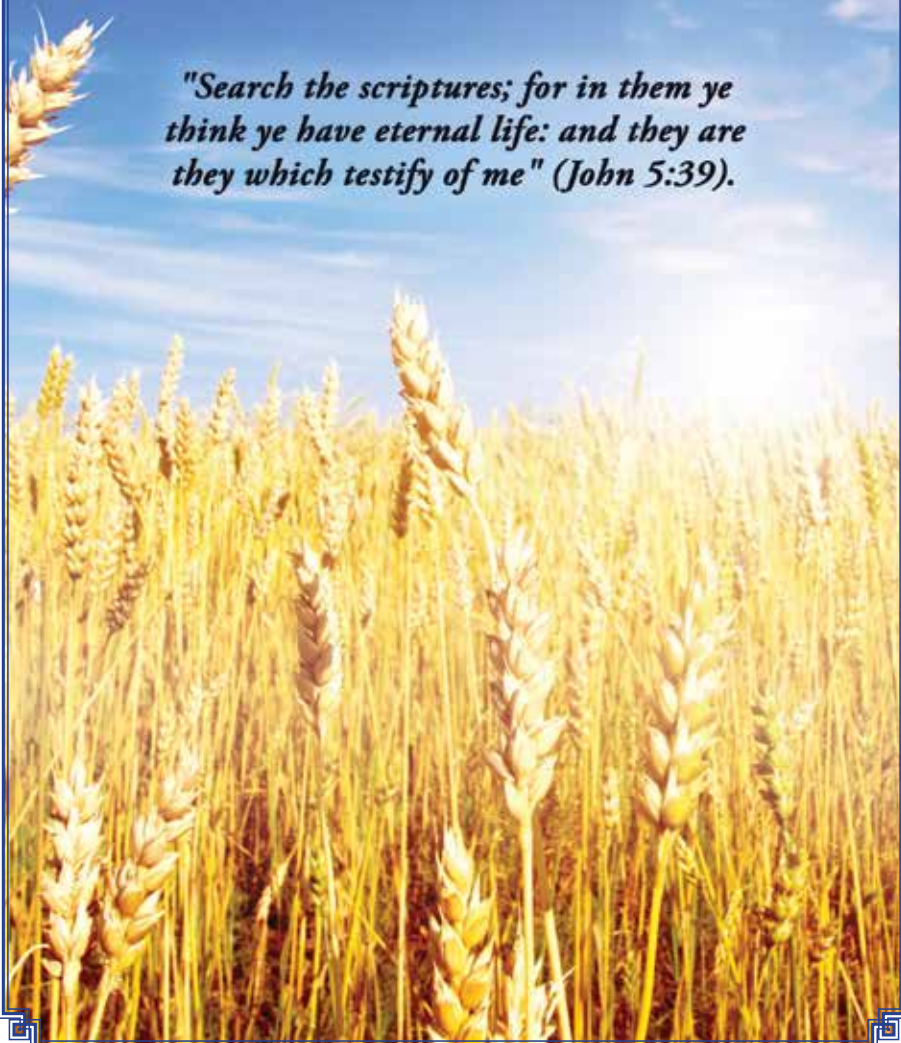


SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VOLUME 41

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



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OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

521 Lesson

CURSES UPON THE DISOBEDIENT

MEMORY VERSE: “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen” (Deuteronomy 27:26).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 27:1-26; 28:15-68

In the previous chapter, Moses pointed out to Israel the law of first fruits and tithes as part of the covenant stipulated in their treaty with God. From that study, we learnt of the financial responsibility of God’s people towards those who minister at His altar as well as to the poor orphans, widows and strangers.

Our text deals with the awful consequences of disobeying the commandments of God. Moses had told the Israelites that if they chose to disobey God rather than obey Him, terrible curses would come upon them: they would be robbed of all joy, health, longevity and success. They would experience physical sickness, emotional disturbance, natural disasters, oppression, fruitless labour, untimely death, defeat, debt, and unimaginable problems.

Question 1: What is the consequence of disobeying God’s commandments?

This study is a revelation of one of the basic truths of the scripture: obedience to God brings blessings while disobedience brings curses. God is no respecter of persons. Whether in the Old or New Testament, those who flouted His rules were adequately punished. Entering into a covenant relationship with God demands that we fulfill our own part while He keeps his own part of the covenant by blessing us in return. Anyone who wants to please the Lord and enjoy His blessings must make obedience to His commandments a primary duty. Becoming God’s covenant partners through the new birth is a rare privilege. But we

must not forget that such privilege begets responsibility. Hence, those who have the privilege of being God's people also have the responsibility of keeping His commandments.

MONUMENT FOR THE LAW ON MOUNT EBAL (Deuteronomy 27:1-8; Joshua 8:30-32; Exodus 20:25)

“And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister: And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee” (Deuteronomy 27:1-3).

Moses instructed the children of Israel to set up great stones on mount Ebal, plaster them, and write plainly on them all the words of the law. And this was to be done as soon as they entered the Promised Land. It is important to note that the monument itself was to be very mean, only rough unhewn stone plastered over; not polished marble or alabaster, nor brass tables, but common plaster upon stone. This teaches that the word of God needs not to be set off by the art of man, nor embellished with the enticing words of man's wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:4). They were also to build upon the same mount an altar of unhewn stone where they should offer burnt offerings and peace offerings for the ratification of their covenant treaty with God. This command was carried out by Joshua when the children of Israel eventually entered Canaan.

<p>Question 2: Why was it necessary to set up a monument for the law on mount Ebal?</p>
--

The directive to set up a monument for the law was necessary in order to keep a memorial for future generations and to remind the Israelites of their obligation to keep God's commandments. Here, the laws written upon stones would serve as a visual aid to help them remember God's

requirement but particularly it would serve as a written document of the covenant between them and God.

In ancient times, it was customary for two parties who wished to enter a covenant treaty to write a formal agreement stipulating the conditions of the covenant and the consequences of failure to abide by the terms agreed upon by both parties. Therefore by asking Israel to write the law on plastered stone, God would have them realize that the relationship with Him was not a loose one that could be abandoned without grave consequences. Rather, it was a binding relationship in which they would be blessed if they obeyed.

<p>Question 3: What can believers learn from the setting up of a monument for the law by Israel?</p>

This teaches us that we should be diligent in preserving a memorial for future generations concerning the full-orbed truth of God's word. We must preserve the pure, undiluted teachings of God's word for upcoming generations. This we can do by teaching the word of God to our young people very clearly so that the laws of God would be written upon the table of their hearts. We should also use all available media such as electronic and literature to preserve all the past messages that God has graciously given to the church.

Another lesson is that as believers, we should always keep the word of God in view and make it the rule of our lives. With regards to our covenant relationship with God, He expects us to obey His commandments. But we cannot obey the commandments unless we learn and know them; therefore, we should study the word of God and allow Him to write His words upon the table of our hearts. In addition, we see the altars of burnt and peace offerings in association with the laws written upon the plastered stones. This altar and the sacrifices upon it were not for sin offering but signified a joyful fellowship with God. Israel had entered the Promised Land, and as such, they could gather round the altar as well as eat their peace offerings in God's presence without any dread of the commandments. Likewise, for the true believer who has

been forgiven and cleansed from all iniquities and who lives in total obedience to God's word, there is no dread or morbid fear of the commandments but a calm and happy fellowship with God. But in contrast, **“the sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites ...”** (Isaiah 33: 14). Sinners and hypocrites cannot enjoy true peace neither can they savour the joy of fellowship with God unless they repent and yield themselves completely to Him.

CURSES ON THOSE WHO TRANSGRESS THE LAW (Deuteronomy 27:9-26; 11:26-32; 28:15-68; Joshua 8:30-35)

Moses pointed out the curses that would come upon those who chose to disobey the laws of God. He appointed six tribes of Israel to stand upon mount Gerizim to pronounce blessings on those who kept the law and the other six tribes on mount Ebal to curse the transgressors. And as the curses were pronounced, the people were to say, 'Amen' (meaning, so let it be) as a mark of their agreement or affirmation. By such affirmation, the people took responsibility for their actions.

It should be understood that the pronouncement of these curses does not mean that God is wicked or vindictive; rather, He is just and wants men to know that they are responsible for their own choices or actions. Basically, the curses were to serve as a deterrent against wrong actions. They were warned not to break God's commandments. But should anyone decide to attract the curses to himself through a willful transgression of God's laws, then, he should take full responsibility for his disobedience. Therefore, the setting forth of the 'curses reminds us that disobedience has grave consequences. And the fact that they were stated in contrast to the blessings is an indication that God wants people to make their own choice: to obey and be blessed, or disobey and be cursed. It is another way of expressing the universal principles of sowing and reaping, reward and punishment, or cause and effect.

<p>Question 4: In view of God's attributes of mercy and justice, how can we justify the curses in our text?</p>
--

A close look at the curses to be pronounced upon the disobedient shows that the actions that warranted them were definite transgressions of the Ten Commandments and other sundry laws which God gave to the children of Israel. The First curse upon those who make graven or molten images borders on violation of God's command against idolatry and image worship (Exodus 20:3-5). Other curses were placed upon those who dishonour their parents (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16); those who steal land by shifting their neighbour's landmark (Deuteronomy 19:14; Exodus 20:15); those who take advantage of the Physically challenged and underprivileged people (Exodus 22:21-24; 23:9; Leviticus 19: 14, 33, 34; Deuteronomy 10: 17-19; 24:17; 27:18, 19); those guilty of various forms of Immorality, such as incest and bestiality (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 18:8, 9, 19, 23; '19: 19; 20: 11, 14-17; Deuteronomy 22:30); those who commit murder secretly or as hired assassins (Exodus 20: 13; Deuteronomy '5: 17); and those who fail to keep any of the entire law (Deuteronomy 27:26).

It is important to note that for some of these violations, God had already specified the appropriate penalties for the offenders. For example, those who committed immorality or murder were to receive the capital punishment. But that is possible only if they were discovered or if the crime was committed openly. The question now is, what about those offenders who were not discovered, and who thought themselves smart or ingenious in covering this crime; would they escape God's judgment and not receive a just retribution for their deeds? Even though it might appear they have escaped direct judgment for their crime, they would continue to live under a divine curse until they eventually face God's final judgment. It then means that whether a person commits sin openly or secretly, he shall not go unpunished. The only way to escape God's judgment is to repent and receive pardon from the Lord. **"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"** (Proverbs 28: 13). **"The curse of the LORD is in the**

house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just” (Proverbs 3:33).

Question 5: Point out some instances when the curses in our text were fulfilled upon the Israelites and state the lesson this teaches believers.

Looking at the history of the Israelites, it would be observed that all the curses which were predicted in our text came to pass upon them because of their disobedience and backsliding. Literally, they experienced terrible diseases, famine, failure, captivity, terror; massacre and unprecedented persecution in the hands of their enemies. A sample of these curses and their fulfillment, even in Bible days, serve as a warning for us not to handle the predictions of divine judgment lightly. Some Bible passages that confirm the fulfillment of these curses include 2 Chronicles 29:8,9; Judges 6: 1-6, 13: 1; 2 Kings 17:4,6; 24:12, 14; 25:7, 11; Daniel 6:11, 12; Haggai 1:6; Joel 1:4; 2 Kings 6:24-29 and Daniel 3:6. At different times, the Jews had been a special object of persecution by the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires. They were massacred and taken into captivity on several occasions. Indeed, the suffering of the Jewish people, as Moses foretold, has been a sign and a wonder for all people (Deuteronomy 28:45, 46).

The lesson believers need to learn from this is contained in Apostle Paul’s admonition: **“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”** (I Corinthians 10:11, 12). Believers must guide the word of God in their heart jealously. They should not be too familiar with the Bible, to the point of taking God and His word for granted. This is dangerous!

REDEMPTION FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW
(Deuteronomy 27:26; Jeremiah 11:2, 3; Galatians 3: 10-14; 4: 1-5; James 2: 10, 11)

The entire curses in our text constitute what the New Testament describes as the curse of the law. It is the

expression of God's displeasure against the breaking of His commandments. But this curse of the law should be distinguished from other types of curses that are mentioned in the Bible. There is the curse upon the earth because of Adam's transgression (Genesis 3: 14-19). That curse remains in force until the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 22:3). Till then, man will continue to struggle in order to survive. Women will also continue to experience painful labour in child-birth. There are also curses that come as a result of powerful pronouncements by men, either as agents of God or Satan, The curses of Jacob upon Reuben, Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:3-7); Joshua upon whosoever would, rebuild Jericho (Joshua 6:26); David upon Joab and his posterity (2 Samuel 3:26-29); and the attempt by Balaam to curse Israel (Number 22:5-6), fall into this category. As can be seen from these instances, such curses do not just happen; they are effected when certain conditions are fulfilled. **“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse Causeless shall not come”** (Proverbs 26:2).

Question 6: How can a person be free from the curse of the law and what would be the evidence of such freedom?

However, the curse of the law refers to the grim consequence of man's helplessness to keep God's law. The inevitable verdict would be a perpetual rejection by God and constant experience of defeat and failure. But Jesus Christ redeemed us from all that because He died in our place on the: cross of Calvary. No one can by his own efforts measure up to the standard of holiness required by God but Jesus having imputed to us His own righteousness now invites us so that He can impart the ability to obey God's laws into us. It is only when we respond to this invitation that we can be delivered from the curse of the law. The genuine evidence of such a deliverance from the curse of the law would be the presence of divine grace to enable us keep God's laws. In addition, God's laws would be written upon our hearts and we shall be able to obey Him regardless of the cost. Such an experience is not only possible but also offered to whosoever will come to the Lord in genuine repentance and faith.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	MARK	11-12	2 SAMUEL	3-4
TUE	“	13	“	5-6
WED	“	14	“	7-8
THUR	“	15	“	9-10
FRI	“	16	“	11-12
SAT	“	1	“	13
SUN	“	2	“	14

522 Lesson

PROMISED BLESSINGS FOR THE OBEDIENT

MEMORY VERSE: “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God” (Deuteronomy 28:2)

TEXT: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

The previous chapter closes with a reminder to Israel on the consequences of breaking God’s commandments. Six of Israel’s tribes were given the role of pronouncing blessings on the obedient on mount Gerizim while the remaining six tribes were to pronounce curses on the disobedient on -mount Ebal. God has exceeding great- and precious promises for all His children. In this lesson, the Lord promised various blessings upon those who obey His word. Obedience opens the door to His promises. Our text contains the prescribed conditions for receiving God’s blessings, the catalogue of the blessings and conditions for considering the blessings.

Question 1: What is the key that unlocks God’s blessings?

Obedience brings blessings. Once a child of God, regardless of age, nationality or colour obeys God, he becomes a candidate of His promised blessings. He places himself in a privileged position where God can easily reach him. However, continued obedience is essential to conserve the blessings. God will withdraw His favour if an individual, a community or nation deviates. He demonstrated this in dealing with the household of Eli. **“Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed”** (1 Samuel 2:30).

