

The Promises of God

Lesson 1

God, the Creator

Can you imagine nothing existing except God? Neither our planet nor the whole universe? No plants, animals and people, no earth, air and water, no sun, moon and stars, not even night and day? Shall we add not even time and space? Only God existing. Indeed that is surely difficult to imagine, isn't it?

Yes, God's Holy Book, the Holy Bible, says that God created the universe, the heavens and the earth: the sky and the air and the water, the sun and the moon and the stars, vegetation, birds, animals, fish and all living creatures. Then, according to the Holy Bible, God said:

"Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air, and to everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

When God created man (Adam), He breathed into him the breath of life and placed him in the Garden of Eden. He also created woman (Eve) by taking her out of man. Man and woman lived together as husband and wife in perfect harmony. God distinguished them from the rest of His creation by creating them in His own image. He gave them a special relationship with Himself. Under God they ruled over all the creatures on earth, gave names to them and lived in harmony with them.

When God saw everything that He had created, He saw that it was good, indeed very good! How wonderful was the life Adam and Eve lived together in the Garden of Eden! Neither they nor the rest of creation yet knew sin and the curse of sin. God spoke with Adam and Eve, and they spoke with Him. They had blessed fellowship together with God. They loved God, and they

loved each other. For all the blessings God had given them they were truly thankful. To God alone be all glory and honour!

Then, once more, let all people, you and I also, remember that God created the world and all that is in it, that He created it good, with meaning and purpose. It did not come into being by itself or by chance, without meaning and purpose. (Or could you imagine it without meaning and purpose?) And which reminds us, if we may need reminding, that the world does not belong to you or to me. Nor can I claim myself as my own. For God is my Creator. Your Creator too.

Therefore in the words of a Psalm (Zabur), a part of the Holy Bible, let us praise God, our Creator and Lord of all:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

To God alone be all glory and honour!

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice,
Tender to me the promise of His Word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Pow'rs and dominions lay their glory by,
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His Word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forever more!

Lesson 2

The Sin of Humankind

From Lesson 1 we learned how God created the world and that all He created was good -- all with meaning and purpose and nothing by chance. So also He created man and woman. They lived under the care and rule of the Lord God, loving Him and caring for each other peacefully, harmoniously and thankfully.

Why, then, in this world do we so often find so little peace and contentment and thanksgiving, so much anger and distress and conflict? Why, so often, is it so hard to do good, so easy and natural to do evil? Why must we learn to love and to serve, yet need no one to teach us how to hate and to hurt? Even when we do good to others, how often do we do good selfishly, more for our own sake rather than their sake? As we consider the evil in this world, we wonder how our hearts can become so wicked and diseased! Yes, that includes you and me too!

When Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, they were not wicked. They lived a joyful life of obedience to God. Would they always freely obey God from their hearts and be subject to Him? One day the Tempter (Satan/Shaitan) came to offer them the desire of doubt and disobedience. In the Holy Bible we read:

Now the serpent (the tempter) was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Then the Lord said:

"Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me and I ate."

Thus Adam and Eve fell into sin and its curse. The original sin of humankind was not the worship of an idol made from metal or wood; rather, their sin was from their hearts, from doubting and disobeying God. Why should they be subject to God, trust and obey God? Why

should they not trust themselves, obey their own desires, follow their own will? In doubting and disobeying God and in following their own desires, they turned themselves into their own idols! They wanted to be like God, to honour and glorify themselves, to take His place! O Lord God, preserve us from this idolatry, this sin of having other gods beside You or ignoring You -- doubting and denying Your existence!

How familiar we are with the foolish excuses which Adam and Eve gave for their sins! The man blamed the woman and even blamed God. The woman blamed the Tempter. Their excuses were false excuses. Both knew well within their own hearts that they had sinned against God and against His holy will, that they had sinned against themselves also, that God is judge and that they are answerable to Him, that their sin was their own fault and their excuses false. They experienced fear, guilt and shame. In time, they also experienced death, the wages of sin.

So the disease of sin spread into the world. So terrible it became that their first-born son, Cain, eventually murdered his brother Abel.

Yet before God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, He gave them a remarkable promise of hope in mysterious words He spoke to the Tempter. As the Holy Bible states:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."

