

My New Testament Companion

All requests for information should be addressed to the author. Details are as follows:

Ghana Christian University College (GhanaCU), Accra E-mail: jimmyamoah@yahoo.com

Phone: +233 (0)24 446 2843

Designed and Printed in Ghana by:

Classic Graphics

Asafo, Kumasi, Ghana

Phone: +233 (0)24 488 7832

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MY *New*
Testament
COMPANION

Rev. James Yamoah
(PhD)

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INSPIRATIONAL PASSAGES FOR THE BOOK

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than
the Thessalonians, for they received the message
with great eagerness and examined the
Scriptures every day to see if
what Paul said was true”
(Acts 17:11; NIV)

“Study to show yourself approved unto God,
a workman who does not need to be
ashamed and who correctly
handles the word of truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15; NLT)

FOREWORD

A famous religious leader, Mahatma Gandhi, has shared that, the difference between love and like is demonstrated this way: “If you **like** a flower, you pluck it but if you **love** a flower, you nurture it.” Remember, once you pluck a flower it withers in your hand in less than 24 hours. Love nurtures, love is eternal, but “like” in this context, is temporal. In my estimation you are going to **love** this book and keep it in your library not only as a reference book, but as a book you would want to turn to from time to time as you do to your Bible.

I was stunned by five things when I finished reading *My New Testament Companion*: First, is the author’s academic and scholarly display of gems of knowledge, understanding and of course, wisdom. The author examines candidly and passionately ways to live and enjoy the blessings of God with authentic discussions that will leave you to raise hands in praise of the Living God and His Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, anyone who is passionate about our Savior’s Second Coming should love this book and treasure it just as the Holy Bible is treasured.

Second, Paul’s mission and the import of his letters are examined with a scholarly and intellectual touch. What was Paul mission?

He fought the good fight of faith right from the beginning to the end. At first, he defended the Jewish faith with full alacrity, and had to assist the elimination of those who he thought were enemies to the Jewish faith. But on his way to Damascus, his plan became a paradox if not oxymoron. What he opposed became his affectionate desire, and subject of thought. The reason Paul became famous among the other disciples/apostles are clearly discussed, leaving no doubt in the mind of the reader.

Third, my attention was drawn to proffered steps to pure religion which can hardly be found in any ordinary book. While *My New Testament Companion* is not a second Bible, it has the key to what all of us are struggling to obtain in terms of religious piety. In fact, Rev. James Yamoah (PhD) has rich ideas in the dynamics of salvation which have eluded many Pastors of the world today. “Are you saved?” has always been the clarion question of many a lover of pure religion. As you read *My New Testament Companion*, answers to questions about salvation could be found in his insightful presentations on spiritual gifts, the gospel of grace, and justification by faith.

Then also, the ministry of angels and demons, that are the hob, around which spiritual gifts spin, have been given a vivid explanation. What are spiritual gifts and the fruits of the Spirit?

Who can stand the one in whom is the Spirit of God? If one angel could slaughter 185,000 Assyrian Soldiers (2Kings 19:35), why should Christians fear demons and their operations? Scripture says: “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them (Psalm 34:7). The author helps us to deeper understanding of these spiritual beings.

Lastly, this book, *My New Testament Companion*, succinctly and unequivocally deals with two most crucial issues that have been topics of debate in these eschatological times: the 666 and the 144,000. Every lover of the Lord Jesus Christ—the center of the Bible and the book in your hand—can only exclaim: “COVID 19, and the end time events culminating in the sealing of the 144,000 are but sheer theological, ecclesiastical, and eschatological happenstances. After reading this book, one could argue rightly that 666 and 144,000 agenda in the book of Revelation are being distorted by those who have imperfect knowledge about the word of God. I am proud to be a firsthand beneficiary of these eye-opening truths.

Rev James Yamoah (PhD) will always be remembered for his humility, and desire to share knowledge and insight through publications. I recommend *My New Testament Companion* for it is easy to read; loaded with facts in depth and clarity; has life

transforming information, and it is full of hope for life here and now, and in the next one to come. It is a must read book for the clergy, laymen and intellectuals; most especially, students of Theology.

Dr. Samuel Stevens Boateng

Senior Lecturer, Christian Education

Ghana Christian University College, Amrahia, Accra

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I owe a number of people tons of gratitude. They are the instruments that have been used by the Almighty God to bring me to this stage of life. Those that constitute my foundational family and worthy of mention are Madam Mary Nyarko (my mother), Messrs. Francis Gyamera Akwaw (of blessed memory) and Peter Yamoah Akwaw (my uncles), Mrs. Rose-Vida Danquah and Ms. Georgina Achiaah (my aunts), and all my siblings, Maggie, Big Joe, Emma, Josephine, Esther, and Martha.

The tall list of this central family also includes my cousins: Mrs. Ellen Kessie, Dr. Angela Danquah, Linda Danquah, Dr. Francis Yamoah, Gifty Yamoah, Housely Danquah, Eunice, Yvonne, Francisca, Doreen, Richmond, and Richard. In addition to this family are Nana Osei Bonsu, CEO, Bethesda Printing Press, Kumasi, Nana Kofi Tibo Ampong, Nana Kofi Amoah and my entire Asona family at Chirapatre. I am also forever indebted to other people who in diverse ways have helped to lay a solid foundation for me to build upon in life. Notable among them are the families of Mr. Obiri-Yeboah, Mrs. Rita Amakye-Ansah, Mad. Charity Yaa Nyarkoah (my beloved mother-in-law), Dr. Victor Okoh, Rev. (Mrs.) Amenuveve, Mr. Nii-Noi Adumuah (MCE, Adentan), Mad. Salome Ofori Owusu (USA) and her son, Mr. Eric Sifah, and Mr. Boahene.

There are many families that I am deeply indebted to. One of them is the family of Madam Cecilia Mensah of blessed memory, the former matron of Wenchi Senior High School (Wess), in the Bono East region of Ghana. She is the woman who hosted and treated me as one of her sons during my two-years (1989-91) National Service commitment at Wess. Madam Cecilia was the pivot of the Besse family comprising her husband, the late Mr. Kwame Amoh Besse, and her children, Kwadwo Besse, Mary Marfowaah Besse, Yaa Yeboah Besse, Kwame Anokye Besse, Kwabena Bame Besse, and Naana Abena Gyameah Besse.

What really spiced up my stay with this family is the continuous presence of two grandchildren of the matron: my “beloved daughter,” Grace Ama Takyiwaah Boadi Danquah, presently a family woman domiciled in the USA; and her cousin, Elisha Kwame Antwi-Boasiako, who is now a minister of the gospel in Ghana. These grandchildren of the matron became my “closest friends” and immediate companions at home during most of the free times of that challenging period of my bachelorhood. It is their presence which often lighted and colored most of my dull or boring moments and brought the needed excitements during this period of stay in “a home far away from home”. It is my heartfelt prayer that the goodness and mercies of the Lord continues to

follow this great family for generations and that just as they received me so they will be received by other people.

How can I also overlook the countless Christian leaders at Christ Resurrection Church (CRC) who have served as my fathers, friends, and acquaintances in whose hands I passed to this humble height? Worthy of acknowledgement and appreciation are Apostle Charles Soso, Rev. Justice Osei Assibey, Rev. Joseph O. Frimpong; then we have Rev. Joseph E. Mensah and other currently serving ministers, Elders George Osei Kwame and Sarkodieh Minka; other church leaders, including Mrs. Agnes Amakye-Ansah, Mrs. Gladys Osei Kuffour and the entire membership of Christ Resurrection Church (CRC), Ghana, most especially, the youth whose tall list I cannot provide here. These are among the great number of people that have helped and nurtured me in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me acknowledge the diverse contributions made by certain personalities that have enabled me to reach this stage in life to produce this book. These include Rev. Dr. Martin Obeng (Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra); Rev. Eastwood Anaba (Bolgatanga); Prophet Christopher Yaw Annor (ICGC); Apostle John K. Appiah; then, Her Excellency Rev. Dr. (Mrs.) Gifty Lamptey, Rev. Samuel Mensah and other notable ministers of the gospel. Special thanks

go to Dr. David Roadcup, Dr. Jon Weatherly, Dr. and Dr. (Mrs.) Weber, and Mr. Daniel Dyke, all at Cincinnati Christian University (CCU), Ohio, USA, for their great encouragement.

It is also hard for me not to express my indebtedness to my Restoration Christian Church (RCC) family comprising the General Overseer, Andrews Karikari; Vice Overseer, Joseph Borketey; former General Overseer, Stephen Ofori Amanfo; former Deputy Overseer, Pastor Jones Abbey; and all other pastors, including Adu-Gyasi, Budu-Nyarko, Eric Afful, Ashia Boateng, Daniel King Zuh, Timothy Mensah, Gabriel Obodai Torgbor, Moses Charthey Bio, Gabriel Obodai, Samuel Yeboah and Wisdom Korsina. Then also are: Elders Nii Ashie, Bright Adatsi, Robert Wormadey, Edem Hini and all the deacons, deaconesses, and other leaders and great helpers, particularly the families of Christian Adjei Jnr., Reindolf Annor, Yaw Nimako, Kotoka Asante, Seth Mantey, Rebecca Larteley, Julius Dagbe (aka, Atigya) and all the saints for their encouragement in my current service as one of their pastors.

A core group of the RCC fraternity comprises those who constitute the Christian University Community (CUC) family. These are my immediate spiritual household. Notable personalities, particularly Elders Nicholas Opare, Nelson Nesto Etu, Emmanuel Agbey, and

the team of deacons and deaconesses together with all the dedicated members cannot escape mention. As a church on the campus of the University College, I can hardly forget about all the wonderful students that have become part of the campus church all these years. I am grateful to the Good Lord for your immense support all these years and wish you the best of God's blessings.

Worthy of mention and appreciation is another group of great ministers of the Almighty God who are more than just friends to me. The ones whose names constantly ring bells are the following respected servants of the Lord: Evangelist Samuel Opoku (USA); Pastors Welbeck Ntim, Christopher Affum-Nyarko, Emmanuel Nii Nortey, Eric Akosah, Jackson Offe-Gyimah, William Sackey, James Owusu, Emmanuel Dunyo, Frank Mensah and all the members of Oceans of Love International (OOLI); together with all those I have mentored in ministry and are still serving, especially, Reverend Ministers Juliana Opoku, Martin Semordzi (Atinka FM, Accra), Fred Asare Mawujitse, Kenneth Quarshie (USA), Samuel Appiah Young, Samuel Appiah, Samuel Doe Akogo, Maxwell Apau, Samuel Afriyie Siaw and Paa Kobina Einstein, Kofi Woelinam, James Avoka, Godfred Nimo, Seth Djaba, Charles Adoboe and Anthony Yamoah Buabeng. God richly bless all of you.

I cannot also overlook the contributions made by certain groups, mates and friends whose interactive presence has enabled me to produce this book. The immediate groups that constantly ring bells in my spirit are first, Alumni of my former Secondary School which formerly was Technology Secondary School (now KNUST Senior High School, Kumasi), TECHSOSA, especially the 1982-year group which now boast of astute professionals of many fields. The second group is the 1989-Biological Sciences mate of University of Science and Technology (UST, now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, KNUST). The last but by no means the least is GHAFES, the Evangelical Christian group identified commonly in KNUST campus as Inter-Hall Christian Fellowship (IHCF). My association with this group did not only help to inculcate but also strengthened solid Christian values in me after I rededicated my life to Christ at the onset of my undergraduate studies at KNUST.

The acknowledgement list is incomplete without the mention of the East Legon Cell group of the Ghana Baptist Convention. This Sunday evening Bible Study body, spearheaded by 'Asore Panin' of Tesano Baptist and *Evangelist Extraordinaire* (E. E.) of the Ghana Baptist Convention, Mr. Daniel Ofori (who is also the CEO of White Chapel group of companies), and under the tutelage of Rev. John Nkum, with Rev. Akwasi Damprane Agyeman as chief

moderator, includes a host of dedicated Reverend ministers and Christian leaders. Among them are Rev. Yaw Dakyi, Rev. Albert Owusu-Ansah, Rev. Timothy Aidoo, Rev. Nathan Obeng-Aboagye, Rev. Jacob Ampomah Agyenkwa, Rev. Michael Ampofo, Mr. Delali Blekpe, Mr. Frederick Amuaful, Mr. Theophilus Andoh, Mr. Ato Kwamina Nkum, Mr. Kwasi Fynn, Mr. Stephen Osei Boadi, and Mr. Josh Kwaku Boadi. We also have Mrs. Alice Quarshie, Mrs. Rosemary Adu-Poku, Mrs. Josephine Nkum, Mrs. Araba Andoh, Mrs. Pat Blekpe, Mrs. Esther Ofori, Mrs. Pat Osei-Bonsu, Mrs. Dakyi, Mrs. Baleeka Ampofo, and our brothers; Elvis, Jeff, and Laud. The consistent search for the truth of Scriptures by this group has helped to deepen my interest in the study of the Bible. May your devotion to the study of God's word lead to true transformation into the image of Christ.

I can never forget my special children in the Lord from the days of my National Service in teaching. In this regard, the following names come to mind: Ms. Ataa Kwatemaa Adjei Jnr., Mr. Fred Effah Yeboah, Dr. Cecilia Boateng (USA), Rev. Augustine Owusu (USA), Ms. Esther Wiredu (Germany), Emmanuel Tackie, (China), Mr. Kwame Anokye and all whose names are not mentioned here but embedded deeply in my heart. I greatly appreciate God for placing all of you under my care at some point in life and wish you the best of God's blessings.

I am grateful to my colleague lecturers and staff, my students, and Alumni of Ghana Christian University College (GhanaCU), Accra, whose interaction with me at the College has propelled me to this stage in life. I wish to single out Mr. Selorm Saligah and Ms. Afua Frimpong-Kore, for their editorial support. But for their painstaking scrutiny, this book might not have come to fruition.

As expected at this final stage, I definitely need to narrow the focus down to my core family comprising the “bone of my bones”, Mrs. Florence Yamoah, whose comforting presence provided me with the ultimate encouragement that gave birth to this book, and my children: Jemima, Emmanuel (who helped with the typing of the document), and Joseph. I wish to admit that it is their interactive presence which kept me awake to finish this project. In fact, they constituted the immediate ‘power-house’ for the production of this book. I pray God’s abiding presence with them.

Above all, I am forever grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His mercies towards me, in accordance with the promise: “...Great is His faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23). To Him alone should all glory be given. Amen.

REV. JAMES YAMOA (PhD)

VICE PRESIDENT – GHANA CHRISTIAN UNIV. COLL, ACCRA

CONTACTS: 024 446 2843; jimmyamoah@yahoo.com

DEDICATION

To:

Dr. Christian Pat Adjei (of blessed memory), Dr. Ronald Ron Rife, Mr. David Kalb and all the Lecturers who have painstakingly inculcated the truth of the New Testament in my life, so that I can train those who also are in a good position to train other trainees,

then,

Mr. Daniel Ofori, the ‘Asore Panin’ of Tesano Baptist, Accra, and *Evangelist Extraordinaire* (E. E.) of the Ghana Baptist Convention, who is also the CEO of White Chapel group of companies; Rev. John Nkum, Rev. Damprane Agyeman, and all the members of East Legon Cell group of the Ghana Baptist Convention, for their devotion to the consistent search for the truth of the Word of God.

and finally,

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God richly bless all of you.

Amen.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE BOOKS USED IN PARENTHESES

<i>Genesis</i>	Gen	<i>Nahum</i>	Nah
<i>Exodus</i>	Exod	<i>Habakkuk</i>	Hab
<i>Leviticus</i>	Lev	<i>Zephaniah</i>	Zeph
<i>Numbers</i>	Num	<i>Haggai</i>	Hag
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	Deut	<i>Zechariah</i>	Zech
<i>Joshua</i>	Josh	<i>Malachi</i>	Mal
<i>Judges</i>	Judg	<i>Matthew</i>	Matt
<i>Ruth</i>	Ruth	<i>Mark</i>	Mark
<i>1 Samuel</i>	1 Sam	<i>Luke</i>	Luke
<i>2 Samuel</i>	2 Sam	<i>John</i>	John
<i>1 Kings</i>	1 Kgs	<i>Acts</i>	Acts
<i>2 Kings</i>	2 Kgs	<i>Romans</i>	Rom
<i>1 Chronicles</i>	1 Chr	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	1 Cor
<i>2 Chronicles</i>	2 Chr	<i>2 Corinthians</i>	2 Cor
<i>Ezra</i>	Ezra	<i>Galatians</i>	Gal
<i>Nehemiah</i>	Neh	<i>Ephesians</i>	Eph
<i>Esther</i>	Esth	<i>Philippians</i>	Phil
<i>Job</i>	Job	<i>Colossians</i>	Col
<i>Psalms</i>	Psa	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	1 Thess
<i>Proverbs</i>	Prov	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	2 Thess
<i>Ecclesiastes</i>	Eccl	<i>1 Timothy</i>	1 Tim
<i>Song of Songs</i>	Song	<i>2 Timothy</i>	2 Tim
<i>Isaiah</i>	Isa	<i>Titus</i>	Titus
<i>Jeremiah</i>	Jer	<i>Philemon</i>	Phlm
<i>Lamentation</i>	Lam	<i>Hebrews</i>	Heb
<i>Ezekiel</i>	Ezek	<i>James</i>	Jas
<i>Daniel</i>	Dan	<i>1 Peter</i>	1 Pet
<i>Hosea</i>	Hos	<i>2 Peter</i>	2 Pet
<i>Joel</i>	Joel	<i>1 John</i>	1 John
<i>Amos</i>	Amos	<i>2 John</i>	2 John
<i>Obadiah</i>	Obad	<i>3 John</i>	3 John
<i>Jonah</i>	Jonah	<i>Jude</i>	Jude
<i>Micah</i>	Mic	<i>Revelation</i>	Rev

SOME DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOK

<i>Tobit</i>	Tob	<i>Wisdom</i>	Wis
--------------	-----	---------------	-----

COMMON THEOLOGICAL ABBREVIATIONS

Abb	Full meaning	Abb	Full meaning
AD	In the year of our Lord	LXX	<i>Septuagint</i>
BC	Before Christ's advent	NT	New Testament
<i>et al</i>	and others	OT	Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

My New Testament Companion has come out of a demand for a material that will help users of the second part of the Bible, the New Testament (NT), to have an appreciable grasp of issues in the inspired text. As such, areas of studies treated in this book are fundamental issues calculated to lay a good foundation in the understanding of Scriptures. Little wonder, basic issues such as what the Bible is, background to the title 'Bible,' importance of studying the backgrounds to the Bible, are fundamental to this book.

Interesting matters that border on the Science of Introduction and background to the NT are treated to an appreciable extent in the subsequent chapter. Additionally, fundamental issues that undergird the NT Canon like the need for it, the criteria for collection and order of selection of materials into the Canon are raised. Mention is also made of the impact that the canonization of the NT Scriptures has made on humanity in general.

Significant matters such as the political events underlying the NT, which include the emergence of Emperor Augustus Caesar, the kingship of Judea from Antipater to Herod the Great, the role of Herod the Great in the NT era, the successors of Herod the

Great such as Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas and other Herods, are mentioned to some extent. Also included in the discussions are some of the roles of the Roman Governors. There are other interesting subjects like the party groups mentioned in the NT. These include the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Samaritans, Herodians, and other communal parties.

Areas of interactions on the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ include preparations for the birth of Christ, the emergence of synagogues and the ministry of John the Baptist. Added to these major areas of discussion is the Jewish expectation of a Messiah. The dimensions of the holistic ministry of Jesus Christ, the disciples and other followers are also dealt with appreciably. Another pertinent area of discussion is the treatment of the NT Canon. Areas of concern include what the Canon is, the need for the NT Canon, the writing of various books and the order of their collection and selection for the canonization.

Turning to the NT books themselves, there is a probe into what exactly the books of the gospel are, i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Then we have the Acts of the Apostle which deals with events that preceded the day of Pentecost and those that come thereafter, particularly with respect to the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Apostolic or First Century Church. The book

provides a lead into the persecution of the believers and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 which led to the dispersal of the Jews in general. There are also the discussions into the background to some common cities encountered in the NT. Cities whose backgrounds are treated include Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Antioch, Tarsus.

It is not only the backgrounds of some notable cities that are treated but messages underlying the letters to these cities are also dealt with. Issues like the nature of NT letters focusing on the backgrounds and message of Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, and to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Background information and message to other NT letters: Hebrews, James, Peter, John, Jude and the Revelation by Apostle John are also raised in this book.

Special issues in the Pauline epistles such as the advent of spiritual gifts and the Church, the significance of spiritual gifts in the Church, how the spiritual gifts relate with one another in practical unity, abuses associated with the operation of spiritual gifts, issues as to whether the spiritual gifts are needed in the Church today, are all discussed. Other interesting issues that are

discussed include the issues of whether all governments are of God, how Israel will be saved, and the question of whether women should speak or teach in the Church. Matters that will help answer questions about the resurrection of the dead in the context of Christ's experience, such as debunking the denial of resurrection of the dead and an assurance of the glorious resurrection of the saints, is carefully treated. A discussion on Paul's thorn in the flesh, which is an interesting subject for discussion to several NT users, is raised in this book.

Some concerns in some of the epistles of the NT such as the meaning of the Old and New Covenant and how the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant are raised. Along this same tangent, issues such as the work of grace as oppose to the Law, the position of the mediator, justification by faith as opposed to works, implications of the old covenant for the NT Church, Christ's position as a Priest and King, the priesthood of all believers are underlined in this volume.

Issues relating to the ministry of angels and demons in the NT are also featured in this book. They are organized in accordance with the four major divisions of the NT. The discussions on the former cover various aspects such as their origin, their role in the scheme of God and other interesting undergirding areas as

revealed by the NT authors. On the latter, the discussions focus mainly on their activities and the NT authors' revelations on how to deal with these spiritual beings.

Last, but by no means the least, are notes on doctrines such as Gnosticism, Cerinthianism and Docetism which no doubt forms the basis of some of the arguments of John in some of his letters, and brief discussions of some of the special issues in the book of Revelation such as the number "666", the 144,000 Saints, the Lamb upon the Throne, the Beast, Pre-Millennialism versus A-Millennialism and the like.

All the discussions in *My New Testament Companion* are finally summarized in the last chapter. Then they are sealed in that same chapter with a conclusion which draws the curtain of the presentations in the book to a close. No doubt, all users of this book will see it as a real companion to help unravel some of the messages of the New Testament.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

Many definitions may be given to the *Bible*. For example, from a layman's perspective, one may define it as the historical record of God's plan of salvation for humankind. Other users may say that it is a carefully told story of the relationship between God and humanity. On the basis of its usage by many language groups over the centuries, the *Bible* may be argued as having been translated into more languages than any other book in history. It stands to be argued as a unique book that has been honored over the centuries by many cultures — a book given by God and containing a timeless message for all human beings. Many religions have sacred books, but on the basis of comparative studies I am convinced that none of them compares with the *Bible* in terms of its information on existence of life.

What is the *Bible*?

The *Bible* is a divine book comprising the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). It is a rich book because it is loaded with issues that border on all aspects of life. Yet, it is a complex book because of its composition and the apparent observation that its message is not straight-forward in terms of presentation, meaning and comprehension. It was written by over 40 inspired

authors. The collection of 66 works by many different authors, written and compiled over a span of some 1,600 years, is the only book that can support a claim to have been inspired by God himself (2Tim 3:16)¹. It reflects the personalities of the writers and the literary styles of their times. Its content covers all areas of life: geographical navigations, historical narratives, poetical and proverbial expressions, philosophical underpinnings, teachings and messages on moral life, evangelistic sermons, prophetic disclosures as well as grand apocalyptic visions.

By providing clear information, the Bible is the only book that reveals the origin of the whole universe, focuses attention on the creation of the earth, and narrows such a focus down on the relationship between the Almighty God, who is the Creator, and specific elements of creation. It particularly affirms the uniqueness of humankind in the light of their divine mandate on earth. It is not only the book that gives flawless details about the fall of creation but also accounts for the presence of evil and suffering in the world. The unique book reports on God's momentous interventions in history and introduces its users to the distinction between saints (or believers in the true God) and sinners (unbelievers) with an undeniable revelation of the triumph of the power of God over the forces of Satan.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scriptural quotations are from the NIV.

Beneficial to humanity as a guide to life, the Bible gives a clear plan of God's salvation for a sinful world and unveils the future of creation. It does not only provide specific instructions for godly living but also shows the pathway of salvation. It is the only book that gives a vivid revelation about the end of the world, and in its exalted revelation of the Creator it calls on humanity to a life of faith in Him. A book with all these qualities can never be judged as ordinary; it can only be rightly taken as the 'Scriptures which cannot be broken' (John 10:35) and given by the loving God to guide the life of His beloved to a responsible life on earth. It is indeed the only book that can be acclaimed as not originating from the will of any created being but containing an infallible message masterminded by the Creator himself (2Pet 1:20-21)

Background to the title 'Bible': The origin of the English title 'Bible,' is the name *Byblos*², which means 'papyrus.' The name refers to a famous Phoenician city along the Mediterranean coast that was known for the production of papyrus, a material on which information was written. Little wonder, when the 'Book of books' was finally constituted, it received the title 'Bible,' since

² Byblos has become a place of outstanding universal value. It is a World Heritage Center of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The archaeological site is protected by the Lebanese Antiquities Law 133/1937 and law NO 166 of 1933 (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/295/> cf. www.middleeast.com; cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* available at www.britannica.com/place/Byblos.

paper from which a book is produced is itself a product of papyrus. Similarly, the Greek word, *biblia*, which generally means books (or papyrus), was thus applied to the Bible because it is considered as the 'Book of books.'

Importance of studying the backgrounds to the Bible

Studies into the background of the Bible could be considered under the two main divisions: the OT and the NT. The study of the Bible is important for a number of reasons. One of these is to provide users with impressions on a number of matters concerning God's redemption plans. Obviously, the study of the Bible is important because the OT sets forth God's salvation plan right from the first book, Genesis 3:15 and 21, and the NT concludes this plan by revealing that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation (2Tim 3:15). So studying the Scriptures brings a person to the knowledge of God's true part to salvation and eternal life. Other importance of studying the backgrounds to the Bible includes:

- ***Historical purposes:*** The Bible is our only reliable source of knowledge about events of the past like God's dealings with creation in general and particularly humanity, the history of ancient civilizations, the emergence of various religions and their development, and other events over the past centuries.

- ***Information purposes:*** The events in the Scriptures were written down as a source of information for users to know about God's dealing with humanity in all ages (1Cor 10:6).
- ***Learning and/or Practical life purposes:*** The information revealed in the Scriptures are pattern of behavior and activity amongst God's people in all ages which are set forth as examples for subsequent generations throughout history (1Cor 10:11; Rom 15:4; 2Tim 3:16).
- ***Transmission purposes:*** The content of the Scriptures does not only serve as a source of historical information and for learning and/or practical life purposes but also needs to be passed on to successive generations for their own experiences (1Cor 11:2; 2Thess 2:15; 2Tim 2:2).
- ***Prophetic purposes:*** The Bible is our only reliable source of information about the future of creation. It reveals God's ultimate plans and dealings with creation and the destination of humanity.

Background to the New Testament: The 'Science of Introduction' is the overall efforts directed at examining the Scriptural documents to determine its merits and demerits. Whereas one part of it, 'General Introduction,' focuses on the Canon (list of acceptable books) and the Text (language and form of presentation of its message), the other part, 'Special

Introduction,' looks at the individual books and discusses their pertinent areas such as its name, authorship, date and purpose of writing, recipients, etc., in an attempt to prove their genuineness.

In this document, emphasis is on NT matters rather than OT where discussions are sparingly held. This approach is purported to dedicate quality space and time for information that pertain to discussions of interest. Specifically, our discussions will be on matters considered to be relevant for understanding some of the core background issues of the New Testament.

Chapter Summary

In this first chapter, our attention has been devoted to some of the background issues to New Testament studies. Areas that have been considered are fundamental subjects which are needful to the laying of a good foundation in the understanding of Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. In this wise, basic matters such as one will inquire to know what the *Bible* is like the background to the title *Bible*, what the divine document is made up of, and the importance of studying the backgrounds to such a document, are fundamental to this book and have been treated to an appreciable extent. In the end, the presentation narrowed down on the New Testament to give a

brief background to it. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the process of canonization of the New Testament Scriptures.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

In the previous chapter, our discussions concentrated on some of the fundamental matters of the Bible in general before the focus was narrowed down to the New Testament (NT) studies. The submissions here will be devoted to the origin of the NT Canon, its quantity and arrangement, and how it has been preserved throughout the centuries till present. The circumstances that led to the development of the NT Canon is quite complex. The various books of the NT were written by two groups of people: Apostles of Jesus Christ and companions of the apostles after the first century Church was born at Pentecost.

Later, letters were written to individuals, churches, or larger groups of persons to confirm the truth of Christianity, engender belief in Christ, correct problems in the local churches, or argue against error. With time, the books were copied by local Christian communities and passed from one individual or local assembly to others.

The need for the New Testament Canon

As indicated in the preceding chapter, the objective of 'General Introduction' to the Bible (both the OT and NT) is to focus on the

‘Canon,’ which is the list of acceptable books, and the ‘Text,’ the language and form of presentation of its message. With regard to the NT, therefore, a couple of factors definitely necessitated the organization of the books and/or letters which were in circulation in the first century AD into an acceptable Canon. Among them are the following:

1. The early letters were written on papyrus making them wore out rapidly. This led to regular copying leading to many different manuscripts emerging. At a point in time there were many written materials in circulation. This necessitated a means to control the situation. So the step taken was for preservation of the books.
2. Connected to the preceding observation was the determination of which materials were genuine and which ones were false.
3. The need for the NT Canon was also necessitated by the fear of adulteration of the truth because some heretics were setting up their own Canon.
4. Besides the persecution of the believers through various means of tortures, there was a call on them to turn over the sacred books to state officials. Hence, the fear that the genuine documents from the apostles might be destroyed was a major factor.

What Is the Canon?

The word ‘Canon’ means a straight line, a rule, or a standard for measurement. In biblical context, it is applied to the writings of persons regarded as divine instruments such as the prophets, the apostles, and their companions, to see whether they are inspired by God and thus regarded as authoritative and truth pertaining to doctrine and life. In our discussion here, the Canon represents the list of accepted books that constitute the New Testament. A book is canonical because it is considered and accepted to be inspired. In this wise, the leadership of the Church of Christ that began in the first century AD determined the canonicity of the New Testament books.

Inclusion of books in the New Testament

There were questions to be answered or some criteria to consider about a book before its inclusion in the Canon or its acceptance by Christians. The tests of canonicity of any book were as follows:

1. Whether it came through the apostles of the Lord or through persons under the guidance of an apostle such as Luke. In other words, it must be written by a known apostle. This must be:
 - a. Someone who was relatively close to Jesus and/or was involved in His earthly ministry. This is regarded as the eyewitness account.

- b. Someone authenticated by a known apostle.
- 2. It must have been generally accepted by the people of God. This latter test refers to:
 - a. those who received the book from the original writers,
 - b. then by transmission to individuals in the Church,
 - c. finally, transmission from one Church to another.
- 3. There must be evidence of guidance by the Holy Spirit. In other words, there must be proof that the book had to come with the power of God and be effective for changing lives or can edify when read aloud.
- 4. It must have the ability to edify when read aloud: The book had to come with the power of God and be effective for changing lives. It must have the universal consciousness of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. That is, it must have been generally accepted by the people of God. This test refers first to the ones who received the book and then its transmission to other churches.
- 5. The text of the book must be devoid of contradictions, inaccuracies, and the like, and should be consistent with existing Scriptures.
- 6. The book must bring about a universal consciousness of the Church or God's Kingdom. That is, the establishment of God's Church must be revealed through the book.

Order of Collection (Acceptance)

Determination of the New Testament Canon took place over a long period reaching its final form at the synod of Carthage in AD 397. The order was as follows:

1. Initially, it comprised parts of Luke, and 10 letters of Paul.
2. Later, all the epistles of Paul were added by AD 100.
3. Then there was the collection of the gospels after AD 100.
4. The Muratorian Canon existed by AD 180. In all, 22 books had been accepted. However, some books were questioned by Eusebius, one of the Church Fathers³, in AD 324. Books such as Hebrews, James, 2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude and Revelation had some questions about their authorship.
5. In AD 367 – Athanasius, another Church Father, presented the list of 27 books of the New Testament which needed to be accepted.
6. In AD 397 – the Council at Carthage approved all the 27 New Testament books as canonical.

Manuscripts of the New Testament

For many centuries AD, the New Testament books were copied by individuals of local Christian communities. Such copies were then

³ The Church Fathers were the influential leaders, primarily teachers and writers with deep theological insights, who emerged in the early church immediately after the Apostles.

passed from one group of believers to the other for decades. However, since the early letters were written on papyrus, they wore out rapidly and required regular copying.

Consequently, many manuscripts of the New Testament abound. Indeed, there are more than five thousand existing copies, many with New Testament books entirely or largely intact. Also, there are several older translations of the New Testament into languages like Syriac, Coptic and Latin that have survived many centuries. No work of antiquity comes near the New Testament for authenticity as the word of God because its composition was under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

Some of the existing documents were not added to the books of the Canon because they were designated as being 'apocryphal' in nature. *Apocrypha* means 'hidden.' This term came to be applied to Jewish literature that were not canonical but were respected and sometimes supposed to be Scriptures. They were called, hidden, based on 2 Esdras 14:19-48 (26, 44-48). However, Jewish religious writings excluded them from the Hebrew Bible but included in the Christian OT until reformers set them apart as Apocryphal. Fredericksen (2019) corroborates the position that Apocryphal or 'hidden' books are not accepted as canonical by Jews and Protestants.

Nevertheless, Council of Trent (of Roman Catholic Church) in AD 1546 accepted the Apocrypha books and they became known as the Deutero-canonical books. Consequently, Bibles used by the Roman Catholic Church contain these books which are usually distributed among the historical, prophetic and wisdom books of the Old Testament or fixed between the Old and the New Testaments.

What the Roman Catholic Church refers to as 'Apocrypha' is the same document that the Protestant usually call 'Pseudo-epigrapher' (bearing false inscriptions). This was because many of the books were claimed to be written by Old Testament characters like Enoch, Moses and Solomon. They are works of similar character and date which have never been considered as Scriptures. The Apocryphal (or Deutero-canonical books) are the following: Tobit (or Tobias), Judith, The Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Baruch, 1 and 2 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Additions to Esther, Additions to Daniel, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The song of the Three Children, and Letter of Jeremiah.

The Impact of the New Testament Canon

It is hard to underestimate the impact that the Canon generally referred to as the 'New Testament' has had on the larger world

community and the Church over the centuries. Particularly, the Canon has brought order in the number of books that the various churches could use as inspired. The agreed books have made it easier for the Church to not only receive but also depend on what is accepted as the New Testament Scriptures, a volume full of inspired messages that have come from the same source, the Holy Spirit, through all the writers.

Though the process of canonization was not an easy task because it involved careful scrutiny of lots of documents and has passed through many hands spanning many years, the outcome of such inspired efforts which is a single volume of the constituted books, now called the New Testament, has become easier to handle for use, circulate, and better preserved. The New Testament, combined with the Old Testament, constitute a single document, the Bible, which has become the guide to many believers of the Eternal God.

