



SUNDAY SCHOOL TEXT BOOK

CLASS

8

Published by

SHARON FELLOWSHIP

SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

SHARON FELLOWSHIP CHURCH
SUNDAY SCHOOL TEXT BOOK
CLASS - 8



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SHARON FELLOWSHIP CHURCH
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SHARON FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

Sharon, Tiruvalla, Kerala, India- 689 101

PREFACE

Sunday school has a great impact in the growth of the church. Because majority of believers accepted Jesus Christ as their personal saviour through Sunday School. Along with believers the servants of the Lord in any generation received their basic bible knowledge through Sunday School. Also it is noteworthy to mention that many of churches were begun through Sunday School.

I am so delighted as the Sunday School activities in Sharon Fellowship churches are striving forward in an active and well-organized method. This is a commendable service as it relates our kids with Lord. Because Sunday School can develop powerful warriors for the expansion of the kingdom of God.

I am so happy as our Sunday School's syllabus is revising by including the contemporary elements to get a quality Christian education for our children. I am so grateful to those who worked hard for including this book of 8th class under our new revised syllabus. I pray that this book may become a great blessing to our kids around the world.

May the God who has revealed Himself be pleased to use this work to lead many into knowledge of Himself.

In Christ,

Tiruvalla
25-11-2017

Rev. John Thomas
(General President)

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INTRODUCTION

Sunday school is doing the great ministry of relating children with Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore there is no wrong in saying that today's Sunday school is tomorrow's church. From this it is clear that the future of church is depending upon Sunday school. It is from this perspective that every church should see Sunday school and encourage its activities.

Sunday School Teaching is neither a trivial task nor simple mission. Rather it is very important like any other service of the Church. It is a mission that God entrusted upon us by considering us as Faithful. Therefore teaching ministry of Sunday school should be done with enough prayer and prayer.

Sunday school studies may enable our children to receive Jesus Christ as their personal saviour. It may also help them to grow in Christ and also to become the witnesses of Gospel where ever they are. This new curriculum of Sunday school is helpful to attain the above mentioned aims. Teachers should study it well and teach students with this aim.

Sharon Sunday School Association decided to revise the old curriculum by including the contemporary elements to get a quality Christian education for our children. As a part of it, this text book of 8th class is reaching in your hands. I pray that its learner may be blessed by this text book

Pastor Abraham Mannamaruthy
*Director, Sharon Fellowship
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STATEMENT

Sunday School is a necessary aspect of the Church. The growth and existence of a church is depended upon the ministries among the youngsters and the kids of it. If our youngsters and kids get good – quality Christian education surely they will become a great asset to our church and the kingdom of God.

Text books had been published from Sharon Bible College-Tiruvalla and Faith Theological Seminary-Manakala for the Sunday school studies of our children. Since all those books were distributed before few years there was a shortage for the textbooks in these years. Therefore there was a constant search for the text books from our Sunday school ministers.

God enabled us to publish the text books from 1 to 10 standard of Sunday school in 1998 through the leadership of Dr. T. P. Abraham (Acting President of S.F.C.). These text books got a very good response from Sunday school students and teachers of our own churches as well as from other denominations. Since the published text books were distributed completely we were able to publish several prints of text books of all classes.

We taught the 11th and 12th Standards of our Sunday School by depending on some other text books. Later in 2003 Sunday School Committee decided to publish the text books of 11th and 12th standards of our own. As a result God enabled us to publish the text book of 11th standard on 2004 and the text book of 12th standard

on 2008. Also in 2013 God enabled us to publish new text book for Nursery kids and text book with activity portion for 1st standard. After realising the rapid changes of the educational sector and of the contemporary generation we are re-publishing this text book with revised curriculum.

Through the syllabus that we published, a Sunday school student will get a good study of the Word of God from its beginning to end. Along with this student will get a basic knowledge about the Bible, Bible Survey, other religions, life of missionaries etc. A student who covers this text book will get a thorough knowledge about the history of Israel, Church history etc.

The author of this text book is **Sister Jessy Koshy.**

English Translation of this book is done by **some volunteers of Gujarat Centre.** We extend our hearty thanks to the precious work behind it timely.

I pray that this text book may become a great blessing to lots of children and to churches. May the name of the Lord be glorified through this text book. May the God who has revealed Himself be pleased to use this work to lead many into knowledge of Himself.

For Sunday School Association

Pastor P.A. Chackochen
(Coordinator, Curriculum Committee)

Brother Roshy Thomas
(General Secretary)

Tiruvalla
25-11-2017

LESSON 1

Israel is led towards Captivity

Reading Portion : 1 Kings 12; 2 Kings 17:1-24

Memory Verse : Amos 9:9, 10

Purpose : To understand the reasons and circumstances that lead to the fall of the Northern kingdom of Israel.

Introduction : David began reigning in Israel according to the plan of God. The period of David's reign was a golden period in Israel's history. His son Solomon who ascended the throne after his death built the temple of Jerusalem which was the glory of Israel. Solomon imposed heavy taxes on his kingdom for building the temple, for other development work and for his own lavish lifestyle. The heavy taxes became unbearable for the people. The Lord said that Solomon's kingdom would be divided into two because he married heathen (strange) women and the consequent idol worship (1 Kings 11:8-12). After the death of Solomon (BC 930), his son Rehoboam went to Shechen to establish his throne. The subjects who were laden with heavy taxes went to the king under the leadership of his servant Jeroboam and requested that he should reduce the burden. The king dismissed their request arrogantly. This enraged the people and the stage was set for division of the kingdom of Israel into two parts.

Historical Background

Under the leadership of Jeroboam, son of the Ephraimite Nebat, ten tribes of the northern region of Israel rejected the kingship of Rehoboam and formed a separate kingdom. The northern kingdom which accepted the leadership of Jeroboam consisted of ten tribes

and was called “Israel” while the southern kingdom of Rehoboam consisting of two tribes was known as “Judah”. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah. In later years Samaria was established as the capital of Israel.

Jeroboam developed Dan (northern side) and Bethel (near the border of Judah) as places of worship of national importance. Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel and encouraged the people to worship them. The Lord was displeased with this. Idol worship and rebellion against the Lord contributed further to the fall of Israel. Though the northern kingdom, Israel flourished economically in the eighth century under the rule of Jeroboam II, their wickedness in religious, social and cultural aspects pushed the kingdom towards instability. Israel did not have a distinct royal lineage like Judah. This instability of administration was the major reasons that led to the fall of Israel. After the death of Jeroboam II (BC 746) the kingdom of Israel lasted only 210 years. During this period it was ruled by 19 kings from nine different royal families (BC 931-722). There was no one in the northern kingdom of Israel who reigned according to the Will of God. Moreover the threat of war from neighbouring kingdom also contributed to the fall of Israel.

Israel and the kings of Syria

Syria was located in Mesopotamia. This was one of the major enemy states of Israel. There were constant wars between Israel and Syria (2 Kings 5-7). We see how the commander of the Syrian army Naaman brought an Israelite girl captive in war, how Ben Hadad the king of Syria planned to attack Israel and how Elisha the prophet was filled with the spirit of God and prophesied about the war strategy of the king (2 King 5:3; 6:12). The prophet Elisha had also prophesied about the decline that was to happen to Syria.

Israel and Assyrian Kings

The Assyrians were the people who ruled in Mesopotamia from BC 1830 to BC 606. Assyria was a small state flanked by the Tigris river valley on the west and Armenia and Kurdistan mountain ranges in the north and east. On its south was the kingdom of Babylon. In its early days Assyria was under the rule of Babylon. Later, Assyria gained independence and strengthened itself but ancient Babylon began to weaken. In the period between BC 885 and BC 607 Assyria was a powerful state in the world. The Assyrians were strong and men of war. (Isaiah 33:19) During the reign of Tiglath Pileser I (BC 1113 to

1074) Assyria reached the height of its glory. It was during the reign of Shalmeneser III (BC 858 to 824) that Israel and Assyria went to war for the first time. Shalmeneser who reigned Assyria for a long time was killed in this war. Many kings including Jehu and the king of Israel had accepted his dominance.

Tiglath Pileser III (BC 744 to 727) who seized power from Shalmeneser IV attacked many small kingdoms and subjugated them in order to enlarge the boundaries of his kingdom. Israel also came under attack from Assyria. Manahem who was then king of Israel had to pay huge presents to Tiglath Pileser III (2 Kings 15:19-20). During the reign of Ahab in Israel, Assyria attacked Tyre and Sidon and exacted tribute from them. Assyria's next attack was against Syria. After Syria was weakened Assyria began to attack the kingdom of Israel. The kings of Israel and Syria formed a coalition to withstand the attacks of Assyria. They threatened Ahaz, King of Judah because he refused to join them. So Ahaz sought the help of Assyria. (2 Kings 16:5-7; Isaiah 7:1-19) In BC 732 Assyria attacked Israel again and Pekah, King of Israel was killed. Hosea became king after him (2 Kings 15:29-30). Assyria also challenged Judah with war. (2 Kings 16:5-6; 2 Chro. 28:17-21) Shalmeneser V was Tiglath Pileser's descendant. Assyria again rose up against Israel because King Hosea stopped the tribute that was being paid to Assyria. Hosea, who was the last king of Israel, withstood Assyria with the help of Egypt. In BC 722 Assyria attacked Israel and captured the city of Samaria. Thus the people of Israel had to go captive to Assyria.

Israel towards Captivity

The Israelite captives who were taken to Assyria were made to live in Helah, Habor and the city of the Medes. These people were never able to return from captivity. Babylonians and Syrians were brought to inhabit Samaria (2 Kings 17:6 ; 8-11). The foreigners who were brought to Israel began to exchange their sons and daughter in marriage with the Israelites remained in Samaria and a new generation was born. These are the people called the Samaritans.

If Israel had obeyed the counsel of God that they received through His servants and prophets and would have returned to God and His laws, they could have escaped captivity in Assyria. Their sin became more grievous because Jerobaom lead them towards idol worship. The people had fallen from their religious and spiritual life and this lead to economic anarchy and inequality. The wealthy oppressed their brothers who lived in poverty. Drunkenness, immorality,

unrighteousness, oppression and crime increased in the land. During this period God gave strict warnings to the people about their sinful ways through His prophets Amos and Hosea. The Israelites rejected the counsel of God and did not return to Him (Amos 7:17; 4:1-5; 5:15; 5:24; Hosea 4:1; 4:11-19; 6:1-6). The Israelites who were God's own people defied his interventions and so God handed them over to their enemies. The people of Israel had to go as captives to Assyria in BC 722. There are no historical records available about what happened to the ten tribes of Israel after BC 722. They are considered as the Lost Tribes.

Practical Lesson

People or nations who do not fear or trust God have no stability. God does not justify sin. Even though Israel was the chosen people of God, they were sent into captivity because they broke the commandments of God and went into idol worship and wickedness. It is a fact that whosoever live according to the counsel of God receive blessings and growth according to His will, while whosoever rejects His counsel will face his judgement.

Questions

1. In whose period was the kingdom of Israel divided?
2. Name the enemy states of Israel.
3. What were the reasons for the decline of Samaria?
4. Who are the Samaritans?

LESSON 2

The Growth of the Kingdom of Judah

Reading Portion : 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles 13 to 23

Memory Verse : 2 Chronicles 16:9

Aim : To learn about the southern kingdom of Judah and its kings. To understand that kingdoms which are rooted in God shall prosper and the kingdoms which do not trust Him will weaken.

Introduction : We have understood the reasons as to why Israel had go into captivity. Though the kingdom of Israel achieved economic prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II, the consequent pride and idolatry in the kingdom led their downfall. The frequent civil unrest, administrative instability and rebellion against God hastened Israel's fall. On the other hand the kingdom of Judah began to settle and gradually developed under the rule of the house of David. Compared to the kings of Israel, the kings of Judah were God fearing and trusted in God. The kingdom flourished because it had at least a few kings who submitted themselves to God's counsel like David did.

The prosperity of kingdom of Judah

During the time of king Uzziah who was the most valiant amongst the kings of Judah, the land grew politically, economically and agriculturally. There was peace and prosperity in the kingdom because there was no threat of war. Judah could not compete with Israel's agricultural prosperities because Israel was blessed with fertile land and good rainfall. Under the rule of Uzziah who had knowledge

in agriculture, Judah began to prosper in agriculture. He also had plenty of livestock.

Uzziah was also very careful about national security. He organized his army and strengthened the kingdom. He repaired the walls of Jerusalem and built fortresses. After the golden period of David and Solomon it was during Uzziah's time that Judah gained economic prosperity. The reason for Uzziah's rise and victories was that he took decisions based on the counsel of God revealed through his advisor Zechariah - the prophet (2 Chro 26:9-15).

The reign of Hezekiah was also a period of growth in Judah's history because he reinstated worship in the kingdom. His reign was blessed by the Lord (2Chro. 30:1-27). The kingdom grew politically, religiously and economically. Hezekiah captured cities that were lying waste and enlarged his kingdom. He withstood the attacks of Assyria and defeated them. He used innovative methods for water conservation and distribution. (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chro 32:30) Hezekiah also had abundance of gold, silver and precious stones. Hezekiah could achieve political and religious victories because he heeded to the advice of prophet Isaiah who revealed God's will to him. As long as Judah was ruled by God fearing kings God gave them prosperity. Whenever they turned away from God and rejected God's counsel the kingdom fell into trouble. Compared to the kings of Israel, the rulers of Judah and its people were obedient to the prophets of the Lord.

Important kings of Judah and their characteristics

1. Rehoboam (BC 922-915)

Rehoboam son of Solomon was the last king of undivided Israel and the first king of the southern kingdom of Judah after division. In his early days he walked in the ways of the Lord but slowly began to worship other Gods. (1 Kings 14:22-24) As a result of this, Shishak the king of Egypt attacked him and plundered his country. He died after 17 years of rule. His son Abiah ascended the throne in his place.

2. Abijah

Abijah was a king who attempted to bring back the ten tribes which had separated after the division of the kingdom and tried to unite Israel. He fought against Jeroboam victoriously and captured regions including Bethel. (2 Chro 13:1-20). He reigned in Judah for 3 years. His son Asa became king after him (2 Chro. 14:1).

3. Asa

In the early days of his reign, king Asa ruled his kingdom in a way that pleased the Lord. The first ten years of his rule were peaceful.

He removed unclean idols and groves of Asherah from the kingdom and repaired the altar of the Lord. (2 Chro 15:8) Asa tried to bring spiritual reformation to Judah. He gathered the people in Jerusalem and offered sacrifices to the Lord. He encouraged the people to live by the law of God. He removed his grandmother Maakah from her position as Queen Mother because she made abominable idols for Asherah. He had a large and well organized army. God enabled him to gain important victories in war. God was displeased that Asa made an alliance with Baasha, king of Israel and Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. When the prophet Hananiah revealed God's counsel against this Asa imprisoned him (2 Chro 16:1-10). Because Asa refused the counsel of God he suffered from a grievous disease in his foot and became bedridden. Asa still did not trust in the Lord for healing but relied on physicians so he was not healed and died. Asa was king in Judah for 41 years.

4. Jehoshaphat

Jehoshaphat continued the work of religious reforms that his father had started but he was not able to destroy the grooves of idol worship (2 Kings 22:43). In the third year of his reign Jehoshaphat sent princes and priests to the cities of Judah to teach people the law of the Lord. He succeeded in this endeavour and people returned to the Lord. When enemies waged war against him, Jehoshaphat declared a fast and completely trusted in the Lord because of which he succeeded. (2 Chr 20:1-30). He established a court in Jerusalem for delivering justice. He began to build ships for international trade but because he allied with Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, the ships broke as told by God and he had to face loss in trade. Jehoshaphat was a king who made important contributions to the growth of Judah.

5. Jehoram - (BC 849-842)

Jehoram was Jehoshaphat's first born son and is counted among the kings who did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Jehoram murdered his brothers in order to establish his own kingship (2 Chro 21:1-5). He married Athaliah the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel. This became a reason for him to turn away from the ways of the Lord. He was afflicted with a serious disease of the bowels and died when his bowels came out of his body. No one grieved on his death (2 Chro. 21:20).

6. Ahaziah (BC 842)

Jehoram's younger son Ahaziah displeased the Lord because he committed wickedness according to the counsel of his mother

Athaliah. He was killed by Israel's commander Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-28). He ruled only for one year.

7. Athaliah - (BC 842 – 837)

She was the only queen to ascend on the throne of Judah. She was the daughter of King Ahab and Jezebel of Israel. When she learnt that her son Ahaziah was killed, she destroyed all the princes and seized power. She reigned for 6 years.

Practical Lessons

The Lord protected the kings and their kingdoms and preserved them from their enemies as long as they obeyed the Lord. On the other hand whenever they displeased the Lord they had to face his wrath. Even in our lives we have protection and growth when we are close to the Lord. We must submit to live with the Lord.

Questions

1. What were the characteristics of Uzziah's reign?
2. Who was the last king of undivided Israel?
3. Write a note on the history of Asa's life.

LESSON 3

The Growth of the Kingdom of Judah - Continued

Reading Portion : 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles 24 to 26

Memory Verse : Deuteronomy 7:9

Purpose : To learn about the kings who ruled Judah and the ones whom the Lord used for his work.

Introduction : In the last lesson we learnt about the growth of the kingdom of Judah. We also studied the life and times of the kings who ruled Judah. We learnt about the kings who stood with the Lord and led the kingdom towards progress and those kings who rebelled against the Lord which led to the decline of the kingdom. In this lesson we will learn about the rest of the kings of Judah.

8. Joash (BC 837 to 800)

Joash was the son of King Ahaziah. When queen Athaliah was murdering the princes, Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba saved Joash from the queen and hid him. When Joash was seven years old, the priest Jehoiada gathered the people together and crowned Joash king and killed Athaliah. (2 Kings 11) During the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest, Joash did what was pleasing to the Lord (2 Chro 24:2). He actively completed the repair work of the house of God. After the death of Jehoiada the priest, idol worship began to increase in the land and Joash began to displease the Lord. He killed the prophets who warned him. He stoned Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest to death because he conveyed the counsel of God to him (2 Chro 24: 20 & 21). He was killed by his own servants. (2 Chro 24:25) His son Amaziah became king in his place.

9. Amaziah (BC 800 to 783) (2 Chro 25, 2 Kings 14)

Amaziah became king when he was 25 years old. He ruled in Judah for twenty nine years. During the early days of his reign, he ruled doing what was pleasing to the Lord. Later his enemies formed an alliance against him and killed him because he rejected the counsel of God. (2 Chro 25: 27 and 28)

10. Uzziah (BC 783 to 742)

The people of Judah made Uzziah king after his father Amaziah was killed. He was sixteen years of age when he became king. He ruled for fifty two years. He was one of the powerful kings of Judah.

11. Jotham (BC 724 to 735)

Jotham began to represent the kingdom and rule it when his father Uzziah became a leper. He was twenty five years old when he became king. During his reign Jotham strengthened his kingdom by building the upper gate of the temple, repairing the gates of the city, and building fortresses. He defeated the Ammonites in war and exacted tribute from them. He became powerful because he walked uprightly before the Lord. Jotham died after sixteen years of ruling Israel. His son Ahaz, became king after him.

12. Ahaz (BC 735 to 715)

Ahaz became king at the age of twenty. He closed the doors of the temple of God and cut to pieces the articles that were in the temple. He built high places to other Gods in every corner of Jerusalem and displeased the Lord, becoming worthy of Lord's wrath. (2Cro 28:25) When Ahaz died he was buried in Jerusalem but not in the tombs of the kings. His son Hezekiah became king after him.

13. Hezekiah (BC 715 to 687)

Hezekiah became king when he was twenty five years old. The time of Hezekiah's rule was the golden period in the history of Judah. In the first month of the first year of his reign he opened the doors of the temple that his father Ahaz had closed and completed the repair work of the temple and reinstated worship. Hezekiah became sick unto death but the Lord heard his prayer and added fifteen years to his life. After the death of Hezekiah his son Manasseh became king.

14. Manasseh

Manasseh took up the reins of the kingdom when he was twelve years of old. Manasseh rebuilt the high places of other Gods that his father Hezekiah had destroyed and displeased the Lord. The time of

Manasseh's rule was a period of religious decline. Manasseh's sins had adverse effects. The Assyrian army came and captured him and took him in chains to Babylon. When he was in trouble, Manasseh humbled himself and called upon the Lord. God heard his prayer and returned him to throne. Manasseh was in chains for almost a year. After his return he cleansed the temple of God and commanded the people of Judah to serve Jehovah. Manasseh was the longest ruling king in Judah. He ruled for fifty five years.

15. Amon (BC 642 – 640)

After the death of Manasseh, his son Amon became king at the age of twenty two. Lord was displeased with him because he served idols. His own servants killed him in his chamber.

16. Josiah (BC 640 to 609)

Amon's son Josiah became king at the age of eight. He began to seek the Lord from his childhood. He cleansed the kingdom by removing the high places and groves of Asherah that his father had built. He found the scrolls of the law of the Lord and gathered the people in the temple and read it out to them. He humbled and decided to obey the laws. He destroyed the altars and high places that Jeroboam had built in Bethel. He reinstated Jehovah's worship and the celebration of the Passover. Josiah died when he was wounded in a battle with Pharaoh Necho in the valley of Megiddo. (2 Chr 35:22 and 23). His son Jehoahaz became king in his place.

17. Jehoahaz (BC 609)

Jehoahaz was twenty three years old when he became king. He ruled only for three months. The king of Egypt Pharaoh Necho deposed Jehoahaz and placed his brother Eliakim on the throne and renamed him Jehoiakim. (2 Chro 36:1-4, Jer 22:10-12)

18. Jehoiakim (BC 609-597)

Jehoiakim who became king at the age of twenty five ruled for eleven years (2 Kings 23:36). He paid tribute to Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. During his reign Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon attacked Judah. He was a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar for three years (2 Kings 24:1). Because he rejected God's counsel given through His prophets and shed innocent blood which displeased the Lord, he lost his battles against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:4, Jer 26:20-23). He killed Urijah the prophet, defied prophet Jeremiah, tore the scrolls of the law of God into pieces and burnt it. After his death his son, Jehoiachin became king.

19. Jehoiachin (BC 598-597)

As soon as Jehoiachin began his reign, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah. The king and the people of Judah were taken as captives.

20. Zedekiah (BC 597 – 587)

Zedekiah who was the brother of Jehoiachin's father was placed on the throne after Jehoiachin. According to the word of God, which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet during Zedekiah's time, the royal lineage of Judah had come to an end.

Practical Lessons

If the people fear God and trust in Him then the nation shall grow and prosper. Let us submit ourselves to build a life founded in the trust of our God.

Questions

1. Write a note about Joash.
2. Whose son was Jotham?
3. At what age did Manasseh become a king?
4. Who burnt the scroll of the law of God?

LESSON 4

Judah towards captivity

- Reading Portion** : 2 Chronicles 33 and 36, Jeremiah 52
Memory Verse : 2 Chronicles 7:14
Purpose : To understand the circumstances that led to the captivity of the kingdom of Judah and to grasp the dangers that befalls on the people of God when they turn away from the Lord's ways.

Introduction : In the last lesson we got a brief idea of the kings who ruled Judah and about Judah's prosperity. The kings of Assyria attacked the kingdom of Israel in BC 721 and took the people to captivity. Similarly the kingdom of Judah was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. During this period they had to go into captivity in three phases. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah and the beautiful temple built by Solomon were completely destroyed in BC 586.

The background of Judah's captivity

Though a few Jewish kings sought the Lord and ruled according to His Counsel, a majority of Jewish kings had no knowledge of the Lord and disobeyed His Counsel. They had to go into captivity when they turned away from the Lord, sinned and leaned their hearts to worship other God's. Let us learn about the major reasons that led to the downfall of Judah.

Worshipping other gods

Of the Ten Commandments that the Lord gave His people - the Israel, the first one was a strict warning against idol worship. When

Israel was under God's command they were a great people and their neighbouring kingdoms feared them. When they rebelled against God's leadership and asked for a king like the other nations of the earth, God granted them their request and gave them a king. David who was called a man according to the heart of God, ruled the kingdom according to God's Will but beginning with the reign of his son Solomon, idol worship entered Israel and as a result the kingdom weakened. Most of the kings who ruled the divided kingdoms of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom) left the ways of the true God and built altars and high places for other gods.

Though the third king of Judah – Asa and his son Jehoshaphat walked in the ways of the Lord and did what was pleasing to him they did not remove the high places from the land. The people worshipped at these high places, offered sacrifices and burnt incense (1 King 22:43). Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat walked in the ways of Ahab and displeased the Lord (2 King 21:6). Ahaz son of Jotham also followed his father and did what was against the Will of God and built up idols of Baal. According to the detestable ways of the heathen, he put his sons through fire and offered sacrifice and incense in high places and under every green tree (2 Chro 28:2-4). Ahaz's son Hezekiah opened the doors of the temple that his father had closed and destroyed the high places and altars and idols that his father built. However Hezekiah's son Manasseh sinned much more than his forefathers and angered the Lord.

The sins of Manasseh (2 Chro. 33)

The period of Manasseh's reign was a time of religious decline. He did not walk in the ways of his father Hezekiah but did what was displeasing to the Lord. He sinned more and more and brought the wrath of God on Judah. Following are the major sins of Manasseh:

1. Rebuilt the high places destroyed by Hezekiah, made altars to the idols of Baal, made high places for Asherah and worshipped all the hosts of heaven.
2. Defiled the temple of God by making altars to other gods in the temple.
3. Practiced sooth saying, witchcraft, sorcery, consulted mediums and spirits and provoked the Lord to anger.
4. Sacrificed his sons to other gods.

Manasseh rejected the prophets sent by the Lord and persecuted them. According to the Jewish records of the Rabbis, it is assumed that Manasseh ordered to kill prophet Isaiah by the sword.

The sins of Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim was the king who committed the most sins after to Manasseh. His sinful acts are mentioned in the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer 22:13-17). They are as follows:

1. He committed unrighteousness and injustice
2. He shed innocent blood
3. Made people work without wages
4. Persecuted the prophets of the Lord
5. Burnt the scrolls of the law of God (Jer 36:22-23 and Jer 27:32)

The rise of the Babylonian empire

Babylon which was established in BC 2000 was one of the major cities of Mesopotamia. Babylon gained independence from Assyria in BC 600 and later became a part of Judah's history. Nebuchadnezzar's reign was a glorious period for the Babylonian empire. It grew economically. Nebuchadnezzar subdued enemy states and enlarged the boundaries of his kingdom. The Assyrian capital Nineveh was defeated in BC 618. In BC 605, Egypt too came under the power of Babylon. In short Babylon grew by ruling over other kingdoms through its military and economic prowess.