Through these words God promised humankind a Saviour. A Saviour would come to conquer sin and death. The Tempter would crush the Saviour's heel but the Saviour would crush the head of the Tempter. After their fall into sin, a new hope sprang up in the hearts of Adam and Eve: the hope of God's forgiveness of their sin against God and against their neighbour.

Can we have any greater hope in our lives than the hope of God's forgiveness of our sins? For surely God our Creator is also righteous. God loves us and God judges us!

Lesson 3

Noah and the Flood

Bang! Bang! Bang! For years Noah (Nuh) had been working on this immense structure. He called it an ark, a boat. He said that because of the wickedness and violence of the people, God would destroy them in a flood.

There were now many people on earth. Probably all or many of them knew about the one true God, but, sadly, they had no time for Him and disobeyed Him. They thought, "Why should God care whether or not we sin? He is great and we are so small. Why should He care about us and what we do? Surely we shall escape His judgement!" Or simply, as so many today also continue to think, "We are doing quite well without God, proud of ourselves and our accomplishments, living well and well respected."

The more Noah called the people to return from their indifferent and evil ways and to serve God, the more the people laughed. A boat in the middle of dry land! A blazing sun in a cloudless sky! And now with his sons and their wives, Noah is taking all the creatures on earth in pairs into his boat!

Yet seven more days the people mocked Noah. They considered him mad, until ... until it began to rain and rain and rain. Faces full of mockery changed to faces full of fear. Now who were the fools? The Holy Bible tells it thus:

The flood continued forty days on earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters swelled above the mountain, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarmed on the earth, and all human beings; everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

After the flood Noah offered sacrifices to God upon an altar he built. God promised that even though the hearts of people were evil, He would never again destroy all people in a flood. God used the rainbow as a sign of His covenant which He made with humankind.

Whenever we see the rainbow, it is a reminder to us of this blessed promise which God gave to all people through Noah. It reminds us of the faithful Noah who, as the Holy Bible says, "walked with God". He was alone and forsaken, surrounded only by people who mocked him.

In fact he was not alone. For God was with him and he enjoyed fellowship with God. He knew that God was leading him and guiding him. While building the ark and sacrificing on the altar, we can imagine how often he would recall the promise of God to Adam and Eve that the coming Saviour would crush the power of evil.

Yet, the flood also reminds us of God's wrath upon sin. When we sin, we sin, first and foremost, against God. He is holy and His judgement upon sin is certain and true. And, like it or not, each one of us has a conscience.

Like Noah, come, let us learn and remember the blessed promises of God and walk with God. He is ever faithful, ever strong. As we consider the example of Noah, how fitting are the words of the Holy Bible as found in a Psalm (Zabur):

The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.
More majestic than the thunders of the mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves of the sea,
majestic on high is the Lord!

Eventually, a disciple of Jesus the Messiah wrote:

By faith Noah, warned by God about events yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith (Holy Bible).

Once more, at the sight and beauty of the rainbow, let us praise God for His greatness and the greatness of His grace. Then, like Noah, ponder becoming "an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith."

Lesson 4

Abraham, the Friend of God

We can imagine how the story of the flood and Noah, the man who walked with God, passed from Noah's children to their children and to their children's children. Surely people would remember how God saved Noah and his family and how God judged people for their wickedness! Yet, sadly, how easily we all forget God and disobey His commandments! At that time, men and women all over the earth were soon even worshipping idols and doing evil works. As the Holy Bible says, the people became proud. They sought only their own honour, their fame and a name for themselves.

Thanks be to God, there was one man who was different. He was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's sons. His name was Abraham (Ibrahim). God's words to Abraham are recorded in the Holy Bible:

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Abraham trusted God and therefore he obeyed God's commands. He moved away from his own land (modern day Iraq) to a country called Canaan. God told Abraham that He would give this land to his descendants after several hundred years. The Holy Bible records two other promises also that God gave to Abraham:

"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord

"By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves."

Through this second promise God indicated that the promised Saviour would come as a descendant of Abraham. Truly through Him the world would be blessed!

At the command of God, Abraham left his own land and people, not knowing where he went. Later he saw the land his descendants would inherit. There he built altars for sacrifice to God. Abraham, like Noah and others, understood their sin and their need for God's forgiveness.

