The background of the entire page is a scenic landscape. At the top, a sunset sky with soft, glowing clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and light blue. Below the sky, there are rolling mountains. The middle ground features a dense forest of evergreen trees. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, reddish-brown wildflowers, and a wooden fence runs across the lower part of the frame. The entire scene is framed by a decorative orange border with corner ornaments.

Search The Scriptures

VOLUME 2

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

Volume

2

Search the Scriptures



Name:.....

District:.....

Region/Group:.....

State:.....

Search the Scriptures

Volume 2

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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 calendar 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.

January, 2023

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 in-depth 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, thoroughly 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
Your Pastor

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

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SECTION I
BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: “Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exodus 18:21).

TEXT: Exodus 18:1-27

The importance of counselling as a ministry cannot be overstressed. Counsels can be good or evil depending on its nature and the motive of the giver. The Bible encourages good counsels like the one given by Jethro in our text. His recommendation brought peace and progress to the ministry of Moses. However, wrong counsels, like the one given by Ahitophel and designed to destroy David, are ungodly, devilish and should be avoided by the people of God (2 Samuel 17:1-4).

The Scripture further stressed that, “**Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety**” (Proverbs 11:14). Every Christian needs godly counsels to live a successful spiritual and secular life. However, we must be careful of whom we take counsels. Because the thoughts of unbelievers are not right, their counsels are not likely to be right but deceitful. Therefore, we must refrain from seeking advice from them when we get to crossroads in life. Moreover, we should not allow pride hinder us from getting counsels from our leaders in the church because, without counsels, purposes are disappointed (Proverbs 15:22; 20:18).

This study focuses on the importance of godly counsels to Christian living and ministry as it examines Jethro's counsel to Moses.

REUNION AND RECONCILIATION OF MOSES WITH HIS FAMILY (Exodus 18:1-12; 2:16; 4:25,26; Numbers 12:1; Psalm 78:12-16; Exodus 15:1-11; 1 Corinthians 7:10-15)

Jethro's response to the good news of what God had done to Moses and for Israel is very instructive. One, he came to rejoice with them when he heard of the testimonies of God's dealings with Israel and blessed the Lord "**...who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians**". God must take the glory for His marvellous doings; no mortal should share in it. Two, Jethro was encouraged and his faith in the Lord was strengthened. "**Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them**" (Exodus 18:11). Three, he offered burnt offering and sacrifices to God and held a thanksgiving fellowship with the elders of Israel (Exodus 18:12). The people of God should take time out to offer sacrifices of praise and freewill offering to appreciate His doings among them.

The visit of Jethro was an opportunity for him to reunite and reconcile Moses with his wife after the disagreement they had because of the circumcision of their son. "**Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision**" (Exodus 4:25,26). Here, Jethro played the role of a peacemaker as Jesus admonished in the Scriptures (Matthew 5:9). Though his relationship with Moses as father-in-law was mentioned twelve times in our text, he did not take sides with his daughter concerning the conflict between the couples. This teaches that parents whose children are married should be scriptural in their relationship with them.

Also, believers should naturally be peacemakers. We should resolve differences between us and other people at all times. God will not accept our gift, service or worship if we nurse grudges against anyone. **“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift”** (Matthew 5:23,24). Where possible, we should make efforts to reunite disputing or quarrelling families or brethren within the church or our fellowship group.

RECOGNITION OF MOSES’ COMMITMENT AND JETHRO’S COUNSEL (Exodus 18:13-23; Romans 13:1-3; Proverbs 11:14; 1 Kings 12:1-14; Joshua 9:14)

Jethro’s visit to Moses was purposeful and profitable; it added value to the life and ministry of Moses and the congregation. Though not an Israelite, Jethro exhibited a good quality that should be found in all Christian leaders. He demonstrated the ability to perceive and discern the state and condition of subordinates while on active service. While it is good to be committed to ministry like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Paul and the other apostles, leaders should learn to be observant of the streak of their activities and review them regularly with wisdom and dependence on the Holy Spirit. The purpose is to prevent moving in a circle, where one does much activity but makes little or no progress. This was what informed Jethro’s counsel. He said: **“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee”** (Exodus 18:21,22).

Jethro did not take the place of God in his counselling

thus, he was quick to add, **“God shall be with thee”** and **“If thou shall do this thing, and God command thee so...”** Counsellors who rule out God, His sovereignty and Word should be avoided. Counselling that robs us of dependence on God in prayer and deprives us of seeking the light of His word will cause us to err from the path of life and godliness. Counsellors, therefore, must be subject to God’s word and will, and depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

In Jethro’s counsel, we also see the preeminence of the teaching ministry: **“And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do”** (Exodus 18:20). In addition, his counsel includes some qualities that should characterise those who occupy leadership positions in the house of God. They must be able men and women who **“fear God”, “men of truth, hating covetousness...”** Apostle Paul’s epistles to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) set out the qualifications of leaders in the New Testament church. They include people who are blameless, married only to one wife, vigilant, sober, well behaved, hospitable, teachable, not given to wine, not greedy, patient, not covetous, rule their homes well, not a novice, have a good report of outsiders, etc.

Jethro’s counsel eventually brought about the appointment of new assistants to Moses and the decentralisation of the work for easy leadership. This shows that systems run more effectively when they are administered at different levels of authority. Besides, there is a sense of belonging when responsibilities are given to others. They are able to exercise their gifts. Moreover, new and potential gifts are discovered and developed.

REALISATION OF JETHRO’S WISE COUNSEL
(Exodus 18:24-27; Numbers 11:25-29; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-3; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 13:1-3)

After being guided, Moses took the counsel to God for approval. No matter how reasonable a counsel may

be, we cannot safely run with it unless God directs us to do so. Wisdom demands that we subject every counsel we receive to prayers and the word of God (Isaiah 8:20).

Moses, having been cleared by God to go ahead with the advice he had received, did not let ego get in his way but carried out the instruction. Those who counsel others should learn from Jethro that God is the highest Counsellor. **“Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?”** (Isaiah 40:13). He does not need anyone to advise Him concerning any of His works, either of creation or the government of the world; and He has the prerogative to overrule any counsel we give. Jethro did not impose his counsel on Moses because he recognised the overruling power of God. We must detest the attitude of Ahitophel who stooped so low to commit suicide because his counsel was rejected (2 Samuel 17:23). We must not quit the work of God or desert the assembly of the saints simply because the counsel we have given, which we perceive to be the best, was not followed. After we have offered our counsel, we must learn to submit to the decision of leadership, who are led by the Spirit of God.

On one hand, some counsels can be ungodly, like the counsel of Balaam to Balak (Numbers 31:15,16; Revelation 2:14), Jonadab to Amnon (2 Samuel 13:1-14), the peer group to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:9-11) and Jeroboam to the Northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:28-33). Such counsels must be rejected outright and the evil counsellors exposed.

On the other hand, some counsels may appear good and potentially profitable but may not be God’s choice for us. Prophet Nathan counselled David to go ahead and build the house of God without consulting the Lord who eventually overturned the prophet’s advice (1 Chronicles 17:1-4). We need prayer and wisdom to make the right decisions on the counsels we receive from others. Finally, we must be careful not to ignore godly counsels. The likes of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:27,28), Pilate (Matthew 27:19,24) and the Council (Acts 5:27-35) all received good counsels but failed to make the right decisions and the consequences were grave. Those

who ignore the calling and counsel of God should know that it is to their peril (Proverbs 1:24-33).

Jethro went back to Midian after a short stay with Moses, whose visit impacted positively on his ministry and the entire nation of Israel. The challenge for us today is to ensure that our visitations and counsels result in mutual edification and spiritual renewal; not to gossip, slander, backbite or conspire to pull down other people. The counsels we give and our conversation must mark us out as true believers and point unbelievers to Calvary.

Questions for review:

1. What should be our responses to God's marvellous doings among His people?
2. Why is counselling important to a child of God?
3. Why is it important for a Christian to reconcile with people before offering his/her service to God?
4. What prompted Jethro to counsel Moses?
5. What can church leaders and Christians learn from Jethro's counsel on the appointment of leaders?
6. Identify five qualities of a leader.
7. Why should we subject every counsel to the acid test of God's word and prayer?

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
54

MOSES RECEIVES THE LAW AT MOUNT SINAI

MEMORY VERSE: “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.” (Exodus 24:7).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 19 to 24

Moses succeeded in bringing the children of Israel to Mount Sinai as God had promised (Exodus 3:12). They left Rephidim behind with its negative experiences and came to camp before the mount where God chose to enter into a covenant with His people. This study deals with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. The chapters under study reveal that preparations are necessary to meet with God (chapter 19); two, He gives laws and demands absolute obedience from His chosen people (chapter 20); three, God commands cordial interpersonal relationships, justice and equity in the society. Therefore, He stipulates sundry civil laws and regulations (chapters 21-23). Four, the old covenant offers limited privileges and restricted access to God. Even the chosen and favoured leaders, such as Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel were forbidden to come near (chapter 24).

These chapters also lay bare the awesome majesty of God, on one hand, and His concern for our lives, on the other, even on issues seemingly little such as a missing donkey. Lastly, those who are called to minister to God’s people must wait on Him to receive what to give to His people.

PREPARATION OF ISRAEL TO RECEIVE THE LAW (Exodus 19:1-25; 1 Samuel 7:3; Amos 4:12; Leviticus 11:44; 20:7; Numbers 11:18; Joshua 3:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5)

God brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai in order to enter into a covenant with them. But before entering into the covenant, He stressed the need for Israel to prepare themselves both inwardly and outwardly. He reminded them of His past mercies, how He delivered them from Egypt and brought them to Himself. He used the figure of an eagle bearing its young on her wings to describe His care and protection of the Israelites. God also revealed to them the greater blessings and privileges that awaited them in the future. **“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: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation...”** (Exodus 19:5,6).

The New Testament describes believers as **“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...”** (1 Peter 2:9), **“kings and priests”** (Revelation 1:6). In effect, God wanted the Israelites to know He was ready to bless them, but on their part, they needed to prepare their hearts to trust and obey Him. Trusting God and obeying His commands are necessary requirements for anyone to enjoy His fellowship and receive other blessings. But above all, we should submit our lives to Him in perpetual obedience and service. God’s blessings are available to anyone who would enter into covenant relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Israelites responded in complete agreement that they would obey and do all that the Lord commanded (Exodus 19:8). Apparently, they were ready to keep the terms of the covenant though they were yet to know the details. Without mincing words, Israel’s answer and promise were presumptuous. It showed a people willing to obey God but ignorant of their inbred weakness and human limitation. Later events would reveal how

incapable they were to walk straight with God in their own strength. However, under the new covenant dispensation, believers are called to a life of obedience to God enabled by grace and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (John 15:5; 1:17; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Galatians 2:21). What the law could not achieve by legislation, grace accomplishes by impartation of divine ability.

Part of Israel's preparation required that they sanctified themselves, wash their clothes and abstain from legitimate conjugal union. To sanctify in this sense would mean to set themselves apart to God. In Scripture, the word sanctify, and its derivatives, sanctification or sanctified, is used in different ways. One, it means to consecrate or set apart a person, thing or place for holy use. This is the sense in which a person is asked to sanctify himself (1 Samuel 16:5; 2 Chronicles 35:6). Also, this is what Jesus implies when He said, "**And for their sakes I sanctify myself...**" (John 17:19). Two, to sanctify also means to make a person or place clean, holy, free from defilement and sin. When applied to the people of God, it means to make holy by the removal of inbred sin, the adamic nature and crucifixion of self (John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 4:3).

Washing of clothes symbolises external cleanliness and the inner purging required to walk with God. It is obvious that washing the clothes without a corresponding cleansing of the heart is valueless in God's sight. Those who would approach God must be inwardly clean and maintain outward decency as well. New Testament believers are admonished to "**...draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water**" (Hebrews 10:22).

The Israelites spent two days for their self-preparation and purification. The abstinence stipulated in this period of preparation to meet with God must also be understood as a mark of self-denial and not an indication that lawful conjugal union between a man and his wife impedes receiving from God. It is a common spiritual exercise to abstain from food and physical pleasure in order to subdue the flesh and allow the spirit to focus on God (1

Samuel 21:3,4; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Jonah 3:5-8; Joel 1:14; 2:15).

God commanded the Israelites not to touch the mountain or gaze on Him when the emblems of His presence manifested at Sinai. This indicates that He prohibits undue familiarity with holy things and unholy curiosity or probing into what He has chosen to keep secret (Deuteronomy 29:29; Ecclesiastes 5:1). The cases of Uzzah and the men of Bethshemesh should also serve as warnings not to handle holy things with levity or manifest carnal curiosity in God's presence (2 Samuel 6:6,7; 1 Samuel 6:19).

The role of Moses as an intermediary between God and the children of Israel at this time is notable. He made several trips to the mount to meet God and back to speak to the people. Bear in mind that the base of the mountain, where the people were assembled, was quite a distance to the top where God met Moses. This shuttle between fellowship with God and ministry among the people is a mark of true ministers of God in particular and true believers in general. We must never be tired of climbing up to meet God or going down to minister to the people (Exodus 19:21-24).

PRESENTATION OF THE LAW TO ISRAEL (Exodus 20:1-26; Deuteronomy 5:7-21; 4:13; Matthew 4:10; 5:20-48; Romans 13:8-10)

After the Israelites had prepared themselves, God manifested the tokens of His presence on Mount Sinai through thunders, lightnings, thick cloud, unearthly trumpet sound, smoke, earthquake and audible voice. These tokens were expressions of God's majesty and proofs of His great power to Israel. There were other times God manifested His presence in less dramatic ways such as in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13), visions and dreams (1 Kings 3:5-14). The Israelites trembled when they saw and heard the physical signs that announced the presence of God. Then, the Lord introduced Himself and explained the basis for the law He was about to give them. "**I am the LORD thy God,**

which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2).

The Ten Commandments consist of two sections. The first section or first table contains the first four commandments, which cover man’s duties to God. The second section relates to our duties to other people. The first commandment prohibits having other gods beside the true God (Exodus 20:3; Psalm 81:9; Isaiah 43:10; Matthew 4:10; 1 John 5:21). The second commandment places a ban on image worship: no graven images, whether a representation of the true God or of false gods, are allowed. The Lord who made the heaven and the earth cannot be adequately represented by the image of anything He has made (Exodus 20:4-6; Isaiah 40:18; John 4:23,24). The third prohibits taking God’s name in vain. This refers to using the name of God in an irreverent or careless manner (Exodus 20:7). The fourth deals with worship and rest on God’s holy day. He appointed this day for rest and spiritual emphasis. The moral principle of this commandment is the basis for the observance of the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day by Christians in the new dispensation. The major difference is that while the Sabbath law emphasises rest, the Lord’s Day focuses on worship (Exodus 20:8-11; Acts 20:7).

The fifth commandment is the first among the duties of man to his fellows. Children are commanded to honour, obey and care for their parents. A promise is attached to this command: **“that thy days may be long upon the land”** (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3). The sixth forbids murder. This prohibition includes homicide (killing of another person intentionally), suicide (self-murder) and abortion. Life is sacred and it is the greatest possession God gave to every man. It must be treated sacredly and preserved (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-26). The seventh is against adultery. This covers all forms of sexual immorality – adultery, fornication, masturbation, lesbianism, sodomy, pornography and every kind of behaviour that promotes lust (Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:28).

The eighth disallows stealing. Theft, pilfering, robbing,

receiving stolen items, dishonest accumulation of what belongs to other persons are all classified as stealing. We must not steal the property, idea or work of other people. Neither should we steal human beings, that is, kidnapping, engaging in human trafficking or keeping a person in an illegal marriage (Exodus 20:15) or eloping with someone's daughter. The ninth is against bearing false witness. God prohibits lying, false witness, deception, calumny, maligning and perjury. Those who spread unverified stories that turn out to be untrue will be guilty of bearing false witness. We must not speak ill about our neighbours or slander them (Exodus 20:16; Psalm 50:19,20). The tenth is against covetousness, that is, secret desire to possess what belongs to others (Exodus 20:17). The New Testament equates the sin of covetousness with idolatry because the object we covet invariably assumes the position of an idol in the heart. Believers are admonished to be contented with what they have.

Indeed, all the commandments are summed up in one – love. **“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”** (Romans 13:8-10).

PROMULGATION OF ISRAEL'S LEGAL CODE AND SEALING OF THE COVENANT (Exodus 21:1-36; 22:1-31; 23:1-33; 24:1-18; Deuteronomy 4:1-19,32-40; Hebrews 9:18-24;12:24)

The Lord gave specific laws and regulations, which have certain peculiarities to govern the civil society of Israel. One, Israel's legal codes originated from God and are incorporated with their moral and ceremonial laws. Two, the law has a higher standard of justice and equity

for all categories of people. Three, it has provisions protecting the rights of slaves, the poor, women, widows, orphans and the less privileged. This was an uncommon feature in the world at the time of Moses. Moreover, God set forth the laws to safeguard life, property, personal rights and proper worship.

Among other laws, we observe here: law about altar and proper worship (Exodus 20:22-26), servant (Exodus 21:2-11), murder and strife (Exodus 21:12-27), penalty against carelessness (Exodus 21:28-36), property theft, loss and restitution (Exodus 22:1-15), personal actions (Exodus 22:16-31; 23:1-8), Sabbath, appointed feasts and true worship (Exodus 23:10-33).

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ raised the bar and gave new perspectives on some of these laws. He pointed out that murder is not limited to killing someone physically but includes hating someone (Matthew 5:21-26; 1 John 3:15) while adultery includes impure thoughts. Rather than seek to enforce the rule of 'an eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth', He taught the principle of non-retaliation (Matthew 5:38-41).

After giving the commandments, God promised His people protection, healing, provision, long-life, among other blessings. These blessings are to be received on condition of obedience by the people (Isaiah 1:19). Then, the Lord ratified and sealed the covenant of law with His chosen people. For this purpose, He commanded Moses to bring up with him Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel. These were representatives of the entire nation. Moses rehearsed all that God had commanded before the people and they unanimously promised to obey them.

Significant lessons stand out in the Mosaic covenant. One, God loves to be a covenant Partner with His people. He entered into covenant with Abraham, Israel, David, etc. Today, we have the new covenant He has made with believers through Christ (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:8-13; 12:24). Two, faith and obedience are necessary to enjoy the covenant benefits in our relationship with God. Three, the old covenant had significant shortcomings; it offered limited access to God as shown by the emphasis

on setting up bounds around the mount and the limit placed on Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders. They were to worship afar off. But in the new covenant, believers are brought near by the blood of Jesus. Four, almost everything was sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed animal in order to ratify the covenant. The new covenant has been ratified with the blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:18-24). Today, God still brings people into covenant relationship with Himself. This would happen when we turn away from sin and turn to Him through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:17,18).

Questions for review:

1. Recall two civic laws in our text that regulate interpersonal relationships.
2. Explain the word 'sanctify' as it is used in our text and what it means to you as a Christian.
3. In what ways do people manifest undue familiarity and carnal curiosity in spiritual things in our present time?
4. Explain the New Testament summary of the Ten Commandments.
5. Point out major lessons portrayed in this lesson.
6. What is expected of ministers of the gospel before appearing before their congregation?
7. How can we enter into covenant relationship with God?

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

Lesson
55

DIVINE INSTRUCTION ON THE PATTERN OF THE TABERNACLE

MEMORY VERSE: “And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount” (Exodus 26:30).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 25 to 27

Moses had been on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments for forty days and forty nights. God commanded him to take offerings from the children of Israel to make the tabernacle, the Ark of the covenant and the brazen altar. **“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering”** (Exodus 25:1,2).

Since the Lord is sovereign, the order has to be obeyed fully. The people of God were asked to offer willingly, without coercion because God loves a cheerful giver. **“And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them”** (Exodus 25:3,8).

In giving for the building of the tabernacle, it is important to note that none was prevented from giving as much as they wanted. They all gave according to their several abilities. The whole essence of Christianity is the expression of our supreme love to God by giving our best to Him in appreciation of His best gift to us – His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). He has also promised to freely give us all things (Romans 8:32). In appreciation, we should demonstrate our supreme

love to Him by giving our best, bountifully, cheerfully, sacrificially and regularly (2 Corinthians 9:6,7; 8:1-3; 2 Samuel 24:24).

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ERECTION OF THE TABERNACLE (Exodus 25:1-40; Revelation 21:3; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Haggai 1:4-8; 1 Chronicles 29:14)

The tabernacle symbolises God's presence with His people and foreshadows the future state when God's tabernacle will be with the redeemed. **"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God"** (Revelation 21:3). In the New Testament, emphasis is placed on the body of believers as the temple of God, which must be kept holy. **"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"** (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). Though God does not need a building before fellowshiping with His children (John 4:21-24; Acts 7:48; 17:24; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 9:11), it is necessary to have a decent constructed building that provides the right atmosphere where His people can worship Him (2 Chronicles 7:12-16).

God is not pleased with believers who do nothing about His house or care to make it conducive for worship. **"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways"** (Haggai 1:4,5). Giving towards God's project such as it was done with the tabernacle is an integral part of worship and believers' key to divine prosperity.

On the eve of their departure from Egypt, the Israelites borrowed gold, silver and fine and decorative clothings from their Egyptian neighbours, which were later found useful for the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 12:35,36). The sovereignty and foreknowledge of God

came into focus through the way He prepared the Israelites ahead of this project in the wilderness. Truly, **“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”** (Acts 15:18).

Alongside the tabernacle, God also commanded that the Ark of the covenant be made, with detailed instruction on how it was to be constructed. The Ark symbolises God’s presence in the tabernacle. It was to be positioned in the most holy place (within the veil) where the high priest alone entered in once every year with blood offered for himself and for the people (Hebrews 9:7). This is similar to the priesthood of Christ. Jesus, by His blood, has made for us a new and living way into the holiest place of the new spiritual tabernacle. We now have boldness through Him to appear before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19,20).

There were three significant materials inside the Ark: One, the two tables of stone upon which God wrote the Ten Commandments; two, the golden pot of manna; and three, Aaron’s rod that budded. A mercy seat was also to be made and the material to be used to craft it must be of pure gold. Also, the table of shewbread (otherwise called bread of presence) was to be made of Shittim wood and overlaid with pure gold. The Lord also commanded Moses to make a candlestick and lamp-stand.

The spiritual significance of the Ark, mercy seat, table of shewbread and the candlestick include: the Ark of covenant as an emblem of God’s presence with His people in the Old Testament, which foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel who became man to dwell with His people (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). Also, it foreshadows the presence of God with the redeemed in heaven (Revelation 21:3) and the pot of manna symbolised God’s provision. Note that for forty years, God’s supply of manna did not fail (Deuteronomy 8:16). Aaron’s rod that budded shows that God approved of the ministry of His chosen servants; the mercy seat where sin was atoned for foreshadows Christ’s sacrifice for our sins so that they no longer appear in the eye of divine justice and judgment. The mercy seat that was

put above the Ark which bore the commandments proves that mercy reigns over judgment. The table of shewbread symbolises Christ as the Bread of life (John 6:31-35) and the golden candlestick and the lamp stand point to Christ, the Light of the world (John 8:12; 1:9; 12:46), while the pure gold used represents His purity and royalty.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE FURNISHINGS OF THE TABERNACLE (Exodus 26:1-37; 40:16-35; 29:43-46; Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:24)

“And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount” (Exodus 26:30). The pattern of the design of the tabernacle was made clear and more comprehensible in Exodus 26. Here, we have the details of how the tabernacle was to be furnished.

The ordained furniture for the tabernacle included: the inner curtains (which are ten in number) and their coupling; the colours chosen for them are blue, purple and scarlet and were to be embroidered with cherubs as a mark of divine ownership. Five of the curtains were to be sewed together so that the ten curtains would form two hangings all together, which would further be coupled together with golden clasps or taches to portray a single structure. This foreshadows a united church fitly joined together by the common salvation and grafted as branches into a single vine, to grow into one holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:20-22; 4:11-16; John 15:1,5). Outer curtains of goat’s hair and ram’s skin preserve the strength and the beauty of the inner curtains from the coarseness of its external environment that can roughen them.

Boards were to be made for the tabernacle to bear up the curtains. These boards by their design were to provide support for the curtains. This suggests that special attention must be given to divine directives concerning their structure, strength and number. They were to be made of Shittim wood, of specified dimensions and design, and to be placed in the right position.

Curtains without boards could easily lose their stability when confronted with strong wind. The boards were to be coupled with gold rings both at the top and beneath, and were to be held firm by the bars fitted to the sockets to join them together.

God directed two veils to be made of blue, purple and scarlet. The veils were to serve as partition between the holy place and the most holy place. In the most holy place was placed the Ark of testimony overlaid by the mercy seat. In the holy place outside the veil, the table of shewbread was to be set on the north side, while the candlestick was to be placed toward the south. The second veil was to be hanged at the door of the tent.

There are important lessons to draw from the commandments God gave Moses concerning how the tabernacle was to be furnished. One, believers must portray total, unalloyed and undiluted obedience to God and His word. Two, servants of God must be sensitive and ready to move at God's command (Exodus 40:16-33; Hebrews 3:5). Three, God's presence is with believers, as symbolised in the tabernacle (Exodus 29:43-46; 40:34,35). Four, the tabernacle foreshadows Christ, who is the real embodiment of God's presence (Hebrews 3:1-4; 8:1-5; 9:24; Romans 10:4). Five, the tabernacle shows the reverential fear that should characterise our worship just as no one dared to enter the most holy place presumptuously.

SACRED DIRECTIVES ON THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING IN THE TABERNACLE (Exodus 27:1-21; Leviticus 10:1,2; Hebrews 13:9; John 1:29; Psalm 119:110; Matthew 5:14-16)

God further commanded Moses to make an altar of burnt offering out of Shittim wood and overlay it with brass; hence, it was also called the brazen altar. The dimension was five cubits in length, breadth and height. Each of the four corners projected upwards to the form of the horns of the altar. The horns of the altar depict yielded and total submission to God's will. It is also a symbol of might and the protection of God.

Other vessels associated with the altar were pans, shovels, basins for collecting the blood of animals poured out by the priests, the flesh hooks and fire pans for carrying the fire of the altar. The fire must be taken from the brazen altar every morning and it must not go out. Fire here symbolises the Holy Ghost. Strange fire must not be offered thereon. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, died for offering strange fire (Leviticus 10:1,2). This teaches us that we must not buy into every wind of strange and false doctrine so our faith and that of our converts are not subverted, but resist them. **“Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines...”** (Hebrews 13:9). Also, as the fire on the altar must keep aglow, so must a believer always be on fire for the Lord in holy living, evangelism, ministry of the Word and prayer.

The altar of burnt offering was located in the outer court of the tabernacle. Curtains were used as fence for the tabernacle. In the same vein, the Church is to be separated from the world’s principles and practices. The separation of this altar is also to ease its carriage because Levites were to carry it on their shoulders as they journeyed through the wilderness. Immediately a worshipper entered through the gate, the first object he would notice was the brazen altar. Different sacrifices made on the altar were burnt offerings, sin offerings, meat offerings, trespass offerings and peace offerings. The altar of burnt offerings depicts atonement by the blood of an innocent victim. Today, Jesus Christ has been made the perfect Sacrifice for us (John 1:29).

Furthermore, God commanded Moses to direct the children of Israel that they bring the pure olive oil that had been refined for the purpose of lighting, to make the lamp to burn always (Exodus 27:20). The word of God is the believers’ lamp (Psalm 119:105) that illuminates their mind regarding courses of action to take in their Christian lives. Thus, God’s word must be given adequate reading and listening attention. A believer who is to shine as light in the world is also expected to be filled with the Holy Ghost. **“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).

Our lesson emphasises that the worship of God in His appointed place should be conducted according to His specifications just as the materials of worship should be those He has chosen. Beware of strange altars and fires!

Questions for review:

1. What are the conditions to be fulfilled to make our giving acceptable to God?
2. Briefly describe the spiritual significance of the tabernacle, the Ark, the mercy seat, the table of shewbread and the candlestick.
3. What can we learn from the divine details on how the tabernacle was to be furnished?
4. What is the New Testament interpretation of the pure oil that makes the lamp to burn always in the tabernacle?
5. How should believers treat the place of worship and their body as the temple of God?
6. Mention some ways that these tabernacle materials point to Christ, the express image of God.
7. Why are believers expected to shine as lights in the world?

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

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Lesson
56

INSTITUTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

MEMORY VERSE: “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office” (Exodus 30:30).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 28 to 31

In the previous chapters, God gave Moses specific instructions on the construction of the tabernacle. The present study focuses on specific instructions to make the priestly garments, consecration of the priests, construction of the altar of incense, laver for washing, the composition of anointing oil as well as the regulation on the Sabbath. Also, the priests that would minister in it were to be consecrated before receiving the regulations that would guide their ministry. The tabernacle must be in place before the priests that would minister in it. God sets things in order. “**Let all things be done decently and in order**” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Similarly, the priests were consecrated before receiving the regulations that would govern their ministry. New Testament believers must first be consecrated to God to make their service acceptable (Romans 12:1,2).

CHOICE OF CLOTHING AND CONSECRATION OF THE PRIESTS (Exodus 28:1-43; 29:1-46; Numbers 3:10; Zechariah 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:1-10; 9:6,7)

God directed Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons into the priestly office. Aaron’s humility is also praiseworthy. As the priest, he had to function under the leadership of his younger brother (Exodus 7:1). Moses was also directed to make holy garments for

Aaron and his sons. These garments were for glory, beauty, holiness, honour and divine majesty. However, under the New Testament dispensation, believers, as priests, are to go beyond adorning themselves outwardly and put on the garments of salvation and robe of righteousness (1 Peter 2:9,10; 3:3-5; Revelation 1:5).

The clothing of the high priest, as well as his responsibilities were clearly defined. Their dressing must match the office they occupied. Their clothing consisted of the brodered coat, girdle and an ephod – a sleeveless garment, made of blue linen. Pomegranates were embroidered on the lower end, alternated with golden bells, which sounded when the high priest moved around in the sanctuary (Exodus 28:31-35; 39:22). Other items of the dressing are the mitre – a crown-like cap for the head having the inscription: **“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”** engraved on it. The purpose of this is to emphasise the necessity of holiness, not only for the high priest but also for the congregation.

An elaborate ceremony took place at the inauguration of the priests with much emphasis placed on purity. The candidates washed themselves, signifying the inner purity that should mark the conduct of the ministers of God. Prophet Isaiah put it thus; **“Depart ye, depart ye... be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”** (Isaiah 52:11). After washing, the priests were clothed and anointed. Significantly, their appointment comes after purification. In God’s order, cleansing comes before anointing, salvation before service and purity before power. The rites of consecration were completed with offering of the prescribed sacrifices.

It is pertinent to observe the weakness of the Levitical priesthood right from inception. The priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could represent others, thereby acknowledging their own sinfulness and need for pardon. They laid their hands on the head of the sacrificial animal as a mark of transferring their guilt on a substitute. This acts as a precursor to the role played by Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:4-6; John 1:29). The Old Testament priests needed to make atonement

for their sins, but Jesus, the great High Priest of the new covenant was sinless. He needed no sacrifice for Himself.

Also, the burning of the entire animal at the consecration ceremony signified the priests' entire dedication to God and His service throughout their lifetime. Another aspect of the consecration service was the application of the blood of the ram of dedication to different parts of the priests' bodies. All these are pointers to the total consecration and absolute surrender to God characteristic of present-day believers. Details of the consecration of the priests were designed, one, to instil in the people the exalted views of their calling. New Testament saints, as priests of the Holy God, should see their calling as holy, heavenly and high. **"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). Two, it was to impress upon the priests themselves the magnitude, profundity and importance of their assignment.

Partaking of the fellowship offering also depicts communion with God. It reminded the priests that God is the Source of their sustenance and strength. Strangers (non-priests) were prohibited from eating of this fellowship offering. The purification rites performed by Aaron and his sons show that holiness is a necessity for anyone who wishes to engage in God's service.

COMMUNION AND COMMUNICATING WITH THE DIVINE POWER (Exodus 30:1-21,34-38; 37:25-28; 38:24-31; Numbers 1:2-4; Zechariah 13:1)

After the priesthood was instituted, God gave Moses instructions to make the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1-10). It is also called the golden altar because God's direction was for Moses to **"overlay it with pure gold"**. The incense represents the devotion of saints whose prayers are set before God daily. Furthermore, Aaron's burning **"therein sweet incense morning and evening"** shows that believers must be constant in prayers (1

Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1).

The altar of incense placed directly in front of the Ark of the covenant represents the presence of God with believers and His assurance to answer their prayers. The sweet smelling odour that ascended up from the holy of holies signifies the prayers of believers ascending to God in heaven.

“When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD...” (Exodus 30:12). We learn here that God requires accountability; therefore, church leaders should be diligent to know the state of affairs among their congregation. Two, every man is to give a ransom. This is tribute paid to God in appreciation for blessings received and the support of divine worship. None was excluded from the payment of the ransom, meaning that everyone is equal regarding the need of redemption. The rich have as much need of Christ as the poor. **“The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls”** (Exodus 30:15). Furthermore, obedience to God’s instruction takes away plague among His people while disobedience attracts divine wrath and judgment.

God told Moses to make a laver of brass for the priests to wash in and this was to be set near the door of the tabernacle. This was to teach them purity in all their services. Believers today do not need daily literal washing in water before they can render acceptable service to the Lord. Jesus Christ has paid the price both for our salvation and purity. Rather, we appropriate His sacrifice by consecrating ourselves to Him, renewing our minds in the perfect will of God daily and living in non-conformity to the world.

CALL AND COMMENSURATE GIFT FOR SERVICE
(Exodus 31:1-18; 1 Kings 7:13,14; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 56:2-7)

God drew towards a conclusion of His sundry

instructions to Moses upon the mount where He had been for forty days. He revealed to Moses the detailed description and plan of the tabernacle. Bezaleel and Aholiab were commissioned to take charge of the actual construction. This shows that, one, there is no monopoly of God's gift, power and wisdom. He gives to everyone according to the measure of grace; two, God does not want His servants to work in isolation no matter how gifted and talented they are. They need the help of others to accomplish His purpose. Three, He chose the persons to do the work so that there would be no contest, envy or carnal comparisons about the preferment.

God is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17; 2 Peter 1:3). Bezaleel and Aholiab were gifted in the skill of workmanship, Aaron and his sons were called into the priesthood, and Moses was the overall head. We learn therefore, that gifts and callings differ. Whether we are gifted or called or both, there should be no place for pride, but humility and readiness to submit to leadership and work with one another. God **"filled [Bezaleel] with the spirit of God"** (Exodus 31:3). Talents and abilities are not enough to thrive in ministry without the Spirit of God.

Immediately God gave the order that the tabernacle be set up for His service, He reminded the children of Israel of the command for the sanctification of the Sabbath. **"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you... Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD... for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed"** (Exodus 31:13-17).

However, New Testament believers are not to observe the Sabbath (Saturday) but the Lord's Day (Sunday) for the following reasons: one, Jesus' resurrection took place on the first day of the week. Two, believers in the early Church came together for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Three, Paul the Apostle

commanded early believers to bring their offerings on this day (1 Corinthians 16:2). Therefore, believers are to hallow the Lord's Day. We must not engage in any personal or secular work on this day, except those on essential duties or whose employment involves emergency services. It is a holy day when we engage in spiritual activities such as worshipping the Lord, evangelism and other good works. We must also ensure we give our body rest and keep the day holy unto the Lord.

“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18). God gave Moses the tables of stone to preserve the record for a long time to come so that future generations of the Israelites can refer to it. Believers are privileged to have the Scriptures, the word of God, which was written **“for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”** (Romans 15:4). Moreover, Christ has atoned for us under the new covenant and the laws of God are written in the heart of those who are converted and are guided by His Spirit. **“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”** (Hebrews 8:10,11).

Questions for review:

1. Why was the tabernacle put in place before the priesthood was instituted?
2. State the significance of the garment of the priests.
3. Point out major weaknesses of the Levitical priesthood.
4. What lessons can believers learn from the altar of incense and ransom?
5. What should be the mindset of believers as they serve

- in their appointed offices?
6. What is the application of Sabbath day to New Testament believers and can it be observed?
 7. Mention some privileges believers enjoy in the new covenant.

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

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Lesson
57

ISRAEL DESCENDS INTO IDOLATRY

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him” (Exodus 32:26).

TEXT: Exodus 32:1-35; 33:1-23

Israel’s journey from Egypt to Canaan witnessed many temptations, trials, triumphs and setbacks. The setbacks were occasioned by their constant disobedience to the commandments of God. The account in our text represents one of their several misadventures and the idolatrous tendencies, which lurked in their hearts. While Moses was away to the mount to receive the law, the people mounted pressure on Aaron to make a god for them to worship. The action earned them divine judgment. Though Moses interceded on their behalf, many of them died and went to their early graves.

God detests idolatry in any form and warns that He would not share His glory with anyone. “**I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images**” (Isaiah 42:8).

The two chapters that make up our text offer lessons to contemporary Christian leaders and members to abhor idolatry in every form. Our allegiance and service should be to the true and living God only. He would not entertain rivalry in our worship or service but demands wholehearted commitment and devotion. The texts also highlight the conditional spiritual security of God’s

people. He says, “...**Whosoever, hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book**” (Exodus 32:33).

ISRAEL’S ERROR OF MAKING AND WORSHIPPING IDOLS (Exodus 32:1-6; 20:3,4; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 9:8-16; 7:25; Psalms 106:19-22; 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isaiah 40:19,20; 44:9-20; 45:20; Jeremiah 10:5; Acts 7:40,41; 1 Corinthians 10:7)

Moses the servant of God had gone to the mount to receive the law written with the finger of God. While he tarried in His presence, the children of Israel became apprehensive and said to Aaron, “...**Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him**” (Exodus 32:1). Sadly, Aaron succumbed to their pressure and became an accessory to sin to provoke the Lord to anger. Rather than reject their request, he facilitated their downward journey into idolatry.

Israel’s unholy request was in clear violation of the first commandment which God gave to them concerning idolatry. In Exodus 20:3,4, He says, “**Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.**”

Idolatry is evil in all ramifications and exposes humanity’s folly and weakness. Its practice *denies* the existence of the only true and living God (Isaiah 44:6,8). People who recognise and serve idols have by their deed denied that God is alive. Two, it *dishonours* the One who is Governor over the whole earth (Psalm 22:28). Three, idol worship *devalues* our being from the image of God we were created into. Four, those who lay claim to another god beside the Almighty, *demeans* God’s power as the mightiest force on earth and in heaven (Psalm 62:11; Isaiah 40:28). Five, idolatry *damns* its adherents’ soul in eternal perdition. Six, to make or worship an idol is the height of foolishness, idiocy and thoughtlessness. Various references to acts of idol-

worship in the Scriptures portray the worshippers as lacking in understanding, wisdom and common-sense (Psalms 115:8; 135:18). Seven, being inanimate and incapable of moving, talking, hearing, smelling or eating, idol-worship must be denounced in all its ramifications.

For succumbing to the unholy requests from the children of Israel, Aaron was an example of weak leadership, which begets compromising laity. He failed as a leader for his inability to exert his spiritual authority and prevent the people from going astray. Every leader called by God into the ministry should be strong and courageous to defend God's glory and declare His word without fear, favour or intimidation (Joshua 1:7). To yield to pressure from people or society and lower the standard of God's word, is to invite God's frown because He does not condone idolatry or hide His displeasure against those who persist in evil. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness”** (Romans 1:18).

Consequently, the Lord was angry with the people and determined to destroy them, but for Moses' prayer and plea.

INTERCESSION FOR PARDON AND FORGIVENESS
(Exodus 32:7-25,30-35; Numbers 14:11-20; 16:45-48; Deuteronomy 9:18-20; Psalm 106:19-23; Genesis 18:22-33; Luke 22:31,32; 13:6-9; James 5:16)

Israel incurred God's displeasure because they went into idolatry. He expressed this as He rejected and referred to them as “thy people”. As punishment for their sins, He proposed to destroy them and make out of Moses a great nation. But Moses stepped in to avert God's fierce anger against the sinning idolatrous Israelites. **“And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?”** (Exodus 32:11).

Moses understood the power and efficacy of

intercession early in his ministry to the children of Israel and he utilised this privilege on several occasions when God was poised to punish the people for their sin. He took it upon himself to pray for them so that they would not be destroyed (Numbers 14:11-20; 16:46-48; Deuteronomy 9:18-20; Psalm 106:23). As leaders and children of God, we have the privilege to intercede on behalf of our families, organisation, denomination or nation. Our intercessory prayer will go a long way to prevent calamities befalling individuals, families, nations and usher people into the kingdom of God.

Moses responded in a way that is very instructive. Rather than surrender to the divine verdict on Israel, he called on God for mercy and pardon. Moses would rather be removed from God's book than have Israel wiped off the earth and replaced with his own descendants. God hearkened to his plea and **"...repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people"** (Exodus 32:14). The church needs leaders who can stand in the gap between an offended God and offending sinners and backsliders. Through prayers of intercession, people can be saved, sanctified, healed, delivered and set free from bondage to the flesh and reconciled with the Lord.

In order to be effective intercessors, we must be selfless, have an eye on the glory of God, maintain a consistent, holy relationship with Him, be full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and be sincere and passionate about the spiritual welfare of others. These qualities are found in many intercessors in the Bible like Abraham: he interceded for Ishmael (Genesis 17:18) and for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:22-33); Job interceded on behalf of his children (Job 1:5); Paul prayed for the salvation of the Jews, his kinsmen in the flesh (Romans 10:1); and Epaphras was a notable intercessor for the early churches (Colossians 4:12,13). Believers are exhorted to get involved in intercessory prayers for all men and those in positions of leadership (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Our Lord Jesus, the great Intercessor and the Holy Spirit are also interceding for believers (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26,34).

Whatever excuse Aaron offered was at best flimsy and unacceptable as he was accused of stripping the people naked (Exodus 32:25). Many people act like Aaron. They give excuses and blame others or Satan for their sin.

After denouncing Israel's sin, Moses offered them opportunity to repent and make a decision to be on the Lord's side; that is, to renounce sin, forsake the camp of sinners and cross over to God's side. The tribe of Levi seized the opportunity and recommitted themselves to the Lord. They were spared the sword of judgment that killed about three thousand souls. There is hope of averting God's judgment for penitent sinners and backsliders (Isaiah 55:7; Proverbs 28:13).

INDICTMENT, PENITENCE AND GOD'S FAVOUR
(Exodus 33:1-23; 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6; 10:16; 2 Chronicles 30:8; Jeremiah 7:23,24; 2 Chronicles 7:13-15; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; Psalm 34:18; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10)

Upon the declaration of His resolve to deal with all sinning persons (Exodus 32:33,34), the Lord commanded Moses and the people to resume their journey. He described Israel as **"a stiffnecked people"** (Exodus 33:3), which paints the picture of a people difficult to lead; people bent on doing their own will and going their own way. He said, **"...I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way"** (Exodus 33:3). However, this indictment is not only limited to Israel, but is a common experience of the unregenerate human nature, which lies at the root of every rebellion against God's commandment.

It is instructive to examine some of the losses Israel suffered as a result of their idolatry. First, their fellowship with God was prematurely aborted. The joy and blessing anticipated were lost as Israel must go on in their journey without Him. Second, God's command to Moses to, **"Depart and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt"**, suggests an abandonment of the people into

the hand of Moses. This downgrades their comfort and security, for no person, however devout or righteous, can take the place of God. Third, although God still assured to uphold His promise to give them the Promised Land, He denied them the peculiar comfort and assurance of His divine presence, which they had enjoyed. They were to continue the journey with the presence of a guardian angel. One of the greatest punishments God metes out for the sin of any people, assembly or individual, is the withdrawal of His presence (Joshua 7:10-12).

“And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments” (Exodus 33:4). The people were filled with fear and contrition, and in expression of these, they stripped themselves of their ornaments as God had instructed (Exodus 33:5). Some Bible commentators say that the act of removal of bodily ornaments was a common way of expressing sorrow in the Middle Eastern culture. Today among all who lay claim to contrition and repentance, God also looks out for evidence in order to show mercy (Matthew 3:8).

“And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp” (Exodus 33:7). By removing the tabernacle to the precincts of the camp, Moses intended to lead the people to a fuller recognition of their separation from God and the need to seek Him, if truly their repentance was genuine. It was also to awaken a hunger for the restoration of the covenant in their minds. The people looked on with deep reverence whenever Moses went into the tabernacle and bowed in adoration before the Lord in front of their tents when they saw the pillar of cloud come down on the tent and stand before the door.

While still basking in divine favour, Moses used the opportunity to request to be shown God’s glory. He wanted a higher revelation of God than he had known.

His request received divine acceptance when God said, **“...I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy”** (Exodus 33:19). In granting Moses’ request, the Lord moderated it by permitting only such limited vision of His glory as a mortal person’s weakness could withstand. That the Lord acceded to Moses’ desire teaches us to seek closer and more intimate walk with God notwithstanding our experiences with Him in the past; even if it means putting us **“in a clift of the rock”**, so that we can withstand it. Paul the apostle earnestly prayed: **“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”** (Philippians 3:10). There are higher heights, deeper depths and greater revelations to attain if we walk consistently, committedly and completely with Him. He is willing to reveal more of His power, grace and glory to those who walk uprightly.

Questions for review:

1. What do we learn from Israel’s descent into idolatry?
2. What is the danger of impatience and how can we avoid impatient actions?
3. Why is it important to have leaders in the church with strong convictions?
4. Mention some intercessors in the Bible and identify some of their qualities that are worthy of emulation.
5. What does it mean to be on the Lord’s side and what are the consequences of remaining in sin?
6. What is the significance of the removal of the tabernacle of the congregation?
7. How can we enrich our spiritual experiences with the Lord?

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

A circular graphic with a double border. The word "Lesson" is written in a cursive font at the top, and the number "58" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font in the center.

Lesson
58

A grayscale background image of an open book with its pages slightly curled, resting on a surface.

RENEWAL OF THE LAW AND OFFERING FOR THE TABERNACLE

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These are the words which the LORD hath commanded, that ye should do them” (Exodus 35:1).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 34 to 36

After the ugly incident of idolatry in chapters thirty-two and thirty-three, God instructed Moses to hew two new tables of stone, like the first, so He could write the law on them again (Exodus 34:1-4,28). This gesture was an evidence of pardon and a renewal of divine favour towards Israel, a people that had been labelled “**rebellious and stiffnecked**”. Afterwards, Moses went up to Mount Sinai where the Lord renewed His covenant with Israel and wrote the Ten Commandments again. The Lord declared Himself as a merciful and compassionate One willing to forgive the iniquities of His people. Moses tarried in His presence for forty days and forty nights.

The renewal led to the commandment to offer for the building of the tabernacle. Moses prepared the hearts of the children of Israel to bring offering for the building of the tabernacle and the materials were provided by those whose hearts the Lord stirred up. Aside the inspired offering, God endowed able men and women with divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding to construct the tabernacle and design its materials (Exodus 31:2,3,6). From the foregoing, it follows that a renewal of our relationship with the Lord will usher in divine favour, wisdom and understanding. There will be

refreshing from the presence of the Lord and as He supplied the needs of the people so much that they were restrained from giving for the work of the tabernacle, He will do the same if we return to Him and renew our covenant relationship.

RENEWAL OF THE LAW AND PROMISE OF VICTORY (Exodus 34:1-35; Deuteronomy 10:2,4; Exodus 32:16; 24:12; 31:18; Deuteronomy 6:19; 7:1-6; 11:25; Joshua 1:3-5; 23:9)

The children of Israel had stripped themselves naked by regressing into idolatry and God was ready to destroy them and raise another nation through Moses (Exodus 32:10,25). But He pardoned them as a result of Moses' intercession. **“And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest”** (Exodus 34:1). This is indicative of divine pardon and answer to Moses' intercessory prayer that the Lord decided to give the law afresh to the people and renew His covenant with them. Relapsing into sin always brings the loss of God's favour and presence.

Moses was commanded to come over to the top of Mount Sinai once again. In response, he went up early in the morning. **“And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD”** (Exodus 34:5). In fulfilment of His promise to him earlier (Exodus 33:22,23), the Lord revealed Himself and proclaimed His attributes. He is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, and keeps mercy to thousands. True to the Scriptures, God has manifested these attributes in every generation. One, He showed mercy to Noah, a righteous person in his generation, and saved him and his household from the flood (Genesis 7:1). Two, He showed mercy to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their offspring. Three, His mercy sent Christ to die for sins of the whole world. Four, His gracious character would not leave us as preys in the hand of the enemy. Rather, He takes

care of our fears and upholds us with His right hand of righteousness (Isaiah 41:10). Five, His longsuffering has endured for us though we are sometimes too slow to understand His will and purpose. Six, He is good to all His creatures and His goodness is all over the earth (Psalm 33:5). Seven, He forgives our iniquities, transgressions and sin. David expresses the blessedness of those whose transgression and iniquity the Lord forgives. **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile”** (Psalm 32:1,2).

The Lord also projects Himself as a God of judgment and justice; an impartial Judge **“...that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”** (Exodus 34:7). He calls on all nations therefore to repent of their transgressions lest He turns them into hell (Psalm 9:17).

Further manifestations of God’s renewed mercy towards Israel are understood in a series of promises of wonders among them (Exodus 34:10,11). First, He would make a new covenant with them. Second, He promised to do unprecedented marvels. Third, He would defeat enemy nations around them, though this required obedience from the children of Israel. They must not have affinity or go into any form of alliance with the enemies. Israel must be a separate nation under God in order to enjoy all the promised benefits and blessings. They must not be found to be deep in unholy alliance and friendship with the world (James 4:4).

God renewed His covenant with Israel by restating His commandments (Exodus 34:11-28). A broader look at the commandments suggests that they are designed to guarantee the believers’ spiritual welfare and safeguard our relationship with God. Though the ceremonial aspect of the law has been abolished for New Testament Christians, the moral aspect of observing rest after working for six days, separation from the world, offering our talents and treasures to the Lord, avoiding idolatry and immorality, offering only what is pure and

sanctified, ensuring we offer holy and acceptable service to the Lord, etc. still stand (Exodus 34:15,21,25).

At the end of the fortieth day when Moses departed from the presence of the Lord, **“...behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him”** (Exodus 34:30). When we spend quality time in the presence of the Lord, His grace rubs off on us. The world will perceive and take knowledge that we have **“been with Jesus”** (Acts 4:13).

RESOURCES FOR THE TABERNACLE AND THE APPOINTED WORKMEN (Exodus 35:1-35; 25:2-8; 1 Chronicles 29:3-9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8; 8:12,2-5; Philippians 2:14)

Aside the law, which Moses received and faithfully conveyed to the children of Israel, he also received instruction on the building and furnishing of the tabernacle. **“And Moses spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass”** (Exodus 35:4,5; see also Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5). The resources for building God’s tabernacle are to be provided by the congregation of the Lord (Exodus 35:5-19). It was stated that those whose hearts the Lord stirred should give willingly and bountifully for the tabernacle.

As soon as the commandment to give went forth, the people responded and brought offerings in abundance – from the rulers (verse 27) to the lowest of the people, **“as many as were willing hearted”**. They did it enthusiastically because they knew how important it was towards the completion of God’s house. Believers should emulate this attitude and be willing to give generously and sacrificially towards God’s projects (Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 8:2-4; 9:6,7). We should also be willing to surrender our time, talents and resources to God. Apart from paying our tithes regularly and faithfully, we are required to give for evangelistic and

mission work (2 Corinthians 8:4), building projects, etc. Other areas that require our resources include meeting the needs of needy members and ministers as well as for executing special programmes, crusades, retreats, among others. However, the condition of the giver's heart is of utmost importance to God; we must give from a pure heart, willingly and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

“And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri... And hath filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, in all manner of workmanship; And hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan” (Exodus 35:30,31,34). Here, God appointed workmen specially to be involved in the building of the tabernacle and filled them with His Spirit, wisdom, knowledge, skill and understanding (verse 31) to effectively carry out the work. Bezaleel and Aholiab were endowed with wisdom to work and teach others (verse 34). Those God has given knowledge should be willing to communicate it for the benefit and growth of the church. Similarly, leaders should identify and engage such people and not deprive the church of their gifts and service.

The Old Testament tabernacle is a shadow of the New Testament believer's body (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22). We should therefore, keep all members of our body holy to the Lord.

FABRICATION OF THE TABERNACLE MATERIALS (Exodus 36:1-38; 1 Chronicles 29:5; 2 Chronicles 24:13; Exodus 28:3; Psalm 68:11; Matthew 28:20; Mark 16:15-20; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; Romans 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58)

As soon as the materials for the construction of the tabernacle were offered, the workmen commenced the work. **“According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it. And**

look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount" (Exodus 25:9,40). God qualified them for the work and with willingness and resolution, they wrought the work (Exodus 36:8-38). All ministers of the gospel should seek to build the body of Christ through the sound teaching of God's word (1 Corinthians 3:10,11). The mandate of the great commission has been given to every believer. Jesus said, **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature..."** (Mark 16:15-20). Afterwards, He said we should teach them to observe all things He has commanded us (Matthew 28:19,20). The task the Lord has given us is to evangelise the world of sinners and disciple the converts until they are able to stand as heaven-bound believers. The Lord did not just send us **"to go"** without equipping us, but like Bezaleel and Aholiab, He has given us His Spirit and wisdom and made adequate provision for us to carry out the work.

The zeal and urgency, which the early disciples attached to the work, should motivate every believer to put their hands to the work. We must arise with willingness, resolve and compassion (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34). Jesus Christ, our perfect Example did the work with all earnestness; He identified a must in Himself: **"I must work the works of him that sent me..."** (John 9:4). Paul the apostle placed a curse on himself: **"...woe is unto me if I do not preach the gospel"** (1 Corinthians 9:16). A songwriter said, *"To the work, to the work, we are servants of God; let us follow the path that our Master has trod..."* Like Israel, we must be willing to give our time, talents and treasures for this great work. We must devise strategies and keep working till the Master comes (Luke 19:13).

Questions for review:

1. What do we learn from the way God forgave the children of Israel?
2. How should restored backsliders respond to God's mercy?
3. State the evidence that Israel's sin was forgiven.
4. What was Israel's response to offering for the

tabernacle and how should believers respond to giving for God's work?

5. What should be the level of our commitment to the great commission?
6. What are the responsibilities God has given to gospel ministers?
7. What debt do we owe our neighbours who are not in Christ?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "59" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
59

CONSTRUCTION AND ERECTION OF THE TABERNACLE

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them” (Exodus 39:43).

TEXT: Exodus chapters 37 to 40

God’s dealing with Israel foreshadows His future plan for humanity, created in His image. In our texts, He commanded Israel to construct a tabernacle where He would meet with them. This tabernacle is a picture of what would happen in the new heaven and the new earth; the Lord God will dwell with His redeemed people: **“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”** (Revelation 21:3).

The importance of the tabernacle can be understood when viewed as a channel of communion and fellowship between God and His people. The tabernacle is a place where God registers His presence among His people here on earth. As a figure of the eternal tabernacle, the earthly tabernacle must be raised following God’s specifications.

God had called Abraham out of his kindred to be separated from the idols of his lineage and the iniquities of his generation in order to raise a generation of peculiar people that would be regulated by special divine injunctions. Their pattern of worship and communion with God, and the place of worship are to be ordained

by Him. Thus, the details of the construction of the component parts of both the tabernacle and the garments of the priests were specified by the Lord. The plan of God for making Israel a peculiar people is presented to us in this lesson just as He is gathering a people to Himself today through the Lord Jesus Christ, **“...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...”** (1 Peter 2:9).

This is very instructive because God did not leave the people to choose the pattern of worship and materials for worship themselves; rather, He specified the what, where and how for those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. He institutes the order of worship and so demands obedience from all true worshippers. Those who come to God must come through the God-ordained way. Jesus says, **“I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6). And the Lord Jesus, the Word personified, says that those who are to worship God must do so in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE (Exodus 37:1-29; 38:1-31; 31:2; 30:6; 39:35; Numbers 8:4; Deuteronomy 10:2; 2 Chronicles 3:15; Hebrews 9:2)

“And Bezaleel made the ark of shittim wood...” (Exodus 37:1). Moses, the spiritual leader of the Israelites was instructed by God to guide and direct the construction of the tabernacle. The personnel involved were called of God. **“See, I have called by name Bezaleel ...of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship”** (Exodus 31:2,3). Likewise, Moses was called before his commission for service (Exodus 3:4). In God’s programme in the New Testament, the call to conversion is the first contact between God and all human instruments in His service. This relationship with Him begins when we heed His invitation to: **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Finding and becoming a member of God’s

kingdom begins with salvation from sin and conversion from the way and life of sinning, which ushers in a remarkable transformation of life (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Bezaleel was commissioned for the service of the Lord in the construction of the tabernacle. He complied with the specifications of God in the choice of materials given to Moses. It must be observed that the best of materials were used for the work – shittim wood, brass, silver and pure gold. This implies that nothing else is good for the Master’s service and tabernacle other than the best of our talents, treasures and time. Two cherubims were made of pure gold and placed at the two ends of the mercy seat with their wings spread and facing each other. The spreading of the wings symbolises protection from the throne of mercy.

COSTUME OF THE PRIESTS (Exodus 39:1-43; 35:19,23; 28:2,6-28,31-43; Psalm 132:9,16; Zechariah 3:1-4; Hebrews 9:6,7; Revelation 19:8)

The priests that minister before the people in the tabernacle are the representatives of God whose appearance must accord reverence for Him. As such, the priests could not appear anyhow in the performance of their duties. Thus, the components of the garments were both significant and symbolic. The design of their garments consists of the ephod and the breastplate. Ministers of the gospel must not give room to being despised because of unbecoming adornment. While their moderation should be known to all, they must be presentable, not giving occasion to the enemies of the gospel or those who hear them to despise them. **“Giving no offence in any thing”** (2 Corinthians 6:3) is the rule to follow.

The ephod is made of gold, blue, purple and fine twined linen. It was a short kind of waistcoat, which consisted of two pieces, one covering the back and the other the front. The two pieces are fastened together on the shoulder with a curious girdle of the ephod. Two precious stones (onyx) are fixed on each shoulder of the ephod. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel

according to their order of birth, are engraved on the stones. Two golden rings are also fixed on it for holding the breastplate in place. The uniqueness of this design projects the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness and the decency that should characterise those who appear before Him.

