

# **APPROVED TOPICS FOR THE GKS YOUTH FELLOWSHIP ANNUAL ASSEMBLY BIBLE QUIZ**

**2025**

1. FACTS ABOUT COVERING OF HAIR IN WORSHIP
2. THE ALL-SUFFICIENT PRAYER
3. HOW ARE SAINTS MADE?
4. IS THE PENITENT THIEF IN HEAVEN?
5. THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE
6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STORY OF RUTH AND NAOMI
7. DO ALL CHURCHES WORSHIP ONE GOD?
8. WAS JESUS CHRIST HANGED ON A CROSS OR TREE?
9. WHAT IS THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN CHRISTIANITY?
10. GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

## 1.      **FACTS ABOUT COVERING OF HAIR IN WORSHIP**

In appearing before God for devotion or worship, every woman is required by nature and by the law of God to cover her hair. This puts her in a solemn and becoming posture for study, meditation, prayer and singing of praises to God. However, it has now become the norm for women in most Churches in the world to go for devotion or attend services with their hair uncovered. This practice which has been gaining ground with the advance of secularism in the last 100 years is a clear violation of the law of God as stated in the Holy Bible.

Writing in such websites as [www.btinternet.com](http://www.btinternet.com), [www.christianhospitality.org](http://www.christianhospitality.org) and [www.pbc.org](http://www.pbc.org) , a number of church leaders and commentators on the issue contend that “the hair is the God-given covering, the material covering is just a human fashion or custom” and that “women are not supposed to wear veils because God has given them long uncut hair instead”. Among the arguments they use to buttress their stand are that:

1.      By the law of Moses, women being tried for committing adultery are allowed to uncover their hair in the temple;
2.      Mary, sister of Lazarus worshipped Christ without covering her head;
3.      The Priests of old wore caps while a king of Israel was crowned in the temple

Let us now look at these arguments against the background of the Holy Scriptures. In the case of women accused of adultery as stated in Numbers 5:11-31, the law provided that she should undergo a special rite to ascertain if she was actually guilty of the charge made against her. The law states among other things that “the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head”. (verse 18) Some hold to this as proof that women could uncover their hair in the temple. But it should be understood that women spoken of in the passage under reference were under trial and uncovering their hair signified the humiliating and shameful nature of the accusation against them. Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible in explaining verse 18 “uncover the woman's head”, states as follows:

“To take off a woman's veil, and expose her to the sight of men, would be considered a very great degradation in the East.” It adds: “To this St. Paul appears to allude in 1 Corinthians 11:5,6,10”.

Since in the East it is considered highly disrespectful for women to appear before men without a covering in line with the law of God - it is therefore natural to expect them to show much greater reverence for God Almighty by covering their hair during devotion. What those who canvass this argument should also reflect on is that: if the Jewish women normally worshipped in the temple with uncovered heads, why then was it necessary for women caught in adultery to be specifically asked to uncover their hair? Certainly, it was not the practice in those days for women to go into the temple with uncovered hair. Also, it should be pointed out that the woman accused of adultery did not go to the temple at that particular time for worship but for judgment.

The Bible states that shamefacedness is a virtue in women. St. Paul in his letter to Timothy instructs thus: “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided

hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” - 1 Timothy 2:9,10

Another instance adduced by those who believe and teach that a woman need not cover her hair in worship is that of Mary, the sister of Lazarus. On a certain occasion when the Lord Jesus Christ visited them, the Bible records her as “weeping at the feet of Christ and wiping his feet with her hair”. Here again we see that this was not a temple service but an unplanned, spur-of-the-moment action, in an informal setting - the family home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The spontaneous outpouring of goodwill, and appreciation by Mary to God Almighty for His goodness on her, including the raising of Lazarus, her brother from the dead, cannot be used to justify leaving the woman's hair bare during worship. -John 11:2; 12:2,3; compare Luke 7:37-50.

Some have argued that since the Bible says one should “pray without ceasing”, (1 Thessalonians 5:17), a woman should cover her hair all the time. This is not correct. As indicated earlier, the law on covering of hair by women has to do with worship situations. What St. Paul meant in his letter to the Thessalonians was that we should be regular in prayer; we should not be weary of asking for help from God. Prayer is a formal, solemn act of thanksgiving and of making requests from God by way of worship. This cannot be a 24-hour activity.

It is true that in the time of old, the priests wore headgears. The high priest wore a distinctive head gear called mitre (See Exodus 28:4,37,39; 39:28,30; Leviticus 8:9), while that worn by other priests was generally called bonnet. (Exodus 28:40; 29:9) The mitre is defined by the Smith's Bible Dictionary as “the turban or headdress of the high priest, made of fine linen cloth, eight yards long, folded around the head on the front of which was a gold plate with the inscription 'Holiness to the Lord’”. We agree that under Mosaic law it was mandatory for priests to cover their heads but such law was not retained in the Christian era. See Colossians 2:14-17.

It is also true that King Joash was crowned in the temple as recorded in 2 Kings 11:11,12,14. But this was an abnormal situation. Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 11:1) had usurped the throne after the premature death of her husband Jehoram and her son Ahaziah. She sought to secure herself on the throne by the murder of all the seed royal. Only Joash her grandson, then an infant, was saved by his aunt Jehosheba. The child was concealed in the temple for six years and brought up under the care of the priest, Jehoiada. During this period Athaliah reigned over Judah. At the age of seven Jehoash was brought from his place of refuge and crowned under the supervision of Jehoiada the high priest. The people's zeal for God and their loyalty to the house of David ensured that they quickly stood up to Athaliah's subsequent challenge and put her to death. - 2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chronicles 23:1-21.

What happened was that God allowed the Priest Jehoiada to install Jehoash as king in order to continue the royal lineage of king David in keeping with His oath to him. (Psalm 132:11,12; 2 Samuel 7:12; 2 Chronicles 6:16) The devil, knowing the purpose of God that all kings of Israel would come through the line of king David, had planned to frustrate that purpose by using Athaliah to kill all the heirs to the throne. But no one can interfere or change the will of God. The crowning of Jehoash in the temple is an exceptional case which cannot be cited as a precedent

for all time. God also makes allowance for unusual circumstances and these could warrant exemptions from the general rule. The circumstances of those days warranted the action of the Priest Jehoaida as the temple was the only secure place the priest could get to hurriedly crown the king. In any case, this was not a normal coronation ceremony as Jehoash was only seven years old. There is no other example in the Holy Bible where a king of Israel was crowned in the temple. In summary, we must reiterate that the case of king Joash being crowned in the temple was an example in time of old, which does not apply in the Christian era.

Some scholars have argued that though Joash was crowned in the temple, the venue could not have been the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies where the priest enters once a year. According to the American Tract Society Dictionary, **“The temple itself, strictly so called, which comprised the Porch, the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies, formed only a small part of the sacred precincts, being surrounded by spacious courts, chambers, and other apartments, which were much more extensive than the temple itself. It should be observed that the word temple does not always denote the central edifice itself, but in many passages some of the outer courts are intended.”** - Emphasis ours.

### **Change of Priesthood**

The Bible shows that Jesus Christ came to “magnify the law and make it honourable”. (Isaiah 42:21) It was the will of God that in due course the work of the Ministry should be raised to new heights through Jesus Christ. In the words of Apostle Paul “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Romans 10: 4) The Priesthood changed with the coming of Christ, the Melchizedek, as a result of which the laws, which were only a shadow of things to come, were done away with. St. Paul said: “For the Priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.” (Hebrews 7:12) For the fact that Jesus Christ did not come from the priestly line of Levi indicates that the law as to the priesthood had changed. (Hebrews 7:11-15) And in Galatians 3:24,25 St. Paul added: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school master.” After Christ, the perfect teacher, had come, nobody should take the people of God back to the schoolmaster.

We implore our readers to take particular note of the fact that Apostle John records a vision in the book of Revelations where the 24 elders who sat about the throne of God “cast their crowns before the throne” in reverence to God Almighty. (Revelation 4:10,11) This is a clear demonstration of the fact that men, no matter how highly placed ought not to cover their heads during worship and is in line with the words of St. Paul that men should not cover their heads while worshipping God.

Jesus Christ and his apostles wore no head covering or any distinctive garments as the priests of old did while ministering in the temple. That was why Judas had to use a kiss to identify Jesus Christ. (Matthew 26:48). The example and precept of Christ and his apostles supersede the laws of the old testaments regarding the dressing of priests and ministers of God. (John 13:15) St. Paul in his letter to the Christians at Colossae stated: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it

to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”- Colossians 2:14-17.

## **St. Paul**

To better understand the Bible position on the covering of hair by women, let us dissect St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 in which he dwelt extensively on the issue. In verse 1 he enjoins the Corinthian Christians to follow his example just as he was also following the commands of Christ. In verse 2 he reminded them of the need to keep the ordinances he delivered to them. He went on to state the basis of the ruling he was to give, saying in the next verse, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.” For this reason therefore: “Every man praying or prophesying, (preaching the word of God) having his head covered, dishonoureth his head: (Jesus Christ) But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head (the man) for that is even all one as if she were shaven”. (verses 3-5) Then he added in verse 6, “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered”. The statement is clear enough.

In spite of the clarity of St. Paul's statement, many professed Christians still do not understand what St. Paul meant in verses 5 (already quoted) and 15 of 1 Corinthians 11. Verse 15 says: “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” A number of professed Christians wrongly explain this text to mean that because the woman already has hair on her head she does not need any scarf or any other covering anymore!

There should be no room for confusion in understanding of 1 Corinthians 11 verses 5 and 15, if we are sincere to ourselves. What St. Paul is saying is that if the woman prays without using a scarf or other material to cover her hair, she by so doing dishonours her head, that is the man. The material over her head is a sign of her subjection to the man and her readiness to subject herself to the divine order. The only condition in which she could pray without covering her hair is to shave it all. The covering in verse 5 refers to a material covering or vesture, etc. There is no way the expression “having her head uncovered” could mean “having no hair on her head”. The “long hair” in verse 15 means the woman's natural hair. This gives her glory and she could use it to cover her face if struck by shyness: “for her hair is given her for a covering”.

St. Paul's words are rendered more clearly by the Living Bible. We may as well quote verses 2-76, which reads as follows: “But there is one matter I want to remind you about: that a wife is responsible to her husband, her husband is responsible to Christ, and Christ is responsible to God. That is why, if a man refuses to remove his hat while praying or preaching, he dishonors Christ. And that is why a woman who publicly prays or prophesies without a covering on her head dishonors her husband [for her covering is a sign of her subjection to him]. Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering then she should cut off all her hair.