Chapter Summary

The focus of discussions in this chapter has been the process of canonization of the New Testament Scriptures. Interesting issues that border on the 'Science of Introduction' and background to the New Testament are treated to an appreciable extent. Fundamental matters that undergird the NT Canon, like the need

for such a divine document in one piece, the criteria for collection of the individual books, the order of selection of such materials to form an acceptable NT Canon, and most importantly, the impact that the canonization has made, are fairly dealt with in this volume. In the next chapter, attention will be directed to some of the political events of the New Testament era which impacted upon the message of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER THREE

SOME POLITICAL EVENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA

It is only Christ who is the focus of Christianity; indeed, the entire biblical message revolves around and rests upon Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ alone who makes the gospel of grace possible. He alone has delivered mankind from the penalty of sin and has conquered death. In the light of this, the biblical teaching about Jesus, in the words of Cottrell, “is both the pinnacle and the bedrock of Christian doctrine” (Cottrell, 1992, p. 61).

Studies into theology, particularly, the ones that focus on the area traditionally known as ‘Christology,’ mostly concentrate on the issues which deals with the person of Jesus Christ. McGrath (1994, p. 275) writes that although the New Testament is the primary source for the teachings of Christ, issues about His personality are set in an OT context. From Apostle Peter’s great confession at Caesarea Philippi that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16), the basic question that confronts both believers and biblical scholars is, what does this mean?

The answer to this question provides us with details of the person and the work (or office) of Christ which will be visited in a

subsequent chapter. In the meantime, the discussions will focus on how the Roman authorities became connected to the people of Israel. It begins with the Caesars.

The Emergence of Emperor Augustus Caesar

A narrative of historical events covering the transfer of power from the Greeks to the Romans till a period beyond the death of Jesus Christ is carefully presented in *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* by Bock (2002, p. 81-106). Much of the subsequent discussions are captured in Bock's chronicle of events. The story of how God prepared the political world of the first century BC for Christ's birth is a fascinating one and involves a special person born as Octavian in 63 BC. After the murder of his uncle Julius Caesar in 44 BC by Brutus and Cassius (Tikkanen, 2020; cf. Mark, 2019), Octavian embarked on a ten-year civil war in which he emerged victorious.

Octavian began his rule in 31 BC and was crowned with the title Augustus ('revered,' or 'sacred') in 27 BC (cf. www.history.com, 2009). Now called Augustus Caesar, he thus became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire and the first Emperor of Rome (Mark, 2019). His call for a census towards the end of the millennium coincided with the birth of Jesus. Octavian died around AD 14. This is confirmed by Luke 3:1 which reveals that at the onset of

the ministry of John the Baptist (most probably in AD 29), Tiberius Caesar, the Emperor who succeeded Octavian, had been on the throne for fifteen (15) years.

Kingship of Judea: From Antipater to Herod the Great

One person who took advantage of the Roman civil war and the confusion in the rulership of Palestine to strengthen the position of his family was Antipater (ref. diagram on page 22), from Idumea, a region at the lower part of Palestine. Antipater received Roman citizenship and was made Roman Procurator over Judea. Consequently, Judea enjoyed great protection and privileges from Rome. Antipater was given the task of claiming the whole country for himself. With the help of Roman soldiers, he succeeded in taking Jerusalem in 37 BC.

Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II, was executed at Antioch by the Romans. The Hasmonean power thus came to an end. Antipater put his eldest son, Phasael, in charge of Jerusalem and its surroundings. His second son, Herod, who later was named Herod the Great and married to a granddaughter of Hyrcanus (Mariamme, for political reasons) was also rewarded with control over Galilee from 37-4 BC.

The role of Herod the Great in the New Testament

By the time of the death of Antipater, Herod the Great had been made king over Galilee and was a Roman vassal. This gave him the freedom and the right to levy taxes with considerable freedom of action. He was not responsible to any provincial governor but directly to the Roman Emperor in Rome. He created in Palestine a Hellenistic kingdom of considerable prestige. Herod the Great engaged in enormous building campaign. He rebuilt Samaria and named it Sabaste, built the new city of Caesarea on the coast, fortified Jerusalem and built series of fortress-palaces at Herodium, Masada and Machaerus.

Herod the Great paid exceptional attention to Jericho and developed it as his countryseat. It was fitted with a theatre, stadium, and a tower. His projects were financed through heavy taxation. For example, sometimes, he would reduce taxation in an attempt to please them, however, he would still incur their displeasure with other issues. Several steps were occasionally taken by Herod the Great to please the Jews. For example, he tore down the temple which had suffered considerable damage and begun a building project acclaimed as one of the most beautiful in the ancient world. Much of this project was done in his lifetime but was continued long after him (John 2:20).

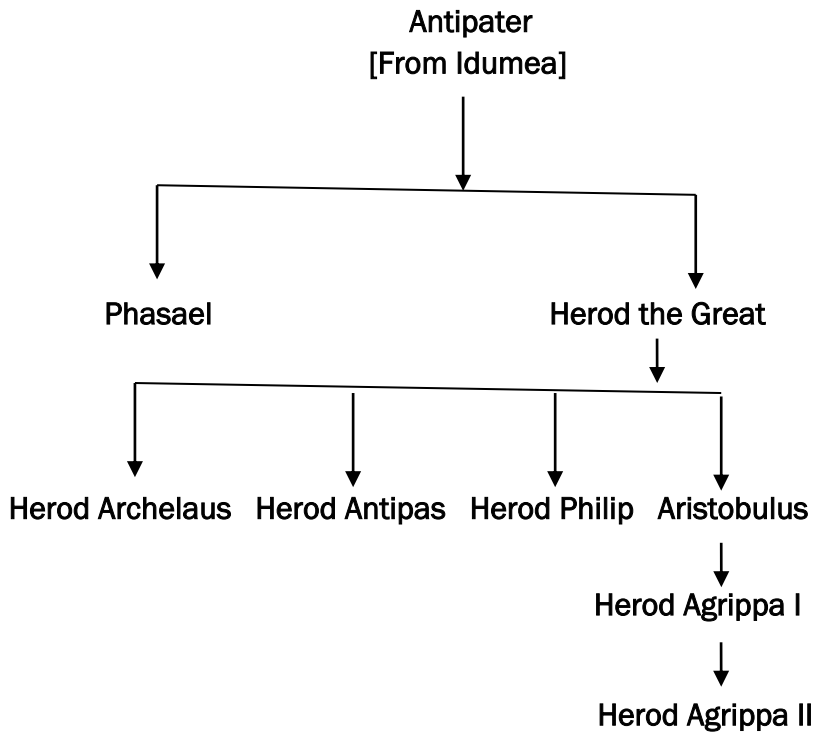
Herod the Great and the Birth of Jesus Christ

Many Jews were greatly oppressed during the reign of Herod the Great, so they resented him. He made and unmade High Priests arbitrarily. His opponents were brutally murdered, including his wife and relatives. The Jews never liked Herod the Great because he was too wicked and scandalous. In fact, the Jews never acknowledged him as king, despite all his efforts to eliminate all oppositions to his throne.

According to Matthew 2:1-23, Jesus was born at a time when Herod the Great was the king in charge of Judea. This means that he was the Herod who employed a persecution complex, which affected several babies at the time of the birth of Christ (Matt 2). It is likely that he died in the early years of Christ's birth. Consequently, the Jews resorted to several rioting against his successors until Rome ratified that the area of reign be split among his sons.

Successors of Herod the Great

In his will, Herod the Great named his son Herod Archelaus as king over Judea, Samaria and Idumea (Matt 2:22), and his other sons; Herod Antipas and Herod Philip, as tetrarchs as shown in the diagram on the next page:



(Diagram showing the descendants of Antipater)

Herod Antipas was tetrarch in Galilee and Perea while Herod Philip was tetrarch in the North East regions of Palestine comprising Iturea and Trachonitis (including the regions of Batanea and Panias), and Lysanias was tetrarch of the region of Abilene (Luke 3:1; ref. diagram on page above).

Herod Archelaus: This is the Herod who succeeded his father, Herod the Great over Judea, Samaria and Idumea. It was the misrule of Herod Archelaus that influenced Joseph to settle with

Mary and Jesus in Nazareth, of Galilee, when they returned from Egypt. It was the same misrule of Archelaus that led to his removal from office and banishment by Emperor Augustus in AD 6 after only 10 years on the throne. In fact, except for some brief periods, Roman governors ruled in all the former territory of King Archelaus.

Herod Antipas: He was a clever and ambitious person. It was this Herod Antipas that John the Baptist rebuked for divorcing his wife to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother (Mark 6:18). When in retaliation Herodias induced her dancing daughter to demand the head of John the Baptist, Antipas yielded to the wicked request (Mark 6:20-29; Matt 14:3-12). Jesus called him 'that fox' (Luke 13:32). He met with Jesus when he came to Jerusalem for the Passover in AD 33, and Jesus later stood trial before him (Luke 23:7-12).

Other Herods: The New Testament mentions Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (through Aristobulus), who was undoubtedly an arrogant person. He was the one who executed James the Apostle and son of Zebedee and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). It was this Herod who was struck by an angel of the Lord and eaten by worms before he died (Acts 12:23). After his death, he was succeeded by Herod Agrippa II. This great-

grandson of Herod the Great was the one who heard Paul's self-defense and became persuaded about the authenticity of Christianity (see Acts 26:28).

Roman Governors: It has been indicated earlier that Roman governors ruled Archelaus' former territory which included Judea, Samaria and Idumea after he was dethroned. One of these governors, called Pontius Pilate (Luke 3:1), was the one who sat in judgment on Jesus. The governors Felix (Acts 23:23-26) at Caesarea, and Festus who succeeded him (Acts 24:27; 25:3-22), are also mentioned by the New Testament as Roman leaders who heard Paul's case.

From AD 6-66, Judea was part of the province of Syria but with semi-independence status. The nation was ruled by men called procurators whose seat of government was at Caesarea. All these were military governors or procurators who were directly responsible to Rome and took charge of difficult provinces. Governor Florus' raiding of the temple treasury ignited the Jewish revolt of AD 66-74, which reached a climax with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 by Titus, the Roman General.

Though it is not easy to draw a link between the political leadership of the New Testament era and the ministry of the Lord

Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Church, the ultimate role of such political hierarchy cannot be completely overlooked. The series of events beginning with the flight of His parents from Bethlehem to Egypt at the time of His birth to His journey to the cross at Golgotha (which means the Place of the Skull, Matt 27:33; cf. Mark 15:22) are punctuated by certain roles of some of the political leaders. It can therefore be concluded that the political activities of Jesus' day influenced His ministry, either positively or negatively; the political leaders are the instruments that God used to shape the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Summary

Attention has been given to some of the pertinent political events of the New Testament era in this chapter. Significant matters such as the political events underlying some of the events of the New Testament, which include the emergence of Emperor Augustus Caesar, the kingship of Judea from Antipater to Herod the Great, the role of Herod the Great in the New Testament period, the successive kings, (i.e., the Herods), are mentioned to some extent. Also included in the discussions that have been dealt with here are some of the roles of the Roman Governors. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on some of the party groups that are mentioned in the New Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME OF THE PARTY GROUPS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Attention has been given to some of the pertinent political events of the New Testament era in the immediate past chapter. However, there are certain developments that serve as foundation to these New Testament events. During the Intertestamental period, there were series of Jewish struggles with pagan overlords because of the corruption of their beliefs and practices, and/or interference with Jewish religious thinking and life. Consequently, the period witnessed the emergence of different groups which arose primarily to defend one position or the other, in their efforts to interpret and defend true Judaism. The commonest among these groups have been discussed in the next section.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin represents an official Jewish council in Palestine under Roman rule, to which various political, religious, and judicial functions have been attributed. The word is taken from the Greek word for council, *synedrion*, and designated for the supreme Jewish legislative and judicial court known as the Great

Sanhedrin or simply the Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem (cf. Promeet and Rodriguez, 2020). The group arose during the Intertestamental period after the Maccabean revolt. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 rabbis. This number, according to Shurpin (n.d.), agreed with the instructions that the Almighty God gave Moses: “Gather for me 70 men from the elders of Israel.” Moses was the one who presided over them, as the verse continues: “And they shall stand there with you” (Exod 24:1; cf. Num 11:16-25). This means that the 70 judges in addition to Moses become 71 persons.

The composition of the Sanhedrin is sometimes in dispute. The controversy usually centers on the two major parties of the day: Sadducees and Pharisees. While some argue that the Sanhedrin was made up of Sadducees, others say it was rather the Pharisees who formed the group. Then also there are those who hold the view that it was a mixture of the two groups.

Indeed, clear indications in the gospels are that it was constituted by the Sadducees who dominated the group, then the Pharisees as well as any past and ruling High (or Chief) Priest. At a point in time, especially during the period of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it had become powerful enough to be the highest decision-making body of the Jewish state.

Blackman *et al* (n.d.) observed the following:

The Sanhedrin judged accused lawbreakers but could not initiate arrests. It required a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect. There were no attorneys. Instead, the accusing witness stated the offense in the presence of the accused and the accused could call witnesses on his own behalf. The court questioned the accused, the accusers, and the defense witnesses. The Great Sanhedrin dealt with religious and ritualistic Temple matters, criminal matters appertaining to the secular court, proceedings in connection with the discovery of a corpse, trials of adulterous wives, tithes, preparation of Torah Scrolls for the king and the Temple, drawing up the calendar and the solving of difficulties relating to ritual law.

The Sanhedrin were recognized by the Roman authorities in that the latter relied on them to ensure that the Jews complied with Roman laws. The power to imprison, set a prisoner free or sentence the person to death depended on them. Their operation was like the parliament of many present-day countries. The book of Acts gives an account of the trials of Peter and John before “the council and all the senate,” pointing to a split between the

Pharisaic and Sadducean members of the Sanhedrin. The basic difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees lay in their respective attitudes toward the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and the problem of finding in it answers to questions and bases for decisions about legal and religious matters.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees were a Jewish group mentioned, either collectively or as individuals, ninety-eight times in the New Testament, mainly in the gospels. This group had their origin in the Maccabean era. The Pharisees emerged as a party of laymen and scribes in contradistinction to the Sadducees. They had their origin probably in the Hasidim and aimed at sanctification through separation from all that was heathen, unclean, and sinful. They believed in the ministry of angels and in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They were anti-nationalist. They strove to guide towards holiness through education. They demanded a school for every town in Judea. They strongly opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine.

The Pharisees believed that the Law that God gave to Moses was twofold, consisting of the Written Law and the Oral Law, i.e., the teachings of the prophets and the oral traditions of the Jewish people. Hence, they are credited with developing the traditional

interpretations and application of the law as well as the development of the OT theology, i.e., its beliefs, teachings, and explanations. According to their teaching, the Torah and oral laws were both binding. They believed in the universality of God and the individuality of soul. Scott Jr. (n.d.) notes concerning the two groups: “Whereas the priestly Sadducees taught that the written Torah was the only source of revelation, the Pharisees admitted the principle of evolution in the Law: humans must use their reason in interpreting the Torah and in applying it to contemporary problems.” It is worthy of note that it is the Pharisees that helped Judaism to survive even after the fall of Jerusalem around AD 70.

The Sadducees

The Jewish party which consisted of High Priests, aristocratic families, and merchants — the wealthier elements of the population, was the Sadducees. They tended to have good relations with the Roman rulers of Palestine, and generally represented the conservative view within Judaism (Scott Jr., n.d.). They are usually considered as the ‘Righteous ones.’ They emerged in the Maccabean era.

Originally, they were formed of priests and nobles. Yet this was the aristocratic party of Jesus’ period, made up of the well-to-do

and dominated by the hierarchy of upper-level priests who supervised Greek culture in Judea and thus would be considered the political 'liberals' of that time. The group formed the controlling body of the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees refused to accept any precept as binding unless it was based directly on the Torah, i.e., the written Law. This means that they recognized only the written Torah and not the Oral tradition which is spread by the Pharisees. Moreover, they considered themselves as the only authorized interpreters of the Torah. Unlike the Pharisees, they neither believed in the ministry of angels nor in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They considered themselves as nationalists who were dedicated to fighting for the survival of the Jewish state.

Together with the Pharisees, they contributed to the maintenance of strict adherence to the Laws and Jewish traditions. In addition, this group, with the Pharisees, dominated the Sanhedrin and took the lead in the plot to dispose of Jesus. It is likely that by AD 70, that is after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Sadducees had disappeared as a party because they were not mentioned in most of the books of the New Testament that were written beyond this period.

The Scribes

This is a group of persons mentioned in the New Testament which was composed of teachers of the law and/or people engaged in writing, which correspond to present-day secretaries, depending on the translation one uses. This class was made up of men who had dedicated their lives to the study of the Old Testament Law and its traditional interpretations. They were the sages or rabbis whose years of study under acknowledged masters had won them the coveted recognition as ‘experts in the law.’ Little wonder, they were sometimes also referred to as lawyers.

The Samaritans

The Samaritans were a people of mixed race and culture. They originated from the foreigners that were brought in by the Assyrians to settle with the Israelites who were left by the Assyrians in Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and neighboring towns, after the kingdom fell to them in 722/721 BC. These foreigners included those from Babylon, Cuthah, Huva, Hamath and perhaps some Ammonites, Moabites, and Midianites. They intermarried with the remnant Israelites on the land.

These intermarriages with the original inhabitants gave rise to a new breed of people later referred to as the Samaritans. That is,

their name was connected to Samaria which happened to be the capital of the Northern Kingdom before its fall to the Assyrians. As a result, the Samaritans were often rejected by the Jews as part of them because they were not full-blooded members. Even though at a point in time some priests were brought among them to teach the statutes of Yahweh, there are indications that they still worshipped the gods they brought from their lands as well as Yahweh. This led to a syncretized Yahweism.

The Herodians

This was a Jewish political party that supported Herod Antipas and the policies instituted by the Romans. They were enemies of the Pharisees but together with them, they were found to be the main opposition to the ministry of Jesus and tried on many occasions to trap him with tricky questions (Matt 22:15-17; Mark 3:6).

Communal Parties

Other Jewish parties emerged as communal parties living a semi-monastic, ascetic life, e.g., Essenes. They originated from the Pharisees party. They lived in communities in the Dead Sea area and held all things in common. They were almost ascetic. In extreme cases, some of them lived celibate lives and rather adopted children. They were experts in prediction and as part of

their doctrines, they believed in angels and in predestination. Other communal parties were the 'Unity of the New Covenant' in Qumran; and the 'Therapeutae.'

As was expressed in the previous chapter, it is not easy to completely overlook the link between the activities of the religious leadership of Jesus' day and His ministry. Indeed, all the events from His birth to His death and resurrection are interspersed with roles of some of the religious leaders or groups. Therefore, it is not hard to admit that the activities of the religious groups of Jesus' day influenced His ministry in one way or the other. The groups or their leaders are the instruments that God used to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ to pass.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has been devoted to the organization and operations of some of the party groups mentioned in the NT. The major ones are the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees. There are other party groups which are also mentioned in the NT. These include the Scribes, Samaritans, Herodians, and some communal parties. Brief notes on some of these groups that bother on their roles and impact on some of the events of the NT were presented on all these groups. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

The few decades before the emergence of Jesus Christ into the scene of the physical world witnessed the Roman Empire in an amazingly complex situation. Around the first century BC, the Roman empire included many different ethnic groups. The Romans captured Jerusalem in 63 BC, an event that witnessed great loss of Jewish lives. Judah became a vassal Roman Province. Palestine was under the Roman governor of Syria. The Romans enforced their decision in Palestine by installing a High Priest and appointing a king for the Jews between 63-40 BC. It was estimated to include about 54 million people, of whom about 5 million were Jews.

Preparations for the Ministry of Jesus Christ

It is common knowledge that the ancient Greek and Roman religions served as the religious background of the New Testament (cf. Bediako, 2000, p. 36). However, to some extent, no one can discount the stronger influence of the Jewish religion in the regions of Palestine, particularly, Jerusalem, which was the heart of the NT. Thus, many events had to serve as part of the underground preparations towards the earthly ministry of Jesus

within such a heterogeneous religious context. A couple of issues and policy decisions that really helped to lay the platform for His ministry are as follows:

- While Roman law was supreme, people could follow their own customs and maintain their own court systems. So, under this policy, the Jewish Sanhedrin, their highest decision-making body, did not only administer the Old Testament Law, but also served as a supreme court for the Jews. They had the mandate to ensure compliance to the Law.
- The Jewish courts were frequently sending out pairs of sages to settle cases in Jewish communities within the empire.
- Roman taxes were relatively light and in return, people throughout the empire received many benefits.
- Another benefit, linked to prosperity, was the great mobility that the empire promoted. There were no national borders to cross, no foreign languages for traders to learn. Moreover, large merchant ships carried cargoes swiftly throughout the Mediterranean basin and even to the British Isles.
- A network of roads was constructed so that Roman legions and people could have easy access to various parts of the colony. This step also permitted rapid transit of people, goods, and information.

- Apparently, the greatest of these benefits was peace in the empire. Roman peace (*Pax Romania*) enforcers, particularly military men, were ubiquitous (cf. www.history.com, 2019). Roman power was supreme, so the people in it were neither torn by unrest among themselves nor wars with their neighbors.

In spite of these factors of the Graeco-Roman culture which together served as a platform for the ministry of the Lord himself to take-off, it was obvious that if His followers (who were later appropriately referred to as Christians) “were to achieve any real measure of valid and settled identity, they needed to come to terms with the various facets of that culture from which they themselves had emerged” (Bediako, 1999, p. 16). This, they achieved, though not on a silver platter; they did so at the peril of their lives because of the many persecutions they faced.

The emergence of Synagogues: Though the Synagogues arose in the OT period, there was no clear mention of it as it is in the NT. This special worship arrangement arose during the period of the captivity of the people of the Judah (the Southern Kingdom) by the Neo-Babylonians, under the Emperors of Nebuchadnezzar. During this period, the Jews were given a certain degree of freedom to worship the Lord, the Most-High God, even though

sometimes, they had conflicts and were persecuted, as encountered by Daniel (ref. Dan 3).

The freedom of the Judeans notwithstanding, they missed the Temple worship and even exercised doubts about God's presence in a foreign land because they yearned for the worship of Him (Psa 137). The Lord was to show them that He was sovereign and could be worshipped in any part of His creation. The Synagogues consequently came into existence as meeting places for the reading, teaching, and interpretation of the Law.

The worship service was carried out in a non-sacrificial form yet following as closely as possible the order of the sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem temple. By this way, the Jews imparted to the other nationals in Babylon the knowledge of the true God and the hope of the Messiah (Dan 3, 4:28-37; 5:10-12; cf. Matt 2:1-2). The synagogue worship required a quorum of ten (10) without any restriction on the number of women.

Jewish visitors were encouraged to read passages from the scrolls and share words of exhortation with the group. The synagogues continued to be places of gathering for the Jews during the period of the Lord Jesus Christ and He also worshipped there.

The Jewish expectation of a Messiah

The Greek word 'Christos' is translated from the Hebrew (or Aramaic) term *Mashiah*, which has its most familiar anglicized form as 'Messiah,' meaning 'one who has been anointed' (McGrath, 1994, p. 276). The title 'Messiah,' that is, 'the anointed one' is translated as *Christos* in Greek or 'Christ' in English. In the context of the Old Testament, anointing is the equivalent of being ordained to a particular office or work. The 'Christ' is thus the one whom God has ordained or appointed to work the works of salvation.

A connection exists between 'Messiah,' the Anointed One, and the fact that prophets (1Kings 19:16; Isa 61:1), priests (Exod 30:30; 40:13) and kings (1Sam 10:1; 15:1; 1Kings 19:15-16) were inaugurated by anointing (Ryrie, 1999, p. 292). In the OT, prophets, priests, and kings were literally anointed with oil to consecrate them for special services or to signify their endowment of the Spirit of God (Lev 4:3; 8:12; 1 Sam 10:1, 6; Psa 105:15; Isa 61:1). In the short term, God established these three offices to supply leadership for His people.

In the long term, however, as Ryrie argues, this practice in the Old Testament period pointed to the promised arrival of God's 'Anointed One,' who would fulfill all the three eternal offices: that

of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King. Therefore, a way was prepared for Jesus to come and combine in Himself the function of all three offices which is our concern here. To this end, the Israelites for many centuries looked forward to a glorious period of the reign of a Messiah.

However, towards the first century BC, the expectations of the Jews for this Messiah who would become their king, and not only deliver them from Roman domination, but also lead them to rebuild the nation of Israel to its former glory had heightened. By looking for a military deliverer and a political Messiah, the Jews minimized the messianic roles of prophet and priest. It was against this backdrop that Jesus began His ministry.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

On the strength of solid historical support, Bock (2002, p. 77), places the life of Jesus within a range of between 6 and 4 BC and His death between AD 30 and 33. Jesus' ministry was preceded by that of John the Baptist, the One to prepare the way for the Messiah, which is recorded in Matthew 11:1-19. The reference by Jesus himself that John the Baptist "is the Elijah who was to come" (Matt 11:14), was only a figure of speech or typology. It means that how John the Baptist dressed, his attitude towards food the daily necessities of life including his life of isolation in

the wildness and his hard utterances, were just like Prophet Elijah. His reference also means that the two, share similar spiritual and physical resemblance, and never to indicate that Elijah had reincarnated as some might argue (Matt 11:14; cf. Mal 4:5).

John the Baptist was specially anointed and commissioned by God for a special task and was regarded as a great person. According to Jesus, no man born of a woman is as great as John the Baptist. He was commissioned to not only prepare the pathway for Jesus but also reveal Him as the 'Messiah' (*Christos* or Christ) to the world. Therefore, John the Baptist knew Jesus as the 'Son of God' and the promised 'Deliverer' of the Jews. This revelation, notwithstanding, he still sent his disciples to Jesus with a question; whether He was the 'Messiah' or not.

No doubt, John the Baptist wanted a declaration and confirmation from Jesus himself that He was indeed the 'Anointed One' that he (John) had both spoken of and had introduced to the people. It is also very likely that, John sent his disciples to Jesus so that after his disciples themselves had heard from the 'Messiah,' their faith would be strengthened. Most probably, such a confirmation would reconcile the ministry of John to that of Jesus and thus clear any potential barriers to the furtherance of the New

Testament ministry. Jesus' answer to John the Baptist, i.e., "the blinds receive their sight, the lame walk..." is a fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 6:1-3, and a confirmation from Him as the Messiah.

Continuing, Jesus revealed that among those born of men no one is greater than John the Baptist but he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Indeed, those in the Kingdom of God are greater than John the Baptist because of their entry and abiding faith through Christ (Heb 10:35-39). Moreover, He made mention of those who are entering into the kingdom by force (Matt 11:12), which might be understood as people who despite every difficulty will always persist in the faith in Christ and hold on to God. As Jacob did when he said to the man who struggled with him for a whole night: "I will never leave you until you bless me" (Gen 32:24-28). Thus, such people are those who can possess the Kingdom of God irrespective of worldly challenges.

One of the surprising events of the New Testament is the death of John the Baptist. Clearly, his death was a very painful experience; he was beheaded by Herod Antipas to fulfil his daughter's request. As to why God did not deliver him when he was imprisoned or even from such a cruel death, it is hard to explain.

However, it might be conjectured that John the Baptist had finished his ministry at that time. Hence, there was no need for him to continue living (John 3:25-26). Definitely, the type of death John experienced teaches that God may allow any of His servants to face some kind of death in order to test their faith.

Total Salvation: Focus of the Holistic Ministry of Jesus Christ

The first few books of the New Testament provide enough details of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Christ. From all indications, Jesus practiced what could be regarded as holistic ministry, in that He focused on all the needs of the totality of a person. In other words, He ministered to the whole being: body, soul, and spirit of the people He encountered.

The holistic ministry of the Lord is what is also described as the total gospel. This involved not only teaching (or preaching), healings (or deliverance) and praying, but also restoration of hope and joy as well as provision of basic needs like food to those who become believers. In fact, Jesus did not only call people to follow Him, but He also taught them how to engage in the various ministries of God's Kingdom. In this wise, He created different forms of jobs to His followers. Despite the challenges from both the Jewish and the worldly powers He persisted in His earthly ministry to the end and encouraged His followers to do same.

The holistic ministry of Jesus also included ministering to all the different groups or classes of people. These included the Jews and the Gentiles; men and women, adults, and children, the rich and the poor; the educated and the illiterates; the pious and the sinners; those in the cities and in the villages; those in authority as well as their servants; He neither discriminated in any way nor differentiated between any existing societal grouping or classes.

What really mattered most to Jesus was how He would bring people to the saving power of His message. To this end, though He received all manner of individuals and groups, He remained focused towards a certain group of people in society. This special group of people are those regarded as sinners, to whom He had come to call into repentance (Luke 5:32; 24:45-47). While His encounter with the self-righteous made them uncomfortable and perhaps ashamed, on the contrary, His special accommodation of sinners made them felt comfortable and ready to repent. Little wonder, He was referred to as a friend of sinners (Matt 11:19; cf. Luke 7:34).

Commenting on such open-arms attitude of Jesus towards sinners, Carey (2009, p. 27) notes:

One might not be shocked that Jesus kept company with sinners, especially if he aimed to

reform them. If one assumes this conventional view – that Jesus befriended sinners to bring them to repentance – a passage like Luke 5:32 makes sense: “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners toward repentance.”

Jesus indeed engaged in His ministry without the normal human limitations to time. He went all out, working every time and ensuring that He focused on His main earthly mission and vision wherever opportunities existed, as indicated in John 9:4. As a true shepherd, He was “a caring loving guide to the sheep” (Heward-Mills, 2016, p. 3). He ministered everyday throughout the week, even including days that the Jews regarded or celebrated as Sabbaths. He had the passion to engage in the work His ‘Father’ had entrusted to Him even in the night.

This notwithstanding, He saw resting of the body as a necessary part of ministry such that He could take His disciples to a solitary place so that they could rest (Mark 6:31). Indeed, there are times when the most sacred work that any child of God can do is to get quality rest, “for, he grants sleep to those he loves” (Psa 127:2). This should be regarded as an important ingredient of Christian ministry and should be one of the pertinent charges that must be spelt out to ministers of the gospel.

One of the significant areas of Jesus' ministry is seen in His desire to involve others in the Father's work. This is observed in His readiness to train people in order that they could take over and continue when the need arose. He did not only teach His disciples the rudiments of ministry, but He went ahead to grant the opportunity to demonstrate what they had learnt from Him. Against this backdrop, He often sent them out so that they would get the needed 'on the job' training as well as the required practical experience.

The final part of Jesus' holistic ministry is His work on the cross. As the representative of humanity, Jesus Christ received all the punishment of the judgment incurred by the sin of Adam and transferred to his race. His willingness to be crucified on the cross and His resurrection exalted Him into a special position. He now occupies a unique position before God's throne as the Mediator between God and humanity. As the Mediator, He has become the conduit for God's pardoning grace to reach humanity.

The Greatest Testimony about Jesus: Signs and miracles were important to prove the divinity of Jesus and the authenticity of the gospel. Clearly, their occurrences were so common with the ministry of Jesus that even those who often opposed His presence and tried to stone Him had to admit that they were not

doing so because of the miracles (John 10:33). O'Donovan (1996) observes: "The statements of Christ's enemies are some of the strongest proofs in history that Jesus really did perform great miracles..." (p. 12)

Notwithstanding, these signs and miracles were not meant by God to replace the power of the His word when spoken under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that in Caesarea Philippi, Simon Peter made a great confession about Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). However, Jesus' reply: "...And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church..." (Matt 16:18), has received many varied interpretations. Some interpret this statement to mean that it is the personality, Peter, which in Greek means "a rock" (and is similar in meaning to Cephas, which in Syriac also means "a rock or stone"), that would be the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Other interpreters are of the view that it is the truth in Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" that Jesus to said, "...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." In other words, the Church that Jesus would build would not be on Peter but rather on his confession. Of course, any Bible reader and/interpreter should not lose sight of

the fact that Christ himself is called a rock (ref. Isa 28:16; 1Pet 2:8). Thus, Jesus' reference to Peter's confession might be taken as an affirmation that Peter has confirmed Him (Jesus) as the biblical rock upon which the foundation of God's people could be built. This means that the 'rock,' that is, Jesus Christ himself (1Cor 10:4) is the foundation on which the Church will be built (1Cor 3:11; Matt 7:25).

The confession by Simon son of Jonah (same as Simon Bar-jona) indicates that those who believe in Jesus build their hope on a solid rock. It also means that those who demonstrate their faith in Jesus constitute the Church, i.e., *ecclesia*, meaning the 'called out ones' (John 6:69; 9:35-39; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Acts 8:37; 1John 4:15; 5:5-13). Such believers, by virtue of their faith in Christ, are not moved, and the gates of hell can never overcome them. Jesus appeared before the throne of grace (or 'Mercy-seat') once for all humankind and made the propitiation (a gift to turn away God's wrath against the disobedience of humanity) for their sins.

The redemption work accomplished by Christ for humanity has retrospective as well as prospective efficacy. This means that Christ's work is not only for those who have believed in Him to the present period but also for those yet unborn. According to Newell

(1972, p. 125-126), what this implies is that from the time of Adam, God in His forbearance did not punish sin according to His justice. Rather, by His eternal mercy, He took the sins of humanity to the cross. On this occasion, God held an open Judgment day for all sins by displaying absolute righteousness and justice in not sparing His own son, on ‘whose shoulders,’ He put the sins of the whole human race. In the atoning death of Christ, Newell writes: “God’s righteousness was fully exhibited in His wrath against sin.”

The prophet Isaiah rightly reveals: “...He was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him...and He has laid on him (Christ) the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5, 6). Undeniably, God used Christ to work out the deliverance of the sinful human race. In doing so, He justified all those who believed in the atonement that was provided by Jesus on the cross and declared them ‘righteous.’ That is, the sinner is accepted as a just person by God. He did all this not only because He is just, but also, He is the only One who justifies all who believe in Jesus.

In one of his series of *The Daily Study Bible*⁴, Barclay (1976, p. 59)⁵, a renowned New Testament interpreter, describes this

⁴ The Daily Study Bible is a series authored by William Barclay. The date of publication of the different volumes in the series is either 1975 or 1976.

justification work of God as the ‘Supreme paradox’ of the gospel. In other words, anybody would expect that once God is just, He would condemn the sinner as a criminal. However, here we have the great paradox; “God is just, and somehow, in that incredible, miraculous grace that Jesus came to bring to men, He (God) accepts the sinner, not as a criminal, but as a son whom He still loves.” Hence, for Barclay: “The singular death of Christ Jesus on the cross makes it possible for God himself to be just and also the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.”

The Disciples: It should be noted that there were various individuals and groups who were directly or indirectly involved in the ministry of Jesus. The primary group constituted the team of disciples. During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, disciples contributed greatly to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, though in different ways or from different angles. The term ‘disciple’ corresponds to ‘a student’ in the contemporary sense. Such a person is a follower, a learner, and a servant of a leader. A ‘disciple’ is also usually regarded as a ‘spiritual son’ of a master or teacher.

Because of the commonalities in the authorship and to some extent, their dates of publication, and in order to differentiate the volumes from each other, the specific titles in the series are captured as footnotes.

⁵ *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans.*

There were many Jewish and non-Jewish disciples or followers of Jesus. These included members of His own family and others including fishermen, priests, and tax collectors. They also included some members of both the privileged class like the Sanhedrin (who became 'secret disciples') and the ordinary Jewish and non-Jewish folks. Out of the lot, Jesus picked twelve, designating them apostles (Mark 3:14), for a closer and specific ministry and these ended up continuing and being primarily occupied with His work. Their names: Simon (who is also called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and then Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him (Matt 10:2-4).

