ephesians 2:19,20; 1:20-22)

"**And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18). Peter's declaration of Christ as the Son of the living God, is the foundational truth upon which the universal Church is laid. Regardless of any weight of opposition against the Church, it shall continue to stand. When Jesus said, "upon this rock I will build my church", He did not mean He will build His Church on Peter or that he will be His vice-regent on earth, as some people claim. The rock upon which Christ builds His Church is the solid truth that was expressed in Peter's confession. The Church is built upon Jesus the Lord, the Rock of our salvation, the Stone rejected by the builders, which has become the chief Cornerstone; the gates of hell can never prevail against it. Those who fight against the Church by opposing the truth, corrupting gospel ordinances, persecuting Christians, and persuading by craft or forcing by cruelty, shall not prevail.

"**And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**" (Matthew 16:19). Authority is given as "key" to all faithful Christians and not only to Peter, to bind and to loose,

to shut and to open, to uproot and to plant, to pull down and to build (Jeremiah 1:10). We are to bind and loose people from sicknesses, diseases, satanic operations, infirmities and sin, whether in the family or workplace or the church. "**Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?**" (Isaiah 58:6).

Christ charged the disciples not to tell any man that He was the Christ as at that time because it was not yet time for them to do so (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Two, He wanted the people to find out by themselves and be convinced of His messiahship. "**Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?**" (John 18:34). Three, preaching Christ to others at that time would have generated premature persecutions for which the disciples were not adequately prepared or equipped to handle. They were to wait until they had the convincing proof of Christ's resurrection and be endued with power from above. Four, it would bring distraction and undue opposition to the earthly ministry of Jesus before the appointed time. After Jesus rose from the dead, He commanded His disciples to spread the news and be His witnesses everywhere. Now, we are free and required to preach Christ and make Him known everywhere.

REVELATION OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 9:22-27; 18:31-34; Romans 6:11-13,16-23; John 10:26-28)

No sooner had Peter made his confession of Christ than He began to foretell His death and resurrection. This was necessary to disabuse the mind of those who held the notion that Jesus was the Deliverer who would redeem them from the dominion of the Roman Empire and set up an earthly kingdom. "**When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**" (Acts 1:6). At this time, Jesus knew that the faith of His disciples had grown enough to accept strong

doctrinal teachings like His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, Second Coming and eternal reign. Young converts need the milk of the Word and not strong bones. A time comes, however, that they should be introduced to the deep mysteries of the kingdom of God.

"**From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day**" (Matthew 16:21). However, Peter began to rebuke Him because he did not understand the necessity of the crucifixion. He was ignorant of God's redemptive plan for humankind. But Jesus turned and retorted: "**Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men**" (Matthew 16:23). Satan was using Peter's love and concern for Christ to cause the Master to stumble in His mission to the cross. Today, some friends and family members try, like Peter, to use their influence to discourage men and women from doing the will of God.

Jesus went further to reveal to them the cross-bearing life of true disciples. They must be willing to endure the same sufferings as their Lord. When we live after the manner that Jesus prescribed for us, persecution will arise (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:16).

When Christ "**shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels...**", there will be reward for believers while sinners and backsliders will be judged according to their works. We need to examine ourselves and be sure to live according to the standard of the word of God so as to be qualified to be with Him in His kingdom.

Questions for review:

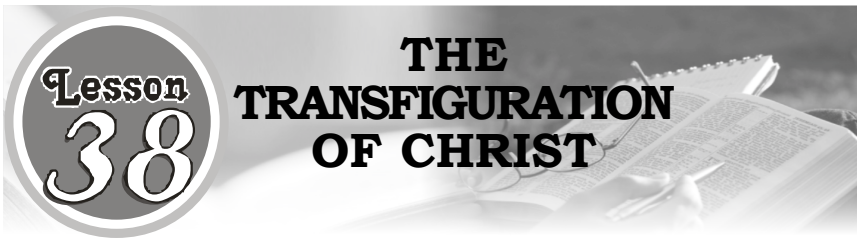
1. Why did Christ warn His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees?
2. Why is it important to have a proper knowledge of who Jesus is?
3. Why was Jesus Christ called Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist or one of the prophets?

4. Mention some proofs that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
5. Explain what you understand by “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.
6. What was the aim of Satan in using Peter to rebuke Jesus?
7. Mention those that will be judged and the way out of sin.

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PSALM 119:1 - 56
MONDAY:	PSALM 119:57 - 176
TUESDAY:	PSALM 120 - 130
WEDNESDAY:	PSALM 131 - 138
THURSDAY:	PSALM 139 - 150
FRIDAY:	PROVERBS 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	PROVERBS 4 - 6



THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: "**And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light**" (Matthew 17:2).

TEXTS: Matthew 17:1-27; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-36

The event in our study focuses on the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was so spectacular that the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) recorded it vividly and at length. This is because it is a sign of His glorification that is to come. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ strengthened the faith of Peter, James and John as it confirms the truth that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Apostle Peter was to later testify that James, John and himself "**were eyewitnesses of his majesty**" and that Jesus "**received from God the Father honour and glory**" (2 Peter 1:16,17). In God's plan, the transfiguration had an immediate impact on the participants and long-term application for the Church. The study also exposes how believers who have been delivered out of the hand of their enemies – sin, self, Satan, trials and temptation – should serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness until the end (Luke 1:74,75). Attention is also given to the not clearly understood personality of Christ's forerunner, the healing of the lunatic, the death and resurrection of Christ and Christian duties and responsibilities.

REVELATION OF AND RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S GLORY (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Peter 1:16-18; Psalm 4:4)

The account of the transfiguration was a historical reality and not mere fiction. Jesus actually took Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain to pray. While praying, the appearance of His face changed and His dress was white and radiant. Then, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and discussed with Him. Peter was overwhelmed with the experience and proposed to remain on the mountaintop. He, therefore, suggested that they make three tabernacles each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. But while He was still speaking, a cloud overshadowed them and God's voice came out of the cloud saying, "**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him**" (Matthew 17:5). After the voice, Jesus was found alone.

There are several lessons from the account of the transfiguration. One, Jesus devoted much time to prayer. This underscores the importance of prayer in a believer's life and ministry (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 11:1; 22:44-46). Prayer has transforming power and is able to make a believer glow to the glory of God. Two, we need divine revelation to be able to comprehend the glory of the Lord. Though Jesus put on human flesh, He was divine. His disciples would not have truly known this except God lifted the veil on their hearts to reveal Christ in His divinity on the mount of transfiguration.

Three, the appearance of Moses and Elijah teaches us that departed saints are not lost. They are safe in the bosom of the Lord; and someday, we shall see them face-to-face. Four, Moses and Elijah, in glory, talked with Jesus about His death and resurrection. Moses was the lawgiver to Israel and thus, represented the law. Elijah was the great prophet of Israel and thus, represented the prophets. The 'Law and the Prophets' implies the entire Scripture, which personifies Christ, the Word. We must read and listen to the Word and obey it without doubting or questioning. The Law and

the Prophets point to Jesus as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world.

Five, the response of Peter showed that he spoke inadvertently. He spoke "**not knowing what he said**". To start with, he proposed a tabernacle each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It must be noted that Jesus cannot be put on the same level with any prophet. Six, God spoke from heaven to distinguish Christ as His beloved Son and that they should hear Him (Matthew 17:5). This heavenly proclamation and affirmation was meant to signal Jesus as God's final Authority through whom all men would be redeemed.

Seven, we understand also that Moses and Elijah left the scene and Jesus was found alone. We learn here that the grand purpose of all revelations is to make us see Jesus only. We should not allow dreams, men or angels to becloud our vision and devotion to the Lord Jesus, as He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The three disciples of Christ, having seen the glory of Jesus and heard the voice of God concerning His Son, "**...fell on their face, and were sore afraid**". Believers must understand that God is omnipresent and "**...is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him**" (Psalm 89:7).

"**And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead**" (Matthew 17:9). The reason was that at this time in His ministry, the disciples did not believe in the death of Jesus let alone His resurrection from the dead (Mark 9:10). They did not fully understand what they saw and heard. Believers should realise that there is time for everything. Personal revelation from God about an issue should be mentioned only when it is necessary and edifying.

All who desire to behold Christ's glory in eternity must genuinely repent from sin and experience transformation of heart, consecrate all to the Lord, receive grace to live a godly life and continue to serve the Lord until the end.

RIDDLE ABOUT CHRIST'S FORERUNNER CLARIFIED (Matthew 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Malachi 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:10)

"**And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?**" (Matthew 17:10). The disciples wanted to know the assertion of the scribes that Elijah will come before the advent of the Messiah. This was prophesied in Malachi: "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD**" (Malachi 4:5). It was not that he should appear in person as they supposed, but that the forerunner of the Messiah will bear a striking resemblance to Elijah.

Jesus therefore told His disciples that Elijah indeed had come (Luke 1:17) in the person of John the Baptist. However, the Jewish rulers did not acknowledge the ministry of John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah. In their ignorance, they killed him. Jesus said He would be killed in like manner. By this systematic interpretation and explanation, the disciples understood that Christ referred to John the Baptist as His forerunner who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

PLEA FOR MERCY AND PAINFUL REBUKE FOR THE FAITHLESS (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43; Psalm 51:1; Matthew 9:27; Mark 10:47,48; Luke 4:24-27)

"**And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water**" (Matthew 17:14,15). This man came to the Fountain of life and the Source of all blessings. This is instructive to many who are in Christ's fold but wander elsewhere to seek help.

We need the mercy of God to break the power of sin and loose ourselves from the tyranny of sin. The psalmist recognises the place of God's mercy to deliver from sin

and set free from its domineering effects; so, he prayed thus, "**Have mercy upon me, O God according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression**" (Psalm 51:1).

Jesus Christ is a compassionate and merciful Lord who will never deny anyone who comes to Him with sincerity the privilege of grace, pardon and mercy. He said, "**him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out**" (John 6:37). However, faith is essential if we must receive from the Lord. Had the disciples demonstrated faith, they would have witnessed the power of God to deliver the lunatic child. The Lord rebuked them and said, "**O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?**" (Matthew 17:17). Faith makes the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Faith determines God's power and presence in our lives and is the basis of our relationship with Him. "**Without faith it is impossible to please him**" (Hebrews 11:6).

That the disciples came to Jesus apart to inquire why they could not cast out the evil spirit was proof of their eagerness to learn. Their tenderness of heart to acknowledge their failure and seek more knowledge is instructive. The Lord graciously taught and showed them why they failed.

"**Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting**" (Matthew 17:21). Christ underscores the power of prayer and fasting. He points to it as a channel through which we can prevail and get the power of God to accomplish our desire.

CHRIST FORETELLS HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION (Matthew 17:22,23; 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22,44,45)

After Peter's great confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, Christ began to foretell His imminent suffering and death. "**And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:**" (Matthew 17:22). He had to repeat the message while at Galilee because the disciples did not grasp its import and implication. It was

appointed and expedient for Him to die for the sins of the world and be raised again for our justification. But the disciples did not understand and they were afraid to ask Him. We must avoid the fear that limits our understanding of spiritual truth.

Here, we observe the courage and readiness with which Christ spoke of His sufferings. Early believers had the same courage in facing death. Peter and Paul spoke about death in such a way as to demonstrate that the sting of death has been taken away (2 Peter 1:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14). Through the death of Christ, the power of death has been broken for believers.

CHRISTIAN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (Matthew 17:24-27; Romans 13:1,7; Exodus 30:13; Luke 20:25)

At Capernaum, Christ paid the temple tax. This was the yearly tax imposed on all Jewish males as stipulated in the law (Exodus 30:13). Peter's affirmative answer to the question, "**Doth not your master pay tribute?**", was an indication that it was the practice of the Lord to pay all His dues. Before Peter could speak to Jesus about the tribute money, He went ahead of him to speak on the matter, for no thought could be withheld from His omniscience. Christ only stated His freedom from the payment of the tribute but did not insist on it. He was free from paying temple tax because He is the Son of God, the One greater than the temple. Yet, He paid the tribute to serve as example to believers and to avoid unnecessary offences. We ought to follow His example in fulfilling our Christian responsibilities both in the church and in secular society. The Holy Spirit says, "**Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour**" (Romans 13:1,7).

The miracle of provision of money for the tribute shows, one, the possibility of God providing for His people through unexpected means. Two, the importance of honest labour in order to provide for our needs and those of others who depend on us. It is part of Christian responsibility to be gainfully employed, rather than being a parasite on others. Peter had to go and fish out the money to meet their need. Third, we see the duty of providing for those who depend on us. Jesus provided for Himself and Peter. Those who are rich have the responsibility of helping the poor. Finally, we observe that the money provided was enough to pay for both Jesus and Peter. The Lord desires to meet all our needs if we trust Him.

Questions for review:

1. Explain the significance of the appearance and discussion of Moses and Elijah with Jesus.
2. Who was Christ's forerunner?
3. Why did Jesus instruct His disciples not to talk about what they saw?
4. What are the qualifications for partaking in the eternal glory?
5. What is the significance of Christ's death and resurrection?
6. What are the similarities between Elijah and John the Baptist?
7. What can we learn from Christ's payment of the tribute?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PROVERBS 7 - 8
MONDAY:	PROVERBS 9 - 11
TUESDAY:	PROVERBS 12 - 14
WEDNESDAY:	PROVERBS 15 - 17
THURSDAY:	PROVERBS 18 - 20
FRIDAY:	PROVERBS 21 - 23
SATURDAY:	PROVERBS 24 - 26

CHRIST TEACHES ON FORGIVENESS

MEMORY VERSE: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21,22).

TEXT: Matthew 18:1-35

In the previous chapter, Peter, James and John were with Christ on the mount of transfiguration where they had the solitary privilege of experiencing Christ transfigured before them. While there, they witnessed Moses and Elijah in conversation with Him. Moreover, they heard the voice from heaven approving the authority and divine Sonship of Christ. In other words, a curtain was lifted for the disciples to see for a while a little of the glory of His kingdom. The present study, however, will expose us to the fact that to have a revelation of the kingdom of heaven is not as important as to live the life that qualifies one to enter into the Kingdom. This required kingdom lifestyle of childlikeness, avoiding offences, forgiving and restoring fellowship with one another constitute the essence of the current discourse.

DEMAND FOR CHILDLIKENESS (Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 10:15; 1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20; Psalm 131:2; Luke 18:16)

The carnal nature of man, as exemplified in the disciples, manifested again at this time as they asked Jesus, "**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**"

(Matthew 18:1). Jesus answered in an unmistakable term with an instructive comparison. He said: "**Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 18:3). This is a demand for a second conversion as demonstrated in the many virtues in the lives of little children that are worthy of believers' emulation. These include their humility, trust, sincerity and forgiving spirit. Children do not sleep over or keep grudges. We must note that there exists a difference between childlikeness and childishness. Jesus condemned childishness, which manifests in selfishness, self-centeredness and other immature behaviours. "**Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men**" (1 Corinthians 14:20; 13:11). Humility, as a childlike virtue, enables teachability, submission, readiness to admit it when we are wrong and willingness to apologise. Sincerity as demonstrated by children shows in their simplicity, transparency and innocence. God expects us to trust and rely on Him the same way little children rely and trust fully on their parents. "**Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee**" (Psalm 143:8).

Another major characteristic of childlikeness is freedom from self-management. Children never see themselves as independent or sufficient for anything but wait on their parents for direction and instruction. No wonder Jesus said, "**Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein**" (Mark 10:15). This is because "**...of such is the kingdom of God**" (Luke 18:16). It needs be stated that the kingdom of heaven contrasts sharply with the kingdoms of this world. People gain prominence and greatness in the world by politicking, lobbying as well as image-making and through awareness campaigns of their wealth, status, accomplishments or plan for public management. Jesus taught however, that humility and self-emptying are the

keys and ways to greatness and prominence in His kingdom. "**Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 18:4). This allusion means literally that believers be of humble, innocent and simple spirits just as little children.

Jesus explained how dear this category of Christians are to Him such that angels behold the Father's face continually on their behalf despite their seeming littleness of importance before men (Matthew 18:10); and how careful we must be in not constituting any form of obstruction or discouragement on their way to heaven. If we receive, encourage and support such meek believers, it will attract divine rewards. This is because such gestures will be taken as done directly unto Christ. Becoming a stumbling block to their godliness and virtue on the other hand, attracts sore divine punishment: "**But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea**" (Matthew 18:6). Hanging a millstone was an advanced form of punishment by the Syrians and Greeks in the days of Christ. The Scripture states that the punishment from God on those that constitute stumbling block or offences for the childlike Christians would be more severe than the greatest punishment any human being or ruler on earth could devise or dispense.

DEALING WITH FAULTS AND OFFENCES AMONG BRETHREN (Matthew 18:7-20; Romans 14:13; Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:24,25; Psalm 133:1-3)

"**Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!**" (Matthew 18:7). Offences are things, actions, utterances or person that can induce others to sin. So long as the present world exists, temptation and allurement to sin will continue. But the Scripture pronounces terrible judgment on people through whom these offences come. As believers, we

must ensure that we do not act, talk, dress or relate in any way that would deplete grace in the lives of others. "**Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way**" (Romans 14:13). We also need to cut off any relationship, attachment or connection with anyone or anything that could offend, no matter how otherwise useful, profitable or seemingly indispensable such may be. How do we deal with things or people that offend? The Scripture is clear about that. We are to "**cut**" off, "**pluck**" out and "**cast**" them from us. None of these actions is easy or readily bearable. But when we weigh the consequences of our inactions with the outcome of the sacrifice that must be made, wisdom demands that heaven-bound pilgrims should take the painful but profitable path (Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:24,25).

Rather than constitute a stumbling block to fellow believers, we must actively seek to restore those that have stumbled. Legalistic leaders who are unwilling to forgive the repentant are also in the category of those who make others to stumble. For "**...it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish**" (Matthew 18:14). Since believers manifest the attributes of God, we ought also to handle our brethren who had offended us with love and the intention to get them fully restored again to the faith. The faults of erring brethren are not meant to be publicised. But we should rather seek quick and immediate restoration of such brethren. This, however, does not rule out the scriptural injunction to "**rebuke** [them that sin] **before all, that others also may fear**" (1 Timothy 5:20). Any offence that would incite members of the church to be disobedient to the word of God and to leadership must be publicly reproved so that sin does not spread by one act of indulgence. Leaders and members must not be subdued by fear to expose the errant ways of those who are leading others astray, no matter how influential they may be.