The breastplate is also made of the same material as the ephod; it is an outermost wear above it. It is a square made of double pieces each, one span long and one span wide. Twelve precious stones in setting of gold are inserted on the breastplate. The stones are arranged in three rows of four sets and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 39:8-21; 28:15-30). The breastplate also has a porch for keeping the Urim and Thummim. These two objects are used to determine the will of God on difficult issues or to receive counsel from Him (Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8-10; 1 Samuel 23:6-8; 28:6). In the New Testament dispensation, believers are endued with the Holy Ghost who guides and leads us into all truth. We do not need the Urim and Thummim; the Holy Spirit and the word of God are guides in all matters of life and faith (Acts 13:1-3; 16:6-8; 20:21-24; 21:10,11; 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

CONFORMITY TO DIVINE PATTERN (Exodus 40:1-38; 39:42,43; 25:9,40; Acts 7:44; Hebrews 8:5)

“And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it...” (Exodus 39:43). In response to God’s command, the people conformed to the divine order. They obeyed and complied with His instruction to the minutest detail in constructing the tabernacle and the design of the priest’s garment. Moses painstakingly examined the quality of the work and the dimension and the detailed specifications **“...and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded...”** What a challenge! Believers should be careful to obey God’s word in all areas **“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...”** (Romans 12:2). Similarly,

leaders who have received the pattern of worship and leadership from the Lord must ensure workers under them carry out the work of the Lord in accordance with divine commands.

It should be noted that the tabernacle is the evidence of God's literal presence among the children of Israel. This affords them the opportunity of sacrificial atonement for their sins and continual fellowship with Him. Secondly, Aaron and his sons are to be washed, cleansed, sanctified or set apart for divine service. The Lord's service should not be done presumptuously. There must be salvation before service, cleansing before commission and purity before participation. God must be sanctified in the lives of those who approach Him on behalf of the people. The consistency of God's word remains significant for believers.

“And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments...” (Exodus 40:13). Holiness is the demand of God from anyone who desires to offer acceptable service. The garment of holiness must be such that projects the glory of God and presents the minister as His representative. This emphasises the decency, non-conformity to the world and moderation of all believers who minister in songs, soul-winning and all manner of service, that their garments should befit the glory of God; it should not be confusing or ambiguous like the attire of a tempter. It is such a service predicated on a cleansed life, clear motive and consecrated living that is acceptable to God (Deuteronomy 30:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7; 1 Peter 1:14-16).

Thirdly, the glory of God descended and His presence was manifest to them as a seal of divine approval (Exodus 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-23; 1 Kings 8:10,11; Revelation 15:8). **“Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle”** (Exodus 40:34). The seal of God's approval for their obedience was His literal presence among them. What a joy to fulfil God's demand and work in His way. The Lord came down to identify with His people through the pillar of cloud in the day and pillar of fire in the night. His continual abiding presence becomes the

possession for us His children as we obey Him in small and great matters. As we do His will, He will abide with us always (Matthew 28:20).

Questions for review:

1. What is the place of the tabernacle in God's programme for Israel?
2. What do we learn from the way the people obeyed Moses and worked according to divine specifications?
3. What experience must we have before rendering service to God?
4. What does the use of gold symbolise in the believer's service?
5. What should characterise believers' garments?
6. As New Testament believers, what do we possess in place of the Urim and Thummim as guides?
7. How can we retain God's presence in our midst?

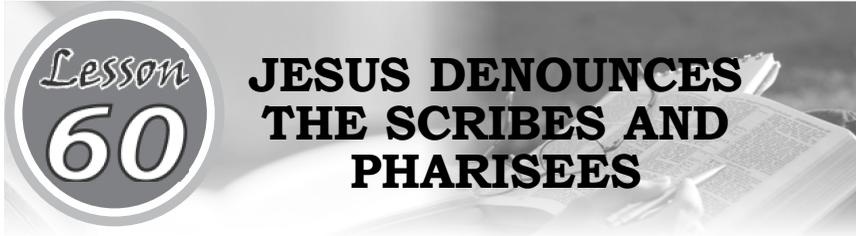
THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

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

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

SECTION I
BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:3).

TEXTS: Matthew 23:1-39; Luke 11:37-54; 13:31-35

The scribes and Pharisees in the New Testament were custodians of the law and regarded as spiritual guides among the Jews. They held sway in the land of Israel because the people looked up to them for proper interpretation of the law. While the Scribes were copiers of the law, the Pharisees interpreted and taught same. During His earthly ministry, Christ engaged them on many occasions on matters of the interpretation and application of the law as well as their conduct among the people. It was very clear on the numerous occasions that these teachers of the law had muddled up and destroyed the purpose for which the law was given. That which was meant to point people to Christ and make them serve God in holiness and righteousness, became instruments of deception, hypocrisy and offence. It was obvious that they were **"...walking in craftiness... [and] handling the word of God deceitfully..."** (2 Corinthians 4:2). **"For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers"** (Matthew 23:4). Their recalcitrance and refusal to embrace the new light occasioned the numerous woes Christ pronounced against them. Those who refuse to accept the light of the gospel and continue in error risk heavier judgment from the Lord.

Christ warned His disciples against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He also cautioned them against the love of position, human praise and self-exaltation (Matthew 23:9-12).

DECEITFULNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (Matthew 23:1-12; Luke 11:37-41; 12:1; Ezekiel 33:31; Mark 7:6; 12:38; Matthew 6:5; 5:20; Titus 1:6)

It is obvious from the statements Christ made about the scribes and Pharisees that they were deceptive both in conduct and practice. **“...The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not”** (Matthew 23:2,3). One, they assumed a position they were not morally qualified to occupy. Moses’ seat is a metaphor for leadership, legislation, integrity, discipline and religious authority. It represents power and authority exercised on God’s behalf by His servants. Christian leadership must not be considered from the perspective of personal gain, but a laudable and exceptional opportunity for service to humanity. Two, as legislators and lawmakers in Israel, the scribes and Pharisees taught one thing and practised another; they talked of good works but did none. Their manner contradicted their message. Three, they prescribed very strict and tedious rules about tithing, Sabbath, swearing and traditions for others, but they would not observe the same (verse 4; Mark 7:3,5). Four, whatever they did was to receive the applause of men (verse 5). Their prayers, fasting, alms deeds and good works were meant to attract public praise because they were neither interested in God’s glory nor His approval. Five, pride was their second nature as they preferred chief seats and prominent places, even in the synagogues. Six, they liked to be called by great titles of Rabbi or Master, whether or not they were qualified to take it. Yet, Christ warned His disciples not to be ambitious of titles to the neglect of good and godly conduct (verses 8-11). The Lord is displeased with church leaders who merely use

God and religion to serve their selfish interest, or want their followers to reverence and worship them.

Such were the dishonest nature of the scribes and Pharisees that the Lord said “...**unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy**” (Luke 12:1). Hypocrisy should find no place in the heart of those who come near to God for service and worship. As believers, we are admonished to avoid the pitfalls of these religious bigots as a precondition for getting to heaven (Matthew 5:20). Unfortunately, the scribes and Pharisees, though accredited expositors of the law and highly esteemed by the people of Israel, did not live as models of virtues.

DENUNCIATION OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES
(Matthew 23:13-36; Luke 11:42-52; 20:46; Isaiah 9:16-18; Malachi 2:8,9; Jeremiah 18:15-17; Ezekiel 44:10)

God detests pride, arrogance, hypocrisy and self-praise wherever they are found, whether among those who occupy top positions in religious or secular world. Thus, the Lord profiled the lifestyle of these religious sects and pronounced woes on them. By their lifestyle, they were not fit for the kingdom of God. “**But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in**” (Matthew 23:13).

First, the scribes and Pharisees, through their lifestyle, made it difficult for people to believe and accept the gospel. They prejudiced the people’s minds against the new light coming from the doctrine of Christ. While they were sworn enemies to the conversion of souls to Christ, they compassed sea and land to make proselytes to themselves (Matthew 23:15). They caused the people to err: “**For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed**” (Isaiah 9:16). Second, they fleeced widows and orphans out of their meagre resources and “...**for a pretence make long prayer...**” (Matthew 23:14). This practice denotes covetousness and oppression (Micah 3:3) and a display

of piety for selfish advantage. Third, they seemed to be very meticulous with strict observance of religious traditions and rites, but in their comportment they were vile. Fourth, they gave detailed attention to the letter of the law, but neglected the spirit behind the law (Matthew 23:16-22). Fifth, they majored in the minor, neglecting very important ordinances and playing up non-essentials.

Sixth, they were fair externally, like sepulchres, which appear beautiful outward, but foul within, full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Seventh, they carefully avoided Levitical defilements but by no means pay attention to the depravity in their hearts. It is unreasonable to cleanse the outside of the platter if the inside is dirty. Clean hands and pure hearts are required (Psalm 24:3,4).

Eighth, they were sanctimonious by protesting against the murder of the prophets, yet plotted to murder Christ, to whom all the prophets bore witness. They pretended a deal of kindness to the memory of the prophets; they honoured their relics, built their tombs and garnished their sepulchres, yet they persecuted the righteous that were present with them.

The Pharisees' response to the Lord's rebuke was the height of their hypocrisy. Rather than be sober and repentant as the Lord denounced them, **"...the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him"** (Luke 11:53,54).

Children of God should avoid preachers, pastors and ministers who **"profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work, reprobate"** (Titus 1:16). The cup of God's wrath awaits all hypocrites except they repent. There is hope for all hypocrites and vain worshippers while the days of mercy last. They must repent now and believe the gospel. **"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will**

abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM PROPHESED
(Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:31-35; 19:41-44; Jeremiah 26:18; Micah 3:12)

The Lord ended His sombre message on a very sad note. He lamented over the future fate of Jerusalem: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”** (Matthew 23:37). He repeated the name of the city for emphasis and on account of the intensity of His passion and pity against the judgment that awaited it.

The sins of Jerusalem were many. They repeatedly rejected every entreaty to return to their Maker (Proverbs 1:24; Isaiah 1:18; Ezekiel 18:31). Instead, they dealt treacherously with the prophets that were sent to them; they killed some, stoned others and a good number were imprisoned. They rejected the messengers of God sent to guide them in the way, word and will of God. Their rulers, kings and prophets were accessories to the destruction of these messengers and their messages (Jeremiah 8:9; Luke 4:29). The glory of God departed from the temple as soon as Christ deserted it. It was no more the house of God but **“your house”**. **“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”** (Matthew 23:38,39). Christ’s last words left a mixed message of sadness and a glimmer of hope and an assurance of mercy for Israel. Sadness because there would be a period of blindness, in part, for them (Romans 11:25), but as He gazed through the protracted period of their unbelief, He saw the great restoration in the future, when **“...they shall look on him whom they pierced”** (John 19:37; Zechariah 12:10). **“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness**

from Jacob” (Romans 11:26). Today, the gospel message goes out to all and sundry. Sinners are enjoined to embrace it, repent and make right their lives. Believers are admonished to shun all forms of hypocrisy and duplicity. There is a tone of soberness in the voice of the Lord because those who reject the offer of grace today have no other way of escape from the wrath of God.

Questions for review:

1. Why did the Lord warn His disciples against the lifestyle of the scribes and Pharisees?
2. Why did Christ denounce the scribes and Pharisees?
3. What does it mean to sit in Moses’ seat, and how should Christian leaders relate to those they lead?
4. Describe the character traits that befit a disciple of Christ.
5. What can we learn from the leadership style of our Lord Jesus Christ?
6. Give some reasons believers should imbibe the virtue of humility and keep away from pride and self-exaltation.
7. What should be done to retain the presence and power of the Lord in our places of worship?

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



MEMORY VERSE: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12,13).

TEXTS: Matthew 24:1-51; Mark 13:1-37;
Luke 17:20-37; 21:5-38

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not leave the church in darkness of events of the end-time as well as His second coming. Preparatory to His betrayal, trial and crucifixion, He acquainted His disciples, and by extension, the church, with a preview of events that will signal His return. So significant is the subject and its understanding that each of the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – records it. Understanding the nature of the events of the last days is important to our preparation for the rapture and the second coming of Christ.

The reasons for this revelation by our Lord Jesus Christ are not farfetched. One, to avoid being deceived. “**And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you**”. The possibility of deception, even among Christians, is probable, hence the admonition to “**take heed**”. Two, so that believers will not be surprised at the turn of events. “**Behold, I have told you before**” (Matthew 24:25). Three, to enable the Church prepare for His coming since He does not want us to be caught unawares. That day will take the inhabitants of the world like a snare (Luke 21:34,35).

The chapters under consideration reveal the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, events that will

characterise the end-time and signs of Christ's second coming, and the need for believers to be on the lookout for their soon-coming King.

CHRIST FORETELLS THE FATE OF THE TEMPLE (Matthew 24:1,2; Mark 13:1,2; Luke 19:43,44; Jeremiah 26:18; Micah 3:12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5)

The spiritual condition of Jerusalem at the time of Christ was unacceptable to God. A people redeemed by Him from Egypt, “...to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Romans 9:4) have made the word of God of none effect through their conduct and teaching. The magnificent temple appeared to be the major pride of the nation contrary to God's expectation to be peculiar in righteousness and service.

“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple” (Matthew 24:1). This was the second temple after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first, which was built by Solomon. Though it was inferior in comparison to it (Ezra 3:12), extensive renovations carried out by Herod for sixteen years had made it the most magnificent building in Jerusalem at that time. Its splendour caught the disciples' attention and they wondered what would be the future of it. Looking upon it with wonder and admiration, they had thought that the temple was invincible, at least, by human standards. **“And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”** (Matthew 24:2).

The destruction of this temple was carried out by a Roman General called Titus about AD 70. The commander of his army, Turnus Rufus, ploughed up the very foundation upon which the temple was laid. His action was in fulfilment of the word of God against Jerusalem for their iniquity and repeated disobedience against God. **“Therefore shall Zion for your sake be**

plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest” (Micah 3:12).

We learn here that sin is capable of bringing down a superstructure and turning it into a sordid monument; it can turn cities and kingdoms into ruins. Notwithstanding the magnificence of an earthly structure, if its foundation is laid in sin, it will crumble eventually. It behooves the wise-hearted therefore, to ensure they are rooted in righteousness and built on the truth that never fails. He **“that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool”** (Jeremiah 17:11).

CONDITION OF THE WORLD TOWARDS THE END-TIME (Matthew 24:3-41; Mark 13:3-32; Luke 17:20-37)

Four of the Lord’s disciples – Peter, James, John and Andrew – consulted privately to have further understanding of the events of the last days. **“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?”** (Mark 13:3,4). Christ’s revelations in response to the disciples’ questions cover events at hand, like the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the persecution of His disciples and catastrophic events until the time His kingdom shall be established (Matthew 24:47,51).

The end-time shall be characterised by unique and identifiable events. There will be large-scale deception perpetrated by false christs, prophets and teachers (verses 5,11). These personalities will come with strange and unscriptural doctrines and teach men to follow them. Two, great destruction of lives and property occasioned by wars and natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricane, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, flooding, etc.

Three, rumours of wars and outbreak of large-scale conflicts among nations. Four, cure-defying diseases,

pestilences and famine. Five, grievous persecutions of the saints, widespread betrayal, backsliding and lukewarmness among Christians. Six, inordinate increase in iniquity leading to apathy in spiritual things. Seven, a revival of preaching of the gospel to all nations; **“and then shall the end come”** (Matthew 24:14). Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also reiterates some of the signs of the end. **“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”** (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

However, the **“abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet”**, relates to the time of the great tribulation after the saints’ rapture when the Antichrist will unleash a regime of terror on the world, especially, against the Jews (Matthew 24:15-22). This period will also witness God’s full wrath on workers of iniquity who rejected His offer of salvation. People who will miss the rapture will be a target for Satan’s wrath and rage with a floodgate of intense suffering on the inhabitants of the earth. Believers who will make the rapture because they are born again, sanctified and abiding in the Lord, will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

After the concurrent events of the great tribulation and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, then supernatural cosmic signs will manifest, which shall herald the second coming of Christ. **“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”** (Matthew 24:30). The preceding events are: the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, the stars of heaven shall fall, the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken; owing to this chain of changes in the universe, men’s hearts shall fail them and there will be confusion everywhere.

The second coming of Christ will be in two phases: the first is the rapture, when the saints shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). After the rapture, comes the great tribulation for a period of seven years. At the second phase, Jesus will come to the earth with the saints who had been raptured to establish His kingdom here on earth for a period of one thousand years; this is called the millennial reign (Revelation 20:4). The Lord seals these prophecies with a declaration: **“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”** (Matthew 24:35).

As for the exact timing of the second coming of Christ, the Lord says, **“But of the day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”** (Matthew 24:36). This has consistently put to shame so-called prophets who attempt to predict the exact timing of the Lord’s return. However, we are admonished to recognise the signs of the times through the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32). The prevailing socio-politico-economic signs tell us that we may be nearer the end than we thought. The devil and his cohorts are busy seducing people with different strategies to haul as many souls as possible into perdition. Humans are inventing new ways of committing sin; acts of terror and criminality are threatening to overwhelm the most effective constituted authorities. There is unbridled lust for money, power and position through occult means. Immorality and immoral acts are on the ascendancy. Believers should not relent in preaching the gospel and rebuking sin and labouring to edify one another.

The coming of the Lord will also share some similarities with events at the time of Noah, which was sudden and unexpected. **“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”** (Matthew 24:37). At that time, people were given to all manner of social activities with scant regard for godliness, righteousness and spiritual matters. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and serving divers pleasures until the flood came and took them away. Our Lord warns that there will be a repeat of it at the

time of His coming. Today, people seem to have little time to serve God and do His will. Their time is wholly devoted to sensual pleasures, lusts of the flesh, pride of life, flesh-gratifying activities, all to the detriment of their souls. Those who sell their spiritual birthright for the things of this world will miss the rapture while others will make it (Matthew 24:40,41).

The exactitude with which the signs of the end are being fulfilled before us underlines the infallibility of the Scriptures and the certainty of the second coming of Christ. The rapture can happen anytime; the trumpet of God can sound anytime to call the saints home to heaven. Believers should look forward to this great event and get ready for the Lord's coming.

A CALL TO WATCHFULNESS AMONG THE SAINTS
(Matthew 24:42-51; 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 17:32; 12:36-40; 21:34-37; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Revelation 16:15)

The Lord's concern is that His people should escape the pending doom. Thus, He warns: "**Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come**" (Matthew 24:42). Watchfulness is an attribute of the godly. The careless soul may become prey to the enemy. Our adversary, the devil, is on the prowl seeking to destroy souls in hell fire. Those who are conscious of this danger and are in constant watch over their souls will not give him opportunity to lead them into sin. Members of our body – feet, arms, eyes, ears, mouth – should not be surrendered as instruments of unrighteousness to do evil.

We need to keep our hearts from pollution and defilements diligently so that the enemy will not take advantage of us. Sinning church members must shake themselves from the dust of sin and receive the light of the gospel that sets free from sin. Careless and compromising preachers must repair their altars and be washed in the blood of the Lamb, otherwise they will miss the rapture. Some people will be overwhelmed by the joy of their successes and forget to watch over their

souls (Luke 21:34). Some will be unfaithful in service, duty or responsibility to the detriment of their souls (Matthew 24:45-51). **“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober”** (1 Thessalonians 5:6). The Lord has warned us before the time. Believers are to watch and pray, sinners are to make haste to repent and accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour before it is too late.

Questions for review:

1. What should be the attitude of born again Christians to earthly things?
2. What should be our response to the eternal and future events in the Bible?
3. Itemise the happenings that will characterise the end of time.
4. When will the rapture take place? How soon is it?
5. Differentiate between the rapture and the second coming of Christ.
6. When will the great tribulation take place?
7. What are the practical steps we can take to watch over our souls?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "62" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

Lesson
62

PARABLES OF THE TEN VIRGINS AND THE TALENTS

MEMORY VERSE: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13).

TEXTS: Matthew 25:1-46; Luke 19:11-27

The Olivet Discourse consists of solemn truths about the end of the world, believers’ preparation for the rapture and the second coming of Christ. The parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and of the sheep and goats are intended to teach readiness, watchfulness, probity, stewardship, diligence and commitment to noble ideals. They are meant to forewarn Christ’s disciples to avoid carelessness in conduct and service.

These parables share some similarities. One, each represents two groups of people with different characters – the wise and the foolish virgins; faithful and unfaithful servants; and sheep and goats. Two, there are two separate consequences and destinies – commendation and condemnation; reward and rebuke; and eternal life in heaven and everlasting punishment in hell. Three, each parable emphasises the qualifying virtue for receiving the rewards. Four, each presents the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church; the prudent Nobleman who would reckon with His stewards and the glorious King and impartial Judge of the whole universe.

The aim of the parables is to point to the certainty of Christ’s second coming with the implication that the saints should be ready at all times. Careless believers should wake up from their slumber; backsliders should return and be restored, while sinners must repent of their sins. In all, everyone is expected to prepare adequately for Christ’s return before it is too late.

READINESS FOR THE BRIDEGROOM'S RETURN (Matthew 25:1-13; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 14:4; 19:6-9; Ephesians 5:25-27)

While He was leaving the world, our Lord Jesus Christ left His disciples in no doubt that He would come again to take account of His servants. He would reward the faithful ones but punish those that are slothful, unfaithful and backslidden. In the parable of the ten virgins, which is specifically directed at believers, the Lord warns that some would be ready and others would not. **“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish”** (Matthew 25:1,2). Christ was in the practice of illustrating “the kingdom of heaven” with persons and objects (Matthew 13:24,31,33,44,45,47; 18:23; 20:1; 22:2). The virgins here represent two categories of believers who profess faith in Christ and are expecting to meet Him when He comes again. They are virgins because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14; 19:8). Two, because they are not defiled or polluted with sin (Revelation 14:4; Psalm 119:1). Three, they are sanctified and spotless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

As believers are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), these virgins had lamps with them. Oil is used in the Scripture to anoint individuals and vessels for consecration, sanctification and dedication to the Lord (Exodus 29:7; 40:9; Leviticus 8:10-12). As the Holy Spirit is sometimes likened to anointing oil (1 Samuel 16:13), the grace of God in the believer’s life is the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit. Those with the extra oil are the saved and sanctified ones, filled and possessing sufficient grace that overcomes sin. These faithful and fervent believers understand that the bridegroom could tarry and they needed enough oil to sustain their lamps. The foolish virgins, though they took up the lamp of profession, were unconcerned for the oil of grace to fill and maintain their lives.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered

and slept". The bridegroom did not come at the time they expected and they became weary of waiting and slept off. This is a common danger and warning to all believers. As the coming of the Lord tarries, some Christians would tend to lower their consecration, become careless and let off their guards over their souls, which can lead to lukewarmness and backsliding; they 'slumber' and 'sleep', forsake personal devotion and become careless. Eventually, **"the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut"** (Matthew 25:10). Behold, it was too late for the virgins who had no oil in their lamps and while they went to buy oil, as it were, to rekindle their first love, the door of final salvation was shut against them.

Salvation is an individual experience which cannot be shared at the instance of meeting the Lord. Hence, we must make use of the opportunity we have now to possess the fullness of God's grace in our lives and maintain the same till the end (Ephesians 5:14).

"Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matthew 25:11,12). The unprepared virgins were rejected. Mere profession of faith without corresponding works of grace will lead to a tragic disappointment on the last day. Those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof will be shut out of the marriage supper of the Lamb (2 Timothy 3:5). Believers must be diligent lest any fail of the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15). To avoid being disappointed, we must **"Watch therefore, for [we] know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh"** (Matthew 25:13).

RECKONING OF OUR STEWARDSHIP TO CHRIST
(Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; 16:2; Mark 13:34; Romans 14:12; Matthew 16:27; 12:36; 1 Peter 4:5; 4:10; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:5-8)

The parable of the talents reveals that every Christian is endowed with one or more talents by God for the

service of the Kingdom. **“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come”** (Matthew 25:14; Luke 19:13). Saints are stewards of the manifold grace of God. They are expected to use their endowments or talents for the advancement of the kingdom of God (Luke 19:13).

The Greek translation of talent here is *“talanton”*. It was a form of money used in those days, which means that the “nobleman” expected each of the servants to “trade” with his money. In present-day usage, talent implies all the natural, spiritual and ministerial gifts a believer is endowed with. As the number of talents given to servants vary, so it is with believers. The Lord knows our individual abilities and has given us commensurate talents. This shows that there is no room for competition or carnal comparison. The fact that all gifts come from Him leaves no room for superiority or inferiority complex. Hence, the counsel: **“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”** (1 Peter 4:10).

One of the servants who received five talents traded with them and gained other five; likewise he that had received two (Matthew 25:16,17). They worked diligently, conscientiously and wisely in order to multiply their talents. As stewards of God’s grace and endowments, we are expected to use our gifts, talents and resources in the most profitable manner to advance the course of Christ’s kingdom. The emphasis is not on how great or small our talents are, but how faithful we are in putting them to profitable use. Our faithfulness in God’s vineyard will qualify us for greater and higher duties in the house of God.

“But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money ...saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not

down, and reap that thou didst not sow" (Matthew 25:18; Luke 19:20,21). This servant, on the other hand, was displeased with the number of his talents, and, instead of prioritising faithfulness above fruitfulness, he incurred the wrath of his master and lost everything. Those who fail to use their talents stand the danger of losing them and going into eternal punishment.

There is a day of reckoning for everyone when we shall give account of our stewardship to God (Luke 16:2; 19:15; Romans 14:12; Matthew 18:23). This calls for sober reflection and conscious efforts to ensure that we work to receive commendation and not condemnation at the end of life. Every one of us should be careful with the way we spend our lives and the resources which God has graciously given to us.

RECOMPENSE AND RETRIBUTION AT CHRIST'S COMING (Matthew 25:31-36; Acts 17:31; Revelation 1:7; Psalm 9:17; Matthew 7:23)

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31). This underscores the certainty of Christ's Second Coming. He will come back in His glory. His first coming was in humility, but the second shall be with power and great glory. At His coming, there will be rewards for righteousness of the saints but retribution for sin and wickedness on sinners irrespective of their power, position and popularity.

"And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). At this glory-circled throne of judgment, there will be a separation of the sheep from the goats. The sheep represents the righteous, obedient, gentle Christian; the goats are the rebellious, stubborn and stiff-necked people who spurn the counsel of God. A distinction shall be made between the righteous and the unrighteous, between believers and infidels, between professors of religion and possessors of righteousness, between the

faithful and the unfaithful, and between those who served the Lord and those who called Him Lord but did not do His will. The entire judgment shall be characterised by righteousness and justice. One, there shall be no miscarriage of justice. The Judge of all the earth shall do justly (Genesis 18:25). Two, there will be no hiding place or escape from the long arms of the law. Persons, who escaped human justice because they were well connected or could influence judgment with their position and power, shall be judged accordingly.

Three, there will be no mistaken-identity; offenders shall answer for their crimes and every person recompensed according to their works. Four, every labour or service for God's kingdom shall be adequately rewarded. Five, those who suffered for righteousness' sake shall be ushered into everlasting bliss in the presence of the Lord. Six, those who mourned shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4). Seven, God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17; 21:4). Thus, separate destinies await saints and sinners at the close of time.

The righteous are commended for manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) through service to God and humanity. They preached eternal life to others, ministered to the needs of the poor, sickly and destitute ones. The Lord invites them to **"...inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world."** But the unrighteous that wrought wickedness and rejected God's offer of salvation **"shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"** (Matthew 25:46).

Questions for review:

1. What is the major purpose of the parables in our texts?
2. Who do the virgins in the reference represent?
3. Why were the virgins categorised into foolish and wise?
4. What can we learn from the parable of the talents?
5. Itemise the character traits that mark our readiness for the Lord at all times.

6. In what ways are some believers today behaving like the servant who hid his talent?
7. In what practical ways can love and care be demonstrated in the body of Christ according to Matthew 25:35-40?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "63" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
63

A grayscale background image showing an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it.

**LAST SUPPER AND
CHRIST'S BETRAYAL**

MEMORY VERSE: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).

TEXTS: Matthew 26:1-30,36-68; Mark 14:1-26,32-65; Luke 22:1-30,35-53,63-71

The consummation of Christ’s mission on earth was approaching. The past three and half years of His life had been spent going about His Father’s business of preaching, teaching and healing everywhere. As the twilight of His life on earth loomed, He told His disciples: **“Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified”** (Matthew 26:2). Jesus knew what was to befall Him, and He was prepared.

Our texts outline the major events leading to Christ’s betrayal and trial before the chief priests and council of elders. First, there was a conspiracy to kill Him. Second, He was anointed with very precious ointment which He claimed was done against His burial. Third, He held the last Passover with His disciples and instituted the Lord’s Supper. Fourth, He resorted to Gethsemane with three of His disciples to pray in preparation for His passion. Fifth, Judas Iscariot betrayed Him unto the chief priests and elders, and His trial and travail began.

CONSPIRACY AGAINST CHRIST AND TRIBUTE TO MARY (Matthew 26:1-16; Mark 14:1-11; Luke 22:1-13; John 11:45-53; Psalms 2:1-4; 56:6; 83:5)

“Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Matthew 26:3,4). The conspiracy to arrest and crucify the Lord was devised by the religious council of His day. Principal members in this evil plot were the chief priests – former high priests or principal men of the priesthood; scribes – copiers and custodians of the law; and the elders – civil magistrates. The council members comprised both ecclesiastical and laymen so that the decision taken could have broad acceptance. The place of the meeting was different – palace of the high priest instead of the usual ‘chamber in the temple’ used by the Sanhedrin. The reason for this is probably to ensure secrecy given the sensitiveness of the matter since they were to take Christ by subtlety. Moreover, they feared that their plot could generate uproar among the people. All this happened in fulfilment of the Scriptures. **“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed...”** (Psalm 2:2). Everything that happened to Him had the approval of heaven. In like manner, the Lord knows about everything that happens to a believer; He prevents some and allows others.

As part of His concluding assignments, the Lord was in the house of one Simon, then **“There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat”** (Matthew 26:7). The pouring of the ointment on Christ’s head has double application. First, it is emblematic of His being anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9). It is like the one poured on Aaron’s head that ran down his beard and skirt of his garment (Psalm 133:2) to signify the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is also indicative of the

gifts and graces of the Spirit of God on Him without measure. Second, the Lord said it was done in preparation for His burial. In old time, it was customary for the people to anoint and embalm bodies for the sepulchre and Christ was preparing to die for the sins of the world. **“While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof”** (Song of Solomon 1:12).

The reaction of the disciples to the act of kindness by this woman was shocking. They felt it was a waste of resources, but the Lord paid tribute to her work which He said shall be a reference point for sacrificial giving, love for Christ, acts of kindness, surrendering all and giving the best to the Master. After all, nothing is too much to be given to God who has freely given us all things; we should be ready to give willingly and cheerfully.

The conspirators found a willing instrument in Judas Iscariot **“...And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him”** (Matthew 26:15,16). Although there was prophecy that someone would betray Christ, there is no reason it should be Judas Iscariot. The fruit of covetousness pushed him into it. Believers should be wary of the **“deceitfulness of riches”** (Matthew 13:22) and keep themselves in the love of God.

CELEBRATION OF THE LAST PASSOVER AND INSTITUTION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; 10:16)

The Lord celebrated the Passover with His disciples. This event was the last before He went to the Cross and marked the institution of the Lord’s Supper. **“Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?”** (Matthew 26:17). Passover was a feast of the Jews celebrated each year to commemorate their providential escape from the land of Egypt. It was the night the angel of death visited

every household in Egypt except the community of Jews in Goshen. It was a token of the separation the Lord promised to make between those who serve Him and those who do not (Exodus 11:7; Malachi 3:8).

The Lord foretells four events at the last Passover, which He had with the disciples. He spoke of His betrayal, the Lord's Supper, His denial and scattering of the disciples, and His meeting in Galilee after the resurrection. The first elicited questions among the disciples was, "**Lord, is it I?**" (Matthew 26:22). Though Judas Iscariot was told of his plan, he did nothing to repent; the reward of unrighteousness blinded his eyes (2 Peter 2:13). Many walk away unconcerned after a heart-searching sermon instead of repenting and making right their ways. They hear the Word but do nothing about it like a man who beheld his dirty appearance in the mirror but failed to clean up (James 1:23,24).

Second, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted. In obedience to the command of the Father, Jesus observed the Passover feast with His disciples. "**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**" (Matthew 26:26). The Lord's Supper is a rite of Christian worship instituted by our Lord at the eve of His atoning death. It is meant to be celebrated "**often**" to remind the body of Christ of the intense suffering of Christ by the 'breaking' of His body on the Cross. Two, it is to enhance fellowship and bonding among the followers of Christ (Psalm 133:1). Three, it reminds us of the efficacy of the blood shed for the remission of our sins. Emblems for the conduct of the Lord's Supper are unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). These are emblems that signify the body and the blood of Christ. Jesus spoke also of His betrayal and meeting in Galilee (Matthew 26:31,32).

CHRIST'S PRAYER, BETRAYAL AND TRIAL BEFORE THE COUNCIL (Matthew 26:36-68; Mark 14:32-65; Luke 22:40-55,63-71; John 18:3-13,19-24)

The Lord resorted to Gethsemane with three of His disciples to pray in preparation for what was ahead. Gethsemane was a familiar spot for the Lord because He often went there for prayer and meditation (John 18:2). His mien in this place mirrored the agony of His heart. **“Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me”** (Matthew 26:38). At this time, the Lord was overwhelmed with the thought of going to the Cross and needed help from heaven to bear it. By this example, He teaches us that we need divine support to do the will of God and prevail over the challenges of life. Prayer should be a regular resort of Christians to unburden our hearts before the Lord.

The nature and content of Christ's prayer give us insight into an acceptable pattern in prayer. **“And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”** (Matthew 26:39). One, it teaches us that the will of God is paramount when we kneel before Him in prayer. God's will towers above every other thing even in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Two, there is total submission to do the Father's will (Philippians 2:8). Three times the Lord repeated the same words of submission and surrender to God's will (verses 39,42,44). Sometimes, believers ask for something repeatedly without receiving answers because they fail to find out whether it is according to the will of God. Three, He warned the disciples against spiritual sleep and slumber, and commanded them to watch and pray.

After the prayer and satisfied that He had prayed through, Christ beckoned on the disciples: **“Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me”** (Matthew 26:46). Judas Iscariot betrayed Him to the chief priests and elders with a kiss. In the ensuing atmosphere of arrest, Peter drew his sword and removed

the ear of one of the servants of the high priest; but Christ cautioned him and healed the man. If He wanted to be defended, He would have asked help of heaven. **“But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled”** (Matthew 26:56).

Then the council sought false witnesses against Jesus but found no cause to condemn and crucify Him. In spite of all that rose up falsely with accusations, Christ remained silent and answered nothing. But to the question of whether or not He is the Son of God, **“Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven”** (Matthew 26:64). This statement was counted as blasphemy and forthwith, He was condemned to death (Matthew 26:66).

In all, we learn, as Christians, that our lives must be above reproach. Even if our adversaries bring railing accusations, there should be no ground to convict or find us wanting. A life void of accusations is what we are called to live (Philippians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:14,17; 2:19,20). Two, in matters of life and death, Christ prayed to do the Father’s will. We should be ready to do the will of God always. Three, Christ never forgot to do good even in the face of injustice and false accusation (Luke 22:51). Four, He did not defend Himself but committed all judgment into the hands of the Father (1 Peter 2:22,23). Five, we should learn to be calm and hold our peace in the face of wrong accusations and respond only when necessary (Proverbs 21:23). Six, we should believe that our fate is in God’s hands and He will order it to fulfil His best purpose. Seven, God will always be glorified in whatever He permits to come our way.

Questions for review:

1. What are the salient lessons from all the events in our passage?
2. Why should we give our best to God?
3. What does it mean to betray Christ today?
4. Why is it important to celebrate the Lord’s Supper?

5. What precautions should be taken in the observance of the Lord's Supper?
6. What is the place of prayer in trying and troublous times?
7. Identify salient lessons from the conduct of our Lord during His trial.

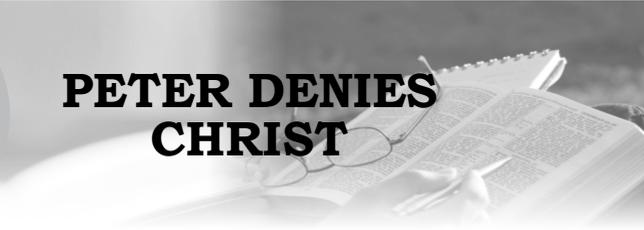
THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font at the top and the number "64" in a large, bold, sans-serif font in the center. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle pattern.

Lesson 64

A grayscale photograph of an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it. The Bible is open to a page with text, and the glasses are positioned over the text.

PETER DENIES CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75).

TEXTS: Matthew 26:31-35,69-75; Mark 14:27-31,66-72; Luke 22:31-34,54-62

The gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke record accurately the unfortunate denial of our Lord Jesus Christ by none but Peter, one of His frontline apostles. His so-called boldness, outspokenness and grit failed in a moment of threat and fear. He had boasted to the Lord that, “...**Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee...**” (Matthew 26:35). He had forgotten that the Christian race is not to the swift or the battle of life to the strong (Ecclesiastes 9:11). No believer is sufficient on their own to run the Christian race successfully. Everyone needs the grace of God to overcome temptations and trials without failing or faltering. Whatever caused Peter to fail at this crucial, critical moment in his life, calls for reflection, introspection and understanding so that believers across board can take heed to guard against moments of challenge, tests and trials which come to all Christian pilgrims to avoid failing in the day of adversity (Proverbs 24:10).

PETER'S DENIAL OF CHRIST FORETOLD (Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34; Zechariah 13:7; John 6:64; 13:11; 18:4)

Our text opens with Christ's prediction of His imminent arrest and the scattering of the disciples. **"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad"** (Matthew 26:31). Our Lord had known that He was destined to go to the Cross and the path to this eternal purpose would involve persecutions, oppositions, ridicule and reproach from the people and religious authorities of His day. He knew that after His arrest, His disciples would be scattered to fulfil the Scripture (Zechariah 13:7), but He was determined to do God's will knowing that after the travail of the cross comes the triumph of His resurrection (Matthew 26:32). His reference to His passion and eventual crucifixion were not accidental but part of God's redemptive plan for man.

Christ's revelation of the plight of His disciples at His trial was meant to awaken and prepare them for the challenge ahead. But they did not understand. How many times had the Lord warned us about things to come through His word or dream or revelations, yet we did not perceive or prepare for the battle! **"For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed"** (Job 33:14,15). Peter only bragged about his courage and resolve to stand instead of praying. He could have avoided the pain and sorrow of denying His Lord if he had prayed against Satan's devices towards him (Luke 22:31). Judas Iscariot was another disciple who ignored warning and walked into the snare of the devil through covetousness and greed. He betrayed the Lord and sold Him for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). Believers need to be on guard against the wicked devices of our adversary, the devil, so as not to fall prey to his wiles (Ephesians 6:11).

A believer is nothing without the power of our Saviour (John 15:5). Every Christian worker, leader or minister, irrespective of age or experience, is daily kept by the power and sustaining grace of God. That we need to constantly look unto Jesus for grace, spiritual strength, stamina and power to be victorious over temptations and all vicissitudes of life, is particularly underscored by Peter's experience. The point is that every believer must be circumspect to heed the warning of the Saviour.

All the disciples, including Peter, responded to the prediction with over-confidence by declaring their readiness to lay down their lives for the love of Jesus. Peter even went as far as bounding himself with an oath that he would never be offended in Christ. According to Luke's narrative, Christ had warned Peter specifically of the impending test of faith and temptation to which he would fall but He ignored and despised the warning. To show his readiness to go with Jesus, even to prison and death, he boasted, **"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended"** (Matthew 26:33). He seemed not to know that he **"that thinketh he standeth [should] take heed lest he fall"** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

This is not the first time Apostle Peter was caught up in irrational speech and lack of spiritual discernment. He had earned the Lord's rebuke: **"Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God but the things that be of men"** (Mark 8:33). On another occasion, **"Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles... For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid"** (Mark 9:5,6). As Christians, we should be **"swift to hear, slow to speak"** (James 1:19).

However, this presumptuous boast and contradiction of Jesus' prediction by Peter was in no doubt made out of sincerity and his closeness to Him. Perhaps, this relationship beclouded him from paying attention to Jesus' repeated warning about the impending fall. Peter's response shows that he was ignorant of himself, particularly his spiritual status. There are lessons for believers here. One, over-confidence leads to unexpected

fall and disappointment. Two, our close walk with God should not degenerate into familiarity and contempt for the Lord and His word. Three, we need to remember constantly that it is by the grace of God we stand (1 Peter 5:12). We should be watchful irrespective of our status or present relationship with God. Four, that all humans are ignorant of themselves, particularly of what lies ahead, hence the need to hear from God regularly. Five, we should never develop an attitude that ignores the use of daily means of grace. Knowledge of our frailty should constantly keep us on our guard and total dependence on God. Therefore, **“let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

PETER’S DENIAL OF CHRIST FULFILLED (Matthew 26:69-74; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-61; John 18:17,18; Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Psalm 119:89)

At the arrest of Jesus, His disciples forsook Him and fled. However, Peter still had a sense of attachment to his Master, but in his cowardice and faintheartedness, he could not identify with Him. He began to toe the path of backsliding by following Jesus afar off. He was afraid to identify with his Master. Peter’s undue consideration for personal safety, ridicule and persecution prompted his following Jesus afar off. Backsliding often starts with withdrawal of commitments. Believers who for one reason or the other begin to see the need to keep a distance from the fellowship of God’s people are definitely on their way to backsliding. There is always danger in drawing or looking back.

Peter’s second step towards his fall was his keeping company with the enemies of Christ (Psalm 1:1). He sat among the opposition and warmed himself by their fire. Believers easily lose their spiritual strength and convictions through close affinity with unbelievers and people they do not share the same doctrinal convictions. Unequal yoke is hazardous to our Christian life and convictions. **“Ephraim has mixed himself among the**

people... Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not” (Hosea 7:8,9).

If Peter who was a faithful follower of Jesus could deny his Master thrice, it shows that our status, positions and titles, cannot give us immunity from temptations or backsliding. It is also proof that the doctrine of unconditional security is false and unscriptural. In Peter’s denials of Christ, we notice lies, deceit, false oath and cursing. This is a reflection of how far a believer can go in a moment of unwariness. It shows also the gravity of presumptuousness and the need for daily watchfulness. On no condition should a Christian lie, take false oaths or act out falsehood, because “...**all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone...**” (Revelation 21:8).

There are several reasons Peter denied His Lord, which has made many to deny Christ today. One, the fear of man (Proverbs 29:25; Isaiah 57:11). Two, following afar off with the Master (Matthew 26:58). Three, association with sinners (John 18:18,25). Four, forgetting the Lord’s warning (Luke 22:61). Five, faithlessness at a critical moment (Hebrews 10:38,39).

PETER’S REPENTANCE AFTER THE FALL (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:22; Psalm 51:17; Jeremiah 3:22; 1 John 1:9; 2:1)

The fulfilment of the prediction of Peter’s denial of Christ was a dark spot in his life, which placed him at the risk of eternal rejection. But he remembered the words of the Lord and immediately broke down and wept bitterly. “**And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly**” (Matthew 26:75). “**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise**” (Psalm 51:17). Peter’s prompt repentance is instructive. “**Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first**

works...” (Revelation 2:5). He differed from Judas who failed to repent even when he realised that he had betrayed Christ. While the word of God does not encourage deliberate sinning and backsliding, there is, however, a promise of restoration for all sincere and penitent sinners and backsliders.

Peter did what many Christians fail to do when there is a moral slip or an act of backsliding. Instead of going back to the Lord quickly to repent from their sin, they remain in that position until it becomes too late. The Scripture admonishes us: **“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (1 John 2:1). There is hope for backsliders who take the right steps to return to Christ’s fold by genuinely casting off the old garment of sin, repenting and pleading with the Lord for mercy and restoration. God has promised that He will forgive their backsliding. **“Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God”** (Jeremiah 3:22).

Questions for review:

1. What can a believer learn from Christ’s prediction of the scattering of His disciples immediately after His arrest?
2. What led Peter to boldly contradict Jesus’ prediction and what are the lessons for Christians?
3. What makes Peter’s case different from that of Judas?
4. What are the consequences of following Jesus afar off?
5. What is the effect of believers’ close relationship with unbelievers and backsliders?
6. Mention five reasons that can make a believer to deny his Lord and how can one be free from them?
7. What does the Lord expect a backslider to do?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "65" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
65

THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” (Matthew 27:35).

TEXTS: Matthew 27:1-66; Mark 15:1-47; Luke 23:1-56

Every judicial system frowns at miscarriage of justice, unfairness and perversion. It abhors all attempts to oppress those who cannot defend themselves and upholds the principle of fair hearing. It protects the rights of innocent persons and punishes only the convicted and the guilty. But Christ’s case was different. Sent into the world as Saviour, He was persecuted, humiliated and rejected by the same people to whom He was sent. They arrested Him, assembled a band of false witnesses who testified against Him in order to convict Him. At last, He was crucified. The account in our texts suffices as the highest level of injustice, hate and odium against an innocent person.

However, all that happened to Christ has been predetermined. His purpose for coming into the world was foreordained by the Father in heaven. In this case, His persecution, arrest, trial, crucifixion, death and burial were in fulfilment of the Scriptures (Matthew 17:22,23; 20:18,19; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22). Nothing happened in His life and ministry that had not been written beforehand so that the plan and purpose of God might be fulfilled. His death, however, brings the good news of salvation to the world of dying souls. What was thought to be the enemy’s masterstroke became the

Almighty's master plan, "**Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

DECISION OF THE COUNCIL AGAINST CHRIST (Matthew 27:1-10; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:17; Psalm 2:2; Luke 22:66; John 18:28)

Christ's persecution and hatred began as soon as He was born. Beginning with Herod who felt that he was mocked by the wise men and sought to kill baby Jesus, to the scribes and Pharisees who tried to discredit Him at every opportunity, to the elders and the religious council who wanted Him destroyed, Christ had been the subject of intense persecution. On several occasions, they sought to lay hands on Him but could not because His time had not yet come (Luke 20:19; John 8:20). At last, in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, He was arrested and brought before Pilate for trial. "**When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death**" (Matthew 27:1).

The elders and chief priests did not hide their malice for the Lord Jesus Christ. They despised Him because, one, through His doctrines, He had sought to denounce the false religious practices of His day and deliver the people from the stranglehold of religious bondage. Two, His truth has exposed the hypocrisy of the leaders in both national and religious circles. "**And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil**" (John 3:19). Three, their craft was fast losing patronage due to the new revelation from Christ (Acts 19:25-27). When opportunity thus presented itself, "**...they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor**" (Matthew 27:2) for trial. "**The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed...**" (Psalm 2:2).

Judas Iscariot realised the consequence of his action

and went back to the officials to return the thirty pieces of silver. He had not envisioned that the outcome of his betrayal would lead to the condemnation and crucifixion of Christ. But they refused to collect the money and he cast it down before them and went and hanged himself. The guilt of betraying an innocent soul was too much for him to bear. Unlike Peter, his remorse did not contain the ingredients of genuine repentance. If he had repented genuinely, God would have forgiven him. However, the money was used to purchase a parcel of land where strangers were buried. **“Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value”** (Matthew 27:9). While there is life, no sinner is irredeemable; God’s grace is still available to save every repentant sinner (1 John 1:9).

DELIVERING CHRIST TO BE TRIED AND CRUCIFIED (Matthew 27:11-44; Luke 23:8; Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32,33)

Christ was delivered to Pilate the governor for interrogation and trial. **“And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest”** (Matthew 27:11). Pilate’s question was followed by accusations from the chief priests and elders, but He answered nothing so much that they marvelled greatly at His silence. Probably the governor had never seen anyone remain calm and composed under an attack before.

The trial of our Lord Jesus Christ here was based on three grounds: **“And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King”** (Luke 23:2). “This fellow” was a phrase of contempt meant to malign and ridicule Him (1 Samuel 21:15; 1 Kings 22:27; Matthew 12:24; John 9:29; Acts 18:13; 24:5). One, He was accused of perverting the nation; that is, exciting the people to sedition and tumults. Two, Christ was accused of

preventing people from paying taxes, which was not true because He paid taxes also (Matthew 17:27). Three, He was also charged with attempt to unseat the Roman king by claiming to be King. All these charges were concocted in order to convict Him of treason and execute Him.

However, Pilate declared that Christ is innocent, just like other people (Matthew 27:3,4,19,24,54; Luke 23:14,15) and would have Him released, but perceived that the people were implacable and ready to cause unrest if he did not do their bidding to release Christ to be crucified. In spite of the fact that He had been proved by the Roman authorities to have done nothing worthy of death, the Jews yelled out that a notorious murderer, Barabbas, should be granted amnesty, in place of Jesus. They preferred that a murderer be set free than an innocent and sinless Christ. **“Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified”** (Matthew 27:22). When he saw that he could not prevail against their demand, he succumbed. **“Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified”** (Matthew 27:26). The soldiers, as an assembly of the wicked enclosing their victim (Psalm 22:16), having received orders, began a regime of torture and cruelty against the Lord. They stripped, beat, spat on Him and plaited a crown of thorns which was forced on His head and they led Him to a place called Golgotha to be crucified. There, **“they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots”** (Matthew 27:35). Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful way to execute a criminal.

While on the cross, passers-by reviled Him, cast aspersions on His person, mission and ministry. They shook heads, wagged tongues and the highest level of mockery was hauled at Him. Some said, He saved others, but could not save Himself. **“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am**

the Son of God” (Matthew 27:43). Even one of the thieves that was crucified with Him joined in the scorn. As believers, we may encounter situations and challenges that call our faith to question; let us remain firm and trust the Lord to deliver us.

DEATH AND BURIAL OF CHRIST AND THE JEWS’ CONSPIRACY (Matthew 27:45-66; Mark 15:33-47; Luke 23:44-56; Isaiah 53:3-12; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 13:12)

Within a period of about twelve hours, the judgment and condemnation of Christ was hastily concluded under Pilate and He was released to be crucified on the cross. His response to daughters of Jerusalem who bewailed His maltreatment was, **“weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children”**. His response reveals that the depraved state of sinners and their eternal doom are greater causes of weeping than the death of a saint. Therefore, He prayed for His persecutors, **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”** (Luke 23:34).

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour” (Luke 23:44). Christ died an unusual and unique death. The whole elements of nature responded to His death – there was an earthquake with violent convulsion of the ground; the rocks split asunder and the sun refused to shine. It was said that the quaking of the ground reverberated to other countries beside Israel just because an innocent Soul, the King of kings and Lord of lords was cruelly murdered for sins He did not commit. **“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit”** (1 Peter 3:18). Also, the veil to the holy of holies, into which the high priest alone went, once a year, to atone for the sins of the people (Hebrews 10:19,20) was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), which signified that the middle wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles was broken down (Ephesians 2:14-18), and that each believer

now have personal access to God. Two malefactors were crucified also with Jesus but only one of them seized the golden opportunity to be saved. How many people miss a lifetime opportunity to be saved and make heaven! They grow up in a Bible-believing church, hear the word of God repeatedly and have access to Christian materials. But they could not make use of the spiritual resources that they had.

When Jesus finally gave up the ghost, one of His disciples, a rich man of Arimathaea named Joseph, went and begged Pilate to remove His body for burial in his own new tomb, where no man had been laid. Joseph and others gave their best to the Master, so must we give of our best to Him. Christ suffered all these to redeem and deliver us from the hands of our enemy so that we can serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives (Luke 1:74,75). He paid for everything that pertains to life and godliness. It is left to whoever will appropriate the complete work of Christ on the Cross and be saved in order to get to heaven. Whoever gets lost would be guilty of spurning the offer of grace, which was wrought by Christ.

Questions for review:

1. Why were the religious Jews bent on putting Christ to death despite many testimonies of His innocence?
2. Why did the Jewish leaders prefer a murderer to be released to them, rather than the Messiah?
3. How does Judas' repentance differ from Peter's?
4. What can we learn from Christ's preservation from His enemies until it was time to go to the Cross?
5. Give some reasons Christ had to suffer these humiliations.
6. What makes some people to miss a lifetime opportunity to get saved?
7. Mention some benefits of Christ's death on the cross.

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

END OF SECTION I

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69 - Sundry Laws of Purification	125
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NEW TESTAMENT	
73 - Resurrection of Christ and the Great Commission	157
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SECTION II BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: "And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD; and it shall be forgiven him for any thing of all that he hath done in trespassing therein" (Leviticus 6:7).

TEXT: Leviticus chapters 1 to 7

Leviticus is the third book of the Bible. The name 'Leviticus' means "relating to the Levites". It is so called because it gives account of the Levitical priesthood, sacrifices under the Levitical dispensation and many other rites and ceremonies in the Old Testament. It is God's instructions to Moses on the administration and regulation of the sacrificial and religious lives of the children of Israel.

It has been noted also that the key idea of Leviticus is embodied in the command: "...**ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy... For I am the LORD...**" (Leviticus 11:44,45). The subject of holiness occupies more than ten chapters in the book. A Christian scholar titles the book as "holiness code", while a Bible Dictionary describes it as a book of sanctification, of consecration of life, of the avoidance of sin, the combating and removal of sin among the people of God.

In the texts, five kinds of offerings or sacrifices were prescribed for the nation, namely: the burnt offering, meat offering, peace offering, sin offering and trespass offering. God instituted the sacrifice regime because man had sinned against Him and his sins must be atoned before they can be forgiven. "**And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission**" (Hebrews 9:22).

This study sets down ceremonial and sacrificial requirements or procedures to atone for the sins of the people until the revelation of the complete and perfect atonement by Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world. The sacrifices in the Old Testament points to the supreme and final sacrifice that was consummated in Christ. Our proper understanding of the “principles of atonement and holiness” taught in the book will deepen our understanding of the New Testament revelations of the Person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PARTICULARS AND SPECIFICATION OF THE SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS (Leviticus 1:1-17; 2:1-16; 3:1-17; 4:1-35; 5:1-19; Exodus 20:24; 29:14,18; Numbers 28:3; Hebrews 9:22)

The Lord did not leave the children of Israel to figure out how to worship Him, but gave specific procedures through His servant. **“And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock”** (Leviticus 1:1,2). Of the five types of offerings specified in our texts, the first three – burnt, meat and peace offerings – constitute what is called ‘the sweet savour’ or ‘voluntary offerings’; while the last two – sin and trespass offerings – are called ‘non-sweet savour offerings’. For the procedure for burnt offering, four parts can be identified: one, the description of the animal to be used. This could be from the herds of cattle or from the flocks of sheep or goats and from fowls (that is, turtledoves or young pigeons). Whatever animal was used must be a male without blemish and offered voluntarily.

Two, the responsibility of the offerer is to bring the animal into the tabernacle courts, lay his hand on it after it was tied to the horns of the altar to identify with the animal as his substitute. Afterwards, the animal is slaughtered, skinned and cut into parts; the inner parts

and legs are washed before handing them over to the priest. Three, the priest's responsibility is to receive the offerer and the offering, and lead them to the altar of burnt sacrifice. He would collect the blood of the slain animal and sprinkle it on both the altar and the offerer and burn the whole flesh into ashes as a burnt offering. Four, then there is the sharing of other parts that are not burnt into ashes. God's portion was the whole offering. The skin of the animal was apportioned to the priest, while the offerer had nothing to himself. However, the procedure for turtledoves or pigeons differs. The offerer simply hands over the bird to the priest, who wrings off the neck and allows the blood to pour at the side of the altar. Then, he would open up the bird in the middle without separating it into two halves, remove the feathers, crop and intestines, and throw them on the ash pile by the altar.

The meat offering is bloodless. The word 'meat' in the context of this offering means food, meal or grain. It consists of the normal food of the average Israelite. The flour is mingled with oil, frankincense and salt, but no yeast or honey. Once this offering was made unto the Lord, whatever was left of it is for the priests and his sons.

Peace offering is offered as a symbol of fellowship and friendship with God in which the offerer, his friends and the priests feasted together as a mark of fellowship. The procedure for peace offering is similar to that of burnt offering. The offerer and the priest should be ceremonially clean. The offerer chooses an animal from the herds or the flocks, which must be without blemish. The priest collects the blood of the animal in a basin and sprinkles it on the altar. Both the waved breast and heaved shoulder are the priest's portion, while the remaining parts belong to the offerer.

Sin offering is one of two non-sweet savour offerings. It is concerned with sins committed in ignorance or unintentionally. There are four categories of offerers for the sin offering: the priest, the congregation, the ruler and the common man. The sin offering is required for all categories of people, **"For there is no respect of**

persons with God" (Romans 2:11). The procedure is also the same for all categories. Neither the offerer nor the priests have any share in this offering.

The last of these sacrifices is the trespass offering and it covers those offences that require restitution, especially when an individual infringed on the rights of others; or when a person sinned against God in specific areas. Though similar to sin offering, it differs in the sense that it is concerned with specific sins, which include concealment of information when under trial, failure to undergo ceremonial cleansing for defilement, failure to fulfil promises in rash vows, sins of ignorance concerning holy things, sins of ignorance in general and breach of trust.

From these details, we learn that God does not leave anything to chance but that He is interested in details. Two, He is a God of order and expects that we follow due process in service. Three, He expects His people to obey His words even to the minutest details. Four, there are consequences for sins of omission or commission. Five, there is need for a substitutionary death before our sins can be forgiven.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS (Leviticus 6:1-30; 1 Samuel 6:3; Romans 12:1,2; Hebrews 13:15,16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Luke 19:8-10)

Generally, the sacrifices are designed to be a ransom for sins and to make personal devotion and consecration to God (Romans 12:1). They are meant to appease the wrath of God against the sinning individual, family or nation as there is provision of atonement for all manner of sins that men commit. The burnt offering is a voluntary act of worship and the only sacrifice that is entirely consumed on the altar. It is a representation of the believer's consecration, dedication and commitment to God. There is no hindrance for any willing heart to come before the presence of God, whether rich or poor.

The meat offering is an appreciation and thanksgiving offering, symbolising fellowship with God and is offered

as an expression of worship. Today, believers are to offer to God the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15,16), talent, treasure, time, leisure, prayer, service, etc., as tokens of their commitment and dedication. We must ensure that we pay our tithes and offerings and care for our ministers who labour over us in God's vineyard (Malachi 3:10; Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 9:11). The ingredients for meat offering – oil, frankincense and salt – symbolise the Holy Spirit, prayer and praise (Hebrews 13:15), and perpetual covenant relationship with God (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19) respectively.