CONDITIONAL BLESSINGS FOR GOD’S CHILDREN
(Deuteronomy 28:1,2; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 5:29; John 15:10, Matthew 12:50; John 14:23, Matthew 6:33)
“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken

diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the Earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1).

The Lord on several occasions has been merciful and compassionate to the children of Israel. They ate angel's food, drank water out of the rock and witnessed God at war against their enemies and oppressors, yet He stressed the need to hearken to His word. There are miracles of mercy which are meant to reveal God's glory and draw men to Him, yet obedience remains central to benefitting from His rich promises. People are eager to engage in religious activities rather than paying attention to the word of God. To such people God queries: **“Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?”** (Jeremiah 7: 10, 11). People seem to forget that heaven and earth will pass away but the word of God stands for ever.

Question 2: Enumerate how a child of God can maintain obedience to God.

The word “if” in our text is conditional; it is not enough to hear God's word but to hearken diligently to it. Diligence in obedience entails that sinners turn swiftly to Christ in repentance (Acts 3:19); saints hasten to obey God's word; we accept God's word as final authority in all issues of life; we store the word of God as treasure in our heart (Psalm 119: 11); we serve the Lord in all sincerity by heralding the good news to sinners (Mark 16:15); we refrain from evil (Psalm 119: 101); and there is sustained fellowship with God and his children without turning aside.

CATALOGUE OF BLESSINGS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN
(Deuteronomy 28:3-13; 2 Peter 1:4; Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 22:7; Psalm 84: 11)

Having laid the foundation for His blessings, God here enumerates in detail the benefits Israel will enjoy if they obey His word. A study of these blessings shows that they are all-encompassing and cover every area of human needs. There is no facet of human existence - physical, spiritual or material - that God is not on hand to satisfy our needs. He is sovereign -and the solution to all human problems. Those who believe and serve Him need not look elsewhere to have their desires granted. It is a grave misadventure when those who claim to serve God, out of desperation decide to consult other beings to have their needs met. **“For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof”** (1 Corinthians 10:26). These promised blessings were not only to keep the children of Israel fixed on God but to make them depend on Him alone for ever. God has all the power to meet all their needs if they fulfilled the conditions.

Question 3: What lessons can a believer learn from the various promised blessings?

These promised blessings teach believers that God alone is sufficient. Second, He is rich in mercy to all who walk uprightly. Third, if any man will be faithful to keep God’s word, He will fulfil His promises. The psalmist said: **“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help”** (Psalm 121:1). Fourth, the law of sowing and reaping comes into force for the promises to receive fulfillment. There is no place for idleness as he that does not work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3: 10). Fifth, there is no place for pride because God is the source of all our blessings. He is the One that gives us power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8: 18). Sixth, no man is capable of hindering or reversing our blessings provided we are in the centre of God’s will (Numbers 23:20). Seventh, believers should know that their main vocation is evangelism, and, as long as they **“occupy till”** He comes (Luke 19: 13), He will not stop blessing them.

Question 4: Enumerate the kind of blessings God promised in our text.

The catalogue of blessings involves all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). They include prosperous

merchandise in the city; fruitful labour of sowing and planting the fields or farms, husbandry and livestock; blessed offspring; success within and without the home; victory over the enemies, no matter their number or strength; protection and preservation within or outside the home; abundant rainfall to refresh the land and enhance vegetation. People of God would be so blessed as to have **“bread enough and to spare”** (Luke 15:17). They would be head above only and no occasion to come under servitude to unbelievers. It is interesting too to discover that the Lord promised to establish His people in holiness and righteousness (verse 9). This is the sum of all blessings: to be made holy and established in holiness. If anyone is endowed with all the fullness of this world but lacks holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, such an one has gained nothing (Mark 8:36). A detailed examination of the blessings outlined here is staggering and should constrain every child of God to commit himself to obeying the Lord at all times.

<p>Question 5: Explain the promised blessing of holy living.</p>

It is interesting that establishment in holiness is specially listed in our text as a promised blessing. Holiness is not just a command, it is a promised blessing. This is a great lesson to many today who thirst for material and other temporal blessings while trivializing the blessing of holy and righteous living which towers above other blessings (Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12: 14).

God’s promise of sufficiency from His treasure house is a great source of assurance that He can meet our daily needs without His children necessarily resorting to borrowing. The believer must know that the borrower is a servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7) but godliness with contentment is great gain. We should be content with whatever God gives us. Certainly, retrogression or failure or mediocrity is not the will of God for any of His people.

CONSERVING GOD’S PROMISED BLESSINGS
 (Deuteronomy 28:14; 5:32; 6:10-15; 1 Samuel 2:30; 13:12-14; 15:23; 2 Kings 17:16-21; Daniel 5:20; Romans 11:22)

Whatever is not kept could be lost. It is possible to suffer defeat after victory, want after plenty, or regret after joy if one is careless with God's blessing. This is why He concluded the series of promises with a reminder to Israel on the need to continue in obedience. Saul, the first king of Israel started well but ended very badly because of disobedience. Thousands of the children of Israel left Egypt with victory tune in their mouths but perished in the wilderness due to disobedience. Demas was a companion of Paul, the apostle but he backslid and went back. Judas Iscariot worked and walked with Christ but could not make it to heaven. The uniform testimony of the scripture is that all who will continue to enjoy God's blessing must keep on abiding in His word.

Question 6: What are the necessary conditions for retaining God's blessing?

When Eli's sons forsook God's commandments, they were punished. It was the goodly Babylonish garment that Achan stole in defiance of God's commandment that cost Israel their victory against their enemies. However, those who continue in obedience will always receive His goodness and mercy. **"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"** (Psalm 84: 11). As it was required of the children of Israel to continue in obedience in order to enjoy and retain God's blessings, so it is required of all God's children today. To maintain unbroken fellowship with God, we must (i) constantly remain connected to the true vine (John 15); (ii) consecrate to live a victorious life everyday; (iii) promptly obey divine injunctions; and (iv) commit ourselves to the great commission. These conditions are necessary in orders to retain whatever blessings we have received from God.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	3	2 Samuel	15
TUE	"	4	"	16-17
WED	"	5	"	18
THUR	"	6	"	19
FRI	"	7	"	20-21
SAT	"	8	"	22
SUN	"	9	"	23-24

523 Lesson

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS COVENANT

MEMORY VERSE: "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 29:1-29

In the previous chapter, the Lord had told the children of Israel of the catalogues of blessings which will come upon them as a result of obedience to His word. He also drew their attention to the list of the curses which would come upon the disobedient and the erring Israelites. The Lord is always faithful in all His ways and He fulfils His part of every covenant if men would keep their own part. In order to encourage His people to keep His covenant, God' often reminds them of His previous faithfulness and challenges them to steadfastness in His covenant. In the present discourse, we have the rehearsal of God's past faithfulness and His covenant with the children of Israel. He equally highlights the consequences of departing from His prescribed way of life. This is exactly what He did at Moab as this study reveals.

Question 1: How does God encourage His people to keep His covenant?

REHEARSAL OF GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS (Deuteronomy 29: 1-8; 8: 1-8)

"These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb" (Deuteronomy 29:1). As instructed by God, Moses called the present generation of Israel who were about to enter the Promised Land to a renewal of the covenant earlier made with their fathers at Horeb. He started with a rehearsal of the various manifestations of God's previous faithfulness to Israel as a nation right from Egypt. He specifically reminded them of

(i) His signs and miracles of deliverance in Egypt (verse 2); (ii) their experience of divine visitation in spite of their stiff-neckedness (verses 4,5); (iii) God's special care in giving them angelic food (verse 6); (iv) victory over many enemy nations in battle (verse 7); and (v) inheritance of the land previously occupied by heathen nations. It is important to always remember God's past mercies and faithfulness so that we can renew our faith in and commitment to Him. David praised the Lord when he remembered all His benefits (Psalm 103: 1-5).

Believers today should be grateful to God for salvation as well as other physical, material and spiritual blessings received from Him. They should always remember that God who has called them to salvation is always faithful and able to keep them to the end just as He took the children of Israel to Canaan. **“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”** (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Question 2: Enumerate some past instances of God's faithfulness to Israel.

RENEWED COVENANT FOR GOD'S PECULIAR PEOPLE (Deuteronomy 29:9-21; Hebrews 8:6; 1 Peter 2:9)

“Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do”(verse 9). God's faithfulness was purposed at challenging Israel to keep their part of the covenant through obeying the commandments of God. As God has been faithful to Israel, He expected Israel, individually and nationally to also faithfully keep His commandments.

Question 3: What lessons do we learn from God's demand to make covenant with all Israel irrespective of age or status?

The covenant into which the Lord God was calling Israel was all-encompassing, cutting across age, tribe, gender, position, profession and status. It was to be observed by those who were immediately present with Moses and those who were unavoidably absent as it had no generational limit (verses 9-12,14,15).

Question 4: How can one come into covenant relationship with God today?

All men of all ages who desire blessings in time and eternity must be ready to abide by the conditions of the covenant of redemption as clearly stated in the holy Writ. Jesus Christ, through His sacrificial death shed His blood' for the redemption of all men. **“But now hath he obtained an excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises”** (Hebrews 8:6). Today, whosoever believes in Him and appropriates His sacrificial blood by faith will be saved. In salvation, man enters into a covenant relationship with God and hence becomes His peculiar child.

Question 5: What is the new covenant? State some of its benefits.

Some of the better promises under this new covenant are (i) salvation by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9); (ii) forgiveness of sin after confession (Proverbs 28: 13); (iii) sonship of the heavenly Father (John 1:12); (iv) eternal life (John 1: 12); (v) deliverance from the power of Satan and darkness (Colossians 1:16); (vi) abundant life (John 10:10); (vii) a transformed and renewed life with the laws of God written on fleshly tables of the heart and not on stone tables (Hebrews 8: 10-11). Anyone who comes into this covenant becomes part of God's peculiar people today (1 Peter 2:9). God does not enter into covenant relationship with the sinner. No sinner can keep the terms of His holy covenant and please God. He is also far from God and His way. Thus, he needs to be cleansed by Christ's blood and empowered through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. **“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”** It is expedient that those who have not yet entered into this covenant relationship with God should humbly pray for their salvation as He has long been waiting to receive them as part of His peculiar people.

RECALLING GOD'S STERN PREDICTION OF JUDGMENT ON DISOBEDIENCE (Deuteronomy 27: 18-29; Hebrews 12:28,29)

“Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be. among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven” (verses 18,20). Here we see the predicted judgment of God against anyone who dare violate this covenant to serve other gods. Such a person who walked in the imagination of his heart would not be spared by God of the curses written against him. In addition to the suffering and afflictions that would follow, **“his name shall be blotted under heaven”**. Truly, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The possibility of backsliding and its consequences are very clear from our text. God threatened to separate the backslider unto evil while national backsliding would lead to plagues, desolations and destruction of great magnitude (verses 22,23). Whether it occurred in the life of an individual or a nation, a certain judgment was bound to follow.

Question 6: What challenges can believers receive from God's stern prediction of judgment?

The Scripture is replete with predictions of God's fiery judgment on apostates and backsliders. God's stern warnings are to encourage us to flee from the danger of sin and idolatry as we behold Him with reverence and godly fear. **“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire”** (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

Question 7: What can we do to escape God's fiery judgment?

In order to escape these predicted judgments, it was vital for the children of Israel to constantly remember God's words and His accompanying warnings. **“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest**

observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8). Sinners must immediately repent so as to escape God’s judgment. To remain steadfast and faithful in the blood-purchased covenant of redemption through Jesus Christ, New Testament believers who are already saved should (i) Let the words of Christ dwell in them richly. (ii) Exhort one another constantly so as to avoid hardness of heart through unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin. (iii) Not forsake the assembly of other believers of like precious faith. (iv) Obey the direction of godly leaders who teach the undiluted word of God. (v) Avoid peddlers of false teachings who trivialize God’s stern warnings against sin and make merchandise of the simple through fair speeches on temporal prosperity and miracles. (vi) Hasten to make corrections in their lives whenever the word of God reveals or convicts them of any appearances of evil. (vii) Remain faithful to God and our Saviour Jesus Christ till the end.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	10	1 Kings	1
TUE	“	11	“	2
WED	“	12	“	3
THUR	“	13-14	“	4-5
FRI	“	15-16	“	6
SAT	“	17-18	“	7
SUN	“	19	“	8

524 Lesson

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

MEMORY VERSE: “And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee” (Deuteronomy 30:2,3).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 30:1-20

Moses’ address to Israel in the last lesson had centred on the need to be absolutely committed to the keeping of the covenant, commandments and laws of God. Clear and stern warnings were also issued about the consequences of disobedience similar to those suffered by the heathen nations whom Israel had defeated. **“And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law: So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it; Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant -of the LORD God of their fathers ... And the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day”** (Deuteronomy 29:21,22,24,25,28).

Our study today shows that, in spite of such divine wrath and punishment for disobedience, God usually makes provisions for restoration of His people on condition of repentance. As it was with the Israelites, so

it is with believers today who compromise their faith. Any individual, family, church congregation or even a nation that disobeys God will attract His displeasure and just punishment. However, the backslidden, upon genuine repentance usually has a chance of restoration coupled with an obligation of renewed obedience.

THE POSSIBILITIES AND BLESSINGS OF FULL RESTORATION (Deuteronomy 30: 1-7; Luke 15: 18; Matthew 26:75; 2 Kings 22:8-13; Lamentations 3:40; Ephesians 1 :7)

The journey to full restoration begins when a backslider calls to mind his folly and is re-awakened to the standard of God's word, steadfast and abiding love as was the case with the prodigal son. The re-awakening of his mind to the forsaken glory of his father's house helped him to take the right step by deciding to go back to his father. Just like the father accepted him into the family, God is always willing and ready to accept those who come to Him in genuine repentance. Right from the time of the children of Israel, the Lord has always given the assurance of His compassion and possibility of restoration. But this is only possible when a backslider repents of his evil ways and returns to the Lord. **"And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and. thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD -thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee"** (Deuteronomy 30:2,3).

Question 1: What are the steps to full restoration ?

It is essential to note that God promised the children of Israel restoration only on condition that they return to Him. Full restoration must be preceded by returning to the Lord. This is the reason Jeremiah called on Israel to **"... search and try (their) ways, and turn again to the LORD"** (Lamentations 3:40). Besides, a sinner must exercise faith in God's love and care as well as His eagerness to pardon, receive and fully restore the penitent. God is always willing

to demonstrate His love and redeeming power to bring full restoration when there is repentance.

Question 2: What is the basis of our faith today that God will receive, pardon and restore the penitent?

The sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for the atonement of sins makes our redemption possible. **“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”** (Ephesians 1:7). This should always be the basis of our faith.