And if it is shameful for a woman to have her head shaved, then she should wear a covering. But a man should not wear anything on his head [when worshipping, for his hat is a sign of subjection to men]”. St. Paul adds in verses 13-15: “What do you yourselves really think about this? Is it right for a woman to pray in public without covering her head? Doesn't even instinct itself teach us that women's heads should be covered? For women are proud of their long hair, while a man with long hair tends to be ashamed.”

The Churches who allow women to uncover their hair in worship are motivated by the quest for large membership and money, for which reason they are prepared to compromise Christian standards than practise righteousness. Such will definitely give account of their stewardship to God. (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10) Even the wives of some of the Church leaders cover their heads during worship whereas most members of their congregation don't. This is hypocrisy.

Like the unfaithful priests of old, some of the Church leaders of today are committing a grievous blunder by not clearly setting out the right standards, as commanded by God for people to follow. In Ezekiel 22:26 God declared: “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, ... and I am profaned among them.” See also Ezekiel 44:23; Leviticus 10:10.

### **Personal Righteousness**

The truth is that several Churches have gone with the prevailing fashion of the secular world such that the covering of hair “has slowly but surely slipped out of sight” in many congregations.

Those women who prefer to do their own will by not covering their heads argue that God does not look at the outward appearance or dressing but the heart. This is a grossly misleading argument which has nurtured several licentious practices. The outward appearance or conduct is and should be a reflection of what is in the heart. And Christ said so in Matthew 15:18-20 thus: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man...” By refusing to obey the command of God, those women who fail to cover their hair in worship and the priests who cover their heads are showing that their hearts are far from God. (Matthew 15:7-9; Isaiah 29:13,14) Indeed, those who follow the opinions and traditions of men and serve God loosely are indulging in vain worship.

It is in view of this that we go all out to draw people's attention to the truth as stated in the Holy Bible, not for the love of controversy as some say, or with the view of embarrassing anybody, but in the interest of the sheep of God who want to practice His righteousness so as to be saved.

Regrettably, many professed Christians today are behaving like the natural Jews who, instead of adhering to the standards God has laid down for His worshippers, are following the dictates of their hearts thereby falling short

of the righteousness of God. St. Paul stated: “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” - Romans 10:1-3

Warning those who refuse to abide by this instruction on covering of hair, St. Paul declared “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” He also stated: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” – 1 Corinthians 14:37,38. See also 1 Corinthians 11:16; 7:40; Matthew 7:21.

## 2. THE ALL-SUFFICIENT PRAYER

On a certain occasion during his earthly ministry, the disciples of Jesus Christ asked him to teach them how to pray, “as John also taught his disciples”. Being the perfect teacher that he is, our Lord and Master Jesus Christ immediately taught them a unique and concise way of making solemn requests to God that has since then become the model for all Christians. Because the Lord’s Prayer is all- embracing, it is sometimes referred to as “The All-Sufficient Prayer”.

The account in the book of Matthew chapter six verses nine to thirteen states: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...” (Matthew 6:9-13; see also Luke 11:1-4) Let us now go on to explain the meaning of the main points in the prayer in the light of the Scriptures.

**Our Father:** Spiritually, the word “father” means “life-giver”. God Almighty is the Creator of all living things whether in heaven or in earth. (John 20:17; Revelation 4:11) Because He is the Sustainer of life, He is called “the God of the spirits of all flesh”, in Numbers 16:22 and 27:16. In the words of Apostle Paul, in his famous speech on Mars Hill in Athens, it is “in him we live, and move, and have our being... For we are also his offspring”. - Acts 17:28; see also Job 34:14, 15; Psalm 104:29,30.

The Bible shows that God Almighty loves us and will always provide for our needs. A deep and sincere appreciation of His love for us and of our total dependence on Him are vital to His answering our petitions. Jesus Christ stated: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11) Our confession of God Almighty as our Father sets the tone for subsequent petitions contained in the prayer.

**Hallowed Be Thy Name** - The name which God Almighty took exclusively to Himself is JEHOVAH. (Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18) The name should be hallowed, meaning that it should be held in awe or deep reverence, and should not to be taken in vain. (See Exodus 20:7; Psalm 111:9) There are many people today who, contrary to the law of God, go to law courts and swear falsely in God’s name. He would punish all such ones except they repent. In any case, Christians are not to swear anymore. (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12) The Almighty God declared through His servant “for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” –1Samuel 2:30.

Another aspect of the matter is that we should not do anything that will make people to speak ill of or bring reproach to the name of God and His work. Apostle Paul stated: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not



commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.” (Romans 2:20-24) A high standard of morality or righteousness is expected from those who have given themselves to the service of God. Indeed, man was created to show forth the praise of God. (Isaiah 43:21) By sincere and faithful service, true worshippers give honour to God and hallow His name for their blessing by His grace. Jesus Christ stated: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” -Matthew 5:16.

**Thy Kingdom Come:** The next line in the prayer is for the Kingdom of God to come. This prayer shows that the person saying it has the understanding that the kingdom of God which will cover both the heavens and the earth, is the only solution to the problems of this world. – Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13.

Bible prophecies show that the Kingdom of God will come in this age. (Isaiah 2:2) This prophecy has fulfilled with the setting up of God’s Kingdom Organisations in various parts of the world, of which the God’s Kingdom Society (GKS), the Church of the Living God, is part and parcel. (Matthew 24:31, 15, 16; Daniel 2:44; Revelation 17:10, 11) The Kingdom will continue to grow as people of goodwill are gathered into it by the power of God until He (God Almighty) will bring iniquity to an end and righteousness and peace will cover the earth. Since the Kingdom has been set up, true Christians no longer say “Thy Kingdom come” but “Thy Kingdom has come”.

**Our Daily Bread:** The prayer for God to “give us this day our daily bread” should be understood to mean that we are asking God to give us both spiritual and literal bread. The spiritual bread, which is the word of God, is more important. It teaches man what to do so as to get life, which ordinary bread cannot do. (Isaiah 55:1-3; Matthew 16:6-12; etc.) God declared through His servant Moses that he humbled the Jews, and caused them to suffer hunger, and fed them with manna, so that they might “know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live”. (Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4; Job 23:12) Jesus Christ, in enjoining us to be diligent in acquiring the knowledge of God so as to be approved for life, exhorted us thus: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” -John 6:27.

However, literal food is also important as it is needful for daily sustenance. No human being can stay or function for long without food. It was for this reason. God Almighty fed the Jews with manna in the wilderness. (Exodus 16:16-35) Also, Jesus Christ miraculously fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two small fishes. – John 6:1-14.

It should be noted that Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread, that is, for us to have food enough for the day. We should not ask for or set our minds on having so much more than we need for our sustenance, for that would

amount to greed, which could lead people to sin and untimely death. We should remember the words of Agur who prayed God to feed him with food “convenient” for him. - Proverbs 30:8.

This aspect of the Lord’s prayer also means that we should be contented with what God has provided for us. The Bible says: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” -1 Timothy 6:6-8.

**Forgiveness:** The Lord’s Prayer also harps on forgiveness as it is written: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Since it is the duty of every one to obey God, anyone who violates His laws has incurred a debt, which can only be made good by repentance and right conduct. But being a merciful Father, and by virtue of His love for man, God Almighty forgives those who show remorse for their sins and repent. But for this quality of forgiveness, no man would be alive to serve God. David the prophet stated: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm 130:3, 4) Furthermore, the Psalmist stated: “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” - Psalm 103:8-14.

The other part of the prayer is that since God is ready to forgive us, we should also forgive those who wrong us. Illustrating this point, Jesus Christ gave a parable about a king whose servant owed him 10,000 talents (\$10 million according to The Living Bible ) but since he did not have money to pay the king promptly forgave him and cancelled the debt. However the servant would not forgive his fellow servant who owed him only 100 pence (about \$2000) but threw him into jail. On being told what his servant had done, his lord was angry and said unto him “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.” Jesus Christ then said in verse 35: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” – Matthew 18:21-35.

Still stressing the importance of forgiving each other, Jesus Christ said: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.” - Luke 17:3-5; see also Matthew 18:21,22.

**Temptation:** The prayer continues with the words: “And lead us not into temptation...” From Bible understanding, the phrasing is wrongly translated, because God does not lead people into temptation. God tries or tests His people, but He does not tempt them. Apostle James stated: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” - James 1:13-15.

It is the devil who tempts people and so is known as “the tempter”. (Matthew 4:1, 3) The statement, “God did tempt Abraham” in Genesis 22:1 is properly put in Hebrews 11:17 where St. Paul said: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ...” In the words of James the apostle: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. - James 1:12.

God does not lead us into temptation; He delivers us from temptation. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians at Corinth attests to this: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) Writing in this vein, St. Peter said: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” (2 Peter 2:9; see also Luke 22:31) In view of the afore-stated points, true Christians no longer say “lead us not into temptation” but “leave us not in temptation”.

**Deliverance from evil:** Next in the prayer is a request for God to deliver us from evil. The world is full of evils, troubles or perils. It was for the purpose of saving mankind from these troubles that Jesus Christ came, suffered, died and was raised by the Father. Apostle Paul said Jesus Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”. -Galatians 1:4.

David the prophet was a man who suffered many afflictions at the instance of the devil. It was God Who delivered him from all these evils. He was therefore well placed to make this declaration: “The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.” - Psalm 34:17-19 See also John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 3:10-13.

The account of the Lord’s Prayer in the book of Luke stops at “deliver us from evil” But that in the book of Matthew ends with a doxology: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” According to authorities this part was added by later writers. It is not part of the inspired text. Adam Clarke’s commentary has this to say: “The whole of this doxology is rejected by Wetstein, Griesbach, and the most eminent critics. The authorities on which it is rejected may be seen in Griesbach and, Wetstein, particularly in the second

edition of Griesbach's Testament, who is fully of opinion that it never made a part of the sacred text. It is variously written in several MSS, and omitted by most of the fathers, both Greek and Latin.” Another reputable commentator, Jamieson Fauset, wrote: “If any reliance is to be placed on external evidence, this doxology, we think, can hardly be considered part of the original text. It is wanting in all the most ancient manuscripts;

On a review of the evidence, the strong probability, we think, is that it was not part of the original text.” Besides, the words “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”, amount to repetition as these have been said at the beginning of the prayer. Jesus Christ had earlier warned us against unnecessary repetition. – Matthew 6:7, 8.

From the foregoing it could be seen that the Lord’s Prayer, while not listing specific personal problems, covers all one would ask from God, and this accounts for why it is called the all-sufficient prayer. In Smith’s Bible Dictionary, the author, at page 63, quotes Lange as stating: “In this prayer, our Lord shows his disciples how an infinite variety of wants and requests can be compressed into a few humble petitions. It embodies every possible desire of a praying heart, a whole world of spiritual requirements; yet all in the most simple, condensed and humble form, resembling in this respect, a pearl on which the light of heaven plays.”