Peace offering is a symbol of fellowship and friendship with God after forgiveness of sin (Romans 5:1). Sin offering is meant to atone for sins committed through ignorance (Leviticus 4:2,3). Ignorance is not an excuse to disobey God's law. Trespass offering is for transgressions that require restitutions especially when a person's right had been infringed by another, or where one transgressed God's command ignorantly.

We learn here that all the sacrifices symbolically point to Christ, who atoned for our sins by shedding His blood at Calvary. **"...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"** (1 Corinthians 5:7). He was made **"...to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"** (2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7). Two, that different animals and birds are used for sacrifice is indicative of the fact that all manner of sins must be atoned for. Three, when God's right to our tithes and offerings or property rights of men are violated, the wrong has to be made right and the sin atoned (Luke 19:8). Four, people must recognise the gravity of sin, and not excuse it on the grounds of ignorance. Sin must be exposed, dealt with whenever and wherever it is found; and full restitution made before the offender can be restored into fellowship with God. Five, New Testament saints do not require any of these ceremonies or sacrifices anymore (Romans 10:4).

Six, it is important to note that the Old Testament sacrifices did not really take away sins, **"For it is not**

possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). The offerings only typify the Person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect and ultimate Sacrifice for the sins of the world. John the Baptist acknowledged this fact and pointed to Jesus, **“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world”** (John 1:29). Seven, each worshipper personally brought their animals for the sacrifice. In the same manner, we must come to Christ personally, acknowledge and confess our sins to Him in order to be forgiven. Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary has fulfilled all requirements once for all. We only need to look to Him to be cleansed. Afterwards, we consecrate our lives completely to Him (Romans 12:1).

PENALTIES FOR SACRILEGE AGAINST THE SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS (Leviticus 7:18-38; Isaiah 52:11; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 2 Timothy 2:19)

After giving instructions on how to administer various sacrifices and offerings, the Lord revealed His displeasure against anyone who handles the sacrifices carelessly without following due process or in an unholy manner. All acts of violation attract grievous consequences and punishments. **“But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people”** (Leviticus 7:20). An Israelite who violates the procedures for acceptable sacrifice risks being disenfranchised, barred from the privileges of the sanctuary or be cut off by death. In like manner, New Testament believers who partake of the body and blood of Christ unworthily risk sickness or death. **“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body”** (1 Corinthians 11:29).

Holiness is the watchword for all believers irrespective of their statuses, privileges and positions. Our denominations notwithstanding, we must serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives in

order to get to heaven (Hebrews 12:14). God expects those who handle spiritual things or occupy spiritual offices to be diligent in service and walk uprightly (2 Corinthians 4:2).

As we reflect on the perfect sacrifice of Christ for the atonement of our sins, we are reminded of our obligation and responsibility to present ourselves as living sacrifices unto God (Romans 12:1). Our sacrifices to God must be **“holy, acceptable to God”**, which is our **“reasonable service”**. We must also offer the sacrifices of righteousness (Psalm 4:5), praise, prayer, talents, time, service and everything as a symbol of our dedication to God (Hebrews 13:15). This is acceptable in His sight.

Questions for review:

1. What is the major purpose of the book of Leviticus?
2. Mention the various sacrifices from our texts.
3. What is the significance of the offerings to contemporary Christians?
4. Why is Christ’s sacrifice superior to all other sacrifices?
5. How can we make our services acceptable to God?
6. Mention the possible consequences of violating God’s order.
7. What should be our watchword as we expect the coming of the Lord?

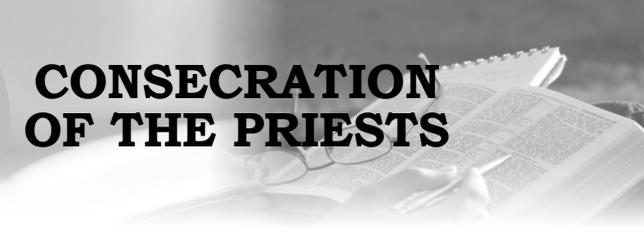
THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

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

A circular graphic with a double border. The word "Lesson" is written in a cursive font at the top, and the number "67" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font in the center.

Lesson
67

A grayscale background image showing an open book, a pair of glasses, and a pen resting on a surface.

**CONSECRATION
OF THE PRIESTS**

MEMORY VERSE: “And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces” (Leviticus 9:24).

TEXT: Leviticus 8:1-36; 9:1-24

Although God ordained the priestly office for Aaron and his sons (Exodus 28:1), they could not commence their ministry until they were consecrated. The consecration became necessary to set them apart for divine service. Their consecration involved an elaborate ceremony carried out by Moses in the presence of the whole congregation. The aims are to impress on the people’s mind an exalted view of the priesthood; to inform the priests of the sacredness of their ministry, responsibility and God’s demands; and to instil in the priests the consciousness that they represented the people and to be so qualified, they needed to first offer sacrifices to make them holy and set apart for God’s service. This teaches us, one, that it is not enough to receive a call from God, there must be patient waiting for His commissioning and empowerment. Two, those who are called to be servants of God must be separated, sanctified and set apart for service. We must not run ahead of God, but wait patiently for Him to fulfil what He has appointed us to do.

CEREMONY OF CONSECRATING THE PRIESTS (Leviticus 8:1-36; 9:1-21; Exodus 29:1-35; 30:20,21,29; Hebrews 9:10)

The tabernacle of the congregation had been set according to the commandment of the Lord to Moses, but services could not commence without the priests to minister in it. Though Aaron and his sons had been appointed to minister in the tabernacle, they could not officiate without consecration and anointing. **“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread”** (Leviticus 8:1,2). This was the call to begin the ceremony of consecration. One, the ceremony took place in the tabernacle of the congregation before the children of Israel. The procedure for the consecration began with washing of Aaron and his sons with water, signifying spiritual cleansing with the water of the word of God (Ephesians 5:26; John 15:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Two, the priests were clothed with the priestly garments. These garments were made **“...for glory and for beauty”** (Exodus 28:2,40). The clothing of the priests symbolises salvation and righteousness (Psalm 132:9,16; Isaiah 61:10). Three, the priests were anointed with oil which was poured on their head till it ran down to their garment (Psalm 133:2). The anointing of the priest symbolises the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit anoints and empowers us for service (Acts 1:8). The importance of the Holy Spirit baptism cannot be over-emphasised in gospel ministry.

The fourth phase of their consecration was the sacrifices (Leviticus 8:14-29). There was a young bullock for a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering and another ram of consecration for peace offering. As a covenant between the Almighty God and the family of Aaron, it was necessary to ratify the covenant of the priesthood with sacrifices (Psalm 50:5). Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bullock for the sin offering. This signified identification with the animal and transfer of

their guilt to it. The animal was killed, its blood collected in a basin and applied on the horns of the altar while the leftover was poured under the altar. It is important to note that the sin offering preceded the other sacrifices because until sin is atoned, there can be no acceptable service or sacrifice to God. The sin offering, thus, is a picture of the sacrificial death of Christ for the sin of the whole world (John 1:29). None can enter into God's service whose sins remain unremitted by faith in Christ.

The sin offering was followed by the burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram and it was killed. The blood was sprinkled on the altar and round about it. The flesh of the animal was washed and completely burnt on the altar. This was followed by the peace offering. The ram of consecration was brought and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on it. It was killed and the blood collected for the next stage of the ceremony.

The fifth stage involved the application of the blood of the consecration ram to the right ears, right thumbs and right great toes of Aaron and his sons. Symbolically, their ears were to be anointed to hear God's word and deliver it to the people; their hands and feet were to be dedicated to working and walking in the way of the Lord. After that, they are sprinkled with blood from the altar and the anointing oil (Exodus 29:20,21). Thus, they were completely set apart for the Lord. These sacrifices signify also that the blood of atonement is the basis for sinners' reconciliation and saints' relationship with God.

The sixth step in the ceremony was the wave offering (Leviticus 8:25-27; Exodus 29:25-27). This offering involved some specified parts of the animal and unleavened cake, cake of oiled bread and wafer to be waved before the Lord. After that, the items were placed on the altar and burnt completely. Moses also took the breast of the ram of consecration and waved it before the Lord, and then kept it for himself.

At the seventh stage of the ceremony, Aaron and his sons boiled the remaining flesh of the ram of consecration and ate it with the remaining bread in the basket. The leftover was to be burnt with fire (Leviticus

8:31,32).

COMMENCEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF THE PRIESTS (Leviticus 9:1-22; Exodus 27:21; 28:1,41-43; Ezekiel 43:26,27)

After partaking of the sacrifices, Aaron and his sons were commanded to remain in the tabernacle for seven days “**until the day of your consecration be at an end**” (Leviticus 8:33). They were to “**...abide at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation day and night seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, that [they] die not...**” At the end of the seventh day, the priests were called to commence their ministry. Aaron performed the first set of sacrifice while his sons assisted him. He made the sin offering, burnt offering, meat offering, and peace offering according to the pattern and sequence that the Lord had ordained by the hand of Moses. After that, he pronounced the priestly benediction on the people and then came down from the altar. When God’s counsels are followed by ministers, they become channels of blessings to His people (Numbers 6:22-27).

From this commandment to the priests to abide in the presence of the Lord, we learn that it is not enough to be appointed into the service of the Lord; we must constantly abide in Him, for without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:4,5). The priests abiding in the tabernacle of the congregation was to determine the preservation of their spiritual lives. Believers must therefore remain in Christ for spiritual security and entrance into heaven. As the priests were obedient to this instruction, we must be committed to doing all things according to the commandment of God.

CONFIRMATION AND APPROVAL OF THE PRIESTHOOD (Leviticus 9:6,23,24; Exodus 29:42-46; 40:33-35; 1 Kings 18:38,39; 1 Chronicles 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

At the end of the benediction, Moses and Aaron went

into the tabernacle to worship God and to report that they had done everything He commanded them. They expected God to fulfil the promise He attached to the building of the tabernacle, the institution of the sacrifices and the priesthood (Exodus 29:44-46). Ministers should always return to the Lord after carrying out divine assignments to evaluate what they have done in the light of God's word. Moses and Aaron took note of the fact that God promised to sanctify the tabernacle, Aaron and his sons with His glory. As Moses and Aaron came out of the tabernacle and blessed the people, the glory of God appeared to all the congregation of Israel as He had promised. **“And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people”** (Leviticus 9:23).

Also, the fire of God came down from heaven and completely consumed the burnt sacrifices which were on the altar. This fire had great impact on the people as they fell on their faces in awe and worshipped God. The supernatural appearance of the glory of God and the miraculous fire from Him implied His confirmation and approval of the priesthood and the sacrifices. Gospel ministers and indeed, all believers should seek to fulfil the purpose of God's call on their lives. The absence of divine approval in ministry will lead to frustration and emptiness. To attract divine confirmation in our ministry, we must do all things according to the divine pattern. The statement, **“as the LORD commanded Moses”** or **“as the LORD commanded”** appeared eight times in our texts (Leviticus 8:9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36; 9:7, 10). This implies that there was regular evaluation to see that divine details were followed. In all our labour and work in the vineyard of Christ, we must examine ourselves to see that we do not deviate from the word of God (Hebrews 8:5).

Contemporary Christians should consecrate themselves to God on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ and live daily to do His will. Ministers especially, should be found to live the holiness life for their followers to emulate. God's standard is that we should **“Follow peace**

with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Believers are to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God and serve Him in spirit and in truth as spiritual priests in Christ Jesus (Romans 12:1,2; Revelation 1:6). Sinners are required to turn away from their sins and put their faith in Christ by surrendering to Him.

Questions for review:

1. What basic lessons do we learn from the appointment and consecration of the priests?
2. Point out the major steps involved in the consecration of the priests and explain the significance of each for present-day believers.
3. What can we learn from the commandment to the priests to remain in the tabernacle of the congregation throughout the days of their consecration?
4. Why did Moses and Aaron go into the tabernacle after the inauguration of the priesthood?
5. What is the implication of the fire from the presence of the Lord?
6. Why is it important to constantly examine our work in the light of God’s word?
7. How can we enjoy divine approval always?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the text "Lesson 68" in a stylized font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
68

STRANGE FIRE IN THE TABERNACLE

MEMORY VERSE: "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace" (Leviticus 10:3).

TEXT: Leviticus 10:1-20

The speed and severity with which God judged Nadab and Abihu in our text of study should kindle reverence in all that come nigh God as ministers. The incidence also exposed the weakness of the law in its inability to deal with man's sin. The imperfection of the Levitical order or priesthood is here underlined by the sin and punishment of the newly ordained priests. No sooner was the priesthood inaugurated than it was violated. How unlike the perfect and everlasting priesthood of our royal High Priest, Jesus Christ! Indeed, **"the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did"** (Hebrews 7:19).

Nadab and Abihu, on their own, and not by order, offered in the temple. It does not appear that they had any command to offer incense at present, a role which belonged to Aaron, and not to them as yet; but without any instruction and direction, they rushed into the holy place with their censers and offered incense, even both of them when only one priest was to offer at a time, when it was to be offered, and this they also did with strange fire. This may be an emblem of dissembled love, when a man performs religious duties without any cordial affection to God, or obeys commands not from love, but selfish views. It may also amount to an ignorant,

false and misguided zeal not according to knowledge, but presumptuous and hypocritical. Or of false and strange doctrines, such as are not of God, nor agree with the teachings of Christ, but foreign to the Scriptures. Finally, it may pertain to human ordinances and inventions and everything that man brings on his own, in order to obtain eternal life and salvation.

DIVINE JUDGMENT ON SIN (Leviticus 10:1-7; Exodus 30:9; Leviticus 4:2,3; Numbers 15:30)

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not” (Leviticus 10:1). We are commanded that God must be worshipped on His own terms and according to His specifications. It is dangerous to introduce human innovations into Christian worship or service or tamper with those ordinances in which we have His commandments. In the Old Testament, the rites and ceremonies commanded by God prefigured important and eternal truths which cannot be altered by any man without being guilty of stepping into His exclusive prerogative.

By examining the circumstances in which the sin of Nadab and Abihu occurred, we may assume a number of infringements since **“we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth...”** (Romans 2:2). One, it may be that they burned the incense at the wrong time in the course of the day’s service. Two, it was not their duty to offer incense in that particular service. Three, the sin could have been the result of self-exaltation and pride rooted in the honour newly conferred on them. Four, they could have taken the fire for the incense from common fire as against the holy fire taken from off the altar. Five, they might have used in their censers a strange incense (also called fire) contrary to the express commandment that **“ye shall offer no strange incense [fire] thereon [the altar of the sanctuary]”** (Exodus 30:9). Six, it could also be that a special incense proper for that particular service was not used. Seven, they might

have burnt the incense, two of them at the same time, which was unusual. Eight, familiarity with holy things into which they were newly admitted could have bred lightness in attitude and loss of a sense of solemnity. Nine, the suspicion of drunkenness and the resultant carelessness and misjudgment is strengthened by the proximity between this infraction and the introduction of the law addressed to Aaron and his remaining two sons: **“Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, and thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die...”**(Leviticus 10:9). Ten, perhaps, the sin was committed presumptuously, that is, deliberately going beyond what they knew was right or appropriate. **“But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously... shall be cut off from among his people”** (Numbers 15:30).

The above notwithstanding, if otherwise, Nadab and Abihu would likely have benefitted from the then existing law that, **“If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD... then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering”** (Leviticus 4:2,3).

The sentence against the sin of Nadab and Abihu was speedily executed. Though God **“is long suffering to us ward”**, we must learn that He may choose to deal with the sinner with dispatch, particularly when, as is likely the case here, it is a wilful sin. Anyone who willingly continues to sin has no divine guarantee of a continuing space for repentance. Many have been deceived into sin by the thought that their peculiar circumstances would make their sins to be ignored or taken less seriously in the court of heaven. The case of Nadab and Abihu is a clear warning that circumstances which we may consider as extenuating may not be so regarded by the Judge of all the earth. Our safety is guaranteed only in doing what we know to be the will or commandment of God. The notion that God will understand and overlook a presumptuous sin is self-delusion.

It is very instructive that the circumstances of Nadab

and Abihu did not appear to have any mitigating effect on their sins. One, they were the sons of the high priest, Aaron; two, they were recently anointed with the holy oil as men set aside for divine service; three, their past records were commendable. They had only seven days before diligently and successfully concluding the rites of consecration to the priesthood; four, they were young, inexperienced first offenders; five, the infraction was committed in the euphoria of their recent elevation; six, the priesthood being restricted to the family of Aaron, had only four other members; seven, their death could so reduce the number of eligible persons for the priesthood because they had no children and that the priesthood would be in danger of extinction or at best suffer a short supply of personnel. None of these supposed considerations could spare the offenders. Thus, we must pray for grace and courage to do always that which we know to be the commandment of God even in difficult situations.

“And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD hath kindled” (Leviticus 10:6). There can be no doubt that the death of Nadab and Abihu caused great pain and sorrow in the heart of Moses. Nevertheless, he encouraged himself and comforted Aaron by the word of God (Leviticus 10:3; Exodus 19:22). Knowing the unfortunate incidence to be a fulfilment of God’s word puts it beyond doubt as to its justice. In times of bereavement, affliction or adversity, the best and most potent comforts are those we source from the word of God. The effect of the words spoken by Moses to Aaron was very comforting and **“Aaron held his peace”**.

In the midst of the ugly occurrence, we find Moses showing greater concern to ensure that decorum and orderliness prevailed. He was more concerned to ensure that Aaron and his two remaining sons were not, on account of what had happened, diverted or made unfit for the work of the priesthood. He said, **“And ye shall**

not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you” (Leviticus 10:7). He insisted that priesthood must, even in time of sorrow and misfortune, demonstrate that they value the honour and affection for God and for His service than the dearest of their earthly relations.

How unlike the common attitude among some believers, whose service to God fluctuates according to their fortunes and misfortunes! Does such attitude not amount to passing judgment on God’s prerogative? Some would even entirely abandon the work or lower their commitment to Christ on account of offence by another believer. How unlike Job, when he suffered great adversity, said, **“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him”** (Job 13:15). The lesson here is that as true believers, pleasing God always and concern for His glory should always lie closer to our hearts than our private fortunes. Afflictions or temporary setbacks should, instead of taking us off our duties, quicken us in them.

Moses was also concerned about the effect any defect in the priesthood would have on the congregation of Israel. **“...And lest wrath come upon all the people”** (Leviticus 10:6). Ministers and leaders must always be conscious of the pervasive effect of any defect in their spiritual lives. The congregation ought to count themselves highly favoured by God when they have leaders who make the spiritual soundness of their congregation their utmost concern; who labour to feed the flock with the knowledge of the word of God and strive, by their personal examples to demonstrate what the fear and reverence to God imply.

DIVINE CHARGE AFTER THE JUDGMENT (Leviticus 10:8-11; Numbers 6:3; Proverbs 31:4; 20:1; Jeremiah 35:6; Luke 1:15)

“Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever

throughout your generations” (Leviticus 10:9). These words from the Lord directly to Aaron after the incident of the strange fire suggest that the sin of drunkenness may lie at the root of the infraction. Here, the word of the Lord shows how we may positively gain from God’s judgment on others and even the consequent experience of other persons. As sure as God’s **“goodness and forbearance... leadeth [us] to repentance”**, we must be equally affected by His judgment visited on others.

With a head and heart under control, a believer or servant of God will be able to discern between good and evil, holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean (Leviticus 10:10). An individual under the influence of alcohol or any other intoxicating substance cannot remain within the boundaries of Scripture or be able to do according to the will of God.

“And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses” (Leviticus 10:11). Teaching and instructing in the law and words of righteousness are primary duties of God’s servants. They cannot be in bondage to other elements – internal or external – and be able to discharge this responsibility faithfully, fully and fervently. Ministers of God cannot afford to be slaves to sin, self, society or Satan. They must be men and women who have mastery (1 Corinthians 9:25) over themselves and are vessels of honour in the hands of the Lord. As we behold around us the horrible consequences of the neglect of God’s word, we should be cautious to separate ourselves from all sins. We must double our guard knowing, as the Scripture warns us, to be separate from the world (2 Corinthians 6:14; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Drunkenness is a great sin before the Lord and is highly incongruent in the life of a believer. It is condemned in many parts of the Bible (Proverbs 20:1; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). In the New Testament, drunkenness is forbidden to both ministers and members. Christ singled out **“eating and drinking with the drunken”** as one of the vices which may put the servant at risk of not being found ready for the return

of the Master (Ephesians 5:18; Luke 21:34). The reason given for the prohibition of wine in the priesthood was the need for sobriety and for the priest to be able to distinguish between what is sacred and what is common or vile. A believer ought to have always the clearest head and sober heart, and not be caught up in the terrible mire of drunkenness.

DIVINE COMMAND CONCERNING THE PRIESTS' PORTION (Leviticus 10:12-19; 27:21; 24:9; Deuteronomy 12:27; 2 Kings 23:9; 1 Corinthians 10:18)

Continuing in his efforts to restore order and reverence to the priesthood, Moses reminded Aaron and his remaining sons of his earlier instruction from the Lord concerning eating of their (priestly) share of the sacrifices. **“And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left, Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar: for it is most holy”** (Leviticus 10:12). In the course of doing this, he observed that, contrary to the rule, the blood of a goat for sin offering was not brought into the sanctuary (holy place) and yet the flesh of the goat was burnt instead of being eaten beside the altar by the sons of Aaron. The rule was that if the blood of the sin offering was brought into the holy place, then the flesh was burnt without the camp. If, however, the blood was not taken into the holy place, the flesh must be eaten by the priests.

Moses gently (obviously considering the great sorrow of heart Aaron was already enduring), rebuked him for this miscarriage. Aaron explained that he thought the sorrowful state of their hearts consequent upon the death of Nadab and Abihu disqualified them in the sight of God from feasting on the sacrifice as normal. In other words, it was the fear of displeasing God, not rebellion, that informed their deliberate abstinence. Moses was satisfied with the explanation and apparently God also, hence He took no notice of the irregularity.

The Old Testament altar besides which the priests

ate the flesh of the sin offering typified Christ, just as the sin offering also typified Him. Christ is therefore, both the Sacrifice for our sin and our Altar for our sacrificial love and service to God. He provides believers with an endless feast of spiritual strength, renewal and the refreshing of spiritual pleasures. Those who continue in sin, or continue in Mosaic rites and ceremonies, exclude themselves from the true altar and the true sacrifice (Hebrews 13:9-11). However, any sinner who repents from sins before God becomes a welcome participant in the great spiritual feasting around the true Altar – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for review:

1. What can we learn from the incidence of the strange fire?
2. How can we relate the problem of strange fire to the Christian service?
3. What is the danger in justifying sinful compromise and/or disobedience to God's word on the excuse of the peculiarity of our circumstances?
4. Why was Aaron commanded not to mourn the deaths of his two sons?
5. What should be a believer's attitude to his or her commitment to Christ in times of difficulty or sorrow?
6. Why should a believer totally abstain from alcohol and intoxicating beverages?
7. How can an individual partake of the altar of the Lord?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a script font and the number "69" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson 69

A background image showing an open book, a pair of glasses, and a pen resting on a surface.

SUNDRY LAWS OF PURIFICATION

MEMORY VERSE: “For I am the LORD that bringeth you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45)

TEXT: Leviticus 11:1-47; 12:1-8

After the institution of the priesthood, the consecration of Aaron and his sons and the tragic death of Nahab and Abihu, God instructed Moses to give the law of clean and unclean animals and purification rites for the unclean to the children of Israel.

God’s purpose of dietary prohibitions and demand for external cleansing of Israel were both sanitary as well as spiritual. Besides, having redeemed them out of bondage in Egypt, He intended to school them in the elementary art of differentiating clean from the unclean, and to impress upon them that they could live by no other law than His. They were to be peculiar people whose lives, relationship and worship were regulated by His laws. It is only as they live by His laws that they can be holy as He is. Note that studies in the Levitical system of priesthood, sacrifices and cleansing can be fully appreciated by keeping in mind their typical and spiritual reference to our Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice on the cross for us. It is clear from the foregoing that God’s laws are borne out of His holy thoughts, reveal His holy nature and to accomplish His holy purpose of transforming and preserving His people.

CLASSIFICATION OF CLEAN AND UNCLEAR ANIMALS (Leviticus 11:1-43; Genesis 7:2; 8:20; Deuteronomy 14:2-21; Isaiah 34:11; 3 John 2; Numbers 23:9)

The distinction of animals into clean and unclean was made by God even before the flood (Genesis 7:2). By reintroducing it at the time of the law, He must have deemed it fit to maintain that distinction among His people, which the loss of the knowledge of the true God erased from the heathen nations.

Three broad categories of animals were listed for the purpose of determining the clean and the unclean animals. First were the land animals. These included the four-footed beasts as well as crawling animals such as snakes, lizards, snails and moles (Leviticus 11:2,29,30). Second were the aquatic or water creatures such as fish (Leviticus 11:9). Third were the flying animals such as birds and insects (Leviticus 11:13,23).

For a four-footed land animal to be regarded as clean, it must both chew the cud and part the hoof. This means that it must be a ruminant animal and have its hoof divided. An animal in this group would be regarded as unclean if it has either of these two features without the other, or if it has neither of them. The aquatic creatures must have both fins and scales to be considered clean. In the case of the flying creatures, God mentioned specific members that must not be eaten. These are mostly scavengers that feed on dead animals or carnivorous blood eating birds. Predators such as the eagle, the hawk and the kite are classified in this category as unclean. Other unclean birds include the owl, pelican, raven and cormorant, all of which are solitary creatures that inhabit dark places (Psalm 102:6; Isaiah 34:11).

A closer look at the animals in their two broad classifications as clean and unclean reveals the concern of God not only for the earthly comfort and health of His people, but also for their spiritual security and eternal well-being. **“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as**

thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2).

According to God’s commandment, **“Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat”** (Leviticus 11:3). The Lord did not forbid certain foods, as men are apt to think, just because He is sovereign, but because in His perfect knowledge as God and Creator, He knew that the consumption of some animals as foods would be injurious to the health and morals of His people. Animals considered clean among the four-footed beasts must both chew their cud and divide the hoof. Chewing the cud refers to the inbred habit of some animals (also called ruminants) of bringing back into the mouth, food that had been previously swallowed, to be chewed more thoroughly the second time. Animals which chew the cud naturally deal with their diets more thoroughly than those that swallow their food with little or no mastication. Therefore, their flesh are better nourished and more likely to afford better nourishment and less harmful substances to man. Their flesh will be easier to digest and better assimilated by the human digestive system.

Other animals which do not chew their cud but divide the hoof such as pigs are known to wallow in the mire and often serve as intermediate hosts to parasitic organisms which infest man if the flesh is not thoroughly cooked before eating. Others in this class are blood-eating predators, feeding on the flesh and blood of their preys. Generally, the flesh of such beasts could easily harbour harmful substances or diseases for man if he feeds on them. For the aquatic creatures, only those that have both fins and scales on their bodies are clean. Most creeping animals such as serpents, lizards, moles and snails were not to be eaten, while among the insects, only locust, grasshopper, bald locust and beetle are edible.

Apart from reasons of good health, there is a spiritual angle to the law of clean and unclean animals. First, God saw it as expedient that His people should constantly exercise their obedience to Him, not only in their temple worship but also in their daily practices even at home. Second, God aimed at separating His

people as far as possible from idolatry and all forms of false worship practised among the heathens. By exposing the uncleanness of those animals and birds such as the eagle, the serpent or the owl, which were held in reverence or used in divination or sacrifices to idols, Israel would be protected from learning the ways of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:12) and be preserved as a holy people unto God.

“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Leviticus 11:44). Because God’s people should **“dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations,”** the law of dietary distinction teaches us how the Israel of God ought, in every area of their lives, to be guided by non-conformity with this present evil world (Romans 12:1,2; Galatians 1:4).

PURIFICATION RITES AND CLEANSING AFTER CHILDBIRTH (Leviticus 12:1-8; Psalm 51:5; Luke 2:22-24)

“Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean” (Leviticus 12:2). According to the law of purification after childbirth, a woman, having given birth to a baby boy was unclean seven days and thereafter remained at home for additional thirty-three days. In the case of a baby girl, the mother was unclean for fourteen days, and then remained home for additional sixty-six days. During the thirty-three or sixty-six day period of her purification, the new mother was not allowed into the sanctuary and she was not to participate in the Passover or peace offering. If she was the wife of the priest, she would not, as she would in the past, eat anything that was holy unto the Lord.

The ceremonial uncleanness which the law placed on women after delivery, as with the law of clean and

unclean animals, has both physical and spiritual dimension. On the physical consideration, it spoke of God's tender care in protecting the new mother from the hazards posed by visitors at a time when her bodily weakness and vulnerability to infection were greatest.

On the spiritual plane, the uncleanness was reflective of man's natural sinfulness and the defilement into which all men are born. As the Psalmist puts it, "**Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me**" (Psalm 51:5). The nature of every person born into the world became sinful from birth as a result of the disobedience of our first parents – Adam and Eve. Every child born thereafter became an addition to the pool of corruption and sin represented by our common humanity. The period of the new mothers' exclusion from participation in holy things is symbolic of the exclusion from God's presence and favour which would have been the lot of all men had God not provided for our purification and salvation through the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God – our Lord Jesus Christ.

"And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest" (Leviticus 12:6). At the end of her purifying period, before she could return to the sanctuary or participate in holy things, the woman must make her offerings. First, she must offer for a sin offering, a turtledove or a young pigeon. The sin offering was the same, irrespective of the economic status of the woman. It was to complete her purification from her ceremonial uncleanness.

Second, she must bring a burnt offering of a lamb, to appreciate God's mercy in seeing her through the dangers and difficulties of childbirth. If she could not afford a lamb, she was allowed to bring a turtledove or a young pigeon instead. It is noteworthy that in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary, His mother was unable to offer a lamb; therefore, she offered a turtledove instead (Luke 2:22-24), an indication of the poverty into which Christ was born. Indeed, **"...though he was rich, yet**

for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

In the burnt offering, she at once expresses her gratitude and implies a commitment to raise a godly seed. She anticipates that the blood of the atoning sin offering, which cleanses her from her uncleanness, also cleanses the front of her womb.

CEREMONIAL UNCLEANNESS AND PURIFICATION UNDER THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION (Leviticus 11:45; Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 2:20-23; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

“For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45). As noted earlier, one of the major purposes of the law of clean and unclean animals was to separate the Jews from the Gentiles, to avoid the pollutions of idolatry among God’s people. Also, in the ceremonial purification after childbirth, we saw a harbinger of the cleansing of **“everyone that cometh into the world”** by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as Christ has come and **“hath made both [the Jew and the Gentiles] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in [ceremonial] ordinances; for to make in himself of twain [Jew and Gentile] one new man, so making peace”**, the need for separation on the basis of ceremonial cleanness and purification ceased to exist.

The New Testament believer is therefore, freed from the burdens of ceremonial laws so he can focus on the more important matters of repentance, faith in Christ and its concomitant holiness of life from a sanctified heart. A New Testament believer cannot subject himself to the ceremonial ordinances of the law as if salvation comes from their observance. However, in taking our liberties in Christ, we must also be careful not to endanger our health for the pleasure of our appetites. **“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but**

righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”
(Romans 14:17).

Questions for review:

1. What can a believer learn from the laws of clean and unclean animals and the purification rites?
2. What health and hygiene reasons can be advanced in support of the prohibition of most unclean animals as unsafe for human consumption?
3. What lesson(s) on holiness and separation from the world does the law of clean and unclean animals teach us?
4. Based on the law of purifying for mothers, explain how a baby born into the world with a sinful nature can attain justification and righteousness before God.
5. In what way can a Christian mother appreciate the atonement in the blood of Christ; both for herself and her baby?
6. What should be the believer’s attitude to the eating of “clean and unclean” animals?
7. Explain how the believer is free from the burden of ceremonial laws.

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "70" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

Lesson
70

IDENTIFICATION AND CLEANSING OF LEPROSY

MEMORY VERSE: “And the priest shall look on him again the seventh day: and, behold, if the plague be somewhat dark, and the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean: it is but a scab: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean” (Leviticus 13:6).

TEXT: Leviticus chapters 13 to 15

This lesson focuses on laws on diagnosis of leprosy. These laws show the high premium that God places on health and cleanliness of His people, hence He commanded that a leper be quarantined until he was cured of his disease.

Leprosy is a disease that affects skin texture, colour and sensitivity. It symbolises sin and how it works in man. Though the effect of leprosy is seen on the skin, the power resides deeply in the body. Even so, sin affects the human soul; causing unwholesome change in character and behaviour. While its effects are seen outside, its power is deeply rooted within the soul of man. Like leprosy, sin separates man from God and has no human remedy. Leprosy must be cured just as sin must be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb for restoration of fellowship with God (Romans 6:12-14; 1 John 1:8; John 1:29).

LAWS FOR DIAGNOSIS AND QUARANTINE OF LEPERS (Leviticus 13:1-3,5,6,8; Deuteronomy 24:8; Numbers 12:10; 2 Chronicles 26:19,20; Micah 3:8; Zechariah 13:1; Matthew 11:4,5; Luke 7:22)

The priests were given details to ensure accurate diagnosis. It was to prevent error in judgment. There are lessons for Christian leaders and believers from the way the priests were expected to handle cases of leprosy. One, Christian leaders have a great responsibility to keep the congregation pure and preserved from any pollution of sin. Two, they must be impartial in exercising their duty. Sin must never be excused among members in the church. Three, all believers are priests in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9). We need to therefore, examine our lives and make sure we are free from the leprosy of sin and afterwards watch over our fellow believers.

Symptoms of leprosy include bright spot on the skin, a boil or hot ulcer rising out of a boil, inflammation or burns on the skin, inflammation on the head or beard resulting in the hairs falling off, plagues in the garments and in dwelling places. Leprosy was diagnosed if the spot on the skin was depressed and the hair turned white. Israelites have dark hair; therefore, a change of colour to white was an evidence of leprosy. If there was doubt on the suspected case, the victim was kept in isolation for seven days and re-examined. If need be, he was shut up for another seven days before the final judgment was made. During isolation, genuine cases of leprosy would become obvious and the victim declared unclean and shut out from the community. However, if the priests confirmed that the victim was not infected with leprosy, they would instruct him to wash himself and return to the congregation.

The following lessons on how leprosy appears on a person are noteworthy. One, it could arise spontaneously on the skin. We should therefore, watch out lest sin arises in our hearts (Hebrews 3:12; 12:15,16). Two, leprosy could appear on the skin where a boil or burn had been healed. We should be careful to avoid the danger of nursing past offences or minor misunderstanding which may provide a fertile breeding ground for sin in the church. Also, we should forgive and forget whatever way we might have been wronged (Matthew 18:35).

“And if a leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of him that hath the plague from his head even to his foot, wheresoever the priest looketh; Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean” (Leviticus 13:12,13). How do we explain a situation where mere spots of visible leprosy rendered a man unclean; whereas, a person whose entire skin was covered from head to foot with leprosy was pronounced clean? The explanation is that when the leprosy had turned white all over, the disease was no longer active and infectious. In that case, the priest would declare the leper clean.

The basic lesson for us here is that sins, which have been confessed, repented of and forgiven, pose no danger to the church. It means then that there would be cases that looked like leprosy but after the priests had examined very well, they would simply pronounce them clean and allow them to remain in the society. This underlines the need for caution, by not rushing into condemnation or hastily imposing sanction without thorough investigation even in cases where there is a popular perception of offence (John 7:51).

Once the priests had confirmed a case of leprosy, lepers would promptly be quarantined (Leviticus 13:45,46,52-59; Numbers 5:1-4; 12:10-15; Deuteronomy 24:8). The leper was required to rend his clothes, shave his head and put a covering upon his upper lip – signs of deep mourning or a great calamity among the Jews.

The leper could live in company of other lepers; but not in the community of healthy people. Any time the leper would come into the city, he should cry ‘unclean!’ severally as he approached the city so people could avoid contact with him. What a terrible picture of sin and the sinner’s condition (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1).

There are several similarities between leprosy and sin. First, leprosy is loathsome. Lepers were unclean and so are sinners before God (Isaiah 64:6). Second, leprosy begins in an insignificant way but later, its effect is so disastrous. In the same way, sin may seem little but it

is the little foxes that spoil the vines; and our (spiritual) vines have tender grapes (Song of Solomon 2:15). Third, leprosy is progressive and diffusive. Though it begins in a very small way, it spreads until it consumes the entire body, like **“a little leaven [that] leaveneth the whole lump”**. Fourth, leprosy causes loss of sensitivity. Lepers do not feel pain, cold, heat, etc., because the skin, being the sense organ for detecting these stimuli, has already become numb. Similarly, sin deadens the conscience and leads to loss of spiritual sensitivity. The sinner, unless awakened by grace, can neither hear the alarm nor perceive any danger to his soul. Fifth, leprosy separated its victim from the congregation of Israel (Numbers 12:10-16). Sin also separates man from God both now and in eternity.

Looking at how leprosy disfigures and disgraces its victims before eventually killing them, we should dread sin as it has a more devastating effect than leprosy which only affects and disfigures the physical body. We must ensure that we are genuinely saved from sin and truly sanctified. The garments that had leprosy in it were to be burned no matter how precious or costly they were (Leviticus 13:47-59). In the same way, we must hate the garments or gains spotted with sin (Jude 23).

LAWS FOR THE CLEANSING OF LEPERS AND LEPROSY IN HOUSES (Leviticus 14:1-32; Matthew 8:4; Luke 5:14; 17:14)

God did not stop at the laws for the diagnosis of leprosy by the priests, He also instructed the children of Israel on the purification rites for cleansing the confirmed leper. God wanted them to understand that though leprosy was incurable by human efforts and that the leper was as good as dead, there was still hope for the leper in Israel.

God directed Moses on what to do when ‘a leper’s leprosy had disappeared’. The priest should go out of the camp to meet and examine him in order to confirm that he was truly healed. The man could not go to the priest because he remained unclean and barred from

the community until the priest declared otherwise. Once the priest confirmed that the leprosy had been truly healed, he would proceed with the purification rites. This consisted of two ceremonies; one outside the camp and the other at the court of the tabernacle, with an interval of seven days between them. The procedure was designed to achieve different ends. The ceremony outside the gate was designed to restore the cleansed man to the civil society, while the ceremony at the tabernacle was for his restoration to religious fellowship and worship in the sanctuary.

The purification rites of a healed leper are very significant. The law pictures our salvation from sin. The shedding of the blood of birds and of lambs during the cleansing ceremony symbolised the blood of Jesus shed on behalf of sinners as atonement for sin and reconciliation with God. Although the purification of the cleansed leper was done in the congregation of Israel, it took the second ceremony to restore him to fellowship in the tabernacle. For the first ceremony, two clean birds were used. One bird was slain, the other let loose. The slain bird symbolised the previous condition of the cleansed leper. He was as good as dead. But the living bird set free symbolised his new condition of freedom.

Our salvation from sin follows the same pattern as in the purification ceremony. Jesus “**...was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification**” (Romans 4:25). As Christ died and rose again, so the believer is identified with Him in death and resurrection to a new life. We must not only stop at the initial experience of justification by faith, we must press forward to be sanctified and baptised in the Holy Ghost. Sanctification removes the sin (disease) within.

God also gave the law concerning leprosy in houses to the children of Israel anticipating when they would settle in Canaan (Leviticus 14:33-57; Exodus 32:26,27; Numbers 14:20-30,37,38). This law could not be enforced in the wilderness since they dwelt in tents and not houses.

Lessons from the law of leprosy in the house include: one, the owner of the house should report and invite

the priest to investigate what seemed to be leprosy in his house. This teaches us not to cover up sin in our lives and homes as individuals.

Two, the house must be emptied before the priest would examine it otherwise, if the priest confirmed that there was leprosy in the house, the house and everything in it would be rendered unclean. From this, we learn the need for discretion to prevent the influence and consequence of sin on the innocent. Three, the priest must do a thorough investigation before declaring the house unclean. If there was growth of leprosy on the wall of the house, he should order that the affected stone or portion of the wall be removed and dumped in a place outside the camp. Then, the wall of the house would be scraped thoroughly, the removed stones replaced with other ones and the house re-plastered. After this renovation, if the plague reappeared, then the house would be declared unclean and it would be utterly demolished; and its debris carried out to an unclean place.

Four, if leprosy did not appear after the house had been renovated, the priest would declare the house clean and carry out purification rites. The purification ceremony for a house cleansed from leprosy was similar to that of a cleansed leper.

LAWS FOR CLEANSING FROM OTHER FORMS OF DEFILEMENTS (Leviticus 14:33-57; Exodus 32:26,27; Numbers 14:20-30,37,38; Leviticus 15:1-33; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 3:3; 1:9; Hebrews 9:22-26; Ephesians 5:25,26)

In our text, God also pointed out to the Israelites that defilement could arise from secretions that issued from human body. This may be a diseased flux or a normal discharge that is associated with the reproductive system. According to this law, a person could be defiled by reason of a running issue, emission of semen, the normal menstrual flow in women, intercourse between a man and woman or an unusual flow of blood in a woman. In every such case, the individual was required

to wash himself or herself at the end of their period of uncleanness. Anyone who had contact with the defiled person or any of his objects became defiled and in need of purification.

The law of purification from bodily issues shows the need for holiness of character in order to maintain our fellowship with God. Though these defilements were less serious than leprosy, they nevertheless needed cleansing. This reminded the children of Israel that God was not only against the very obvious and serious defilements such as leprosy, but also frowns against those evil things that people might consider trivial or natural tendencies. **“For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy...”** (Leviticus 11:44).

The law shows God’s concern for the physical wellbeing of His people. He did not overlook even seemingly small things such as mildew or mould on the walls of their houses, once they could bring infection to His people. This is another clear proof of God’s love and care for His children.

The nations that surrounded the Israelites were ignorant of the laws of hygiene and how to prevent infection. These nations might have considered the detailed laws of God to Israel, a burden and a strange thing. But by compliance with these laws, Israel proved that they loved and honoured God and were distinct from their neighbours. As a result, Moses was able to say to the children of Israel: **“For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”** (Deuteronomy 4:7,8).

Finally, we need to remember that under the New Testament dispensation, we are no longer subject to ceremonial laws. Jesus has set us free by fulfilling for us the demands of these laws. However, we can still benefit from the principles of righteousness, holiness and hygiene which they set forth.

Questions for review:

1. Why did God command that leprosy should be drastically dealt with?
2. Compare the roles of priests in identifying leprosy with that of Christian leaders.
3. Point out the similarities between leprosy and sin.
4. What lesson was the law of purification from leprosy intended to teach?
5. Explain the two ceremonies that constituted the purification of lepers in Israel and their purposes.
6. Point out the significance of the law of cleansing of the leper.
7. What is our position in the New Testament dispensation concerning ceremonial laws?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font at the top and the number "71" in a large, bold, serif font in the center. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle texture.

Lesson 71

A black and white photograph of an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it. The Bible is open to a page with text, and the glasses are positioned over the text.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

MEMORY VERSE: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (Leviticus 16:30).

TEXT: Leviticus 16:1-34

The text for this lesson opens with a solemn reminder of the tragic and untimely death of the two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – for offering strange fire before the Lord. Obviously, **“the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23). The penalty for sin can be averted through God’s gracious provision of atonement, which is the subject of the present lesson.

Atonement became necessary because of the fall of man. When Adam and Eve sinned, they became guilty and estranged from God. Going by God’s holiness and justice, man should be punished for his sins but attributes of mercy, grace and kindness has moved Him to restore His relationship with man through the medium of atonement. This involved the transfer of the sinners’ guilt upon an acceptable Substitute who can bear the lawful punishment for man’s sins. The Lord, therefore, gave the directive through Moses to Aaron concerning the institution of the great day of the atonement – a special annual event for the Jewish nation.

The sins of the entire nation were atoned for through the shedding of the blood of prescribed animals. The tabernacle was also purified from the defilement of sin and for the next one year, the whole nation of Israel obtained a new lease of life in their walk with God. The special sacrifice and the entire programme of the day of

atonement gives us an insight into the damaging consequences of sin and what it takes God to cover the sins of humanity. The service of the day of atonement was appointed to deal with any sin of the people which were not adequately covered by the daily or any other sacrifices during the year. It was instituted to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month every year by the children of Israel. Today, the Lord Jesus Christ is our Substitute and with His blood, He has atoned for all the sins of all, once and for all.

PRECAUTIONS FOR PRIESTS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD (Leviticus 16:1,2; Psalm 50:3; Isaiah 52:11; Habakkuk 2:20; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 3:23; Acts 5:1-11)

Reference to the death of the two sons of Aaron in the text was not just a mere historical excursion but a solemn warning to present-day believers who are also referred to as priests in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10). Aaron's two sons died as a result of their sacrilegious acts. Their death reveals and confirms the justice of God. Though He does not delight in judgment, He judges sin so others can turn from their evil ways and live righteously.

It is only God's way and on His own terms that man's sins can be expiated. Unwilling that any should perish, He revealed His own way of pardon through atonement. Charting a new course or way of approaching God (as in the case of Nadab and Abihu) is sin. New Testament believers must approach God's presence with reverential fear and honour for Him (Hebrews 12:28).

Atonement through animal sacrifice to cover the sin of the whole Jewish nation was necessary to bring them into favour and fellowship with God. Since atonement through the blood of sacrificed animal foreshadows Christ's singular and final sacrifice, not only for the nation of Israel but for the whole world, a sinner's only hope of redemption is through Christ's atonement.

PROCEDURES AND PURPOSE OF THE SERVICE OF ATONEMENT (Leviticus 16:3-20; 23:26-32; Exodus 30:10; Numbers 29:7-11)

The procedures of the sacrifice on the day of atonement was somewhat different from the normal daily sacrifices done by the priests. On the day of atonement, the high priest alone officiated in the sanctuary. And for most of the time he had to put off his distinguished robe of glory and honour, being clad only in pure white linen garment like the ordinary priests. Special offerings were also made in addition to the normal daily sacrifices. The special sacrifices include a young bullock for a sin offering for Aaron and his family, two goats for a sin offering for the people of Israel, a ram for a burnt offering for Aaron and his family and a ram for a burnt offering for the children of Israel.

The service on the day of atonement took several stages. One, Aaron the high priest had to bathe himself in water and put on the special sacred linen garments. Two, he presented the sacrificial animals before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle. Three, he cast lots on the two goats of the sin offering for the people so as to determine which one to kill and which to send away into the wilderness as a scapegoat. Four, the sin offerings were made.

Then, Aaron killed the young bullock for his own sin offering and collected the blood. Then he entered the holy of holies taking in one hand a censer full of live coals, which he had taken from the brazen altar, and in the other hand sweet incense beaten small. As soon as he entered the holy of holies, Aaron poured the incense upon the live coals in order to produce a cloud of sweet incense which covered the mercy seat. In this way, Aaron would not look directly on the mercy seat. Next, he would then go out and bring in the blood of the slain bull into the most holy place. Then he would sprinkle with his finger the blood on the eastern side of the mercy seat and then in front of it seven times. After this, the sin offering for the people was sacrificed. That means Aaron would go out of the most holy place and

kill the goat which was chosen for the Lord by lot. Then he would carry the blood into the holy of holies and repeat the sprinkling as he did for his own bull.

Five, Aaron made atonement for the holy place by staining the horns of the golden altar seven times with the blood of the bull and of the goat. The remaining blood he poured at the base of the brazen altar in order to make atonement for the outer court of the tabernacle. Six, the scapegoat was taken and Aaron laid both his hands upon its head, confessing over it all the sins of the children of Israel. Then the scapegoat, bearing upon it the sins of the people, was sent away to the wilderness.

Seven, the next stage involved the sacrificing of the burnt offerings. For this, Aaron went into the holy place, removed the linen garments in which he ministered, bathed himself and put on his priest's robes before coming out into the outer court to kill the burnt offerings. He offered a ram as a burnt offering for himself and his family and a ram for the people of Israel. Next, Aaron burnt the fat of the sin offering upon the altar. The flesh and entrails of the sin offerings were carried outside the camp and burnt. Afterwards, the person who led the scapegoat into the wilderness as well as the person who carried the flesh of the sin offerings for burning would wash their clothes and bathe themselves before returning to the camp.

While Aaron made atonement for the people, God commanded that the entire children of Israel maintain an attitude of penitence and sobriety. The day of atonement was observed as a special Sabbath and the children of Israel were required to spend it in self-examination, humility, fasting and genuine sorrow for their sin. This implies that atonement by sacrifice must be complemented with penitence before a person can receive pardon (Leviticus 23:27-30).

This is instructive to those who feel that repentance is just to mention your sins to God, whether you feel sorry or not, and to simply claim the benefits of Christ's redemptive work by faith. While we cannot undermine the place of simple faith in obtaining salvation, God expects every penitent sinner to be truly sorry and turn

away from their sins. David said, **“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin”** (Psalm 38:18). Paul also spoke of making the Corinthians sorry for their permissiveness (2 Corinthians 2:2; 7:8-10). Such godly sorrow leads to repentance: it cannot be separated from true penitence.

As a result of the sacrifices on the day of atonement, God forgave all the sins of the children of Israel. All their trespasses and shortcomings of the previous year were covered by the blood of atonement, and as such, they could start with God on a fresh note. To emphasise this idea of a new beginning for the people of God, the trumpet of jubilee was blown on the day of atonement. **“Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land”** (Leviticus 25:9). This is an indication that our liberty and release from the bondage of sin is a function of Christ’s atonement.

PERTINENT LESSONS FROM THE SERVICE OF ATONEMENT (Leviticus 16:21-34,8-10; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 53:6,12; Hebrews 10:1-14; 13:11-13)

The word ‘atonement’ appears once in the New Testament **“And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement”** (Romans 5:11). Atonement literally means a repair done in order to restore a damaged relationship. Man’s relationship with God was damaged when he fell into sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-24). God, at the incidence of this breach promised an atonement by Christ who He called “the seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15). The Old Testament institution of the day of atonement owes its origin as a temporary representation (type) of the promised atonement by Jesus Christ – the seed of the woman. In other words, atonement means reconciliation of God and mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For reconciliation or atonement and remission to be possible, God had to make a way of escape from sin by providing a Substitute. The Scripture

says, **“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission”** (Hebrews 9:22). The Old Testament day of atonement was only the shadow of the substantive atonement which became fulfilled in Christ.

We should note the following peculiarities of the day of atonement and their relevance to the believers in Christ. One, regardless of the day of the week it fell, the day of the atonement was to be a special Sabbath and solemn assembly (Leviticus 16:29-31). This was an early indication that God’s true Sabbath was not limited to a particular day but to the atonement of Christ.

Two, the offerings were peculiar. The ram that was slain represented Christ dying for our sins. The scapegoat represented Him bearing our sins without the camp outside the gate and removing them far from us (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 53:6,12). Sprinkling blood by the mercy seat typifies Jesus’ entry into heaven with His blood to atone for us, while burning the flesh of the sin offerings outside the gate symbolised Christ’s suffering without the gate so that we can be sanctified (Hebrews 13:11-13).

Three, the day of atonement was the only day in which the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies. This was an indication that the people under the Old Testament had limited access to God. Aaron was warned to **“come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not”** (Leviticus 16:2). But under the new covenant, Jesus has torn the veil that barred our access to God. Now we are commanded to draw near and come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Four, no one was permitted to be in the holy sanctuary while Aaron made atonement for it. This pointed to Christ who trod the winepress alone (Isaiah 63:3) and He is the only One qualified to make atonement for mankind. Five, on the day of atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies clad in special white linen garments rather than his normal high priest’s robes. The white robe symbolised the purity and absolute perfection of Jesus our great High Priest. The laying aside of Aaron’s

robe of honour and glory while making atonement also pointed to the self-emptying of Christ during His incarnation when He laid aside His glory in order to atone for our sins.

Six, the sacrifice on the day of atonement procured forgiveness and favour for the children of Israel. But this was only a shadow of the reality in Christ (Colossians 2:17). Jesus Christ has fulfilled all the details of what the day of atonement prefigured. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away their sin; it is only Christ's blood that can (Hebrews 10:4-7). In Christ, no animal is required, only faith in His finished work of redemption on the cross. Again, both the priest and the people had to offer sacrifices for their sins, but Christ needed no sacrifice to qualify Him; He came as the just, sinless and spotless Lamb of God. The utter insufficiency of the legal sacrifices on the Old Testament day of atonement is underlined in the Scripture: "**For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me**" (Hebrews 10:4,5). The life of a goat or a bull being so inferior to that of a man, could not pretend to be an equivalent, as to repair the damage done by the sin of man to God's honour. Whatever value they conferred to the people on that day of atonement was only in their typical reference to Christ. His sacrifice has procured for us both temporal and eternal blessings. In Him, we have redemption and forgiveness of sins, nearness and access to God, deliverance from the bondage of sin and Satan (Romans 5:1,2; 8:1,2; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:13,14). But just as the Israelites could enjoy the benefits of atonement only if they were penitent and humble, we also shall enjoy these benefits only if we repent of our sin, humble ourselves before the Lord and follow Him to the end. The atoning sacrifice of Christ at Calvary needs no yearly repetition. Christ need not "**...offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others... but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**"

(Hebrews 9:25,26).

Every believer now has boldness and unrestricted access to enter into the holiest – presence of God, at any time. **“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh”** (Hebrews 10:19,20). Let us take full advantage of what Christ has done for us. For any sincere seeker to enjoy the benefits of Christ’s atonement, he must come before God in humility, honesty and godly sorrow.

Questions for review:

1. Why was it necessary for God to institute the day of atonement in addition to the daily sacrifices?
2. Outline the procedure of the service of atonement.
3. What attitude characterised the children of Israel on the day of atonement and what does this teach sinners and backsliders today?
4. State the purpose of the atonement.
5. Point out the benefits believers enjoy as a result of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.
6. How can sinners benefit from the atonement of Christ?
7. What should be the response of believers to the finished atonement of Christ for their past forgiven sins?

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

A circular graphic with a double border. Inside, the word "Lesson" is written in a cursive font above the number "72" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
72

CLARIFICATION OF MORAL LAWS

MEMORY VERSE: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 18:5).

TEXT: Leviticus chapters 17 to 19

After spending more than four hundred years in Egypt, the children of Israel imbibed some of the immoral lifestyles and idolatrous practices from the Egyptians. This sinful acculturation continued to affect their relationship with God as they could not consistently obey Him. In the text, God drew their attention to the necessity of holiness in their walk with Him. He furnished them with a comprehensive catalogue of prohibitions, moral precepts and practical obligations aimed at making them a peculiar people, distinct from surrounding heathen nations.

Apart from the corrupting influences of a long sojourn in Egypt, in the present text, God responded by enacting laws that will regulate the lifestyle and systems of worship by His people. While He reiterated some precepts and commandments that had been given earlier, He also introduced new ones in the face of Israel’s present realities. Repetition and emphasis are common in the Scripture as necessary antidotes to man’s tendency to forget and slide from the right path (Philippians 3:1). Peter the apostle considers failure to reiterate essential, saving truths of the Scripture to the flock as spiritual negligence, which leaders must avoid (2 Peter 1:12).

LAWS REGARDING SPECIAL SACRIFICES (Leviticus 17:1-16; Numbers 15:30; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Leviticus 3:17; 7:26,27; Deuteronomy 12:16,23-25; Matthew 26:28; Romans 3:25; Ephesians 1:7)

When the children of Israel settled in the Promised Land, they became widely dispersed from their leadership and from one another. Some of them settled at a considerable distance from the tabernacle. The new situation brought with it the temptation to succumb to self-will and the corrupting influences of the inhabitants of Canaan who made sacrifices everywhere. It was to counter this danger and reinforce godly standards among the people that God sent the renewed moral laws through Moses. **“To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices, which they offer in the open field, even that they may bring them unto the LORD, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest, and offer them for peace offerings unto the LORD”** (Leviticus 17:5). The duty of making sacrifices was given to the priests.

Before this enactment, it had been a long-standing practice for householders to erect altars where they also played the role of the priest by offering sacrifices for themselves and for their families unto God. Noah, Abraham, Job, all erected altars and offered sacrifices unto God by themselves (Genesis 8:20; 15:10,11; Job 1:5). This liberty became a source of corruption in worship as individuals invented practices according to their various imaginations. Some Israelites learnt to sacrifice to devils like their Egyptian hosts. The law of sacrifice prohibits sacrificing to God in the open fields. It permitted both the Israelites and strangers in their midst to kill animals for sacrifice only on God’s altar in the tabernacle. The designation of the tabernacle at Shiloh and inauguration of the priesthood were complimentary to this law. It gave due solemnity to public worship in Israel. Disobedience to this law was punishable by death (Leviticus 17:4,9). Though the law was designed as a standard uniform practice of worship in Israel **“for ever... throughout their generations”**, it

was often breached by the people.

The New Testament underpinned by the perfect sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour brought an end to the Old Testament ceremonial laws, including that of animal sacrifices. The Scripture captures this beautifully: **“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure... Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second... every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”** (Hebrews 10:5-12). Christ’s death is the final and acceptable sacrifice for forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

The New Testament thus ushers in a new dispensation of the gospel of Christ and acceptable worship. Since Christ died for all people in the universe, God has also designed that worship should not be confined to a single place. Christ reveals this to the Samaritan woman. **“Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him”** (John 4:21,23). Today, holy hands may be lifted to God by the church everywhere (1 Timothy 2:8) and a sweet smelling fragrance of true and acceptable worship ascends to God in every place. Christ is our true tabernacle as well as our altar of sacrifice. Nevertheless, we are not to neglect the gathering of ourselves together in places of our public worship (Hebrews 10:24).

The law against the eating of blood was repeated here for emphasis and as a reminder, having been given earlier (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; Genesis 9:14). **“And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth**

any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people” (Leviticus 17:10). God considered the infringement of this law so serious that it carried capital punishment. This is because **“the life of the flesh is in the blood”**. God instructed that the blood of animals be poured out because **“...it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”** (verse 11). The prohibition was because: one, blood is the life of the animal and it belongs to God. Two, it is solely set aside for atonement. Three, idol worshippers were given to drinking or eating the blood of their sacrifices and God does not want His worship to have a semblance of idolatry. Four, He wants His people to have regard for life. Five, the blood of those sacrificial animals in the Old Testament foreshadowed the blood of Jesus Christ which should be shed to atone for the sins of mankind. It must therefore be held sacred.