Notwithstanding, when there is an offence, the onus is particularly on those who had been offended to initiate

the restoration of the offender. The first action is to humbly contact the brother or sister that has offended us. Then we tell their fault between them and us alone. If however this fails, we should approach him or her in the company of one or two witnesses after which the matter should be reported to the church leaders if the offender still refuses the restoration process. If this would still not help, the Scripture says the offender should be treated as a "**heathen**" and a "**publican**". It is important to note that this process of handling those who had offended us is strictly meant for believers. Unfortunately, the opposite of this is what is often practised by many professing Christians today. They withdraw in bitterness, malice and resentment from those who had offended them and seek subtly for an opportunity to revenge. A fellowship or local assembly where this scriptural process is followed becomes a community of united saints who would pray, receive answers and enjoy the unceasing presence and power of God (Matthew 18:18-20; Psalm 133:1-3).

DISCOURSE ON FORGIVENESS AND FELLOWSHIP IN THE CHURCH (Matthew 18:21-35; 5:20,38; Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31,32; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 6:12,14,15)

"**Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?**" (Matthew 18:21). The earlier instruction of Christ on restoring fellowship with an offending brother provoked the question of Peter. He needed clarification. The rabbis had taught that forgiveness terminates after three offences. Peter therefore, felt he would be doing well if he terminates his forgiveness after seven offences, seven being a perfect number. But Jesus gave a different answer: "**I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven**" (Matthew 18:22). This means believers must forgive indefinitely because true love would not keep records of offences. The demand on believers for righteousness is far more than what was

practised by the Scribes and the Pharisees. "**For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 5:20). This also by far exceeds the demand of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:38). This is because we are under a different and better dispensation; and to whom much is given, much is required. "**But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more**" (Luke 12:48).

Jesus illustrated His teaching on forgiveness with the aid of a simple allegory with three main actors; the king, the forgiven servant and a fellow servant. The salient points in this parable on what transpired between the king and the forgiven servant include: one, a great debt which the servant could not pay; two, a terrible punishment or judgment for the servant's indebtedness; three, a plea from the indebted servant; four, compassion from the king; five, forgiveness and freedom. These represent exactly what happens between a sinner and the Saviour. A sinner is a debtor and cannot pay the debt of his sin. Thus, he only deserves judgment. "**For the wages of sin is death...**" (Romans 6:23). But when a sinner repents, prays in faith asking for forgiveness, he becomes justified and free from sin as well as its consequences. We were forgiven our sins, which were many and as a result become endowed with grace to forgive others. "**Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye**" (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31,32).

Unfortunately, the forgiven servant did not demonstrate the grace of being forgiven. He refused to forgive a smaller debt owed by a fellow servant despite his pleas. Knowledge of what transpired between both servants got to their master. "**And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him**" (Matthew 18:34). This

exemplifies what happens when we refuse to forgive those who offend us. We shall be judged if we refuse to forgive and forget the offences that others committed against us. Those who refused to forgive their fellows would be cast into hell where they will be tormented eternally (Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 6:12,14,15). This is so because un-forgiveness is sin in the sight of God. Therefore, those who have determined never to forgive persons who have offended them should repent and learn to forgive, "**...even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you**".

Questions for review:

1. Enumerate some virtues of little children that believers ought to have.
2. What are the keys to greatness in the kingdom of heaven?
3. What can believers learn from the parable of the lost sheep?
4. What are the scriptural steps we must take in order to restore fellowship with the brethren who have wronged us?
5. Why should a believer forgive?
6. What are the consequences of not forgiving someone that offends us?
7. What should be our attitude to those we have forgiven?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	PROVERBS 27 - 29
MONDAY:	PROVERBS 30 - 31
TUESDAY:	ECCLESIASTES 1 - 3
WEDNESDAY:	ECCLESIASTES 4 - 7
THURSDAY:	ECCLESIASTES 8 - 12
FRIDAY:	SONG 1 - 4
SATURDAY:	SONG 5 - 8

SECTION IV

LESSON **PAGE**

OLD TESTAMENT

40 - Jacob's Last Days on Earth 304

41 - Israel's Multiplication and Oppression in Egypt.. 312

42 - The Birth, Call and Commission of Moses 319

43 - Divine Judgment on Egypt 326

44 - Passover and Israel's Exodus 334

45 - Israel's Miraculous Passage through the Red Sea 342

46 - Israel's Murmuring and the Divine Intervention 351

NEW TESTAMENT

47 - Christ Prohibits Divorce 359

48 - Proper Perception of Riches 366

49 - Parable of the Labourers 373

50 - Triumphal Entry and Cleansing of the Temple 380

51 - Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen .. 386

52 - Jesus Confounds the Sadducees and Pharisees.. 392

JACOB'S LAST DAYS ON EARTH

MEMORY VERSE: "**And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite**" (Genesis 49:29).

TEXT: Genesis 48:1-22; 49:1-33; 50:1-26

This study opens with Jacob now at the twilight of his life. Though weak in body, yet he "**...strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed**" (Genesis 48:2). We are here reminded of the transience of life. The once young, budding, scheming, labouring Jacob was now nearing the end of his earthly existence. With the passage of time, human strength wanes and opportunities diminish. This corroborates the Bible truth about the brevity of human life: "**The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away**" (Psalm 90:10). Therefore, our constant prayer should be, Lord, "**...teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom**" (Psalm 90:12). Every individual on earth should live with the consciousness that death may come at any time. This therefore calls for constant watchfulness, prayerfulness and holy living by both young and old (Luke 12:35,36). However, it is noteworthy that Jacob was not scared at the imminence of death. This is a lesson for every believer on the need to be ready at all times.

Some noteworthy events that characterise Jacob's last days on earth were the adoption of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. We also see his final blessings

and rebuke of his sons, as well as instruction concerning his burying place. Jacob assured his sons of God's visitation and their return to Canaan, the Promised Land.

JACOB BESTOWS SPECIAL BLESSINGS ON JOSEPH AND HIS SONS (Genesis 48:1-22; 49:22-26; John 3:27; Ephesians 1:11)

Though Joseph was busy with the affairs of Egypt, he never forgot his filial responsibilities, especially to his father. On learning about his father's ill-health, he went immediately with his two sons to visit him. It provided Jacob the opportunity to rehearse to Joseph his past encounters with God. Neither old age nor sickness could make Jacob forget the promises that God made to him. "**And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession**" (Genesis 48:3,4). Believers are here reminded never to forget God's promises or instructions.

After rehearsing his encounters with God, Jacob turned to Joseph's sons and made the following pronouncement: "**And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine**" (Genesis 48:5). By this declaration, he adopted Joseph's sons as his own. He also set Ephraim above his elder brother Manasseh. Does this action of Jacob show partiality on his part? Or was the choice due to some act of sin in the life of Manasseh? Far from any of these reasons; it merely confirms the idea of God's election, prerogative and sovereignty (Romans 9:11-16). God's choice is as a result of His wisdom, love and foreknowledge.

Though Joseph initially protested at this preference of the younger above the elder, Jacob insisted that it should be so. "**And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people,**

and he also shall be great... and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:19,20). However, it is heart-warming that such choices do not leave the other party worse off. The choice of Ephraim over Manasseh is a proof of God's sovereignty. The believer's election into God's family is an act of God's mercy. "**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast**" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

It is noteworthy that Jacob spoke about death without fear. He also assured Joseph of God's abiding presence, and that He would bring them again into the Promised Land. This calls to question the unnecessary fear some believers entertain on the subject of death (Philippians 1:21).

JACOB'S SOLEMN PROPHECIES CONCERNING HIS SONS' FUTURE (Genesis 49:1-22,27,28; 1 Chronicles 5:1,2; Joshua 15:1; Judges 1:1,2)

"**And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days**" (Genesis 49:1). From the passage, Jacob summoned his sons for a special conference. "**Gather yourselves together**". These words introduced his dying address to his sons. The purpose of the gathering was clear and definite: "**that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days**." Children usually cherish the last words of their departing parents.

The farewell address began with Reuben, the first born. "**Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch**" (Genesis 49:3,4). As the first born, Reuben was no doubt expecting a special blessing from his father.

But instead of a blessing, he received a curse. Why? He committed immorality with his father's concubine, thereby defiling his father's bed (Genesis 35:22; 49:4; 1 Chronicles 5:1). He allowed his evil passion to have the better part of him. It is a grievous evil to commit immorality, and more grievous to do so with the wife of one's father. The consequence was that he lost all the excellence or right of the first born. By the dispensation of providence, a double portion went to Joseph, the first born of Rachel; the royal line from which the Messiah came to Judah; and the priesthood to Levi.

Reuben's sin affected not only him but also his posterity. No record exists in Scripture of any member of his family ever coming to a position of eminence or prominence in Israel. There are numerous lessons that contemporary believers can draw from Reuben's incontinence and lack of self-control. One, sin has grave consequences (Genesis 34:24-27; Judges 16:1,21). Two, time does not cancel out sin or lessen its effects (Numbers 32:23; Galatians 6:7). Although Reuben's sin was committed long before now, the curse for sin came many years after. The Bible says, "**Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered**" (Proverbs 11:21). Three, repentance, renunciation and restitution are the only remedies for sin (Proverbs 28:13).

In blessing his sons, Jacob did it to "**...every one according to his blessing...**" (Genesis 49:28). Each of the sons was blessed, but the form of the blessing was suited to each one's character and conduct. In His dealings with His creatures, God places great emphasis on their character and conduct. The type of blessing a believer receives from the Lord will depend on his character and the level of his walk with and devotion to Him. "**Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine**" (Exodus 19:5).

JACOB'S CHARGE CONCERNING HIS BURIAL, JOSEPH'S DEATH AND SUNDRY INSTRUCTIONS (Genesis 49:29-33; 50:1-26; Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32; Acts 7:15,16)

"**And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave... which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace**" (Genesis 49:29,30). After his charge to his sons, Jacob gave directions concerning his burial. Having ended his charge to his children, the patriarch "**gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people**" (Genesis 49:33).

It is worth noting that Jacob's sons obeyed their father's charge concerning where he was to be buried. Like the sons of Jacob, our Saviour also gave us a charge before His final departure from the earth. His charge is: "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). If Jacob's sons were faithful to their father's last command, contemporary believers should be faithful in carrying out the Master's command concerning the great commission. We must go to all the nooks and crannies of our communities and preach the good news of the Kingdom to sinners around us.

Meanwhile, Joseph mourned his father just as any loving child would a good parent. Indeed, all the sons of Jacob, together with their households, "**mourned** [him] **with a great and very sore lamentation**" (Genesis 50:10). This expression of emotion showed the great love they had for their father and the pain they felt as a result of missing him. In keeping with the instruction given, Jacob's sons buried him in the land of Canaan, the same place where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Leah were buried. The word of God counsels believers to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). But in doing this, believers must avoid excesses or the tendency to act like the people of the world. "**Let your moderation be known unto all**

men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). Whether in marriage, child naming, house dedication, burial or any other celebration, believers should shun worldliness or the practices of Egypt. "**Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God**" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

After their father's burial, Joseph and his brethren, and their entourage all returned to Egypt, thus fulfilling Joseph's promise to Pharaoh that they would return (Genesis 50:5,14). Like Joseph, believers should be people of integrity who always make their words their bond. The Scripture asserts that the person who will dwell in God's "**holy hill**" (heaven) is the person who among others, "**sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not**" (Psalm 15:4).

Meanwhile, the brothers of Joseph began to feel insecure, fearing that with the demise of their father, he may likely exact vengeance on them for the evil they did to him in the past. As a result, they sent emissaries to him to plead that he forgives them of their misdeed. This is a confirmation of the Scripture that "**The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion**" (Proverbs 28:1). They experienced guilt for their sinful act. Hence, they came to Joseph begging for forgiveness. We are here reminded that sin soils the conscience and befuddles the mind. Also, time does not annul sin, only repentance does. Joseph was a godly man who would not seek vengeance for a wrong done to him by others. His tender heart bled and he "**wept**" at the distress and doubts of his brothers. But he allayed their fear by promising to care for them and their little ones.

Joseph's attitude to his brothers throws up some vital lessons. One, he subscribed to the biblical injunction to "**recompense to no man evil for evil**" (Romans 12:17). The word of God commands believers thus: "**Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord**" (Romans 12:19). Two, he displayed Christlike character by forgiving those who offended him. While undergoing excruciating pain on

the cross, Christ thought it fit to pray for His persecutors. "**Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...**" (Luke 23:34). When Joseph's brethren came to him to plead for forgiveness, he assured them that he harboured no ill-will towards them. Three, like Joseph, when faced with challenges of life, believers should neither murmur nor complain but seek the face of God in prayer (Philippians 2:14; 1 Peter 4:19).

Joseph's brethren also came and did him obeisance by prostrating to him on the floor. We should recall that his brethren had riled at the thought of him becoming ruler over them, or that they could someday be vassals or underlings under his authority (Genesis 37:5-11; 43:28; 50:18). Rather than align with God's purpose, they hatched a plan to eliminate him. Prevented by God's providential plan, they eventually sold Joseph to Midianite merchantmen, who in turn, sold him into slavery in Egypt (Genesis 37:28,36). God's purpose will stand regardless of any human opposition. "**Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?**" (Lamentations 3:37).

"**And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die...**" (Genesis 50:24). The biography of Joseph was now completed. Human life on earth has an expiry date. Therefore, believers must make each day count by living a life that glorifies God. Joseph "**took an oath**" of his brethren concerning where he was to be buried, thus expressing his unwavering confidence in the return of the sons of Israel to the Promised Land. Joseph was a prophet. He assured his brethren, saying, "**God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob**" (verse 24). This prophecy was fulfilled with the eventual departure of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. God's word would surely be fulfilled, whether men believe it or not (Isaiah 55:11). Joseph's brothers kept their oath by burying his bones in Shechem (Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32; Hebrews 11:22).

Questions for review:

1. Identify major events that characterised Jacob's last days on earth.
2. From the account of Ephraim and Manasseh, explain what you understand by God's sovereignty and believers' election/adoption.
3. What consequences arise when sin is not repented of?
4. What should guide believers' attitude to burial and celebrations in general?
5. What does the fulfilment of Joseph's prophecy concerning Israel's departure from Egypt teach us about God and His word?
6. How should a believer prepare for death?
7. What does the fear of the brothers of Joseph teach us?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	HEBREWS 1 - 4
MONDAY:	HEBREWS 5 - 9
TUESDAY:	HEBREWS 10 - 13
WEDNESDAY:	JAMES 1 - 5
THURSDAY:	ISAIAH 1 - 4
FRIDAY:	ISAIAH 5 - 8
SATURDAY:	ISAIAH 9 - 12

ISRAEL'S MULTIPLICATION AND OPPRESSION IN EGYPT

MEMORY VERSE: "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel" (Exodus 1:12).

TEXT: Exodus 1:1-22

The opening verses of our text present us with an account of Jacob and his household after they had come to settle in Egypt. The Scripture records that "**...all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them**" (Exodus 1:5-7).

This wonderful increase was according to the promise made unto their fathers. The Lord had said: "**...I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation**" (Genesis 46:3). With the arrival of a new king which knew not Joseph, Israel began a new era of cruel bondage and oppression in Egypt. However, the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and grew in strength and might. What a great lesson for contemporary Christians, that, though the performance of God's promises is sometimes delayed, it will always come to fulfilment.

ISRAEL'S POSTERITY AND MULTIPLICATION IN EGYPT (Exodus 1:1-7; Deuteronomy 10:22; Acts 7:14-17; Psalm 105:23,24)

As a result of the famine in Canaan, Israel and his children went down to Egypt; seventy men made up of Jacob, his sons and grandsons, along with their wives and daughters. Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt. It was this little band of insignificant immigrant that God used to raise up a mighty nation as He promised Abraham (Genesis 12:2). This was a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham that He would multiply his seed exceedingly and make of him a great nation.

"**And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them**" (Exodus 1:7). The Israelites became so great that the Egyptians confessed that they were "**more and mightier than we**". We learn important lessons from this growth of Israel: One, God's promises are reliable and will certainly come to pass, no matter how long the time. God had earlier told Abraham that He would multiply his seed as the stars that cannot be counted (Genesis 15:5). Two, as long as we remain in obedience to God's will for our lives as children of God, His promises will definitely be fulfilled regardless of the environment we find ourselves (Isaiah 1:19). Three, as the children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied, believers are expected to be fruitful and increase abundantly both spiritually and physically. The Scripture says, "**The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon**" (Psalm 92:12).

ISRAEL'S PERSECUTION AND MALTREATMENT IN EGYPT (Exodus 1:8-16; Genesis 15:12-14; Acts 7:18,19; Psalm 105:25)

"**Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely**

with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land" (Exodus 1:8-10). After the death of Joseph, the fortunes of the children of Israel changed in Egypt. A new king began to reign who did not know Joseph; neither did he know the God of Joseph. Three important elements are recognisable as we look at the oppression of Israel in Egypt. These are: one, the reasons for oppressing Israel; two, the methods employed in oppressing them; and three, manifold benefits as a result of their oppression.

The reasons for the oppression of Israel were twofold. First, they wanted to stop them from multiplying and consequently weaken them. Second, they wanted to prevent them from growing to a point where they could get freedom and leave Egypt. They feared the Israelites, yet they were not willing to let them leave their land. They planned to keep them in perpetual slavery. Satan always desires to enslave people. He actually motivated the Egyptians to oppress Israel. "**But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel**" (Exodus 1:12).