The Lord’s Prayer is not a selfish prayer as each person is praying not only for himself - as could be seen from the use of the plural pronouns “our” and “us” - but for all people of God. Unfortunately however, many professed Christians today tend to ignore it or even hold it in derision, believing it is not ‘potent’ enough. Rather they prefer to use prayers taught by man. Is it not contradictory for people to believe that Jesus Christ their Master and Lord and that he is “the same yesterday, today and forever” and yet ignore his teachings? Those who refuse to say the Lord’s Prayer are unwittingly undermining their belief in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master.

A fact that cannot be over-emphasized is that God will certainly answer those who say the Lord’s prayer with faith and understanding by His grace. The Bible says: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”. (1 John 5:14) It should be pointed out that though one can say other prayers, as circumstances dictate but the fact is that the Lord’s Prayer is adequate for private or congregational use.

We pray God to help those willing to serve Him to retrace their steps to do His will by His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### 3. HOW ARE SAINTS MADE?

**THERE are honours that no man can arrogate to himself or can give to another but which the Almighty God alone gives. And such is the honour to be a saint. But the age-long tendency of some in Christendom to impose their own dogmas and traditions upon their adherents in complete disregard of the tenets of Christianity as enunciated in the Scriptures, has in most cases been the cause of misunderstanding.**

When we make reference to the first president of God's Kingdom Society, the late Gideon M. Urhobo, as a saint some people look at us with frowns of disapproval and some others express great surprise. We have always been confronted with questions such as (1) who made G. M. Urhobo a saint? (2) when was he canonized? And (3) where was he canonized? Some of our Roman Catholic friends have put it straight to us that it is only the Pope who can declare a person a saint.

It is gratifying to note that such questions have every so often provoked frank religious discussions through which many people have emerged from behind the cloud of ignorance to the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The issue as to how saints are made or how they can be identified cannot be resolved unless we go straight to the Holy Bible, which all Christians accept as their guide-book and authority. The Christian policy is that ANY teaching or practice, which is not in conformity with the Scriptures, must be rejected. And so St. Paul stated: "But through we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed...."—Gal. 1:8, 9.

With a dispassionate mind, we have carefully considered the claims of the Roman Catholic Church in regard to canonization as well as the system whereby certain persons had been beatified and made saints, and have come to the conclusion that the claims are scripturally unsustainable.

#### **Canonization**

Writing on "How saints Are Made" in a Roman Catholic magazine, The Gold Coast CATHOLIC VOICE, JULY 1954, Msgr. Joseph J. Sullivan stated that any catholic may petition a Bishop to begin the cause of a person whom he considers fit for canonization and the Bishop may begin the informative process.

According to the Monsignor, when the various parts of the informative process are completed a notarized copy is sent to the sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome for scrutiny. "It is the Pope who finally decides whether the cause should proceed or not."

With regard to the scrutinizing of the informative process report, Msgr. Sullivan wrote: "First the Congregation examines whether the process was carried out properly; then it studies the results of the investigation. In each case an official of the Congregation, call the Promoter General of the Faith, acts as the 'Devil's Advocate' and opposes the continuance of the cause from every possible viewpoint. His objections are carefully weighed and considered by the congregation."

The Monsignor added: “According to the law, formal investigation into the practice of heroic virtue by a person is not permitted until 50 years after his death...”

It is when the Pope is satisfied at the end of the various ceremonies that he, at the third request of the postulator of the cause, declares, “ ‘In honour of the Holy Trinity, for the glory of the Catholic faith and the progress of the Christian religion, in virtue of the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Apostle Peter and Paul, and of his own plenary and proper authority,’ that the servant of God in question shall be inscribed on the register of the saints (‘Canon Sanctorum’)...” (Addis & Arnold’s Catholic Dictionary, page 112).

The Catholic Voice (Jan. 1956) stated positively: “Only the Pope can speak the words that declare a person a saint.” (Back page).

We wish to recall here that Catholics agree that “the whole Bible is the word of God” and “it is a Catholic teaching that there is no error in the Bible”. And concerning the Bible a Catholic newspaper, the INDEPENDENT (Oct. 16-22, 1966) has this to say: “Not only must Priests find in the Bible the source of their sacred learning, nourishment for their interior life and substance for the instruction of their people, but the people, too, should be encouraged and helped to read the sacred scriptures for themselves.”

Well, can anybody cite the Sacred Scriptures to show that saints are ordained in the way the Roman Catholic church is doing? Who acted as the “devil’s advocate” when Peter, Paul or any other apostle was made a saint? From whom did that tedious process of canonization, with all the formalities and ceremonies originate? Was it from Christ or Peter or Paul?

Moreover, where in the Bible is it stated that a person must die before he is made a saint? Or that it should be 50 years after a person’s death before he is declared a saint? Did Peter or Paul or any other apostle canonize anybody at all? What is the name of that person who was canonized? And where in the Bible is the record?

## Holy Person

A Saint is a holy or sanctified person. One who has received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and is therefore set aside by God through Jesus Christ for holy uses. The early apostles of Jesus Christ stand out as practical examples.

Many people are ignorant of the fact that the fold of God’s sheep under the shepherding of Jesus Christ is composed mainly of two categories or classes of Christians: **the Little Flock** and the **Other sheep** (Luke 12: 32; John 10: 16). The Little Flock is made up of the apostles who having been anointed must devote their lives exclusively to the services of God. All other believers who are not anointed, no matter how high the degree of their knowledge of the Scripture, like Timothy and Titus, are the **Other sheep**.

Jesus Christ himself made this clear distinction when he specially chose twelve out of the multitude of his followers and called them APOSTLES (Mark 3: 13-19; Luke 6: 12-16). At that stage the ordination of the apostles

was not yet complete in that they had not been anointed with the Holy spirit However, Jesus Christ gave them a promise to the effect that “the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost (Spirit), whom the Father will send is my name, he shall teach you all things”. (John 14: 26; Act 1: 8). This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. (Acts 2: 1-4). But before then Judas Iscariot who proved unworthy of the grace of God, being the son of perdition, had fallen and killed himself and his office had been given to Matthias—Acts 1: 15-26.

The twelve apostles were the foundation members of those that made up the Little Flock but later on others like Stephen, Paul, Cornelius and so on were chosen. And though Cornelius was a gentile God showed that he had been sanctified having received His grace. For concerning him the angel of God said to St. Peter: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”—Act 10: 15.

St. Paul introducing himself in his epistle to the Roman Christians stated: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christians **called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God**” (Rom. 1: 1). And he further stated: “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He call, them He also justified: and whom he justified, them He also glorified.”—Rom. 6: 27,29-30.

It is such ones like set. Paul who are anointed, set apart or chosen by God Himself through Jesus Christ for the ministry of the Gospel, and who are the firstborn among Christians, that are the saints. St. Paul referred to that group of Christian as the “Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven”. —Heb. 12: 22, 23.

And God said: “**Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.**” (Ps.50: 5). It is as a result of that covenant by sacrifice that they are prepared to undergo any form of persecution the devil may devise and even die for the sake of the Gospel. But Christ said: “...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2: 10.

What is obtaining in the Catholic Church is quite the opposite of the scriptural facts herein brought to light. People whose professions had nothing to do with the Gospel have been canonized or made saints. A catholic Dictionary (formerly “The catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary”) has this to say: “The canonized saints form a microcosm of the Church; among them are to be found representatives of all forms of human life, activity and temperament...Nor are their activities and greatness directed in strictly religious channels only; besides so many priests and monks and nuns the Church has canonized emperors and kings and queens, solders, artisans, domestic-servants. Beggars, housemaids, lawyers, merchants, society dames, farmers and their labourers, artists, physicians, a retired hangman—sanctity is an order of which all are eligible.” (Page 444)

Roman Catholic authorities do admit that there had been abuses in their system of canonization. Despite the fact that some of the defects were said to have been remedied by the tenth century when Ulric, Bishop of Augsburg, was canonized, the Addis & Arnold's Catholic dictionary stated: "Still, however, through the inordinate fondness with which those of a particular country or religious order regarded holy persons of their own blood or profession, instances of abusive cultus sometimes occurred."—(Page 110).

We have made it clear that saints are not made by man. They are called to be saints by God through Jesus Christ, and they are devoted entirely to His service preaching the gospel of His Kingdom. It is their duty to pronounce God's judgment written in the Bible to warn men against sin. As it is written: "Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand; to execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all His saints..." (Ps. 149: 5-9) And St. Paul stated: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?..." (1 Cor. 6: 2, 3). This duty of judgment they discharge through the preaching of the gospel of Christ.—John 12: 48.

It is quite clear from all this that saints are not ordained after death. And St. Paul writing to the Corinthian believers generally, the saints inclusive, stated: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, call to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord... Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1: 2,3). The saints among them were living Christians and St. Paul could not have sent greetings with the wishes of grace and peace to dead people.

The saints are also priests and kings. (Rev. 1: 6). They are taught by God in spirit and need not attend seminaries or colleges for academic qualifications. And St. John wrote: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."—John 2: 27.

And so the principal mark by which a saint can be identified is the TRUTH of God's word which he must preach unmixed with lies. For "no lie is of the truth" said John the apostle. (1 John 2: 21). There are other marks such as visions and persecutions for the sake of the Gospel but these can sometimes be seen in counterfeit prophets, so much that they can hardly be distinguished from the saints by those without spiritual understanding. But false prophets can never preach the truth without adulteration!

If beggars, domestic servants, housemaids, labourers and a hangman can be saints, why should it be a sin for Gideon M. Urhobo to be a saint? Is it because he is a Blackman, an African, a Nigerian or an Urhobo man? But God does not discriminate against any one because of his colour, race or tribe. --Act 10: 34-35.

The works of the late G. M. Urhobo show clearly that he was chosen to be a saint, Apart from other spiritual aspects of his life he preached the TRUTH fearlessly, uncompromisingly and unadulteratedly. And Jesus Christ said: "By their fruits ye shall know them."—Matt. 7: 20.



The Saints are comparatively few. "Many are called but few are chosen", said Jesus Christ. To be among the anointed few who are the saints or priests is a great honour. And St. Paul declared: "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."—Heb. 5: 4.

