

January to March 2017

“Apostasy”

by
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About the Author



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BEWARE OF APOSTASY

Apostasy is the falling away from “the faith” of the living and true God. It is one of the most important themes in the Holy Scriptures. It speaks of professing Christians denying the faith they once believed. It is a state where Christian churches oppose the fundamental teachings of God’s Word, the Bible. This is prophesied in the New Testament as well as in many accounts in the Old Testament which alludes to this generalized turning away from the truth.

Paul warns the believers not to be deceived as the Day of the Lord will not come except apostasy sets in first. This falling away will reach its peak prior to the revelation of the man of sin and the rapture of those who genuinely believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

The Word of God reminds us of that day when many shall depart from the faith. This falling away will be so rampant in the last days that the testimony of the believers will be at stake. Many Christians will compromise and become identified with those who do not believe the Word of God. This sure upcoming event will test the Christian’s devotion to his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us be aware of the perils that this falling away causes. Let us ponder upon our lives. It is to our advantage to let the Word of God guide and lead us. If we care not for this event, we may fall prey as victims of this end-time apostasy. The only way by which we will be enlightened to see the truth is through the study of God’s Word.

Praise be to our God who warns us of this falling away. He does not want His children to become victims of this awful situation. He cares for us enough to record warnings of this dreadful time. May the Lord cause us to be teachable and humble enough to hear the warnings through His Word.

THOUGHT: Am I aware of this end-time apostasy from the faith?

PRAYER: *“Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (Ps 12:1).*

MONDAY, JANUARY 2

MATTHEW 24:4-5

2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

“... the time will come when
they will not endure sound doctrine...”

FALSE CHRISTS WILL DECEIVE

The word “apostasy” is taken from the Greek word *apostasia*. It is defined as the defiance against an established system or authority. This refers to the rejection of the teachings of God’s Word, the Bible, which is the sole and supreme authority of the Christian’s faith and practice. Apostasy leads people away from believing the Holy Scriptures.

The Lord Jesus Christ warns that in the last days there are many deceivers. He strongly urges His disciples to “*take heed that no man deceive*” (Matt 24:4) them. To “*take heed*” is to see with a sense of frequent awareness or taking notice of what is happening around. There will be an increase of deceivers who will claim they are the “second coming” Christ. Many will claim to be Christ but their main desire is to deceive people, even the believers.

Today many professing Christians despise the pure teaching of the Bible. They want to hear flatteries from the preachers to boost their self-esteem. They only seek the things that satisfy their hedonistic and materialistic desires.

Let us seriously take the words of Jesus. He did not give us this warning without a sense of urgency and danger. Urgent because we are in the last days and the deceivers are increasing in number. Dangerous because of the consequences it will bring to a believer’s life.

We must make sure we are aware of these dangers. Ignorance of these truths does not exempt anyone before God. Let us be sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit that we may learn more of His Word. He ensures that He records everything for our learning today. Let us be doers of the Word.

THOUGHT: Am I turning my ears away from the Truth?

PRAYER: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Ps 139:23-24).

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3

MATTHEW 24:10-12

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

“... all that will live godly
in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

FALSE PROPHETS WILL DECEIVE

In Matthew 24:10-12, the Lord Jesus continues His warning about apostasy in the last days. It will really be a test for every believer because of an increase in persecution during that period. Christians will be hated because of the name of their Saviour. Jesus describes this as many “*shall hate one another*” (Matt 24:10). The intensity of the opposition will be so great that many of those who once profess to be Christians will compromise and deny the faith.

Many in the church will be offended. Many will be stumbled because of the pressures from society as well as from compromising churches. Many churchgoers will give up their faith and conform to the mould of the unbelieving. This leads to betrayal between Christians and churches. Infidelity will be more observable and hatred towards one another will define Christian relationship.

False prophets will flourish. The animosities in the churches will cause these churches to be their easy prey. These prophets will deceive many professing Christians. Since many are compromising, the love between believers will grow cold. Their compassion and care for one another will grow lesser and lesser. Many will be apathetic to one another's burdens.

May the Lord be gracious and merciful to cause us to endure in that trying time. We must be willing to face afflictions and rejections. We must be ready to face and suffer persecutions if we have to live up to the godly life expected of us by our Saviour. We must be thankful that we still have freedom today to share our faith in God's Word without intense opposition. We must grab this opportunity to reach out to more souls for His kingdom. The time will come when we will not be able to do it anymore.

THOUGHT: My Lord works while it is day. Do I also?

PRAYER: “O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.” (Ps 7:1-2).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4

MATTHEW 24:23-28

JOHN 10:27-28

"My sheep hear my voice...

(no) man (shall) pluck them out of my hand."

ANY MAN CAN DECEIVE

The warning against apostasy is indeed worthy to be seriously considered. This is the third time in Matthew chapter 24 that Christ reminds the believers of the coming increase of deceptions in this world. Men who are deceived will themselves deceive others. Verse 23 describes that any man can claim Christ is here or there. This is the result of the increasing number of false Christs and prophets.

The deception is even greater because of signs and wonders being performed. Many spectacular things will be seen. People will be ensnared and mesmerized by these so-called miraculous signs. These devious unnatural things will even captivate believers; and will cause professing Christians to accept these tricks as divinely ordained. Deception seduces believers to embrace false Christs and their doctrines.

The danger is that these deceptions are so good they look genuine. The Scripture says that even the very elect will almost be persuaded by the cunning and treacherous wonders that are performed. False healing and counterfeit miracles will shake the faith of many true believers. Moreover, doctrines of devils denouncing the biblical teachings will be popularized. New interpretations contrary to God's Word will be heard from the pulpits of many churches.

We thank the Lord for the promises in His Word. Those whom He has chosen from the foundation of the world will never fall. His almighty purposes will never fail. His eternal decrees are unalterable. We have a God whose sovereign power in His election is beyond man's cunning deception. We have the security of God's everlasting salvation in the finished work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Have I truly received Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: *"O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me" (Ps 119:97-98).*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5

HOSEA 4:6-11

GENESIS 6:5

*“... every imagination... of his heart
was only evil continually.”*

WILFUL IGNORANCE LEADS TO APOSTASY

In Hosea 4:6-11, the Prophet Hosea described how the people of God were destroyed. They were deceived to worship the gods of the heathens because of their lack of knowledge. This was not because they were not taught but because they wilfully rejected the knowledge of God given to them through the prophets in their days. They apostatized and the Lord rejected them, including their children.

They forgot the law of their God who had delivered them out of the bondage of Egypt. They embraced the laws and practices of the heathen religions. The Word of God was relegated to nothing but words of ancient men. They forsook and left off the keeping of His laws. They had a very low view of the Scriptures.

This led to increased sinfulness in the land. They committed sin as easily as they ate bread. They had no qualms and fears in committing sin. Their hearts' object was iniquity. Lawlessness was in their minds. They made sin their way of life. They were likened to the days of Noah where the *“wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5).

Woe to us if we reject the knowledge of God! We hear the Word preached every Lord's Day. Do we listen to the preacher and the convictions of the Holy Spirit? Have we been attending Sunday school and other Bible studies in our church? Do we desire to learn God's Word deeper? Are we doing our personal daily Bible reading and meditation faithfully? Do we seek God to personally teach us from His Word? Lord, please give us an intense hunger and thirst for Thy precious and Holy Word. May the Holy Spirit give us understanding as we read the Bible and grant us the love to keep and obey Thy Word.

THOUGHT: Do I hunger and thirst for God's Word?

PRAYER: *“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”* (Ps 119:4-5).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6

ISAIAH 14:12-15

PROVERBS 16:18

"Pride goeth before destruction..."

THE ORIGIN OF APOSTASY

The name "Lucifer" literally means "shining one." It figuratively denotes a morning star of royal splendour. But Lucifer rebelled against God and was cast down from heaven. This fall is described as a cutting or hewing down and "*he was cast unto the earth*" (Rev 12:13). He deceives the nations of the earth. He prevents them from giving glory and worship to God.

Lucifer was one of the heavenly archangels, but he wanted to ascend to the position of God the Almighty. He aimed to climb, indicating an active move to go up to put himself on the throne of God. This was how haughty and boastful his spirit was. Obviously, he desired in his heart to usurp the authority over all of God's creation. He wanted to be like the Most High. This is tantamount to saying, "I will replace the Most High God on His Throne."

The proud "I's" of Lucifer led him to destruction. He did not acknowledge the authority of God over him. His haughty ambition to become the Most High pushed him down into a great fall, ending in eternal condemnation. He was not content with his state. He yearned to be the greatest of all.

O, that we would keep our hearts from being haughty and proud! We must guard our desires and ambitions in life from the influences of Satan for by such evil discontent, we tend to carry our head high. We think highly of ourselves and covet worldly things and positions. We desire far more things than what God has given us. Let us not provoke God to wrath or we will soon find ourselves stumbling and falling to our own ruin.

THOUGHT: Am I contented with the state God has put me in?

PRAYER: *"The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law"* (Ps 119:69-70).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7

EZEKIEL 28:11-18

1 TIMOTHY 3:6

“... lifted up with pride

he fall into the condemnation of the devil.”

THE SIN OF PRIDE

In Ezekiel 28:11-18, Satan is seen instigating the earthly ruler of Tyrus. Before the fall, Lucifer was an anointed cherub and was set upon the holy mountains of God. He was covered with precious stones. He glittered and shined for all to see. There was a celebration in the day of his creation. He was perfect... until the sin of pride set in.

The riches of Tyrus caused the king to sin. His heart was likened to Lucifer's. The archangel was lifted up because of his beauty. He was corrupted in his wisdom because of his splendour. The pride of life is the seed of sin and apostasy. This then grew into rebellion and bore fruits of sinfulness.

The consequence of pride is blasphemy against God and His Word. A proud man treats the authority of God with contempt. He resorts to violence to get his own ways. He sows false teaching and promotes superstition and idolatry. His doctrine gears towards immorality and riotous living.

This is the result of pride. It destroys individual lives, families, churches and nations. It was Satan's sin that caused his fall to earth. By this sin, he continues to deceive man as he still desires the throne of God. He knows he cannot unseat God, but his pride blinds him to continue his desire to be *“like the most High”* (Isa 14:14).

Christians, let not pride cause us to stumble and to forfeit God's plan for our lives as His witnesses. Let us ask for the grace of God that we may be meek and humble. Let us not desire vain glory for it will lead us away from Christ. Let us always remind ourselves that we are but sinners saved by His grace. We have nothing of our own and we must not desire things for our sakes but for His glory alone.

THOUGHT: Am I committing the sin of pride?

PRAYER: *“He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it. Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble”* (Ps 10:11-12).

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 8
GENESIS 3:1-7
MATTHEW 4:4

*"... Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceedeth
out of the mouth of God."*

SATAN CAUSES MAN TO DISOBEY GOD'S WORD

Satan used the serpent, being craftier than any of the other animals, to tempt Eve. He caused Eve to doubt God's Word when he told Eve, "*Yea, hath God said...?*" (Gen 3:1). This same doubt is in the questioning of the perfect divine inspiration of the Word of God. Satan further distorted God's Word as he twisted the words of the LORD by asking Eve, "*Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*" This same distortion is introduced today in the corrupt modern English versions of the Bible. This is the unbelief in the verbal and plenary preservation of the Scriptures.

Satan then went on to deny God's warnings. He said, "*Ye shall not surely die*" (Gen 3:4). This is really the rejection of the perfect authority of God's Word in the lives of every believer. This is reflected in the humanistic approach of rationalism in understanding the Bible, i.e. using man's intellect to discern the mind of God.

Satan's ploy for Christians is to lead them to disobey God. He knows he cannot take away the salvation of those who have truly believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. However, if Christians are tricked to refuse to comply with the commandments of the Word of God, they can become lights hidden in bushels. They can no more reflect the true light of Christ in their lives. Christians must remember to obey every Word of God necessary for their day-to-day living.

Lord, let us desire to be always a shining light for Thee, a light that shines for Thy glory. Shield us from the lies and deception of the enemy. Our days on earth are just but a few so let us be useful for Thee until Thou calls us home one day. Help us to discern Thy will for us and not to disobey Thy Word. May we love Thy law and meditate upon it. Let it be the light of our path in this sinful world.

THOUGHT: Am I obedient to God's Word?

PRAYER: "*O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles*" (Ps 43:3).

MONDAY, JANUARY 9

ACTS 5:1-11

MATTHEW 6:19-21

"Be sober, be vigilant..."

(of your) adversary the devil..."

SATAN CAUSES MAN TO LIE AGAINST GOD

Satan seduces people to become liars. Peter in Acts 5:3 asked Ananias, *"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?"* Satan used covetousness to cause Ananias and Sapphira to lie. What they meant to do was to keep back a part of the price, while pretending to bring the whole of it to the apostles' feet. Great wicked deeds in the Scriptures are traced back to the influence and temptation of Satan.

Believers are deceived by Satan to lie to God by Satan's cunning ways, one of which is the glitter of money. Men are easily drawn towards leaving God and falling away from the faith because of earthly treasures. Silver and gold induce man to make alibis for not giving their honest tithes and offerings. Worship and fellowship meetings would then be demoted as secondary while business opportunities are of greater significance.

With full sobriety and watchfulness, believers must be careful of the enemy's tactics. Lowering our guard will allow the tempter to subdue us. He wants to defame the name of the Lord through the sins and transgressions of Jesus' disciples. He likes to litigate by presenting before God the wretched works of Christians. He accuses them of breaking the law and does this with all diligence.

Dear Reader, are you captivated by the riches of this world? Are you given to lying because of your love for earthly possessions? Do you not realize that your soul is more precious than the riches of this whole world combined? Let go of your temporal possessions! Seek things that will last for eternity.

THOUGHT: Am I sober and vigilant against the devil?

PRAYER: *"Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword" (Ps 17:12-13).*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

LUKE 22:31-34

1 JOHN 5:4-5

“... whatsoever is born of God
overcometh the world...”

SATAN CAUSES DISTRESS TO MAN

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). The Lord Jesus Christ told Peter that Satan desired to try him by placing trials and temptations in his path. The purpose was to agitate him and to see whether his faith would remain. He desired to see Peter’s witness for Christ be found as chaff. He wanted Peter’s confession to be seen by the world as a false profession.

This remains true today. Satan disturbs the lives of the saints in their service for the Lord. Satan wants Christians to fail. He wants believers to be distressed and cease to live for Christ. He seeks faithful servants to waver in their faith. He magnifies the cares and difficulties of this world to cause Christians to be depressed and dejected. His aim is for believers to fall away and exchange their loyalty to Christ with their love for the things of this wicked world.

But the Lord Jesus Christ also told Peter, *“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”* (Luke 22:32). The One who is praying is greater than the one who is agitating. He has already overcome the world and His child also has overcome the world.

Satan may cause you to stumble, but arise and continue to run the race that the Lord Jesus Christ has set before you. He may cause you to be discouraged, but you must wait on the Lord, trust in God and be of good courage. He may cause you to be physically disabled, but know that God’s grace is sufficient for you. The Lord’s strength is made perfect in your physical weakness. Rest not in your own power but in the power of Christ which works for you.

THOUGHT: Am I trusting Jesus enough?

PRAYER: *“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD”* (Ps 27:13-14).

SATAN HINDERS GOD’S MINISTRY

“Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us” (1 Thess 2:18). This shows how Satan uses strong measures in causing believers not to accomplish things for the Lord. It has been said, when God works, Satan also works, even harder than the believers. Satan impedes the Christian’s course by cutting off the way. He hinders the preaching of the Word, the hearing of it and the believing of it. “When the endeavors of Christians are directed to the work of the Lord, it is certain that everything that hinders proceeds from Satan; and would to God that this sentiment were deeply impressed upon the minds of all pious persons — that Satan is continually contriving, by every means, in what way he may hinder or obstruct the edification of the Church!” (John Calvin).

This hindrance, however, did not prevent Paul from looking forward to that blessed day of Christ’s return when all who have faith in Jesus will be gathered together. He was fully persuaded that the work of the Gospel will prosper not because of what he had done but by the work of grace in the hearts of those who believe.

Lord, may we be more careful that our work for Thee be not hindered. May we continue to labour for Thee in spite of the many obstacles that may come our way. We trust that Thou have ordained the ministries and have allowed us to serve. We believe that Thou who planned it will accomplish it according to Thy perfect design. We may falter and sometimes fail, but let not our human frailties prevent us from pursuing after the crown of rejoicing that awaits us at Thy coming. Strengthen us to rise up and labour for Thy cause and open our eyes to see that glorious hope so that we will endure unto the end.