HOLINESS: THE PERMANENT STANDARD OF GOD’S WORD (Deuteronomy 30:8-14; Hebrews 12: 10; 1 John 2:25,29; Matthew 24: 18,19; 1 Timothy 4:6)

The standard of God’s word has not changed. His requirement for holiness and righteousness is immutable and is the same for men and women of all ages, God cannot compromise His standard because of weakness on the part of men to keep His word. What he demands from all and sundry is absolute obedience to his word. Total obedience to God’s word is not negotiable. **“And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day”** (verse 8), This explains the reason those who fall short of His standard are always disciplined.

God’s discipline on His people is to make them **“... partakers of his holiness”** (Hebrews 12: 10). Examples of such dealings abound in the scriptures. When Jonah was restored after his will was broken by affliction in the belly of the fish, the word of the Lord took him back to the commission he earlier rejected (Jonah 3: 1,2), No excuse is acceptable in the sight of the Lord for our disobedience to His word. This is because He has not required from us the impracticable and the impossible. The revealed word of God must be obeyed without any form of adulteration.

Question 3: What characteristic of God’s word makes it capable of universal obedience?

The word of God is not mysterious or esoteric as some think. It is simple, clear and comprehensible. This makes it amenable to universal obedience. **“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it”** (Deuteronomy 30:11,14). One of the commonest tricks of false teachers is that they make the word of God secretive. By claiming knowledge of the so-called deep things of Satan, by reading mystical books, they fashion out doctrines which are not in agreement with the doctrines of the Bible and by so doing divert the attention of the simple-minded from the clear, undiluted word of God.

Question 4: What are the practical effects of false teachings and what should be the believer's attitude to false doctrines and false teachers?

Heaven-bound believers should steer clear from strange doctrines and their peddlers. False doctrine pollutes the mind and damns the soul. Usually, false doctrine would attempt to undermine vital issues of godliness and righteous living or give false hopes about eternal realities (Revelation 2:14-16, 20-22). But the truth is that false teachers and false prophets cannot escape God's judgment. For believers to overcome their evil machinations, we must not give them any room in our heart and the church at large. We must appreciate the fact that false teachers and their heretical doctrines are accursed (Galatians 1:8, 9). Secondly, we should not in any way tend support to or bid them 'God speed' so as not to be partakers of their evil deeds (2 John 10). Thirdly, we should always speak the truth that we have known so as to silence their false teachings (I Peter 3: 15; Galatians 2:4,5). Finally, we must realize that our eternal destiny is rest assured when we keep the sincere and unadulterated principles of God's holy word.

The warning to steer clear of false teachers and their doctrines is particularly relevant to believers in these last days when Satan is unleashing his flood of deception thereby deceiving many (Matthew 24:11,12; I Timothy

4:1). We must stand on the truth at all times as this is the only antidote to false doctrines. Preachers of the gospel should teach their various congregations the whole counsel of God. This will help to preserve the church from any form of decay resulting from false doctrines. Believers are assured of the abiding presence of the Lord in life and ministry as they teach the whole counsel of God to the people (Matthew 28:20).

Question 5: What should characterize the life of a restored backslider?

Those who are restored from their state of backsliding should prove their redemption and restoration by their renewed desire to uphold the practice of the word of God which they had previously forsaken.

The restored Corinthian believers demonstrated this after expressing godly sorrow for their sin and backsliding. **“For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter”** (2 Corinthians 7: II).

Those who claim to have repented of their sins but still indulge in secret sins; those who do their restitution, not out of genuine conviction but to please leaders or ‘fulfil all righteousness’, are not sincere in their obedience. They are in fact, trivializing and misusing the expression which the Lord uttered in total gravity when He demonstrated exemplary humility in subjecting himself to water baptism under the hand of John the Baptist. Our obedience to the word of God and the practice of every doctrine of the Bible must be sincere, honest and not intended to achieve temporal benefits or human approval

THE PERFECT CHOICE FOR ABIDING BLESSINGS
(Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Genesis 2: 16,17; Job 20: 4,5; 9:4; [isaiah 56: 4-5].

Moses, in this part of our text by way of emphasis, took the children of Israel through God's commandments. He presented the benefits of obeying God's word and the grave consequences that will follow if they disobeyed His commandments. As forgiveness and restoration are possible through repentance, so also is punishment certain for a relapse into evil. God's promise of abundant life, multiplication and longevity was certain to be fulfilled for the nation if the word of God was kept and obeyed. However, His wrath and punishment was to be manifested through certain destruction and a shortened stay in the Promised Land any time they relapsed into idolatry. Israel was therefore confronted with a clear, perfect choice to experience peace and lasting blessings or make a choice of disobedience and experience desolation.

Question 6: Why should we exercise our freedom of choice to obey God rather than disobey Him?

Man's nature as a free moral agent is destined from creation. In the first place, man was created to exercise his freedom of choice for good only, in total submission to God's will. But God's dealings with man from ages past prove that man has always pitched his tent against his Creator. And this is dangerous! Though Adam was free to eat of every good tree of the garden of Eden, he was forbidden from exercising His will to eat of the fruit in the midst of the Garden. We must allow God's words and commandments to rule our lives. Selfish will that runs contrary to God's holy will must be jettisoned.

Also, our choice must be guarded by the revealed word of God. No choice that directly or indirectly opposes the written word of God is a right choice. A choice in marriage, for example, is to be exercised in total obedience to the clear word of God against unequal yoke which forbids the believer from marrying an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Those under authority, either as children or servants must, as they choose to obey those over them, ensure that they do not go contrary to God's word. Furthermore, our conviction of the certainty of God's judgment on sin should compel us to always choose to obey His commandments.

Finally, obeying God and doing His will is not only an ingredient of worship: it is the best guarantee of receiving and abiding in His promised blessings. This was the kernel of God's message to Israel. No one can enjoy lasting blessings from God while standing in disobedience to His word and His will. **"Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?"** (Job 20:4,5).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Luke	20	1 Kings	9
TUE	"	21	"	10
WED	"	22	"	11
THUR	"	23	"	12
FRI	"	24	"	13
SAT	John	1	"	14
SUN	"	2-3	"	15

525 Lesson

APPOINTMENT OF JOSHUA

MEMORY VERSE: “And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it” (Deuteronomy 31:7).

TEXT: Deuteronomy 31:1.13

Our text is the beginning of the concluding section of the book of Deuteronomy recording the last words and activities of Moses and his death (Dt 31:1, 34:12). Here, at God’s command, Moses gave a charge to Joshua to take over leadership of Israel. He also encouraged the congregation and commanded the Levites to ensure that they read the law to the children of Israel every seventh year during the feast of tabernacle.

It is instructive to note that as Moses came to the last days of his life, his major concern still centred on the future welfare of his people and how they would maintain their covenant relationship with God. His last words to Israel reveal the tenderness of his heart and the loving concern he had for them. As a result, he was no longer bothered about his own exclusion from Canaan but made sure that leadership was successfully transferred to Joshua with Israel adequately prepared to accept him as their new leader. As we shall see in this study, Moses did not leave a vacuum in leadership; neither did he take the matter of his successor lightly. Even so in the church of the living God, the issue of leadership should not be handled with levity. Those to be appointed into leadership must be such as God has chosen, and the congregation must readily accept them in total submission to divine will. And, whenever the need arises for change of leadership at any level in the church, the transition should be smooth, efficient and free from rancour.

Question 1: What challenge can believers receive from Moses' concern for Israel's welfare even at the approach of death?

FORMAL APPOINTMENT OF JOSHUA AS ISRAEL'S LEADER (Deuteronomy 31:1-6; 34:7-9; Numbers 27:12-23; Joshua 1:1-9)

Moses began his valedictory message to the children of Israel by stating the reasons for a change of leadership and their need to be courageous as they finally prepare to enter the land of Canaan. He gave two reasons why he must step aside from leadership so that Joshua could take over: his old age and the divine sentence barring him from crossing over Jordan to Canaan. At the time Moses gave this address, he was exactly 120 years old. But despite his age, **“his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated”** (Deuteronomy 34:7). In fact, as a practical proof of his physical fitness, he was still able to climb mount Nebo, where he eventually died without any human aid. Therefore, when Moses spoke of his great age that: **“I can no more go out and come in”** it was not in reference to physical inability but a declaration that his ministry had come to an end and time for a new leader to take over. In scripture, ‘to go out and come in among the people’ means to lead the people (Numbers 27:16, 17; 1 King 3:7).

Moses was a man who knew his limits and his own appointed time. He realized that despite his personal desire to cross over to the other side Jordan, by virtue of God's own appointment and irrevocable sentence, his ministry which began when he was 80 years old, had finally come to a conclusion (Exodus 7:7; Deuteronomy 3:23-28; 34:7).

Question 2: What is role of the congregation in ensuring smooth transition in leadership?

In order to prepare the Israelites for a smooth leadership change, Moses first addressed the entire congregation. He assured them that the Lord would go before them to destroy the Canaanites and that this victory would be achieved under the leadership of Joshua, as God has said (verse 3). This address to the entire congregation of Israel

was necessary because they had a great role to play in the smooth transfer of leadership. It is often said that leadership transfer is effective and complete only when the people give their allegiance to the new leader. So, Moses had to assure them that though there may be a change of leadership, that would not in any way diminish the presence of God and the certainty of entering the land of promise; only that they should submit to Joshua and be courageous.

This address contains some important lessons especially on the subject of transition in leadership. First, it reminds us that change is inevitable in leadership and, whether we like it or not, whenever God deems fit, He removes and replaces His human agents. God's abiding presence remains with His people so long as they continue in their covenant relationship with Him. Third, the congregation must not resist a God-ordained change in leadership, rather they should cooperate with the new leader irrespective of their emotional attachment or respect towards the outgoing leader. Fourth, the outgoing leader takes primary responsibility for a smooth transition to the new leader, and he must completely step aside to allow his successor take full charge. He should not do anything to undermine the influence of the new leader over the congregation. Fifth, the congregation and also the incoming leader must realize that leadership change is not about competition or comparison of talents and ability; rather it is a God-ordained necessity to give successive leaders the opportunity to bless the congregation with their ministry. Sixth, every leader should prepare the people under them to trust in God and depend on Him for their spiritual growth. No leader should make himself indispensable or absolutely essential for the congregation. Therefore, they should not allow members to depend on them for their spiritual development, but should assist them to connect directly with God so that whenever any leader is taken out of the way the people would not become destabilized and their faith undermined. Seventh, everyone should realize that God is the ultimate Leader of His congregation and He will certainly lead His people to fulfill their appointed destiny.

The church at Corinth did not fully grasp these principles of leadership change and consequently rival groups arose among them. They were divided into factions on the basis of their preference for leaders who had ministered among them (1 Corinthians 1: 10-12; 3: 1-9). In the same manner, whenever we lose focus of God as the ultimate and ever-present Leader of His flock, and we begin to pay undue attention to human agents He uses to lead us, we may easily fall into the same error as these Corinthian believers. So, believers must not allow the issue of leadership or its transition to distort our perception of God's work to the extent that we forget that the principles of spiritual leadership are not exactly the same as the secular. In God's kingdom, people should not see themselves as belonging to or following a particular leader as people of the world do. Moreover, in the secular people may choose their leaders and dictate the terms of their appointment and function, but in spiritual leadership, it is God who appoints whomsoever He wills over His own people and He expects them to accept His choice without any reservation.

Question 3: Why should a believer derive encouragement from the word of God?

Apart from the concept of leadership transfer, Moses' address to the congregation also bears out the infallibility of God's word and the dependability of His promises. Moses told the people with full assurance that **"The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said"** (Deuteronomy 31:3). Here, Moses would have Israel know that God's word remained sacrosanct irrespective of changing circumstances. Though men or situations change, God's word abides and whatever He has promised He will certainly perform. This is a great encouragement for believers to trust God and rely on His word. The confidence of God's people in His abiding presence and word can lift the heart in days of adversity and gloom. From the words of Moses, we see that the same God who defeated Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, could also overpower the Canaanite kings who would later confront Israel. Similarly, as believers, when we remember

all the challenges the Lord has helped us to overcome our confidence should be buoyed and we should be rest assured that the divine grace that has brought us thus far will also see us through to the end.

THE CHARGE AND LEADERSHIP TRANSFER TO JOSHUA (Deuteronomy 31:7, 8: 1:37, 38; 3:28; Numbers 27:13-23)

After addressing the congregation, **“Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it”** Deuteronomy 31:7). In effect, Moses was handing over to Joshua and encouraging him to take charge and lead the people to inherit Canaan. Besides Moses’ message to the entire congregation, he felt that the new leader also needed a word of encouragement for himself in view of the enormous task ahead of him. It is remarkable that the encouragement of Moses to Joshua was similar to that which he also gave to the congregation. It was the same promises of God, same commands and objectives that he placed before them. The Word of God is the same both for leaders and the led. Both are to obey the commandments and equally rest on the promises so as to experience the ‘power and presence of God. As leaders need the word of God to enable them lead effectively, the congregation also require the same word to be good followers in order to accomplish their God-given goals. The word of God is sufficient for all and sundry and there is no need to look elsewhere for any human help or secret of success outside what God has said.

Question 4: What can believers learn from the disposition of the Israelites and Joshua as Moses handed over his leadership?

It is clear that the entire congregation was willing to accept God’s choice of Joshua to lead them into Canaan. This could be understood from the fact that Caleb, who was a partner and colleague of Joshua in the expedition to spy Canaan, was among the congregation at this time.

He did not protest against the choice of Joshua or rally a faction to oppose leadership like some rebellious folks would do. Others in the congregation could have also been disgruntled saying Joshua was not their man; but there was nothing of such or any negative reaction from the people. Even after the death of Moses, the entire congregation still encouraged Joshua to lead them and pledged their full allegiance to him (Joshua 1:16-18). This humble and meek response to leadership change is worthy of emulation by all believers.

On his part, Joshua displayed rare qualities that believers who aspire to leadership must also emulate. His patient waiting for God's own time before taking over from Moses is commendable. It would be recalled that prior to this time Joshua had been chosen and publicly invested as the successor to Moses. He was introduced to the assembly as their new leader and Moses had laid his hands upon him as a physical symbol of impartation of divine authority (Numbers 27:13-23). But after that ceremony, Joshua did not assume immediate control over Israel; rather he continued to develop and function under Moses until God's appointed time to take over. He was neither in haste nor over-ambitious. He served as a faithful assistant to Moses, willing to take a lowly place before he was exalted (Exodus 24: 13; 33: 11). And even after he was appointed he remained self-effacing and reserved (twin qualities that the undiscerning may hastily equate with timidity) which in God's sight is an eminent proof of a heart purged of all pride, unholy ambition and self-dependence.

From the comportment of Joshua we learn that those who are truly qualified for leadership will never intrude nor scheme for appointment into any position. Rather they will take their place to serve with all commitment and consecration in God's vineyard until their enlargement comes. The point is that the man whom God chooses is not necessarily the one who feels or appears most qualified or the one who flaunts his scorecard to recommend him for appointment. God looks for godly traits of humility, integrity, obedience, faithfulness, spiritual-mindedness, holiness, courage and entire consecration in those whom

He would confer spiritual authority upon. Joshua clearly manifested all these qualities and he is a challenge to all believers (Exodus 24: 13; 33: 11; Numbers 14:6-8; 32: 12; Joshua 3;5; 8;30; 10;25; 11:15; 24;15).