The devil will always oppose God's people because he knows that they have a great future. He stirs up men to persecute believers with the sole aim of making them miss their great inheritance in Christ. The enemy opposes people with a great future. Therefore, the king said, "**Come on, let us deal wisely with them...**" (Exodus 1:10). What they called dealing wisely was wickedness in the sight of God. There are people who claim that they are applying wisdom when they perpetrate all sorts of wickedness. "**This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy**" (James 3:15,17).

The Egyptians employed four methods to oppress Israel. One, **affliction by task masters:** these were men

who allotted work, collected tribute, whipped and abused the Israelites. Two, *slavery:* they were denied freedom in every area. Three, *hard labour and rigorous service in the field:* they were used to cultivate and maintain farms without payments. They were forcefully engaged in brick making and burning which they used to build treasure cities for Pharaoh. Four, *infanticide:* Pharaoh commanded the killing of all male infants born to the Israelites. The Hebrew midwives were ordered to kill them as soon as they were born. When that failed, he commanded all Egyptians to throw all the Hebrew male infants into the River Nile.

Satan has repeatedly used different methods against God's people over the ages. Pharaoh's gradual plan to eliminate the Israelites started by "dealing wisely" (through rigorous labour), then ended up with making the midwives murderers. A sinner may start with little sins, but except s/he repents and turns over his/her life to Christ, s/he will eventually be hardened in them. A backslider, at first, starts by hiding, but he soon gets shameless about his/her evil deeds (Jeremiah 6:15). Sin has a degenerating process and effect; therefore, arrest it before it takes hold of you. Let not sin be your ruin.

The suffering of Israel in Egypt produced positive results. One, it made them ever willing and yearning to leave Egypt. It reminded them that Egypt was not their resting place, and they kept the vision of the Abrahamic covenant alive in their minds. Had things been easier for them in Egypt, it was doubtful if they would ever desire to go back to Canaan. Persecutions and tribulations also make believers to always remember that they have no continuing city here and to set their affection on things above – ever looking forward to the day when they will go to glory. Two, it made the Israelites to be physically strong, vigorous and lively. Their women were able to deliver quickly and they were healthier than the Egyptians. Three, it gave them a new revelation of the might of God. They learnt that God is able to preserve His people in spite of difficulties and oppositions from men.

Believers who are going through tribulations should understand that the power of God is available to see them through as in the case of Daniel and the three Hebrew children. God's unfailing promise is: "**When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee**" (Isaiah 43:2). Four, it made the Egyptians to realise the futility of any device or counsel against God and His people (Numbers 23:22,23). Five, through Israel's affliction in Egypt, we learnt that the growth and increase of God's people are not a product of favourable or unfavourable circumstances.

ISRAEL'S PRESERVATION AND MIGHT IN EGYPT (Exodus 1:17-22; 3:8; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Job 5:19; Psalm 32:7; Romans 8:35-39)

God intervened and preserved Israel in Egypt. Rather than accomplish the desire of the enemy, the affliction they went through enhanced God's purpose. When the king commanded Shiphrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives to kill the infants at birth, God instilled fear in the heart of these women. "**But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive**" (Exodus 1:17). When the king queried them, the midwives replied that "**...the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them**" (Exodus 1:19). We see the hand of God in all these events which resulted in the frustration of the plans of the Egyptians.

We also observe that the midwives disobeyed the order of Pharaoh, not fearing his wrath. Examples from the Scriptures show that ungodly command of legitimate authorities should not be obeyed. King Saul commanded that David should be killed but Jonathan his son refused (1 Samuel 19:1,4,5). Nebuchadnezzar's command that all the people in his kingdom should worship his golden image was disobeyed by the Hebrew children (Daniel

3:17,18). Daniel disobeyed the command of Darius not to ask anything of God (Daniel 6:6-10). The apostles disobeyed the Sanhedrin's directive not to preach or teach in Christ's name (Acts 4:16-20).

God commands believers to obey the powers that be – of the country, parents in the family, masters at workplaces, leaders in the church – but only "**in the Lord**". Where their command or order conflicts with God's words, we have to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). God's word is supreme and no human authority can set it aside.

It is instructive that God rewarded the midwives because they feared Him. He dealt well with them and gave them houses. The fear of God and obedience to His command bring blessings while disobedience attracts a curse. Whenever there is a genuine fear of God, there will be a departure from evil (Proverbs 3:7). The fear of God dispels the fear of men. The midwives were able to confront the wrath of the king because a higher and nobler fear possessed them. We must shun the fear of man because it ensnares (Isaiah 51:12,13; Proverbs 29:25).

Finally, we learn from the oppression of Israel not to oppress one another. God hates oppression. Therefore, employers, masters, and those who have househelps or the children of their relations living with them, and indeed everyone who is in a privileged position in society, church or family must see to it that they avoid all forms of oppressions. "**Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God**" (Leviticus 25:17).

Questions for review:

1. What can believers learn from the growth of the Israelites?
2. State the reasons for Satan's instigation of oppression over Israel in Egypt.
3. What are the four methods that the Egyptians employed to oppress Israel?
4. What are the positive outcomes of believers' tribulations today?

5. When are believers to obey or disobey those in the position of authority?
6. What are the gains in obeying God as the midwives did?
7. Are human schemes of wickedness able to upturn God's plan for His people?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	ISAIAH 13 - 17
MONDAY:	ISAIAH 18 - 21
TUESDAY:	ISAIAH 22 - 25
WEDNESDAY:	ISAIAH 26 - 29
THURSDAY:	ISAIAH 30 - 33
FRIDAY:	ISAIAH 34 - 37
SATURDAY:	ISAIAH 38 - 41

THE BIRTH, CALL AND COMMISSION OF MOSES

MEMORY VERSE "**Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt**" (Exodus 3:10).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 2 to 6

Moses was born when Israel was going through a difficult time in Egypt. The latest edict of the Pharaoh which knew not Joseph was against Israel. He had "**charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive**" (Exodus 1:22). Consequently, Moses was hid for three months after his birth. When it became practically impossible for his mother to hide him any longer, he was then brought to the river side in an ark of bulrushes. By providence, Moses was sighted by Pharaoh's daughter who had compassion on him. Upon request by his sister to call "**a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child**", Moses was given to his own mother, unknown to Pharaoh's daughter. He grew and was brought to Pharaoh's palace where he was fully prepared for the deliverance of Israel. Meanwhile, when Pharaoh sought to lay hand on Moses for killing an Egyptian, he fled to Midian where he accumulated experience as a shepherd. It was at this time that he was called and commissioned by God.

MOSES' BIRTH AND PRESERVATION FOR GOD'S PURPOSE (Exodus 2:1-22; 1:22; Acts 7:19-21; Hebrews 11:23; Proverbs 21:30,31)

"**And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months**" (Exodus 2:1,2).

Moses was born during the period of Pharaoh's edict to kill the sons of the Hebrews by casting them into the river Nile. However, because Jochebed, the mother of Moses, saw that the child was goodly, she believed that God had a special mission for him. Therefore, she acted by faith by preserving his life. Although it was a great risk for her to have attempted to hide the child, she believed that God would preserve him. As believers, we should not be afraid of the threatening circumstances that sometimes prevail around us. Such periods are always trying moments and opportunities to put our faith to test.

The parents of Moses were Levites and they gave birth to him without any pomp or fanfare, under a threatening circumstance. We should recall that Jesus' birth and survival was threatened by Herod. Joseph's birth was delayed, and when he eventually came, his survival was providential. Most great men that God has extraordinarily used over the ages were mostly men of humble beginning whose chance of survival was very doubtful.

God, however, used several means to ensure the preservation of Moses, his chosen servant. First, He used his comeliness. "**In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair...**" (Acts 7:20). It was the comeliness of Moses that God used to make the heart of Jochebed cleave much to the child and volunteer to take a risk of preserving him. "**And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months**" (Exodus 2:2). However, it is important to stress that beauty without godly character is like a trash in an attractive envelope. The Scripture says, "**As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion**" (Proverbs 11:22). Lucifer, Absalom and Jezebel had comeliness without godliness. They attracted God's

displeasure because of their pride and disobedience. Second, God used Jochebed's faith, diligence and discretion. She hid and nursed the child for three months until it became too risky to keep him in the house. Thereafter, she made an ark of bulrushes, and Miriam, Moses' sister, was stationed at a distance to monitor what would happen to Moses. She did all the needful and then left the rest in God's hand. In all these, we see human responsibility cooperating with divine sovereignty to ensure the survival of Moses.

Third, God directed, not only the steps of Pharaoh's daughter to the river at the time the ark was put by the river brink, but also directed her gaze to see the ark and also aroused her curiosity and sympathy. God used her coming to the river at this instance to deliver Moses. Fourth, the crying of the babe at the time Pharaoh's daughter picked him up was another means of divine providence to save Moses. The crying drew her compassion and sympathy and being a woman also, her feminine instinct was aroused and she was attracted to the child. Lastly, Miriam's timely intervention and prudent suggestion to go and call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child was acceptable to Pharaoh's daughter.

We see clearly the supernatural finger of God because Pharaoh's daughter accepted Miriam's bold suggestion without any hesitation or suspicion. Miriam eventually went and called the child's mother who then had the privilege of nursing her own son, and also got paid for doing so. God in His sovereignty employs the most humbling means and methods to achieve His purpose. Though the time of the king's edict was a dark period for Israel in Egypt, God brought something cheering and praiseworthy out of it. As believers in Christ, we should be prayerful and rest assured that God's hand of providence is working great things on our behalf, as lines will continue to fall in pleasant places for us.

Moses was nursed and nurtured by his own mother until he was brought to the palace. "**And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses:**

and she said, Because I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). Although Moses was raised in the palace, he had knowledge of his nativity and saw the oppression of his people by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He attempted twice to save his people. In the process, he killed one Egyptian. Pharaoh heard this and sought to slay him; but he fled to Midian where he met the seven daughters of the priest of Midian who came to draw water from a well. He put up a strong defence against the shepherds who would not allow them to water their father's flock. Eventually, he was invited home. "**And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter**" (Exodus 2:21).

MOSES' ANSWER TO GOD'S CALL (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-6; Hebrews 11:24; Judges 6:11-16; 1 Kings 19:19; Matthew 4:18-22; Acts 26:9-18)

"**And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage**" (Exodus 2:23). The cry and groaning of the Israelites drew the attention, compassion and respect of God and He remembered His covenant with their fathers. This led to the call of Moses to the ministry. Although Moses had lost the dream of delivering his people with the passage of time, God had not forgotten them.

"**Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb**." He must have been a caring shepherd who wanted the best pasture for his flock. A man who diligently and faithfully took care of his father-in-law's flocks for forty years without any record of misdeed could be depended upon by God to lead Israel to the land of promise. The patience, meekness and discipline needed by Moses to lead the often unruly and difficult children of Israel seemed to have been acquired during his forty years of waiting and tending animals. Those were years of humble preparation for a

nobler task. As he occupied himself with this humble occupation at hand, God exalted him to lead His people and to maintain a special relationship with Him. Believers should be busy doing something worthwhile for a living while they wait on God to open doors of higher opportunities. Other people who were called while they were busy include Gideon, Elisha, Peter, Andrew, James, John, etc.

The call of Moses created the awesome realisation that there was an unseen Personality behind the great sight who knew him well and could call his name distinctly. If he could run away and hide from the Pharaoh of Egypt, here was a Personality that he could not hide from. "**Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do**" (Hebrews 4:13). He must have realised that this was the God of the Hebrews whom he learnt about in his childhood. Therefore, he answered with absolute surrender: "**Here am I**". His response was similar to those of Abraham, Jacob and Samuel (Genesis 22:11; 46:2; 1 Samuel 3:4). God wants us to answer likewise to His call today.

Moses was warned as he approached the presence of God to avoid undue familiarity which breeds disrespect. "**And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground**" (Exodus 3:5). He was commanded to put off his shoes as a mark of respect and submission to God's presence. The place where he stood is holy and should therefore, not be polluted. By the same token, believers should respect their places of worship and avoid irreverent acts and attitudes.

MOSES' PURPOSEFUL COMMISSION BY GOD (Exodus 3:7-22; 4:1-31; 5:1-23; 6:1-30; 33:18-23; Genesis 15:1-8; Acts 7:6,7; Galatians 3:14-17)

"**And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt... And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the**

children of Israel is come unto me... Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

God made Himself known unto Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses knew very well the splendour of God's glory; therefore, he began to look beyond the flocks of Jethro under his care to the bondage and deliverance of the children of Israel in Egypt and how to take them to Canaan.

The call and commission of Moses show that God is interested in human race and still seeks to bring them out of the bondage of sin and Satan. If anyone sincerely surrenders to Christ, s/he will be delivered from the bondage of Satan, sin and sickness (2 Corinthians 5:17). Moses became the choice of God for the deliverance of Israel like Christ who came to the world as God's choice for our salvation. "**For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly**" (Romans 5:6).

At the time of his call and commission, Moses seemed to have lost the vision for the mission which he earlier imposed upon himself and failed therein. He no longer felt competent for the task. "**And Moses said unto God, Who I am, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?**" (Exodus 3:11). His fear and objection to the commission was due to human shortcomings such as: one, his escape from Egypt and living in asylum in Midian. Two, lack of military training or weapons. Three, there was no standing army to mobilise to combat Pharaoh. Finally, the Egyptian army was one of the strongest in the world at the time. The thought of human limitation for mission work is still the problem of many believers today. But we can depend on the Lord for our finances, businesses, family needs, educational pursuit, career success, church growth, breakthrough in ministry, etc.

It is instructive that though Moses felt unqualified and incompetent to carry out this mission, his feeling and expression of inadequacy would not deter God from using him. He was ignorant of the fact that with his

experience at the palace, Jethro's house and at the backside of the desert, God had fully prepared him for the task ahead. Thus, He knocked out all his excuses and assured him of success in the mission. It was upon this token that he demanded from Pharaoh: "**Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness**". The Lord expects us to be prompt to the call to preach the gospel and liberate people from the grip of sin and Satan (Mark 16:15).

Questions for review:

1. Describe the family background of Moses and point out lessons from the timing and lowliness of his birth.
2. Mention some means that God used to preserve Moses from death.
3. Mention some Bible characters and the work they were doing before they were called by God.
4. Mention some practical ways worshippers manifest irreverence to God in the place of worship and what can be done to correct them.
5. How can human limitations hinder successful mission?
6. Why was Moses reluctant to return to Egypt?
7. How did Moses succeed in taking the children of Israel out of Egypt?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	ISAIAH 42 - 45
MONDAY:	ISAIAH 46 - 50
TUESDAY:	ISAIAH 51 - 55
WEDNESDAY:	ISAIAH 56 - 60
THURSDAY:	ISAIAH 61 - 66
FRIDAY:	JEREMIAH 1 - 2
SATURDAY:	JEREMIAH 3 - 4

DIVINE JUDGMENT ON EGYPT

MEMORY VERSE: "**And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether**" (Exodus 11:1).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 7 to 11

The seventh chapter of Exodus begins the second section of this book of redemption. The first section (chapters 1 to 6) points out the need for redemption pictured by a people enslaved; describes the presentation and perplexity of Israel; reveals the arrogance and rebellion of Pharaoh; exposes the weakness, discouragement and complaint of Moses; and highlights Pharaoh's challenge of God's authority. In this section (chapters 7 to 11), the mighty power of the Redeemer is displayed in the plagues on Egypt. We shall also see the agony and humiliation of Pharaoh; learn of Moses' authority and boldness, as well as God's acts of authority against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt.

It is pertinent to say that as God is a God of love, He is also a God of justice. Sinners who repent genuinely will be forgiven their sins. But those who harden their hearts, even if it is a whole family or an entire nation, He will surely bring His judgment on them (Psalm 9:17).

SERVANTS OF GOD AND THEIR AUTHORITY (Exodus 7:1-13; 4:15,16; Numbers 12:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 5:17-21; Ezekiel 3:17-21; Romans 15:17-19; Hebrews 2:3,4)

"**And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet**". Moses was endowed with divine authority to act as God's ambassador. Acting in God's stead, he was to rule over Egypt's proud king, commanding him to do what he should do, controlling him when he did wrong and punishing him for his disobedience, so that Pharaoh would have to plead with him for the removal of the plagues. What an unparalleled and exalted position for God's servant! Aaron was to be a spokesperson to Moses; hence, he was to be a prophet to Moses. God's prophets act as His representatives and the Lord puts in their mouth the very word He would utter.

It is noteworthy that God told Moses and Aaron, "**Thou shalt speak all that I command thee**". As believers, we should preach the unchanging message of the gospel to all sinners, which are "**...repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Acts 20:21). Moreover, if a Christian worker is privileged to minister at the level of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, s/he should recognise that the message to be preached is still the whole counsel of God, the unadulterated message of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; Acts 26:27). There should be no addition or subtraction (Proverbs 30:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

Many casual readers of the Scripture often confuse themselves when they read the expression, "**I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt**" (Exodus 7:3). It is clear from the next verse that God is not responsible for the hardness of heart of Pharaoh who would not hearken unto His word. In other words, Pharaoh chose to be stubborn and unyielding to God's warnings and instructions; and God gave him over to a reprobate mind to do whatever he liked (Romans 1:28). God wished Pharaoh would have humbled himself and yielded to His incessant pleading. But he, as a free moral agent, refused: "**And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself**

before me? let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast" (Exodus 10:3,4).

We must have proper perception and understanding of the Word concerning the hardness of heart of Pharaoh so as not to be deceived by peddlers of the false doctrine of predestination. This doctrine, which states amongst others, that everything was predetermined by God from the beginning and that He has decreed in advance that certain souls will be saved and others will not, is unscriptural and completely false. Man is a free moral agent. Our choice of where we spend eternity is ours and we cannot hold God responsible for such choice and what eventually happens to our soul. What we are today and what we become tomorrow depend largely on our personal choices. God can only plead and warn ahead of judgment and destruction.

It is the desire of God that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. "**Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time**" (1 Timothy 2:4-6; 2 Peter 3:9). Every sinner or backslider should repent and believe the gospel to avoid the wrath of God.