Judah towards captivity

The period of Josiah's reign was the time of spiritual reform. It was during Josiah's time that the Assyrian empire began to decline in power. At the same time the Babylonian empire began to rise. Pharaoh Necho was the ruler of Egypt during this time. He set out to expand his kingdom by attacking Assyria while passing through Palestine. King Josiah of Judah waged war with Necho but was killed. Josiah's son Jehoiahaz became king in his place. After three months of rule Necho deposed Jehoahaz and made his brother Jehoiakim as king over Judah. During Jehoakim's rule the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah and took some people as captives. Daniel and his friends were a part of this group of captives. During the reign of Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again and took the king and people captive to Babylon. Prophet Ezekiel was a part of this group (Ezek 1:1). All the silver and gold of the Jerusalem temple was plundered. Thus Judah was subdued by Babylon in BC 598. However a small remnant was allowed to live in Jerusalem. Zedekiah, the brother of Jehoiachin's father was made king over Judah.

Egypt began to rise again during the time of Zedekiah. Judah allied with Egypt and prepared for war against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again in BC 587. The city and temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. Zedekiah was bound and taken to Babylon. They pierced and took out his eyes and he died in the prison. Thus Judah also went into Babylonian captivity. The few people who were left in Judah went to Egypt and proclaimed the word of God among the captives. Jeremiah the prophet was among this group. Israel, the Northern Kingdom was completely destroyed in BC 721 while Judah, the Southern Kingdom was destroyed in BC 587.

Practical Lessons

Idolatry is a sin that the Lord does not forgive. Israel and Judah had to go into captivity because they rejected the Lord. People and kingdoms that leave the ways of God will be destroyed but all those who obey the Lord and submit to His Will shall flourish.

Questions

1. What are the reasons of Judah's fall?
2. What are the major sins of Manasseh?
3. Explain the fall and captivity of Jerusalem?
4. During which king's reign was Judah completely weakened?

LESSON 5

Babylonian Captivity

Reading Portion : 2 Kings 25:22-30, Jeremiah 38 & 40, Isaiah 40 & 41

Memory Verse : Isaiah 40: 1, 2

Purpose : To understand the lifestyle of the Jews who were in the Babylonian captivity and to study how they stood for the Lord.

Introduction : Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in BC 586 and inhabitants of Judah were taken captive to Babylon. The experience of captivity in Babylon was a milestone in the history of the people of Israel. The people of Israel whom the Lord had chosen as his own people had to go into captivity because they rejected the Lord and his laws and worshipped other Gods. They were in Babylonian captivity for seventy years. (BC 606 to 536)

The city of Babylon

The city of Babylon was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was one of the most important cities of Mesopotamia. It was situated on the banks of the river Euphrates which is near the present day Baghdad. The name Babylon (Babel) comes from the Akkadian word "Bab-ilu" which means the doors of God. (Akkadian was the language of ancient Mesopotamia). This city which was well known for its military power and trade was the capital of the Babylonian empire. Babylon reached the peak of its glory during the reign of Emperor Nebuchadnezzar. During the forty five years of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar was engaged in building palaces, the city of Babylon, and temples. The city of Babylon was fifteen square miles, had walls

which were three hundred feet high, thirty five feet deep and eighty feet wide.

The Jews and Babylon

When Nebuchadnezzar attacked the kingdom of Judah in BC 586 he took all its soldiers, strongmen, and noble men as captives into Babylon. It is recorded that the number of people whom Nebuchadnezzar took captive was four thousand six hundred (2 Kings 24:12-16; Jer 52:28-30). Their captivity in Babylon became a reason for a complete transformation in the people of Judah. Even in captivity they lived as a separate community and followed their national and religious traditions. They were keen in following the laws, observing Sabbath, circumcision and avoiding food offered to idols. The system of building synagogues in every town began while the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. We can see from Psalms describing the emotions of these captive Jews (Psalms 137).

The conditions of the Jews who had to live as captives in Babylon were pitiable. In order to maintain their faith in one true God they had to undergo communal persecution. The experience that Daniel and his friends had to undergo is the example of such harsh trials (Dan 3 & 6). People who were taken captive from families of priests, kings and noble men had to bear the reproach (Isaiah 43:28). At the same time the Jews also got opportunities to take up important responsibilities of the kingdom (Daniel 4:28) and to become faithful servants of the King (Neh 1:11). In spite of being in captivity the Jews flourished economically and grew as a race (Jer 29:5 & 6). They preserved their traditions even in captivity. In BC 539 Babylon was attacked and captured by the Persians. Thus the Babylonian captivity of Israel came to an end as the Lord had revealed through prophet Jeremiah.

Prophets in the period of Captivity

There were prophets anointed by the Lord who tried to bring the captive Jews back to the Lord and to fill them with hope. Ezekiel and Daniel were two important prophets among them. Daniel reached Babylon nine years before Ezekiel reached as a captive. Daniel became famous in Babylon (Ezek. 14:14 & 20; 28:3). Daniel served in the palace while Ezekiel ministered to the captive masses. Ezekiel prophesied to the people about the counsel of God in order to make them repent and return to the Lord. The prophet reminded them that they had to live in captivity because of idol worship and leaving the ways of God and due to their wicked lives. The fall of Jerusalem, the

judgement of neighbouring kingdoms, the restoration of Israel due to which “they will know that I am God” are exhortations that are reiterated in Ezekiel’s prophecy (Ezek. 6-39). Ezekiel held a respectable position and consideration among the captives (Ezek. 8:1, 11:25, 14:1, 20:1). The prophet was very careful about the blessing and growth of the people of Judah. His prophecies encouraged the captives. Jeremiah was an important prophet who lived and ministered among the remnant who lived in Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar attack of BC 598. When king Zedekiah of Judah allied with Egypt and tried to attack Babylon, Jeremiah revealed the counsel of God against him. Jeremiah counselled the people to go against Babylon without relying on Egypt but they did not obey him so they had to go into captivity.

During his ministry of forty years Jeremiah gave hundred and sixty four warnings about Babylonian captivity through his prophecies. However, the people refused to return to the Lord or heed to his warnings, yet the prophet ministered among them with weeping. Jeremiah had also prophesied that Israel would return from captivity after seventy years and that Babylon would be completely destroyed (Jeremiah 23:5-8; 25:1-4, 11&12; 29:10; 39:11 & 12; Chapters 50 and 51).

Daniel was a prophet who confessed the sins of the people who were in captivity and prayed with fasting and repentance. Daniel was in captivity in the beginning of his youth. His ministry is spread over seventy years and was during the rule of five kings including Nebuchadnezzar, the Median king Darius and the Persian king Cyrus. Daniel was from a royal family and held high positions in Babylon. His prophesy mainly contained God’s future plans about the Israelites. He said to the captives that the Lord reigns over all the authorities of the world and He gives the authority to rule to those whom He pleases. Daniel stirred them up by giving them the important message about the appearance of Messiah and restoration of the Israel. Moreover, when he came to know about the prophecy of Prophet Jeremiah that there is deliverance to Jews, he interceded with prayers and fasting for the fulfilment of the prophecy and deliverance. Daniel who was greeted as ‘a man greatly beloved’ got the divine vision and it’s interpretation about the future plans of the world.

In brief, the Lord, due to His unending love and mercy for the Jews, sent his prophets amongst the captives and gave them the divine messages from time to time so that they become conscious of their

sins and repent. These messages were source of comfort and hope for them. Through the prophets He encouraged the captives by giving them inspiring and comfortable message that His Mighty presence is existing even in the midst of captivity; that God still loves them and that they will be redeemed from their captivity and brought back to their own country.

Practical Lessons

Israel and Judah had to go into captivity because they rejected the Lord. In spite of this, the Lord, due to His love and mercy, sent His prophets to restore the people. Let us submit before the Lord who accepts the relented and repented ones.

Questions

1. Describe the city of Babylon city.
2. Give a brief note about the life style of the Israelites who were in captivity.
3. Who were the prophets during the captivity of Jews? How did their ministry benefit the captives?

LESSON 6

The Babylonian Empire

Reading Portion : Genesis 11: 1 – 9; Daniel chapters 1 – 6

Memory Verse : Rev 21: 2, 3

Purpose : To understand the Babylonian empire, one of the first and most glorious among world empires. To grasp the supremacy of the Almighty God who reigns over all the empires of the world.

Introduction : Babylon was an ancient empire which was well known throughout history. It is a name that is found throughout the Bible from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelations. An empire and a culture developed around this city called Babylon. Beginning with the book of Genesis, Babylon can be seen as a city that stood against the Will of God. In the book of Revelations, it is portrayed as the habitation of Satan and as a city which rebelled against Jerusalem, the city of God.

Ancient Babylon

Babel was the first manmade city after the flood during Noah's time. The Bible mentions that it was built by Nimrod (Genesis 10: 10; 11: 1-15). According to Babylonian religious legends, god Marduk is the founder of this city. Marduk was a major god worshipped by the Babylonian people.

Babel was a city built by a group of people who gathered in the plains of Shinar under Nimrod's leadership. The city was built and raised up against the plan of God. Shinar region is situated on the banks of the river Euphrates which is to the south of modern day Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. This plain began to be called "Babel" because it was here that God confounded the language of the people who grouped together against His will. The word 'babel' means 'confusion' or 'discord'. Ancient Babylon is the city established by Nimrod.

History has found that humans began to live in communities and engaged in agriculture for the first time in Mesopotamia. In other words, it has been estimated that the Mesopotamian or Babylonian culture is one of the most ancient in the history of human culture. It was also the birthplace of man-made religions and idol worship.

After Nimrod, the period of King Hammurabi was the golden period in Babel's history. It was during this period that 'cuneiform', an early form of writing, was developed. Clay tablets, believed to have belonged to Hammurabi, with cuneiform writings containing laws, codes and religious rules have been found. Hammurabi and his descendants strengthened the city. This dynasty which was established in B.C. 1900 was attacked and subdued by the Assyrian army in B.C. 1600. Assyria ruled the kingdoms of the world until B.C. 612.

New Babylon

In B.C 612, the Chaldeans from the Semitic race attacked Assyria with Nabopolassar as their leader. With the help of the Medes, they established their empire with Babylon as its capital. Nabopolassar took over the reins as the first king of this empire. His elder son Nebuchadnezzar became the ruler after his death. The Babylonian empire flourished in all aspects during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

The Babylonian Empire

Nebuchadnezzar was able to build up Babylon as one of the most glorious kingdoms of the world. Babylon reached great heights economically and culturally. The city of Babylon, which was the capital of the Babylonian Empire was beautified with Huge walls, wide highways and canals and golden temples by King Nebuchadnezzar. In short, Babylon was known as a golden city because of its elaborate temples made of gold, palaces adorned with sculptures and its great highways. Nebuchadnezzar, who was a warmonger, subdued other kingdoms and expanded the boundaries

of his empire. He attacked and conquered Jerusalem three times, in B.C. 606, 597 and 586, and took its king, nobles, members of the royal family and its inhabitants as captives. The temple of Jerusalem was burnt with fire. Its treasures were broken open and the wealth and holy vessels of silver and gold were stolen.

Nebuchadnezzar died in B.C. 561. The Babylonian empire survived for about 25 years after his death. Evil-Merodach (B.C 561 – 560), Neriglissar (B.C 559–556), Labash-Marduk (B.C 556), Nabonidus (B.C. 555 – 538) and Belshazzar were kings who ruled after Nebuchadnezzar. After this, The Median Empire rose in power. Babylon ruled over the nations of the world for almost 70 years.

Nebuchadnezzar

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, he dreamt while he slept thinking about the future affairs of his kingdom. It was a dream given to him by God to reveal God's plans about the future (Daniel Ch. 2). In his dream, the King saw a great statue which had a head of pure gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet made of a mixture of iron and clay. Then, a stone, untouched by hand, came out of the mountains and smashed the statue. Nebuchadnezzar became restless after seeing the dream and forgot what he had seen. Daniel revealed the forgotten dream and its meaning to the King.

Although the Lord had revealed His power and glory to Nebuchadnezzar, his heart was filled with pride. So he became mad, left his palace and lived in the forest like an animal. After the designated time, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and looked up to heaven. He received his senses back and was reinstated on his throne. He sent out a decree that all the inhabitants of Babylon should fear the Lord who was King of Kings and worship Him.

Belshazzar

Belshazzar's father Nabodinus was emperor of Babylon but he lived a careless and luxurious life outside the city of Babylon. Therefore, Belshazzar ruled the kingdom instead of him. He ruled between BC 556 – BC 536. After Nabodinus' death in 536, Belshazzar ascended the throne as emperor of Babylon. King Belshazzar, who was proud of Babylon's glory, threw a grand feast for his nobles. The king, his princes, wives and concubines drank wine from the gold and silver vessels brought from the Temple of Jerusalem, became merry and worshipped other gods. At that very moment, a hand

appeared and wrote some words on the walls of the palace. The great emperor trembled with fear. None of the wise men of Babylon were able to read the writing or reveal its meaning. Daniel, who was renowned to be filled with the Spirit of God, was brought to the palace. Daniel read the writing “Mene, mene, tekel , upharsin” and revealed its meaning (Daniel 5: 26, 27). “God has measured your kingdom and brought an end to it. He has weighed you in the balance and found you wanting. Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians”. This was the meaning of the writing. According to the meaning which Daniel had revealed, the Medo-Persian army attacked Babylon the very same night and Belshazzar was killed. With this, the Babylonian empire was wiped out from history and the Medo-Persian Empire came into existence.

Practical Lessons

Everyone, however great he is, will fall before God’s judgement. We understand from this chapter that God exalts those who submit to His authority and brings down the proud.

Questions

1. Who was the founder of Ancient Babylon?
2. Who founded the new Babylonian empire?
3. What were the major events through which Nebuchadnezzar recognized the power of the Almighty God?

LESSON 7

The Medo-Persian Empire

Reading Portion : Genesis 10: 2; Daniel chapters 2, 5, 6, 7

Memory Verse : Dan 6: 28

Purpose : To understand that it is the creator God who appoints and controls the powers and authorities of the world and that from time to time God gives power to whomsoever He pleases.

Introduction : We learnt about the Babylonian empire. The Medo-Persian Empire rose to power after the fall of Babylon. Though it was not as powerful as the Babylonian empire, The Medo-Persian Empire was able to influence the history of the world. The Medes were a people who lived in the hilly terrains of Media in Iran. They are considered to be descendants of Madai, son of Noah's son Japheth. The Babylonian empire, which reigned over the world, became prey to the wrath of God because of its sin, pride and abominations and was absolutely destroyed. The Medes subdued the Babylonian empire under the leadership of their king Cyrus and seized power.

Background

Media was an ancient land that lay to the south of the Caspian sea, north of Elam, east of the Zagros Mountains and to the west of Parthia. They were well known for horses. It got a place in history in the 9th century BC. In B.C 836, the Assyrian king Shalmanesar III attacked the Medes. The Medes had to pay tribute to him. Though they came under several attacks, the Medes eventually gained power and destroyed the Assyrian capital Nineveh in B.C.612. Thus, the

Assyrian empire was completely destroyed. With this the relationship between Media and Babylon became stronger. During the reign of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar (B.C 605 – 562), Media also reached the heights of its glory.

Persia was a south-west Asian kingdom situated to the south-east of Media and north-east of the Persian Gulf. In 1935, it was officially named as Iran. Its early inhabitants were a group of Aryans who migrated from central Asia, about 2000 years before Christ. Out of the two groups that came, one came to be known as Persians and the other as Medes. The Medes grew towards the North-west and the Persians towards the south. Their land came to be known as Parsamash. They called it Parsamash in memory of their legendary birthplace, Parsua. The territory of the Persians grew to the east of Anshan and to the north the Persian gulf. This is the land that came to be known as Parsa, or Persia.

Medo-Persian Empire

The silver chest and hands of the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Daniel 2: 30) depicts the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medo-Persians reigned for over a hundred years between B.C. 538-330. As silver is less valuable than gold, the Medo-Persian empire was less glorious than Babylon. However, in territory and period of reign, the Medo-Persians were ahead of the Babylonians. Like the two hands are close to the chest, the Medes and Persians jointly ruled this empire. Gold symbolizes kingship while silver shows nobility. In the Medo-Persian administration, nobles had an important position (Daniel 6:4,14, 15). When Babylon was subdued in B.C. 536, Cyrus was the Persian King while his father-in-law Darius was the Median king. As Cyrus was engaged in the military affairs of the kingdom, he appointed the Medes king Darius as governor in Babylon. After two years of rule, Cyrus' father Cambyses I died and Cyrus took over the reins of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

Darius was the first king of the Medo-Persian Empire. In this empire, Persian kings were more powerful than Median ones. After Darius, the Persian Cyrus became emperor.

Darius

Darius, the first ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire, began to reign in B.C. 538. After Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, the 62 year old Darius became king. When Cyrus, the Persian conquered Babylon in B.C. 539, Darius was the king of Medes. As Cyrus had to

pay full attention to military affairs, he appointed his father-in-law, the Median king Darius, as governor of Babylon. In later years, the affairs of the Medo-Persian Empire came under the rule of Cyrus. Daniel was one of the important officers of the empire during Darius' time. It was during the time of Darius that God miraculously delivered Daniel from the den of lions.

Cyrus

Cyrus' era was a golden period in the history of the Medo-Persian Empire. This was also a very important time in the history of Israel. It was Cyrus who gave commands to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. He gave permission to the willing Jews to travel to Jerusalem and build it and commanded his people to send offerings for rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1:1-6).

Almost fifty thousand captives were set free and went to Jerusalem for building the temple. The holy instruments taken from the temple of Jerusalem were returned. The temple and walls of Jerusalem were built under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. The Persian king Cyrus was pre-ordained by God for the deliverance of the Israelites and for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah had prophesied about the deliverance of Jerusalem that was to take place through Cyrus, even before Cyrus was born. As far as the people of Judah were concerned, Cyrus' reign marked the end of their dark and terrible captivity. The Medo-Persian Empire stretched until the Indus river valley. It had 127 provinces. The Medo-Persian period was a time when the Israelites received many favours from the kings. While other kings attempted to attack and destroy Judah, the Medo-Persian emperors permitted the Israelites to return to their land and build their temple.

Cyrus' descendants (Ahasuerus, Darius II) also favoured the Jews and gave them opportunities and security to preserve their separation and continue worship. It is considered that Darius II was the son of Esther. It was during this period that permission was given to build the temple according to Cyrus' commands (Ezra 6).

Darius III, the last king of the Medo-Persian Empire, was a powerful King and statesman. He was defeated by Alexander the Great in Syria in B.C. 331 and the curtains fell on the Medo-Persian dynasty.

Practical Lessons

The future of the nations of the world is determined by the Almighty God. He makes kings to rule according to His will and also

removes them from their thrones. The invisible workings of the hands of God are visible throughout world history. Let us worship God and recognize that God is King over the kings of the earth and works in the heart of kings to do good to His people.

Questions

1. How was the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire?
2. Cyrus' reign was a golden period in the history of the Medo-Persian Empire. Explain.
3. What was the problem faced by Daniel during Darius' period?

LESSON 8

The Greek Empire

Reading Portion : Daniel 2, 7, 8

Memory Verse : Psalm 39: 5

Purpose : To understand that it is the Almighty God who controls world history and that all powers of the earth are under His authority.

Introduction : After the Medo-Persian Empire, The Greek Empire came to power under the kingship of Alexander the Great. In the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, the silver chest and hands symbolize the Medo-Persian Empire while its bronze thighs and belly symbolize the Greek Empire.

Though the Greeks have a very ancient history, they had direct contact with the Jews only in the period after Babylonian captivity. Before this period, the Greeks did not have a powerful kingdom or any centralized administration. Therefore, they never sought to rule over neighbouring nations. Greece consisted of several city-states. Every city governed itself as independent states. Although these states had conflicts with each other, none of them subdued the other or ruled over one another. In B.C. 338, King Philip II of Macedonia, which lay to the north of Greece, attacked these states and merged them with his kingdom. This is how the Greek Empire was born.

The Birth of the Greek Empire

The Greek empire was born under the kingship of Macedonian king Philip II towards the end of the 4th century B.C. The historical

name of Greece is Hellas. The Turks called this land Yunanistan. It is known as Yavanan in Arabic and Yavanaya in Sanskrit.

Alexander, the son of King Philip, was a brave warrior since childhood. He was educated as a disciple of the great Aristotle. As commander of the Macedonian army, the warmonger Alexander brought together and consolidated the scattered city-states of Greece. After the death of his father Philip, he took up the reign of Macedonia at the age of 20. As a continuation of the conflicts between Greeks and Persians, Alexander captured several territories of the Persian Empire. In a battle with the Persian king Codomannus's army, Alexander defeated them effortlessly in B.C 334. In B.C. 331, Alexander waged war with the Persian emperor Darius III and completely destroyed the Persians. Darius was killed by his own army. Alexander blew the horn of victory and captured Shushan, the capital of the Persian empire along with Babylon, Persepolis and other cities. Thus, the Greek empire expanded under the rule of Alexander.

The Growth of the Greek Empire

Alexander, who aspired to be emperor of the world, began to attack neighbouring states and expanded the boundaries of his kingdom. Being a warrior and statesman, he was eager to capture the nations towards the east and the west. In B.C. 326, he had captured territories up to the western banks of the river Sindhu (Indus). In the eight years between B.C. 334-326, Alexander completely wiped out the Persian Empire and established his own Empire.

Alexander laid siege to the cities of Gaza and Tyre, which lay to the north of Palestine, for over nine months to subdue them. He conquered Syria and Egypt effortlessly. On one occasion, Alexander arrived with his army to attack Palestine. However, a high priest named Jaddua met him and read to him about the prophecies concerning Greece and its rulers as it was recorded in the prophecies of Daniel. It is believed that Alexander, who was impressed by this, returned without attacking Palestine.

When Alexander conquered Persia, Judah which was under Persian rule, passed on to Alexander's realm. However, he did not destroy the temple of Jerusalem and protected it and allowed the Jews to practice their religion. Alexander could not fulfil his dream of conquering all the nations to become the emperor of the world. He died of a prolonged fever at the age of 32 years in BC 323.

The Greek Empire after Alexander

After Alexander, four commanders of his army became rulers of the regions that came under their armies.

1. Cassander – Greece, Macedonia
2. Lysimachus – Asia Minor
3. Seleucius – Syria, Babylon
4. Ptolemy – Egypt, Palestine

As a result of the conflicts between these four rulers, Seleucius, ruler of Babylon gained victory over the other three in B.C. 281. However, Seleucius was killed the same year. Palestine, which lay between Syria and Egypt, was first annexed with Syria and then with Egypt for administration. Between the years B C 301- 198, Syria was under the rule of Ptolemy. Ptolemy initially favoured the Jews. During this period, the Jews settled down in Egypt and built synagogues and worshipped there. Alexandria was an important city under the dominance of the Jews. The Old Testament was translated into Greek for the first time in Alexandria (Septuagint translation). In short, Ptolemy allowed the Jews to follow their own religious traditions.

Palestine again came under the Syrian authority. In BC 198, during the time of Antiochus the great, Syrian rulers were known as Seleucids. The Greek Empire existed until the beginning of the 2nd century B.C.

Alexander the Great, who was disciple of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, desired to spread Greek culture all over the world. Alexander's descendants continued this policy. Alexandria, which was a city built by Alexander in Egypt, later became a centre of Greek culture and science. The Greek culture gave birth to world renowned philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The concept of democracy is also an invaluable contribution of Greek culture. It can also be rightly called the first Western Empire of the world. The Greek Empire which attained glorious heights in the areas of science and culture declined because of the constant conflicts between its rulers and gave way to the birth of the fourth world power, the Roman Empire.

Practical Lessons

God is the controller of world nations. He controls the events that take place in world history. It is the same God that controls our lives. We must humbly submit ourselves in the hands of this Almighty God to fulfil his complete Will in our lives.

Questions

1. Who is the founder of the Greek empire?
2. Explain the beginning and development of the Greek Empire.
3. What are the circumstances that led to the decline of the Greek Empire?
4. What are the benefits that Jews gained during Greek rule?

LESSON 9

The Roman Empire

Reading Portion : Daniel 2, 7, 8

Memory Verse : Daniel 2: 44

Purpose : To understand the history of the Roman Empire and to learn how the Lord had been preparing the nations of the world for the birth of His Son Jesus into the world.

Introduction : The Roman Empire rose into power after the decline of the Greek Empire. It was a crucial period in the history of Christianity. Significant events like the birth and death of Jesus Christ - the Saviour of the World, His resurrection, the birth of the early Church, its development, and its persecution took place during this period.

Background

Rome was a renowned city state by BC 300. City states were under self governance in Italy during this period. After a long period of conflict, these cities joined together and formed a new state. The city of Rome was the capital of this state and the state itself came to be known as Rome. The nobles and wealthy representatives from several cities in Italy gathered together in Rome and governed this state. This group of representatives was known as the "Senate". Later, the leader of the Senate came to be the ruler of the nation state. This ruler was known by the title of "Caesar". When Rome grew and became an Empire, the Senate and Caesar continued to be its rulers.

The Roman Empire was divided into several provinces. Each province had its own Governor. There were also Governor-Generals over these Governors. The Roman army camped in every province.

Roman Empire: Beginning and Growth

Rome was a city founded by an Italian namely Romulus in B.C 785 on the banks of the river Tiber. In later times, this city subdued neighbouring territories and became an empire. Roman Empire gained supremacy in the world in B.C. 63. Rome's power increased gradually and the whole of Italy came under Rome's power. In B.C 275, the Greek colonies on the Aeolian coast came under Rome's power. As result of several battles (B.C. 264- 146), the regions of Sicily, Sardinia, and the territories that came under Carthage, Macedonia came under the Roman Empire. Pompeii, who ruled between B.C. 86-48, brought the provinces of Pontus, Syria, Sicily under Roman territory between B.C 64 – 63. In B.C 63. Palestine was also attacked and captured. The period between B.C. 63-31 was a period of civil revolt in Rome in which Julius Caesar, Pompeii and Crassus were competing in the race to grab power. Pompeii was killed in B.C 48 and Julius Caesar came to power. Julius Caesar established his own dictatorial rule. Because of his dictatorial tendencies he was murdered by the Senate. His nephew Octavian became the Roman Emperor under the title of Augustus Caesar. The word 'Caesar' means 'emperor' while 'Augustus' means 'worshipped'.

Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus Caesar (B.C 31 – A.D 14). John the Baptist and Jesus Christ ministered during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (A.D 14 – 37). After this Caligula (AD37 - 41) and Claudius (AD 41 – 54) became the emperors of the Roman Empire. Paul's missionary journeys took place during Claudius' time. Rome was burned during the reign of Emperor Nero (AD 54 – 68). Christians were persecuted mercilessly during this period. Paul was martyred during Nero's reign. In the race for power after Nero's death, Vespasian (69- 79) became king. It was during this period that there was a revolution in Jerusalem and it was completely destroyed (AD 70). After Vespasian, Titus (79-81) and Domitian (81-96) came to the throne as emperors after Vespasian. Nerva (96-98), Trajan (98 -117), Hadrian (117 – 138), Antoninus Pius (138-161), Marcus Aurelius (161 – 180), Commodus (180-192), Septimus Severus (193-211), Caracalla (211-217), Elagabalus (218 – 222), Severus Alexander (222 – 235), Maximian (235 – 238), Decius (241 – 251), Aurelian (270 – 275), Diocletian (284 – 305) were some of the important ones among the emperors of Rome.