THOUGHT: Do I persevere in preaching the Gospel of Christ?

PRAYER: *“Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me”* (Ps 63:7-8).

SATAN CAUSES DECEPTION

Satan works by deception. *"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light"* (2 Cor 11:14). He deceived Eve through his subtlety. Likewise, there will come false teachers and deceitful workers who shall transform themselves into devoted Christians. To transform is to alter the outward scheme of things or disguise themselves so as to deceive.

The deception is very subtle and cunning; Christians must be watchful and prayerful. They lay before the believers circumstances that may appear sincere and noble, yet contradicting to the mandate God has given to His people. They come to preach another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel. They come with their chocolate-coated preaching that conceals the deadly poison of deceit. They present a "better gospel," a "more enlightened" exposition of the Scriptures and a "safer venture" to reach out to the lost.

They master the theme of "grace" which goes off-tangent from what the Bible teaches. They preach it to lead the people to antinomianism and claims that the moral law is already abrogated. They do not understand that without the law, there is no grace and grace is made gracious because of the law. They lead believers to live lawless lives that lead to immorality, such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness and all kinds of sin which Paul declares, *"they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Gal 5:21).

Be warned of these preachers and teachers who come with smooth words to entice men to believe in their false doctrines. Their desire is to get richer and richer! All they seek for is the money of the people who are deceived. Be discerning! Seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit indwelling in you.

THOUGHT: Am I living according to God's Word?

PRAYER: *"Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise; For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue"* (Ps 109:1-2).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13

MATTHEW 25:41-46

REVELATION 20:10

“... the devil that deceived them
was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...”

DO NOT BE JUDGED WITH SATAN

In Matthew 25:41, the Lord Jesus said, “*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*” The Lord Jesus knows who His sheep are and who the goats are. They that do His will shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They are those who have put their faith in the perfect obedience of Christ, even His death on the cross. They are the ones who believe in their hearts that Jesus has risen from the dead after three days and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ and all those who profess to believe in Jesus but later fall away because of Satan’s agitation, hindering or deception, will be cast into the everlasting fire. Many today, even seminary and Bible college professors, deny the teaching of the Bible that the wicked will be burned in a literal fire. Matthew 25:41, however, plainly declares that there is an everlasting fire made ready for the devil and his angels which shall also be the place for the unbelieving and apostatizing ones.

Let us not risk our eternal future with the wiles and subtleties of Satan. Know the will of God for your life. God’s Word is His perfect blueprint for your life. Eternity is at stake! Do not exchange your everlasting place in the Kingdom of God for eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire by not knowing the truth from God’s Word. Do not be complacent that you have professed Christ as your Saviour and Lord, but remain unconcerned for the spiritual things that are demanded in His Word. Truly know what He has done for you, what He is doing for you and what He will do for you in the future. Do not join Satan’s eternal abode. Stay in the right way, stay in the strait and narrow way (Matt 7:14)!

THOUGHT: Am I assured of my eternity with Jesus?

PRAYER: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me*” (Ps 51:10-11).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14

REVELATION 12:1-11

PSALM 1:1-2

“... *Blessed is the man...*

(whose) delight is in the law of the LORD...”

KEEP SATAN AWAY, KEEP APOSTASY AT BAY

Apostasy began with Lucifer who became Satan after he was cast out of heaven onto earth. He is identified as the chief apostate of the first ever apostasy to occur in the whole universe. His goal is always to keep man from redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ. He sought to destroy the nation of Israel and to kill baby Jesus. He worked to circumvent Jesus' mission to be man's Saviour.

Today's apostasy is still Satan's persistent attempt to thwart God's plan of redemption for man. Satan deceives the believers in order to make their testimony falter, to prevent people from coming to Christ. He keeps man distant from the saving knowledge of Christ.

Keep him away from your daily lives. Walk not in the counsel of the ungodly. Live not according to the ideas and philosophies of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their perspective is limited only to this temporal life on earth. They do not see eternity ahead of them. Stand not in the way of sinners for they tread a lawless path. They mind not the Word of God and do that which is against the law of God. They do not fear God and know not that after death they will face God's judgment. Sit not in the seat of the scorers, for they imagine vain things. Their hearts are full of evil; they hate God. Do not associate with them for they will surely cause you to depart from the faith of God.

On the contrary, keep reading the Bible and saturate yourself with God's precious Word. Let the Word of God dictate your heart, mind, actions, speech and your whole life. Be prepared for that eternal place where God has destined you to be. Live a life glorifying unto His name.

THOUGHT: Am I keeping myself away from apostasy?

PRAYER: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Ps 32:1-2).*

THE BEGINNING OF MAN'S APOSTASY

The firstborn child of Adam and Eve was Cain. Without stating the time interval, the Word of God says that Abel was born next. Abel was a herdsman who tended to a flock of sheep. Cain, on the other hand, was *"a tiller of the ground"* (Gen 4:2), meaning he grew crops. The brothers' positions and occupations were significantly contrasted.

It appears that Cain had been offering according to God's prescription, but with the passing of time, he changed. Instead of offering a blood sacrifice, he is described to have brought the fruit out of the ground which he tilled. In this context, it describes the fruit from plants, a bloodless offering. This reveals his disobedience to what God had shown his parents (Gen 3:21).

Cain evidently denied the prescribed offering according to God's Word. The Apostle Paul says in Hebrews 9:22, *"... And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."* A blood sacrifice points to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Anyone who denies the shedding of the blood of Jesus rejects God's only prescription for the cleansing and forgiveness of man's sin. The Lord Himself said, *"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt 26:28).

"There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day. And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away" (William Cowper).

THOUGHT: Am I washed by the blood of Christ?

PRAYER: *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"* (Ps 51:1-2).

MONDAY, JANUARY 16

GENESIS 4:3-7

PROVERBS 1:7-9

*“... hear the instruction of thy father,
and forsake not the law of thy mother.”*

THE HEART OF AN APOSTATE

The phrase “*in process of time*” (Gen 4:3) is *miggetz yamim* in Hebrew which carries the meaning “sometime later.” It indicates that there was a change which occurred from a previous state after a certain period of time. This same phrase *miggetz yamim* (although translated differently in English) is also used in 1 Kings 17:7: “*And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*” And also in 2 Samuel 14:26: “*And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year’s end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king’s weight.*” In both these verses, the contexts suggest that at one point in time, there was a certain state or condition, but “sometime later” there was a shift that transpired. In 1 Kings 17:7, the brook used to have water flowing, but after a while it dried up. Likewise in 2 Samuel 14:26, Absalom’s hair was long, and as every year’s end came he shaved or cut it off. Similarly, Cain previously offered the right offering together with his parents and brother, but in the process of time he changed. He brought an offering for the LORD from the fruit of the ground.

The LORD definitely instructed Adam and Eve concerning the terms of approaching God in their worship (Gen 3:21). God explicitly revealed His requirements to them. These requirements were made known by Adam and Eve to their children. Therefore, it is beyond question that Cain and Abel both knew that they must bring a bloody offering to sacrifice when coming before Jehovah. This is faith in the perfect sacrifice of the death and the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Dear Reader, remember God’s instructions. Do not depart from them. Listen to what God’s Word is teaching you. You might have studied in some prestigious universities, but secular wisdom will not give you the spiritual guidance that God’s Word can. Do not despise God’s Word.

THOUGHT: Am I listening to the instructions from God’s Word?

PRAYER: “*Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name*” (Ps 86:11).

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17

GENESIS 4:3-7

HEBREWS 11:4

"By faith... offered

... a more excellent sacrifice..."

THE OFFERING OF AN APOSTATE

The Bible says that the LORD regarded (or looked with interest at) Abel and his offering. He offered the firstlings of his flock, a foreshadow of the firstborn Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the LORD did not regard Cain and his offering. Cain's offering was not "respected" (Gen 4:5) by God, hence it was rejected.

Although "*offering*" means a gift or a tribute, it is usually regarded as bloodless. However, comparing Scripture with Scripture we learn from Hebrews 11:4 that, "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*" Here, "*a more excellent sacrifice*" does not refer to the quality of the offering but in how it pleased God which is only by faith alone (Heb 11:6), so that if Abel's sacrifice was preferable to that of his brother, it was made excellent by faith. It was faith in the foresight of the bloody sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Do you accept God's Word and approach Him solely on the basis of faith in God's provision? Do you believe that it was only through the shed blood of the Redeemer, God's Lamb, that you are able to be reconciled to God? If you do, then you are restored to God's presence and fellowship. You are a regenerated, born-again believer, purchased by the precious blood of Christ. But if you continue to distort and reject God's Word and rely on your own personal merits of good works to earn salvation, then you are still carnal and not saved. You are still trying to enter heaven using your own way instead of God's way.

Follow God's prescription for your soul. Believe in God's Holy Word for your soul's redemption!

THOUGHT: Am I still carnal?

PRAYER: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise"* (Ps 51:17).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18

GENESIS 4:6-15

1 JOHN 1:9

*“... he is faithful and just
to forgive us our sins...”*

QUICKLY REPENT OF YOUR SIN

When the LORD confronted Cain, Cain became very angry and was filled with displeasure instead of repenting of his sin. The LORD, who is full of mercy, however, asked Cain why he was so hot in contention and burned with anger. God told Cain that if he had done well by believing what was instructed, he and his offering would have been accepted.

God justly reproved Cain for his sin. Cain could have admitted his wilful disobedience and asked for God's forgiveness. But Cain, like any other foolish and wicked man, contended with God. The LORD told Cain that sin's desire was to lure and prevail over him. Hence, He commanded Cain to overcome sin which could only be done through faith in the Messiah of God. He should believe and prove his faith by bringing a blood-sacrifice.

God has delivered man from the power and bondage of sin by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What Cain needed to do was to only repent and believe, but he failed to do it.

Dear Christian, if you have sinned against God and have transgressed His Word, rather than pursuing your own ways, you must confess and repent of your sins. The Lord has provided us a way of access to His Holy Throne of Grace and we can be reconciled to Him right away. Do not delay. Do not procrastinate. Let not the sin in your heart grow and harden you. Humble yourself before the Lord and acknowledge that you have sinned against Him. Seek His forgiveness. Let not the accuser cause you to be depressed. God is willing to forgive you of all your sins and to cleanse you through the blood of Jesus Christ!

THOUGHT: Am I repentant of my sins?

PRAYER: *“Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD” (Ps 25:6-7).*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19

GENESIS 4:11-16

REVELATION 20:15

*"... not found written in the book of life
was cast into the lake of fire."*

THE DANGER OF AN APOSTATE

Like the chief apostate, Cain was a threat to the true worshippers of God. He murdered his own brother, Abel, who did what was right in the eyes of God. Apostates cannot stand to see faithful believers continue their devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will find ways to destroy them. They will try their best to keep the true believers' testimony out of reach, so that others will not believe in Jesus Christ.

But know for sure that Cain was condemned, as Satan was sentenced. The LORD declared Cain's curse from the ground for the blood of his brother. When he worked on the ground, the earth denied him of the fruit of his toil. He became a fugitive and a vagabond on earth. He will receive these same words from Jesus: *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matt 25:41). Cain, like other apostates, is sure to be cast into the Lake of Fire for their rejection of the goodness of God unto repentance, *"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev 20:15).

O Christian, associate not with apostates. Join them not who deny Jesus Christ. They are out to destroy your faith. They can mislead you into following a different path. You will be ushered into a broad way which leads to destruction. You will be deceived to believe in another Jesus, one who does not care whether you live a life of sin or not. As Cain went out from the presence of God, you will be moved to leave the God of the Bible.

The influence of an apostate renders you useless in the work of the Lord. You will be counted as dead and disabled in the Lord's army. Beware and be watchful! Do not become a victim!

THOUGHT: Am I watchful against apostasy?

PRAYER: *"Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: That I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation"* (Ps 9:13-14).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20

EXODUS 32:1-6

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14

*“... my dearly beloved,
flee from idolatry.”*

APOSTASY BREEDS IDOLATRY

Apostasy is not just a turning away from God by individual professing believers. It also involves a united stand of a professing group of people (such as a church) against God. Individuals and churches that apostatize generally go on to idolatry.

The children of Israel saw that Moses had long delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai. They assembled and went to speak to Aaron. Before Moses went up, he had told the elders, “... *Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them*” (Exod 24:14). They were right in approaching Aaron, but they were very wrong when they requested for an image of God.

The people turned away from the LORD and worshipped the image that Aaron made. The Psalmist described this apostasy: “*They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea*” (Ps 106:19-22).

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, Paul used this incident to describe their “*fathers*” who sinned at Sinai and subsequently perished in the wilderness. He transported his audience to the foot of Sinai to become eyewitnesses of Israel’s apostasy.

Will you exchange God (who created and sustained you) for man-made idols? Will you leave Jesus (who ransomed and saved you) for wooden statues? Will you deny the power of the Holy Spirit (who indwells and empowers you) and embrace painted icons? Seek not to worship idols!

THOUGHT: Do I have idols in my life?

PRAYER: “*Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands*” (Ps 115:2-4).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21

EXODUS 32:1-10

2 PETER 3:3-4

“... there shall come
in the last days scoffers...”

IMPATIENCE CAN LEAD TO APOSTASY

The people were weary of waiting for Moses. The Hebrew word translated “*delayed*” (Exod 32:1) is an idiomatic expression having the sense of confusion, whereby either the one who waits or the one being waited upon feels the delay to be exceptionally long. The people probably supposed Moses had perished on the mountain. Their impatience caused them to look for an image of God who could lead them towards Canaan. They wanted a guide right away to bring them through the vast wilderness to the Land of Promise where they longed to be.

Similarly, many Christians today, even seminary and Bible college professors, question the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They mock at Bible prophecies, take Jesus’ promise lightly, and scoff at God’s plan. Are they eager to see Jesus? No! They are simply unbelievers. Their object of scorn and derision is the Bible.

Our impatience will lead to doubt and discontent. Distrust will cause us to go astray and soon depart from the Lord. Let us not be weary of waiting on God’s plan, promises and providences for our lives. Let us understand that He is the sovereign Lord who ordains every event according to His perfect design and timing. Let us not question God’s will for our lives for He knows what is best for us and what is glorifying to His Name.

Dear Reader, the God who loves us perfectly arranges the circumstances of our lives so that we may be good witnesses of His great mercy and grace. He who “*spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*” (Rom 8:32). Let us wait patiently upon Him. Our Father who cares for His children will surely do that which is right and timely.

THOUGHT: Am I patiently waiting for my Lord’s return?

PRAYER: “*I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning*” (Ps 130:5-6).

HEDONISM CAN LEAD TO APOSTASY

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence. Their hedonistic attitude moved the children of Israel to look for someone who could hasten their journey to reach the Promised Land (Exod 32:1). Having come out from the Egyptian bondage and slavery, they dreamed of having a land and a house of their own. They could not wait any longer to get into Canaan.

The LORD promised the children of Israel, through Moses, in Exodus 3:8, "... *to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey...*" This intense desire to immediately enter the Promised Land was because they regarded the land as very pleasurable. Their reactions in the wilderness journey reveal that they were a people lusting after their carnal desires.

Their desire is described in Numbers 11:4-5: *"And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick."*

Our Father in heaven is the One who provides for all our physical needs. He will grant us the daily bread that we require. Let Him quieten our hearts to trust in His loving care, that none of us desire high-living and self-gratification. Let Him comfort us as the psalmist says, *"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread"* (Ps 37:25).

THOUGHT: Am I seeking worldly pleasures to gratify self?

PRAYER: *"Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed"* (Ps 112:1-2).

MONDAY, JANUARY 23

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

2 PETER 2:9

*"The Lord knoweth how to deliver
the godly out of temptations..."*

CARNAL CHRISTIANS?

The question of whether true believers can manifest characteristics of carnality is important for us to consider. Carnality is worldliness. Symptoms of this are observed among believers, ministers and churches today.

However, truly born again believers will not remain in such a state but will return to God after a period of waywardness. While it is true that Christians still sin, yet to say that a regenerated believer can live in carnality more or less permanently is contrary to Scripture. Those who constantly call themselves "carnal Christians" are actually "hypocritical professors." They are not the *"babes in Christ"* whom Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:1. Those who are truly and genuinely saved will repent of their carnality. The Scripture does not teach that there are two ways to heaven. There are no two choices: a spiritual way and a carnal way.

Lot is an example of one who was taken in by worldliness but was delivered from his carnality. *"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations..."* (2 Pet 2:9a). As such, if a professing Christian lives in a constant state of carnality and does not show any evidence of repentance in his life, the question of whether he is truly regenerated in the first place must be raised.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

THOUGHT: Do I love the things of this world?