#### 4. IS THE PENITENT THIEF IN HEAVEN?

That one of the two thieves hanged beside Jesus Christ was taken to heaven by him the same day of his crucifixion is widely believed in Christendom. Not only has the thief been given the title of “Good Thief” or “Holy Thief”, a day has also been set aside to commemorate him. But did Jesus Christ go to heaven the day he was killed? Or could the so-called “Good Thief” have gone there before him? And is there any scriptural justification for all the veneration being accorded the penitent thief?

Though faith is an essential quality in Christianity, it is no hindrance to sound reasoning or verification of facts. Lack of spiritual understanding, inconsistency of some religious leaders and the tendency of taking things for granted without recourse to the Holy Bible are responsible for many errors in the teachings and beliefs among professed Christians.

According to the holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ was crucified between two criminals, while one taunted him, the other showed faith, as well as remorse for his evil deeds, and asked Jesus to remember him in his Kingdom. Here is Luke’s account: “And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.” “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” – Luke 23:32, 33, 39-43; See also Matthew 27:38-40, 44.

In his work, *A Catholic Dictionary*, Donald Atwater wrote about “The good thief who on the cross confessed Christ.” He stated: “Nothing is known for certain of him except what is narrated in the gospels. Apocryphal writings call his name Demas. His feast is kept in some places for example, Diocese of Southford, March 26.”

A Roman Catholic newspaper, *The Leader* (Saturday, March 24, 1962), published in Owerri, Nigeria, once stated: “on the supposition that our Lord was crucified on 25th March we commemorate on this day the holy thief, Demas. We know no more of his history than is recorded in the few sentences devoted to him by St. Luke.”

If, according to these publications, “Nothing is known for certain of him except what is narrated in the gospels,” how came about the name “Demas”? And is it right to describe a thief as “holy” or “good”? To call someone a “good thief” or “holy thief” is another way of encouraging people to be thieves. From a scriptural point of view no thief is good, and the point of his being holy is out of the question. This is because stealing is a sin. The law of God states clearly: “Thou shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15) And Jesus Christ mentioned stealing among “the things which defile a man.” (Matthew 15:10, 11, 15-20) What is more, the Bible is positive on the point that no thief will inherit the Kingdom of God. – 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

That a thief can repent or change to become a good citizen there is no argument. Such a person can at best be said to be a penitent or repentant thief. In point of fact, he then ceases to be a thief, having forsaken his evil ways. And Saint Paul admonished: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” – Ephesians 4:28

In the case of the thief under reference, his utterance in reaction to the blasphemy of his fellow criminal showed his repentance and how he realized that it was good to fear God. And the fact that he recognised Christ as Lord and addressed him as such showed that he had faith in him. And Christ’s favourable answer to his request shows that he was truly penitent and if he had lived longer he would not have been a thief anymore.

However, there is nothing in the Scripture to justify the veneration being accorded him, or to warrant the setting aside of a special day to commemorate him as is being done in certain religious circles.

### **Misconception**

It is popularly believed and taught in Christendom that the penitent thief went to heaven with Jesus Christ on the very day they were crucified. Even in Halley’s Bible Handbook which is described as “the most prized and used guide book to the Bible in the world today”, it is stated that as Jesus “returned to God, he bore in his arms the soul of a robber, first-fruits of his mission to redeem a world.”

This belief is borne out of a misconception of Christ’s reply to the thief’s request. After rebuking his fellow criminal for his blasphemy he turned to Jesus and said: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.” – Luke 23:32, 43

Concerning this text, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the whole Bible states: “See here how the happiness of heaven is set forth to us. (1) It is paradise, a garden of pleasure, the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7) (2) It is being with Christ there. That is the happiness of heaven. (3) It is immediate upon death: This day shalt thou be with me, tonight before tomorrow.”

To say the least these comments of Matthew Henry on the passage are very misleading indeed. In dealing with a subject such as this, care must be taken to ensure that any interpretation given is in harmony with other facts of the Holy Bible – the accepted book of authority for all Christians. This is because any teaching that is not in conformity with the Holy Bible must be discarded, no matter who teaches it or what he claims to be. The prophet Isaiah was inspired to say: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” And St. Paul warned: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again,

If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” – Galatians 1:8, 9; see also 1 Timothy 6:3-5

In the first place, the thief did not ask to be taken to heaven. His request was “...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” (Luke 23:42) This shows that he must have heard Christ’s teaching that he would come again. Indeed, Jesus Christ did say; “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” – Matthew 16:27, 28

The Scriptures clearly shows that it is at Christ’s second presence that he would set up his kingdom. Thus St. Paul wrote to Timothy: “...I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus – who will some day judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:1, The Living Bible) It was therefore on the basis of this knowledge that the thief entreated Jesus: “Lord, remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom.” It would be contrary to God’s purpose and out of place for Christ to have promised him that he would, on that very day of his crucifixion be in his kingdom which was yet to be set up, and that at the last day.

To say that the thief went to heaven “immediate upon death,” that night before the following day, would mean that he rose from the dead before Jesus Christ who was not raised until the third day. (Luke 24:46; Acts 10:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4) That would run counter to the divine order in the resurrection of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:23) The truth is that Jesus Christ, not the thief, is “the first born from the dead”, “the firstfruits of them that slept.” – Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:20

Moreover, it would mean that the thief went to heaven before Christ, for he (Jesus) did not go to heaven the very day he was killed. Rather, he was in the grave till the third day, and when he appeared to Mary after his resurrection he said to her: “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father...” (John 20:17) It is recorded further that after Christ’s resurrection he stayed on this earth for forty days before his ascension. – Acts 1:1-3, 9-11; see also 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

Indeed, the weight of both scriptural evidence and reason is heavily against the teaching that the penitent thief went to heaven “immediate upon death.” It was Jesus Christ who said: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3) How could the thief have gone to heaven that day when Jesus had not gone there to prepare the place nor “come again” as he promised to receive the saints to himself? Who then took the thief to heaven?

## **Punctuation**

Let us now consider the reply of Jesus Christ to the request of the thief. Said he: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Taken as it appears, this text would mean that Christ promised the thief that he would be with him in paradise the very day he was crucified. But could Christ have said so knowing that he would be “in the heart of the earth” (grave) three days as he had earlier said (Matthew 12:40), and would not ascend to heaven until the fortieth day after his resurrection?

The truth of the matter is that there is an error of punctuation in the text under reference. In the original Greek Scripture no punctuation was employed; and punctuation marks in the modern style were not invented until about the ninth century after Christ. According to some authorities there is no record of a comma being where the Authorised Version places it in Luke 23:43 in any Greek manuscript written earlier than the fifteenth century. We see therefore that the comma which appears before the word “To day” was incorrectly inserted by translators and has made many people misconstrue the statement of Jesus Christ.

However, some translations punctuate and render the text correctly and convey the proper meaning that is in harmony with other scriptures. Among these is The Improved Version which renders the text thus: “He said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Amen, I say to thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise.” And Rotherham’s translation, The Emphasised Bible, put it this way: “And he went on to say – Jesus! remember me whensoever thou shalt come into thy kingdom. And he said unto him – Verily I say unto thee this day; With me shalt thou be in Paradise.” Other translations, in which the text is similarly punctuated correctly, with the comma coming after instead of before the word “today”, include Lamsa’s Holy Bible.

The understanding of the word “today” as use by Jesus, with reference to the context is that it applies to the time he made the promise and not to the time the thief would be in paradise.

## **Paradise**

Another point that must be made clear is the promise of Jesus to the thief that he would be in heaven. It is not only heaven that is paradise.

The word paradise, derived from a Hebrew term and from the Persian word pairidaeze, or the Greek word paradeisos, means a beautiful park or park-like garden. Indeed, the Garden of Eden which man lost as a result of sin was a paradise. (Genesis 2:8-15; 3:17, 24) It was typical of what the entire earth would be like in God’s Kingdom fully established.

The Holy Bible shows that God promised to make both heaven and earth new in His Kingdom. The new world will be so beautiful and full of bliss that the former world of sin in which we are now will not be remembered.

(Isaiah 65:17, 18) And St. Peter under inspiration confirmed this when he stated; “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” - 2 Peter 3:13; see also Revelations 21:1-5

God Almighty will surely fulfil His promises and bring about the “restoration of all things.” (Acts 3:9-21; New King James Version) Then the earth shall be reconstructed, beautiful and made glorious and perfect like the Garden of Eden. As it is written; “For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” “And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited.” – Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35; see also Isaiah 60:13

And so paradise, according to the Scriptures, means either heaven or earth in God’s Kingdom where the inhabitants will live in perfect peace and happiness for ever. And it is in the paradise here on earth, that is, the earth made glorious in the Kingdom of God that the penitent thief, as Christ promised, would be. He did not and would never go to heaven because he is not of the class of the few chosen and ordained first-class Christians billed for heaven to be kings and priests who will reign with Jesus Christ.

The early apostles were the foundation members of the heavenly class, and Christ addressed them as the “Little Flock”. (Luke 12:32) To them he further made the promise, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” - Luke 22:28-30

Many people make the mistake of thinking or believing that it is only in heaven all the righteous will dwell in God’s Kingdom. But the Bible shows vividly that majority of those who will be saved will be rewarded here on earth in the Kingdom of God. That was why Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray for God’s Kingdom to come to the earth. He said: “... Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” – Matthew 6:9, 10

To be favoured to be in God’s Kingdom on earth – the perfect and glorious earth – is a blessing. And Christ said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5; see also Psalm 37:9-11, 22, 29; Proverbs 11:31 and Isaiah 45:12, 18) It was this glorious hope of paradise on earth the penitent thief had when he said: “Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom.” And Christ assured him: “I say to thee today, thou shall be with me in paradise.”

The penitent thief, we reiterate, did not and will not go to heaven but will be among other faithful men and women who will come back in the resurrection to be in paradise or God’s Kingdom on earth.

## 5. THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

The coming of Jesus Christ to die for mankind marked a great turning point for good in the history of the world. The inhabitants of the earth who hitherto had walked in darkness and in the shadow of death suddenly had the chance of gaining perfect life, peace and happiness in God's Kingdom fully established. It was for this divine purpose that Jesus Christ, having been endowed with regal power and authority, is, along with the remnant of the saints in these last days, calling his people into his kingdom fold notwithstanding the devil's evil machinations to mislead the people through false religious organisations.

After the fall of man, the Perfect and All-wise God, in keeping with His divine promises, created the nation of Israel to serve as a means through which He will bring His people to walk in harmony with Him again. Unfortunately most of the Jews were stubborn and disobedient and so God scattered them across several nations as He had earlier warned them in Deuteronomy 28:25; 1 Kings 14:15, etc. This prophecy fulfilled to the letter as Israel was conquered, pillaged, humiliated and taken captive by their enemies, which include the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Romans.