The Roman Empire lasted for about 500 years. This Empire which was established in B.C. 30, was divided into Western Rome and Eastern Rome in AD 364. France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Great Britain were a part of western Rome while Greece, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Bulgaria were a part of Eastern Rome.

The Roman Empire and the Christian Church

The role played by the Roman Empire in the growth of the Christian Church is not minor. The peaceful conditions under the Roman rule, means of transportation and communication were beneficial to the spreading of the Gospel. The laws of the Roman Empire, civil liberties, languages and cultures were pre-planned by God for the transmission of the Gospel. The spread of Latin in Western Europe was one of the contributions of Rome. Many European languages are related to Latin. The inscription on the cross of Jesus was in the Hebrew, Greek and Roman languages. The Greek language also grew and spread under the Roman Empire helping the cause of spreading the Gospel. Christian doctrines and scriptures grew through both the Greek and Latin languages. In later writings, the writings of Tertullian and St. Augustine have paramount importance.

The administrative laws of the Roman Empire and its civil liberties (rights of citizens) were helpful in the propagation of the gospel to a great extent. We understand from the Acts of the Apostles how these rights helped Paul during his missionary work (Acts 22:25; 23: 35; 24:10; 25:16).

On the other hand, the persecution unleashed on Christian community by Roman emperors is indescribable. The Caesars tried their best to wipe off the Church from the face of the earth. They persecuted and killed many Apostles of Christ Jesus and other members of Christian groups. Church history records ten horrific persecutions unleashed by the Roman Emperors on Christians. Christianity was officially accepted during the reign of Emperor Constantine (AD 313). Even amidst cruel persecution, the Christian Church flourished and also spread to all corners of the world. In the dream seen by Nebuchadnezzar, the thighs were iron while the feet were a mixture of iron and clay. This symbolizes the world order that exists today – a mixture of monarchy and democracy. Though the literal Roman Empire declined, the democracies which came into existence in later ages show shadows of the Roman Empire. Like the stone untouched by hand which destroyed the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and turned into a mountain, unstable

governments like the Roman Empire will exist in the world until Jesus Christ comes to establish his immovable kingdom.

Practical Lessons

The empires and dynasties of the world are unstable. However, because the Church of God was established on earth by God Himself, worldly empires cannot destroy the Church. God is Almighty to help His Church grow in any adverse circumstance. Let us prepare with hope for the kingdom of God which has firm foundations.

Questions

1. Explain the beginning and growth of the Roman Empire.
2. Who was emperor of Rome during the birth of Jesus?
3. What were the contributions of the Roman Empire in the growth of the Christian church?
4. What was the reason for naming the city as Rome?

LESSON 10

Heroes of Faith during Captivity

Reading Portion : Daniel 1 - 7

Memory Verse : Daniel 1:8

Purpose : To understand how the Israelite youths who were in Babylonian captivity stood for the true faith even in adverse circumstances and stood for the laws of God, not valuing their own lives and to see how God works for such people.

Introduction : Babylonian captivity was a terrible period in the life of Jews. The Israelites had to spend 70 years between B.C. 606-536 in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took the Israelites into captivity in three phases - in B.C. 606, B.C. 598 and B.C. 587. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (B.C. 609 – 598) and took some people captive (Daniel 1:1). Daniel and his friends were a part of this group.

Background

Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, attacked and captured Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah before he ascended the throne. During the same period, Nabopolassar died and Nebuchadnezzar became king. Jehoiakim, the members of the royal family and the nobles of Judah were taken as captives to Babylon according to Nebuchadnezzar's orders. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were wise young men who were a part of this group.

Daniel

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were the prominent among the captives who were brought to Babylon. History shows that they were relatives of Zedekiah, king of Judah. The king gave orders to the prince of eunuchs Ashpenaz to select children from the Jewish royal family, noblemen without blemish, but well favoured, skilful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge and were worthy to serve in the palace and give them special training for three years and send them to the palace to work for the king (Daniel 1:4). Daniel and his friends were selected as a part of this group. These young men had to face situations unfavourable to their faith and worship of the one true God. Though they were given royal food and wine offered to idols, Daniel and his friends purposed in their heart that they would not defile themselves with these things (Dan 1:8). The king changed their Hebrew names which proclaimed the living God and gave them new names which praised Chaldean gods. Daniel, whose name meant "God is my judge" was changed to Belteshazzar which means "the god Bel saves". After their training was completed, the King saw that Daniel and his friends were much wiser than all the magicians and sorcerers of his nation. They were given high positions in the kingdom (1:20, 2:48, 49).

Daniel was a prayer warrior (2:18, 6:10, 13; 10:2). Even amidst the responsibilities of his position, Daniel maintained a disciplined prayer life. Though there were many oppositions against his prayer life, Daniel overcame all of them through prayer. During Darius' time a decree was passed by the king that no one should worship anyone but the King for 30 days and that anyone who breaks the order would be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel continued praying to God and was thrown to the lions, but God miraculously saved him (Ch.6). Daniel had to risk his own life and have unshaken faith in order to survive in Babylon, the centre of idol worship. His faith and prayer became a reason for an entire kingdom to see the glory of God.

God gave Daniel the gift of interpreting dreams. Daniel interpreted dreams dreamt by Nebuchadnezzar and the writing on the wall seen by Belshazzar. Daniel was renowned for his interpretation of dreams and Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over all magicians, sorcerers, astrologers and Chaldeans in the land (5:12). Daniel faithfully served in high positions such as Prime Minister, Counsellor, ruler over princes of the land during the time of Medo-Persian kings like Cyrus and Darius. Daniel spent time to understand the word of God, fasted and prayed and interceded for his people.

even amidst holding high official responsibilities. He received a testimony that he was trustworthy and beloved of God. Daniel lived through the reign of many emperors but prospered during all their times (Dan 6:28).

Daniel was renowned as a Hebrew statesman and strategist, great prophet and a man of God. He lived in Babylon throughout the period of captivity. Daniel's ministry extended to over seventy years beginning with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and continued till the reign of the Persian King Cyrus (5 kings). In B.C. 536, Cyrus took over kingship and declared freedom for the Jews. Daniel lived for two years after Cyrus' declaration and died with the hope of resurrection according to the words that God had spoken to him. Jewish tradition says that Daniel returned to Jerusalem at a ripe old age and was buried in the grave of his ancestors.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were captives along with Daniel. The king gave them new names: Shadrach (Attracted by the moon god), Meshach (A name similar to the god sheshak) and Abednego (Servant of god Nebo), to proclaim the greatness of Chaldean gods (Daniel 1:7). They stood firm along with Daniel in prayer, worshipping the one, true God and in faith.

Daniel chapter 3 describes the brave story of these youngsters who were thrown into a furnace because they stood firm in the commandment of God that they should not worship strange gods. Nebuchadnezzar raised a golden statue and commanded that all the people of the land should worship only the idol. However, these young men were determined that they would not bow down to the idol whether the God they worshipped delivered them or not (3:17, 18). They were thrown mercilessly into a furnace that was heated seven times more than usual, according to the king's commandment. However, the King and the people of the kingdom saw the God who came down into the fire as "the fourth" and delivered those who trusted in Him. Their strong faith was able to prove the glory of God to the king and his people as they did not even have the smell of fire. Though they had to leave their land at a very young age and go into captivity, they showed exemplary trust in God, and preserved the faith and laws of God that they had received in their childhood.

Practical Lessons

Compromise is not a way of faith. We may have to stand alone in the trial of faith. However, our Lord is a God who comes down in

the midst of trials and reveals His glory to them who stand faithfully for His laws.

Questions

1. What are the trials that Daniel had to face while he was in captivity?
2. What is the meaning of the name "Daniel"? What was the name that the King gave him?
3. What are the qualities of Daniel?
4. What are the Jewish names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
5. Describe the incident in which God came down in the furnace?

LESSON 11

The Seventy Weeks

Reading Portion : Daniel Chapters 9-10
Revelation Chapter 6-9.

Memory Verse : Daniel 12:3

Purpose : To understand the importance of prayerful life. To have a general knowledge about 70 weeks.

Introduction : Daniel understood from the book of Jeremiah that Israel will be delivered from captivity after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). He started praying with fasting and supplications and confessed before the God of Israel about their iniquities and wickedness of his people. During the prayer, the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and gave him skill and understanding about the 70 weeks and revealed the things that would happen in the future.

The prayer of Daniel

Daniel was a prayer warrior. It was his routine to seek the face of God not only in adverse situations but also in favourable conditions. He strictly practised and maintained the habit of praying even during his busy official schedule. Even though there was a strict decree from the king not to pray to anyone else except the king for 30 days; Daniel fearlessly went into the upper chamber of his house; opened the windows towards Jerusalem and kneeled and prayed three times a day giving thanks to the loving God, as he did before (Dan 6). He was cast in to the den of lions for the lone reason that he prayed to the living God even though there was the unalterable law of the Medes

and Persians. Daniel was not hurt God shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel could lead a holy life, face all the adverse situations courageously, succeed all the tests and trials, receive the divine visions and revelations, to uphold the name of the Lord before the gentile rulers, etc. only because of his prayerful life.

In Daniel Chapter 9, we see how Daniel intercedes before God with fasting and supplication for the miserable condition of the people. As Daniel had deep knowledge and understanding of the scripture, he grasped from the book of Jeremiah that the captivity of their people will end in 70 years period (Dan 9:2-3). Thereafter, for the fulfilment of the promise, he fasted and prayed wearing sackcloth and turned his face towards the Lord.

In the 10th chapter we see Daniel turning his grievous face to Lord without eating any delicious bread or flesh or drinking any wine for 21 days. When he submitted before the Lord confessing his own and also his people's transgressions, angel Gabriel came to him, as a reply to his submissions, and revealed to him the details of the 70 weeks (Dan 9:25-27)

The response of the angel

Daniel fasted and prayed to understand the fulfilment of the vision that was received in the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia (Dan 10:1). He grieved and fasted for this subject for 21 days (3 weeks). God heard him when he prayed with supplication and confessed with repentance and meekness (9:21; 10:12). But we see that there was a delay of 21 days for the reply (10:13). The delay was because of the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood against the Angel who brought the reply for 21 days. Though Daniel was not aware of this, the angel and the prince of the kingdom of Persia were in warfare. Daniel understood it later when the angel revealed this to him (10:13).

Though the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood against the angel, yet on the 21st day, the archangel of God defeated him and helped Daniel to get the reply (10:14,21). Though it is invisible and unknown to man, we should not forget that spiritual warfare is a reality.

The 70 weeks

The concept of 70 weeks is the subject that the Lord made the prayer warrior Daniel to grasp when he looked towards Him in the light of his understanding from the book of Jeremiah that the captivity of his people would end in 70 weeks time. This matter is interpreted in many ways. The matter of 70 week is very difficult to interpret.

The division of this period and its meaning, etc. were explained by Angel Gabriel (Daniel 9:25-27). Let us look in to it briefly.

These are :

- (1) From the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem until the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks.
- (2) In 62 weeks the walls and the street shall be built again even in the time of troubles. After 62 weeks the anointed will be pierced. He will have no one i.e. he will be alone.
- (3) Thereafter (in the 70th week), the army of the prince to come will destroy the city and the holy Sanctuary. His end shall be with a flood. War and desolations are determined till the end (Dan 9:26).

This 70 weeks is divided as 7 weeks ($7 \times 7 = 49$ years), 62 weeks ($62 \times 7 = 434$ years), 1 week ($7 \times 1 = 7$ years).

Seventy weeks consists of 490 days. As far as Israel is concerned or according to the prophecy, one day is equal to 1 year (Num 14:33-34). Therefore 490 days have to be considered as 490 years. This is the period of judgement for the house of Israel. This is the period of the punishment of the people of Daniel. According to book of Daniel 9:24, Daniel understood that it shall take 490 years for a permanent restoration of the people. As revealed to Prophet Jeremiah, after 70 years, the Jews got a temporary relief during Persian rule.

The seventy weeks have been divided in to three parts. The first part is 7 weeks or 49 years. As per Talmud of the Jews, Nehemiah was given commandment in the first day of the first month of Nissan to build and restore Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-8). The calculations show that this happened on 14th March BC 445. From this date, it took 49 years to complete the walls of Jerusalem.

The second part is the 62 weeks. Sixty two weeks are equal to 434 years ($7 \times 62 = 434$). In the end of this period, the anointed shall be cut off. After 483 years from the proclamation of the commandment, Jesus Christ the Messiah or the anointed has to be cut off. Thus in AD 30, Jesus Christ was crucified. On that day the period of 483 years required for the restoration of house of Israel was completed. Now 7 years are left.

The third part is 1 week (out of 70 weeks) i.e. the events to happen in 7 years period between 484th year and 490th. These are the details given in the book of Revelation Chapter 4 to 19. The events

from the 4th Chapter is to happen in future. Before this, the rapture of Church has to occur. The study of Revelation gives details of the important events that will occur in the 70th week.

The Book of Revelation :

1. Chapters 1-3 : The Church on the earth till the period of its rapture.
2. Chapters 4-5 : The church in the heaven.
3. Chapters 6-9 : The rule of antichrist in the first part of 3 and half years.
4. Chapters 10-19 : The rule of antichrist during the second part of 3 and half years.
5. Chapters 20-22 : The people divided into 3 groups - the Jews, the gentiles and the Church. We see that the church along with Christ is the head and is ruling the world including the gentiles and the Jews.

Practical Lessons

The prayerful life of Daniel helped him to lead a victorious life even in the midst of adversities. Let his prayerful life be an example to us. God reveals the future events to all those lead a prayerful life. The events in today's world give us a forewarning about the second coming of Jesus Christ. The study about the 70 weeks increases our trust and faith in the Almighty God who controls the entire universe.

Questions

1. Give an account of the prayerful life of Daniel.
2. Who brought the reply to the prayers of Daniel?
3. For how many days the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood against the prayers?
4. Give a detailed account about the period of 70 weeks.

LESSON 12

The Leaderships during Post Captivity Period (Ezra, Zerubbabel)

Reading Portion : Ezra Chapters 1, 7, 8.

Memory Verse : Ezra 8:21

Purpose : To learn about God's deliverance from captivity according to His promise to the Israelites and also about the leaderships He used for this purpose.

Introduction : The Jewish people started crying to God in their pathetic condition in the Babylonian captivity. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia to deliver the Jews. Cyrus, after conquering Babylon, declared freedom to the Jews (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5). Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. Jews who were desirous of staying back in Babylon were ordered to help in the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Cyrus also ordered for the return of the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem. Thus, the Jews returned to Jerusalem after 70 years in captivity.

The background

Upon the decree of Cyrus, the Jews returned to Jerusalem in the year 538 BC. It is not clear as to how many Jews returned to Jerusalem in the first lot under the leadership of Sheshbazzar. Some of the Jewish people could not return as, by this time, they were permanently engaged in trade in Babylon and it was difficult for them to leave it. Cyrus helped a lot in restoration of the Temple. The vessels brought

out by Nebuchadnezzar were returned to Jerusalem through Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8-11).

The Jews who returned from captivity started building the Temple. They built the altar and laid foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:1-3, 8-10). But due to numerous troubles by the adversaries, the work was ceased (4:1-24). The city continued to be desolate. The people who came from captivity to their homeland had to struggle a lot to settle in the unfamiliar place. They had to face calamities one after the other like destruction of crops, famines, etc. one by one (Haggai 1:6; 9-11). The aids promised from the Persian treasury were not made available (Ezra 5:1; 6:5). Many of the people were unsatisfied with the work (Haggai 2:3; Ezra 3:12-13). Immediately after the start of the restoration work Cyrus also died.

The return in the leadership of Zerubbabel

The political leadership of the people who returned along with Sheshbazzar was with Zerubbabel, the son of Shechtel. It is considered that Prince Sheshbazzar was the brother of Zerubbabel's father (1 Chro 3:18). Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem during the reign of Cyrus itself in the years between BC 538 and 522. The possibility is that Zerubbabel reached Jerusalem by the time Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the Temple. It is also believed that as Sheshbazzar could not continue in the leadership, may be due to ageing, Zerubbabel might have taken over the charge. Zerubbabel was from the house of David (Dan 3:19). He was the grandson of King Jehoiakin. The political leadership of the people who returned from captivity was taken over by Zerubbabel and the spiritual leadership was by chief priest Joshua, the son of Jehozadak of the Zadok priesthood. Some 50000 people also returned along with them.

Though about 3 crores of Jews were in Babylon as captives, only 49897 returned to their own land Jerusalem. Majority of them did not want to return to Jerusalem due to the difficulties in the journey of about 900 miles, the burden of restoration of the temple and the reluctance in leaving their livelihood associated with their trade, etc. However, people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Levi and some representatives from other 10 Tribes returned. After their return, they laid the foundation of the Temple in BC 536 (Ezra 3:8). But the Samaritans frustrated their work and bribed the Persian counsellors and got the work stopped (Ezra 4:5). The work ceased up to the second year of Darius, the king of Persia (Ezra 4:15, 24). The work

was ceased from BC 534 to 520. Due to powerful messages through prophets like Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and the people were revived strongly and the ceased work of the Temple was restored in 520 BC. The Samaritans again approached Darius, the then emperor of Persia. However, Darius found out the rolls of the decrees of Cyrus, his predecessor, giving permission to restore the Temple. He too decreed to restore the work of the Temple to Zerubbabel (Ezra 6:12). Accordingly, during the 6th year of the rule of Darius II (in BC 515), the restoration work of Temple was completed and the Temple was dedicated with great joy and the Passover was celebrated.

The return of people under the leadership of Ezra

Ezra, being from the house of chief priest Aaron and Phinehas with high tradition of priesthood, was an expert scribe with deep knowledge and understanding of the law and scripture. He held a high position in the matters of disputes over the interpretation of law.

After BC 400, Jerusalem was under complete unrest during the reign of Artaxerxes II. The king commissioned Ezra, his advisor in Jewish religious matters, to lead the Jews who were willing to return to Jerusalem and settle the chaos and issues there (Ezra 7:14). Ezra organised the people for a long journey. Ezra was given the official authority to collect free will gifts for the work of Temple (Ezra 7:13), to investigate about the conflicts and to teach the law of the Lord to the people (Ezra 7:25-26).

Ezra firmly believed that “The hand of our God is favourably disposed to all those who seek Him”. In spite of knowing that it was a long journey and carrying huge wealth collected for the restoration of the Temple was risky, Ezra decided not to ask the king for soldiers to escort them. He proclaimed a fast at the bank of Ahava River and after prayers they started the journey. After a long journey of about 4 months Ezra and his group reached in Jerusalem in the year 97 BC (Ezra 7:8-9; 8:31). The vessels of gold and silver, etc. which were brought by them were safely handed over to the Temple. The official letter given by the king was also handed over to the governors.

The religious renewal under the leadership of Ezra

The return of Ezra caused a religious renaissance in Jerusalem. He saw that certain priests and Jews had taken strange women forsaking the Law. He persuaded the people to abandon the strange wives and be restored to the Law. After understanding the Law, the people confessed their transgressions, grieved, wept, abandoned their unholy ways and returned to the Law. It was Ezra, the Scribe who

taught and read out the Law to the people during the period of Nehemiah. Ezra gathered all the Israelites in Jerusalem and read the Law to them in length. He translated the scripture from Hebrews to Greek so that the people may understand the Law. In spite of heavy rain, the people did not return but submitted before the Word and relented before God. It took 8 months for this spiritual process. Ezra wept before the Lord and interceded for the people. Thus, a great revival and renaissance occurred in Jerusalem. The people renewed their relationship with God. They understood that association with gentiles would lead to backsliding from faith. On recognising that mixed faith would cause the falling away from true faith, they repented, confessed their transgressions and abandoned their sinful ways and restored to God.

Practical Lessons

The Lord used the gentile kings from time to time to deliver and redeem His people and also anoint His devout servants with knowledge and understanding of the Law to lead them spiritually.

Questions

1. When did the captives return to Jerusalem?
2. Why most of the Jews settled in Babylon were reluctant to return to Jerusalem?
3. Who reconstructed the Temple?

LESSON 13

The Leadership during Post Captivity Period (Contd..) (Nehemiah)

Reading Portion : Nehemiah Chapter : 1-2

Memory Verse : Nehemiah 2:17

Purpose : To know that the Lord is concerned about His people and He raises His faithful servants even in the midst of afflictions and completes His work through them.

Introduction : Some 100 years passed after the Jews returned to their homeland. After restoration of the Temple, they have been prospering but Jerusalem city was without walls. Though a revival took place on Ezras's return to Jerusalem, the work of the wall was not started. Let us continue to study as to how the Lord used Nehemiah to restore Jerusalem which was in a very pathetic condition and how he overcame the unfavourable situations and completed the constructions of the walls.

Background

By end of BC 445, certain representative of the Jews came to the Shushan, the capital of the kingdom. They conveyed about the desolate condition of the Jerusalem (Neh 1:1-4). When he heard of the afflictions and reproach of his own people who returned from captivity and about the desolation of Jerusalem, he wept before the heavenly Lord with prayers and fasting for about 4 months. He yearned to return to Jerusalem and work for it (Neh 2:4-5). He prayerfully informed the King about his intention. Artaxerxes I, who was then the emperor, appointed Nehemiah as governor to Jerusalem

and sent him there for the work of its wall. In the 20th year of the rule of Artaxerxes, a group of Jews under the leadership of Nehemiah returned to Judah according to the order of the king. Though the temple was restored 70 years ago, the city of Jerusalem was lying waste and unmaintained. The neighbours hindered the work of the wall. Ezra scribe who came 13 years earlier to Jerusalem was there. The renaissance work of Ezra became more effective and powerful after Nehemiah reached Jerusalem. Nehemiah, who came with the target of the spiritual and material flourishing of his people understood the necessity of constructing the walls of Jerusalem, encouraged the multitude of his own people. He organised them and led them to construct the wall ignoring all the adversaries.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah was the cupbearer of Artaxerxes I, the king of Persia. 'Nehemiah' means "consolated by Jehovah". The Queen Esther was the wife of the father of Artaxerxes I. Her influence towards her own people also helped the Jews. Nehemiah, the faithful cupbearer was appointed by the King as governor of Jerusalem and also sent him for the work of it wall. Nehemiah was a prayerful person with utter faith and trust upon the Lord. His qualities like patriotism, expertise, unmatched courage, tolerance, meekness, leadership, etc. are worthy to note.

The successful completion of the wall

Nehemiah, after reaching Jerusalem took an account of the devastated state of the city, organised for the cooperation of the people in Jerusalem and motivated them and called them, "*Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach*" (Neh 2:17-18). He told them to repair the wall and gates nearer to their houses. Due to the cooperative approach, the work was completed quickly.

As the work was progressing, resistance and hindrance also started. Initially, opposition came in the form of scorning and later through strong secret counselling. Sanballat the Horonian, Tobiah the Ammonite, Yeshem the Arabian and the neighbouring gentiles became enemies and tried to hinder the work of the wall (Read 2:10, 19, chapter 4 and 4:12-23). However, Nehemiah and the people strongly relied on their God and dedicated themselves to the work and decided to overcome and face all obstacles. Nehemiah organised the people and trained them to courageously face the opposition. Half of the servants were appointed to continue with the work and the

other half to hold weapons (Neh 4:13-23). Nehemiah faced all the internal and external hindrances and oppositions courageously and successfully completed the work in 52 days time (Neh 4:20-23). Josephus, the Jewish historian recorded that it took two and half years time to complete the work of the wall of Jerusalem in his period. The main construction of wall might have taken 52 days and its finishing might have taken two and half years.

The cleansing of the Temple and restoration of the people

After completion of the wall, Nehemiah made efforts to bring about a spiritual unity amongst the people. Nehemiah was aware of the need of a moral and religious renaissance as corruption was in full swing even in the house of the chief priest (Chapter 13). The chamber meant only for holy purposes was given to Tobiah, the enemy of Nehemiah, in accordance with Eliashib the chief priest (3:1, 13:4,,5,7,28). Nehemiah removed Tobiah harshly from the chamber and cleaned it for use of the holy work of the Temple (13:4-9). Arrangements were made to shut the city gates to observe Sabbath. All kinds of trade on Sabbath day was totally stopped. Thus, the observation of Sabbath was made compulsory. The grandson of Eliashib who had taken the daughter of Sanballat was chased out from the nation (13:28). Thus, the cleansing of the Temple under the leadership of Nehemiah quickened up. Nehemiah gathered the people at the water gate for spiritually uplifting them. The Law was read out to them under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe. Men, women and those who were capable to understand listened to the Law attentively from morning until the midday. The Law was translated into Greek for the congregation to understand it easily. Touched by the Words, the congregation repented and submitted themselves to observe the law. From the next day the feast of the booth was celebrated. The reading of the book of Law was conducted every day (Neh 8:13-18).

The end of Nehemiah

After ruling Judah for 12 years as governor, Nehemiah returned to Shushan Palace in the year BC 433. After many years, he again returned to Jerusalem. He stayed the rest of his days in Jerusalem and worked for its re-construction as far as possible. He removed all the filthiness from the Temple and sanctified the Lord's worship. He made the people including the Priests and the Nobles to seal a covenant to serve the Lord faithfully. Thus, he led the Israel to a spiritual renaissance. After making all efforts to make the Israelites a different and separate community from rest of the nations, he died at a good old age as recorded by historian Josephus.

Practical Lessons

God uses the one who has a broken heart and burden for God's people and intercede for their deliverance, redemption and the building of the Church. Let us submit ourselves to be watchmen of the Church of God. Let us follow the exemplary virtues of Nehemiah like prayerful life, tolerance, love of own people, talent, competence, courage, leadership, meekness, etc.

Questions

1. Who was Nehemiah?
2. What was Nehemiah's reaction when he heard about the pathetic condition of Israel?
3. What were the obstacles that Nehemiah had to face in construction of the wall?
4. In how many days was the work of wall completed?

LESSON 14

The History of Jews through different periods (AD 70 - up to 20th century)

Memory Verse : Zech 2:5

Purpose : To know about the history of the nation of Israel from AD 70 onwards up to its restoration. To understand the cruelty of the dictator Hitler to the Jewish people.

Introduction : After AD 70, Palestine was part of the state of Syria in the Roman Empire. The Jews who escaped from there to save their life settled in different parts of the world. After the death of Titus (AD 81), though the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, they had to face severe persecution by the then emperors like Trajan, Hadrian, etc. (AD 98-138). Violence erupted in Jerusalem as Hadrian prohibited circumcision and also decided to build a temple for the Roman god Jupiter in place of the Jerusalem Temple. In AD 135 Jerusalem again became a battle ground similar to the situation as in AD 70. Vespasian, the Roman emperor did not allow the Jews to live in Jerusalem but forced them to settle in distant place of his empire. Vespasian experimented by adopting this diaspora so as to damage the national and religious unity of Jews so that they do not create hindrance to the peace in his empire.