Under the New Testament dispensation, sacrifice to God no longer entails slaughtering animals and sprinkling their blood. This is because, one, Jesus has accomplished on the cross at Calvary what those rituals in the Old Testament stood for. Our sacrifices are now of a spiritual nature (Hebrews 13:16; 1 Peter 2:5). We are to come with the spiritual sacrifices of faith, holiness, praise and service to God. We can also give our tithes and offerings as part of our sacrifice and worship to God. Two, children of God are no longer restricted to a specific location in offering spiritual sacrifices. Instead, we can now worship God everywhere (John 4:21-24; 1 Timothy 2:8). Three, Jesus is our Priest and sacrificial Lamb. We are therefore, commanded to offer sacrifices to God through Him (Hebrews 13:15). Four, the blood of Jesus has atoned for our sins. His blood is far better than the blood of bulls and goats in value and efficacy.

God still forbids eating of blood in the New Testament (Acts 15:20,29). Believers must be steadfast in the faith lest they be guilty of treading under or counting Christ's blood an unholy thing (Hebrews 10:28,29).

LAWS AGAINST IMMORAL RELATIONSHIPS (Leviticus 18:1-30; 11:44; Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Proverbs 4:14; Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 4:1-4; Hebrews 13:4; Deuteronomy 28:15; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 1 John 2:17)

In furtherance of His directives, God ordered the children of Israel not to emulate the immoral practice and lifestyle of the heathen nations among whom they dwelt. **“Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen...”** (Jeremiah 10:2). The believer is commanded to **“come out from among them** [the heathen] **and be ye separate”**, from their practices, customs and traditions (2 Corinthians 6:17; Romans 8:13). Two major areas where the Egyptians and Canaanites had negatively impacted on the children of Israel were the marriage relationship and profane worship. Usually idolatrous practices are steeped in immoral relationships and moral perversions. All kinds of sexual perversions typified their religious and social lives. They unashamedly practised incest, homosexuality (sodomy or lesbianism), bestiality and sacrificing their children to Molech. Our text includes a record of immoral relationships that God prohibited among His people. These include, one, incest which is any form of sexual relationship or marriage between close relations. Such will include marrying a parent, sibling, half brother or half sister, stepmother or father, grand children, aunt, uncle and in-law. Two, adultery which comprises any sexual relationship or marriage to another person’s spouse. Three, sexual relationship with a menstruating woman. This practice is said to be associated with some idolatrous rituals. Four, homosexuality which could either be sodomy (a man having sexual relations with another man) or lesbianism (a woman having sexual relationship with another woman). Five, bestiality – the practice of a human being having sexual relationship with an animal. This is utter confusion!

All these relationships and sexual perversions can undermine the institution of marriage and pose a challenge to God’s original plan for marriage. God’s

purpose is that husband and wife should be one flesh. But those who embrace homosexuality will have a hard time explaining how two sodomites or lesbians can become one flesh. The bestial person is even more absurd – a man or woman being one flesh with an animal. What an abomination!

God also prohibited the children of Israel from the familiar idolatrous practice of making their children to pass through the fire. The Scripture mentions the idol ‘Molech’ in connection with this practice. God recommended the death penalty for those who were involved in such evil practices.

God warned His people against breaking these laws by drawing their attention to the tragedy which befell the Canaanites. If they follow the wicked examples of the Canaanites whom God disinherited of their land and gave it to Israel, the same doom would befall them. He did not only caution against disobedience, He also promised eternal life to those who keep His commandments. He said, **“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”** (Leviticus 18:5). Obedience to God’s words is a prerequisite for blessing under both the Old and New Testaments.

LAWS REGULATING PERSONAL CONDUCT (Leviticus 19:1-37; 11:44,45; 20:7,26; 21:8; Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 6:14-16; Leviticus 22:19,29; 26:1; Exodus 20:3-5,8-17; 22:21; 23:32; Isaiah 8:19; 1 Timothy 4:1-4; 1 John 5:21; Leviticus 23:32; Exodus 23:11; Luke 12:33; Acts 4:34-37; James 5:4)

God commanded Moses to **“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy”** (Leviticus 19:2). None in this congregation is exempted from this divine directive. The reason for this command was because He is holy. Having created us in His image and likeness, He is greatly pleased and delighted to have us resemble Him in character, disposition and relationship. The timeless relevance of

this divine demand for holiness underpins its reiteration in the New Testament for all believers. **“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”** (1 Peter 1:15,16). Holiness or sanctification experience can be obtained by saved, consecrated, thirsty and faith-filled believers who pray to God for it. The holiness God demanded from them was not abstract; that was why He gave the details of what He expected them to do that will reflect His holiness.

God listed some commandments that His people must keep and these relate to their moral, social and religious lives. Some of the commands were intended to check human depravity and corruption while some others were to show the tenderness and care of God for His people, especially to those who are less privileged or handicapped. These include: one, command for filial reverence and sabbath observance; two, prohibition of idolatry, spiritism and occultism; three, law against coercion and self-will in religion; four, law against theft, fraud and lying; five, prohibition of rash vows, swearing and irreverence for God’s name; six, command to avoid talebearing and hatred; seven, religious laws of segregation and first fruits of trees; and eight, injustice in judgment and business.

Another area where God commanded that His people should be different has to do with the practice of mourning for the dead. Practices such as rounding the corner of the head, cutting corners of the beard, cuttings on the flesh for the dead and printing marks on the body were common practices of idolatrous nations. In our present day, we must shun related practices which people do for the sake of fashion. The craze for strange haircuts, tattoos on the body and the likes should be avoided totally and completely. Ceremonial rites that have idolatrous connections must be opposed and discarded particularly during marriage, naming and burial ceremonies.

God also forbade the practice of making daughters to become prostitutes. Parents must take heed not to initiate their daughters into prostitution either by

directly sponsoring them or through sheer inattention or carelessness. God also prohibits any actions that can hurt our neighbours such as talebearing, hatred, gossip and character assassination that can weaken the bond of love and unity and destroy the fellowship of believers.

For the welfare of the under-privileged, God put in place, the law of gleaning. An Israelite must not go over the field after harvest to gather the leftovers. Instead, the poor, the orphans, the strangers and the destitutes were allowed to collect those leftovers for their living. This law pointed out the duty of the rich towards the poor: that they should make conscious efforts and plans to assist those who are less privileged. The New Testament also enjoins believers to engage in good works and not to be unduly stingy or tight-fisted. The poor and the needy are however, not expected to be idle.

God forbids depriving a labourer of his lawful wages and taking advantage of the handicapped such as the blind, deaf and dumb. We must not curse or abuse the deaf, neither should we put a stumbling block before the blind nor lead them astray. Within the context of the New Testament, this implies we must not withhold the knowledge of the way of salvation from sinners by not preaching Christ to them. It also involves abstaining from anything that may make a believer to fall (Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8:9). The aged must be properly cared and strangers should not be oppressed, denied their rights or defrauded. As God's children, we should show forth His love and care for the well-being of others particularly those who are less-privileged and of the household of faith, while shunning corrupt and depraved inclinations.

No one is exempted from observing and obeying the moral laws of God. The natural man is graceless and cannot keep these commandments but thankfully, everyone can be empowered through salvation to keep them (Titus 2:11). When an individual is saved, such stands in a better position to continually receive grace from God to obey these laws and abide in Christ.

Questions for review:

1. How should spiritual leaders respond to the increasing moral and spiritual corruption these last days?
2. What is the importance of repetition and emphasis of certain laws in the Scriptures?
3. Highlight the law against indiscriminate sacrifice and the lessons from it.
4. Explain God's instruction concerning blood and how it applies to present-day believers.
5. Highlight the significance of the New Testament dispensation to the believer's calling.
6. Mention some improper relationships that God prohibits among His people and why.
7. Explain how God expects His people to be distinct in their lifestyle of holiness.

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

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

SECTION II

BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46,47).

TEXTS: Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53

The resurrection of Christ is one of the most significant events about His life on earth. Like His conception, it was unprecedented, supernatural and unique in all generations. Christianity was founded on the resurrection of Christ as it is one of the central truths of the gospel. It is the cornerstone of the gospel message and New Testament faith. Angels announced it; the Roman soldiers guarding His tomb acknowledged it; and multitudes of believers who saw Him before He ascended to heaven confirmed it. The resurrection of Christ guarantees victory over sin, Satan and death for those who are quickened by His life-giving Spirit (Romans 6:5-11; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

When Christ rose from the dead, He scheduled a meeting with His disciples at Galilee: “**Then said Jesus unto them... go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me**” (Matthew 28:10). While the disciples were still wondering about the authenticity of the news of His resurrection, the Lord met with them and gave them a charge which will bring about the continuation of the task that He came to accomplish on earth. This charge today is known as the great commission.

Believers have the infallible proofs of Christ’s bodily resurrection as a great bastion of hope and comfort.

This truth emboldens believers to go into all parts of the world, turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

PROPHECIES AND PROOFS OF CHRIST'S BODILY RESURRECTION (Matthew 28:1-12; Mark 16:1-14; Luke 24:1-48; Psalm 16:9,10; Matthew 16:21; Acts 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,20; Revelation 1:17,18)

The resurrection of Christ happened as it was foretold in the Scriptures. He re-echoed it to His disciples before it occurred. **"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). Like His resurrection, every aspect of His life – virgin birth, ministry, death and burial – was recorded by the prophets and every prediction and prophecy came to pass. The accurate fulfilment of the prophecies of His resurrection thus assures believers of the certainty of His second coming and their own resurrection. **"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept... But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming"** (1 Corinthians 15:20,23).

The proofs of Christ's resurrection abound in the Scriptures. There are also historical facts to support this claim. One, the angel declared unto Mary Magdalene and other women that came to the tomb to anoint Christ that **"... he is risen, he is not here: behold the place where they laid him"** (Mark 16:6). They were astonished at the sight of an empty tomb. Two, Peter and John ran to the tomb, and what they saw was the burial clothes, because Christ had risen in bodily form. **"And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself"** (John 20:7). Three, Jesus appeared unto several of His disciples after His resurrection (Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:13-31,36-51). Four, Christ showed them the evidence of His crucifixion: the nail marks in His hands and feet

that were pierced. **“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have”** (Luke 24:39). Five, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was a proof of the reality that Christ is risen from the dead and exalted at the right hand of God as He had promised and predicted (John 16:7). Six, the apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem without fear and those who opposed Christ could not refute it (Acts 5:27-33).

Seven, the willingness of Christ’s disciples to die for what they knew to be true. Stephen died by stoning (Acts 7:54), James the son of Zebedee died by the sword in the hands of Herod (Acts 12:2), and even Paul, an erstwhile persecutor of the Church, was killed on an account of his faith in Christ. Eight, the great number of believers in different generations who experienced the presence of Christ in their hearts since the resurrection is a reality that proves beyond any shadow of doubt that Christ rose from the dead. Nine, the observance of water baptism, the Lord’s Supper and Sunday Worship by the early Church and believers today affirmed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ordinance of water baptism is based on the truths of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week informed the choice of that day for worship (1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

After Christ rose from the dead, He showed Himself alive **“...by many infallible proofs, being seen of them [His followers] forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”** (Acts 1:3). Christ appeared to the following: one, Mary Magdalene out of whom He cast out seven demons (Mark 16:9; John 20:15,16); two, the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:9); three, two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:36-43); four, Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5); five, the ten disciples with the absence of Thomas (John 20:19); six, all the disciples including Thomas (John 20:26-31); seven, about seven disciples beside the sea of Galilee (John 21:1-25); eight, the twelve apostles including Matthias (1 Corinthians 15:5); nine, above

five hundred believers in Galilee (1 Corinthians 15:6); ten, James the Lord's brother (1 Corinthians 15:7); and eleven, Paul the apostle (1 Corinthians 15:8). These witnesses are enough to substantiate the fact that Christ rose from the dead.

Christ's resurrection from the dead as a fundamental truth of the gospel proves His divinity, the efficacy of His redemptive sacrifice, the infallibility of the Scriptures, the certainty of future judgment upon the wicked and the resurrection of all men (John 10:17,18; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:17; Psalm 16:10; Luke 24:44-47; Acts 17:30,31). Therefore, all believers shall also live with Him forever after their lives on earth.

PERJURY AND FALLACY OF THE ADVERSARIES AGAINST CHRIST'S RESURRECTION (Matthew 28:11-15; 26:56; 27:62-66; John 20:19; Romans 10:9; John 20:31)

The soldiers that were on guard at the tomb were eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection. They went to the chief priest in fear and confusion to announce that Jesus had risen. Instead of accepting it and repenting of their unbelief, the chief priest and the elders of the Jews decided to make them deny the truth of His resurrection. They summoned an assembly and decided to change the narrative. They refused to accept the fact that Christ had actually risen; and planned to keep others from believing in the resurrection. They bribed the soldiers with money, despite the fact that they saw the miracle and witnessed the power of His resurrection. They were told to lie that **"...His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept"** (Matthew 28:13). At the end, the truth was revealed and the resurrection of Christ is still believed by many today. The Jewish leaders thought that by bribing the soldiers to lie against the truth, they could overthrow the truth about Christ's resurrection. How could the disciples who fled during the arrest of Christ and were still hiding for fear of the Jews go to steal the body of Jesus from a tomb that was guarded by Roman soldiers (Matthew 26:56; John 20:19)? Many

people in the world today live in complete ignorance of the divine truth. Others willingly allowed themselves to be deceived by Satan that Christ did not die, not to talk of rising from the dead. The purpose here is to make the people reject Christ and God's offer of salvation. Scoffers may scorn, the ignorant may choose to remain in the dark, but the truth remains that Christ is risen from the dead and those who believe and confess this truth have everlasting life (Romans 10:9; John 20:31).

PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION THROUGH THE GREAT COMMISSION (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:49-53; 2 Timothy 4:12; Acts 5:29-32; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Christ's call to His disciples was to make them **"fishers of men"** (Matthew 4:19). But His arrest, crucifixion and death left them devastated and confused. However, the news of His resurrection terminated their fear and confusion; and brought on a resurgence of hope and excitement as they looked forward to meeting Him again at Galilee. **"Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me"** (Matthew 28:10). At that meeting, the risen Lord gave them a commission to go and preach the gospel to all people in all nations of the world. This parting charge of Christ before His ascension should be taken seriously by every believer.

The great commission is anchored on Christ's victory over sin, Satan and death. **"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"** (Matthew 28:18). This declaration of His authority and power underpins the commission for soul-winning and is an encouragement to believers to preach the gospel. The authority and might of the risen Christ usually accompanies the great commission. Empowered by Christ, the obedient believers need not fear forces of darkness as they preach the gospel to all categories of sinners including witches, wizards and occultic people. It was with this same power that Philip the evangelist brought Simon the sorcerer on his knees

in Samaria and liberated the people who were hitherto under his dominion. It is binding on all believers to accept the great commission and preach the gospel because we are saved to bring fellow humans to the liberating knowledge of Christ.

The mandate of the great commission is in four-fold. One, we are to **“Go”** and meet sinners where they are – at home, in their workplace, business centres, buses, trains, social media platforms, etc. None is exempted. Two, the charge is to **“preach”** the message of Christ’s love, sacrifice and resurrection for their salvation and bring them to obey Him. Three, we are to **“baptize”** those who believe as a public attestation and identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Four, we are to disciple them by **“teaching them all things”** He has **“commanded”**. This implies the integration of converts into the local Christian assembly for their continual exposure to the doctrines of Christ. Before His ascension, the Lord assures obedient believers, who preach the gospel, like His immediate disciples, of His abiding presence: **“...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”** (Matthew 28:20). This assurance guarantees our security, success and fruitfulness as we obey the great commission. While obedience brings blessing, disobedience displeases God and attracts His judgment (John 4:36; Ezekiel 3:17).

Our Lord’s resurrection is the basis for the great commission which is the assignment He has given to all believers to preach the gospel to every creature.

In conclusion, it is an indisputable fact and a compelling reality that Christ rose from the dead and is alive for ever as our Lord, Saviour, Deliverer, Sanctifier, Baptizer with the Holy Ghost and the coming King who will reign for ever. He is incomparably preeminent and superior to other founders of religion who died and never rose. The true believer’s faith, life, service and hope of resurrection to eternal joy and reward in heaven are anchored firmly on the resurrection of Christ.

Questions for review:

1. How does the resurrection of Christ confer uniqueness to the Christian faith?
2. Mention at least five proofs of Christ's bodily resurrection from the text.
3. Name three persons or group of persons who met and interacted with Christ after His resurrection.
4. Highlight the significance of Christ's resurrection as a fundamental truth of the gospel.
5. How does the evidence of Christ's resurrection and power of His name condemn sceptics?
6. Why is the great commission not optional for genuinely converted believers?
7. Mention the four-fold mandate of the great commission and its benefits.

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font above the number "74" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
74

CHRIST BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

MEMORY VERSE: “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14,15).

TEXT: Mark 1:1-45; 2:1-28

The writer of this gospel is “**John, whose surname was Mark**” or Marcus, son of Mary and cousin of Barnabas (Acts 12:12,25; Colossians 4:10). Though nothing is known about his father, his mother who resided in Jerusalem was a consecrated believer. It was in her house that the early Church held a prayer vigil that resulted in the release of Peter from prison. John was most probably converted in one of such meetings by Peter who calls him his “**son**” (1 Peter 5:13). As a growing believer, Paul and Barnabas considered him serviceable and allowed him to accompany them on their first missionary journey. He, however, turned back at Perga in Pamphylia for lack of preparedness and maturity to endure the hardship and hazards of missionary work (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Barnabas’ insistence that Mark should accompany them on the second missionary journey three years later to which Paul disagreed for being undependable brought a “**sharp contention**” between them and they parted (Acts 15:36-40).

Barnabas parted ways with Paul, took Mark with him to Cyprus and groomed him to spiritual stability and maturity. Christlike love prevailed at some point as both Mark and Paul reconciled and he was with the Apostle in his first imprisonment at Rome. As a remark of true

forgiveness of the past unfaithfulness, which was known to the Colossians, Paul had to instruct them to “**receive**” him as a true evangelist and ‘fellow labourer’ (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24). His instruction to Timothy later that: “**Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry**” (2 Timothy 4:11) reveals that both Luke and Mark who wrote two of the synoptic gospels were with Paul. After Paul’s death, Mark joined Peter in Babylon from whom he must have learnt so much of the firsthand account of the life and ministry of Christ that he wrote in his gospel (1 Peter 5:13). From the foregoing, believers must learn the importance of absolute surrender of life and resources for God’s use, spiritual tutelage, *agape* love that produce forgiveness and reconciliation from sanctified hearts and acknowledgment and affirmation of other believers’ usefulness.

The gospel according to Mark is primarily addressed to the Gentile Christians. Therefore, fewer references were made to the Old Testament prophecies. The book provides explanations of Jewish words and customs contained therein (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:1-4). It portrays Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, hence there is no account of His genealogy as we have it in the books of Matthew and Luke. It focuses on Christ’s threefold ministry of preaching, teaching and healing, which confirm the Saviour’s dominion over sin, sickness, demons and death. Our lesson illustrates Christ as our perfect Example in ministry and conduct in the face of opposition.

CHRIST’S PREPARATION FOR A FRUITFUL MINISTRY (Mark 1:1-13; Matthew 3:13,17; Luke 3:21; Matthew 28:18-20; Isaiah 40:29-31)

Mark opens this gospel with the revelation of Christ as the Son of God: “**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God**”. He anchors the subject matter of discourse on Scripture prophecies of Christ’s advent and that of His forerunner, John the Baptist. Concerning the ministry of the forerunner, Mark affirms that John was faithful and “**did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for**

the remission of sins... saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost" (verses 4,7,8).

The book proceeds to the preparation of Jesus Christ for His ministry. **"And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan"** (Mark 1:9). Christ's baptism was His first public appearance in about three decades. Before this time, He lived unnoticed and unknown but was manifested at God's appointed time. True children of God must learn from their Saviour to wait for God's will and time in all their actions and expectations.

Christ submitted Himself to John the Baptist for water baptism to fulfil all righteousness and as a model that all who genuinely repent of sin and believe the gospel should be baptized in water (Mark 16:15,16). As demonstrated by Jesus Christ, water baptism is by immersion in water once, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Every local church is expected to carry out this all-important ordinance on young converts as regularly as possible without any delay.

As soon as Jesus came out of the water, He received approval from God the Father by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him: **"And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"** (Mark 1:11). In spite of the open approval from heaven, Jesus Christ decided to engage in a forty-day fasting period in the wilderness by the leading of the Holy Spirit in preparation for His earthly ministry. Christ is our perfect Example and we learn from His preparation for ministry that, one, we must submit for water baptism as He did if we are genuinely converted. Two, Jesus waited upon His Father before His public ministry to be empowered. Thus, **"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him"** (Acts 10:38). Three, though our Lord was alone in the wilderness when the devil tempted Him, He did not sin, neither did He yield

to the temptations of the devil. He was conscious of the presence of the Father. He overcame the temptation and angels ministered to Him there. Engaging in fasting and prayer does not shield any believer from temptation but we are assured of victory the same way our Lord overcame, received strength and anointing for His ministry.

CHRIST'S POWER OVER SIN, SICKNESS AND DEMONS (Mark 1:14-45; Luke 24:46,47; Colossians 1:12,13; Philippians 2:9,10; Isaiah 53:4,5; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Matthew 7:7,8)

Jesus Christ started His earthly ministry in the city of Galilee after forty days of fasting. His message was **"...the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel"** (Mark 1:15). This is the pattern for all believers to follow. The message of repentance as a requirement for obtaining the forgiveness of God runs through the entire Scripture. Its indispensability made Christ to emphasise it even after His resurrection (Luke 24:46,47). Every evangelistic message should emphasise the following, one, repentance: this is the conscious turning away from sin and its deceitful pleasures to righteousness. Two, faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ: atonement is the appeasement of the offended God through the sacrifice and shedding of the blood of the ransoming Lamb, Jesus Christ, for sinful humanity to be reconciled to the Almighty. Three, the certainty of judgment on all unrepentant sinners: **"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"** (Hebrews 9:27).

At the outset of His ministry, Jesus Christ called the first set of His disciples (Peter, Andrew, John and James). He took them along to the city of Capernaum, a city on the seacoast of Galilee where He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath day with an unusual authority. There, He encountered a man with an unclean spirit that confessed His deity. **"And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And... he came out of him"** (Mark 1:25,26). Christ manifested His authority over the powers of darkness. He has also given believers authority over powers of darkness (Luke 10:19).

Demons tremble at the mention of the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:9,10).

Christ's authority over sickness was also demonstrated as He left the synagogue for the house of Simon Peter. There, He healed Simon's mother-in-law of a febrile illness and subsequently healed all that was brought to Him. **"And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils..."** (Mark 1:32-34).

Divine healing and health remains the covenant right of every child of God. It is a vital part of our full salvation in Christ (Matthew 15:26-28; Ephesians 2:12-21; 2 Peter 2:9,10). Sickness, in whatever form, is of the devil and he uses it to captivate and oppress people (Job 42:10; Luke 13:16,12; Acts 10:38). Jesus has conquered sin, Satan and disease on our behalf. He bore our infirmities, sicknesses and diseases so that we would claim and enjoy full release and deliverance. Disobedience to God's word, misuse of the tongue, unbelief and disobedience to the law of nature (inadequate rest, lack of exercise, poor hygiene among others) can make one not to enjoy the expected healing and health promised by God.

It is instructive to note the centrality of prayer in ministry as demonstrated by Christ. He did not skip prayer after a very busy outreach (Mark 1:35). Ministers must continue in prayers after every evangelistic outreach to avoid spiritual dryness. As no individual can continue to live without breathing, likewise no believer can remain spiritually alive without praying. It is important that believers and ministers maintain a vibrant devotional life if they are to remain spiritually fresh and strong.

The healing of the leper further lends credence to the omnipotence of Christ. Having healed a man of his leprosy, Jesus **"...saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them"** (Mark 1:44). This instruction was given in conformity to the law in the Old Testament on handling cases of leprosy

(Leviticus 13:37). Rather than obey Christ, the man went on to publish his testimony of divine healing everywhere. His disobedience affected Christ's outreach as He could no longer openly enter the city to continue His good works. Thus, He had to retire to desert places where only those who could come out of their places met Him. There were other instances where Jesus gave a similar instruction to recipients of divine touch and revelation not to tell anyone about their experiences (Matthew 17:9; Luke 8:54-56; John 12:10,11). At another instance when He cast out demons from the maniac of Gadara, He instructed "**Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee**" (Mark 5:19). The Lord knows where testimonies of His great work will endanger lives or hinder His ministry or advance it. We must learn to always obey the Lord whether we understand the rationale behind His demand or not.

CHRIST'S POSTURE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION (Mark 2:1-28; 1 Peter 2:21-23; John 8:48-49; Hebrews 12:3)

After the healing of the leper in Galilee, Christ went back to the city of Capernaum. His arrival was greatly publicised such that there was no adequate space for the people who gathered to hear Him and be ministered to. He "**preached the word unto them**". Every crowd-pulling minister should learn from Christ that the most important need of their lives is the word of God. Thronged by a huge crowd that made it difficult for anyone to get close to Jesus Christ for any personal attention, four men had to break the roof to let down a paralysed man to Christ's presence in the house. Jesus commended their faith and "**said unto the sick of the palsy, son, thy sins be forgiven thee**" (Mark 2:5). This pronouncement elicited accusation of blasphemy from the scribes who were ignorant about His deity. After revealing the discontent in their hearts concerning His authority to forgive sin, He healed the man to prove His deity to them. Thus, the man received double blessings of forgiveness and healing.

Jesus “**went forth again by the sea side**” and there He taught the multitude that followed Him. It was while passing by that He saw Levi “**at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him**”. Christ leveraged on the opportunity of a dinner organised by Levi (Matthew) whom He had just called to reach out to publicans and sinners. The scribes and Pharisees were again critical of His association with sinners. The Lord’s response here is instructive: “**When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**” (Mark 2:17). By this statement, Jesus Christ revealed that His primary goal in ministry was the salvation of sinners – rich or poor, educated or illiterate, religious or irreligious. This should be the priority of every believer regardless of any opposition.

A question was also posed to Him on why the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees fast and His disciples do not (Mark 2:18-20). He told them that His disciples were going to fast after His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven. Fasting is a scriptural, beneficial and spiritual exercise that can accomplish great things when done with prayer of faith. Christ taught His disciples the indispensability of fasting when they failed to cast an evil spirit from a child (Matthew 17:19-21). Both John and the Pharisees belonged to the Old Testament and there is no ground for comparison of the old with the new dispensation of grace which Christ’s ministry represents. So, “**No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse**” (Mark 2:21). This simply implies that the new doctrines do not match the old rites of the Pharisees.

In another encounter, the Pharisees accused the disciples of plucking ears of corn unlawfully on the Sabbath day. Jesus “**...said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath**”. Since the period of the resurrection of Christ, New Testament believers are not bound by the rite of Sabbath. The Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10) or first day of

the week has now replaced the Sabbath day (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). And it is lawful to do good works of love and mercy every day of the week.

In conclusion, believers learn obvious lessons from Christ's ministry, preaching and prayer life, and those who desire to succeed must follow His footprints.

Questions for review:

1. How can an immature and unfaithful believer become a great instrument in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ?
2. What do believers learn from Christ's submission for water baptism?
3. What was the major role of the Holy Spirit in Christ's earthly ministry?
4. How can sinners and backsliders benefit from the healing covenant?
5. How can believers maintain spiritual freshness?
6. List examples of good deeds permissible on the Lord's day.
7. What can present-day believers who desire to succeed in ministry learn from Christ's approach to His ministry?

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
75



**CHRIST ORDAINS
TWELVE DISCIPLES**

MEMORY VERSE: “And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14).

TEXT: Mark 3:1-35

Christ spent His lifetime ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of people. He taught all who came to Him liberating truths that gave both temporal comforts and spiritual hope. These good deeds of Christ met with opposition from leaders of the established religion of His day.

In the text, the Pharisees and the Herodians were piqued by His command to heal a man with a withered hand on a Sabbath day. His antagonists saw nothing wrong in their own conspiracy to kill the great Benefactor on a Sabbath. Such contradiction and unjustified fury of men, however, did not deter the Lord from His divinely-appointed mission. While taking steps for His own protection, He continued to preach the saving gospel and minister healing and deliverance to the oppressed. As effective as He was, He could not minister to people in different communities at the same time. For His redemptive work to reach more people in other communities, He ordained twelve disciples “**that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach**”.

CRUEL INSENSITIVITY OF HARDENED HEARTS (Mark 3:1-12; Psalm 7:11; Ephesians 4:26; Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 11:28)

The censorious and faultfinding attitude of the Pharisees manifested again in the text as Christ entered the synagogue and met a man with a withered hand. Rather than appreciate Him, **“they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him”** (Mark 3:2). They did not consider the physical, emotional and social plight of the paralysed fellow human. They were religious but pitiless. The Lord asked them a question that was designed to awaken their conscience to the unreasonableness of their legalistic rigidity and ignorance at the expense of human compassion and mercy. **“Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace”** (Mark 3:4). We must not, on account of sinners’ angry disposition and distracting argument, abandon them to their ultimate fate. The Lord here shows the example. His question to the Pharisees was so pointed and pertinent that they could give no answer, vis-à-vis their opposition to the healing of the man with a withered hand.

Christ demonstrated the practical application of the scriptural injunction to **“Be ye angry, and sin not...”** (Ephesians 4:26). Though angered by their pitiless disposition and grieved in His spirit by their hardness of heart, He went ahead to heal the man, saying: **“Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other”**.

Love is the reason for Sabbath, that is, physical, emotional and spiritual recuperation and vigour. Christians should be discerning to recognise similar traits of hardness of heart and address them while carrying out the great commission. Hardness of heart among the people we seek to evangelise should drive us to our knees and make us even more resourceful and passionate witnesses for Christ.

After restoring the withered hand, the Pharisees **“went**

forth... took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him” (Mark 3:6). Christ was proactive by withdrawing with His disciples to the seaside. The hostility of the Pharisees to Christ contrasted sharply with the enthusiastic reception accorded Him by ordinary people who had no reason to feel threatened by His doctrines. A large crowd followed Him to the sea shore from His home city of Galilee and other places: Judaea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, beyond Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. All who came to Christ with cases of ill-health, affliction and demonic oppression received their needed relief. Today, Christ is still calling out to the teeming population of spiritually dead and suffering humanity to: **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Everyone who responds will experience His compassion and power to save, heal and deliver. It is important also to learn crowd control techniques from the Lord’s instruction to His disciples. **“And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues”** (Mark 3:9,10). He ministered to the people from the ship and it was amazing that unclean spirits saw Him and **“fell down before him”** in acknowledgment of His deity as **“the Son of God”**. If demons know He is the Son of God, any mortal who rejects this truth is worthy of the severest divine judgment.

CALLING AND ORDINATION OF TWELVE DISCIPLES (Mark 3:13-21; Matthew 28:20; 1 John 3:8; John 14:12)

“And he goeth up into a mountain, and called unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils”
(Mark 3:13-15).

Christ preceded the selection of His disciples with intense prayer for which He always retired to the

seclusion of a mountain. He chose them to disciple, mentor, train and empower them to preach and do all He could.

Discipleship is a process. The first aim after selection is for them to be with Him as keen and constant learners of His doctrine and lifestyle. His design is to train them so they may train others. Also, He ordained them to be sent forth to preach. Furthermore, He empowers those He ordains with authority to heal the sick and cast out devils. For Christ, the sum total of the disciples' commission was the continuation of "**all things whatsoever I have commanded you**". This commission must necessarily include preaching, teaching and healing (Matthew 4:23; 9:35). When Christ commissioned the already-trained disciples, He added the promise: "**and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world**". Christ knew His immediate disciples who received this commission would not live unto the end of the world or reach the entire world in their lifetime. Thus, the commission transcends those pioneer disciples – Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot – to all believers today.

Becoming a disciple of Christ begins with answering Christ's call to salvation through faith in Him. A disciple, after being born again by faith in the vicarious death of Christ, must learn to be like the Master by being acquainted with His teachings. He or she must also possess Christlike compassion for the salvation of souls. A disciple's goal must be like the Lord in everything. As Christ said, "**It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord...**" (Matthew 10:25). In order to do this, believers must always abide in Christ through much praying, constant meditation and reflection on His word. We must accept the commission and seek the Lord to be empowered for fruitfulness in service. Interestingly, Christ has promised that: "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also... And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name**

shall they cast out devils..." (John 14:12; Mark 16:17). Conferment of this power of attorney on obedient, witnessing believers confirms the divinity of our Lord.

Returning from the mountain where He had gone to pray and ordain the disciples, Christ was met by a large crowd of needy people. Attending to them was so tasking that Christ and His disciples could not as much eat their necessary food. The level of zeal exerted in putting the needs of the suffering people above the basic need for food is considered insanity by some people who were watching Him closely. Today, such conclusions are often drawn when some devoted believers place service to the Lord above personal interests. But such discouraging comments did not affect the Lord's commitment to the great commission and should not affect ours as well.

CONTRADICTION AND BLASPHEMY OF HARDENED SCEPTICS (Mark 3:22-30; Ephesians 4:18; Luke 14:26; Matthew 10:37)

While the Galileans took Christ's selfless and compassion-driven concern for the people for insanity, the scribes from Jerusalem attributed His healing power to Beelzebub, the prince of devils. **"And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand"** (Mark 3:23-25). To insinuate that Christ had the prince of devils on His side in casting out every spirit was utterly ridiculous. God is not pleased when people disregard the truth in defence of their sin and unbelief. **"And for this cause [deliberate refusal to embrace the truth], God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie"** (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Christ's response to this blasphemous allegation of the scribes is instructive. He was calm in His effort to show them the error of their assertion. He did not hide His opposition to Satan and his cohorts. He came to save and deliver humanity from the bondage of sin and Satan. Many of these antagonists on His trail have also

heard the confession of demons inhabiting humans that Christ was **“the Holy One of God”** (Mark 1:24).

The Lord’s response shows that internal division in a kingdom or house will make it to collapse. He affirms that Satan cannot cast himself out or willingly self-destruct. He affirms His superior authority and power by which He binds the strong man (Satan) and spoils his house. He, however, gives a serious warning against ascribing the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Those who make such ascriptions cannot be saved because they stand against the remedy to their perdition – the new birth experience that is engineered by the same Holy Spirit. As Christ taught Nicodemus **“...Except a man be born of water [the word of God] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

CHRIST REDEFINES RELATIONSHIP (Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 7:3,6,10; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19,20)

“There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?” (Mark 3:31,33). Christ’s response to the attempt by His siblings to interrupt His preaching is highly instructive. First, He elevated doing the will of God above deference to natural relationship. Presented with the option to either continue His preaching or regard the presence of His mother and brethren, He preferred the former. This is in consonance with His teaching. **“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). He did not suggest that we should have bitter hatred in our hearts against any relative but we should prefer God in our expression of love. Consideration of family ties must never be allowed to sway us from the path of total obedience to the Lord. Second, it is clear from the text that Mary,

the mother of our Lord, had other sons after the birth of Christ contrary to the error concerning her perpetual virginity (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 7:3,6,10; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). Third, the passage shows that the cords that bind us to fellow Christians are stronger than those that bind us to our blood relations who are not born again. Fourth, the Lord placed the highest premium on doing the will of God always, and so should we as His disciples.

Questions for review:

1. What can we learn from Christ's persistence in preaching, teaching and healing in spite of opposition?
2. What does Christ's patient reasoning with the Pharisees teach us?
3. What should be a believer's response to a hardened heart?
4. How can a sinner become a disciple of Christ?
5. What can believers learn from Christ's approach to the commissioning of His disciples?
6. Mention some reasons people give for not receiving the gospel and explain how a believer can handle them.
7. Mention some important lessons from Christ's response to the attempt by His brethren in the flesh to interrupt His preaching.

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "76" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
76

PARABLES OF THE SEEDS

MEMORY VERSE: “And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables” (Mark 4:11).

TEXT: Mark 4:1-41

The title of this lesson is apt because three out of the four parables recorded in the text are about seeds and their growth. A parable is a short story that is used to teach some truth, religious principle or moral lesson. During Christ’s earthly ministry, multitudes always gather to hear His words, even though some of them were not sincere seekers of the truth. Some were mere curious listeners who, like the Athenians in Paul’s day, were only interested in hearing something new (Acts 17:21). Others were drawn by sheer crowd effect and had no definite purpose for being in the gathering (Acts 19:32); still, some came because of what to eat (John 6:26).

Among Christ’s audience, there were disciples who truly wanted to learn and obey the truth. To this small crowd, Jesus taught the principles of God’s kingdom in parables. He used simple stories to wrap up deep and profound truths which would be understood by those who sincerely sought after God. It is an irony that Jesus fetched His parables from the familiar background of His listeners but those who were insincere did not understand them.

The text records the parables of the sower, the seed and the soils (Mark 4:1-8,13-20); the lamp (Mark 4:21-25); the unnoticed growing seed (Mark 4:26-29); and the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32).

THE SOWER, THE SEED AND THE SOILS IN THE KINGDOM (Mark 4:1-25; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23; Luke 8:5-15; Ecclesiastes 11:6; Genesis 15:11; Hosea 10:12; Psalm 1:1-4; 92:13-15)

In the parable of the sower, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a farmer who sowed by scattering seeds on the farmland. The seeds fall on different portions of the field. The seeds sowed on the “**wayside**”, “**stony ground**” and among “**thorns**” were all unproductive. It was only the “**good ground**” that produced varying degrees of fruit. This parable teaches the necessity of hearing and understanding the word of God for a person to develop and bear fruit in God’s kingdom. Also, it shows the importance of continuing in the Word without getting entangled with the world, otherwise the tender life produced by the seed will be choked. Invariably then, it is not enough to hear the word of God or grow in Christ only for a while, God expects those who receive His word to bear fruit (Isaiah 5:1-7; Mark 11:13,14; Luke 3:8,9; 13:6-9; John 15:1,2).

Jesus interpreted the parable when the disciples asked Him. The sower represents the preacher, the seed is the word of God and the soils symbolise the different kinds of hearers. On the great field of the world, the word of God is dispersed to all. Christ Himself was sowing the seed of the Word when He went about teaching and preaching. Now, He sends all believers to sow or preach the Word in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:1,2; Ecclesiastes 11:4,6).

Christ reveals causes of fruitlessness of those who are exposed to the gospel. The “**way side**” hearers do not pay sufficient attention as they are distracted by the beehive of traffic and passers-by; among them are spiritual robbers whose main goal is to “**steal**”, kill and destroy the seed. They are casual, nonchalant listeners to the word of God. People who hear the word but do not understand have hearts like the wayside seed where the seed is exposed and easily snatched away by the devil. The second category are those whose hearts are hardened underneath though they present a good front. They receive the word with zeal and joy but at the slightest temptation, trial or persecution, they fall away

just because they are not deeply rooted and cannot endure any stress on account of their obedience to the Word. The third category are those whose hearts are likened to a thorny ground. The word they have received is on the verge of producing fruits but the cares of this world, desire for riches and lusts, acting as spiritual thorns, choke the word and make it fruitless.

From this parable, we can identify some factors that hinder growth and fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. First is a careless disposition to God's word. Anyone who fails to make necessary effort to hear, understand and practise the word of God will not grow or bear spiritual fruit. Second is the hardness of heart. The Bible teaches that the heart can be hardened through unbelief, repeated sinning, impenitence, pride, and deceitfulness of sin (Exodus 9:34; 2 Kings 17:14; Daniel 5:20; Mark 6:52; 8:17; 16:14; Acts 19:9; Romans 2:5; Hebrews 3:13). These hardeners will prevent a person from being deeply rooted in God. Third, worldly cares and encumbrances, worldliness and inordinate pursuit of riches can make a seemingly growing believer stifle the growth of the fruits of the Christian character (1 Timothy 6:9,10).

The word of God produces fruit only on a **“good ground”**. This represents a heart that seeks after God and from which all hardness and thorns have been removed. **“For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns”** (Jeremiah 4:3). People with the good hearts are earnest, honest, sincere and patient in their pursuit after God; they endure all circumstances and vagaries of life, weather conditions and eventually produce fruits of righteousness, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, soul-winning and effective service in God's kingdom. They progress from one level of fruitfulness to another as they continually experience spiritual pruning.

The truth of God's kingdom is precious and it is sought after only by those who know its value. Therefore, when Jesus spoke in parables, earnest seekers would probe deeper and endeavour to understand their meaning, whereas the insincere would simply remain

unperturbed in their ignorance.

From the eleventh and twelfth verses of the text, it would appear that Christ's parables are designed to keep some people from getting saved. But this is not so. So, the statement: **"lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them"** points out the consequence rather than the intention of Christ's parables. God is not willing that sinners should perish but that all men come to repentance (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). What is expressed here is that those who fail to seek the meaning of Christ's teaching would remain ignorant, unconvinced, unrepentant and unsaved.

The Lord made it plain that the gospel is universal in scope and no one should be deprived of its benefits. He indicated that as the gospel might be compared to seed, so is a candle or lamp designed to give light to all men. The word of God is meant to be shared with everyone. It must not be kept in the secret but published everywhere so that everyone could partake of its blessings (Mark 4:21,22; Matthew 5:15; Luke 11:33). The Psalmist describes it this way: **"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"** (Psalm 119:105). However, some people fail to see the gospel light (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). And when that blindness departs and people hear and receive the gospel, the god of this world makes frantic efforts to steal the word from them.

SILENT GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEED (Mark 4:26-34; John 6:63; 15:1-5; 1 Corinthians 3:4-7; Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; Job 8:7)

Jesus used two other parables to illustrate growth and development in the kingdom. The parable of the seed growing secretly is peculiar to Mark's gospel. **"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come"** (Mark 4:26-29).

This parable teaches that the growth of God's kingdom is like a seed planted, but growing without human aid. As the seed has the power of new life in it, so is the word of God. The Word has the power to produce a new life in those who receive it. Jesus said: **"...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"** (John 6:63). Here, the emphasis is on the potency of the seed and its ability to reproduce in a way man cannot explain. However, this is not intended to discourage human effort in spiritual harvest; but to show the balance of human-divine partnership involved in spiritual growth and fruit-bearing. Whereas, the parable of the sower emphasises the duty of man in achieving spiritual harvest, the seed growing secretly points out God's power in producing it. The sower may sow the seed and another may water it but the increase comes from God. Apostle Paul made this clear to the Corinthian church. **"For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase"** (1 Corinthians 3:4-7).

Again, the Lord compares the kingdom of God to **"a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it"** (Mark 4:31,32).

The parable of the mustard seed foretells the expansion of the kingdom as seen in the remarkable growth of the church. It contrasts the small and insignificant beginning of the church with its phenomenal growth to the extent it becomes a place of refuge to many. In this parable, Jesus indicated that the work of God's grace often proceed from small beginnings (Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 19:20; Revelation 11:15). Therefore, believers should not despise the day of small beginnings but we must rely

on the promises of God that: **“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation... though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase”** (Isaiah 60:22; Job 8:7).

“And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it” (Mark 4:33). Preachers of the gospel should learn from Christ to use words and illustrations that are easy to understand in their messages. They should do audience analysis to know what their audience will understand and digest easily.

STORM AT SEA CALMED BY CHRIST (Mark 4:35-41; Matthew 8:22-27; Luke 8:23-25; Psalms 89:6-9; 107:23-31)

After dismissing the multitude, Jesus and His disciples crossed the sea of Galilee or lake of Gennesaret in a boat. While on their journey, a life-threatening tempest arose. Meanwhile, Jesus slept at the backside of the boat and the disciples had to wake Him when they could not deal with the situation any longer. Jesus arose and simply rebuked the raging storm and there was a great calm. Afterwards, He reprimanded the disciples for their lack of faith. How could they ever imagine that the storm would sink the ship with their Lord and Master in the boat with them.

This striking miracle throws up a number of lessons for believers. One, it confirms the humanity of Jesus Christ. He had been preaching all day; weary and tired, so He slept. Two, it demonstrates His power over nature and proves His divinity. Three, implicit obedience to Christ's command or even His presence with us, does not preclude a storm arising in the journey of life. That we are following the Lord will not guarantee a smooth sail all the time. Four, there is a common temptation to doubt the Lord's care whenever we face danger or difficulties. This temptation is stronger when our prayers are not answered and Christ seems asleep or unconcerned about the storm in our marriage, finances, health or spiritual life. But, remembering His faithfulness in the past and His promises concerning our future, we ought not to doubt His love and care.

This teaches us that with Christ's abiding presence, no storm of life can sink the boat of our life. Five, the other little ships on the sea with Jesus also benefited from the miracle. Six, in the journey of life, we must ensure Christ is present with us. Otherwise, when storms arise, there will be none to deliver.

Questions for review:

1. Why did Jesus speak in parables?
2. What can a believer learn from Christ's explanation on the parable of the sower?
3. What factors can hinder growth and fruitfulness in the kingdom of God?
4. Point out the major instructions from the parable of the seed growing secretly.
5. What should a gospel minister learn from Jesus' ministry?
6. How does the stilling of the storm manifest the dual nature of Christ?
7. What can believers learn from the miracle of the stilling of the storm?

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

77

CHRIST'S POWER OVER DEMONS, DISEASES AND DEATH

MEMORY VERSE: "Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him" (Luke 8:39).

TEXT: Mark 5:1-43; Luke 8:26-56

This study focuses on the demonstration of Christ's power over demons, diseases and death. In the previous chapter, Jesus demonstrated His authority over the elements of nature by stilling the tempest at sea (Mark 4:35-41).

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the entire human race has been grappling with the contrary forces of nature, supernatural attacks of evil spirits, diseases and death. Even with advancements in science and technology, man still faces certain critical conditions that defy scientific explanation or medical solution. Such cases, often described as incurable or impossible, are described in our text. In each of these cases, however, Jesus proved that He alone has the solution to all of man's problems: He delivered the demoniac, healed the woman with issue of blood and raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. This cluster of miracles confirms that Jesus is the Messiah and demands that men put their faith in Him as Saviour and Lord. The way they received divine mercy and intervention presents lessons on how we can experience the unchanging power of the immutable Christ (Hebrews 13:8).

CHRIST'S POWER OVER DEMONS (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39; Mark 1:23-27; Matthew 15:21-28; 17:14-18; Luke 4:41)

“And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit” (Mark 5:2). Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee into the region of Gadara, which was largely a Gentile territory. The case of the man was so pathetic. It illustrates the devastation and havoc Satan wreaks wherever he operates. Demons had taken possession of the man's personality, voice, reasoning and will. He lost his sanity and dignity that he remained naked, separated from society and lived in the cemetery. He was violent, incoherent in speech, always yelling and mutilating himself. **“And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones”**. The evil spirits gave him unusual strength to break fetters or chains that were used to keep him in check.

Jesus cast out all the evil spirits that dominated him with authority by saying, **“Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit”**. His reasoning returned to normalcy, he dressed up properly and made a voluntary decision to follow Jesus. Without Jesus, this pitiable condition of the demoniac would have continued until his death. It was with a grateful heart that the man **“...prayed [Christ] that he might be with him”** as there was no other one who could preserve his life from further infiltration than the One who delivered him.

The Lord declined his request to be with Him **“...but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee”**. He obeyed and testified publicly in Decapolis to the great compassion and power of Jesus. It is obvious that God who created human life can dispossess Satan and empower a once possessed man to be a useful instrument of His grace and a preacher of the gospel. The case of Mary Magdalene is similar to this (Luke 8:2,3). When cast out, the demons that came out of him wasted a whole herd of swine.

The case of this demoniac throws some light on the

nature of demons and their activities. First, demons inhabit in humans and other creatures to carry out the threefold purpose of Satan to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Second, demons recognise Jesus and they tremble before Him (Mark 5:6,7; 1:34; Acts 19:15; James 2:19). Third, they know their doom is certain, yet remain deviant and unrelenting in evil (Mark 5:7,12,13; 1:24; Matthew 8:29). Fourth, evil spirits can talk using the voice of their victim. It is interesting to know that Jesus never engaged them in prolonged conversations. He simply cast them out. Believers must be careful not to be deceived or misled by the so-called confessions of demons. Fifth, demons enslave, defile, torment, deceive, harass, control, oppress, seduce and destroy their victim. Sixth, they give unusual strength, knowledge or other abilities to a person they possess so as to accomplish their evil purpose (Mark 5:3,4; Exodus 7:22; 8:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:11-15). Seventh, demons prefer to dwell in locations where there is disobedience to God's word (Mark 5:10-12; Deuteronomy 14:8). As a matter of fact, sinners and backsliders are under the influence of Satan who empowers them to reject and resist God's word, will and way.

Eighth, Jesus is sovereign over demons and they obey His commands always. Demons bow before Jesus; they dread His torment and are cast out at His word. Jesus has conferred the same power upon those who believe in His name (Mark 16:17; Luke 9:1,2; 10:19). Believers in Christ need not fear demons nor submit to their harassment, lies or enticement. By virtue of Christ's victory over Satan and his demons, children of God are free from demonic control.

The Gadarenes reacted in a strange way to this miracle of deliverance. Having received the report of how the evil spirits were cast out, they came out *en masse* and saw the demonic man truly delivered and was sitting at the feet of Jesus. Rather than bring all their sick folks to Jesus for healing, they requested that He should leave their coast, perhaps to avoid further economic loss. They were ignorant of the fact that the "**Legion**" of spirits (between 3,000 to 6,000) did not want to leave their

country. The legion “**besought him [Christ] much that he would not send them away out of the country**”.

The reason for this was that they wanted to continue their evil works of stealing, killing and destroying people’s lives and destinies. Unfortunately, their pigs that were destroyed by the demons were of more value than human lives to them. This attitude of misplaced priorities is seen in many people today. A lot of people reject or forsake Jesus because of their love for riches while they fail to realise that their souls are worth more than any material possession on earth (Mark 8:36).

In contrast, the demoniac who was delivered chose to go with Jesus. He went to proclaim the goodness of God in the entire region of Decapolis. Like he did, Christ has sent us and expects that we continue to share His great compassion and power with our families, friends, neighbours and communities.

CHRIST’S POWER OVER DISEASES (Mark 5:21-34; Luke 8:40-48; Matthew 8:1-15; Mark 2:1-12)

By the time Jesus returned from the region of the Gadarenes, many people were already waiting for Him. Among them was a ruler of the synagogue, named Jairus, who pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter. While going to Jairus’ house, a woman who had suffered issue of blood for twelve years came in the crowd, touched His garment and was healed. Here again, we see a critical ill-health condition that had defied medical solution and drained the finances of the woman and her family (Mark 5:26). In addition, the religious and social stigma attached to her condition aggravated her agony.

According to Judaism, a woman who had issue of blood was considered unclean and should be isolated. Anyone or anything she touched also became unclean. Consequently, her husband, relatives and friends would avoid her so that they would not be defiled (Leviticus 15:25-27). For twelve years, she was barred from enjoying social company and disallowed from joining the temple worship. Apparently, all the odds were against her and she could have given up all attempts to

get healed, especially as the path to getting miraculous healing from Jesus seemed blocked by virtue of the law that quarantined her and the mammoth crowd encircling the Healer. But the woman believed she would be healed if only she could take the risk of touching the dress of Jesus without Him or anyone knowing. Her faith was unstoppable. Rather than giving up, she went through the crowd *incognito* and touched the garment of Jesus. **“And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague”**. Jesus also perceived that healing virtue had gone forth from Him.

It takes faith to overcome the barriers and human traditions that could hinder one from reaching out to Jesus for help. This woman as well as Jairus who was an official of the Jewish synagogue, could have kept away from Christ and forfeited His intervention in their cases. Coming to Jesus, Jairus risked his job and social status; he might also be excommunicated because the Jewish leaders had agreed not to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (John 9:22). But Jairus came by faith because he needed help desperately and only Jesus could solve his problem. Desperate people always defy religious, cultural, social, legal, official, etc. sentiment, to seek and receive salvation, healing and deliverance from Jesus.

When Christ enquired: **“Who touched my clothes?”**, the disciples were surprised because of the crowd that thronged Him. At first, the woman feared and trembled to admit that she had touched Jesus. She was afraid of the reaction of both the crowd and Jesus to being touched by a woman who was ceremonially unclean. On realising that she could not hide from Christ, she came forward, fell down in worship and told Him all the truth. Jesus called her **“And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague”** (Mark 5:34). Jesus honoured the faith of that woman and still granted her healing and deliverance by faith. A songwriter aptly captures it:

*He healed them all – the blind, the lame, the palsied,
The sick in body and the weak in mind,
Whoever came, no matter how afflicted,*

*Were sure a sovereign remedy to find.
His word gave health, His touch restored the vigour,
To every weary pain-exhausted frame;
And all He asked before He gave the blessing
Was simple faith in Him from those who came.*

Jesus is our Healer. He loves all and seeks to save, heal and deliver everyone who trusts in His mercy and faithfulness.

CHRIST'S POWER OVER DEATH (Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56; 7:11-15; Matthew 9:18-26; John 11:1-44)

While Jesus attended to the woman who had the issue of blood, messengers came to inform Jairus that his daughter had died. They said that there was no need to bother the Lord any more. However, Jesus encouraged him, **“Be not afraid, only believe”**. At that point, Jesus left the crowd and went to Jairus’ house with Peter, James and John where relatives and others were weeping. Jesus told them the girl was not dead but only asleep. With Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, raising the dead is as simple as waking someone from natural sleep (Mark 5:39; Matthew 9:24; Luke 8:52; John 11:11-13,25; Acts 7:60; 1 Corinthians 15:51). Ignorance of mortals made them laugh at the immortal Son of God when He spoke about divine omnipotence. They did **“err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God”** (Matthew 22:29). Unbelief scorns, limits and hinders but faith believes and receives miracles from God.

Jesus asked the people to vacate the room and allowed only the parents of the girl and His three disciples into the room. **“And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise”** (Mark 5:41). Immediately, she rose and walked. Those present were surprised at the miracle. Christ instructed them to keep the event secret because religious fanatics might seek to harm her in their attempt to prevent people from believing in Jesus. Recall that such murderous decision was taken against Lazarus whose testimony of being raised to life made many people to believe in Jesus (John 12:10,11).

Jesus simply commanded the dead to rise because

He has power in Himself. All others who raised the dead had to pray to God because they were operating on delegated authority. There are two other records in the gospels about Jesus raising the dead: a widow's son and Lazarus (Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44). In each case, Jesus proved His mastery over the power of death regardless of the state of the corpse.

The raising of the dead by Christ foreshadows the future resurrection of believers who sleep in Him. At rapture, the power of death over God's people will be eternally broken and its sting neutralised. In the meantime, everyone should prepare to partake in the future resurrection by repenting of their sins and living righteously before God.

Questions for review:

1. What is the significance of Christ's authority over demons, diseases and death?
2. In what ways did Christ manifest His power over demons in our text?
3. Explain why the woman with the issue of blood decided to touch Jesus' clothes.
4. What does faith in God teach about the woman with the issue of blood?
5. What is the significance of Jesus raising the dead?
6. Is it possible for believers to demonstrate power over demons, diseases and death today?
7. What does the raising of the dead by Jesus foreshadow?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "78" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
78

A grayscale background image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

**CHRIST REJECTED
IN HIS OWN
COUNTRY**

MEMORY VERSE: “And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching” (Mark 6:5,6).

TEXT: Mark 6:1-56

In the earnest pursuit of His threefold ministry of preaching, teaching and healing, Christ came to His home city after raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead. Contrary to the heroic reception He enjoyed in other places, His own people at Nazareth treated Him with contempt because they knew His lowly origin. Consequently, they could not experience many miracles that Jesus would have done among them. Undeterred by the contempt and rejection, Jesus empowered and commissioned His twelve disciples to preach the gospel in the neighbouring towns and villages. They returned with good reports of their outreach.

Christ cared for the spiritual as well as the physical needs of His hearers: He fed the multitude that came to hear His message and healed many that were sick. Unlike in His own city, He was warmly received by the inhabitants of Gennesaret. The rejection of Jesus by His own kinsmen and acceptance by others illustrate the general attitude of mankind. **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”** (John 1:11,12).

THE MISTAKE OF CHRIST'S KINSMEN CONCERNING HIS REAL IDENTITY (Mark 6:1-6; 5:22-24,35-43; Matthew 13:53-58; Luke 2:39; 4:16; John 4:44; 6:42; 7:5,14,15)

“And he went out from thence, and came into his own country...” (Mark 6:1). Having preached in other places, Christ returned home so He could be a blessing to His own relatives and **“his disciples followed him...”** wherever He led them. This portrayed their humility, submissiveness and total identification with His mission and ministry.

Back in Nazareth after a long time, Christ taught in their synagogue on the Sabbath day. As usual, His teaching was with wisdom and demonstration of power. One would have expected the people to celebrate their own but they rejected Him with cynicism and contempt. They despised Him because of His lowly origin and the fact that He was not taught in any known rabbinical school. They derided and berated His personality using such demeaning remarks as: **“...From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him”** (Mark 6:2,3). Obviously, these disparaging expressions and mentioning of His siblings were to debunk any claim that He is the Messiah or the Son of God. The people at Nazareth were ignorant of the deity of Jesus and their familiarity with Him resulted in contempt and unbelief. They even became offended at His teachings and ministrations. Consequently, **“he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them”** (verse 5).

Considering the reaction of the people of Nazareth to Jesus, we are warned of the danger of undue familiarity with God, His message and His appointed ministers. If we have a wrong attitude towards God's servants, we cannot derive maximum benefit from their ministry. This

is to be expected because faith cannot thrive in an atmosphere that is filled with resentment and prejudice. Relations and contemporaries of God's anointed servants should be watchful in this regard.

Learning from Christ's example, believers should make efforts to reach their relatives and close associates with the gospel; but they must not be discouraged whenever such attempts are rebuffed. Truly, **"A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house"** (Mark 6:4). Even when they despised Him, He still **"went round about the villages, teaching"**. If some will not receive our message, we should reach out to other fields where the people are yearning for the gospel and its benefits.

THE MANDATE TO PREACH THE GOSPEL AND HEROD'S MURDER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Mark 6:7-32; 16:15-20; Matthew 10:1-42; 28:18-20; Luke 9:1-9)

"And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits" (Mark 6:7). Christ paired the disciples as He sent them out to preach the gospel. This practice is in consonance with the scriptural requirement of two witnesses for establishing the truth, which the early Church also adopted (2 Corinthians 13:1; Acts 12:25; 13:2; 15:39,40). This principle of pairing converted believers is still useful and effective today as when it was first introduced by the Lord. It ensures companionship, provides mutual support and creates a sense of security (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

In carrying out this assignment, Christ knew that they would come across ill-health that human ingenuity and knowledge cannot cure and that they would face opposition from demons and their human agents. Thus, the Lord gave them power over demons and diseases. And concerning their physical welfare, He commanded them to take only the minimum provision for their journey. In a nutshell, their mission would not allow a materialistic attitude and the tendency to go from house

to house looking for where provisions are more abundant. We learn from this instruction to avoid encumbrances as pilgrims and strangers on earth and to trust God for supply of all our needs on the mission field (Hebrews 13:5,6). On their part, those who receive the gospel should support the preachers with their material resources (Galatians 6:6; Matthew 10:10; 1 Timothy 5:17,18).