In His omniscience, God knew and told Moses and Aaron that Pharaoh would ask for a sign. Thus, He adequately prepared them for miracles. The first contest between the power of God and Pharaoh was the rod of Aaron, which he cast down as commanded by the Lord and it became a serpent. "**Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments**". This shows the reason for Pharaoh's hardness of heart since he trusted in the power of his sorcerers and magicians, not realising that the power of the magicians is no match for the power of the almighty God. The Lord uses signs and wonders to confirm His words spoken through His servants.

Although false prophets who deceive unsuspecting people with fake miracles are on the rise today, the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached with "**signs following**" for the confirmation of the truthfulness of the gospel (Mark 16:17-20; Romans 15:17-19; Hebrews 2:3,4).

SEVERE JUDGMENT FOR THE IMPENITENT (Exodus 7:14-24; 8:1-32; 9:1-35; 10:1-29; Psalm 2:12; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:8; Ephesians 5:6)

The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites for a long time but at the appointed time, God delivered them. He sent His servants to Pharaoh to release His people so that they could go and serve Him, but Pharaoh rebelled and increased the hardship of the Israelites. God had promised to deliver Israel with a strong and mighty hand. Pharaoh rejected His word and authority and consequently invited divine judgment upon himself and the land of Egypt.

A succession of ten terrible judgments descended upon Pharaoh and Egypt. One, River Nile was turned to blood (Exodus 7:14-25). Two, frogs covered the land and entered the homes of the Egyptians (Exodus 8:1-5). Three, lice came on the people and their animals (Exodus 8:16-19). Four, swarm of flies invaded the houses of the Egyptians and covered the ground (Exodus 8:20-24). Five, a grievous disease smote the cattle (Exodus 9:1-7). Six, boils and sores afflicted them and their beasts (Exodus 9:8-12). Seven, thunder and hail destroyed plants and trees (Exodus 9:18-35). Eight, locusts consumed all vegetation (Exodus 10:1-20). Nine, thick darkness overspread the land for three days (Exodus 10:21-29). Ten, the firstborn of every family, including that of their animals died (Exodus 11:4-7; 12:29-33). It is interesting to note that in the centre of this terrible destruction on the Egyptians, the Israelites who dwelt in the land of Goshen were safe and spared. "**I will put a division between my people and thy people**" was God's pronouncement to Pharaoh (Exodus 8:22,23). God's promise to every true believer is: "**There shall no**

evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Psalm 91:10). Even at the close of the age, before the great tribulation and punishment of sinners, God will take His redeemed people away from this world through the rapture of the saints, because He hath not appointed us unto wrath.

There are things to learn from Pharaoh's intermittent false repentance and unacceptable options. He, like many people, while suffering the consequences of their sins had remorse for sins rather than true repentance. On several occasions, Pharaoh trembled and posed as if he was ready to comply with God's demand but alas, it was not a true and total submission to God's will (Exodus 8:8; 9:27,28; 10:16,17). His later action, in sequence, shows that he manifested spurious repentance. True repentance should produce total change of heart and action, hatred for evil, carefulness in avoiding the objects of temptation and desire to do the will of God. Evidence that one is truly saved include obedience to the word of God, honesty, living right, good conversation, that is, a bridled tongue. Except the sinner or backslider genuinely repents and believes in Jesus, he or she will not escape God's judgment. The wrath of God will eventually come on the children of disobedience.

SYMBOLIC PLAGUES OF GOD'S WRATH (Exodus 9:24,25; 10:4-6,14; 11:6; Matthew 24:15-25; Jeremiah 30:4-9; Joel 2:1,2,31)

The ten plagues came upon Egypt because they were wholly given to their own worship of other gods, were rebellious against the true God and they oppressed His people instead of releasing them to serve the Lord. The pestilence came upon the Egyptians to overthrow their pagan gods and bring the recognition of the true God.

These plagues are symbolic. After the rapture of the Church, the full fury of the great tribulation will break upon this world. During the time, God will pour out His wrath and judgment. The plagues of Egypt, as terrible as they were, cannot be compared in intensity with the plagues that will be released on this world when God's

wrath is poured out. "**For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be**" (Matthew 24:21).

The Egyptian plagues should serve as warning to everyone. We should examine ourselves to be sure we are in the faith as only members of the spotless Bride of Christ can escape the terrible day of God's wrath.

There is a solemn parallel between the plagues of Egypt and the period of judgment that will come upon the world. During the great tribulation, many severe plagues will be poured upon the world for rejecting Christ. The analogies furnished between the visitations of divine wrath in Egypt and those which the Scripture predicts and announces for the future are many and detailed. One, during the time of the great tribulation (Jacob's trouble), Israel will again be sorely oppressed and afflicted (Exodus 5:21-23; Jeremiah 30:5-8). Two, God will send two witnesses to work miracles before their enemies (Exodus 6:26,27; Psalm 105:26-36). Three, the Israelites' enemies, like the magicians, will also perform some miracles (Exodus 8:6,7; Revelation 13:11-15). Four, God will execute sore judgment upon the world (Exodus 12:12; Jeremiah 25:15,16).

Five, water will again be turned into blood (Exodus 7:19-21; Revelation 8:8,9; 16:4,5). Six, satanic frogs will appear (Exodus 8:2; Revelation 16:13,14). Seven, a plague of locust shall be sent (Exodus 10:12-15; Revelation 9:2-11). Eight, God will send boils and blains (Exodus 9:8-11; Revelation 16:2). Nine, terrible hailstones shall descend from heaven (Exodus 9:22-25; Revelation 8:7). Ten, there shall be awful darkness (Exodus 10:21-23; Revelation 16:10,11). Eleven, just as Pharaoh hardened his heart, so will the wicked harden their hearts (Exodus 9:35; Revelation 9:15). Twelve, death will consume multitudes (Exodus 11:5,6; 12:29,30; Revelation 9:15).

SHOCKING OCCURRENCE THAT CLIMAXED GOD'S WRATH (Exodus 11:1-10; 3:19,20 Leviticus 26:21,22; Isaiah 26:9,10; Psalm 78:43-51; Amos 4:6-12)

God had been patient with the people of Egypt. Though Pharaoh and his people had refused to obey Him, He did not immediately send the final judgment. Instead, He dealt patiently with Pharaoh, by sending nine plagues of less intensity. Then He sent the final one, in an attempt to teach the Egyptians that He is All-powerful and that their own gods were powerless. But they refused to be taught.

The last plague, the severest of the plagues, was directed at the firstborn in Egypt, "**the chief of their strength**" (Psalm 78:51). The firstborn of both man and animals were smitten dead by midnight (Exodus 11:4-6). Pharaoh, Egypt's magicians and the people were helpless in the midnight emergency; neither wealth, science, might nor magic were able to provide the needed deliverance. The same pattern of plagues and judgment that came upon Egypt will come upon the world. More awful judgments shall be visited upon the earth after the rapture. All these should provoke genuine repentance on the part of sinners and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Similarly, we should awake to obedience, faith and consecration so that we may be accounted worthy to escape these things that shall come to pass. "**And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man**" (Luke 21:34-36).

God is not willing that any sinner should perish; yet, sin will inevitably be punished. God sends warnings and allows chastisement and plagues to come to us in order to bring us to submission, to save and deliver those held in bondage. If we repent, mercy is shown to us; but if we persist in sin, it will only attract more plagues as well as the final judgment.

Questions for review:

1. Explain the balance between God's love and His justice.
2. What do you understand by the expression, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart"?
3. What is the wish of God for every sinner and backslider?
4. Mention some of the plagues that came on Pharaoh and the Egyptians as a result of their impenitence. How did God secure the Israelites from His wrath on the Egyptians?
5. Distinguish between spurious repentance and sincere repentance. What is the evidence of true repentance?
6. When will the great tribulation occur? Explain the events in the plagues of Egypt that will be similar to those of the great tribulation.
7. What must one do to avoid the impending judgment on unrepentant sinners here and hereafter?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JEREMIAH 5 - 6
MONDAY:	JEREMIAH 7 - 9
TUESDAY:	JEREMIAH 10 - 12
WEDNESDAY:	JEREMIAH 13 - 14
THURSDAY:	JEREMIAH 15 - 18
FRIDAY:	JEREMIAH 19 - 21
SATURDAY:	JEREMIAH 22 - 24

PASSOVER AND ISRAEL'S EXODUS

MEMORY VERSE: "It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations" (Exodus 12:42).

TEXT: Exodus 12:1-51; 13:1-22

In this study, Moses communicated the message that would release the Israelites from their protracted bondage in Egypt. The Lord instructed them to sprinkle the blood of slain lambs on the lintel of their houses so that they could be identified for sparing while the human and animal firstborn of the Egyptians would be slain. This unforgettable experience is called the Passover. "**And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt**" (Exodus 12:13). After this, Egypt would be too painfully pressured to release them from their four hundred and thirty years bondage. In gratitude to His faithfulness, the Lord required that all firstborn Israelites be set apart for His sacred use. Also, He assured them of His protective presence through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

INSTITUTION OF THE ORDINANCE OF PASSOVER (Exodus 12:1-20; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

"**This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.**

Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover" (Exodus 12:2,3,11). In God's programme, important spiritual achievements and attainments are to be celebrated to express the excelling value assigned to them and our deep appreciation unto God as the Author of such achievements. God instituted the ordinance of Passover as an event to prepare the Israelites for their exodus from Egypt. Each household or a combination of households was to choose a lamb or goat without blemish, a male of the first year, to be killed and to make a mark on their house's doorpost with its blood.

This divinely appointed sacrifice was to be the substitute for their firstborn that would have died in the plague. The lamb was to be roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, which foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ as a paschal Lamb on the cross at Calvary. The Passover presaged His shed blood for the remission of our sins, His sinless body, which provides life for believers and the bitter suffering and death that He endured to bear our grief and sorrows (Isaiah 53:3-7).

The feast of the Passover was to commemorate the night that the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites marked by the blood. "**And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt**" (Exodus 12:13). Apart from its first observance that preceded the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, the feast of unleavened bread was ordained to be an annual event that would last for seven days. All through the period of this feast, no leaven should be found anywhere in their houses. Leaven in their houses is now to be spiritually interpreted as sin in the life of a Christian. "**Your glorying is not good. Know ye not**

that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

INSTRUCTIONS ON THE OBSERVANCE AND THE PURPOSE OF THE PASSOVER (Exodus 12:21-51; Leviticus 22:19-21; Deuteronomy 16:1; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16; Romans 9:17,22; Exodus 12:43-49; Isaiah 56:6,7; Romans 10:4; Matthew 26:17-20,26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:17,18,23-34)

As Moses was sent to Pharaoh with heavy tidings that would judge his disrespect for God's command, so also was he sent to the Israelites with divine counsels on what to do to enjoy the promised blessings of God. Moses, like other faithful servants of God, "**...are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life...**" (2 Corinthians 2:15,16).

Moses faithfully delivered God's message to the Israelites on how they were to observe the first Passover in Egypt. "**Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning**" (Exodus 12:21,22). He also instructed on how it was to be celebrated as a perpetual ordinance. "**And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service**" (Exodus 12:24-27). Observe that while Pharaoh continually

showed contempt for the word of God, the response of the Israelites to His word was commendable. "**And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they**" (Exodus 12:28). This implicit obedience of the Israelites to God's command on how to observe the Passover brought them into favour with God (Exodus 12:50,51).

If Pharaoh's conscience had not been hardened, his confession would have been: "**For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure**" (Job 31:23). But hardness of heart made him to turn deaf ears to the frightening words of God's judgment pronounced on Egypt until a final plague of the death of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt was meted out.

There are other people in the Scripture that suffered similar judgment for showing disrespect to God's warning. Eli's indifference to God's warning brought untimely and shameful death to his children and himself. "**And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years**" (1 Samuel 4:17,18). Nebuchadnezzar's disregard of God's warning led to his debasement to the form of an animal (Daniel 4:27-33). The Scripture's warning to those who are unwilling to yield to God's warning through His word and servants is, "**He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy**" (Proverbs 29:1).

God rewarded the obedience of the Israelites with the performance of the promised blessing. "**And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies**" (Exodus 12:51). God manifested Himself to Pharaoh and the Egyptians as the Judge through the

following acts: (a) the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain. (b) Pharaoh ordered the immediate release of the Israelites in total submission to the supremacy of God's power over His creatures. "**And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth**" (Exodus 9:16). (c) the exodus of Israel from Egypt eventually became a reality.

The following are the descriptive features of this glorious exodus from Egypt: one, they left Egypt with all their personal effects (Exodus 12:34). Two, there was a notable expression of divine favour to the Israelites. By divine intervention, they were enriched with the spoils of Egypt (Exodus 12:35,36). Three, the Israelites enjoyed complete salvation, deliverance and redemption since they were divinely helped to go with all their young ones and their animals as a performance of what God had ordered through Moses (Exodus 12:37,38; 10:9). Four, Pharaoh, under the strong hand of God, thrust out the Israelites out of Egypt as God had previously assured Moses (Exodus 12:39; 6:1). Five, their exodus was the final fulfilment of God's long-awaited promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:13,14). Six, it was also an accomplishment of His current promise of divine response to their cry unto Him to put an end to their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10; 12:40,41). Seven, the permanence of this blessing is expressed through God's demand that the memory of this event be preserved all through their generations (Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

"**And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof**" (Exodus 12:43,44). All Israelites as well as their servants, who were bought with money and were circumcised, must partake of the ordinance of the Passover. Under the new covenant dispensation, only those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus are to partake of the New Testament version of the Passover, which is the Lord's Supper. "**And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it,**

and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28). The observance of the Lord's Supper is to commemorate the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation and the glorious expectation of His return to take all saints to heaven (1 Corinthians 11:26-29).

GRATITUDE FOR THE BLESSING OF THE PASSOVER (Exodus 13:1-22; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Deuteronomy 6:20-25; John 10:4,5)

The Israelites were to show their gratitude to God in a practical way for the preservation of their firstborn of both human and beast. Accordingly, God demanded that they set apart their firstborn children for His sacred use. In the same manner, believers should sanctify themselves unto God, who had saved them from eternal death that would have been their lot if Christ had not paid the penalty by His substitutionary atonement. "**But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**". "**For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive**" (Romans 5:8,15; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22; 2 Corinthians 5:15).

The children of Israel were to celebrate the feast of the unleavened bread in the Promised Land to perpetuate the remembrance of the blessing of the Passover. While observing this feast, they were to exercise the greatest caution in ensuring that no leaven was found or eaten in any part of their houses. Leaven in the New Testament dispensation stands for sin, which must no longer characterise any area of a Christian's life (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). "**Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God**" (1 John 3:9). The Israelites were also to make their children

appreciate the purpose of the feast and to partake in its observance with strict adherence to the prescribed rules as ordained by God. By so doing, they would be as wise as Abraham, of whom God said, "**For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him**" (Genesis 18:19). Christian parents and leaders should encourage their children to always be in a ready spiritual state for the observance of the Lord's Supper as well as the rapture.

When the Israelites commenced their wilderness journey, they did not know the right way to take and had to follow God's leading. They were to walk by faith with God as their only Guide. Their human understanding could not comprehend why He decided not to lead them through a shorter distance to the Promised Land but rather chose to lead them through the wilderness of the Red Sea. Having seen the end of God's work all through Israel's wilderness journey, our confession of faith should be: "**Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?**" (Proverbs 20:24). God gave the children of Israel visible objects in form of a pillar of cloud by daytime and a pillar of fire by night to signify His presence with them. Jesus Christ is the most glorious Light of our dispensation who guides all His disciples through His Spirit in their earthly pilgrimage to their final destination prepared for them (Psalm 119:105; John 1:4,5; 10:4,5; 9:5).

Questions for review:

1. What sacrifice did God ask the Israelites to make before they left Egypt?
2. Relate the lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs used for the Passover with Christ.
3. Describe notable blessings that are associated with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.
4. What are the similarities between the Old Testament Passover and the Lord's Supper of the New

Testament?

5. How important is God's leading to every pilgrim in his journey to heaven?
6. Why is it important for every believer to partake in the Lord's Supper?
7. Why must we be grateful to God for delivering us from the enemy of our soul?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JEREMIAH 25 - 27
MONDAY:	JEREMIAH 28 - 30
TUESDAY:	JEREMIAH 31 - 32
WEDNESDAY:	JEREMIAH 33 - 35
THURSDAY:	JEREMIAH 36 - 38
FRIDAY:	JEREMIAH 39 - 42
SATURDAY:	JEREMIAH 43 - 45

ISRAEL'S MIRACULOUS PASSAGE THROUGH THE RED SEA

MEMORY VERSE: "And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever" (Exodus 14:13).

TEXT: Exodus 14:1-31; 15:1-27

As the children of Israel continued their journey to Canaan, they soon came to the Red Sea, the first major obstacle that threatened their progress since they left Egypt. The sea is a natural creation of God that ran along its own course; it did not exist primarily to stop Israel's progress, though it became God's chosen route to take His children to the Promised Land. It was to later play an important role, in defeating Pharaoh's agenda, for the people of God. Unfortunately, we see the Israelites' complain and murmur at this trying period. After their deliverance from Egypt, they probably felt there would be no more problems as they marched to Canaan.

The miracle of crossing the Red Sea was so significant in the history of the Israelites that it became a reference point and a standard for expressing the mighty power of God to their later generations. They often referred to this miracle to portray God's love and care for His people and to inspire them to have faith in God, especially when facing difficult challenges. "**And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies**" (Psalms 106:11; 18:3).

Moreover, the experience signifies the destruction of unrepentant sinners. The same passage through the sea which served for Israel's deliverance brought death and destruction to the Egyptians.

DIVISION OF THE RED SEA AND THE DROWNING OF THE EGYPTIAN HOST (Exodus 14:1-31; Psalm 32:8; Matthew 16:7-11; Mark 6:52; Jeremiah 17:9; Exodus 14:13,14; Isaiah 50:4; 1 Peter 3:8-11; Psalm 91:14,15; Isaiah 65:24; Jeremiah 33:3; Luke 11:9; Psalm 32:8; Nehemiah 9:9-11; Psalms 77:12-20; 106:7-12; Isaiah 63:9-14; Hebrews 11:29)

God did not make any mistake in leading the Israelites towards the Red Sea. He did it on purpose. "**And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt**" (Exodus 13:17). It is necessary for believers to be confident of divine guidance in every area of their lives because the Lord has promised: "**I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye**" (Psalm 32:8).