PRAYER: *"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all"* (Ps 34:18-19).

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24

NUMBERS 13:26-33

EXODUS 3:12

“Certainly I will be with thee...”

LEADERS, DO NOT APOSTATIZE!

Apostasy among leaders can create much havoc and confusion in churches. The effects are far more damaging than the apostasy of members in the pews because of the leaders' greater influence. If they fall away, they may cause believers to stumble, backslide or lose their faith. The body of Christ will be affected and the testimony of faithful believers tarnished. Above all, the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be shamed.

One of the initiating factors in apostasy is doubt in God's promises. The ten spies saw the difficulty of invading the land of Canaan because they did not believe in the words of the LORD given to Moses. God already made it plain to them that the land would be theirs. Joshua and Caleb believed God and had faith in Him. The heathens in Canaan might be men of great sizes and shapes, and mighty warriors of the land, and their cities have great walls, but they were all no match for the power of God.

Leaders, the Lord did not place you in a leadership position for your own name's sake. He gave you the opportunity to serve Him because the Lord has equipped you with enough wisdom, talents and abilities to lead His people. When God called Moses, the LORD assured him, *“Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain”* (Exod 3:12). He encouraged Joshua to continue on. He was with Joshua, David, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and the rest of those whom He appointed leaders over His children. Do not forsake your appointment. God has enabled you to face the challenges ahead. Do not leave your flock nor abandon your office. You are the under-shepherd and He is the real Shepherd of the flock. Trust in the Lord always!

THOUGHT: Am I leading the flock as an under-shepherd?

PRAYER: *“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD”* (Ps 31:24).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

NUMBERS 13:17-27

"Providing for honest things,

2 CORINTHIANS 8:21 ... *in the sight of the Lord, but also... of men."*

BE HONEST!

The spies came to Moses, Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the desert Paran Kadesh. They brought back with them a report of what they saw in the land of Canaan. They described the place to the congregation. They reported that the land was indeed a place flowing with milk and honey. They also showed the fruits of the land which they brought with them: *"a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs"* (Num 13:23).

The activity and diligence of the twelve men were commendable. In so short a time, they examined the whole land from the desert of Sin to the sea, and along the whole course of the Jordan. They did it even during the hottest time of the year when the grapes were beginning to ripen. Thus far, they faithfully executed the task entrusted to them.

Up to this point it can be said that they were men who reported honestly. But when they disregarded the words of the LORD given to them through Moses, most of them became dishonest in their report by exaggerating the strength of their enemies. Their distrust of God's Word led to a corrupt report and the rebellion of the people against Moses and Aaron.

When doubts and fears beset man, dishonesty comes to the surface. When God's Word is taken lightly, false claims will appear. When promises of God are not trusted, deceptive information will be reported. Let us be careful to exercise what is good and honest before God and to behave with good conscience towards men. Let not the church of Christ and her ministry lose their trust in God. Dishonesty leads to apostasy, and apostasy is by itself dishonesty.

THOUGHT: Am I honest in my dealings?

PRAYER: *"Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God"* (Ps 20:6-7).

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

NUMBERS 13:31-33

1 JOHN 4:4

“... greater is he that is in you...”

DO NOT OVERESTIMATE THE ENEMY!

The world's philosophy is never to underestimate the enemy. While this is also true in the spiritual realm, overestimating the enemy to the extent that God is rendered powerless over it is unscriptural. It is said that the twelve spies agreed with the report, but differed in their evaluation. Ten of the spies said the difficulties were too great, which meant returning to Egypt was better (Num 13:31-33). The other two, Caleb and Joshua, asserted that God could give victory in spite of the difficulties. They knew who God is and they knew His power. The two pleaded with Israel not to rebel against God by refusing to enter the land (Num 13:30; 14:6-9). Joshua and Caleb did not underestimate their enemy neither did they overestimate them as the other ten spies did.

The ten spies reported that the inhabitants of the land were mighty people and the cities were inaccessible and very great. Moreover, they claimed that the children born of Anak, the giants in those days, were present and that they (the twelve spies) looked like grasshoppers in comparison to them. The ten spies spread an evil report about the land among the Israelites by exaggerating the difficulties of the conquest in their unbelieving despair, and describing Canaan as *“a land that eateth up the inhabitants”* (Num 13:32). They said, *“We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we”* (Num 13:31). They discouraged the hearts of the people. It was a tragic irony that the ten spies were speaking of the very nations already named in God's promise to Abraham (Gen 15:18-21).

The world says, “Do not underestimate your enemy.” We add, “Neither overestimate the enemies of God as if they are more powerful than Him.” The children of Israel forgot the promise of God to Abraham. They believed the evaluation of their dishonest leaders. Do not magnify the power of the enemy over God's power!

THOUGHT: Do I really know my God the Almighty?

PRAYER: *“As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me”* (Ps 55:16).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

NUMBERS 14:1-10

NUMBERS 11:23

“... my word shall
come to pass unto thee...”

DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE LORD THY GOD

The children of Israel listened to the ten spies but turned a deaf ear to Joshua and Caleb. They believed the evil report that magnified the enemy. They downplayed the words of God and diminished His power. They grumbled and complained. It was nothing less than rebellion against God. They forgot the power of God when He delivered them out of Egypt. As a result, those aged twenty years and above died in the wilderness (Num 14:29), forfeiting the benefit of entering the Promised Land.

The false report was so convincing that the people wanted to kill Joshua and Caleb. In unbelief, the truth became a lie and the lie a truth. They then began to plan to return to Egypt. It is difficult to see why God's people would have thought that God, who had led and provided so miraculously thus far, would eventually fail in His original intention.

They underestimated the power of God who delivered them out of Egypt. The spies made a strategic addition by frequently mentioning the physical size of the indigenous people. Note that Moses did not ask about the people's physical size.

How great is your God? Is He greater than the terminal illness of a cancer patient? Is He greater than the bankruptcy a businessman is facing? Is He greater than the retrenchment that threatens an employee? Is He greater than the problematic child of a concerned father? *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not”* (Num 11:23). The children's chorus goes, “My God is so big, so great and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do.” This must be the song in the heart of every child of God.

THOUGHT: Is there anything greater than the Lord, my God?

PRAYER: *“Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy: That they may know that this is thy hand; that thou, LORD, hast done it”* (Ps 109:26-27).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28

NUMBERS 16:1-11

ROMANS 12:3

*“... not to think of himself
more highly than he ought to think...”*

WORLDLY AMBITIONS BEGET APOSTASY

Korah was a man with considerable influence and bearing. He was able to provoke and give leadership to a sweeping rebellion against God-appointed leaders. He and his companions accused Moses and Aaron of setting themselves above the rest of Israel (Num 16:3,13). They were not prompted by physical needs and desires but were motivated by personal ambitions and worldly influences.

Korah's object was not to abolish the distinction between the Levites and the people but to win priestly dignity for himself and his kinsmen. Moses exposed Korah's motive to seize the high priesthood for himself, suggesting Korah's aspiration for the highest religious office (Num 16:8-10). This shows his discontent with the prominent role that he already possessed as a significant member of the Levite tribe.

God has given every member of the church (whether a leader or a follower, old or young, male or female), the necessary gifts for the work of the ministry. No one should arrogate to himself a higher regard of who he really is before God's presence.

Do we desire the positions of others? Do we long to be promoted for our personal glory and fame? Do we love to become prominent over others in the church? Do we seek for the praises and accolades of men? Do we aim for the highest pedestal in the hierarchy of our company? Do we intend to be the number one because we want others to kowtow to us? Perish that thought, O believer! Remember, you are only a recipient of what the Lord has given you. You are only a sinner saved by grace, and all glory and praises must be unto Him.

THOUGHT: Do I have the ambition to be promoted and to be great?

PRAYER: *“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people”* (Ps 113:7-8).

DISCONTENTMENT LEADS TO REBELLION

Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, also complained and asked Moses: "...*thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?*" (Num 16:13). Their intention was to seize the government of the nation and have a self-elected high priest. They had in mind to force Moses and Aaron out of the posts assigned to them by God. They wanted to overthrow the constitution which God had given to His people. They accused Moses of seeking to rule over them. This discontent is a symptom of an apostate heart which cannot submit to the sovereignty of God over the appointment of offices. They could not see the design of God and wanted to be leaders themselves as well. Apostasy sets in when the appointed hierarchical order of God's servants is rejected by men.

Their grievance was directed at Moses' failure to deliver the nation into the Promised Land. Their complaint was obviously misdirected because it was the people's unbelief, grumbling and rebellion that had prevented them from proceeding directly to their destination. Looking at the situation from a higher plane, it was the sovereign God who kept them from moving.

Discontentment of leaders surface when supposed-to-be followers have their own agenda. Once the leaders cannot meet their desires, they imagine they can do far better if they were piloting. This is one of the symptoms of those with natural minds but without the spiritual eyes to recognize that there is a higher, all-wise Being who is on the throne and in control of all the affairs of life.

Dear Reader, the Lord of lords and the King of kings came to this earth not with pride and pageantry, but in servanthood and humility. He came not to be served, which He deserves, but to serve, which we do not deserve.

THOUGHT: Am I content with what God has assigned to me?

PRAYER: *"Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!"* (Ps 113:5-6).

MONDAY, JANUARY 30

NUMBERS 16:8-13

ROMANS 12:10

“... in honour
preferring one another.”

JEALOUSY IS A GATEWAY TO REBELLION

Failure to recognize God's sovereignty will result in jealousy. One will envy those who got the promotion. Usurpation of posts will take place even within Christian churches. Certain men vie for promotion of their own personal ambitions. They are taken in by the world's philosophy to climb the corporate ladder, and so they climb the church ladder. The conflict created will stumble others. It might even involve the entire church. It drives wedges to cause church factions, and eventually ends up in the church splitting.

“It was jealousy, then, that instigated Korah and his companions to set on foot first a quarrel, and then a tumult; respecting the priesthood, because they were indignant that the hope of attaining that honor was taken away from themselves and their posterity for ever. Thus there never was any more deadly or abominable plague in the Church of God, than ambition; inasmuch as it cannot be that those who seek for pre-eminence should range themselves beneath God's yoke. Hence arises the dissolution of legitimate authority, when each one neglects the duties of his position, and aims at his own private advancement” (John Calvin).

Being in the household of God, we are one family. Being a part of the church of God, we are one body. Being a citizen of the kingdom of God, we are one dominion. Dear Christian, envy not the work of others. Do your own work for the Lord according to what He has given you. Lust not after the appointment of others. Be satisfied with what the Lord has positioned you. Surely the Lord knows what He has in store for you. *“For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another”* (Ps 75:6-7).

THOUGHT: Am I jealous of my fellow Christians' services?

PRAYER: *“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear”* (Ps 119:37-38).

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31

NUMBERS 16:23-35

GENESIS 18:25

*"Shall not the Judge of
all the earth do right?"*

REBELLIOUS LEADERS ARE JUDGED

God vindicated Moses and Aaron by opening the earth to swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram, along with their households. The text does not mention any shaking of the ground as might be expected in an earthquake. The uniqueness of the event lies in the unusual condition where the ground opened up and swallowed the people. Moreover, its timing also proved its distinctiveness because hardly before Moses had finished his speech, everything happened suddenly. The LORD brought fire to consume the 250 supporters of the rebels and slayed them all. When many Israelites complained about this harsh treatment, God sent a plague throughout the camp which took the lives of 14,700 of these complainers (Num 16:23-35, 41-50). *"They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked"* (Ps 106:16-18).

Further, to show Aaron's approved position, God caused Aaron's rod (out of the twelve rods) to bud and blossom (Num 17:1-11). God also instructed Moses to keep Aaron's budded rod in the tabernacle as a constant reminder and evidence that God had divinely chosen Aaron as the religious leader of Israel (Heb 9:4).

The God of Israel is a God of mercy, but He is a God of justice, too. When men refuse to submit to His supremacy and control, which are for their good, they will have to face the wrath of God. They chose to dishonour God when they rejected His authority over them. God will not lower His standard of justice. He is the Judge of all the earth and He does that which is right. Be warned lest you be judged too!

THOUGHT: Have I been rebellious against God?

PRAYER: *"O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed"* (Ps 6:1-2).

DO NOT MOCK GOD'S WORD!

Balaam is first mentioned in the Bible when the Israelites approached the land of Canaan after their victory over Sihon and Og (Num 21:21-35). Balak, king of Moab, sent the elders of Moab and Midian to ask Balaam to curse the children of Israel. They brought with them the rewards of divination. The Apostle Peter called it the "*wages of unrighteousness*" (2 Pet 2:15). Balaam at first refused due to a warning from God. His answer (sent through the messengers), however, gave Balak the hope of winning over the celebrated soothsayer. When the second delegation came, Balaam really changed his mind. Upon hearing of a "blank cheque," he invited Balak's servants to stay another night while he asked God for "further revelation." The instruction to go with the elders was dependent on a call for him the following day. But, without any call, Balaam wilfully went with them.

How do we mock the Word of God? It is when God commands us to do something and we do a different thing. It is when He tells us to go to a certain place and we go in the opposite direction. It is when the LORD calls us to believe in His teaching and we prefer our own beliefs. God's Word is then rendered powerless, senseless and useless.

Balaam mocked God's Word when he did not believe in its finality. This is seen today in how the Charismatics seek "further revelations" through dreams and visions. They search for counsels to satisfy their own imaginations. Apart from the inerrant and infallible Word of God, these Charismatics pursue unbiblical sources of revelation in order to be healthy and wealthy. Their desires are only for the temporal and material things of this world. They do not have the foresight of eternity. Apostasy sets in when the Word of God is denied of its finality.

THOUGHT: Do I believe in the finality of God's Word?

PRAYER: *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever" (Ps 12:6-7).*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2

NUMBERS 23:1-23

JAMES 1:22

*“... be ye doers of the word,
and not hearers only...”*

DO NOT OPPOSE THE WORD OF GOD!

Balaam used three different vantage points from which to view the Israelite encampment to pronounce a curse. But each time he tried to curse Israel, he spoke words of blessing desired by God instead. These attempts were his open opposition to what the LORD had declared to him (Num 22:12).

Although Balaam told Balak that he could not have power at all to say anything but the word that God put in his mouth, the prophet continued to oppose God's Word by keeping his company with Balak and taking opportunity to curse Israel. Thus, he was correctly identified as a degenerate prophet who prophesied in opposition to the pure revelations from God. He obstinately continued to try to curse the Israelites in spite of the repeated overturn of his curses into blessings.

Apostates do not believe in the authority of the Scripture. They believe in the continuation of revelations through visions and dreams because they desire to gratify their lusts for materialism. They deny the doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures, the completeness and finality of it because they pursue after the pleasures and comforts of this world.

Dear Reader, the Word of God is *“a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Ps 119:105). Do not extinguish it. Let it shine in your life that others may see. It is the heavenly wisdom that guides our life. Do not despise it and let it direct you that others may be blessed too. It is *“...the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”* (Rom 1:16). Do not silence it. Let it be taught and preached that others may be saved. Be ye hearers and doers of the Word (James 1:22).

THOUGHT: Am I a doer of God's Word?

PRAYER: *“LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart”* (Ps 15:1-2).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3

NUMBERS 31:13-20

DEUTERONOMY 7:3-4

*“... they may serve other gods:
so will the anger of the LORD be kindled.”*

APOSTASY ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY GOD'S PEOPLE

Balaam taught Balak how he could get the LORD to punish Israel. He taught Balak to use the women of Moab to lure the men of Israel to commit whoredom against the LORD. The people of Israel fell to the tricks of Balaam. With their ungodly relationships, they were lured to sacrifice to the gods of the Moabites. *“Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD”* (Num 31:16).

The warning of God through Moses was: *“Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly”* (Deut 7:3-4).

Unbiblical relationships with unbelievers are common today among Christian youths. They do not listen to nor obey the warnings from God's Word. Both the Old and New Testaments contain God's warning. Believers do not understand the dangers of unequally yoking with unbelievers and are inviting the wrath of God to come upon them. Christian parents must warn their children against marrying those who do not believe in the Christ of the Bible. Otherwise, they will be casting their children into God's fiery wrath. Many of the so-called fundamental and evangelical pastors liberally allow their members to marry Roman Catholics and those from Christian cult groups. Be forewarned! The anger of the LORD is kindled against you!

THOUGHT: Do I speak up against unequal relationships with unbelievers in my family and church?

PRAYER: *“Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise”* (Ps 106:47).