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:12,13). The message of repentance from sin and faith in Christ’s sacrifice for salvation is the central theme of the gospel to be proclaimed by New Testament preachers (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; Revelation 2:4,5; 3:3). They cast out many devils and healed many that were sick. Like them, Christians who obey the great commission to preach the gospel to every creature will experience divine confirmation of their message with miracles, signs and wonders.

The mission of the twelve produced a ripple effect in the ministry of Jesus and His fame spread all over. Herod Antipas, hearing about Jesus, thought He was John the Baptist who had incarnated. It could be recalled that Herod was glad to hear John’s message as long as it did not indict him. His conscience troubled him because of his cruel treatment of John who had rebuked him over his incestuous marriage to Herodias, wife of his half-brother Phillip (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). He was convinced about John’s innocence. **“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly”** (Mark 6:20). Rather than repent, the couple took offence and imprisoned him. Herod and his guests were pleased with the daughter of Herodias for dancing so well during his birthday ceremony. There, Herod made a reckless promise to give the young girl anything she requested. Prompted by her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist in a charger. The king sent executioners to murder John in the prison and bring his head for the

dancer and her mother, after which John's disciples buried him. Herod was guilty of killing God's anointed prophet because he chose to save his face and fulfil a thoughtless promise. He had opportunity to repent and correct his life but he vacillated until it was too late. There are striking lessons here for us. One, we should avoid getting angry at God's servants whenever they rebuke us for wrongdoing. Open rebuke is better than secret love. Two, repent of sin before it multiplies and leads to greater evil. Herod proceeded from divorcing his wife to an incestuous marriage and capped it with murder. Three, preachers should be bold and unequivocal in declaring the word of God to all.

“And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:30,31). Feedback or reporting is an inseparable part of our ministerial assignment. Done with a humble heart, accountability facilitates church planning and growth while it forestalls waste of resources.

After giving their report, Jesus assessed their strength and saw that there was need for them to rest awhile for physical and spiritual renewal. The work-rest cycle was given by God who rested after His work of creation on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2,3; Mark 4:38). Endless labour without adequate rest is counterproductive and often results in burnout. However, we should not misconstrue rest for self-indulgence or laziness. As such, we must strike a balance between work and rest.

MIRACLES OF FEEDING MULTITUDES AND WALKING ON THE SEA BY CHRIST (Mark 6:33-56; Matthew 14:15-31; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-21)

While the disciples boarded a ship with the Lord to a desert place to rest, **“many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out,**

saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:33,34). Christ and the apostles demonstrated how to maintain a balance between ministry and rest. They came out of their retreat to attend to the multitude of people who converged for the teaching at the new location. His concern and compassion for the hurting and hungry made Him ready to help at all times. Out of compassion, He taught them many things, fed them and healed their sick ones. Preachers who see multitudes as a means of raising money are not Christlike. Those who are indwelt by Christ will show compassion by feeding the people with His word and caring for their physical needs instead of making merchandise of perishing souls (Philippians 2:5).

The apostles suggested that Jesus should dismiss the multitude when it was dusk. Their concern was how to feed the people, since they were in a desert area with little or no food for them. **“He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat”** (Mark 6:37). Christ was ever ready to meet the needs of those who hunger and thirst after His word. Telling the disciples to feed the multitude when they had no visible resources was to develop their faith in God’s ability to meet all their needs in every situation.

“He saith unto them, how many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes (Mark 6:38). Jesus commanded the disciples to organise the multitude in batches for easy access and management. Then, He blessed the five loaves and two fishes, shared them to the disciples, who divided them to feed the multitude until everyone was satisfied. About five thousand men ate and there were twelve baskets filled with leftovers. From this, we learn not to belittle our gifts and talents in the service of God. Little is much if it is surrendered to God for His use. The miracle inspires and reassures us that the Lord knows all our needs and we should avoid fear and anxiety. Gathering of the remnants shows prudence and distaste for waste of His benevolence.

After feeding the multitude, Christ instructed His disciples to cross to Bethsaida by ship while He dismissed the crowd. Afterwards, He went to a mountain to pray. This proves that regular personal retreat is an inevitable antidote to spiritual dryness and instability (Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; Matthew 26:36,39,41,42; Luke 22:39-46). While the apostles were at sea, Jesus saw them rowing hard against the wind while He was walking towards them on the water. Aside the storm that troubled them, they were also sore afraid that the approaching figure was a ghost. Then Jesus spoke, **“Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid”** (Mark 6:50). He calmed both their fear and the storm. This miracle demonstrates Christ’s omnipotence and authority over nature. It also exposes the fear and superstition of His disciples.

On reaching the land of Gennesaret by ship, the people received Christ with much enthusiasm. They expressed their faith in Him by bringing their sick folks for healing. **“And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole”** (Mark 6:56).

Jesus still saves and heals because He is always the same. He has empowered His servants to preach the gospel, heal the sick and deliver the oppressed as He did during His earthly ministry (Acts 10:38; Hebrews 13:8). Sinners should therefore repent and receive Him as their only Saviour, while believers should be unrelenting in perpetuating Christ’s ministry on earth through commitment to soul-winning.

Questions for review:

1. Why was Jesus rejected in Nazareth and what was the implication?
2. How can believers avoid undue familiarity with God, His word and servants?
3. From Jesus’ instruction to His disciples to go out and preach, why is it wrong to commercialise the gospel?
4. What should be our attitude when we are despised while preaching the gospel?

5. What can we learn from the principle of pairing as demonstrated by Christ?
6. What should be the central theme of our gospel message?
7. What do believers learn from the way Jesus demonstrated His compassion for the people?

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

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SECTION III
BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Leviticus 20:26).

TEXT: Leviticus chapters 20 to 22

God is holy and desires that His people be holy. He does not leave them in doubt of the details of the standard lifestyle He expects of them. In the text, He prescribes the relationships He expects among the children of Israel and constantly warns them against imbibing the evil practices of the Canaanites. The higher standard of physical, social and moral perfection for the priesthood is also highlighted. So, a high standard of purity is demanded from everyone, both the ordinary Israelite and the priests. God’s laws prescribe severe punishments for those who indulge in idolatry, spiritism and unlawful sexual relations. Aside punishment for individual deviants, the entire nation risked being disinherited of the Promised Land if they lived like the Canaanites or adopt their ungodly customs. Considering the variety of things that could render a person liable to divine judgment or disqualify him from ministry, there is no room for profanity and uncleanness in our walk with God.

PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING GOD’S COMMAND
(Leviticus 20:1-27; 11:44; 18:4,5; Deuteronomy 13:10,11; 17:2-5; 22:22-24; 23:17; 2 Samuel 12:5-13; Matthew 5:19; 15:4; Mark 7:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7)

God calls His people to abstain from the religious

practices of the heathen and to maintain sexual purity. He highlighted some specific heathen practices the children of Israel must avoid and stipulated capital punishment for those who disobey by engaging in false worship, idolatry, occultism, adultery, incest, sodomy and bestiality. He warned that if the people failed to execute the culprits, He would do it Himself and judge those who aid and abet sin. This is a great warning to believers not to commit sin or cover up those who live in sin.

The Canaanites practised human sacrifice and spiritism as part of their religion, so the Israelites needed to be warned against the adoption of such wicked and abominable practices. In modern times, people get involved in spiritism out of ignorance, sheer curiosity or desperation. Some are interested in knowing what the future holds; others seek information about missing items or concerning the dead. There are others who seek guidance, favour, healing, protection and power from evil sources through the use of talisman, palmistry, crystal ball, star gazing, clairvoyance, Ouija board, water divining, magic, Aquarian gospel, charms, amulets, fortune telling, horoscope, tarot cards, seances, astral projection, witchcraft, spell casting, extra sensory perception and superstition. All these are prohibited by God in His word (Leviticus 19:31; 20:2-6,26,27; Deuteronomy 18:9-12). Those who get involved in them must repent or they would be cut off from God forever (1 Chronicles 10:13,14). As believers, we must avoid these practices because they open the door of our lives to Satan. They violate God's command and ascribe His glory to other gods.

The call of believers to holiness is based on the revelation of God's holy nature. He is holy and His children must be holy. The Fall brought Satan's unholy nature into man. However, God, in His mercy, gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a remedy for sin inherited and committed. While repentance and faith in Christ are the conditions for pardon for sin committed, the believer needs the second work of grace, subsequent to salvation, to be free from the adamic

nature of inbred sin. This is called sanctification or heart circumcision.

The believer who seeks to be sanctified must consecrate or set himself apart unto God. If there is any known impurity in his life, he must cleanse himself from them (2 Corinthians 7:1; Leviticus 27:14,16; Numbers 8:17; 2 Chronicles 7:16). After a believer has done his part, he or she can then pray in faith to God who sanctifies. These two aspects of sanctification are clearly shown in our text. **“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you”** (Leviticus 20:7,8).

God stipulated harsh penalties for unlawful sexual relations. This portrays how He detests and has zero tolerance for immorality. Adultery, incest, same-sex union and bestiality were to be punished by death. This was intended to promote sexual purity and safeguard the family. Unlawful sexual relations damage the sanctity of marriage and distort the picture of the union between Christ and the Church, which the institution of marriage was intended to portray (Ephesians 5:25-32). Those who indulge in sexual sins expose themselves to sexually transmitted infections (STI) like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhoea and herpes that bring disgrace, shame and untimely death. They also expose themselves to eternal damnation in hell.

Sexual perversions are now so prevalent in many societies, aided with the advent of the Internet where obscenity is glamorised. In some countries and religious denominations, people who disobey God’s word on proper sexual orientation and decorum like lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders are defended and protected by law. The ugly trend will, however, not alter divine judgment of those who choose immoral lifestyle: **“whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”** (Hebrews 13:4).

PURITY AND PHYSICAL FITNESS OF PRIESTS: A MODEL OF THE BELIEVER'S PERFECTION (Leviticus 21:1-24; 10:6,13,15; 19:27,28; Deuteronomy 14:1; 23:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9; 5:10; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:40; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 7:26; 13:21)

God gave specific rules to govern the priesthood. The priest must be free from physical defects, moral or ceremonial pollutions and social entanglements. Those things which could disqualify a priest or mar his ministry give us a hint of what believers must avoid in order to serve God acceptably. This is because believers are New Testament priests (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). The standard of holiness God expects of all His people is essentially the same in terms of moral perfection. He, however, expects that those in position of leadership go the extra mile to become models of moral excellence and self-denial. This is to be expected because a higher privilege demands higher responsibility. Those who are privileged to occupy leadership positions in the church are also under a special obligation to maintain a higher standard of devotion to God in character and service.

God commanded that both the priest and the animals for sacrifice must be perfect; they must not have any missing, deformed or extra parts. Physically challenged priests were disqualified from offering sacrifices. This was not intended to demean or unfairly discriminate against them as they could eat of the holy things. There were other Levites who, without physical defects, were disallowed from the priesthood. It was a question of divine choice and appointment to typify the perfection of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice. God loves and cares for the physically challenged. As a matter of fact, He made provision to defend and protect their rights (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). In the New Testament, physical defect does not disqualify anyone from approaching God or ministering at His altar.

All Israelites, but priests in particular, were prohibited from pagan funeral customs such as rounding the corners of the head or beard, cutting and making tattoos on the body for the dead. The priests were to avoid ceremonial uncleanness by reason of contact with a

corpse or participating in mourning. Being present when someone died, entering a house where someone had just died, taking part in a funeral, making lamentation for a dead person or touching a dead body would render a person ceremonially unclean in Israel. This also disqualified a priest from ministry until he got purified.

God disallowed the priests from defiling themselves for the dead, except for very close blood relations such as father, mother, child, brother and unmarried sister. This command indicates the priority of work of the ministry over less important assignments. A minister must not allow lesser duties, such as funeral, to distract or hinder him from performing the more important work of the ministry. A priest was rendered ceremonially unclean for seven days each time he was defiled for the dead. Consider the kind of hindrance that would bring to the tabernacle ministry if the priests were allowed to get defiled indiscriminately.

As believers, gospel preaching is our primary duty. We must not allow our preoccupation with burial programmes or other social activities to distract us from this assignment ordained by God. We must keep in mind the principle of moderation during funeral rites for our departed loved ones. There should be no imitation of the world; neither should we sorrow like those who have no hope. Believers must not sin simply because they want to give their departed loved ones a befitting burial. God calls His people unto holiness both in times of joy and sorrow.

The priests were also required to maintain holiness in their marriage relationship and family life. They were not allowed to marry promiscuous or irreligious persons. Also, they were forbidden from marrying divorcees. A substandard marriage or scandalous children rendered a priest unfit to minister at God's altar. As New Testament priests, believers must pray for God's guidance and be discreet in choosing a marriage partner. Being married to a wrong spouse can disqualify or seriously limit a person in God's service. A priest who flouted God's standard on marriage was dismissed from service (Nehemiah 13:23-28).

PRECEPTS CONCERNING THE PRIESTS AND THE ANIMALS FOR SACRIFICE (Leviticus 22:1-33; 7:20,21; 13:2,3,44-46; 15:2,3; Exodus 12:5; Numbers 19:11-16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19,22,23)

God warned the priests against profanity in handling holy things by presumptuously carrying on in ministry with ceremonial uncleanness. **“Say unto them, whosoever he be of all your seed among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things which the children of Israel hallow unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD”** (Leviticus 22:3).

Aside from physical defects, leprosy or bodily discharge, contact with a carcass or unclean animal rendered a priest unfit for service. Such priests who were defiled must undergo the prescribed purification rites before they could come back to service. This is a clear rebuke to believers who are conscious of definite impurity in their lives but continue in service without seeking God for cleansing. God warned that such people would be cut off from His presence.

Israelites who were not of the family of Aaron, visitors in the priest’s family or hired servants were not permitted to eat of the holy portion. Even a priest’s daughter who married outside the priestly clan was prohibited from eating the holy things, except she became a widow or divorced, having no child and returned to her father’s house. If anyone ate the holy things without knowing, such a person was required to return what was eaten with a twenty percent fine. This precept indicates that those who do not know the Lord have no inheritance in His kingdom; they are strangers and aliens to the commonwealth of true believers in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Ephesians 5:3-5; Acts 8:20-23).

The sacrifices the priests offered must also comply with God’s prescription. To be acceptable, the sacrifice must be perfect, a male animal and offered willingly. Animals that had defects were not acceptable. This informs believers to offer their best unto God. We should

give God the best of our time, talent and treasure. The temptation to give God things of little value should be avoided. Considering the fact that God gave His only begotten Son to redeem us from our sins, it is expected that the least we can do is offer Him the best we have.

God's demand for holiness is timeless. All men everywhere and in every age are expected to live in holiness. This means to separate from the ungodly lifestyle of sinners and be totally pure in spirit, soul and body. He is holy and anyone who will walk with Him must be holy. He places a high premium on holy living "**...without which no man shall see the Lord**" (Hebrews 12:14).

Questions for review:

1. Why is holiness compulsory for everyone?
2. Mention some heathen practices God prohibited in our text.
3. How can believers experience sanctification and what are the benefits?
4. What are the consequences of unlawful sexual relations?
5. What model does the old priesthood pose to contemporary believers?
6. What can believers learn from the instruction that priests should not defile themselves for the dead?
7. What is the basis for God's demand for holiness from His people?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "80" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
80

A background image showing an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it.

**DIVINELY APPOINTED
FEASTS**

MEMORY VERSE: “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:3).

TEXT: Leviticus 23:1-44; 24:1-23

In addition to the regular Sabbath, God ordained seven religious feasts or festivals for the children of Israel. These are the feasts of Passover, Unleavened bread, First-fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, day of atonement and Tabernacles. The feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the major ones while the other four were associated with them. The three major feasts are also referred to as pilgrimage feasts, as the children of Israel had to travel to Jerusalem to observe them in the temple (Deuteronomy 16:16). For Israel, the feasts were periods appointed by the Lord for His people to gather for spiritual retreat and to commemorate significant events in their history. But the feasts also had prophetic significance with respect to God’s plan for the entire human race.

Apart from ordaining the feasts, God also gave commandments concerning the oil and the shewbread. The Lord created His consciousness in the children of Israel through the commandments on the ordained feasts and the perpetual light burning in the tabernacle. Then, He warned them against blasphemy resulting from the reckless use of the tongue. This study, therefore, focuses on the feasts of the Lord and their significance for present-day believers; the oil and the shewbread, and

caution against blasphemy. Believers must endeavour to reverence God as they attend various programmes organised by the church and refrain from evil-speaking: **“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 5:8).

PRESCRIBED FEASTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE
(Leviticus 23:1-36; Exodus 23:14-17; Numbers 28:16-31; Deuteronomy 16:1-17; Joshua 5:10; 2 Chronicles 8:12,13; 35:1; Nehemiah 8:1,14; Ezra 3:4; Romans 15:4)

The feast of Passover is the first among the feasts. It took place on the 14th day of month Abib, the first month of the year in the Jewish religious calendar (corresponding with March/April). The feast of Unleavened Bread, which is associated with it, began the following day, 15th day and continued till 21st day (a whole week). The feast of Firstfruits also took place the next day after the commencement of the feast of Unleavened Bread; that is, on the 16th day of month Abib. As a result, one pilgrimage would take care of these three feasts.

The feast of Weeks or Pentecost came next, fifty days after the feast of Firstfruits on the 6th day of the month Sivan, the third month (corresponding with May/June). This feast had no minor feast associated with it and so pilgrims attended it and returned to their homes. This is followed by the feast of Trumpets which came up on the first day of the seventh month, Tishri (corresponding with part of September/October). Ten days later, that is, the 10th day of the month, the Day of Atonement took place. After that, the feast of Tabernacles, which is the last feast, came up on the 15th day of the month and ended on the 21st day of the same seventh month. These three feasts could be covered by one pilgrimage as well – those who came to Jerusalem for the feasts could spend three weeks there to attend the three feasts in the month Tishri.

Aside these feasts, the Jews added other ones after

they returned from captivity, some of which are mentioned in the New Testament. These include: one, the feast of Dedication (John 10:22) held on the 25th of the ninth month, Chisleu (corresponding with December) to mark the dedication of the temple after it was cleansed from defilement caused by Antiochus Epiphanes between 166-164 BC. Two, the feast of Purim (Esther 3:7-9,18-24,31,32) which held on the 14th of the twelfth month, Adar (corresponding with March) to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from the evil plot of Haman in the days of Queen Esther. Three, the cheerful feasts marked with the fasts of 4th, 5th and 7th month to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem (Zechariah 7:3; 8:19).

Our Lord Jesus attended the feasts during His earthly ministry to show that believers ought to submit themselves to the word of God no matter the height they attain in ministry (John 2:13-25; 5:1; 7:1-11,39; 10:22-24; 1 Peter 2:21; Luke 22:8). We should faithfully attend church services and special programmes to hear and learn from the word of God, as well as be spiritually renewed and refreshed.

Though these appointed feasts described in the text were held at different times, there are some general features common to them. They were times of joy and thanksgiving, except for the Day of Atonement which was characterised by sobriety and self-humiliation (Psalm 122:1-4). Two, all the males attended the feasts (Exodus 23:17; Deuteronomy 16:16). Three, they involved presentation of special offerings (Exodus 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16,17). Four, each feast had a special Sabbath associated with it. The Lord appointed these feasts to avail the children of Israel the opportunity to celebrate His great acts of salvation and mercy in their history.

PERTINENCE OF THE FEASTS FOR CONTEMPORARY SAINTS (Leviticus 23:1-44; Isaiah 25:6,8; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

The Old Testament holy seasons with accompanying elaborate sacrificial systems, rituals and ceremonies have no place in our present-day gospel dispensation as they have been done away with through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. For contemporary saints, these feasts have deeper meaning and application beyond the historical and agricultural significance, which they held for the Jews. The feast of Passover commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage; but for believers, it represents salvation from sin. As a replacement for the Passover, the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, which believers are to observe in remembrance of His death and in anticipation of His return. **"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"** (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Just as no unclean person was allowed to partake of the Passover, so it is with the Lord's Supper. The unsaved and backsliders are not to partake in the Lord's Supper. **"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"** (1 Corinthians 11:29).

The feast of Unleavened Bread is closely linked to the Passover, implying that everyone who have encountered Christ must live a life that is free from the leaven of malice, hypocrisy and wickedness (Luke 22:1,7-20; 1 Corinthians 5:8). Leaven signifies the presence of sin. Therefore, eating unleavened bread in connection with the Passover symbolised a turning from the old life of sin to a new life of purity. The feast of Firstfruits calls believers to show gratitude to God in view of His mercies and benefits and to give God first place in the administering of their substances (Proverbs 3:9,10; Matthew 6:33). Believers in Christ are referred to as the firstfruits of Christ's redemptive work (James 1:18;

Revelation 14:4). Christ rose from the dead “...and [became] **the firstfruits of them that slept**” to assure us of hope of our own resurrection.

The feast of Weeks or Pentecost was a celebration of harvest, a holy Sabbath and a time of giving freely to the Levites, strangers, orphans, and others. For the present-day saint, Pentecost is synonymous with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There can be no proper harvest of souls into God’s kingdom without the baptism in the Holy Ghost. Literally, we see the connection between these feasts: Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after the feast of Firstfruits. In the same way, Jesus was crucified as our Passover and rose from the dead as the Firstfruit, and fifty days after, the Holy Ghost came on the early believers. Thus, there can be no Pentecost without the Passover. Everyone who seeks to receive the Holy Ghost Baptism must be born again, sanctified and be passionate to be used of God in bringing sinners to Christ. There must be earnest prayer and faith to receive this experience.

The feast of Trumpets is celebrated at the beginning of the seventh month (Israel’s civil New Year). But it reminds believers of the trump of God that shall sound at rapture. **“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first”** (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). This is the glorious hope of every believer in Christ. Also, the feast of Trumpets announced the commencement of the month of atonement. This informs believers to blow the trumpet of the gospel as an indication that Christ has fulfilled every sacrifice on the cross and has borne our sins. The day of atonement symbolises Christ, our perfect High Priest, entering into heaven to make permanent propitiation for our sins. It reminds believers that their sins have been remitted and taken away like the scapegoat bore away the sins of the Israelites (Leviticus 16:21,22; Isaiah 53:4-6,11).

The feast of Tabernacles reminds us of the brevity of our stay on earth and the need to live in humility and sobriety. During this feast, the Israelites left the comfort of their homes and dwelt in booths for a whole week to commemorate how God protected and guided them in the wilderness.

The feast of Tabernacles, also called the feast of In-gathering, concludes the cycle of annual feasts. At the end of time, there shall be a final harvest which will lead to separation of the tares from the wheat (Matthew 13:37-41). All believers shall be gathered unto the Lord and so shall we be with the Lord forever and ever.

PRECEPTS CONCERNING OIL, SHEWBREAD AND BLASPHEMY (Leviticus 24:1-23; Exodus 27:20; Psalm 23:5; Matthew 25:3; Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37; Colossians 3:8)

Moses was directed by God to command the children of Israel to bring pure olive oil for the light; and he was to make shewbread and set it on the golden table in the sanctuary. The oil, to be used to keep light burning perpetually in the tabernacle, was a symbol of divine presence, revelation, illumination and guidance that believers stand to enjoy as they remain in fellowship with God. From the passage, we see that the people had a part to play in order to keep the light burning in the sanctuary. They were to supply the oil while the priests had to light the lamps and trim them regularly. This teaches us that the presence of God can only abide in our lives as we obey God's command and cooperate with His Spirit He has given to guide and lead us.

The shewbread consisted of twelve loaves of unleavened bread which were set in two rows on the golden table before the Lord in the sanctuary. The loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel being set before the Lord continually. This shows that as God's people, we are continually in His presence and, as such, are never forgotten (Isaiah 49:15,16). The oil and the shewbread are actually two sides of a coin. The oil gave the light and represents God's presence among His

people, whereas the bread represents the people in the presence of their God.

After giving instruction concerning the symbol of His presence among the children of Israel, the Lord went further to caution them against blasphemy or reckless use of the tongue against God. The passage also shows that there are grave consequences for departing from God's precepts and plan in any area of our lives. Blasphemy means speaking ingloriously or irreverently about God or His attribute; speaking contemptuously about Him, His works, providence, perfection and government.

The Lord had earlier warned the children of Israel against blasphemy in the third commandment "**Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain**" (Exodus 20:7). God puts blasphemy in the category of crimes that deserve capital punishment. Those who defaulted in both the Old and New Testaments were not spared (2 Chronicles 32:14-17,21; 1 Timothy 1:20). God's name must be hallowed and not used thoughtlessly or insincerely; it must not be associated with idolatry, magic, swearing, comedy or any evil. Other forms of blasphemy that must be avoided include charging God foolishly, accusing Him of wrongdoing and questioning His sovereignty, especially during bereavement or disappointment. We should watch against careless talk that slander God's personality or attributes.

While dealing with the case of blasphemy, God also reiterated the laws against murder and cruelty. Retaliation was also discouraged, which should be enforced by the judges and not necessarily the individuals offended. The punishment for murder was death. However, Christ's explanation of the law shows that murder is more than killing another person physically; it also includes character assassination that results from angry outburst and hatred (1 John 3:15). Christ commanded us not to retaliate but rather bless those who curse us and to repay evil with good (Matthew 5:38-42; Romans 12:19-21). This is the law of love.

Questions for review:

1. What do the Israelites term as feasts?
2. Mention three feasts appointed by God for the children of Israel to observe and their respective dates.
3. What do we learn from Christ's attendance and participation in the appointed feasts for the Jews during His earthly ministry?
4. What are the general features common to these feasts?
5. Highlight the application of the divinely appointed Jewish feasts to present-day believers.
6. Explain the connection between the oil and the shewbread.
7. What is blasphemy and what are the ways people blaspheme God's name today?

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



Lesson
81

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

MEMORY VERSE: “And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family” (Leviticus 25:10).

TEXT: Leviticus 25:1-55

This passage reveals two of God’s closely related Ordinances for the children of Israel – the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee. These ordinances were God’s means of bringing about rest for the land as well as release and redemption for the children of Israel. The chapter begins with this recurrent phrase: “**And the LORD spake unto Moses**”. This phrase is used ninety-nine times in the Pentateuch. It reveals God’s authorship and Moses’ faithfulness. Moses was faithful in declaring God’s counsel as it was received. He did not regard his convenience, the popular opinion or opposition of the people when delivering the counsel of God. Even God attested to his faithfulness: “**My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house**” (Numbers 12:7). Ministers, today, should faithfully proclaim God’s word without fear or favour. Any attempt to distort, either by adding to, or removing from God’s commandments, for whatever reason, will amount to unfaithfulness.

SOVEREIGN PROCLAMATION OF THE SABBATICAL YEAR (Leviticus 25:1-7,18-22; Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 23:10,11)

The children of Israel were commanded to till the ground for six years and then allow it to lie fallow on the seventh year. This year was to be a Sabbath of rest for the land. The sabbatical year was God's idea; it was amongst other things, God's way of making the land to rest so as to regain its nutrients. God's command was clear: **"...thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard... thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land"** (Leviticus 25:4,5). However, they were permitted to eat the crops that grew of their own accord during the Sabbath year. Besides, God promised to bless them in the sixth year so that they will have enough to eat in the seventh year (sabbatical year), eighth year and up till the new harvest in the ninth year (Leviticus 25:18-22). Since they were not going to sow in the seventh year, they will not have any harvest in the eighth year; and what was sown in the eighth year would only be ready for harvest in the ninth year, hence God's threefold blessing on the sixth year. This provision is a spectacular miracle to sustain an uncommon agro practice.

From the divine institution of the sabbatical year, the following lessons can be gleaned: one, God is concerned about everything He created. He instituted Sabbath for the land to enable it rest and regain its nutrients. In the same vein, He used the sabbatical year as an avenue to cater for the poor and for the beasts (Exodus 23:11). This was for the ultimate good of the Israelites because when the land is allowed to rest, its fertility will be renewed and will yield better thereafter.

Two, God commanded them to work for six years before allowing the land to lie fallow on the sabbatical year. God does not encourage laziness. Contemporary believers should avoid laziness in all aspects of their lives. Apostle Paul said, **"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat"** (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Three, it brings to fore the principle of rest after work. God rested from His work after creation (Genesis 2:2,3). Believers should also take out time to rest because adequate rest will enhance both spiritual and physical productivity. Four, there is a final, eternal rest for all saints. It is an eternal and blissful rest with God. **“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest...”** (Hebrews 4:9,11). Five, obedience and faith will attract God’s blessings. The children of Israel were to till the ground on the sixth year and expect God’s blessings that will sustain them up to the ninth year. God had earlier made a similar provision for them when He fed them with manna. They were to gather what they would need for the sixth and the Sabbath day on the sixth day (Exodus 16:22,26). Indeed, God cares for His own people.

God’s plan is that His children should enjoy a present moment-by-moment rest, free from the worry and anxiety that is so prevalent in the world, before entering the future rest reserved for the believers. But, in most cases, people forfeit the promised rest because of disobedience to God. For instance, when the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan, they did not obey God’s directive to allow the land rest every sabbatical year. This disobedience was a contributory factor to their going into exile for seventy years, so that the land could enjoy its accumulated sabbaths (2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Leviticus 26:33-35,43).

SUCCINCT PURPOSES OF THE YEAR OF JUBILEE
(Leviticus 25:8-13,28,40,41,54; Romans 8:2; 5:18,19; Ephesians 3:12,13,19; Matthew 11:28)

The year of jubilee was divinely instituted; it was the year after every seventh sabbatical year. The sabbatical year was every seventh year and the year after the seventh sabbatical year, that is, the fiftieth year, was the year of jubilee. **“A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you...”** The proclamation of jubilee was heralded by the sounding of the trumpet of jubilee on the tenth day of the seventh month (Day of Atonement). It is worthy of note that the year of jubilee actually begins on the

first day of the seventh month but the activities of the year officially begins on the tenth day after atonement had been made. This portrays the truth that genuine repentance precedes true freedom.

God instituted the year of jubilee for the following reasons: one, release from bondage. In the year of jubilee, all Hebrew servants who were not earlier redeemed were released and allowed to go free **“...and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof... And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him... then he shall go out in the year of jubile, both he, and his children with him”** (Leviticus 25:10,41,54).

Two, restoration of inheritance. Those who had sold their properties, largely because of poverty, could now return to their inheritance freely in the year of jubilee. **“...and ye shall return every man unto his possession... and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession ...and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return”** (Leviticus 25:10,28,41). Three, reunion with family. Israelites who had earlier been sold or who sold themselves to servitude were freed and can then be reunited freely with their families in the year of jubilee. **“...And ye shall return every man unto his family ...and shall return unto his own family...”** (Leviticus 25:10,41). Four, a year of rest for the land. The year of jubilee was also a Sabbath of rest. **“A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed”** (verse 11).

The year of jubilee typifies what Christ did for us at Calvary. The sounding of the trumpet of jubilee that heralded the year of jubilee can be likened to Christ's great proclamation on the cross: **“It is finished”**. Christ's ultimate sacrifice brought us release from sin and satanic bondage (John 8:36; Galatians 5:1), restoration from the Fall (Romans 5:18,19), reunion with God and His family (Ephesians 2:12,13,19) and rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28). Sinners and backsliders are excluded from these privileges except they return to God, acknowledge, confess, repent, forsake their sins and believe in Christ as their Lord and personal Saviour.

SUNDRY PRECEPTS CONCERNING THE YEAR OF JUBILEE (Leviticus 25:14-17,23-55; Deuteronomy 25:15; Psalm 24:1; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Colossians 4:1)

The precepts concerning the year of jubilee can broadly be divided into two: property laws and laws regarding slaves. With regards to the former, the year of jubilee was to be used as a yardstick in fixing prices for the sale and purchase of possessions. The closer the transaction was to the year of jubilee, the lesser the price and vice versa (Leviticus 25:14-17). This is because in the year of jubilee, the land would be returned to its original owner. Therefore, a land purchased close to the year of jubilee would only be used for a short duration as compared to a land that was purchased long before the year of jubilee. This is the principle of equity. Believers should emulate the Lord by applying this principle in their business transactions.

Secondly, no land could be permanently sold because God is the owner of all the land and the children of Israel were to be His tenants (Psalm 24:1). As a matter of fact, the directive to leave the land fallow in the sabbatical years reminded the Israelites that the land was not really their own. Believers should realise that whatever they have belongs to God; they are only stewards. Thirdly, God also instructed them on how to handle the cases of the poor Israelites who sold their possessions as a result of poverty. The land could be redeemed by any of their close relatives or they could redeem it themselves if God prospers them. But if there is none to redeem the land, it will return to them during the year of jubilee. Fourthly, when a house within a fenced city is sold, the seller could redeem the land within a year; if not, the land becomes the permanent possession of the buyer. Such houses could not be redeemed even in the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:29,30). The only exception to this is the houses that belonged to the Levites (Leviticus 25:32,33). This teaches us that not everything that is lost can be regained. Hence, the need to jealously guard our integrity and spiritual experiences so as not to lose them. Fifthly, the pastures of the cities belonging to the Levites were not to be sold. It was “**their perpetual possession**”. Believers

should take heed lest they transact their souls, the truth and their spiritual birthright for pecuniary gains.

God also gave them instructions concerning the impoverished and the slaves. The following precepts were given to the children of Israel in this regard. One, the indigent Israelites were to be catered for by those who had the means. They were to allow them stay in their neighbourhood and not take any interest or profit from them. They were cautioned to fear God and avoid making merchandise of their vulnerable brethren. Believers who are well-off should learn how to distribute to the necessity of the saints. **“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded... That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”** (1 Timothy 6:17,18).

Two, God gave precepts to Israelites who had Hebrew servants. They were not to maltreat them; rather, they were to take them as sojourners and hired servants and not as bond servants. Bond servants were the perpetual properties of their masters who had despotic powers over them. On the other hand, hired servants were more like employees, who were meant to receive wages for their work after a specified duration. Furthermore, the Hebrew servants were to be freed in the year of jubilee. One of the lessons from this is that believers who have servants should treat them well, especially those who are of the household of faith. **“Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven”** (Colossians 4:1). Three, they were also instructed on how to handle heathen slaves. They were to serve as bondmen and bondmaids and were the perpetual possession of their Hebrew masters. They were not to be released during the year of jubilee. Four, God also gave precepts concerning heathens who had Hebrew servants. Such servants could be redeemed by any of their close relatives or by they themselves. They were to be treated as hired servants, and if nobody redeems them, they were to be released in the year of jubilee.

A famous Bible commentator summarises the year of jubilee as “the 50th year to proclaim liberty to all people, and to start business all over again as at the beginning.

At this time all mortgages were cancelled, all servants released, and all bondages of men annulled. Debts were forgiven, and lands reverted to the original owners. The new start in business at the end of jubilee was based upon another year of release, 50 years in the future". In Christ, true jubilee abounds.

Questions for review:

1. What can Christian leaders learn from the faithfulness of Moses?
2. What can we learn from the divine institution of the sabbatical year?
3. What are the reasons God instituted the year of jubilee and what does it typify?
4. How can sinners and backsliders enjoy the privileges of Christ's death and resurrection?
5. Explain the precepts concerning the year of jubilee and how believers can learn from it.
6. What is the significance of the laws God gave to the Israelites regarding the redemption of properties?
7. Enumerate the lessons from God's precepts concerning the poor Israelites and the slaves.

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



Lesson
82

CONDITIONS FOR BLESSINGS AND CURSES

MEMORY VERSE: “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit” (Leviticus 26:3,4).

TEXT: Leviticus 26:1-46

God gave unequivocal instructions to the children of Israel after He brought them out of the land of Egypt. In particular, He warned them against the dire consequences of idolatry. This warning was necessary because the Israelites had been exposed to idol worship in Egypt and virtually in all the nations they encountered in their wilderness journey. Also, there were mixed multitudes among them who would introduce strange worship and probably lead the people astray. Moreover, God knew that their Canaanite neighbours would constitute a source of temptation to worship idols. As a matter of fact, at Sinai, Israel had shown how prone they were to idolatry when they set up the golden calf.

In this chapter, the Lord commanded Moses to inform the children of Israel that they would enjoy the blessings of their covenant relationship with Him only if they were obedient. Disobedience and backsliding would bring them untold sufferings; and only genuine repentance would abate the punishment and misery that would come upon them. This shows that the promises of God are conditional. Believers are enjoined to be obedient to the word of God in order to enjoy His blessings (Deuteronomy 11:26-28; 27:10; Jeremiah 7:23).

Disobedience to the law of God attracts His indignation.

CATALOGUE OF BLESSINGS FOR THE OBEDIENT
(Leviticus 26:1-13; Deuteronomy 28:1-13; 30:2,3,8-10,20; Job 36:11; Genesis 22:15-17; Proverbs 10:22)

God demands complete obedience from His children. His instruction to Israel was very clear: **“If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit”** (Leviticus 26:3,4). The condition for enjoying God’s blessings was stated here in plain language. As believers, we have a part to play in order to benefit from the blessings of God. Obedience to God’s instructions as stated in the Holy Writ concerning every area of our Christian life is very paramount as we run the race to heaven.

God prohibited the making or worship of idols. He commanded: **“Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image...”** He hates idolatry in any shade or form. This is because idolatry places another person or thing above Him. In essence, an idol becomes the object of devotion, rather than God, the Creator. Idolatry is the greatest affront against God and it must be avoided (1 Corinthians 10:14; 1 John 5:21). Of the Ten Commandments given to Moses, the first three centred on warning against idolatry (Exodus 20:3-5).

Also, God commanded the Israelites thus: **“Ye shall keep the sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary...”** The sanctuary of God today among believers is our place of worship. He said where two or three are gathered in His name, He is in the midst of them. Also, the body of a believer is regarded as the spiritual temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5). Both the physical place of worship and the spiritual temple must be held in reverence. It is written: **“Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever”** (Psalm 93:5). Believers must be conscious of God’s presence at all times and avoid every form of irreverence to His sanctuary. Such acts of

irreverence include defiling our bodies with drugs, immorality, tatoos and turning the house of God to a centre for merchandise, making noise and distracting other worshippers with our cell phones during church services (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:18-20; Habakkuk 2:20; Jeremiah 7:11; Matthew 21:12,13).

The Lord promised the children of Israel a lot of blessings if they obeyed His commandments. One, they would enjoy abundance of the fruits of the earth. **“Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit”** (Leviticus 26:4). Although the ground was cursed after the fall of man (Genesis 3:17; 5:29), those who are obedient to the word of God would still have fruitful and bountiful harvest.

Two, unlimited and constant supply: **“And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new”** (Leviticus 26:5,10). It implies that the storehouse of a believer shall not run dry; he or she will have more than enough (Psalm 23:1; Joel 2:26).

Three, peace and divine protection. **“And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land”** (Leviticus 26:6). The children of Israel could testify of the fulfilment of God’s promise of peace and protection over them throughout their stay in the wilderness. God is faithful to His words and believers are also enjoined to be faithful in order to enjoy divine security (Leviticus 25:18,19b; Psalms 23:4; 91:10-12).

Four, victory in wars at home and abroad. **“And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword”** (Leviticus 26:7,8). The children of Israel were assured of winning their battles as the Lord promised to fight for them. This was fulfilled in different

battles they fought in later years (Numbers 21:33-35; Joshua 6:2,20,21; 1 Samuel 7:10). Believers need not fear the battles of life confronting them as the Lord has promised to fight for them and defeat their enemies (Exodus 23:22).

Five, the increase of their people: **“For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you”** (Leviticus 26:9). The nation of Israel was a small nation when they were in Egypt, but God multiplied them (Genesis 47:27; 48:4). He has promised His children fruitfulness and every child of God is free to enjoy it (Deuteronomy 6:3; 7:13; Job 8:7). Six, the favour and presence of God: **“And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people”** (Leviticus 26:11,12). The presence of God was with the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness; and as a chosen people, they also enjoyed His favour (Exodus 3:21; Deuteronomy 31:6). The presence of God is always with His children (Haggai 1:13; Matthew 28:20).

Seven, deliverance from bondage: **“I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright”** (Leviticus 26:13). The children of Israel suffered in the hand of their bond master in the land of Egypt for about 430 years, but God came to their rescue and delivered them. Our God is merciful and He will not allow His children to remain in bondage or oppression of any kind. He is our Refuge and Fortress.

CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE (Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 28:15,62-64; Acts 7:39-43; Romans 2:8-13; 1 Samuel 15:19-23)

God hates disobedience. Those who refuse or fail to keep to His word will not go unpunished. God said, **“But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that**

ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it” (Leviticus 26:14-16). Just as He pronounced blessings on the obedient, God also pronounced curses on the disobedient.

When God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, He made a covenant with them; that He would bring them into the Promised Land, but they must serve Him in holiness. Unfortunately, many of the children of Israel who left Egypt and saw all the wonders of God, broke this covenant and they were punished by God (Deuteronomy 4:23,24; Numbers 3:4; 11:4-6,33; 14:26-35; 21:5,6). God warned that if they failed to hearken to Him, He would appoint over them terror, consumption and the burning ague. He also said He would set His face against them, and they would be slain before their enemies. This shows that there is no unconditional security in the kingdom of God (1 Samuel 2:30; 2 Chronicles 15:2).

Those who were disobedient to God among the children of Israel all suffered one punishment or the other. The word of God has not changed; God punishes sin at all times. Though the punishment may appear slow in coming, it will certainly come. 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).

God had earlier promised them security and protection from their enemies, but disobedience to His word would force Him to remove His divine shield over them. The fruitfulness that He promised them would be taken away and unfruitfulness would take over. Destruction and pestilence will come from the Lord to them, not from the enemy. Our God is a consuming fire and is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). We are only saved from our enemies when we are faithful to Him.

There are a number of people in the Bible who sinned against God and thereby incurred His wrath: Cain

(Genesis 4:9-13), Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26), Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2), Miriam (Numbers 12:1-10), Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:31-33), Achan (Joshua 7:1,24-26), sons of Eli (1 Samuel 2:12-17; 4:11), Saul (1 Samuel 13:13; 15:9-11), Gehazi (2 Kings 5:21,25-27), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

CONDITIONS FOR RESTORATION (Leviticus 26:40-46; Joshua 24:14-16,23; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 18:8; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Joel 2:12-14; Luke 13:3,5; Acts 3:19; 17:30; Revelation 2:5,16)

God is merciful unto all those who seek His face in repentance. It is only when we fulfil the condition necessary for restoration that we would be restored (2 Chronicles 7:13,14). There is need for those who have gone astray to humble themselves, seek the face of the Lord in repentance and turn away from their wicked ways; then the Lord will forgive and heal their land. Repentance from sin is the major condition for restoration (Isaiah 55:6,7; Jonah 3:8-10).

“If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land” (Leviticus 26:40,42). It takes humility and a contrite heart to repent. The psalmist said, **“...a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”** (Psalm 51:17). When a sinner comes to God in humility and with a repentant heart, God will forgive his sins (1 John 1:9). He will not cast out anyone who sincerely comes to Him for forgiveness because He is **“...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9).

Questions for review:

1. Why was the warning against idolatrous practices necessary at this stage in the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land?

2. In what ways can believers show reverence for God's house?
3. Highlight the blessings that follow those who are obedient to God's command.
4. What were the conditions God gave the Israelites for entering into the Promised Land?
5. What are the consequences of disobedience to the commandments of God?
6. Mention some characters in the Bible who sinned against God and incurred His wrath.
7. What should be the attitude of those who have backslidden from the faith, if they want God to accept them back?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "83" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
83

LAWS OF VOWS AND DEDICATION

MEMORY VERSE: “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD” (Leviticus 27:30).

TEXT: Leviticus 27:1-34

This last chapter forms part of the conclusion of God's commandments to Israel under the Levitical priesthood. In our text, God gives directives concerning vows, voluntary services and freewill offerings. In addition, because of the frailty of mortals to renege on their vows, God made the provision for the redemption of what had been so consecrated, at a certain rate.

Vows are religious promises made to the Lord, and for the most part with prayer, and paid with thanksgiving (Numbers 21:2,3; Psalm 66:12-14). They are made to advance a plea to God for a desired blessing. A person may vow or devote self, children, cattle and goods to the Lord. But if after consecrating them and the person who made the vow refused to redeem them, then those items vowed become the Lord's property for ever.

Tithes on the other hand represent that proportion (usually the tenth part) of one's property or income/profit devoted to God. The Scripture requires children of God to tithe faithfully and consistently. However, vows differ from tithes in the sense that the former are not mandatory. Once vows are made, it becomes obligatory to perform them (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21,22). Tithes are quantitatively and qualitatively specific, and mandatory under the law (Deuteronomy 14:22). From scriptural and historical perspectives, vows and tithes are designed for the support and sustenance of officers

in spiritual service (Genesis 28:20-22; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 23:23).

LAWS CONCERNING VOWS, THE SANCTITY OF PLEDGES AND THEIR REDEMPTION (Leviticus 27:1-13; Numbers 6:2-11; Judges 11:35; 1 Samuel 1:11; Ecclesiastes 5:2; Psalm 15:4; Jeremiah 35:1-6)

The children of Israel were required to dedicate certain things such as the firstfruits of their harvests, firstborn animals, firstborn sons and a tithe of their increase to God for His service. Many Israelites were often willing to go beyond these to dedicating themselves or members of their families, additional animals or landed properties to God. As blood-bought souls, believers in Christ are to dedicate themselves unreservedly to the Lord who purchased them from slavery to sin and Satan.

The relative values of persons are regulated according to an estimate value of their future service or work. If a person is too poor to redeem his/her vow according to the redemption chart, the priest determines some figures according to the poor person's ability. The redemption rate for middle-aged persons between twenty and sixty years ranks high – fifty shekels for males and thirty for females. On the other hand, a man or a woman above sixty years old attracts a redemption value of fifteen and ten shekels respectively. A comparison of the two age ranges suggests that we need to serve the Lord in our prime age rather than wait until old age before we enlist to labour for the Lord.

From the foregoing, some salient instructions emerge: firstly, making vows teaches us that we should not restrict ourselves to those mandatory duties. God is highly pleased when we voluntarily take on ourselves non-mandatory expressions of faith, love and gratitude to give for His cause. Secondly, it is highly instructive that under the vow regulations given by God, age, gender or economic conditions are not allowed to preclude the liberty of devotion towards God. Thirdly, the graduation of redemption prices according to the age of individuals teaches us to avoid the temptation of limiting ourselves,

but rise to make exceptional responses whenever our skills, talents, wealth, faith or maturity place us in a vantage position. “...**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).

While it is good to be zealous in good things, wisdom and discretion are also needful to guard against making rash vows. From a general consideration of scriptural prescriptions concerning vows, it comes out clearly that vows once made are not to be altered (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

Redemption and exchange are also necessarily allowed where the animal vowed could not be used for sacrifice by reason of its uncleanness. Redemption is also allowed in situations where the management of the subject of the vow would be cumbersome if not commuted to cash as in the case of landed property. Even in those cases where it is necessary to allow for redemption, there is an imposition of twenty percent surcharge on the value of the animal or property redeemed. The foreclosure of renunciation of vows and the imposition of surcharge are no doubt, meant to discourage thoughtlessness and frivolity in making vows unto the Lord. The vital lesson in this is that God takes our words, pledges and promises seriously. He expects us to be bound by our words. He frowns at situations where at the least difficulty we abandon our promises on the altar of convenience. Commitment to our promises and vows to God and our fellow men or women ought to be strong enough to compel performance, though it may be more difficult by reason of unforeseen developments.

The Scripture commends, “**He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not**” (Psalm 15:4). This principle is applicable to marriage, business and employment vows, and should spur heaven-bound saints to loyalty to our marriage and business partners, employers and employees. Christian integrity is non-negotiable. The principle is also applicable to spiritual and biological children of pious parents; they should honour God by adhering to the pious teachings of their

godly parents and pastors, especially when, as in the case of the Rechabites, they have been called to be with the Lord (Jeremiah 35:1-6).

The sanctity of vows, promises and pledges, therefore, necessitates caution before making them. We should avoid making promises and pledges that would translate into sinful actions or which may become impossible or embarrassing to fulfil. Carefulness, due considerations and the benefits of wise and godly counsels should be brought to bear before we make promises and pledges. **“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. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?”** (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

LAWS CONCERNING REAL ESTATES DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF GOD BY A SINGULAR VOW (Leviticus 27:14-25; Exodus 16:36; 1 Kings 15:15; Ezekiel 45:9-13; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

If a man, in his zeal to honour the Lord should sanctify his house to Him, the house must be valued by the priest and the money realised from the sale converted to the use of the sanctuary. But if the owner be inclined to redeem it, he must not have it as cheap as another, but must add a fifth part to the price. To the very poor, God would abate the estimation; but to him that was fickle, whose second thoughts inclined more to the world and his secular interest than his first, their price would rise.

There is a way of sanctifying our houses unto the Lord, without either selling or buying them. The members of our household, who serve the Lord by walking uprightly in words and deeds, doing everything as unto the Lord and providing a church location for worship, have dedicated their house to the Lord. Joshua

said, “...as for me and my house, we will serve the **LORD**” (Joshua 24:15b).

If a person should sanctify some part of his land to the Lord, giving it to holy use, then a difference must be made between the part of the land that came to the donor by descent and that which came by purchase. If it was the inheritance of his father, here called the field of his possession, which pertained to the family from the first division of Canaan, he might not give it all; God would not admit such a degree of zeal as it amounts to ruining the family. But he might dedicate only some part of it. In that case, the land was to be valued by so many measures of barley. So much land as would take a homer of barley, which contained ten ephahs (Ezekiel 45:11; Exodus 16:36), was valued at fifty shekels (a moderate price) if it were sanctified immediately from the year of jubilee. But, if some years after the jubilee, there was to be a discount accordingly. When the value was fixed, the donor might, if he pleases, redeem it for sixty shekels the homer’s sowing, which was with the addition of a fifth part: the money then went to the sanctuary and the land reverted to him. But if he would not redeem it, and the priest sold it to another, then at the year of jubilee, beyond which the sale could not go, the land came to the priests, and was theirs forever.

Here, we learn that what is given to the Lord ought not to be given with a power of revocation; what is devoted to the Lord must be His forever, by a perpetual covenant. If the land was his own purchase, the value of it was to be given to the priests for pious use.

It was supposed that those who, by the blessing of God, had grown so rich to become purchasers would think themselves obliged in gratitude to sanctify some part of their purchase, at least to His service. We ought to give as God prospers us (1 Corinthians 16:2). Purchasers are in a special manner bound to be charitable.

DIVINE OWNERSHIP OF TITHES AND FIRSTLINGS (Leviticus 27:26-34; Exodus 13:1,2; Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8; Malachi 3:10-12)

Verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine of our text call for careful examination as they refer to personal properties such as persons, animals or things that are devoted to destruction because they are placed beyond the reach of redemption. These are referred to as subjects of vow and so are to be destroyed and not redeemed. Such objects (except human beings) are to be put to death or in the case of inanimate objects, destroyed for the glory of God. No one has power to take another's life unless those under divine judgment or people judged and condemned by the law (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17; Joshua 11:20; 1 Samuel 15:3,33; Romans 13:4). However, the firstborn of every clean animal is by the law dedicated to the Lord (Exodus 13:1,2). As such, they could not be dedicated to the Lord in any act of singular vow (Leviticus 27:26). The practical implication of this is that our vows must advance our consecration to the Lord.

“And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’S: it is holy unto the LORD” (Leviticus 27:30). The law gives divine authority to tithing. In the largely agrarian economy in Israel, the tithe is an acknowledgment that the land which yields their harvests belongs to God and that He actually gives the fruits and the increase on which they depend. They are commanded to give a tenth of all produce and livestock, in addition to numerous offerings to the Lord. Tithes could not be dedicated to the Lord as vows because they are already appropriated by divine command. When, therefore, a pledge or vow is made in support of special projects such as missions or church building, such a vow or pledge must not be allowed to compromise our faithfulness to paying our tithes. Tithes under the Levitical priesthood system are necessary for the support of the priesthood and the demands of religion under the Mosaic dispensation. Today, tithes and offerings are used for gospel work and

the maintenance of its institutions and facilities.

The Scripture does not only command us to “**Honour the LORD with [our] substance, and with the firstfruits of all [our] increase**” but promises that by so doing, “[our] **barns shall be filled with plenty, and [our] presses shall burst out with new wine**” (Proverbs 3:9,10). On the other hand, withholding our tithes from the Lord is described as the worst type of robbery – robbing God who has freely given us all things to enjoy (Malachi 3:8). Every child of God must desist from such act.

In summary, God is interested in our attitude towards possessions. He wants those who profess real devotion to Him to prove it by their detachment from material things and willingness to give sacrificially for His work.

Questions for review:

1. Differentiate between vows and tithes.
2. What lesson does making vows and redeeming them teach us?
3. Mention instances in which vows are redeemable and cases where they are not.
4. Mention some commitments children of godly parents should make to keep the faith of their parents.
5. What should believers do to avoid unnecessary difficulties arising from their vows and promises?
6. How can we sanctify our dwelling places and other properties unto the Lord?
7. Why are believers commanded to faithfully pay their tithes?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "84" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

Lesson
84

CENSUS OF ISRAEL AND DUTIES OF THE LEVITES

MEMORY VERSE: “Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls” (Numbers 1:2).

TEXT: Numbers chapters 1 to 4

This study introduces us to the book of Numbers, the fourth section of the Pentateuch. The events recorded in the book spanned a period of about 38 years, starting from the second year after Israel’s departure from Egypt till the fortieth year when they arrived at Canaan’s border. The book portrays the patience and faithfulness of God towards His chosen people. Also, it warns against the consequences of unbelief, murmuring and disobedience. The Israelites learnt their lesson the hard way and their experiences are written for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4).

Exactly one month after the completion of the tabernacle of the congregation, God commanded Moses to number Israel. The census ushered in another milestone in the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land. Census is a count for official purposes, especially one to count the number of people living in a country and to collect information about them. The word “census” is depicted with words like “number”, “numbered”, “numbering”, and “numberest” in the Holy Bible. The book of Numbers is so named based on the two numberings of the children of Israel recorded in it: the first being in our text, at Mount Sinai and the second at the plains of Moab (chapter 26). This study describes the strict adherence of Moses, Aaron and the leaders of

the tribes of Israel to the details of the divine instruction for the numbering procedure. It includes details of the layout of Israel's camp, their tactical formation while in transit and the responsibilities assigned to the Levites.

CENSUS AND THE PECULIAR INSTRUCTION CONCERNING THE LEVITES (Numbers 1:1-54; 3:1-51; Psalm 87:4-6; 1 Samuel 3:4,6,8,10; 1 Kings 19:9; Acts 10:13; 22:7; 26:14)

“Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies” (Numbers 1:2,3). The primary purpose of this census is ascertained by the repetition of the phrase **“...all that are able to go forth to war...”** fourteen times in the first chapter of Numbers. Israel had left Egypt over two years now. There was a need to raise an army to fight battles in times of war. God did not want His people to be caught unawares by the intrusion of the enemy. So, He gave Moses the benchmarks for raising armies from the various tribes of Israel. The yardsticks were age, gender and ability to fight. In a nutshell, all the three criteria must be met before being enlisted. They were to count and document every name in a book. This teaches the need for accurate record keeping and reporting as we do God's work.

The assignment was too much for Moses and Aaron to prosecute. So, God specifically named twelve leaders across the tribes to facilitate the work. **“And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers. And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of the tribe of Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur”** (Numbers 1:4,5). God does not want His servants to operate as lone rangers. Whenever He calls a man or a woman into a ministry, He raises up specific people with different spiritual gifts and talents to complement their ministries. Operating without interacting with other

believers of like-precious faith and calling could lead to carelessness and destruction. The inhabitants of Laish perished because they failed to connect with potential deliverers (Judges 18:27,28). A ministry that operates in isolation will soon go into oblivion. Samson's ministry is an example. He raised no army, had no assistant nor intercessor; he mentored no one and eventually died with none to carry on his ministry.

In a bid to recruit an army for Israel through a census procedure, God gave Moses a pattern that involved narrowing down from a broad perspective. He was required to select from all the tribes, individuals who met the age criteria of twenty years old and upwards (Numbers 1:3). This is likened to a sieving process that systematically edges out the irrelevant. By practice, God has operated this way in the Scripture at different times. **“...ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family... shall come by households; and the household... shall come man by man”** (Joshua 7:14,15). The same practice was adopted when Samuel was to choose a king for the children of Israel which led to the selection of Saul the son of Kish (1 Samuel 10:20,21).

The outcome of the census indicated a striking fulfilment of Jacob's prophecies concerning his children. The tribe of Judah had the largest number of soldiers. Joseph had taken a double portion inheritance among the tribes through Ephraim and Manasseh. Then, Ephraim the younger had a larger population than Manasseh (Genesis 48:17-19; 49:8). The implication of all these is that the promises of God concerning our lives will be fulfilled. Also, parents should recognise that what they say concerning their children may turn out to be prophetic. Therefore, all negative utterances should be avoided.

God commanded Moses not to number the Levites among Israel. They were numbered separately and given the responsibility over the tabernacle of Testimony, the vessels and all that belonged to it. They were to encamp

round about it before the camps of the other tribes. In a nutshell, they were to complement the physical warfare of the recruited armies with spiritual warfare (Exodus 17:9-13). This is a balanced arrangement.

ASSIGNMENT OF THE HOST INTO WARFARE RANKS (Numbers 2:1-34; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2:11)

The army of Israel was grouped into warfare ranks and distributed in the four cardinal points as follows: Judah, Issachar and Zebulun with an army strength of one hundred and eighty-six thousand, four hundred (186,400) occupied the East; Reuben, Simeon and Gad with an army strength of one hundred and fifty one thousand, four hundred and fifty (151,450) occupied the South; Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin with a military strength of one hundred and eight thousand, one hundred (108,100) occupied the West while Dan, Asher and Naphtali had a military strength of one hundred and fifty-seven thousand, six hundred (157,600) and occupied the North.