PROVISION FOR RECITING AND TEACHING THE LAW (Deuteronomy 31: 9-13;66: 1-9; 17: 11; 24:8; Leviticus10;11; Nehemiah 8; 1-18; Hebrews 10:24,25)

After his address to the congregation and Joshua, Moses turned his attention to the Levites and elders of Israel. He handed to them a copy of the law which he had written and commanded them to read and teach it to all Israelites every seventh year, that is the year of jubilee, during the feast of tabernacles. But this periodic teaching of the law was not intended to replace regular teaching at home by parents (Deuteronomy 6: 1-9) or cancel the normal teaching ministry of the priests in the tabernacle. (Deuteronomy 17: 11; 24:8; Leviticus 10: 11). Rather, this public teaching was to complement and increase the effect of those regular teachings so that no average Israelite would be ignorant of God's law.

Question 5: Why is it so important that all the people must hear the teaching of the law?

God attached great importance to the reading and teaching of His word. In Our text, He commanded that all Israel should be gathered together, men, women and Children, and even strangers who identified with Israel, no one is excluded. They should assemble together to hear the reading of the law so that they could learn the will of God and do it. The word of God is very important and so central that all Israelites must gather to learn it periodically. And the reasons for this regular reading and teaching of the law are clearly mentioned in our text. One, to inspire obedience, devotion and worship; two, to give revelation of truth, knowledge and understanding of God's will; three, to bring to remembrance all that God has commanded so as not to forget Him.

Question 6: How can believers correct the general apathy towards the word of God in these last days?

As God commanded Israel of old, present-day believers need to rediscover their lost zeal both for regular assembly and passionate longing to hear the word of God. There is a general drop in attendance at regular fellowship meetings, or where the attendance is maintained, there is widespread lateness and apathy. Many believers today are more interested in exciting programmes and events that will give them emotional lift, or usher them into so called breakthroughs, rather than a solemn attendance to God's word. It appears to many people today that the word of God by itself does not have enough attraction except it be supported with music, oratory, side-shows and such other human aids. Yet, we see that the gathering of Israel was for the sole purpose of hearing the word of God read and expounded. The word of God should be the longing desire of every true believer. **"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious"** (1Peter 2:2, 3).

During the revival under Nehemiah and Ezra, the people rediscovered this instruction on gathering together for the recitation and teaching of God's law. Ezra read the law to the hearing of all who could hear with understanding, both men and women upon the first day of the seventh month. He read from the morning until mid-day and the ears of the people were attentive unto the book of the law. Then after reading, there was a time of devotion, worship, and exposition or interpretation of the law. (Nehemiah 8: 118). As a result of that attention to the word of God, the people corrected their lives and there was much joy and spiritual progress among them.

As individuals, families and local assemblies, we need such a revival that will turn the heart of everyone back to God and renew our love for His word. And there is no gainsaying the fact that the reason for much shallowness and stagnancy in the lives of many believers is this loss of interest in the word of God. It is like an infant who refuses to take milk, and an adult who neglects the solid food that will give them nourishment. There is no doubt that such persons would be malnourished and weak. The word of God is the spiritual milk and solid food for all believers,

and except we feed on it regularly we cannot be strong in our inner man. At the family level, we should help our children to develop a strong thirst for the word of God. This could be done by providing them with good Bibles that suit their age and, rather than worldly useless toys, appropriate aids that will help them understand the word of God. We must not neglect regular teaching and personal follow up to ensure that the young ones are growing in the knowledge and grace of God. Also in the local church, the best of our resources, both human and materials, should be deployed for teaching our young ones the word of God, All members of the church should be encouraged and assisted to make the word of God the priority of their lives. Also during regular meetings, retreats, special programmes of the church, the centrality of the word of God must be maintained. But then, we must also ensure that we are not hearers, learners, or teachers of the word only but we must be doers of the word so that we can, experience the blessings of God’s word (James 1:22,25).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	John	4	1 Kings	16
TUE	“	5	“	17-18
WED	“	6	“	19-20
THUR	“	7	“	21
FRI	“	8	“	22
SAT	“	9	2 Kings	22
SUN	“	10	“	3

END OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

526 Lesson

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

MEMORY VERSE: “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:15).

TEXT: Acts 23:1-22

In our text, Paul the apostle continued the defence of his ministry, this time before the Sanhedrin. It would be recalled that the Jews caused an uproar in the temple on the supposition that Paul had brought in Trophimus, a Gentile, into the inner courts of the temple’ (Acts 21:27-29). Paul was arrested. With respect and politeness, he made his defense by testifying of his conversion and commissioning by Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Though politeness is a Christian virtue expected of all believers, some aggressive persecutors like the Jews will not regard it. Rejecting Paul’s explanations that present both Jews and Gentile Christians as equal before God, the crowd pronounced him guilty of death. But the Roman commander, not acceding to jungle justice based on religious sentiments, took him from the mob and attempted to extract confessions from him by flogging. He could not do that when Paul asserted his Roman citizenship, He rather summoned the Sanhedrin to meet and determine Paul’s case.

Question 1: What is the meaning and work of the Sanhedrin?

Sanhedrin simply means Council. It was the highest Jewish tribunal during the Greek and Roman periods. It consisted of about seventy members made up of the High Priest, Chief priests and elders who were drawn from the two major religious sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The council was the final court of appeal for all issues connected with Mosaic law and the Jewish religion. The body also carried out some administrative and legal

functions with permission from the Roman governor who ruled Judea. This study focuses on Paul's arraignment before the Council (23: 1-10), the encouragement he received from Christ (23: 11) and the conspiracy to kill him (23: 12-22). As we discover how God intervened to thwart the conspiracy of the enemy and deliver His faithful servant, our faith will definitely be strengthened, not only to abide in Christ but also to serve Him the best way we can.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE THE COUNCIL (Acts 23:1-10; 24:6; 4:2; 13:23, 24; 1 Timothy 1:15, 19; 2 Timothy 1:3; Luke 21:12-15)

Paul began his defence by observing the normal Jewish courtesy saying, "**men and brethren**". Then, looking steadfastly at the Council, he said, "... **I have lived in all 'good conscience before God until this day'**" (Acts 23: 1). Here, we see the necessity of a pure conscience .before God and man. The conscience is the inner faculty that approves of a person's right action and disapproves of wrong ones. But the conscience can function effectively only when it has adequate knowledge and right standards. For instance, if it is uninformed or ignorant of truth, the conscience may excuse wrong actions as though they were right and condemn just actions. Besides, the conscience can be hardened, seared or stifled through repeated wrong doing, indoctrination, misinformation, rationalization and corporate approval of questionable deeds. Thus, as Christ predicted, there are people who could kill Christians and still think that by so doing they are rendering service to God (John 16:2). So then, the conscience can only be a safe guide when it is properly trained and fed with the truth 'of God's word.

Question 2: What is the conscience, and how can a person have a good conscience before God?

The Bible reveals that there is a good conscience (1 Peter 3: 16; 1 Timothy 1:5, 6, 19; Hebrews 13: 18); conscience void of offence (Acts 24: 16); evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22; Isaiah 5:20); and weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7, 12). To have a good conscience, a person, must get saved by repenting of sin and believing in Christ. All the sins which

he has ever committed are thus blotted out and God reckons him justified and righteous. Following his salvation experience, he makes his restitutions so as to have a clear conscience before fellow men and God. Besides, he saturates his mind with the word of God so that he can properly discern between what is right and wrong (Hebrews 5:13, 14). Irrespective of age and level of experience with God, the believer who seeks to maintain a pure conscience must always live a righteous lifestyle and continually makes his restitution whenever he does anything wrong.

Paul's declaration that he had maintained a good conscience before God made Ananias the High priest to instruct those standing by to smite him on the mouth. Ananias felt Paul had spoken a lie as he thought no mortal man could honestly claim to have always maintained a pure conscience before God. His confession of a pure conscience was an indictment to Ananias who was reputed for great acts of wickedness and greed. History has it that he collected tithes from the Jews by force right on their threshing floors and embezzled same, thereby depriving other priests of their share.

Like Ananias, there are many people who think it is impossible to maintain a good conscience and live a holy lifestyle. They feel that the widespread corruption in the world and the presence of sin in their own lives is sufficient explanation for such lame generalization that everyone must equally be a victim of sin. But Christ's answer to such people is always the same: **"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"** (Matthew 22:29). The truth is, **"the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"** (Titus 2:11,12). The grace of God enables and erstwhile sinner to live a consistent godly life. The saving and sanctifying grace of God enables the believers to live above sin. The experiences of salvation and sanctification can lift a person to a new realm where the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus make's him or her free from the dominion of sin and death.

Question 3: How can someone receive the sanctification experience?

In order to receive the experience whereby one is totally made free from inbred sin, there must be the initial salvation experience and strong thirst to have the fullness of God's holiness. Also, the believer must consecrate himself to God and claim His promises to sanctify in earnest prayer of faith (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:25-27, 37).

When the High Priest commanded Paul to be smitten, Paul retorted” **God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?**” (Act 23:3). By this statement Paul called the High Priest a hypocrite or white-washed wall and he pronounced God's judgment on him. But the people standing by reproved Paul for speaking roughly to the High Priest, and his response to this rebuke, even though coming from his persecutors, is very instructive to believers today.

Question 4: Point out some lessons believers can learn from Paul's response to those who corrected him for reviling the High Priest.

Paul, the apostle realized he had done wrong and apologized. It is clear from the passage that Paul made reference to scripture while rebuking the erring High Priest (Leviticus 19:15,35; Deuteronomy 25:1; John 7:51), and as soon as he realized his own error, he also quoted scripture to show why he should not have spoken the way he did. Believers and Christian ministers should not quote scriptures only when it suits their purpose but should also submit to the word when it exposes their wrong actions. It is not a sign of weakness for a person to admit his error in public but a mark of humility and transparent holiness. Paul admitted he was wrong and he apologized publicly.

Although the High Priest was wrong on commanding Paul to be smitten, Paul did not use that as an excuse to justify his own mistake. Moreover, regardless of the personality who occupies an office, we should accord such due respect because of the authority vested in the office. Self-control

is a fruit of the spirit that all believers need to bear so as not to falter during persecution or unfair treatment. We often attract undue opposition to ourselves when we hastily confront others. Because of his outburst at the High priest, Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin began on a wrong footing and the hope of a fair hearing hanged in a balance. He, however, wisely employed a "damage control" strategy to get him out of his precarious position before the council. He capitalized on the long standing controversy between the Pharisees and Sadducees to divide the council. He claimed to be a Pharisee and that it was because of his faith in the resurrection and coming judgment that he was being persecuted (Acts 23:6,26:5; Philippians 3:5). Instantly, the camp of the Pharisees became sympathetic to Paul. This was a practical manifestation of the special wisdom that Jesus promised to give His followers when facing persecution (Luke 21:15).

PROMISE OF DIVINE PROTECTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM CHRIST (Acts 23:11;18:9,10;27:23,24:11-15,23; Isaiah 41:13)

After his rescue from the Sanhedrin, God had to encourage Paul as he continued to suffer for the sake of the gospel. **"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome"** (Acts 23: II).

<p>Question 5: What can believers learn from the way God encouraged Paul?</p>
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Paul had been eager to keep the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem and to convince the Jews about Christ. Thus, he resisted attempts by the brethren who were sympathetic to his revealed suffering(Act 21:3-5,10-14).Being so dogged, He wrote to the Christians at Rome that he was coming to them with the Fullness of the blessing of Christ (Acts 19:21;20:16:21:17-21; Romans 15:23-29). He looked forward to a fruitful fellowship with the Roman Believers after the trip to Jerusalem. But with the turn of events, he needed divine encouragement; hence, **"the night following the Lord stood by him"** to encourage him.

From the experience of Paul, we learn to encourage one another especially in difficult times and during persecution. Even believers and leaders that we think are courageous and strong need encouragement in time of trial (Hebrews 13:7). We can also visit and share our possessions with those who are in need, give physical assistance to those who are sick or handicapped and pray for others (2 Samuel 17:27-29).

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL (Act 23:12-22; Psalm 37:12,13; Proverbs 10:31, Isaiah 8:10; Micah 2:1)

After Paul was taken from the Council, the Jews realized that they had missed an opportunity to kill him. Therefore, more than forty of them swore to an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed him. They hatched a plan to lay ambush while the chief priests and elders asked the chief captain to re-arraign Paul before the council the next day. Then the men in ambush would kill Paul before he got to the Council. However, Paul's nephew heard the plot and went into the barracks to tell Paul who, in turn , sent the young man to inform the Chief Captain. Then, the Chief Captain arranged and sent Paul, under tight security to caesaria which was the provincial headquarters of the Roman colony in Judea.

Question 6: What can believers learn from the plot against Paul and the way God delivered him?

The plot against Paul shows the extent to which wicked people could go in their determination to do evil. What a challenge for believers to even be more determined to do good and carry out the mandate of Christ to win souls. Second, it shows that satan is unrelenting in his attacks against the servants of God. If one attempt fails, he quickly devices another and his agents will go to any length to conspire against the children of god. Third, we can see how God's providence works for His people. God positioned Paul's nephew to hear of the plot and reveal it, and caused the centurion to be willing to obey Paul's instruction without asking for details. He also made the Chief Captain to act immediately to save Paul's life even without ordering an investigation. Just as it happened in

Paul's case, divine providence works on behalf of every believer to protect and deliver him from untimely death. Fourth, Sometimes God allows us to know the plans of the enemy, not to frighten us but that we may take steps to frustrate those plans. At other times, God may not even reveal to us what the enemy is up to but His providence will over-rules the enemy's plan. When Balak plotted to curse Israel, God intervened on their behalf to foil the plan. So, whether we know the plans of the enemy or not, God will always help us. His providence has clearly anticipated all the exigencies of our life's journey and He has made adequate provision both for our safety and sustenance.

Fifth, the importance of prompt and wise use of intelligence report needs to be emphasized. Paul acted quickly on the report he heard and he was saved from untimely death. This was in contrast with King Gedaliah who received such a report but neither believed nor took precaution, and was killed Jeremiah (40:13-16;41:1). Sixth, God's promise of preservation and the revelation of His good plan for a believer do not preclude the threat of the enemy. The conspiracy to kill Paul took place the night after his own vision of God's promised presence and protection, In spite of God's promise and reassurance to Paul, Satan and his agents still hatched a plan against him. Seventh, we learn that divine sovereignty and providence work most effectively when they are complemented with human responsibility. Though God had assured that he would get to Rome, he did not take that promise for granted. As believers, we must also complement God's sovereignty in our lives with our own human responsibility by doing what is humanly possible for our safety and trust God and act upon His promises, we can rest assured that no plan of the enemy will prosper against us.