BEWARE OF THE DECEIVERS

The "*doctrine of Balaam*," spoken of in Revelation 2:14, is an allusion to the fact that it was through the teaching of Balaam that Balak learned the way by which the Israelites might be led into sin. Constrained by God, Balaam uttered prophecies regarding the future of Israel that were wonderful and beautiful (Num 24:5-9, 17). He failed to curse the people of God, despite his many attempts.

Today, Balaam's advice is embraced by churches. They claim to advance the cause of God when they advocate an unholy alliance with the ungodly and the worldly. They conform their life to the lifestyle of the world. The churches are more like the world rather than being an influence to the world. Ministers in churches are promoting the unbiblical philosophies of the world to love mammon. Church ministries, utilizing entertainment, are patterned after the world. Church members are looking for worldly teachings, ready to be seduced with the mushy kind of love. There is so much delusion in Christianity today.

The church is supposed to be a people called out by God. We are called out from the world, from darkness and deception! We are called out from the bondage of sin, from judgment and condemnation. We are called out from all unholy alliances, from unbelieving and unholy relations. Christ has paid it all. He did it all because He loves His own. Do not reciprocate His love with infidelity. Love the LORD your God.

The world out there is going to do everything to trap you. Do everything according to God's Word that you be not caught and become one of the world's victims. The worldly way is not of the Father. It leads only to destruction. Take heed!

THOUGHT: Am I unequally yoked together with the world?

PRAYER: *"Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (Ps 97:10).*

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 5

NUMBERS 24:1-9

ROMANS 5:8

“... God commendeth his love toward us

... Christ died for us.”

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

That God continued to treat the Israelites as His special people is highlighted in the Balaam narrative (Num 22-24). Balaam was called in by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Israelites as they came near his land. Balaam. However, Balaam blessed Israel because of the intervention of God.

God continued to abide and provide His own people with all of His divine care and concern, in spite of Israel's continual turning against the LORD their God. The Book of Numbers ends with God's people turning against the Lord by worshipping the heathen gods, yet we find in the Book of Deuteronomy God reiterating His laws and warnings through Moses. Time and time again the LORD's unchanging love for His people is gloriously displayed.

This remains true today for God's church. So many a time the church goes astray from His ways. She does that which is evil before God's eyes. She rebels against her LORD by disobeying His Word. Yet God in mercy and grace continues to be loving and faithful to her.

He readily chastens us (His children) to bring us back into His presence. Like a father who loves his children, God pursues after and seizes us to return to Him. Like a compassionate mother, He beseeches us to love Him still and to repent of our ways that we may have a right relationship with Him.

“O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure. The saints' and angels' song” (Frederick M. Lehman). If this is God's love for us, how should we love Him in return? How can we not be faithful to Him?

THOUGHT: How much do I love my Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: *“I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live” (Ps 116:1-2).*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6

2 PETER 2:12-15

1 TIMOTHY 6:10

*"For the love of money
is the root of all evil..."*

ROOT OF ALL EVIL: THE LOVE OF MONEY

The love for the wages of unrighteousness pulled Balaam to gravitate towards mocking and opposing the Word of God. He sought the riches of this world by attempting to curse Israel three times but to no avail. He knew how the LORD strongly disapproved of the children of Israel being cursed.

The love of money is the root of all evil as Paul warned in 1 Timothy 6:10. He observed that there were some in the church who coveted after money. The result? They apostatized and tortured themselves through many distresses in life. They subjected themselves to life apart from God's Word. Thus the Apostle commanded, *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses"* (1 Tim 6:11-12).

O Christian, make not money your master, for *"no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matt 6:24). For who shall you love, the gift or the giver? Seek not the temporal reward of money, but seek eternal reward from God. Would you exchange the eternal joy in heaven for the temporal happiness on earth?

What is a hundred years of earthly life with millions of dollars under your name compared to everlasting life rejoicing and glorifying the Lord's name? Do not be fascinated by money, but be sensitized by the Spirit of God indwelling you.

THOUGHT: Am I loving money more than my Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: *"Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness"* (Ps 119:35-36).

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7

JUDGES 2:1-5

EXODUS 20:1-3

*"I am the LORD thy God
... have no other gods before me."*

WHERE IS BIBLICAL SEPARATION?

Biblical separation is one of the most neglected doctrines of the Scriptures. It is not a denominational distinctive but a command from God's Word to separate from what is unholy and unclean. The basic foundation is God's perfect holiness!

The individual tribes were expected to occupy their respective assigned land portions; nonetheless, not one tribe succeeded in subjugating all the territories allotted to them. They needed to conquer the lands. But instead of conquering, they were subdued by the influence of the heathen gods of the nations. Their apostasy was a necessary consequence of their friendly attitude towards the Canaanites who were left in the land. The root cause of the apostasy was the failure of the previous generation to separate from the heathen nations around them. They did not listen to the warnings of God!

The worship of idols is one of the three immutable absolutes prohibited in the Jewish system of ethics (incest and murder being the other two). The first two commandments of the Decalogue prohibit the worship of any other gods as well as images (Exod 20:1-5). It was clear to the children of God that their worship of other gods deserved the wrath of the LORD their God. Yet, they did not take heed of God's commands but embraced instead the heathen idols of the nations around them.

They disobeyed the LORD when they made leagues with idolaters. Their failure to separate resulted in their failure to properly teach the Word of God to their children. Lack or absence of biblical instruction produced a generation who knew not the LORD nor the great works that He had wrought upon them and their forefathers. They forgot how Moses and Joshua commanded them to continually teach the Word to their children (Deut 6 and Josh 8).

THOUGHT: Do I obey God's command of Biblical Separation?

PRAYER: *"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps 29:2).*

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8

JUDGES 2:6-10

DEUTERONOMY 6:7

*“... thou shalt teach them
diligently unto thy children...”*

GENERATION GONE!

After the death of the generation of elders who had seen all the great works of the LORD for Israel, the next generation failed to teach the people about the LORD and the works that He had done for Israel. The result was a quick and complete fall of the new generation. The new generation fell because of their spiritual compromise and idolatry (Judg 2:1-5) which was brought about by the neglect of their parents to teach them. Believing parents neglected their duty to care for and diligently teach their own children. Their unholy alliance prevented them from guiding their children in the way of the Lord. Their engagement in the pagan religions lured them away from God.

“When they forsook the only true God they did not turn atheists, nor were they such fools as to say, There is no God; but they followed other gods: so much remained of pure nature as to own a God, yet so much appeared of corrupt nature as to multiply gods, and take up with any, and to follow the fashion, not the rule, in religious worship” (Matthew Henry).

Christian parents, let not your children be drowned by the philosophies and publicities of this world. Let not their lives be drained into the vanity of worldliness and wickedness. Let not the next generation be lulled by the luxuries and laxities of this present life. Will you dare to imagine your children cast into the eternal inferno all because of you? Pause and reflect upon your role as parents. Have you done that which is necessary in order for them to live eternally in heaven? Fathers and mothers, do not waste your life on temporal earthly things of this world. Think of the souls of your children. Where are they heading to? Can you tell?

THOUGHT: Am I passing to my next generation the whole counsel of God?

PRAYER: *“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done” (Ps 78:4).*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9

JUDGES 2:10-13

DEUTERONOMY 11:19

“... teach them your children,
speaking of them...”

FAILURE OF BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION

There was an obvious failure of the parents to teach the Word of God that resulted in the apostasy of the next generation. The children knew not the LORD mentally and experientially. They did not hear about who He is and His wonderful works from the mouth of their parents. Moreover, the life of their parents did not manifest any obedience to God's Word. They followed the LORD only up to the time of Joshua and the elders who witnessed the great works of God. After that, they departed from the teachings of God.

Their failure to remember God's deliverance led to apostasy. The tragic events that followed demonstrated the effects of an absence of biblical instruction in the family. It resulted in a generation doing what was right in their own eyes. The spiritual malaise that set in after the death of the generation that had witnessed the mighty saving acts of Jehovah was sketched in bold strokes: APOSTASY! Forgetting the LORD's work on them, the Israelites quickly apostatized, turning to the gods of the Canaanites.

How do we show love to our children? Will it be only by providing them with material things? Will it be only by sending them to the most prestigious schools that we can afford? Will it be only by taking them on a holiday to the most expensive resorts overseas? How can they know our love for them? Is it not by teaching them God's Word? Is it not by showing them the way to heaven? How can they feel our love? Is it not by worshipping the Lord together with them as a family? How can they see our love? Is it not by living a holy life to showcase to them what it really means to be a disciple of Christ?

THOUGHT: Am I instructing the children of the next generation in the ways of God?

PRAYER: *“For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children”* (Ps 78:5-6).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10

JUDGES 17

2 TIMOTHY 4:7

*"I have fought a good fight
... I have kept the faith."*

FAILURE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

The last five chapters of the Book of Judges represent the author's supplement or appendix to the history of the period of the Judges. God's Word provides further insight into the issues which gave rise to the apostasy of many generations. It was noted that though this was the longest period in which Israel was under another nation, there was no record of the Israelites crying out to the Lord for deliverance as they had done in the past. Instead they seem to be content to exist under foreign domination.

Important lessons from this apostasy are seen in its subtle process and disastrous results. Thus, it is observed that the mere possession of a correct theology does not guarantee an escape from apostasy. A consistent application of divine truth in the life of the believer must be done according to God's Word. We must be like Paul who faithfully ran the race of life set before him. By the grace of God, he was kept in Christ, the Author and Finisher of his faith. He had held fast without wavering until he finished his course (2 Tim 4:7).

Let us live according to the Word of God. Let us live manifesting the grace and mercy that God has granted us. Let us live fulfilling the desires of God in our lives. Let us live for His glory and honour. Let us be the salt and light of this world. Let us be witnesses of His saving grace so that others may come to know the salvation through God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us strive to be a blessing to the brethren. Let us bear one another's burden for Christ's sake. Let us be loving to one another in the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Remember: "Only one life 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last!" (C.T. Studd).

THOUGHT: Am I living according to the Bible's teachings?

PRAYER: *"Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple"* (Ps 119:129-130).

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11

JUDGES 17:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

*"Be ye not unequally yoked together
with unbelievers..."*

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

Religious syncretism involves the blending together of different religious attitudes and ideas into one system. This trend was observed in the lives of Micah and his family as they were affected by the popular trends of their day. According to Judges 17:1, Micah was an Ephraimite. This fact is significant because the Tabernacle was set up at Shiloh which was in Ephraimite territory. He should have been one of those who were devoted and loyal to God because of his proximity to the Tabernacle, the place of worship. However, as we learn from the story of Micah, it becomes clear that Shiloh had lost its spiritual influence among many of the families in the tribe of Ephraim. If this were the case, how much less influence the sanctuary at Shiloh must have had among the other tribes located in more distant regions!

Religious syncretism was exemplified by what happened in the family of Micah (Judg 17:1-5). Their faith was so compromised that even the mother was ignorant of the laws of God. She ordered a graven image and a molten image for her family. Religious syncretism was the rule of life as they did what was right in their own eyes. Pagan practices and beliefs were strongly intertwined with their erroneous worship of the LORD their God.

Today, there are fundamental and evangelical protestant churches which are unequally yoked together with the Roman Catholic Church. The command to separate from them is unrestrainedly neglected. Even pastors and leaders of protestant churches are culprits of these spiritual maladies by approving the joining of hands with a church that anathematized the biblical teaching of salvation by free grace through faith alone. Patterned after Micah's syncretism is the founding of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT). They have forgotten the Word of God, and have embraced paganism.

THOUGHT: Am I cooperating with those who are against God's Word?

PRAYER: *"Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies"* (Ps 139:21-22).

EXTREME MATERIALISM

Another individual who entered the scene in the last five chapters of the Book of Judges was a Levite from Bethlehemjudah (Judg 17:7). Evidently this Levite was unemployed and had no place of permanent service. During his travels northward, he encountered Micah and indicated that he sought a place of service. The very fact that the Levite wandered, seeking a means of support, revealed that the apostasy had left the Levites without provision from the people. The Israelites failed to give their tithes and offerings unto God, leaving the priests and Levites to wander to look for work for their own living.

Micah extended to this young priest an official "call" to his local shrine. This included a salary of ten shekels of silver, a suit of apparel, and food (Judg 17:10). The introduction of the Levite into this story is important because it shows that apostasy had not only influenced the thinking of the Israelites generally, but also that of the spiritual leaders in Israel. The Levite was content to accept such a position (Judg 17:11) in spite of what he knew of the Law of Moses and its prohibitions with regard to idolatry.

Materialism denies God. And it also brings the Christian down from the spiritual position given to him by God. Where he is but *"a little lower than the angels"* (Ps 8:5), he is made into a little higher than the apes.

Materialism drives man to the shopping malls rather than to the church sanctuaries. It motivates man to have big bank accounts, big cars and big houses rather than big tithes and offerings for the Lord. It destines man towards material prosperity rather than life in eternity. When materialism is fully embraced, the objective truth of God's Word goes into the trash.

THOUGHT: Is my life driven by materialism?

PRAYER: *"They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps 49:6-7).*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13

JUDGES 19:22-28

ROMANS 1:26-27

“... God gave them up
unto vile affections...”

MORAL RELATIVISM

After the death of Joshua, the political and spiritual trends in Israel changed. The tribes became more interested in material wealth and political compatibility than obedience to the law. Through intermarriage and religious syncretism, the strength of Israel began to decline. Tribes became independent and many sanctuaries were built in addition to the one in Shiloh. Rather than progression and victory, the Book of Judges portrays a sad story of retrogression and apostasy.

On the surface, moral relativism appears to be the epitome of tolerance. Delving deeper, it is the denial of the absolute truth of God's Word. The text describes the pre-monarchical period hence there was “*no king in Israel*” (Judg 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Israel began to reject the Law of Moses as the standard of conduct. There was only one other way in which moral activity could be conducted: on the basis of subjective norms. Every man established his own principles of righteousness on the basis of his own evaluation. When the foundation for absolute truth is destroyed, relativism always follows, leading to confusion and loss of objective morality.

The absence of moral standard is seen in the chaotic marriage relationships. Separation of husbands and wives was apparently common as revealed in the story of the Levite and his wife. Moreover, the sons of Belial had no regard for law and morality in their lustful desires. The Levite was also spiritually degenerated, seen in his offer of his concubine to the sons of Belial. The problem escalated to the national level. When the Benjamites refused to hand over the sons of Belial to the Israelites to be punished, a civil war broke out.

THOUGHT: Do I believe in the absoluteness of God's truth?

PRAYER: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”* (Ps 19:7-9).

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

1 SAMUEL 13:8-14

JEREMIAH 17:5

“... Cursed be the man that trusteth in man
...whose heart departeth from the LORD.”

MAN OVER GOD?

The elders of Israel demanded for a king like all the other nations around them (1 Sam 8:4-5). *“And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them”* (1 Sam 8:7). The prophet Samuel warned the people of the consequences if they continued to desire a king. Nevertheless, the people did not listen to him. The LORD then gave them a new king, Saul.

Saul’s rule was to weld the tribes into a nation, but it did not materialize. Instead he apostatized. Saul lost the kingdom in two stages: The first occurred when he wrongly offered a sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel in 1 Samuel 13:8-14, and more decisively, in 1 Samuel 15, when Saul was charged with carrying out the “ban” on Amalek, he disobeyed God.

How many times have we preferred man rather than God? Why do we rather hastily run to man for help in times of our troubles? We give credence to man’s work and give them special honour. Why do we rather magnify the arm of flesh as the cause of our successes? We show greater affection to man, devoting our loyalty to them. Why do we rather hearken to man’s counsels in times when we are confused? We prefer the words of man, submitting ourselves to their whims and wishes. Why do we not honour our Lord? How should we show our affection to God? How do we surrender our will to Him?

“Give unto the LORD, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron 16:28-29).

THOUGHT: Am I trusting man over God?

PRAYER: *“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes”* (Ps 118:8-9).

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

1 SAMUEL 15:1-9

PROVERBS 3:5-6

*"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding."*

INSUBORDINATION IS REBELLION

The earlier verses of yesterday's text describe Saul's self-seeking attitude and his cowardice. His son, Jonathan, smote the garrison of the Philistines, yet he blew the trumpet and proclaimed that he himself did it. This may be understandable for he was the king. However, when the Philistines regathered with a greater number of men and chariots, he was shaken. And when the people of Israel retreated and hid themselves, he was filled with terror. His failure to acknowledge God caused him not to comply with Samuel's instruction. Samuel appointed a time to go to Saul, which was seven days later. Several days passed and many of his men fled and hid themselves. Saul took upon himself to do that which God had not assigned him to do.