As they journeyed towards the Promised Land, the armies of the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun on the eastern part were commissioned to lead the whole congregation. Others were to follow in the order stated above with the combined tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali protecting them from behind. The Levites were stationed between the South and West groups of armies. The arrangement was divinely given. It provided a robust security for everybody in the camp because every probable soft spot of invasion was blocked with security network. The distribution of the armies ensured that the larger number of trained soldiers were stationed at the front and back of the congregation. The implication of this is that the children of Israel could not be easily overpowered at the front or from behind by the enemy. The contemporary application of this is that we should beef up security in our various churches, camp meetings and conferences without taking chances or being ignorant of the devices of the enemy (2 Corinthians 2:11). The fact that God directed Moses to raise an army

despite His presence among the Israelites teaches that man must do his part and not be passive about his own welfare.

The promptness and accuracy with which Moses, Aaron and the captains of the tribes carried out the Lord's instruction is noteworthy (Numbers 1:54; 2:34; 3:51; 4:49). Moses was able to do this because of the divine approval, respect, favour and cooperation he enjoyed from the captains and the congregation in the course of supervising the task committed to his care. The work entrusted to the church is enormous. Church leaders need prayer and cooperation to fulfil their divine mandate. All saved members of the church need to assist and cooperate with their leaders if the mandate of the great commission will be fulfilled.

CENSUS OF THE LEVITES AND THEIR DUTIES (Numbers 3:1-51; 4:1-49; Leviticus 10:1-10; 1 Chronicles 21:1-30; Deuteronomy 4:24)

Numbers chapters three and four focus on the Levites. They were not numbered with the other tribes and were not included in any of the ranks. They were gathered and organised in their own team as an honour to them because of their peculiar service.

Aaron and his sons had been consecrated to minister in the priest's office. The mention of it here is a confirmation of their appointment (Numbers 3:2,3). Aaron's sons were mentioned: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The first two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had died after offering a strange fire before the Lord. Strange fire here refers to unapproved source of fire for sacrifice in the presence of God. Their mention here can serve as a reminder to the other priests and contemporary believers of the need to avoid a similar error by approaching divine assignment with dignity and respect and not with pride and presumptuousness. **“For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God”** (Deuteronomy 4:24). David was provoked by Satan to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1). Therefore, wrath came upon the people. It was like a strange fire

because David was not instructed by God to carry out the census. He does not want His servants to act irrationally.

The Levites, aside the priests, were to be presented to Aaron “...**that they may minister unto him**” (Numbers 3:6) in the place of the firstborn in Israel. “**And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD**” (Numbers 3:12,13).

Right from the night of the Passover, God claimed the firstborn of all Israel as His. But at this time, He planned to replace all the firstborn with the Levites so they could assist the priests in their work. So, a census had to be taken to ascertain the numerical strength of the Levites in comparison with all the firstborn. The Lord commanded Moses to number the Levites in two categories: firstly, the census involved every male from a month old and upwards (Numbers 3:15) and secondly, the males from thirty to fifty years old (Numbers 4:3,23,30). The first category was for the purpose of identifying the number of the firstborn males of the Levites which should be taken in the place of the firstborn males of the children of Israel. The number was found to be twenty-two thousand (22,000). The number of the first born males of the children of Israel was also taken at the commandment of the Lord and it was found to be twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three (22,273). Comparing the figures, the firstborn of all Israel were 273 more than the Levites. The extra two hundred and seventy-three of the children of Israel were redeemed (Numbers 3:39,40-51).

The second category of the Levites that were numbered includes those that qualified to work in the Tabernacle of the congregation. The Lord instructed Moses to “**take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their**

fathers, From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation” (Numbers 4:2,3). Under the new dispensation, all genuinely saved children of God are qualified for service in the church of the living God irrespective of age. However, the Lord requires that His children be holy for acceptable and enduring ministry (2 Timothy 2:21).

The duty of the various families of the Levites was spelt out. There was no competition, carnal comparison or complaints among them. The Kohathites were to carry the Ark of the Covenant, the table, candlestick, altars and instruments of the sanctuary. They were to be supervised by Eleazar. The Gershonites were given the charge of the entire curtains including those of the tabernacle, hangings and the coverings of badgers’ skins (Numbers 4:22-26). Ithamar, the son of Aaron, was to take the charge of them (Numbers 4:28). The Merarites were responsible for the heavy burdens: the boards and bars, the pillars and sockets, the pins and cords (Numbers 4:31,32). They had the record of every material so that there will be no confusion when the tabernacle was to be set up again.

In the church today, there are different ministries. All are important; none is superior. Ministers who have a public ministry should not despise others because we are co-labourers in the vineyard of the Lord. We shall be rewarded according to the quality of the services that we offer. **“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is”** (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Questions for review:

1. Mention the rationale behind the census of Israel.
2. What were the criteria for raising the armies?
3. What do we learn from the appointment of some individuals to assist Moses and Aaron in the census?
4. What can we learn from the outcome of the census and what implication does it pose to us?
5. Comment on the importance of security in the

- assembling of God's people as implied in this study.
6. What can we learn from the death of Nadab and Abihu?
 7. What is the implication of the variation in the duties of the Levites to present-day believers?

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

A circular graphic with a double border. Inside, the word "Lesson" is written in a cursive font above the number "85" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
85

TEST OF MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS

MEMORY VERSE: “Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done...”
(Numbers 5:6,7a).

TEXT: Numbers 5:1-31

This chapter reveals God’s directives on the preservation of holiness in the camp of Israel. He informed them that He would dwell in their camp on the proviso that they remained free from both moral and ceremonial defilement. In particular, the text focuses on the exclusion of those who have ceremonial uncleanness, restitution of misappropriated property and how to resolve cases of suspected marital unfaithfulness.

In every age, God’s expectation from His people is a life of continuous holiness. He abhors any appearance of defilement both in the individual lives of believers as well as in their interpersonal relationships. Just as purity was required for God to dwell in Israel’s camp, it is equally demanded if we want God to dwell among us today. On the condition that we come out and remain separate from all defilements and defilers, God promises to dwell with us and be our Father (2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ezekiel 43:9). The regulations given in this text are typical of what believers must do to remain pure and enjoy the presence of God always.

SEPARATION FROM DEFILEMENT IN THE CAMP

(Numbers 5:1-4; Leviticus 13:45-49; 15:2-33; 21:1-12; Ezekiel 43:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 5:8,13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; 2 John 10,11; Revelation 21:27)

God instructed Moses to command the children of Israel to isolate from their camp every leper and every one that has an issue, and whoever is defiled by reason of having contact with a corpse or participating in mourning for the dead (Numbers 5:1,2). The command was intended to keep the camp clean from all forms of defilement. The instruction was not gender-based as both sexes were involved. But beyond the physical benefit of preventing infections, the exclusion of these people symbolises the removal of sin from the camp. Leprosy typified sin in the way it destroys the flesh of its victim gradually. If they were left in the camp, they could spread defilement to others either directly or indirectly. Therefore, God commanded their removal so **“that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof [He dwells]”** (Numbers 5:3b). God has zero tolerance for defilement and Moses made this clear to the Israelites that if He sees anything unclean among them, He would turn away from their midst (Deuteronomy 23:14).

God’s directive to put away defilement from Israel’s camp teaches that outward and administrative perfection in the church must be coupled with holiness. Though the camp of Israel had been well organised and made secure; the tabernacle and the priesthood had been put in place, yet God would not dwell with them on those accounts except they were free from defilement. This tells us that holiness is central for individuals and congregations that want to retain the presence of God.

Notice also that the individual leper or ceremonially defiled person was removed from his or her position in the camp. That is an indication that sin makes a believer forfeit his/her place in God’s kingdom. Believers must continue in holiness for them to enjoy the grace of God. And if anyone falls into sin, it will take genuine repentance and total cleansing to restore lost privileges

and rights to such a person.

In the New Testament, the command to excommunicate those who persist in sin corresponds with the exclusion of defiled persons from Israel's camp (1 Corinthians 5:12,13). The camp of Israel typified the church. Therefore, church leaders must remove anyone whose presence in the assembly would constitute a source of defilement to others. Individual believers must also get rid of anything that defiles from their personal lives because "**a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump**" (1 Corinthians 5:6).

The obedient response of the Israelites to God's command on this point is worthy of emulation. Much later, when Miriam became leprous because she spoke against Moses, she was shut out of the camp notwithstanding her clout in the assembly (Numbers 12:1-16).

SCRIPTURAL DIRECTIVES ON RESTITUTION FOR WRONGS DONE (Numbers 5:5-10; Genesis 20:1-8,14-18; Exodus 22:1-7; Leviticus 5:15-18; 6:1-7; Luke 19:8,9; Matthew 5:23,24; Acts 23:1-5; 24:16)

In furtherance of God's instruction to maintain purity in their lives, He instructed the Israelites to make restitution whenever anyone has done wrong against his or her neighbour. These instructions on restitution in our text are additions to what God had commanded before on the subject (Leviticus 5:15-18; 6:1-7). By this commandment, He places emphasis on living right with Him and with our fellow men. When a man commits sin, he needs to make things right with God through confession, but there is also a need to make things right with the person offended, by making restitution. Therefore, to retribute a trespass involves two things: confession to God and compensation to our fellow men. Confession without restitution is incomplete repentance.

Restitution is making right all wrongs done against our fellow men, restoring stolen or misappropriated properties to their rightful owners, paying debts, making confessions to those offended, apologising to those

slandered, correcting wrong marriages, exposing examination malpractices and giving back whatever has been gained by fraud, including certificates, wife or husband. In cases of misappropriated property belonging to a neighbour, the law required the Israelites to return the exact cost of the property plus a twenty percent surcharge to the rightful owner. But, if the owner has died, the restitution should be made to his relation; and if the man has no kinsmen to recompense the trespass unto, it should be recompensed unto the Lord by giving it to the priest. In our present time, complex cases of restitution should be referred to church leaders who are God's representatives.

It is surprising that many people reject or rationalise the clear teaching of the Scripture on restitution. Some claim that the demand to make restitution after experiencing the new birth is a relapse to legalism; while others postulate that the practice has been abolished with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. But they err. To make restitution cannot be equated with legalism because it is not a means of obtaining justification from God; rather, it is a proof that one has truly been justified. It is a fruit of repentance and evidence of a true desire to have a clear conscience before God and man. Anyone who has truly made peace with God will equally long to make peace with their fellow men.

Looking at the Scripture, the doctrine of restitution is not limited to a particular dispensation. Before the law was given by Moses, Abimelech, the king of Gerar made restitution by restoring Sarah to Abraham, her rightful husband (Genesis 20:1-8,14-18). Under the dispensation of the law, God commanded restitution (Leviticus 6:1-7; Numbers 5:5-10). In the New Testament, Zacchaeus, Paul and others made restitution (Luke 19:8,9; Acts 23:1-5; Philemon 18,19). Thus, restitution is timeless and God expects believers to make restitution wherever they have done wrong.

SUSPICION OF MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS AND ITS RESOLUTION (Numbers 5:11-31; Leviticus 18:20; 20:10; Job 24:15; Proverbs 2:16,17; 6:34; 30:20; Song of Solomon 8:6; Zechariah 7:10; 8:17; Hebrews 13:4)

God instructed Moses on how to resolve cases where a husband accuses his wife of committing adultery but has no conclusive evidence. This could be a case of unfounded suspicion on the part of the husband or actual secret infidelity carefully concealed by the wife. Either way, God considers the allegation of marital unfaithfulness a weighty matter that must be investigated diligently so as to exonerate the innocent and punish the guilty. Here we learn that God will not condone even the slightest hint of evil among His people. Jealousy in the heart of the husband must be dissolved because it destroys the foundation of trust and, if left unresolved, can be as cruel as death. On the other hand, sexual immorality is a heinous crime against God and man. Therefore, every suspected case of infidelity must be searched out and dealt with. In the New Testament, believers are instructed to avoid even a hint of immorality in their lives; and peradventure there is any such hint of evil in the church, we are instructed to deal with it ruthlessly (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

In our text, God commands the man who suspects that his wife has committed adultery to bring her to the priest to be tried and proven innocent or guilty. In other words, the accuser must not take laws into his own hands but allow God's priest to adjudicate. The priest would subject the woman to what was known as a "trial by ordeal", which was a very common means of exposing secret marital unfaithfulness in ancient times. God gave the Israelites definite instructions on how to carry out this trial because He did not want them to copy the idolatrous versions which the Canaanites practised. However, it must be stated that such trial is not valid for use by believers today. The Holy Spirit and His numerous gifts in the church supersede those ceremonial procedures which God ordained only as a

temporary measure.

Following the test procedure, the result was always remarkable because God intervened, and not that there was anything magical about the water that was given to the suspect to drink. If truly the woman had been unfaithful to her husband, the water would enter her body system, her belly became swollen and her thighs rotten. But on the contrary, if the woman was innocent and it was just a case of the husband being unduly jealous, the bitter waters would do her no harm. Instead, the innocent woman would be more robust in health and she would bear children. It is significant that the same water that exposed the guilt of the secret adulteress proved the innocence of the faithful wife who was falsely accused. In other words, what causes dread and disgrace to the wicked holds no terror for the righteous. If we have done no evil and we are innocent before God, nothing can harm us (Daniel 6:22; Psalm 18:19-24).

This procedure reveals God's concern over the sanctity of marriage and the need to curb negative feelings such as jealousy, suspicion, wrong accusation and the like. To this end, believers should avoid adultery and fornication like a plague, not just because they destroy the marriage union but that they directly violate God's law. Also, husbands and wives should conduct themselves in such a way as to avoid any suspicion by their spouses. There should be no secret dealings with, or undue closeness to the opposite gender. But then, believers should also desist from entertaining unfounded suspicion against one another. Our relationships should be based on mutual trust; and when there is a breach of that trust, the matter should be brought to the open, investigated and dealt with. Suspicion and lack of mutual trust destroy good relationships.

There are sundry lessons from the test of marital unfaithfulness in our text. First, there is nothing covered that will not be revealed. Every secret sin that men commit are open and known to God. Therefore, let those who cover up their evil deeds wise up and repent before

their sins find them out. Second, it is more honourable for an offender to confess his or her wrong rather than being investigated and disgraced. A secret adulteress who claims innocence and goes through these frightening rituals with impudence, only to be exposed afterwards, will certainly become a byword among the people. Achan faced such a tragedy and became a byword in Israel (Joshua 7:16-26).

Third, God is fair and will never be party to gender bias. Though there was no such test of marital unfaithfulness designed for men in the Old Testament, God exposed and judged them severely for committing adultery. As a matter of fact, the test of marital unfaithfulness worked on the woman only if the accuser himself was free from the same sin (Hosea 4:14). Hence, it was a matter of whoever comes to equity must come with clean hands.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They wanted Him to sanction her execution. But Jesus said unto them: “...**He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her**” (John 8:7). By this, Christ did not condone sin but encouraged everyone to acknowledge their sinfulness, repent and experience genuine salvation. Fourth, a day of retribution is coming when God will, through Jesus Christ, judge the secret deeds of men according to the gospel (Romans 2:16). Fifth, God will surely reward the righteous. Believers who are falsely accused today and wrongly punished will one day be exonerated and fully rewarded.

Questions for review:

1. How can believers enjoy the abiding presence of God always?
2. What can we learn from God’s directive to put away defilements from Israel’s camp?
3. How true is the doctrine of unconditional security of believers in view of God’s command to put out those who were defiled from the camp?
4. What is restitution? Prove from the Scripture that the practice of restitution is timeless.

5. What are the dangers of marital unfaithfulness?
6. What should be the believer's stance and reaction to marital infidelity?
7. Point out key lessons from the test of marital unfaithfulness in our text.

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

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

SECTION III
BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

Lesson
86

**CHRIST'S
EXPLANATION OF
UNFAITHFULNESS AND
DEFILEMENT**

MEMORY VERSE: "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man" (Mark 7:15).

TEXT: Mark 7:1-37

The chapter opens with the dubious and unscrupulous attitude of the Pharisees and certain of the scribes who came to put to check the progress of the gospel ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in the entire Jewry. This study also points out the dispute Christ had with them concerning the allegation about eating bread with "**unwashed hands**", the needful instructions He gave to the people on that occasion and further explanations about faithfulness and unfaithfulness to God and His sacred word. Mention was made of the demonstration of faith and healing of the woman of Canaan's daughter and finally, the cure of the man that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech.

FAULTFINDING OF THE UNFAITHFUL PHARISEES AND SCRIBES (Mark 7:1-5; Matthew 15:1,2; Luke 6:7)

"Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault" (Mark 7:1,2). The Pharisees and scribes travelled from a far distance in order to come and pick up a quarrel against Christ in Galilee where they felt He was held in high reputation. They came from Jerusalem on an official assignment to evaluate

His ministry. Previously, such delegation was made where they pronounced a harsh condemnation against Jesus (Mark 3:22). These official delegates had already made up their minds about Jesus, looking for an occasion to confirm their curiosity. Apart from having a predetermined conclusion about Him, they failed to evaluate Him against the measure of God's word. They brought a complaint against the disciples to their Master, expecting that He would have them conform to their inventions and impositions. They sought to make themselves the standard for others to adhere to.

One of the purposes of Christ's coming was to set aside the ceremonial laws which God made and to abrogate them in order to make way for the new. **"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second"** (Hebrews 10:9).

Had the scribes and Pharisees come to be taught by Jesus, their zeal and quest for knowledge would have been commendable; but to have come to oppose the Lord and check the progress of His gospel was tantamount to wickedness. They were unlike certain Greeks who came to worship at the feast and desired to see Jesus (John 12:20,21). Believers in Christ should avoid the insincere motives of these religious bigots.

It is unfortunate that their mission was to find fault. **"And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault"** (Mark 7:2). This they often do so **"...that they might take him"** (John 11:57). Their problem was upholding the tradition of the elders. By this tradition, all the people were enjoined to wash their hands before eating. There was no harm in the practice itself except the much emphasis placed on it as an integral part of their religion. **"For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders"**. The religious leaders meant elaborate ceremonial washing, not washing for the sake of cleanliness. The observant Jews of that time would strictly observe a rigid and extensive ritual for washing before meals. Their washings were commanded by tradition, not the Scripture. The

Pharisees and the Jews knew this, yet they still went ahead and criticised the disciples for non-adherence. Contemporary Christians must be diligent to be able to search, compare and contrast between the revealed word of God and the opinions of men so as not to fall into error (John 5:39; Psalm 119:97,137,9,11).

JESUS' EXPLANATION OF DEFILEMENT AMONG THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES (Mark 7:6-23; Isaiah 29:13; Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 20:20).

“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6). Jesus referred to them as hypocrites because they were too concerned with trivial matters such as the washing of hands. A hypocrite is “an actor” or someone who wears a mask. The picture they portrayed is more important to them than who they actually are. They **“honoureth [God] with their lips”**, but in the real sense, **“their heart is far from [Him]”**. It is possible for a so-called believer to appear spiritual when actually, he is far from God.

Hypocrisy is tantamount to unfaithfulness before God. Although many are regular in church attendance, reading of the Bible, eloquent in prayers, involved in financing church projects and engaged in evangelism, their hearts are still far away from their Maker. All these are nothing but vain worship. The Pharisees, in their blind zeal, were **“teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”**. Truly, there were many washings imposed by the Mosaic laws (Hebrews 9:10), which were mere symbols of inward purity of the heart, they presumptuously added to the ceremony and were very apt in washing of pots and cups and **“many other such like things...”**

Christ reproved them also for laying aside the commandment of God and making His word of no effect by their traditions. He cited an example of the commandment of God for children to honour their parents which they had flagrantly underestimated. Once a man conformed himself in all areas to the tradition of

the elders, they would find a means of exonerating him from the consequence of disobeying the commandment of God. But, believers must avoid this tragic error of replacing true righteousness with mere human traditions and ceremonies. Parents should instil the fear of God into their children early enough and teach them the whole counsel of God. They should spare no effort to train them in love (Proverbs 22:6).

Jesus emphasised the things that defile a man. He stressed that: **“There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man”** (Mark 7:15). Specifically, Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness with respect to food. Eating with unclean hands or any other such thing does not in any way defile; it is what comes out of man that defiles. He thus expanded their understanding of what constitutes real defilement. He said, **“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man”** (Mark 7:21-23). Believers need to examine their hearts and see whether any of these is present with them (2 Corinthians 13:5), and ask God for complete purging of their hearts.

FAITH OF THE ALIEN AND UNIQUE HEALING OF THE MUTE (Mark 7:24-37; Matthew 15:21-28; Acts 10:38)

“And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter” (Mark 7:24-26). Jesus had travelled about 50 miles north to the coast of the Gentiles. A poor woman who was in distress, a Gentile and a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, approached and desired Him to help her young daughter

who was possessed of the devil. Although Christ's response was, "**...it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs**", she was not discouraged. With faith and perseverance, she got the needed miracle.

From this woman, the following lessons stand out: one, she was humble in her request. Believers should also be humble before the Lord at all times (1 Peter 5:6). Two, she was importunate. She defied all the apparent insults thrown at her to get her desired miracle. Three, she was direct and focused in her request (Mark 10:51). Present-day believers should not be discouraged but tarry for their miracles (Luke 18:1-8). Four, Jesus commended her faith which was the basis for her miracle (Matthew 15:28).

The last part of the chapter shows the healing of a man that was both deaf and mute. "**And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him**" (Mark 7:31,32). The Lord Jesus hardly stayed long in a place because of the nature of His ministry (Acts 10:38). He never rejected anyone who needed His help. On seeing the man "**that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech**", He took him aside from the multitude to show that He sought not the glory of men but of God. Christ's humble disposition in ministry should serve as a lesson to contemporary believers. Throughout His ministry, He used different methods of healing. He healed in response to the faith of those that approached Him. His power is unlimited.

Christ took the man aside, "**And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.**" That He sighed showed His compassionate response to the pain and sorrow sin brought to the world. As soon as He gave a word of command, "**straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.**" This was a clear fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah that "**...the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped... and the tongue of the**

dumb sing..." (Isaiah 35:5,6).

In a rare display of humility, Christ charged the people not to publish the miracle but in their zeal, they did. In fact, "**...the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it**". The miracles of Christ are always astonishing; and anyone who comes to Him today with faith, will also have good testimonies to tell others about their encounter with the Lord. We should not be ashamed to tell others about the love of the Saviour.

Questions for review:

1. Why did the scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus from Jerusalem?
2. What should be a believer's motive for coming to the house of God?
3. How can a believer differentiate the word of God from the opinions of men?
4. In what ways do churchgoers demonstrate hypocrisy to God today?
5. What role are parents to play in effective upbringing of their children in the way of the Lord?
6. What can believers learn from the comportment of the Greek woman?
7. What can believers learn from Christ's humble disposition in ministry as He healed the man that was both deaf and mute?

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
87

JESUS WARNS AGAINST HELL

MEMORY VERSE: “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24).

TEXT: Mark 9:30-50; Luke 16:19-31

The subject of hell is an important discourse that demands careful and proper consideration because the existence of man on the surface of the earth is not for ever. There are two destinations before man. Where to end up is hinged on the kind of choice made here on earth when one is still able to decide. The two destinations are heaven and hell.

The teaching on hell is cardinal in the Bible and found in both Old and New Testaments. It is vividly revealed as the place of agonising torment and everlasting punishment in unquenchable fire for unrepentant sinners. Thus, it is the final abode for unconverted souls and fearsome home to all transgressors. The word “hell” is found about fifty-four times in the King James Version of the Bible. Its translation in Hebrew occurs thirty-one times, while the Greek interpretations “Gehena”, “Hades” and Latin interpretation “Tartarus” occur twelve, ten times and once respectively.

Christ warned specifically and repeatedly on the danger of hell and the need for His listeners to steer clear of it (Matthew 5:22,29,30; 18:8,9; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5). The apostles also followed the same explanation of hell as offered by the Lord (Romans 2:5-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; Hebrews 10:26,27; James

3:5,6; 2 Peter 2:4-9; Jude 7,23). The church cannot afford to give less attention or emphasis to the teaching on hell, without subverting the gravity and gloominess of the subject.

CLARIFICATION OF WHO IS THE GREATEST (Mark 9:30-37; Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 22:24-27; Hebrews 4:13; John 3:3-7; Philippians 2:5-8)

Christ had revealed His imminent death on the cross and resurrection the third day to His disciples. **“But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.”** Instead, they disputed among themselves on their way to Capernaum who should be the greatest. As they were in the house, Christ asked them the cause of their disputation, but they held their peace. Being Omniscient, in whose eyes **“...all things are naked and opened...”** (Hebrews 4:13), He said to His disciples, **“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 18:4). Christ gave the condition for entering into the kingdom of God which is primary and of greater importance. Before anyone can become the greatest in the Kingdom, he or she must first be converted. This means that the heart must be teachable, corrigible, submissive and obedient. Salvation or being born again is paramount to the life in the Kingdom. This is the basis or foundation which whoever wants to enjoy the life in God’s kingdom must first have (John 3:3,5).

Furthermore, Christ revealed the need to have the humility of a child. By nature, children are unassuming, unpretentious and sincere. They do not pretend to be what they are not, but display honesty and simplicity in character. Possessing this is tantamount to having the mind of Christ. **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 2:5). A person cannot rightly claim to be a child of God if he or she is haughty, proud, pompous or arrogant.

Christ urges us to imitate and imbibe His humble nature. **“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” (Matthew 11:29). The meekness, humility and lowliness of Christ appear in His assumption of human nature, in His subjection to the will of the Father, and in his sufferings and death.

CAUTION FOR BEING HASTY TO JUDGE OTHERS (Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49,50)

After clarifying who is the greatest in the Kingdom, there was a report that someone whom the disciples thought did not belong to their ‘inner circle’ was casting out demons : **“...and we forbad him, because he followeth not us”** (Mark 9:38). Christ clearly said that such should not be stopped nor be resisted because **“...there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me”** (Mark 9:39). It should be noted that God-sent believers and gospel ministers do not belong in one denomination. The Lord has His servants scattered over the nations. Therefore, true disciples of Christ should appreciate others who do not belong to their assemblies but are committed fully preaching the gospel of Christ in sincerity and in truth.

However, we should not be ignorant of Christ’s warning against false prophets and teachers who are out to deceive others. There are some like Barjesus (Acts 13:6-12); sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-17); and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-21). So, we are warned by Christ to beware of false prophets (Matthew 24:11,24; 7:15; Mark 13:22,23); Paul the apostle warned against their evil effects in this end-time (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4); Peter warned believers of **“...their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of”** (2 Peter 2:1,2); John the Beloved also cautioned believers to **“...try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world...”** (1 John 4:1,3).

Those who are Christ’s followers are genuine and are often known by the fruits they bear. **“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that**

Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). They cannot lightly speak evil of the Master because the Spirit of God dwells in them (Mark 9:39).

Christ also revealed the significance of giving to the disciples in His name. He said, **"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward"** (Mark 9:41). Giving for the gospel is an important part of identifying with Christ. Those who faithfully give for the progress of God's work will be rewarded here on earth and in heaven. As believers, we should always **"...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"** (Acts 20:35). It is a great privilege to give to God.

CONSEQUENCE OF OFFENDING THE LITTLE ONES (Mark 9:42-50; Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 18:6-9)

As Christ concludes the discussion with His disciples, He spoke on the issue of offence and its danger. He said, **"And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea"** (Mark 9:42). It is clear from this that the offence (source of sin) may be from another individual. Satan and his agents often use human agents to be sources of sin to believers. This is the reason we need to be careful and watch over our lives in order not to be instruments of offence in the hands of Satan. As we watch carefully, we should disallow the enemy from tempting us to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness (Romans 6:13).

Christ also warned that if the hand or foot – that is to say if any individual(s) as important as any of these members of the body – becomes an object of offence, it is better we cut it off and enter into life eternal maimed than to have all the members and be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worms never die nor the fire quenched. The matter of life in hell is real as life in heaven. Those who dispute the

reality of hell should consider the story of the rich man and Lazarus. **“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame”** (Luke 16:23,24).

The Lord is so much concerned about where we spend eternity; He wants all men to be saved so that none will perish in hell. Apart from the hand or foot, which He typified as objects that can be used as source of sin, He also said, **“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire”** (Mark 9:47). It is therefore evident that any of the important members of the body can be used by the enemy as a means of temptation to send one to hell. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that we heed Christ’s warning to avoid all means of offence(s) to avoid ending up in hell.

To escape eternal punishment in hell, sinners must confess their sins and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Saviour. Believers must watch and pray always, constantly resisting the devil through faith in the word of God, daily trusting and leaning on His unfailing arm to carry them through, with their gaze fixed on Jesus moment by moment. We cannot afford to be careless at any time because the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Questions for review:

1. Why does the subject of hell demand careful and serious consideration?
2. What should be the attitude of believers to the teaching on hell?
3. What does it take to become ‘greatest’ in God’s kingdom?
4. Why should we imbibe the humble virtue of Christ?
5. How can we know those who truly belong to Christ?
6. Why is it necessary for believers to give to others?
7. Why is Christ’s warning against hell so stern and what must believers do to avoid it?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "88" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the circle is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
88

HEALING OF BLIND BARTIMAEUS

MEMORY VERSE: “And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47).

TEXT: Mark 10:46-52

In this narration of Jesus’ healing of a blind man, the name of the blind man was mentioned probably because he was well known in the area. Blind Bartimaeus’ story is one that evokes pity. Though he was born blind, he did not allow his situation to prevent him from coming to Christ for help. Neither did he allow anyone to shift his focus from the merciful Saviour.

Beggars were common sights in most towns. Since most occupations require physical labours, anyone with handicap was at a severe disadvantage and usually forced to beg in order to find a means of living. Little wonder God commanded His people to care for such needy folk (Leviticus 25:35-38). Those who are disabled to get a livelihood through their own labour and have no other way of surviving are objects of charity, and particular care ought to be taken of them. In the present dispensation however, disability is not always seen as liability as there are things that enlightened disabled individuals can do to earn a living.

Blind Bartimaeus learnt that Jesus was passing by; therefore, he took advantage of the opportunity and called out for mercy (Mark 10:47). The Lord heard his call, responded and healed him.

The narration of the blind Bartimaeus’ encounter with Jesus is quite illustrative of a sinner’s encounter with the Saviour. His healing typifies the spiritual cure

wrought by the grace of God on those that are spiritually blind.

A SINNER'S PRE-ENCOUNTER WITH THE SAVIOUR
(Mark 10:46; Ephesians 4:17,18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 3:14; Matthew 23:17; John 12:40; Revelation 3:17)

“And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging” (Mark 10:46). The case of blind Bartimaeus is an expressive representation of the condition of sinners. A sinner is spiritually blind; thus, he is in a poor, miserable and helpless condition. He or she is blinded by sin and do not see the truth of the word of God. **“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 4:4). A sinner is under the influence and power of the devil who has enslaved him and darkened his understanding so that he would not behold the glorious gospel of Christ. He is without any spiritual sight, and lacks a true sense of his spiritual state or condition; he does not know the way of peace, life and light. He does not understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In the case of blind Bartimaeus, he had been there helpless for many years until Jesus passed by. The onus lies on believers to tell sinners about the Saviour. Their business is to make their Master known as the Messiah and Saviour of the world. The gospel should be preached to others because they cannot call on Him whom they have not heard about; and they cannot hear without preachers. The divine revelation must be made known to them before they can receive and call upon Him in prayer. And those who have heard must acknowledge their poor spiritual standing, confess and forsake their sins in order to be saved (Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

SINNERS' RESPONSE AFTER ENCOUNTERING THE SAVIOUR (Mark 10:47-51; Hebrews 12:1; Romans 10:13; Hebrews 7:25; James 5:16; Matthew 11:28-30)

“And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47). Bartimaeus was determined to attract the attention of Jesus as he heard that He was passing by, calling out loudly and addressing Him by His Messianic title, Son of David. He cried out for mercy, and **“Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called...”** The people around him who had discouraged him at first, now signified to him the gracious call of Christ. They said, **“...Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.”**

The great invitation Christ gives every sinner to come to Him is a huge encouragement and hope. Let the guilty, the empty and tempted be of good comfort for Christ calls them to be pardoned. He said, **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). In coming to Christ for help, healing and other blessings, we should see Him as the promised Messiah and the Trustee of mercy and grace. We should promptly respond to Christ's invitation in order to enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom. He calls the guilty, the tempted, the hungry and the naked to be of good comfort because He will pardon, succour, satisfy, clothe and have all their needs met.

Blind Bartimeaus, on hearing the call of Christ, did not hesitate to get to the Saviour. **“And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus”** (Mark 10:50). He abandoned everything that might in any way hinder him or retard his movement to Christ. A person who would come to Jesus must cast away the garment of his own sufficiency and self-deceit, free himself from every weight and sin that most easily beset him. **“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”** (Hebrews 12:1).

There are vital lessons from this text in relation to a sinner coming to Christ for salvation as well as a believer who wants to receive from the Lord. One, there must be importunity and fervency: **“...but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me”** (Mark 10:48). Two, there must be exercise and expression of faith in the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25). Three, faith and fervent prayer attract the Saviour’s compassion. **“And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole...”** (Mark 10:52).

A SEEKER’S POST-ENCOUNTER WITH THE SAVIOUR (Mark 10:52; 1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 8:22; 16:24; Mark 10:21; John 8:12)

“...And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way”. The resolution of blind Bartimaeus to follow Jesus after his healing is instructive. In a sense, he joined the multitude, and went after Christ partly to express his gratitude for a wonderful favour and partly to be a witness of the power of His deity and the truth of His messiahship. He became His disciple, embraced His doctrines, believed Him as the Messiah, and submitted to His ordinances. This should be the effect of salvation wrought in our lives. Mercy is effective when it brings forth in our hearts glory and praise to God and engages us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough to come to Christ for spiritual healing; but when we are healed, we must continue to follow and receive instructions from Him.

As recipients of God’s mercy, believers should be attracted to the Saviour and follow Him. Being enlightened by Christ, they should follow Him as their Leader and Commander, Captain of their salvation, Shepherd of the flock, Guide and Forerunner, and as the Light of the world. Following Him is safe, honourable, pleasant, comfortable and profitable in life and after life. We must follow Christ all the way.

In conclusion, the case of blind Bartimaeus throws up the following lessons: one, people are blinded by

sin; they do not by nature see the truth. Two, it is proper in this state of blindness to call upon Jesus as the fountain of light. **“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”** (John 8:12). Those in darkness are to seek Him. Three, when people rebuke or laugh at us, it should not deter us from calling on the Saviour. Four, the persevering cry of those who seek the Saviour aright will not be in vain. Jesus never turned away any that had ever called on Him. **“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”** (John 6:37). Five, sinners must come to Jesus and cast themselves at His feet, casting away everything that obstructs their progress. Six, faith is the only channel through which we shall receive mercy (Hebrews 11:6). Seven, those who are thus restored to sight, should follow Jesus. They should follow Him wherever He leads. He that can give sight to the blind cannot lead His followers astray. We should follow the Lord Jesus Christ all the way.

Questions for review:

1. What should be a believer's attitude to the less-privileged?
2. How is a sinner likened to the blind?
3. What is the duty of believers to sinners?
4. What must a sinner do to come to Christ in relation to the case of Bartimaeus?
5. What can we learn from the way blind Bartimaeus cried to the Saviour?
6. What should a recipient of God's mercy do in gratitude to the Lord?
7. Why should the gospel be preached to sinners?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font above the number "89" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with glasses resting on it.

Lesson
89

THE WIDOW'S MITES

MEMORY VERSE: “And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43,44).

TEXTS: Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

The timeless and inspiring account of the widow who gave her all to God is the focus of this study. The event took place at a period when religious leaders were exploiting the less-privileged in the society – widows, the fatherless, orphans etc. The Bible reveals how the scribes devoured widows’ houses (Mark 12:38-40). In many societies, the rights of widows are not well protected and this makes them predisposed to maltreatment. The early Church made conscious efforts to address the needs of widows (Acts 6:1-4).

Like many widows, the central character in our text was described as a “**poor widow**”. Her action was challenging and instructive; she gave, in spite of her financial condition. The same attitude was demonstrated by the Macedonian believers who also gave despite their state of poverty and great trial. Paul wrote: “**How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality**” (2 Corinthians 8:2). Also, the widow actively participated in religious activities despite her financial and marital status.

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

God promises to increase the wealth of givers, not receivers (Proverbs 11:24,25; Luke 6:38). We should always be ready to offer to Him because He gave His **“only begotten Son”** so that we might gain eternal life (John 3:16). The gift of His Son is priceless and unquantifiable. Therefore, nothing should be considered too much to give to God in order to reciprocate His love for us. Giving is a privilege because only the living can give to God.

DIVINE PROSPERITY AND RECORD OF OUR ATTITUDE TO GIVING (Mark 12:41,42; Luke 21:1,2; 1 Samuel 2:7; Acts 10:4; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:14,17; 2 Chronicles 17:16; 35:8; 2 Kings 12:9; Joshua 6:19; Matthew 27:6)

That Jesus **“...sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury”** (Mark 12:41), shows that He is interested in and sees all that we do in His house, including giving. The omniscient God has the record of our giving, both past and present. The angel told Cornelius that his prayers and alms **“...are come up for a memorial before God”** (Acts 10:4). God is not only aware of the amount we give but He also knows the level of our prosperity. He has record of all our regular and irregular incomes, profits and losses. That is why the Scripture enjoins us to give according to the level of our prosperity. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: **“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come”** (1 Corinthians 16:2). The poor widow in our text did not announce she was giving the last two mites she had, yet Christ knew. The Lord knows our net worth, what we give and what we keep back (Acts 5:3; Mark 12:44).

The manner and attitude to giving is as important as what we give. Jesus **“...beheld how the people cast money into the treasury...”** (Mark 12:41). Christ knows our motives for giving. He knows whether we give liberally or sparingly, grudgingly or cheerfully, humbly or

arrogantly. He knows whether we give to please men or to please Him. The Bible clearly states: **“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”** (2 Corinthians 9:7). God commanded the children of Israel to give willingly. He said, **“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering”** (Exodus 25:2).

Another important lesson here is that **“...many that were rich cast in much”**. This is expected of the rich people. The rich should not compare themselves with the poor in the church when it comes to giving. As exemplified by the widow, the poor also do not have any excuse not to give. Giving involves determination and self-denial because there are always other needs competing for the money or gifts we plan to give to God.

Ministers have the following roles to play with regard to offering in the church. One, provision should be made for people to give in an orderly manner (2 Kings 12:9; Joshua 6:19; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; 14:40). Two, faithful people should be assigned to keep the treasury (2 Kings 22:9). Three, they should be vigilant and also preach against contributing money obtained from unrighteous gains. **“Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God”** (Deuteronomy 23:18). Four, they should be prudent and accountable in the way they spend money realised from collection of offering because many, like the poor widow, gave from their hard-earned incomes.

DIVINE PARAMETERS FOR RATING AMOUNT GIVEN (Mark 12:42-44; Luke 21:2-4; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 17:10-16; Matthew 6:1,3; 10:29; Acts 4:34-37)

“And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing” (Mark 12:42). A farthing was a very small amount of money (Matthew 5:26). It was just enough to buy two sparrows

(tiny birds) (Matthew 10:29). The amount given by this widow, though small, caught the attention of our Lord. In many gatherings today, such a small offering may not be noticed or announced when referring to great giving. This only confirms the word of God: “...**for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart**” (1 Samuel 16:7).

The major lesson here is that giving is not necessarily rated by the amount given. Though the rich people gave much, they still had much left after they gave. Perhaps, many of the rich people gave only a small fraction or percent of their money; whereas, this woman gave one hundred percent. It is also instructive that the poor widow gave priority to giving to God. Needless to say, that as “**a poor widow**”, she had many financial challenges. Notwithstanding, she gave all that she had. Note that she trusted God for divine provision after she had “...**cast in all that she had, even all her living**” (Mark 12:44). The poor in the church should not shy away from giving and leave the financing of God’s projects for the rich alone. Giving to God brings blessings and everyone should desire to share in them. No amount is too small to give to God. No one should therefore withdraw from giving because the amount they have to give is too small.

It is important to clarify some misconceptions about giving to God and giving alms to beggars. Christ warned: “**Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth**” (Matthew 6:1,3). God is not a beggar. Giving to God is different from giving alms to beggars. The two mites the widow gave were not hidden. The proceeds Barnabas and other disciples realised from the sale of their possessions were brought to the apostles publicly (Acts 4:34-37).

DIVINE PRAISE FOR RELEASING OUR ALL TO GOD
(Mark 12:43,44; Luke 21:3,4; Genesis 22:16,17; Mark 14:9; Philippians 4:14-19; Malachi 3:10-12; Luke 6:38; Matthew 19:29; 2 Corinthians 8:4,5)

“Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43,44). This singular act of giving by the widow elicited public commendation from our Lord. Sacrificial giving brings God’s blessings. God blessed Abraham because he willingly gave his only son Isaac as an offering to Him. He said, **“...That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven...”** (Genesis 22:17). Jesus also praised the woman that offered to Him an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard. He said, **“Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her”** (Mark 14:9). Paul praised and prayed for the Macedonian brethren who sent gifts to him while on his missionary assignment (Philippians 4:14-19). When giving is done scripturally, the giver is happy and the windows of heaven are opened for divine blessings (Malachi 3:10-12).

Giving to God is not limited to money. Giving our all to Him implies surrendering our time, talents and treasures whenever He needs them in whole or in part. In most cases, God does not tell us the specific rewards He plans to release on us when He asks us to give. Abraham was not told the blessings that would follow his obedience after surrendering Isaac. Peter was not told that there would be bountiful harvest of fishes at the time he surrendered his ship for Christ’s use. Likewise, the widow in our text did not know that giving only two mites would lead to such praise from Christ and that her singular act of liberality would furnish the theme of many sermons many years later.

God values our salvation more than our giving. One

must be saved before his giving can be accepted by God. For God to recognise and reward our giving, our names must have been written in the book of life in heaven (Revelation 20:12). This is possible through genuine repentance from sin and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. When this is done sincerely, there is freedom from sin, guilt and condemnation. The Macedonian believers are examples in this regard. Paul the apostle who witnessed how they gave to the work of God, wrote: **“...And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God”** (2 Corinthians 8:4,5).

Prosperity comes from God (1 Samuel 2:7). Ours is to be faithful in giving and service, or whatever He demands from us. Thereafter, His promise of abundance will be fulfilled in our lives (Philippians 4:19).

Questions for review:

1. What can believers learn from the life of the poor widow?
2. What should be our attitude while giving to God?
3. What are the roles of ministers in keeping church funds?
4. How would you describe the value of the two mites given by the poor widow?
5. What can we learn from the amount the poor widow gave?
6. Clarify some misconceptions about giving.
7. What is the place of salvation in our giving to God?

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



Lesson
90



BIRTH OF JOHN AND ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST

MEMORY VERSE: “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

TEXT: Luke 1:1-80

This study introduces us to the gospel according to Saint Luke. The writer, Luke, was a Gentile convert, a physician and a beloved companion of Paul the apostle. He presented Jesus Christ as the Divine-Human Saviour, who came to save mankind from sin. In his writing, he narrated the life and ministry of Christ, as seen by eye-witnesses, explaining the Jewish terms and customs which were not familiar to his Gentile audience. Luke dedicated the book as well as the Acts of the Apostles, which he also wrote, to the “**most excellent Theophilus**”. By extension, the gospel was written for and dedicated to all who are desirous of knowing God.

However, this study will focus on the family background of John the Baptist, angelic prediction of his birth, Zechariah’s doubt and divine discipline, the annunciation of Christ and the birth and early days of John.

FAMILY BACKGROUND OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(Luke 1:1-7,36,57-64; 3:2; 1 Chronicles 24:10)

John was born into the godly family of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Both parents were from priestly families and

they lived righteously before God despite their protracted problem of childlessness. However, they did not allow their physical problem to threaten their marriage or hinder their commitment to God. Zacharias took his turn to fulfill his priestly duties before God in the temple. Many people are not faithful in God's service because they allow their problems to weigh them down or they withdraw altogether. Others resort to murmuring and grumbling. But not Zacharias: **"...he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course"** (verse 8).

David divided the priests into twenty-four courses (or shifts) and made a roster for them (1 Chronicles 24:1-19). The course of Abijah, to which Zacharias belonged, was the eighth: and his duty was to burn incense in the temple. It was while Zacharias was on this path of duty that God sent Angel Gabriel to announce the cheering news that he would have a son. At last, his prayers of many years brought forth an answer.

John the Baptist had the privilege of being born into a godly home and his righteous and upright parents influenced him. We learn some lessons from his parentage: One, commitment and faithfulness to God and His service does not necessarily preclude a person from having problems. For reasons best known to Him, He allows us to pass through difficult situations. But He never leaves us to struggle through the problems alone or in vain. Two, a Christian must not allow difficulties or problems to hinder him or her from remaining godly and faithful in the service of God. As a matter of fact, we can turn what looks like a disability into an advantage. Three, we should learn to take all our problems to God in prayer and persevere until the answers come. From the case of John's parents, we learn that answers to our prayers may be delayed but cannot be denied. Four, old age is not an excuse for dropping out of God's service. We must continue to serve God until He calls us home. Five, married couples should avoid blaming each other or seeking to justify self when there is delay in childbirth. They should not think divorce or taking a second wife is the solution. Six,

Elisabeth did not give in to self-pity and carnal devices to get her problem solved. Neither was she a source of discouragement to her husband in ministry.

ANGELIC PREDICTION OF JOHN'S BIRTH AND ZACHARIAS' DOUBT (Luke 1:8-22; Hebrews 1:13,14; Psalm 103:20)

As Zacharias ministered in the temple, Angel Gabriel appeared to him announcing that Elisabeth his wife would give birth to a son, whose name would be John. The unexpected sight of the angel frightened Zacharias but his fears were allayed as the angel said, "**Fear not, Zacharias**". Angels still minister to the heirs of salvation. They bring answers to prayers, protect believers and deliver them from danger. Ministers of the gospel are also called angels of the church (Revelation 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14); and they are to relate with the people in a way that will not create fear in their minds.

Answers to our prayers often come in unexpected and incredible ways. From the way the angel spoke to Zacharias, he had probably ceased praying for a child because of old age. However, God surprised him. With God all things are possible; hence, we should never give up on anything that He has promised us in His Word. We should persevere in prayer until the answer comes (Luke 18:1-8).

The angel predicted other details and gave further instructions concerning the expected child. All that the angel spoke concerning John were fulfilled. He said many people would rejoice at his birth (Luke 1:14,58); the child would be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:15; Matthew 11:11); he was to drink neither wine nor strong drink (in compliance with the Old Testament law of Nazarites (Luke 1:15; Matthew 3:4; Numbers 6:2-4); he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and, consequently, be empowered to carry on a ministry similar to that of prophet Elijah of the Old Testament (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:1-13); and he would be a forerunner of the Messiah (Luke 1:17; John 1:6-8).

Zacharias' response to the angelic prediction was that of unbelief (Luke 1:18). Undoubtedly, his faith had weakened because of the delay as well as his old age. The knowledge he had about natural laws of procreation made him doubt the supernatural information from the angel. We should be careful lest we allow our natural or intellectual knowledge hinder our faith and confidence in God's word. The laws of nature are subject to God's omnipotent, miracle-working power. Therefore, when God promises to do something, true believers should simply respond in the affirmative. There are times when it seems as if our problems are beyond solution and every promise in the word of God appears unrealistic. At such times, we need to exercise faith and reckon that God is able to perform what He has promised, irrespective of obvious, negative circumstances (Romans 4:20,21).

For his unbelief, Zacharias was struck with dumbness till the time John was born. Eventually, Elisabeth conceived as the angel had predicted. Though Zacharias was disciplined, God still granted him a son. Even when God disciplines us, He still loves us and would fulfill His promise to perfect what concerns us.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST (Luke 1:26-38; Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Matthew 1:18-25; 2:1-12)

God was the first to unveil the virgin birth of Christ when He referred to Him as the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). This was His allusion to the fact that Christ would be conceived by a woman who had never known any man. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, **"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son..."** (Isaiah 7:14). The word 'virgin' as used in this reference means a woman that has not had carnal knowledge of any man. Luke's gospel recorded that the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph, saying, **"...behold, 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..."**

(Luke 1:31,32). Matthew, another gospel writer also revealed that Mary was found with a child by the Holy Ghost before she came together with Joseph, her espoused husband. While Joseph thought of putting her away secretly, **“...the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:20,21). He further recorded that Joseph knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called His name JESUS (Matthew 1:25).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus sometimes referred to others as His mother, brothers, sisters, but never called any mortal man His father – not even Joseph (Matthew 12:49,50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21). He always referred to God as His Father and this is another proof of His deity and divinity. The Bible says that Joseph was a just man (Matthew 1:19). If he had had carnal knowledge of Mary before Christ was conceived, he would not have thought of putting her away, and would not be qualified to be referred to as a **“just man”**. On the other hand, if Mary as an espoused virgin had conceived through another man before her marriage, it would have been right for Joseph to put her away (Deuteronomy 22:13-21; Matthew 19:9). In fact, the angel of God bore witness that the seed conceived in Mary was by the power of the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:35).

Though we know that the birth of Samson and John the Baptist were also announced by angels (Judges 13:2-5; Luke 1:11-15,26-33), that of Christ was unique because Samson and John the Baptist had earthly fathers. They were all descendants of Adam’s fallen race.

The virgin birth is thus an essential doctrinal truth which must be upheld because of its significance in God’s redemptive programme and its necessity for the salvation of mankind. Disputing this cardinal doctrine is, by implication, faulting the Scripture’s claim and denying Christ’s deity and distinctive sinlessness that

qualified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Christ is the spotless Lamb of God found in fashion as a man. His incarnation through the virgin birth is God's divine design, which finite minds cannot comprehend (Isaiah 55:9). To receive and believe the Scripture's claim about Christ's birth by a virgin-mother is to settle the question of the mystery and omnipotence of God. The virgin birth is therefore a unique sign from God conferred on Christ and Him alone. No other living soul had ever or will ever be conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in this peculiar, spectacular manner.

BIRTH AND EARLY DAYS OF JOHN (Luke 1:57-80; 1:13)

“Now Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her” (Luke 1:57,58). The birth of John caused joy, not only in Zacharias’ family, but also in the neighbourhood and they rejoiced with them. On the eighth day, the child was circumcised and named. As the custom was, the relations called the child after his father, Zacharias. But Elisabeth objected and called him ‘John’, as the angel had directed. Zacharias also **“...asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.”** As soon as they named the child, Zacharias’ mouth was opened, his tongue loosed and he spoke and praised God (Ezekiel 24:27). Filled with the Holy Ghost, he also prophesied.

The prophecy of Zacharias contains some striking details. One, he praised God for His intervention to redeem His people. He had prophetic insight to know that it was time for the Messiah to come from the lineage of David (verses 68,69). Two, he recognised that the Old Testament prophecies were about to be fulfilled, and that the stage was set **“That he [God] would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness**

and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (verses 74,75). God’s will for all believers is to attain and live the holiness life through the experience of sanctification whereby they are delivered from both outward and inward sin. Three, he also predicted John’s calling and ministry and would be called a prophet of God and be a forerunner of the Messiah. Four, he predicted also that many people would be saved through Christ. Thus, John was to prepare the way for Christ’s first advent. In like manner, contemporary believers are to engage in proclaiming the second advent of Christ through vigorous and relentless preaching of the gospel to prepare souls for heaven.

Questions for review:

1. What challenge can believers receive from the preface to the gospel of Luke?
2. Mention some lessons that believers can draw from the lives of Zacharias and Elisabeth.
3. What encouragement can those believing God for the fruit of the womb derive from the fact that Elisabeth conceived in her old age?
4. From the experience of Zacharias, point out the danger of unbelief.
5. Explain the ministry of John the Baptist.
6. State why Christ is different from other descendants of Adam.
7. Point out the details in the prophecy of Zacharias at John’s birth.

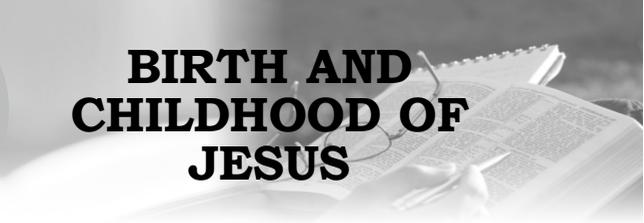
THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "91" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle pattern.

Lesson
91

A grayscale photograph of an open Bible with a pen resting on it, serving as a background for the title.

**BIRTH AND
CHILDHOOD OF
JESUS**

MEMORY VERSE: “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10,11).

TEXT: Luke 2:1-52

Luke’s gospel presents our Lord Jesus Christ as the Promised Saviour of Israel and the world. The Messiah’s birth as recorded in Luke and Matthew’s gospels is considered one of the greatest events in human history because all the prophecies that were made several hundred years before the event were all fulfilled accurately.

This study focuses on the birth of Christ as it was announced by the angel, celebrated by the host of heaven and witnessed by the shepherds. **“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS”** (Luke 1:30,31). The presentation of Christ in the temple as well as some outstanding events in His childhood are equally recorded in our text.

FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY CONCERNING THE BIRTH OF JESUS (Luke 2:1-7; Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; John 1:46)

“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him

in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:6,7). The birth of Jesus was characterised by series of preceding events. Notably, it was revealed and promised by God the Father (Genesis 3:15). Old Testament prophets also prophesied about it and the purpose of His coming (Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-12; Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 42:7). Micah in his prophecy concerning His birth captured the exact time, place and way Jesus will be born. **“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 precise way in which the prophecies concerning Jesus’ coming were fulfilled teaches us about the reliability of the word of God and that God is faithful to His Word. It also serves as a credible proof of divine inspiration and authorship of the Bible.

God, by providence, arranged events that coincided with the time and place of Jesus’ birth. According to our text, Christ was born at the time when Israel was being colonised by the Roman empire. Emperor Augustus Caesar who reigned twenty-six years before Jesus’ birth issued a decree that census should be taken in all his provinces. Unknown to him, God was using this to fulfil His program. If God faithfully brought the prophecy concerning the birth of Christ, the Saviour, to pass, then every word He has spoken in the Scripture is true and will certainly come to pass.

By this directive, Joseph and Mary were compelled to travel to their native home (Bethlehem), to be taxed. At their arrival, the hope of the world was consummated: **“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn”** (Luke 2:7). An amazing lowliness was demonstrated when Christ, who is God and Creator of all things was born in a manger (John 1:3). That the Creator of the universe and owner of all things was not born in a palace but in a lowly place beats the imagination of religious leaders

and kings all over the world. This shows that the thoughts of God are not the same with men, neither are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

PROCLAMATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS BY THE ANGEL (Luke 2:8-20; John 3:16; Isaiah 9:6; 1 Corinthians 1:27; Matthew 28:19,20)

When Jesus was born, only the host of heaven and His earthly parents knew what had happened. But God, willing that the world should quickly know about the arrival of the Messiah, sent an angel to bring the good news to men who could be described as ordinary shepherds. **“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:9-11). The content of this pronouncement indicates that Jesus is the Saviour sent for the redemption of humanity. Just as it pleased God to choose a poor and humble background for the birth place of the Messiah, He also preferred to first bring these tidings to shepherds tendering their flocks instead of religious leaders and kings. Indeed, **“...God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...”** (1 Corinthians 1:27).

The angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus was followed by a host of other angels praising and glorifying God, who has manifested His good will towards men by sending the Messiah to die for sinners (John 3:16). Also, on receiving the news, the shepherds never hesitated to trace the exact place of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:16,17). Likewise, believers are not expected to fold their hands after they have been born again. They should promptly obey the command of the Lord to **“...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15).

PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (Luke 2:21-39; Genesis 17:12,13; Leviticus 12:1-4; Exodus 13:2; 1 Samuel 1:24)

“And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). The Mosaic laws given to the children of Israel were expected to be observed to the letter by all Israelites. A woman who bore a son was ceremonially unclean for 40 days (twice that if she bore a daughter (Leviticus 12:2-5). After that, she was to offer a lamb of the first year and a dove or pigeon (Leviticus 12:6). If poor, she could offer two doves or pigeons (Leviticus 12:8). Mary’s offering indicates that she and Joseph belonged to the lower class of society.

Three different religious rites under the law were observed. First, was the circumcision of all male children after eight days of birth (Leviticus 12:3; Genesis 17:12-14); second, the purification of every woman that newly put to birth (Leviticus 12:1-4) and third, the presentation or dedication of every firstborn child in Israel (Exodus 13:2). Mary and Joseph faithfully performed all these rites as a devoted couple under the old covenant.

The religious rites observed under the Old Testament dispensation, though not directly practised in the New Testament church, are pointers to our circumcision, purification and presentation, which are symbols of our holiness and consecration. The ordinances commanded to be observed in the New Testament are water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. There are many churchgoers who take these ordinances for granted, at their own peril, but when we obey God’s commandments, we stand the chance of getting His blessings.

After Jesus was presented in the temple, God the Father and the host of heaven rejoiced; the Holy Spirit too began to move in the temple and spoke through one Simeon, a just and devout man, who had earlier got a revelation that he would not die until he witnessed the birth of Jesus; he began to prophesy concerning Jesus. Anna, a prophetess of about eighty-four years

old, serving God in fasting and prayer in the temple, night and day, prophesied too concerning Christ.

PROOF OF MESSIAHSHIP DURING THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS (Luke 2:40-52; Isaiah 9:6; John 8:58; 4:34; 9:4)

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). Jesus was now twelve years old. The Jewish feast of the Passover, which holds every year, was near. His parents were under obligation to go to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. Young Jesus was taken along and after the ceremony, another event of spiritual significance that beats human imagination occurred. The young Jesus chose to stay back in the temple at Jerusalem and engaged in religious dialogue with leaders of thought in the Jewish religion.

We understand that Jesus grew in all aspects of His being. At twelve years, the power of God had started manifesting in His life. Driven by a sense of mission, He left His parents and went into the temple for His Father’s business. Sitting with the doctors of the law, He demonstrated the wisdom of God that baffled His hearers by the way He asked questions and interpreted the Scriptures. This should have drawn the attention of the religious leaders to the divine personality of Jesus but they were spiritually insensitive. Meanwhile, His parents, on their way back home, presumed He was in the company until after some days. They had to return to Jerusalem to look for Him. When they found Him, Mary asked **“...Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing”** (Luke 2:48). Jesus replied His parents: **“...How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”** (Luke 2:49). This statement made by Jesus pointed to His mission as the Messiah sent to redeem mankind.