Pharaoh and the Egyptians manifested hardness of heart and rebellion against God in their pursuit of Israel despite the terrible judgments they had experienced because of their oppression of Israel. They were so hardened as to follow Israel into the miraculously divided Red Sea. The children of Israel expressed unbelief and fear "**...when Pharaoh drew nigh,** [they] **lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD**" (Exodus 14:10). When they saw the hot pursuit by the Egyptians, they responded in a way that betrayed their doubt of God's power to protect them on their journey. Believers must know that fear and faith are antagonistic to each other. When fear comes, faith goes out. Fear kept the host of Israel in bondage of Goliath for forty days (1 Samuel 17:11), made

the servant of Elisha to cry in despair (2 Kings 6:15,16), and caused Peter to lose focus on Christ while walking on the sea. Consequently, he began to sink (Matthew 14:30). Fear is a great hindrance to faith and the Scripture is dotted with encouragement for God's children to "**fear not**" (Genesis 15:1; 2 Chronicles 20:15-17; Psalm 56:4; 46:1-3; Isaiah 35:4).

Apart from their fear and unbelief, the children of Israel manifested other negative tendencies that believers must avoid. One, indiscretion in the use of their tongue. They spoke carelessly without deep thought or restraint. We must guard against unwholesome speech, especially when we are under pressure and in trying situations (Proverbs 18:21; Psalm 106:32,33; James 1:26; 3:2). Two, they manifested ingratitude to God and Moses. Three, they were insincere in saying they wanted to remain in Egypt and serve the Egyptians from where they were delivered in answer to their prayer for emancipation (Exodus 3:7). Besides, Moses did not compel them to leave Egypt but on their own volition, but now they blame him because of their present difficulty. Very often, we shy from taking responsibility for our decisions and actions, especially when difficulties arise in consequence. At such times, it is common to find that people tend to blame their leader. We must avoid this carnal trait. Four, they were unstable in faith. Whenever things were easy for the Israelites, they praised God but when things went wrong, they murmured. They oscillated between faith and unbelief depending on their external circumstances. Five, Israel made an unbelievable choice. They preferred bondage to freedom simply because they needed to pay a price to remain at liberty. Many sinners today choose to remain in bondage to sin and Satan simply because they are unwilling to give what it takes to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

Moses responded to Israel's murmuring in a challenging way. He responded in a spirit of faith and love that overlooked the harsh language of the people. He did not return railing for railing; he did not attempt a futile self-defence or counter-accusation against Israel

either. Like Christ, he had been given the "**tongue of the learned**" and he knew "**how to speak a word in season to him that is weary**" (Isaiah 50:4). No doubt, Moses had acquired rare qualities and attitudes of a shepherd during his forty years training in the wilderness. As a result, he was able to endure the hardness of leading Israel in difficult times. Every prospective leader in the church must take their training seriously and experience God's touch on their lips so that they will speak aright at all times, both before obstinate 'Pharaohs' and complaining 'Israelites' (Exodus 4:12; Isaiah 6:7; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Colossians 4:6).

The manner in which Moses encouraged the children of Israel is very instructive. One, he allayed their fears by pointing them to God. He said, "**The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace**" (verse 14). It is the sacred responsibility of church leaders to help people overcome their fears by pointing them to God in times of difficulty. Two, he told them to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord (verse 13). In times of great distress, it is essential to be still so that we can receive instructions from the Lord. Otherwise, we may miss important details in divine instructions (Job 37:14). Three, Moses gave Israel assurance of God's salvation and help, though he did not know the manner in which the deliverance would come. Four, while encouraging the people with the word of faith, he listened to God for a word that would get the problem solved. After prayers, God told Moses what to do so that Israel would have a passage through the sea. Believers should learn to pray at all times as Jesus has commanded: "**...that men ought always to pray, and not to faint**" (Luke 18:1).

In answer to Moses' supplications, God instructed him to "**...speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward**", while he lifted up his rod to divide the sea. When we do things in God's ways, we should expect divine intervention. God thereafter, initiated some actions that succoured Israel and saw them through the sea to the other side. First, He hardened the heart of the Egyptians. Second, the angel of God went behind

the Israelites for protection. Third, the pillar of cloud moved from their front to their back to prevent the Egyptians from overtaking them. Fourth, God divided the Red Sea after Moses stretched out the rod as commanded. It is noteworthy that the rod in the hand of Moses was what God used to divide the Red Sea. He often uses what He has invested in us to intervene in our situations in times of distress. God used five loaves of bread and two fishes to feed about five thousand men (John 6:9-11); He used the pot of oil to break the financial yoke of the widow during Elisha's time (2 Kings 4:2,7); and He turned the sling in the hand of David to a potent weapon of war (1 Samuel 17:49).

As the Israelites started to cross the Red Sea, God protected them all night. He interposed between them and their foes, using the same emblems of His presence, which they were already familiar with – the same means by which God guarded them in time of danger. The pillar of cloud dispersed as darkness towards the Egyptians while the light-giving pillar of fire was on the side of Israel. This is symbolic and deeply significant.

One, God's word is light to the believers (Psalm 119:105) but the same word is darkness to the unrepentant sinners. Two, God is able to protect His people from the hurt of the adversary. Just when the enemy thought he was ready to lay hands on the hindmost of God's people, the Lord stepped in and covered His people with His wings. Christ's blood circumscribes the path of true believers and God's fiery presence protects them (Zechariah 2:5). Three, the darkness also hid from the Israelites the fury of their pursuers. This was designed to protect their hearts from panic and to help them remain focused on God. In His mercy, the Lord often hides from us those things that would terrify and rob us of His perfect peace. Four, the light on the side of Israel enabled them to walk through the opened sea. God not only gave His people a way through the sea, He also gave them light to walk in it. God's provisions are always complete. Five, we see in this incident a prefigure of the final separation between believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers are children

of darkness and in eternity, they will be completely separated from the believers who are children of light.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians pursued Israel. God allowed them to reach the midst of the sea and then troubled them. He looked on the Egyptians with displeasure and it brought panic and confusion on them. The wheels of their chariots were also broken off and they drove heavily thereby slowing down their movement. They suddenly realised that they were contending against the God of Israel but it was too late to escape. In obedience to God's directive, Moses stretched his hand over the sea again and its normal flow was restored. The flood overwhelmed the Egyptians and they all perished in the sea. God's judgment for unrepentant sinners is certain. Pharaoh had several opportunities to repent but did not until he was destroyed. The only way for sinners and backsliders to escape the type of judgment that befell Pharaoh is for them to genuinely repent from sin and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

DEMONSTRATION OF GRATITUDE THROUGH PRAISES (Exodus 15:1-21; 2 Samuel 22:1-51; Psalms 66:1-8; 106:1-12; 89:1; 136:1-15)

Moses and the children of Israel demonstrated their appreciation to God almighty by singing praises unto Him. "**Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea**" (Exodus 15:1). This song was a narration of how God delivered the nation of Israel from perishing in the Red Sea and how their enemies perished in the same sea. The song reveals the graciousness of God, mercy and care for His chosen people. This was the first recorded song in the Scriptures. A cursory review of it is pertinent in knowing what constitutes acceptable praise. It is a song wholly given to God's honour and holiness. It was a spontaneous and inspired response to the goodness of the Lord to the children of Israel.

A review of the song's contents revealed the following: one, it acknowledges God and His power. God is the source of all victories and He is worthy of our praise and adoration. Two, Israel's victory was celebrated as God's victory. It is a measure of humility when we ascribe all glory to God for our achievements and successes. Three, God's holiness is highly exalted. God is holy and all His operations are in holiness. Four, the prophetic declaration of destruction to the enemies of God and His people. Apostle Paul, by the Spirit of God, assures believers that God would deliver them from every evil work. The power of positive confession cannot be underestimated in the life of the believer. Five, women, led by Miriam, raised their voices in praise and re-echoes the might of the Lord in this great deliverance. The attitude of singing songs that fan the embers of disunity and quarrels among people should be discouraged. It is inimical to progress and spiritual wellness. This type of negative singing brought rancour and disunity in Israel in the time of Saul (1 Samuel 18:6-8). Instead, we should sing songs to the glory of God like Miriam and Mary did (Luke 1:46-55). Songs that excite carnal passions, no matter how seemingly religious, should not be found in the circles of heaven-bound saints.

DESPAIR AND DIVINE INTERVENTION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE (Exodus 15:22-27; Deuteronomy 7:15; Psalm 42:11)

God's deliverance is full and complete. He is always ready to give immediate response to the cry of His people. "**Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation**" (verse 13). When we begin to praise God in realisation of the good things He has done for us, our eyes will be opened to other areas in which He has wrought wonderfully for us; and how He put to shame our enemies. It is therefore, expected of us to show our appreciation unto God each time we experience His protection, provision and deliverance.

No sooner had the children of Israel praised the Lord for their deliverance than the problem of shortage of water hit their camp. They found some at Marah but the water there was bitter. Instead of crying to God for supply, they resorted to murmuring which eventually became their constant reactions to difficult situations and challenges. Murmuring and complaining became their undoing in the course of their pilgrimage (Exodus 16:2,8; 17:3; Numbers 11:1,18; 14:2,27; Deuteronomy 1:27; 1 Corinthians 10:10). Murmuring is a canker that can eat into the fabrics of Christian unity and progress. Scripture's admonition to believers is, "**Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door**" (James 5:9).

In his usual pattern and response to challenges, Moses went to God in prayer when the people began to murmur. Believers should emulate this virtue whenever they face challenging situations. Notwithstanding their murmuring, God, in His mercy, made the bitter water sweet and revealed His blueprint for their healthy living. These rules are encapsulated in Exodus 15:26 – "**And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee**".

The transitory nature of life's problem is hereby illustrated in Israel's leaving Marah for Elim, where they had abundant supply of water. As the Scriptures rightly states, "**For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning**" (Psalm 30:5). Believers should therefore be hopeful in times of problems while awaiting God's intervention.

In conclusion, believers should note that, one there is no problem too difficult for our God to solve. Two, whatever the threat of the enemy, God is ever near to deliver us promptly. Three, as we sing in appreciation to God's deliverance and provisions in our lives, He will

do more for us. Four, the devil is always at the corner to reduce our joy to nothingness whenever we experience divine visitation or deliverance. Five, rather than complain whenever we come to a crossroads in life, we should cry unto God for His intervention.

Questions for review:

1. What does the Red Sea signify for all believers?
2. Point out some negative attitudes manifested by Israel at the Red Sea that believers must avoid.
3. What should believers do in times of trouble?
4: Point out lessons from the way God intervened when Pharaoh pursued Israel.
5. What do we learn from the way Moses and the children of Israel praised God after the deliverance from their enemies?
6. What should be the reactions of believers to likely bitter experiences of life?
7. How can we cross our Red Sea today?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	JEREMIAH 46 - 48
MONDAY:	JEREMIAH 49 - 50
TUESDAY:	JEREMIAH 51 - 52
WEDNESDAY:	LAMENTATIONS 1 - 3
THURSDAY:	LAMENTATIONS 4 - 5
FRIDAY:	EZEKIEL 1 - 2
SATURDAY:	EZEKIEL 3 - 5

ISRAEL'S MURMURING AND THE DIVINE INTERVENTION

MEMORY VERSE:"I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God" (Exodus 16:12).

TEXT: Exodus 16:1-36; 17:1-16

A short while after the children of Israel left Egypt, they lacked food and water. This led to murmuring and complaining against God and Moses. Israel, before now, had witnessed God's manifold mighty power in Egypt; they crossed the Red Sea and sang inspired songs of victory. What the Israelites did at this time shows that they doubted God's ability and faithfulness to provide for their needs. When believers respond to challenges the way unbelievers do, they underrate God's power and frustrate His grace. Instead, believers should remember His past blessings, trust Him in the present challenges and pray for divine intervention. In spite of their murmuring, God revealed His goodness by meeting their needs.

Immediately after their murmuring and provision of water by God at Rephidim, the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites unprovoked. Believers are constantly on the battleground with the devil and therefore should seek no repose. "**Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**" (1 Peter 5:8). It is cheering that through God's leading, Israel defeated the Amalekites.

ISRAELITES MURMUR AGAINST GOD AND MOSES (Exodus 16:1-10; 17:1-4; 14:11,12; 15:24; Numbers 14:2,27; 20:3-5; 21:5; Acts 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:10; Philippians 2:14; Jude 16)

As Israel continued their journey, they left Elim where "**...they encamped there by the waters**" and came to the wilderness of Sin where they lacked food and water. This made the whole congregation to murmur against Moses and Aaron. "**...Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger**" (Exodus 16:3). It is instructive here to note how easily people often forget God's goodness and mercy towards them when challenges come.

When the children of Israel encountered challenges, they often resorted to murmuring and complaining. Sometimes, their murmurings aggravated to confrontation. Moses at a time said, "**...they be almost ready to stone me**" (Exodus 17:4). In the face of challenges, they doubted God's power in the forms of complaint, discontent, disobedience, anger, opposition and even outright rebellion. Murmuring against God's servants is an indirect murmuring against God. "**And Moses said, ...the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD**" (Exodus 16:8). God hates murmuring. Therefore, those who engage in the vice must desist from it as doing so can bring about much physical and spiritual damage (1 Corinthians 10:10).

This would have been the case when the first occurrence of murmuring in the early Church threatened the unity, growth and stability of the Church (Acts 6:1-6). But it is heart-warming that the leaders were discerning and wise to adjudicate the matter by conferring delegation to the people to appoint seven deacons who would take care of the widows on whose pretext it surfaced. We are warned to "**Do all things**

without murmurings and disputings" (Philippians 2:14). Murmuring implies forgetfulness of God's love, goodness, blessings and mercy. It is an indication of impatience, unbelief, intolerance and immaturity. One cannot murmur and pray in faith at the same time. Murmuring kills faith and makes one an ingrate. Believers should avoid the sin of secret or open murmuring. Miriam became leprous and many of the children of Israel died in the wilderness because of murmuring. It is still as damning today as it was ever (Numbers 14:2; 16:41,49).

Surprisingly, God manifested undeserved patience and mercy towards Israel in this case as He promised to "**...rain bread from heaven**" and commanded Moses to "**smite the rock and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink**" (Exodus 16:4; 17:6). Moses, in this state of confrontation from the people, cried to God for direction. How instructive this is to leaders to learn to rely absolutely on God in the time of confrontations, confusions, frustrations and challenges. They should learn to be more patient and understanding.

INCREDIBLE DIVINE PROVISION OF FOOD AND WATER IN THE WILDERNESS (Exodus 16:1-21; 17:5-16; 15:22-26; 1 Kings 17:8-16; Matthew 14:15-21; 15:32-39; Philippians 4:19)

"**I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God**" (Exodus 16:12). God recognised the need of the people, which occasioned the murmuring. He responded as One with whom nothing is impossible. He demonstrated His love and concern for the welfare of His people. He gave them Manna (angels' food) and quails. He is Jehovah Jireh. In the Bible days and even in contemporary times, God is always at hand to meet His people's needs. "**For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities...**" (Hebrews 4:15).

He fed Elijah through the agency of ravens, provided for the Zarephath widow's household through veritable prophetic utterance and fed multitudes with what was barely sufficient for only one lad (1 Kings 17:3-6,8-16; Matthew 14:15-21; 15:32-39). When our situations look like we are forgotten and answers to our prayers seem to be delayed, we must not doubt God's presence like the Israelites doubted and asked, "**Is the LORD among us, or not?**", because He is ever near.

Being the present Help in trouble, God heard Moses' cry each time and instructed him on what to do. At Marah, the bitter water that was available was made sweet. In Rephidim, there was complete water scarcity but the same God provided water for them at Horeb and manna at Elim. Though the Israelites thirsted for physical water, Christ expects us to thirst for spiritual things such as righteousness, purity of heart, baptism in the Holy Ghost, anointing for effective service and greater successes in ministry. He invites as many as are thirsty to come to Him and buy without money (Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 5:6; John 6:35; 7:37,38; Revelation 22:17). As God met the physical needs of the children of Israel, so will He meet all the physical and spiritual needs of His people today.

God gave definite instructions regarding the manna which He provided: one, "**Gather of it every man according to his eating**"; two, **an omer for every man**; three, "**according to the number of your persons;**" four, "**take ye every man for them which are in his tents**;" five, "**Let no man leave of it till the morning**;" six, "**To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning**". In their usual manner, some of them disobeyed God's instruction. They went out to seek manna on the Sabbath and God was displeased. "**How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?**" From the foregoing, the following lessons could be deduced: (i) disobedience to God will always bring divine displeasure; (ii) care must always be taken in carrying out God's instruction to

the letter; (iii) God still demands consecration and honour for the Lord's Day; (iv) we should beware of tempting God; and (v) our lifestyle must be devoid of greed and covetousness. God commands that the manna be kept for a memorial for generations (Exodus 16:33). This command teaches us the necessity of giving testimonies and keeping record of the same for future generations to see and know what God has done, can do and will do for all those who trust Him.

Christ is "**the bread of life.**" He is the true Manna for our soul, that is, the word of God by which our souls are nourished. All we desire and consume our thoughts and energies on should not be for the physical bread alone, as the devil readily uses these means to concoct temptations that magnify want and misfortune so we would not concentrate on the word of God. We must create time out of our busy schedules to hear, read and study the Scripture always. We are not only to hear and read the Word, we are also expected to share it with the people around us. "**Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine**" (2 Timothy 4:2).

ISRAELITES FIGHT AGAINST THE AMALEKITES (Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15:2,3; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Matthew 18:18-20; Ephesians 6:11-18)

"**Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim**" (Exodus 17:8). This was the first nation to fight with Israel. The Amalekites were the descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12). They were a threat to Israel's entrance into Canaan and oppressed them on different occasions (Numbers 13:28,29; 14:39-45; Judges 3:13; 6:3-5; 1 Samuel 30:1). In the same way, Satan also opposes believers in their pilgrimage and endeavours without any provocation. Therefore, the Christian must always be on guard.