The instructions of the Word of God are clear and direct. They are given for us to keep and obey. They are not to be followed only when situations are favourable. They are to be observed even when things seem incongruent. They are not choices for us to pick and choose. They are absolute truths that every Christian must do.

We should pray for the Lord's enablement to do whatsoever He commands us to do. We should ask for His grace to patiently wait when things do not turn out as expected. We should cry for His help in times when we are cornered and do not know what to do next. Our God is a loving Father who cares for His children. He sees our every move. He knows when is the best time to seize us when we stumble and fall. He knows what is ahead of our journey and prepares all that we require. *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding"* (Prov 3:5).

THOUGHT: Am I obedient to God's Word?

PRAYER: *"Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass"* (Ps 37:3-5).

DISOBEDIENCE IS UNBELIEF

Saul's failure to commit Amalek to destruction in 1 Samuel 15 was the trigger that led to his rejection as king of Israel. While two of Saul's important campaigns produced victories, there were also some very serious lapses because of his personal deeds. It is entirely possible that the Ammonite victory gave Saul a false sense of self-sufficiency, for on at least two occasions, he made decisions without consulting the LORD. The LORD's assessment of Saul was that *"he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments"* (1 Sam 15:11). This means Saul was no longer a follower or a servant of the LORD. Turning his back pertains to spiritual relations such as to turn away from God or to apostatize. Saul finally lost the throne because of his failure to obey God's Word concerning Amalek.

When the LORD commanded Saul to go and smite Amalek, God meant to utterly destroy or commit to destruction all of Amalek. Saul deliberately disobeyed God's Word on the pretext of promoting God's work. Samuel reproved Saul for disobeying the Word of the LORD. This shows the importance of God's Word over sacrifices and offerings.

Saul's "repentance" was unacceptable in the eyes of God. Saul cried, *"I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me"* (1 Sam 15:30). What really mattered to him was to retain man's esteem of him. For him, the support of men was more crucial than reconciliation with God. Saul was more concerned about his loss of honour and reputation with the people, than his sin against God.

THOUGHT: Is my heart obedient to the LORD?

PRAYER: *"Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God"* (Ps 68:1-2).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17

1 SAMUEL 18:1-9

EZEKIEL 14:6

*“... Repent, and turn yourselves
from your idols...”*

DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM GOD

David's success in warfare and his growing popularity became a matter of great concern to Saul. It was told that what compounded the problem was the growing popularity of a women's song that went, "*Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*" (1 Sam 18:7). David had captured the imagination of the Israelites and he rose rapidly in popularity. This led to Saul's deep jealousy of David's success. Moreover, Saul had a great fear of David, probably cognizant of the fact that the Spirit of God had departed from him.

The chief weakness of Saul's character seems to be his want of decision. He was easily swayed by events and by people. His impulsiveness was such that he did not know where to stop. Upon remonstrance, his repentance was as deep as it was short-lived (1 Sam 24:16; 26:21). Saul's reign ended with discredit and rejection. He went to his death with defeat.

When God through the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins, let us not linger and continue to wallow in the murky waters of sinfulness. Let us not pretend to be clean and presume God knows not of our transgressions. Let us not try to cover ourselves with the cloak of piety as if all is well with our souls even though we are aware of the skeletons in our cupboards. Let us repent of our sins right away!

Repentance is God's gateway back to His fold. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, so wait not for sin to destroy your whole life. While it is early, nip sin in the bud! A little crevice on a gigantic dam may soon drown a village or a town! So let us take the safest and happiest route, which is to turn to God and repent of our sins. Our merciful God is very willing to pardon us!

THOUGHT: Do I readily repent of my sins?

PRAYER: *"Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way"* (Ps 25:8-9).

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18

1 KINGS 4:29-34

ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

“... Fear God, and
keep his commandments...”

BE WISE INDEED!

Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba, and the third king of Israel. His kingdom was surely the most glorious the world has ever yet seen. His kingdom was made famous by the wisdom of its king, the perfection of its government and the quality of its religion. These features made Solomon's reign glorious beyond comparison, even until today.

Solomon loved the LORD and worshipped Him at the altar of Gibeon. The LORD then appeared to him in a dream and said, *“Ask what I shall give thee”* (1 Kings 3:5). In response, Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people wisely. The choice pleased God, and He gave him wisdom such as no king before nor since had had, and God added to it both riches and honour beyond all others. His fame spread abroad through all the lands, and men came from far and near to hear him.

Nevertheless, Solomon testified in Ecclesiastes 1:13-14, *“And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”* Why? The answer is found in his conclusion in the Book of Ecclesiastes: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”* (Eccles 12:13-14).

Brethren, life is short! Live in reverence to God. Live to love His commandments. Live in obedience to His Word. Live by faith in His Son. Live in submission to His will, and live in hope of eternal life. Live in God's wisdom. Do not waste your life!

THOUGHT: Am I living in God's wisdom?

PRAYER: *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Ps 90:12).

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 19

1 KINGS 12:25-33

AMOS 9:8

"... the sinful kingdom..."

I will destroy it from off the face of the earth..."

APOSTASY OF A KINGDOM

Solomon's polygamy and imperialism gave rise to one sad consequence for Israel (1 Kings 11): the division of the kingdom. Because Solomon violated the laws of kingship (Deut 17:14-17; cf. 1 Kings 10:14, 26-29; 11:1-3), the LORD raised up adversaries (1 Kings 11:14, 23), the greatest of them being Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into the Southern Kingdom under Rehoboam and the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam.

For Jeroboam, the greatest challenge he faced was Jerusalem -- where three times a year, in accordance to God's revealed plan, the Israelites had to go there to worship the LORD (Lev 23). Fearful that the people from the northern tribes might be drawn to the Southern Kingdom (Jerusalem was in the southern territory), Jeroboam adopted drastic measures to bring these influences to an end by revolutionizing the religion of the Northern Kingdom. This led to the kingdom's apostasy.

The abominable religious practices instituted by Jeroboam in the north were an indirect result of the division of the united kingdom of Israel due to Solomon's sins. Solomon should have learned from his father David who in Psalm 51 declared what it meant to be a man after God's own heart. Solomon's sins led to devastation for several generations.

As Christians we should be thankful for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has already paid for all our sins. As children of God we have the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins by the shedding of His precious blood on the cross of Calvary. What Jesus has done for us assures us that we will never be cast away as apostates.

THOUGHT: Am I separating myself from apostates?

PRAYER: *"Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Ps 26:1-2).*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20

1 KINGS 13:1-10

1 CORINTHIANS 10:21

*"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord,
and the cup of devils..."*

CHANGE NOT FOR THE WORSE

Jeroboam changed the symbols of Israel's religion. Instead of golden cherubim, he replaced them with golden calves. Thus he became distinguished as the man *"who made Israel to sin"* (1 Kings 14:16) and the succeeding kings of Israel followed suit. Jeroboam's object was political: to preserve the kingdom. He instituted religious observances that would bind the people to the north.

He changed the centre of worship. Jeroboam took steps to prevent the people's periodic visits to Jerusalem, the centre of worship. He built two shrines: one in Bethel, at the southern extremity of his Northern Kingdom, and the other in Dan, near its northern boundary (1 Kings 12:29).

He also changed the priesthood system since the vast majority of priests and Levites had fled southward to Judah, taking with them the remnant of true believers from the northern tribes and leaving behind a situation of near-total apostasy (2 Chron 11:13-17). He opened the priestly privileges, such that *"whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest"* (2 Chron 13:9).

Moreover, he changed the religious calendar. A substitute religion, rather than no religion, has always been Satan's supreme goal (Rev 3:16-18). Jeroboam simply shifted the celebration of the feast of the tabernacles from the seventh month to the eighth month (1 Kings 12:32-33; Lev 23:33-35). And, with the celebration in two locations, he made the event more spectacular than its counterpart in Judah (held in one location).

However, he did not stop there. He *"stood by the altar to burn incense"* (1 Kings 13:1). He arrogated to himself a role which God did not give to him. He promoted himself to a status which God did not ordain him to have.

THOUGHT: Am I changing for the better?

PRAYER: *"Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required"* (Ps 40:6).

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

1 KINGS 11:1-13

*“... the king hearkened not unto the people;
for the cause was from the LORD...”*

1 KINGS 12:15

APOSTASY DUE TO BACKSLIDING LEADERS

1 Kings 12:25-33 records the beginning of apostasy in the Kingdom of Israel. Fearing that he might eventually lose political control over the ten tribes because of their long-standing religious ties with Jerusalem (capital of the Southern Kingdom, 1 Kings 12:27), Jeroboam instituted a state religion designed to meet his people's need for convenience, and his own need for power. This *“became a sin”* (1 Kings 12:30) for Israel. The Northern Kingdom's apostasy was caused by Jeroboam's false religious practices which took deep root throughout the existence of the kingdom. The house of Israel never departed from the practices he established.

When the house of David fell into idolatry, the LORD raised up another “David” and promised to establish his house without, of course, abandoning his earlier promises to David. Jeroboam proved himself a false David. He was not as obedient to the LORD as David had been, but instead established an unauthorized system of worship, an unauthorized priesthood, and an unauthorized festival calendar. Historical books of the Bible consistently refer to Jeroboam the son of Nebat as the author of the apostasy of Israel from the Mosaic religion.

Apostasy arises whenever believers do not live holy lives as witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. Their life of backsliding invites the wrath of God upon them, which will also affect the people around them. Backsliding leaders are deposed and false professors are set to rule, leading more people into the bandwagon of Satan. Apostasy can occur even in the best kingdoms, nations, churches or families when members become complacent to the attacks of the enemies. This controversy is a good illustration of how apostasy begins when leaders wilfully rebel against the LORD their God.

THOUGHT: Am I backsliding from the Lord?

PRAYER: *“But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid”* (Ps 86:15-16).

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

2 KINGS 11:1-16

MATTHEW 2:16

*“... slew all the children
that were in Bethlehem...”*

SATAN'S ATTEMPT TO WIPE-OUT THE MESSIAH'S LINE

Following the secession of the northern tribes, the kingdom left to Rehoboam consisted primarily of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The Kingdom of Judah lasted 480 years, exactly twice as long as the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This longer existence was due to the people's faith and the few godly kings in the Southern Kingdom.

Seven-year-old Joash became the ninth king of Judah, and he reigned forty years. He was born during a period of excessive bloodshed in the south. His own grandfather Jehoram murdered all his (Jehoram's) brothers when he gained sole power (2 Chron 21:1-4), while Jehoram's other sons were killed by Arabians (2 Chron 22:1), leaving only Ahaziah and his family as the descendants of David. When Ahaziah reigned as king of Judah, Jehu executed both Ahaziah and Joram king of Israel (2 Kings 9:24-27). And when Jehu also killed forty-two members of Judah's royal family (2 Kings 10:13-14), Joash became the sole surviving descendent of David.

It was at this time that Athaliah (Ahaziah's mother) usurped the throne in Jerusalem. Athaliah was the daughter of Israel's wicked king Ahab who became the wife of Jehoram. She seized the opportunity to become the “king” of Judah. When she took over the throne, she massacred the royal princes, but Joash was saved from her unnatural fury by the action of his aunt Jehosheba, the wife of Jehoiada, the high priest (2 Chron 22:10-11). It was in this situation that the seed of David was at the verge of extinction.

Satan has always wanted to cut-off the line of the Messiah even though he never succeeded. He attempted this when baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem. God's perfect plan will never fail. The all-wise and all-knowing God cannot make mistakes. He has set everything according to His sovereign plan. Let us fully trust in Him!

THOUGHT: How should I thank God for His perfect plans?

PRAYER: *“O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver” (Ps 7:1-2).*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

2 KINGS 11:1-16

HEBREWS 13:7

*“Remember them
which have the rule over you...”*

FORSAKING GUARDIANS

When Jehoram died and his son Ahaziah was killed, Athaliah seized the power of state for herself, killing all the royal males except for Joash, who had been concealed by Jehosheba and Jehoiada (2 Kings 11:1-3). By the ingenuity of Jehosheba (the wife of Jehoiada the high priest), Joash, then an infant, escaped and was hidden in the temple for six years (2 Chron 22:10-12).

In the seventh year, Jehoiada plotted with supporters loyal to the family of David to dethrone Athaliah and successfully proclaimed Joash as king (2 Kings 11:1-16; 2 Chron 22:10-23:15). The Davidic line was reestablished when Joash, the lone-survivor of Athaliah's purge, was placed on the throne (2 Kings 11:12).

During those formative years of Joash's early life, he was under the moral and spiritual influence of Jehoiada. And, under the guidance of Jehoiada, the reign of Joash was a good and godly one. Baal worship was destroyed, the temple was repaired, and the people were revived to return to the LORD. While Jehoiada lived, he was used of God to preserve the nation in the days of Joash. But after his death, *“... they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass”* (2 Chron 24:18).

Remember them which have the rule over you. Remember our faithful pastors who are God's appointed under-shepherds. They rule well over us with all faithfulness, prudence, and diligence. They point us to the way of peace, life, and salvation to men, and direct us to Christ. They are our guides in understanding the Scriptures. They lead us in the paths of faith and holiness. Let us always pray for them.

THOUGHT: Am I praying for my pastor and church leaders always?

PRAYER: *“Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed”* (Ps 89:50-51).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

2 CHRONICLES 24:15-22

JEREMIAH 22:9

“... have forsaken the covenant
of the LORD their God...”

FORSAKING GOD

Upon the death of the good and godly man Jehoiada, it soon became evident that the strongest pillar of the state was removed. Joash changed radically. The Bible testifies that *“Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him”* (2 Kings 12:2), but after Jehoiada’s death (2 Chron 24:15), there was a sad declension. This was due to his association with the princes who worshipped other gods.

The apostasy is described: *“And they left the house of the LORD God... and served groves and idols...”* (2 Chron 24:18). Joash did not only give them leave to do it themselves, but he joined them. Soon, idols and groves began to be set up in Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah.

The high priest Zechariah, a worthy son of Jehoiada, testified against Joash’s action. Wrathful at the rebuke, the king gave orders that Zechariah be killed in the temple-court (2 Chron 24:21). *“Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it”* (2 Chron 24:22).

Will we forsake the Lord our God? He is the Lord who chose us to be His peculiar people even before the foundation of the world. He distinguished us with many favours from the rest of the people. He has established a covenant with us, mediated through His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has done so many great and wonderful things in our lives. He even promises us many good things including eternity in His Kingdom in heaven. Why would we forsake the God who loves us so much?

THOUGHT: Do I forsake the LORD my God?

PRAYER: *“How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy”* (Ps 78:40-42).

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

MATTHEW 16:6-12

LUKE 12:1

*"Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees,
which is hypocrisy."*

THE LEAVEN OF APOSTASY

Jesus said: *"take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees"* (Matt 16:6). To *"take heed"* is to take notice by visible observation which in this context is *"to see."* To *"beware"* is *"to pay attention to,"* *"be cautious about."* Of what? The leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees! Disgust was present when Christ spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the New Testament, leaven was used by Christ to refer to the externalism of the Pharisees and to the unbelief of the Sadducees.

In Luke 12:1, Jesus said, *"Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."* Hypocrisy is *"to give an impression of having certain purposes or motivations, while in reality having quite different ones. They pretend or to act hypocritically in pretense."* Hypocrites are strictly actors, or stage players. In the New Testament, they are figuratively the moral or religious counterfeit or dissembler.

The Lord Jesus Christ warned His disciples who were in much danger of hypocrites. They stood on guard against those who were openly vicious, but they commonly lie unguarded against Pharisees who were great pretenders to devotion, and Sadducees who pretended to promote a free and impartial search after truth. Therefore the caution is to *"take heed and beware."* Their corrupt principles and practices are compared to leaven which is souring, swelling, and spreading. They displayed a great show of piety and holiness but had no spiritual life. They had a lot of knowledge in doctrine and manners but are without the truth. They had men's respect and reputation but were not regenerate. Be not a hypocrite! Be truthful and honest! Be not an actor! Be meek and pure! Be not pretentious! Be wise and kind-hearted!

THOUGHT: Am I a hypocrite?

PRAYER: *"Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression"* (Ps 19:12-13).

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES: FORMALISM

Formalism is the practice or the doctrine of strict adherence to prescribed or external forms. The fatal mistake of the Pharisees was that they thought of nothing but the mere externalities of religion. They were just concerned for their names, their forms of religion, their visible rites, or, at most, their aesthetic emotions. They valued more the excessive strictness in their attention to all the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law but without heart conviction. Thus, with all their religiosity, they actually had no religion, no spiritual vitality, no renewal of nature, and no union with Christ. In other words, they were like what is common today in most of our churches: Christless Christians.