There are many ways believers could become involved in their Father’s business. One, through daily practical Christian living, which is expected from all who call upon

the name of the Lord. A popular saying goes thus: "Show me the life you live and I will believe the Christ you preach". Two, every true disciple of Christ is expected to reach every human creature of God with the good news of the Kingdom. This is the greatest service we can render to our God. Three, intercessory prayer whereby we pray for the steadfastness of souls already won and conversion of those who are yet to come in. Four, we should also aim at giving generously for missions' work, both home and abroad.

Five, regular follow-up and visitation of new comers and church members is another viable way of identifying with the business of the Kingdom. Six, active involvement in at least one area of church work is also a way of showing concern for the progress of God's kingdom.

Questions for review:

1. Why is the birth of Jesus considered one of the greatest events in human history?
2. What does the fulfilment of prophecies concerning the birth of Jesus teach us about God's faithfulness?
3. Like the shepherds, what should be our response to the spreading of the gospel?
4. What ordinances did Christ command believers to observe today?
5. Mention the fate of those who flout God's ordinances and the reward for those who obey His word.
6. Why did Jesus stay back in the temple at Jerusalem after the feast of the Passover?
7. What are the practical ways believers today can be engaged in the "Father's business"?

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

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SECTION IV BEGINNING OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD (Numbers 6:2,8).

TEXT: Numbers 6:1-27

The institution of the law regulating the Nazarite vow in the Old Testament was a symbol of a life consecrated and devoted to God. The separated life of a Nazarite is in essence an illustration of what a consecrated Christian life is in reality. The Nazarite vow was taken voluntarily by an individual who separates himself to live only for God and to devote his life exclusively to serving Him.

The word Nazarite is derived from the Hebrew word *nazar*, translated as 'separation', meaning something set apart or wholly dedicated for a sacred purpose. However, it should not be mistaken for the expression Nazarene, which was a term used to describe the Lord Jesus because He dwelt in the city of Nazareth (Matthew 2:23), and was also a derogatory term used to describe Christians in the early Church (Acts 24:5).

The Nazarite's vow symbolises a life that is totally surrendered, submissive, loyal and obedient to the Lord and His word; a life that is separated from the world and all its vanities and sinful propensities and devoted exclusively to seeking at all times and in all things God's glory and honour. In truth, every true believer in Christ is a spiritual Nazarite, called to separate from sin and

the world into a life of holiness and service to God.

PERSONAL SEPARATION AND CONSECRATION OF A NAZARITE (Numbers 6:1-8; Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Luke 1:74,75; Acts 21:23-27; Judges 13:3-5,7; 16:17; Genesis 28:20; Amos 2:11,12; 1 Peter 1:15,16).

The separation of the Nazarite was personal, voluntary and wholly given to the service of God. From the text, the vow of Nazarites involves four distinct restrictions or prohibitions that distinguished them from the average Israelite. One, they were not allowed to drink wine or strong drink (Numbers 6:3). Two, they were not allowed to eat or drink anything processed from the grape-vine, that is, they could not eat the fresh grapes or dried raisins (skins); neither the seed of the fruit nor the vine (grapes). Three, they left their hair uncut all through the period of their separation (Numbers 6:5; Judges 13:5; 16:17). Four, they were not permitted to go near a dead body or mourn the dead, even a close relative – father, mother or siblings.

These prohibitions were very significant as they set forth a high standard of holiness and absolute surrender that God demands from those who profess real devotion to Him. The wine (fermented) and strong drink represented carnal and sinful pleasures. It was prohibited because it intoxicates and impairs or deadens the senses; it can also pose a serious danger to true devotion and a holy walk with God as seen in the cases of Noah and Lot (Genesis 9:20,21; 19:31-38), and it can lead a child of God to become an easy prey to Satan. Warnings against fermented wine and strong drink abound in the Scriptures (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-6; Isaiah 5:11; Hosea 4:11; Ephesians 5:18).

“All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow” (Numbers 6:5). Among the Jews, an abundance of hair was considered a mark of physical

strength. The free growth of hair on the head of a Nazarite represented his dedication of his whole strength and powers to the service of God. It also serves as a mark of identification of his status as a Nazarite. Similarly, a believer through his lifestyle and dressing should bear a mark of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:17). This shows that true devotion and genuine piety must not remain hidden but outwardly manifested. A believer should keep his conscience pure from dead works and should touch no unclean thing. **“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”** (Isaiah 52:11).

The vow of a Nazarite could be taken for short, not more than 30 days or for long, for a lifetime. Some were Nazarites for life either by divine designation like Samson (Judges 13:5-7; 16:17) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) or by their parents’ vow concerning them, like Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11,24-28). The Nazarite’s consecration typifies the absolute surrender of Christ as well as total separation that God expects from Christians (Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 6:17; James 1:27). God used the lifestyle of the Nazarites to illustrate the high standard of holiness and commitment required of believers. They were living examples of dedication and devotion among the Israelites. They also exemplified practical deadness to the world, self-denial and single-mindedness in the service of God.

PRESCRIBED SACRIFICE FOR INTERRUPTED NAZARITE’S VOW (Numbers 6:9-21; Leviticus 21:10,11; Acts 18:18; 21:23-26; Ezekiel 33:12,13; 18:24)

“And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it” (Numbers 6:9). If a Nazarite becomes defiled accidentally by the dead after taking a vow of separation, the vow is deemed to have been interrupted and is therefore, required to go

through a cleansing rite for eight days. On the seventh day, he is expected to shave his head, while on the eighth day, meet with the priest at the brazen altar to perform the prescribed sacrifice and hallow his head. The implication of this is that he would have to start his consecration anew, beginning again to let his hair grow and abstaining from all forbidden things. Also, all the days he had previously consecrated at the time he became defiled would be lost completely (Numbers 6:12).

The experience of a Nazarite in his day of defilement underscores the terrible effect of the defilement of sin in the life of a believer. When a believer falls into sin, it makes all his past consecration and sacrifice to become worthless; and unless he repents and gets restored to the Lord, those days would neither be remembered nor rewarded by God. By implication too, the righteousness of the righteous man shall not be remembered when he goes back into sin (Ezekiel 3:20). That debunks the view of eternal security held by some religious teachers who erroneously believe that once an individual is saved, he or she remains saved even when sin is committed. Sin makes all our labour for God to be disapproved and we stand in danger of losing our eternal reward (Acts 1:16-20; 19:27-34; 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 4:14,15). Therefore, believers should watch conscientiously against sin and defilement in order to avoid the grave consequences of losing the grace of God and fellowship with Him.

At the time of expiration, the Nazarite who had successfully completed his period of dedication was taken to the tabernacle to make sacrifices before being discharged from his vow. **“And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”** (Numbers 6:13). He would offer a year old male lamb without blemish for a burnt offering, a year old female lamb for a sin offering, a ram without blemish for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes and wavers anointed with oil plus meat offerings and drink offerings. After the priest has ended the sacrifices, then the Nazarite would shave his head

and put the hair in the fire of the peace offerings. Thereafter, the priest would place the prescribed portions of the offering in the hands of the Nazarite and wave them before the Lord. Then the Nazarite could, as a token of gratitude to God, offer freewill offerings in addition to the normal requirements of his Nazarite vow. After this ceremony, the Nazarite was released from his vow and he was free to live as an ordinary person. The Nazarite had to offer the prescribed sacrifices at the end of his vow as a testimony that even though he had offered unto God his best services and consecrated himself, he still needed the efficacy of the blood of atonement. The best we can offer to God will only be acceptable unto Him on the basis of Christ's atoning blood. Without faith in His blood, all our works are vain.

From the separated life of the Nazarites, we learn the following: one, as the Nazarites were examples and models of devotion to the children of Israel, so should believers be examples to the world and the leaders in the church should be models to the congregation (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3). Two, as the Nazarite vow was voluntary, so also should our commitment and consecration to God be voluntary. Believers can perform some specific duties in the church such as singing, evangelism, intercession, security and financial support of project or programme. Three, the Nazarites maintained a very high level of personal purity. They abstained not only from sin but even from the appearance of it. Believers should be scrupulously holy and abstain from every source of defilement. Four, by allowing his hair to grow long, the Nazarite accepted a practice that would bring reproach to him. In the same manner, believers must devote themselves to God unmindful of the reproach of people, and should always be ready to surrender their dignity or honour, if need be, in the path of devotion. Five, their lives depicted total detachment from the world and a mastery over its joys or sorrows. They restrained their appetites and controlled their emotions for the sake of their commitment to God.

PRIESTLY BENEDICTIONS PRONOUNCED ON GOD'S PEOPLE (Numbers 6:22-27; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Psalms 4:6-8; 121:7; 128:1,4; Deuteronomy 28:3-6; John 14:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:16)

It is pertinent to observe that the command to bless the children of Israel was only given after they had obeyed the commands and instructions that God gave them. They had built the tabernacle and began true worship; they were also counted, camped, cleansed and consecrated to God as priests, Levites or Nazarites before the priestly benediction was given. This teaches that obedience to God and total consecration to Him are conditions for true and permanent blessings.

“The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). The content and structure of the blessings is remarkable; it is rhythmical and consists of three distinct parts which cover every area of human needs – spiritual and physical. Each part of the benediction begins with God’s name and this is an indication of the Trinitarian doctrine and a pointer to the fact that all the three members of the Godhead are united in blessing the saints. In the priestly benediction, we see the blessing of God’s goodness and His preservation; two, the benefits of God’s grace and His presence; and three, the bounties of God’s gifts and His peace. It is such an all-encompassing benediction which may well be regarded as the Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament.

From the priestly benediction, we learn some important lessons. One, it is important for leaders to pray for their congregation. Two, the content pertains more to spiritual blessings than physical or material acquisition. Three, believers are priests of God; therefore, we should learn to bless people with our lips rather than criticise or curse them. Four, the blessings of God will come upon us only as we live in obedience to Him and do all that is pleasing in His sight. The priestly benedictions could not avail for Israel when they

backslid and turned away from God.

God is always righteous and He blesses the righteous. To begin to enjoy the blessings of the Lord, repent of all your sins, receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour, make restitutions and remain in unbroken fellowship with Him.

Questions for review:

1. Who is a Nazarite and what does his separation symbolise for New Testament believers?
2. Mention some activities Nazarites were prohibited from partaking in and point out their significance.
3. Mention some Nazarites in the Bible and point out the lessons a believer can draw from their consecration.
4. What can a believer learn from the instance of a Nazarite's interrupted vow and the cancellation of his days of consecration by defilement?
5. What are the implications of the Nazarite's vow to believers?
6. Mention some important lessons from the priestly benediction.
7. State the condition on which the priestly benediction would be fulfilled.

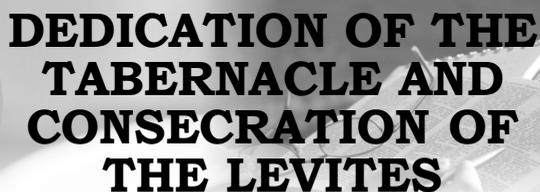
THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font at the top and the number "93" in a large, bold, sans-serif font in the center. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle pattern.

Lesson
93

A black and white photograph of an open Bible with a quill pen resting on it. The text is partially visible on the pages.

**DEDICATION OF THE
TABERNACLE AND
CONSECRATION OF
THE LEVITES**

MEMORY VERSE: “Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering” (Numbers 8:14,15).

TEXT: Numbers 7:1-89; 8:1-26

In response to divine command, Moses set out to dedicate the altar and consecrate the Levites. The event witnessed generous offerings for its dedication as well as the purification and cleansing of the Levites before their engagement in service. The offering was given by the princes of the tribes of Israel for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the dedication of the altar. By God’s sovereign prerogative, the Levites were given as gifts to Aaron and the priests to perform a holy service in the tabernacle and its precincts, and to preserve and protect the holy things of God from intruders (Numbers 8:19; 1:53).

PROVISION OF OFFERINGS FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE (Numbers 7:1-9; Hebrews 3:2; Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:7; John 17:20,21)

It is noteworthy that Moses did not allow the offerings to be made until the tabernacle was fully set up. His obedience and orderliness are exemplified by his exact and adequate preparation for the ceremony. Also, the

understanding of God's demand for holiness made him anoint and sanctify the tabernacle and all the vessels before the dedication of the altar (Numbers 7:1).

The provision for the work of the tabernacle by the princes and tribes of Israel is highly commendable and worthy of emulation by the church. The princes generously gave while the tabernacle was under construction. **“And the rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate”** (Exodus 35:27). Now that the tabernacle was fully set up, they brought more presents (six wagons and twelve oxen) for the service of the tabernacle. Believers need to give cheerfully and generously to God whenever we are called upon to do so. Also, just as the princes (leaders) demonstrated true leadership spirit as they led the people by example, in giving to God, church leaders are to lead by example in everything that is good, perfect and acceptable in the sight of God.

Furthermore, the offerings were purely voluntary and spontaneous; they saw needs in the house of God and met them promptly without persuasion. Lastly, their spirit of cooperation with Moses and one another to accomplish God's work is edifying. Genuinely converted children of God are to have one mind with their God-appointed ministers, cooperating with them in every scriptural way to achieve heaven's goal.

The offering was to be specifically used for the service of the tabernacle and to be distributed to the Levites according to their service. Two wagons were given to the sons of Gershon who were to carry only the curtains, coverings and hangings (Numbers 7:7), four wagons and eight oxen to the sons of Merari since they carried the boards, bars, pillars and sockets of the tabernacle (Numbers 7:8), while the Kohathites were not given any wagon because they were to bear the ark on their shoulders. (Numbers 7:9). The way the wagons and the oxen were shared is instructive. They were not shared equally, yet the Levites did not complain since the instruments were given according to the levels of their service for God. For every service God calls us into, He gives commensurate ability and provides the means to

carry it out. God gives greater strength, grace and anointing to those who have greater work to do for Him.

PATTERN OF OFFERINGS FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR (Numbers 7:10-89; 1 Corinthians 14:33,40; Exodus 25:2; Numbers 31:50)

“And the LORD said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar” (Numbers 7:11). According to the Lord’s directive to Moses, each tribe was to offer for a whole day, each prince on his own day, for the dedication of the altar. To allot a whole day to a tribe for offering when the twelve tribes could do it in one day shows that there is nothing more acceptable and productive than to serve God on His own terms.

There are several lessons from the manner of the presentation of the offerings. *Priority of rank*: They did not offer their offerings according to their birth order. Judah presented first in fulfilment of Jacob’s prophecy (Genesis 49:8). Leadership in the church is not by age but by divine design. *Picture of solemnity*: Service to God is a solemn business; the modern trends of hilarious, lousy and comical worship in churches are alien to biblical patterns. *Prevention of hurry and disorderliness*: The service was orderly as the people were not in a hurry to leave God’s presence. *Purpose of repetition*: Each of the twelve tribes brought the same gift equal in quantity and quality for the altar dedication. The way the same quantity of offering given by each tribe was repeated for all tribes was not a vain repetition. It shows that God takes record of the service and commitment of individuals and will reward them on individual basis. *Paramount measure in giving*: The children of Israel gave after the shekels of the sanctuary (Leviticus 27:25; Numbers 3:47). The shekel of the sanctuary had the highest value. Those who build with wood, hay, stubble shall suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). The offering involved all families. The course of the kingdom of God will be greatly advanced if every believer contribute their own quota sincerely, selflessly,

scripturally and sacrificially.

God's reaction to the voluntary offerings showed that they were pleasing to Him and suitable for His service. At the end of the offering by the tribes, God spoke from the mercy seat to signify His gracious acceptance of and pleasure in the offerings (Numbers 7:89; 12:8). This was an assurance that God was amidst them as promised (Exodus 25:20,22). As it was then, the best way to prepare to hear the voice of God is to fully obey Him.

PURIFICATION CEREMONY OF THE LEVITES AND THEIR APPOINTED SERVICE (Numbers 8:1-26; Isaiah 52:11; Titus 3:7; 2 Timothy 3:17)

Recall that the Levites came into limelight when they willingly, wholeheartedly and promptly responded to the call to repentance and restoration after Israel's massive descent into idolatry (Exodus 32:26-29). This penitent action endeared them to God and consequently separated them from other Israelites to serve Him. God's command to cleanse the Levites before their engagement in the service of the tabernacle reveals the high premium He places on holiness and the quality of life He expects from His servants. Purity of life remains God's all-time demand and condition for engaging in His service and for seeing Him at the end of service on earth.

Before the cleansing rites, God commanded Moses to instruct Aaron to light the seven lamps specially made to illuminate the tabernacle. He took the light from the golden altar to light the middle lamp. Then from it, he lighted the others, each one borrowing the light from others. The literal light in the tabernacle symbolised the spiritual light of Christ, "**...the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world**" (John 1:9). He expects all believers, who are the temples of God, to shine His light before all men (Matthew 5:16). A Christian's life must not only conform to the word of God, but also be guided by it in everything. Christ transmits His light to those who come to Him, repent of their sins and receive Him as Saviour and Lord. Therefore, God appoints ministers purposely to lead

sinners to Christ through the light of the gospel (Acts 26:14-18). The light in the tabernacle also gives expression to the necessity of good and adequate illumination in the house of God. We must ensure that the house of God where believers meet for fellowship is well lit as in the tabernacle.

The Levites were not only to be separated from other Israelites; they were to be cleansed. No one can come near God or claim to be serving Him without being cleansed from sin. The holy God would not allow the Levites to enter and serve in a sanctified temple without cleansing. The rites and ceremonies of their cleansing were to follow divine order and to be carried out. First, God commanded Moses to sprinkle the water of purifying on them. This should not be misunderstood or misinterpreted to mean “all kinds of water” that people use for cleansing in some assemblies. The sprinkling of water only foreshadowed the application of the blood of Jesus by faith for cleansing from outward and inward sins and also as the Bible compares the cleansing effect of the Word to water (Hebrews 9:14; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

Second, the Levites were required to shave off their hair and wash their clothes. This is similar to what a leper was to do after he had been pronounced clean by the priest (Leviticus 14:8). The purpose was to remove every form of defilement that would not wash off from their flesh while the washing of their clothes was to free them from pollution from themselves and the environment. Though the ceremonial cleansing in the Old Testament has been abolished, believers are to maintain cleanliness in their appearance and environment. They must avoid unhygienic practices such as unkempt hair, unclean and uncut finger nails that breed germs, dirty clothes and environment that constitute health hazards. God does not only care for the purity of the believer’s heart, but also his outward look. Therefore, believers must separate themselves from unbelievers not only in lifestyle but also in outlook and dressing. They must consecrate their entire life to God.

Third, the children of Israel were to put their hands

upon the Levites not as ministers having power to ordain but as their brethren showing their willingness to release them entirely for God's service. It also signifies acceptance of their choice in place of their firstborn to render holy service to God. They, by this rite surrendered them to Aaron who was to offer them before the Lord. Fourth, the Levites were to lay their hands upon the heads of the two young bullocks for sin and burnt offerings to make atonement for them to the Lord. By so doing, they declared their unworthiness to engage in God's service until atonement was made for sin.

Servants of God must have personal testimony of the new birth experience and voluntarily consecrate themselves to God's service. Though God demanded that Aaron gave the Levites to Him as offering, He gave them back to Aaron to serve under him and his sons (the priests) to assist them in the service of the tabernacle. They were to complement and not to compete with the priests. God's word has clearly defined roles for all His servants, including those to serve under appointed spiritual leaders.

The priests were to make atonement by sacrifice, thereby making peace with God, while the Levites were to ensure that the divine standard for the maintenance of the tabernacle and its use are strictly upheld to preserve the fellowship between God and His people. Christian servants need to hold on relentlessly and tenaciously to the standard of God's word in all spiritual matters. Church property should not be allowed to be misused. Also, believers should watch and guard against intruders and peddlers of false doctrines whose aim is to pollute and damn the souls of saints.

The Levites' years of active service were from twenty-five to fifty years. After this age, they would be exempted from strenuous service that required exertion of energy. Yet, they were to minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation to keep the charge of the tabernacle. It is obvious that old age may not accommodate the stress and strains of hard work. Therefore, we are to serve God more when we are young and our bones and muscles are firmer and stronger.

We must not wait until retirement age before committing our lives to God's work. Christ's command to His disciples is, "**Occupy till I come**". We must keep on serving the Lord until He comes for us at the rapture or death. No matter our age, we can still render useful service in God's kingdom until the hour of our transition into glory like Joshua, Elijah and others.

Questions for review:

1. What can Christian leaders learn from Moses' attitude before the dedication of the altar?
2. Identify useful lessons from the attitude of the princes to the dedication of the tabernacle.
3. What should inform how believers are assigned responsibilities in the church?
4. What should be our attitude as believers to one another?
5. What major things can believers learn from the manner the tribes presented their offerings?
6. What is the relevance of the lighted lamp in the tabernacle to the house of God, believers in Christ and sinners/backsliders in the world?
7. Why should we dedicate our youthful years to serving the Lord?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "94" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
94

A grayscale background image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

COMMEMORATION OF THE PASSOVER AND DIVINE GUIDANCE

MEMORY VERSE: “And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel” (Numbers 9:5).

TEXT: Numbers 9:1-23; 10:1-36

At the inception of the children of Israel’s journey from Egypt, God gave them the ordinance to keep the Passover every first month of the Jewish year. **“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even”** (Exodus 12:2,14-18; Deuteronomy 16:1). This is to be a yearly event in the month of Abib, which is the Jewish first month of the year. Since they left Egypt, there has been no instruction for the observance of the ordinance until God instructed Moses to communicate its observance to the people. Their response to the divine command was prompt and commendable. This was the first commemoration since their departure from the land of bondage and was evidently to be a litmus test to prove their obedience and compliance with God’s instruction.

To have a proper and orderly dissemination of information to His people, God gave them two trumpets to be used at different situations as the instructions required. By these instructions and supernatural guidance, God demonstrated His love and goodness for His people and showed that He is God of order. Today’s lesson shall examine the practice of the Passover as instituted by God, the privilege of divine guidance and

the provision of trumpets to aid His chosen people.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PASSOVER IN THE CAMP
(Numbers 9:1-14; Exodus 12:14-18; Numbers 28:16-25; Leviticus 23:5; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 3:6; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-30)

The Passover was instituted on the day Israel left Egypt and was intended to remind them of how God spared their firstborn while all the firstborn of the Egyptians, both human and beast, were killed, leading to their release from Egypt. The instruction for the observance of the Passover was explicit and detailed enough for them to understand (Exodus 12:14-18; Leviticus 23:5-8). God commanded Moses to instruct them to “**Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover**” (Numbers 9:2,4). Subsequently, they kept the Passover as appointed in the wilderness of Sinai “**...according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel**” (Numbers 9:5). Expectedly, Israel’s obedience made them recipients of God’s manifold blessings.

While the Passover was being observed in the camp, there were certain men who were defiled by the dead body of a man. For this reason, they came and reported themselves to Moses and Aaron as well as query why they could not join others to observe the ordinance. Then Moses took the matter to God to know what decision to take. There had been no explicit injunction regarding those who withdrew or failed to participate in the ordinance of God for whatever reason, and there had been no clear-cut penalty or punishment for such cases. Therefore, this case was taken back to God who gave the verdict: “**...If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs**” (Numbers

9:10,11). Believers should always consult God to know His mind when taking decisions so as not to act contrary to His will.

In addition, God's verdict on the matter stressed further that: **"...the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin"** (Numbers 9:13). It was equally added that strangers that will keep the Passover must follow the same process of observing it as true Israelites (Numbers 9:14; Exodus 12:48,49). This shows that God is an impartial God; His commandments apply to all.

The implication of the Passover for the New Testament believer is the observance of the Lord's Supper, which was instituted by Jesus Christ so that all believers can partake thereof regularly, to **"shew the Lord's death till he come"**. As believers participate in this commemoration, we remember Christ's sacrifice for us and our proper response to Him. The emblems used are **"unleavened bread"** and the juice of the **"fruit of the vine"**. The gospel according to Luke also shows the link between the Feast of Passover and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-20). This implies that just as the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ replaced the sacrifice of the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood for atonement of sins, the Lord's Supper has replaced the Feast of the Passover as an ordinance.

We discern the Lord's body during participation in the Lord's Supper. This implies that we recognise that the emblems – the fruit of the vine and the unleavened bread – represent or symbolise the Lord's broken body and His blood that was shed respectively. They are not the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This calls for holiness of life and solemnity on our part as we come to the Lord's Table. More importantly, we must keep our total being worthy for it. Grave consequences can befall those who eat it unworthily. Anyone who eats and drinks unworthily brings **"damnation"**, punishment and chastisement on himself (1 Corinthians 11:23-30). Those

who always feel disqualified to partake of the Lord's table are not certain that they will be qualified for the rapture and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

PRIVILEGE OF DIVINE GUIDANCE (Numbers 9:15-23; 10:11-36; Exodus 13:21,22; 14:19; Romans 8:14)

“And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night” (Numbers 9:15,16). The children of Israel had opportunity of being led and guided by the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night from the beginning of their journey from Egypt. The pillar of cloud was to protect them from intense sunshine and to lead the way while the pillar of fire was to provide them with light and protect them by night (Exodus 13:21,22; 14:19). But on the day they reared the tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai, the cloud covered the tabernacle by day and the appearance of fire by night until the morning.

Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the children of Israel resumed their journey and wherever or whenever the cloud stopped, the tabernacle and the children of Israel ceased to move. So long that the cloud hung around the tabernacle, the children of Israel remained in the tents. **“At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents”** (Numbers 9:18). What a privilege to be guided by the counsel of God's word! If believers yield and submit their will to God's guidance and leadership, many untold mistakes, regrets and troubles will be averted in their lives.

As the children of Israel continued their journey, Moses invited his father-in-law to come along with them. **“...We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and**

we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Numbers 10:29). With this invitation, Hobab was not ready to follow but Moses persuaded him so that he could be of assistance to them being more familiar with the terrain. **“...And thou mayest be to us instead of eyes”** (Numbers 10:31). Moses promised to extend to Hobab whatever goodness God would do to them (Numbers 10:32). We are on a journey to an eternity with God in heaven, our Promised Land. As many Hobabs that cross our way, we are to encourage, persuade and motivate to come along with us to be part of the benefits of eternity in heaven. This is another way to accomplish the great commission.

The journey lasted three days after they left Sinai and the cloud of the Lord went before them when the ark set forward. **“And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel”** (Numbers 10:35,36). All the enemies of God shall be scattered and shall not be able to stand as God abides in the camp of His people. David recognised this fact. Therefore, he prayed in like manner: **“Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God”** (Psalms 132:8; 68:1,2). Believers in the New Testament dispensation are guided by the Holy Spirit and the word of God through prayer (Romans 8:14,26; Psalm 119:105).

PROVISION OF TRUMPETS FOR PASSING INFORMATION IN THE CAMP (Numbers 10:1-10; Psalm 47:5; Jeremiah 4:5,19; Joel 2:1,15-17; Amos 3:6)

God desired orderliness to be maintained and decency applied in all His dealings with His children in the camp. Hence, He said to Moses, **“Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that**

thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps” (Numbers 10:2).

The two silver trumpets were employed effectively to coordinate the movement of the tribes in their onward march through the wilderness to the Promised Land. The trumpets were to be used in warfare as well as to summon the people to solemn gatherings and worship.

The trumpets and the clouds were divine complementary instruments used by God for guiding His people. They were to be used for creating awareness and for divine purposes in the camp. They include: one, to call all the assembly of the people to Moses at the door of the tabernacle. Two, when only one trumpet is blown, it is to gather all the princes, the heads of thousands of Israel to Moses. Three, they are to blow an alarm for camps to move when journey is to be made. The first blowing of an alarm is for movement of the camps lying on the eastern part of the camp, while the second is for movement of the camps lying on the south of the camp. Four, when in battle against the enemy, they are to blow an alarm with the two trumpets for them to be remembered by God for their salvation from the hand of their enemies. **“And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies”** (Numbers 10:9). Five, the trumpets are to be blown over their sacrifices in the days of their gladness, solemn days and in beginning of their months for a memorial before God.

The calls are differentiated by the use of the trumpets. God arranged and appointed only the priests, the sons of Aaron, to be the trumpeters. Believers are to be orderly and well organised always and especially before God. Besides, they are to be regular trumpeters of God’s word by preaching the gospel to sinners.

Questions for review:

1. What is the Passover and when was it to be observed by the children of Israel?
2. What was the purpose of the Passover feast?
3. What do you learn from the prompt obedience of the Israelites?
4. What do we learn from the men who reported themselves to Moses and Aaron after being defiled by a man's dead body?
5. What should be the attitude of believers today before taking decisions over issues?
6. By what means can believers be guided and led today?
7. Mention the functions of the trumpets used in the camp and their significance to present-day believers.

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

A circular graphic with a double border. The word "Lesson" is written in a cursive font at the top, and the number "95" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font in the center.

Lesson
95

A grayscale photograph of an open book with a pair of glasses resting on it. The book appears to be a Bible or a study text.

**MURMURING
IN THE CAMP**

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased” (Numbers 11:10).

TEXT: Numbers 11:1-35; 12:1-16

In fulfilment of His promise to Abraham, God rescued the children of Israel out of the land of bondage through supernatural signs and great deliverance. He led them through the wilderness and generously provided manna (angels’ food) to nourish them on their journey to the Promised Land. Despite God’s love, care and benevolence, on several occasions, they murmured and complained against Him and Moses. God’s demonstration of miraculous power ought to have elicited their trust and confidence; instead, they doubted and disbelieved Him. He had promised them sustenance and security.

However, Israel’s failure to wholly trust God led to their undoing. Though they had left Egypt, they carried the sinful practices of Egypt along with them. They hardened their hearts in unbelief and thus incurred the displeasure of God as they were consumed in His wrath in the wilderness. The warning comes to believers: “**...To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness**” (Hebrews 3:7,8).

DEVASTATING RESULT OF GOD-PROVOKING MURMURING (Numbers 11:1-10,33-35; Exodus 16:2,11-13; Psalm 78:17-22,30-33; 1 Corinthians 10:10; 1 John 2:15-17)

“And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp” (Numbers 11:1). The chapter opens with a negative tone depicting the unpleasant and distrustful behaviour of the people. They were so accustomed to murmuring that it became their second nature. Murmuring is sinful and is not condoned by God from His people. It is a show of ingratitude as well as a display of carnality. It is a negative attitude that will always incur God’s indignation. Believers are, therefore, warned to be careful and shun all forms of sinful and carnal conduct, for He **“...shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”** (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

God responded to their murmuring with fierce judgment; He sent His fire to devour some of the people. The pillar of fire was meant for their preservation, warmth and direction; but when they sinned, God employed the same fire to destroy them. Closeness to God is no licence for sinning against Him, as He is no respecter of persons. Realising the grave danger of their sinful act, they cried unto Moses who responded by praying to God for mercy and the fire was quenched.

“And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?” (Numbers 11:4). The children of Israel had barely escaped God’s wrath when the mixed multitude among them caused them to sin. The mixed multitude was the term used to describe the non-Israelites who joined the people in the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:38), having seen the mighty works of God among them. This confirms the timeless Scripture that **“...evil communications corrupt good manners”** (1 Corinthians 15:33).

The mixed multitude blended with the people and began to influence them negatively to rebel against God. Soon, they made the people forget God's goodness, mercy, faithfulness as well as His great plan. They made the children of God desire the dainties of Egypt and despise the manna God had graciously provided for them. They said, **"We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes"** (Numbers 11:5,6). It is sad that they preferred the herbs of Egypt to the land flowing with milk and honey. Whereas they were mere slaves in Egypt, God was going to give them their own land, but their blindness of heart prevented them from seeing afar off. Their lust for flesh and herbs soon resulted in their profuse weeping. The fact that all the families were swept away by lust shows their level of carnality. **"Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased"** (Numbers 11:10). They eventually incurred God's wrath.

The event surrounding the mixed multitude conveys some useful lessons for God's children. One, believers must be careful about the company they keep and ensure they associate with men of like-precious faith. We should be wise to choose the company of people we relate with, not because they are members of the same church, tribe, profession or in the same neighbourhood, but by the content of their character and righteousness. Two, we must always remember God's mercies, goodness, faithfulness as well as His great plans for us at all times. Three, every Christian must seek to have the sanctification experience both in precept and in practice.

Four, every child of God should set their affection on things above and not on the things of the earth (Colossians 3:1). Five, we must request daily sufficient grace to endure affliction and patiently wait on God to meet our needs. Six, children of God must be contented

with what they have while trusting God to enlarge their coast and meet their needs. Seven, we must seek scriptural means of meeting our needs. Finally, members of the church must make diligent effort not to displease God and His appointed leaders.

The consciousness that we can choose our actions but not the consequences should guide our daily decisions even in matters of legitimate needs. God eventually supplied the meat, but **“...while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague”** (Numbers 11:33). As a consequence, God’s fierce judgment descended on the people twice resulting in devastating destruction. Apostle Paul therefore warns, **“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer”** (1 Corinthians 10:10).

DUE RESPONSE TO GOD-APPOINTED MINISTRY
(Numbers 11:11-32; Exodus 16:12,13; Psalm 78:26-29; 1 Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:6-9; Exodus 18:19-26; Matthew 7:7-11; Philippians 4:19)

Overwhelmed by the unpleasant reaction of the people, Moses resorted to prayer. Truly, the task of leading God’s people as well as meeting their varied needs could be challenging, but leading a group of disgruntled, carnal and backslidden folks can be daunting and very frustrating. In response to Moses’ prayer, God provided meat for the people (Numbers 11:31). He is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord our Provider. Believers should take their needs to Him in faith and trust in His unfailing promises and power. By resorting to God in prayer, Moses revealed the limitation of man in accomplishing divine tasks as well as the need for constant divine renewal of strength. This should serve as a challenge and an encouragement to God’s servants to take their ministerial challenges always to God who has called them and who is ever faithful to come to their aid.

God's response was swift and the impact immediate. He decided to raise co-helpers for Moses who was to select seventy elders among the people and present them to Him for anointing. This teaches us important lessons: one, no leader, however gifted, can excel in ministry alone. Two, leaders and workers should be selected with care and prayerfulness. They should be known, tested and proven to be spiritual. Novices are not qualified for appointment to leadership positions, no matter the need. In the early Church, the appointment of a replacement for Judas Iscariot was based on those who had **"...companied with us [the Apostles and disciples] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us"** (Acts 1:21). Also, Apostle Paul, writing on the qualities of a leader instructs that **"...let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless"** (1 Timothy 3:10).

Three, Moses was to bring them to the tabernacle. This implies that those chosen to lead God's people must be separated and consecrated to God. Four, God was to talk with Moses in their presence signifying the place of His word in leadership and service. Moreover, Moses remained the key leader who received from God and communicated the same message to the rest of the leaders. This was to give validity to Moses' leadership; thus, they were to assist and not replace him. Authority in leadership is derived. While Moses' was derived from God, the seventy elders were to derive theirs from Moses. Anyone, like Korah, Absalom, Adonijah, who violates this principle risks the judgment of God. Five, the authority and effectiveness of leadership in the church are hinged on the Spirit's empowerment. That they had to be touched by God's Spirit before they commenced their assignment shows that leadership without the Spirit's enduement will result in futility and endless toil. God has promised the Spirit's power for His servants. He still baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49).

DIVINE RECOGNITION OF GOD-APPROVED MINISTERS (Numbers 12:1-16; 16:1-5,12,15-18,20,21,28-35; 2 Samuel 15:1,4,10-12;18:1,9,15; Genesis 49:5-7; Acts 1:21,22; Philippians 2:14-16)

No sooner had God quelled the rebellion, than another problem erupted. This time, it was orchestrated by Miriam, the women leader and Aaron, Moses' deputy. She, in company of Aaron, challenged the legitimacy of Moses' leadership. That the children of Israel murmured against Moses was quite displeasing, but to have the duo of Miriam and Aaron embark on this evil mission was shocking and unexpected. Miriam erred by equating her authority with Moses'. Aaron, who narrowly escaped God's fierce judgment for leading God's people into idolatry, lent his support to this revolt instead of rebuking Miriam. By this, he manifested weakness and compromise once again. The Scripture enjoins the believer to "**...neither be partaker of other men's sin**" (1 Timothy 5:22). Moses once again displayed the virtue of great leadership. He did not attempt to defend himself; rather, he allowed God to do it (Numbers 12:4-8).

God is concerned about His servants. He heard and acted on the rebellion Himself. The consequence of Miriam's action was swift and unimaginable; she became leprous; white as snow. Believers are hereby warned to beware of how they treat God's servants. They are to avoid familiarity, which breeds contempt. They should respect and obey them. They should wait on Him to defend them because vengeance belongs to God and He will defend His own. His judgment will come on those who "**despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities**" (Jude 8). Leaders, however, must display the virtues of meekness, godliness and forgiveness as demonstrated by Moses. Rebels in the church must repent and make necessary restitution to secure God's forgiveness and restoration.

Although Moses interceded for Miriam, God determined she must serve the punishment to teach her and others a lesson that nobody despises God's appointed servants and gets away with it. Those who

are under discipline in the church should humbly bear the punishment as it is for their good. Leaders should not be in a hurry to restore those who have erred but should allow them to be fully purged and purified before restoration.

The danger of murmuring, whether against God or His servants, is grave. It incurs divine displeasure, which births unpleasant consequences. The children of Israel suffered unnecessary and incalculable losses because of this vice. Believers today are enjoined to: **“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That [they] may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world”** (Philippians 2:14,15). They are to submit themselves to God-ordained leadership and walk by faith to enjoy God’s unbroken fellowship, favour and blessings, and eventually reach the Promised Land.

Questions for review:

1. What is the danger of murmuring against God and His ministers?
2. What does the phrase ‘mixed multitudes’ mean in the passage and how does it affect the church today?
3. Mention some useful lessons from the event surrounding the mixed multitudes.
4. How should believers go about having their needs met?
5. What do we learn from the selection of the seventy elders that God raised to assist Moses in leading the people?
6. What is the place of Holy Spirit’s baptism in Christian leadership?
7. What should be the attitude of believers towards God’s ministers?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a cursive font above the number "96" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book with a pen resting on it.

Lesson
96

THE SPIES' REPORT AND ISRAEL'S REBELLION

MEMORY VERSE: "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not" (Numbers 14:9).

TEXT: Numbers 13:1-33; 14:1-45

God commanded Moses to send twelve Israelites, heads of the tribes, to spy the land of Canaan before their entry and possession of it. This expedition was aimed at encouraging and stimulating the people's faith on the reality and prospect of Canaan. Well-intentioned, this was a divine strategy employed to usher in the Israelites into their promised possession of the land flowing with milk and honey, which the Scripture calls the "**glory of all lands**" (Ezekiel 20:6). God is holy; and He has good purposes for giving us instructions and strategies (Jeremiah 29:11). His instructions, guidance or rebuke, when accepted, are to make us continue to discover His faithfulness, omnipotence and other attributes from time to time in different situations. He does not ask us to do anything that will result in our downfall. It is unfortunate, however, that God's good purposes do not always yield the expected results as we would see in the outcome of this divine assignment in this lesson.

SELECTION OF THE TWELVE SPIES WITH A SOLEMN CHARGE (Numbers 13:1-24; 21:32; Deuteronomy 1:19-25; Numbers 32:8-13; Galatians 2:4,5; 2 Kings 4:23-26; Matthew 10:6-11; Acts 26:16-20)

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them” (Numbers 13:1,2). Those who were chosen for this service were rulers among them and **“heads of the children of Israel”** (Numbers 13:2,3). From each tribe, one person was taken. There was good intention in selecting such calibre of people for this important and sensitive assignment. It was intended to give the best result and in accordance with biblical pattern of choosing leaders, such as missionaries, pastors and representatives to take up responsibilities (1 Timothy 3:6).

The terms of reference, scope of work or mission statement for the spies were clearly defined. They were sent into the land of Canaan to **“see the land, what it is”**; that is, to ascertain its present state. Their assignment fell into two main areas of survey: one, to enquire concerning the land itself, whether it is good or bad; and to enquire about the inhabitants – their population, stature, strength and their mode of dwelling. Their mission was a fact-finding one. That faith does not necessarily depend on facts does not imply that there are no facts to back up or prove faith. There are innumerable facts and evidences to substantiate our faith. Faith is verifiable. The onus is on doubters and sceptics to come, **“taste and see that the LORD is good...”** (Psalm 34:8).

Moses gave a parting charge to the spies to **“...be of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land”** (Numbers 13:20). This charge shows that he expected that they should bring back a positive and an encouraging account to the people. In a similar way, believers and ministers of God are expected always to walk by faith and not by sight and to put a positive construction on the most gloomy situations and experiences of life. Mountains are to be seen as miracle opportunities, stumbling blocks as stepping stones, trials as testimony indicators and every cross as a crown in disguise. This is the spirit that conquers always. Ours

is a charge to win souls of men in every land (2 Timothy 4:1,2).

This was not the first time spies were sent out in the Scriptures. Moses, Joshua and David used spies as means of investigation (Numbers 13:1-33; 21:32; Joshua 2:1; 1 Samuel 26:4). The spies went forth with great zeal and commitment from Zin in the south and came to Rehob, near Hamath in the north. They proceeded to Hebron, an old city where the burying place of the patriarchs was situated. They eventually came to a particular brook where they cut a bunch of grapes and other fruits of pomegranates and figs as evidence of the richness of the land and the faithfulness of God. Their example is a challenge to believers on how to be zealous and enthusiastically committed to our own commission of preaching the gospel. The cluster of grapes and other fruits brought from Eshcol remind believers of the ripened field for harvest and the acute need for harvesters (Matthew 9:36-38; John 4:34-38; Revelation 14:15-18). Like our Master and perfect Example, Jesus Christ, we must work while it is day for the night comes when no man can work (John 4:34; 9:4).

“And they returned from searching of the land after forty days” (Numbers 13:25). Some people do not see any need to give account of their stewardship to their leaders. The church needs both oral and written reports of its activities for planning and projections.

EVIL REPORT OF THE TEN SPIES (Numbers 13:25-33; Deuteronomy 1:25-33; 1 Kings 8:56; 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24; Hebrews 10:23; Luke 10:17-20; Mark 6:30,31)

“And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature” (Numbers 13:32). Though the report of the spies confirmed that God’s promise concerning the land was good and that it flowed with milk and honey, the majority harped on the difficulties they

discovered. They considered the walled cities, the giants, and the terrain, which they claim “**eateth up the inhabitants thereof**”. Thus, ten of the twelve men exaggerated the difficulties and underestimated God’s omnipotence, faithfulness and ability to fulfil His promises. Their evil report brought discouragement to the entire congregation of Israel. They soon forgot all the miracles that God wrought in the past. Such spectacular and supernatural manifestation of God’s presence, power and providence ought to have built in them implicit trust and confidence about what God can do.

The subtle process of unbelief and the destructive effects of walking by sight are all too obvious in their evil report. Walking by sight tends to becloud and belittle our vision of God’s power, while it magnifies our vision of the little problems on the way. This attitude and lot of the ten spies teach believers some important lessons. One, when God appoints the way of duty, we must beware of allowing our minds to dwell on the difficulties to be encountered. Two, we must be careful not to underestimate God’s promise and ability to aid us in the course of His service. To be negative, cold, faithless or fearful because of difficulties has the capacity to weaken the hands and cripple the feet of both the leaders and the laity. Three, we should avoid exaggerating the true position of problems or issues. Four, we should develop the habit of confronting and countering negative or challenging situations by faith.

GOOD REPORT OF THE TWO SPIES (Numbers 13:30; 14:6-9; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 10:10; 2 Corinthians 4:13,18; Romans 4:17)

Faith, the opposite of fear, is “**the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen**” (Hebrews 11:1). Joshua and Caleb were people of faith; and it showed in their positive confession challenging the multitude to act on God’s age-long promise by possessing the land of Canaan. They sought to overwrite unbelief and negative impressions on their minds with

confession of faith. **“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it”** (Numbers 13:30). Caleb considered and set his heart on the promises and power of God rather than on the facts they saw in Canaan. He counted on God’s faithfulness in the past and was strongly persuaded that He was able to do it again. He relied on God’s ability as the basis for their ability. He called those things that be not as though they were (Romans 4:17). He did not keep quiet and allow the clamour of unbelief to silence the voice of faith.

Faith distinguishes a man. The faith of Caleb and Joshua marked them out as unique and extraordinary. By faith, they pleased God and obtained a good report that they wholly followed the Lord (Hebrews 11:2,6; Deuteronomy 1:36). In a world of unbelief and ungodliness, we can stand out as special stock through our faith. Believers must be careful and watchful to draw the line between words of faith and those expressing unbelief in God. We must be wary of the kind of words we hear, the kind of preachers we listen to, the kind of books we read so that our faith is not destroyed while our hearts are infected and contaminated with unbelief.

ISRAEL’S UNBELIEF AND REBELLION AGAINST GOD (Numbers 14:1-45; 13:26-33; 16:4,22,45; Deuteronomy 1:26-36; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5,10-12; Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:6,11; Romans 8:35-38; Exodus 17:4; 16:7; 1 Samuel 30:6; Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:52,59)

Multitudes of the Israelites went off course when they failed to exercise faith in the word and power of God. In their unbelief, they cried, made derogatory statements against their leaders, confessed their desire to die and blasphemed the God who brought them out of Egypt. They said they wanted to go back to Egypt through leaders they sought to appoint for themselves. **“And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?”** (Numbers 14:3). This is clear rebellion.

God is never happy with those who draw back from Him (Hebrews 10:38).

It is fear and unbelief that make men to doubt God's omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience in all situations of life, and to murmur against Him and His appointed leaders. Believers need to be careful with the use of their tongues so as not to incite other fickle-minded and unstable Christians to murmur against God or His appointed leaders. Rather than present negative examples that discourage, we are enjoined to exhort other brethren to **"lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; ...lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed"** (Hebrews 12:12,13).

The eyes of faith see silver lining in any cloud of circumstances. So, it was with Caleb and Joshua. Failure to see with the eyes of faith can lead to missed opportunities and ultimate failure in life. Manifestation of unbelief in a single person can lead thousands of others astray. To prevent the manifestation of God's wrath that would usually lead to deaths of many Israelites, Moses interceded for them. What a good example this is for every spiritual leader! He earnestly pleaded for God's mercy and forgiveness on their behalf. **"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now"** (Numbers 14:19).

Though God purposed to disinherit Israel and raise up for Moses a greater and mightier nation, he refused to see the multitude perish and himself become a greater nation. He always advanced reasons that bother on the glory of God as grounds for them to be forgiven (Exodus 32:12,32; 34:9; Numbers 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 9:28). A leader then must not place his personal gain above the interest of God's heritage. He should stand in the gap for God's people and see how God could be glorified in all things (1 Peter 5:1-4). The Lord granted the prayer of Moses for Israel but insisted on destroying those who disbelieved Him. All the adult Israelites who despised the pleasant land, which they should have inherited

were shut out of it. And this promise of God was to be fulfilled for their children who were under twenty years of age, and whom they, in their unbelief, said “**should be a prey**”.

Caleb was a man of noble and heroic courage. He was rightly rewarded for his uprightness, steadfastness and total reliance on God’s promise. He got to the Promised Land and possessed his possession even at an old age (Joshua 14:7,10-12,14). Underscored here is the point that it is not just enough to begin the Christian race, it is those who continue and endure to the end that will be saved and rewarded. But it is faith that will win the victory. God rewards only those who overcome. Those who bear their cross to the end will wear the crown.

Our God is a God of mercy and of judgment. Those who lead others into sin do not escape His judgment. If these men who brought evil report with the congregation had heeded the plea of Moses and the exhortation of Joshua and Caleb, they would have escaped being judged. “**Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God**” (Hebrews 3:12). As children of God, we should continue to live a faith-filled and graceful lifestyle in Christ to the end, and we shall be rewarded.

Questions for review:

1. What quality of character is expected of those charged with important responsibilities in the church?
2. What were the twelve spies sent to do in the land of Canaan?
3. Point out the challenges and encouragement soul-winners can receive from the spies.
4. What are the pitfalls believers should avoid from the evil report of the ten spies?
5. What can a believer learn from the life of Caleb?
6. How should a Christian use his tongue to fulfil Christ’s plan of redemption for humanity?
7. What can we learn from Caleb’s spirit of wholehearted dedication to God’s word and service and His faithfulness to His promises?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "97" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
97

A background image showing an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it.

**SUNDRY OFFERINGS
AND
PRESUMPTUOUS SIN**

MEMORY VERSE: “And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God” (Numbers 15:39,40).

TEXT: Numbers 15:1-41

This study comes after the utterly unpleasant incident of rebellion, unbelief and murmuring of the children of Israel against God and Moses His servant. God, who is both tender in mercy and of a purer eyes than to behold iniquity, instituted these laws of sacrifices for their full restoration and reassurance of entry into the Promised Land, on condition that they were willing and obedient. Although their unbelief provoked God to pronounce destruction on them, when Moses interceded, “...**the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word**” (Numbers 14:20). Again, as a token of the truth that there can be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22), He gave commandments concerning the offerings.

It is important to note that the provision for sin offerings for those who sin ignorantly is in contrast to those who indulge in presumptuous sins: “**For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the**

adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26,27).

REGULATIONS FOR SUNDRY OFFERINGS (Numbers 15:1-21; Ezekiel 44:30; Malachi 3:10-12)

“...When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you” (Numbers 15:2) is a reassurance that God will perform His promise of giving the children of Israel the land of Canaan. As He gave the reassurance, it was His expectation that the children of Israel will make offerings to Him; hence, He gave the guidelines that they must follow. The offerings they could make include burnt offering (verse 3), freewill offering (verse 3), meat offering (verse 4), drink offering (verse 5) and peace offering (verse 8). The meat offerings were of two sorts: some were offered alone (Leviticus 2:1), others were added to the burnt offerings and peace offerings.

The importance of this law is to determine what proportion the meat offering and drink offering should bear to the type of animal sacrifice they were to accompany. One, a lamb or a kid goes with meat offering of tenth-deal of flour, mingled with oil and the drink offering of the same quantity of wine. Two, for a ram, the meat offering was doubled to two tenth-deals of flour and the same quantity of wine for a drink offering. Three, a bullock sacrifice was to attract three tenth-deals of flour and the same quantity of wine for a drink offering. Thus, the sacrifices were regulated by the rule of proportion.

“...As ye are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you” (Numbers 15:15,16). Here, the Lord made it very clear that there is no inequality in His demands from the Jews and the Gentiles. From this declaration, we learn that, one, God is no respecter of persons. No matter our social, educational, religious or tribal status, His demands remain the same. Two, He expects the Jews to be kind to strangers and not to oppress them. Three, it puts to rest the pride of the Jews, who felt that as Abraham’s

seed, they were more accepted before the Lord than the Gentiles. No man's ancestral lineage shall turn either to his advantage or prejudice before God. Four, Gentiles are part of God's redemptive plan from the beginning (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8).

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, Then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up an heave offering unto the LORD. Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations” (Numbers 15:17-19,21). This law of offering the first of their dough to the Lord was meant to be observed in the Promised Land because their meal in the wilderness was manna. But in Canaan, where they should eat the fruit of their labour, God required that He should be honoured as their great Benefactor. They were to offer, not only the first fruits and tenths of the corn in their fields (these had already been reserved), but when they had it in their houses, in their kneading trough, when it was almost ready to be set upon their tables, God must have a further tribute of acknowledgment, hence, part of their dough must be heaved or offered to Him (verses 20,21). This means that we must show appreciation to God for our daily provisions and give Him first place in our lives. The vision of prophet Ezekiel that **“...ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house”** (Ezekiel 44:30) further reminds us that as New Testament believers, we must pay our tithes, which is ten percent, and give freewill offerings from the remaining ninety percent in appreciation to God as our great Benefactor.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SIN OFFERING (Numbers 15:22-29; Leviticus 4:13,14,21; 2 Chronicles 29:21; Ezra 8:35; Acts 17:30)

Under the law, fulfilling all righteousness in keeping all the requirements of the law is a necessity. However,

because of the number of regulations that require Jewish faithfulness and the tendency to err by forgetfulness, the Lord gave the requirements concerning sacrifices to atone for sins of ignorance or omission. Sacrifice for sins of ignorance was a remedial law. There is a requirement for national sin committed through ignorance and for an individual. For the congregation, the Lord requires one young bullock for a burnt offering, with the meat offering and drink offering, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering. With these, the priest shall make atonement for the congregation and the Lord will forgive them.

For an individual, the requirement is slightly different. A she-goat of the first year brought for a sin offering is used by the priest to atone for the sin and it shall be forgiven. Sins committed ignorantly therefore, need to have atonement made for them. Ignorance will not excuse those that might have known their Lord's will and did not do it. David prayed to be cleansed from his secret faults (Psalm 19:12,13). In any case, we must note that there must be a sacrifice for sin to be atoned for. **“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many... unto salvation”** (Hebrews 9:22,28).

In the present dispensation, sins committed ignorantly shall be forgiven after acknowledgment, repentance and faith in Christ, the Pascal Lamb, who was offered for the sins of the whole world. All categories of ignorant sinners therefore, can be forgiven if they humbly approach Calvary to obtain mercy. **“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent”** (Acts 17:30).

RETRIBUTION FOR PRESUMPTUOUS SINNERS
(Numbers 15:30-41; Exodus 31:14; 35:2; Nehemiah 13:17-18; Hebrews 10:26,27; Matthew 12:31,32; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Peter 3:1; Matthew 14:36; John 14:26; 16:13)

“But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously,

whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people” (Numbers 15:30). Presumptuous sinners are those with a high hand lifted against Jehovah, openly confronting His authority by setting up their own desire in competition with His injunctions. They sin just for sinning sake, in contradiction to the precept of the law and in defiance of the penalty. Presumptuous sin is like fighting against God and daring Him to do His worst. **“For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty”** (Job 15:25). Anyone, irrespective of social, religious or secular status, who infracts on His commandments, reproaches the Lord (Numbers 15:30). Presumptuous sin is imputing folly or iniquity to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth. Such is the malignity of wilful sin. The gravity of presumptuous sin is summed up in the fact that **“...if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”** (Hebrews 10:26). The Scripture declares that: **“...that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him”** (Numbers 15:30,31).

A typical instance of presumptuous sin in this text was in the sin of breaking the Sabbath. The offence was of a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. This seemingly small offence was a violation of the command to keep the Sabbath day holy and to do no servile work therein and thus dishonours the Institutor of the Sabbath. The offender was brought before Moses, Aaron and the entire congregation, while God was consulted. A sentence was passed on him and he was stoned to death by the congregation to serve as a deterrent to all Israel not to sin presumptuously.

Following the giving of the various laws, especially the law for atonement of the sin of ignorance, there was the need to provide a way of preventing Israel from repeatedly falling into sin. The measure was an instruction to make signs upon the borders of their

garments to remind them of the commandments of the Lord so that they would not sin as a result of forgetfulness. **“And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God”** (Numbers 15:39,40). The sign appointed was a fringe of silk or thread, the garment itself ravelled at the bottom and a blue ribbon bound on the top of it to keep it tight. The Jews were in this way different from other people of the earth in their dressing. The ribbons on fringes at the hem of their garment marked them out in the public. This law on their dress code was to persist throughout their generations.

The Pharisees made their own fringes broader so as to appear more righteous than all. **“But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments”** (Matthew 23:5). The phylacteries were different things. They were their own invention. The fringes were divinely instituted. In this dispensation of grace, Christ has abolished all these ceremony of fringes and ribband. He has given us the Holy Spirit to remind us always, of the way and will of the Father for His saint and the Church. Under the new covenant, it is written: **“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them”** (Hebrews 10:16). However, believers are required to maintain a constant reading of the Scriptures to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance (2 Peter 3:1).

Note that the giving of the law is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The Lord once again reemphasised His original intension: **“That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God”** (Numbers 15:40). The essence for which we are commanded to obey the word of God is so that we would be holy and pleasing in His sight all the days

of our lives.

Questions for review:

1. What awaits those who indulge in presumptuous sin?
2. What can we learn from God placing the same demand on the Jews and the strangers?
3. How can a sinner be cleansed from the error of his way?
4. What is presumptuous sin, and what punishment does it carry under the law?
5. What is the significance of the fringes of ribband in the dressing of the children of Israel?
6. What are the ways of bringing believers to remembrance of the will of God in this dispensation?
7. Why was the law given to the children of Israel?

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

Lesson
98

KORAH'S REBELLION AND APPROVAL OF AARON'S PRIESTHOOD

MEMORY VERSE: "And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins" (Numbers 16:26).

TEXT: Numbers 16:1-50; 17:1-13

The children of Israel had been delivered by God's mighty power from slavery and bondage in Egypt. They embarked on the journey to Canaan but wandered in the wilderness for about forty years. It was in one of these years Korah and his co-conspirators – Dathan and Abiram and On – led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness of Paran. This rebellion was strange because, one, their long wilderness wandering was as a result of their unbelief and rebellion against God, Moses and Aaron (Numbers 14:2-3; 9-10; Deuteronomy 9:23). Two, the leaders of the rebellion were men of influence, position and honour, "**...princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown**" (Numbers 16:2; 26:9). Three, Korah, Dathan and Abiram progressed in their rebellion by convincing other two hundred and fifty leaders of the tribes' "**...princes in the assembly...**" that the rebellion was a worthy cause.

Consequently, they rallied the whole congregation against Moses and Aaron to usurp their authority (Numbers 16:2). Four, they were not satisfied with their honoured and privileged positions in the congregation. Korah, a Levite from the priestly tribe of Levi, was one who occupied the honourable office of bearing the ark

and the sanctuary furniture. Dathan and Abiram were from the tribe of Reuben (Genesis 49:3,4), whose infamous rebellion attracted fatal consequences from God with a tragic end. God vindicated Aaron's priesthood; his rod blossomed and bore almonds as God's approval of his priesthood (Numbers 17:1-11; Hebrews 9:4).

DEPRAVITY OF MAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Numbers 16:1-3; 12:2; 2 Samuel 15:3,4; John 12:5)

Rebellion is an opposition to constituted authority; being unwilling to obey rules or accept normal standard of behaviour. It is a mark of depravity in man. It sometimes starts with a pretext of defending people's opinion or right. For example, Miriam, Moses sister said, **"...Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?"** (Numbers 12:2). Korah said, **"...all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them..."** (Numbers 16:3). Absalom said, **"...See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee... Oh that I were made judge in the land..."** (2 Samuel 15:3,4).

