

Understanding Salvation among Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

All religions and or denominations, among other things, seek to provide answers to life-threatening conditions facing their adherents. One of them is the concept of salvation. This paper examines the concept of salvation among Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana. Using interviews and secondary materials from some Pentecostal/Charismatic practitioners and scholars, it was identified that salvation is a state that affirms that the soul of an individual is saved from destruction by believing in the atoning works of Jesus Christ. This is received by confessing Jesus Christ as one's Lord and personal saviour. This makes the believer become like a "spiritual Israelite" who is able to access the promises of God in both the Old and New Testaments in the here and now as well as in the life hereafter. Additionally, receiving salvation gives believers victory over the influence of evil spiritual forces. There are, however, impediments to the progress of the believer which are classified as "spiritual" and "physical" enemies. Notwithstanding, believers are able to overcome these obstacles when they remain students of the word of God and become prayerful. This ensures their continued enjoyment of the blessings of God in the here and now as well as in the life hereafter. The paper recommends that all religions and/or denominations should take a quick look at what constitutes salvation and its implications because it is a meaningful human concern. Additionally, obstacles to salvation should be highlighted along with strategies for overcoming them for believers in the here and now and the hereafter. The study has added to the body of information about the doctrine of salvation from the Pentecostals/Charismatics perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of salvation is a distinctive religious belief associated with an issue of thoughtful human concern. It is reasonable to argue that the main goal of all religions is to bring about salvation for their followers, and the existence of numerous dissimilar religions tells that there are many diverse viewpoints on what constitutes salvation and how to obtain it. In Christianity, understanding the meaning and importance of salvation is key to an eternal inheritance in Christ. This, undoubtedly,

makes salvation the central theme of the Bible. Thus, the concept of salvation is central to the Christian faith, and adherents of the Christian faith are Christians.

Christians span the globe, but the global body of more than 2 billion¹ Christians is separated into denominations, emerging from the differences in worship styles, practices, traditions, organisational structures, etc. Myriads of interpretation of the Scriptures have also been one of the leading factors for the emergence of new denominations. However, denominations with common theology, beliefs and practices form a common umbrella to encourage wholesome relationships that will spark powerful revivals and maintain their uniqueness. It is also to uphold high standards of Christian doctrine, ethics, and attitudes; to foster positive relationships and effective networking among member churches and other church organisations.²

The Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, and the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches are the four main Christian organizations in Ghana. Each organization has a number of denominations as its member churches. With 31.6% of all Christians as members, the Pentecostals and Charismatics (hence referred to as Pentecostals/Charismatics) have the most adherents.³

The Pentecostals/Charismatics owe their origins to the work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts of the Apostles, and they generally agree on the practices of speaking in tongues, receiving miraculous gifts, and being baptized in the Holy Spirit. In spite of their commonalities, they have some differences such as the emphasis on speaking in tongues as the first sign of being baptised in the Holy Spirit. While Pentecostals place much emphasis on this, Charismatics do not. Notwithstanding their differences, their commonalities allow them to be joined as a common Christian group than being joined by other denominations with distinct theology.

In Ghana, examples of the Pentecostals/Charismatics are the Assemblies of God, Christ Apostolic Church International, Foursquare Gospel Church, Global Evangelical Church, Harvest Chapel Int., International Bible Worship Centre, and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC). Others are Jubilee International Church, Lighthouse Chapel, Perez Chapel International (formerly, Word Miracle Church International), Praise Valley Temple, Rhema Christian Centre, Salvation Army, The Apostolic Church, The Church of Pentecost, Victory Bible Church, etc. It is, however, worth noting that the beliefs and practices of these Pentecostals and Charismatics are not exclusive to the churches that are only categorized as “Pentecostals” or “Charismatics”. Some characteristics of Charismatics and Pentecostals, such as speaking in tongues, belief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as prophecy, healing and deliverance, etc. are found in some of the historic mission churches like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Methodist Church Ghana, the Roman Catholic Church, etc.⁴

The Pentecostals/Charismatics' understanding of salvation is quite unique among other religions and denominations. This stems from their beliefs, practices, traditions, etc. This paper explores the understanding of salvation among Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana. This is because of the emphasis Pentecostals/Charismatics place on it as a distinctive religious belief of deep human concern. How is salvation understood among the Pentecostals and Charismatics and through what means can it be achieved? Are there “enemies” of salvation? How can these enemies be overcome (if there are), so that the believer will continue enjoying the blessings of God? These questions inform the investigation in this paper.