The attack of Amalek on Israel is characteristic of the devil's scheme against believers. One, it was sudden. Two, the timing was strategic: Israel had just left Egypt

and had not formed a formidable army. Three, Amalek sustained the attack for a very long time. Four, the attack was unprovoked. Satan is the chief enemy of all believers and still applies same strategies today. Because he does not give up easily, we must not be tired of contending in the good fight of faith until the battle is won (2 Kings 13:14-19; 1 Timothy 6:12).

God must have given the strategies to Moses when he ordered Joshua to "**Choose out men, and go out** [to] **fight with Amalek**", while he would stand "**on the top of the hill with the rod of God in** [his] **hand**" (Exodus 17:9). There are important lessons we must learn from this. First, God is not stereotyped. The methods He deployed to defeat the Egyptians were completely different from this. There is an appropriate strategy for each battle in life. We must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading on what to do or not to do. Second, God could have destroyed the Amalekites without the instrumentality of Israel but He chose to have their cooperation and support to achieve His aim. This reminds us of the importance of the divine-human partnership in securing our privileges in the Lord. Third, the place of prayer cannot be overruled. Moses, Aaron and Hur were on the mountain while Joshua and his men were on the battlefield. As Moses lifted up the rod, believers should raise intercessory prayers for people far and near who are facing challenges of life. When the hands of Moses became tired, Aaron and Hur rallied round him to ensure a lasting victory for Israel. They made Moses to sit on a stone, "**and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands**". As long as his hands were held up, Joshua discomfited Amalek. This is unity in operation. Prayer must be sustained until the answer comes. Believers must unite to fight our common enemy and to fulfil the Great Commission.

Joshua had some good qualities as a leader-to-be. He was obedient, submissive to leadership and did not question the authority of Moses. "**And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek... So Joshua did as Moses had said to him...**" (Exodus 17:9,10). He was courageous. He was called to

lead the people in battle and he went even at a short notice.

After Israel defeated Amalek, God ordered Moses to chronicle the event so it would serve as a memorial of the victory God gave the Israelites at the time; he was also required to rehearse it to Joshua that God would utterly wipe out Amalek from the earth. The writing would also serve to teach and tell their generations to come that the war is to be sustained, "**Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation**" (Exodus 17:16). In like manner, believers are expected to sustain the battle against sin, self and Satan until the end.

Moses gave the glory, honour and adoration to God for the victory. He built an altar unto the Lord for a memorial "**and called the name of it Jehovahnissi**" which means the Lord is my Banner. The presence and power of the Lord was the banner under which they were lifted and kept together, and protected in the day of their triumph. In the name of our God, we must always lift up our banners. As long as we trust in the Lord, He will fight for us and our victory is sure. Sinners and backsliders who are facing challenges can also come to Jehovah Nissi today by repenting from their sins and trusting Jesus for salvation, protection and victory over their life's challenges.

Questions for review:

1. What should be the attitude of the believer in times of needs?
2. What are the consequences of murmurings and complaints in the life of a believer?
3. How can a believer avoid murmuring?
4. Give examples of people who experienced God's miraculous provision in the Scripture.
5. Identify some of the strategies Satan often employs against believers.
6. Mention some outstanding qualities that made Joshua successful.
7. Why was it unnecessary for Israel to murmur in the

wilderness?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	EZEKIEL 6 - 8
MONDAY:	EZEKIEL 9 - 13
TUESDAY:	EZEKIEL 14 - 17
WEDNESDAY:	EZEKIEL 18 - 21
THURSDAY:	EZEKIEL 22 - 24
FRIDAY:	EZEKIEL 25 - 28
SATURDAY:	EZEKIEL 29 - 31

CHRIST PROHIBITS DIVORCE

MEMORY VERSE: "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).

TEXTS: Matthew 19:1-15; Mark 10:1-16

Our Lord Jesus made preaching and teaching of the Word an integral part of His life and ministry. He had no idle time. Every time He came in contact with people, He seized the opportunity to present the gospel light and correct the errant views of the doctors of the law who twisted the word of God and polluted it with the doctrines and traditions of men. For a long time therefore, the people who resorted to the synagogue to learn of God and be admonished on how to please Him were set on a wrong course. For this reason, multitudes sought and thronged Christ always to hear Him speak the mind of God with the authority lacking in the teaching of the Pharisees. He is the living Bread to the hungry, a guiding Light to the lost and health to the sick and afflicted.

The Pharisees in our text came to Jesus, not to learn and know the truth that could have set them free but to set a snare for Him because of the hardness of their hearts. Their pride, refusal to learn and admit their ignorance, and outward show of self-righteousness (Luke 18:10-12) made them to ask the Lord "**Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?**" This question on divorce and remarriage, though valid and

sound, was not borne out of the intention to do the right, but to confound Jesus. They knew the Scriptures but pretended to be unlearned in this matter. However, Christ's emphatic declaration against divorce, except for fornication, forced them to quote Moses' permissive command, which is not in line with the purpose of God; because "**...from the beginning it was not so**". True worshipers must come before the Lord with a humble and receptive heart, and not with Pharisaic attitudes.

Taken aback by Christ's precepts on marriage, the disciples concluded that it is not good to marry. However, their reason was ill-informed and void of careful deliberation.

CHRIST'S VERDICT ON MARRIAGE (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 2:18-24; 5:32; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; Proverbs 18:22; Genesis 24:3,4; Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:12,13; Matthew 22:23-29; Ezekiel 9:12; Nehemiah 13:25; Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; Ephesians 5:26,27; Revelation 19:7)

Marriage is a sacred institution; it is God's idea and not a derivative of any culture. "**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).

Jesus pointed the Pharisees to the origin of marriage: "**But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female**" (Mark 10:6). The original plan and design of God for marriage is that one male and one female would come together in a close and intimate union to become "**one flesh**". This is against the sinful practices of polygamy, polyandry and same-sex marriage that is rampant today. The fact that God could create more than one woman for Adam but did not, shows that polygamy is detestable to Him. Jesus authoritatively taught that for a man to go into marriage, he must "**leave**" his father and mother and "**cleave**" to his wife; and the two persons will become one in mind, love, pursuit, desire, understanding, purpose, vision, ministry, etc.

From the exposition of our Lord Jesus Christ, we

understand that (i) two people are divinely united to become one in marriage; (ii) matrimonial union is more intimate and binding than parental or filial affection; (iii) the union in body means a complete union in spirit, mind, interest, decision and possession; (iv) they are united together and bound to each other such that any separation would cause damages to their lives and personalities; (v) the union is premised on a pure flame of love that warms their lives; (vi) such union is so beautiful, precious and delightful that it cannot and should not be put asunder by any man; and (vii) God has yoked or joined them together and only death can terminate the union.

It means then that believers must not go into marriage with unbelievers. Doing such displeases the Lord; in fact, He forbids it. That is why Abraham took an oath of his servant that he would not take a wife of the heathen for his son, Isaac. "**And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac**" (Genesis 24:3,4). Also, believers should desist from giving their children to unbelievers in marriage as this is forbidden by the Lord and not good for their spiritual well-being. Disobedience to this injunction attracts divine judgment. "**Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you**" (Joshua 23:12,13).

Marriage is also used figuratively to describe Christ's union with the Church. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church (the Bride) for whom He gave His life to "**sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,**

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:26,27). Christ will come again to take the saints home to Himself. Those who have prepared themselves and remained unspotted by the world would be joined with Him in heaven where they shall be rewarded. "**Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready**" (Revelation 19:7).

CHRIST VETOES DIVORCE (Matthew 19:7-12; Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:4-12; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11; Ephesians 4:32)

God's word teaches that marriage is binding for life and never to be dissolved by any man or woman, judicial system, or civic/religious potentate except when it is wrongly contracted or there is a situation of death of one of the couples. "**What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder**" (Mark 10:9). Although the idea of divorce has gained popular acceptance across cultures and even adopted by some denominations today, it still does not change the fact that God hates divorce. "**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). When asked about the bill of divorcement, which Moses commanded, Christ, the final Authority on all issues, explained that it was for the hardness of their hearts and for their selfish motives that Moses permitted them to do so. "**But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery**" (Matthew 5:32).

Jewish custom forbids a virgin engaged to a man to go into fornication. When a virgin who is already in courtship with a man commits fornication with another man, the husband-to-be, if he so wish, can put her away.

When they are married legally, infidelity found on the part of either is called adultery. Christ does not support divorce between married couples as a result of infidelity. Rather, He commands forgiveness. The grace to forgive and love does not give room for divorce in a true Christian marriage. "**And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you**" (Ephesians 4:32).

Remarriage while the first and legal wife or husband still lives is also sinful. Childlessness or inability to sexually satisfy one's partner should not be a reason for separation or remarriage. Rather, the couples who need the fruit of the womb should look up to God who gives children; and make amends where necessary. "**Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband**" (1 Corinthians 7:3). Nonetheless, if a spouse is maltreated for one reason or the other to the extent that life is threatened, the church should be informed immediately for proper counsel and course of action to take.

"**His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry**" (Matthew 19:10). Christ's disciples, having heard this verdict on marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage felt it would be a hard thing to marry and therefore chose celibacy. "**But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it**" (Matthew 19:11,12). These few exceptions are to receive God's guidance and are not to be product of infantile decisions, misguided, imitations, faithless consecration or frivolous religious compassion. Paul the apostle affirmed that, "**...to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband**" (1 Corinthians 7:2). Those who abstain unnecessarily from marriage because they want to consecrate themselves to the Lord

and to His service, but secretly commit fornication or masturbate to satisfy their sexual urge are committing sin and would be judged if they fail to repent. The advice to everyone is to get married and not be self-deluded by gratuitous asceticism.

CHRIST'S COMPASSION FOR CHILDREN (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15,16; Matthew 18:3)

"**But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me for such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and departed thence**" (Matthew 19:14,15). Jesus loves little children as well. He was not pleased with the disciples for preventing them from coming to Him. He saw children as the products of divinely ordained union of marriage and He blessed them. In the same manner, He blesses all the children in the Kingdom, young or aged. He gives to all who come unto Him a cleansing touch (Luke 17:12-14), illuminating touch (Matthew 9:29,30), reassuring touch (Matthew 17:7), liberating touch (Mark 7:33-35) and healing touch (Luke 22:51).

Parents are to bring their children to the Lord early for salvation as that will prevent them from becoming lethal instruments in the hands of the devil. When they are brought early to the Saviour, they will be touched, saved and transformed for God's use like Samuel, Daniel and the three Hebrew children in Babylon. Commenting about Timothy, Paul recognised the fact that "**from a child** [he had] **known the holy scriptures, which** [is] **able to make** [him] **wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**" (2 Timothy 3:15). As we introduce our children to Christ in their early years, they will not depart from His ways when they are old, but constitute a reliable generation that would take over the baton of true Christianity from us.

Questions for review:

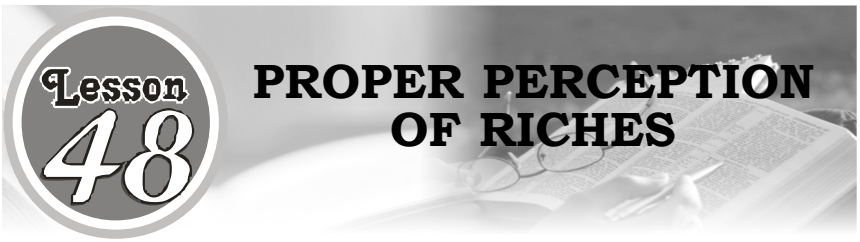
1. What are the motives behind the questions the Pharisees asked Jesus?
2. What should be our attitudes before God and His

ministers in the church?
3. How long is Christian marriage supposed to last?
4. What does the Bible teach on separation, divorce and remarriage?
5. Why is it important for parents to bring their children to Christ at an early age?
6. How should children be treated in the children church?
7. Why is Christ compassionate towards children?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	EZEKIEL 32 - 35
MONDAY:	EZEKIEL 36 - 38
TUESDAY:	EZEKIEL 39 - 42
WEDNESDAY:	EZEKIEL 43 - 44
THURSDAY:	EZEKIEL 45 - 46
FRIDAY:	EZEKIEL 47 - 48
SATURDAY:	1 PETER 1 - 5



PROPER PERCEPTION OF RICHES

MEMORY VERSE: "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

TEXTS: Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30

This account, captured by the three synoptic gospel inspired-writers, unfolds the dialogue of Christ with a rich, young ruler who against all odds and with admirable piety approached the Lord Jesus Christ to ask the all-important question: "**Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?**" (Matthew 19:16). Christ, in response, first corrects his misuse of the title "Good Master". The correction is necessary since sin has made all men bad except God, which warranted the need for a Saviour. The Lord then demands that he keeps the commandment. On further inquiry by the young man, the Lord lays emphasis on the content of the second tablet of the commandment that borders on relationship with fellow men and women. "**The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?**" (Matthew 19:20). "**Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me**" (Mark 10:21).

Christ's demand from the young man is not different from what He teaches His disciples. "**And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let**

him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34-38; Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-25; 12:33,34). This study's focus shall be on the demand of Christ, which reveals a divine concept of proper perspective of riches.

It shows no one is truly rich until he or she obtains salvation and "**...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness**"; lays his treasures in heaven and lives a cross-bearing life daily while following Christ. The young man, a supposed ruler, was grieved at Christ's demand and left sorrowful. This occasion was used by the Lord Jesus Christ to reveal to His disciples the danger of trusting in earthly riches as well as the possibility of obtaining salvation through God's grace. He further expounds on earthly and heavenly recompense for those who forsook earthly treasures for His name's sake.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS OF A RICH YOUNG RULER (Matthew 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-21; Luke 18:18-22)

"**And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**" (Luke 18:18). This rich young ruler approached the issue of eternity with a cloak of self-righteousness. He felt sure that his background and works were enough to recommend him for the kingdom of God. Christ, however, saw beyond the physical and punctured his flattery. "**And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God**" (Luke 18:19). This was not because Christ is not qualified to be so addressed, but to prevent a misconception that borders on His purpose and mission. "**Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man**" (Job 32:21). All men, without exemption, have been corrupted by sin (Psalms 14:2,4; 58:3; 51:5; Romans 3:9-19,23). This is the major reason for Christ's incarnation for our redemption (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53:3-12; Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 2:14-17). So, only God is good, and He is God.

Christ points the attention of the young man to the infallibility and veracity of the commandments. "**Thou**

knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up" (Luke 18:20,21). Although the rich young ruler observed the contents of the second stone-table commandments, he felt a sense of lack for which he needed Christ's clarifications. "**Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me**" (Mark 10:21). At this instance, the young man was grieved and left sorrowful because "**he had great possessions**".

The attitude of this young man mirrors that of most religious young men in our society. Christ's instruction exposes the young man's covetous hold on physical riches to the detriment of his soul (Exodus 20:3; Matthew 6:24; Luke 9:25). Two, it exposes the need to translate his earthly treasures to heaven, which will also influence his heart's focus (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:33,34). Three, it exposes his unwillingness to make necessary, legitimate sacrifices to have eternal life (Philippians 3:7-10). Four, it shows that human moral efforts are insufficient to attain the standard of righteousness demanded by God (Isaiah 64:6; Micah 6:6-8).

STARTLING REVELATION ON THE RICH'S SLIM CHANCE OF MAKING HEAVEN (Matthew 19:22-26; Mark 10:22-27; Luke 18:23-27; Psalm 52:1-7; Proverbs 11:28; 1 Timothy 6:8-10)

The response of the rich young ruler is surprising when reconciled with his initial eagerness for Christ's instructions. It is equally amazing to see the influence of wealth on his soul that resulted in him turning down such a glorious offer. Nevertheless, it reveals the hold of wealth on the rich's heart. Christ, taking advantage of this incidence, expounds to his disciples the danger of inordinate quest and confidence in riches. "**And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How**

hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:24,25).

This statement reveals: one, the difficulty of salvation of rich people. It is noteworthy that the way and the gate to heaven is narrow. "**Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it**" (Matthew 7:13,14). Christ says it is easier for a camel's head to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved. This comparison goes to tell the difficulty of a rich person to be truly saved. Two, nothing less than the grace of God can enable a rich person's salvation and sanctification. As a camel is loaded with burden, so are the rich people loaded with excesses that are not compatible with the way that guarantees entry into heaven. Three, it is very rare for the rich not to set their heart upon their riches. It is equally impossible for a person who sets his or her heart upon riches to make heaven. "**He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch**" (Proverbs 11:28). Four, the way to heaven is fitly compared with the needle's eye, which is difficult to hit at with the strand of a thread and difficult to go through.

Each person requires grace for salvation, sanctification and the possibility of making heaven. However, unlike the rich man in the text, each individual must strive to avail him/herself of the grace of God to qualify. Upon Christ's exposition on the issue, the disciples retorted, "**Who then can be saved?**" (Matthew 19:25). To this, the Master gives a comforting response: "**The things which are impossible with men are possible with God**" (Luke 18:27). God has promised the redeemed wealth here on earth if they obey Him. "**Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth**" (3 John 2; Deuteronomy 28:1-13). Godly men like Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Hezekiah, etc. were rich, yet they did not put their

confidence in riches, but in God.

It is however, noteworthy that the path to wealth acquisition could be attended with danger and the heaven's pilgrim needs be watchful. "**But 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**" (1 Timothy 6:9,10; Proverbs 11:28). Godliness with contentment remains the modest rule for heaven's wayfarers. The Scripture, nevertheless, admonishes the rich not to be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us all things. They are also to minister to the poor and invest in the Kingdom's mission. "**Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life**" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

SATISFACTORY REWARD FOR CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS (Matthew 19:27-30; Mark 10:28-31; Luke 18:28-30)

"**Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee**" (Mark 10:28). Peter was touched by Christ's exposition on the danger of riches. He therefore demanded to have insight into the saints' eternal reward. This is necessary to strengthen his conviction and those with him as they face the hazard involved in following Christ. The Lord was not hesitant in assuring Peter and the other disciples, as well as believers at large of the reward we are sure to receive here on earth and in heaven above. "**And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall**

sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:28,29).