The nation of Israel was a Roman colony when Jesus Christ was born. He was sent by God to save the entire human race including the natural Jews. But being that they were in captivity they looked for political freedom instead of spiritual freedom. (John 8:31,32,36; Luke 4:16-18; John 6:15; Acts 1:6) As a result, only a few of them believed in him. Because they rejected him, Jesus Christ cursed Jerusalem when he said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." -Matthew 23:37-39.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ declared that the stubbornness of the Jews would bring upon them misery and anguish. Speaking of the fate that would befall them he asserted: "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." - Luke 21:24.

The words of Jesus Christ fulfilled on Jerusalem in AD 70 when General Titus, a Roman commander, marched into the city destroyed its temple, killed many of the Jews, and forced most of them into captivity. Thus, the last vestiges of the state of Israel were wiped out. Most of the Jews then went into Diaspora, a word which means dispersion. It was not until May 14, 1948 that the state of Israel was reborn. This followed the historic decision by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 29, 1947 to partition Palestine into two other independent states, one for the Jews, the other for the Arabs.

## **Return**

The proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of the Scriptures that the Jews will in course of time regain their land. But the major fulfillment of that prophecy is the gathering of the people of God in various parts of the world into His Kingdom to serve Him in truth for their blessing and salvation in the end by His grace and power as it is written: “My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.” - Ezekiel 34: 6,11-16.

It goes without saying therefore that what God did for the natural Jews in gathering them to their own land was only a type of what He promised to do in a greater measure to His children the world over through Jesus Christ, the antitypical seed of Abraham. (Galatians 3:16) The sacrificial work of Jesus Christ opened the door of salvation to both the natural Jews and those who were not Jews by birth, then known as the gentiles. All those who believe in Jesus Christ, from any part of the world are today spiritual Jews. In his letter to the Christians in Galatia, St. Paul declared as much when he stated: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29. See also Romans 2:28,29) Thus, faith and not blood relationship has become the mark by which the true children of Abraham the spiritual Jews are identified. These spiritual Jews are also known as the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16.

## **The Gathering work**

Referring to His children the world over, God Almighty declared in Isaiah 43:5- 7,21 “Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.” The work of gathering the people of God has been entrusted to Jesus Christ who is referred to as Shiloh (which means Peaceful One) in Genesis chapter 49 verse 10 as it is written: The sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a law giver from between his feet until Shiloh come. Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Similar prophecies to the effect that God will use Jesus Christ to bring light to the gentiles are contained in Isaiah 11:10; 42:5-8, etc.



This gathering work will go on despite the devil's opposition. In John 11:49-53 we read of how the chief priests and the Pharisees convened to discuss how to check the popularity of Jesus Christ. They declared: "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

Moreover, God Almighty used picture language to describe how He would use Jesus Christ to call those of the apostle' class, and through them, all people of goodwill to Himself as it is written: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." (Zechariah 8:20-23) The "Jew" is Jesus Christ. "The skirt" refers to the anointed Christians who constitute the body members of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27) The "ten men" that would take hold of the skirt stand for all people who love truth and righteousness from all parts of the world, that is, "the Other Sheep" who are gathered to God through the preaching of the apostles.

The inspired words of the prophet Zechariah found fulfillment when Jesus Christ came to the world and started the work with the 12 apostles as recorded in Luke 6:12-15; 12:32 and Mark 3:14. Before his passion Jesus Christ stated: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32) After his resurrection therefore, he anointed and commissioned the apostles to continue the work of gathering the people of God "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The gathering of people of other nationalities to God besides the natural Jews took a major dimension on the day of Pentecost when Peter and other apostles preached the word, and people of diverse nations were converted. (Acts 2:1-41) Indeed the Lord had begun to fulfil His promise through the prophet Isaiah to wit: "The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." (Isaiah 56:8) In other words, both the natural Jews who were dispersed abroad and the gentiles will be gathered to Jesus Christ. See also 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

God used other apostles who were called later, such as Stephen, Paul, Cornelius among others, to continue the work. St. Paul affirmed that God had through Jesus Christ committed the work of reconciliation to the apostles when he said: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." - 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; see also Ephesians 2:11-22.

The gathering work did not end in the days of the early apostles. Jesus Christ said at the time of his second presence, he will choose the remnant of the saints from all parts of the world. (Matthew 24:31) These are the “fishers” and “hunters” whom God will send to rescue His people “from every mountain and from every hill and out of the holes of the rocks.” (Jeremiah 16:16) The complete number of the apostles' or saints' class is 144,000. -Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-5.

## **The Kingdom of God**

God promised to set up His Kingdom on earth in this period known as the last days into which He will gather His people through the remnant of the saints as it is written: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.” (Isaiah 2:2) “The Mountain of the Lord's House” symbolizes God's Kingdom belonging to Jesus Christ and his body members (the apostles or saints) who constitute the spiritual house or temple of God according to Luke 12:32; 22:28-30; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Hebrews 3:6. The “mountains” represent satan's entire organization both visible and invisible. The hills denote worldly clubs and societies. “All nations” stand for all lovers of truth and righteousness the world over. What the prophecy is saying in effect is that in this age we are now living, known as the last days, the Kingdom of God belonging to Jesus Christ and the saints will be established on top of satan's entire organisation and that this Kingdom will in course of time outgrow all other worldly societies and clubs as all people of goodwill will flow into it, obviously for safety and protection. Ultimately, all individuals and institutions outside the Kingdom of God will be destroyed. The signs of the times now staring everyone in the face show that we are now in the last days and that the prophecy has fulfilled. -Daniel 12:4,8-10; Matthew 24:3-8,21; Luke 21:25-36; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

The Bible shows that any church that preaches the truth in any part of the world in this age of the end of the world, having been set up by one of the remnants of the saints is the Kingdom of God. By virtue of the fact that she preaches the truth unmixed with lies, having been founded by one of the remnant of the saints in person of St. Gideon Meriodere Urhobo, we have no doubt in our minds that the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) the Church of the Living God is part and parcel of God's universal Kingdom which He promised to set up in these last days as stated in Isaiah 2:2. Giving account of His call in February 1933 he stated "After three and half years' diligent and prayerful studies of the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ revealed himself to me in a vision and commanded me to go and proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom (or 'Gospel of Peace') to all nations as the only remedy for all human sufferings and woes; to expose all the false doctrines which Satan had used to deceive the people and to keep them in ignorance of God's Kingdom and purpose of creation; and to pronounce God's written judgment against all wickedness." In spite of intense persecutions, the GKS was set up in the year 1934 in Lagos. She has since been championing the revealed truth of the Bible as expounded by Saint Urhobo.

It is of utmost importance that those gathered to God should strive to do His will at all times else they will not be saved. Our Lord Jesus Christ emphasized this so clearly in the parable of the nets as well as that of the wheat and tares, on which, in concluding he said: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” - Matthew 13:, 24-30, 39-43, 47-50.

Moreover God admonished His children through His prophet Zephaniah: “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.” - Zephaniah 2:1-3; Isaiah 26:20,21

May the Almighty God JEHOVAH help those gathered to Him to prove themselves worthy of their calling by holding fast to the end by God's grace so that He will fulfil on them “all the good pleasure of His goodness” through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

## 6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STORY OF RUTH AND NAOMI

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a moving illustration of the power of faith. It is demonstrative of the blessings that abound for the poor and meek who diligently and earnestly maintain their integrity even in the most trying circumstances. Those called into the Lord's service must show like measure of faith and obedience to get a full reward in God's Kingdom fully established by God's grace and power.

**Naomi:** Naomi had strong faith in God by reason of which she still remained steadfast in the work of God despite losing her husband and her two sons who died childless. The Bible says nothing should separate us from the love of God Almighty and Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:35-39; Psalm 71:20-22). Naomi cared for the future well-being of her daughters-in-law. She calls to mind the description of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31.

From the story we could also see that it is not the beginning that matters but the end. Though Naomi was beset with a series of tribulations including famine and deaths, she had a bright ending by God's grace due to her faith. -Ecclesiastes 7:8; Psalm 112:1-3; Matthew 24:12,13.

**Ruth:** Though a young woman, she demonstrated great faith in not allowing the loss of her husband to dampen her belief that the God of Israel is the true God. Truly, the series of deaths in the family were enough to give one second thoughts on the benefits of remaining in the family; but her faith in God kept her going. Unless one is prepared to remain in God's service even in the face of death, he can not continue till the end. - Luke 14:26,27; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Again, Ruth refused to go back to her people and to the false religion they were practising. She told Naomi "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God". – (Ruth 1:16; Deuteronomy 6:4,5; Luke 11:27,28) It should also be pointed out that in her dealings with her mother-in-law, Ruth was respectful, obedient, honest and truthful. (Ruth 2:1,2) (Ruth 2:18; 3:16,17) Ruth was also a very hard working young woman. She did not want to sit down idly, eating the bread of idleness. (Proverbs 31:27; Proverbs 10:4; Proverbs 22:29)

Because of her faithfulness and obedience, Ruth has the honour of being the great- grandmother of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ruth 4: 17-22; Matthew 1:5-16.

**Boaz:** Because he was God-fearing, he was not slack in keeping to the terms of the levirate marriage as stated in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, and the law that farmers should leave part of the harvest for gleaners, the poor and strangers in the land. We should be ready to make sacrifices for righteousness sake. There is blessing in so doing. (Matthew 16:24, 27) The high discipline of Boaz is a shining example to all.

Boaz was a firm believer in God's providence. He had strong faith in God. He was also very liberal in providing for the indigent family of his late brother. This teaches us by way of example that we should help the widows and the fatherless in our midst and the less privileged generally. - Ruth 2:5-18; Isaiah 1:17.

**Orpah:** Orpah was the wife of Chilion. She returned after initial reluctance to her people, and to her gods, and to the prospect of a happy married life. By ceasing to be for the Lord, one is then counted as being against Him. (Matthew 12:30) St. Paul declared: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Hebrews 10:38,39) It is vital to recall the warning of our Lord Jesus Christ that we should “remember Lot's wife”. (Luke 17:32) Again he declared: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” - Luke 9:62.

### **Further Interpretation**

In the story, **Boaz stands for God Almighty**, the Great Provider, Who is liberal to the faithful poor and needy. (Psalm 40:17) God Almighty is the Father of all. He gives to all meat in due season. (Psalm 104:27; 145:16) Though Boaz was richer than the near kinsman he did not use that to force matters his way. Though God has all power, yet He does not deal with man according to his sins.

**In the story, Naomi stands for the anointed Christians.** These are the ones God uses to bring forth children in His organisation. St. Paul declared: “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” - 1 Corinthians 4:15. see also 1 Timothy 1:2.