¹ World Population Review, *Most Christians Countries 2022*, accessed online on May 25, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-christian-countries>.

² Ghana Pentecostal & Charismatic Council, *Objectives and Values*, accessed on May 23, 2022, <https://www.gpccghana.org/objectives-and-values/>.

³ Ghana Statistical Service, *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census General Report Highlight*, Vol. 3c., 2021: 58. Accessed online on March 9, 2022, https://census2021.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/reportthemelist/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203C_Background%20Characteristics_181121.pdf.

⁴ See Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*, (Zoetermeter: Boeckencentrum, 2006) for a more comprehensive discussion of this trend in the Ghanaian Christian landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The purposive sampling method was used to select respondents who have a fair knowledge of the subject area. They were selected from a broad spectrum of specialized knowledge which relates to the topic. The mixed method technique was adopted in the collection of data. Primary data was sourced through interviews. In all, ten people from Ghana were interviewed. Those interviewed were heads and key leaders of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Books, academic journals, and other significant publications that contributed to the research were used to gather secondary data.

The Meaning of Salvation

Among the Pentecostals/Charismatics, salvation (or *nkwagyee*) is accepting Jesus Christ as one's Lord and personal saviour (*cf.* Rom 10:9-10). Through this, the person's soul is preserved from destruction by believing in Jesus Christ's atoning works. This is believed to contribute to a dramatic transformation in the Christian material and spiritual parts of their lives. Another idea holds that becoming a Christian makes one a "spiritual Israelite" who receives the same covenant blessings as Abraham. This is the case because Pentecostals/Charismatics literally appropriate the promises made to the Jews and early Christians in the Old and New Testaments for their own material well-being.⁵

James Saah argues in favour of the idea that being a Christian gives one access to God's promises. According to him, salvation results in the fullness of life that Jesus speaks of in John 10:10. It leads to material prosperity in addition to being translated" into the Kingdom of God in a spiritual sense and being redeemed from the kingdom of evil. In other words, both the here-and-now, as well as in the life hereafter is "life in fullness" to be lived. It is the new identity of the Christian that empowers the believer to act morally uprightly and to succeed in their endeavours. The idea that one can experience the fullness of life through salvation without the empowerment that comes with being a Christian will remain an illusion.⁶ In expressing this, Ebenezer Abboah Offei notes that life in fullness "is not simply breath but some additions... which offers a believer the power to fight the battles of life... [it is] the ability to move quickly and accomplish everything one has to do before one dies."⁷

According to Abboah Offei's perspective, battles are a part of life (or *nkwa*). Salvation equips the believer to be an overcomer in the battles life may present to the Christian, which is another assumption of the observation. There is also the idea that the rate of accomplishment is just as important as one's capacity to fight battles and be an overcomer.⁸

These characteristics that Christians display are a result of the new nature that a person acquires when he or she becomes a Christian. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, the change in identity manifests itself as a change in behaviour and character. Hansel Agyei Frimpong has emphasized this idea. He said this:

When we accept Jesus Christ, we are no longer mere mortals seeking to follow the commands of God. One is reborn when one receives Jesus Christ. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, the individual takes on the characteristics of a brand-new species that was created by God. In Christ, the old nature of sin has been cast off, and God has created the human spirit in his image and likeness.⁹

However, since the Christian becomes a seed of Abraham, it is also expected that salvation will bring rewards and wealth in the material world. Second, becoming a Christian grant one triumph over the influences of evil spiritual forces, such as those stated in Ephesians 6:12 - principalities, powers of

⁵ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, "The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology," *AJPS*, 5(1) (2002): 87-106.

⁶ James Saah (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 5, 2010 in Accra. He is a Bishop of the Action Chapel International.

⁷ Ebenezer Abboah Offei (Catechist Dr), Personal interview conducted on October 25, 2010 in Akropong Akuapem. He is the leader of the Grace Deliverance Team of the Grace Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Akropong in Akuapem.

⁸ Abboah Offei, excerpts from interview.

⁹ Hansel Agyei Frimpong (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 26, 2010 in Accra.

darkness, and demonic spirits in heavenly places. The notion that there are wicked spiritual powers that engage the Christian in spiritual warfare is based on this and other parallel texts from the New Testament, such as Jesus Christ's interactions with demon-possessed and demon-afflicted persons.