Moreover, the Lord has promised that believers will shine as the brightness of the firmament and as stars for ever (Daniel 12:3); they will be rulers over many things and filled with the joy of the Lord (Matthew 25:23); they will have glory, honour and peace (Romans 2:10); they will be glorified together with Christ as joint-heirs and reign with Him (Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12); and there is a better and enduring substance for them in heaven (Hebrews 10:34) and an incorruptible crown of life, righteousness and glory (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10). However, we must heed the warning to "**...hold that fast which** [we have, that is, our salvation]**, that no man take** [our] **crown**" when the Lord shall come unannounced (Revelation 3:11). Believers should therefore give all to follow Christ, "**Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ**" (Colossians 3:24).

It should be noted, notwithstanding, that these blessings are not for those who neglect their family members and do not cater for their necessary needs, but for those who do not allow conjugal or filial love to supersede the love they have for God, His service and Kingdom. Beyond these, He has given more promises for the overcomers (Revelation 2:7,11,17,25-28; 3:5,12,21; 7:16,17; 21:4,7).

As Christ concludes the dialogue, He says those that are first shall be last, and the last first. This means, according to a Christian commentator, that the Jews, who have been first and most distinguished people of God, will in general, reject the gospel of grace and be consequently rejected by Christ. The Gentiles, who have had no name among the heirs of the promise shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth and become the first, the chief and most exalted people of God. This prediction of our Lord has been and is being literally

fulfilled; the present state of the Christian and Jewish churches sufficiently proves it.

The expectation of many will be disappointed on the day of judgment. Many will miss heaven. And many will find others in heaven, whom they least expected there. This is because God does not judge as man judges. "**But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth...**" (Romans 2:2). It is not those who start the Christian race first that matters, but those who endure until the last mile. For this reason, we are admonished to "**Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able**" (Luke 13:24).

Questions for review:

1. Briefly explain the statement: "Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God".
2. Mention the significance of responding to Christ's demand to have eternal life.
3. What should be the attitude of the rich in the church?
4. Mention some blessings that accrue to those who forsake all for Christ's sake.
5. List some warning signs that rich brethren should not ignore in their walk with God.
6. What are we to do with our God-given riches?
7. Why is poverty not synonymous with purity?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	2 PETER 1 - 3
MONDAY:	DANIEL 1 - 2
TUESDAY:	DANIEL 3 - 5
WEDNESDAY:	DANIEL 6 - 8
THURSDAY:	DANIEL 9 - 10
FRIDAY:	DANIEL 11 - 12
SATURDAY:	HOSEA 1 - 4

PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS

MEMORY VERSE: "And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Matthew 20:6).

TEXTS: Matthew 20:1-34; Mark 10:32-45; Luke 18:35-43

Christ, the greatest Teacher that ever lived, illustrated the kingdom of God with many parables. As a style of teaching, it is used to help inculcate higher spiritual truths with familiar stories or comparisons. Here, we are presented with "**an householder**" who went out "**to hire labourers into his vineyard**". The householder refers to our Lord Jesus Christ and the vineyard is His Church. This parable teaches significant lessons about the work of the kingdom of God. It instructs that there is always something to do in the house of God and even outside the church for all categories of believers. Also, believers who are doing little or nothing to advance the kingdom of God should be encouraged to work to enable them partake in Kingdom benefits now and on the last day (2 Corinthians 5:10).

CALL TO THE SERVICE OF THE MASTER (Matthew 20:1-8,17-19; 4:18-22; John 9:4; Mark 10:32-34)

"**For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard**". The call to service in God's vineyard is the noblest under the sun. Believers are saved to serve. It is, therefore, abnormal for a true believer to fold his arms without

getting involved in the work of the Master. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, demonstrated His obedience to the call of God upon His life by going about doing the work of His Father. He publicly declared "**My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work**" (John 4:34). He called Peter and his brother, Andrew, as well as James and John, the sons of Zebedee and they followed Him. It is pertinent to note that before one responds to the call to service, he or she must first respond to the call to salvation. The sinner must repent of sin, recognise Christ as Lord and personal Saviour and abide in the truth and holiness before he or she can get involved in the work. The church has the unfinished task of evangelising the whole world and that makes it more compelling for all believers – old and new converts – to ensure they do not stand idle all day.

In the parable, some persons gave excuses of not being engaged by anyone in any work. Immediately, the householder reached out to them so they could join the workforce. The Lord expects leaders in the church to encourage believers to see the need of working for God. The great commission cannot be accomplished if we do not join hands and labour together. The people in the days of Nehemiah responded positively to the work of God: "**So built** [they] **the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work**" (Nehemiah 4:6). Believers should get involved because evangelism is the only means through which redemption can get to souls languishing in sin.

Christ was a faithful and committed Labourer. Near the end of His service on earth, He predicted His suffering and death for the third time. He had earlier hinted His disciples on His forthcoming trial and suffering (Matthew 16:21; 17:12,22,23). Nevertheless, the Lord always talked about His resurrection each time He prophesied His death. Christ's entrance into Jerusalem marked the beginning of the last phase of His public ministry. Having accomplished His part, He has handed over the baton of ministry to His disciples

and to us (John 17:4,18,20). We should be sure of our calling and be ready for whatever the Lord demands of us. Believers should place a high premium on their call and avoid distractions that the pursuit of mundane things brings. We should never lose sight of the eternal value of souls and the imminent return of Christ with our rewards for faithful service.

COMMITMENT TO SERVICE WITHOUT PREJUDICE (Matthew 20:9-12,20-23; Mark 10:35-40; John 6:43; Philippians 2:14; Colossians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:58)

"**But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house**" (Matthew 20:10,11). The first set of workers in this parable murmured and complained because they expected greater rewards than the other workers who were called in to work in the vineyard at a late hour. The Lord expects believers to render acceptable service to Him. We are not to serve in expectation of personal gain but in appreciation of what God has done for us. Hence, our services should not be done with murmuring, complain or jealousy. The Bible admonishes us to "**Do all things without murmurings and disputings**" (Philippians 2:14). As believers, we should not be surprised or take offence when God rewards others in unexpected ways. When we are converted, we become members of the body of Christ; and as we grow in grace, we should reason that when any member is honoured, the honour is for all of us.

It took the disciples a long time before they fully understood Christ's mission. Most of them felt Jesus was a political Messiah who would, upon entering Jerusalem, overthrow the Roman government and set up His own reign. Besides, two of His disciples – James and John – came "**desiring a certain thing of him...** [that they] **may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in** [His] **kingdom**" (Matthew 20:20,21). Christ has just spoken about His impending

death in the hands of the religious leaders. This did not occupy their thoughts. Instead, they contemplated how to be above the other disciples. Believers should walk in the Spirit and prioritize the will of God above other pursuits instead of dwelling on the mundane.

Christ, in His answer, told James and John, "**Ye know not what ye ask**". He asked them whether they were ready to drink of His cup and pass through the same baptism of suffering with Him. Since they were ready, "**...he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father**" (Matthew 20:23). Indeed, they drank of His cup, for James was later killed by Herod (Acts 12:2) while John experienced much persecution and tribulation (Revelation 1:9), and eventual banishment on the isle of Patmos. Believers should not fight for position in the church or in the world, but diligently and faithfully serve the Lord who will reward everyone in due time.

We must take steps to ensure the work of God is done acceptably. Paul admonishes us to, "**Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it**" (Colossians 4:17). This godly counsel is instructive to believers of all ages. Some workers, like Demas, who once worked diligently for the Lord, abandoned their first love. The mundane gains of this world should not make us leave the work of God. We should strive and labour to the end without quitting the work. Christ's admonition to us remains, "**Occupy till I come**". Therefore, we must continue in His work until He comes.

CORRECTIONS FOR THE SERVANTS IN THE MINISTRY (Matthew 20:13-16,24-34; Mark 10:41-45; Luke 18:35-43; 1 Samuel 30:21-25; Hebrews 12:5,6)

Some of the labourers who entered into service early misunderstood the power of agreement and the benevolence of the householder. They grumbled against

his good gesture of rewarding the servants accordingly. "**But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?**" (Matthew 20:13). Aside, murmuring, position-seeking and self-aggrandisement are evils believers must avoid. We must serve the Lord based on His own terms and be willing to accept His will. As a righteous and an impartial Father, He will not short-change any of His own but will reward them handsomely.

James and John's request was borne out of a desire to be prominent among the rest of the apostles. They were ambitious for honour and fame. The request of the two disciples generated a bit of jealousy among the rest. They were angry with the two brothers and this occasioned an important teaching from the lips of the Saviour. In His explanation, Jesus drew the line between leadership in the world and leadership in the church. Leaders in the world exercise authority and lord it over their followers and subordinates. In the church, the idea of leadership is different. To lead is to serve others humbly in love, in line with Christ's own example. He gave His life as a ransom for many. Jesus pointed out that humility is a supreme attribute of a Christian leader. He was to buttress this point later when He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:3-15).

In addition, Jesus never closed His eyes to the needy. His compassionate touch brought a miracle to two blind men sitting by the way side. The blind men were quick to recognise Him as the promised Messiah, since the "**son of David**" is a messianic title. Their faith in Christ was honoured. Their prayer could not be silenced by the multitude who "**rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David**" (Matthew 20:31). Sinners are spiritually blind and, more than the physical healing, they need salvation for their souls. Spiritual blindness and darkness persist in and outside many religious circles and only the gospel message, delivered by faithful witnesses, can illuminate their hearts. Paul's ministry was geared towards this singular purpose.

It is remarkable that consequent upon their healing, the two men decided to follow Jesus. Jesus once told a man He cured of a thirty-eight year infirmity to sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon him (John 5:14). This is the response God expects from all saved souls. They are to consecrate everything to Christ and continue to follow Him. Many are helpless around us. They live in misery that is worse than physical blindness. Christians should have compassion on them and rise up to win their souls before they are eternally lost.

There are lessons to draw from the corrections of the householder and that of Jesus to the disciples. One, we should be contented with whatever the Lord gives us. Two, God holds the prerogative to determine what He does with His resources. He distributes to people according to His own will (1 Corinthians 12:11). Three, we should glorify God when He blesses others and not become jealous (Luke 18:43). Four, we should avoid carnal comparison of our service with that of others. Five, we must understand that God owns us and all we have. The services we render to Him are products of the grace He gives us freely. We have to allow Him have control over our ambitions. We should not dictate to Him the way He should reward us. Six, God does not want His children to run others down in order to get more advantage. Seven, we should never resent God's gracious acceptance of the despised, the outcast and sinners who have turned to Him for forgiveness; neither should we be jealous of what He has given to other people. Rather, we should focus on His gracious benefits to us and be thankful for what we have.

In summary, we should receive the call of God on our lives with gratitude and serve Him with all our hearts without comparing ourselves with anyone. Our focus should be to please the Master who knows how to reward everyone accordingly. Since there is no partiality with Him, no one would be short-changed or owed anything; the Judge of all the earth cannot do unrighteously (Genesis 18:25; Hebrews 6:10). Let us labour fervently until the Master comes.

Questions for review:

1. What steps should a sinner take before serving God acceptably in His vineyard?
2. Explain the expression "Believers are saved to serve".
3. What was James and John's request? Why should believers not fight for position in the church and in the world?
4. How should a believer react when God blesses a fellow member of the church?
5. Why is sanctification a necessity for Christian service?
6. State the importance of correction in the church.
7. What do you learn from the corrections of the householder and Christ?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	HOSEA 5 - 9
MONDAY:	HOSEA 10 - 14
TUESDAY:	JOEL 1 - 3
WEDNESDAY:	AMOS 1 - 5
THURSDAY:	AMOS 6 - 9
FRIDAY:	OBADIAH 1
SATURDAY:	JONAH 1 - 4

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY AND CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

MEMORY VERSE: "And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matthew 21:9).

TEXTS: **Matthew 21:1-27; Mark 11:1-33; Luke 19:28-48; 20:1-8**

Christ's entrance into Jerusalem marks the beginning of the last phase of His public ministry. This event was so significant that the four gospels recorded it (Matthew 21:1-27; Mark 11:1-33; Luke 19:28-48; 20:1-8; John 12:12-16). The triumphal entry revealed the plan of God to beam out the glory of Jesus as the Messiah whose kingship, dignity, honour, dominion, power and authority was declared in Jerusalem. Though He had entered many cities, this one was uniquely striking. It was a prophetic fulfilment. "**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass**" (Zechariah 9:9). Thus, in theological term, it is called, 'the triumphal entry', in the sense that Christ rode on this specially prepared colt, which had not been used by anyone before then. It also heralded His royalty as King of Israel. It was His last entry into Jerusalem before He died on the cross at Calvary. It was accompanied by spiritually inspired procession: spreading leaves on the way, with shouts of hosanna to herald His entry.

The whole city was moved at the news of Christ's entry

into Jerusalem. "**And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee**" (Matthew 21:10,11). The crowd, which probably consisted of those who greatly admired Christ's ministry and personality, as well as devoted Jews who came earlier to prepare and purify themselves for the feast of Passover, were not made up of great men and rulers but the common people (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

DIVINE OWNERSHIP EXERCISED BY JESUS (Matthew 21:1-3,6,7; Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:28-35; Matthew 21:3; 1 Kings 20:4)

At the mount of Olives, in the vicinity of Bethphage and Bethany, Jesus told two of His disciples, "**Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a Colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him and bring him hither**" (Luke 19:30). The disciples carried out the assignment with enthusiasm, courage and thoroughness. How applicable this message is to the great commission and the need for a fulfilled ministry. Believers are to go, without excuse at God's command, to the hideouts of sinners and rescue them from the snares of Satan. In fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy, the disciples were accosted. How instructive this is to end-time believers. We are messengers of the good news. Our obedience to the call to go and loose those who are bound by sin, sicknesses and Satan should be prompt. We must also be prepared to face any opposition, resistance or persecution; standing on nothing other than what Jesus has commanded. The owner of the colt released it for Christ's use; this demonstrated Christ's divine ownership over all things and persons, and as such, has authority to use them at will.

For believers, Christ's ownership over us is twofold: by creation and redemption. Therefore, redeemed and blood-washed children of God must willingly submit themselves and all that they have to Him for "**...the Lord**

hath need of them..." (Matthew 21:3). In His service, our understanding of divine ownership will enable us to freely give our all to God. "**And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have**" (1 Kings 20:4). Our lives, talents, time and treasures are not useful until they are surrendered for use to the glory of God (Luke 19:34,35). Husbands and parents must not tie down their wives and children from being used by God. Simon Peter surrendered his fishing boat to be used by Christ (Luke 5:1-6). Denying the Lord the use of our time, talent, treasures, etc., is akin to renouncing the lordship of Christ and His need of these things.

DEMONSTRATED AUTHORITY OF CHRIST CHALLENGED BY THE RELIGIOUS JEWS (Matthew 21:14-27; Mark 11:12-33; Luke 19:36-44; 20:1-8)

The texts display events that attest to Jesus' demonstration of authority over all natural and supernatural elements. The healing of the blind and lame at the temple (Matthew 21:14), the casting out of those who sold and bought in the temple (Luke 19:45), the cursed and withered fig tree (Matthew 21:18,19) among others, show that Jesus has power over all things, whether physical, physiological, natural, supernatural, social, material, human or spiritual. However, the miracles and Jesus' authority in casting out of the temple those who sold and bought angered the religious Jews so much that they challenged His rabbinical authority, hoping to discredit Him as a mere impostor and self-motivated person. "**And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?**" (Mark 11:28).

It is surprising to note that these challengers of Jesus' authority, recognised Him as Master but opposed His exaltation as 'King' and wanted Him to stop and rebuked the disciples for allegedly doing wrong. Some religious people of our time believe Jesus is a Prophet, but not their Saviour, Lord and King. It is a pity such people

cannot experience salvation, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism and other blessings, which come only by acceptance of Christ as Saviour, King of kings and Lord of lords.

DESECRATED TEMPLE CLEANSED BY JESUS (Matthew 21:12,13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

Though the omniscient Christ predicted the total destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), He still embarked on reformation with the hope that the people would submit to divine instruction to do right. Therefore, Jesus "**went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought**" (Luke 19:45). He did this by whipping them with a scourge of small cords (John 2:14,15). This is one act of regal authority that Jesus demonstrated in His day. The look on His face and the tone of His word, made those that sold and bought in the temple astonished and compelled them to yield to His command; thereby, fulfilled this Scripture: "**A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes**" (Proverbs 20:8). Even though the sale of those animals was for the convenience of those that could easily bring more money with them than animals for sacrifice and changing money for those that wanted it changed, the whole process was turned into making worldly gain.

Similar practices are being perpetrated today. People establish churches as money-making ventures. Some assemblies do bazaar, thanksgiving, money-collecting ceremonies, display and sale of false Christian books, distribution of business cards and contract papers to canvass business opportunities inside the church and during programmes at campgrounds. These practices tend to replace spiritual activities such as prayers and the study of God's word. They hardly listen to the word of God because they must network among worshippers during or after the service. God is angry with such people who make His house a market. Christian leaders and

all believers should have eagle eyes and the Christlike courage to radically cleanse the church by taking definite steps to identify and stop such people from desecrating God's house.

There are twofold meanings of 'the temple': the place of worship and the believer's body. The place of worship is to be reverenced and kept holy. Some worshippers desecrate the church building and premises by throwing spittle, food wastes, nylon wrappers, etc. on the floor. Others allow their children to loiter and run about while some youths pass notes to one another when the service is on. All disorderly conduct in the house of God dishonours Him.