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	John	11	2 Kings	4
TUE	"	12	"	5-6
WED	"	13-14	"	7-8
THUR	"	15-16	"	9
FRI	"	17-18	"	10
SAT	"	19	"	11-12
SUN	"	20-21	"	13-14

527 Lesson

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE FELIX

MEMORY VERSE: "And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak" (Matthew 10:18, 19).

TEXT: Acts 23:23-35; 24: 1-27

Paul, in the preceding chapters had come to Jerusalem with great determination to observe the feast of Pentecost. While in the temple with other apostles, he was arrested and detained. It is significant to note that from this point in time, Paul was never a freeman again, he merely moved from one authority to the other; first the Chief Captain of the band (Acts 21:31, 33), next the Sanhedrin (Acts 25:4-7) and Agrippa (Acts 25:23), all in defence of the faith and proclamation of the gospel. Our lesson focuses on one of these trials and how Paul defended himself. There were many false accusations and unfounded allegations leveled against him. He was presented as an enemy of the Jewish race who **"had taught all men everywhere against the people and the law and this place"** (Acts 21:28). In this study, we will see how Paul defended himself and the faith thereby giving us example on what to do when faced with similar accusations about our faith. We are not to be deterred or worried when the devil raises false accusations against us. We should be steadfast and unyielding to the devil's oppositions against the gospel. When our decisions are according to the will of God, leading to the salvation of souls and enhancing the growth of the kingdom, we must be resolute and unwavering though opposed by the enemy.

Question 1: What should be our attitude when men raise false accusations against us?

PAUL SENT TO CAESAREA (Acts 23:23-35; 9: 10; 21:33,39)

“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night” (Acts 23:23).

When Paul appeared before the Sanhedrin, his defence divided the Council over the doctrine of resurrection. He would have been torn apart between the Pharisees and Sadducees but the quick intervention of the Chief Captain saved his life. Thereafter, some Jewish fanatics planned to murder Paul but their plot was exposed to the Chief Captain who quickly sent him to Governor Felix in Caesarea. It was God’s miraculous deliverance that was in full force to save the life of Paul from the Jews.

God is a present help on hand to deliver His people. David’s life was often in danger but He delivered him from them all. Daniel was saved from the den of lions while his three companions were preserved from the burning fiery furnace (Daniel 6:22; 3:28). Peter was saved from the sword of Herod and expectation of the Jews (Acts 12: 11). As we obey the Lord and do His will, He would be with us to deliver us from danger. Jesus said: **“I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:20).

<p>Question 2: What can believers learn from the way God preserved the life of Paul from his enemies?</p>
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God used the Roman army to deliver Paul from the Jews and to send him to Caesarea. God can use the most unlikely means to deliver His people. When He decides to intervene in our lives, He could do it in an unexpected manner. Therefore, believers should trust God in times of danger knowing that **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”** (Psalm 46: 1).

In sending Paul to Caesarea, Lysias, captain of the Roman army in Jerusalem wrote a referral to Felix, governor of the province of Judea. Lysias’ letter to Felix stated a brief summary of facts and his own perception of Paul’s innocence and his submission of the matter for superior adjudication. Though a secular subordinate, Lysias’

letter provides a blueprint for those working with church authority to render brief and accurate report of important facts to ensure objective determination of issues referred to higher authorities. However, Lysias' letter covered up the fact that he had bound Paul and almost got him whipped. He gave the impression that he realized Paul's Roman citizenship and acted in his favour. No doubt he wanted to impress the governor and present himself as a dutiful officer. Believers should avoid hypocrisy and praise of men in the house of God.

However, the promptness with which the chief captain acted in sending Paul to Caesarea is worthy of note. As believers, we must do whatever assignment God commits into our hands with a sense of urgency. The chief captain realized that the life of a Roman citizen was very precious and he had a responsibility to protect it; so he took drastic steps to ensure Paul was taken to safety. Even so, sinners out there are in serious danger and soul-winners must take urgent steps to rescue them before they are destroyed by the enemy of their souls.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE FELIX (Acts 24:1-15; James 3:17; Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:31; 1 Peter 2:21-23)

Paul's accusers, led by the High Priest sent their prosecution team from Jerusalem to conduct his trial before Felix the governor. They employed Tertullus, an orator as their spokesman to flatter the governor by persuasive language and to accuse Paul of the most damning offences while the Jewish leaders assented to the truth of the false allegations.

Question 3: How should we use our gifts?

Tertullus demonstrated and typified how not to use our gifts and talents. God's gifts in our lives should be employed for God's glory and not to undermine God's work or the welfare of our fellowmen. Divinely-inspired wisdom does not involve the impurity and hypocrisy demonstrated by Tertullus. **"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy"** (James 3:17). Leaders today must be

careful of the antics of sycophants like Tertullus who are always ready to misinform them through carnal wisdom and fair speeches.

Question 4: Describe Paul's conduct and speech during his defence before Felix and the lesson it teaches.

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a Judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself” (Acts 24: 10). After listening to the accusations, the Governor permitted Paul to make his response. Firstly, in complementary language devoid of undue flattery, Paul expressed his confidence that Felix would be just in judging the matter. Secondly, he denied the various allegations. He did not hire an orator or a lawyer to defend him as he did not need any, having been gifted with godly wisdom and the Holy Spirit to state his defence and prove his innocence by simple clear language. Thirdly, he challenged his accusers to bring the proofs of their accusation which they could not. Paul's defence was a demonstration of gracious speech which believers should emulate. **“Let. Your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”** (Colossians 4:6). It was a great evidence of grace in the heart that Paul could be so calm, articulate and courteous in the face of false accusations which would normally provoke the unregenerate into railing and clamorous speech. Many people manifest such traits when asked to state their side in a dispute. But the scripture enjoins us to eschew **“all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour and evil speaking”** (Ephesians 4:31). **“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously”** (I Peter 2:21-23).

PURE CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD AND MEN (Acts 24: 16:21:23:1; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Timothy 2:22; Matthew 5:8; Psalm 15: 1-3; Daniel 1:8; 1 Samuel 12:3-5)

“And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24: 16). While Paul defended himself before Felix, he gave his own personal testimony and openly declared his convictions. He denied the charges which the Jews leveled against him, but at the same time he was not ashamed to make a profession of his faith in Christ. In his address, he made reference to his own spiritual exercise wherein he always tried to maintain a pure conscience before God and men. In this, Paul was claiming that he was free from a guilty or defiled conscience which would have resulted from deliberate transgression of the law.

The conscience can be described as an automatic warning system in the human soul. It accuses us when we do wrong or else excuses us when we do right. The conscience, (i) knows our inner motive and real thoughts; (ii) could not be easily convinced if violated; (iii) acts like officers in a courtroom; (iv) is a register to record what we have done in exact detail (Jeremiah 17:1); (v) is the accuser that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty; (vi) is a defender inside with us if we are innocent (Romans 2:15); (vii) acts as a witness against us (2 Corinthians 1:12); (viii) is the judge condemning or vindicating us (1 John 3:20-21); (ix) is the executioner smiting us with grief when our guilt is confirmed (1 Samuel 24:5; 2 Samuel 24: 10)

Question 5: How can a believer maintain a good conscience?

A believer should adopt Paul's spiritual exercise of maintaining a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. This is possible by ensuring that we confess all known sins in our lives and make appropriate restitutions. Confession of our sins secures God's forgiveness and restoration of His divine favour; but restitution leads us to experience peace with those men whom we have offended.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL DESPITE DISTRACTIONS (Acts 24:22-27)

While Paul appeared before Felix, he boldly preached Christ to him and his hearers. Felix, Drusilla his wife and Paul's accusers, all heard the gospel clearly preached.

Felix was convicted by the power of Paul's message but he did not respond positively. He allowed his corruption to hinder him from surrendering his life to Christ. Even so today, there are many people who hear the word of God but allow love of sin and reward of unrighteousness to hinder them from taking appropriate steps of obedience.

Question 6: From the experience of Felix, point out the danger of procrastination in responding to the gospel message.

Felix said to Paul: **“go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”** (verse 25). But eventually, before Felix could get saved, he lost his conviction as well as the opportunity to be saved. From him, we learn the danger of procrastination in responding to the gospel message; the best time to respond to the word of God is now (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Paul's ministry to both Jews and Gentiles was so convincing that people felt the power of his anointing. Felix trembled at his message and Agrippa was also convicted. Even so, Christian soul-winners' must preach in a way as to convict the sinners. They should seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to minister with great power and unction. To be effective in gospel outreaches we must, (i) prepare and plough the hearts of our hearers (Proverbs 16:1; Hosea 10:12); (ii) reveal and reprove the evils in their hearts (2 Timothy 4:20); (iii) enlighten them with the gospel (Psalm 119:130); (iv) assure them of the Love and forgiveness from Christ (John 6:37) and (v) convince them to convert to Christ (Acts 4:12).

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	1-2	2 Kings	15-16
TUE	“	3-4	“	17
WED	“	5-6	“	18
THUR	“	7	“	19
FRI	“	8	“	20-21
SAT	“	9	“	22-23
SUN	“	10	“	24-25

528 Lesson

PAUL APPEAL TO CAESAR

MEMORY VERSE: “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:11).

TEXT: Acts 25:1-27

Paul, in the previous chapter, stood trial before Felix the Governor for alleged desecration of the temple and heresy. Disappointed that Paul did not give him bribe to be set free, he left Paul bound to please the Jews and forestall any allegation of maladministration from the people before the emperor; But he could not please the people either. For a brutal suppression of a Jewish uprising, history has it that he lost favour with the Sanhedrin and the Roman emperor subsequently replaced him with Porcius. Injustice is still perpetrated today by judicial officers for pecuniary reasons. Believers are clearly warned against the love of money which is the root of all evil and specifically makes men to wrest judgment (1 Timothy 6: 10). Our study today centres on the appearance of Paul before Festus and the conditions that warranted his appeal to Caesar.

RENEWED PLOT BY THE JEWS TO KILL PAUL (Acts 25: 1-5; 23: 12-24; Proverbs 4: 16; Luke 23: 10; Jeremiah 38:4; 2 Timothy 4: 18)

Immediately Festus made his first visit to Jerusalem, the high priest and the Jewish leaders informed him of the accusation against Paul. They desired that Paul's case be taken back to Jerusalem in a bid to lay ambush and kill him before getting there. However, Festus did not grant their request. Rather, he asked Paul to be remanded in custody in Caesarea and that his accusers should go to confront him there. Paul was originally taken to Caesarea when the plot to kill him was foiled but the Jews were unrelenting in their plan. One would have thought

that after two years, this wicked plan would have been abandoned and forgotten. But not with the brewing hatred and murderous intention they nursed against Paul. How enlightening to note that they, being unregenerate, were acting out their master's scripts. **"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of, it"** (John 8:44). The Jews wanted to capitalize on Festus' newness to the office to fulfill their plan but he rejected their proposal. Christians who assume new leadership positions should be cautious with sycophants who give seemingly harmless suggestions or proposal that will hatch their undisclosed motives.

Question 1: What can the believer learn from the unrelenting plot to assassinate Paul?

From the renewed plot by the Jews to kill Paul, it is clear that the enemy does not easily give up his plan to hack down believers. Sinners and persecutors use different tactics to achieve their purposes as we see that the Jews made political overtures to Festus while their main aim was simply to kill Paul. Thus, the utter depravity of the unregenerate is manifest. **"For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall"** (Proverbs 4:16).

Question 2: What encouragement can the believer derive from the preservation of Paul in the face of renewed presecution by the Jews?

God's overruling providence ensured the protection and preservation of Paul despite the renewed plot of the Jews to kill him. From this, believers should be encouraged to continue to serve God as He will preserve them from all satanic plans. Festus' rejection of the request to take Paul back to Jerusalem for trial shows how **"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"** (Proverbs 21:1). The defeat of the wicked plot of the Jews is reminiscent

of Ahitophel's counsel against David that was rejected by Absalom. God, in His infinite wisdom, would always find a way to rescue His own. It was He who rescued David from Goliath's physical prowess. And having rescued him severally, 'Paul the apostle is emboldened to declare that, **"the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work. And will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen"** (2 Timothy 4: 18). Since those in authority are under God's sovereign power, believers should therefore be encouraged to seek divine intervention in governance. And though our enemies may be many and well connected, we are assured that God's will shall be done even if we do not have the ears of our leaders or access to plead our cause before them.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE FESTUS (Acts 25:6-12; Matthew 10:17-20, 25; Luke 12:11,12; 1 Peter 3:15, 16)

Festus stayed about ten days in Jerusalem and returned to Caesarea, the official headquarters of his province. The Jews apparently followed him and Paul's trial commenced the following day. Expeditious dispense of justice is always commendable and scriptural. Sitting in judgment, Festus' commanded Paul to be brought before him. In this tribunal, Paul's accusers laid many serious charges against him which they could not prove. Paul denied all the allegations.

Christ had predicted that His disciples would be brought before governors, kings and rulers for His sake as a testimony against them. So, Paul's defense before Festus gave him an opportunity to witness for Christ. When we thus suffer persecution, we need not entertain thoughts of self-pity but take consolation in Christ's words. **"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"** (Mathew 10:25). Besides, we must use every opportunity of defence to preach the gospel of Christ to the people.

Although Festus was not fully decisive after hearing Paul's denial, his conduct is highly commendable. He did not

commit any act of illegality or injustice in order to please the Jews. On two occasions, he resolutely declined to yield to pressure so as to maintain the principle of fairness (Acts 25:4,5,15,16). This teaches us that people in authority should not bend the rules of justice whatever the pressure.

Question 3: What can believers learn from Paul's appeal to Caesar?

When Festus muted the idea of taking him back to Jerusalem for trial, Paul responded promptly and courageously, saying "... **I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged...** " (verse 10). He then appealed to Caesar. His proposal not to be tried at Jerusalem was because He had experienced so much violent persecution from the Jews that his hope for justice at their hands became lean. They had earlier plotted to take his life which was why he had been brought to Caesarea for his safety. It would therefore be foolhardy to give them another opportunity to execute their plan. Having been tried by Felix and subsequently detained as prisoner in violation of the law to please the Jews and Festus seem to lack the will power to do justice, he resolved to assert his rights by appealing to Caesar. This way, Paul's long cherished desire and prayer to see the Roman church and to preach the gospel there was to be fulfilled (Romans 1:9-11). God answers prayer, and many times, in ways we little anticipate.

In his defence, Paul emphasized his innocence and the fact that he had no intention to evade just punishment if found guilty (Acts 25:10,11). True Christians should not try to evade the law but rather they should obey the laws of the land. The Scripture says, "**But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf**" (I Peter 4:15). Enduring the persecution with boldness and courage, Paul was able to testify of Christ in Rome in fulfillment of Christ's promise to him.