Other followers: Besides Jesus' named disciples, there were other people who were connected to Him and could also be regarded as followers. These included His own biological family members and a tall list of people made up of both Jews and Gentiles who played various roles in the fulfilment of His earthly ministry.

Chapter Summary

A couple of fundamental issues of the NT have received considerable attention in this chapter. Particularly, the focus of discussions has been narrowed down to the earthly ministry of

the Lord Jesus Christ. Areas of interactions on the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ include preparations for the birth of Christ, the emergence of synagogues and the ministry of John the Baptist. Added to these major areas of discussion is the Jewish expectation of a Messiah.

Total salvation of the sinner which is regarded as the focus of the holistic ministry of Jesus Christ, the disciples and other followers have also been dealt with appreciably. The emphasis was on the fact that Jesus had a mission and a vision for His earthly ministry. A couple of issues about John the Baptist, the fore-runner of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially the significance of his ministry to that of Jesus, have been raised.

In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the background to some cities which are commonly encountered in the New Testament. Attention will be focused on the cities which have specific bearing on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER SIX

BACKGROUND TO SOME CITIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many cities, towns and rural locations are mentioned in the Bible. For any user of the New Testament to follow and understand the series and cycle of events captured in it and also have a firm grasp of its message, some background information or knowledge of some of the cities, towns and other locations which are frequently mentioned is essential. This chapter is dedicated to some pertinent issues of specific cities⁶.

Background to Rome

History: Located in the central portion of the Italian peninsula, Rome has a landscape that reveals that it is built over seven hills. It was one of the greatest and most beautiful cities in the ancient world. It was a wealthy and the cosmopolitan capital of probably the greatest empire the world had ever seen, the Roman empire. Rome was a diplomatic and trade city with well-built roads which made for easy and peaceful travels during the period of Christ's earthly ministry, so that there was constant traffic. It is now the capital of Italy and one of the world's great historic cities.

⁶ Most of the information on these cities were sourced from *New Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana* and other significant resources.

Rome has no doubt been acknowledged as an important center of civilization for over 2000 years. Due to its long history, Rome is identified by some scholars as the 'External City' (cf. Ring, 2019)⁷. There are many traditions, legends and myths surrounding its origin. One tradition says that Rome was founded by twin brothers called Romulus and Remus who were saved and raised by a she-wolf. The traditional date of founding of Rome is put around 753 BC and it was governed by kings in conjunction with a Council and a senate, until 509 BC.

Though the Roman empire was engulfed by civil war, Octavian, also called Augustus Caesar, finally brought peace to it in 27 BC. Since then, its rulers received the title 'Emperor,' making Augustus Caesar the first emperor. Rome is believed to have reached its peak by middle of the first century AD at the time of the beginning of Christianity. Presently, Rome is the spiritual and physical seat of the Roman Catholic Church.

Culture: The children of Rome were basically educated at home under the supervision of their parents before they pursued higher education. In fact, higher education in Rome meant the study of rhetoric - the act of public speaking and persuasion and politics.

⁷ Reference can also be made from www.history.com/rome.

Training in rhetoric provided skills needed to argue cases before law courts or in Roman senate. Often, students did read philosophy and history to improve upon their abilities as public speakers. Few women could enter this field of studies because courses in 'Rhetoric' was generally seen as a 'no go zone' for women and many were discouraged from entering into politics.

Religion: It is believed that the Romans met the Greek ideas in 300 BC and began to worship the gods and goddesses of the Greeks. The earliest people believed that the gods and goddesses had power over nature and all aspect of daily life. For example, Ceres was the goddess of harvest, Janus was the god who stood to watch at doors of homes.

The Romans gave the gods and goddesses Roman names and built in their honor some temples and shrines. Their gods were served by priests who perfumed public ceremonies to win the favor of these deities. For instance, Jupiter, their supreme god, was worshipped as the god of the sky with power over the weather. Christianity entered Rome probably as a result of the early persecution in Jerusalem and Samaria such that by the middle of the first century AD, it had become strong in the city. Ring (2019) posits that Rome understood glory as the fountainhead of Christianity and eventually won back its power

and wealth and reestablished itself as a place of beauty, a source of learning, and a capital of the arts.

Interestingly, Rome was also known for its role as the center for persecution and martyrdom of the early Christians. By AD 100, many Romans had lost interest in their religion and had become much committed to Christianity, which appealed strongly to their emotions. The promise of salvation and life of happiness after death it offered helped it to grow rapidly. At the peak of the persecutions, many of the Christians went into hiding and solitary life outside the city. Many Christian catacombs were known in Rome by the middle of the second century AD. These were designed for the burial of the dead, but it later became a hiding place for Christians who were being persecuted.

Background to Corinth

History: Corinth is an ancient and a modern city in south-central Greece. Its history is obscure until the early eighth century BC, when the city-state of Corinth began to develop as a commercial center. The land got attracted to the Phoenicians who settled there and introduced many of their cultures and religious practices. Corinth's political influence was increased through territorial expansion. The Corinthians established colonies which later assured them a dominant position in trade with the western

Mediterranean. Wallenfeldt *et al* (2019) reveal how during the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BC, Corinth's colonial expansion was extended into the regions of Macedonia.

It was Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, who initially conquered the place and settled many Macedonians. Later, the Greeks under Alexander the Great completed its liberation and changed the name to Corinth and ruled it. The Corinthians involved themselves in most of the political conflicts of Greece. Later, they also interfered in the political matters of the Romans. Unfortunately, this interference led to the destruction of the city in 146 BC by the Romans. However, between 46 and 44 BC, Julius Caesar reestablished Corinth as a Roman colony and made it the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. The city was once more flourishing by the first century AD and became an important administrative and trade center.

Religion: Corinth was the most splendid commercial city of Greece. It was also a natural stopping place on the route from Rome to the east, and the place where several trade routes met. Corinth had a population of about 250,000 free persons and 400,000 slaves by the first century AD, with majority of the people being Jews, Romans and Greeks and few other nationals.

The city is known to readers of the New Testament for the letters addressed to its Christian community by Apostle Paul.

Culture: During the period of Roman dominance, Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury, and immorality. The presence of many temple prostitutes of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and a large number of floating populations helped to give the city a proverbial immoral name. Consequently, 'To live as a Corinth' was an adage which meant to live a life of wastefulness and drunkenness. Nevertheless, the city was naturally devoted to the worship of 'god of the sea,' since much of their wealth came from there.

Due to its strategic position, Corinth became a highly flavored commercial city in the ancient times and was known as 'Two Sea's Corinth.' It became a center for many industrial products, particularly ceramics, which made the city famous all over the world. Many objects of luxury from other places also found their way into the city such that its market was patronized by traders from all the corners of the then known world.

Little wonder, Corinth was thus referred to as 'the vanity fair' of the ancient world. During the period of the Romans, Corinth was one of the strongest educational centers in the Province of Achaia.

Background to Galatia

History: Galatia was a province in the central part of Asia Minor. The name was first introduced into this region after many migrant Celtic tribes from ancient Gaul crossed from Europe, having invaded Macedonia. After ravaging far and wide, the Gaul were finally confined to the central part of Asia where they settled as conquerors, formed a kingdom, and gave the name Galatia to it.

Later, Galatia was conquered by Rome and it continued as its subject area. Hence, Galatia area was converted to a Roman province called Galatia. Consequently, the name 'Galatia' carried a double connotation: geographically, to designate the authority inhabited by the Galatians, politically, to denote the entire Roman province. The cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, which were evangelized by Paul on his first Missionary journey, were in the Province of Galatia.

Culture and Religion: The culture of Galatia was influenced by those of the large numbers of Romans, Greeks, and Jews who were attracted to this region because of geographical location. Galatia was the main region that Apostle Paul concentrated his efforts during his first missionary journey with Barnabas. Some years later, after Paul and his team had left them, the Galatian Christians were indoctrinated by some 'apostles' who were

holding on to the doctrines of Judaism to observe the laws of Moses as part of the requirement for salvation.

When Paul heard of this later development he did not hesitate to respond. Consequently, he wrote to the believers in the region of Galatia to reject any teaching based on the law, as he used to believe (Gal 1:13-14). In his epistle, he argued that the Jewish law was just temporary and was intended to come to an end with the arrival of Christ.

Background to Ephesus

History: Ephesus was an old Ionian city that stood at the end of one of the caravan trades routes through Asia Minor towards the Mediterranean Sea. The city was an ancient port city whose well-preserved ruins are in modern-day Turkey. It was once considered the most important Greek city and the most important trading center in the Mediterranean region.

Throughout history, Ephesus survived multiple attacks and changed hands many times between conquerors. The city was famous for the Temple of Artemis (a name given by the Greeks; the Romans called this goddess Diana). Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, chastity, childbirth, wild animals, and the wilderness. She was also one of the most revered Greek deities.

Some historical sources mention that it was the reforms of Caesar Augustus that brought Ephesus to its most prosperous time (cf. Anderson, 2020; www.history.com, 2018). Some of these sources reveal how a business district was opened around 43 BC to service the massive amounts of goods arriving or departing from the man-made harbor and from caravans traveling the ancient royal road. In effect, Ephesus became second only to Rome at that time as a cosmopolitan center of culture and commerce. The city displaced Miletus as a natural trading port in the early period of the Romans and was a proud, rich and busy harbor, which became a rival of the harbors of Alexandria in Egypt and that of Antioch in Syria.

Culture: As mentioned earlier, the city of Ephesus was connected to the shrine of Artemis (or Diana), a fertility goddess. As a result of the strong belief in this cult, much trade in that part of the world centered around the city. Indeed, the city became a place of pilgrimage for many people including tourist, worshippers and traders who were eager to carry away talisman and souvenirs. It also became a haven for silversmiths who could manufacture silver shrine and images from a metallic stone which was believed to be an image of the goddess Artemis which had fallen from heaven.

Mark (2009) reveals that women in the city of Ephesus very well. They enjoyed rights and privileges equal to men and there are records of female artists, sculptors, painters, and teachers. At night, the streets of the city were brightly lit with oil lamps, a luxury not many cities could afford.

Religion: Ephesus played a vital role in the spread of Christianity. Starting in the first century AD, notable Christians such as Apostles John and Paul, visited and preached against the worship of Artemis. In the process, they won many converts into Christianity. Ephesus is mentioned multiple times in the New Testament, and the book of Ephesians, written around 60 AD, is thought to be a letter from Paul to the Ephesian Christians, although some scholars question the source.

Apostle Paul is related to Ephesus when he came to the city from Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla during his second missionary journey. He initially spoke only to the Jews in the synagogue. Not every Ephesian was open to Paul's Christian message. Chapter 19 in the book of Acts tells of a riot started by a man named Demetrius. Tired of Paul's attacks on the goddess he worshipped, and worried that the spread of Christianity would ruin his trade, Demetrius plotted a riot and enticed a large crowd to turn against Paul and his disciples.

Ephesian officials, however, protected Paul and his followers and eventually Christianity became the city's official religion. It was at Ephesus that during Paul's two-year stay (being his longest stay at any place) the Lord did many supernatural wonders and miracles such that even handkerchiefs and aprons from him could heal the sick. Apostle Paul, with support from Aquila and Priscilla, nurtured Christianity to grow at Ephesus.

The letter to the Ephesians is believed to have been written by Paul while in prison in Rome (Eph 1:15) to the Gentile believers (Eph 2:11) living in that region of Asia Minor. Ephesus was no doubt a hotbed of early Christian evangelism and remains an important archaeological site and Christian pilgrimage destination. The city was one of the seven churches of Asia to which the Revelation of John was addressed. Unfortunately for Christianity, the one great city of Ephesus later became uninhabited after its invasions and destruction by the Goths in AD 263. The city is believed to be part of the present-day Turkey and has been taken up by Muslims.

Background to Philippi

History: Philippi is a city east of Macedonia, in the southern part of Europe. It is believed that the site was occupied originally by the settlers who came from the offshore island of Thasas.

However, King Philip II of Macedonia (same as Macedon), the father of Alexander the Great, took it from the Thasians, increased its size with many inhabitants, and changed its name to Philippi, which corresponded to his own name.

Later, the city was annexed by the Romans and became one of its provinces. According to Tikkanen (2020; cf. Mark, 2019), this city was the place of the decisive Roman battle, the Battle of Philippi, in which Mark Antony and Octavian (who later became Emperor Augustus Caesar) defeated Brutus and Cassius, the leading assassins of Julius Caesar, in 42 BC.

Culture: Philippi boasted of a school of medicine which was connected to one of the guilds of physicians with the followers of early Greek medicine scattered throughout the Hellenistic world. Little wonder, Philippi was a center of medicine and was argued to be the birthplace of Saint Luke, the physician. The population of the city during the first century included Thracians, Greeks, and Romans. Though Philippi was thoroughly colonized by the Romans the city was still overwhelmed by Greek culture.

Religion: The religion of the Philippians was believed to be a composite one and included the worship of many gods because of the city's mixed population. Christianity reached Philippi during

Paul's Second Missionary journey. It was the first Macedonia and European Church that was founded by Paul in AD 52. It actually represents the first major penetration of the gospel into the gentile territories (Phil 4:14–15). It was not surprising that Paul's first convert there was a merchant woman by name Lydia, a seller of purple. Her whole household was baptized and became the nucleus of the Church in that city (Acts 16:15). It was at Philippi that Paul and Silas were imprisoned for driving out an evil spirit out of a fetish slave girl (Acts 17:16–24).

Apostle Paul loved the Philippian Church so much that even when he was in prison, he wrote to them. In his epistle, Paul showed his concern for their persecution and warned them against false teachings and complacency. Paul then exhorted them to love each other, submit to each other and to God and encouraged them to rejoice even in the face of the persecutions.

Moreover, Apostle Paul used his letter to express his gratitude to them for their concern for his welfare and the gift of the Church sent to him. Paul bid the Church not to fear their adversaries for they were going through what he was also going through and enduring. The Church suffered at the hands of the Muslims when they invaded the land. Consequently, the church could not survive but the city of Philippi still exists.

Background to Colossae

Colossae was a historical city in the southern Roman province of Asia Minor. It had previously been a major city, located around 120 miles on the road of Ephesus to the Caspian Sea. Around 400 BC, Colossae was one of six large cities of Phrygia. It was a city with a Hellenized name but does not have any Greek origin. It was famous for purple wool, that is, a popular wool dyed dark red purple by a dye from the cyclamen flower.

The main job of the Colossians, apart from rearing of livestock, was the production of garment of the finest quality and dyed wool. The many sheep pastured in the area contributed to a wool industry. The city of Laodicea and likely Colossae, were damaged or destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17, was rebuilt and damaged again by an earthquake in about AD 60. As a result, the city lost its place of prominence by the end of the first century AD.

Culture: Rediscovered in 1836, but never excavated, materials from the site of Colossae and ancient references demonstrate that the once vibrant city shared similarities with other cities in Asia minor during the Roman period. These included the use of Greek as the main language, having the typical building found in cities, issuing its own coinage, practicing polytheism, and living life according to typical Roman social and cultural norms. The

people had families, servants, understood Greek, used Roman money, worshiped various deities, and worked primarily in the agricultural sector.

Colossae had a mixed culture. This is because of the presence of the Greeks among the natives in addition to a large number of Jewish traders and settlers who were brought by Antiochus the Great. Therefore, the city had an unstable culture. The natives were considered a relaxed people with some being very superstitious in their belief and even worshipped angels (Col 2:18). One of their beliefs was that Archangel Michael once appeared to the people saving the city in the time of flood. Accordingly, Archangel Michael was regarded as the chief protecting saint of the city.

Religion: Colossae was the home of his companions: Archippus, Philemon, Apphia, Onesimus and then Epaphras, the one described as Paul's servant and student in God's work who took advantage of Paul's presence in the region, and founded the Church of this city (Péridès, 1908). Indeed, Scriptures reveal that both Philemon, who was a Church leader and host, and Onesimus, were members of the Church in Colossae (Phile 1-2; Col 4:9, 14) which was believed to have had a much larger Christian community at that time. Unlike many of the cities in Asia

minor, Paul might not have brought the gospel to Colossae, and might not have even visited the city (Col 2:1; 4:12-17).

Epaphras, the one who is believed to have continued to be a leader in the Church in Colossae, had a name which has been found on a few Roman period inscriptions and seems to be a shortened form of Epaphroditus (Col 1:7; 4:12; Phile 23; Phil 2:25; 4:18). Kennedy (2019) argues that Paul's letter was sent to the Church there because of the personal connections of Paul to Christians, and because both Tychicus and Onesimus were returning to Philemon in Colossae (Col 4:7-9; Phile 10). Thus, the epistle to the Colossians was carried by Tychicus, who was traveling with Onesimus, and brought to Philemon.

The Church at Colossae is believed to comprise mainly of Gentiles (Col 1:21–27). It is believed that when Paul finally wrote the letter to the Colossians (1:2), he was imprisoned, either in Caesarea or more likely in Rome (Acts 28:16; 30-31). Pétridès (1908) is convinced that the Apostle addressed the epistle from Rome to the believers at Colossae, probably about AD 61-62.

The Message: The problem in Colossae is Greek Gnostics teachings and that of converts into Christianity but were still holding on to the doctrines of Judaism. It also included the

adoption of Hellenistic philosophy and opposition to the complete Deity and supremacy of Christ, salvation made complete through the work of Christ. Then also, there was the observation of rituals and laws related to occasions as festivals, celebrations of new moons, and special Sabbath days, and other religious practices.

Consequently, Paul's letter to Colossae, far more than merely a historical source about Christians in Colossae, was meant to rebuke, correct, and teach them the truth of God's word. It was also to warn them against heresies of religious syncretism or combining and replacing beliefs of Christianity with other religions or worldviews (Col 2:8-23).

The Church at Colossae remained steadfast and grew from that period of its pioneers, despite the diminishing size of the city of Colossae until the city was overrun by the Saracens during the eighth century AD, when the Church's strength declined. In the twelve century AD, the already reduced size and glory of Colossae and the Church was destroyed by the Turkish Muslims and Colossae completely disappeared.

Background to Thessalonica

History: Thessalonica, a coastal city, was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia in the south-eastern part of Europe.

Thessalonica was probably founded towards the end of the century by the bringing together of small towns at the head of the Thermaic gulf. As a military and commercial station, it grew to great importance in the Roman Empire.

According to Cartwright (2016), the city was founded in 315 BC by Cassandra, one of the officers of Alexander the Great, who took control of Greece after the death of Alexander in 323 BC. The city was named after his wife, Thessalonike, daughter of Philip II of Macedon and a sister of Alexander the Great. Later, it became the center of the forces of General Pompey during the civil war with Julius Caesar. Thessalonica was a highly prosperous city and was eventually declared a free city by the Romans. So, it was ruled by its own magistrates.

Culture: The culture of Thessalonica was a mixture of Greek, Roman, and Jewish beliefs and its population was these plus many natives. There was a high degree of freedom for women in Thessalonica and this stimulated women involvement in social activities. The people were mostly pagans and generally weak in morality. The great number of Jews in Thessalonica is testified by several synagogues and the number of proselytes among whom were some women of high social standing.

Religion: During the spread of Christianity in the first century AD Apostle Paul came to establish a Church here during his second and third missionary journeys. Paul preached in the synagogue on three Sabbaths and made some converts among whom was Aristachus who accompanied Paul during his journey to Jerusalem. Later, Apostle Paul left Thessalonica when his enemies, mostly Jews, raised a cry of treason against him and this resulted in a serious riot. Jason had to pay the price by facing the mob instead of the Apostle.

Timothy's report from Thessalonica, after Paul had sent him to check on their welfare, led Paul to write to the Thessalonians. According to Pallardy (2020), two letters were written by Apostle Paul with one addressed to Thessalonians and the other to its first bishop, Gaius, who was one of the companions of Paul. In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul counselled them in respect of several matters including holiness, the need for them to endure in the face of the persecutions and the need to be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus.

Background to Antioch

History: Antioch is the largest city of the empire and capital of the proconsul province of Syria. Antioch was a city built on the bank of the Orontes River in ancient Syria. It was founded around 301

BC by one of the Greek generals and commanders of Alexander the Great. His name was Seleucus I Nicator, He was also the founder of the Seleucid empire. He named the city after his father, Antiochus. Antioch in Syria was the greatest of all the sixteen cities named as Antioch and founded by Seleucus I Nicator.

Antioch in Syria was a great commercial center where ships and caravan converged for trading. When the deterioration of the Seleucid dynasty led to the Roman occupation of Syria in 64 BC, Antioch became the capital of the new province of Syria and was beautified by Emperors Augustus and Tiberius, aided by Herod the Great. Due to her prosperity as a commercial center, the city became the meeting point of the great and oriental civilization. During this Roman domination period, Antioch became the third city of land, so its culture was influenced by the Jewish culture.

Culture: Antioch was a center for Greek philosophy until it fell under the Roman Empire. It had an important Jewish community from the early times when the Seleucid king rewarded their Jewish mercenaries with grants of land, so its culture was influenced by the Jewish culture. Its suburb of Dapline was known for notorious lifestyles and it became the playground of the dissolute city. This suburb of Antioch also became a great

archaeological center where Church excavations revealed the Octagonal edifice of Constantine and cross. The citizens (both natives and many Jews) were famous for their commercial aptitude.

Religion: The Romans made freedom of worship and belief possible and so Christianity was easy to gain roots here. It was at Antioch that the first Gentile Church, the mother of all others was established. It is likely the Church started because of the stoning of Stephen the deacon which brought about the scattering of the disciples of the Church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:19).

One of the original deacons of the first century Church was Nicholas who was a proselyte from Antioch. The Church itself was likely to have been formed by Christians from Cyrus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20) during the persecution period. The Church in Antioch became so great and alive that it was at this place that the early believers first gained the title, 'Christians' (Acts 11:26).

Antioch gave rise to a school of thought distinguished by the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Barnabas was sent by the Church to assist in the work. When he had labored there for a while, he went to Tarsus and brought Paul to assist in teaching the disciples (Act 11:26-26). After an earlier visit to Jerusalem,

they came to continue the work at Antioch, and it was during this period that the Holy Spirit directed them to set off for the missionary journeys which gave birth to many of the Gentile churches. (Acts 13:1-4). Antioch thus became the base for the Missionaries of the Church. The present city has now become Islam dominated area.

Chapter Summary

Discussions in this chapter have been on the background to some cities which are commonly encountered in the New Testament. Cities whose backgrounds are treated include but not limited to the following: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Antioch, and Tarsus. Moreover, it is not only the backgrounds of some notable cities that are treated but also the culture of their citizens and the messages underlying the letters written to these cities are also dealt with. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the books that constitute the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GOSPELS AND ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AT A GLANCE

The books of the New Testament have been classified into four major areas: Gospels, History, Letters, and Revelation (or Apocalypse). This chapter is dedicated to some interesting highlights of some of the books of the first two areas, the Gospels and History, that might be significant to understanding the second division of the Bible. Of particular interest to our discourses are the name of the authors, date and purpose of writing, primary recipients as well as specific significant issues of the scriptural document.

The Gospels - The first four books of the New Testament

The first three gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, usually called the Synoptic gospels, are so called because they appear to be similar, and the contents are quite chronological. The fourth, John, has a peculiar structure. The gospels in general present a kind of literature that is very different from other ancient and modern writings.

The gospels are not just biographies of Christ which seek to present understanding of Jesus' life or that of His family, friends,

or any mental and psychological dimensions. No! In fact, the gospels should not be considered as histories of heroic deeds or collections of His famous sayings, though some of these kinds of materials are found in the gospel accounts. Rather, the four books that constitute the gospels are regarded as a new genre for which other categories are inadequate in comparison.

These first four books of the New Testament account for the life of Jesus with respect to His words, works and that of those that related with Him regarding the redemptive plan of God for humanity. Against this background, the gospel is considered as 'Good News' from God revealed by means of the ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus as Christ. The four books accepted as the gospels are as follows:

Matthew

Matthew's gospel was probably written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, thus, written between AD 65 and 69. Matthew was an eyewitness of many of the events he recorded. He was a tax collector and most likely had scribal skills and knowledge of Judaism before he was called by Jesus to be His disciple. No wonder, he wrote for a Jewish-Christian readership community and wanted to emphasize Jesus' Jewish heritage and demonstrate how Jesus fulfils the OT prophecies of the Messiah

(Adeyemo, 2006, p. 1105). This gospel was written by Matthew, also called Levi, to the Jews. Indeed, Matthew is concerned with Jesus's Jewish background in relation to His teaching. The purpose was to relate the worship of Jesus to the Jewish faith.

Mark

This gospel was written between AD 45 and 80. Early Church tradition identifies the author of this gospel as John Mark, son of Mary (Acts 12:12), cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10) and the foremost missionary companion of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:5). The authorship of this gospel by John Mark is also indicated by Oduro (2016, p. 1). This same author, John Mark, is argued by Ype (2002, p. 9) as being of African descent and the one who “founded of the oldest church in Africa in Alexandria, the city in which he died as a martyr in the summer of the year 68.”

The year in quote above is most likely AD 68. Be that as it may, Africa cannot be described as a continent deemed impenetrable by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Ofotsu, 2018, p. 14). The gospel was in Africa even before this period. People from Egypt and Libya who were present in Jerusalem and might have witnessed the Pentecost (Acts 2:10) as well as the Ethiopian eunuch who converted to Christianity (Acts 8:27-37) no doubt brought the gospel to Africa during the early days of its spread.

Some Church traditions claim that Mark became Apostle Peter's interpreter while working with him in Rome and put into writing Peter's version of the gospel. No wonder, it is the sermon notes of Peter about the life of Jesus. Some scholars consider Mark to have been the first gospel written (Ype, 2002, p. 9) and even argue that Matthew and Luke, both used Mark's gospel as one of their sources (Longman III, 2013, p. 1105). While Adeyemo (2006, p. 1171) sees Mark, the author, as presenting Jesus as the servant of God, Willmington (1989, p. 273) considers him as placing emphasis on the miracles of Jesus.

Luke

This gospel was written between AD 60 and 65. It was written and composed from a research including the testimonies from many people (Mary, the disciples, probably from Mark's material, etc.). The title of the recipient, *Theophilus*, is interpreted in various ways. Some regard this recipient as a high-profile person whose name means 'Lover of God,' from two Greek transliterations, *theos*, meaning 'God,' and *philo*, meaning 'lover.'

The connection to high profile position is indicated using the description 'Most Excellent' attached to the name. However, other schools of thought regard the recipient as a body (or group) of people seen as Christians because they demonstrate love for

God or any individual who demonstrates true love for God. In this sense, the name applies to all users of the book.

The gospel of Luke has been traditionally known as the gospel that portrays Jesus as the perfect man who came to bring salvation to all humanity (2:32; 3:6; 4:25-27; 9:54; 24:47). Luke is author of the third gospel and the book of Acts; co-worker, loyal friend, and periodic companion of Paul during his missionary journeys; and by profession a medical doctor. Longman III (2013, p. 1079-1080) notes that although Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 1:1-4), the use of the pronoun 'we' indicates that he was present for some of the events critical to the missionary expansion of the early Church (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Indeed, Luke is mentioned in Paul's letters, being identified as a 'dear friend' and 'doctor' (Col 4:14) and, by inference, as a Gentile (Col 4:11). He also provided support for Paul during his imprisonments in Rome (2 Tim 4:11; Phile 24). Adeyemo (2006, p. 1203) regards Luke's concentration to be on the human side of Jesus. Along the same tangent Willmington (1989, p. 273) sees the author as portraying Jesus Christ as perfect human and thus emphasizes on the many parables of the Lord.

John

This gospel was most likely written towards the end of the first century, i.e., around AD 80-90. It is also referred to, by some scholars, as ‘the Fourth Gospel’ (Thatcher, 2007, p. 1). It was most probably written from Ephesus by John, the beloved disciple (21:20, 24) and one of the three disciples who together with Peter and James were especially close to Jesus (Matt. 17:1; Matt 26:37; Mark 5:37). Adeyemo (2006, p. 1251) argues that since Peter is often described as being with the beloved disciple (13:23-24; 20:2; 21:20-21), he cannot be the author. Nor can the author be James, because he was killed by Herod Agrippa I, most probably, before AD 44. John is therefore left as the most likely candidate to be the ‘beloved disciple.’

While reflecting on the work of Robert Fortna: *The Gospel of John and the Signs Gospel*, Thatcher (2007, p. 159) notes: “On numerous occasions, John insists that his “witness” is based upon the best testimony available, in support of the more significant assertion that what he records is “true.” Clearly, the author, John, if accepted as the author of the Johannine epistles, is no doubt an eyewitness of all that Jesus did, as he appropriately describes himself as such (1 John 1:1). There is no doubt that John’s gospel presents the best picture of the divine nature of Jesus. Commenting on the source of the Gospel of John,

Thatcher (2007, p. 160) argues that there is “no inherent reason why the Fourth Gospel could not be based on earlier written documents...” He continues that “...Many notable scholars have suggested particularly that John’s “signs” stories are likely based upon earlier accounts.”

According to Willmington (1989, p. 273), John presents Jesus Christ as the Mighty God and emphasizes the doctrines of the Lord in his gospel. However, the events are not chronological. The purpose is revealed in John 20:3: “...So that readers might believe in Jesus.” This gospel has a unique prologue 1-18 which is clear in its message which is built around seven (7) miracles or signs that Jesus did. The contents also include the seven (7) ‘I AMs’ by Jesus. Generally, this gospel emphasizes the blessings of salvation.

History - Acts of the Apostles

This book is considered as the historical record of the New Testament events especially with regard to the birth, growth and spread of the Church. Acts of the Apostles is also regarded as the part two of Luke’s book and is believed to have been written around AD 6. It covers about 30 years of missionary work and was written by Luke as evidence of a thorough research to the recipient of his gospel, identified as Theophilus.

In the third of the four gospels, the writer, Luke the Physician, presents to the primary recipient, Theophilus, the results of his investigation of the life and work of Jesus. Then in Acts, Luke continues to recount the work of the apostle of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit sent from Him. The Book of Acts sets forth the growth of Christianity in many stages. Six of such stages are identified in this discussion. The purpose is to provide a history of the early Church and its Jewish/Gentile struggle.

Pentecost and spread of the Gospel: It was into a world that was unified by language, culture, and politics and by its spiritual hungers, that Christian missionaries ventured with the message of Jesus Christ. The Church was born through a baptism of ‘fire’ on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. The world of the first century AD responded well! What was it that brought thousands and ultimately millions to faith in Christ? It was the power of the Holy Spirit released through this ‘fire’ baptism as prophesized by John the Baptist (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). It was more than the power of a better idea, or a superior theology.

As we read Acts and the New Testament epistles, we realize that at least two major factors attracted the first century people. First, the Christian message was vibrant with hope. God in Christ broke into the world of humanity and demonstrated His love and power,

and in the resurrection revealed an endless, triumphant life which Christ offers to every man. There was a second major influence as well. Christianity created communities of love.

The first century AD, unlike the present period of great socialization, was an age of isolation and loneliness. So, one would wonder how attractive the gospel could be to such a fractured community lifestyle and the impact it would make. Interestingly, however, to know Christ and to experience the transformation that comes through His love was more than enough for such unstructured community lives to resist. So, the gospel was shared in word and in deed such that the world of the first century AD was won for Christ.

Apostle Paul and the growth of the New Testament Church

Many pre-Pentecost disciples or apostles of Jesus Christ like Peter, James and John, and a couple others like Stephen and Philip who became deacons were prominent figures who featured in Acts of the Apostles. However, one other personality who became a pivot in the book and whose ministry really impacted the then known world was Paul. About half of the events in the book and, in fact, half of the contents of the whole New Testament center around his call and ministry, thereby making him a special personality for discussion here.

Saul, also called Paul, was a Hebrew from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5) but born in Tarsus as a Roman Citizen (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:28). Tarsus was a city in ancient Cilicia and is presently located in the south-central part of Turkey, about 12 miles (20 km) from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of the oldest continually inhabited urban centers in the world and was an important trade center for most of its history.

Initially a province during the Persian dominance, and later re-founded by the Greeks under Antiochus Epiphanies who also brought Jews there, the Roman Emperor Pompey took Tarsus around 67 BC and made it a Roman colony. It is likely that the introduction of Jews into Tarsus and its later status granted by the Romans that gave Paul his Romans citizenship.

While some users of the NT consider the name of Paul to have been changed from Saul upon his conversion, Mark (2019) throws some light on this controversy:

His birth name was no doubt Saul while Paul (Paulus) was his Roman name which he naturally would have used more in his missionary work among the Gentiles. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no biblical evidence that Saul changed his name to Paul after his conversion experience. Acts

13:9 states that Saul was also called Paul and he is referred to as Saul elsewhere following his conversion.

Paul was sent to study in Jerusalem under Gamaliel and became not only a devout member of the Jewish community but also a prominent Pharisee (Acts 22:3; 23:6). When the disciples of Jesus Christ began sharing their new faith, Saul was among their persecutors until he had an experience in a broad-day vision on his way to Damascus in which resurrected Jesus spoke to him and he was struck blind (Acts 9:3-9).

After recovering his sight with the help of Christians, he began his evangelistic work with so much zeal that he gained immediate recognition in Damascus. This also led to a plot among the Grecian Jewish community who felt betrayed by his conversion to kill him. It is against this backdrop that he was helped by some of the disciples to escape to his hometown, Tarsus. It was also from Tarsus that Barnabas took Paul to Antioch when he was sent by the Church in Jerusalem to visit this Gentile Church.

Instructed by the Holy Spirit to step out, Paul embarked on series of missionary journeys, traveling the length and breadth of the then known world to spread the new faith, and became a great evangelist. Through his letters and sermons on his many travels,

Paul spread his vision of the dead and resurrected Christ. In the words of Yohannan (2003, p. 119), “Paul recognized that Jesus Christ was the ultimate answer to all man’s problems.” Paul continued his extremely successful missionary efforts for approximately 30 years and many of the churches he founded, which are mentioned in the NT have still flourished. Mark (2019) observes that Apostle Paul was martyred, according to Christian tradition, in Rome.

Persecution of the Church and destruction of Jerusalem: History has it that Florus, a Roman governor, at a point in time came and raided Jerusalem and took away the temple treasury. This raid by the governor ignited the Jewish revolt of AD 66-74, which reached a climax with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Mopping-up operations lasted till the capture of Masada, a fortress on the west side of the Dead Sea, where the last rebels and their families, numbering more than nine hundred (900), committed mass suicide just before the Romans entered.

The Jews suffered even greater loss of life at the destruction of Jerusalem. Both that destruction and the capture of Masada were preceded by long sieges. Apart from such events and, despite the authority of the Herods (or the kings) and the Roman governors, the Jewish courts controlled most local matters of daily life.

Worship at the temple and its sacrificial system ceased with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Suggested outline of Acts of the Apostles

The growth of Christianity through the eyes of the author of Acts is demonstrated by means of summary or outline of the book.

- Chapter 1:1–3:26 shows the early events in Jerusalem including what happened on the Day of Pentecost; Peter's sermon and the birth of the Church.
- Chapter 4:1–6:7 reveals the ministry of Peter and John; the early persecution of the Church culminating into the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and then some controversies in the Church such as complaints about the neglect of widows.
- Chapter 6:8–9:31 talks about the spread of the Church throughout Palestine; martyrdom of Stephen and the struggle of the saints with the Jews.
- Chapter 9:32–12:24 talks about how the Gentiles became part of the Church and the spread of the Church to Antioch; how the gospel reached Africa through the Ethiopian Eunuch, the conversion of Cornelius; further struggle with the Jews.
- Chapter 13:1–16:5 reveals the ministry at Antioch by Barnabas and Paul and their first missionary journey and shows how the Church spread to Asia Minor.