**Ruth stands for the “Other Sheep” class.** These are the poor and meek in spirit - those who were outside God's favour but who on hearing the truth, hold to Him and His Kingdom without looking back until the end. - Ephesians 2:10-12; Luke 24:45-47; Acts 10:34,35.

**Orpah stands for the unfaithful**, those who having received the call, are unable to continue or endure, but backslide into satan's organisation along the way. - Matthew 24:12,13; James 1:12; Hebrews 12:3.

We shall be highly profited if we learn the lessons from this story for our own blessings and ultimately salvation in the world to come by God's grace.

## 7. DO ALL CHURCHES WORSHIP ONE GOD?

**EXCEPT** the way to God is as divided and diverse as church denominations are in the world today, all the churches cannot be worshipping the one true God. This is a very serious matter about which personal opinion and unwillingness to listen to reason in the light of the Scriptures may lead not only to self-deceit but also to fatal consequences. The only authority universally acceptable upon which all Christians are bound to depend for a sure and unmistakable answer to the question at issue, is the Holy Bible.

Chief Deji Olugunna in an article published in the Sunday times (Oct. 10, 1971) expressed the view that Christian denominations can be broadly divided into four groups, namely, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants and Pentecostals. He then stated: “Each of these organizations has its own God and presents him to the world as the best and the only God. There are the God of the Roman Catholics, the God of the Orthodox Church, the God of the Protestants and the God of the Holy Ghost people— four different Gods of their own interpretation of the Holy Bible.

The Chief added: “Surely, there cannot be so many Gods and faiths. This is the headache of man and the tragedy of the whole world. There is no scripture warrant whatsoever for so many Gods and the various gods must be amalgamated if Christian religion is to be real to man.”—Page 11.

But in the opinion of Mr. Segun Bucknor (Sunday Times, Nov. 14, 1971) “all the Christian sects believe the same God and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God as their Saviour. They differ essentially only in interpretations of the Scripture and their methods of worship”.

The idea of some people that all church organizations belong to Jesus Christ and are worshipping the God Almighty is very wrong and misleading. It is not based on knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. It is possible for a person to claim to be a worshipper of God while in actual fact he, knowingly or unknowingly, is engrossed in the service of the devil. For the reason that Jesus Christ was fully aware of this fact he said: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” —Matt. 7: 21.

### **Natural Jews**

And concerning the natural Jews who purported to be God’s worshippers but were not doing His will, St. Paul stated: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”—Rom. 10: 1-3

Despite the claim of some of the Jews that God was their Father Jesus told them point- blank that they were the children of the devil. There were exchanges of words between him and them thus: “But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hat told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.

Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me> Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. **Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do.** He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”—John 8: 40-44.

Jesus Christ made it abundantly clear that the claims of those natural Jews that they were of God was false. And St. Paul also said: “It is impossible that the word of God should have proved false. For not all descendants of Israel are truly Israel, nor, because they are Abraham’s offspring, are they all his true children; but, in the words of Scripture, “Through the line of Isaac your descendants shall be traced.’ That is to say, it is not those born in the course of nature who are children of God; it is the children born through God’s promise who are reckoned as Abraham’s descendants.”—Rom. 9: 6-8. New English Bible.

Even some pagans strongly believe that their idols are media through which they deal with and worship the Almighty God. Their belief which is based on ignorance does not make them worshippers of God. Many of them are good citizens, we have always said quite honestly; but this does not mean they are serving the Almighty God. Idols are the creation of the devil and since they serve them contrary to the commandment of God it is the devil they are worshipping. —Exodus 20: 4-6; Isa. 2: 8,9.

Such were the Athenians, and St. Paul, addressing them, said: “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’ hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things...**Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:** because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”—Acts 17: 23-31.

## **Hypocrites**

The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes were sects of the Jews who professed to be worshippers of God. But Jesus Christ in his days on earth exposed their hypocrisy and the falsity or worthlessness of their claims. When he was confronted by the Sadducees on the question of resurrection he told them, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” He gave answers that put them to silence and shame. —Matt 22: 23- 33,46

Jesus Christ who was well known for his forthrightness, and in whose personality were flashes of divinity, wit and inspiration, denounced the Pharisees and Scribes as hypocrites. Among other things he said: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”—Matt. 23: 27, 28.

With reference to the Pharisees and the Scribes, Jesus quoted the Almighty God as saying through Isaiah the prophet: “This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips: but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”—Matt. 15: 7-9.

And when Christ’s disciples informed him that the Pharisees were offended at his utterance, he retorted: “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leader of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”—Read Matt. 15: 12-14.

It will be wrong to think that there are not the counterparts of the Pharisees in our time. Many of the church denominations in the world are false. And they can be identified by their doctrines and many of worship, which are inconsistent with the truth of the gospel and the tenets of Christianity as contained in the Holy Bible. After the apostolic times, since from about 325 A.D. to this age, certain church leaders in succession have been teaching as doctrines dogmas which they invented from their own hearts contrary to the Scriptures.

## **Doctrines**

Doctrines are the basis of the Christian faith; where the doctrines are untrue the faith is built not on Christ, the Rock, but on sinking sand, and any claim to worship God is bogus. God Himself has said, “But in vain they do worship Me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Whoever does not want to worship in vain must give serious thought to this quoted statement of God and ensure that the doctrines he accepts and believes are not the commandments or traditions of men, or that they are in harmony with the Scriptures.

What scriptural authority or Justification has anyone to teach, believe or practise any of the following?

The doctrine of purgatory The baptism of infants The baptism of bells

Baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water

The use of candles “blessed” or not, for devotions. Mary being the “Mother of Almighty God”!

The ordination of women as prophetesses who see visions or preach from house to house.

The immortality of the soul

The fixing of date (1914, 1939-45, now 1975) for the Battle of Armageddon. Pouring of libation to ancestors.



These are only a few of unscriptural dogmas and innovations being taught and done in certain church organizations. The truth must be spoken without fear so that the scales of ignorance may fall from the eyes of the people.

Anyone who does not want to remain in darkness or ignorance must be broadminded; he must be prepared to listen to reason and accept facts. It was Disraeli who said, “To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge.”

Some people say that, because they were brought up or have been long in a certain church organization, they could not for any reason leave it for another. Suppose that church is not preaching the truth, what would they gain in the end if they suffer the loss of their souls? “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man”, said King Solomon, “but the end thereof are the ways of death.”—Prov. 16: 25

When St. Paul was in the Jewish religion he thought he was right and he savagely persecuted the Christians. But when the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ dawned upon him and he was converted, he confessed his ignorance. Said he: “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood (human beings): neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus.”—Gal. 1: 13-17.

And in his epistle to Timothy he said that he was “before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious”. He added, “But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”—1 Tim. 1: 13.

## **True Worshippers**

It is not safe, therefore, to take things for granted and remain in any church without ascertaining the truth of her doctrines and beliefs. When Jesus Christ engaged a Samaritan woman in a conversation, he told her, “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.”—John 4: 22, 23.

Those who worship without knowing what they worship or those who are not true worshippers cannot be said to be serving the same God with the true worshippers. While the false one serve the devil, the true ones worship the Almighty God. “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

No sane person has the pleasure to identify himself with the devil because he (Satan) is known to be the author and the very embodiment of evil. He sometimes deceives some people by appearing to them in dreams or visions or by some other sign as an angel of God. And such people not knowing that Satan is their inspirer do go about

to parade themselves as prophets or prophetesses or apostles of Jesus Christ whereas in truth they are reprobates. However, in the end they will get every bit of punishment their evil deeds deserve.

Concerning religious fakes who masquerade as the apostles of Christ, St. Paul wrote: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” And their works being evil, they will be damned. —2 Cor. 11: 13-15; Gal. 1: 8

In certain church groups both men and women claim to have been equally ordained by God to prophesy—some preaching from house to house and others go along the streets with bells in the early hours of the day. There are those who profess to be “divine Healers” and claim to have the power to repel Satan in the name of Jesus Christ. By such bogus claims they, at the instance of the devil, do make disciples of simple folks. Someone was deceived the other day to swallow a wooden cross. Some preach against medical treatment when sick; for believing and obeying the “apostles” or “prophets” who teach these “doctrines” many have died untimely!

The mere fact that one prophesies or does wonders in the name of Christ does not qualify one to be a true worshipper of God or a follower of Jesus. Christ himself said: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”—Matt. 7: 22, 23

In the face of the scriptural facts brought to light in this sermon, it will be very wrong to think or say that all the churches, which are divided on doctrines and method of worship, are worshipping the one true God.

## 8. WAS JESUS CHRIST HANGED ON A CROSS OR TREE?

**This erroneous belief that our Saviour Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross has given rise to superstitious tendencies and practices in Christendom for which there can be no scriptural justification. According to the Scriptures, the instrument upon which Christ was hanged and which in the Gospels is sometimes termed cross was in fact a tree or piece of wood. And to venerate the cross is idolatrous.**

Today, the cross is made an object of worship in the circles of many who profess to be Christians. It is believed by some that the cross is efficacious against poison, witchcraft, and so on. And there are those who make on their person the sign of the cross. In some Church buildings it occupies a conspicuous place; it is carried aloft during certain religious processions; at funerals it also has a part to play: It is worn on the chest by bishops and some others, suspended about the neck by a chain or cord; and it is engraved on tomb-stone.

There seem to be a competition these days among some Church denominations as to which of them is able to display the biggest cross.

**The inspiring mind will want to know the scriptural basis for these beliefs and practices concerning the cross. All Churches agree that the Holy Bible is the Guide Book provided by God to which reference must be made on any point of doctrine and on other aspects of the Christians way of life.**

James Cardinal Gibbons, a powerful authority in Roman Catholicism, wrote in his book *The Faith of Our Fathers*: “The Cross is held in the highest reverence by Catholics, because it was the instrument of our Saviour’s crucifixion. It surmounts our churches and adorns our sanctuaries. We venerate it as the emblem of our salvation.”

– Page 2.

He further stated: “it is also a very ancient and pious practice for the faithful to make on their person the sign of the Cross, saying at the same time: ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’ Tertullian, who lived in the second century of the Christian era, Says: ‘In all our actions when we come in or go out, when we dress, when we wash, at our meals, before retiring to sleep,... we form on our foreheads the sign of the cross. THESE PRACTICES ARE NOT COMMANDED BY A FORMAL LAW OF SCRIPTURE; but tradition teaches them, custom confirms them, faith observes them.’ “—Pages 2-3, (Caps our).

The Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary edited by Donald Attwater states that the cross is “the most widespread and venerated symbol of the Christian religion because upon a cross of wood our Lord died to redeem the world.”