For about 19 centuries from AD 135 to AD 1948, the Jewish people did not have their own country. They settled in different parts of the world, depended on them and had to face their persecutions and cruelty.

The Jews after the diaspora

Due to the feeling that it is dangerous to live in Jerusalem because of frequent disturbances in it and also due to a warring like situation there, thousands of Jewish people migrated to other countries. More particularly, the wealthy and the intellectuals migrated to other safe cities within the Roman empire. Certain poor and downtrodden people remained in Judah. The who scattered were settled in countries like, Rome, Alexandria, North Africa, cities on the shore of Mediterranean, etc. Gradually they spread over to the main European countries like Spain, Poland, Germany, etc. A group of Jews came to Asian countries. Some reached Kochi in India. By the 5th Century, the Jews spread to almost all the countries in Europe and in Middle East. As the trade and commerce centres increased in these countries, most of them became business men and bankers. During 12th -13th century, the Jewish people acquired the prime position in all the commercial centres and business places in Europe and Asia. Jews were the owners of banks and commercial centres during the middle centuries. Even though they were a minority without any social or state security, the ordinary people, the Lords and even kings were debtors to the affluent and wealthy Jews from whom money was borrowed on a high interest rate. The rulers thought that the remedy to get rid of the debt was to persecute the Jews.

With the discovery of American continent by the 16th century, the Jews started migrating to South America from Europe. Many Jews also travelled with Columbus in search of America. The history records that Luis D. Thomas, a Jew and the companion of Columbus first landed in America. In 1654, they started a Jewish Colony in New York. By 19th century, they settled in America in great numbers.

By 19th century, the Jews dispersed and settled in all the 5 continents of the world. Thus, the Jews who were dispersed from the holy city of Jerusalem became a mixed race (nationality).

The series of persecution experienced by Jews

Except Jews, there is no other community in the world who has faced so much persecution. The main reasons behind their persecution are their religious rituals and the separated life without mingling with other gentiles. Till 18th century, the Jews were not granted citizenship in the country to which they had migrated. Most of the laws of all the countries where they were residing were against their religious traditions. During the middle century, military service was mandatory in all European countries. The non-compliance of this and also the

non observance of the common feasts and special days celebrated by the ordinary people of the country, worship of emperor, etc. led to hostility between the Jews and the people and rulers of that country. Most of the landlords and governors of these countries became debtors to the Jews. These debtors resorted to persecution and expulsion of the Jews as a remedy to get rid of the debt. The Jews were not allowed to learn a skill or get employed.

Till 3rd century AD, the Christians and Jews were equally persecuted in Roman Empire. By 365 AD when the emperor Constantine became Christian and Christianity was declared as official religion of Rome, the Christians were spared religious persecution. However, the persecution of Jews was doubled. They were persecuted by the Catholic Church too. The prohibition of Jewish religion by emperor Theodosius through a statute was the heaviest blow. By the fall of Roman empire by 5th century and the rise of Pope as the holy empire of Rome, the Jews were slaughtered in large scale and also subjected to severe atrocities.

In AD 1096, during the Crusades from time to time tens of thousands of Jews were killed and many of their colonies attacked. The declaration of Pope that destruction of Jews was according to the Will of God led the way to the ruin of Jews. During the Crusades, large number of Jews migrated to Poland to save their life. By end of 15th century, there were about 5 lac Jews in Poland. However, during the civil war in 1648, the Jews were again persecuted there.

The Jews who migrated to Russia were safe initially but during the reign of Czar Emperors, they had to face severe persecution. In 1555 AD, Pope made a decree to confiscate the wealth of the rich Jews and to disgrace them to be insolvents. The condition of Jews in Morocco also was very miserable. Killing a Jew in Morocco was not considered as a murder.

Hitler and the persecution of Jews

After the First World War (1918), the Jews who settled in Germany were freed by their allies under America, France, Britain, Italy, etc. However, when Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 AD, the brutal and ruthless persecution in the history of Jews started. Hitler and his Nazi party felt that their defeat in the First World War was because of the Jews and therefore, they should be ruined fully. Hitler created communal disharmony among the German people towards the Jews through his speeches through various media like Radio, news papers, other publication, etc. Destruction of Jews was

one of the main tasks of Hitler. His secret police (Gestapo) gathered the Jews one by one and put them in concentration camps built at different places in Germany.

As Germany was heading towards the victory in Second World War and the European nations were under its control, the secret police of Hitler combed out the Jews settled in these nations and put them in concentration camps. They were marched in large groups through gas chambers and killed due to suffocation. Some 60 lac Jews including women and children were beastly killed. By the end of the war, almost the same number of Jews were left in the concentration camps with skin and bones only. Some 60000 Jews in the Bunsen camp died due to starvation. An average of 1000 Jews died in a day in these camps for lack of food or water. Many were forced to kill and eat others due to hunger and thirst. When the Second World War ended in 1945, the allied forces found the most ruthless form of cruelty on men. The human bones were piled up in the camp like logs. An average of 300 people per day continued to die for next two weeks even after their liberation.

When another camp namely Buchenwald in Germany was liberated, General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces and General Patton, the Military Commander were broken hearted seeing the ghastly scene over there. Due to the scene, they could not move further and they sat aside. Their army officers accompanying them wept seeing the condition there. The history witnesses that Hitler committed such cruelty on the Jews that one cannot even imagine. However, the later events indicate that the persecution staged by Hitler and Nazi party quickened the formation of Israel nation.

Practical Lessons

All the wars that took place in the world have some connection with the Jewish people directly or indirectly. In spite of facing so many wars and persecution, they have survived all of them and have become a great nation and still stands exactly like the vision of Moses 'a burning bush but not being consumed'. It is only because of the faithfulness of the Lord. Let us be with the Lord who keeps the promise.

Questions

1. In whose period did the Jewish diaspora occurred?
2. What brutal and cruel persecutions did Jews face from Hitler?
3. Who was the first Jew to land in America?
4. Who prohibited observing the Jewish religious rituals?

LESSON 15

The Jews blossoming

Reading Portion : Rom 11

Memory Verse : Matt 24:32

Purpose : To understand about the formation of Israel Nation. To grasp as to how the Second World War was helpful in formation of the Israel nation.

Introduction : May 14, 1948 was a golden day in the history of Israel. On this day the persecution faced by them for centuries ended and their dream to have their own land became a reality. Like the bush being burnt but not being consumed, the Jews survived all the persecution and cruelty from time to time as the fulfilment of the prophecy (Isa 66:8) and started blooming like the fig tree. The cruelty done by the dictator Hitler on the Jewish people opened the eyes of the nations of the world that the Jewish people need to have their own state and which led to the formation of Israel.

The first world war and the Israel

Jewish community was the most affected and persecuted people during the First World War (1914-1918). We have already learnt in the last lesson that the Nazi party under the leadership of Hitler carried out ruthless and horrific persecutions towards the Jews. The sufferings endured by Jews in Russia during the war period are indescribable. During the corrupt regime of the Czar emperors, the Jews were made to stand in queue and their tongues were plucked

out with pliers. Thus many regimes tried to ruin this community over a period of two and half centuries.

When the First World War ended, Turkey lost Palestine. General Allenby brought Palestine under the British rule. In 1917, the British army, under the leadership of General Allenby conquered Jerusalem. In 1920, according to the agreement of the United Nations, Palestine was under the governance and protection of Britain. This condition continued till Israel was declared as a sovereign independent state in 1948.

The architect of the success of the grand alliance, that was otherwise being defeated by the German army, was a Jew namely Dr. Chaim Weizmann, a Professor in Chemistry in the Manchester University. When the natural resources of the explosives went under the control of Germany, he artificially made and supplied it to the grand alliance and thus won the war. When Britain triumphed in the First World War and wanted to award and recognise Dr. Chaim Weizmann, he demanded for the home state of Jews in the land of Canaan. The Balfour Declaration by the British Government on 2nd November, 1917 was the result of this wish. After this declaration, the rate of relocation of Jews to their own land started increasing. By this, the dream of the Zionist Movement started turning in to a reality. Zionism was the movement of Jews who did not have their own home land to revive and stir up the conscience of Jews settled in different parts of the world facing sufferings, injustice and atrocities in the countries where they resided with the goal to create and support a Jewish state in Palestine. As the Balfour Declaration did not come into immediate effect, it took more time for the Jews to accomplish the goal.

The Second World War and Israel

The Second World War was began with Germany attacking Poland on 1st September, 1939. This was the global war with Britain, Belgium, Russia, Australia, Canada, France and America on one side and Germany, Japan, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, etc. on the other side. After Germany attacked Poland, the Britain and France declared war against German Allies on 3rd September, 1939. Thereafter Germany and Russia made an agreement with the settlement of their borders. Hitler, the ruler of Germany ruined the Jews who were settled in Poland. However, Germany which was initially dominant in the war was miserably defeated on 7th May, 1945 that led to Hitler's suicide. Japan who did not heed to the warning of the grand alliance and

continued the war was bombed with atom bomb by America on 6th August, 1945 creating the most horrific catastrophe in the human history. Japan surrendered on 14th August, 1945. Thus the Second World War ended.

During the war period, the Jews supported the alliance and joined in the war. The Second World War was the milestone for Jews. During this period, the Jews became the bait of the most barbaric and brutal slaughtering terrifying the human consciousness.

A Nation is born

On 14th August, 1948, Britain gave up the authority over Palestine and the dream of Jews to have their own State bloomed. The birth of the Israel State was accelerated not because of the Zionism or the Balfour Declaration of the British Government but because of the fact that the Jews underwent such sufferings and persecution during the Second World War which no other community in the world had ever faced. The atrocities and cruelty against the Jews touched the conscience of the world and terrified the nations of the world. The need to have a permanent own land for the Jews was felt by all nations of the world and the members of the United Nations Organisation.

In 1945, the heads of the alliance like American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Churchill, Russian Prime Minister Joseph Stalin, etc. met in 'Yalta' on the shore of Black sea to discuss about the after effects of the war. The need of the Jews to have their own state also came up for discussion. Even Joseph Stalin who was otherwise an atheist and opponent of Jews supported this need.

On 29th November, 1947 the United Nation passed a resolution allowing division of Palestine with 33 votes in favour and 13 votes against it. Some 10 nations did not participate in the voting. Russia and France supported and voted for this division. The Jews welcomed this division. Thus, on 14th August, 1948 Britain withdrew from the authority of Palestine and a new nation called Israel was established officially for the Jewish people. David Ben-Gurion, the leader of Zionism became the first Prime Minister and Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the British Scientist and President of the Zionism took charge as the first President of the new nation. America ratified Israel as an independent and sovereign state on the same day when Israel was officially declared as a state.

After the birth of Israel as a nation in 1948, there were wars between them and the Arabs in the year 1956, 1967 and 1973. Israel

defeated the Arabs in all these wars. Israel got the membership in United Nations Organisation on 11th May, 1949.

Israel today

From the very day of its formation, Israel faced many issues which no other nations have suffered. The Arabs declared war against it on 15th May, 1948 itself. The Arab-Israel war lasted for just 6 days in 1967 is very famous. On 6th October, 1973 the Arabian nations warred against Israel but Israel was always victorious. Some 55% of Palestine is with Israel and 45% is with the Arab. The service of the UN protection army is still continuing in their border.

All the Arab nations had objected to the birth of Israel. Only Egypt and Jordan are in peace with Israel from the beginning. Syria is still demanding for the Golan heights. The Arab peace initiative by Saudi Arabia in 2002 was accepted by all except Libya. Many terrorist organisations like Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Hamas, etc. are working against Israel even today. Benjamin Netanyahu II is continuing as Prime Minister from 2009 onwards. He supports all the peace accords. It is worthy to note that Israel, the smallest nation among all is prominent and is leading in everything among all other nations of the world.

Practical Lessons

The rebellion against God became the reason for the scattering and destruction of Israel. However God's promises are perpetual. Like God's promises were perpetual with the Israel, His promises with us are also permanent.

Questions

1. What was the reason for the Israel to scatter to many places?
2. Give details of the sufferings faced by Jews under Hitler.
3. What were advantages of Second World War for the formation of Israel?
4. Give an account of the formation of the nation of Israel.

LESSON 16

The Holy Spirit

Reading Portion : John 14:16-21; 16:7-15

Memory Verse : John 14:16

Purpose : To understand that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the third in the Trinity of God the Father and Jesus, the Son and to submit ourselves in His hands so that the Holy Spirit may dwell in us.

Introduction : The work of the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son can be seen clearly from Genesis to Revelation (Genesis 1:1-2, Revelation 22:17). Christianity is founded on the faith in the Trinity. Holy Spirit is the third person(ality) in the divine Trinity. The Scripture describes the Holy Spirit as the Almighty God identical to the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit

In Hebrew, the original language of the Bible, the word “ruha” and in Greek the word ‘pneuma’ has been used to indicate about the Holy Spirit. The mean wind, power, breath, etc. We can see that the Holy Spirit works in a secret, invisible manner, as a mystery and also in a visible manner. It is not only a mere power but also a personified power.

The images of Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been represented by many images based on His works, appearances, manifestations, character, etc.

Water: As water cleans. Likewise also the Holy Spirit cleans and gives life and joy. As water is unavoidable in life, so also is the Holy Spirit an essential experience in Christian life.

Oil: Oil which was used for anointing Kings in the Old Testament period stands for the Holy Spirit. The oil i.e. the Holy Spirit makes our life bright and powerful (Exo 30:25; 29:7; Lev 21:10; 1Sam 16:13).

Fire: Like the character of fire which sanctifies, cleans, burns, etc., the Holy Spirit too sanctifies a person. Like fire that gives light, the Holy Spirit enlightens the heart.

Wind: The form of wind is invisible but its deeds are visible. Thus, the wind demonstrates the activities of the Holy Spirit like life, power, movement, strength, etc. (Ezekiel 37:9; 3:8; Isaiah 40:7; John 3:8; Acts 2:2).

Seal: Indicates approval and ownership. The Holy Spirit provides the approval and assurance of our redemption (Ephesians 1:14).

Dove: (Mathew 3:16; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; 3:32). It symbolises peace, innocence, etc. The dwelling of Holy Spirit in our life is essential to remove ungodliness from us and lead a sanctified and innocent life.

Morning Dew : The morning dew brings gladness, newness, fruitfulness, etc. Likewise, the Holy Spirit makes our life new, joyful and fruitful (Psalms 110:3; 133:3).

The personification of Holy Spirit

Many think that the Holy Spirit is only a force without a personified character. But He is not a mere force or work. He is a person with a powerful working force. Force cannot work on its own. Rather it works according to the directions. But a person can work according to his will. Throughout the Bible, we see a Holy Spirit having wisdom, understanding, emotions, thought, desire, decision power, etc. Thus, Bible teaches us about the personification of Holy Spirit very clearly and accurately.

1. The teachings of Jesus Christ make it clear

We see Jesus Christ clearly personified the Holy Spirit when he introduced Him to disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever", (John 14:16). Here, for the word 'other', the Greek

word 'allos' has been used. This word means 'another of the same kind. It means, Jesus Christ, before going to the presence of the Father has surely appointed another person of the same kind as Him i.e. the Holy Spirit to take charge of the work of this world.

2. The common name manifesting the personification has been used

"... for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you (John 16:7). And when he is come, he will reprove the world... (John 16:8), ... he will guide you into all truth (John 16:13), he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

3. The characters of a person is visible in Holy Spirit too

The Holy Spirit has (a) knowledge (1 Cor 12:10) (b) Will (1 Cor 12:11) (c) Desire (Acts 16:6-7) (d) Grief (Eph 4:30).

4. The equality in the Divine Trinity manifests the personality of Holy Spirit

- a) During the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit appeared as a person in unity with the Father and the Son (Luke 3:21-22; Matt 3:16-17).
- b) The baptism is to be given in the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).
- c) In the blessings of apostles, the name of Holy Spirit has specifically mentioned (2 Cor 13:14).

5. The works of Holy Spirit that reveals His personification

The Holy Spirit

- a) Searches the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10)
- b) Speaks to the churches (Rev 2:7)
- c) Calls (Gal 4:6)
- d) Intercedes ((Rom 8:26)
- e) Give witness (John 15:26)
- f) Teaches (John 14:26)
- g) Guides (Rom 8:14)
- h) Forbids (Acts 16:6-7)
- i) Appoints (Act 20:28)

- j) Sends (Acts 13:1-2)
- k) Gives conviction (Eze 16:8)
- l) Regenerates (John 3:3-5)

6. The Holy Spirit discerns other's work like:

- a) Rebellion against Him (Isa 63:10)
- b) Making Him grieve (Eph 4:30)
- c) Despites Him (Heb 10:29)
- d) Blasphemy (Mat 12:31-32)
- e) Lying to Him (Acts 5:3)
- f) Fellowship with Him (1 Cor 13:14)
- g) Resisting Him (Acts 7:51)
- h) Obeying Him (Acts 10:19-23)

The divinity of Holy Spirit

1) The divine characters

Theologically, all the characteristics of divinity are manifested in the Holy Spirit in its fullness. This proves the divinity of Holy Spirit beyond any doubt.

1) Omnipotence

We can see the might of the Holy Spirit when He moved over the earth which was void and without form (Gen 1:2). Thus, Holy Spirit is also Mighty like the Almighty God.

2) Omniscience

The word of God (Scripture) is the manifestation of Holy Spirit's omniscience. The Holy Spirit reveals its divine mysteries to us (Isa 34:16; 1 Cor 2:10-12). We can grasp the fullness of his omniscience by His act of giving the gifts of grace (1 Cor 12:4,11). Through the revelation of the secret act of Ananias and Sapphira, the greatness of His knowledge is very clear (Act 5:3-4).

3) Omnipresence

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? (Psalms 13:7). In this verse, the omnipresence of God and the Holy Spirit is demonstrated together. This verse not only gives evidence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit but also proves the equality of God and Holy Spirit.

4) Eternity

We can see the Holy Spirit acting along with the Father and the Son throughout the Scripture.

5) Holiness (Rom 1:5)

The Holy Spirit, who is equal to the God, also possesses the same precious divine holiness.

II. The divine names by which the Holy Spirit is called manifest His divinity.

- a) God (Act 5:3-4): In verse 3, it is said that Ananias has sinned against the Holy Spirit whereas in verse 4 it is said that he has sinned against God. Thus, it is clear from here that the Holy Spirit is God too.
- b) God's Spirit : (1 Cor 1:16; Rom 8:9)
- c) Jehovah's Spirit (Isa 11:2)
- d) The Lord Jehovah's Spirit (Isa 6:1)
- e) The Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3)
- f) The Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9)
- g) The Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6)
- h) The Spirit of Jesus Christ (Act 2:32-33)
- i) The Spirit of Jesus (Act 16:7)
- j) The Holy Spirit (Luk 11:13; Act 4:2).

Practical Lessons

Let us remove the misunderstanding that the Holy Spirit is a mere invisible power dwelling in man. Let us grasp His personification and divinity as God and submit ourselves to God as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Questions

1. Write the words used for the Holy Spirit in the original language and also its meaning.
2. What are the other names given for Holy Spirit?
3. The Holy Spirit is not only a mere force but also a powerful working personality. Explain.
4. Prove the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

LESSON 17

The Works of the Holy Spirit

Reading Portion : Joel 2:28-32; Act 2:37-39; 8:15-16; 1 Cor Chapters 12-14.

Purpose : To understand the extent and glory of the deeds of the Holy Spirit. To recognise the significance of the fellowship of Holy Spirit that dwells in a God's child and enables him to lead a victorious Christian life.

Introduction : The deeds of Holy Spirit are clearly mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit did not dwell in a person permanently. However, in the New Testament period i.e. the dispensation of grace period, the Holy Spirit performed a glorious act by dwelling in a person permanently and making him godly. Let us study in this lesson the diverse works of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament we see a working Holy Spirit. Even the Bible begins with the acts of the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2). The Holy Spirit participating in the creation is seen working continuously throughout the history. We can understand from the redemption work of the Holy Spirit in making the earth that was without form and void suitable for dwelling. The source of man's life is the Holy Spirit.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7; Job 27:3; Psa 104:30). The Holy Spirit who

participated in the creation is now continuously working in man to sustain, lead, prepare and redeem him (Psa 104:29-30, 38; Job 26:13).

The Old Testament history reveals that certain people were specially anointed with the Holy Spirit on certain special occasions to execute certain special tasks according to the Will of God. In order to get the understanding and knowledge for the building of the Temple, Aholiab and Bazaleel were filled with the Spirit of the God (Exo 31:3). We can also see in Joseph (Gen 41:38), Jephthah (Jud 11:29), Samson (Jud 14:6), Saul; (1 Sam 11:6), etc. filled with Holy Spirit. With the help of Holy Spirit, they could do great things. Thus we can understand that during the Old Testament times, God had anointed certain people with His Holy Spirit to execute certain special tasks.

The Old Testament scripture was written with the inspiration of Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Sam 23:2). The prophets spoke, wrote and recorded only what the Holy Spirit gave them. The Holy Spirit revealed to them about the birth, afflictions, resurrection and future glory, etc. of Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12; Psa 22; Isa 7:14; Psa 16:10-11).

The works of Holy Spirit have equal significance even though they are different in the Old Testament period and the one that began on the Pentecost day.

Holy Spirit in the public ministry of Jesus

The role of Holy Spirit in the public life and ministry of Jesus in this world is worthy to note.

1. The birth of Jesus in flesh was in Holy Spirit (Luk 1:35; Mat 1:18)
2. The Holy Spirit visibly descended on Jesus during His baptism (Mat 3:16; Mark 1:10).
3. Jesus was led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit (Mat 4:1; Mar 1:12; Luk 4:1).
4. Jesus did the ministry with the power of the Holy Spirit. The sermons, the healing of the sick, the casting out of demon, etc. by Jesus were done with the power of Holy Spirit (Luk 4:4-14; Act 10:38).
5. The resurrection of Jesus was the work of Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11).

Holy Spirit in the believer

The Holy Spirit dwells in a believer as a comforter and a guide and helps him to lead a victorious Christian life and prepares him for the eternal life. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit that one is reprov'd about sin, God's righteousness and the forthcoming judgement. (John 16:8-11).

The diverse works of Holy Spirit in a believer

1. The Holy Spirit frees the believer from the law (force) of sin and death. The Holy Spirit has given us 4 types of freedom.
 - a) Freedom from judgement (Rom 8:1-4)
 - b) Freedom from the fear of failure (Rom 8:5-17)
 - c) Freedom from a depressed life (Rom 8:18-30)
 - d) Freedom from fear (Rom 8:31-39)
2. The Holy Spirit fills: Holy Spirit is not a mere emotional situation. It is a great life experience of loosening our self control but being completely controlled or led by the Holy Spirit. The fullness of Holy Spirit is unavoidable for fruitful ministry and victorious Christian life.
3. Holy Spirit strengthens : (Eph 3:16; Act 1:8): The Holy Spirit is the source of power. In Greek, original language of Bible, the word 'Dunamis' is used to indicate Holy Spirit. It means 'dynamite' which is used for breaking rocks. Such power was aptly visible in the Apostles and believers of the first Church (Act 4:12-16; Act 8:11, 19-21). The Holy Spirit grants the power to free from sin, diseases and from the rulers of the darkness.
4. One becomes a courageous witness: It was with the power of Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ could send His weak disciples in the midst of persecution and adversaries as strong witnesses. This truth is witnessed by the history of hundreds of His devout who were martyred from early church up till today.
5. Helps in prayer: The Holy Spirit helps a believer by giving strength to pray (Rom 8:26; Eph 6:18). We do not know what we should pray. But the Spirit itself strengthens us and makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.
6. The Spirit helps us to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-11)
7. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16)

8. The Spirit of truth guides us into all truths (John 16:13)
9. The Spirit enable one to recall the words of Jesus (John 14:16).
10. The Spirit searches all things, the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10-11)
11. He teaches (John 16:13-15)
12. He guides us even in the smallest matters of daily life (Act 8:29; 16:6-7)
13. He prepares us for the eternal life (Eph 1:14)
14. The Spirit will abide in us and will quicken our mortal bodies (Rom 8:10-11)
15. Spirit gives the gift of grace to individual believers and also to the Church in general (1 Cor 12)
16. The Holy Spirit separate and appoints certain people for special purposes. Paul and Barnabas were separated for the mission journey (Act 13:2-4).

Practical Lessons

We can lead a triumphant Christian life only under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us yearn for the fullness of Holy Spirit so that our Christian life also becomes victorious.

Questions

1. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation?
2. How did the Holy Spirit work in the Old Testament?
3. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the public ministry of Jesus Christ?

LESSON 18

The Gifts of Grace

Reading Portion : Eph 4:11-13, 1 Cor 12:4-7; Rom 12:3-8,
1 Pet 4:10-11

Memory Verse : 1 Cor 12:1

Purpose : To understand the Gifts of Grace granted by God to His Church and to create a desire in us to receive it and to prepare ourselves for the same.

Introduction : God has granted wonderful spiritual gifts to the Church. The chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians begin with the exhortation of Paul that "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant". Therefore, it is clear that for proper use of spiritual gifts, it is essential to understand it. The Corinth Church was confused about it. We see that Apostle Paul has very keenly explained them about it. The members of the Church should be aware of the gifts by grace. In the next 3 lessons we are going to learn about these gifts.

What is meant by the gift of grace?

Gift of grace means the supernatural abilities poured by the Holy Spirit on a man. In the New Testament, mainly 3 Greek words have been used for gifts. (1) Pneumatika; (2) Pneumata and (3) Charismata. Out of these, the word 'Pneumatika' can be translated as 'spiritual' or 'supernatural', 'Pneumata' as 'spirits' and 'Charismata' as 'gifts by grace'. The first word reveals about something beyond human capabilities whereas the second word denotes the spiritual aspects. These words, therefore, makes it clear

that the gifts of spirit is not received according to the capability of an individual. The word 'Charismata' is mostly used in the New Testament in relation to gifts. This word means 'received as free' or 'received by grace'. We can see the word Charisma 17 times in the New Testament. It means, grace or gift of grace, etc. From these words the words 'charismatic, charismatics, etc. have been derived. Gifts are received from God, the giver, for free or by His grace.

When we study what are gifts, we must also clearly understand what they are.

1. Gifts are not natural or innate talents or capabilities. All humans have many inborn talents and capabilities. Spiritual gifts are special divine gifts seen only in born again people.
2. The gifts by grace are not fruit of the Spirit. The children of God ought to bring forth the fruit of Spirit. These should dwell in His children till the end. These should be nurtured by all the children of God (Gal 5:22-23). But the Gifts are not to be nurtured and it is a grant of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit helps in executing the gifts of Spirit.
3. The Gifts are not to be considered as a performance or an activity to be fulfilled as a part of Christian ministry.