- Chapter 16:6 —19:20: indicates the extension of the Church to Europe; Paul's Second and Third Missionary journeys.
- Chapter 19:21—28:31 mentions Paul's arrest and trial in Jerusalem and Caesarea and ends with his voyage and stay in Rome.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a glance at the books that constitute the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. On the Gospels, there has been a probe into what exactly the books of the gospel are, i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Then on the Acts of the Apostle, mention has been made of the events that preceded the day of Pentecost and those that come thereafter, particularly with respect to the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Apostolic or first century Church. The discussions have provided a lead into the persecution of the believers and mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which led to the dispersal of the Jews in general. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the background and message of the New Testament letters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BACKGROUND AND MESSAGE OF THE PAULINE LETTERS

The letters written by the apostles and their companions are different from the letters most people would write today. Writing tools and materials were not plentiful, so the authors sought to conserve space when writing. Moreover, the greetings and benedictions in the NT letters are unlike the sort of correspondence we would see now, but they are like the introductions and conclusions found in other first century letters. The NT authors composed their letters to solve problems in the Church or to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who needed to hear about it. Apostle Paul was one of the gifted authors of the NT. This chapter is dedicated to discussions on the background and messages of his epistles.

The Letters of Paul

From about AD 53, Apostle Paul used the city of Ephesus as a center for evangelism and Church planting throughout the Roman province of Asia. Probably, the seven churches of Revelation were founded during this time or shortly thereafter. While imprisoned in Rome (around AD 60-62), it became necessary that he communicates with the believers of some of the churches he had

planted. This became the genesis of the Pauline epistles of the New Testament.

These glorious letters included those to the churches, with some being pastoral letters as well as letters to individuals. For example, Apostle Paul wrote specific letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Philippians, and Philemon. The Epistle to the Colossians was to be read in the Church of the Laodiceans and the epistle from Laodicea was to be heard by the congregation in Colossae (Col 4:16).

The contents of these letters included messages on salvation, sanctification, contending for the faith, submission to Christ, the Church, and to authority. It is apparent that the practice of writing epistles for wider circulation than a single individual or group was an accepted one, as seen in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

Romans

Background to Romans - The dispersion of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem had led to the establishing of synagogues during heathenism throughout the Roman empire. In that period, the polytheistic religion of the Roman empire was becoming increasingly unpopular, and many people were receptive to the message of the gospel and become proselytes to

the worship of the one true God. It was from such group, composed largely of Gentiles (Rom 1:13), and a small Jewish group, that Paul probably wrote this letter for the purpose of instructing the Church.

Apostle Paul was brought to Rome when he appealed to Caesar during his trial before Festus in Caesarea. Paul is believed to have been tried and martyred in Rome during the Nero persecutions between AD 64 and 68. It is from Rome that the Roman Catholic Church got its roots. There were at least 40 churches in Rome early by the fourth century AD. The three most important churches built by Constantine (one of their emperors) were Saint Peter's Church in the Vatican, St. Paul's Church which is outside the walls of Vatican and St. John's Lutheran church. The Saint Peter's Church was Europe's largest Christian Church.

The letter to Romans is believed to have been written by Paul in the spring of AD 58, when he was preparing to leave the region of Asia Minor for Jerusalem (Rom 15:25; Acts 20:16). This was after completing his Third Missionary journey and he anticipated a visit to Rome and even to Spain. It was probably at Corinth, where Paul spent three months (Acts 20:3), or at Philippi, that he wrote this letter and sent it by Phoebe (Rom 16:1), who was a deaconess in Cenchrea, a city near Corinth.

Message of Romans – Of the many epistles that throw light on the gospel, none explains it more fully like Paul's letter to the Romans. It is a major treatise on salvation and justification by faith. Indeed, the content of Romans is centered on God's revelation of righteousness, and the evidence that, both Jews and Gentiles alike are unrighteous sinners in need of salvation. It is in the book of Romans that the relationship between atonement and justification is made clear.

Vidu notes that much of the debate over the atonement is in fact a debate over how justice may be defined, how it applies to God, and how it relates to other divine attributes (2014, p. 3-4). Truly, in the letter to the Romans, God's justice is revealed when He declares that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are guilty before Him. However, God remains righteous when He justifies those sinners who believe in Christ because of His atonement on the cross, and calls them into the body of believers, the Church.

The book describes what it means to be saved because in it, the author answers fundamental but pertinent questions such as: What is salvation? How and why is it needed? What about the Jews? Are they saved? How and why are they God's chosen people? Then also the author deals with practical issues such as: How do saved people act? How should believers relate with

others? The final sections tackle issues relating to state powers; freedom and responsibility, personal comments about his desire to come to Rome; and final greetings.

Although the introduction is lengthy and the conclusion also has a rather longer list of greetings than usual, Paul's knowledge of the message of the OT is reflected in his extensive quotations which are used in support of his main content. Romans was written mainly to educate the believers in the basic doctrines related to salvation (1:8) and to help them understand the unbelief of Jews and how Gentiles have benefitted from it (9:11). Paul also explained general principles of the Christian life that he wanted them to be aware of and put into practice (12:1-15:13).

Apostle Paul's gratitude, purpose and mission emerged in this epistle. Convinced that humanity is lost without Christ, Paul was thankful that the righteousness of God has been imputed to him and all who believe in the gospel. For this reason, he was not ashamed of the gospel, but was determined to make Christ known to people everywhere, as he indicated in Romans 1:16-17.

Corinthians

Background to 1 and 2 Corinthians - Two letters are addressed to the Corinthians: These were written by Paul. Paul was visited by a

delegation from Corinth while in Ephesus with news concerning the tragic situation in their local Church at Corinth. Willmington (1989, p. 414) notes that Paul, upon hearing of the situation in Corinth and the issues confronting the Church there, responded with a letter. Paul dealt with several problems in the Church at Corinth, including divisions, arrogance, selfishness, immaturity and immorality.

Not only were the members of this Church not unified, but also there are indications that the members were at odds with Paul himself. Now, seeking to reestablish his authority over the Church, Paul took pains to write to answer some questions that had been sent to him by the Church.

Message of 1 and 2 Corinthians – Paul wrote these letters to answer some questions that the believers at Corinth had sent to him regarding such issues as marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship and concerns about the resurrection of the dead. The first of these books was written to correct wrong ideas and practices. It covered issues such as divisions, sexual sin, courtesies, spiritual gifts, pure love and resurrection. In the second book, Paul defended his apostleship (of Christ). Also included in the second book are correction of doctrines on salvation by faith as against any boasting by deeds or works.

Galatians

Background to Galatians - There is no doubt about the fact that Paul, the Apostle, was the writer of this letter since his authorship is seldom questioned by scholars. Though this epistle is believed to have been written to the Galatian churches, yet the date of writing and the destination of this letter have been subjected to much discussion. Many have argued for a date of AD 47 or 54, and the choice depends to a great extent on the destination. There are two prominent views: a) the North Galatians theory and, b) the South Galatians theory. These two present differing views of the location and identification of these Galatian believers.

The disagreement revolves around what Paul meant when he used the term 'Galatian.' Some say that he was addressing the people living in the Roman Province of Galatia, while others believe he was addressing or referring to the people mainly of Gallic descent but had become believers. These Gallic people had become absorbed into the native Gaul. Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the churches of this Gallic origin referring to them as Galatians in the racial sense.

Accordingly, Paul established these churches on his Second and Third Missionary journeys (Acts 16:6;18:23), and wrote this epistle from either Ephesus or Corinth, most probably, between

AD 53 and 57. Those who hold to the South Galatians theory suggest that Paul used the term 'Galatians' to refer to those who lived in the Roman Province of Galatia which was established in 25 BC.

If this theory is true, it is probable that Paul visited these believers once on his missionary journey (Acts 13, 14) and then again during his later travel. This means that a reasonable date for the writing of the letter would be sometime between his First and Second Missionary journeys, about AD 48 or 49, and shortly before the Jerusalem council convened (Acts 15). The churches of this Roman province of Galatia Paul addressed were Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derby. The cities of Corinth and Antioch in Syria are the most likely places for Paul to have written this letter. If this latter view (South Galatia Theory) is adopted, then this letter is the earliest of Paul's letters. It is supported by its lack of reference to the Jerusalem Council, convened primarily to discuss the problem which Paul dealt with in this epistle.

The purpose of this letter was to disabuse the minds of the recipients, of the teaching of the 'Judaizers' who had come after Paul had left for Galatia and insisted that the Gentile believers could not be true Christians unless they submitted to the Jewish ordinance of circumcision, and to the law of Moses. The Judaizers

also disapproved of Paul's apostleship, a situation which nearly undermined the authenticity of his teachings.

Message of Galatians – This was a treatise on salvation and the author, Apostle Paul, it placed emphasis on faith as opposed to works. The apostle dealt with a Church that returned to salvation based on works. Paul showed that he was equal with the original apostles because he received his doctrine by revelation from Jesus (Gal. 1:11-17). McKnight and Modica point out what makes Paul's letter to the Galatians somewhat peculiar. According to them, not only does the apostle focus on what is it which makes a person a Christian, but in all of his letters "it is in Galatians that Paul gives a clear account of his own conversion" (2016, p. 1-2).

Once Paul had established his apostolic authority, he went on to present the gospel which he preached and emphasized that believers are justified by faith in Christ's atoning work rather than by the works of the law (Gal 2:15-5:15). Apostle Paul concluded with exhortations about how to be led by the spirit instead of the flesh (Gal 5:16-6:10).

Ephesians

Background to Ephesians - This is a circular letter written from Roman prison around AD 62. Paul did not write to the Ephesians

to solve a particular problem or deal with any emergency issue in the Church. Instead, he wrote a broadly reflective letter to help Christians remain strong in their faith. He had spent almost three years teaching and caring for some of these people, and he wanted to make sure that they continued to follow Jesus.

Message of Ephesians – Longman III (2013, p. 509) reveals that Paul wanted believers to have a deeper understanding and experience of three realities; the new life in Christ; the new community in Christ and finally the new walk to which Christ called them. So, the epistle is a treatise on sanctification. The mystery of the Church, Christians in action – living and working in harmony despite differences. The author also makes his readers know the real enemy – Satan, and the use of the armor of God.

Philippians

Background to Philippians - This was written by Paul to the Philippian Christians from prison around AD 62. The stimulus for Paul in writing to the Philippians may have been that Epaphroditus who was a native of Philippi was about to return and could act as a messenger (2:25). He had brought Paul news from the believers at Philippi and had been of help to him during his imprisonment. Paul wanted to respond to the news and to thank the members of the Church for their financial generosity.

Message of Philippians – This is a treatise on living joyfully as the believers had been a joy to him. There are indications that it was a ‘thank you’ letter to a Church that Paul loved. Adeyemo (2006, p. 1439) notes concerning Paul, that as a pastor, he wanted to encourage the believers at Philippi to maintain their Christian unity and love, following the example of humility set by Christ. There was also a need to warn them of the possible danger that could come through false teachers, such as the Judaizers.

Colossians

Background to Colossians - This letter was written by Paul to the Church at Colossae from prison around AD 62. There are clear indications that the Colossian Church was composed mainly of Gentile membership. Willmington (1989, p. 475) reveals that sometime after its beginning, this Church was infected by a deadly virus known as Judaistic Gnosticism.

Message of Colossians – This epistle appears more like a short version of Ephesians with different emphasis – opposing legalism and philosophy. It is a treatise that encourages the believers at Colossae to keep the faith free from syncretism. In other words, it is a reminder to avoid syncretism. In fact, chapter 2 of the letter gives clues to the position that the Colossians were doing several things that Paul found troublesome. For example, they were

judging each other for not keeping certain dietary regulations and holy days (2:16). Some of the believers were claiming superiority through personal worship experiences that involved visions of angels (2:18).

Longman III (2013, p. 331) observes that some of the members subscribed to strict discipline of the human body, punishing themselves through various acts of self-abasement to curb fleshly appetites (2:23) and enhance their worship experiences (2:18). Consequently, Paul wrote this Colossian epistle to deal with these issues and sent it to the Church by a faithful brother known as Tychicus.

Thessalonians

Background to 1 and 2 Thessalonians - This epistle, addressed to the new believers in Thessalonica, seems to be the first of Paul's letters and was probably written from Corinth sometime between AD 49 and 54. Even though Paul and his companions had spent less than a month there (Acts 17:1-9), a flourishing Church had been born. According to Adeyemo (2006, p. 1459), Paul wrote this intimate letter to comfort and instruct the believers here because they were suffering persecution. In his letter, he commends them for standing firm in their testimony as believers

in Christ, and encourages them to continue in their faith, which is to be sustained by the hope of Christ's return.

Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians – The first of these letters was written by Paul to the Church at Thessalonica. It reminiscences about the Church and its survival. It is also about Paul's teachings about the Lord's return for His Church. In it, Paul discusses how believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now, whereas at the time of the first letter the Thessalonians were expecting the imminent return of Christ (1Thess 5:6), by the time of the second letter, some were of the belief that Christ had already come (2Thess 2:2). Consequently, some of the believers had withdrawn from their work into idleness (2Thess 3:6). Accordingly, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was to address a church troubled by issues of eschatology (Adeyemo, 2006, p. 1625). It is a clarification about Paul's teachings on the Lord's return and the events preceding it.

Paul's purpose was to correct their eschatology, restore them to their tasks, and rebuild their confidence in Christ. He did this both by emphasizing Jesus Christ as Lord and also by describing two apocalyptic events that must happen before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: the great apostasy and the appearing of the man of lawlessness (2Thess 2:3). The need for each Christian

to work is made clear. Paul warned believers not to feed those who would not engage in profitable work to cater for themselves.

Timothy

Background to 1 and 2 Timothy - The books, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, have always been regarded as forming a separate group of letters different from the usual letters of Paul. The most obvious difference is that they, along with the letter to Philemon, were written to persons whereas all other Pauline letters were written to churches. The two epistles to Timothy and the one to Titus, because of their special instruction for Church leaders, are commonly known as Pastoral epistles.

In these letters, Paul presented his thought and feelings as he prepared to entrust his ministry to others. Timothy was a native of Lystra. His mother was a Jewess, and his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1). He was highly esteemed by believers of both Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). It was likely that he came to the Lord through Paul's ministry in Lystra on his first missionary journey. His mother and grandmother had instructed him in the Scriptures (2Tim 1:5; 3:15). Paul added Timothy to his team on his Second Missionary journey.

To avoid criticism by the Jews, Timothy was circumcised by Paul (Acts 16:3). Apostle Paul sent him back to Thessalonica as his

representative (1Thess 3:1–2) when he (Paul) was hindered by Satan from going there himself (1Thess 2:17–18). Paul sent Timothy there along with Erastus, on another important meeting from Ephesus (Acts 19:22). From there, Timothy proceeded to Corinth (1Cor 4:17) where Paul had written to encourage the believers to accept him as his companion in the ministry (1Cor 16:10–11).

Timothy also accompanied Paul on the trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4–5) and was with Paul during the latter's trip to Rome. It was from Rome that Paul wrote three of his prison epistles (Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phile 1). After Paul's release from prison, he engaged in further ministry in the east and left Timothy at Ephesus (1Tim 1:3) to deal with false teachers, supervised public worship, and assist the Church in the appointment of leaders.

Message of 1 and 2 Timothy – Paul's letters to Timothy were written between AD 64 and 67. The first of these was written around AD 64. It was written from Macedonia and it shows Paul's directions to Timothy about pastoring the Church at Ephesus. Paul wrote this to Timothy because he feared that he might be delay in joining Timothy at Ephesus. In this epistle, Paul reveals how Timothy should oversee leadership in the Ephesians Church.

Paul also instructed him on how to deal with the growing problem posed by the false Gnostic and Judaist teachers, and doctrines on Greek Myths which were prevalent in the Church at Ephesus. His warning against these teachers' infiltrations into the Church appeared to be an echo of an earlier one in Acts 20:28-30. Here, Paul urged Timothy to boldly withstand these evil men by upholding the truth of the Scriptures, while abstaining from youthful lust and lust for money.

Apostle Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy from prison in Rome (2Tim 1:8; 4:16–18) towards the end of his life around AD 66. Accordingly, it is believed to be Paul's last letter. This letter shows how Paul encouraged Timothy to carry on his work because he (Paul) foresaw that the end of his life was drawing closer. Timothy was emboldened to stand against false teachers and deal wisely with them (2 Tim 2:14–26). The Apostle saw the need to encourage Timothy, regarded as his 'son' and mentee in the ministry, to be firm as the latter encountered persecutions and turmoil in dealing with all forms of opposition in the Church. Moreover, Paul urged Timothy to exercise his spiritual gift (2Tim 1:6). He was to boldly endure suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2Tim 2:3), and to continue to exhibit strong testimony for Christ in the wake of the apostasy and weakness in the world (2Tim 3:1–9).

The style of Paul's second letter to Timothy is less didactic than the first letter, and it is believed that Paul wrote a more personal letter because he expected to be executed soon. Paul talked to Timothy as a father who would soon be leaving his 'son.' The references to Timothy's own spiritual heritage and call to the ministry reveal how Paul reflected on his own influence on Timothy's life (2Tim 1:3, 5, 6). Apart from Paul's letters to Timothy and the mention of the latter in Acts and in some of Paul's writings to the churches, nothing else is known about Timothy except that he was the head of the Church at Ephesus and most likely became a prisoner at a point in time (Heb 13:23).

Titus

Background to Titus - Titus was likely a Gentile from Macedonia (Gal 2:3), who was led to Christ by Paul (2Tim 1:4). He was with Paul in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1) when some Jewish Christians insisted that Titus should be circumcised but Paul refused (Gal 2:3-5). Titus might have been with Paul when he wrote the letter to the Galatians. Titus enthusiastically volunteered to help the Church at Corinth (2Cor 8:17) and was full of affection for the believers there (2Cor 7:15).

It is evident that after Paul's release from his house arrest in Rome, Titus travelled with him to do missionary work in the east.

They landed on Crete, a large island in the Mediterranean, and evangelized in several towns in the region. When Paul was unable to stay, he left Titus at Crete to complete the organization of the congregation in that region (Tit 1:5). Titus met with considerable opposition and insubordination in the Church, especially from Jews (Tit 1:10).

It is quite possible that Titus had written to Paul to report this problem and asked for spiritual advice. Paul responded with this short letter believed to be written around AD 64, and probably delivered by Zenas the lawyer and Apollos (Tit 3:13), sometime between Paul's first and second imprisonment. It is believed that Paul wrote the letter from Nicopolis, where he planned to spend the winter and asked Titus to join him (Tit 3:12).

The letter to Titus was written about the same time that the first letter to Timothy was written because the tone of instruction of the two letters is similar. This means that it was written by Paul to Titus around AD 65. It is believed Titus was dispatched from Nicopolis after meeting Paul to Dalmatia (2Tim 4:10).

Message of Titus – This letter reveals Paul's directions to Titus about pastoring the Church in Crete. It also serves as a template on how to oversee the Church. In his letter to Titus, Apostle Paul

responded by asking his disciple, Titus, to complete the process of organization of the Church and to appoint leaders in it. He was also to exercise his own authority firmly and to teach sound doctrine while avoiding unnecessary strife (Tit 3:9). Finally, he was to warn those who cause division and to teach submission to those in authority (Tit 3:1).

Philemon

Background to Philemon - Paul's letter to Philemon is somewhat personal even though it was addressed to three specific individuals namely Philemon himself, Apphia and Archippus, who were probably Philemon's wife and son respectively. The letter was written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, between AD 61 and 63. Philemon was believed to be a Greek who owed his conversion into Christianity to the ministry of Paul. He was probably a native of Colossae in Phrygia or one of the sister cities, namely Laodicea or Hierapolis, who had come to settle in Colossae. He was most likely a man of wealth because he had a large household including slaves, one of whom was Onesimus. Additionally, a group of believers was meeting in his house, an indication that he was a prominent Christian in Colossae.

Message of Philemon – This is a private letter from Apostle Paul to Philemon from prison around AD 62. It is a treatise about

Christians and slavery. The content of this letter is not anti-cultural but has within it the seed that eventually destroyed slavery. In this letter, a runaway slave, Onesimus, was sent back to Philemon, his master. Onesimus, believed to have come from Colossae (Col 4:9), was perhaps guilty of stealing from his master, Philemon, so he had escaped from Colossae to Rome.

However, Onesimus might have been found by Epaphras and sent to Paul. Upon his conversion into Christianity, he had been found to be a useful servant to Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, Paul, realizing that he could not continue to harbor and maintain a runaway slave, intended to send him back to Philemon. Subsequently, Paul wrote this letter through Tychicus to Philemon with the objective of a possible return of the slave, Onesimus, to his master. Paul saw this step as a demonstration of true reconciliation in the body of Christ.

The content of this letter is just not a simple request for a slave's life on humanitarian grounds. For, Apostle Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother, because he had also become a fellow Christian. The apostle's request thus presented Onesimus as a beloved brother both to himself and to Philemon and his main intention was to breakdown the worldly barrier of division in the Lord and enslavement. Paul expressed

his sorrow at the departure of Onesimus but saw it as a necessity step that led to the latter's conversion. He asked Philemon to be lenient with Onesimus and receive him with open hands since he had become a changed person, one completely different from the slave who ran away.

Apostle Paul did not prefer to make it an obligation though he could have done so because Philemon was also deeply indebted to him. Clearly, Paul used words which would foster love between the master and his slave. Indeed, he chose considerate words which were full of praise for his firm faith in the Lord and deep Christian love. He was confident that a man of Philemon's standing in Christianity would do all that he asked and even more (v. 21).

The final remark of Paul on the issue was a further appeal for Onesimus' total release and freedom to help in the Christian ministry by joining him (Paul) in Rome. This request of Paul under normal circumstances could have had a far-reaching effect in the Roman world. This is because slavery was such an integral part of the social structure of the day that, to preach freedom to a slave world have been tantamount to revolution or treason. Paul used the occasion not to engage in political campaigning but to preach

a gospel capable of transforming human life by fusing into it Christian love and brotherhood.

Chapter Summary

The interactions in this chapter have centered on the backgrounds and messages of the NT letters which were written by Apostle Paul. Interesting issues like the nature of NT letters which led to a focus on the backgrounds and message of Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonica, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon have been dealt with. The next chapter will focus its discussions on other letters that were written by the other apostles and leaders.

CHAPTER NINE

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

After the death of Stephen, many disciples were scattered all over the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 7:54-8:3). In Acts 11:19, the author notes: “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.” These Jewish Christians no longer had direct contact with the apostles in Jerusalem and needed to be instructed and admonished in their tribulations. This led to the writing of many letters by some of the apostle other than Paul to the diaspora Christians or believers. The backgrounds and the messages of these letters have been presented in the subsequent section.

Hebrews

Background to Hebrews - The authorship of the Hebrews is still debatable. In most cases, therefore, authorship is accepted as unknown, but the letter was no doubt written to Jewish Christians. This letter was most likely written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, probably sometime between AD 64 and 68, and was directed to Jewish Christians (the Jews were the ones who were most likely referred to as ‘Hebrews’). Indications are that

both the believers here and the writer had come to faith in Christ Jesus through the preaching and teaching of those who had heard Jesus (2:3-4; 13:7). They had been believers for some time (13:7) but their faith in Christ was being undermined by intense persecution.

Message of Hebrews – This book is a treatise to explain how Christ is the fulfillment of the OT sacrificial system. This resulted in a new covenant based on faith. Jesus is presented as both High Priest and Sacrifice. The author of Hebrews sets out to encourage the wavering believers by pointing them to Christ Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT covenant. The author argues that Christ outranks Moses and is superior to the entire Jewish priestly system as well as superior to the prophets and even the angels. In view of Christ's supremacy, he argues that faith in Christ is an improvement on Judaism because Christ offers a superior covenant, a superior sanctuary and a sacrifice truly able to cleanse the sinner from sin.

Adeyemo (2006, p. 1489) notes how the author exhorts his readers to persevere in the faith in the face of persecutions. He points out the consequences of not doing so and encourages them by reminding them of examples of devoted heroes and

heroines of the faith. He ends by explaining the role of discipline and giving them some practical advice for living the Christian life.

James

Background to James - James might have written this letter to instruct and comfort the scattered believers, as he addressed this letter to “the twelve tribes dispersed abroad” (1:1). It is apparent from the contents of this letter that the rich were taking advantage of them (2:6; 5:1-6), and their trials had led to worldliness, rash words, and strained relationships (2:1; 4:1, 11; 5:9). In view of the persecution, some believers might have been tempted to hide their faith (5:10-11). Thus, Elder James exhorted them to demonstrate a lifestyle that would reflect their faith.

Message of James – This was probably written by James, brother of Jesus, considered to be one of the Bishops of the Church, to the 12 Jewish tribes scattered (in diaspora). It was most likely written around AD 45. The theme is: ‘Faith must be demonstrated by works.’ The author argues that Christian faith is demonstrated in good works. He warned members of the body of Christ against improper use of the tongue since it is a part of the human body that is vested with great power which can be used to destroy. Rather, believers should endeavor to use the tongue to bless at all time.

Peter

Background to 1 and 2Peter - The Apostle Peter was the most prominent disciple during the early ministry of Jesus and had a tremendous impact on the early Church. The first twelve chapters of the book of Acts was devoted to his ministry and to the development of the Church in the east, where he was the dominant figure. Peter wrote two of the New Testament books.

The first letter was addressed to the believers in the five Roman province in Asia Minor (1Pet 1:1), which is modern day Turkey. It was likely to have been written around AD 65. It centered on the difficulties the believers were facing at that time which would even intensify in the future. Indeed, the first empire-wide persecution of Christians did not come until AD 249 under the brutal Emperor Decius, yet local persecutions were often quite severe. One took place early in the second century in Bithynia, one of the provinces, during which time Peter wrote his second epistle (2Pet 1:1). Consequently, the second letter by Peter, which is apocalyptic in nature, was written around AD 67.

Message of 1 and 2Peter - The first of these letters was addressed to diaspora believers who had gone as far as the northern part of present-day Turkey. It talks about remaining faithful during persecution. Little wonder, its theme is usually

considered as: 'Suffering comes to God's people, so stand firm in your faith.' Clearly, it was written to encourage Christians to endure the persecution that was prevalent in the area and to prepare the readers for the difficult times ahead. Peter used Jesus' suffering as the cornerstone of his exhortation and admonished believers to suffer as Christians and not as law breakers (1Pet 4:15–16)

The second letter by Peter was to warn about false teachers who did not believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. There are statements about the end of the earth and how the earth shall be consumed with a fervent heat. In his second letter, though it is possible that Peter was addressing the same group of believers as the first, it might also have been addressed to an entirely different group. For example, some scholars conclude from the phrase: "to those who...have received a faith as precious ones" (2Pet 1:1), that Peter was written to Gentile believers.

Besides, Peter's second letter can be observed to be directed against Gnostic and Antinomian philosophies. Gnostics taught that in addition to believing in Jesus Christ, one must also receive what they describe as the esoteric knowledge (or *gnosis*) of the gospel. Antinomians believed that since salvation was by grace alone, the requirements of the moral law were irrelevant.

Peter, however, countered these strange and false teaching in his second letter. He issued a firm warning concerning these false teachers and refuted this idea by stressing the fact that believers had already known the truth of the gospel. This, according to him, had come in the form of eyewitness testimony about Jesus Christ (2Pet 1:16-18) and the written Scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Pet 1:19-21). Peter used the second chapter of his second letter (2Pet 2:1-22) to attack the licentious lifestyle that naturally resulted among those who held these beliefs. Peter also rebuked any skepticism about Christ's return and corrected the faulty perception of this event with one of the most detailed description of the end-time events in all the Scriptures.

According to Peter, the delay of Jesus' return was only apparent because God does not function according to man's concept of time (2Pet 3:8-9) and declared that when the "day of the Lord comes," it will be accompanied by total destruction of the physical universe (2Pet 3:10-13).

John

Background to 1, 2 and 3John - Reliable historical sources dating from the second century AD not only connect the Apostle John to the Church at Ephesus but also reveal that he ministered throughout the province of Asia from about AD 70 to 100.

Therefore, the possibility of all three books being written by the apostle to Christians in that region around AD 90-100 in high. The first of these letters was addressed to all believers, while the second was dedicated to a special identity called 'Lady' with the third addressed to a person named Gaius (Pergamum). In terms of their theme, the first is considered 'God is love,' the second is 'Love one another' while the third is 'Good and Bad Church leadership.'

Message of 1, 2 and 3John

The letters of John have many similarities with the Gospel of John, little wonder all of them are ascribed to one author – Apostle John. The aim of writing the first letter was to assure believers that they have eternal life (5:13), a point emphasized so much in the Gospel of John (3:15; 5:39; 6:54; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2; 17:3), and thus to reassure Christians of the security of their salvation in Christ (Adeyemo, 2006, p. 1529).

The second letter which was a follow-up to the first was no doubt written as a warning about false doctrines. To counter the effect of false teachers and heretics, the author, Apostle John, exhorted believers to continue in their faith in God's command to love one another. As a further follow-up to the first and second letters, the third letter was written to a believer named Gaius. It was to

acknowledge the cordial reception and demonstration of hospitality to ministers of the gospel that became acquainted with him. The letter also contrasted the conduct or otherwise of two other believers, presumably, leaders of a Church: Demetrius and Diotrephes. The author commended the former for good works but condemned the latter for misconduct.

Jude

Background to Jude - The author of this letter identified himself as Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (Jude 1). In the early Church, there was one leader called James who was regarded as the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19). If someone could be referred to as such without further specification, then Jude, the author of this letter, who described himself as a brother of James might also be a brother of Jesus. Most likely, he was the same person mentioned as 'Judas' and listed together with James in Matthew 13:55 (cf. Acts 1:14) as half-brothers of Jesus. Be that as it may, then James and Jude might be the Lord's junior brothers.

Little is known of the precise time when the book was written. It has, however, been suggested that since Jude's letter sparks the same idea as the second letter of Peter, it might have been written around AD 70, probably a little before the destruction of

Jerusalem, or around the time of Peter's death. Bible scholars differ in view concerning the recipients of the letter of Jude since scanty information about recipients' circumstance exist. While some feel that it was written to churches in Asia minor, to whom the second letter of Peter was directed, others support the view that the recipients were believers in Palestine who were familiar with Jewish history (Jude 5–10). In other words, the letter was written to Jewish believers.

Message of Jude – The letter of Jude has only one chapter and it is similar in content to that of the second letter of Peter (Jude 3–19; cf. 2Pet 2:1–3:10). The book is apocalyptic in nature and no doubt trumpets a general warning about false teachers (vv. 4–19). It contains a quotation from the apocryphal book of Enoch (vv. 14 – 15). Serious apostasy seemed to have been prevalent in Jude's day (Jude 4, 12–19), and he might have been alarmed at the great number of false teachers that were being accepted in the churches.

Consequently, Jude wrote his letter to urge the believers to “contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the Saints” (Jude 3). He ended his exhortation with praise and glory to the Lord, the one “who is able to keep...the only God” (Jude 24–25). This expression shows Jude's perception of God as one

who is eternal and one who is to be always praised by the believer.

Revelation

Background to Revelation - This apocalyptic book was written by Apostle John between AD 90 and 95 from the Island of Patmos (or Ephesus). It was written to the believers of seven (7) churches of Asia to show that Jesus is the Lord of all the events of history, so they should stand firm. The book of Revelation particularly seeks to present God's plans for the end of the age and talks about a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Apostle John received the revelations contained in this book during the latter part of the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), when he intensified his persecution of Christians. John was undoubtedly exiled to the island of Patmos because of his Christian testimony. He was released after eighteen months by Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98), after which the apostle returned to Ephesus to resume his leadership role there.

Message of Revelation - Among the New Testament books, the uniqueness of the book of Revelation is reflected in being apocalyptic, a genre which is familiar to the Jews. The book is set forth in vivid and emotional terms and reveals the events of the

conquering Messiah. The descriptions here are similar to the discourses of Jesus which are found in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 concerning His Second Coming.

In the introductory part of the book, John tells his story. While there, John was praying one day, a day he described as “the Lord’s day,” when a voice instructed him to write what he was about to see (vv. 9-11). John turned and was given a vision of Jesus in His full glory, so awesome that John fell to the ground, stunned (vv. 12-17). Jesus lifted him up, revealed his identity to the apostle and told him to write what he saw (vv. 18-20). Hence, the content of Revelation is unfolding events in the spiritual realm shown by the Lord to depict His dealing with creation and concerns the present and mostly, the future.

Chapter Summary

Besides the epistles of Apostle Paul, there were also letters written by the other apostles and leaders of the Church during the first century AD. The discussions in this chapter have been dedicated to the background information and message to these letters: Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and Jude. The background and message of the Revelation by Apostle John has also been raised in this chapter. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the operations of spiritual gifts in the New Testament.

CHAPTER TEN

OPERATIONS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ ushered the world into a new dispensation. It is commonly described as the dispensation of grace or of the Holy Spirit. It represents the period within which God through the perfect sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ is reconciling mankind unto himself. What one needs to do is to repent from the unacceptable lifestyle, confess any sins unto God, and put his/her faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross by accepting Him as Lord and Savior. Finally, the person is baptized in the name of Jesus to begin a new life. After this process, humanity, that hitherto had been alienated from God, now becomes reconciled to God. A person now becomes a member of the body of Jesus Christ, i.e., the Church, and receives the Holy Spirit and the power to live for God through Jesus Christ.

The Church and the Advent of Spiritual Gifts

When we speak of the Church, many people usually think of a building where Christians congregate for worship service. However, the word ‘church’ comes from the root word, *ecclesia*, i.e., ‘the called-out individuals.’ So, it has been defined in many

several ways depending upon what constitutes the fundamental underpinnings.

For example, in the context of orthodox Christianity, the church represents those who are sanctified and purified by the blood of the Lamb of God and therefore have access to God through Jesus Christ by faith. Ott and Wilson (2011, p. 7) also define the church as being “composed of persons who have experienced salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ according to the gospel and confessed in baptism.” They continue that such people “desire to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, regenerated and enabled by the Holy Spirit.”

Irrespective of which definition is suitable, people become believers individually, but they are not encouraged to live as separate entities rather as part of the church which is a body (Acts 2:44-47). According to Apostle Paul, the Church is part of “the body of Christ” to which everybody belongs (1Cor 12:24-27). Therefore, everybody who becomes a member enters fellowship with all others (Heb 10:25).

The Church is established by the Lord Jesus Christ for many reasons. As the main mouthpiece of the ministry of the resurrected Christ, it is regarded as the wheel for the continuation

of His work on earth. Not only should the Church be able to demonstrate the saving power of the gospel, but it is also expected “to be a source of hope, direction and guidance to the world” (Tengey, 2017, p. 13). As a yardstick for the world to evaluate the life of Christ on earth, the Church should be seen as a holy institution where lives are truly molded to reflect the message it preaches.

As mandated by its founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church should be a problem solver to the world and never the problem creator. Tengey continues with this argument:

The church should be showing the way in everything; from honesty, justice, truthfulness, ethics, responsibility, accountability, and moral strength such that when the world is looking for solution to these problems, their first point of contact will be the church (2017, p. 13).