Generally, a cross is known to be a stake or post with another piece of wood across it such as the Latin Cross, Greek Cross, Tau Cross and the so called St. Andrew’s Cross.

Latin    Greek    Tau    “St. Andrew’s”

## Traditional View

The traditional view is that Christ was probably crucified on the Latin Cross, though some other Roman Catholic Scholars are more inclined to believe that it was the Tau.

The actual cross on which Christ was crucified is said to have been found by Helena, mother of Constantine, in A. D. 326. Concerning this, the Catholic Voice Issue of the Emperor Constantine who had marched to victory under the sign of the Cross and had proclaimed for the first time the legality of the Christian Religion in the Roman Empire, was piously moved to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and seek there for the True Cross on which our saviour died. After much search and digging around the Hill of Calvary, three crosses were discovered. Which, if any, was the True Cross? Two of them were placed near a sick man, but nothing happened. Immediately, however, that the third cross was brought near to him he recovered from his illness and was at once restored to health. So, according to this pious tradition, was the True Cross discovered. The Cross was brought to Rome and the practice then arose of sending portions of it to important parts of the Church and to important personages.’ – Page 129.

Historically, no story can be of more doubtful truth than that of the so-called “finding of the Cross”. The American Peoples Encyclopedia has this to say: “The tradition of ‘The invention of the Holy Cross’ by Helena conflicts with a still older tradition, according to which the true cross was found during the reign of Tiberius. An attempt during the nineteenth century to reconcile the two legends (by terming Helena’s discovery a ‘rediscovery’) was unconvincing to most scholars.”—Vol. 6, page 557.

If it is true that the actual cross of Christ was found by Helena, why are Roman Catholic theologians and scholars still uncertain as to whether the cross was the Latin or Tau type? The Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary stated: “Christ’s cross was probably shaped as in Fig. 1 (Latin), though it may have been as in Fig. 6 (Tau).” (page 129) And The Catholic Concise Encyclopedia stated: “The shape of the cross upon which Christ died is not certainly known, but it is determined that probably it was the T-Form with the upright (crux immissa) extending slightly above with room for an inscription (St. Irenaeus).”—Page 117.

Viewed against the background of the Scriptures, this legend of the finding of the cross by Helena is of no significance at all to true Christians. It has only served as a device through which the devil has lured innocent, spiritually unlearned men into more idolatrous and sinful practices.

The Addis & Arnold’s Catholic Dictionary states: “From the time that the cross on which Christ died was found by Helena, mother of Constantine, Christians esteemed it a great happiness to possess a particle of its sacred wood. We read in the ‘Peregrinatio Etheriae’ how on Good Friday at Jerusalem the bishop used to tell the people: ‘Be ready here that you may be able to behold the holy wood of the Cross, each one of us believing that it will be profitable to his salvation...’ ‘A silver-gilt casket is brought in which is the wood of the holy Cross... **The custom**

**is that the people come one by one and bowing down at the table, kiss the wood and pass on.’ “ –Page 235.**  
(Emphasis ours)

**To bow down or genuflect to a particle of wood—be it the “Cross” of Christ or not—is contrary to God’s commandment in Exodus 20: 4-6 and is nothing short of idolatry. Neither Jesus Christ himself nor his apostles gave any intrinsic virtue, and importance was to be attached to it as such the apostles of Jesus Christ should have set the example for other Christians to follow.**

But it was Constantine, Emperor of Rome, who made the cross gain popularity in Christendom. He claimed to have seen a vision of the cross in the sky in 312 A.D. and it was his mother who purported to have seen the “true” cross in 326 A.D.

The Bible should be the basis for any Christian teaching or practice. Christians are warned against legends or fables such as that of “the invention the Holy Cross”. St. Paul admonished: “but refuse profane and old wives’ fables (obviously like Helena’s), and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.”—1 Timothy 4: 7.

Lots of things done in Christendom for which they have no scriptural authority are easily covered up in the name of tradition. This was the attitude of the typical Pharisees and Scribes that was condemned by Jesus Christ. He (Christ) told them: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God BY YOUR TRADITION...Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”—Matt: 15: 3-9.

Now, turning to the Holy Bible, the texts often cited to show that Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross are with reference to the story of the crucifixion in the first four books of the New Testament. St. Matthew, relation how Christ was crucified, stated among other things: “And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene. Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise, also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.”—Matt. 27: 31, 32,39-42.

Similarly, the word cross is used in the other three books of the New Testament. There is no argument about this. But we must not lose sight of the fact that translators of the Holy bible did occasionally manifest in their usages of words and expressions their personal prejudices, and bias for certain prevailing dogmas and customs of their times.

Even today, in our time, some translators still harbour prejudices and bias which make them ALTER, Bible texts to suite their traditional religious beliefs. An instance is “The New Testament Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.” The Archbishop of Nepte and Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain—H.E. Cardinale—who wrote the FORWARD to the Catholic edition of the revised Standard Version under discussion, said: “This Version of the New Testament **has been so edited as to make it acceptable to Catholic readers. The Standard Bible Committee of the united States of America are to be thanked warmly for graciously giving consent to such alterations**”!

Taken on the surface, the story in the Gospels would mean that Christ was crucified on a cross but getting below the surface the weight of scriptural evidence is found to be in favour of the fact that he was hanged on a tree. In the light of this the word cross in the context is inappropriate.

It must be borne in mind that long before the Bible was translated into English the cross had been a traditional object of veneration by nominal Christianity believing that it was the instrument of punishment on which Christ died. Between the second and fourth centuries Tertullian and Constantine were among those who made much ado about the cross and contributed to its installation as a thing of special virtue that must be adored.

According to Benjamin Vincent in his Haydn’s Dictionary of dates and Universal Information, “Crosses in churches and chambers were introduced about 431; and set up on steeples about 568.”

Judging the extent of popularity the cross had gained at the time translations of the Bible began, it is no surprise that translators were influenced by their bias in its usage.

Moreover, it is on record that the simplest “form of cross” in ancient times was an upright stake, tree or piece of wood. The idea of a cross-beam fastened at right angles at the top of the stake was later developed.

E. Royston Pike, in his Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions, stated: ‘The simplest form of cross was an upright stake to which the criminal was bound...From this there were developed by the addition of a cross-piece three main shapes of cross proper...’—Page 115.

And The New Bible Dictionary states that “the Greek word for ‘cross’ means primarily an upright stake or beam, and secondarily a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution,”—Page 279.

**Can anyone prove from the Bible that the stake on which Christ was crucified had a cross-beam? Or is there any scriptural authority to back the assumption that he was crucified on the Latin or Tau cross? It is all mere imagination and vain tradition.**

In an attempt to justify the idea of a cross-piece fastened at right angles below the top of the upright stake, some have made reference to the statement that a title or inscription was written by Pilate and placed above the head of Jesus Christ. This, no doubt, is a weak argument. Is it the title that made or turned the tree or stake into a cross? The Bible shows clearly that the title was quite different from the stake which was improperly termed cross. As

it is written: “And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.”— John 19: 19.

### **Eye-Witness**

St. Peter who, too, was an eye-witness of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ stated categorically on more than two occasions that he (Christ) was hanged on a tree. He (Peter) and the other apostles, addressing the council of the Jews, declared: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and HANGED ON A TREE. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”—Acts 5: 30-32.

**The testimony of all the apostles which is of great weight, and which in all honesty was made to those who killed Jesus Christ, makes no reference to cross as the instrument of Christ’s execution. On a TREE, not Cross, they all attested to, he was hanged.**

On the occasion when Peter the apostle went and spoke to Cornelius and his company as directed by the Lord, he (Peter) also said: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and **hanged on a tree**: him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly.”—Acts 10: 38-40.

Tree in the context with reference to texts just cited does not mean a perennial plant with branches but a piece of wood, beam or stake. The Oxford Universal Dictionary defines tree, among other things, as “a piece of wood, a stem or branch of a tree, a pole, stake, post, beam, wooden bar, etc:”

It was the tree or piece of wood improperly or wrongly translated “cross” in the Gospels that one Simon was compelled to carry after Jesus Christ to Calvary.

Furthermore, St. Peter confirmed in his epistle that Christ died on the tree. He stated: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: ...who his own self bare our sins in his own body **ON THE TREE**, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”—1 Pet. 2: 21- 24.

There is also the declaration of Paul the apostle that the body of Jesus was taken down from the tree, NOT cross. He said to the Jews: “Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, **THEY TOOK HIM DOWN FROM THE TREE**, and laid him in a sepulcher. But God raised him from the dead.”—Acts 13: 26-30.

## **Jewish Custom**

The use of the cross as an instrument of execution of criminals was alien to the Jews. The Jewish custom based on the law of God was to hang accursed persons on trees. As it is written: “And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of G0od□ that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”— Deut. 21: 22, 23.

It was on the strength of this law Joshua, after hanging the king of Ai on a tree, commanded that his body should be taken down when the sun had set. He did a similar thing to other fine kings whom he hanged on trees. Read Joshua 8: 28, 29; 10: 26. 27/

Pilate, in treating with the Jews as regard the trial and execution of Jesus Christ, conceded to them their custom.— John 18: 39; 19: 31-33, 40

Jesus Christ was treated as an accursed person by the ungodly Jews and they executed him by hanging him on a tree in fulfillment of the Scriptures. But God has through this wicked act of the unbelieving Jews brought redemption to all believers. For this reason St. Paul wrote: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that HANGETH ON A TREE.”—Gal. 3: 13.

There is no scriptural authority to substantiate the view generally held that the cross is a Christian symbol. Jesus Christ did not give such indication, and his apostles never did.

“We usually think of the cross as a symbol of Christ and Christianity, but actually, crosses were used long before Christ was killed on the cross. They have been found as far back as the Stone Age and long before the birth of Jesus they were used all throughout Europe, sometimes on medals and coins. The first time that the cross was used as a Christian symbol was during the reign of Constantine, an early Roman emperor.”—Illustrated World Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, page 1473.

The Bible truth which cannot be successfully twisted by biased, misinformed people is that Jesus Christ was NOT crucified on a cross but was hanged on a tree as testified to by Peter the apostle and his colleagues who were eye-witnesses. —Acts 5: 29- 32; 10: 38-40



## 9. WHAT IS THE PLACE OF THE CROSS IN CHRISTIANITY?

**NEITHER Jesus Christ nor his apostles attached importance to the literal cross. When ever they employed the word ‘cross’ for the edification of the believers it was in the figurative sense according to the Scriptures.**

There is no one who has a good knowledge of the Bible that will not have a feeling of disgust at the superstitions and unnecessary ceremonies with which the cross has been associated.