It is said that external observance of the laws of God without the heart conviction is like painting a rotten old piece of wood. It looks good outside but there is nothing good inside. Thus, Jesus told the Pharisees, *"... for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity"* (Matt 23:27-28).

O, the externalities of religion that replace the eternal value of salvation! The splendour of their garbs of pretended holiness that replaces the robe of Christ's righteousness! The pomp of their ceremonials that replaces the power of the gospel! Are we merely professors of Christ or real possessors of Him? Do we have the assurance of eternal life in Christ? Are we merely onlookers or actual followers of Jesus? Do we have the desire to serve Him? Are we merely learners but never believers of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we have the fruit of the Spirit? May God enlighten our hearts and minds to understand the truth and save us from hypocritical faith.

THOUGHT: Am I worshipping God in form only?

PRAYER: *"Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness"* (Ps 29:1-2).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

MARK 7:1-13

MATTHEW 15:3

“... ye also transgress the commandment
of God by your tradition.”

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES: TRADITION WORSHIPPERS

The Pharisees not only received all the Old Testament books as of divine origin, but they also added to the authoritative revelation of God the traditions of the fathers. They attached such weight to the traditions of men that they practically regarded them to be of more importance than the inspired writings of the Old Testament.

Traditions are beliefs and practices handed down from one generation to the next either in writing or by memory. These can be precepts or customs not commanded in the written law, but which they held themselves bound to observe. The law is made void by their lowering of its demands and replacing it with the lesser demands of their traditions. The naked truth of God's Word and the inventions which men contrive out of their own evil imaginations must be differentiated.

The Bible said that the Pharisees “*except they wash their hands oft, eat not*” (Mark 7:3). This custom of washing was applied not merely to their hands before eating, but also extended to their returning from the market. It also applied to pots, and cups, and brazen vessels and tables (Mark 7:3-4). It is well so long as they did it for the sake of cleanliness, but the problem arises when they made it into a matter of superstition. They regarded external purity of much more import than heart purity.

Are we guilty of breaching the divine command because of traditions? Are we afraid of transgressing the commandments of God because of man-made rules and regulations? Are we disregarding the laws of God because of our customs and indigenous practices? Be not a modern-day Pharisee by becoming a tradition worshipper!

THOUGHT: Am I a tradition worshipper?

PRAYER: “*It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way*” (Ps 119:126-128).

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

LUKE 18:9-14

MATTHEW 23:28

“... ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men,
but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Being descended from Abraham, and having him as their father, the Pharisees mistakenly thought that they were not in peril of hell fire like other men. Their descent from him was a kind of title for them to enter into heaven. In Luke 18:9, the reasons why the Pharisee was rejected are stated to be these two: he trusted in himself that he was righteous, and he despised others. Pharisees believed that all Pharisees were bound for heaven and that all non-Pharisees were bound for hell.

They had great conceit of themselves and of their own goodness. They thought themselves as holier than all others. They were proud to think of themselves as examples to the rest of the Jews. They had a confidence in themselves before God and not only had a high opinion of their own righteousness, but depended upon the merit of it. They trusted in themselves as being righteous and believed that as such, they could enter the kingdom of God. They thought they had made God their debtor and could demand anything from Him. These were the Pharisees who had trusted in their own righteousness but rejected the righteousness of God.

These and many such-like things the Pharisees did. Every Christian must be aware of these and avoid these atrocious characters. Today, many professing Christians also have the “holier than thou attitude.” They appear pious and religious, but they despise other Christians in the church. They trust in their own merit of having served God in whatever capacities they had, yet they love not their brethren. They can boast of their knowledge in theology but not let it touch their hearts to win souls, thus causing them to stumble others instead. Do not be a modern-day Pharisee by being self-righteous!

THOUGHT: Am I a self-righteous Christian?

PRAYER: *“I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation” (Ps 40:10).*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

ACTS 23:6-10

JOB 42:2

*"I know that thou canst do every thing,
...no thought can be withholden from thee."*

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SADDUCEES: FREE-THINKERS

The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocracy and high-ranking people in the Jewish community during the time of Jesus. Many high priests were chosen from among them. As men of high social and religious status, they were content with the existing order of things. They denied the validity of any of the written laws of the Pentateuch. They even rejected the doctrines such as afterlife and resurrection.

A free-thinker is someone who forms his own opinions and beliefs, especially about religion or politics, rather than just accepting what is taught in the Bible. The Sadducees did not want to conform to the Word of God. They did not believe in orthodoxy; for them, revelation and faith were invalid. Their most important tool in determining truth was reason. Whatever they could not perceive was rendered null.

Do you only accept the things that science can prove? Do you only affirm what your mind can imagine? Do you only believe what you think is reasonable? Do not trust your feeble mind. Do not rely on your finite wisdom. Do not lean on your own understanding. Job's honest response to God is worthy of consideration for those who think they know more than God. *"I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:2-6).

THOUGHT: Do I think like a free-thinker?

PRAYER: *"Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered"* (Ps 40:4-5).

THURSDAY, MARCH 2

MATTHEW 22:23-33

HEBREWS 3:12

“... any of you (with) an evil heart of unbelief,
(is) departing from the living God.”

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SADDUCEES: SCEPTICS

The Sadducees accepted the first five books of the Bible, but they failed to see the teachings about angels and the hope of resurrection. They erroneously rejected the other books of the Old Testament. This led to their denial of many teachings from the Scriptures.

They were like the sceptics who are inclined to question or doubt accepted opinions. Sadducees believed that there was no resurrection, no angels, and no spirits. They laughed at those who believed in these spiritual things. They posed difficult questions to provoke the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, they put before our Lord the woman who had had seven husbands. They asked Him, “...in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?...” (Matt 22:28). They hoped that in this way they would be able to render the teachings of Jesus as absurd. They tried to make His chief doctrines appear ridiculous so that His disciples would give up their faith (which they had received from the Scriptures).

Today, the leaven of doubting God’s Word is introduced through the unbelief of the perfect inspiration and perfect preservation of the Scriptures. This skepticism will pervade the whole body of the doctrines of the church. We must be careful not to have faith like that of the Sadducees. The moment the written Scriptures are questioned and a low view of God’s Word is embraced, the inevitable consequence is unbelief and apostasy. Beware and be careful!

How we must thank the Lord for inspiring His Word for us! We must be immensely thankful that He preserved His precious Word to the jot and tittle. We must also be forever thankful that He established His Word for eternity!

THOUGHT: Am I sceptical about the Word of God?

PRAYER: *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth”* (Ps 119:89-90).

FRIDAY, MARCH 3
DEUTERONOMY 4:1-6
REVELATION 22:18-19

*“... if any man shall take away
from the words... God shall
take away his part...”*

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SADDUCEES: RATIONALISM

Rationalism is the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief. The Sadducees restricted themselves to the authority of the Law of Moses. Their rationalistic beliefs blinded them from believing the miracles in the Scriptures, especially the resurrection.

God knows that there will be some who would add to the Word, and some who would subtract from it, some who would tone it down by adding to it other things and some who would bleed it to death by subtracting from its principal truths. He warned in Deuteronomy 4:2, *“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”* This same warning is repeated in Revelation 22:18-19 as God reminds: *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

Today, modern textual criticism promoted by unbelieving Bible scholars has resulted in an increasing uncertainty in the authenticity of the biblical text. These uncertainties resulted in the weakening of the authority of the Scriptures. This in turn opens a floodgate of humanistic interpretation of the Bible. When the Bible is understood by human reasoning alone, sooner or later it will be denied as nothing but an ordinary book on the shelves. Let not your heart be rent away from believing the whole counsel of God!

THOUGHT: Am I rationalistic in approaching the Bible?

PRAYER: *“Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation”* (Ps 119:98-99).

SATURDAY, MARCH 4

JOHN 6:41-58

JOHN 5:39

*"Search the scriptures...
... they are they which testify of me."*

A WARPED UNDERSTANDING ABOUT JESUS

The Jews murmured when Jesus said, "... *if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh...*" (John 6:51). The people struggled among themselves for they could not understand what Jesus meant. Moreover he added in John 6:54-56: "*Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*"

The people began to murmur, showing their unbelief because they did not fully understand who He was. They questioned His person, alleging that He was just a man, one of the sons of Joseph whom they knew of. Jesus, however, was not surprised by their grumblings, and He exposed their unbelief. Calvin says they showed a twofold obstruction. First, they framed for themselves out of a false opinion when they said, "*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*" (John 6:42). Another arose from a wicked sentiment, that they did not think Christ was the Son of God because He came down to them clothed in their flesh.

We too are guilty of excessive malignity when we despise the Lord of glory, who, on man's account, emptied Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). The divine majesty of Christ has been revealed to us by God in the Scriptures. We must have a clear understanding of who Jesus is based on the inspired and preserved Holy Scriptures. Let us devote ourselves to a personal study of God's Word. Let us study it regularly and systematically. Let us truthfully know the Bible that we may not have a warp understanding of who Jesus is.

THOUGHT: Do I really know the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures?

PRAYER: "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments*" (Ps 119:9-10).

WORLDLY MOTIVES IN FOLLOWING JESUS

John 6 records one of the most stupendous miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ. He multiplied five barley loaves and two small fishes (John 6:9) to feed more than five thousand people. The next day the people who were fed continued to follow Him. Jesus knew their hearts and perceived that they were after Him because they “*did eat of the loaves, and were filled*” (John 6:26). Jesus then brought them to a higher level of spiritual truth. He declared to them, “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:35). And the Jews murmured at His claim.

This passage shows that the term “*disciple*” in its broadest sense can even refer to unbelievers. It shows that it can refer to temporary followers of Christ as well. In Jesus’ day, some followed Him only for a time, only with a casual attachment, and when His teachings became clearer, they left Him. Their motivation was to obtain free food or to simply satisfy their curiosity. Jesus reproved them for they followed Him not because they understood the miracles which authenticated His divinity. They did not realize the spiritual significance of the miracles. Their desires were driven by the free supply of food they received. They followed Him only for what would make them healthy physically and for what would prosper them materially. Let us remember that the Lord our God should be our lone object of worship. Let us not worship the things of this world. Let us be faithful to Him as He is always faithful to us!

Did you become a disciple of Christ because of the worldly things you desire to acquire from Him? Do you follow Jesus Christ for material prosperity, or for life eternal? Dear Reader, examine your motives. If you are still following Jesus because of worldly motives, you must repent of your worldliness so that you will not find yourself leaving Jesus in the end. Do not be a Demas who forsook the Apostle Paul because he loved this present world (2 Tim 4:10)!

THOUGHT: Am I following Jesus with worldly personal motives?

PRAYER: “*As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him*” (Ps 18:30).

MONDAY, MARCH 6

JOHN 6:53-69

JOHN 15:5-6

“... He that abideth in me, and I in him,
... bringeth forth much fruit...”

WEIRD INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS' TEACHINGS

The people tried to understand spiritual things in a carnal way. It was hard to conceive how they could imagine that Christ spoke of giving His flesh for them to eat, as men eat the flesh of oxen or sheep. Jesus gave them the litmus test of why they kept on following Him: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you*” (John 6:53). Jesus delivered His message in a manner which drove away what modern churches call “seekers.”

The disciples were offended by the words of Jesus when He revealed to them that “*there are some of you that believe not*” (John 6:64). Many were leaving, and their departure proclaimed their lack of genuine faith. The late Rev Timothy Tow declared, “It is only the elect, the chosen of God, who will stick on.” In a few short hours, from the heights of popularity when the people greatly pressed upon Him by force, Jesus was reduced to the loyalty of a few men who must have watched the exodus of the other followers with puzzled seriousness. The offence of the cross was beginning to operate. Jesus whittled a crowd of 5,000 down to twelve.

The question Jesus has for you is, “*Will ye also go away?*” (John 6:67). What is your answer? Will your answer be like Peter’s? “*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:68-69). Do you have a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you have a zeal for Him to serve in whatever opportunity He has given you? Do you love Him enough to follow wherever He wants you to go in His harvest fields? Do not forsake Him for only in Him can we spend our lives with greater profit and advantage on this earth. Only in Him can we secure our lives with a glorious future and jubilation in heaven with God.

THOUGHT: Do I understand the Words of Jesus correctly?

PRAYER: “*Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name*” (Ps 80:17-18).

TUESDAY, MARCH 7

ACTS 1:15-20

MATTHEW 10:36

*"... a man's foes shall be
they of his own household."*

BETRAYAL IS APOSTASY

Judas was called one of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet he became an apostate. How he departed from his Master is enigmatic. He had experienced the grace of God in the most intimate way. In spite of the absence of deep grace in his own heart, he was used as an agent in the promotion of the work of grace in the hearts of others. Indeed, he was so near, yet so very far!

In Acts 1:15-20, the Apostle Peter addressed the disciples and brethren who were waiting for the promise of the filling of the Holy Spirit. He mentioned that *"this scripture must needs have been fulfilled"* (Acts 1:16), referring perhaps to the prophecy in Psalm 41:9: *"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."* Judas became the guide of them who arrested Jesus, thus committing treason of the highest degree.

It was a betrayal by one who sat with Jesus at His table. He ate bread with Jesus without being discriminated against and was treated as His own disciple. He dipped his morsel in the same dish as Jesus, like a special guest honoured by the Master's presence. How could he betray his teacher and his God? Wherefore *"it had been good for that man if he had not been born"* (Matt 26:24).

Christians, we have been bought by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus and understand His great sacrifice. We know what wretched sinners we are. We are unworthy of His love, we are unworthy of His mercy, and we are unworthy to be saved. Yet by His abounding grace, He came to bear the punishment of our sins. If we truly believe these truths with our hearts, we must not even consider betraying our Lord and our God. Will we?

THOUGHT: Am I prone to betray?

PRAYER: *"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance"* (Ps 55:12-13).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

JOHN 12:1-8

MATTHEW 6:24

“... *Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*”

BLINDED BY THE LOVE OF MONEY

Every Christian must be reminded that Satan tries to drive believers every day to sin. Although we are not under his dominion, he puts us under his surveillance to take every opportunity to trip us. He desires to accuse us of infidelity against our Lord and Saviour. He rejoices every time we sin and brings railing accusations against us. Therefore, we must learn to repent early lest Satan's continued harshness on our souls lead to his reign over us. As soon as we are abandoned to Satan's tyranny, his rage will have no bounds.

On the other hand, Satan enters into the reprobates and takes possession of all their senses, overthrows any fear of God, extinguishes the light of reason, and destroys every feeling of shame. The unbeliever is swallowed up, and with insatiable unbelief, hastens to do every wicked and abominable work of the flesh to his own destruction.

The cause and source of so great a blindness in Judas was his love of money. He was a reprobate. One manifestation was that his eyes were fixed on jewels rather than on Jesus. His love was set towards gold, and not towards God. He valued carnal security more than eternal security.

Judas was an embezzler and a pilferer. He desired the money to be entrusted to him, that he might secretly enrich himself. “... *he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein*” (John 12:6). Satan used the lust of covetousness in Judas as a means by which the iniquitous result was accomplished. Judas preferred money over the Master, sin over salvation, and hell over heaven. “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matt 6:24). Which of the two are you serving?

THOUGHT: Is money the love of my life?

PRAYER: “*Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day*” (Ps 25:4-5).

THURSDAY, MARCH 9

MATTHEW 27:1-10

MATTHEW 26:48

*“... he that betrayed him
gave them a sign...”*

UNREPENTANCE

Judas carried out his satanic task as he went to the chief priests and betrayed his Lord. He had these dark deeds planned quietly and deliberately. Satan entered into him, not that Judas was formerly directed by the Spirit of God, for he had always been the slave of Satan. He was a con man who pretended to be a believer but in reality was not. Judas acted under the satanic influence in complete accordance with the divine foreknowledge, but he was still responsible for his own devilish actions.

Judas then *“sought how he might conveniently betray him (Jesus)”* (Mark 14:11). He waited for the right opportunity to secure his blood-money. Judas sought the door to hell, and waited for it to open, not realizing he was about to sin against light and love. An apostate not only turns his back to the Master but also bites Him. What an ugly picture of a brute beast, untamed and fierce.

After the betrayal, when Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned to death, he was filled with remorse. He brought the money back to the chief priests and elders. However, his repentance did not denote a change for the better, but only of views and feelings. An unconverted person does not know and cannot have true repentance. Yes, he *“repented himself”* (Matt 27:3), but a repentance that wrought no saving act of faith in his heart. It was a worldly sorrow that feared the consequences, a penitence that does not lead to a hatred of sin.