The objective of Gifts

1. For the edification of the Church (1 Cor 14:26; 14:12; 12:3-4; Eph 4:11-13) :

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man for the profit of all (1Cor 12:7). Spiritual gifts are unavoidable for the edification of church. Lack of gifts is an obstruction to the growth of Church.

2. For the sanctification of Church :

In order to remain sanctified, the Church is required to keep on burning in gifts of grace always. The hypocrites and others who took a form of godliness feared even to look at the former Church. "Great fear came upon all the church" (Acts 5:1-11). As Peter was the leader of those stirred up in gifts, he could bring out the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira which led to sanctification of the whole Church. These days, lack of spiritual gifts in the Church has deteriorated its growth.

3. To create consciousness among believers of the divine presence in them (1Cor 14:24-25). The gifts create a serious awareness of the perfect glorious presence of God in the Church.

4. Gifts are essential in the expansion of gospel and for the evangelism (Act 3:4; 5:15-16; 8:6-8; 9:36-43; 14:8-10).
5. God's name is glorified through the gifts (1Pet 7:10-11).
6. For guidance according to the Will of God (Act 13:2; 9:11-19; 8:26; 16:6; 21:11).
7. To restore (equip) the saints (Eph 4:3). The Greek word for restoration (or equip) gives the meaning as 'repair' or 'mending'. The same word is used for mending the nets in Mat 4:21 and perfecting of the saints in Eph 4:12. In other words, the ministry of His servants and the working of gifts, which are for the caring and growth of the Church, is used by the Lord for the restoration and the perfection of the Church. Accordingly His people are perfected and become the cause of spiritual edification and growth in the Church.

Are the gifts given on the basis of our competency?

Gifts are given not on the basis of one's competency or ability. The Holy Spirit gave gifts to every man (1 Cor 12:11). Though the gifts are different, the giver is same. The Triune God is the giver (Rom 12:3; Eph 4:7-11; 1Cor 12:4,11). The gifts are said to be the manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). It enlightens the diversities of the workings of the Spirit. The manifestation of spirit as said in 1Cor 12:7 gives us 3 explanations.

1. Charismata : It details the different gifts working in the Church with the same Spirit.
2. Diakoni : Indicates the diverse ministries performed for the Lord.
3. Energemata : It represents the diverse working of miracles performed by the Spirit.

Gifts are neither acquired nor achieved based on our capability or competence. It is purely a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is given according to the Will of Holy Spirit for the common benefit of the Church. Gifts do not indicate the standard of sanctity nor is it a measurement of spiritual qualities. The Holy Spirit is fully aware to whom and when it is to be given. There is a time limit for the working of gifts. It can work for a long or short time. If a gift is granted to a person, it is not necessary that it would continue to work forever. A gift may not work in a person permanently. It is not given for the benefit of self. As it is given for the extension of evangelism or for the benefit of all, no one should boast upon it nor misuse it.

God grants gifts to the Church - the fellowship of the separated and chosen saints. Gifts are tools to be used for the building of the temple - the church. It has to be deployed only with the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit and through our sanctified life.

Different gifts

1. The Word of wisdom
2. The Word of Knowledge
3. Gift of Faith
4. Gift of Healing
5. Gift of Miracles
6. Gift of Prophecy
7. Discerning of spirits
8. Gift of Tongues
9. Gift of interpretation of tongues
10. Gift of Administration
11. Gift of helping
12. Gift of kindness
13. Service, Ministry
14. Exhortation
15. Gift of giving
16. Church Administration
17. Gift of revelation
18. Teaching
19. Evangelisation
20. Apostleship
21. Married life (1Cor 7:7)
22. Celibacy

Gifts that are relevant to ministry (Eph 4:11)

The precious positions like Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Deacons, Teachers, etc. which are given for the performance of administrative responsibilities of the Church are in fact not spiritual gifts but the gift of grace granted by the Lord to the Church. However

it is better that these positions are held by people who are granted such gifts.

All gifts are important like all the parts are important for the body. There is diversity in gifts. Each one is precious in itself. All the gifts are essential and required by the Church till the moment before rapture on the second coming of our Lord. Gifts will no more be required when the church achieves its fullness (1 Cor 13:8-10).

Practical Lessons

Let us remove the ignorance and misunderstandings about the gift of grace, grasp its greatness and crave for it. Let us widen the gifts that we have received.

Questions

1. Give the meanings of Greek words mentioned for gift.
2. What is the objective of gifts?
3. Name the different gifts.

LESSON 19

The Gifts of Grace (Contd.)

Reading Portion : 1 Corinthians Chapters 12 - 14

Memory Verse : 1 Cor 12:7

Purpose : To have a clear and detailed understanding about the Gifts of Grace granted by God to His Church and to grasp its greatness and significance and to prepare for proper usage of the gifts received according to the Will of God.

Introduction : We have already learnt in the last lesson about certain general aspects of gifts like its objective, the diverse kind of gifts given to the Church, etc. We can read some 9 gifts mentioned in the Epistle to the Corinthians. However there are over 20 gifts mentioned in the New Testament.

Let us study about 9 gifts mentioned in the book of 1 Corinthians. These gifts can be divided into three groups.

I. Gift of Languages

a) Diverse Tongues b) Interpretation of Tongues c) Prophecy

II. Gifts of revelations

a) Word of knowledge b) Word of wisdom
c) Discerning of spirit

III. Gifts of actions

a) Gift of faith b) Gift of Healing c) Gift of diverse miracles.

The explanations of gifts

1. Gift of tongues

It is a heavenly gift to speak in a tongue not learned by the speaker. This is different from the other tongue which is given during the baptism in Holy Spirit. Paul has named it as diverse kinds of tongues (1Cor 12:10), diversities of tongues (1Cor 12:38), tongues (1Cor 13:8), etc. We assume that the apostles may not have stated about the different tongue that one gets during the baptism of Spirit. The diversities of tongues are given to few people in the Church. It is clear that the question that "do all speak with tongues" indicates diverse tongues. The gift is not other tongue but diversities of tongues.

The significance of diverse tongues

1. As a sign to the non-believers (1Cor 14:22; Isa 28:11-13)

Let us see the experience of the Pentecost day. When they were gathered in the upper chamber of the house, they began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit gave them to speak. We can see that the gathering spoke in diverse tongues. People around them from different countries were amazed and reacted with fear and said that "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God" (Act 2:11). The non-believers accepted that whatever happened was not the result of being full of wine but the wondrous work of God.

2. It is for edification of the church (1 Cor 14:5)

From the statement that "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church" (1Cor 14:4), we can understand that the tongue mentioned there is the unknown tongue manifested at the time of baptism in Holy Spirit. Whoever speaks in other tongue, if it is not interpreted, others will not receive edifying (14:5) and whoever speaks in diverse tongues may pray for the gift of interpretation (14:3) indicates that the diverse tongues is the gifts given for the benefit of all in the Church. When speaking to God in the unknown tongue no interpretation is required. It is given for the spiritual edifying of the individual. The gift of diverse tongue is supernatural and beyond the capabilities of man. The natural instinct and capabilities of a person is insignificant here.

3. Interpretation of tongue

Interpretation is in furtherance of the gift of diverse tongues. Apostle Paul advises that whoever has received the gift of diverse tongue should also pray for the granting of the gift of its interpretation

(14:3). Through interpretation, one can translate the meaning of the diverse tongue which is something beyond the natural capability of man. By its interpretation, it becomes possible for the entire church to understand the meanings of the messages and thus it edifies them who hear it. When the church gather in fellowship and if a non believer or an unlearned comes there, if the secrets of his heart are manifested through diverse tongues and its interpretation, he would be convinced of his sins and it will lead to his repentance.

4. Prophecy

According to Paul, one must crave for prophecy like other spiritual gifts (1Cor 14:1). Prophecy is gift given to few members of the Church by God to convey His special message to the church. The meaning of prophecy, according to the original language, is “to speak for others”.

The ministry of prophecy is to receive God’s message and to convey it to the church in Spirit. Prophet is God’s authorised messenger. Let us see the main objectives of the gift of prophecy.

1. Edify spiritually (1Cor 14:3; Eph 4:11-13).
2. To bring conviction of sin (1Cor 14:24)
3. To reveal the secrets of the heart (1Cor 14:25)
4. To generate divine consciousness (1 Cor 14:25)
5. To comfort (1 Cor 14:3)
6. Exhortation (Act 15:32; 1Cor 14:31)
7. To confirm in faith (Act 15:32)
8. To discern (1Cor 14:24)

Proclaiming or acclaiming the present day facts courageously and authoritatively and revealing the future events (Act 11:28; 21:11); prophecy is one of the gifts of grace that influences the maximum number of people. Many have misunderstood that prophecy is to be given the highest importance among gifts. Many are exploited with such understanding. If we do so, it amounts to giving importance to one part of the body only (1Cor 12:14). Therefore, it is the duty of the church to examine and ascertain all these things in the light of the Word of God and accept only the aspects which are according to the Word. At the same time we should also remember that this is the most influential gift of grace for the growth of the Church.

II The gifts of Revelation

1. The Gifts of Wisdom

Paul speaks about two kinds of wisdom -The wisdom of the world and wisdom of God (1Cor 2:6-7). For 'wisdom', the word 'sophia' is used in Greek. According to Clement's opinion, gift of wisdom means the mature knowledge in human and divine aspects. There can be occasions when human wisdom may become inadequate and may require supernatural wisdom or capability. In such situations, the Holy Spirit helps us by pouring the divine wisdom in to the individual. Jesus assured His disciples that He would give such words and wisdom that our adversaries cannot gainsay or resist. (Luk 21:15). The Sanhedrin was astonished hearing the words of the illiterate Peter (Act 4:8 – 5:29).

2. The Word of Knowledge

For the word 'knowledge', a Greek word 'gnosis' has been used. It means the supernatural ability to know an individual in the same manner as God sees and identify that individual. Paul has mentioned this word in his epistles about 23 times. The words and counselling given by the Holy Spirit to speak according to the need of the time and context falls in this group. The following examples points out its necessity.

1. Jesus deals with Satan (Luke 4:1-13)
2. Jesus deals with Pharisees and Scribes (Luk 20:22-26; John 8:3-11)
3. Given for administration of Church and for solution to problems (Act 6:1-5; 15:28)
4. Apostle Paul uses during his missionary journeys (Act 27:23-24).

It is also seen that Jesus promised His disciples the Word of Knowledge (Luk 21:14-15).

3. Discerning of Spirits

By discerning, every spirit is not to be believed blindly but to be examined whether they are from God (1John 4:1-2). It comprises the ability to recognise the right and wrong, to identify the excellent, to discern the signs of times, to discern the thoughts of mind, to discern the body, etc. Peter could discern the mind set of Ananias and Sapphira and also the greed of Simon with such a discerning power. With this

gift, Apostle Paul could discern the spirit of divination dwelling in the girl who was following him (Act 16:16-17). The main purpose of the gift of discerning is not to discern the individual but to discern the spirit living in such individual. It is, therefore, essential to have such gift for all ministers of Christ.

Practical Lessons

Lack of the knowledge of gift of grace and immaturity in utilising it properly are one of the causes of failures of today's church. In order to use gifts appropriately, it is necessary to have deep knowledge about the gifts. Let us prayerfully yearn to obtain the gift of grace in our Church and also in us.

Questions

1. How many types of gift of grace are there? Which are they?
2. Explain the significance of gifts of tongues.
3. What is the purpose of the gift of prophecy?
4. What do you mean by gift of the Word of Knowledge? Explain with examples.

LESSON 20

The Gifts of Grace (Contd.)

Reading Portion : 1 Cor Chapters 12 :9-11, Rom 12.

Memory Verse : 1 Cor 14:39

Purpose : To understand the significance of different gifts and to use them in the expansion of Church.

Introduction : It is essential for all the believers, especially those who have received the special gifts, to understand about the working of different gifts which have been given by the Lord for the spiritual growth and progress of the Church. We must understand that the matters which do not suit the growth of the church are not the workings of the Spirit or gifts. Let us continue to study about the spiritual gifts.

III. The working gifts

1. The gift of faith

The gift of faith is totally different from saving by faith. "And these signs shall follow them that believe;" (Mark 16:17). This is called gift of faith. This gift removes all the doubts in us and turns all adversities in our favour and helps us to fulfil the divine purpose. Through this gift we obtain deep trust and confidence in the Lord.

Let us understand this by relating to Jesus' words that all things are possible for the one who believes. In Chapter 11 of the book to Hebrews, we can see the great history of the faith warriors who converted the unending possibilities of the gift of faith in to actions

(Heb 11:33-40). Abraham sacrificing his son by faith and Elias declaring to Ahab that there shall be no rains until he says are the examples of the faith in work. We can see the powerful usage of the gift of faith in the ministry of Peter and Paul (Act 3:4; 13:8-11).

2. The gift of healing

In Greek, the original language, the plural word 'Charismata immanton' is used for the gift of healing. It means the gifts of healings. This gift is to heal by the power of the Holy Spirit without the aid of any other medium. It is not necessary that a person with this gift heals all the diseases. The sick will be healed if it brings glory to God.

Healing is included in the promises of God. Healing is also one of the miracles performed by the believers (Mark 16:18). The elders of the church have the responsibility of anointing the sick with oil and pray. These are general things to be done in the church. We can see that God has given the ministry of the gift of healing to certain people by whom miraculous healings takes place when prayed for.

3. The gift of the working of miracles (1 Cor 12:10)

The working of miracle is the sign of God's power. These workings are over and above the law of the nature like healing of any kind of plague, casting out of demons, resurrection of the dead, etc. Through the working of miracles, God strengthen the Word (Act 14:3), the power of Jesus' name is revealed (Acts 3:16). Souls are saved, the church grows. The authority over the nature is demonstrated (Exodus 14:21-22; Josh 3:15-17; 2King 6:1-7).

Now let us study in brief about the other gifts described in the New Testament.

1. Teaching

Many things are recorded in the Bible regarding teachings (Rom 12:7; 1Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). This is an unavoidable gift for the church. For the word 'teaching', the Greek word 'Didache' is used in the original language. It means to teach. Whosoever received the gift of teaching are called 'Teachers'. God's plans for them are to study and discern the doctrinal truths and teach others. If the teaching is wrong, it would have an effect on the faith. As teaching is a very important aspect, Paul gives exhortation to Timothy to be careful in teaching (1Tim 4:16). Emphasising that Bishops should be apt enough to teach (Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9) is because of this reason.

2. Ministry

Ministry is a gift entrusted to all of the born again believer in one or the other way (Rom 12:7; 1Cor 12:28). Administration, caring, teaching, exhortation, etc. are given to certain people but the gift of ministry is given to all in different ways. Each one has to be faithful (Rom 12:7). If any man speaks.... ministering, let it be according to the ability which God has given (1Pet 4:11). Ministering of God's word, serving of the sick, helping of widows and orphans, etc. are the gifts of ministry.

3. Governance

The governance, administration, etc. are given to certain individuals only (Rom 12:8; 1Cor 12:28). For 'governance', the word 'Proistemi' is used in original language Greek. It means, to appoint, to establish, to chair, etc. For the word 'gift of governance', the word 'Kubernesis' is used. It means, to steer, to show the way, etc. The purpose of governance of church is to feed or direct the church.

4. Evangelism

The gift of evangelism is given to the believers for the growth of the Church (Eph 4:11). The purpose of this gift is to make the gentiles conscious of their sins and to lead them to salvation.

5. Giving

"He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity" (Rom 12:8). For 'giving', the Greek word 'Metadedoomi' is used. It means to take part (participate). The same word is used in Luke 3:11. In Romans 11:1, this word has been used to mean 'to give'. It emphasise the spiritual and material duty of the believers towards the work of church (ministry). Though the Lord has commanded every believer to give, special gift is given to certain individuals to give more and more.

6. Mercy (Compassion)

"... he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom 12:8). In Greek the word 'Eleeo' is used to indicate the gift of mercy. This word has the meanings like compassionate, mercy, kind, affectionate, etc. It means helping the poor and the afflicted. The word 'cheerful' has the meanings like, joy, cheerful, joyful, etc. in Greek. This is a gift to cheerfully help the afflicted.

7. Helping (1 Cor 12:28)

The Greek word 'Antilembano' has been used for this word. Help, supply, support, etc. are the meanings of this word. Such help

comprises the share for the work of Lord, help to the deserving co-believers and also the share given to the poor. Though all the believers have to help, certain people have been granted this gift to help cheerfully and with compassion.

8. Hospitality (1Pet 4:9; Heb 13:1-2)

Some are given special grace to receive guests heartily, to show hospitality and to provide shelter to them.

9. Leadership (1 Cor 12:28)

..... he that ruleth, with diligence..." (Rom 12:8). Having a Bishop is a grant of the Lord to the Church to lead His Church according to His Will and to properly and systematically organise its future aspects. God gives suitable commanding power and leadership quality to certain people so that they lead, reprove and correct the church from time to time.

10. Exhortation (Rom 12:8)

Exhortation is related to the gift of teaching. Those who exhort have a close relationship with teachers and prophets. The work of exhortation is to counsel the believers with the Word of God and true doctrines and to make them strong to dedicate their life for Christ. By exhortation God's children gets spiritual experiences of edification, growth, comfort, consciousness of sin, repentance, sanctification, faith, spiritual flourishing, etc.

The gifts and some forewarnings

These days, there is an increasing trend of using the gifts of grace for personal benefits and self boasting instead of the profit of all. The gifts were not for the former Church or for the church in Corinth only. This is to be experienced by the Church at any point of time or period. Though the Corinth church was filled with all the gifts, many a time they misused it. A forewarning was given to them about the immature use of the gifts and also made them aware about the benefits and blessings of its right use. Through exhortations like, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1Thi 4:14), nourish up the Words... (1Thi 1:6), covet earnest for the best gifts (1Cor 12:31); covet for spiritual gifts especially for prophecy (1 Cor 14:39), etc., the apostles clearly teaches them the preciousness of gifts and motivated them to use it appropriately.

Practical Lessons

We must have the knowledge of Word to understand the cheating being done these days in the name of gifts. We must grasp the importance of gifts and also use it appropriately.

Questions

1. What do you mean by gift of ministry?
2. What is the difference between the saving by faith and the gift of faith?
3. What are the working gifts?
4. What do you mean by gift of working miracles?

LESSON 21

The Fruit of Spirit

Reading Portion : Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11.

Memory Verse : John : 15:5

Purpose : To be filled with the fruits of the Spirit and be able to lead a victorious Christian life.

Introduction : The gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit are different, yet they are closely related to each other. The Lord desires His children to be filled with the spiritual fruits. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, the fruit of Spirit can be revealed in its fullness only if one abides in Christ.

The difference between the gifts of Spirit and the fruits of Spirit

The gifts of Spirit are the gifts of grace granted to the Church for the benefit of all. The fruits of Spirit are to be produced naturally in each one of his own. It is the natural reflection of the Holy Spirit dwelling in a person. Spiritual gifts are not spiritual fruits. A person may not receive all the gifts. However, it is essential for everyone to yield all the 9 fruits. The Holy Spirit divides the gifts among different persons. It is not necessary that the gifts received by an individual are always expressed. It is under the total control of Holy Spirit. But the spiritual fruits are to be borne by all the children of God by abiding in the Holy Spirit. It is to remain with them till the end. The fruits of the Spirit should be produced and increased in us daily. It has to be nurtured (Gal 5:22-23). But the gifts of Spirit are not to be nurtured by us. It is a grant according to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

What is the fruit of Spirit

Spirit means the Holy Spirit. To produce the fruits of the Spirit means to produce fruits by the dwelling of Holy Spirit in a person. Though the fruit is of the Holy Spirit, it has to be produced by the Spirit of man. Only when the spirit of man submits to the Holy Spirit and works under its authority, the fruit can be produced. In short, the fruit of Spirit is produced when the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit work together. We can produce fruit only when we abide in Christ.

We can destroy the desires of flesh only by dwelling in Holy Spirit. They that have Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). This experience can be achieved only with the power of spirit. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, our carnal mind is replaced with a spiritual mind (Rom 8:5-14). Like the branch abiding in the vine produces grapes, the fruit of Spirit is manifested in us when the Holy Spirit dwells in us. The lists of the fruit of spirit comprises precious qualities like love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. The Holy Spirit yearns for a person having all these qualities. The name of God shall be glorified when we produce more and more fruits.

The fruit of Spirit

1. Love (Agape)

The greatest among all fruits is love (*'charity' in English translation*) (1Cor Chapter 13 –). Therefore, the prime position is given to charity. The Greek word 'Agape' indicates the highest form of love. Agape is the experience of selfless and sacrificing yearning for other's welfare. Agape is the love of God manifested on the cross. God the Father demonstrated His love to men through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who made that love to flow in to the hearts of believers (Rom 5:5). Jesus prayed so that His disciples' heart be filled with God's love. God's children should love each other with the love of Christ.

2. Joy (Chara)

Holy Spirit fills a believer with such a joy that it is sustained in all situations. With the strength of this joy, even while staying in prison, Paul was able to exhort the community of believers to rejoice in the Lord always. The joy of the children of God cannot be taken away by any adversity (Phil 3:1; 4:4). It is an experience of the kingdom of God. It is written that "For the kingdom of God is not

meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). The Holy Spirit is the source of joy. Therefore, anyone filled with the Holy Spirit produces and enjoys this fruit.

3. Peace (Eirene)

The word ‘Eirene’ means to indicate the right relationship between God and men. The reconciliation to God is the foundation of peace. Jesus Christ is the prince of peace and the giver of peace. When the Holy Spirit starts dwelling in us, the peace of God will rule our hearts (Col 3:16). “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7) is God’s promise to us. “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). This peace ruled in Jesus, during his life in this world even during trials, tests, mocking, crucifixion and at all other times. The Lord has given us the same peace that He experienced Himself (John 14:27).

4. Longsuffering (Makrothumia)

Longsuffering, according to the original language, it means the ability to overcome or bear the cruelty, hostility, opposition, mocking, murmurings, dissatisfaction, wrath, thought of revenge, etc. of others. In the Scriptures we can see longsuffering as one of the qualities of our Lord (Exo 34:6; Num 14:17). When the Holy Spirit dominates in a person, it will be visible in him by displaying the Lord’s characters. The longsuffering that enabled Stephen to pray for forgiveness of the people stoning him should be visible in every child of God.

5. Gentleness (Chrestotes)

Gentleness means behaving with loving kindness. Though it has meanings like merciful, compassionate, etc., gentleness has a characteristic beyond such meanings. Compassion is a priceless benefaction of Christianity. Even though we were undeserving, God showed us His mercy without considering our transgressions. We are therefore duty bound to be merciful to others. A Spirit filled person will always display this Spiritual fruit. They would show gentleness to poor, the downtrodden, the orphan and the widows.

6. Goodness (Agathosune)

In the original language, ‘goodness’ means ‘love in action’. Doing good heartily is called goodness. Christian life should not be self centred but its target should be the welfare of others. When the Holy Spirit lives in us, our priorities for self will be replaced with goodness.

7. Faith (Pistos)

The transformation that would develop in a person when relying on God and His Word is called Faith. When the Holy Spirit lives in us, the godly characteristic of faith would be demonstrated in us too. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1Cor 4:2). We should have faith on God till the end. It is the message of our Lord to the church that we must be faithful till the end. Similarly God's children should be faithful to men.

8. Meekness (Praotes)

The Greek word Praotes means, calmness, slowness, benign, etc. In the original language it means a situation with matured approach and having attitude for not raising or indulging in dispute.

9. Temperance (Egkrateia)

The word Egkrateia means having self control. It is a control that is to be displayed at all levels of life. Temperance is the spiritual control over anger, the desires of the flesh, covetness of the worldly affairs, the desires of speech, selfishness, etc. In other words one must have temperance in relation to all the 5 senses and at all spheres of life. One can have temperance to a certain limit by own efforts. But if we allow the Holy Spirit to take over the complete control of our life, we can have total temperance in our life.

The relationship between gifts and love

Chapters 12 and 14 of the book of 1 Corinthians describes about the gifts and their working. In the middle Chapter 13 gives the detailed description about love. From this, it is clear that gifts and love have an intertwining bonding. The power of gifts and its functioning should have bond of love. The gifts of grace, howsoever great it is, if not out of love will be non-profitable. Therefore it is said that "though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal". The spiritual maturity is to be evaluated not on the basis of the number of gifts possessed but on the basis of the fruits of the Holy Spirit demonstrated. Gifts, howsoever great it is, not beneficial if it not dealt in the fullness of godly love. The way of love is the greatest of all gifts (1Cor 12:31; 13:13).

Practical Lessons

The fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced with one's own effort. It is produced by the living of Holy Spirit in oneself. As all the 9

fruits are defined in one singular word 'fruit', the Spirit filled person should possess all the 9 fruits.

Questions

1. Which is the greatest – fruit or gift of the Holy Spirit?
2. Gifts and love should have interweaving relationship. Prove.
3. What are the fruits of Holy Spirit?
4. What is the speciality of godly peace?

LESSON 22

The Origin and Growth of Church

Reading Portion : Acts Chapters 2, 8, 13, 16 and 17.

Memory Verse : Matthew 16 : 18

Purpose : To understand what is Church. Moreover to grasp how wonderfully the Church surpassed and sustained the severe persecution.

Introduction : The word 'Church' brings many ideas to our mind. By the word Church we do not mean the beautiful building or an organisation. Then what is Church in the light of the Holy Scripture? What were the persecutions it faced in the beginning? How did the Church grow? Let us examine these questions.

What is Church?

For Church, the Hebrew word 'quhal' is used. It means assembly, congregation, etc. In New Testament, mainly the Greek word 'Ecclesia' is used. Its meaning is 'a group of people separated for a special purpose'. Another word used in Greek is 'Kuriakon'. It means 'the one who is of the Lord' or 'the one who is for the Lord'. The word 'Ecclesia' meaning 'Church' is a combination of two words namely 'Ec' (come out) and 'caleja' (call). When these are joined it means 'called out'.

Ecclesia is used in the New Testament in two ways (1) to mean local church [e.g. Church of Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, etc.] and (2) to mean the Universal Church or the entire churches of the world. Therefore, Church is the society of people separated from all tribes,

generations, nations and languages, who are saved and sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Genesis of Church

Though Church was a mystery hidden in the heart of God from the beginning, it was revealed through Jesus Christ. In Matt 16:18, Jesus Christ said to Peter *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"*. The accomplishment of this occurred in the subsequent event of Pentecost day (Acts Chapter 2). Therefore it is evident that Church is not formed as the continuation of the congregation of Israel. Though the disciples were present even before the formation of the church, the real birth of the church occurred on the Pentecost day. When the Holy Spirit was poured on the tarrying disciples, they were filled with the power and started preaching gospel. Some 3000 people accepted the gospel, repented and became members of the church. From this day, we can see the growth of church.