FESTUS RECOUNTS PAUL'S CASE TO KING AGRIPPA
(Acts 25:13-27; 26:1; Deuteronomy 17:4; 19: 17,18;

Proverbs 18:13,17; John 7:51)

King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus as the new governor who replaced Felix. Festus recounted Paul's case before Agrippa, noting that Felix had left Paul in prison without any crime established against him. He explained that the chief priests and elders of the Jews informed him, about Paul during his recent visit to Jerusalem but that he told the Jews that it was not according to Roman custom to deliver the accused to be killed without having the opportunity to defend the allegations leveled against him (Acts 25:15,16). The Bible emphasized this principle of fair-hearing and it is unscriptural to condemn a man without hearing his own side of the case. Christ's command is, **"Judge not, that ye be not judged"** (Matthew 7: 1).

Question 4: State the principle that should guide administration of justice among believers.

After Festus' explanation of Paul's case, Agrippa requested to hear Paul himself. The following day, King Agrippa and Bernice entered into the auditorium with much pomp together with the commanders and other prominent men of the city. Festus reported the Jews claim that Paul was not fit to live any longer but that he found no fault deserving death penalty. He noted that Paul had appealed to Caesar, but that he had nothing to write to Caesar about Paul. He hoped that after Agrippa's examination of Paul, he might have something to write. He thought it was unreasonable to send an appeal to Caesar without specifying the charges. In this case, we see the faultlessness of Paul established by the Roman governor (Acts 25:24-27; 23:9,29; 26:31; Luke 23:4,14) and a grand lesson to all believers that we should live above board in private and in public. Transparent holiness is required of all heaven-bound pilgrims if we hope to escape condemnation at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Three amazing characters are presented before us in this trial; King Agrippa II, Festus and Paul. King Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great and the immediate son of Herod Agrippa I who died by the hands of an angel after he had killed James (Acts 12). Yet, he came to hear Paul only

out of curiosity. Curiosity thus draws multitudes to gospel ministers today. They listened but refused to yield to the demand of the gospel to repent of sin so as to obtain the mercy of God. Like Agrippa, they are almost persuaded to be Christians (Acts 26:28) but are not. Festus is a specimen of the manner in which the great and rich usually regard Christianity. They esteem it to be a subject of inquiry in which they have no interest, a question about “one dead Jesus” who Christians affirm to be alive. But in Paul, we have an example of a man who had a deep interest, in the gospel and was willing not merely to look at it with curiosity, but to stake his life, his reputation, his all, on its truth. He was willing to defend it everywhere, and before any class of men. Here was a man that for everything he did or demanded was mainly that he might preach the gospel. All his anxiety to secure justice to himself was to declare the truth of God in the presence of princes, nobles and kings. There is the need for more Christians to be as committed to the cause of Christ as Paul (Romans 1:14-16; 1 Corinthians 9:16,17; 2 Timothy 2:10).

DAILY BIBLE READING

MORNING			EVENING	
MON	Acts	11-12	1 Chronicles	1
TUE	“	13	“	2
WED	“	14-15	“	3-4
THUR	“	16	“	5
FRI	“	17-18	“	6
SAT	“	19	“	7
SUN	“	20	“	8

529 Lesson

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

MEMORY VERSE: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

TEXT: Acts 26:1-32

The previous chapter ended with the consultation between Governor Festus and King Agrippa over Paul's case. Festus had sought counsel from Agrippa because he, being more familiar with the Jewish religion and lifestyle should be able to clarify what the accusations against Paul were. But Agrippa decided to listen to Paul directly and even though he had no legal jurisdiction over him, being a Roman citizen, subjected him to rigorous questions and cross-examination in the palace. Here we see how God furnishes His people with opportunities to preach the gospel. Paul had preached the gospel to Felix the governor; now it is time to preach to a king and another governor.

In our text, Paul was granted the liberty to speak and defend himself against the accusations that were leveled against him. In response, he presented his defence with amazing boldness and holy zeal. He was not apologetic but spoke with passion and conviction. Details of his defence and the politics of religion between Agrippa and Festus shall be examined here.

Question 1: How should the believer exploit opportunities to preach the gospel?

TESTIMONY OF PAUL'S CONVERSION (Acts 26:1-15; 8:3;9:1;2 Corinthians 5: 17; Galatians 1: 13-16; Philippians 3:6)

Now before king Agrippa, Paul was permitted to defend himself against the accusations of the Jews. **"Then**

Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself" (Acts 26: 1). He began his defence with a complimentary remark and went on to talk about his birth, upbringing and religious lifestyle before his dramatic conversion. He reiterated before the king, governor Festus and others that although he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, he was sent to Jerusalem early from his youth where he had his education under Gamaliel **"a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people"** (Acts 5:34), and that his manner of life was well known to the Jews and their leaders. As a Pharisee, he was zealous and touching the righteousness which is in the law he was blameless. Paul also acknowledged that as a Pharisee, he was a bitter enemy of the church of Christ.

Question 2: With reference to Paul's testimony, what are the proofs of his conversion?

Paul began by telling his audience that the sudden change that altered the course he was pursuing was not intentional. It was in the pursuit of his violent opposition to the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah that he was converted. Hitherto he was totally opposed to Christ and Christianity by denying Him to be the Messiah, by condemning His religion as heresy and by persecuting His followers. But there was a total turn around on his way to Damascus when he **"heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"** (Acts 9:4). This experience brought a definite change in his life. We cannot claim to be Christians without personal encounter with Jesus. Everyone who has obtained genuine salvation should be able to explain without hesitation his manner of life before meeting the Lord, his encounter with the Lord and the transformation that took place after the experience. Paul was used to talking about his experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6; 26:13). We may not have seen a bright light, heard an audible voice' and fell down like Paul but there must be a definite experience that brought transformation and salvation into our lives before we can claim to have been born again. Conversion brings the same change into the life of every believer (2 Corinthians 5: 17). For this life-changing experience to take place, a

sinner must come in contact with the word of God. He must acknowledge his sinful nature, condemnation and the need for a Saviour. This reality must compel him to repent of his sins and confessing his utter helplessness to God. The sinner must manifest faith in the word and pray to God for forgiveness and cleansing. After confession and repentance, the penitent sinner must turn away from sin, Satan and the world and turn to God. Finally, he must accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour of his life, turning all allegiance to Him.

PAUL'S REFERENCE TO HIS HEAVENLY COMMISSION
(Acts 26: 16-23; 9: 15, 16; 22: 10-15; Galatians 1:15,16; Matthew 4:18,19)

After testifying of his dramatic conversion, Paul proceeded to narrate the secret of his new zeal to preach the gospel he previously opposed. He said that at conversion, the Lord had showed him that he was going to be a vessel to **“preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”** (Ephesians 3:8). This commission which he called the **“heavenly vision”** (Acts 26:19) became his propelling force and he was ready to defend it at the expense of his life. Paul's obedience to the heavenly vision was without delay. Having had such glorious vision, he did not rebel against the light but immediately went forth and preached, first at Damascus, then at Jerusalem, then throughout all Judea and at last among the Gentiles.

Question 3: Enumerate the challenges believers can receive from Paul's immediate obedience to the heavenly vision.

As the apostle Paul was prompt in obeying the Lord, even so believers must not be disobedient to the great commission to preach the gospel to the whole world. It is imperative to say that delayed obedience is disobedience. Believers must not delay in gospel preaching; it is a divine commission that needs prompt action.

The content of the commission was to **“make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people,**

and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18). Our calling as Christians encompasses giving witness of the death and resurrection of Christ, preaching to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, praying to bring those in the regions of darkness into light, delivering them from the power of Satan and helping them to receive forgiveness from the Lord through repentance from their sins. As Christ called Peter and John to follow Him as fishers of men, so are Christians called to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Matthew 28: 18-20; Mark 16:15).

PAUL’S EVANGELISTIC APPEAL BEFORE AGRIPPA (Acts 26:24-32; 23: 11)

Paul’s presentation of the gospel message to Festus, Agrippa and others was with great power that could not be resisted. The message was persuasive to both the Jewish Agrippa and Roman Festus. He moved from what they had known to the unknown. When the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Ghost, it brings conviction.

<p>Question 4: Point out some basic lessons we can learn from the way Paul presented the gospel to Agrippa and others.</p>

Paul, unruffled by the sarcastic and inflammatory, statement of Felix simply replied, **“I am not mad, most noble Festus”**. From this reaction, we learn that we must avoid distractions when presenting the gospel message. Two, we should not be cowed or intimidated and be forced to abandon the gospel message midway. Three, we must remain calm and composed in the face of provocation or persecution. Four, we must not place our personal convenience above the salvation of souls. Although he was bound and stood at the risk of his life, he remained faithful in declaring the word. Five, we should manifest Christ like character of meekness and lowliness. Six, we must be polite and not lose our guard to utter perverseness (1 Peter 3:9). Paul seized the opportunity not only to give a vivid

explanation of his case but also to preach the gospel. When he finished his presentation, his audience was convinced beyond doubt that he was guiltless; even Agrippa said to Festus **“the man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar”**.

Question 5: What should the believer do if his will contradicts God's?

Paul would have been set free but that the scripture might be fulfilled that he will bear witness of Jesus in Rome. **“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome”** (Acts 23:11). When God's will contradicts our convenience, we must confess like Christ: **“Not as I will but thine will be done”** (Luke 22:42) and surrender to Him.

When Agrippa refused to release Paul on the flimsy excuse of Paul's appeal to Caesar, little did he know that he was fulfilling scripture. **“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain”** (Psalm 76:10). Believers should ensure that they are committed to doing the will of God and all things will work to the glory of God. At this time, it was God's will for Paul to go to Rome in continuation of his ministry. He was in the center of God's will and the Lord prevented his enemies from putting out his light prematurely and ending his ministry abruptly. In like manner, God will protect His children and will not suffer them to perish until they have finished their assignment. Whatever God allows in the life of the Christian, our resolve should be to allow God's will to be done.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Acts	21	1 Chronicles	9
TUE	"	22-23	"	10-11
WED	"	24-25	"	12
THUR	"	26	"	13-14
FRI	"	27-28	"	15-16
SAT	Rom	1-2	"	17-18
SUN	"	3-4	"	19-20

530 Lesson

PAUL SENT TO ROME

MEMORY VERSE: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5,6).

TEXT: Acts 27: 1-44

In our previous studies, Paul had been tried before Festus, the Roman governor who took over from Felix. We would recall that the uproar that greeted Paul’s preaching of the gospel at Jerusalem had provoked disaffection among the Jewish mob as well as the Sanhedrin. Felix had left the issue unresolved and abandoned Paul in prison. When he appeared before Felix and perceived that he was not decisive, Paul therefore appealed to Caesar. Though Felix knew that Paul was innocent, he was not prepared to release him so as not to displease the Jews. But he had no choice than to send him to Caesar to whom he had appealed.

Our present study reveals the events during the journey to Rome with Paul and other prisoners under the custody of Julius, a Roman centurion. During the voyage, many challenges arose at sea: there was a contrary wind, a disagreement between Paul and the ship crew, and a mighty storm followed by a shipwreck. During these series of events, we noticed Paul’s demonstration of faith, calmness, and exemplary composure in the midst of danger.

Question 1: What should be the believer’s attitude when confronted with life’s challenges?

It is a pity today that many who profess to be believers find it difficult, to cope with life’s challenges. They easily resign to fate in the face of danger. Irrespective of whatever challenge that may stare us in the face - whether in ministry or personal life - the Lord expects us to exhibit a high level of calmness and faith in Him. We should be able to attract others to Christ through the challenges we go

through in life. God will never leave us alone when the enemy threatens. His grace will always be sufficient to see us through as we remain faithful to our calling.

THE ROUTE TO ROME AND PAUL'S COUNSEL FOR SAFETY (Acts 27:1-10,21; Proverbs 15:22; 11:14; 1 Kings 12:8-11; Ecclesiastes 4:13)

The long trip to Rome eventually started with Paul and other prisoners sailing from Caesarea by a coastal route through Sidon in Phoenicia, Island of Cyprus, the cities of Myria and Lycia in Asia Minor and Lasea in Crete. Travelling against a tumultuous wind, they boarded a ship of Alexandria sailing to Italy. At a point, Paul admonished that the journey may not be safe as the weather appears unfavorable and that they should wait for some time in Crete (verses 10,21). Paul's observation was relevant because ships at this time were not equipped with advanced navigation equipment as we have today. Safety of the voyage depended on the weather as dictated by the particular period of the year. This particular journey took place at a most inauspicious time of the year.

It is important to appreciate the usefulness of good counsel at various times in our life. Counseling from experienced people in spiritual and secular matters when not contrary to scriptures should not be ignored. **“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established”** (Proverbs 15:22). Also, **“where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”** (Proverbs 11:14). We should however take counsel from godly, mature and spiritual people. The young king, Rehoboam took counsel from young, immature and inexperienced friends; this led to the fall of his kingdom (1 Kings 12:8,11,16). Rehoboam failed to evaluate the advice given to him by both the elders and his peers. This negligence cost him his kingdom; ten of Israel's twelve tribes followed Jeroboam while only two tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam. He must have learnt his lessons, but it was already late. How we need to evaluate the advice we get from people in the light of God's word because advice is helpful only if it is consistent with biblical principles.

Question 2: What is the principle of godly counsel and why is it important?

Good, timely and godly counsels from experienced, spiritual leaders have several benefits: (i) it prevents avoidable failure in life and ministry. (ii) It prevents costly losses of time and materials. (iii) It can prevent backsliding. (iv) It saves from physical harm and danger. Indeed, as the scriptures says, **“better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished”** (Ecclesiastes 4: 13).

THE STORMY VOYAGE AND PAUL’S CHEERING EXHORTATION (Acts 27: 11-26; John 16:33)

Though he respected Paul, the centurion preferred the opinion of the owner of the ship to Paul’s counsel. They therefore continued their journey under the inclement weather and eventually ran into the stormy wind called Euroclydon. They lost control of the ship and eventually allowed it to drift with the wind. For further safety, they lightened the ship by throwing away much of its cargo. The situation became so complicated’ that the ship crew despaired and could not eat for a long period. In this disconsolate situation, the lot again fell on Paul to encourage and strengthen the people.

Question 3: What Christian virtue do we see in the life of Paul and how does it apply to present day believers?

Despite the fact that Paul’s earlier advice and counsel were ignored, he further counseled and encouraged the people. This is humility and love in action. This is unlike many so-called believers in the church who become disinterested and uncooperative because their initial suggestions were not taken. This is a demonstration of pride which should not be found among believers. This explains the reason the Scripture enjoins us to **“let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”** (Philippians 2:3).

It is instructive to note that Paul was able to exhort and

strengthen them during the shipwreck because he had received direct personal encouragement and assurance from the Lord the previous night. **“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee”** (Acts 27:23,24). A direct personal relationship with the Lord will ensure constant renewal and resilience in the face of trouble. Instead of allowing life’s challenges to weigh us down, we should always look up to God for help in such time of need.