Christians, let us not view sin lightly. It is not just a feeling of guilt or fear of evil circumstances that drives us to repentance. It must be the convicting power of the Holy Spirit leading us to see the justice of God upon sinners. Jesus suffered on the cross to pay for the penalty of our sins. He died for you and me. Let us quickly repent of our sins.

THOUGHT: Do I quickly come to God in repentance of my sins?

PRAYER: *“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin”* (Ps 32:5).

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

HEBREWS 5:11-1

1 PETER 2:2-3

*“... desire the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby.”*

WARNING AGAINST STAGNANCY

The author of the book of Hebrews warned that if Christians continue to be stagnant in their spiritual growth, there is a tendency that they will return to their former life. There is a grave recompense expected, for it is impossible for those who once appeared to have been in the faith to repent if they fall away from it (Heb 6:4-6).

Their spiritual stagnancy was rebuked. The accusation was about their being dull, sluggish or slow to become involved in some activity. To be *“dull of hearing”* (Heb 5:11) is descriptive of that state of mind in which statements could be made without producing any corresponding impression, without being attended to, without being understood or without being felt. In other words, they were spiritually lethargic.

The author's exhortation was for believers while he also cited examples of false believers who may, in the end, apostatize. He desired Christians to have the assurance of their hope in Christ and so they must not become lazy, for he knew that they were ignorant of some of the very elements of the gospel. Many of them could only bear the simplest nourishment. They were incapable of receiving the higher doctrines of the gospel, as much as little children are incapable of digesting solid food. They were, in fact, in a state of spiritual infancy.

How about you? Are you growing spiritually through the study of God's Word? Do you have the appetite to partake more and slowly digest “meat” doctrines? Are you in a higher spiritual plane than before? Do not become stagnant or lethargic, or you might be found to be spiritually dead.

THOUGHT: Am I growing in my spiritual life?

PRAYER: *“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward”* (Ps 19:10-11).

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

HEBREWS 6:1-6

MATTHEW 7:22-23

“... *I never knew you:*

depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

ONCE ENLIGHTENED

The Greek word translated “*illuminated*” (Heb 10:32) occurs eleven times in the New Testament, sometimes just referring to the giving of light by a lamp (Luke 11:36), and other times referring to learning in general. “...*who were once enlightened...*” (Heb 6:4) can be used with the idea of “initially” or “at the first.” Thus it is impossible for those who initially or at the first were enlightened but who subsequently fell away to be brought back again to repentance. They never were regenerated in the first place.

To “*have tasted of the heavenly gift*” (Heb 6:4) means to have participated in the gospel and its attendant blessings. They “feel something of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit in his operations upon their souls, causing them to taste something of religion, and yet be like persons in the market, who taste of what they will not come up to the price of, and so but take a taste, and leave it” (Matthew Henry). They never were born-again.

O, how great a regret it would be for people who may have seen the heavenly splendour but did not pursue to go and experience it! They know the glory of heaven and hear of the majesty of the kingdom but shift their focus to the temporal glitters of worldly treasures. They feel the warm rays of the Light of the Son but they prefer the light “*under the sun*” (Eccles 1:14, 2:11) and become vain in their lives. They were brightened with the torchlight of truth but they favour more the fire of the burning lake that cannot be quenched.

Dear Reader, have you truly believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Do not be content with being known as a nominal Christian. Be a child of God! Do not be content with being a church goer but be part of the church of Christ! Do not be content with being a hearer of God’s Word. Be a doer of it!

THOUGHT: Are you enlightened or indwelt by the Spirit?

PRAYER: “*Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit*” (Ps 51:11-12).

ONCE PARTAKERS

Hebrews 6:4 described some as “*partakers of the Holy Ghost*”. The term “partake” means “to share in something,” often with others, hence “partaker” would mean “to be a partner, a companion.” However, it does not mean that they were regenerated people. They may have extraordinary and miraculous gifts; they may have cast out devils in the name of Christ, and done many other mighty works. Such gifts in the apostolic age were sometimes bestowed upon those who had no true saving grace, such as Judas.

They have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come. They may have some relish of gospel doctrines, hear the Word with pleasure, remember much of it, and talk well of it, and yet never be cast into the form and mould of it, nor have it dwelling richly in them.

Falling away signifies a deliberate, complete and final repudiation of Christ. It is a sin without forgiveness. It must be understood that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, a condition beyond hope of recovery. Apostasy will be punished with everlasting burnings of the fire that shall never be quenched. This is the sad end to which apostasy leads, and therefore Christians must grow in grace. If they do not go forward but go backward, the woeful extremity of misery awaits them.

Jesus describes that seeds which fell upon a rock: “*are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away*” (Luke 8:13). Do not fall away! Do not just be a partaker of Christianity. Be a part of God’s family!

THOUGHT: Am I only a partaker? Or am I truly part of God’s Kingdom?

PRAYER: “*Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert*” (Ps 106:12-14).

MONDAY, MARCH 13

ACTS 20:17-31

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

"... in the latter times

...giving heed to seducing spirits..."

TAKING CARE OF THE FLOCK

In Acts 20, the Apostle Paul was seen in two different but important lights. In Troas, he was publicly leading the worship of the church. Then in Miletus, he was in a private meeting with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17). This private meeting was Paul's farewell discourse with the elders of Ephesus.

The Apostle declared that he was pure from the blood of all men. To *"take you to record"* (Acts 20:26) makes an emphatic affirmation or a serious declaration and assertion to invite the people to confirm his testimony. He did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God to them. He did not hesitate or shrink from proclaiming to them the Word of God. The whole counsel of God is the entirety of the doctrines in the Scriptures.

The elders were charged that they must take care of the flock given to them by God. They were warned that grievous wolves would enter among them. These are grievous, which means "burdensome" creatures, giving a picture of violent, cruel and unsparing animals. They will devour whatever they can. In other words, these represent the false teachers who will destroy the faith of many people in the congregation.

Paul reiterated this warning in his letter to young Timothy: *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"* (1 Tim 4:1-2). Let us take heed of the alarms set off by the Apostle Paul! This is evident today in many Christian churches. Very few preachers are expounding the Word of God in the pulpit. Many are instead preaching their own opinions and suggestions.

THOUGHT: Am I well taken care of by the leaders of my church?

PRAYER: *"Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak"* (Ps 12:1-2).

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

ACTS 20:28-32

HEBREWS 13:7

*"Remember them which have the rule over you,
who have spoken unto you the word of God..."*

WATCH AND REMEMBER

Paul enjoined the elders of Ephesus to *"watch, and remember"* (Acts 20:31). To *"watch"* is to stay awake with constant readiness and to remain fully alive or active. To *"remember"* is to keep something in mind and think of it always. Paul encouraged them to remember how for three years he took all opportunities to warn them even in tears. In effect, he reminded them to watch continually with passion against the onslaught of the enemies of the gospel (as he used to warn them).

Watch, be alert and keep awake. In other words, he wanted them to employ the most conscientious care for the church. This demanded strict attention to, being cautious or active in remembering what Paul had for three years, night and day, admonished them with tears. He then set them before God and to the word of His grace, to the One who is able to build them up and give them an inheritance in Him who had sanctified them all (Acts 20:32). He desired them to be good shepherds to feed the flock and to guard the flock against wolves which he prophesied would come after his departure.

To remember is to recall about the false teachers. They should remember that they must not be negligent in building upon that foundation which was so diligently laid for them through Paul. The only way to abide in the truth is to watch against evil, and do good; and to keep in mind the heavenly doctrines originally received. Unwatchfulness and forgetfulness are two grand inlets to apostasy.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17).

THOUGHT: Am I submitting myself to the rule of my elders?

PRAYER: *"Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders" (Ps 107:31-32).*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15
ACTS 20:25-30
2 CORINTHIANS 11:13

“... *false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves
into the apostles of Christ.*”

THE SOURCES OF APOSTASY

Paul knew that after his departure “...*grievous wolves enter in among you...*” (Acts 20:29). The word “*know*” (Acts 20:29) is to perceive, notice, discern, or discover. It is like the Latin word *video*, which is to perceive by any of the senses. The “*wolves*” are strong, mighty, dangerous wolves -- so strong that the feeble flock will not be able to resist them. Their intention is to destroy the church. The term “*wolves*” also denote the enemies of the flock -- false, and hypocritical, and dangerous teachers. They are false teachers who will use the flock for their own purposes and benefits. “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*” (2 Cor 11:13).

Not only from the outside but also of their own selves shall men arise, speaking distorted things to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30). From within the church, men will arise to seek a private following and cause the flock to go astray. The phrase “*perverse things*” (Acts 20:30) means things that are able to lead others astray. They can cause others to turn away from a belief. They can mislead others. They will draw the disciples away. Literally, it is to pull or drag away; and figuratively, it is to alienate, to lure people away to follow them. Corruptions of doctrine flow from the pride of men. These ambitious men will turn away from, and corrupt, the Word of God. Calvin is right: “ambition is the mother of all heresies.”

There are two sources of apostasy in churches: those from without and those from within. This shows the great danger of apostasy which the Apostle predicted. Not just from outside of the church, but even out of the present existing Christian body, there shall arise those who will destroy their own churches. Beware!

THOUGHT: Am I aware of the sources of apostasy?

PRAYER: “*Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah*” (Ps 52:1-3)

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

GALATIANS 1:1-7

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

*"For other foundation can no man lay
than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

BEWARE OF FALSE GOSPELS!

Paul marvelled at the things that happened in the churches of Galatia. The word "*marvel*" (Gal 1:6) is defined as being extraordinarily impressed and disturbed by something, or being astonished. In other words, Paul was very surprised that the Galatian Christians changed so quickly. It was a transfer or change of sides like moving from one place to another or to a different location.

The Galatian Christians were being changed from believing the One who called them into the grace of Christ to another gospel. Paul was amazed. He did not expect them to turn aside from his gospel, and from Christ. It was not that they entirely rejected Christ but that their doctrines were corrupted such as to leave them nothing more than believing in an imaginary Christ.

Paul presumed that someone was troubling and distorting the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:7). Paul's usage of "*some*" refers to the certainty of the presence of false teachers. These were the Judaizers who introduced the false gospel of works. They included circumcision as part of a requirement for salvation. For the Galatian Christians, Paul showed them that this "*another gospel*" would change their state from being free back to bondage again. Paul's major purpose was to persuade them to cleave to him and his gospel and to reject his opponents and their gospel.

This false gospel of works is mainly taught by the Roman Catholic Church. This is now subtly introduced into the evangelical protestant churches through the unholy union in Evangelical and Catholics Together (ECT). Beware of this false gospel!

THOUGHT: Am I accommodating the false gospel of works?

PRAYER: *"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps 24:3-4).*

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

GALATIANS 1:6-10

1 CORINTHIANS 16:22

*"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ,
let him be Anathema Maranatha."*

FALSE GOSPEL IS ACCURSED

The introduction of the false gospel into the churches of Galatia resulted in the undermining of the gospel that Paul preached. He boldly proclaimed to them that even if he or an angel out of heaven were to bring good news to them other than that which he had already preached, he should be accursed (Gal 1:8). Paul alluded to those brethren identified with him or anyone who claimed that he was from heaven but was bringing another gospel. If the preaching was contrary to that which he had preached, he pronounced a curse on them: *"let him be accursed (anathema)."* This means to deliver someone over to divine wrath. He openly declared that the gospel of the Judaizers was not just a false gospel, but also a disturbance to the church of Christ.

Paul continued to say, *"as we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"* (Gal 1:9). He charged them with the additional crime of doing injury to Christ by endeavouring to subvert the gospel. Subversion is an enormous crime. It is worse than corruption. Indeed, worthy to be accursed.

They should not have entertained another gospel, besides the one they had received from Paul. They should have taken to themselves, like a spiritual legacy of doctrines and traditions, what they had learned from Paul. It was something for them to hold on to. Paul argued, *"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ"* (Gal 1:10). He wanted to convince them to believe and act on the basis of what he had taught them. Paul told them that his desire was not to make men happy, but to warn them for the Lord's cause. He did not seek favour to win over Christians to his side but to God's side.

THOUGHT: Am I holding on to the biblical truth of the gospel?

PRAYER: *"In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?"* (Ps 120:1-3).

SATURDAY, MARCH 18

2 TIMOTHY 2:16-18

1 TIMOTHY 1:20

“... I have delivered unto Satan,
that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

WARNINGS AGAINST PROFANE BABBLINGS

Paul gave his injunction to Timothy that he must be campaign as a good soldier against the opponents of Christ and the gospel. Timothy must be uncompromising on the matter of sound doctrine. Paul warned him that a religious teacher who knew the truth but taught falsehood, or allowed falsehood to be taught under his jurisdiction, would not have a good conscience. He would be condemned for such a perversion.

Paul admonished Timothy to avoid profane, empty talk for it would advance to more ungodliness. “*Profane*” describes worldly or godless talk void of any spiritual value (2 Tim 2:16). “*Vain babbling*” is empty talk, chatter, or foolish discussion that produces nothing but empty chaff. These are the characteristics of false teachers. Since words and conduct are inseparable, ungodly conduct would be advanced by ungodly words.

Paul was not hesitant to name names and wrote that these false teachers, Hymenaeus and Philetus, were condemned not for saying there was no resurrection, but for teaching that the first resurrection was past already. Paul wrote of those whom he had delivered unto Satan, so that they might not teach others to blaspheme. This means he excommunicated them from the church. He turned them back to the world so that if they were truly God’s children, they would realize their sin and come back to the church in repentance. Paul’s concern was for the protection of the church as well as the constructive correction of Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Let us keep ourselves from profane and vain babblings! Let us guard our mouth from blaspheming our God. Let us keep our words guided always by the Word of God and the Spirit of God!

THOUGHT: Am I guarding my mouth from sin and blasphemy?

PRAYER: “O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom” (Ps 74:10-11).

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 19

3 JOHN 1:1-14

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8

*"... being found in fashion as a man,
he humbled himself..."*

LOVE TO HAVE THE PRE-EMINENCE

Diotrephes was a person contentiously resisting the Apostle John's authority and forbidding others from exercising the Christian hospitality which he himself refused to show. The phrase *"loveth to have the preeminence"* means he likes or loves to be first in rank or position. The words may indicate that he was a church official who abused his position. He desired to be number one!

He was probably more than a private member of the church. It may be that he was the pastor. Although already having preeminence, he coveted more than his due. He lorded over God's heritage by ruling the flock with force and cruelty. It may be also that he sought to have the preeminence over the rest of the elders of the church, for in those churches there were more than one elder (Acts 20:17). His ambitious spirit is a characteristic of a false leader, who set himself up as the head and even above the apostles of Christ. This is one sure way towards apostasy.

John wanted to remind Diotrephes of the evil that he had done to the brethren. He was prating (i.e. talked nonsense and made empty charges against another, made outrageous or malicious statements or badmouthing). Diotrephes even cast brethren out of the church. This included the notion of violence in driving them out.

Should we not follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil 2:6-8)?

THOUGHT: Do I love to have preeminence in the church?

PRAYER: *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Ps 8:3-4).

MONDAY, MARCH 20
REVELATION 3:14-19
MATTHEW 25:29-30

“... cast ye the unprofitable servant
into outer darkness...”

A CHURCH OF AND FOR THE WORLD

The Lord Jesus Christ delivered a message to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Laodicea was the last of these seven churches. The Lord Jesus identified Himself as the Amen, thus identifying Him as the ultimate affirmation. He also describes Himself as the faithful witness, one who affirms or attests, and that He is the only One who does it faithfully. He is identified also as the true witness. He is also the beginning (by which everything began to be), the origin, the active cause, or the uncaused cause of everything.

The Lord has the absolute and total knowledge of their works. He found them neither cold nor hot; referring, perhaps, to the well-known fact of the tepid water in Laodicea that tends to produce sickness of the stomach, and an inclination to vomit. Water that is hot, or water that is cold, has its beneficial qualities. But the Laodicean church was neither cold nor hot, i.e. God cannot find any redeeming feature in this church; it is spiritually bankrupt. It denotes deep disgust and loathing at the indifference which prevailed in the church at Laodicea. Most churches today are in the same condition. In these churches are thousands of professing Christians with their empty moralism, their arid rationalism, their selfish humanism and their pleasurable materialism.

The church became useful for the world, but not for the Lord. They had no spiritual worth or value. The church was concerned more with the social and physical needs of the world. The ministries were no more geared towards heavenly things, but focused on earthly things. What has become prevalent today is humanitarian missions rather than gospel missions. The improvement of health and livelihood conditions is often regarded as the chief end of man and the top priority among modern churches.