The growth of the Church

In the Book of Acts, we see the fulfilment of God's promise that *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"*. Jerusalem was the capital and religious centre of Jews. The Church originated in Jerusalem expanded to the entire Judah. Thereafter we see its victory flag furling in Samaria (Chapter 8), Europe (Chapter 16) and at the last in Rome, the capital of Roman empire. The growth of the church in the first century can be understood in two ways.

1. Internal growth

Those who were baptised after accepting the Word continued with one accord in the temple, listening to the teaching of the apostles, in breaking of bread, praising the Lord and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:42-47). Therefore, the Church grew in the grace and wisdom of Jesus Christ.

2. External growth of the Church

The external growth occurred with the preaching of the Gospel. The Apostles and the believers courageously witnessed Jesus Christ as the Lord. The first coming of the Holy Spirit, the formation of the church and the first detailed preaching occurred in Jerusalem. The first 7 chapters of the book of Acts describe the history of the church in Jerusalem in continuous order. In this portion, we can see the basic

doctrines of the church, rituals, worship, personification, style, social status and condition, evangelism, fellowship, etc. Following the martyrdom of Stephen, the believers started going out of Jerusalem. They preached gospel in the entire Judah and Samaria.

The contribution of Paul, the Apostle of the gentiles, is very valuable. During his missionary journeys, he not only established many local churches but also appointed the elders and made them strong in faith. Moreover, he rescued the gospel truths from the Jewish frameworks and strengthened the truth that the gentiles are also equally eligible for the salvation and they should be fellow heirs, same body and partakers of God's promise in Christ through the gospel.

There are many causes for the growth of the church in the first century.

- i. The expansion of the then Roman Empire (transportation facility, peaceful environment, safety, judicial system, etc. helped preaching of gospel).
- ii. The lifestyle and witnessing of the former church.
- iii. The messages (sermons) and the zeal for religion.
- iv. The expectation that Jesus Christ will come back soon (the hope of the future world).
- v. The miracles done by the former church.
- vi. The persecution faced by the former church and their reactions to it.
- vii. Prayer and fellowship with one accord.
- viii. The attitude of Christians towards their afflicted brethren (e.g. widows, mercy towards the poor).

These led to the growth of the church. But growth multiplied along with equal opposition.

The persecutions faced by the Church

The period between the beginning of gospel preaching and up to the third century was a time of persecution for the church. In the third century, the church conquered the Roman Empire. The subsequent growth of the Church was in accordance with the words of Tertullian that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church". In the initial period the church faced opposition and persecution from the Jews. They found the church as the 'group of blasphemers'.

Roman government viewed the church as a part of Jewish religion and therefore it was an 'unlawful religion' for them and, therefore, they were persecuted.

The causes for persecution

1. The government viewed Christianity as an unlawful religion. The Roman government was particular that all the people under their rule should have similar religious faith. Practising, following and believing in any religion which was not in accordance with the rule or not approved by the government was considered as offence according to the law.
2. The Christians were reluctant and refused to follow the polytheism and worship of the emperor.
3. They were treated as atheists as they refused to worship the idols.
4. They preached about the destruction of worldly kingdoms and the coming of an eternal kingdom. In addition to this, as the Christians were against idol worship, they refused to accept government jobs and serve in the army. As they refused worshipping idols, they were considered as anti nationals and were persecuted for the offence of sedition.
5. Their fellowships for worship and Lord's Table were considered as gatherings for evil and as sedition. These gatherings were interpreted as secret meetings and persecuted. They were portrayed as man eaters.
6. The respectable position given to women and the mercy and brotherhood shown to slaves by the Christians could not be accepted by them. They understood the consequences of such attitude which led to persecution of Christians.

Many other allegations were put on the Christians. On the top of all these, their strong and courageous proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Lord and the name of Jesus Christ is the only name for salvation led to severe persecution. Some were exiled, some were beheaded, some were cast in to the den of wild animals, some were brutally killed in public places, some were jailed, some were slain with the sword and some were thrown in to fire (Heb 11:36-38; 1Pet 1:6-7). In spite of this, the church continued to grow.

The church which existed only at few places in the Roman Empire not only spread and became world famous but also worked as a wonderful and amazing powerful force due to their courage and

unity in prayer even while facing death. Many books were written during this period in order to strengthen the brethren in faith. These persecutions helped to correct many of the misunderstandings of others and demonstrated the real Christianity to them.

Practical Lessons

God is the owner of church. It was begun by the Holy Spirit and its growth is led by the Holy Spirit. God needs dedicated individuals to complete His tasks and to be His witness. Let us dedicate ourselves for the same.

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word 'Church'?
2. What are the Hebrew and Greek words used for Church?
3. What do you mean by 'internal growth' of the Church?
4. What are the causes for the persecution of Church?
5. What are causes due to which the Church grew?

LESSON 23

The Church – after the persecution

Reading Portion : Rev 2:8-11

Memory Verse : Rev 3:8

Purpose : To understand that God preserves those who Courageously withstand even during persecution and to grasp that no force can ruin the Church

Introduction : During the second and third centuries, the Christian church expanded all over the Roman Empire. At the same time, they had to face severe persecution and afflictions. When Satan understood that Church cannot be ruined through persecution he started destroying it through false doctrines. Christianity, relieved from the clutches of Jewish-politico-religious bondage had to counter the false doctrines and heresies of many mystery religions. Moreover, the fall of Roman Empire had become a challenge to the survival of Christianity.

The Church History

The period between AD 300 and AD 500 is known as the Constantine period. In AD 311, when Emperor Galerius died, 4 persons staked claim to rule the Empire. Constantine and Licinius on one side and Maxentius Deo and Mac Sautius on the other side contested for the power. Constantine converted to Christianity because he won the Milvian Bridge War and defeated Maxentius on October 28, 312 AD. It is recorded in the history that on the noon of the previous day of the war, he saw a cross sign in the sky and a writing

‘In this sign conquer’. Thereafter, he saw the same vision during the night and in the light of the same his soldiers went for war with the flag having the cross sign replacing the eagle sign, due which he had an overwhelming victory. Therefore, Constantine and Licinius gathered together in Milan and proclaimed Christianity as the official religion according to the Law. This is called the Constantine Edict of Milan. Accordingly, Christianity got equal position along with other official religions and all the wealth and properties that were lost during the persecution period were returned to them.

In AD 323, when he was anointed as the emperor of Roman Empire, he declared Christianity as the State Religion and granted all amenities. Thereafter he shifted the capital to Byzantium and gave the city a new name as Constantinople. Elegant worship places were built according to the royal standards and Christian doctrines were incorporated in framing laws. Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea was told to write 50 copies of the Bible for 50 new churches. It is believed that these handwritten copies were later found and are preserved safely in the Vatican Library.

Constantine received baptism on his death bed. It is alleged that he was not a real Christian till that time. Moreover, the historians give 3 other reasons for Constantine approving Christianity.

1. He was convinced that the God of Christians is powerful as he could not ruin Christianity.
2. He understood that his governance can be made strong by accepting Christians who were increasing in numbers.
3. He may have had a real compassion towards Christian faith.

During his time, Christianity obtained freedom to grow. As he was in favour of Christianity, Constantine declared Sunday as a public holiday. He gave money from the treasury to construct church buildings. Priests were exempted from taxes. The eagle sign was replaced with cross as his official sign. Thus, many people became Christian without transforming the heart, only to receive the benefits. Therefore, the internal standards of the church started diminishing. Additionally, the State and government started getting involved in the church administration.

During the period from AD 300 to AD 500 many heresies entered in to the Church due to its relationship with the State. During this time, the Church was forced to interpret their faith and counter the false rituals and heresies.

Even before Emperor Constantine's time, certain false doctrines had started entering the church through creating doubts on the doctrinal creeds, life styles, rites and rituals, etc. All these anti-doctrines had similarity with the rituals of the heathen. In addition to the above, certain Greek thoughts and Persian mystery religions also influenced the Christian doctrines. At this time it became essential for interpreting and protecting the Christian creeds thus and thus the apologetic writings came in to existence. These are the explanations by the Church elders relating to the Christian faith. In this connection, the contributions of church elders like Athenagorus, Athanasius, Ignatius, Justine Martin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, etc. are very valuable. By the time of 3rd century, church councils were formed to resolve matters of dispute. Three types of councils existed (1) Local Council, (2) National Council and (3) International Councils.

The main Councils

The 4th century AD can be called the period when numerous faith related arguments took place. During this century, the basic Christian philosophies were formed and a creed of faith codified. Following are the main Councils organised to protest against the false doctrines that crept in to the Church.

1. The Nicene Council (AD 325)

The historical first general council was convened in Nicaea Town, one of the important cities and prime place of Bithynia. It is believed that this council was convened by Constantine in AD 325 wherein some 318 Bishops participated representing the entire Roman Empire. The false doctrine brought by Arius opposing the divine nature (deity) of Jesus Christ was prohibited and the Nicene Creed establishing the divinity of Jesus Christ was declared. The Council started on June 19, 325 AD was completed on 25th August, 325. Thus, fervent argument took place between Arius and opposing parties.

Certain portions of the Nicene Creed as it is known today were modified by subsequent councils. However, the main portion was formed in Nicene Council is called Nicene Creed.

2. The Constantinople Council (AD 381)

Even after the end of the Nicene council the arguments between the two groups were not over. In order to confirm the Nicene Creed and to restore peace among Churches, great efforts were made by

Capadocian Bishop Beselius (Basil), Nyssa Bishop Gregorius and Nazianzus, Bishop Gregorius. (They are called the Cappadocian Fathers).

The second council was convened not only to disapprove of the Arius doctrine but also to remove the two other false faiths arisen as a consequence to Arius faith. They are known as Macedonianism and Appollinarianism. This Council was held between AD 385 May and July was convened by Theodosius Emperor. This council was conducted to further confirm and strengthen the doctrine of Trinity and also to review the Nicene Creed from where the Arius Group, Macadonians and Appollinarians were casted out.

3. The Ephesus Council (AD 431)

This council convened to establish the incarnation of Jesus as man and also to oppose and reject the Nestorian teachings. This council conducted between June and July of 431 AD. It was convened by Emperor Theodosius. The Church was parted in to two with Alexandrian Theology and Antiochian Theology. The Emperor's objective was to join them together.

The council which had begun before the arrival of Nestorian group was not ready to listen to their ideas. All the teachings raised by Nestorian were rejected and they were excommunicated from the church. They also discarded the good teaching that Virgin Mary should only be considered as the mother of Christ and not to be called as Mother of God. The truth is that this council had very serious adversities. The Eastern Churches did not accept this council.

4. Chalcedonian Council

This council was convoked by the Marcian emperor in AD 451 in the months of October-November. Some 600 Bishops participated in this council. The main resolution was the two natures of Jesus Christ (the divinity and humanity) was agreed upon. In this council the Eutychainism was totally rejected. It was officially affirmed that Christ, the single individual posses both human and divine Wills.

From AD 300 to AD 500 is the period when the basic creeds and doctrinal standards of Christian faith were formed. The first official written creed is the Nicene Creed.

Practical Lessons

We have seen as to how the Christian truths about faith were founded and established. We have also understood that Satan has

numerous wile plans to destroy the church. Therefore we are dutifully bound to fight for the doctrines given to us.

Questions

1. Which are the main councils?
2. What was the main event that occurred in AD 313?
3. What were the contributions of Emperor Constantine?
4. What are the meanings of the words 'Christhotoyos' and Theotoyos?
5. Why are these different?

LESSON 24

The Dark period of the Church

Reading Portion : Dan 6:12

Memory Verse : John 17:11-12

Purpose : To be aware of the dark period of Christian history.

Introduction : We have already seen how the Church overcame the challenges it faced. Thereafter the Church which was supposed to be the light of the world travelled from the light into darkness. Now let us study how far the church went through darkness and about the false doctrines that crept in during this period.

The fall of Roman Empire

In the Christian history, the period of AD 500 to AD 1500 is called the Middle Ages. The historians also called this period as the Dark Period. In the initial period of the middle age, due to continuous wars with certain barbarian tribes and also due to internal conflicts, the political strength of Roman Empire started weakening. From the attacks of Goths and Huns and when Turkey conquered the capital city of Constantinople, the Roman Empire was totally wrecked. The rich culture that was nurtured by the Greek-Roman empires till that time was totally wiped out due to ignorance and cultureless nature of the Goth tribes, etc. This was socially, financially and culturally a dark period.

During this period, new ventures and organisations formed in the church. From the first century itself, the divisions namely Eastern

and Western churches were in existence. These were the two powerful schools of thought in that period.

The authority of Popes in Church

In AD 540, Gregory, born in an elite family who was then 33 years old was appointed as governor of the city of Rome by Emperor Justin II. Bored with power and luxurious life, he decided to quit that position and lead a monastic life. In AD 575, He joined a group of Benedict community as a monk. In September 3, 590 AD, he was ordained as the Pope against his wish. He is known as the first Pope, father of Popes, the great Gregory, etc.

His claim that the general supervision of the Christian churches rests with the Bishop of Rome being the successor of Peter led to the growth of authority of the subsequent bishops. This led to the combining of the governance by political and religious authorities. As the Bishop of Rome was located in the capital city, they had a special official position among other bishops. The Christians also maintained a special affection for Rome as the martyrdom of Peter and Paul had occurred in Rome. During the attack of Goths, the bishops of Rome saved the city through dialogues and settlements. All these helped the Roman bishops to reach the position of Pope.

The genesis of superstitious beliefs

During this period, certain superstitious beliefs against the true Bible entered in the Church. Most of them were begun by Gregory. A few of them are mentioned below.

1. They taught that original sin can be washed away by baptism.
2. If a believer commits a sins after the baptism, the remedy for it is the atonement prescribed by the Church.
3. There is a place called purgatory. If the indulgence prescribed by the holy church is performed, the dead can be purified.
4. The Lord's Table is the repetition of Lord's death. It is not commemoration. It is to be offered as a sacrifice only.
5. In the 'qurbana' (holy offering) transubstantiation takes place. The bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
6. The qurbana is beneficial to both the living and the dead.
7. The saints can help in many ways. Therefore their intercession is essential.
8. It is essential to bow down and pray to the saints.

9. The relics have power. It has to be redeemed and dedicated properly.

Thus, many heresies had entered in to the church. The true Word and Christ, the possessor of the Church did not have any place in the church.

The beginning of Monastery

A Monastery group is an institution that emerged and developed in godliness and love of Christ when the values of church started degrading during 3rd and 4th century. These monasteries stood as a corrective force against the church leadership when they ignored the Christian values and went after power, wealth, luxury and worldly life. These institutions were a source of exhortation for the church.

The church had already ignored its chief mission of evangelism. While the church leaders were in the company and parlours of the kings, the monks wandered before them and preached the gospel. These institutions of monks preferred to sacrifice worldly pleasures and chose to take a vow as monks. They gave top most priority to education, counselling and accomplishment of the mission. Their target was to save themselves and also save the church as this ship was sinking in the worldly affairs.

Saving their own souls and progress of the church were not the only targets that they had. The Gnostic views like material world is wicked and the body of man is the seat of sin, etc. also influenced some of them. Therefore, few of them attempted to torment and destroy their body. History witnesses the progress of the monastery institutions. We can see that these monks used to live alone without contacting each other during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. They started living in monasteries by start of the 3rd century aligning their sacrificial life style more towards a Christian way particularly in terms of worship, dressing (clothes), food, living standard, etc. By the 13th century this was also changed. They became poor volunteers for the welfare and progress of the society by roaming in the streets and market places of the towns and villages and also preached the gospel. In any case, their contribution to the progress of the church was very great.

The division of church as Western and Eastern Churches

The church was divided in to two in 1054 AD. The causes of this split were the differences in the strong beliefs which had grown during 4-5 centuries, jealousy among themselves, petty issues, the quest for power by the Pope and the Patriarch.

The Crusades

After the attack of the Turks, the Christian religion and Christians had to face persecution from the Muslims. The subsequent wars held between Muslims and the Christians are called Crusades. The soldiers who took part in the crusades used to display a sign of a red cross on the top or right side of their clothes. They also wore a badge with a cross. The symbol of their flag was also a cross. These fights were given the name of Crusade because of all these displays.

There were mainly 3 reasons for these crusades.

1. The attack of Muslims on the Christians. Jerusalem was under their control by 7th century. The Christians wanted to re-capture their holy land.
2. For centuries, the Christians pilgrims from Europe used to visit Jerusalem. Turkey started levying huge amount as taxes (Jizya) for this. Sometimes the Christian pilgrims were attacked and killed.
3. To save the Western Europe from the attack of Muslims.

The crusades were prompted by the western church and led by the Popes. Some 8 crusades occurred between AD 1095 – 1270. But the crusades could not achieve the desired objective. This caused many after effects on a religious, social and cultural level. Firstly, this increased the power of the Popes. Their revenue increased due to levying of the 'saladin' tax. Secondly, There was a general awareness of godliness among the European people. Thirdly, The Lord who was otherwise seen and heard only during the 'qurbana' (sacrifice) while visiting Jerusalem had become more realistic in their life. Fourthly, this provided a new zeal for missionary work. Fifthly, these crusades brought vast changes in the field of education. They concentrated on learning new languages, practice mathematics, build new cities, etc. We cannot forget that the crusades created much damage too.

The Christian Education

The zeal for finding out the truth started increasing among the people in the middle of false doctrines and philosophies. An intellectual revitalisation also began with the introduction of the monasteries. They wrote many books. Many thoughts combining of faith and logic emerged to strengthen the truth. It is to be noted that a keenness to question the faith also emerged during this period.

Practical Lessons

We must understand that much damage that can be caused by the decay of the church. God has made each one of us as the watchman to remind and revitalise the church and the society when they deviate from the truth. The great challenge today is to keep ourselves and our belief strong. Let us welcome that challenge.

Questions

1. How did the church move in the control of the Pope?
2. What were the causes for the emergence of monasteries?
3. What are the pros and cons of crusades?
4. How did superstition come in to existence in the Church?

LESSON 25

The Religious Renaissance

Reading Portion : 1 Kings 21:1-29

Memory Verse : Job 19:25-26

Purpose : God separates certain people for Him from all generations. David finished his ministry in his generation according to the counsel of God and died. Like this, we need to grasp that we too have been entrusted with certain responsibilities to be fulfilled in our lifetime.

Introduction : In the Medieval Period, the Christian faith spread over entire Europe. In order to remove the insecurity arisen due to the fall of Roman Empire, the Christian Church tried to go ahead as the messengers of peace and compromise. In Europe many uncivilised people were transformed and became Christians. As we have seen in the last lesson, the increase in authority of Pope led to the misuse of power and the compromise between Church and politics led to spiritual deterioration. However, during the second half of the 14th century, the winds of change started blowing. The consequence of this was the 'religious intellectual awakening'.

The Renaissance

The Renaissance which began in the 14th and 15th centuries led to the reformation of religion. Europe needed a revival which was otherwise weary or ruined culturally, socially and financially. The renaissance helped it. The renaissance brought a re-birth to the culture, art and literature in Europe. The invention of printing by

Guttenberg in 1445 and subsequent publishing of Bible sped up the momentum of reformation. New ideas and knowledge were took form in respect to man, nation, diplomacy, philosophy, etc. These reformations enabled many languages to grow and strengthen in Europe.

The renaissance also gave many contributions in the field of literature. The world famous 'Divine Comedy' by Dante, the political science writings of Niccolo Machiavelli, the translations of the writings of Plato, Homer, etc. led to the intellectual rejuvenation. The sculpting of Da Vinci, the Pieta of Michelangelo, other sculptures, new discoveries in the area of science, the compass, telescope, mechanical clock, etc. were the inventions of this period.

The religious renaissance

The renaissance and intellectual awakening led to great changes among the public. People came forward to question many wrong customs and blind rituals that existed then. They started to raise their voices against the authority of Pope. People started to think that each individual is important. The emerging thought was that each individual is valuable and their welfare is the welfare of nation. People started studying and interpreting the Bible through a new look and wanted to liberate the Church from the pauper Papacy. During this period, John Wycliffe, John Huss, Erasmus, Savanarola, etc, came forward as representatives of revival. They are called as forerunners and morning stars of reformation.

John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe was born in 1314 in a village in Yorkshire in England. After completing his education in the Oxford University, he served as a Priest among the poor in Lautenberg. He was a great Bible interpreter and came to be known as the Morning Star of Religious Reformation. In AD 1365, when Pope Clement demanded a levy, due to him being from England, he joined King Edward III and the Parliament and raised voice against giving levy to Pope and also questioned his authority. He questioned the teachings and rituals (sacraments) of the Church which were not based on the Bible. He argued that the head of the Church is Christ and not the Pope. He further argued that instead of the church the Bible should lead the life of believer. He reminded that the doctrine of transubstantiation is not according to Bible and it will lead to a teaching that the priests possess a supernatural power. He also sent his disciples to all places

in England to exchange and spread his ideas and messages. They are known as Lollards.

Between 1382 and 1384 the entire Bible was translated from Latin to English and sent to all the places. He taught that only the Word of God is the standard for the creed of faith. Agitated with this activity, Pope and his followers persecuted Wycliffe. He died peacefully in 1384. After 31 years, his bones were exhumed, burnt and the ash was cast into the 'Swift' river.

John Huss (1373-1415)

John Huss is among the first to work for the religious Reformation in Europe in the 14th century. While in Prague University as a professor, he got a tract containing the ideas of John Wycliffe from certain students who came from England to Bohemia. This led him towards reformatory thoughts. Thereafter, he bought the books of Wycliffe. Influenced by Wycliffe's doctrines, Huss raised a voice of revival in Europe. In 1412, he raised voice against the Sale of Indulgence by the Pope. Because he rejected the orders to confess his mistakes as per the resolution taken in the Council of AD 1415, Huss was burnt publicly. After the death of Huss, majority of people in Bohemia (in Europe) accepted his ideals and decided to protest against Pope.

Desiderius Erasmus

Even though he was a Dutch, majority of his life was spent in France, England, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, etc. After the death of his parents at the age of 18, he joined a Monastery. Then he studied in the University of Paris and thereafter started teaching there. Erasmus was a Thinker, Scholar and Writer. He wrote many books. His Greek Bible with translation in Latin is very notable. With the efforts of Erasmus, the Greek scholars were able to understand the truths of New Testament. His New Testament translations along with explanations could be understood even by an ordinary man. The knowledge in the Scripture alone led to the religious revival (Reformation) later. The 'Praise of the Folly' written by Erasmus is a good creation satirically attacking the blind superstitions of the European society and the bad teachings of the Pope.

Savonarola

Savonarola is an individual who worked in the forefront with the ideology of Christianity for making Christianity a firm power in the world by sanctifying the Church. He was a strong preacher, a

monk and a statesman. He was born in Ferrada, Italy in AD 1452. He joined a monastery of the Dominican order at the age of 22 years. He rebuked the ungodly and wicked people of the city as a prophet. In the year 1470, he publicly burnt most of the pictures, sculptures, ungodly books and other valuables of the city.

He rebuked the unrighteous life of the then Pope Alexander VI, who became his opponent. The Pope not only excommunicated him but also burnt his body.

The above great men sacrificed their life to sow seed of reformation of the Church. However, we see from history that all these things brought fruit later.

Practical Lessons

The truth always prevails howsoever one tries to hide it. We must stand as the watchmen of the true word. Moreover, our prayers and deeds are necessary to have newness and revival in the weakened church.

Questions

1. Who are the forerunners of the renaissance?
2. Is renaissance the forerunner of reformation? Explain.
3. What was the religious situation during 14th and 15th centuries?

LESSON 26

The Reformation

Reading Portion : Romans 5 : 1-12; 2Cor 6:14-17.

Memory Verse : John 16:1-3

Purpose : To learn that the disciples are responsible at all times to preach the gospel of salvation accomplished by Christ on the Cross of Calvary and the Way of the Cross is their goal.

Introduction : If God begins any work, He is mighty to finish it successfully. Though efforts were made in the 14th century to reform the Church, the values of which were deteriorated during the Medieval Age, success was fully achieved only after continuous efforts for the next 2 centuries. In the last lesson we saw the efforts of the forerunners involved in it. Martin Luther and John Calvin are the other two important persons for the cause of the reformation.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born in 1483 in Icelaben in Germany. After university degree he went for law degree at the behest of his father. However he was being disturbed by the guilt of sin. Therefore he abandoned learning law and joined a Monastery. He accepted monasticism with the anxiety of achieving salvation of the soul through monastic rituals, fasting and bodily sufferings. When he failed to get the expected result, he started looking at the sacraments of the church with a doubtful eye. In AD 1508, Martin Luther was appointed in the newly established University in Vittenburg to learn the philosophy of Aristotle. In AD 1511, when he was visiting the

Holy places in Rome and was fearfully climbing the 'Santa Scala' on knees, the picture of the theme of the Book of Romans which he had read earlier that said "*my righteous will live by faith*" came to his mind. He returned immediately. This situation can be considered as Martin Luther's transformation.

In 1512, after obtaining a doctorate degree in Theology, Martin Luther started teaching Bible in the University. He believed and also started preaching that the cause for the gift of salvation is only through faith as against the teaching of church that one can be justified by sacraments and good deeds.

The beginning and subsequent events of Reformation

On 31st October 1517, Martin Luther wrote 95 articles in Latin against the 'sale of indulgences' of Pope Leo X and affixed the same on the gate of the churches in Vittenburg. This day is considered as the auspicious birth date of the Reformation. The sale of indulgences was to raise money for the building of the Temple in the name of Peter. The work of Luther done with the objective to renew the church became famous in Germany within two weeks time and in the whole Europe within a months' time. But initially the church never agreed to discuss this issue.

Pope agreed to examine him in Germany in the year 1518 AD. One representative of the Pope interrogated Luther in Augsburg and adjudged him as a false teacher. Martin Luther refuted this and preached against the doctrines like 'transubstantiation, priesthood mediation, the austerity for non matrimonial life of priests, the apex authority of Pope', etc. being observed by Roman Church. Fumed with this, the Pope ex-communicated him from church and threatened to execute him. When Pope's authority was defied, he was sentenced to death. However, some of his friends secretly shifted him to Wartburg and hidden there for 10 months. At this place, he translated the Bible in to German language. In 1529, in the assembly convened at Spear, majority of the Germans disagreed with the ideals of Luther and the Germany split in to two. The Southern Germany stayed with Roman side and the Northern Germany supported Luther. The name Protestants emerged at this place. The competition between them ended with a covenant in 1555.

Martin Luther died in 1546 at the age of 63 years. He propagated "*justification by faith*" statement till his death. Luther's Theology required for salvation can be summarised in the following three phrases.

1. Sola Scriptura (only the Word)
2. Sola Fides (only the faith)
3. Sola Gratia (only God's grace)

John Calvin (AD 1509-1564)

John Calvin was born in Noyon in northern France on 10th July, 1509. He was influenced by the reformatory thoughts of Luther. Later on he was known as the Official Representative of the Reformation. His theological book 'Christian Religious Institute', poured an official flavour to the reformatory ideals.