Paul’s attitude in the midst of the storms shows he was a burning and shining light to the ship crew and those that sailed with him. He did not hide his identity; instead, he proved to them that he was the servant of the living God. Similarly, believers are expected to brighten the corner where they are. We should not be afraid or ashamed to proclaim the message of hope to the sinning world. **“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven:”** (Matthew 5:14-16).

<p>Question 4: As a believer, how can you positively influence your neighbours during the time of adversity?</p>

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul’s counsel to his companions in voyage was that they should be of good cheer as he believed God that **“it shall be even as it was told (him)”**. Every believer should exercise faith in the word of God. We should be bold with words of encouragement, motivation, edification and hope where others are panicking (Romans 8:26-32).

THE SHIPWRECK AND PAUL’S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE
(Acts 27:27-44; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Peter 5:4-11; Acts 21:10-11; 23:11; 27:22-26,16,31,34)

After fourteen days of being storm-driven, the ship finally drifted towards land. The ship crew tried to find the depth of water under the ship and became afraid as the ship appeared to be heading for the rocks which could make it sink; the ship men pretended that they wanted to cast the anchor when they actually wanted to flee the ship to a perceived safety. When they had left the boat to escape, Paul warned the centurion and the soldiers that **“except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”** Consequently, they cut off the ropes of the boat so that no one could escape.

It is also noteworthy that after fourteen days without food, Paul pleaded with the crew and passengers to eat for the sake of their health. After giving the, exhortation, Paul himself took food and this encouraged others to eat. Paul’s exemplary attitude here is instructive. It is not enough to counsel others to have faith in God when our own life contradicts such confession. Like Paul, our actions must match our confession if we are going to influence others around us. The ship finally ran aground and became wrecked.

In order to keep the prisoners from escaping, the soldiers decided to kill all of them. However, the centurion dissuaded them from their purpose in order to keep Paul alive. No doubt, men face varying degrees of trouble and they also seek various route of escape from their problems. Like the ship crew, they often rely on their own wisdom which usually land them into more troubles. Whatever the challenges - marital problems, trials, temptations, job insecurity, academic problems - we must depend on Christ for solution. He is always there to direct us in the right path.

Believers are encouraged to rise up to every situation that has plunged their fellowmen into darkness, confusion, violence and crisis so as to dispel the darkness that has covered the whole world (Isaiah 60: 1-3). By their conversion and transformation, believers are Christ’s ambassadors and representatives and subsequently empowered by the Holy Spirit to save men (John 10: 10; Matthew 5:13-16). No matter the situation they find themselves, believers are

not expected to entertain any fear. Rather, they should approach issues in the spirit of power, love and sound mind to resist the devil (Romans 8:1,2; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8).

Question 5: How can a sinner enjoy divine protection?

The decision of the centurion not to allow the soldiers kill the prisoners was a divine intervention. Thus, they allowed them either to swim out or use boards or broken pieces of the ship to get to land. This was a miraculous escape for Paul from untimely death as he made his way to Rome according to the direct assurance he had already received from the Lord (Acts 27:22-26). God is interested in our success both in life and ministry. His will for our lives must prevail in spite of the raging storms. It is however interesting to note that the fulfillment of God's promise also covered the people who travelled with Paul in the ship. This assures us that when we walk with the Lord, He will not only preserve us but will also do same for our family members and those around us. Such is the promise given to the Philippian jailor and to everyone who choose to believe God today: **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house"** (Acts 16:31)

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	Romans	19-20	1 Chronicles	21-22
TUE	"	7-8	"	23-24
WED	"	9-10	"	25-26
THUR	"	11-12	"	27-28
FRI	"	13-14	"	29
SAT	"	15-16	2 Chronicles	1-2
SUN	1 Cor.	1-2	"	3-4

END OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

BEGINNING OF SPECIAL STUDIES

531 Lesson

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 2: What are the sources of temptation?

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

God is never the Author of temptation or sin. **“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”** (James 1:13,14). God

can never be blamed for sin though men in their desperate attempt to break loose from responsibility for their actions often heap blame of their failure on God. What then is God's place in the spectrum of temptations? The Apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, posits that temptation begins with man's desire which may be perfectly legitimate by itself, but which leads away from God-appointed goals to baser, inferior and transient ideals. Indeed, the devil tempts the believer with what he is craving for. It, therefore, means that the first and greatest source of temptation is the heart. The enemy within pride, lust, revenge, envy, etc. - is greater, fiercer, more ravenous than the enemy without. No wonder the Bible in Proverbs says, **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"** (Jeremiah17:9). And Christ in the New Testament notes: **"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man"** (Mark 7:21-23). Temptation comes when one **"is drawn away of his own lust..."** Satan, however, is he who does the 'drawing away'. Satan sees the propensity to sin in the heart and then fans the smouldering coal into a full-blown flame. This is the first source of temptation.

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

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

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

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

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

The ignorance of some saints in scriptures concerning the purpose of Satan in orchestrating their downfall made him to achieve his devices against them. But the word

of God exposes his purpose for bringing temptations to Christians. **“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). The devil plans, calculates and develops strategies to carry out his devices in a well structured and organized manner. Whatever God stands for, Satan stands against; whatever God loves, he hates; whatever God appreciates, he devalues; whatever God builds, he wants to destroy.

When **“Satan stood up against Israel”**, David was ignorant of his devices. David became his target because God found him a man after His own heart. The same way Satan hates and seeks to destroy the believer who has a similar testimony of divine approval. Rather than provoke physical warfare through another Goliath in which David would have brought his experience to bear, he came through an unfamiliar terrain. He **“provoked David to number Israel”**. Through this unrecognized method, he achieved his aim of destroying seventy thousand Israelites. Numbering the people of God is not a sin if it is commanded by God. But it is Satan’s device to influence the believer to do what is good but not commanded by God. Believers need to know therefore that anything that does not originate from God is from Satan.

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

Seeking to prevent a glorious experience such as Peter had at Pentecost and his usefulness thereafter, Satan

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

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

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

Question 4: How can a believer be victorious over temptation?
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The cause for such a miserable spiritual life is a result of living too near to the border line. One who persists in walking near a precipice is in far greater danger of tumbling over than one who seeks to tread on sure ground. The Lord was victorious because, first, He did not rush with a light heart into temptation, nor shirk it. He confronted it bravely when he must face it. It is only in such a spirit that we can hope to resist temptations successfully. If we handle temptations prayerfully, victory is sure. The defeat of the devil, the tempter, in his encounter with the Lord in the wilderness assures us that we will overcome him if we resist him through the power of the Spirit.

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

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

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

Victory is secured as we carefully and prayerfully follow some biblical principles especially the ones derived from the acrostics: v.i.c.t.o.r.y. - vigilance, integrity, circumspection, trust, obedience, righteousness and yieldedness. In summary, the Christian pilgrim on his way to heaven will have victory over every temptation as he rejects evil (Proverbs 1:10-15); lives righteously (Proverbs 4:20 27; Isaiah 33:14-J7; Titus 2:11,12), obeys God (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 27: 10; Acts 5:29), lives by faith (Hebrews 10:38), endures in times of temptation” (James 1:12) and depends on divine help (1 Corinthian 10:13).

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

The scripture offers some practical helps on how to overcome temptations and the tempter. (i) Abstain from all appearances of evil - do not go to places (brothels, bars, etc.) where you can be tempted. (ii) reject legitimate offers/favours that lead or predispose you to sin, like the Rechabites did. (iii) Flee outright from persons who want to coerce you to sin, like Joseph and Christ did. (iv) Like Christ, quote relevant scripture verses to counter those who misinterpret and misapply the scriptures to lure

you into sin. (v) Part with sinful friends because they can influence you to do evil. (vi) Depend on the Spirit of God to show you God's way out of temptations.

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

Question 6: What are the benefits that believers who overcome temptations and the tempter enjoy?

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

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

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

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

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	3-4	2 Chronicles	5-6
TUE	“	5-6	“	7-8
WED	“	7	“	9-10
THUR	“	8-9	“	11-12
FRI	“	10-11	“	13-14
SAT	“	12-13	“	15-16
SUN	“	14	“	17-18

532 Lesson

MODERATION AND CHRISTIAN DRESSING

MEMORY VERSE: “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5).

TEXTS: Philippians 4:5-7; 10-13; 1 Peter 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:9, 10

A sore spot in Christian living and doctrine is the dress code and moderation among believers. Much bickering, arguments and distortions have accompanied this teaching.

The Bible gives us moderation as the governing principle that the Christian can safely follow, especially in areas that the Bible did not categorically give commands. Our conduct during wedding, christening, funeral, ceremonies, standard of living, music and dressing fall into this category. The Bible principle that dictates our position in such matters is moderation.

Question 1: Outline aspects of our Christian lifestyle and character that are not distinctly set out in the Bible and mention the Bible principle that dictates our position.

Moderation, in a general sense, refers to a subdued attitude towards the tendency to indulge oneself. It may also be explained as freedom from excess. This is close to temperance. In Bible usage, it has a deeper meaning. It refers to our entire attitude towards life - what we say, do, use. In life, we relate with people and they watch our actions and behaviour, even if those actions do not directly concern them. No wonder the word of God clearly gives commands that touch on our character. **“Let not then your good be evil Spoken of... Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded”** (Romans 14:16; Titus 2:6).

It is our attitude of patience in life that will establish our souls (Luke 21:19). The impatient, agitated and anxious Christian is not a good example of the forbearance of Jesus Christ. James has a parallel scripture to Philippians 4:5

that reads: **“Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”** (James 5:8).

Our lifestyles are to be .examples of moderation, not only in physical matters but also in matters of the spirit; not only in outward appearance, but also in inward disposition. Moderation must be reflected in a believer's mood, comportment, carriage, emotional responses, desires, ambitions and physical actions.

No wonder Paul the apostle, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit enjoined Philippian saints to exhibit moderation so that people will know of this quality in them. He himself emphasized this quality when he gave a testimony of his life: **“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”** (Philippians 4: 12)

Moderation cannot be separated from humility. Our Lord Jesus Christ had heaven at His beck and call, yet came down to the earth to humble Himself, Although rich in heaven, He made Himself poor on earth (2 Corinthians 8:9). Even when He and the disciples needed to pay tax, He made Peter to work for the money: catching a fish and extracting money from its belly.

<p>Question 2: What is moderation and why it necessary in the life of the believer?</p>
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CHRISTLIKE MODERATION ENJOINED (Philippians 4:4-5; 2:5; 1 Peter 4:3,4; Proverbs 23:1-5; Ecclesiastes 7:16)

The exhortation to moderation by Apostle Paul was given to believers. No wonder the injunction to rejoice in the Lord preceded this age-long command. It is therefore obvious that moderation is a spiritual virtue that should be found in any genuine child of God. **“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand”** (Philippians 4:5).

In our desire for legitimate things of this life and personal or group rights, there should be moderation. This we could see in the life of Abraham who, though much older than Lot, and being the heir of the promise of God's covenant blessings, gave Lot the freedom of first choice over the pasture for their cattle. He refused to be drawn into the dispute among their herdsmen over grazing land for their cattle. He said to Lot: **"Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left"** (Genesis 13: 9).

In separating for good, notice also that Abraham did not evict Lot by force, though it was, in his power to do so. He even needed to appeal to him, saying, **"I pray thee"**. How many believers today would confidently comport themselves like Abraham? Would it not be heard in the neighbourhood and in the church that they can no longer see eye-to-eye because of money and property? Can a fellow believer safely and freely trust you to show moderation in collecting valuables from his stock of good, and you would not greedily empty the stock? The word of God teaches godliness and Contentment as being of great gain.

Believers must not insist on their rights as that could deny them heaven. Therefore, moderation will prolong your life on earth. Men-pleasing tendencies, inordinate ambition, elaborate Christian engagements, lavish house warming, naming and funeral programmes are not in consonance with the principle of moderation. Indulgence in trendy fashion, keeping with the styles in vogue, the designs of dress, the indecent, promiscuous dresses in the world are at variance with moderation. They are often a pointer that the individual is a victim of inferiority complex, and lacks confidence in the God he claims to follow.

Similarly, we must manifest moderation in Our words for **"in the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin: he that refraineth his lips is wise ... Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"** (Proverbs 10:19; James 1:19). A life of talkativeness offends God. God commends sound,

faultless speech, and moderation is the wedge.

What about moderation in the things we eat? Many people have developed bodily ailments because of lack of self-control in consumption. Over-eating, otherwise called gluttony, is sin. It is a mark of selfishness and unbelief in the power of Almighty God to provide for us. Some unmanageable appetites arising from unwholesome eating habits have been blamed for obesity, heart diseases, hypertension and high-blood pressure. Even when invited to a feast with abundance of edibles, God's word quietly advises on moderation (Proverbs 23:1-3,6-8). Conversely, some people engage in unduly long dry fasting for weeks and thereby ignorantly impair their health. **"Let your moderation be known to all men."** As the coming of the Lord draws nearer, believers must reflect on this important injunction and live by it.

Question 3: Mention some areas in which the believer must exercise moderation.

CHRISTIAN ADORNMENT EXTOLLED (1 Peter 3:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:9; Romans 12: 16; 1 Corinthians 11:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Adornment embraces all the things we wear on our bodies. Yet, the Lord is concerned also about our inner adornment which should produce a moderating and sobering influence on outward adornment. The word of God enjoins women, and of course men, to adorn themselves with **"the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"** (I Peter 3:3).

In these last days, when some so-called Christians and pastors give scant regard to obscene and indecent dressing, it will take an unwavering biblical position to bring about a renewal. Those assemblies where indecent and loud dressing has been raised to the level of an art will have to repent. Curiously, ministers whose adornment can only be mildly described as abomination now occupy pulpits. When ladies or men who profess being Christians wear dresses that expose their chests, navels, armpits, or

laps into the house of God, it is evident that such ungodly habits are served to distract genuine and sincere seekers from getting to God.

Costly adornments like gold watches and straps, golden hand bands, chains, earrings and other deviations only help to inflame pride and vanity and flies in the face of a meek and quiet spirit. Similarly, curling or blowing up our hair is clearly indicative of a depraved heart. **“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”** **“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”** (1 Timothy 2:9,10; 1 Peter 3:3-5)

<p>Question 4: Mention the things that give radiance to the believer's life.</p>

Whoever therefore says, “there is no harm in these things” may as well say, “there is no ***harm*** in stealing or in committing adultery”. Clinched in this thought of both Paul and Peter is the keynote of the whole matter. What sparkles in the believer is not the dress he wears but a humble, godly spirit that transcends the glitter of the most precious jewels. The real beauty of the Christian is the inner man. A Christian needs not have any special ornament about his dress. It is the holiness that shines through the countenance of a meek and humble Christian causing him/her to dress carefully and modestly in conformity with the inoffensive dictates of the gospel. The Christian woman must avoid like plague, the hair-do that is masculine or those that are deliberately served to attract attention. **“For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be Covered”** (1 Corinthians 11:6).