Pentecostals/Charismatics are similarly encouraged to have hope and confidence and to believe that God will ultimately triumph because Jesus Christ drives out demonic (and unclean) spirits from people as well as the healing and miracle stories in the New Testament. Therefore, salvation is understood to be a state in which a person triumphs over serious challenges that prevent him or her from living life in fullness or as God intended, both in the here and now, and in the *Parousia*.

Salvation as a Present-Day Experience

It is believed that salvation as a whole has both spiritual and material components. Similarly to this, redemption should be felt in the here and now in both dimensions. Larbi asserts that supplicants [or Pentecostals] primarily attend Pentecostal prayer camps in hope of immediate salvation—here and now.¹⁰ One needs to be both spiritually and physically equipped for this experience to become a reality.

Spiritual Empowerment

The Christian is thought to have been given the opportunity to gain from being a freed person after receiving forgiveness of sins. This is a requirement in order to gain access to the things of God. There is the awareness of having been freed from the impossibility of leading a morally honest life. This point is emphasized in the song that follows, which is popular among Pentecostals in Ghana:

Once I was a sinner
Saved by grace (4x)
My sins are gone far away
Jesus has taken my burden [sins] away
Once I was a sinner
Saved by grace (2x)

The song serves as an illustration of how Pentecostals and Charismatics relate sins to hardships. Since Jesus Christ has abolished the burden of sin from the individual who accepts him/her as “Lord and personal saviour,” that person is expected to live a life free from sin. In contrast to the wicked life one led prior to becoming a Christian, the Christian (or “new specie”) is given the ability to live a life that pleases God. A person is able to enjoy God's benefits in the present moment in accordance with Abraham's blessings when they reach this “new” condition of being.

According to John Adelego, a Christian can experience God's promises in the here and now, but God's blessings are partially in “the spirit,” which is why a person must be a Christian in order to receive them. He asserted that “all the things God has promised us are spiritual things. We are given it in the form of spiritual substance. To obtain it, you must be in the right frame of mind. And once you have it, it first manifests in your physical existence after being received in the spirit.”¹¹ He seems to be saying that even if salvation is a “spiritual” experience, it must be manifested in the believer's everyday activities. This finds expression in Adelego example that if an individual pays his or her tithe following Malachi 3, they will get “divine ideas” from God. From this argument, salvation turns into a tool for achieving “life in abundance” in the sense of material and bodily well-being. As a result, the Christian should anticipate enjoying God's gifts in the here and now. It is evident that the expectation of salvation as a way of attaining material and physical well-being more closely resembles the understanding of the traditional worldview regarding the fullness of life (*nkwa*). Therefore, some Pentecostals/Charismatics may associate salvation with Abraham and his “material” blessings according to the conventional worldview.

¹⁰ Larbi, “The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology,” 87-106.

¹¹ John Adelego (Pastor), Personal interview conducted on June 4, 2012.

However, the concept of “blessed” in the Pentecostals/Charismatics Ghanaian context is generally understood. This is demonstrated in the terms of a long life with good health, financial sufficiency and independence, good marriage, childbirth, conquest over evil spirits, (especially witchcraft), etc. God’s blessings to Christians also include defence against anything that can jeopardize their bodily and spiritual growth as well as their survival. This is what Abboah Offei refers to as a Christian’s “additions,” which allow him or her to “champion” or “control” the existential situations in which he or she may be found. Due to their strong conviction that Christians are actually involved in a spiritual battle, Pentecostals/Charismatics place a lot of emphasis on the necessity for spiritual protection against forces that they consider to be at “war”. The “forces of darkness” or demons want to prevent Christians from entering their “Promised Land,” or the ideal destiny that God has planned for them. The blessing is therefore thought to manifest throughout the Christian’s social, spiritual, and economic spheres of existence.

Physical/material

The degree to which a Christian experiences God’s blessings in the here and now depends on a number of variables, including how well-informed one knows about the promises God has made and how they are put into practice. According to Michael Ankomah of the Perez Chapel International,

[t]he way a person uses the benefits of salvation will determine how they affect him or physically. For instance, reading the Bible can cause a person’s entire worldview to shift, which also has a physical impact on him. Depending on how one looks at it, if a person practises the sowing and reaping principle and believes in it, their financial situation will also likely improve.¹²

Ankomah views the improvement in the Christian’s living situation as proof of that person’s salvation. This shows the strength of God at work in the Christian’s life — power that paralyzes the devil and all other forces hostile to human life.¹³ As a result, Pentecostals/Charismatics are known for including personal testimonies of their experiences in their liturgy.