We should avoid anything that makes us appear to take God for granted. Believers are the spiritual temple of the living God; and as such, we must be careful not to engage any member of our body in self-destructive habits like smoking, drinking, drug addiction and immorality, as such will amount to desecrating the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). As believers, the Spirit of God dwells in us. Therefore, "**...dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**" (2 Corinthians 7:1). We must live a consecrated, obedient and holy lifestyle, and "**glorify God in** [our] **body, and in** [our] **spirit, which are God's**" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Questions for review:

1. Why is the entry of Christ to Jerusalem termed the triumphal entry?
2. What do the response of the disciples to Christ's assignment and the release of the colt by its owner teach us on divine ownership?
3. What motivated the Jewish leaders to challenge the authority of Jesus and what was their main aim?
4. Who are the 'money changers' and those that 'sold and bought in the temple' in our contemporary time, and how can they be cast out?
5. What are the twofold meanings of 'the temple of God'?
6. Why should we avoid defiling the temple of the Holy

Ghost?

7. How should believers treat their bodies which is regarded as the temple of the Holy Spirit?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	1 JOHN 1 - 5
MONDAY:	2 & 3 JOHN
TUESDAY:	MICAH 1 - 4
WEDNESDAY:	MICAH 5 - 7
THURSDAY:	NAHUM 1 - 3
FRIDAY:	HABAKKUK 1 - 3
SATURDAY:	ZEPHANIAH 1 – 3

PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

MEMORY VERSE: "And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty" (Mark 12:2,3).

TEXTS: Matthew 21:28-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

A parable is a story that teaches moral. But the parables of the Bible, according to an old definition are "earthly sayings with heavenly meanings." Our Lord Jesus Christ used many parables to give life-enriching messages to enhance the understanding of His audience. Christ's method was so effective, that even the officers that were sent by His detractors to arrest Him came back saying, "**Never man spake like this man**" (John 7:46). All the parables were quite simple, straightforward and life-changing. He used most of these parables to teach many important aspects of the Kingdom life. As Christ's message was simple and clear, believers and preachers of the gospel should ensure that they make the gospel message straight and simple so that all hearers may have the opportunity to understand and be led to Christ, the Saviour.

Meanwhile, in the parables under consideration, He gave a sad commentary on the Jewish stewardship of the vineyard of Almighty God. The entire study is naturally subdivided into three sessions which are: the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32), the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-44) and the reaction of the council of elders who tried to denounce the authority of Christ (Matthew 21:45,46).

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS (Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 15:11-32; Ezekiel 18:21,22; John 4:34)

"**But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not**" (Matthew 21:28-30). In this parable, our Lord Jesus Christ addressed those who were bent on trapping Him in His speech. They were determined to find fault with Him by all means. Here, He painted a picture of the chief priests and the elders. The parable represented two kinds of persons: the disobedient and the obedient. The son who said: "**I go, sir: and went not**" represented the scribes and Pharisees who professed to know God, but never obeyed Him. The son who said: "**I will not**" but repented and went, represented the publicans and the sinners. Like the second son, there are people who speak good words and make fair promises but go no further. The Lord commands us to be doers of His word and not hearers only (Ezekiel 33:31; James 1:22). God expects unconditional and prompt obedience to His word.

The command to "**go work to day in my vineyard**" entails that the call to preach the gospel requires practical and immediate obedience. We must launch out with our gospel nets today to catch men for Christ because the night comes when no man can work (John 9:4). The Lord has promised to reward our efforts (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 22:12).

PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN (Matthew 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18)

"**Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country**" (Matthew 21:33). The Lord used the imagery of the vineyard in this parable to speak directly

to the children of Israel and their leaders. The vineyard represents the children of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-16; Jeremiah 2:21); the householder represents God; while the hedge around the vineyard represents the law, the statutes and the ordinances that God gave them. The law accounts for their distinctiveness amongst other nations and it is the hedge of God around them.

God planted Israel in the land of Canaan and handed over the nation to the judges, chief priests and elders within their tribes. These were the husbandmen, the cultivators. They were to make the children of Israel bring forth fruits of equity, justice, judgment, praise, worship, love, righteousness and acceptable sacrifice of sweet smelling savour unto the Lord. But the leaders of Israel did not lead the people in the right way. They did not appropriately and adequately teach the law. The people therefore, went astray. This made the Lord to send prophets to them so that they could lead the people back to Him.

"**And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise**" (Matthew 21:34-36). Here, our Lord briefly and appropriately captured the attitude of the leaders of the people to the prophets. He clearly shows the persecution of heaven-recognised servants. The persecution consists of their beating by degenerate Israel. Right from the time of the kings, they had always accepted the false prophets; while they rejected the true messengers from God (2 Chronicles 24:20,21; 2 Kings 6:30,31; Hebrews 11:32,36-38).

Backslidden Christians do the same today. A backslider mocks and criticises the people of God and His word. The uniform testimony of the Scripture is that what the backslidden Israel did will be repeated by the backslidden, apostate church at the close of the age. They will accept false prophets and reject the true prophets of God (Matthew 24:11,12; 2 Timothy 4:3,4). When your heart becomes critical against the word of

God and those who teach it, it is a sign of backsliding and degeneration. You may then begin to persecute those who are in the faith. Believers should focus on the word of God and be followers of exemplary leaders and preachers of the Word.

One quality stands out in the life of the servants sent by the householder. Although they were persecuted, abused, stoned, misused, reproached and even killed, they stayed at their posts. Moses, Joshua, David, Jeremiah, Amos, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stayed at their duty posts. Several others in the New Testament like John, Paul, Stephen and Philip did not abandon their calling even when they were persecuted. Believers should resist temptation, endure trials and stand for Christ even in the face of fierce opposition to their faith.

"**But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him**" (Matthew 21:37-39). Here, the Lord talks about Himself and His position as the rejected Son. He knew that the people standing before Him would persecute Him but with calmness, He kept on in the mission the Father gave Him. This is a lesson for the church. We must not fear them which "**kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell**" (Matthew 10:28). Jesus spoke prophetically that He would be killed. God wanted the Heir of all things to be honoured and heeded. But Israel would not. They plotted, schemed and killed the Son of God. This evil was not committed ignorantly. They accepted full responsibility for the consequences of their action by saying, "**His blood be on us, and on our children**" (Matthew 27:25).

"**Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?**

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:42-44). Those who reject the doctrines of the word of God on restitution, sanctification, divorce and remarriage, etc., should beware lest the 'Rock of offence' fall on them. Those who reject the ministers of the gospel should also beware lest they reject the Fountain from where the Lord satisfies their thirst.

Sinners and backsliders must turn to the Lord today; "**fall on this stone**" and be broken. For "**a broken and a contrite heart... God wilt not despise.**" But for those who hold on to their sin till the judgment day, the Stone shall fall on them and grind them to powder. They will suffer eternally in hell.

THE PITIABLE RESPONSE OF THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES (Matthew 21:45,46; Luke 20:19; 2 Kings 17:14; Nehemiah 9:16,17; Jeremiah 19:15; Hebrews 3:13; 2 Timothy 4:3)

"**And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.**" The reaction of the chief priests and scribes depicts the pitiable condition of hardened sinners. Instead of turning away from their evil ways, they were infuriated and sought for a way to kill Christ. They did not allow the Saviour's message to effect the necessary transformation in their lives. Hardened sinners and backsliders still act like the chief priests and scribes. Although they are exposed to the undiluted word of God, they reject faithful preachers and their message which is capable of saving their souls. But people who persecute God's ministers or servants because of their stand for righteousness cannot escape God's judgment except they repent.

It is important for us to draw lessons from these parables as pilgrims on our way to heaven. "**For**

whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). We should always maintain a positive disposition any time we hear God's word. The Lord wants us to be sincere and accept His correction and rebuke.

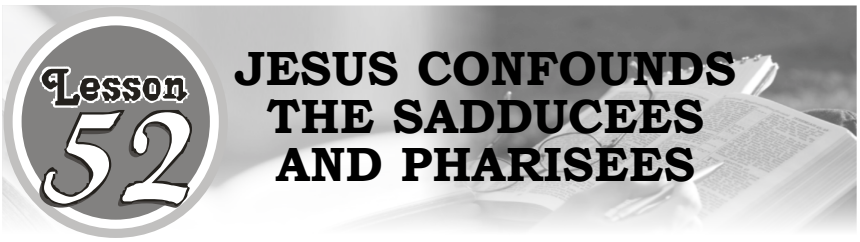
Questions for review:

1. What was Christ's reason for using parables in His teachings and what can we learn from it?
2. What should be the response of believers to God's word?
3. Why is every believer expected to engage in soul-winning now?
4. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, what do vineyard, householder, hedge and husbandmen symbolise?
5. What should be the attitude of believers to persecution?
6. What should be sinners' and backsliders' attitude to God's word?
7. Why should we be faithful as servants of God?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	HAGGAI 1 - 2
MONDAY:	ZECHARIAH 1 - 5
TUESDAY:	ZECHARIAH 6 - 9
WEDNESDAY:	ZECHARIAH 10 - 14
THURSDAY:	MALACHI 1 - 4
FRIDAY:	JUDE
SATURDAY:	REVELATION 1 - 3



JESUS CONFOUNDS THE SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES

MEMORY VERSE: "**Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind**" (Matthew 22:36,37).

TEXTS: **Matthew 22:1-46; Mark 12:13-37; Luke 20:20-47**

The Pharisees and the Sadducees, before Jesus came, had held so much sway that they constituted themselves as the final authority as far as religious matters were concerned. Their hold on the masses was so overwhelming that the people were afraid of opposing them for the fear of being ostracised. Rather than stay with the word of God, they reduced the teaching of God's word to mere opinions and traditions. They taught the commandments of men as doctrines, thereby making the word of God of no effect. But the Lord, the Truth personified, showed up with the pure and unadulterated teaching of God's word, which birthed spiritual life and renewal in the hearers. The people experienced tremendous change, healing, deliverance and reawakening. The response was immediate and the impact far-reaching. Slowly, but surely, His fame spread and He became a threat to the religious leaders of His days. Sadly, rather than accept Him and align themselves with His doctrines, they made themselves His enemies.

This study focuses on the encounter of Christ with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, their plot to "**entangle him in his talk**", as well as His supremacy over them in wisdom as regards the commandment of God and the

revelation of the Kingdom.

SEVERE CONDEMNATION FOR REJECTING THE GRACIOUS CALL (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:7-9; Psalm 15:1-5; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 11:28-30; Isaiah 55:1-7; Proverbs 1:24-33)

The Lord began by narrating a parable of the Kingdom. He left no one in doubt as He attempted to drive home His message to His audience and aimed more specifically at the religious Pharisees. The Lord was fearless in His declaration of the matters of the Kingdom. At the commencement of His ministry, He announced the Kingdom of heaven and sustained the message. Just like Him, we must maintain the message of the Kingdom in spite of opposition and rejection. This is needful because it is only the good news of the Kingdom that can bring transformational change in man.

The parable here reveals that a certain king made a marriage for his son. The king is a depiction of God the Father, the King of heaven and earth, with authority and dignity Who invited guests to the marriage of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The king "**...sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden...**", according to the custom in the oriental world. The initial invitation which was usually sent ahead of the occasion was normally followed by a reminder. The king here had given a royal invitation to those who were bidden: a privileged class of guests. The servants' job was just to notify them that it was time. It is highly probable that they would signify their intention to honour the invitation. Unfortunately, they turned down the generous invitation of the king at the last minute. Rather than respond in fury to their disregard and insolence, the compassionate king sent out another set of servants again with a more detailed message, assuring them of his readiness and provision that "**all things are ready**". All they needed to do was just to come to the marriage. Their response was shocking as "**they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and**

entreated them spitefully, and slew them" (Matthew 22:5,6). The reaction of the king was swift as he passed judgment on them and destroyed them and their city.

The parable reveals the relationship of God with the chosen seed of Abraham, Israel, and their response to His divine offer of free salvation. After His extension of the invitation and their refusal to reciprocate, God abandoned them and threw the invitation open to all. God is preparing the marriage supper of the Lamb for the Bride, the purified Church. Some salient lessons can be derived from the parable: one, God has a beautiful plan for all and will make personal and timeless effort to bring it to pass. Two, God "**...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**" (2 Peter 3:9). Three, the servants of the King must always be ready to do His bidding. Four, God's invitation must be swiftly responded to; otherwise, we risk the danger of missing out a place in the Kingdom. Five, sinners and saints alike must be careful not to make light of divine truths and privileges. Six, despisers of God's invitation risk His punishment. Seven, refusal of the free and full salvation will always bring incalculable loss and ruin.

God's invitation is now open to all (Isaiah 55:1-7). His universal call to man is the call to salvation through Jesus Christ. God's desire is to gather all men, both the good (those that feel they are morally alright) and the bad (those who think they have gone too far in sin and evil). As God's servants, Christians must preach the gospel message of hope, love and life, not condemnation to all. We must assure them that all things are ready. Jesus Christ has paid the ultimate price for all to receive pardon and cleansing for free.

In the parable, the king who usually provides befitting wedding garments for guests was shocked when he discovered a man without the garment. He immediately ordered his expulsion. Today, only the garment of righteousness would qualify us to make it to heaven and participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9; 14:5; 7:14). Nothing else will do. He has made the provision for our righteousness and He is

waiting to cleanse and purify the penitent sinner who would accept His call, because without holiness "**no man shall see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14).

SUBTLE COUNSEL TO RIDICULE GOD'S COMMANDMENT (Matthew 22:15-33; Mark 12:13-27; Luke 20:20-40; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-22)

"**Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men**" (Matthew 22:15,16). The Jewish leaders sent their disciples to entangle Him with a deceptive question. They wanted to know whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. Their intention was to set the authorities against Jesus and His ministry. However, by discernment of the Spirit, Jesus saw their hypocrisy. After requesting for a penny on which the image and superscription of Caesar was inscribed to be brought to Him, He made the landmark verdict: "**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's**" (Mark 12:17). This conclusion made the people to wonder at His wisdom!

From the response of Jesus, we learn the following: first, believers should not be ignorant of the devices of the enemy in seeking to draw them away from the fountain of life. Second, they must possess the spirit of discernment in order to recognise the enemy's deception. Third, all Christians must perform their civic responsibilities in the society and obey constituted authorities. Fourth, they must render willing and acceptable service to God in His vineyard by giving their time, talents and resources for the expansion of His Kingdom.

On the same occasion, the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection came to Jesus with the question of the veracity of the doctrine of resurrection.

They relayed an account of how seven brothers took turns to marry the same woman, after the death of the previous one, in order to raise children for their deceased brother, in line with the Law of Moses. They ignorantly presented the story in a manner to make light of the resurrection and portray it as meaningless. Thus they asked, "**Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her**" (Matthew 22:28).

Jesus Christ thereafter exposed their error and ignorance of Scriptures on the subject matter. He systematically explained to them, by first clearing the air on the issue of marriage in the life hereafter: "**And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err**" (Mark 12:24-27). This means that even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not physically alive at that material time, God said, "**I am**" not "I was", signifying that these patriarchs had resurrected and are living in their glorified bodies.

The systematic approach Jesus adopted in answering the question of the Sadducees is very instructive to Christian leaders. Like Christ, our Master and perfect Example, they must "**be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear**" (1 Peter 3:15). A thorough study of the Scripture will make them approved workmen "**rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).

To say there is no resurrection is tantamount to saying the gospel is void and without substance. Paul the apostle said, "**Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no**

resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:12-14). Our preaching and faith is not and cannot be vain. We believe, according to the Scriptures, that Jesus Christ died, was buried and He resurrected on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). The doctrine of resurrection is therefore, pivotal to the gospel message.

THE SCRIBE'S CONFUSION AND REFERENCE TO THE GREAT COMMANDMENT (Matthew 22:34-46; Mark 12:28-37; Philippians 2:5-11)

"**Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?**" (Matthew 22:35,36). The Scribes were present when Jesus Christ gave answers to the questions of the Sadducees and Pharisees. One of them acknowledged that Christ had answered them well and further asked, "**Which is the first commandment of all?**" Jesus answered him that the first commandment was to love God with all the soul, mind and strength. He added that the second commandment was similar to the first: to "**love thy neighbour as thyself**". The Scribe, pleased, seconded Jesus' answers: "**Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices**" (Mark 12:32,33). Jesus was impressed by the discreet but definite response of the Scribe and said unto him, "**Thou art not far from the kingdom of God**".

From the above, we learn that the Scribe had a good knowledge of the Scripture, which won the admiration of Jesus. Believers must ensure they read and study the Bible regularly to have a good knowledge and understanding of the Holy Writ for proper and correct application. Despite the Scribe's knowledge of the

Scriptures, he was not in the kingdom of God. Knowledgeableness of the word of God and mere moral uprightness do not qualify anyone to become a member of the kingdom of God. Christ clearly declared, "**Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God**" (John 3:3). Therefore, for sinners to be received into God's kingdom, they must acknowledge their sins, confess and forsake them and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Only this can guarantee them a place in heaven.

Jesus' answer also touched on His divinity. Having provided satisfactory answers to the Sadducees, Pharisees and the Scribe, He asked them what they thought about Him and "**whose son is he?**" They answered, the son of David. He further probed by asking them why David called Christ Lord, referring to Psalm 110:1, where David by the inspiration of the Spirit referred to Jesus as his Lord. But they could not give any answer. Jesus Christ was driving at a point – to open their eyes to His divinity as the Son of God. But they were completely blind to this divine truth. "**But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**" (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). Jesus Christ indeed is the Son of God (Matthew 17:1-5; Philippians 2:5-11).

Questions for review:

1. What lessons can be derived from the parable of the wedding feast?
2. What is the consequence of rejecting God's offer of free salvation?
3. What can Christians draw from Christ's encounter with the Pharisees?
4. Explain the 'great commandment'.
5. What is the place of the doctrine of resurrection in the gospel message?
6. Give examples of modern-day scribes and Pharisees.
7. How can a sinner become a member of God's family?

THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

DAILY READING

SUNDAY:	REVELATION 4 - 6
MONDAY:	REVELATION 7 - 8
TUESDAY:	REVELATION 9 - 11
WEDNESDAY:	REVELATION 12 - 14
THURSDAY:	REVELATION 15 - 17
FRIDAY:	REVELATION 18 - 20
SATURDAY:	REVELATION 21 - 22