In the Roman calendar there are two feasts in respect of the cross. “The Finding of the Cross” by Helena, mother of Constantine, is a feast kept on May 3, and “The Exaltation of the Cross” is another feast celebrated on September 14, in memory of the so-called vision of Constantine in A.D. 312. These inventions which are of no scriptural significance are still observed up till today by certain people.

Apart from the Latin cross which is erroneously believed to be the traditional lone on which Christ is said to have died a variety of crosses have been introduced. According to the Catholic encyclopedic Dictionary, there are (1) **Altar Cross** bearing the image of Christ which must be on every altar during mass between and in line with the candlesticks. (2) **Patriarchal Cross** with two cross-bars. (3) **Papal Cross** with three cross-bars that is carried before the pope. (4) **Processional Cross** which has the figure of Jesus mounted on a shaft of metal or wood and which is carried aloft at the head of all processions with the figure turned forward and accompanied on either hand by a priest’s assistant with a candle. At the burial of an infant the figure is detached from the shaft and carried so.

Others are **Archiepiscopal Cross** which is similar to a processional cross and is borne before an archbishop; **Hand Cross** used by some bishops in giving blessing; and the **Pectorial cross** containing relics, suspended round the neck by a chain or cord. And as a part of their religious habit the cross is worn by nuns.

Can anybody show from the Holy Bible the need for these ceremonies and rites associated with a variety of crosses? Of what relevance are they to Christian worship and salvation as taught and exemplified by Jesus Christ and his apostles?

There is also a system of devotion known as “The Station of the Cross” or “The Way of the Cross”. It consists of prayers and meditations on 14 occurrences so-called experienced by Christ on his way to the crucifixion. For the stations themselves there must be 14 crosses. The devotion is conducted either by the worshipper personally, making the way from one cross to another and saying prayers, or by having the officiating priest move from cross to cross while the worshippers make the responses.

Did Jesus Christ command his disciples to perform the ceremony of “The way of the Cross”? Did any of his apostles do it? Or was there a prophecy that it should be done at later date after the death of the apostles of Christ? The right answer to all these are certainly in the negative.

One of the well-known learned defenders of the Roman Catholic Faith is John A O'Brien. With regard to "The Way of the Cross", he, in his work *The Faith of Millions*, stands: "Some of the scenes depicted in the stations are contained in the Gospels; there are others which are not mentioned in the Scripture but which have come down to us through an oral tradition from the first century. **Thus there is no scriptural authority for the three falls of Christ under the Cross, nor for the touching story of Veronical wiping the face of Jesus.**"—Page 475 (Emphasis ours)

But the point is why should these additions of the false stories of the falls of Jesus and of Veronica e made at all when there is **no scriptural authority** for them? In Proverbs 30: 5-6. It is written: "Every word of God is pure...**Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.**" See also Revelation 22: 18, 19.

The attitude of holding to the traditions of men contrary to the Scriptures is of the Scribes and Pharisees. And Christ told them:"...Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."—Matt. 15: 6-9.

No one, however privileged he may be, has the right to teach what is contrary to the Bible. Said St. Paul: "but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed...."—Gal. 1: 8, 9.

Long before the advent of Jesus Christ the cross had been in use among ancient pagans as an instrument for the punishment of criminals. And so at the time of Christ the use of the word "cross" in a figure of speech to mean self-denial or suffering had come into vogue.

Thus Jesus Christ, long before his crucifixion, said to his disciples: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."—Matt. 10: 37-38.

Some people have cited this text to bolster up their reason for wearing a cross around their necks and so on. But the text does not authorize anyone to bear or wear the "cross" of Christ. The disciple is asked to take his own cross. Not that of Christ.

**And if anyone wishes to bear the cross of Christ let him carry a heavy beam or piece of wood like Simon and sweat himself so that he may show how faithful he is to Christ. Not when he is well dressed only to wear a fashionable cross of gold or silver as an ornament.**

However, the word "cross" in the text was used figuratively by Jesus Christ. He meant that whoever would be a worthy disciple should be prepared to deny himself in order to meet his demands. He further said: "If any man

will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”—Matt. 16: 24. See also Mark 8: 34; Luke 9 23.

Similarly, St. Paul used the word “cross” to mean the suffering of Jesus Christ. He said: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”—1Cor. 1: 17.

It was also with reference to the suffering of Christ St. Paul said, “but God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” —Gal. 6: 14.

The instrument used by the enemies of truth and righteousness for the crucifixion of Christ was not of any importance to his disciples. What is of vital significance to Christians is his suffering and death by which he showed an example of faithfulness and loyalty to the Heavenly father and taught the lesson of sacrifice inspired by love for the salvation of mankind.

Said St. Peter: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not: but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”—1 Pet. 2: 21-24.

True Christians are concerned with the cross of Christ, not as an instrumental ornament to be displayed or carried about, but in the sense that it is rewarding edifying to suffer for Christ’s sake (Acts 5: 32-42: Phil. 1: 28-29) A spiritual understanding of this builds up faith and other virtues in a true Christian by which he through God’s grace and power, is able to stand against Satan’s temptations and share in the sufferings of Christ without regret.

St. Peter admonished: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy’. —1 Peter 4: 12, 13.

The truth of the matter has been made clear enough from the Scriptures in the interest of all lovers of truth and righteousness. It is only when men abide in the doctrines of Christ according to the Bible, they can claim to be the children of light; otherwise they, like the Scribes and Pharisees, who hold to traditions instead of the facts and truth of scripture, worship in vain as Jesus Christ clearly stated in the Bible.—Matt. 15: 1-14.

## 10. GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

**If the day of Christ's passion and disgraceful death is a good day, why do churchgoers indulge in fasting, wearing of black robes and other ceremonies suggestive of mourning on "Good Friday? Why do they not go about merry-making? And do you know that Easter was derived from paganism and that it has no connection whatsoever with Christianity?**

"Good Friday" is the Friday before Easter Sunday which is observed in Christendom to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. It is a day of fasting, abstinence and penitence, and there is the religious view that "it is the only day of the year upon which Mass may not be said".

On this occasion the observers hold a protracted three-hour service with ceremonies expressive of intense feelings of the agonies suffered by Jesus Christ. The altars are stripped have of decorations, the candles are unlit and the priests are dressed in black robes. Yet, this is said to be a **good** day.

The only reason which has been given for identifying this bloody day with the grand appellation of GOOD is that the death of Christ has brought redemption to making. This sounds quite plausible but viewed against the background of the Scriptures it is unjustifiable.

To those who were the enemies of light—light of which Christ was and is the very embodiment that day of his crucifixion was good and pleasant because it was the day their evil desire, conspiracy and machinations against the man whom they branded as a "deceiver" was accomplished. It could therefore be understandable why they reveled in their acts of atrocity while Jesus Christ and his disciples were grief-stricken.

Prior to the crucial hour of the supreme test, Jesus Christ had forewarned his disciples: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."—Read John 16: 16-20

When the time came for him to bear the griefs of mankind he showed his preparedness to submit, as a loyal Son, to his Father's will though he was fully aware of his foes' evil motives to do the worst imaginable. Yet in an outburst of human feeling, he said Peter, James and John: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." (Matt. 26: 38) He was in such great agony of spirit that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. His disciples were all exhausted from grief, and they remained under the grip of sorrow until the gladsome news of his resurrection was broken to them.—Luke 22: 45; Mark 16: 9, 10.

**In the light of these scriptural facts about the painful experience of Jesus Christ and his disciples, it does not stand to reason neither is it spiritually convincing for those who take sides with Christ to call or regard that day of his anguish and inglorious death as good.**

The churches have no scriptural authority whatsoever for their mourning, abstinence and dreary ceremonies on "Good Friday". Jesus Christ had long been resurrected and glorified, never to die again. He did tell his disciples

that their sorrow would be turned to joy, and added, “YOUR JOY NO MAN TAKETH FROM YOU.” (John 16: 19-22) And so to continue to mourn every year for the risen and glorified Jesus is most unnecessary and very unscriptural.

Moreover, concerning the dead Paul the apostle admonished the Christians “that YE SORROW NOT, even as others (unbelievers) which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”. (1 Thess. 4: 13, 14). If Christians are not to mourn for the dead because of the hope of resurrection, why should the churches mourn for the Star of that hope who had long ago been raised to glory eternal in the heaven?

It is most unsafe to rely on men’s traditions at the expense of scriptural truth. And it is only when men apply their heart to reason as to accept the truth of Christ that they can be free indeed.—John 8: 32, 36.

## **Easter**

Easter was a pagan festival originally celebrated by the Anglo-Saxons in the spring equinox in honour of a Teutonic goddess known as Astarte or Eostre.

The word “**Easter**” appears once in the Holy bible at Acts 12: 4. All scholars of credit agree that it was a wrong translation of a Greek word for **Passover**. In the Bible Students Companion, William Nicholson wrote: ÉASTER—An improper translation; for the feast of the Passover is meant, Acts xii. 4. Easter was the name of a Pagan festival observed in spring by our ancestors, in honour of the goddess Astarte or Eostre, a Saxon goddess, the Ashtaroth of Syria. In all other places pascha is rendered Passover, the true meaning.”

Concerning Easter, the Westminster Dictionary of the Bible states that it was “originally the spring festival in honour of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo Saxon as Eastre. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxon to the Christian festival designated to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In A. V. it occurs once (Acts 12: 4), **but it is a mistranslation**. The original is pascha, the ordinary Greek word for Passover. R. V. properly employs the word Passover.”—Page 145.

Alexander Hislop, in his book The two Babylons, commented: “Every one knows that the name “Easter”, used in our translation of Acts xii. 4, refers not to any Christian festival, but to the Jewish Passover. This is one of the few places in our version where the translators show an undue bias.”—Page 104.

Further information may be obtained from the Encyclopedia Britannica, which states: “The English name Easter is of uncertain origin; Bede in the 6th century derived it from that of the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre... Around the Christian observance of Easter as the climax of the liturgical drama of Holy Week and good Friday folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of the pagan spring festival brought into relation with resurrection theme.”—Vol. 7, pp. 864-866. And what is more, The American peoples Encyclopedia” has this to say: “Many of the popular observances of Easter are pagan in origin. Some may be traced to the feast of goddess Eostra...”—Vol. 7, page 483.

The celebration of Easter is not authorised scripturally. Neither the Passover feast nor Easter has anything to do with resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the light of the foregoing disclosures about “Good Friday” and Easter, no one can remain in doubt of the fact that many “churches” have for long gone astray. The mere fact that professed Christians associate Easter with the resurrection of Christ without authority of the Scriptures does not in any way alter its paganish image or make it receive the blessing of the Lord.