Moderate and decent dressing must avoid the two extremes of loud dressing or contemptible appearance. The guiding principle in dressing is always in favour of neatness, simplicity and decency. The primary purpose of dressing is to cover our nakedness appropriately, modestly, moderately. A real believer must **“abstain from all appearance of evil”** (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Question 5: What kind of adornment does the Bible recommend to believers?

CAUTION AGAINST COMPROMISE (Philippians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5: 10; Galatians 6:7; 1 Samuel 2:2,3; Isaiah 3:16-23)

Some people preach that God watches the heart only and is hardly concerned about the body. They forget that the believer's body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3: 16). Consequently, God will judge those who misuse their body. **“Moreover, the LORD saith, because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling (even in the church) with their feet: Therefore, the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the LORD will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the head-bands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings, and the nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vials. And ‘it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of a well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girdle of sackcloth; and burning Instead of beauty”** (Isaiah 3: 16-24).

Those who argue over what to wear are. **“the mixed multitudes”** who desire to dress in the attire and style akin to what obtains in the world. They might appear to

have come out of the world at salvation, but the world is, substantially, still in them. The soul panting after God, reaching out for true holiness and heaven is not so much concerned about the style of her outward dress, as she is of her inward dressing and adornment. The spiritually hungry do not desire the show and style of the world. They are instead thirsty for and desirous of a peculiar lifestyle that is wholly pleasing unto God.

There are those who mount strident oppositions to moderation in dressing. They claim that their God is not poor and that God gave express command to Moses that some among His chosen people should be adorned in the most exquisite manner with gold, precious stones and costly array. True, He did command so. But the Jews, especially their priesthood, and Christians are under different dispensations. The glory of the whole Mosaic dispensation was chiefly visible and external; whereas the glory of the Christian dispensation is of an invisible and a spiritual nature.

Question 6: What are some of the reasons some people give for not obeying the Bible injunctions on moderation and Christian dressing, and how can the believer silence the gainsayers?

God's precepts on dressing are clear and unambiguous and should pose no burden to every heaven-bound pilgrim. The simple acid test, which our dressing and indeed our general outlook to life must pass through, is simply this: does it glorify God? If it does not, simply abandon it.

DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	1 Cor.	15	2 Chronicles	19-20
TUE	"	16	"	21-22
WED	2 Cor.	1-2	"	23-24
THUR	"	3-4	"	25-26
FRI	"	5-6	"	27-28
SAT	"	7-8	"	29
SUN	"	9-10	"	30-31

533 Lesson

TRINITY OF THE GODHEAD

MEMORY VERSE: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).

TEXT: Matthew 3:16, 17; 28:19; John 10:30; 15:26; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2

The Godhead and its Trinity is one of the deep mysteries of the Kingdom of God revealed to us in Scripture. It is one of the greatest tenets of the Christian faith that is better believed than mentally understood because it is anchored on the nature and person of God. The subject has, through the ages, confounded the wise and prudent but conferred on the faithful, trusting believer, the blessings of simplicity of faith.

Through reasoning, man can never attain the Trinitarian conception of the Almighty God, neither can he by research or logical inquiry understand the nature of God. The error many people have fallen into is an obsessive desire to rationalize this teaching.

Some contend that the word Trinity’ is not in the Bible; and this has hindered their acceptance and belief of it. They have forgotten that the word, ‘Bible’ is not in the Bible, yet they use the term without reservation. They also fail to note that the word, ‘Rapture’ is not in the Scripture. But, shall we disbelieve the scriptural teaching on the Rapture because the word is not directly written in the Bible?

Another reason some find it difficult to comprehend this Scriptural teaching is that they try to compare the human structure with the divine. They reason that it is incomprehensible to talk about one and only God, yet with a Son and Spirit that are co-equal with Him. They have forgotten that it is not possible to know everything about God, else He would cease to be God. Yet, we make bold to say that there is enough evidence in the Scripture to give us all the profitable knowledge we need to have about the

nature and attributes of God. He has sufficiently revealed Himself in His Word so that every sincere seeker may come to the knowledge of His will.

Believers must therefore be on their guard not to fall into the same temptations but come with open minds into the sanctuary of God so that He might reveal His will to us. Let us, once and for all, lay up this truth in our hearts and be free from being **“tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4: 14).**

Question 1: What should be our attitude to the doctrine of Trinity?

May we, therefore, categorically state that just as we have believed the facts of atomic or nuclear energy, solar energy or the computer, even before we understood their nature, we must, likewise, accept the fact of the Trinity as a teaching revealed in God's word, and that it is doctrinally sound. Every believer must accept the gospel truth of the Trinity by faith, recognizing that God remains the eternal repository of all mysteries (Deuteronomy 29:29).

CONCEPT OF THE DOCTRINE OF TRINITY (Genesis 1: 1; 1:26; 3:22; 11:6,7; Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; 14:26)

Question 2: What is our basis for teaching and believing the doctrine of Trinity?

The doctrine of Trinity is a revealed teaching, that is to say, it embodies a truth that cannot be discovered by human natural reason but through divine revelation and understanding. With all his search, man has not been able to discover for himself the deep things of God. In fact, we cannot fully grasp the pearls of God's Word except through the revelation of His Spirit.

The notion or concept of the Trinity of the Godhead is embedded in the Word of God. The word which is translated 'God' in Genesis 1:1 is Elohim, the plural of El ('The Strong One'). Elohim therefore, means, 'The Strong Ones'. This uni-plural noun appears more than 2,700 times in the Old Testament.

It is interesting to note that God Himself, from the beginning, used plural nouns to explain the work of creation. **“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”** (Genesis 1:26). The use of the pronouns, “us” and “our” implies the involvement of more than one personality in the creation of man. Similar application continues in other references. For example, at the excommunication of man from the Garden of Eden, God said, **“Behold, the man is become as one of us ...”** (Genesis 3:22). And, on the threshold of God’s perfect desire to curb the foolish excesses of man, by wisely confounding him with diverse languages, the same pronoun is used (Genesis 11:7).

Question 3: Explain the word ‘Trinity’.
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Trinity therefore emphasizes the unity of three Persons in one God. The word, “Trinity” is a coinage from three in-Unity or Tri-unity to underscore the perfect, pure relationship between the Personalities in the Godhead. Doctrinally, it expresses that there is only one God, one divine nature who is tri-personal and also involves the distinctions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are joint partakers of the same divine and majesty of God. There is one only and true God but in the unity of the Godhead there are three co-eternal and co-equal Persons; and they are the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.

CLEAR TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE ON THE TRINITY
 (John 15:26; I Peter 1:2; Psalm 89:26; 45:6,7; Acts 5:3,4; Colossians 1:16,11 Hebrews 1:2,3)

The Scripture clearly teaches that the Godhead consists of three separate, distinct, and recognizable Personalities and qualities, perfectly united together. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are different Persons in the Godhead, not merely three names for one Person. The Father is called God (1 Corinthians 8:6; Psalm 89:26; 1; Chronicles 29:10; Isaiah 63: 16; Matthew 6:9); the Son, Jesus Christ, is called God (Psalm 45:6,7; Isaiah 9:6,7;

John 20:28); and the Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3,4; I Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20; Hebrews 3:7-9; 10:15,16).

From the foregoing references, it is clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons, co-eternal and co-existent in power and divine attributes.

Question 4: Why do we believe that God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are co-equal and co-eternal in nature? Support your answer with at least one Scripture reference.

The Trinity is foreshadowed in Daniel 2:47 as three personalities united in one God. The Personalities are God, the Lord and the Revealer of secrets or the Holy Spirit (also Roman 8:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 2:10). These three Personalities are the uncreated Beings. They have always been and will continue to be. And they are united in every sense. There is no possibility of disagreement between them because they are one in mind, character and purpose. In every action, the Three are equally active. The Father is the Creator (Genesis 1: 1, 2; Psalm 100:3; John 1:3), yet the works of creation are ascribed to the Son and the Spirit (Job 26:13; 33:4; Colossians 1:12-16; Hebrew 1:2, 3). The work of regeneration and redemption is ascribed to the three Personalities: the Father in Matthew 3: 17; The Son in John 5: 19-21 and the Spirit in John 15:26. The Spirit sanctifies, yet the Father and the Son are present and active in the work of sanctification.

The Father judges but by the Son, Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31; John 5:22). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit receive honour (John 5:23; Matthew 12:32).

The testimony of Scripture on the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ reveals the perfect unity of the Godhead. **“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). Second, Jesus taught that He is God and also emphasized the truth of God’s oneness (John 5:17, 18). The testimony of Jesus can neither be rejected nor refused.

Christ's assertion of unity in the Trinity is of sufficient strength to prove to every man that there are three distinct Personalities in the Godhead and the three are united. A fourth century Christian creed puts it this way: "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity... for the Person of the Father is one, of the Son another and the Holy Ghost another. But of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost there is one divinity, equal glory and co-eternal majesty ... the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three eternal but one eternal... Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God... Therefore, there is one Father not three Fathers; one Son not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity, there is nothing first or last, nothing greater or less. But all the three co-eternal Persons are co-equal among themselves so that through all, as is above said, both unity in Trinity in unity is to be worshipped."

Further prove of the truth about the Godhead became clear at the baptism of Jesus Christ when the Father sent the Holy Ghost in bodily form as a dove upon Christ, and God Almighty Himself made a public proclamation of Jesus as His beloved Son (Matthew 3:16,17). Even at the outset of His ministry, Jesus affirmed the companionship of God the Father and the Holy Spirit with Him. It was only by their combined workings that He was to fulfil His multi-pronged ministry of preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and delivering the captives (Luke 4: 18). In addition, the work of redemption which Jesus Christ completed on the Cross was a joint venture with the Father and the Holy Ghost (Hebrews 9: 14).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF TRINITY (John 14:9; 1:14; 1 Corinthians 2:12; John 16:12-15)

The doctrine of the Trinity, as have been established, is pre-eminently given to the Church by revelation. And while it brings before us one of the greatest mysteries or revelation and transcends finite comprehension, it is essential to the understanding of the Scripture. And as we shall see, it has its great value and uses.

The doctrine of the Trinity and unity of the Godhead has been called “a bulwark of Christian-theism.” It gives us a glimpse into the wonderful but complex being of God, while at the same time it constantly proclaims the impossibility of comprehending God. While it is a stumbling block to rationalism, it is for those who accept it a safeguard against all tendencies towards rationalism or intellectual pride.

<p>Question 5: What are the benefits of believing the doctrine of the Trinity of the Godhead?</p>
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In the teaching of the Trinity, we behold, first, not only a God who is exalted far above us, but also Christ who is with us and the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Second, the doctrine of the Trinity is essential to God’s revelation of truth. **“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, and the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth”** (John 1: 14). Christ is the revelation of the Father and the express image of His person. **“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”** (John 14:9). Now if there is no Trinity, then Christ is not God and cannot perfectly know or reveal God.

Christianity is the only true religion because Christ is the only true revelation of God; but if Christ be not God then we cannot be sure of His revelation of God, and Christianity will be just another religion like all other religions having its portions of truth and portions of error. But if Christ be God, and indeed He is, as the Bible declares that He is, then Christianity is the absolute revelation of God’s will for mankind.

The same is true of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to His disciples: **“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of**

mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:12-15). The Holy Spirit is the One who guides us into all truth. How can He do that unless Christ and the Holy Spirit are as God the Father?

Third, the legitimacy, validity and veracity of the gospel depend upon this truth; for Christ is most clearly seen to be God’s unspeakable gift, the bringer of eternal salvation when we recognize His essential oneness with the Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is thus seen to be, in His relation to a sinful world, and the Church as well as to individual believers, the infinite Source of hope and a new, holy life.

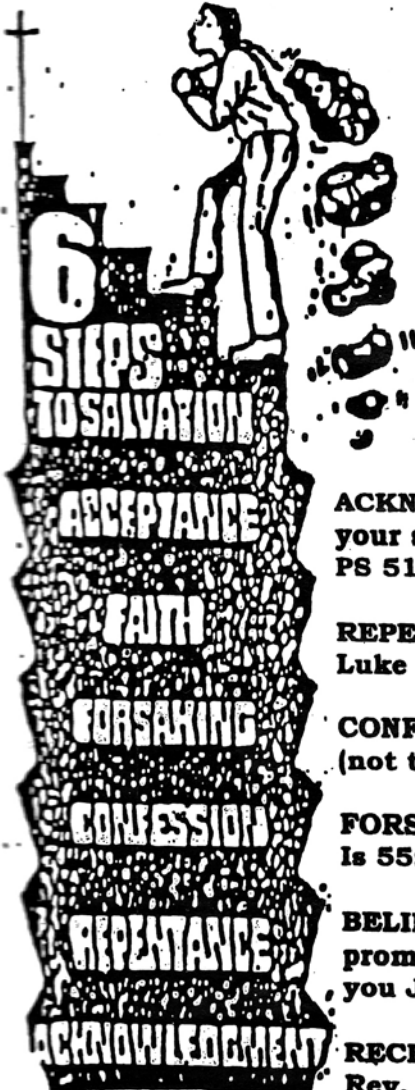
DAILY BIBLE READING

	MORNING		EVENING	
MON	2 Cor.	11	2 Chronicles	32
TUE	“	12-13	“	33-34
WED	Gal	1-2	“	35
THUR	“	3-4	“	36
FRI	“	5-6	Ezra	1-2
SAT	Ephesians	1-2	“	3-4
SUN	“	3-4	“	5-6

**THE END OF THE STUDIES, BUT BE ADVISED
THE WORD OF GOD IS TIMELESS (DOES NOT
BECOME OBSOLETE AT ANY TIME). THEREFORE,
ENDEAVOR TO KEEP THIS BOOK HANDY.**

DISTRICT CHURCHES DIRECTORY

1. Bronx: 213 E. 144th Street (718) 292-7883
2. Brooklyn: 140 Saratoga Avenue (718) 919-1166
3. Queens: 188-21 Suffolk Drive, St. Albans, NY 11412 (347) 200-3301
4. New Jersey: 23-39 South 20 Street, Irvington (973) 202-3989
5. Staten Island: 144-146 Morningstar Road, Staten Island, NY 10303 (917) 238-2258
6. Spring Valley: 95 North Main street, Suite 1 (845) 709-6058



ACKNOWLEDGE
your sinfulness
PS 51:3-5

REPENT OF YOUR SIN
Luke 13:3, Acts 3:19

CONFESS them to God
(not to Priest) 1 John 1:9

FORSAKE all known sin
Is 55:7

BELIEVE that GOD is true to his
promise to forgive and clean
you Jn: 6:37 1 Jn 1:9

RECEIVE JESUS into your heart
Rev. 3:20 Jn 3:17



DEEPER CHRISTIAN LIFE MINISTRY, USA

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DEEPER LIFE BIBLE CHURCH WEEKLY FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

New Jersey	9:00 AM
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