Salvation as a Future Experience

Pentecostals have another world in view. They consider being with the Lord in heaven one day to be the ultimate goal for a Christian. When Jesus Christ returns, human suffering will come to an end, and God’s plan for humanity - eternal association with Jesus Christ and worshipping God with heavenly hosts - will have been fully realised. This event is thought to occur at some unspecified period, yet it is always considered impending. Some Pentecostals/Charismatics draw the conclusion that Jesus Christ could soon return by relating Matthew 24 to some contemporary occurrences both globally and locally. Omenyo makes the following observation with regard to this expectation: “The imminent expectation of Jesus tends to predominate the Charismatic Renewal at its initial stage but it declines when the movement grows older. Then it comes to the fore again during times of strife and war, evil, immorality and acute socio-economic pressures. Charismatics see these as the ‘signs of the times’ which precede the second coming of Christ.”¹⁴

According to Pentecostals/Charismatics, good works cannot bring about eternal residence with God in heaven, the ultimate Promised Land. Instead, it entails leading a morally honest life to stay out of going to hell. This will signal the end of all human misery, suffering, and other negative emotions. As a result, it is believed that the ultimate salvation will be felt in the afterlife. A foretaste of what will be experienced in the second coming of Jesus Christ may be said to be what the Christian experiences in the physical or material world right now.

¹² Michael Ankomah (Pastor), Personal interview conducted on October 26, 2010. He is a Pastor of the Perez Chapel International (formerly Word Miracle Church International).

¹³ Agyei Frimpong (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on June 5, 2012.

¹⁴ Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 244.

Hindrances/Enemies of Salvation

It is possible to obstruct the realization of the fullness of life, whether it be in the here and now or in the afterlife. Pentecostals/Charismatics also refer to these obstructers as the enemy.¹⁵ These adversaries, who may be spiritual or in bodily form, are thought to have what it takes to obstruct the spiritual and material advancement of the Christian.

Spiritual obstacles

Sin

One of the things that prevent people from experiencing life to the fullest is sin. Sin keeps the believer from attaining the desired fellowship with Christ, which results in not receiving the blessings God has promised Christians. For Pentecostals/Charismatics, refusal to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and personal saviour is a fundamental sin. "If someone does not receive Christ, then he or she cannot live this blessed life," says Frimpong.¹⁶ Once a person becomes a Christian, he or she is expected to abstain from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit. By doing this, the Christian enjoys the blessings of God. However, Christians become exposed to Satan's attacks when they commit sin.

It is on this premise that Opoku Onyinah exclaims that "the most miserable person on earth is a pastor who lives in sin."¹⁷ This is due to the fact that a sinner's prayers will either fail or become ineffective as a result of their wrongdoing. James Saah asserts that "one cannot bypass one's conscience in prayer"¹⁸ and that God does not answer the prayers of sinners.¹⁹ A Christian who practises immorality cannot pray effectively, because living a wicked life gives the devil an edge to take advantage of the believer. "Sin can [...] become a platform for the enemy (Satan) to get to you and destroy the fullness that God promises," said James Saah.²⁰ On the other hand, a Christian who commits sin weakens spiritually, making it easier for the devil to take advantage of him or her. Such a person is viewed as impure, which is said to result in a vulnerable spiritual state.

Touching on the issue of "demonic doorways", Atiemo notices that "[s]exual sins are especially held to be a major cause of demonic oppression of many people."²¹ In addition to sex-related behaviours, he cites fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation, bestiality, and pornography. Others include holding onto grudges, being unable to forgive, and harbouring jealousy. The leader of the Jericho Hour prayer group encouraged the audience by saying the following while discussing how sin might be utilized by ungodly forces to prevent a Christian from entering his or her Promised Land: "We are going to pray today against any principalities who have determined for us that due to certain faults and habits we cannot advance or succeed."²² The following prayer was spoken after this:

"In the name of Jesus, by choice, I make a deliberate choice
Any rule established by the principalities to direct my life,
impose restrictions on me, or establish guidelines for me, shall,

¹⁵ Here, the term "enemy" is understood in its conventional sense. It describes anything, a person, or a circumstance that inhibits someone from living a full and abundant life. It's not always necessary for it to originate from outside sources. One's own self can be one's worst enemy. An opponent may be referred to as *otanfo* (which can be translated as enemy), *obusuyefoo* (or the one who creates abomination), or *obonsam* depending on the severity of the inhibition they have caused (which is translated the devil).