THOUGHT: Is my church of the world or of the Lord?

PRAYER: *“Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help” (Ps 107:11-12).*

TUESDAY, MARCH 21

REVELATION 3:14-22

MARK 10:23-25

*"How hardly shall they that have riches
enter into the kingdom of God!"*

A CHURCH FOR HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL

It was the wealth of the city of Laodicea that greatly affected the church. The assembly was described as "rich and increased with goods." As Paul said, "... *they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*" (1 Tim 6:9). Luxury, satisfaction, pride and plenty were the ruins of the assembly there. When a church grows rich materially and feels no need for anything, it becomes drowsy and complacent. Soon it becomes dead spiritually.

This is also the most popular trend for churches today. The prosperity gospel is increasingly becoming "the gospel" of modern day churches. Most commonly taught in Charismatic churches today is that Christians are to be healthy and wealthy. They claim that God's children should not be materially poor. These doctrines of materialism and consumerism are the main theme of modern sermons in churches. These were prophesied in the message for the church of Laodicea.

In recent years, churches have become mere social and community clubs. Their spiritual complacency has caused them to deny the truth of God's Word. The Lord's Day is no more for worship but for socializing. Praying and fasting are superseded by playing and feasting. Worship is no more God-centered, but man-centered. Modern day worship destroys the sanctity and increases profanity of Lord's Day services. Entertainment-based contemporary Christian worship promotes the lewdness and liberal lifestyle of Christians. It is no more carrying the cross and following Jesus, but accumulating the world's dross and denying Christ. How about your church? Is it teaching a biblical standard or a financial standard in life? If you are in a prosperity gospel church, flee from it and ask God to lead you to another church that is Bible-believing and God-honouring.

THOUGHT: Do I belong to a church teaching the prosperity gospel?

PRAYER: *"They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps 49:6-7).*

THE CERTAINTY OF THE GREAT APOSTASY

Paul instructed the Thessalonians about the end times when he was with them (2 Thess 2:5). He wrote about this subject in his first letter to them (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). Yet, they were still confused and fearful that they might have missed the Rapture and were already in the Great Tribulation. The severity of the persecution they were undergoing contributed to that mistaken belief. They thought they were already left behind and began to lose hope. However, the main reason for their confusion came from some false teachers who taught that Christ had already come.

Paul entreated the Christians in Thessalonica to correct their views about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was specifically pleading to the believers for a correction of their wrong understanding. Paul's specific pastoral burden was to correct the false view among the Thessalonian Christians that the day of the Lord had already begun (2 Thess 2:2). Paul made a strong plea regarding this subject. He did not want the church to become unsettled or alarmed by rumours in forged letters which they might have heard about the Lord's return.

In effect, Paul also taught that apostasy in the church had begun, and indeed is ongoing, but will increase more in scope during the church age and will climax at the time immediately before the Lord's return. Today, the apostasy is snowballing in major denominations of Christendom. Many have turned aside from the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. They are no more believers of the God of the Bible but deceivers of God's people. It is so obvious and so alarming. Surely, the coming of our Lord is imminent. Be ye ready!

THOUGHT: Am I looking forward to Christ's imminent return?

PRAYER: *“With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him”* (Ps 89:21-23).

THE WICKED'S REVELATION AND DESTRUCTION

Paul posed a question to the Thessalonians as to whether they had already forgotten what he taught them when he was ministering to them. Evidently, he had already described those events. He reminded them of how he had explained the restraint that prevented the revelation of the Wicked one. The working of the mystery of lawlessness was under divine restraint even during the days of the Apostles (2 Thess 2:7). It has been extending throughout the Church Age, but there will come a time when there will be the removal of that restraint of the mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:6-7), then the wicked shall be revealed.

When this revelation happens, the Lord shall consume the wicked with the Spirit of His mouth. It has the idea of taking away for destruction. This destruction is described: “*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone*” (Rev 19:20).

This particular Satanically-inspired person will be revealed. He will identify himself as the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour, and deceive many (Matt 24:4-5). This will lead to the great world apostasy. But, apostasy begets judgment. God gives up to uncleanness, to vile affections, and to a reprobate mind those professing believers who stubbornly and repeatedly choose to reject God's truth (Rom 1:24-28). This is God's judicial hardening, blinding or a God-sent delusion upon them (2 Thess 2:11-12). If apostates desire to believe in Satan's lie, and be deceived, God allows them thus to be. The end result will be condemnation (2 Thess 2:12). Those who have not truly received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour will apostatize and be condemned. Have you?

THOUGHT: Is my life free from the wicked's work?

PRAYER: “*To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD*” (Ps 102:21-22).

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

DANIEL 7:20-25

DANIEL 7:8

“... there came up among them another little horn,
...in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man...”

THE ANTICHRIST - THE LITTLE HORN

The Book of Daniel is considered the Book of Revelation in the Old Testament. It is a book of kings and kingdoms including the times of the Gentiles. It describes for us the events prior to the time of Christ's first advent until His second coming.

In Daniel 7:21, the little horn “*made war with the saints, and prevailed against them.*” This event is to take place during the seven years of Great Tribulation. Daniel 7:25 describes the Antichrist that “*he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.*”

He is also described as having a mouth that speaks great things. The language used here is the same as that in Revelation 13:5 where it is described as arrogant claims consisting of the assertion of a divine right. It is assumed power over the liberty, property, and consciences of the people.

To speak great things is to speak blasphemies against God. It involves the demands that men worship him, and he is strengthened by a fallen angel (Satan). He wears down the saints of the Highest One, i.e. the sufferings of Israelite believers during the future time of great tribulation. The alterations in times and in the laws refer to his attempt to extend the “time” allotted to him.

Do not in any way get involved with the affairs of the Antichrist. Do not follow his examples. Do not cooperate with them who support the Antichrist. Flee from them and never return to them.

THOUGHT: Am I an antichrist?

PRAYER: “*The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep*” (Ps 76:5-6).

and the oblation to cease..."

THE ANTICHRIST - A PRINCE AND A KING

In Daniel 9:26, the Antichrist is called “*the prince.*” He is portrayed to “*confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease*” (Dan 9:27). He will make a covenant with Israel for seven years and then in the midst of these seven years, he will place an abomination of desolation inside the sanctuary. He will appear as a man of peace mimicking the Prince of Peace. Yet, he will show his true colours as he breaks his covenant.

Daniel made reference to the eschatological Antichrist as a king. He describes him as the wilful king in Daniel 11:36-38. This denotes the will power of this king to implement what he intends to do. He has the ability to execute without any help from any source or any man. But behind him is the backing of Satan. In other words, he is sovereign and powerful to decide on his own with Satan's empowerment. He will exalt himself, meaning he will raise himself up and lift himself high above all the other gods. This provides a picture of a bird building a nest up on the high rocks and cliffs, where he thinks nobody can meddle with him. This wilful king, the Antichrist, is revealed in the Great Tribulation period.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is so different, He is incomparable! He came down from heaven to be born in a lowly manger; He was raised up in the poor family of Joseph and Mary; He grew up in an insignificant place of Nazareth; He was surrounded by uneducated followers; He went around with nothing on which to rest His head; He was crucified on a criminal's cross, buried in a borrowed tomb, but He rose again from the dead after three days to conquer sin and death! Is He your Saviour? Will you meet Him as your King when He comes?

THOUGHT: Is the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures truly my Saviour?

PRAYER: *"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations"* (Ps 22:27-28).

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 26
DANIEL 11:36-45
DANIEL 7:25

*"... he shall speak great words
against the most High,
and shall wear out the saints..."*

THE ANTICHRIST SHALL MAGNIFY HIMSELF

The Antichrist will make himself big and strong. It speaks of growing in wealth and power. These shall be for the physical well-being and prosperity of the people as well as the increase of things tangible and intangible whether objects, feelings or authority. The king increases himself not only with glory and honour but in material riches as well. The heart of the Antichrist is for health and wealth!

He speaks of extraordinary things that oppose God. They involve wonderful words that are presumptuous and blaspheme God. This refers to a diabolical apocalyptic figure who hatches "incredible schemes" or speaks "incredible blasphemies" against God. He speaks greatly of himself and takes a low view of Christ and His Word. This is the humanistic teaching of most churches today. Preachers elevate man and demote God.

The king seems to have his own power to succeed in what he will be doing, yet Satan is actually enabling him. He will only acknowledge his own discernment and understanding. He focuses on himself as the only wise being and therefore he does not need the perception of others. He just regards himself as the only one who has the intelligence and wisdom to interpret circumstances in life. This rationalistic Christianity is certainly in the churches today.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came exactly in the opposite way. As a hymn aptly tells, "Hail, Thou once despised Jesus! Hail, thou Galilean King! Thou didst suffer to release us; Thou didst free salvation bring. Hail, Thou agonizing Savior, Bearer of our sin and shame! By thy merits we find favour; Life is given through Thy name" (John Bakewell, 1721-1819).

THOUGHT: Is Jesus Christ my Lord and my King?

PRAYER: *"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Ps 34:1-3).*

MONDAY, MARCH 27

REVELATION 13:1-9

REVELATION 13:18

“... him that hath understanding count the
... it is the number of a man...”

THE MAN, ANTICHRIST

The phrase “*the sand of the sea*” is used in the New Testament to allude to an innumerable number of people. This means that the Antichrist is one of the human inhabitants on this earth. He is a man, one who is born of a woman. However, he will be different from all other men, so different that people will be saying, “*Who is like unto the beast?*” (Rev 13:4). In his qualities for kingship, he exhibits the ability to suffer a death stroke that will be healed miraculously, producing wonder in the multitudes on earth and thus eliciting their worship. This is of course a counterfeit miracle. Faith-healing wonders today attune men to believe in his deceitful act. He will seduce everyone to believe that he is resurrected.

He is described as having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns. The idea of seven heads and ten horns speaks symbolically of his reign and rulership. It is also used to describe the dragon in Revelation 12:3. This gives us the idea of a man who has political power reigning over a kingdom or even an empire.

He speaks blasphemous words and utters evil speaking or railing against God. The Antichrist here is described as one who is hostile to God. He presents himself as “the god” undermining the nature and attributes of the living and true God. This suggests that he will identify himself with names that speak evil of God. “*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8). The only antidote to keep you away from worshipping the Antichrist is to believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour.

THOUGHT: Is my name written in the Book of Life?

PRAYER: “*Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*” (Ps 139:16).

TUESDAY, MARCH 28

REVELATION 13:11-18 "... as ye have heard that antichrist shall come,
1 JOHN 2:18 even now are there many antichrists..."

THE ANTICHRIST

Who is the Antichrist? This is probably one of the most controversial and intriguing questions in Christendom. Even the unbelievers are intrigued to know his identity. Is it possible to identify him? The Bible gives good clues as to his general identity. The Lord desires His children to be aware of the Antichrist for the Word of God says, *"If any man have an ear, let him hear"* (Rev 13:9). For Christians, it is considered very important because of his significant role in the last days. Paul mentioned that the day of the Lord will not come until the Antichrist be revealed.

What is the meaning of the word "Antichrist"? The word is transliterated in English as "antichrist." The word "anti" means "instead of, for, in the place of." But when used in compounds it can sometimes mean "against." He is "one who is opposed to Christ, in the sense of usurping the role of Christ." It can also mean one who is a substitute for Christ, or a rival of Christ.

The word "antichrist" is found only in John's epistles and collectively mean all who deny that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Messiah is come in the flesh (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). But the Bible specifically identifies a capital "A" Antichrist. Down through the ages, many people have tried to decipher the distinctiveness of the Antichrist and attempted to predict his infamous identity. Several people were implicated, yet nobody has successfully identified him.

However, the Bible has given us more than enough to escape from being deceived to worship the Antichrist. Possess the mind of Christ by confessing Him as your Lord and believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9) and you will surely be spared the deceptions of the Antichrist!

THOUGHT: Am I spared from being deceived by the Antichrist?

PRAYER: *"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"* (Ps 16:11).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

MATTHEW 24:4-14

2 THESSALONIANS 2:3

*"Let no man deceive you
by any means..."*

SATAN'S LAST INSTRUMENT

The Antichrist is the last and final man who will be used by Satan to deceive the nations to apostatize. He is the last instrument of Satan to lead people away from God; the same way Cain was used at the beginning. The revelation of the Antichrist is the prerequisite for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to take His Church with Him forever. This ushers in the seven-year Great Tribulation.

The Antichrist is Satan's last instrument to attempt to defeat the Lord. Although Satan knows he cannot do anything against the LORD, he is also very much deceived to think he could somehow "unsave" God's elect. He will cause so much deception that even the elect would almost be deceived. He will render many Christians useless for the Lord as many of them will backslide.

That day is nearer than we can ever imagine. Many professing Christians and churches have now capitulated to the one-world ecumenical movement headed by the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the vile and disgusting wickedness of homosexuality is even supported by churches. Many countries are now legislating gay marriages, a rebellion against God.

Because of the heat of the spiritual battle, many believers will distance themselves from the battle and stay apathetic. They are scared to fight against apostasy. They would rather busy themselves with the things of this world, but would soon lose their love for God and His Word. They become useless and fruitless in the Lord's work. There is therefore a need to warn, to rouse the Christians from their slumber. What we need today are militant Christians to fight against apostasy with whole-hearted loyalty to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I militant in the fight against apostasy?

PRAYER: *"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" (Ps 24:7-8).*

THURSDAY, MARCH 30

REVELATION 20:1-10 "... all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem
ZECHARIAH 14:17-18 to worship the King..."

THE LAST AND FINAL REBELLION

The Lord Jesus Christ will rule on this earth for a thousand years. This is preceded by a literal seven-year Great Tribulation, which is the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:27). After the battle of Armageddon at the end of the Great Tribulation, Satan will be bound, the saints will ascend thrones with Christ, and the Millennial Kingdom begins (Rev 20:1-6). The Lord Jesus will sit on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem and rule with a rod of iron.

Throughout the Millennium the nations will come up to Jerusalem to worship. Although the LORD will be King over all the earth, Zechariah 14 describes that there is still disobedience and rebellion on the part of some nations as it is predicted of Egypt. This proves the total depravity of man.

At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be loosed out of his prison. After a substantial period of his kingdom's existence on earth, Satan is able to muster an enormous army, made up of those who apparently resent Christ's authority over human affairs, against the existing government. Satan himself will deceive the nations. He will cause those who have tasted the Lord's goodness in the Millennium to wander.

The final apostasy will be short-lived. Although the Bible does not mention the length of time between Satan's release and the actual rebellion of Gog and Magog, the Scriptures suggest a short period of time only. However, the focus is on how they deceive the nations and how the nations who have enjoyed the physical blessings from the reign of Christ still have the heart to rebel against their Provider. How about you? Are you disobedient to God in spite of what He has given to you?

THOUGHT: Am I rebellious against God in spite of His blessings?

PRAYER: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Ps 23:1-2).*

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

JUDE 1:1-4

2 PETER 1:10

“... brethren, give diligence to make
your calling and election sure...”

ANTIDOTE TO APOSTASY

Jude's original intention was to write to his beloved brethren concerning the common salvation, i.e. the doctrine of salvation. As the context of Jude's letter suggests, there were many who distorted the gospel of salvation, departing from what was proclaimed unto them. The word “*diligence*” is not just for the sake of writing a quick letter, but suggests a serious reason behind the underlying urgency. This shows how Jude was so alarmed by the situation that he was pressed to write the soonest he could.

Nevertheless, his great desire was overshadowed by the greater need to exhort the believers. God moved Jude to write that which was more needful. What he needed to write was an exhortation to the Christians to contend for that whole body of doctrine of the Scriptures, “*the faith*” once delivered unto the saints.

To exhort has an element of pleading with them and an aspect of assurance with clear directives regarding the faith. Jude did not disregard the doctrine of salvation but he now covers the totality of God's revelation which was under heavy attack. He knew that there was more than perversion of the gospel, for the leaven of false teachings had also tried to overthrow the entire Holy Scriptures. He wanted to clarify not only about how a person can be saved, but how Christians should live according to “*all things whatsoever*” God has commanded us to do. To “*earnestly contend*” is to make a strenuous effort on behalf of, or a struggle for the defence of God's Word. In simple words, Jude encouraged them to fight for the faith, i.e. to defend the perfectly inspired and preserved Word of God to the jot and tittle, not only from corruption but also from those who want to replace it as the supreme authority of our faith and practice. The one and only antidote to apostasy is the Word of God. Love it, read it, study it, and obey it!

THOUGHT: Do I love the Word of God?

PRAYER: “*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*” (Ps 119:97).

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