It is for the Church to be able to perform its mandate as the body of Christ on earth in an acceptable way that the Lord has empowered it with spiritual gifts.

One of the earliest indications of extensive operations of spiritual gifts appeared in the OT Scriptures. It indicated the following gifts: prophecy, dreams, and visions, according to Joel 2:28. Also, in

the context of the NT, the Lord Jesus himself gave a promise regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit. The promise is part of the overall package to fulfil the God's purpose of reconciliation with the world which Jesus had come to begin. In fulfillment of this promise, the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and this gave birth to the Church of Jesus Christ. Apostle Peter, speaking on the day of Pentecost, related this prophecy of Joel to the Church (Acts 2:16-21).

Spiritual gifts are definitely supernatural gifts because they are related to the Holy Spirit and thus provide divine enablement. Douglas and Merrill (1963, p. 390) seems to integrate the two words when it defines spiritual gift as divine endowment of special ability for service upon a member of the body of Christ that comes through the grace of God.

The Significance of Spiritual Gifts in the Church

The importance which the coming of the Holy Spirit introduced in the Church of Christ is the manifestation of spiritual gifts. His coming was accompanied by the bearing of the fruit of the Holy Spirit by the believers and the power to witness Jesus to the world. While there have been relatively little controversies over the bearing of fruit of the Holy Spirit (such as love, joy, peace, patience and the rest as listed in Galatians 5:22, the level of

controversies over the manifestation or demonstration of the spiritual gifts in the Church is quite high.

It is for the proper functioning of this body that Christ gave out the spiritual gifts. Christ meant that the spiritual gift be used for the benefit of the Church. Without any ambiguity, Ephesians 4:12-23 gives a summary of the reasons for which Christ gave out the spiritual gifts as follows:

- The perfecting of the saints
- The work of the ministry
- Edification of the body of Christ, till we all come into the unity of the faith
- Help believers to grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ
- To be able to speak the truth in love

Mention of the many kinds of spiritual gifts in the Bible which the Holy Spirit has blessed the Church of Jesus Christ with is made in several scriptural passages. The major ones which are mentioned include the gifts of service, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, and gift of administration (Rom 12:3–8). Then there are specific gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, the working of miracles, distinguishing between spirits (discernment), diverse kinds of tongues and interpretations of tongues, and prophecy

(1Cor 12:8-10). There are also the five-fold ministry gifts which are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers which are usually required for shepherding and nurturing believers of God to grow into maturity (Acts 6:2; cf. Eph 4:11). Mention is also made of special gifts of leadership, mercy, and gift of administration (1Cor 12:28-30).

Brief descriptions of some of the spiritual gifts which are revealed in the Scriptures are given in the subsequent subsections:

Dreams: This is to see into the spirit when one is sleeping. It is also called night vision. Its other form is the naked vision which takes place even when man is awake. Both might be implied in God's prophecy through Joel (2:28). Both gifts give direction or instruction and understanding into events in life (Acts 16:9).

Gift of Service: This gift enables a person to devote himself or herself to certain duties or works in the Church voluntarily and wholeheartedly (Rom 12:7). Such a person is always prepared to sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Gift of Teaching: This gift does not only grant believers special understanding of the Scriptures to teach correctly but it also makes such persons present their messages such that they become easily understandable (Rom 12:7; Acts 13:7).

Gift of Exhortation: The one who exhorts or encourages has that special ability to stir up the believers, comfort and challenge them always using Scriptures and especially during challenging periods (Rom 12:8; Acts 4:36).

Gift of Giving: This enables a believer to have the desire to give whole-heartedly whenever the need arises without grudging (Rom 12:8). People with such a gift are usually joyful whenever they can satisfy other people more than themselves.

Gift of Leadership: Somebody with the leadership gift can exercise special qualities when there is the need for organizing or mobilizing people for a special service and takes oversight of people through exhibition of special skills in communication and otherwise with them (Rom 12:8)

Gift of Mercy: The one who shows mercy usually understands the problems of others more than anyone else and is usually moved to make unusual sacrifices to help others. Such a person is usually empathetic. That is, he/she develops a heart that feels for others more than himself or herself (Rom 12:8).

Gift of Wisdom/Word of Wisdom: This is a special fragment of supernaturally imparted gift of grace to somebody to know what to say or do at any given situation. Usually, it is not a

natural, academic or wisdom gained from an experience, and has nothing to do with age (1Cor 12:8; Job 32:7-8).

Gift of Knowledge/Word of Knowledge: The one who has the gift of Word of knowledge can give certain facts and information which was previously unknown to the one and is not easy to gain. It is usually employed in Scriptures to uncover sin (1Cor 12:8; Acts 5:1-11), to give guidance and direction and also give insight into hidden things (1 Sam 10:22) and even predict future events (Acts 11:27, 28).

Special gift of Faith: This is the special endowment given by God to someone to take special steps which others dare not (1Cor 12:9). It appears like God supernaturally removes any doubt from the person during that period of exercising the gift and fills the one with enough faith to accomplish the fact, despite natural contradictions.

Gift of Healing: This gift operates supernaturally to deal with certain diseases and infirmities which are usually hard to cure by physical means. In fact, the one who exercises this gift does not have the ability to always heal all sorts of sicknesses (1Cor 19:11). However, when the Holy Spirit decides to use a person, the operation may be limitless.

Gift of Working Miracles: The one who has the gift of working of special miracles is endowed with power to reveal the glory of God through special demonstration when the need arises. In most cases, it is so overwhelming that it brings changes to challenging situations. Usually, the special miracles that are produced by such a gift are overwhelming that ordinary human efforts cannot make them happen (1Cor 12:10; 19:11).

Gift of Discernment: The believer who operates this gift may be able to distinguish between spirits and can sometimes determine the spiritual source of some of the teachings and manifestations by people. Usually, such a gifted believer is not only able to see into the spiritual realm but more importantly able to distinguish between a spirit of deception from satanic powers and a true spirit from God. When this gift is in action, it is not easy for counterfeit gifts to deceive believers because they would be revealed (1Cor 12:10; Act 13:8–11).

Gift of Speaking in Tongues: This gift is considered as “probably the best gift that God gave to ministers” (Heward-Mills, 2016, p. 351). Usually, it has two functions: prayerfully speaking in tongues for purposes of self-edification and speaking in diverse kinds of tongues. The second function when used in conjunction with the gift of interpretations of

tongues, can be considered as prophesy to edify the Church. This also means that speaking in tongues in a public assembly should be accompanied by its interpretation (1Cor 12:10; 14:5, 13), unless it is a prayer language.

In fact, Paul's advice is that public speaking of tongues should be limited to a maximum of three speakers and should usually be supported by interpretations for the benefit of the hearers. In such a situation, the language becomes beneficial to the hearers, otherwise the operator of such a gifted must be able to do so inaudibly (1Cor 14:28).

Gift of Interpretation of Tongues: This is the companion gift to the tongues and is always used in conjunction with it. Generally, interpretation is the special enablement to bring the tongue into the known language of the believers (1Cor 12:10). It should be noted that interpretation of tongues is not the same as translation because the interpreter of the tongue does not usually have any prior understanding of the language used in the communication. As a result, the interpretation to it is regarded as supernatural just as the tongues being spoken.

Gift of Prophecy: This gift primarily means forth-telling the inspired word of God, but less often foretelling. According to

1Corinthians 14:31, all believers may exercise this gift at some time in accordance with the will of the Holy Spirit, although some have it as a special gift. The purpose of this gift is to edify, exhort and comfort the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gift of Administration: This is the divine grace to manage public, organizational or any business affairs. It is needed for the day to day running of any organization in a fruitful and progressive manner (1Cor 12:28). Those endowed with this gift are usually exceptional in terms of achieving positive results wherever they are placed. Although all the gifts are distributed by the same Holy Spirit, there are some variations among them and difference in their methods of operation (1Cor 12:5-6).

How the Spiritual Gifts relate with one another in Practical Unity

Having released spiritual gifts upon His Church, the Lord through Apostle Paul in Romans 12, told believers how to use them in practical unity for Church growth. Paul's message in the whole chapter can be broken down into three main sections as follows: i) to be right with God and be able to prove His good and acceptable and perfect will (vv. 1-2); ii) to rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit for harmonious living in order to be a blessing to other believers (vv. 3-13); iii) to extend one's goodwill to all people (vv. 14-21).

The detail discussions are as follows:

i). Romans 12:1-2: These two verses might be regarded as a summary of the remaining verses of the chapter. In these verses, Paul beseeched believers to present their bodies as living sacrifice to God. Then he exhorted them to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, and not be conformed to the standards of the world. This might be done by the sacrifice of one's ego, i.e., the lower nature of a person, with all its sinful desires. The reason is that the ego of any believer always becomes a hindrance to the unity in the body of Christ.

However, any person whose ego had been crucified would not conform to this world with regards to the thoughts in the mind and the desires of the heart. Once the Holy Spirit exercises total control over the spiritual nature of a person who believes in Christ, the mind of such a person would be transformed through the renewal brought about by the Spirit when he/she had become totally obedient and submitted to God. Such a person would be able to fully accept the will of God and rely on God's grace and His gift to live in harmony with others.

Romans 12:3-13: Apostle Paul continued his discussion on these verses with a call to humility (v. 3). Boll (n.d., p. 53) argues that the apostle used himself as an example of one who had

benefitted from the grace of God which saved, transformed, and made him acceptable for God's service. Sequel to his argument, Boll explains that Paul's message in verse 3 inculcated a humility of a peculiar sort, i.e., a type of meekness of the mind which enables a person to serve in any capacity, in accordance with the ability which God had bestowed upon such a person.

Moving further, Paul spoke of the body and its members (vv. 4–5), which clearly represent a spiritual body with entities. What this means is that believers constitute one body; i.e., one great spiritual organism in which Christ is the head and those who believe in Him are members who engage in mutual relationships within the body. This means that the believers' oneness in Christ does not abolish uniqueness and differences. Boll once again uses Paul's message in these two verses to exhort members of the body of Christ not to think that they can just occupy any position in the Church or do anything they wish in the body, since every member of the body has a peculiar function. Thus, believers should soberly find out what they are gifted to do and address themselves accordingly.

For the body of Christ to function properly as a unit with many different parts, Paul laid down some precepts as measures for members of the body. There should be no exaggerated notion of

ones' own importance. People with mind-set and believe that they are better than others are haughty and sinful and will spoil the unity of the body. On the contrary, if by God's grace a person becomes a member of the body of Christ, such a person is only one among many. As such, the body with its many members perform different functions which, however diverse they may be, are related to each other in a complementary manner.

According to Harlow (1972, p. 103), the Church which comprises all believers is the body (Eph 1:23), with Christ as the head. So, all the members of the body constitute the many different parts of the body. Since each part of the human body performs a function to make the body work properly, the same can be said about the Church. All the members of the body thus depend upon each other; they are joined by an interdependence of both functional abilities and disabilities. When all the parts function normally, the compactly united body enjoys good health and soundness. However, if any member malfunctions, the whole body suffers (Eph 4:16).

Beginning from verse 6, Paul enumerated some of the spiritual gifts of Christian ministry which are vital to effective growth of the Church as: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, leadership, giving, and engaging in acts of mercy. These gifts are given in

accordance with the proportion of grace received by believers to function together as a unit. The apostle began his discussion on the gifts with that of prophecy. In the Old Testament, the true prophets of God employed both gifts of fore-telling and forth-telling to communicate to the covenant community what God wanted them to do or was going to do.

Similarly, the prophets in the New Testament Church could give their messages by means of both fore-telling and forth-telling. Paul's reference to the operation of the prophetic gift here was in the context of those who engage in both fore-telling and forth-telling, the latter being the process of preaching or speaking the word of God for the purposes of edification and not necessarily giving any predictions. Paul cautioned those with such gifts to serve the Lord by speaking according to the level of faith given them by the grace of God.

There are also those who have the gift of service. Paul exhorted such ministers to do so as not unto mere human beings but God (Col 3:17), and that nothing less than such a standard would please God. Those who have the gift of teaching, Paul advised to continue to teach to the understanding of their hearers, while those who have the gift to comfort and encourage others should also do so to the benefits of the brethren (vv. 7-8a).

Though it is not surprising that at some point in time, a believer might be able to give some form of material substance to help others in need, there are those have been given a special grace (or gift) to give in support of others. These, Paul exhorted to give with simplicity and with a joyful heart (Matt 6:1; cf. Rom 12:8b), and without grumbling. Paul called those who have the special grace to serve as leaders to be willing to work hard in the body (1Thess 5:12). While those who have the gift of offering special help to people in trouble should do it cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7).

For Harlow (1972, p. 104), when all the gifts listed in verses 6–8, together with the ones which are mentioned in passages such as 1Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11, are in full operation in a cooperate manner, the Church will grow together in perfect unity. That is, people will be helped in the body without some regarding themselves as better or worse than the others.

From verse 9, Apostle Paul turned his attention to the gift, which according to 1Corinthians 13, is the greatest: love. He says that love must be genuine, not a form of role-playing. In other words, believers should show true love so much so that their attitude would be devoid of hypocrisy. Thus, the virtues of love listed in 1Corinthians 13 must be applied in dealing with one another in the body of Christ.

As a follow-up to his earlier arguments, Harlow (1972, p. 104) writes that sometimes people can cover up hatred by acting as if they have real love. According to him, Judas kissed Jesus, but it was a sign of betrayal (Matt 26:48). Also, true love does not mean that one should allow a fellow to continue to sin, because God hates anything that is evil. He continues that true love will always lead us to hold on and manifest all that is good to the strengthening of our brethren. Paul summarized Romans 12: 9–10 up in a simple but powerful statement: “honor one another above yourself.”

Touching on the believer’s attitude to work, Paul encouraged them not to be lazy in their daily work especially that which touches Christian commitment and spiritual enlightenment. The believer should burn in the spirit. In other words, when it comes to work, they must keep our spirit at burning point. This is what Barclay (1976, p. 165)⁸ admonishes. Furthermore, the believer should do well to maintain his hope in the Lord (v. 12; cf. 1Cor 1:27), the hope that the Lord is always with us and will come back for us since this will help us to be patient when we are faced with troubles, while keeping watch in earnest prayer (cf. Phil 4:6).

⁸ *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians.*

To keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of brotherly love, Paul exhorted, not only those who have the spiritual gifts of helping the poor brethren, but all believers to be ready to share what we have with those who are in need (v. 13). This was the practice of the Apostolic Church of the NT which led to the flow of God's power to confirm their testimony with signs and wonders (Acts 4:33 -24).

Romans 12:14-21: Continuing how to relate to one another in practical unity, Paul, from verse 14 turned his attention to the believers' relationship not only with members of the body but also with all people. He did not lose sight of people who would turn to disagree with believers. The apostle exhorts that members of the body of Christ should show genuine love to all people through healthy association and by identifying with the joy and also the sorrows of other members.

To identify with a person in sorrow is sometimes easier than to identify with them in joy. We rarely envy the grief of others, but it is easy to envy what makes people joyful. Indeed, love seeks harmony in all personal relationships, and it is the bridge on which the Christian Church passes over the evil of this world into heaven. Thence, he encourages believers to bless those who persecute them and never to curse them (v. 14) nor repay them evil for evil (v. 17). This agrees with the teaching of Christ against

retaliation (Matt 5:38–42) and it is a means to ensure that there is a minimum friction within the body.

On the contrary, believers, to promote unity and understanding in the body, are to take thought for what is noble in the sight of all people (v. 17; cf. Prov 3:4). In so far as it depends upon them, Scriptures exhort that they should live peaceably with everyone. Mac-Gorman (1980, p. 85) believes that sometimes our best effort ends in failure and leads us into troubles. According to him, when another person chooses to misinterpret our actions in the worst possible way and then turns to persecute us, it hurts a lot. It even tempts us to renew our resentment and to seek vengeance. However, we may be helped by realizing that God never withholds His peace from us because of another person's wrongdoing.

Along this same line, Barclay (1976, p. 170)⁹ says that we are to keep ourselves from all thoughts of taking revenge because evil cannot be conquered by evil. If hatred is met with more hatred, it is increased; but if hatred is met with love, an antidote for poison is found. Therefore, by surrendering to God, we allow Him to take up our case and help us not to act contrary (vv. 20–21).

⁹ *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans.*

In the words of Guthrie and Matyer (1070, p. 1041): “The attitude of Christians under the rule of love must be one of mercy, the very opposite of retaliation.” According to them, the words of the passage: “...You will pile up burning coals upon his head” (v. 20), means the Christian will give his persecutor or detractor a burning sense of shame. He refers to an Egyptian ritual in which a person purges his/her offence by carrying on the head a dish containing burning charcoal on a bed of ashes. He uses this to support the common notion that the evil doer would be won over easily and faster through good deeds. In summary, the common saying that “the best way to overcome an enemy is to turn such a person into a friend” becomes applicable here.

From Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12 is meant to go a long way in building up the Church into a peaceful and harmonious body. For the Church to enjoy the full benefits of the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit and win the sinful world, believers must heed to the call to live in practical unity. Mac-Gorman (1980, p. 85) observes that the world at its worst return evil for good and at its best returns good for good and evil for evil, but the follower of Christ is commanded in Romans 12 to return good for evil. What the world needs and is looking for is a demonstration of Christ-like love and what the body of Christ needs is for the members to relate to one another harmoniously.

Abuses associated with the operation of Spiritual Gifts

There are clear indications that some fundamental challenges existed with the operations of these spiritual gifts, especially with regard to some abuses in their usage. Chapters 12–14 of Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth offer some clues to some of such abuses. These likely abuses or misuse of the spiritual gifts probably led to some chaos in the Church, which alarmed Paul and necessitated that that he stepped in with divine directions to their uses in those chapters of that epistle.

There are issues such as speaking in tongues in public gathering by more than one person at a time but without interpretations, then also personalization of the spiritual gifts by individuals, boasting of whose gift is the greatest, and the idea that all should speak in tongues or even be able to exercise common gifts most likely existed are included. The likelihood in the misunderstanding in the operation of the gifts which are similar, and perhaps the unhealthy notion that those who manifest the gifts are better and more spiritual than those who do not, were no doubt some of the common challenges that prevailed in the operation of the gifts.

Moreover, there was also the possibility that certain individuals had crept into the Church and were using counterfeit gifts was also very high, and this situation probably led Paul, under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, to write that the manifestations of some of the gifts be judged by others (1Cor 14:29; 1Thess 5:21). It must be noted with interest that Apostle Paul never stopped the believers from operating the spiritual gifts because of their misuse, rather he corrected and encouraged the appropriate use of such gifts to bring sanity to the body of Christ and glory to God (1Cor 14:31; 1Thess 5:19).

Are Spiritual Gifts needed in the Church today?

The focus of the discussions here is whether Spiritual Gifts are in operation today or not, and why. What has become the bone of contention is the arguments on whether the spiritual gifts which were demonstrated in the Church of the first century is still in operation today. Indeed, there have been great scholastic conflict and debate over the past years as to whether or not the gifts ceased after the first century.

Williams (1912, p. 95) observes that there are two schools of thought concerning the operations of the spiritual gifts. One school suggests that the miraculous gifts were particularly related to the Church in the period prior to the completion of the New Testament Canon, and they ceased after the first century because they were no longer needed. However, the other school stresses that all the gifts were bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the

Church as a permanent endowment because they were needed by the church at all times. So all the gifts are still operational.

Indeed, several divergent opinions have been advanced by scholars as the reasons for the discontinued operation of these spiritual gifts. According to this group, it was therefore necessary that such miracles as healings, speaking and interpretation of tongues, raising the dead, etc., should be practiced so that credence could be given to the message and the messengers of God. With the coming into operation of a completely written and canonized New Testament, however, there is no longer the need for that which was designed for the Church in its infant days.

According to McCalslin (1988, p. 184), miracles in the Church of the first century AD resulting from the spiritual gifts were actually needed. This, according to him, was because the Church was in its infant days and the New Testament Scriptures had neither been fully written nor become operational. In his arguments, Griffith (1972, p. 48) posits that the spiritual gifts are no longer operational. He writes that the gifts were a testimony to Israel about the Messiahship of Jesus and thus became inoperative after the end of Acts of the Apostles, when the people of Israel had refused the gospel.

Warfield (2012, p. 3, 21) also holds the view that the spiritual gifts were given for the authentication of the Apostles as messengers of God. According to him, one of the qualifications of an Apostle was the possession of spiritual gifts and the ability to confer such gifts on other members of the body of Christ. It is not out of place for him to argue that the gift gradually ceased with the death of those whom the apostle conferred.

Another scholar, Lipscomb (1969, p. 143), agrees with Warfield's position (2012, p. 201) that spiritual gifts are no longer in operation because there are no apostles now to impart them since they were inspired men and they saw Jesus. He added that God has revealed all the needed truth now through the complete Bible for instruction and blessings. McArthur (1978, p. 18), like Bruce, posits that any additional revelation is false whether these claims are embodied in books which aim at overruling or supplementing the Bible.

In contrast to these arguments, there are those who believe that the spiritual gifts are still operational and believe that God through the Holy Spirit Has given a spiritual gift to Christians who should make every effort to find out what the Gift is, develop it, and use it to the glory of God. Arguing in favor of the current operation of the gifts, Ryrie (1965, p. 83) defines a spiritual gift

as coming from the Greek word, *Charisma*, which is related to *Charis*, i.e., grace. This means that a spiritual gift is received by virtue of God's grace. This gives the impression that since grace continues to abound today so are the gifts.

In his submission on this subject, Douglas (1962, p. 1130) writes that there is strong evidence for the performance of the spiritual gifts in the Church as found in Corinthians 13:8–12 where Paul envisages them as continuing to be manifested until the *Parousia*, i.e., the 'arrival.' The arrival here may suggest the Second Coming of Jesus. He agrees that in that case, their intermittent appearance in latter history might have been affected by the fluctuating faith and spirituality of the Church and by the sovereign purpose of the Spirit Himself who distributes the gifts as he wills (1Cor 12:11).

One of the obvious positions of Scriptures is that while members of the body may desire any of these gifts, they may not command or claim these spiritual gifts; the gifts may rather be received and manifested as and when the Holy Spirit himself decides (1Cor 12:11). In the back cover of his book: *Mighty Manifestations*, Bonnke (1994) supports the above position when he writes that the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the life of men and women of God so that they may do what He wants. Indeed, the

gifts are not given so that we may congratulate ourselves or polish up our church's image but to endorse the preaching of the gospel to those around us.

In the light of the above arguments, a conclusion that can be drawn is that it is absolutely essential that these gifts continue to operate if the Church is going to accomplish her full mission and destroy the work of the devil, and that whether people believe and accept their operations or not the gifts are important. There is no doubt that there are as many evil and demons in the world today as there were during the earthly life of Jesus and in the days of the Church of the first century. Thus, the supernatural gifts are especially necessary for missionaries and workers to win the spiritual warfare for Christ in the present time just as it helped the early apostles.

Moreover, since a human being is tripartite in nature: i.e., spirit, soul, and body (1Thess 5:23), the spiritual part of a person is as God-conscious in current times as in the times of the patriarchs, prophets and the apostles. Therefore, God still communicates with people through the Holy Spirit either directly or indirectly, as they meditate on Scriptures, because it was written by authors inspired by His Spirit. This also means that God can still speak or perform miracles through any of His believers at any period

provided that person is spiritually conscious (or sensitive) to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Before the advent of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament Church, some of them were operational in the Old Testament. The question is: Why didn't these gifts cease when the NT era began but rather intensified? Carter (1974, p. 258), a defender of the Wesleyan perspective, seems to answer this question when he notes that the significance of the baptism with the Holy Spirit at the inauguration of the Church of the first century, as in the life of Christians in 'every subsequent age' lies in the manifestations and demonstration of the infinite power of God.

Much as there are abuses in the operation of the spiritual gifts today, it stands to argue that the correct use of the gifts can be revived and stressed just as Paul did to the Church of Corinth. The gifts must be operated as stipulated in the Scriptures, bearing in mind that:

- they are not for personal use
- they are not for demonstration of over-spirituality
- they should not be considered as criteria for judging people's spirituality.

Obviously, the promise of God given through the prophet Joel in chapter 2:28 was for the whole of the dispensation of grace or

Holy Spirit in which we are. Since the dispensation of grace did not end with the apostles, so did the spiritual gifts. Therefore, the Church should encourage their operation just as Paul did while at the same time teaching the members to exercise their gifts in accordance with the laid down regulation by the Lord Jesus.

Chapter Summary

Some of the special issues in the Pauline epistles such as the advent of spiritual gifts and the Church, the significance of spiritual gifts in the Church, how the spiritual gifts relate with one another in practical unity, are the areas that have gained our attention in this chapter. Related areas such as the abuses associated with the operation of spiritual gifts, issues as to whether the spiritual gifts are needed in the Church today, have been treated appreciably. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on some of the special issues in the Pauline epistles.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SPECIAL ISSUES IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

There are some interesting questions which form the fundamental issues that Apostle Paul dealt with in his letters to some of the churches. These include but not limited to questions such as whether all governments are of God, how Israel will be saved, and the question of whether women should speak or teach in the church. There are also issues that help to answer questions about the resurrection of the dead in the context of Christ's experience such as debunking the denial of resurrection of the dead and an assurance of the glorious resurrection of the saints. Then also is the issue of Paul's thorn in the flesh, which is an interesting subject for discussion to several NT users. The current chapter is meant to discuss some of these pertinent questions interactively.

Are All Governments of God?

The first seven verses of Roman 13 establish the authority for local and federal governments and give God's endorsement of those in authority. These verses in one way or the other bind civil laws on believers. Accordingly, if believers are seeking to develop a balanced biblical understanding of the statutory powers, then

central to it will be the truth that the state authority and ministry are both given to it by God. For this reason, governments, whether good like the Mede-Persian government of King Cyrus or bad like the Babylonian government of King Nebuchadnezzar, are of God. The reason is that it is He who ordains them and permits their establishment (Rom 13:1).

Moreover, there is no power which is sufficient to resist such authority since doing so is tantamount to rebelling against God and bringing condemnation to the person (Rom 13:2). Explaining why all governments are of God, Paul the apostle, in Romans 13:1-7 rightly affirms the main ministries that those in authority have received of God. Among other areas, Paul mentions that, those in authority are set up as God's servant to do good to believers (v. 4a). The apostle argues that kings are God's agents of wrath to bring punishment on anyone who does evil (v. 4b), adding that such leaders are God's servant who give their full time to work God's will of governing people (v. 6).

The main ministries which God has entrusted to the state is for the state and those in authority to concern themselves with good and evil in the society, that is, to promote and reward the good and to restrain and punish the evil. It is to punish evil that those in authority bear the sword (Rom 13:4). This means that when the

state punishes evildoers, it is functioning as the servant of God to execute His wrath upon them, and that the punishment of evil which is God's prerogative is now being exercised through agents like law courts, kings, governors, etc.

The role of the statutory authorities is not only to punish evil, however, it is also to promote and reward goodness although this positive function has in many cases been neglected. The authorities are also God's servant for the mobilization and utilization of taxes for the betterment of the community. Hence, Christians should accept their tax obligations with good grace, paying their dues in full both locally and nationally, and to esteem the officials who are mandated to collect and apply them.

Sequel to the foregone observations, Paul's view in Romans 13 concerning respect for authority by demonstration of acceptable behavior is supported by an exhortation in the letter to Titus, which reminds believers to be submissive to rulers and authority, to be obedient and to be ready to do whatever is good (Tit 3:1). Sometimes, however, God's people have found cause to challenge certain authorities, especially when law(s) from such authorities seem to infringe upon God's directives. In such cases, there are evidence in Scriptures to how God intervenes in order to demonstrate His sovereignty (Dan 3:1-27; 6:1-11; Acts 4:1-12).

In support of respect for authority, Apostle Peter stated that believers should submit, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by God to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. He added that it is God's will that by doing good members of the body of Christ should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men (1Pet 2:13-15). These admonishing are clear evidence that the believers of old submitted to authorities set up by God at any point in time, except on occasions of a defense of God's precepts against that of humanity.

Because governments and authorities of state are set up and removed by God, as duly acknowledged by King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:17), Paul, the author of the letter of Romans added that believers should fear and give them the due honor. Additionally, once God purposely sets up such authorities to fulfil His divine plans it is expedient that believers intercede for such people. Paul's exhortation to Timothy and his listeners to offer prayers for those in authority also adds impetus to the fact that such authorities have been set up to fulfil God's purpose (1Tim 2:1).

Christians who recognize that the services of authorities in government are ordained by God will do their best to not only

submit to such authorities, but also honor such representatives, pay their tax obligations to them as Jesus also did in (Matt 17:27) as well as pray for their welfare. Such believers do well to encourage the statutory authorities to fulfil their God appointed roles, and in so far as they have opportunity, actively participate in any statutory obligations.

How Israel will be saved as indicated in Romans 9-11

Israel, the chosen nation of God whose people descended from the patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was so named because Jacob, the father of the twelve sons whose direct descendants constituted the nation, had his name changed after he struggled and prevailed over an angel of God (Gen 32:28; Rom 9:6–13). Later, during the exile and the period immediately afterwards, the name, Hebrews (or Jews), became associated with those who had survived the exile – the Judeans. This notwithstanding, the original name, Israel, continued to be used for the nation even into the New Testament period.

From biblical perspective, the deity-humanity relationship was a privilege that the Israelites primarily enjoyed before the advent of the ministry of Jesus, the Christ. Indeed, God identified the Israelites as His people (Exod 3:7, 10; 5:1; 6:7; 7:4, 16; 8:1, 20–23), because of the covenant He had established with their

forefathers and later renewed with their descendants at Mt. Sinai (Lev 26:12). Subsequently, the finished work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, where He shed His blood to atone for the sins of humanity, and the establishment of the New Covenant, have brought possible 'sonship' of God to people of all nations (Matt 26:28; Luke 24:46-47; Heb 9:15).

From the time of the sealing of the New Covenant through the death of Jesus everyone who calls on God through the risen Lord, Jesus the Christ, has entered a covenant relationship with God. In this relationship, God becomes their father and they become His children (John 1:12) and joint heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom. However, once God had been dealing with the Israelites as His chosen people, they stood in a favored position of salvation. Indeed, theirs had been the privilege of the prophets, priest in the Old Testament, and the apostles during the ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament period. As such, theirs also is the privilege of becoming adopted sons of God through Jesus as the Messiah.

Although a sizable number of the Israelites, especially in Judea, believed and accepted the gospel, the nation as a whole largely rejected Him and was antagonistic to the gospel. The Jewish leaders had Jesus crucified, and went on to persecuted many of

the Apostles, especially Paul, wherever he went. They also attacked the Church in general. Apparently, the unbelief of the Israelites (or Jews) in the Messiah and their rejection of the gospel is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to their adoption into the 'sonship' of God. If Jesus was really the Messiah of their own scriptural prophecy, how did it happen that God's own nation have rejected Him? And when and how will they be saved through Him? The letter of Paul to the Romans 9–11 provides us with possible answers.

The Jews or Israelites, because of their apparent reluctance for understanding, were determined to hold to God's favor by their nationality and were disregarding the validity of God's word and promises. This misunderstanding on the part of the Jews (Israelites) had reached in most areas the point of rebellion. Because the Jews had the law through Moses, they stumbled over a simple truth that was basic to the righteousness that comes by faith through the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Rom 9:31-32).

The people of Israel had a strong possessive attitude toward God, but this was not according to knowledge of God's will (Rom 10:2). It was rather according to the Law which, in the understanding of Paul, was ended by the gospel of grace to everyone who believes

Jesus Christ (Rom 10:3-4). Thence, the simple sin of the Israelites was failing to use their perception of what was happening all around them in connection with what was written in their own Scriptures. Though God has extended grace to all mankind, it is difficult for Israel to understand because a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25).

The larger community of Israelites have thus grown hard in heart and feeling and, as a result, are insensitive and dull of perception and understanding. The Gentiles, however, are in the period of God's favor. However, one day, "...All Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26) because the people will be turned back to God. This in no way implies that God will someday change His requirement for salvation to satisfy the mind of the Israelites, nor does the Scriptures teach that all the Jews will be given entrance to heaven.

Certainly, Israel's missionary call by God through Abraham (Gen 12:3) has not been abrogated or changed. Kaiser observes: "Israel was to be God's missionary to the world – and so are we by virtue of our identity as Abraham's spiritual descendants! The mission has not changed...Israel was to be "a light to the nations," just as Abraham had been told" (2009, p. 11 and 14).

Consequently, the Jews' continual believe in a Messiah who is yet to come will someday become futile to many honest Jews. When this happens, it will make them more receptive to the truth, if the Gentiles preach to them just as the early Jews preached to the Gentiles. As indicated by Apostle Paul, a greater number of the Jews will accept the gospel and accept Jesus as their Savior and the promised Messiah or Christ.

Just as the Jews were once obedient and the Gentiles were disobedient, but during and after the ministry of Christ, the positions were reversed so that the Jewish rejection of Christ became a blessing in terms of salvation to the Gentiles, so also the reversal when the Jews turn to the Lord, will be a blessing to the Jews and an end to the door of salvation to the Gentiles (Rom 11: 30–31). Israel's rejection is therefore temporary; they will be saved someday.

This act of Jewish salvation, according to Romans 11:32, is a display of God's mercy because the Jews will also obtain mercy through the mercy of God that had be shown to the Gentiles. This means that the process of Jewish rejection of Christ and their later salvation is a clear demonstration of God's sovereign act of justice and love for the sinner, and it is marvelous. It is something that can truly be described by Paul as a mystery (Rom 11:25).

Should Women Speak or Teach in the Church?

The issue of women's involvement in certain activities of the Church, especially their role as teachers, has been a controversial subject since the period of the Apostolic Church of the first century till today. Whereas some passages of Scriptures (e.g., Rom 16;1; Phil 4:30) reveal their active role and therefore call for their encouragement in ministry, others seem to put them to the background. One such passage is 1Timothy 2:11-12. This passage reads: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over man, she must be silent." Paul's argument is that the path to salvation for women is not likely to be in performing masculine tasks like teaching rather in their continued faith, love and sanctification continued with chastity.

The above passage has received diverse interpretations by many Bible commentators and scholars, some of which have been given here. In the view of Kelly (1963, p. 67–70), the issue is a burning one. He notes that whereas in the Jewish tradition, silence was expected of a woman in the synagogue, there was evidence that a new spirit of emancipation was spreading in Christendom which needed to be controlled. Thus, Kelly believes that the position of Paul agrees with a similar one in 1Corinthians 14:34-35. However, Paul's use of the word translated as 'quiet'

or 'silent' should not be confused with the word in 1Corinthians 14:34-35, which is translated as 'not allowed to speak,' although Paul used both in admonishing women to keep silent in the congregational meeting.

According to Kelly, the message of Paul to Timothy urges women not to create confusion by insubordinate conduct toward men who are charged with the responsibility of leading and teaching the Church. He said: "Paul states emphatically that he does not permit any woman to teach or exercise authority over men in the public worship." He explained that Paul does not encourage the appointment of a woman to such a position as master from which the word authority is derived in the Church.

Lipscomb (1969, p. 143), agrees that women in public worship should keep quiet in manners and arts, yielding in submission and in all lawful respect to the position that God had placed man. That is, as a leader of the family and the Church. This he said, is given as a rule "in all the churches of the saint" (1Cor 1:1-2; 14:33-34) which is to guard against the unacceptable exercise of authority by women over men. Nonetheless, Lipscomb argues that it is not completely wrong for a woman to teach the word of God; it is rather wrong for her to teach in a way that assumes or usurps superiority over men in the Church. Hence, he will not discourage

any woman that teaches but will bring such a one under control in order that she can serve God in humility.