¹⁶ Agyei Frimpong (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 26, 2010.

¹⁷ Opoku Onyinah is the former Chairman of The Church of Pentecost (2008-2018). He said this during his tenure as the Chairman in The Church of Pentecost Ministers and Wives Conference held at Pentecost Convention Centre, Gomoa Fetteh on January 17, 2015.

¹⁸ Saah (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 5, 2010 in Accra.

¹⁹ Bishop James Saah argues that when he uses the term sinners, he does not just mean people who have not accepted Christ but also backsliders and believers who have not turned from some of their own transgressions.

²⁰ Saah (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 5, 2010 in Accra

²¹ Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the Encounter between African Traditional Religion and Christianity* (Unpublished Master's Thesis: 1995), 99.

²² As of September 30, 2010, this prayer gathering was held every Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon at the Action Chapel International Prayer Cathedral in Accra.

as of this day, be broken. What they have used to attack me
My life, my marriage, my business, and my wealth should all be destroyed.”²³

The suggestion here is that the devil may cause someone to be involved in sin as a way of setting limitations on him/her and also to ruin his/her life.

Curses

A curse is one thing that prevents a Christian from experiencing the fullness of life in his or her life. Pentecostals/Charismatics define a curse as a restriction placed on a person's life due to his or her strong spiritual beliefs. Charles Ayarkwa of the Grace Deliverance Team also defines it as "... a spiritual decree or law issued against an individual in order to prevent him/her from doing what he/she could have naturally done".²⁴ Curse brings about failure, disillusionment, chronic illnesses, poverty, barrenness, recurring sins, a reckless lifestyle, etc. on a person's life. It is enablement for failure, as Frimpong stated.²⁵ It is a statement made in opposition to someone with the intention of having a negative impact on him or her. A curse might be cast on an individual, a family, or an entire town. The extent of the curse determines whether it affects the individual, the person's family, or even future generations. The idea that the effects of the sins committed by the progenitors recur in their families' lines is known among Pentecostals/Charismatics as the ancestral curse.²⁶ The results of these curses in a person's life, according to Onyinah, include mental breakdowns, recurrent miscarriages, and spiritual marriages, among other things.²⁷

Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana hold that a person's life can be negatively affected by a negative statement made about him or her. Derrick Prince, whose ideas continue to have an impact on Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana, has said that whether or not such a proclamation is audible, the effect will still be felt.²⁸ By speaking negatively about oneself, a person runs the risk of bringing a curse upon oneself. Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana emphasize the importance of words because of this. This is affirmed by Frimpong who asserts that the simplest way to ensure that one will pass away the following morning is to keep repeating "I will pass away the following morning" numerous times. Also, a person may be cursed by a godly person as a result of the offense,²⁹ from an external reason. Abboah Offei claims that certain people hire other powers to release curses on others.³⁰

In addition to curses brought on by a person's actions or words, Pentecostals/Charismatics also hold that a person's family history can bring about curses.³¹ This might have happened as a result of a bad covenant or a bad deed carried out by others, particularly close family members (whether they are dead or alive). It is said that until action is made to stop the pattern, the curse will continue to impact all members of the family, including the Christians. Curses might appear as extreme poverty, debilitating illnesses like epilepsy, mania, impotence, disrespect, unexpected deaths, unhappy marriages, infertility, acute intoxication, a specific undesirable habit or behaviour, etc.³² In such cases,

²³ This was observed in a visit to Jericho Hour on September 30, 2010.

²⁴ This idea was offered by Charles Ayarkwa during an interview on October 25, 2010, in Akropong.

²⁵ Interview with Frimpong on October 26, 2010 in Accra.

²⁶ Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana", *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*, (UK: Deo Publishing, 2012), 181.

²⁷ Onyinah, "Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana", 181.

²⁸ Derrick Prince, Tape No 6011, *Curses and Cure in Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the Encounter between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, 99.

²⁹ The Presbyterian Church of Ghana's Mampong congregation is served by Rev. Agyei Kwabi. In an interview on October 30, 2010, he expressed this viewpoint.

³⁰ Catechist Abboah Offei made these observations in my interview with him on October 25, 2010 in Akropong.