After obtaining higher degrees from Paris, he went to Geneva in July, 1536. With the ideals of Martin Luther, John Calvin tried to redeem the church in Geneva. His work enabled many Protestant Churches to arise on a right foundation in many parts of Europe. He questioned the authority of Pope, ascertained the authenticity and authority of Bible and endorsed that penal actions are required to be taken in order to sustain in righteousness, holiness and faithfulness of the Church.

In 1537, John Calvin formed a new Church in Geneva. Due to this, there was strong opposition from the Catholic Church that resulted in his exile in the year 1538. He again returned to Geneva in 1541. Calvin accepted only four groups namely, the Pastor, Teacher, Elder and Deacon for the administration of the Church. This was in contrast to the then existing system of Papacy and priesthood. He taught that there are only two sacraments for the Church i.e. Baptism and Lord's Table. Moreover, Calvinism exhorted about the predestination of the God. John Calvin died on 27th May, 1564 at the age of 55 years.

The Principles of Reformation

1. Priesthood of all believers
2. Justification by faith alone.
3. Bible is the sole authority for the creed of faith
4. It is not Pope but the Lord Jesus is the owner of the Church

The Religious Reformation movement that started in Europe expanded to neighbouring nations. There is no doubt that the ray of reformation movement that began in the Medieval Age became a flare by the end of this period and cleansed the Church. However the saints paid a very high price for this.

Practical Lessons

The Church was established by the God and Lord Jesus Christ has paid the price for it. Though it suffered many persecutions, faced the winds of false teachings being led in the wrong directions yet the true church still exists. God the Father wants us to remain transformed at all times. Only God can transform us. Let us submit ourselves for it.

Questions

1. Explain the context of Luther's transformation.
2. Which day is known as the auspicious birth date of reformation?
3. Which is the official book of reformative ideals?
4. Who are the fathers of reformation? Write a short note on them.
5. What are the principles held high by the fathers of Reformation?

LESSON 27

The Counter Reformation

- Reading Portion** : Nehemiah Chapters : 2, 4, 6
Memory Verse : Mathew 25:5-6
Purpose : To understand the hostile powers against our spiritual life that were formed to hinder the progress of the Christian Church and to march forward in the divine way.

Introduction : We learnt in the last lesson that the commencement of religious reformation movement led to emergence of Protestant Churches. Besides this, it also inspired some reformation in the Roman Church. That reformation is called Counter Reformation. For this, following three aspects were initiated.

1. Certain reformations were brought in the disciplines of the church and life.
2. The teachings of the church were made systematic and faultless to counter the Protestants.
3. Alliances with political organisations were strengthened to challenge the new situation.

Counter Reformation

There were cries for reformation ebbing in the Roman Church even before the formation of the Protestant movement. The majority of the group consisting of Pope and clergies were icons who lived in the luxury of worldly life and illusionary power without spiritual

sanctity. However, from the beginning of the medieval period some of them had tried for reformation. We also see that even the people had a quest for the same and the spirit of reformation was spreading. When reformation movement led by Martin Luther reached its peak, the people who were not satisfied with the stand of Roman Church left it. They were called the Protestants. At this point of time the Roman Church initiated purification of faith to counter the followers of Luther and started a reformation within the Church called Counter Reformation.

The internal reformation of Papal authority

In AD 1534 when Pope Paul III came into power, the opposition to influence Protestant reformation in Roman Church started. For this the newly anointed Pope requested the help of Erasmus. But Erasmus could not do anything as he was too old. Thereafter Pope changed the policy followed for the appointment of officers of Papal Church. The family background and economic considerations were kept aside for this appointment and replaced it with people having outstanding qualifications and devotion towards religion. Many of the people argued that the palace of the Pope was the centre point of injustice and wickedness and hence the reformation had to be initiated from there and a change had to be brought in his officers. When the lost spiritual enthusiasm was restored, many people who had earlier left the Roman Church could be brought back. He believed that if the reformation can be a reality in Roman Catholic Church, the Protestantism would be wiped out on its own. With the desire to enforce the rules, he forcefully sent some 100 bishops, who were wandering and were reluctant to fulfil their responsibility, back to their centres. He strongly told that kings should not be involved in the affairs of the Church.

In 1546 and 1563, the Councils convoked at Trent were assigned to sort out the disputes prevalent in the Roman Church. As a response to the religious reformation, the members of a small group namely 'Prayer House of God's Love' established in Rome, tried to change the trends based on Bible and the books of holy saints. They tried to join with the Protestant by accepting the doctrine 'justification by faith'. However it did not succeed.

The Monasteries and the Jesuit Order (or Society of Jesus)

The growth of Monasteries also aided the progress on Counter Reformation. Monasteries like Capuchin, Theatin, Sisters of Charity, Jesuit, etc. were formed in the Catholic Church. The most important

among these are the 'Society of Jesus' also known as 'Jesuit Order'. The founder of this community was Ignatius Loyola from an honourable family in Spain. He was a soldier. After becoming handicapped in war, he dedicated his life to the Lord as His soldier.

In AD 1540, in accordance with a vision purported to be given by God, he organised a group comprising of 9 students of the University of Paris and added them to his order. The order was the Society of Jesus. Though there was no special dress code or instructions for this community but they had high regards for the authority of Pope. Pope also acknowledged and blessed this community.

This community did praise worthy ministries in Europe by establishing Schools and Colleges. This helped to increase the reputation of the Roman Church. It is said that the marking system was started by their scholars. They also concentrated on evangelism. Francis Saviour, the top ranking missionary belonged to this order. Thus, the monastery groups, particularly the Jesuit order, made outstanding contributions to the reformation of the Roman Church.

The Trent Council (1545-1563)

This Council was convened during different periods. The objectives for convening this council were to clearly define the teachings of Catholic Church, codify it, to renew the life of the believers, to suppress the Protestantism, etc.

In this council, the Church rejected the sacramental doctrines containing new ideas like justification by faith, the supremacy of Bible, the right of believers to have bread along with wine at the Lord's Table, etc. The Church along with its Pope as chief restored its old traditions, old sacraments and rituals with minor modifications. In fact, the Trent council did not bring about any reformation in the Catholic Church according to the Word. Rather, it tried to initiate a counter reformation against the reformation.

The Inquisition and Index

Inquisition means investigation of religious offences and execution of sentences. With this, the Protestants were treated as enemies and executed mercilessly. It was an ecclesiastical 'court marshal' or 'judgement bench' as per the military laws. After the establishment of inquisition, thousands of people lost their lives in Italy, Spain, etc. Some of them rejoined the Catholic Church due to fear of death.

The Catholic Church prohibited many books. Pope Alexander VI decreed that anyone intending to publish a book should first seek the approval of the Church officials. He published a list of prohibited books. Reading or keeping or publishing such books was made an offence. These books were seized and burnt. Index is officially called the list of prohibited books published with the approval of Pope Paul IV in 1559.

In fact, the reformists did not intend to begin a new church. The defiance of Catholic Church to undergo changes led to the genesis of the Protestant Church.

Practical Lessons

When the church deviated from its vision, the Lord sent His prophets and gave forewarnings. We are bound to return when our shortcomings are pointed out through the Word.

Questions

1. Write Notes on :
 - a. Counter Reformation
 - b. Monastery Groups and Counter Reformation.
2. What were the decisions of the Trent Council?
3. What is inquisition?
4. Write the relationship between Index and Counter Reformation.

LESSON 28

The Golden period of the Church

Reading Portion : Acts 28

Memory Verse : John 17:21

Purpose : To introduce the organisations that emerged out of religious reformation. To understand that the changes which occurred before the Pentecostal movement of the 20th century were very helpful to the newly formed organisations.

Introduction : In the previous lesson we studied about the religious reformation movements and their advantages. Now we will study about certain institutions that emerged out of such reformations.

The Golden Phase

After the religious reformation, there were significant changes in the Christian Church history. While differences prevailed between the Western and Eastern churches, besides the Protestant faiths, many other new organisations were also formed from both the Churches. The northern Europe followed Protestant faith while England accepted Anglican faith. Countries like Scotland, Scandinavian Nations, nations comprising North Germany, Republic of Dutch, etc. cut off their ties from the Roman Church and accepted Protestant Churches. Nations like Italy, Portuguese, France, Bohemia, South Netherland, South Germany, Ireland, Poland, Hungary, etc. continued to follow the Roman Church. Due to the religious reformation movements, there was a great spiritual revival in both the Churches

(Catholic-Protestant). As people started reading the Bible, they started to accept the truths of Bible and practiced in real life. The organisations like Christian Faith Movements and Missionary Movements took form and strengthened.

Anglican Church

The Church that was established in England during the reformation movements and refused to accept the authority of Pope is called the Anglican Church. In 1534, they defied the supremacy of Pope and declared the King as the head of Church. The Anglican Church – the official church of England, was called ‘the Church of England’. The Anglican Church had 3 groups namely, High Church, Broad Church and Low Church. The Low Churches had more interest in evangelism. The High Churches liked Episcopatism. All of them were under the administrative control of the Arch Bishop of Canterbury and York. The Anglican Church was strengthened by King Edward VI (1549) and Queen Elizabeth (1563). The ‘book of common prayer’ was followed for liturgy and a religious constitution containing 39 articles were the foundation of Anglican Church.

Puritanism

During the period of Queen Elizabeth I, a radical group in the Church of England resisted to follow the blind superstitious faiths of Roman Catholic Church prevalent in this Church and desired to purify the worship, sacraments and doctrines. These groups were called the puritans. They argued that the base of Christian belief is Bible alone and all the believers have priesthood. The priestly tradition of division between common people and the priests was sternly opposed and then began a non luxurious life style with high moral awareness. With their persuasion and the rules, the theatres and other dangerous, hazardous and inhuman games were prohibited.

Presbyterian Church

The Church formed in Scotland parallel to the Anglican Church in England is the Presbyterian Church. There are notable differences between these two churches in terms of faith, administration, etc. By a law of the parliament in 1661, the Presbyterian Church was established as the Church of Scotland.

The Presbyterian Church has certain special features.

1. This church is administered by Elders. (The Greek word ‘*Presbytos*’ means Elder or Deacon).
2. It is not an Episcopal church. Both the priests as well as the representatives are called as the elders.

3. They have equal partnership in the Church administration.
4. The elder elected as the head of the church is called the 'moderator'.

This Church expanded to England, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Hungary, America, etc.

Methodist Church

As of today, this is the biggest protestant church in the world in terms of members. This is due to the efforts of a great man called John Wesley in England during the 18th century. Re-birth (Born again), Certainty of Salvation, zeal for Evangelism, Christian fellowship, the joyful experiences of the redeemed, etc. are the unique feature of this Church. They are reprovingly called Methodists (being particular in methods). Today this church exists in America, England and other countries.

Congregational Church

The meaning of English word congregation means 'church meeting' or 'parish gatherings', etc. Robert Brown started the teachings of Congregational Church in England. This group believes that the believers have full freedom in the church administration and it is fully independent of the Councils, Senior Officers, Government, etc. and that they have no authority over the church. It is only after 1689 that this Church could occupy any place in England. This church emphasises on education particularly religious education. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was formed by this Church. They strongly exhorted about the freedom of local churches, the Lordship of Christ in the churches, the priesthood of believers, etc. They abandoned the Cathedrals and Temples and gathered as small fellowships. These fellowships have today become Congregational Churches.

Baptist Church

In 1612, the Baptist group strengthened after the King James Version of the Bible was published. In the doctrine of Baptism, the Congregation Church and Baptist Church maintain differences. This church teaches that the members should be baptised only after becoming an adult and after believing. Though this church has similarity in doctrines and worship with Pentecost churches, there are difference in doctrines. The Brethren Church was formed from this group.

Society of Friends

In the 17th century, a group was formed in England under the leadership of George Fox called as the Society of Friends. Later they

were called as Brother's Group. Others call them 'Quakers'. (When Fox told a judge that God is to be worshipped with fear and trembling, he said "you are the quakers". From this they got the name Quakers). They believe that men and women have equal freedom and rights in spiritual matters. They do not have a faith creed, church buildings and priests. They abandoned the literal interpretation of Bible and the sacraments of church. They submit themselves to the control of Holy Spirit and do according to the guidance of Spirit. They condemned social evils like slavery, trading of slaves, issues of labour, luxurious life, etc.

Salvation Army

A movement started by William Booth with the objective of social service and Evangelism among the downtrodden and oppressed. As they do not follow the sacraments of Church like Baptism, Lord's Supper, etc. they cannot be seen as a Church. This institution has spread to the entire world today.

The Modern Pentecost Movement

The Pentecost Movement was started in the 20th century within the Protestant Group. Consequent to the pouring of the Holy Spirit in this period, this Church gave significance to individual spiritual anointment, the Word of God and to holiness in life. Pentecost Church is a return journey to the Apostolic Church. The truth is that the changes due to reformative steps led the people to the former (church) system. We can study the Pentecostal teaching in forthcoming years.

Practical Lessons

We have seen the changes due to reformation. Even today God prompt us to return to the truths of the Word. We must return to the joyful days, fellowship, unity and the love of the first century church. Christ is our example in everything.

Questions

1. The religious reformations led back to the former church. Explain.
2. Write notes on :
 - a. Anglican Church
 - b. Presbyterian Church
 - c. Puritanism
 - d. Quakers.
3. Give meanings of (1) Presbyteros (2) Methodist (3) Congregational (4) Puritans.

LESSON 29

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Reading Portion : Matt 24:1-31; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36;
1Thes 4:13-18; 2Pet 3:1-4.

Memory Verse : Phil 3:20-21

Purpose : To understand the prophecies and signs of the second coming of Jesus Christ and to be filled with the hope and be ready for it.

Introduction : The second coming of Jesus Christ is the future hope of the Christian Church and also one of the basic teaching of the Holy Bible. It is a very significant subject continuously mentioned in the Bible right from Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Therefore, it is essential to learn about His second coming with much importance and seriousness.

The second coming of Jesus Christ

In the New Testament having 260 chapters, the subject of Jesus' second coming is mentioned 318 times. The Bible talks about His second coming twice the number of times more than His sacrifice for atonement. The second coming is stated 7 times more than His first coming. For describing the second coming of Jesus, the Greek word 'Parousia' is used. It means, 'coming again', 'appearing again', etc. We can see that the Lord's coming in different manner viz. unexpected coming (Matt 24:39, 42-44), glorious appearance (Matt 24:29-30), Lord's coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory with the company of the angels (Matt 24:20-21, 24,26), the coming with thousands and thousands of saints (Jude 14). There are two main

phases for His coming. (1) The Rapture (2) The Glorious Appearance. Rapture is the coming of Christ in the middle of the sky to take those saints who are tarrying for Him with purity and hope. The glorious appearance is the coming of Christ along with His saints to rule the earth (Matt 24:3, 27-51, 25:31-46; Rev 19:11-21).

The coming of Jesus Christ according to Old and New Testaments

Old prophecies

The Old Testament Scriptures written centuries before His birth has explained about both first coming and second comings. Prophecies like Dan 7:13; Zech 14:4, Mal 3:1, etc. clearly specifies about Jesus' second coming. The New Testament mainly prophesies about second coming and restoration of the kingdom.

The witnesses of angels

The message of angels to the depressed disciples standing and looking at the sky after the ascension of Christ strengthens the second coming of Jesus Christ. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Act 1:11).

Jesus' witness

Unlike other religious leaders the world has seen so far, Jesus Christ has very clearly and differently given firm promises about His second coming (Matt 16:17; John 14:13; Matt 26:64; John 21:22). Jesus Christ taught His disciples about His second coming very clearly. The parable of 10 virgins is an example of this. The Lord has confirmed His coming in the Book of Revelation saying "Behold, I come quickly: (Rev 22:7).

The witnesses of disciples

All the apostles have strongly taught about Jesus' second coming. Paul has more firmly described about the rapture (1The 4:13-17). Peter has emphasised on Lord's glorious coming (2Pet 3:10) and John has advised church to live a sanctified life and to be ready to receive the coming Jesus Christ (1John 3:3).

The rituals of the Church witnesses

The Lord's Table observed during the fellowship of the saints, points out the coming of Jesus Christ (1Cor 11:25-26).

The Signs of the comings

We can see 4 main signs of His comings that have been stated by Lord Himself to His disciples.

1. The flourishing of the Jews

(the fig tree putting forth leaves) (13:28-30)

Jesus had said that the restoration of the Jews would be one of the main signs of His coming. In Bible, the Jews have been equated to the fig tree (Hos 9:10; Joel 1:7; Mar 11:13). As Israel broke the law of the Lord, they were scattered in the entire world. Though they were totally ostracized from their own country in AD 135, they got it back on 14th May, 1948. Thereafter they overcame all the hostility from their neighbours surrounding them and continued to progress. We can see that their subsequent prosperity in the fields of military power, science, agriculture, industry and all other areas is the fulfilment of Jesus' Words about the flourishing of the Jews.

2. The signs in heathens (Matt 24:6-8 Mark 13:7-8)

Wars and rumours of wars

- i) The two world wars occurred in the 20th century. The atom bomb attack in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and other wars led to death of crores of men and also many catastrophes. The Bible says that American war on Vietnam, the war of Arabs against Israel, the invasion of Iraq on Kuwait, the attack of world trade centre in 2001, the subsequent American war on Iraq and Afghanistan, India's war on neighbouring countries and the rumours of wars, and all challenges are the signs of His coming.
- ii) The raising of nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom and also the religious intolerance and sectarianism have been increased ten times than earlier.
- iii) The growth of science and advancement of information technology, etc., are the signs of our Lord's coming.

3. The signs in nature (Luke 21:11; Matt 24:7)

(i) Earthquakes and plagues

In the recent times, earthquakes and diseases have been increasing uncontrollably. Multitudes of people have been wiped out from the earth due to earthquake. Innumerable people have died to killer diseases for which no medicines have been found yet. Aids, Ebola, cancer, H₁N₁ fever, Dengue fever, etc. are examples of such plagues.

(ii) Famine

The scientists evaluate that the present scarcity of water being faced by the entire world is the forewarning about a famine which would occur in the future. The signs in the nature can be understood as the fulfilment of the scripture (Rom 8:22) that the whole creation is groaning for the coming of the Lord.

(iii) The signs in the sky (Luke 21:25-26)

Our Lord Himself has made it clear that the signs of His coming back would be seen in the sky too. *"there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken"*. We can deem that the recent happenings like 'Tsunami', etc. which have caused severe destruction and frightened the humans are the fulfilment of God's Word. The growth in the experiments of space and the changes and signs in the sky reminds us of the coming of Jesus Christ.

4. The directional signs (the signs in the church)**i) The outpouring of Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; Act 2:16-18)**

The abundant experience of outpouring of the Holy Spirit - the later rain is the indication of the Lord's coming.

ii) Falling away from faith (2Thes 2:3)

One of the main signs mentioned in respect of Lord's coming is the falling away from the trust. The slumbering of the brides as said in Matt 25:5, the lukewarm situation of the Laodicean Church are the precursor to the falling away from faith that indicates the coming of the Lord.

iii) False christs and false prophets (Matt 24:24)

One of the signs given by Lord Jesus Christ for His coming is the working of false christs and false prophets. In order to deceive the elects, they shall do wonders and signs. However, the Lord has given forewarning to the Church to be beware of such pseudo- wonders and false teaching.

iv) Rapid evangelism (speedy preaching of gospel) (Matt 24:14)

Christ's words that before His coming, the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the entire world for a witness unto all nations

are being fulfilled in these days. The Holy Bible has been translated in to more than 1250 languages. The preaching of the gospel through the latest technology and modern media is the notable indication about the coming of Jesus Christ.

Practical Lessons

The Biblical truths, signs and the events in the world related to the second coming of Jesus Christ confirm His coming. Let us be ready for it.

Questions

1. What is the Greek word representing the Lord's coming?
2. What are the two phases of the Lord's coming?
3. What are signs of the Lord's return?
4. What are the directional signs towards the Lord's coming?

LESSON 30

The Church and its Rapture

Reading Portion : 1 Cor 15:30-58; 1 Thes 4:13-18.

Memory Verse : 1 Thess 4:16-17

Purpose : To understand the attributes of the appearance of Jesus Christ and the prerequisites for the rapture.

Introduction : The subject of Jesus Christ's return and the rapture are the two doctrinal subjects of the Bible which have been misunderstood the most. Thousands have been misguided and trapped in the false teachings due to misinterpretation of these subjects. Therefore, it is essential to view this as a serious subject and study it.

Two phases of the re-appearance (introduction)

The Scriptures reveals two phases of Jesus Christ's re-appearance. Firstly, the Lord will descend up to the clouds (the middle of the sky) and will take His Church along with Him. Secondly, the Lord shall come back along with His Church with royal glory to establish His Kingdom (rule) on the earth. There would be a gap of 7 years between these phases. As the event in the first phase of coming back in the sky is for rising up the Church, it is called 'rapture'. Since that appearance would be unexpected and would be unknown to all except the believers, it can be called the secret coming.

The appearance on the clouds and rapture

The doctrine of rapture is the most important subject in the science of the end of New Testament dispensation (John 14:1-3; 1 Thes

4:13-18; 1Cor 15:51-52; Phil 3:20-21). For the word 'Rise up' (caught up as in 1Thes 4:17), the Greek word 'Harpazo' and the Latin word 'Rapio' are used. Harpazo means to change forcefully and swiftly. The word rapture has been derived from the word Rapio. It means 'to grab, 'to lift up', etc. Thus, rapture mean the transfiguration (change) of the church and ascending to the clouds to receive the Lord on His reappearance in clouds.

Paul's writings give the clear explanation about the Lord's appearance in clouds and the rapture. He explains it as a mystery revealed to him (1Thes 4:13-18; 1Cor 15:51-58).

We have already seen that there are two phases of Christ's reappearance. Let us now study about the events that will be experienced with Christ's second coming.

Events (Experiences)

1. The Lord will descend to the middle of the sky (clouds).
2. There shall be the trump of God and the voice of the archangel (1 Thes 4:13-15; 1Cor 15:52).
3. On the trump of God whosoever died in Christ shall live again (John 5:25). Along with trump of God there shall be the voice of the archangel. The voice of the archangel is to defeat Satan who will try to obstruct the rising of the saints. This view is on the basis of Jude verse 9. Michael, the Archangel, will be sent to take out the saints from the areas under Satan's rule. At this juncture, the saints will be able to challenge "O grave, where is thy victory" (1Cor 15:55-57).
4. When the trump of God shall blow, the saints living on the earth at that time shall transfigure (change) in a twinkling of the eye and receive a glorious body (1Cor 15:52; 2Cor 5:1-4; 1John 3:2).
5. The resurrected and the transfigured saints shall be lifted up in the clouds to receive the Lord. Thereafter, they shall be with the Lord forever.

The objectives of the appearance in clouds

1. To lift up the Church (John 14:3; 1Thes 4:16).
2. To complete the mission of the Holy Spirit who obstructs Satan (2 Thes 2:6-8).
3. To reward the believers' works (2Cor 5:10; 1Cor3:12-15).

4. To accomplish the relationship of Christ and the Church (Rev 19:9).
5. To pour God's fury on the earth (the great tribulation).

The nature of appearance in clouds

1. The appearance of the Lord in clouds shall be a secret appearance.

The appearance of Lord shall be like thief in the night (Rev 3:3; 2 Pet 3:10; 1The 1:9-10).

2. It will happen unexpectedly

There is no sign given for it. It can happen any time. The former church tarried with this expectation. (1Cor 1:7; Phil 3:20-21; 1Thes 1:9-10). The Bible cautions that as we are not aware of the time, we should always be ready for it.

3. It would be a global event

Two people will be in one bed. One will be taken and the other will be left (Luke 17:34-36). Therefore it would in the night. "Two men shall be in the field: This indicates that it shall be in the day time. Two women shall be grinding together. That can be in the morning. The globe which is in round shape has different timings. If one part is day, the other side would be night. Therefore we can understand that the Lords appearance would be a wondrous global event for everyone at the same time.

The swift developments of events

The events in relation to the appearance in clouds shall occur swiftly. "Twinkling of eyes in 1Cor 15:52 denotes its speed. The rapture of the dead saints and living saints shall happen together within the moment of the twinkling of the eye.

The eligibility to be in the rapture

1. One must be in Christ (1The 4:16; 1Cor 15:51-54; 1 John 2:28)

God's children who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and lead a life controlled by the Holy Spirit have been given the precious name by Paul as 'in Christ' or 'of Christ'. Whosoever is in Christ shall be taken in the rapture.

2. Those who leads a sanctified life (Rev 20:6; 1Thes 4:3; Heb 12:4)

The Lord is coming to take those who are incorruptible, undefiled, that faded away and leading a chaste life. The Lord's

appearance is for the saints who have made covenant with Him by sacrifice (Psa 50:5).

3. Those who are tarrying for the Lord's appearance

(Heb 9:28; James 5:7-8); Heb 10:36-37)

Those tarrying for Lord's coming shall be lifted up. The parable about the men that watch and wait for their lord (Luk 12:35) caution us as to how anxiously we must wait for our Lord.

4. Those who are ready for it (Matt 25:10)

The parable of 10 virgins is a warning to us that those who are prepared to receive Him shall be taken up (Luk 12:35-40; 21:25-28; 1 Thes 5:23). The above Bible portions indicate that one must be ready with girded loins and burning lamp to receive the bridegroom.

5. Those who watch and pray (Luk 21:36; Matt 24:42-44; 25:13; Mark 13:32-34; Rev 13:3)

Only those who watch and pray always in the middle of falling faith and the working of mystery of injustice only shall be able to stand without shame in the appearance of Lord.

6. Those who desire for His appearance (2Thi 4:7-8)

Those who crave for Lord's appearance and also cheerfully endure afflictions and agonies for the Lord shall rise up to receive Him.

The second phase of Lord's re-appearance is the glorious appearance. It means Christ's coming to the earth along with His bride for the millennium rule. The prophetic scholars opine that the glorious appearance for the millennium rule shall occur after 7 years of the rapture on the basis of 70 weeks mentioned in the Book of Daniel (Dan 9:24-27).

Practical Lessons

Those who are desirous of and yearn for the appearance of Christ shall be part of this blessed event of rapture. Many have fallen from the faith due to false teachings about the appearance of Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us grasp the Word correctly, resist the false teachings and be ready to receive the Lord.

Questions

1. What are different phases of Lord's appearances?
2. What do you mean by rapture?
3. What are the characteristics of Lord's appearance in clouds?
4. What are the main events that would occur in relation to appearance in clouds?
5. What are the eligibility for being lifted up in rapture?

LESSON 31

The anti-christ and the persecution

Reading Portion : Rev 13:1-18; 17:7-8; Dan 7:23-24

Memory Verse : 2 Thess 2:3

Purpose : To learn about the period between the appearance of Jesus Christ in the clouds and the glorious appearance. To understand about the personification, character of anti-Christ and the main events during the period of tribulation.