However, Hanson (1982, p. 72–74) disagrees with those who believe that the epistle was written by Paul and that 1Corinthians 11:15, which addresses the participation of women in service of the Church, is highly inconsistent with this text. This means that the two could not have come from the same author. He urges that emphasis should not be placed on the physical differences between men and women in the Church, citing the Gnostics which encourage women to take leading part in both worship and preaching to support his argument. Hanson concludes that although the view of the text is also held by the tradition of Judaism, it would not at all accord with Paul's view.

Most likely, the Church of the first century did not lay down any regulation as in any sense permanent, but as things which were necessary when they were applicable. Accordingly, all the instructions written in Paul's letter to Timothy belonged to this class of regulations. He cited examples to support the open role that women played in the NT and used this to argue his point that Paul did not totally condemn women's participation in the Church. Indeed, the book of Acts cites Priscilla as a valuable woman who, together with her husband Aquilla, taught evangelist Apollos, the

truth of the gospel (Acts 18:26). Euodia and Syntyche were also companions of Paul who labored in the gospel (Phil 4:2-3). Then also, mention is made of Phoebe who Paul mentioned as a servant (or deaconess) of the Church in Cenchrea (Rom 16:1).

Paul's permanent view on the matter is stated in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you were all one in Christ," since the differences of place and honor and function within the Church are all wiped out. Meaning that the instruction by Paul to Timothy needs not to be read as a barrier to all of women's services in the Church but in the light of its Jewish and Greek background since in Christ all are the same.

It is understandable that although in the ancient world women in prominent positions were highly uncommon, yet some women played vital roles in the ministry of Jesus and in the first century Church. There are several passages of Scriptures which reveal Jesus' understanding and appreciation of women, thus setting a pattern for normal Christian living for the years thereafter. These include such passages as Luke 8:1-4; 24:1-10 and John 4:7-42; 20:1-2, and a couple of other texts. Though women are not encouraged to exercise undue authority in the churches, their ministry roles were nevertheless not left to the background.

Apostle Paul might have given that instruction as a control measure to women's rule over men. So, it can be taken as an attempt to curb a local situation but not a universal prohibition as it is being misconstrued since God does not place any hindrance on the ministry of women. Yes, women should be given the chance to fulfil their God-called responsibilities in a cordial atmosphere but under the supervision of Church leaders.

The Resurrection of the Dead

One of the major pivots on which Christianity stands is the resurrection of the dead. *Unger's Bible Dictionary* defines 'resurrection' as the miracles of restoration of the physical life, the reunion of the spirit with the body after death. According to Unger (1967, p. 920), the testimony of Scriptures as to the reality of the resurrection is ample and without a note of discord. However, in the context of the Greek and Roman philosophy where the gospel was growing, the idea of a bodily resurrection was grotesque and absurd. The Greeks particularly share in the belief that the soul survives all death but could not conceive the idea of a resurrection of the dead.

Little wonder, when the gospel was proclaimed by Paul in Athens, one of the Greek cities, it was initially received with much ridicule (Acts 17:16–21). Also at Corinth, some of the believers with the

Greek idea also doubted the reality of a resurrection after death (1Cor 15:12). In fact, there were many teachers that were parading in the Church, particularly those that held the beliefs of the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. This notwithstanding, the teaching that “the soul which at death is separated from the body is again clothed and inhabits an immortal body to live again,” is biblical and accepted by Christianity as a major doctrine.

In 1Corinthians 15, Paul thoroughly answered this thorny issue of the resurrection of the body, making the chapter one of his greatest contributions to the Christian doctrine of resurrection in all his writings. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: “...A time is coming when all the dead will hear His voice and come out; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of Judgment” (John 5:28–29). Elsewhere, Paul also declared: “...There shall be the resurrection of the dead...” (1Cor 15:13). Both agree well with the vision which the prophet Daniel had centuries earlier concerning the last days, about the rising or the resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2).

Apostle Paul dealt primarily with the resurrection of Christians, arguing about the reality of it (vv. 1–34), and secondly with its nature (vv. 35–58). To establish and explain the doctrine of the

resurrection of the dead, Paul rested his arguments on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and affirmed that the event renders any denial of the resurrection of the dead impossible (vv. 1–19). The Apostle revealed to the Corinthians the fact of the gospel of the dead, burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and also intimated its relation to other truths of the Christian faith, specifically that of the resurrection of the dead in general.

In addition, Douglas and Tenney (1963, p. 856) provide a couple of scriptural evidence to buttress the proof of Christ's resurrection. These include the empty tomb; the disciples' claim that Jesus had appeared to them. It also includes the report of the soldiers to Roman leaders, and the fact that the Church has persisted in its existence and growth despite the many grave persecutions over the centuries.

McDowell (1972, p. 228) also writes that the observable facts of people's lives being changed is a credible reason for believing in the resurrection. He says, "it is subjective evidence bearing witness to the objective fact that Jesus Christ on the third day arose, for only a risen Christ could have such a transforming power in a person's life." Paul listed Jesus' appearances to some of his disciples, most of whom were alive at the time of his writings (v. 6).

In his book, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Morris observes:

This muster of witness indicates the importance Paul attaches to the resurrection of the Lord. He can show its consequences for Christian faith, and he lays the foundation by showing how well based is a belief in it. Paul does not give a complete list of witnesses; he gives enough to show that the fact is extremely attested to (1958, p. 207).

Paul completed the lists of witnesses with: 'Last of all, he appeared to me also'. This, according to Bruce (1986, p. 1382), 'is a reference to his Damascus road experience, the vividness of which never faded in his memory'. Indeed, no fact could be better attested to, more reasonably believed, than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is fundamental in the gospel which the apostles preached. The denial of Christ's resurrection by anyone would make a lie of the whole testimony of the Apostolic Church and make a mockery of their suffering.

Applebury (1963, p. 227) questions why believers would be more pitiable than all people if there is no resurrection. According to him, the answer may be found in Paul's own words in 1Corinthians 4:9-13. The apostles were men doomed to die, they

were a spectacle to the world and to angels. They were fools for Christ's sake, they were weak, they were held by disrepute. They suffered hunger and thirst; all this they suffered because they believed that God raised Christ from the dead, and they looked in hope to the coming of the Lord.

In detailing the consequence of the denial of the resurrection, Paul mentions that it would make the gospel message, i.e., the preaching of the 'good news' of the cross, be in vain. This is because the resurrection of Christ and for that matter the resurrection of all the dead was the very substance of the 'Good news'. The testimony would have been false, and the Christian faith would likewise be a delusion, vain and without any substance. Accordingly, the apostles would be proved to be false witnesses because they had testified to a lie.

Additionally, the denial of the resurrection would have meant that Christians are still in their sins and that the dead saints have preached without any hope of being raised from the dead. This would have also meant that believers whose hope is in salvation of the body from corruption and future glorious life are of all men most to be pitied. One can say that the resurrection of the dead is no mere dream nor a doctrine to be highly rejected. If this doctrine falls, then the whole system of the Christian faith falls

with it. If the dead did not rise, then “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1Cor 15:32).

On the contrary, 1Corinthians 15 reveals the majestic nature of the Christian belief as it rises into the midst of infinite and eternal blessedness for believers and the whole universe of God. In his contribution to the issue of the resurrection of the dead, Barclay (1975, p. 161)¹⁰ writes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves four great facts which make all the difference to the view of mankind to life in general. He argues that the resurrection of the dead proves that; truth is stronger than falsehood; good is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hatred and life is stronger than death. He continues that its effect is bearing upon the present lives the change, joy, and reward to be experienced by the living and the dead at the return of Christ. Furthermore, he notes that the Scriptures point out some of the positive facts of the resurrection arguments and declares Christ to be the first of them that are asleep.

In his comments on Christ as the ‘first-fruit’ of resurrection, Applebury (1963, p. 227) writes that the experience of Christ guarantees the resurrection of all believers from the dead. He argues from the OT that the first portion of the harvest was given

¹⁰ *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Corinthians.*

to God to show that all the harvest was His. He states: “Whatever the first fruit was the rest was, Christ who died, was raised from the dead; His resurrection was like first-fruit in that all the dead must be raised.”

Apostle Paul continued the discussion of the topic by declaring that the resurrection of the dead will be by virtue of their relationship to Him. Also, just as physical death is the penalty of transgression of God’s law in the garden by Adam, so the resurrection which cancels the penalty of death comes through Christ, i.e., the second Adam. As in Adam all died, so shall all be made alive through Christ. On top of this, the resurrection of the dead will occur at the Second Coming of Christ and will be divinely arranged in the order of Christ the resurrection of the dead in Christ then the end when He will present His perfect kingdom to His Father. At the Second Coming of Christ, the greatest enemies of mankind, also known as the ‘last enemy,’ i.e., death (v. 26), will be defeated and will never have power over mankind again.

So, when the corrupt nature of the believer in Christ puts on the incorruptible resurrection body, then will it be true that dead has been swallowed up in victory (1Cor 15:54). This new body, according to Paul, is an imperishable form received after the body which is corruptible, and perishable is sown in death. This

incorruptible imperishable new nature is honorable, glorious, and powerful, over which death has no authority again. Indeed, the resurrection of the dead will obliterate natural death completely.

It can be deduced that the death, resurrection and the reign of the Christ and His resurrected saints, are all designed to reveal the redemptive purpose of God the Father and to lead humanity into fellowship with Him as the only true Living God. Certainly, the resurrection of Christ and the hope of the resurrection of the dead in Christ into a 'newness of life' brings believers into a position where they can always express their sincere thanks to God, who gives the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57).

In his summary of the discussion here, Barclay (1975, p. 161)¹¹ admonished believers to be steadfast in the faith and service of the Lord, adding: "...For if you do, all your effort will not be in vain." The Christian life, according to Barclay, may be difficult, but the goal is infinitely worth the struggle. The resurrection of the dead is a fact of Scriptures, particularly 1Corinthians 15, and believed, sustained, and taught by Christianity.

Perhaps, one can dwell on the contribution of Levering (2012, p. 39) to climax the ongoing discussions: "By rising to glory...he

¹¹ Ibid.

showed that the restored people of God have the life of glory as their end.” The reason is that if in the first Adam we all died, then in the Last Adam, that is, Christ, all will be raised, as is summarized convincingly by this passage:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grief like the rest of the men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. Therefore, encourage each other with these words (1Thess 4:13–18).

This section can confidently be concluded on the grounds that the resurrection of the dead is a fact and not false or a speculation. Jesus did not merely ‘swoon’ as is the view of some critics of Christianity contained in one of McDowell’s (1972, p. 232) most popular books, *Evidence that demands a Verdict*¹². He actually died on the cross (Mark 15:22–27, 29–30). The scriptural emphasis on the reality that Jesus died and was buried is clearly

¹² *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell remains one of the most powerful apologetic books. Its defense of Christianity based on fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament period and revelations of many of the historical landmarks in the ministry of Jesus has been acknowledged by many biblical scholars.

revealed in the chapter, not only to indicate the reality of His death, but also the truth of His resurrection. The fact that Jesus was “raised on the third day” as the Scriptures reveal in Luke 24:7 is specified by Paul in 1Corinthians 15 as a proof of resurrection.

What was Paul’s ‘Thorn in the flesh’?

Believers are special people called out of the world to be God’s own chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and a peculiar race. Accordingly, they are to submit and live in absolute humility before God. Because the Scriptures teach that whoever exalts himself will be humbled but whoever humbles himself will be exalted. God uses different means to keep his servants from self-exaltation so that they do not fall into condemnation.

In his discussion, Apostle Paul revealed in 2Corinthians 12:7 how God humbled him. In this text, Paul said: “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given to me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.” The question to be addressed here is: what was this thorn in the flesh (of Paul) and what lesson can we learn from it? The Greek word for ‘thorn’ (which is same as stake) is *skolops* and it denotes a pointed structure often used to inflict pain in somebody punishable. The

meaning of thorn here gives a clue to the situation in which Apostle Paul found himself.

Some scholars have argued that Paul's thorn in the flesh is most likely a spiritual temptation to doubt and to shirk the duties of his apostolic life. This view appears to be too general to be claimed by Paul as something that he was specifically afflicted with. The arguments against this position are unavoidable because every believer faces temptations whether the person is gifted with supernatural powers like Paul or not.

Others consider the 'thorn' of Paul to be something completely differently from a physical issue in the sense of ordinary thorn. They argue that Paul might be alluding to the thorn in Israel's side, that is, the Canaanites that were left by the Israelites during the conquest of the Promised Land and who God decided to use to keep Israel from exalting themselves (Num 33:55; Judg 2:3; cf. Jos 23:13; Eze 28:24). So, in view of the context and Apostle Paul's buffeting, the thorns might be regarded as a continuing persecution since Paul's statement came directly after his vision of glory (v. 6) and this means a lot.

Another explanation is that Paul indicated in his letter to the Ephesians that the forces of Satan are like an opposing army

against which the followers of Christ must wage continues war. This view was appealing considering the many opposition Paul faced, which he had to pay for finally with his life. This argument continues to gain more support by the fact that Paul himself admitted that the thorn was a check on his life. This means that the enemies that surrounded Paul too were somehow a check on his life and ministry.

There are yet other scholars who rather maintain that the thorn in the flesh was plainly some kind of torturing pain, either from epilepsy or malaria, by which the apostle was frequently attacked. These argue that the torturing pain from such sickness probably produced a temporary but consistent embarrassment of some kind which made Paul less acceptable as a preacher of the gospel and gave his opponent the opportunity to belittle his authority. This they believe is the reason for Paul's close association with Luke the physician.

Applebury (1963, p. 214) wrote that Apostle Paul had such an exalted experience that could easily tempt one who is less dedicated to Christ to distort its meaning and lead others to praise such a person rather than the Lord. According to him, this thorn in the flesh is likely to be a body deformation or handicap which would always make Paul see himself as inferior. Although

this argument has strong basis, its weakness lies in the fact that Paul never mentioned any bodily deformation of himself in any part of his letters.

Although this immediate argument slightly supports Applebury's (1963, p. 214) view, the difference lies in the fact that the ailment here is not a deformation. The convincing fact of the argument is that such a 'thorn' was not something that could not be brought under control. The argument here is that since on three occasions Paul asked God to remove it, but God answered that His grace was sufficient for Paul. This means that the sickness should be something that is curable or suppressible.

In line with this argument and perhaps the most convincing one is that of Douglas (1962, p. 148–150). He argues that this ailment being mentioned above here as a thorn in Paul's flesh is rather to be an eye defect. This he supports by the fact that although Paul wrote his own letters (which means that he could see), he apologized for the large sizes of the letters (or fonts) used (Gal 6:11). This, he takes to mean that Paul's eyes were not free of defects. Because of this, some of the Galatians were even prepared to pluck out their own eyes and give to him (Gal 4:13–15), as a sign of the concern for him.

Douglas' argument appears to be the most appealing one since Paul before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, claims that he could not recognize the High Priest (Acts 23:5). Although there are differing views on Paul's thorn in the flesh, the moral lesson that this brings is almost the same by all the commentators. From their arguments, all of them agree that the 'thorn' was something to produce humility in the apostle. According to all of them, God used this to keep the apostle on course so that his exceedingly great power that was upon him could be used for His glory alone.

To conclude this section, I believe that all believers have similar 'thorns' in our flesh and that the humility which appears by the check of such 'thorns' works an excellent thing in us to produce a lowly spirit. This will cause the Holy Spirit to fully use us for Christ to be glorified in us. Let us be thankful for everything even including the thorns in our flesh, for His grace is sufficient to keep us from any negative effects.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has concentrated on some of the interesting questions which are treated in some of the epistles of Apostle Paul. Main questions that have been addressed include whether all governments are of God and how Israel will be saved. The issue of whether women should speak or teach in the Church

have also been dealt with interactively. Also, issues that help to answer questions about the resurrection of the dead in the context of Christ's experience such as debunking the denial of resurrection of the dead and an assurance of the glorious resurrection of the saints, have been discussed. Finally, the issue of Paul's thorn in the flesh, which is an interesting subject for discussion to several NT users, has also engaged our attention in this chapter. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the superiority of the NT covenant over that of the OT.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT TO THE OLD COVENANT

From ancient times up to the present, many great covenants have been made by society either politically, economically, traditionally, or religiously, depending upon the prevailing situations. Both testaments of the Bible, the Old and the New, were based on covenants. The word 'covenant,' according to Vine, is, "a formal agreement between two or more people of equal ranks" (1940, p. 251). God made a covenant with Israel when they were coming out of Egypt. However, in the wisdom of the Almighty, there was need for a New Covenant. Yes, He had a more lasting covenant in mind when He says:

This is the covenant I made with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, and I will put my Law in their mind and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people...for I will be merciful towards their iniquities and will remember their sins no more...
(Heb 8:8-16).

This is an indication that the Old Covenant was provisional and temporary while the New Covenant is changeless and eternal.

Some Indicators of the Old and the New Testament Covenants

In the subsequent sections, it will be needful to concentrate the discussions on the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. This will cover areas such as the position of the mediators of the covenants, the eternal priesthood of Christ and His position as Eternal King. It will also tackle the priesthood of all believers which makes a case for no special priesthood caste under the New Testament.

Additional areas of discussion will include the work of grace as opposed by the law and the justification by faith as opposed to works. Attention will be devoted to the implications of these discussions for believers in order to strengthen the trust of believers in the superiority of the NT Covenant over that of the OT.

The position of the Mediator: The main and everlasting covenant behind all the covenants that God made with His people is the one that involved Jesus Christ as the Mediator. God made mention of this everlasting covenant when He said to Abraham: “In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” And this promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood and trusted Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted to Abraham for righteousness, based on the Grace of God and not the Law.

Though this covenant was made by God to Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified or fulfilled until the death of Christ. Based on the foregoing, one can conclude that the covenant God made with humanity through Christ preceded the Sinaitic covenant. It is therefore superior to it, because Christ, the 'sacrificial Lamb,' was slain even "before the foundation of the earth" (Rev 13:8). Indeed, it is His obedience which has made repentant sinners to be accepted before God, and it is the grace that comes through Him that has enabled believers to live in obedience to God's law (now written on their hearts).

Whereas the Old Covenant emphasized on the law, and grace was scarcely heard of, not by works, the New Covenant is pivoted on grace. That is why Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – so that no one can boast." While God chose Moses as the mediator between Him and the Israelites, He sent His "Begotten Son" to impress the New Covenant on the hearts of its believers.

Barclay agrees with the author of Hebrews that the New Covenant brought by Jesus is greater than the one delivered by angels to Moses. This is because Jesus is superior to both angels (Heb 1:4–14) and Moses, since Moses was faithful as a servant, Jesus

was as faithful as a son (Heb 3:6). Continuing along the same tangent, Barclay (1976, p. 31)¹³ notes: “Moses knew a little about God, but Jesus was God; therein lies the secret of His superiority.”

What this means is that while the New Covenant can boast of a Mediator who is accepted to God in all things, the Old Covenant lacked such. Accordingly, the New Covenant makes everyone have a rightful relationship with God and was far superior to the Old. The Old Covenant’s prescription of sacrifices and ceremonies for atonement and forgiveness was thus temporal.

The Eternal Priesthood of Christ: Another significant comparison between the Old Covenant and the New in terms of the latter being superior to the former is seen in the priesthood role of Christ compared to the priest that operated under the OT covenant. Halley reveals that while the effect of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant was not permanent and needed yearly repetition, the sacrifice of Christ in the New Covenant is once for all (Halley, 1965, p. 653).

In support of the foregone argument, the book of Hebrews reveals that Christ offered himself once at the end of age (Heb

¹³ *The Daily Study Bible. Letter to the Hebrews.*

9:26) and Christians are sanctified once for all by the offering of Christ (Heb 10:10). What the writer of Hebrews meant is that unlike the Levitical priesthood where there was replacement every now and then, with each of them offering a new sacrifice, Christ's death is entirely sufficient to take care of all sins.

Corroborating this idea of Christ's superiority as a priest, Barclay (1976, p. 79)¹⁴ argues that Jesus can do what the Old Covenant priests could not do; He can give believers direct access to the Throne of God (Heb 7:20-22). Indeed, Jesus did this by removing the curtain that separated sinful humanity from God's throne represented by the Ark of Covenant contained in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle at Jerusalem.

While the Old Covenant was premised on 'obey and live,' the New Covenant was established upon better promises; the promises of forgiveness of sins and the grace to renew the heart and bring it in harmony with the principles of God's law. Believers are not to boast about our own righteousness because there is no way that man can earn salvation by himself, instead by accepting the righteousness of Christ. The reason is that it is His blood that atones for the sins of humanity.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Just as every sacrificial lamb or animal in the OT foreshadowed Christ's death, so every priest foreshadowed Christ's mediatorial ministry as a High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary: "...For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man and the man is Christ Jesus" (1Tim 2:5). Also, the Old Covenant is basically on obedience to the Law that was temporally, and it was meant to last as long as mankind succeeded in keeping the Law which made one a slave to sin.

However, the New Covenant is unique and superior to the Old for the reason that Christ's role as High Priest is permanent and is lasting (eternal life). Not only is faith demonstrated here, but also there is hope in the resurrection of a coming king, Jesus, who takes away our sins permanently. Then also, with the New Covenant, sinners get to know Christ before they become believers but a member under the Old Covenant was born before the person was taught to know the stipulations of the law. Moreover, when Jew becomes a Christian by being born again, the person is born directly as a 'spiritual Jew' and is not compelled to obey any law. The fact that Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant, sits permanently at God's right hand, enhances His status, compared with that of the Aaronic Priesthood who could only stand in God's presence once a year and did it repeatedly.

Indeed, the regulation of the old form of Covenant needed to be set aside because they were weak and useless (Heb 7:18), and needed to be replaced by a better one. Therefore, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, descended not from the priestly line of Aaron, but was ordained into the priesthood eternally. He follows the order of Melchizedek, and serves faithfully as a High Priest of the New Covenant. While the High Priests of the Old Covenant offered the blood of animals which could not even take away sins, Christ offered his own blood as a Lamb without blemish to cleans the conscience of man permanently (Heb 9:13,14), making it better with promises.

Reese (1962, p. 270) lists seven ways in which Jesus, the High Priest, is superior to the Aaronic line and the Levitical priesthood. These are as follows: He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek; His High priesthood was announced on oath; He is a permanent priest; He is a sinless priest; He is a priest of a better covenant; He serves in a better tabernacle, and finally, He offers a better sacrifice.

On the basis of the fact that Jesus is said to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6; Psa., 110:4), Barclay (1976, p. 70)¹⁵, quoting the summary of Bruce's argument on Jesus'

¹⁵ Ibid.

supremacy and superiority over the OT priests states: “...Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and his descendants, even the Levites, because Abraham paid tithe to him and he blessed Abraham.”

In Hebrews 10:4, it is stated that the death of animals cannot really atone for the sin of humanity. This means that with regards to the Levitical priesthood, the writer of Hebrews made it clear that it was imperfect and that “the sacrifice by the priests was insufficient to take away sin because it was carnal” (Halley, 1965, p. 652). One has to remember that the Old Covenant sacrifices only indicated acknowledgement and remembrance of sins rather than the actual atonement (Heb 10:11–14). On the contrary, the sacrifice of Christ, as a Mediator, is enough to atone for the sins of all the world.

Christ’s position as Eternal King: Not only does Jesus serve as a Priest but also as a King. Carson (1953, p. 1376) writes that the kings and priests throughout the Old Testament were separate individuals. However, only Melchizedek and Christ combined both offices. This means that in Christ all believers enjoy both kingly and priesthood offices. Hence, the moment one comes to believe in Jesus, that person is born anew into the position of a ‘holy

priest' and is privileged to draw nigh and offer the priestly sacrifice required of all priests before God.

It is expedient for the believer to continue in the blessing of the New Covenant, where Jesus who initiated it is the greatest of all, greater than angels, Moses, and all the Levitical High Priests. Moreover, His blood speaks of better things, 'blessings not curses' than the blood of Abel and all the blood of bulls and sheep. Therefore, with Jesus as our High Priest, we as believers are in the safest hands and are enjoying the promises of a better covenant that will lead every believer to enter into God's final rest.

The Priesthood of all Believers: In 1Peter 2:9–10, Christians are described as 'royal priesthood.' By virtue of Christ's position as "the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek," believers are made holy priests by spiritual birth. However, without Christ one could not work himself into the position of a Holy Priest if the person were to live for more than a thousand years and spend all that time working.

The foregone observation, notwithstanding, the question is, how did the believers in Christ gain the position of royal priesthood and what role do they play as priests? Barclay (1976, p. 196)¹⁶

¹⁶ In *The Daily Bible Study: The Letters of James and Peter*.

reveals that in the Old Testament, the priest was the only one who had access to God and who alone could make sacrifices. He continues, that it was only the High Priest who could enter into the Holy of holies once, to make sacrifices, and that only the sons of Aaron were priest by virtue of their natural birth

So the first designation of any group of people, being in the OT as priest, was in reference to the descendants of Aaron. In the New Testament, Peter's description of members of the body of Christ as a royal priesthood was not upheld until during the period of the reformation. Ferguson and Wright (1988, p. 532) argue that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was classically formulated by Luther to affirm the common dignity, calling and privilege of all Christians before God. They quoted Luther's argument that the nation of Israel was distinguished from others as a kingdom of priests made holy for God.

In his contribution, Barclay notes that under the Old Testament dispensation, the offerings that were brought were animal sacrifices and the priest had the duty and the privilege of bringing them to the Lord. Also, since the Latin word for priest is *pontifex*, which means 'bridge-builder,' the priests were also the men who brought others to God by building a bridge for them (p. 196).

Christ's role as a priest comes into the picture as a complete change from the OT dispensation to that of the new.

Perhaps, Ericson (1985, p. 1086) is supportive of this position when he writes that the priest-hood of all believers is based upon the fact that our great High Priest has "once for all passed through the heavens." We can confidently come before the Throne of grace (Heb 4:14–16). Besides, because Jesus is the Priest forever it is always the case that all who are saved draw near to God through Him.

Since in the old dispensation under the OT, the priests descended from one person to form a body, in the new dispensation, all believers in Christ also form one body of priesthood. Wiersbe (1982, p. 49) supports this and writes: "Today, God's people constitutes a nation of priesthood, each individual member has the privilege of coming into God's presence, not through any person(s) on earth but only through Jesus Christ the mediator."

This fact of Jesus Christ being the only mediator between God and humanity in the new covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), makes unnecessary official mediation work 'by any special class' of people on earth for believers. Kelly (1969, p. 91, 98) agrees with this view when he states:

In contrast to other religious communities where priests are caste demarcated off from the people, and to Judaism, where they were in theory descendants of Aaron, the Christian community as a whole is a priestly body, and a royal priesthood, indicating that there is no Christian caste in the new Israel.

Truly, the principle of priesthood of all believers envisages every person to be capable of relating to God directly. Several biblical teachings support this view either explicitly or implicitly (Rom 5:1–5; 1Tim 2:5; Heb 4:14–16). Ericson (1985, p. 1086) says: there is no need of any special intermediary; all have redemptive access to the Lord. For what is true of the initiation of the Christian life is also true of its continuation. Each believer can know God's will directly. These arguments point to the fact that by Christ's supreme sacrifice, all material sacrifice and even the divine ordained priest of the Law, had been finally abrogated.

Kelley (1992, p. 275) argues that the Protestant Church from the reformation times have agreed to this teaching and insisted that there is no New Testament warrant for ascribing any special qualifications of priesthood to ordain any persons because the old distinction between the clergy and the people was destroyed

by Christ's sacrifice. This notwithstanding, some 'Christian theologies' for example that of the Roman Catholic Church, are often muted in the interest of a special priesthood of the ordained (Ericson, 1985, p. 532).

On the contrary, McNutt (1935, p. 21–26) condemns this argument on the grounds that Christ's work has made any decision-making by only bishops, priests, and elders on matters of worship unimportant. He continues that Apostle Paul reminded the believers that each member or part of the body has a valuable contribution to make to the welfare of the whole body and in matters of worship.

In his contribution, Carson (1953, p. 1376) states that the word from which priesthood is derived is never used in the New Testament to describe the Christian ministry, but rather the task of all out sacrificial life of the Christian. This type of sacrifice is a spiritual one which is holy and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (Rom 12:1). It is written in Hebrews 13:15: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of Praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his Name." Hence, the nature of the believer's daily sacrifice to God as part of the holy priesthood is first of all to praise Him continually.

Commenting on the role of the believers as priesthood, Mackintosh (1976, p. 793) posits that a holy priest should rejoice in the Lord always, ever ready to praise Him. *Hallelujah* should be the proper utterance of the feeblest member of the Christian priesthood. Mackintosh continues that as holy priests, believers should go forth and show forth the virtue and lovely moral features of Christ because every moment of a royal priest's life should emit the fragrance of the grace of Christ.

In addition to the daily praises, Christ receives from God and gives to humankind. This means that Christ is the channel through which the grace and the mercies of God reach humanity. Through Christ's life of humility and obedience, and by offering His life as propitiation to God in reciprocation of God's love, His daily life becomes not a burden but brings the blessings of God to those He represents. The holy priest also intercedes for the people and brings them into communion with God. This is achieved as He continually brings them before the throne of grace, as Paul exhorted the believers to do (1Tim 2:1).

Mackintosh argues that acting as a royal priest is not confined to the matter of giving oneself alone, but the royal priest also has access to the riches of Christ which are laid open to the most obscure member of the Christian priesthood. According to him,

one may be poorly clad, without a penny in the world, and yet carry himself or herself truly as a royal priest, by defusing around him or her the fragrance of the riches of the Lord Jesus Christ through His holy life.

No ‘Special Priesthood caste’: On whether the role of the royal priesthood is confined to a special family as it was in the OT, there are interesting responses. Kelly (1969, p. 98–99) states that a body of priests seems to convey more than the idea of a community enjoying unique closeness to God; the idea of performing a holy service in honor of God must also be included as a subordinate but nonetheless consciously intended motive.

Kelly continues by saying that the Church is a holy nation, not in the sense that either it or its members are in fact paragons of virtue, but because it has been set apart for God’s service and is inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the mighty deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1Pet 2:9-10).

Barclay (1976, p. 197–198)¹⁷ observes that God has called the Christian out of darkness into His glorious light so that he no longer needs to grope about the things of God, because in Jesus

¹⁷ *The Daily Bible Study: The Letters of James and Peter.*

is the light of the knowledge of God. Consequently, when a person comes to know Jesus, the one comes to know the goodness of God and the acceptable roadmap to life. Life, according to Barclay, is no longer a trackless road a star to guide. God has made those who were not people into the people of God. This means the Christian is called out of a life of insignificance into that of significance.

Continuing, Barclay notes that the believer's call into significance happens in a world where humanity's greatness lies not in themselves but what has been given to them. The Christian's greatness, accordingly, lies in the fact that God has chosen the one to be His and to do His work in the world. He argues that no Christian can be ordinary for he is a child of God. In addition, he posits that Christians are called out of a place where there is no mercy to that of mercy, because they have discovered the love of God and know that they no longer fear Him for it is well with them.

An observation by Barclay on this topic will be a significant and appropriate summary and conclusion of our discussions in this section. He notes:

The Christian has been chosen that he may be different from all other men. That difference lies in

the fact that he is dedicated to God's will and to God's service. Other people may follow the standard of the world but for him, the standards are God's because believers constitute the royal priesthood of God.

The work of Grace as opposed to the Law: The Covenant of Grace was first made with humanity in Eden. This was after the fall when there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). To all mankind this covenant offered pardon and the assistance of grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ (Rom 1:5).

It also promises mankind eternal life on the condition of fidelity to God's Law. Apparently, God makes a covenant with his people so they follow and obey His will to inherit His promises. The major one that has existed has been the Old Covenant encountered in the OT of the Bible and based on Law, and the New Covenant based on grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Old Covenant was made between the people of Israel and God which was established by Law, which was strictly imposed on the Israelites, while the New Covenant was made between God

(through Jesus), and everyone who will believe in the saving grace of God through Jesus, i.e., people of all languages in the world. In other words, the Old Covenant was cut between God and the Israelites at Sinai while the New Covenant was cut by the Lord Jesus Christ and all of humanity at Calvary.

Justification by Faith as opposed to Works: Christianity is a living, breathing, speaking, active, and powerful reality. It is something to be seen in everybody's life, something to be felt in the scenes of personal or domestic history, from hour to hour; something formative and influential, a divine and heavenly power introduced into the scenes and circumstances of life. Christianity is the life of Christ flowing out of a believer in practical life.

Believers of the New Covenant are never saved by works but by grace, after which we are expected to do good works since they are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10). However, there are some errors which some members, particularly, those who do not fully understand the finished work of atonement by Jesus Christ commit, that is, hoping that their works of righteousness can earn them salvation.

In the process they bring condemnation to themselves. These are the believers who live by the dictates of the Old Covenant, which

never help those who have practiced it (Acts 15:10). Indeed, anyone who is trying to become holy or saved by his own works of righteousness is attempting on impossibility. All that humankind can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin, because all our righteousness are as filthy rags (Isa 64:6).

According to Galatians 3:10: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse." It is therefore not worthy for a believer of Jesus Christ to drift back into the practices of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant spoke of what person must do while the New Covenant points to humanity what the Lord has done for them. Also, while the New Covenant was written on the heart of men and based on mercy and forgiveness, the old was written on tablets of stones. Additionally, the New Covenant gives man the responsibility to lead those who are taken away to have personal experience with Jesus Christ.

The writer of the Hebrews also uses the idea of the tabernacle to defend the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old. According to him, the Old Covenant tabernacle was a sanctuary which God instructed Moses to construct. However, the true and original one, not made with hands, is the one in Heaven in which Jesus serves as the High Priest, superior to all earthly priests, and makes sacrifices with blood that speaks better (Heb 12:24).

Implications of the New Covenant for the Believer in Christ

Obviously, the implications of the foregoing arguments cannot be overemphasized. Accepting the complete work of Christ in faith and relying on God's faithfulness to forgive us and to declare us righteous are more than enough for every believer to enjoy life eternally. The issue of life through grace by God because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and the High Priest of the New Covenant, seals its superiority over the old one.

There is reliance on God's strength rather than any personal efforts. Scriptures say: "The righteousness from God apart from the Law has been made known...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:21-22). On the contrary, the Old Covenant placed a demand on the people to the dictates of the Law which could not even save them. Before such righteousness could come into effect, the writer of Hebrews says: "Christ was sacrificed once to take away sins" (Heb 9:28).

What this means is that the blood of Jesus Christ did what the blood of animals under the Old Covenant could not do, i.e., to guarantee total forgiveness, justification by God and assurance of salvation. Therefore, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for humankind all the blessings of God are enjoyed by all who believe in Him.

Evans (1912, p. 157) defines forgiveness as one of the following: the cessation of the moral anger and the resentment of God against sin; a release of guilt from sin; a remission of the punishment of sin. He argues that a person is forgiven when the one is justified, and the guilt of punishment is removed so that God sees the believer as without sin and guilt in Christ. He concludes that in forgiveness there is justification because the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed unto all and all that believe.