³¹ This form of curse is known among Pentecostals as "Ancestral Curse". This is not wholly characterised by all Pentecostals, especially, The Church of Pentecost, who believe that a person becomes anew (free from all guilt and curses) when they become Christians; they are new creation. They quote from 2 Corinthians 5:17(NIV), "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" to support their argument.

³² These insights were offered by Rev. Adjei Kwabi during a conversation I had with him for this project on October 30, 2010, in Mampong.

bad luck runs in the family for many generations. Agyei Kwabi describes his encounter with a family that was cursed as a result of an unholy vow made by their forefathers in the tale that follows. He claims that:

Since of a covenant that the ancestors were thought to have made with some deities in order for women in the family to bear children because childbirth was difficult in the family, members of this family now languish in utter poverty. Through prayers, it was discovered that in the past, a family elder had struck a pact with a divinity, exchanging the family's wealth for procreation. The covenant was then sealed following the proper rites. Even though there are now children in the household, that explains why they are currently living in such utter poverty.³³

The curse of the ancestors can affect an entire community in addition to the present generation.³⁴ Additionally, it is thought that a property might be cursed if it was acquired dishonestly. Since idol worship is despised by Pentecostals/Charismatics, if the land was purchased by someone who practises idol worship, it is viewed as a curse. Agyei Kwabi claims that the devil never forgets that a curse has been placed on a piece of property, thus in such a case, everyone who gains from it also experiences the effects of the curse. A curse can be said to be transferable in that way.³⁵

Evil spirits

The fulfilment of fullness of life³⁶ is allegedly also hampered by spiritual programmes/covenants. Before becoming a Christian, a person may have established a pact with a spiritual force. The believer may not be able to experience the fullness of life as a result of such a covenant, which may have been made intentionally or unconsciously. Pentecostals/Charismatics also hold the view that a Christian may be prevented from living a complete life due to evil plans that have been projected against him or her by someone else, typically with the help of an evil spiritual force like witchcraft (*bayie*), magic, sorcery, etc. This could be done out of jealousy or the desire to exterminate the Christian in order to keep his or her job at the company. Such a spiritual programme may result from a familial curse, according to Abboah Offei (either in the extended or the nuclear).

A spiritual programme, such as juju,³⁷ that has been projected upon a person's soul is another possibility. All of these cause suffering for a person in one way or another, preventing them from experiencing fullness of life. However, they are cast out and Christians are set free by passionate prayers that are directed against the wicked spirit. In an effort to prevent Christians from experiencing "fullness of life," the devil actively assaults them spiritually. Thus, the entirety of the Christian life is seen as spiritual combat. The confidence in this truth is frequently emphasized using Ephesians 6. The devil and his demonic minions attack the believer to steal, kill, and destroy them (John 10:10). Attacks like this can take the form of any situation that puts one's life in danger, including despicable illnesses

³³ Rev. Adjei Kwabi made this observation in my interview with him on October 30, 2010.

³⁴ On October 25, 2010, Mr. Charles Ayarkwa, a member of the Grace Deliverance Team of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, was interviewed at Akropong-Akwapim. He made reference to one of the Ghanaian communities where it is rumoured that some individuals were once buried alive. This was intended to serve as both a ritual punishment for the wrongdoing they had committed. According to history, they cursed the neighbourhood in various ways as they passed away from their misery. Charles Ayarkwa claims to have encountered several individuals from this community in various regions of Ghana. Despite all of their efforts, none of them are faring well in life. Through their prayers with different indigenous people from the village it was established that the indigenes are suffering from the curse upon the community. It was discovered through their prayers with several indigenous villagers that the indigenous people are suffering as a result of the curse that has befallen the neighbourhood.

³⁵ These ideas were presented by Rev. Agyei Kwabi on October 30, 2010, during lectures on "curses" that came before a prayer meeting.

³⁶ Consultation with those who possess powers other than those possessed by Jesus the Christ is meant by this. In this category are conventional priests, *mallams*, occult forces, etc. Pentecostals hold that such conversations result in the creation of covenants with evil spirits, which continue to harm a person in one way or another even after they become Christians.