Israel had indeed suffered untold hardship because of the sin of rebellion, murmuring and lust (Numbers 11:1-3; 21:4-9). One should expect that they would have learnt their lessons. Holiness and righteousness of life with contentment and fear of God should have been their watchword. But it was not so. Through Korah and his company, Israel degenerated again into another rebellion that attracted God's anger. Indeed, the human race has rebelled against God and broken His law at will. All men, therefore, became slaves to sin, by nature and habit.

MOSES' REACTION AS AN EXAMPLE OF A SANCTIFIED LEADER (Numbers 16:4-50; Psalm 4:3; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 5:7-9)

Korah challenged Moses claiming that the entire

congregation of Israel was holy and that the Lord was among them. He therefore accused Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves above the congregation. **“And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face”** (Numbers 16:4) and referred the matter to God. Throughout his interaction with Korah and company, he exhibited humility, indicating an attitude of a sanctified heart. He gave them space to repent but they got even more rebellious. He asked Korah, **“Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?”** (Numbers 16:9,10). Korah could have pondered on this and refrained from his actions.

Leaders must appreciate the privileges God has given them to serve. They must not arrogate to themselves authority and responsibility that do not belong to them. It is utter evil not to be satisfied with the position God has placed a person. Two, workers in God’s vineyard must not covet or usurp the authority or privilege that is not theirs. Three, we must watch our actions and reactions lest God charges us for murmuring against the leaders He has placed over us. Our attitude towards them should be to **“Obey them that have the rule over [us], and submit [ourselves]: for they watch for [our] souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief for that is unprofitable for [us]”** (Hebrews 13:17). We are in the church to make heaven, not to fight for positions. Greed for leadership positions in the church or elsewhere should not obscure our vision of heaven.

The height of rebellion was displayed when Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram who boldly said, **“We will not come up”** (Numbers 16:12,14). Instead, they accused Moses of personal ambition and enslavement of the people of God. The rebellion against God and His appointed leaders as played by Korah and his group

prompted Moses to request non-acceptance of their offering. Because he was provoked to wrath, he “...**said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them**” (Numbers 16:15). This is a mark of loss of favour with the leader, who should have the interest of his people at heart.

They further said Moses brought them out of Egypt, a land they described as flowing with milk and honey. They alleged that he neither brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey nor gave them inheritance of fields and vineyards. These were all false claims. Their entry to Canaan was delayed for thirty-eight years because of their unbelief. The promise of bringing them to a land flowing with milk and honey was made by God, not Moses. These accusations angered the man of God. He then spoke of his integrity “...**I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them**”. He told Korah to bring his entire companions in the rebellion before the Lord with incense and fire and stand in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. As they obeyed and gathered, “**the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation**” (Numbers 16:19). God’s wrath was to be unleashed on the whole congregation in an instance. So He commanded: “**Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment**” (Numbers 16:21).

Again, Moses and Aaron’s intercession spared the congregation from the judgment. The congregation were to separate from Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their companions. In order to prove that he (Moses) did not takeover power on his own nor did the works by his own making as the rebels claimed, he asked the Lord to visit the sins of these men in an uncommon way. His request was granted. “**And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation**”

(Numbers 16:32,33).

The congregation that stood with Korah and his company fled from them. The device of the wicked, even in the church, never stands nor prospers. The scripture strongly affirms: **“Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous”** (Proverbs 11:21; Psalm 37:17).

One would have presumed that God’s judgment in the presence of all the children of Israel would have ended their constant rebellion, conspiracy and murmuring. However, it was not so. The next day, all the congregation of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron saying, **“ye have killed the people of the LORD”** (verse 41). God quickly visited them with the judgment of a plague and would have consumed them in a moment, but Moses and Aaron interceded again. Moses told Aaron, the high priest, to go and **“...Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense... and make an atonement for them...”** Aaron **“...ran into the midst of the congregation; and stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed”** (Numbers 16:46-48). But that was not before fourteen thousand, seven hundred people had died.

In the death of Korah and his company, we see the shameful end of those who, out of pride, would not accept and respect divinely appointed leadership. The Bible warns, **“He, that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”** (Proverbs 29:1). It further stresses that, **“the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off”** (Psalm 37:38).

Since the way to avoid problem is to run from sin, God decided to help the rest of the congregation of Israel. He instructed Moses to ask Eleazar the son of Aaron to take the censers of the rebels with which they made offerings before the Lord and make broad plates for a covering of the altar. This is to be done as a sign to the children of Israel. **“And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had**

offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses” (Numbers 16:39,40).

APPROVAL OF AARON’S PRIESTHOOD (Numbers 17:1-13; Exodus 6:16-26; Leviticus 8:1-7; Hebrews 9:4)

Aaron was the first high priest from the priestly tribe of Levi (Exodus 6:16-26) and he started Israel’s formal priesthood (Exodus 28-29; Leviticus chapters 8 and 9). He served as a symbol or type of the perfect Priest (Psalm 110:4), where the future King was described as eternal Priest. God appointed him. He ordered Moses to bring a rod each, according to the house of their fathers. The name of the head of each house was written on the rod for identification. Aaron’s name was written on the rod of the house of Levi. The rods were laid up “**...in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony...**” (Numbers 17:4), that is, before the ark and the mercy seat, which symbolised God’s presence. God said, “**And it shall come to pass, that the man’s rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel whereby they murmur against you**” (Numbers 17:5).

It was a miracle to principally help the children of Israel to quit murmuring against God and His appointed leaders over them. Thus, the priesthood of Aaron was divinely determined and confirmed by a miracle of the budding, blossoming and fruiting of Aaron’s rod (Numbers 17:8,9).

The lessons here include: one, Aaron was distinguished from the rest of the princes or heads of tribes. Two, the miracle of the fruitfulness is an evidence of divine call (Psalm 92:12-14). Three, the buds and blossoms of the rod pointed to the lifespan of the priesthood of Aaron from generation to generation.

With the divine miracle, the children of Israel realised Aaron's priestly standing before God. **"And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?"** (Numbers 17:12,13). They submitted to the divine will, wisdom and choice of God. All contentions and murmuring in respect of the priesthood were put to rest. There was no struggle over the priesthood of Aaron anymore.

All sinners are rebels. God calls all of them to total and complete repentance from all known sins to a life of holiness and righteousness. The rebels against God's words can only be helped out of their predicament by exposing them to the gospel message that brings total rescue and deliverance from the power of Satan, sin and snares of the world.

Questions for review:

1. What is rebellion? How does it start?
2. Give examples of people who rebelled against constituted authority and its consequence.
3. What is the consequence of sin on man?
4. What judgment did God bring on Korah and his company? How should we avoid it?
5. What attitudes are we supposed to exhibit towards divinely appointed leaders?
6. What do we learn from the miracle of the budding of Aaron's rod?
7. What was the significance of the miracle?

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

SECTION IV
BEGINNING OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES



MEMORY VERSE: "...And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10).

TEXT: Luke 5:1-39

In this chapter, Christ calls His disciples to soul-winning and fruitfulness. As He stood by the lake of Genesaret, multitudes, which consisted of a mixed crowd of sincere seekers and not very sincere ones (John 2:23-25), thronged Him. The eagerness displayed by some of the people that came to Christ is commendable. He responded positively to their yearnings as they pressed on Him to hear the word of God. As believers, we should be moved with compassion to reach out to the teeming multitude of sinners who are silently crying for salvation (Acts 16:9).

PRIMARY QUALIFICATION AND COMMISSIONING OF SOUL-WINNERS (Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:17-22; Mark 1:16-20; John 1:35-42; Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20)

The Lord used Peter's boat after a courteous request, from where He reached His audience. He politely requested him to shift his ship away from land to create a good position and an enabling environment for the preaching of God's word. The application of courtesy and wisdom in soul-winning will open the hearts of more people to receive the word of life. On the part of Jesus, we are challenged by His unquenchable and tireless zeal to preach the gospel anytime and anywhere. Though this event took place early in the morning, He

already had a crowd gathered, and He preached to them. Later, He directed Peter to the place he should cast his net for a catch, after he and other fishermen had toiled all night without success. While Peter was initially reluctant, he quickly complied in faith and obedience, **“nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net”** (Luke 5:5). Though an experienced fisherman himself, Peter accepted the advice from the Lord and as a result, made great harvest of fishes. His response demonstrates the value of humility and implicit obedience. With the great catch, he recognised the goodness of God, which led him to repentance (Romans 2:4), having realised his sinfulness. **“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord”** (Luke 5:8).

It is worthy to note that it was after this process of repentance and conversion that the Lord commissioned Peter and the other disciples: **“Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him”** (Luke 5:10,11). The phrase “catch men” underscores the command to win souls. This is a solemn charge to all believers. We must give all our treasures, time and talents to fulfil the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20).

POTENCY OF PRAYER IN SOUL-WINNING MINISTRY
(Luke 5:12-26; Matthew 4:23-25; 9:1-8; John 20:30,31; Acts 4:31,33; 10:38; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 10:17-19)

From the passage, two spectacular miracles stand out; namely, the cleansing of the leper (verses 12-15) and the healing of the paralytic man (verses 18-26). These miracles confirm and support Christ’s threefold ministry of teaching, preaching and healing; **“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). The faith of the leper was remarkable as he besought the Lord saying, **“...if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean”** (verse 12). While some

may see this as a sign of faithlessness, this leper did not express doubt concerning Christ's willingness; rather, he came as a supplicant with no inherent right to be healed, but cast himself on the mercy and grace of the Lord. To touch a leper is dangerous medically, defiling religiously and degrading socially (Leviticus 13:1-59). But the Saviour was not defiled when He touched him and the leper was instantly healed. **"And immediately the leprosy departed from him"** (Luke 5:13). Imagine the boundless joy of the helpless and hopeless leper to be completely healed! **"And he charged him to tell no man, but go and shew thyself to the Priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame about him, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed of their infirmity"** (verses 14,15).

In the Old Testament, people who had previously been certified as lepers and claimed to be cured had to go through a proper form of discharge from the priests before being allowed to move freely in the society (Leviticus 14:1-32). Therefore, Jesus instructed this man to obey the law as a true witness to the power of God to heal and deliver.

Christ also revealed the secret of unparalleled success in ministry to deliver lost humanity from the shackles of Satan. **"And he withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."** There was no doubt that His time of communion with the Father was the source of His supernatural power (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18,29; 11:1; 22:44). The early disciples also gave ample time to prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:31,33; 6:3,4; 12:5). The efficacy of fervent prayer is not only seen in the boldness to preach the Word but also in follow-up and conservation of the fruits of evangelism (Galatians 4:19). Believers who desire a fruitful harvest in soul-winning ministry must spend quality time in fervent prayers.

As Jesus Christ taught in Capernaum, the Pharisees and doctors sat by and watched, and **"...the power of the Lord was present to heal them"** (verse 17). The Pharisees who had been critical of Christ's ministry were

definitely confounded by the manifestation of God's power that usually attended His meetings. Their reaction could not stop His commitment to the work of rescuing men from the bondage of sin and Satan. A soul-winner must learn that in the midst of negative reactions and stiff opposition, the Lord will manifest His power and lift up the standard against any opposing power (Acts 13:4-12). The manifestation of God's power will confirm His word and lead sinners to believe in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers should pray for the practical manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in their ministry to bring solutions to people's problems and draw sinners to Christ (Acts 4:29-33; Mark 16:17-20).

The friends of the paralysed man had strong faith that Jesus would heal him and showed it by their determination to bring him to the Lord (verses 18,19). The four men demonstrated compassion, commitment, courage and creativity. In the face of the difficulty of passing through the crowd, their ingenuity made a way for them. This is a challenge to all soul-winners. There should be no excuse or barriers in bringing people to Christ. We must listen to the Holy Spirit to give us insight into how to overcome barriers in the mission fields. In healing the paralytic man, one fact becomes obvious: Christ identified sin as being largely the root cause of sicknesses and diseases.

Thus, as the Son of God, He demonstrated His power to forgive sins (verses 20,24). The paralysed man received a double miracle: salvation and physical healing (Psalm 103:2,3). We also learn the need to bring our physically challenged friends, families, neighbours and the afflicted to the Lord so that they can receive and enjoy a double cure for sin and diseases from the Lord (Matthew 11:28).

PROVEN METHODS OF SOUL-WINNING (Luke 5:27-39; Matthew 9:9-13; John 1:40-42; Acts 8:29-35)

“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (Luke 5:27,28). Levi, also known

as Matthew (Matthew 9:9), was a Jewish tax collector for the Roman government. These tax collectors were often addressed as “**publicans and sinners**” (verse 30; Matthew 9:10,11). Someone rightly observed that in resolving to follow Christ, Levi “*lost a comfortable job but he found a destiny. He lost a good income but he found honour. He lost a comfortable security but he found an adventure, the like of which he never dreamed*”. As a significant reward, he became one of the twelve apostles and was honoured to write the gospel which bears his name. It is important to note that when we leave all to follow the Lord, the blessings are unquantifiable (Matthew 19:27-29; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Christ’s disciples were called to fish for men. The work of soul-winning has various similarities with a fisherman’s job. First, the fisherman manifests prudence in the process of fishing and employs diverse strategies. In traditional fishing, nets, hooks and traps are used. Successful soul-winning requires the use of diverse strategies, which include personal evangelism, mass evangelism, gospel campaigns, literature evangelism, carriage evangelism, conventional and social media evangelism. We need to seek wisdom and the deployment of the right strategies in evangelism.

Second, the fisherman employs baits. The gospel should be well-packaged and made attractive in its presentation. Soul-winners should present the gospel intelligently to sinners (Acts 8:35; 26:27,28; John 4:7,26; 3:2,3). Third, fishing is an occupation that requires the relevant skill, dedication and devotion of time and talent. Fourth, a fisherman who toils without catching like Peter will not give up or allow discouragement to make him abandon the work.

Fifth, as Peter enclosed many fishes when he followed the Lord’s direction, the work of soul-winning will be fruitful when believers depend on the Holy Spirit and follow the Lord’s guidance (Acts 8:26,29,35; John 15:15; Philippians 4:13). Sixth, the fisherman has reward for his labour. The soul-winner shall surely receive rewards from the Lord (Proverbs 11:30; Daniel 12:3).

“And Levi made him a great feast in his own house:

and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them" (verse 29). In modern parlance, Levi organised a "party" for his professional colleagues with Jesus as Guest of honour. This afforded him the privilege of witnessing publicly to them concerning his new faith in Christ. Here, we learn that while Levi was won through personal evangelism, he held a feast for Christ to reach his associates and acquaintances.

As laudable as Levi's motive for organising the feast was, the scribes and Pharisees found fault with it. They criticised Christ and murmured that He ate with publicans and sinners. In their bigotry and hypocrisy, they missed the wonder of Christ's condescension and grace to all. The publicans and sinners were excommunicated from the synagogue but Jesus accepted them. He gave them the opportunity to turn to God and begin a new life. Believers must avoid the attitude of bigotry and faultfinding like the Pharisees who came to Levi's feast as watchdogs but did not experience the pardon, grace and peace of God that others enjoyed. Jesus simply answered the scribes and Pharisees by re-emphasising the purpose of His coming into the world. **"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"** (verse 32). The mission of Christ on earth is summarised in these words. Every message of the soul-winner should call people to repentance and point them to Christ.

Observe that the next tactic of the Pharisees was to interrogate Jesus on the custom of fasting. **"And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?"** (verse 33). The Lord answered, in effect, that there was no reason for the disciples to fast while He was still with them. He pointed to the time when He would be **"taken away from them"** (that is, His crucifixion); then they would fast as an expression of their grief. Scriptural fasting is enjoined as found in the Scriptures (Isaiah 58:6; Acts 13:2; Mark 9:29). It is beneficial for contemporary believers in our personal walk with and work for the

Lord.

In the concluding verses of our text, following the question and accusation of the Pharisees, the Lord dwelt on three parables to portray the new dispensation, which had begun and there could be no mixing of the new and the old (Luke 5:36-39). In the first parable, the “**old**” garment speaks of the legal system or dispensation, while the “**new**” garment pictures the era of grace. An attempt to mix law and grace results in the spoiling of both. In verses 37 and 38, the second parable exposes the folly of putting a new wine into an old bottle or wineskin. The wineskins burst and the wine is spilled. This demonstrates that the outmoded tradition, rituals and ordinances of Judaism were too rigid to accommodate the joy of the new dispensation of grace. In verse 39, the third parable states, “**No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better**”.

This analogy explains why some people in Israel had trouble accepting Christ. This verse is paradoxical as it exposes the unwillingness of many Jews to believe the gospel. It also pictures the natural reluctance of men these days to abandon the old ways of religious tradition for Christianity. The new dispensation of grace is better than the old because it is “**...a better covenant, which was established upon better promises**” (Hebrews 8:6). Some, who pride themselves in church membership and religious affiliations, lack the evidence of the new birth. We need to pray for their salvation as Paul did for Israel and reach them through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:1-3).

Questions for review:

1. What is the challenge before present-day gospel ministers concerning the mixed crowd that attend our church programmes?
2. From Peter’s encounter with the Lord, what is the basic qualification to be a soul-winner?
3. From Christ’s personal example, what is the place of prayer in the soul-winning ministry?
4. What significant role can the demonstration of divine

- power play in soul-winning ministry?
5. What can soul-winners learn from the four men who brought their friend to Jesus?
 6. Identify and discuss the different methods of soul-winning.
 7. What is the place of parables in Christ's method of reaching the people?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font above the number "100" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background of the graphic is a grayscale image of an open book.

Lesson
100

CHRIST'S AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS, DEATH AND SIN

MEMORY VERSE: "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people" (Luke 7:16).

TEXT: Luke 7:1-17,36-50

Jesus exercised authority over nature, demons, sicknesses and death during His earthly ministry. In our text, He healed the Centurion's servant; at Nain, He raised the only son of a widow from death and at Simon, the Pharisee's house, He granted gracious pardon to an unworthy, penitent sinner. These miracles and many others recorded in the Bible prove His Lordship. These signs and wonders attracted multitudes to Him. The divine purpose of Jesus miracles is to enable people believe in Him and be saved (John 20:30,31). Believers need to realise that we have been commissioned with the mandate to evangelise the world. And when we are endued with the power of the Holy Ghost, it accelerates the presence and possibility of signs and wonders accompanying our evangelistic missions. This ultimately opens doors for more souls to be brought into the Kingdom.

The consequence of sin includes sickness and death, which are the greatest enemies of humanity. Jesus offered His precious blood to deliver man from sin and its deadly consequences. All those who come to Him in genuine repentance are saved from sin. His stripes provide healing for all manner of sicknesses and diseases. He delivers the oppressed and quickens the dead (Isaiah 53:5).

CHRIST'S POWER OVER SICKNESSES AND DISEASES (Luke 7:1-10; Exodus 15:26; 23:25; Isaiah 53:4,5; 1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 4:23; Luke 6:19; Acts 10:38)

As Jesus returned to Capernaum after He had delivered what is commonly referred to as the “Sermon on the Mount”, certain elders of the Jews met Him on behalf of a centurion who was friendly to the Jewish cause and had built them a synagogue; obviously he was being drawn to Christ by God (John 6:44,65). The centurion’s servant was critically ill and they pleaded with the Lord to heal him. The Lord never turned away anyone who comes to Him in sincerity. Christ was already on the way to the centurion’s house when he sent his friends to declare his faith that Jesus could heal his servant without bothering to come to his house. Like all men under conviction, he deeply sensed his own unworthiness. The Lord marvelled at his uncommon faith.

The centurion’s declaration that Jesus only needed to speak the word was in agreement with the scriptural declaration that: **“He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions”** (Psalm 107:20). The centurion’s humility in stating that he was unworthy of Jesus’ coming to his house is commendable. The Lord exalts the humble and abases the proud. The centurion’s servant was instantly healed when Jesus responded to the manifestation of faith and of the centurion.

It is instructive to note that all through the ministry of Jesus, He constantly demonstrated authority over all sicknesses and diseases. **“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).

Sickness is one of the consequences of the fall of man. It is the absence of whole soundness in man – physical, spiritual, emotional, mental or physiological. Sin is the main cause of sickness (John 5:14; 9:1,2; Psalm 107:17).

Other causes of sickness may include unhygienic practices, poor dieting, lack of regular physical exercise, lack of rest, ignorance and satanic assault. However, no matter the cause of the sickness, God has promised to heal us as well as keep us healthy provided we obey Him. He declares in His word: **“...I am the LORD that healeth thee”** (Exodus 15:26). As God made provision for the salvation of our souls, He also provided for our healing. Even before His physical manifestation, the Scripture emphasises this as part of the total package of Christ’s redemptive work through His vicarious death: **“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed”** (Isaiah 53:5).

CHRIST’S AUTHORITY OVER DEATH (Luke 7:11-17,22; Mark 5:37-43; John 11:25,26,39-45; Hebrews 2:14,15)

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother” (Luke 7:13-15). Jesus was totally committed to the work of bringing succour to suffering humanity. As He went to the city of Nain, He met those bearing the corpse of a man who was the only son of a widow. The helpless widow found **“consolation in Christ”** (Philippians 2:1) as He raised her son from death. Christ here demonstrated His deity, sovereignty and authority over death. This miracle also revealed Christ as the resurrection and the life; thus, foreshadowing the resurrection of the dead.

Other cases of the dead being raised to life by Christ include the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:22-24,35-43) and Lazarus (John 11:39-45). After His resurrection, Paul the apostle manifested the same authority on his evangelistic outreach. **“And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said,**

Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him... And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:10-12). Today, this apostolic authority is still being manifested through God’s ministers.

The raising of the dead by the Lord Jesus has several implications. First, it shows us that He has absolute power over death and the grave. Second, it teaches us that as believers, we should not be afraid of physical death. Rather, we should remain faithful to the end in order to partake in the resurrection of the dead. Third, we should not be unnecessarily overwhelmed with sorrow and discouragement when our loved ones (fellow believers) depart this sinful world because they will be resurrected on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

CHRIST’S AUTHORITY OVER SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Luke 7:36-50; 11:21,22; Mark 2:5-10; Luke 13:1-5; John 14:6; Mark 16:15,16)

“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:47,48). Simon was a Pharisee who invited Jesus to eat in his house. It appeared that this Pharisee did not believe in Christ as a Prophet (Luke 7:39), yet our Lord accepted his invitation, went into his house **“and sat down to meat”**. This demonstrates His indiscriminating attitude towards the Pharisees and the publicans whom He sought to save from sin (Luke 19:10). Simon failed to show Jesus the usual marks of hospitality offered to visitors as the then custom was – a greeting kiss (verse 45), water to wash his feet (verse 44), or oil for his head (verse 46).

As the Lord was in his house, a woman, who was apparently a notorious sinner came to anoint His feet with an expensive alabaster ointment. In this type of function, no one would expect a publicly known sinner like her to attend. Her coming took great courage and reveals the determination with which she sought

forgiveness. Her “weeping” was an expression of deep repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). The Pharisees showed nothing but contempt for sinners. Simon was convinced that if Jesus knew her character, He would have sent her away, for her touching Him was presumed to convey ceremonial uncleanness. This self-righteous attitude by Pharisees is roundly condemned in the Scripture: **“Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day”** (Isaiah 65:5). While Simon was musing in his heart if Jesus knew the woman to be a sinner, Christ knew his thought and gave a parable which pointed to his host’s state and that of the woman.

The woman’s encounter with Jesus brought a total transformation to her life as she was saved from sin. Jesus did not turn the woman away contrary to the expectation of His self-righteous host. The scribes and Pharisees refused to acknowledge Him as God and saw His declaration of forgiveness for sinners as a blasphemy. For this reason, they remained in their guilt and condemnation while those they regarded as worst sinners were forgiven when they encountered Jesus. **“Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”** (Matthew 21:31).

All who reject Jesus as the only Saviour will perish in their sins and face eternal perdition in hell. Jesus declares, **“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”** (John 8:24). No mortal can atone for even the most insignificant of their sins. The fact that all men are lost except they come to Christ imposes divine mandate on believers to take the saving gospel to perishing men and women everywhere without delay.

Following the example of the woman, sinners should urgently come to Jesus, repent, confess and forsake their sins, accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and live the rest of their lives for Him. Christ’s authority and power over sicknesses, death and sin is undeniably declared in the Scripture. He has commissioned His

disciples to declare and demonstrate that power as they go about the business of the Kingdom. He commands: **“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).

Questions for review:

1. What is the place of signs and wonders in the evangelisation of our communities?
2. What are the causes of sicknesses and diseases?
3. How can believers enjoy healing and good health?
4. Mention other instances where Jesus raised the dead.
5. What can believers learn from the raising of the dead by our Lord Jesus Christ?
6. Why is the preaching of the gospel mandatory for every believer?
7. What steps can sinners and backsliders take to receive salvation?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font above the number "101" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle texture.

Lesson
101

A background image showing an open Bible with a pen resting on it, set against a light gray background.

**CHRIST TEACHES
AGAINST
SECTARIANISM**

MEMORY VERSE: “And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49,50).

TEXT: Luke 9:46-56

The earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ was characterised by authoritative preaching, teaching, and notable signs and wonders, which brought relief to many of His listeners. In the chapter under consideration, the lesson is centred on Christ’s teaching against sectarianism. Sectarianism could be seen as the tendency of excessive devotion to a particular sect, especially in religion, which often involves conflict with others. The Church, that is the body of Christ, includes believers all over the world. **“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”** (Ephesians 1:22,23).

In the Old Testament, the Jews were totally separated from the Gentiles, but in the New, both Jewish and Gentile believers are reconciled together in one body by virtue of the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-16). This implies that all enmity between them was totally put away and God now considers them – and they are to consider one another – as one in Christ Jesus.

New Testament teachings must therefore apply to the entire body of Christ. The gospel is universal; its principles are profound, non-denominational, cross-

culturally relevant and impactful. In the narrative, Christ corrected the selfish sectarian attitude of His disciples (Luke 9:49). He rebuked John, in particular, as well as all believers who may want to follow the same pattern of behaviour. Believers are to have compassion on the ignorant and acknowledge sincere and noble efforts of others who are faithfully contributing to the success and fulfilment of the mandate of the great commission. Instead of wishing the downfall of others, we can earnestly pray and reach out to them with the truth when we perceive any shortcomings in their lives and ministry. Christ's messianic mission was to save, deliver, heal and perfect people's lives, irrespective of colour, race or church affiliation.

CHRIST REVEALS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Luke 9:46-48; Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 9:33-37; 1 Peter 5:5,6; Matthew 23:11,12; Jeremiah 45:5)

“Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest” (verse 46). The disciples of Christ sounded initially uninformed about the nature and details of the ministry and calling of Christ. Jesus had just hinted of His sacrificial suffering and death for humanity: **“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men”** (Luke 9:44). He wanted His disciples to grasp the great spiritual truth of His suffering, but they could not because of their strong misconception of the true nature of His kingdom. The carnality in their minds gave rise to position-seeking, self-exaltation and struggle for leadership positions. However, we must note that Jesus did not disqualify them from being disciples simply because of their lack of understanding.

In the same way, we should forbear with sincere believers in our churches though they are slow in understanding. If we do, eventually they also will **“...come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:13). In their carnal estimation, the

disciples thought sitting in positions of prominence is all that mattered and that greatness is being above others. Contrary to their opinion, Christ rebuked them for their carnal and selfish ambition (Luke 22:25,26).

True greatness is not tailored after the models obtainable in the world. In the kingdom of God, honour and greatness are found in humility and selfless service to others. Those who crave leadership positions should have the proper guidance and comprehension that church leadership is for service, sacrifice, self-denial, consecration and separation from mundane things (2 Timothy 2:4).

The thrust of Christ's correction is that believers should avoid pride and self-exaltation. He used a little child to teach them a lesson in humility. He pointed out that the greatest in the kingdom is not necessarily the one who occupies the highest position but the one who is humble, having a childlike (not childish) spirit, possessing the simplicity and strength of character, and the complete emptiness of self.

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:2-4). Children of God should not think more highly of themselves than they ought to think; but think soberly and humbly. We should not imagine that we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing (Philippians 2:3-5; Romans 12:3,16; Revelation 3:17).

The plague of pride, position-seeking and sectarianism can be done away with through the sanctification experience, which is the second work of grace, subsequent to salvation. From the Old Testament times, sanctification experience continues to be a valid experience for believers who would live right and please God. **“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,**

that thou mayest live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? A Christian writer puts it this way: *“not the lofty in birth and the rich in possession. Such have no claim, on such grounds, for this distinction. Nor the loftiest in intellect. Nor yet the man who works the most; or suffers the most; or gives the most in the service of God. But the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the humble man. He who is the meekest, who is most unworldly, who is most loving in spirit and he who cherishes a forgiving spirit”*.

CHRIST CONDEMNS SECTARIANISM (Luke 9:49,50 Mark 9:38-40; Acts 10:15-35; John 4: 9-10)

“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us” (verse 49). In the context of our present study, we saw John and his companions displaying sectarianism by vehemently forbidding a man from ministering because he did not follow them. **“And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us”** (verse 50). Some believers appear unloving and unwilling to cooperate with others because they are not in the same area of work or ministry. Others allow their gifts, achievements, positions and normal ministerial differences to be a cause of division and segregation in God’s household. The Lord Jesus Christ still condemns sectarianism among believers today.

Sectarians do everything in their power to oppose, hinder or stop others simply because of differences in denominational affiliation. The effects of sectarian attitudes could be very negative to the church’s revival and survival. The unity, fellowship and love, which form the mighty pillars for church growth, can crumble and impair the ministry and mandate of Christ, and create room for false doctrine. Sectarianism breeds opposition, hatred and division among the brethren. To guard against sectarianism, believers must obey God’s word and **“...esteem other better than themselves”** (Philippians 2:3). We must realise that in Christ Jesus,

there is neither Greek nor Jew; we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Romans 10:12 presents this perspective in a more compelling manner: **“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”**.

Courteous and positive attitude towards the lost will afford believers opportunity of witnessing and winning them for Christ without compromising with them. For clarity, it must be stated here, that believers are strictly forbidden from supporting or identifying with those who, while professing to be Christians, peddle false doctrines or live in sin such as immorality, divorce, drunkenness, covetousness and worldliness. The Scripture is unequivocal in its prohibition of compromise and syncretism, that is, the union or attempt to fuse different religious systems and belief, such as the traditional religion and Christianity (1 Corinthians 5:11). Those who call the name of Christ must depart from iniquity and if they do not, we must not give them the right hand of fellowship, lest we become partakers of their sins.

CHRIST ADMONISHES BELIEVERS AGAINST RETALIATION (Luke 9:51-56; Matthew 5:43-48; Proverbs 25:21,22; Romans 12:17-21; Matthew 6:12-15)

As Jesus was about to enter into Samaria, the Samaritans did not receive Him into their city **“...because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”** (Luke 9:53,54; 2 Kings 1:10-14). They wanted to retaliate but the Lord restrained them **“But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village”** (verses 55,56). Retaliation was enshrined in the Mosaic laws (Leviticus 24:19,20). But the Lord, in this dispensation of grace, said we must

forgive those who offend us as contained in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 5:38,39; 6:12,14,15).

The precious lessons from Christ's response to the vindictiveness of James and John include, one, avoiding attitudes of retaliation or revenge against those who oppose the gospel and us (Romans 12:17-21); two, being careful how we quote and apply the Scriptures. Three, the danger of having zeal without knowledge and power without purity. Zeal without knowledge can destroy much good (Romans 10:1-3).

Four, we must be watchful lest we allow the spirit of Satan or the flesh to motivate our thoughts and actions. Five, not listening to bad advice from others. Six, never resorting to violence or the use of carnal weapons in dealing with opposition to the gospel (2 Corinthians 10:4). Neither should we threaten men with death in an attempt to coerce them to accept the gospel.

Christ condemns no man, neither does He give up on sinners. Rather, He is longsuffering towards men, expecting their speedy repentance, and reconciliation with God. **“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation”** (2 Corinthians 5:19). As His disciples therefore, we should love sinners like the Saviour and spend and be spent to rescue them without going on revenge missions against persecutors or enemies.

Questions for review:

1. Explain what you understand by the word 'sectarianism'.
2. What is the main cause of position seeking in the church and what is its inherent danger?
3. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God?
4. Why is sanctification necessary after salvation?
5. Mention some sectarian attitudes you know among believers.
6. What caution must a believer exercise to prevent sectarianism in the church?
7. What do we learn from the presumptuousness of James and John, and Christ's response to them?

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

A circular graphic with the word "Lesson" in a script font at the top and the number "102" in a large, bold, sans-serif font below it. The background of the circle is a light gray with a subtle pattern.

Lesson 102

The title "MISSION OF THE SEVENTY" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background is a grayscale image of an open book with a pair of glasses resting on it.

MISSION OF THE SEVENTY

MEMORY VERSE: “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:1,2).

TEXT: Luke 10:1-24

In His earthly ministry, Jesus exemplified tremendous passion, undying commitment and zeal for the salvation of souls. He left no one in doubt that preaching the gospel was the central focus of His ministry. The desire to win souls, therefore, should be the driving force in every believer.

In the text, Christ sent seventy disciples, in pairs of two, to go and preach the gospel in places where He would eventually reach. He gave them specific instructions about the business of soul-winning and made them know that those who were hospitable must be appreciated, while rejecters of the gospel were to be denounced. The disciples readily and promptly obeyed and thereby proved the power of God. They returned with great joy of success and the Lord rejoiced with them.

THE MANDATE AND MANNER OF COMMISSIONED DISCIPLES (Luke 10:1-16; 9:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20; 6:24-34; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:1-6; Hebrews 2:3)

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come” (Luke 10:1). In all the three synoptic gospels where we have the account of the evangelistic outreach of the twelve apostles, only Luke records the mission of the seventy. The progression from twelve evangelists at the first outing to seventy was an evidence that: one, the ministry of Jesus produced fruits of stable and dependable souls who were not only won into the Kingdom but also committed. Two, preaching the gospel is not a task for only the leaders but the laity as well.

The purpose of the mission of the disciples was two-fold, namely, to prepare the hearts of the people to receive Christ when He would eventually come to their city and to prepare the disciples themselves for practical ministry. This was necessary since they would take over the task of world evangelisation after His ascension. They were sent out two by two, so that they could encourage and support each other on the field. This strategy supports the position of the Scriptures that, **“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up”** (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10).

In sending out the seventy, Jesus pointed out the enormous task of reaching the harvest-ready world with only a few capable and willing labourers. As a remedy to the shortage of gospel workers, He told them to **“pray... the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest”**. Jesus recommended prayer as an effective means of bringing more leaders and workers into the gospel mission.

The seventy were sent out with specific instructions. One, Jesus said, **“Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves”** (verse 3). This tells us

that preaching the gospel has some challenges associated with it. These may include persecution, opposition, attack, ridicule and resistance. Thus, Jesus wanted to forewarn the disciples so that they would not go with a wrong impression and expectation concerning their mission. Two, they were to **“Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes”**. Ministers of God must be free from worldly encumbrances and be completely devoted to the ministry of soul-winning. The urgency of the task of world evangelisation demands that preachers focus all their attention on soul-winning rather than occupy themselves with making money or the cares of life. However, Christ’s instruction does not prohibit gainful employment that will enable us provide for our family. He never intended that gospel ministers should become loafers and irresponsible men who cannot provide for their family (1 Timothy 5:8).

Three, gospel preachers must be contented with a simple lifestyle devoid of covetousness and ostentation. Anywhere they go, they should be satisfied with the provisions made available. They should have no scruples about food, accommodation and utilities. Four, Jesus commanded the seventy to **“salute no man by the way”** (verse 4). This does not mean that gospel ministers should be uncivil or discourteous; rather, it underscores the urgency of their task and the seriousness it deserves. Therefore, they must not waste precious time on the long ceremonious salutation of the Jews. Furthermore, He told them to show courtesy and say to any house they entered: **“Peace be to this house”**. He further revealed that: **“if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again”** (Luke 10:6). The son of peace refers to a person who responds peaceably to others. It was customary among the Jews to call a person the son of a particular virtue or vice that mostly characterise him or her. For instance, **“son of thunder”** (Mark 3:17), **“son of consolation”** (Acts 4:36) and **“son of Belial”** (1 Samuel 25:17). Five, Jesus warned them not to go from house to house, but to remain in the same house eating and drinking such things as they were given. He assured

them that their needs would be met. He expressed this by the use of a common parlance: **“the labourer is worthy of his hire”**.

Concerning their message, the Lord charged them to preach and say, **“The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you”** (verse 9). This means that the message of the evangelist should be simple, direct and centred on the imminence of the kingdom of God, which is as near as Christ standing at the door of every sinner’s heart and knocking to be let in. Unconfessed sin keeps Jesus outside the heart. To the sinner who wants to enter the Kingdom, Jesus commands, **“repent!”** (Mark 1:15). Our message must be centred on Christ and the work of salvation He accomplished for us at Calvary.

The disciples were also to heal the sick in order to prove that the gospel is not only in words but also in power. Healing and miracles are fundamentally part of the gospel message. Healing facilitates conviction and confirms the divine origin of the gospel. However, Jesus forewarned the disciples not to expect everyone to accept their message because men are free moral agents and can choose to repent or not. But at the end of life each person will be responsible for their choice and decision. On the day of judgment, those who reject the gospel message would face punishment more terrible than what befell Sodom and Gomorrah. This declaration of Christ was intended to stir up zeal and earnestness in preaching in the disciples to convince most of their hearers and save their souls from eternal punishment. It was also intended to prevent the disciples from getting discouraged should they discover that in spite of miracles and their great sacrifice in preaching the gospel, many people still refused to repent. To encourage them further, He told them of His identification with them (Luke 10:16). We should beware of the way we respond to and treat servants of God. A reproach given to God’s servants is a reproach on God.

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth

and ashes” (Luke 10:13). Christ upbraided the unrepentant cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum where He was most conversant with and where He did many mighty miracles with less response. He reproved and pronounced heavy judgment on them because they refused to repent. The impenitence of these privileged cities and their subsequent denunciation by Christ teach us that to whom much is given, much shall be required, and the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. Those of us who hear the sound teaching of God’s word and witness frequent manifestation of God’s power should be careful not to be confronted with the same judgment. We need to pray therefore, that God will open the hearts of the people that we preach to so that they will believe the message and repent.

DISCIPLES’ FEEDBACK AND CHRIST’S RESPONSE (Luke 10:17-20; Matthew 17:19; Mark 9:28; Philippians 2:9-11; Luke 15:7)

The seventy returned with joy and reported an astounding success in ministry. **“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name”** (Luke 10:17). The disciples’ victory and success came through the name of Jesus, the name above every name (Philippians 2:10). Christ told them not to misplace their joy on the ability to cast out demons. Rather, they were to rejoice because their names were written in heaven. Believers should know that the success of their ministry is not measured by casting out of demons alone but by the salvation of the hearers.

Jesus was not surprised at the ease with which the disciples exorcised demons. He attributed it to the defeat of Satan, the chief ruler of demons. Because Satan had fallen, it was not surprising that his demons should also fall. He further told them: **“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). Unless a believer

receives this same power, he or she will not be able to combat the forces of darkness. To receive God's power for the miraculous ministry, the believer must be sanctified, pray earnestly in faith for the enduement with the Holy Ghost. It is Christ's promise to all believers and is worthwhile to tarry until the power is received (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8). Jesus' declaration of the fall of Satan was also intended to be a warning against subtle pride because of ministerial success. Satan fell from heaven because of pride and we should beware not to fall into the same temptation.

PRIVILEGE OF DIVINE REVELATION TO COMMITTED DISCIPLES (Luke 10:21-24; Matthew 13:11-16; Isaiah 5:21; John 9:39-41; Romans 11:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:18-29)

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21). Jesus rejoiced in spirit and praised the Father for His plan of redemption and the manner of its revelation to the new believers and disciples. He pointed out to the disciples their privileges in the gospel programme. It is noteworthy that it was recorded that Jesus rejoiced. Three times, it was recorded that He wept. He was **“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”**, but when souls were converted and people received spiritual illumination, His joy broke through His grief and burden for the sinners and He praised God.

Jesus praised the Father for His sovereign wisdom in hiding great spiritual truths from the worldly-wise who pride themselves in their self-righteousness, but it was revealed to those He described as ‘babes’, that is, those who are humble, tender, willing to learn and obey. This means that New Testament believers have greater privileges than the Old Testament prophets, saints and kings. By virtue of His death and resurrection, the defeat of Satan, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the

fullness of God's power on believers, New Testament believers stand a greater advantage over the Old Testament saints. However, this greater privilege has conferred on us greater responsibilities to reach sinners with the gospel so they will repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Thereafter, we are to follow them up so that they can grow and begin to disciple others. We must consecrate and commit our time, talent and treasure to the work of evangelism and church growth. Great victories and testimonies await us when we are obedient like the seventy.

Questions for review:

1. What is the place of prayer in raising labourers for soul harvesting?
2. Mention the people whose duty it is to preach the gospel.
3. Point out what we can learn from the instructions Christ gave to the seventy.
4. What was Christ's response to the disciples who came to express their joy at the conquest of devils?
5. What should be the focus of every evangelistic message?
6. What can we learn from Christ's denunciation of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum?
7. How are New Testament believers more privileged than believers under the Old dispensation?

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

A circular graphic with a white border containing the word "Lesson" in a cursive font and the number "103" in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Lesson
103

A grayscale background image showing an open book, a pair of glasses, and a pen resting on a surface.

**PARABLE OF THE
GOOD SAMARITAN**

MEMORY VERSE: “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27).

TEXT: Luke 10:25-42

This study focuses on an eternally significant question asked by a certain lawyer (a scribe) during one of the teaching sessions of Jesus: “**Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**” Although the lawyer’s intention was to tempt or entrap Jesus, the question is fundamentally important. People who are truly concerned about their spiritual welfare should seek answer to their questions. However, the way Christ responded to the question and its subsequent illustration with the story commonly called “Parable of the Good Samaritan” shows how God, in His infinite wisdom, can bring something good out of a seemingly evil situation.

There are more than 1,000 questions in the New Testament. Rich and deep spiritual truths are revealed as the disciples and others asked questions from Jesus. While some people came to Him with genuine questions, others approached Him with ulterior motives in pretence of wanting to know the way of salvation. Though members of the church are encouraged to ask questions to clear their doubts, they should not ask with wrong intentions such as to embarrass leaders or test the knowledge of their pastor.

THE PLACE OF QUESTION AND ANSWER IN SCRIPTURE (Luke 10:25-29; 1 Kings 10:1; Matthew 22:15-46; Mark 9:9-13; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:23)

In His teaching ministry, Christ gave ample time to answer different questions. We learn from the way He dealt with the variety of questions which people asked Him, including that of the lawyer in our text, who came with the motive of tempting Him or to justify himself. One, our answers should be based on the Scripture. Jesus referred the lawyer to: **“What is written in the law? How readest thou?”** (verse 26). In response to Christ’s question, the lawyer quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12. Leaders and members alike must be conversant with the word of God. Two, we must aim at leading the inquirer to faith, deeper conviction, obedience and commitment to God’s word. Three, we must **“avoid foolish and unlearned questions”** that engender strife and contentions, because they are **“unprofitable and vain”** (2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9). Four, we should not allow questions and answers in the church to degenerate into debate, argument or a test of scholarship. We should imitate Christ in the way He responded to questions. Sometimes, He simply answered a question with another question, especially to silence those who had evil intentions as He did to the lawyer in our text.

This parable has other valuable lessons. These are summed up in: one, the possibility of having a good knowledge of the Scripture without salvation. Two, understanding the true meaning of neighbourliness. Despite the prevalence of evil these days, believers can be helpful and friendly to neighbours, including strangers. Three, the display of hospitality goes a long way to show that we love the Lord and our fellow humans. Four, pastors and leaders should emulate Christ as they answer the questions of their members, no matter their intention.

PORTRAIT OF TRUE NEIGHBOURLINESS (Luke 10:30-37; 1 Corinthians 6:1-10; James 2:14-16; 1 John 3:17,18; Philippians 2:4)

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Luke 10:33,34).

The parable shows the importance and evidence of true neighbourliness in a transformed life. This is demonstrated in loving God and our neighbours as ourselves, irrespective of nationality, gender, religion or any other distinctions. In this parable, the love and kindness of God to sinful and wretched humanity was beautifully illustrated and portrayed. In our sinfulness, we are poor, distressed travellers on our way to a damnable eternity; robbed, wounded and left half dead by sin and Satan. But Jesus had mercy on us and came to our rescue. Having received redemption through Christ, we have the sole responsibility to reach out to our neighbours who are under the captivity of sin and Satan. Our neighbours are persons who need help; when we have the power and opportunity, they should be helped. To the scribes and Pharisees, a neighbour is not everyone but only the ones who they reckon worthy.

According to Bible historians, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was one of the most dangerous roads to travel in those days. It was infested with armed bandits that none dared to travel from dusk without an escort. The victim in Christ’s story was travelling on this road knowing the risk involved and fell among thieves.

By divine providence, God brought a priest and a Levite to the scene of the incident. **“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way... And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side”** without showing compassion and mercy on the wounded man. Then came a Samaritan as he journeyed, saw this wounded man, had compassion on him, went to him,

bounded up his wounds, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn (equivalent of today's hospital) and took care of him. Before he left the following day, he paid the bills of the victim and promised to pay more, if need be.

The Jews avoided the Samaritans because they regarded them as not full-blooded Hebrews due to their mixed nationality of Jews and Gentiles when the place was captured by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:26-34; Luke 9:51-54; John 4:4:9). Yet, a Samaritan showed the sacrificial love, which the highly ecclesiastical and religious men failed to show. The priest and the Levite may have plausible reasons for failing to help, being religious and strict adherents of the Mosaic law (Numbers 19:16). They obeyed the law but neglected the work of mercy. God expects all Christians, not only to teach about love, but to practise it by taking actions that will alleviate the sufferings of other people. These acts of love include visiting new converts and old disciples, giving to those in need, paying school fees of indigent students, praying for sinners to be converted, as well as preaching the gospel.

Profitable lessons we can draw from this parable include: one, this present world is full of dangers; therefore, we should not lay our treasures here (Matthew 6:19); two, we should not put our trust in men to help us (Psalm 62:5); three, God can use people we least expected to help us; four, true love knows no racial barrier; five, helping others will cost us our time or treasures.

The climax of the story of the Good Samaritan is the command of Christ to **“Go and do thou likewise”**. This applies to every truly converted believer. He commands us to love the Lord with all our hearts, our soul and might; and to love our neighbours as ourselves. It should cut across racial, religious, class, socio-economic and demographic barriers. We are to love without prejudice or partiality.

God's kind of love is only made possible in, and practised by those who have given their lives to Christ and have the sanctification experience. Only *agape* love

can reflect the nature of God in human relationship. Apostle Paul described the features of this love in the 13th Chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. Such unflinching love is what contemporary believers need and must demonstrate in the church. Without this kind of love, we cannot truly claim to be Christ's disciples (John 13:35).

PREMINENCE OF HEARING THE WORD OVER SERVICE (Luke 10:38-42; Ecclesiastes 3:1; Isaiah 58:13,14; Ecclesiastes 5:1)

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word” (Luke 10:38,39). After His encounter with the lawyer in our text, Jesus went to a village called Bethany, to the house of Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters. While in the house, He taught the word of life and Mary sat and listened intently. **“But Martha was cumbered about much serving...”** The focus of the two sisters contrasts sharply. Mary was more concerned with hearing the word of God but Martha was more worried about taking care of the physical needs of the guests, which is not altogether bad.

Many believers fall into either category. They either belong to the group who are ready to hear the word of God during services and special programmes or to those who are busy with activities that are not essential to spiritual development. While it is good to volunteer to work during programmes like retreats, we should not make work our priority. The time we ought to settle down and listen or read the word of God should not be substituted with any other activity, no matter how relevant. Those who prefer to go to their marketplace to sell especially on Sundays should desist from the act as it displeases the Lord (Isaiah 58:13,14). Honouring the day of the Lord attracts blessing. No matter our need, He is able to provide when we give His word precedence over all else, because the earth is the Lord's

and its fullness.

Martha was bothered why Jesus allowed Mary to sit and listen to the Word. Therefore, she asked, “**Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her**” (Luke 10:40-42). We are to emulate Mary’s wise decision. The word of God is what builds us up on our most holy faith to live a life pleasing to God and to qualify us for heaven. Therefore, we should “**be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools...**” (Ecclesiastes 5:1). “**If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them**” (John 13:17).

Questions for review:

1. What is the place of questions in the Scriptures?
2. Enumerate four principles that should guide questions and answers in the church.
3. Who is your neighbour?
4. What can we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan?
5. How should true Christians manifest love considering the attitudes of the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan towards the wounded man?
6. What are the true qualities of Christlike love?
7. What good part did Mary choose in our study?

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

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Lesson
104

A black and white photograph of an open Bible with a pair of glasses resting on it.

**JESUS TEACHES ON
PRAYER**

MEMORY VERSE: “And I say unto you, 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” (Luke 11:9,10).

TEXT: Luke 11:1-13

Overwhelmed by the awesome power and glory that Christ demonstrated during His earthly ministry especially through prayers, His disciples could not but cry, “**Lord, teach us to pray**” (Luke 11:1). With keen interest, the disciples must have observed the qualities of consistency, fervency, persistence, efficacy and the unfailing track results of their Master’s prayer life. Besides, at this early stage of their spiritual lives and ministerial calling, the need to lay a solid foundation required for their survival, growth and enduring success in ministry, led to their cry for help. This has become very urgent and imperative because it forms the key pillar of success in Christian life and ministry. Christ responded promptly to their plea and laid bare the necessary basic principles of prayers.

This attitude of Jesus teaches us that the best time to lay solid spiritual foundations is when the people are spiritually tender and eager to learn, hungry for and opened to the truths of the Kingdom. Preachers should be “**apt to teach**” (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24) and communicate essential and pertinent lessons to the flock every time. Believers should emulate the inquisitive attitude of the disciples and take advantage of the

opportunities at their disposal to acquire foundational principles and knowledge necessary for rapid growth and development.

It is equally noteworthy that the disciples were desirous to be like their Master so that they could independently stand and continue His great work in His absence. We are to seek spiritual experience for advancement in all areas of the Christian faith. We must not always depend on others for sustenance and continuity in the faith (Hebrews 5:12).

The power of prayer cannot be overestimated. “...**God be merciful to me a sinner**” (Luke 18:13) was the publican’s prayer for salvation. David sought external and internal purity and Jeremiah craved bodily healing by prayer (Psalm 51:7,10; Jeremiah 17:14). Prayer was key to Solomon’s receiving the special gift of wisdom from God. Jabez understood that prayer was his only hope of escape from the chains of sorrows and abject poverty (1 Chronicles 4:10).

CHRIST’S INSTRUCTION ON PRAYER (Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 18:1)

The Lord’s Prayer, widely recited by multitudes worldwide is only a model that depicts the priority and themes of acceptable and God-honouring prayer. The prayer opens with a focus on the Father’s purpose, implying that divine interest must be first in our supplication. “**When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth**” (Luke 11:2). There are vital lessons to draw here. First, there is a reflection of intimacy and family tie in reference to God as ‘Father’. This is the first right step to be taken in prayer – setting our relationship right with God, by receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour and turning away from all known sins (John 1:12). This confers on us “...**the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father**” (Romans 8:15). Second is the reverence for our Holy God. His name is to be taken in veneration and not in vanity. Only the enemies of God

will trample on the sanctity of His divine personality and take His name in vain (Psalm 139:20). In offering prayers, we understand the awesomeness of God and we stand in awe, giving Him the glory due to His name (Psalms 29:2; 96:8). God's name is holy and must be greatly held in reverence and majesty. We cannot separate the Person of God from the awesomeness of His name.

Third, is the desire for God's kingdom to come into reality. Oh what beauty, that the King of all the earth establishes His throne and dominion, glory and majesty, and the entirety of the kingdom on earth! The kingdom of God is a priority to seek. Many Christians want to seek first the expansion of their earthly kingdom and influence, but Jesus says, **“seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”** (Matthew 6:33). Know that **“the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 14:17). The prayerful life of Jesus shows us the need to fully depend on the Father. As sons and daughters of God, believers derive all fullness and grace for daily living from the Father through lively communion.

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.” When we acknowledge God as our King, we pledge our loyalty and obedience unconditionally to Him. Also, we take necessary steps to entrench the will and righteousness of the Kingdom in our hearts. The Church looks forward to the coming of Christ's kingdom when Satan and all evil works will be permanently destroyed.

“Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:3,4). ‘Daily bread’ as contained in our text is reminiscent of the manna God gave the children of Israel daily on their way to the Promised Land. Praying to Him, the Provider and Sustainer of life, will yield satisfaction and comfort for all our physical, mental, emotional and environmental needs.

In addition, the forgiven person must forgive in order to deserve forgiveness. This is another important component of the prayer and secret to receiving answer from God. **“And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.”** While God readily pardons and forgives every repented (confessed and forsaken) sin, we must ask for enabling grace from Him to forgive all that might have infringed on our comforts or rights. This teaching of forgiveness is diametrically opposed to the retaliatory practice of some believers. Therefore, **“when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses”** (Mark 11:25,26). We must learn from Jesus. Even while on the Cross, He still prayed: **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:34).

To maintain a viable and fruitful fellowship with the Father and the brethren, forgiveness in interpersonal relationship is neither conditional nor optional. Spouses must make up for every perceived differences and misunderstandings. Members of the body of Christ and family members must forgive and reconcile with one another on every infraction. This is to ensure **“...that [our] prayers be not hindered”** (1 Peter 3:7). The part of the prayer that says, **“And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil”** implies that Christians are to seek preservation from the temptations that frequently befall humanity. We are to pray also for protection from the evil that defiles and destroys families, careers, destinies, ministries, communities and devastate nations. Such fervent scriptural prayers guarantee peace, progress and prosperity.

CALL FOR IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER (Luke 11:5-8; 6:12; 18:1-8; 1 Kings 18:42-46; Daniel 10:2-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Praying with importunity is an act of faith with the unwavering assurance and **“...the confidence that we**

have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Importunity in prayer is insistently seeking with diligence and consistency until the ‘lost coin’ and the ‘lost asses’ are found’ and until the ‘prodigal son’ returns home. Importunity, as used in our text, means not giving up, shamelessly persistent or seeking something. The teaching of Jesus on this principle of prayer was backed up with the case of a needy friend at an odd time: **“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth”** (Luke 11:5,8).

From here the Lord enjoins Christians to maintain a persistent and unrelenting attitude until answers are secured. This entails asking without ceasing as in the case of the prayer for the release of Apostle Peter from incarceration (Acts 12:5). Expressions such as, ‘continual coming’ of the Syrophenician woman, **“prayed more earnestly”** as in the case of the Lord Jesus at Gethsemane, **“the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous”** in James 5:16-18, are all elements of importunity in prayer.

The Scripture is replete with examples of how saints exhibited importunity in prayer. Elijah prayed till rain came; the Syrophenician woman also prayed till she received healing for her demonised child (Matthew 15:22-28). The needy friend leveraged on his cordial relationship with his benefactor-friend and persisted until he received help (Luke 11:5-8). In the account of Luke 18:1-8, tenacity in faith paved way for the widow before an unjust judge. Importunity requires being single-minded (Matthew 6:22); having strong conviction in God’s unfailing faithfulness (Romans 4:16-21; Hebrews 11:11); and fervent communication (James 5:17,18) in prayer.

CHRISTIANS' PENTECOST EXPERIENCE THROUGH PRAYER (Luke 11:9-13; 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; Luke 4:18-20; Isaiah 10:27; Jeremiah 29:11-14; John 14:12-14)

To conclude His teaching on the model prayer, Jesus presented to His disciples the fact that God is freely predisposed to grant His children, the most invaluable gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift is obtainable by saints through prayer. In His words, Jesus said: “**...how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?**” (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit bestows anointing and power on believers for both personal progress, productivity and fruitfulness in soul-winning and ministry (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15-20; Matthew 28:18-20). No individual Christian or church can enjoy the full privileges in Christ without the power and anointing of the Holy Ghost. Without the Spirit's power, the Christian and the church will be limited in growth, development and expansion. A believer's boldness, unction and utterance to preach effectively are still dependent on the operation of the Holy Ghost. In order to surmount the present challenges confronting individuals, families and even churches, we must seek the power of the Holy Ghost through fervent and importunate prayers (Luke 4:18-20; Isaiah 10:27). In other Scriptures, Jesus used words such as “**tarry**” (Luke 24:49) and “**wait**” (Acts 1:4,5) to reiterate the need for persistence in prayer to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. The implication of this teaching is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not for the casual, impatient and lazy Christians with no passion and sense of mission for the Lord's work.

Apart from the principles and portraits of prayer, Christ's teaching reveals the possibility of Christians receiving the Holy Ghost and the attendant gifts of the Spirit. These gifts made the difference in the lives and history of members of the early Church. With the Holy Ghost baptism, a believer experiences a transition from weakness to strength, timidity to boldness, coldness to fervency and from the ordinary to extraordinary exploits. The church too will grow from fewness to multitude

(Isaiah 60:22). The early Church grew from 120 to about 3,120 members at one instance and the exponential growth continued as the apostles, empowered by the Holy Ghost, obeyed the mandate of the great commission and went everywhere preaching the Word and making disciples of all nations. When we are endued with this power, we will do great exploits for the Lord.

Questions for review:

1. What can we learn from the disciples' desire to learn how to pray, and Jesus' prompt response to their request?
2. What are the important elements in our prayers that align us to God's purpose?
3. What are the possible dangers of unforgiving attitude in prayers?
4. Explain how a Christian can demonstrate importunity in prayer.
5. Explain the role of importunate praying in receiving the Holy Ghost.
6. What differentiated disciples during Christ's earthly ministry from the early Church?
7. Why should a believer not rest until he or she has been baptized in the Holy Spirit?

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

END OF SECTION IV

**THE END OF THE STS STUDIES. BUT
BE ADVISED THE WORD OF GOD IS
TIMELESS (DOES NOT BECOME
OBSOLETE AT ANYTINE).
THEREFORE, KEEP THIS BOOK
HANDY**



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DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WEEKLY
FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

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

MONDAY BIBLE STUDY

Rockland County	7:00 PM
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TUESDAY BIBLE STUDY

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

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

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

All the Church Locations except Rockland County	7:00 PM
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ALL NIGHT PRAYER VIGILS

Bronx - First Friday of Every Month	7:00 PM
Brooklyn - Last Friday of Every Month	11 :00 PM
Queens - First Friday & Third Friday of Every Month	11 :00 PM
New Jersey - Third Friday of Every Month	11 :00 PM

Pastor W.F. Kumuyi - General Superintendent
Your Spiritual Welfare is our Concern