Indeed, Christ did all these because He sacrificed a blood that is better than the blood of bulls and goats “that speaks better words than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:24). Having established the fact that the New Covenant was instituted through the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, believers are warned by the author of *Hebrews* not to continue in any sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (Heb 3:12), nor to refuse Him (God) who speaks (Heb 12:25), but to approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:16), and to press on in our call to enter God’s rest (Heb 12:1, 6), looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

The final implication for those who want to follow the Old Covenant is that it would bring them to a previous position where

humanity was once under the terror of the Law “where the relationship between them and God was one of unbridgeable distance” (Barclay, p. 187)¹⁸. As such people will have to obey all the Laws because if even one of them is broken, all have been broken and are under a curse.

There is enough evidence to buttress the position that the New Covenant is superior to the Old so members of the body of Christ must completely depend on it for total salvation. Therefore, if believers choose to remain in the practices of animal sacrifices, ceremonies, and rituals then it means they have not understood the work and promises of the New Covenant. Indeed, no number of rituals or sacrifices of animals can save any sinner now, for, Christ, the Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for sinners once and for and all.

Chapter Summary

This chapter was committed to discussions that border on how the NT covenant is superior to that of the OT. Some issues that have been treated under this topic include the meaning of the Old and New Covenant and how the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant are raised. Along this same tangent, issues such as the work of grace as oppose to the Law, the position of

¹⁸ Ibid.

the mediator, justification by faith as opposed to works, implications of the old covenant for the NT Church, Christ's position as a Priest and King, and the priesthood of all believers have been interactively presented in this chapter. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on some of the false doctrines which no doubt forms the basis of the letters of Apostle John.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SOME OF THE STRANGE DOCTRINES ENCOUNTERED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The apostles and believers of Jesus were faced with strange teachings and had to defend the true teachings of the gospel through some of their writings. Some of these doctrines that only a 'special people' claim to know argue that Jesus did not come as Christ in the flesh but (rather) regarded Him as a glorious figure and not a Savior. Others claim that the birth, life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus were merely apparent, seemed, and not real. Briefs on three examples of such doctrines: Gnosticism, Cerinthianism and Docetism are presented here by way of throwing a little light on their teachings and how the apostles tackled their teaching.

Gnosticism

The term 'Gnosticism' is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means 'knowledge.' Until modern times, it was applied exclusively to a body of teachers of some false doctrines (or heretics) who had been denounced by the apostles, particularly John, and most of the Church fathers. However, in the later century's scholarship, it has been applied more loosely to any

form of religion which emphasizes dualism and/or the possession of secret knowledge. Though the word is sometimes used of false teachings, especially within the period when the NT was being written, the word 'Gnosticism' more accurately describes any systems of knowledge in opposition to orthodox Christianity.

The writings of the Gnostics were all from the standard point of orthodox catholic Christianity to refute what the fathers saw as a corruption of Christianity of the first century AD. By far, the most important source of our modern knowledge of Gnosticism is the Gnostic texts, and the writings of Irenaeus against heresies. There is no consensus on the origin of the Gnostics. It is unlikely that it had a single origin, for by nature Gnostics thoughts were extremely syncretic. Its adherents were always ready, even eager, to utilize religious ideas from many diverse sources to serve their own ends. However, the greatest possibility is that some scholastic Church members, feeling embarrassed by the lowly origins of Christianity, became attached to ideas from Greek philosophy, eastern religion, magic, and astrology.

From indications, the Gnostics were people from within the Church whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectful. It is not surprising that Apostle John wrote to warn Christians about the teachings of Gnostics. John calls them false

prophets and writes: "...They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1John 2:19). Although they have left the Church, John reveals that they still try to disseminate their teachings within the Church and to seduce its members from the true faith.

It is easy to recognize the ideas of Gnostics as being attracted to the concept of other religions, but it is difficult to pin down where precisely they originated. The proposition that Gnosticism was in some way connected with Judaism is not doubted. This is because some Old Testament ideas feature prominently in the Gnostic teachings and speculations, though in the contest that fears them from the authentic Old Testament thought.

Gnosticism teaches that the true God is pure spirit and dwells in the realm of pure light totally separated from this dark world. Also, since this world is evil because it is made out of matter, which is evil, the true God would have nothing to do with it. According to Fredericksen (2019), Gnostics believe that angels are celestial beings who control certain spheres through which a soul is to pass as it frees itself from the shackles of its material existence. Gnostics hold a cyclical concept of time and motion of history was meaningless to them. For them, redemption could have no meaning in this life, but only in an escape from temporal existence of the physical world to the world of spirits. They claim

that because of their possession of special ‘knowledge’ they were released from the normal rule of society to be living an elevated spiritual life” even in their present material state. They teach that the resurrection was already a past event since it was a spiritual event understood only by Gnostics.

As has been indicated already, Gnostics believe in dualism. This observation is supported by Fredericksen (2019) who considers Gnosticism as “one of the religious traditions that have viewed the cosmos in a dualistic fashion.” They also teach that Jesus was pure spirit even though he appears to be body and mind. Then also, they hold the belief that Jesus is a Savior and Light to bring knowledge of the spiritual realm to them (Gnostics) who alone have the spark of spirit to become reunited with the true God.

According to Hanson (1982, p. 72–74), Gnostics encourage both men and women to take leading part in both worship and preaching in of the word of God. For this reason, the true Gnostic regards himself or herself as the spiritual person, having shed all material things of life and released from the bondage of matter. Additionally, Gnostics teach that the divine nature of God came upon Christ by water during Jesus’ baptism and departed before His crucifixion, thereby denying Christ’s physical nature. Because the main attack of the Gnostics was on the person of Christ,

some of the letters of the apostles, especially John, refuted their teachings and answered them on the historicity of Christ Jesus.

According to Apostle John, Jesus is from beginning (1John 1:1; 2:14), is the son of God (4:15; 5:5) and is Christ, the Messiah (2:22; 5:1). John emphasizes that Jesus was truly and fully man, because as a physical being He came by both water and blood (1John 3:16) and is the advocate of humanity with God, the Father (2:1), so that through Jesus Christ, those who believe have life (4:9; 5:12). Thus, within a short compass of John's letters, answers can be found for the false teachings of the Gnostics, and the glory and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ are clearly and fully set out.

Cerinthianism

One of the false teachings about the personality of Jesus that gained strong roots in the first century AD is Cerinthianism. Slick (2014) noted some pertinent information on this heretic belief which originated from a man called Cerinthus who died towards the end of the first century AD. He was a Jew who studied in Alexandria in Egypt but was very active in western Asia Minor where he taught his false teachings about Christ. It is obvious that Cerinthianism reflects a syncretism of beliefs comprising Gnosticism, Judaism, and Christianity. This is because Slick wrote

that “Cerinthus was educated in the wisdom of Egyptian issues from Ephesus. So, he would’ve had a mixture of Christian theology and paganism.”

From the submissions of Slick, it is evident that one of the most authentic sources of information on this false doctrine is the writing of Irenaeus in his volume: *Against Heresies*¹⁹. Irenaeus was one of the Church fathers and a vigorous anti-heretical writer. According to Irenaeus, Cerinthus “represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wiser than other men” (Slick 2014).

Thus, adherents of this false doctrine did not accept the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin, for that seemed impossible to them. His syncretic teachings draw a distinction between the Supreme God and the Creator, and also between Jesus and Christ. It views Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph and only an ordinary man with much virtue and wisdom and not as the Christ.

¹⁹ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* (book 1, Chapter 26, paragraph 1) In ‘What is Cerinthianism?’ by Slick Matt (2014). Online article available at: <https://carm.org/about-heresies/what-is-cerinthianism/> Assessed on 30-04-2021.

Clearly, Cerinthianism identifies Jesus with the son of the Creator but denies the supernatural origin of the humanity of Jesus. Slick (2014) noted their teaching that, "...The Christ and Jesus are separate beings" and that "Jesus was born naturally without the Virgin birth," and that "...the Christ" came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him just prior to his crucifixion." Cerinthus, according to Irenaeus, held the view that after the baptism of Jesus, "Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. Yet, at last, Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being" (Slick 2014).

What this means is that Christ left Jesus before His death, and that while Jesus suffered and rose again, 'the Christ' being the spiritual part (*pneumatic*) remained immune from suffering. Therefore, for believers in the Cerinthianism, there was no lasting union of Christ with Jesus. Since according to them Christ did not suffer, it is only the Jesus part that actually suffered. They believe that the work of Jesus was characteristically found in revelations rather than redemption through his death. Though they affirm the humanity of Jesus, yet they deny the reality of His human experiences or His crucifixion and resurrection.

Cerinthus held the view that the Law of Moses was given by angels and taught that the God of the Jews was not the Lord God Almighty but an angel. He insisted on the necessity of circumcision and observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Slick noted a portion of the writings of Irenaeus which indicated how devotees of this false teachings endeavored to expound the Jewish laws in a somewhat singular manner. He wrote: "...They practise circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God" (Slick, 2014).

Cerinthianism accepted the general idealistic worldview about creation including the creation of matter by an inferior power. Slick (2014) posited: "Cerinthus was of the Gnostic influence which taught that the divine God was too pure and perfect to be involved in the material world. Therefore, the world was created by a lesser god—a power far removed from the supreme divine being." In other words, the world was not made by the first God but by a power which was widely separated and remote from the supreme power.

That power is the God above all who still remains unknown to mankind, not even Jesus. This is similar to what Irenaeus

mentioned about the false teaching of Cerinthus. He noted that he falsely taught his followers that “the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him...” (Slick, 2014). Cerinthianism holds a rather crude view of the Millennium and taught that the righteous would enjoy Paradise of a sensual delight, and that Jesus through the power of the divine ‘logos’ coming upon Him would reign for a thousand years.

Irenaeus reveals that Cerinthus was the arch-opponent of Apostles Paul and John. There is evidence to show that John countered the teachings of Cerinthus because both were active towards the latter part of the first century AD. There is however no such evidence that Cerinthus was active during the time of Paul’s ministry. Slick (2014) indicated another portion of the writings on Irenaeus which mentions some NT writers that Cerinthus and his followers liked or disliked: “They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law.”

John wrote to warn believers of this false doctrines since many false teachers and prophets have gone into the world (1Joh 4:1). He indicated that teachers who do not confess Jesus are not of God (1John 4:2–3). To affirm the humanity of Jesus, John stated: “This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with

water only but with the water and blood” (John 5:6). Earlier, this same Apostle John had written about Jesus as being the one whom he (John) has both heard and seen and handled. He revealed that Jesus is the one from the beginning and is also the word of life (1John 1:1) to show Jesus’ human origin and His divine nature. In plain language and in the light of Scripture, John refuted the false teachings of Cerinthianism and encouraged his listeners to continue to trust Jesus as both Lord and Savior in order to have eternal life (1John 5:11–13).

Docetism

Docetism is a type of doctrine prevalent in a certain section of the First Century Church which gained strength during the period of the Church fathers. It is derived from the Greek term *dokeo*, meaning, ‘to seem.’ Docetism is an earlier Christian heresy that denies that Christ has come in the flesh and argues that Christ’s body only assumed a phantasm in human body form like mask or veil and therefore ‘seemed’ or ‘appeared’ to be human.

What this means is that Christ is only a union of the spiritual Christ, a human material body, and that the divine Christ came upon the Human Jesus at His baptism but withdrew from Him before His crucifixion. No wonder, this doctrine does not accept the virgin or incarnation birth of Jesus Christ as Son of God. The

doctrine proposes that the suffering and death of Christ were in fact suffered by someone else: the human Jesus, or Simon of Cyrene.

Docetism is not so much a definite system as a tendency. It was a characteristic of Gnostic systems and ideas and did not develop by a presumed process from the gospel and the Christian system but came to Christianity from without. Advanced Docete ideas accompanied most Gnostics beliefs. Although it cannot be said that all Gnostics were Docetes, one can safely say that all early Docetes were Gnostics. This is against the background of the observation that Docetism was a consequence of the basic belief that matter is evil, a belief which was the fundamental element of Gnosticism.

As a result, Docetism is a corollary of Gnostic dualism, both of which were a combination of the old Persian philosophy and the gospel using the name of Jesus Christ as their focal point to gain acceptance. Docetes hold the view that Christ cannot be Himself polluted by matter. This is because He has come down to redeem men's soul by freeing them from evil of matter. Therefore, He himself must be pure spirit and could not have any body made of physical matter.

Adherents of this view teach that all the passages from the gospel referring to the bodily or fleshly appearance of Jesus or His material nature; His birth, daily life and death, must be understood by describing them as 'mere appearances' and not genuine. According to them, Christ did not have a material body, and that His associations with the ordinary laws that govern life of humans; eating, drinking, walking, birth and death were all illusions. Devotees of Docetism also teach that Jesus Christ visited the world in human 'semblance' without being corrupted with materiality. They deny that the humanity and His redemptive work of Christ is a fact. Clearly, their teachings presupposed a dualistic view of the world that make it impossible for divine being to assume human flesh.

Apostle John refuted the belief of Docetism when he mentioned: "...Any teachings that does not acknowledge the fact that Jesus had come in the flesh is from the anti-Christ or false teachers and Prophets" (1John 4:3; 5:6). John systematically defended the historicity of Jesus Christ from the first verse of his letter to the last chapter (John 5:20) in order to strengthen the faith of believers in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In some of Paul's letters, certain texts which insisted on the virgin birth, His physical life or historical life, death and resurrection

were sometime directed against such false teachings as that of Docetism. For example, messages of Scriptures such as Galatians 4:4; Romans 1:3; 9:5; and 1Corinthians 15:1–58, were typically directed by the author, Apostle Paul, against Docetism.

Believers of today also need to be careful in order not to be carried away by “every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). Rather, they should be able to contend for the original faith of the true gospel which was once for all delivered by the Lord through His apostles (Jude 3). We must hold firmly to the hope offered by the Scriptures, while proving which spirit in operation is of the Lord, as Apostle John advises (1John 4:1–6). Christians must be spiritually minded and never relax in our resolve to expose falsehood and affirm the truth of the gospel.

Chapter Summary

There are some doctrines which no doubt forms the basis of some of the arguments of John in some of his letters. In this chapter, attention has been given to some of these false doctrines of heretics. Three of such doctrines: Gnosticism, Cerinthianism and Docetism have been briefly discussed in this chapter. Mention has been made of how the Apostle John in particular defended the Christian faith against such false

doctrines. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on issues bordering on the ministry of angels in the NT.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S ANGELS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The presence of angels in both the Old and New Testaments cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, some people might have encountered angels before but, maybe, they are not aware that they were dealing with angels. Operating directly against the ministry of angels are Satan and his team of demons. These are entities which the Bible, particularly the New Testament, makes mention of. Therefore, none of these bodies should be overlooked in any discussion of background issues of the Bible. This chapter takes a cursory look at them in the hope of making some fundamental information about them available for the benefit of the New Testament user.

Understanding the Ministry of Angels

An important dimension of any discussion of backgrounds to the Bible is the issue of angels (Greek, *angelos*, the equivalent of the Hebrew word *mal'akh*, meaning 'messenger') and their ministry in the scheme of God. Significantly, Scriptures are replete of issues involving angels. The Lord God deals with people by employing many means to meet their request, which include the agency of the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus, the power of His word. He

nevertheless deals with believers by using His agents who are the angels to minister to their needs.

Though Christians have the Holy Spirit, yet there are people who encountered angels before they experienced God's Spirit. Even after the Holy Spirit came on the apostles and they were led by the Holy Spirit in all that they were doing, angels were still ministering. Consequently, the ministry of angels has not come to an end, from the perspective of the New Testament.

Though the Doctrine of Angels, Angelology, holds an important place in the Word of God, it is often viewed as a difficult subject because of the complex nature of revelation about them (cf. Keathley III, 2004). This notwithstanding, there is the need for believers and Bible scholars to understand certain pertinent information about angels in order to also know how God deals with His creation. Indeed, it is appropriate that we get an understanding of how angels still operate, even in our time. This is the discussion of the subsequent section.

When were Angels created?

Angels are spirits who were created to serve the interest of God. In other words, they are God's messengers or agents or envoys and helpers who are empowered by God to perform His will (Heb

1:14; Job 1:6; 2:1). The Lord has empowered angels in such a way that when they stand to minister in the name of God, they exhibit the power and characteristics of God. If it is holiness the angel wants to show, the nature of that angel will let the host know that he/she is unholy in contrast to the appearance of the holy angel. If it is power that the angel wants to demonstrate, the angel will exhibit something to show the powerful nature of God. Thus, God is on the throne, but His presence is everywhere, and He uses His angels everywhere.

There are indications from Scriptures that angels were created before the foundation of the earth. In Job 38:4-7, there is the use of the title 'morning stars' which is used together with the title 'angels.' Meaning that angels were present at the time of the foundation of this earth. In Job 1:6 and 2:1, the 'Holy Book' speaks about God's agents who are referred to by another title, 'sons of God,' who came to present themselves before God. This title, 'sons of God,' here is most likely in reference to angels because they were those that God was dealing with in the heavenly realm at the time of creation.

Therefore, at the time of the creation of the earth angels already existed. As created beings and whatever nature they possess is because of their relationship to God, the Creator (Fredericksen,

2019). Indeed, Bible tells us in Genesis 1:1, that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It means that when God created the heavens and all the things in the heavens, angels were also created during the creation of the heavens. Job 38:4-7 is not about human beings because they had not been created now. So, at the time God stepped in to create the earth, angels were there and saw everything God was doing. It means they came before human beings were created.

Various Characteristics and Assignments of Angels

As agents of the Almighty God, the Creator, angels have many different characteristics and perform many important functions, some of which are revealed in Scriptures. Indications are that the significance of angels lie in the functions they perform rather than in what they are (cf. Fredericksen, 2019). Some of these functions in the four main divisions of the New Testament are discussed below:

Ministry of Angels in the Gospels

Throughout the gospels, mention is conspicuously made of the nature and ministry of angels. Right from Matthew, their ministry both in the heavenly realm (Matt 24:36; 22:30) as well as on the earth (Matt 4:11) are presented. They are used by God to send messages to His people. Hence, they are usually referred to as

messengers. It is very likely that angels that convey messages to humans usually reveal themselves to people in the form of humans.

While angels are usually identified as heavenly beings, on the earth, they are usually present where the children of God are because they are sent to minister to them. Angels are thus believed to render special services to God's children. The view that there are guardian angels that keep watch over children is a significant teaching of Scriptures. The Lord Jesus Christ, talking about angels in relation to children, said angels that minister to children are always in the presence of God (Matt 18:10). This is an indication that they go before the Lord to take messages and return to revisit the children.

Created by God to live for eternity (Luke 20:36) but not to marry (Matt 22:30), angels not only act as revealers of divine truths but also are believed to be very efficacious in helping people to attain salvation or special graces or favors. A typical example of angels that are connected with special messages is Gabriel who has been the announcer of destiny changing messages of God. In Luke 1:11-18, he was sent to Zachariah to give a message from God to a priest by name Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist.

There are indications that angels have names and they may choose to either disclose their identity or otherwise. Knight (2020) mentions Josephus as revealing how the Essenes had to take a vow to preserve the names of the angels. The message bearer, angel Gabriel, is a typical example (Matt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; Luke 1:19, 26). We have the cases in Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19 and Luke 1:19, 26 about Gabriel who was sent to Mary and Joseph about the birth of Jesus.

Just like humans, angels have some limitations. In terms of knowledge, they are superior to humans but inferior to God (Matt 24:36; Luke 1:13-16). Though they are spirit beings yet unlike the Almighty God, angels are neither omnipotent, omniscient, nor omnipresent. In other words, they are endowed with some powers and are more powerful than humans.

Angels are involved in warfare to ensure the fulfilment of God's will. When Jesus and his disciples were attacked in Gethsemane by the soldiers, He told Peter if this was a physical fight He could plead with His Father to send innumerable angels to fight for them (Matt 26:1-53). They are spirit being who have emotions as can be demonstrated in the expression of joy (Luke 15:10). A very important function of angels is their involvement in the

resurrection (Matt 28) which is illustrated by the parable of the separation of the wheat from the tares at the end of the world (Matt 13:49).

On the basis of John 1:47-51), Nyarko Asare (2020) advises Christians who wish to encounter angels to refrain from sinful lifestyles and pursue lives of holiness. He states:

Obviously, we cannot live in sin and disobedience, carelessness, and indifference to attract angels of God. Pure hearts attract God's angels. Jesus told the true Israelite with no falsehood that if he remained a follower, he would see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Ministry of Angels in Acts

Angels have been used by God to influence lives in the past and there are clear indications that they keep serving in contemporary times. It is not only in the gospels that angels are seen to be delivering messages to God's people but the book of Acts. However, not everybody can see them. It is people that have had their eyes "occasionally and specially" opened that have seen angels attending to them, moving among God's people, engaged in some special assignments, and the like.

For example, in Acts 27:23, an angel of God was sent to Paul to assure him and those with him in the ship that they will survive a shipwreck. Indeed, angels are present and if the Lord chooses to open a person's eyes the one will see them. Yet, if the Lord decides that He will not let anyone see them, nobody will see them; this may not mean angels do not exist, they are present.

Since angels are spirits, they are not easily seen unless one is spiritually in tune with God's Spirit. What this means is that though angels are viewed as non-corporeal spiritual beings, they appear to humans in an apparitional fashion. Such an angel might also decide to make the host feel relaxed and comfortable as was the experience of Cornelius (Acts 10). Here, the 'Lord' is represented by an angel that appeared in the form of a human being. As God's agents, angels are powerful (Acts 5:19).

Angels are involved in deliverance ministry and are given charge in the deliverance or defense and preservation of God's people. Fredericksen (2019) notes: "As functional extensions of the divine will, they sometimes intervene in human affairs by rewarding the faithful and punishing the unjust or by saving the weak, who are in need of help, and destroying the wicked, who unjustly persecute their fellow creatures." The apostles were freed by an angel in (Acts 5:19) and Peter in particular was

delivered by an angel (Acts 12:7-8). On the contrary, “when Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23).

Interestingly, one does not have to pray for angelic visitation before it happens. Nyarko Asare (2020) notes that none of those who encountered these angels in their lives prayed for the presence of these divine spirits. Rather, they all encountered the angels when they least expected them. According to him, people usually experienced the visitation of angels by attracting God’s attention. A typical example is what is revealed in Acts 10:1-7 about Cornelius.

Ministry of Angels in the Epistles

It is not only in the gospels and Acts that one encounters the ministry of angels, their operations are clearly mentioned in some of the epistles. Unlike humans, angels are not created in the image of God. Therefore, they will not share in the glorious destiny of redeemed humans in Christ. In 1Corinthians 6:3, the Bible says that redeemed and glorified believers in Christ will be empowered to judge angels.

In some of the epistles, Scriptures reveal ranks in the angelic or celestial order (cf. Litke, 2004). The spirit beings are grouped into

ranks such as: angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominions, and thrones (Rom 8:38; Eph 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Jude 9). There is also the mention of a special angelic order like cherubim (Heb 9:5). However, unlike the Almighty God, angels are not infallible, meaning that they can sin (2Pet 2:4). Angels are not omniscient; that is, all knowing (Matt 24:36; 1Peter 1:12); nor omnipotent; all powerful; nor omnipresent, meaning that they are not everywhere at the same time (2Thess 1:7; 2Pet 2:11).

It is revealed how some angels can transform into the likeness of human beings. The writer of Hebrews 13:2 says that we should not fail to entertain strangers because in so doing some have entertained angels unknowingly. Sometimes, surprisingly, mere humans are used as ‘angels’ by God to speak or minister to other people without such people being conscious of it. This observation is what Paul revealed when he said: “...if I speak with the tongues of angels” (1Cor 13:1), meaning that humans can speak with the tongues of angels.

Though there has been superstitious belief in and worship of angels (Col 2:18), most probably because of their supernatural nature (Col 1:16), the writer of Hebrews 1:13-14 says angels are God’s ministering spirits to His people. In other words, God uses

angels for many things, particularly He uses them to minister to those who will inherit salvation. Moreover, angels are present before the throne of God where they engage in so many things, including worshipping, praising, and adoring God and making sure that things of God are done rightly before the throne. Hebrews 12:22, referring to God's presence, says: "...You have come to Mount Zion, to the presence of innumerable company of angels."

Ministry of Angels in the Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation also has a lot to say about the ministry of angels. It shows how in the Heaven of heavens; they stand in the presence of God as ministers involved in worship or praises. Moreover, before the throne of grace in Heaven, the Bible reveals how the prayers, worship and praises of the saints ascend as incense, and it is angels that use bowls to collect the incense and present it before God (Rev 5:8; 8:3-4).

Being obedient servants of the word of God (Rev 22:8, 9), angels are involved in worship (Rev 7:11), but are not to be worshipped (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). That is, in spite of angels representing God as His agents, they do not receive any honor for themselves. This means that if an angel does something as a servant of God, the glory goes to God. If an angel appears to anybody and the person

falls down, the assumption is that whatever praise and worship that is given goes to God Himself.

One of the interesting things to note here is that they appear in different shapes and sizes and usually appear unto people in different ways. In other words, it is difficult to define their shape or their sizes. Whenever they want to reveal themselves, because they are spirit beings, they decide how they want to reveal themselves. There are angels that are sent to humans with message of assurance in times of distress. When they decide to appear in other forms, sometimes it can be frightening. However, if an angel decides to appear before any person, it is the angel that will decide what form, whether to put reverential fear in a person as Apostle John (Rev 1:9-17) experienced.

Apparently, angels are God's agents for war against Satan and his team of demons and other evil spirits. A typical warring angel mentioned in Scriptures is Michael. This also means that in the Book of Revelation too, angelic names are clearly mentioned, typified by Archangel Michael who is mentioned in Revelation 12:7. This Archangel is the Chief protector of creation from the snares of the devil. Scriptures reveal that Michael is the one that led the warrior angels of God to defeat and dismiss Satan from Heaven (Rev 12).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has concentrated on some of the issues relating to the ministry of angels, especially, in the New Testament. The discussions on these supernatural beings cover various aspects of the topic such as their origin and nature, their role in the scheme of God, and other interesting undergirding areas including how children of God can still experience them in the course of their relationship with God. Nyarko Asare states that takes a pure heart and a mindset of fulfilling God's purpose to attract God's angels...Zachariah was ministering in God's presence and was attested to as a righteous man with a blameless life when Gabriel visited him in the sanctuary. Mary was (and is) full of grace when Gabriel went to her as messenger of God.

Overall, there are lots of things that humanity is waiting to experience by way of the ministry of angels since their work is still in process. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on issues border on the operations of demons in the New Testament.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE OPERATIONS OF SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Operating directly against the ministry of angels are Satan and his team of demons. These are entities which the Bible, particularly the New Testament, makes mention of. Therefore, none of these bodies should be overlooked in any discussion of background issues of the Bible. The objective of our discussions in this section is not only the provision of information on Demonology, a term which is often used by many theologians for the study of Satan and demons (cf. Herrick, 2004), but it is also intended to generate practical interest in dealing with such evil powers.

The second objective is based on what Scriptures say about the Lord Jesus Christ: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1John 3:8), and what the Lord also said to His followers: “...they that believe will cast out demons...” (Mark 16:17). What this means is that the first objective lays a foundation for the second. Definitely, a critical study about demons may help unravel a lot of mysteries surrounding their origin, nature, and activities, in order for members of the body of Christ to know how to deal with them. This means that the two objectives tie up together perfectly.

The Origin of Satan and his team of Demons

The evil spirits now called Satan and demons were created as angels by the Almighty God. Satan was formerly an archangel and was originally called Lucifer, son of the morning (Isa 14:12-19; KJV). He was no doubt a creature of perfection, wisdom, and beauty, referred to as the anointed cherub, and present with God in Eden, the garden of God and a key agent on the holy mountain of God (Eze 28:12-19) and playing significant roles in Heaven.

Lucifer however rebelled against God by exalting himself to become like the Most-High. With sin found in him and a third number of the angelic host in Heaven that he had influenced to follow him, they lost their position with God and had no glorious roles to play again. Hence, they were sacked from the Heaven of heavens where God's throne is established, after they were most likely defeated in a spiritual war with God's faithful angels led by Archangel Michael (Rev 12:7-9).

The defeated Lucifer, referred to now as Satan (Greek σατανᾶ or Σατανᾶ, when it begins with capital, and translated in the Septuagint or LXX as *diabolos*, meaning, 'slanderer' or 'accuser') or the devil because of his sinful nature, and together with his team of rebellious angels called demons (Greek δαιμονίζομαι, *daimonisomai*), they have set up their kingdom, appropriately

referred to as Kingdom of darkness, in the heavenly realm and the spheres of the earth. Their objective is to oppose the plans of the Almighty God for His creation. Grudem's (1994, p. 412; cf. Nkansah-Obrempong, 2006, p. 1454-55) definition of demons as 'evil angels who sinned against God and who now continually work evil in the world,' is applicable here. Yet, there are many other interesting features about these spiritual forces of evil that will be come up in the following sections.

General Characteristics/Operations of Satan and Demons

References of the Scriptures to satanic spirits usually correspond to the idea and belief that they are evil supernatural forces. The New Testament provides ample and helpful insights into some of the characteristics, set-ups, schemes and operations of these negative spiritual forces. The main intention of Satan and his team is to attack and destroy creation by virtue of the powers they possess. To this end, they can turn into causative agents of famine, disease, war, earthquakes, accidental deaths, and the like, in order to achieve their ultimate aim.

In other words, whenever there were cases of dramatic event, sicknesses, sudden death, disaster or catastrophes and the like, the traditional beliefs in several cultures are that demons were involved. Scurlock and Anderson (2005, p. 17) posit that

Mesopotamian physicians attributed illnesses to demons or demonesses. Indeed, demons have always been associated with evil that most people, believers, and unbelievers alike feel uneasy at their mention. Fredericksen (2019) corroborates this observation when he posits: “From a social point of view, demons might also be defined as the environmental and hereditary forces that cause humans to act, think, and speak in ways that are contrary to the well-being of themselves and their communities.” This means that their overall aim is to tempt humanity to act in such a way that they would deviate from their eternal destiny.

The subsequent sections provide a breakdown of some of the general characteristics and/or operations of these evil forces in accordance with the four major divisions of the New Testament. These divisions are the Gospel, History, Epistle, and Revelation.

Characteristics/Operations of Satan and Demons in the Gospels

The designation, ‘Demonic spirits,’ is a common reference to a team of demons in operation. Sometimes, the derivative ‘fallen spirits’ (Matt 12:43; Mark 1:23) is used in place of the common title ‘demons.’ As fallen spirits, demons are subordinate to angels (cf. Kent, 1908). Such spirits, are often associated with the adjective, ‘evil’ or ‘unclean’ (Greek: ἀκάθαρτον; plural, ἀκάθαρτα or ἀκάθαρτων). A typical example is found in

Matthew 12:43, where the description, ‘evil spirit,’ instead of ‘a demon,’ is used for the spirit driven out of a certain man.

One of the main objectives of Satanic forces which revealed in the gospels is to deceive humanity into worshipping them instead of worshipping God. Nkansah-Obrempong (2006:1454-55) posits concerning these evil forces: ‘They oppose God and seek to draw worship away from him to themselves’. In the process, they provoke God into jealousy by taking what is due Him alone as the Creator. Not only do they provoke God to jealousy but they also bring the wrath of the Almighty of all things on all those who worship any creation instead of the Creator.

The gospels recorded (Matt 4:8-10; cf. Luke 4:5-8) how the devil (or Satan) tried to achieve this objective in his third temptation of Jesus after His forty days and forty nights fasting. According to Scriptures, “...The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.” This was an attempt to cause the Lord to lust after worldly power. Then the devil gave Jesus a promise: “All this I will give you,” and the condition he gave Jesus was simple, “if you will bow down and worship me.” However, Jesus, knowing what is already written in the Scriptures, rebuked the devil, saying: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

Another major means by which demons achieve their aim is to enter human bodies (Matt 12:43; Mark 1:23) in order to bring negative effects such as diseases, sicknesses or illnesses (Luke 6:18; Kunhiyop, 2012, p. 55-59). Persons afflicted as such are usually considered to be 'demon possessed' (cf. Fredericksen, 2019). Not only do such demons desire to inhabit their victims and cause sickness, but their ultimate aim is also to destroy their victims. They sometimes exhibit such cruel objectives by causing their helpless victims to engage in violent acts (Mark 5:2-4) such that they sometimes attack other physical and spiritual bodies.

In Mark 9:14-29, the story on how Jesus delivered a boy from the demon that had been tormenting him is recorded. In his comment of the nature and operation of such demon, Cotter (2010, p. 181) states that "the cruelty of the demon is shown in its freedom to brutalize the boy, who cannot even cry out for help. Not only do satanic spirits possess people to inflict them with sicknesses, but they can also empower entities they possess to operate like those that are gifted by God.

It is for the reason of counterfeit operations by Satan and his team of demons to deceive ignorant people that Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit and full of power, could detect their operations, cast them out (Mark 5:8; 9:25; Luke 4:36) and empowers His

followers to do same (Mark 6:7). The unfortunate aspect of such demonic deceptions is when they are practiced by people who call on the name of God and/or when such operations are mistaken to be that of the Holy Spirit and vice versa.

For example, demonic powers are mentioned in connection with the ministry of Jesus when He was accused by the Jewish leaders of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Matt 12:24–28; Mark 3:22). The mention of Beelzebub as the prince of demons (Mark 3:22; Luke 1:15), for example, is an indication that besides Satan, there are some demons which have names.

The Lord Jesus also said to His followers: “...They that believe will cast out demons...” (Mark 16:17). Therefore, demons can be cast out of those that they possess. This is achieved by using God’s power through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, believers are equipped by the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ to overcome all powers of the ‘fallen Satan’ (Luke 10:18-19; Matt 28:18).

The gospels are not silent on the fate of Satan and his team of demons. It is recorded in Scriptures that demons and their leader, Satan, will face judgment (Matt 8:29; 29:41). Indeed, all the evil spirits that have been cast out of idols and other entities including human beings, together with all those that are already

bound in chains by God which constitute the expelled rebellious spirits from Heaven, will be brought into judgement. Their destination, together with everyone who follows them, is the unquenchable Lake of fire. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 25:41: "...Then He will also say to those on His left hand, depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Characteristics/Operations of Satan and Demons in Acts

Other terms such as 'evil forces' or 'spiritual forces of evil' also occur many times in Acts (8:7; 19:12-16). Sometimes, satanic forces exercise control over people just by obsession or influence as was the case of a slave girl in Philippi which is recorded in Acts 16:16-19. In other words, the devil can operate in counterfeit ways to deceive ignorant people into believing that it is the Spirit of God in action.

In the course of his ministry, Apostle Paul encountered this slave girl. She was possessed by a certain spirit by which she could predict the future and earned great deal of money for her owners. However, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the Apostle was able to discern that it was an evil spirit and cast it out of the girl (Acts 16:16-18). Though the Apostle faced some challenges with the owners of the slave girl, the emphasis here is on the need for

the Spirit of discernment in order to deal with such deceptive or counterfeit spirits.

Characteristics/Operations of Satan and Demons in the Epistles

It is also instructive to observe some additional fundamental beliefs and interesting issues about satanic spirits in the epistles. The terms ‘evil forces’ or ‘spiritual forces of evil’ also occur many times in Paul’s letters (1Cor 10:20ff; Eph 2:12), in the letter of John (1John 4:1, 3, 6). The epistles reveal how evil-empowered entities operate in diverse ways such as teaching demonic doctrines, engaging in healings and performing various miracles even to the extent of predicting the future or fortune-telling, depending upon the kind of powers they possess as indicated by Paul in 1Timothy 4:1.