³⁷ A spiritual force that is employed to negatively affect people's lives is referred to as "juju." People utilize it to thwart the advancement of others.

like epilepsy, psychosis, impotence, barrenness, poverty, premature death, disgrace, losing loved ones, etc. Obeng says that the devil's attacks are intended to hurt the believer and dissuade him or her from leading a forward-thinking Christian life.³⁸ These demonic hordes are thought of as recalcitrant rulers whose goal is to divert or obstruct Christians.³⁹

Non-spiritual Obstacles

Ignorance

Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana consider ignorance to be a major barrier to the "Promised Land." The commonly cited example in this regard is Hosea 4:6, where ignorance is seen as a cause of destruction. Before the Christian may fight for what is owed to him or her, Pentecostals/Charismatics believe that the Christian must be aware of his or her covenant rights as a child of God. There is also the notion that the Christian will have to rely on this information in order to use the power at his or her disposal to recover what the devil has wrongfully taken from him or her. Frimpong contends that ignorance of one's identity in Christ is the primary cause of failure in the Christian life. According to him, in order to fully experience God's promises for the Christian, a Christian must have matured in the Scriptures. This is so that they might remain within the scope of God's benefits since they are aware of God's ways and His will. He asserts that:

Health, strength, satisfaction, and other blessings have been provided for us by God in every situation, and if we step outside of that, we leave the area in which God's goodness is the rule. ... the enemy may also very simply inflict harm on us. The most crucial element, in my opinion, is for individuals to truly align themselves with God's word.⁴⁰

Enoch Ghartey mentions ignorance as a barrier for the Christian, saying: "Salvation will only affect your material existence by knowledge and wisdom. They walked in darkness, according to Psalm 82:5, because they were ignorant and unable to comprehend. Therefore, many Christians' ignorance is the cause of their continued living as if nothing has transpired inside of them."⁴¹ In other words, realizing the fullness of life requires a thorough comprehension of the Christian's covenant rights as well as their proper application in accordance with God's word.

Laziness

According to John Abu Baidoo, "[t]he basic or major obstacle is a person who is not prepared to move forward in order to receive whatever has been given. Therefore, a big obstacle to the fulfilment of what has been promised is if the individual is unwilling to do what God wants him or her to do in order to actualize these things."⁴² In respect to both being obedient to God and working toward the realization of the fullness of life, the readiness of the Christian to do what God requires is mentioned. "One has to work hard to be blessed, says James Saah. Even if someone may be praying, prayer does not always provide the desired results."⁴³

Overcoming the Hindrances

Pentecostals/Charismatics place a high priority on spiritually empowering their followers to overcome any challenge.

The Word of God

³⁸ Excerpts from an interview with Rev. Ransford Obeng in the on June 19, 2012.

³⁹ Hansel Agyei Frimpong (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 26, 2010 in Accra.

⁴⁰ This information was received from Agyei Frimpong in my interview with him on October 26, 2010.

⁴¹ Enoch Ghartey (Pastor), Personal interview conducted on June 4, 2012.

⁴² Personal interview with John Abu Baidoo (Reverend) on June 25, 2012. He serves as the pastor of the International Central Gospel Church's Trinity Temple (ICGC).

⁴³ James Saah (Bishop), Personal interview conducted on October 5, 2010 in Accra.

Sin is one of the Christian's most crucial struggles, as Mensah Otabil suggests.⁴⁴ It is crucial for Christians to obey God's word because doing so is a requirement for enjoying God's promises to Christians in the here and now. Pentecostals/Charismatics place a strong emphasis on the necessity of daily Bible study for Christians in order to equip themselves and grow spiritually. This is due to the idea that the Bible immunizes people against sin. Their emphasis on daily Bible reading is demonstrated by the creation of Bible Reading Guides like the Christ Embassy's *Rhapsody of Realities*. The ICGC also publishes *The Living Word* for its members, The Church of Pentecost also publishes a *Read through the Bible Guide* for its members to aid in thorough Bible reading. Pentecostals/Charismatics also use technology in their sermons so that believers can easily access it. These include using radio and television to broadcast over Ghana's airwaves and beyond.