Introduction : Tribulation is the period between the coming of Jesus Christ in the sky and the glorious appearance. Many prophets like Moses had given forewarnings about this terrible period. This is the main subject of the sermon of Jesus on Olive mount (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). It has been prophesied "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" by Jesus Christ (Matt 24:21); "... and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.." by Daniel (Dan 12:1). Jeremiah also prophesied that "it is even the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer 30:5-7) empire under the leadership of their king Cyrus and seized power.

The length of the tribulation period

The period of tribulation is mentioned in the Scripture as 7 years. On the basis of the book of Daniel (Chapter 7) and the book of Revelation (Chapter 13), we can grasp that a union of some 10 countries shall come into force. The head of this union shall be the

prince that is to come as mentioned in Daniel 9:26. He shall confirm a covenant with Israel for 7 years (Dan 9:27). The exact period between such covenant and the second glorious coming of Jesus Christ to this earth is the period of 7 years. This period has been divided into two consisting of three and half years each. There are many indications about this in the scripture.

- a) Time and times (Dan 7:25)
- b) Time and half (Dan 12:7)
- c) a time, and times, and half a time (Rev 12:14)
- d) 42 months (Rev 11:2; 13:5)
- e) 1260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6)

The tribulation period is the 7 years out of 70 weeks written in Daniel 9:27. This is also corroborated by the book of Revelation.

Anti christ

Different names

1. King of Babylon (Isa 14:4)
2. Little horn (Dan 7:8, 8:9)
3. King of fierce countenance and understanding (Dan 8:24)
4. Prince of the people to come (Dan 9:26)
5. The king who acts according to his will (Dan 11:36)
6. The one coming in his own name (John 5:43)
7. Man of sin and son of perdition (2 Thes 2:3)
8. One who feigns himself as God (2 Thes 2:4)
9. One who exalts himself above all (2 Thes 2:4)
10. Antichrist (1John 2:18)
11. The beast (Rev 13:1)

The personification of anti Christ

Certain people think that anti Christ is only a fictitious force of iniquity, wickedness, lie, evil, etc. They oppose the personification of anti Christ (Dan 7:24; Isa 11:4; 14:11-17; 2Thes 2:3-10; 1John 2:18-22). The usage of terms like boasting, great swelling words against the Most High, wear the saints, rebellious with God, power hungry, the one who aspire to live on the sides of the north, tries to suppress everything and reign over them, etc. supports the personification of anti Christ.

The character of anti Christ

He pretends peace, is proficient to have friendship with anybody and is able to do miracles with his evil power. He is so diplomatic; a boaster with a mouth speaking great things and blasphemy that even the wisest Jews will fall to enter into agreement with him. He will aspire for supremacy and will try to bring everything in the world under his control and rule them. He will force his seal of 666 on everybody to sell or buy. He will show off as if he is the God and will put an end to true worship. He will be the breaker of all laws, cruel and a murderer.

The Satanic trinity and work

The Lord is a triune God. Satan has also a trinity. In this trinity there are 3 personalities namely the devil, anti Christ and the false prophet.

1. The devil

The synonyms like tempter (Matt 4:3), prince of devils (Matt 9:34), wicked (Matt 13:38), murderer (John 8:44), Satan, the prince of this world (John 12:31) indicates about Satan. He is the chief authority of the devilish power with which he will strike people with diseases and try to bind them with evil power.

2. The anti Christ

Anti Christ is the second in Satan's trinity. The word meaning 'opponent of Christ' has been used in the original language. He is the root of all wickedness and evils. He would be the leader of a nation and also a religion.

3. The false prophet

He is the prophet to be raised by the end of the tribulation period. His chief mission is to prompt people to support the anti Christ (Matt 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22).

The events during the tribulation period

As the Holy Spirit, who is resisting the merchants of wickedness, is already lifted from the earth along with the church, the Satan will be cast in to the earth so that he can freely work (Rev 12:9-17). Therefore, peace shall be completely taken away from the earth (Rev 6:4). Severe famine (Rev 6:6), great plagues (Rev 6:8) and death with beasts of the earth shall occur. Therefore many will be killed.

During this period, the earth will be reigned by the anti Christ. He will be unchallengeable leader of the world (1John 2:18; Rev

13:6-8). During the rule of anti Christ, there will be a huge community of namesake Christians on the earth. They will be united under a single religious leader. The religious and political leaders will make peace with each other. The anti Christ will make peace with the Jews. The Jews will construct their Temple in Jerusalem and will worship there. At this time, Satan with great anger will dwell in the anti Christ and break the covenant with the religious leader (Rev 17:16) and the Jews (Dan 9:2-27) and cause to stop worship in the Temple and instead put his image there (Matt 24:15; Rev 13:14-15).

There will be great persecution to the Jews as they will refuse to worship the images of the anti Christ. During the second period of three and half years of the tribulation period, the Jews will have to face series of persecutions. At this juncture, they will look at the Lord of Israel and shall pray for the coming of their Messiah (Rev 11:3-6). At this time, two witnesses appointed by the Lord (are assumed to be the prophets Moses and Elijah) shall serve in Israel. After accomplishing their service, they shall be killed by the anti Christ. Their dead body shall lie on the street for three and half days. Thereafter they shall stand on their feet and shall ascend to heaven before the eyes of their enemies. During this persecution, Israel shall repent and shall look on him whom they pierced (Jesus Christ). They will be saved as a nation. At this time, all the nations shall unite under the leadership of the anti Christ to fight with Jerusalem. This is called the war of Armageddon. At the right time, Lord Jesus Christ shall descend to the earth as King of Kings with all the brightness of His glory and along with His saints to redeem them and judge the anti Christ and false prophet and shall establish the millennium rule over the earth.

Practical Lessons

During the period of tribulation, the Church i.e. the saints of Jesus Christ shall be with Him in heaven. We have understood as to how Jesus will keep His church safe during tribulation. Therefore let us individually be ready to lead a sanctified life.

Questions

1. What do you mean by the tribulation period?
2. What is the length of the tribulation period?
3. What are the other names of anti Christ?

LESSON 32

The Divine Thrones

Reading Portion : Rev Chapters 4, 5; Rev 20:11-15; Matt 25:31-45; 2Cor 5:10.

Memory Verse : Isaiah 6:1-3

Purpose : To understand about the various Thrones of God. To understand the transient nature of earthly thrones and to grasp the greatness of the eternal throne of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings and worship Him.

Introduction : The seat of the Kings is normally called the Throne. Our God is a king too. God has a Throne. The scripture tells us about many Thrones of God. We will study about some of them which are relevant and important to the Church.

The judgement seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10)

There would be three judgements in the future. These are Christ's judgement seat, the Throne of Glory and the Great White Throne. First among these is the Christ's judgement seat. This is one of the great future plans of God.

In New Testament, two words have been used for judgement seat. The first word is 'kriterion' (Jam 2:6; 1Cor 6:2,4). It means the seat of the judge. The second word is 'Bema'. It means, high place, platform, official seat of the judge (Act 18:12, 16).

'Kisse' is the Hebrew word used to indicate throne or judgement seat. It means high seat. This name is used for the seats of Chief

Priest, King, Captain of Army, Judge, etc. (1Sam 1:9; Jer 1:15; Psa 122:5). It indicates about the judgement seat of the Kings. The word Throne is used to show the majesty of the place or the kingdom (Gen 41:40).

The Greek word 'bema' has been used for the judgement seat of Jesus Christ. In Greece, in the older times, people were given rewards after their victory in sports and games. The word 'bema' is used to indicate the high seat of the chairman who distributes the reward to such winners. While the winners get rewards, the defeated shall loose and will feel ashamed. But there will be no punishment for the loss. As the judgement seat of Christ is named as 'bema', there will be no punishment in this judgement. But it is clear that surely there will be judgement. Here, the saints will be given rewards according to their deeds (1Cor 5:10).

What will be judged?

1. All the thoughts, counsels, imagination, secrets of the believers shall be judged (1Cor 4:5; Ecc 12:14).
2. For the words : We have to give the account thereof for every idle word that we speak (Mat 12:36; Mal 3:5; Jam 5:9)
3. For the deeds : For all the deeds whether good or evil will be rewarded suitably (Heb 6:10; Ecc 12:14; Matt 10:41-42).

In 'bema', the judgement (reward distribution) of the church that is in rapture on the appearance of the Christ will take place. All our deeds shall be passed through fire. If it sustains, it will be rewarded (1Cor 3:10-15). The attitude shall also be evaluated. The fire of God shall burn all our selfish work which we did for our own pride and interest. The works filled with godly love and done for the glory of the Lord shall survive the fire and will be rewarded (1Cor 3:12). It will be a righteous and true judgement without any partiality (Rom 2:2,11).

This court shall be held in the heaven. Christ alone shall be the judge (John 5:22; Dan 7:9-10; Rev 4:1-4). Still, God the Father and the Holy Spirit shall witness this judgement in the midst of thousands and thousands of angels.

Throne of Glory

The Lord shall be seated on the Throne of Glory after the Armageddon war in the Megiddo Valley and the redemption of Israel as a nation. This is the event that is to happen during the glorious

appearance of the Lord. This judgement is for the people who accepted or rejected the wandering Israelites persecuted during the great tribulation during the period of antichrist. This will be at the end of the great tribulation and just immediately before the beginning of millennial rule. For the judgement, all nations around Palestine will gather at the valley of Jehoshaphat. Those who have repented during the great tribulation and the gentiles who helped the wandering and persecuted Israelites will be separated to the right side (treated as sheep in Rev 7:9-10) while those who did not repent and the heathens who had persecuted the Israelites shall be separated to the left side (treated as goats) and they will be judged. Those at left side will be cast into eternal fire. The group on the right side will be blessed and will be sent to the millennium period (Isa 21;13-15; Matt 25:48; Zech 13:9).

Here, the standard of judgement is not the salvation. Rather it would be on the basis of righteous deeds. The Throne of Glory would be to judge the ones who have worked for or against the Jews.

The White Throne

The Great White Throne shows the last judgement of God. This depicts a scene of a court. John saw the vision as depicted in the Book of Revelation that all the dead were standing before this throne waiting for the judgement (Rev 20:12). The Great White Throne is the judgement seat where all dead men, right from Cain onward up to the Millennium and also the fallen angels and Satan, will be judged. The white colour represents holiness and righteousness. There will be no injustice, un-holiness or corruption or partiality. Jesus Christ would be the judge there (John 5:22, Daniel 7:13). The duration (time period) for the completion of this judgement is not mentioned. It will take as much time required for judgement of crores and crores of wicked and to cast them into the hell. The Great White Throne will be set after the millennial rule of Christ and after Satan is released for a while till he is thrown in to the lake of fire. There will be other judges to assist Christ, the Chief Judge (Rev 4:4). They shall be the 24 elders wearing white robes and seated on the thrones. Paul has clearly mentioned in 1Cor 6:2-3 that the saints shall judge the world.

The Israel and the Church – the bride of the Lord are not seen before the White Throne judgement. The judgement of church is over before the Throne of Christ and the judgement of Israel through the great tribulation. All those whose name is not written in the Book of Life will stand before the White Throne for judgement. The sea

shall give up the dead which were in it (Rev 20:13). All the sinners from the beginning of the world wherever or wherever they died shall be gathered before the White Throne (Rev 20:13). The Lord shall judge them according to their works (based on their rejection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God) and cast into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death.

Practical Lessons

God is the righteous judge. Whosoever rejects the free salvation through Jesus Christ will be judged. Therefore we should not disregard such a valuable salvation.

Questions

1. What are the three judgements which will take place in the future?
2. Where will the judgement seat of Christ be placed? What is the purpose of it?
3. Who all will be judged before the White Throne?
4. What is the purpose of the Throne of Glory?

LESSON 33

The Rewards and Crowns

Reading Portion : Revelation chapter 2 and 3

Memory Verse : James 1:12

Purpose : To show that the efforts and works of the children of God do not go in vain.

Introduction : The judgement seat of Christ or the judgement of the saints is the great event that will be held in the heavens after the rapture. In fact, we have already learnt that, this is not a judgement but the distribution of rewards to the saints. The main subject of the judgement seat of Christ is to evaluate various services of the believers and distribute suitable rewards. The ones who have served the Lord faithfully shall be given different crowns as rewards. In order to judge, three types of books shall be opened before the judgement seat of Christ.

The books that will be used to judge

1. The book of Life

In the ancient times, genealogy records were used to be maintained (Neh 7:5-6; 12:22-23). The census also used to be recorded for different purposes. The Holy Bible states that such book is maintained by God also. This book contains the name of the righteous who have inherited the eternal life (Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5). It is called the book of life of the slain Lamb from the beginning of the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8; 21:27). The names of the chosen ones from the foundation of the world are recorded in this book.

That is why Jesus said that “your names are written in the heaven” (Luke 10:20). The names of the ones not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (Rev 20:12,15).

2. The Book of Law

The Courts deliver judgements based on law books. The heavenly court also has a rule book. That would be the Holy Bible (Dan 7:10; Rev 20:12). God’s word has been equated with fire. The work of all will be evaluated on the basis of the Word (1Cor 3:13). Whosoever worked according to the Word shall be recognised and rewarded. Whoever worked for their own fame and self interest will lose the rewards (1Cor 3:15). The work done with selflessness work and with sacrificial mentality for the edification of Lord’s name shall be appreciated. It is before Lord’s judgement seat that we will come to know the greatness of the Word and the nonentity of other laws.

3. Book of Remembrance

All the works of men are recorded in the book of Remembrance (Mal 3:16). The works of a person (good or bad) born on the earth right from the state of his ability to recognise good or evil till his death are recorded in this book. This book will be opened before the judgement seat of Christ and before the White Throne. Everyone will receive the judgement and reward according to the works recorded in this book.

Crowns

Crowns will also be included while distributing rewards to the saints in accordance with the judgement given before Christ’s judgement seat. There are two Greek words to mean crown.

1. Stephanes

Normally this word is used to indicate the flowery crown given to the winner of a competition in his honour.

2. Diadem

This crown is worn by the Kings. The word ‘stephanes’ is used for the crown that believers will receive which is the crown given to honour the winners. Though we are blessed to dwell with Christ, the crown of kings (diadem) is meant only for Christ. However, all the children of who God faithfully served Christ and led a victorious life would get the crown given to the winners.

Different crowns

1. Crown of life (James 1:12)

“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev 1:12; 2:10). The one who survive the difficulties, afflictions, tests, trials of the Christian life and remain faithful till the end shall be rewarded with this crown. The martyrs served the Lord faithfully shall also get this crown.

2. The incorruptible Crown (1 Cor 9:23, 27)

This is the crown given to the ones who strive to lead a holy life in the battlefield of Christian life (1Cor 9:25). This resembles a race that existed in Greece. The winner in the Olympic race is honoured by giving a crown made of the green Olive leaves. For this the word ‘Briabeion’ is used which means ‘receive prize’. We should run looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). All will not get the prize. Whoever runs the race like Paul will get the reward.

3. The crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:1, 8)

Whoever keeps the faith will receive this crown. Paul’s saying that I have finished my race is about his faithful life.

4. The crown of rejoicing (1 Thess 2:19, Philip 4:1)

Those who save souls will receive this crown. The souls we save are our rejoicing crowns in eternal life. In other words, this is the recognition of the saints by the Lord for earning the souls for Him.

5. The crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”. This crown is given to those shepherds (Pastors) who take care of the believers faithfully. The shepherd who minds the entire herd carefully and safely will be given the crown of glory.

6. The Golden crown

This is the crown given to all the saints as a sign of their kingship (Rev 4:4-11; 5:9-10).

The Other Rewards

The winning saints will not only get crowns but also other positions.

1. **Recognition** : Whoever trades the talents faithfully and gained profit for the Lord shall be recognised (Matt 25:14-23).
2. **Thrones** (Luke 14:1-19; Rev 2:27-28; Matt 19:28) : Whoever did the Lord's work as per His commandments and with endurance, bore afflictions and traded talents will get the thrones.
3. **Shining** (Dan 12:3; Matt 13:43) : Each one will get glory and shine in the ratio of the brightness with which they worked here for Him. They that turn many to righteousness will shine as stars forever and ever. (Dan 12:3).
4. **The White Stones and New Name** : This is given to those who not earn wealth through wrong ways but live straight forwardly.
5. **White Raiment** (Rev 3:5)
6. **The Power over the Nations** (Rev 2:25-29)
7. **New Name** (Rev 3:12).

Practical Lessons

God will evaluate why we did His work instead of what we did. Therefore, let our work be selfless and filled with godly love.

Questions

1. Which are the books that will be opened during the judgement?
2. What is the speciality of the book of Life?
3. Which are the crowns that will be given before the judgement seat?
4. What are the other rewards that a believer would get?

LESSON 34

The Millennium

Reading Portion : Rev 20:1-10

Memory Verse : Rev 21:3

Purpose : To understand the characteristics of the millennium rule. To know about the role of Jews and the church during this period.

Introduction : Millennium rules means the righteous governance that Jesus Christ is going to establish on the earth after his glorious appearance. In this lesson we shall study about its main purpose, events, etc. in detail.

Millennium

‘Millennium’ is a Latin word (Mille – thousand, annus-year). The usage of millennium was derived from the phrase thousand year rule. In Malayalam it is called ‘sahasrabda’ which is a Sankrit word. During this period, the earth will be the kingdom of Christ and the church.

The period of Millennium: The Holy Bible makes it clear that the period of governance by Christ between the first and second resurrection shall be a thousand years long (Rev 20:1-6). The thousand years is the period of God’s rule over the present earth whereas the eternal kingdom would be in the new heaven and earth.

The special features of the millennium rule

1. **The Millennium rule is earthly :** The millennium rule will the governance of God on the earth. It would be a welfare state

completely based on righteousness. It would be a kingdom ruled by the King of righteousness (Isa 26:1-2; Matt 25:37; Isa 46:13). Messiah shall judge the poor righteously and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth fairly (Isa 1:4-5).

2. **The Millennium rule would be under the complete dominance of God :** God will reign as the king of kings. The law making, governance and judiciary would be with the king and not with the people. All the nations of the heathen shall submit before the God and submit before this sovereign authority. Jehovah shall be the King over all the earth (Psa 72:19; Zech 14:9).
3. **It is founded on truth:** During the Millennium rule, truth and mercy shall unite (Psa 85:10-11; 98:3). Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain (Zech 8:3). Man changed the truth of God into a lie (Rom 1:25). However, the complete picture of truth shall be established during the Millennium era.
4. **Totally peaceful environment:** There will be no war as all the nations of the world shall end their differences and unite as one nation. There will not be any moral deterioration. Therefore, it would be a single nation with perennial peace. When our Lord of peace reign over the world as the King of Kings, righteousness and peace shall fill the entire world.
5. **An experience of godly holiness and glory:** God shall sit upon the throne of holiness and shall reign over the heathen (Psa 47:8). All the heathen shall know that there is a Holy God in Israel. As the glory of God will fill the earth, this great kingdom will also be filled with holiness and glory.
6. **As Satan would be bound, lesser is the chance of man falling into tests.**
7. **The enmity among animals will end** (Isa 11:6-7; 65:25).
The main objective of Millennium rule
 1. The chief aim of the Millennium rule is to implement all the covenants that God had made with man (Isa 10:21-22; 19:25; Mic 4:7-8; Eze 16:60, 63; Rom 11:26-29).
 2. To establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ : Another objective is to bow every knee before His Son Jesus Christ on the earth where he was treated shamefully. It is the fulfilment of the promise that "I make thine enemies thy footstool". (Phil 2:9).

3. It is another fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham that his children would receive the entire land of Palestine (Zech 8:3; Gen 15:18-29; Eze 47:1-12).
4. To establish the kingdom of God on the earth : Though the redemption of man took place by the death of the Son of God on the cross, the total redemption shall occur only by the reign of God over the earth.
5. Complete Will of God shall be done on the earth as in heaven.
6. God's promise that He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever (Luke 1:33) will literally be achieved.
7. The other purpose is the total redemption of all the creatures waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. (Rom 8:18-20).

The Main events during the Millennium period

1. Satan will be chained and cast into the bottomless pit.
2. Satan will be shut and sealed in the pit for 1000 years.
3. The Israel will be gathered from all the corners of the world to Jerusalem (Isa 11:11-12).
4. Christ will take over the reign of the earth (Isa 11:1-5; Zech 14:9).
5. The Apostles will judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-20).
6. The saints will partake in the kingdom of dominion as kings and priests (Dan 7:27).
7. The Holy City of Jerusalem will become capital of the world.
8. By the end of the Millennium period, Satan will be set free for a while. Satan and his servants will wage war with Christ and His saints and will be defeated.
9. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire permanently.

The condition of Israel during millennium period

Three important events in respect of Israel will take place during the Millennium period. The foremost of them is that Israel shall return and be gathered in their own country (Isa 10:13; Matt 24:20-33; Isa 11:10-12; Eze 37:16-22). Thereafter the re-birth of Israel will occur (Rom 11:24, 27). All the scattered tribes of Israel and Judah will gather in the Millennium period. At that time, the indifferent

nations (Israel and Judah) shall be united as one under the Messiah (Eze 37:21-22; Zec 11:12-13).

The Millennial Temple and worship

During the Millennium period, the reconstruction of the Temple and restoration of worship shall occur there (Eze 40:46; Zec 14:16-17). The Millennial Temple shall be bigger than the earlier ones. The presence of Temple is the confirmation that God is dwelling in the midst of the people. God's glory that left the temple of Solomon (Eze 8:11) shall fill the Millennial temple.

Then, Israel shall be the centre point for the world. They will preach to the heathen about Messiah. Thus many nations and languages will come to Jerusalem in search of Jehovah and to please him (Isa 65:19; Zech 8:13, 20, 23). Thus unity and love will prevail and the worship of the one and only and true God shall be resumed.

The Millennium period and the church

In the glorious appearance, the church will come to the earth along with Christ. During the Millennial reign, the church will reign along with the bridegroom as queen. Only Christ and the church shall hold the honour of kingdom and priesthood together. (Rev 1:6).

Practical Lessons

The reign of Jesus Christ shall be fair, just and peaceful for which man had been yearning from the beginning. God has planned for great and precious things for His church. Let us be ready for such a blessed hope.

Questions

1. What is the millennial rule?
2. What are the special characteristics of millennium rule?
3. What will be the position of church during the millennium rule?
4. What would be the condition of Israel during the millennium rule?

LESSON 35

The New Heavens and Earth

Reading Portion : Isa 66:22-24; Revelation Chapters 21-22

Memory Verse : 2 Peter 3:11-13

Purpose : The existing heaven and earth will be replaced. To understand the new heavens and earth which will be established by God.

Introduction : After the existing universe is destroyed by fire, the judgement of the white throne will occur (Rev 20:11-15). All the wicked will be put into the eternal fire (Rev 20:15). Thereafter the creation of new heavens and earth will take place (Rev 21:1; Isa 66:22).

The New heavens and Earth

At the end of the Millennial rule God will destroy the existing universe by a cleansing fire. Thereafter the new heavens and earth will be created. The heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (1Pet 3:7, 10-11). After destroying the present universe, God shall create new heavens and earth for His church.

While creating the universe, God also created earth in the beginning (Genesis 1:1). It was so wonderful that the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:4-7). But the beautiful earth became void and without form due to the sins of the angels. Thereafter God renewed the earth for man in 6 days. Adam and Eve were made to

dwell therein. Again due to their sin, the earth has reached its present cursed condition (Gen 3:17-21). God decided to redeem mankind and earth through the salvation planned through Jesus Christ. God's children who have been redeemed through faith are now tarrying for the redemption of their body and the earth. During the period of millennium rule, the earth will be similar to the one where Adam lived. The new heavens and earth to be created and to be given to the mankind after the completion of redemption will be as beautiful and bright as in the beginning so that the sons of god shall shout for joy (Isa 63:17-18). The cleansing by fire is to free the earth from the curses and filthiness due to the sins of angels and man. Like the indivisible binding relationship between all things in heaven and earth before the fall of angels, the new heavens and earth shall be together in Christ. This would be the position in the dispensation of the fullness of times (Eph 1:10).

The new heavens and earth shall exist for ever. From then onwards it will never change (Isa 66:22; Heb 12:26-29). The creation of the new heavens and earth is to carry out the plan of the everlasting divine relationship between the dominion of God and the glorious governance of the eternal king Jesus Christ. All the saints, church, Israel, redeemed gentiles, angels, etc. shall dwell in this new earth forever. The holy city of Jerusalem shall be established here.

The new Jerusalem

John saw that, with the establishment of the new earth, the holy city, the new Jerusalem came down from the heavenly God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2). This city is the dwelling place of the church i.e. the bride of the bridegroom Christ. Its foundations are in the names of 12 Apostles and the gates are in the names of 12 tribes of the Israel. Its description is mentioned in Chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation.

The beautiful holy city of Jerusalem shall be an astonishing and wonderful sight for everybody. It is written that the new Jerusalem is not created afresh but will descend from the presence of God in heaven (Rev 21:2). After the millennium when the present earth will be destroyed by fire, this city will be shifted. Thereafter it will come down to link the new heavens and earth and will shine on the 12 foundations of the new earth.

The names given to the new Jerusalem in the New Testament

1. The new Jerusalem (Rev 3:12; 21:2)

2. A city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:18)
3. Jerusalem which is above (Gal 4:26)
4. Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22)
5. The city of God (Rev 3:12)
6. The holy city (Rev 21:2,10)

The size and glory of the new Jerusalem

The new Jerusalem is related to the eternity of the church. Though it is described as the 'city of the bride', all the saved people right from Adam to the last person will be the citizens of this city (Heb 12:22-24). The city would be big enough to contain all of them (Rev 21:18). The wall of the city is made of jasper and the city is made of pure gold like unto clear glass. Its foundations are adorned with different precious stones. God shall dwell there along with His people and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Rev. 21:3-4). A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal shall proceed out of the throne which is the centre of the city. On the either sides of the river of life, there shall be planted the trees of life which will bear 12 types of fruits and yielding it every month.

There will be no temple or sacrifices in the new city of Jerusalem. God Himself is the temple. The promise "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with the men" shall be fulfilled here (Rev 21). There will no sun or moon (shining stars). The God Himself shall be the light of the city (Rev 21:23).

Thus, Jesus Christ after changing all rules, authorities and power, shall deliver the kingdom to God, the Father (1 Cor 15:24). Jesus will complete His responsibilities as the son of man and enter in to glorious eternal status of the Son of God.

Practical Lessons

We must praise the Lord for the eternal heavenly blessings being prepared for the Church. But our hope and pleasure should not be about the heaven but the Lord Jesus Christ who is more precious than the heaven.

Questions

1. What are the special characteristics of new heavens and earth?
2. What are the new names given to the New Jerusalem?
3. Who will be citizens of the new earth?



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