In the epistles too, the devil is revealed as being able to operate in counterfeit ways to deceive ignorant people into believing that it is the Spirit of God in operation. Scriptures say: “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14), so other satanic spirits are likely to do same. One can imagine what such deceptive spirits can do when they possess people. It is usually through the gift of discernment given by the true Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, that one can distinguish between such satanic operations and that of God (1Cor 12:10; Act 13:8–11).

In terms of the connections between Satanic spirits, idols and gods, some of the passages of the messages of Apostle Paul in the epistles associate demons with idolatry. In other words, idols being worshipped as gods are channels of Satan and his team of demons. This is an indication that demons are the power behind idols. Wright (2011, p. 144-45) corroborates the connection between gods, idols, and demons by observing Paul's statement that flirting with idols could lead to demonic practices (1Cor 10:18-21). As observed by Asumang: 'Idols are channels of demons' (2011, p. 19). This also means that idols are channels of Satan and his team of demons and that idols are in themselves powerless unless possessed by demons (Yamoah, 2015, p. 205-206).

Apostle Paul warns of extensive activities of demon in 1Timothy 4:1 and refers to believers' warfare with demons in Ephesians 6:12. James also writes of how demons believe in God (Jam 2:19) and reveals how people use demonic wisdom to outwit unsuspecting victims into sinful acts (Jam 3:15). In the light of these warnings of demonic activities, Apostle John warns children of God about the dangers of demonic teachings (1John 4:1, 3, 6).

Beyond resisting the operation of these evil spirits, believers are empowered to cast them out of the bodies including that of idols

and gods that they have possessed. This is because these satanic spirits, like all other spirits, do not die, so they cannot be killed. Nevertheless, idols will no more function as such when the spirits in them are cast out since they become meaningless without the spirits that possess them.

In this regard, what Scriptures say about the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to demonic activities: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1John 3:8), is of great significant to our discussions. In other words, there is need for believers to tackle one of the main reasons for our studies on satanic forces which is to generate practical interest in dealing with such evil powers. As indicated in one of my books (Yamoah, 2019, p. 80; cf. Asumang, 2008, p. 2): “The victory of Christ over satanic powers was so central to Paul’s messages...His epistle to the Ephesians (6:10ff) in particular, is noted for the emphasis on the total victory of Christ over the evil powers.”

Moreover, Apostle Paul’s message to the Colossians (2:14) also notes that Christ stripped the evil forces of their power when he made a public display of them and triumphed over them. Gombis (2004, p. 405: cf. Asumang, 2008, p. 7) also enumerates the triumphs of God in Christ to demonstrate that ‘the powers ruling the present evil age are indeed subject to the Lord Jesus Christ.’

So in the wrestle of believers with these evil forces, they are exhorted to put on the full spiritual armor of God in order to enforce the victory that God in Christ has won over these evil spirits (Eph 6:10-18).

Though these rebellious spiritual forces appear to be free agents in their operations, not all them are actually free. Apostle Peter reveals how some of the fallen angels are chained in the deepest darkness (2 Pet 2:4). Jude (1:6) corroborates this revelation by indicating that those that were confined in chains in the deepest darkness are awaiting the judgment day

Characteristics/Operations of Satan and Demons in Revelation

It is not only in the other parts of the New Testament that the title ‘evil spirit’ (instead of a demon; NIV) is encountered. In Revelation 16:13 and 18:2 too, mention is made of such a title. Then also, it is not only in the spiritual realm have Satanic forces formed their kingdom, they have also descended unto the earth.

Scriptures confirm this in Revelation 12:12 when it states that woe unto the earth and the sea because Satan and his demons have descended, and their target is God’s creation. To achieve their diabolic agenda, Revelation 16:14 mentions the operation of these evil-powered entities in teaching demonic doctrines,

engaging in healings and performing various miracles even to the extent of predicting the future or fortune-telling, and the like.

The Book of Revelation also provide evidence of idols serving as gods and being channels of Satan and his team of demons. This is indicated by Revelation 9:20. Watt (2011, p. 128; cf. Wright, 2006, p. 139) underscores the observation that idolatry is one of the main tools of demonic spirits. No wonder, Grudem (1994, p. 417) notes that, ‘all the nations...that practiced idol worship were engaging in the worship of demons.’ Nkansah-Obrempong (2006, p. 1454-55) also observe that activities like worshipping and sacrificing to idols and ancestors result in contact with demons.

Both Aboagye-Mensah (2006:967-68) and Asumang (2008:1-19) discuss how Jesus Christ demonstrated victory over evil powers to embolden all those who believe in the power of the risen Lord that they have overcome the devil and his forces. As Kunhiyop (2002:136) notes: ‘If there is the power of witchcraft, then the power of the child of God overshadows it.’

Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on some of the issues relating to the operation of Satan and his team of demons in the New Testament. The details include the origin of these evil spirits

from the Old Testament background and their connection with idols and gods. However, the main discussions have centered on their operations in the various sections of the New Testament with a conclusion on how to deal with them. All true believers must therefore make every effort to not only understand the operations of these evil spirits but to also deal with their powers. This is one of the surest ways to enjoy the victory that the Lord Jesus Christ has won for His church. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on some of the special issues bothering on certain figures and numbers in the book of Revelation.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SPECIAL ISSUES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is full of numbers of which '666' (Six-Hundred and sixty-six) in Revelation 13:18 is one. Another number in the book of Revelation of the Apostle John to be considered is '144,000' (One-Hundred and forty-four thousand) mentioned in Revelation 7:4; 14:1. Then, we have the number 'Thousand' (1000, i.e., a millennium) in relation to the years of reign of Christ during the Eschatological period indicated in Revelation 20:2-4.

These numbers have generated some interesting but contrasting doctrines in relation to the end of the present world and the emergence of the new world. Worthy of consideration are some interesting figures such as the lamb, the beast, the dragon, etc. Throwing a little light on whatever these issues might stand for is the focus of the discussions in this chapter.

The number '666'

This number is revealed to be that of a false prophet who forces his followers to receive his mark of recognition. The number '666,' according to the Scriptures, is needed for economic and social survival during the period of hardship which precedes the

Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The meaning of this number and who it stands for has been subject of controversy over the years in theological circles.

Historically, a similar event occurred at the height of the Roman Rule of the world. In Rome 'the mark of the beast' was the possession of a certificate that a sacrifice had been made to the emperor. As a result, people received the number to survive the persecutions at the time. The occurrences of a similar exercise in the apocalyptic has been explained in diverse ways.

Some argue that it represents Emperor Nero, who was profoundly hated by the Roman political leadership, and was sentenced to death by the senate in AD 68. Nero escaped execution by committing suicide. However, the common people among whom he had a large following, believed that he (Nero) would one day return from the dead. It is this belief of the return of Emperor Nero is what John that is supposed to have used by making Nero the symbol of the beast that persecuted the Church and would returned to do so again.

One explanation to Nero's name that would appear to be more in keeping with apocalyptic style of writing uses symbols rather than form of secret codes. The number '6' is one of the numbers

whiles '7,' which represent fullness or completeness or perfection is the other. While threefold seven, i.e., '777' could well represent the fullness or the perfection of God, a three-fold six, i.e., '666,' would represent the fullness or the highest power of a human, in opposition to God.

Another explanation is that in the ancient times letters of the alphabets served as numbers. The first nine letters stood for number one through nine, the next nine for the numbers ten through nineteen and so on. As there were not enough letters in the Greek alphabets, certain letters and signs were agreed upon and brought into this system. Hence, every name yielded a number.

While some scholars argue that the initials of the Roman emperors from Augustus Caesar to Vespasian add up to '666,' they are opposed by the fact that adherents had to omit Otho and Vitellius to make it work out. Still others suggest that Apostle John was only counting the full title of Domitian in an abbreviation form in Greek in Revelation.

A rather different solution has been offered by another group of scholars who argue that '666' is the triangular number of '36,' i.e., $1+2+3+4\ldots+36$), and that '36' is also another triangular

number of the number '8,' which stands for the antichrist. In view of the world divergent and highly speculative to the riddle, i.e., '666,' it seems best to conclude that John intended only his intimate associates to be able to decipher the Number and who it represents can only be revealed by God through His Holy Spirit.

The number 144,000

This number seems to represent a selected group of saints. The Bible clearly reveals that this number of saints are all Israelites (7:4) who have not defiled themselves in any way (14:4). As first fruits, they are consecrated to God in a special way and are before the throne of God singing a new song which they alone can sing.

Based on this description, some commentators of the Bible take this to mean elite Jewish saints who have attained the utmost in holiness by renouncing marriage and any form of relationships and remained as virgins. However, the difficulty in this interpretation is that sexual relationship defiles a person, a position which is difficult to accept biblically. Another group of Bible interpreter takes the word in more figurative sense and understands the '144,000' to be those who have kept themselves from adultery and fornication. They are virgins in the sense of never entering into any carnal relationship.

In contrast, Mounce, for example, holds the view that the '144,000' are pictured here as the promised 'Bride of Christ' who as they await the day of His marriage have kept themselves from all defiling relationships with the pagan world systems. They have been able to resist the seduction of the great Harlot, with whom the kings of the earth have committed adultery and fornication and have become drunk from drinking the wine of immorality (Rev 17:1-2)

Still, a different point of view is taken by others who see the '144,000' as the first fruit set apart from the world humanity which is ripening for judgment. For example, Robbins (1975) argues that the number is the multiples of the Church's complete symbol which is represented by the twelve (12) tribes in multiply times (i.e., $12 \times 12 = 144$) multiplied by the number '1000' which also represents blessings. In addition to this, the number is symbolic of the Church, the redeemed from the earth, the true spiritual Israelites, the circumcision who worship God in spirit and truth (Phil 3:3), in its dealing with completeness and blessedness.

This last interpretation of the number '144,000' is what I also believe is the meaning and agree with. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that it is only God who can make the meaning clear to His people by the Holy Spirit. However, whoever it stands for, it is

important for everyone to strive to either be among them or with them in heaven.

The Lamb upon the Throne

The book of Revelation contains a lot of figurative descriptions of which the 'Lamb' is an example. Apostle John in a vision (Rev 5, 6, and 14) saw in the middle of the throne of God, the figure of a Lamb (Rev 5:6). The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. The horns figuratively or symbolically stand for strength and power, meaning that the 'Lamb' which Apostle John saw is supposed to have great strength and power.

Additionally, since seven is a number that stands for perfection, it means the strength of the Lamb is perfect. Moreover, the perfect strength of the lamb is supported by His knowledge of all things that happen in the world as represented by His seven all seeing eyes. These qualities made the lamb perfectly omnipotent and omniscient.

The 'Lamb' which John saw is said to have been slain from the foundation of the world. This sacrifice appears in prophecies by some prophets, especially by Isaiah, to be the one who was stained because of iniquities and disobedience of mankind (Isa 53). The prophecy about the Lamb is fulfilled in Jesus Christ at

the prophecy of John the Baptist (John 1:29). Known for its harmless and gentleness, the 'Lamb,' that is, Jesus, gained His power and strength through perfect submission and obedience through suffering. Thus, by virtue of the strength and power of the 'Lamb,' He also is appropriately called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5).

While the 'Lamb' that was slain refers to the first coming of Jesus Christ and His submission to humiliation and to shameful death (Isa 53:1–9), the Lion of the tribe of Judah refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in which he will come as a conquer and a judge of the world to save his sheep and devour His enemies. The Lamb is the only one with the perfect strength and worthiness required to break the seal of the scroll to release God's final judgment on creation (Rev 5:1–6:1). The Lamb is indeed a symbol of sacrifice and submission and yet has received honor, power, and glory. No wonder, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has been given the name that is above all names (Phil 2:11), and is worshiped by all, even in Heaven (Rev 5:8–14).

The Beasts

In Revelation, the description of animals in the form of 'Beasts' is also mentioned with the dragon and they are indicated as agents of the dragon. First to be mentioned is the Beast that comes out

of the sea (Rev 13:1), then a second Beast that comes out from the earth (Rev 13:11), and finally another Beast which sat on the 'great Harlot' with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the habitation of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication (17:1–3).

The first Beast was like that which was seen by Prophet Daniel (Dan 7). The beast represents political power and assumes the form of an imperial state or power. Many Bible scholars argue that this beast refers to the ancient powers of Babylon (a lion; Dan 7:4), Mede-Persia (a bear; Dan 7:5) and or Greece (a leopard; Dan 7:6), since this beast derives its power from the dragon, that represent the devil himself. The duty of this beast from the sea is to persuade, instruct, and to compel men to serve and to worship in a form contrary to that of God. It represents all powers in society which enter into the affairs of godless states.

The duty of the second beast is to serve the interest of the first beast. Therefore, the second beast represents the false prophets that were given a mouth to utter blasphemy against God. It does its work through deception, no wonder, it is usually assumed to represent the anti-Christ who's coming will be under the direct influence of Satan, and will deceive people through miracles and wonders (Rev 16:3; 19:20; 20:10).

The third beast of Revelation 17:3, being ridden by the harlot has seven heads and ten horns. The beast according to some Bible scholars is an obvious reference to the world government of the Roman empire. It is speculated that the seven heads represent the seven hill on which Rome is built, while the ten horns represent the ten nations which have risen out of the Roman empire in Europe.

No matter how one looks and interpret these descriptions of the Beast, it can be deduced that its activities and description represent nothing less than Satanic inspired earthly powers which have existed since the fall of humanity. Although it changes in the form in which it manifests itself (like the beast) yet its functions remain the same.

The Pre-Millennialism versus A-Millennialism

Over the years, there has been a considerable number of debates and discussions among scholars of Christian theology regarding the chronological relationship between the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and other events of the Eschatological period. These debates and discussion have primarily revolved around two major questions.

- Will there be a Millennium, i.e., an earthly reign of Jesus Christ for a period of thousand years?

- If so will the Second Coming of Jesus Christ take place before or after that period?

The view that the return of Christ will inaugurate a Millennium is termed 'Pre-Millennialism' while the view that there would not be any millennium period is 'A-Millennialism.' Although both of these millennium positions have been held virtually throughout Church history at different times, one or the other has dominated.

Pre-Millennialism argues for an earthly reign by Jesus Christ of thousand years (or at least, a substantial period of years closed to a thousand). Unlike A-Millennialism, Pre-Millennialism sees Christ as physically present during this time. Adherents of this view believe that He will return bodily and personally to commence the millennium. This being the case, the Millennium must be seen as still in the future. Pre-Millennialism was probably the dominant millennium view during the early period of the Church. Christians of the first centuries had a strong expectation of an early return of Christ. Instead of holding onto a gradual growth of the kingdom, they anticipated that the Second Coming would be inaugurated by the cataclysmic events.

Ericson (1985, p. 1209) argues that Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and other significant early theologians held onto this view. Those who hold to this view believe that Millennialism would be a time of

great abundance and fertility of a renewing of the earth and building of a glorified Jerusalem. He reveals that about the middle of the ninth century, it began to grow in popularity in conservative circles, especially Baptists, Pentecostal, and some independent fundamentalist churches.

The bone of contention for the different views on the millennium is the mention and interpretation of two resurrections in the passage. The key passage for the Pre-Millennialism is Revelation 20:4–6: “...Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be the priest of God and Christ, and they shall reign with Him for the Thousand years.” Pre-Millennialists observe that there is an evidence of a Thousand-years period and two resurrections, one at the beginning and the other at the end. So, they insist on the literal and consistent interpretation of this passage.

Pre-Millennialists argue that what the Scriptures present is two resurrection of the same type which involves two different groups at an interval of thousand years. It also appears from the context that those who participate in the first resurrection are not involved in the second. It is “the rest of the dead” who do not come to life until the end of the Thousand years. Although it is not said that they will come to life at that point, Pre-Millennialists

argue that the implication is that they will, and that there is an obvious contrast between those involved in the second resurrection and those in the first.

In the view of Pre-Millennialists, the rule of Jesus Christ will be completed right from the very beginning of the millennium, where evil will have been virtually eliminated. The millennium, according to them, will not be an extension of trends already at work within the world. Instead, there will be a sharp break from conditions as we now find them. All Pre-Millennialists also anticipate that Israel will have a special place in the Millennium but disagree on the nature of that special place.

Pre-Millennialists also believe that the millennium will be a time of tremendous change from the period which immediately precedes it, namely, the great tribulation. They also hold the position that that the tribulation will be a time of unprecedented trouble and turmoil including cosmic disturbances, persecutions, and great sufferings. While Pre-Millennialist disagree as to whether the Church would be present during tribulation, they agree the world situation will be at its very worst stage just before Christ comes to establish the Millennium, which will be by contrast, a period of peace and righteousness.

According to Ryrie (1999, p. 522–525), Pre-Millennialists hold a high view of Scriptures, and it is probably safe to say that they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible almost without exception. He notes that Pre-Millennialists understand that the promise of the Abrahamic covenant given to Abraham’s descendants concerning the land from the Nile of Egypt to the Euphrates has never been fulfilled but will be fulfilled in the coming Millennium kingdom. Ryrie, a dispensational Pre-Millennialist, distinguishes the Church from the biblical Israel, and argues that the millennium is the time for all of God’s promises to biblical Israel to be fulfilled.

In contrast to this position, A-Millennialism is the idea that there will be neither millennium period nor earthly reign of Christ. In this case, the great final judgment will immediately follow the Second Coming of Christ and usher in the final state of the righteous and the wicked. Advocates of A-Millennialism maintain that it is built on relatively clear eschatological passages. They argue that the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, that is, regeneration, while the second is a literal, physical, or bodily resurrection, and that those who take part in the first will undergo the second as well. They note however, that in this case the two cases of resurrection occur together, and there is nothing in the context to suggest a shift in meaning.

Contributing to this argument, Murray (1970, p. 1306) posits that the interpretation by the A-Millennialist is untreatable and it attributes confusion and chaotic thinking to the biblical author. Another scholar, Alford (n.d., p. 1928–29), contended that if one resurrection brings a person back to spiritual life and the other to physical life, then there is an end of all significance in language, and the Scriptures are wiped out as a definite testimony to everything. There are indications that these scholars are sensitive to the basic argument that ‘context can alter the meaning of words.’

Despite the simplicity of A-Millennialism and the clarity of its central tenet, it is in many ways difficult to grasp. In other words, in dealing with the mysterious message of Revelation 20:4–6, A-Millennialists have come up with a rather wide variety of explanations. Nevertheless, in general terms, one of the problems one encounters in trying to group the many views and explanations of A-Millennialism is that the Thousand-years of the text is to be taken symbolically.

Hendrickson (1939, p. 156–59) writes that the A-Millennialists consider the book of Revelation as a whole, to be very symbolic. They note that even the most fervent Pre-Millennialists do not take everything in the Book of Revelation literally. The bowls,

seals, and trumpets, for example, are usually interpreted as symbols. By a simple extension of this principle, A-Millennialism contends that the thousand years of Revelation 20 might not be literal. In addition, they point out that the millennium is not mentioned anywhere else in Scriptures.

Similarly, Hamilton (1942, p. 130–31) comments that when A-Millennialists deal with Revelation 20, they usually have the whole book in view. They see the book of Revelation as consisting of several sections, seven being the number most frequently mentioned. Hamilton states that several sections do not deal with successive period: rather they are recapitulation of the same period, the period between Christ's first coming and the Second Coming.

Another feature of A-Millennialism is a more general conception of Prophecy, especially OT prophecy which they frequently treat as historic and symbolic rather than futuristic. To them, prophecy occupies a much less important place in A-Millennialist than in the thought of Pre-Millennialist. Additionally, because A-Millennialism do not believe in the Millennium reign of Christ, they do not engage in the type of eager search for signs of the Second Coming that characterizes much of Pre-Millennialism.

Ryrie (1999, p. 522–525) mentions that A-Millennialist holds a high view of inspiration and authority of the Bible. He adds that the unfulfilled of the biblical promise to Israel, according to the A-Millennialist, are fulfilled spiritually in the Church or that the promises need not be fulfil at all since they are conditional, and the conditions are not met. For this reason, A-Millennialist sees the Church as fulfilling God's promises in antitypical and spiritual way. Consequently, their conclusion, according to Ryrie (1999, p. 523), is that the Church is a heavenly and spiritual kingdom whereas the Church in the Pre-Millennialism period will still be an earthly body of believers.

In resolving this issue, we must now address the question of which millennial view to adopt. It is instructive to note that while the reference to two resurrections in Revelation 20 support the idea of A-Millennialist, there are however no biblical passages with which premillennialism cannot cope or cannot adequately explain. Willmington (1989, p. 851-52) argues that by holding on to A-Millennialism, Isaiah's beautiful prophecy of the bear and the cow lying together and the lion eating straw like the Ox (Isa 11:7) becomes fulfilled. Simply, it doesn't mean what it says. And if this text can never be taken literally, what proof does one have that the magnificent Isaiah 53 should not be allegorized away?

Citing the theologians who have held the view of Clement of Rome (AD 40–100), Ignatius (AD 50–115), Polycarp (AD 70–167), Justin Martyr (AD 100–168), Irenaeus (AD 140–202), Tertullian (AD 150–220), Cyprian (AD 200–258), and the like. Willmington argues that Pre-Millennialism is the oldest view to be adopted by the Church from the Apostolic period through the period of the Church fathers. Moreover, the Pre-Millennialist interpretation is not based upon only one passage in the Bible. Intimation of it is found in a number of places.

Apostle Paul writes: “For as in Adam all died so also in Christ shall be made alive. However, each in his own order: Christ the first fruit, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end when he delivers the Kingdom to God the father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1Cor 15:22–24). Indeed, this description offered by Apostle Paul concerning events of the last days indicate how all the events of the resurrection are going to be in sequence.

Through accurate deduction from the Scriptures one can safely say that just as the first coming and the resurrection of Christ were distinct events separated by time so will there be an interval between the Second Coming and the end. Also, we should note that while the two resurrections are spoken of explicitly only in

Revelation 20, there are other passages which hint at either one resurrection of a selected group (Luke 14:4; 20:35; 1Cor 15:23; Phil 3:11; 1Thess 4:16) or a kind of resurrection in two different stages (Dan 12:2; John 5:29).

It must be concluded here that in spite of the differences in the positions of these two views, the Church should always be regarded as a spiritual body on earth with heavenly vision. With the concept of two resurrections being adequately supported by the above texts and arguments, one can conclude that the Pre-Millennial view is more appropriately scriptural and acceptable than A-Millennialism. This notwithstanding, it is rather safe for any believer in the Second Coming of Christ to be ready at any time, so that whether it is Pre-Millennialism or A-Millennialism that is fulfilled he or she is found among the elect.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, attention has been given to some of the special issues bothering on certain figures and numbers in the book of Revelation which require brief discussions because of the interests they generate. Specifically, there are brief discussions on two figures: The Lamb upon the Throne, the Beast; and then two numbers, “666” and the 144,000 Saints. Also included in the discussions in this chapter are the views on the doctrine of

Millennialism. Particularly, the views of Pre-Millennialism as against A-Millennialism have been interactively presented. This chapter serves as the penultimate one with the next chapter focusing on the overall summary and conclusion to all the discussions in this book.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this volume, *My New Testament Companion* was to meet a demand for a readable material that will help users of the New Testament (NT) Scriptures to have a better grasp of issues in the inspired text in order to appreciate the divine the message it contains. As such, areas of studies that have been treated in this book are some of the fundamental issues calculated to lay a good foundation in the understanding of Scriptures.

The first chapter in particular devoted the discussions to some of the fundamental matters of the Bible in general before attention was turned to the NT studies. As such, basic matters such as one will inquire to know what the *Bible* is like the background to the title *Bible*, what the divine document is made up of, and the importance of studying the backgrounds to such a document, were fairly treated. It was realized that the study of the Bible is important for a number of reasons, the fundamental one being to provide users with impressions on a number of matters concerning God's redemption plans. In other words, the study of the Scriptures brings a person to the knowledge of God's true part to salvation and eternal life. Nevertheless, other importance

or purposes of studying the backgrounds: historical, information, learning and/or practical life, transmission and prophetic, were also put forth. In the end, the presentation narrowed down on the NT to give a brief background to it.

Then the focus of the discussions shifted to the process of canonization of the NT Scriptures. Interesting issues that border on the 'Science of Introduction' and background to the NT were also treated to appreciable extent. These included but not limited to fundamental issues that undergird the NT Canon like the need for such a single document, the criteria for collection and order of selection of materials into it, and the impact that the canonized document has made on society in general and Christians in particular were fairly dealt with.

In the end, it was realized that though the process of the canonization was a tiresome task, the outcome which is a single volume of the constituted books, the New Testament, has become easier to handle for use, circulate, and better preserved. The divine document, combined with the Old Testament, now constitute a single document, the Bible, which has become the guide to many believers of the Almighty God.

Moving on, attention was given to some of the pertinent political events of the NT era in this chapter. Significant matters such as the political events underlying some of the events of the NT, which include the emergence of Emperor Augustus Caesar, the kingship of Judea from Antipater to Herod the Great, the role of Herod the Great in the NT era, the successive kings, (i.e., the Herods), were highlighted. Moreover, the discussions dealt with some of the roles of the Roman Governors like Pontius Pilate, Agrippa and Felix.

It was concluded that the political activities of Jesus' day influenced His ministry, either positively or negatively, and that in one way or the other, God used the political leaders of the time as instruments to shape the ministry of Jesus Christ. The series of events beginning with the flight of His parents from Bethlehem to Egypt at the time of His birth to His journey to the cross at Golgotha are punctuated by certain roles of some of the political leaders.

The interactions did not overlook the organization and operations of some of the party groups mentioned in the NT. Brief notes on these groups that bother on their roles and impact on some of the events of the NT. The major ones that received attention are the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees. Other party groups such as

the Scribes, Samaritans, Herodians, and some communal parties were also mentioned as part of these groups. Once again, it is not easy to overlook the connection between the activities of the religious leadership of Jesus' day and His ministry. All the events from His birth to His resurrection after death witness certain roles of some of these religious leaders or groups. Thus, one can admit that the religious groups of Jesus' day played certain roles that influenced His ministry in one way or the other.

A couple of fundamental issues about John the Baptist and the significance of his ministry to that of the Lord Jesus Christ were also raised. The focus of discussions narrowed down to the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It began with the Jewish expectation of a Messiah and continued into His work on the cross. Areas of interactions centered on preparations for the birth of Christ, the emergence of synagogues and the ministry of John the Baptist. Various dimensions of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the involvement of the disciples and other followers of the Lord were dealt with appreciably.

It was observed that Jesus practiced what could be regarded as holistic ministry, in that He focused on all the needs of the totality of a person. In other words, He ministered to the whole being: body, soul, and spirit of the people He encountered. The holistic

ministry of Jesus also included ministering to all manner of people. Moreover, He completed His earthly ministry by His work on the cross. Now, He occupies a unique position before God as the Mediator between God and humanity, and has become the channel through which God's pardoning grace reach humanity.

It also became necessary to provide brief backgrounds to some cities which are commonly encountered in the NT. Cities whose backgrounds are treated include but not limited to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Antioch, Tarsus. It is not only the backgrounds of some notable cities that are treated but also the culture of their citizens and the messages underlying the letters written to these cities are also dealt with. The objective for this was to unearth the impact that the lifestyle of the citizens had on the message of the gospel and vice versa.

This laid the foundation for a consideration of the books that constitute the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. With regards to the Gospels, there was a probe into what exactly the books i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were. Then on the Acts of the Apostle, mention was made of the events that preceded the day of Pentecost and those that come thereafter, particularly with respect to the spread of the gospel and the growth of the

Apostolic or first century Church. The discussions provided a lead into the persecution of the believers and mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 which led to the dispersal of the Jews in general.

On the backgrounds and messages of the NT letters which were written by Apostle Paul, issues like the nature of NT letters which led to a focus on the backgrounds and message of Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonica, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon was dealt with. Besides these epistles from Apostle Paul treated above, there were many other letters that were written by the other apostles and leaders of the Church during the first century AD. To this end, highlights were given on Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and Jude. A brief background to the book of Revelation by Apostle John was also provided.

From this point, attention was shifted to some of the special issues in the Pauline epistles such as the advent of spiritual gifts and the Church, the significance of spiritual gifts in the Church, how the spiritual gifts relate with one another in practical unity. Related areas such as the abuses associated with the operation of spiritual gifts, issues as to whether the spiritual gifts are needed in the Church today, also received appreciable attention.

It came out that it is absolutely essential that these gifts continue to operate if the Church is going to accomplish her full mission and destroy the work of the devil, and that whether there is Bible or not the gifts are important. A major observation is that there are as many evil and demons in the world today as there were during the earthly life of Jesus and in the days of the Church of the first century. Thus, the supernatural gifts are especially necessary for missionaries and workers to win the spiritual warfare for Christ in the present time just as it helped the early apostles.

Moreover, once a human being is spirit, soul, and body, the spiritual part of a person is as God-conscious in current times as in the time of the patriarchs and biblical prophets and the apostles. Therefore, God still communicates with people through the Holy Spirit either directly or indirectly, as they meditate on Scriptures, because it was written by authors inspired by His Spirit. What this also means is that God can still speak or perform miracles through any of His believers at any period provided that person is spiritually conscious to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

There are other interesting questions which relate to some of the epistles of Apostle Paul which were also treated. With regards to the question of whether all governments are of God, it was

argued that Christians who recognize that the services of authorities in government are ordained by God will do their best to not only submit to such authorities, but also honor such representatives, pay their tax obligations to them as Jesus also did as well as pray for their welfare. Turning to the questions of how Israel as a nation will be saved despite their general rejection of the gospel, it was observed that their rejection is temporary; and that it is a display of God's mercy so that the Jews will obtain mercy through the mercy of God shown to the Gentiles. That is, the process shows God's sovereign act of justice, mercy and love for the sinner, and it is marvelous. Thus, the in general Jews will one day acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God and turn to God for salvation through Him.

On the question of whether women should speak or teach in the Church, it was concluded that though women are not encouraged to exercise undue authority or usurpation of power in the churches, their ministry roles were nevertheless not to be left to the background. The argument is that Paul might have given that instruction as a control measure to women's rule over men. So, it can be taken as an attempt to curb a local situation but not a universal prohibition as it is being misconstrued since God does not place any hindrance on the ministry of women. Therefore, women should be given the chance to fulfil their God-called

responsibilities in a cordial atmosphere but under the supervision of Church leaders.

Then attention was turned to issues that help to answer questions about the resurrection of the dead in the context of Christ's experience such as debunking the denial of resurrection of the dead and an assurance of the glorious resurrection of the saints. Here, it was concluded that Jesus did not merely 'swooned' as is the view of some critics of Christianity but He actually died on the cross. The scriptural emphasis on the reality that Jesus died and was buried is clearly revealed in the Scriptures not only to indicate the reality of His death, but also the truth of His resurrection.

Finally, the issue of Paul's thorn in the flesh, which is an interesting subject for discussion to several New Testament users, also engaged our attention in the discussions. The conclusion that was drawn on this matter is that all believers have similar 'thorns' in their flesh and that the humility which appears by the check of such 'thorns' works an excellent thing in them to produce a lowly spirit, and will cause the Holy Spirit to fully use them to the glory of the Lord.

The discussions moved to another level with attention shifting to a comparison between the Old Covenant mediated by Moses in the OT and the New Covenant of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Some issues that were treated in this area included the meaning of the Old and New Covenant and how the New Testament covenant is superior to that of the OT. Along this same tangent, issues such as the work of grace as oppose to the Law, the position of the mediator, justification by faith as opposed to works, implications of the old covenant for the New Testament Church.

These issues were tied up to the position of Christ as a Priest, Prophet, and King. Through Him, there is now the priesthood of all believers. It argued that Christians have been chosen to be different from all other people. That difference lies in the fact that they are dedicated to God's will and service. Therefore, other people may follow the standard of the world but for Christians, the standards are God's because they constitute the royal priesthood of God.

Interest was shown in some of the doctrines of heretics (or false doctrines) which no doubt forms the basis of some of the arguments of some of letters. Specifically, three of such doctrines: Gnosticism, Cerinthianism and Docetism were briefly

discussed. Mention was made of how the Apostle John in particular defended the Christian faith against such false doctrines. He wrote to warn believers of some of these false doctrines because many false teachers and prophets have already entered into the world. Therefore, he indicated that any teaching that does not confess Jesus as Lord is not of God.

Towards the end of the presentations in this volume, the discussions delve into matters that bother on some of the supernatural beings in the New Testament beginning with issues relating to the ministry of angels. Various aspects of the topic such as their origin and nature, their role in the scheme of God, and other interesting undergirding areas of their ministry in the four main divisions of the New Testament were discussed. The most significant aspect of the discussion centered on how children of God can experience angels in the course of their relationship with the Almighty God.

In relation to this subject which bothers on the supernatural in the New Testament is the operation of Satan and his team of demons. This subject also received considerable attention in this book. Here too, the discussions were organized in accordance with the four divisions of the New Testament. The details areas on the latter included their origin and their connection with idols

and gods together with other practices that were regarded as abominations to God's covenant community. The presentation on these evil spirit ended on how Christians can deal with them and their ultimate fate in the Lake of Fire.

The very last areas of the discussion centered on some of the issues bothering on certain figures and numbers in the book of Revelation. Attention was given to some of them because of the interests they generate. Specifically, two figures: The Lamb upon the Throne, the Beast; and then two numbers, "666" and the 144,000 Saints, came up for discussion.

Also included in the areas of discussions at the final stage of the book are the views on the doctrine of Millennialism. Particularly, the views of Pre-Millennialism as against A-Millennialism were interactively presented where it was concluded that in spite of the differences in the positions of these two views, the Church should always be regarded as a spiritual body on earth with heavenly vision. Moreover, though Pre-Millennial view seems to be more appropriately scriptural and acceptable than A-Millennialism, it is rather safe for any believer in the Second Coming of Christ to be ready at any time, so that whether it is Pre-Millennialism or A-Millennialism that is fulfilled the person is found among the elect.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rev James Yamoah (PhD), Vice President and Senior Lecturer of Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew, Ghana Christian University College (GhanaCU), Accra, and also the Minister-in-Charge of Restoration Christian Church on the College's campus, has not less than thirty (30) years of experience in ministry. He has travelled extensively both in Africa and overseas as a preacher and speaker at many conferences and seminars. Rev Dr JY, as he is affectionately called by his students, is married to Florence since 1991 and they are

blessed with Jemima, Emmanuel and Joseph.

In *My New Testament Companion*, Rev. Dr. Yamoah deals with fundamental issues that will help users of the New Testament to appreciate the text and message of God. The message of this book is not only inspiring but also informative and educative. He has authored other books including:

- *A Guide to Old Testament Exegetical Dissertation*
- *A Model for Hebrew - English Translation and Application: The Biblical Hebrew Student's Companion*
- *Always Ready: Over 150 Messages to Help You Study, Teach, Preach, & Live The Bible Systematically*
- *Amazing Grace: A Guide to Spiritual Formation & Disciplines*
- *Arise & Shine! Be an Instrument of Change to the Youth*
- *Can You Be God's Transformational Leader? Yes You Can!*
- *"Holy War": The Consequence of Open Defecation*
- *Thus says the LORD: 'No Open Defecation, else...'*
- *Fellow Ghanaians, Let's Stop Open Defecation, else...*
- *Pacesetters of Divine Ministry: Let us learn from them!*
- *Suffer to Gain: How the Righteous should overcome Difficult Times*

All users of the New Testament especially students will find fulfillment in the background details revealed in this volume. It is indeed a must read book. Make sure you get a copy now!

For further details please contact: 024 446 2843; jimmyamoah@yahoo.com