The sermons of the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost and other leaders are broadcast on Pent TV. The Living Word Radio, an online radio station operated by Mensah Otabil's ICGC, broadcasts his sermons as well as those of other visiting preachers. They also encourage their followers to purchase sermon recordings so they can listen to them and increase their spiritual nutrient intake. This is intended to provide Christians the tools they need to stand firm in their faith, protecting them from perishing for "lack of knowledge," a phrase usually used by the Pentecostals. They also make extensive use of social media for this.⁴⁵

Prayer

According to Asamoah, "Prayer is the offering of the emotions and desires of the soul to God, in the name and through the mediation of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."⁴⁶ Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on prayer and fasting as important spiritual practices that might help a Christian grow spiritually. In order for the Christian to pursue the fullness of life, it is also necessary to equip him or her with the tools necessary to overcome the obstacles the devil may place in their path. As much as members are urged to pray privately on their own, Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana also place a high value on corporate prayer. According to them, a person's new nature as a Christian also contains an authority that qualifies him or her as a candidate for success and an overcomer. According to Duncan Williams, "[t]he believer has the power to use the name of Jesus to bring the devices of the enemy to a halt."⁴⁷ The believer's claimed position of power is meant to translate into life in fullness, but this is only activated through prayer. It is thought that prayer can help the believer exert his or her control over any obstacles, whether they are spiritual or otherwise.

Therefore, the Christian is expected to pray with authority and with faith. Agyin Asare asserts that "prayer is what moves the hand of God. ... There are blessings reserved for you which can only be taken by applying pressure. Those who have done much for God and with God have learnt how to make this demand for victory."⁴⁸ In other words, prayer should be started with the intention of giving the believer dominion over any circumstance that may be impeding him or her from fulfilling the best that God has in store for him or her. According to Duncan-Williams, prayer is the "lifeline of the believer and ... a vital key for walking in victory."⁴⁹ Given this background, organizing special prayer services for their members on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis is a frequent practice among Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana.⁵⁰ The Jericho Hour, and Roar Night hosted by

⁴⁴ Mensah Otabil (Pastor), Personal interview conducted on October 5, 2021 in Accra. He is the General Overseer of International Central Gospel Church.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Tetteh, *Count your Blessings*, (London: LT Media Ministries, 2002), 18.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, "The Bible and Akan Traditional Religious Values: A Search For Dialogue", *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)*, 2(2) (2020): 78-86.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Duncan-Williams, *Binding the strong man*, (USA: Xulon Press, 2012), 50.

⁴⁸ Charles Agyin-Asare, *Power in prayer: Taking the blessings of God by force* (Lagos: Asiamah Enterprises, 2005), back cover page.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Duncan-Williams, *Enforcing prophetic decrees*, (Prayer Summit Publishing, 2015), back cover page.

⁵⁰ In Ghana, Pentecostals are known for their prayer programmes. To encourage members and guests to pray for their benefits, prayer programmes are held at least once every week. These prayer gatherings are supplemented with sporadic 7-day, 21-day, and 40-day fasting regimens. Pentecostals also often hold prayer vigils, particularly to counteract the

Action Chapel International on Thursdays between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., and The Church of Pentecost on Pent TV respectively are highly well-known examples of such programmes. The platforms provided by these programmes can also be used to learn how to pray effectively, strategically, and with authority.

CONCLUSION

From the discussions so far, it has been identified that the concept of salvation is of importance to any religion, including Christianity. The Pentecostals/Charismatics do not downplay its significance, for it preserves a person's soul from eternal damnation once they believe in the atoning work of Christ Jesus, and confesses Him as their Lord and personal saviour. This enables an individual to become a "spiritual Israelite" who is able to access the covenant blessings as Abraham, for they get access to God's promises. They also enjoy the material blessings such as good health, financial sufficiency and independence, good marriage, childbirth, and conquest over evil spirits as well as spiritual blessings. They become equipped to overcome the battles life may present. They are able to triumph over the influences of evil spiritual forces as outlined in Ephesians 6:12. This makes them become accomplishes as God's children, and receives the blessings of God. While they enjoy the earthly blessings, Christians also hope for the ultimate goal of being with the Lord in heaven one day; they consider being with the Lord as paramount, for human suffering will cease and associating with Jesus Christ and worshipping God will have been fully realised. As they strive to attain fullness of life through salvation, they face adversaries which obstruct their spiritual and material advancement. These include sin, curses, evil spirits, ignorance, and laziness. To overcome these obstacles, Christians must be students of the word of God and prayerful. This ensures their continued enjoyment of the blessings of God in the here and now as well as in the life hereafter. The study has contributed to the broad knowledge of the concept of salvation and has delved deep into how salvation is understood by the Pentecostals/Charismatics who share a similar Christian faith.

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supposed night time activities of "demonic spirits." Various congregations also conduct annual "prayer summits" to allow members to pray their desires into reality. One of these yearly events is the ICGC's "destiny Summit."

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