Still Abraham's wife, Sarah, had no son. Who would believe that she, who was barren for 90 years, would become the mother of a great nation as God had promised her? Though she herself began to doubt, Abraham continued to believe that nothing was too difficult for God. Soon God fulfilled this promise also. Through Sarah, Isaac (Ishaq) was born to Abraham.

Later Jacob (Yaqub, also called Israel) was born to Isaac. With Isaac and Jacob's sons, God renewed the covenant that all nations should be blessed through their nation, also called Israel. God's promise of a Saviour made to Adam and Eve remained alive through the nation, Israel.

Throughout his life Abraham endured many trials and sorrows. He did not consider such troubles to come from the hand of fate. They only increased his faith in God. Abraham's confidence in God was so firm that God considered him a true servant, yet more than a servant. The Holy Bible calls him "the friend of God". Some of you may remember how Abraham, at the command of God, was even ready to sacrifice his son -- a command God withdrew when He saw Abraham's readiness to obey His command. O that we, like Abraham, would trust in God with our hearts and become God's friends!

Abraham died and was buried in the Promised Land. Some thousand years later, Jesus the Messiah could say of Abraham's descendants, the sons of Israel, as the Holy Bible records:

"Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad."

Centuries before the coming of Jesus, God said through Isaiah the prophet:

"Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many." (Holy Bible)

Lesson 5

Moses

Jacob (Yaqub), the grandson of Abraham, had twelve sons. One of these sons, Joseph (Yusuf), became the chief minister (*vizier*) of the Pharaoh (*Firawn* = Egypt's king). Because of the famine in the land where they lived, Jacob and his other sons moved to Egypt also. At first the Children of Israel lived happily in Egypt. But how sad they became when a later Pharaoh of Egypt made them slaves!

As God had promised Abraham, Abraham's descendants, called the Children of Israel, became so numerous that they became a nation. The Pharaoh began to fear them because of their great number and decided that all the newborn boys should be killed. Yet one boy escaped. He was even brought up by the daughter of this wicked Pharaoh. The boy's name was Moses (Musa).

When Moses grew up, he was greatly grieved about the condition of the Children of Israel. One day, while tending the sheep, he saw an amazing sight: a bush on fire which did not burn! From the bush God called to Moses. God said, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Thus God called Moses to approach the Pharaoh, who was at that time the most powerful king on earth. With Aaron (Harun) his brother, Moses went to the Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." But the Pharaoh refused to listen. Then God brought nine plagues, one after another, among the Egyptians. Still the Pharaoh's heart was hard. Finally God told each family of the Children of Israel to take the blood of a lamb and smear it on the doorsteps of their houses. According to the Holy Bible, God then said:

"I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

Only after all the Egyptian first-born were slain did the Pharaoh let the Children of Israel go. Yet as the people came near the sea, which lay between Egypt and the land which God had promised to Abraham, the army of the Pharaoh came to bring them back. As the Lord

commanded Moses, he lifted up his staff and the sea parted. All the Children of Israel crossed the sea on dry land in safety. When the Egyptians followed, Moses again lifted his staff and the waters poured back. All the Egyptians were drowned in the sea. The Children of Israel continued their journey to the Promised Land. It was during this journey that God gave them many commandments. The most famous of these are the Ten Commandments, which are recorded in the Holy Bible.

God said:

1. "I am your God. You shall have no other gods besides me.
2. You shall not make idols and bow down to them.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God without thought.
4. Remember the day of rest to keep it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work.
5. Honour your father and mother.
6. You shall do no murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbour's."

Centuries later as a summary of these commandments, Jesus the Messiah said:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second like it is this:

You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

What an edifying set of commandments to help any individual, family or community to live a righteous and pleasant life! Or even a nation or state toward democracy (lit. "people rule").

How wonderfully God had saved the Children of Israel! He had spared them from destruction in the land of Egypt and had brought them safely through the sea. In order to remember this great salvation, God ordered the Children of Israel to celebrate the Festival of the Passover every year. During this festival the people sacrificed a lamb. Then all the people recalled how God had freed them from slavery in Egypt. They remembered their birthday as a free nation! God had saved them! God, their Lord and Saviour! Constantly successive prophets reminded them of this great event in their history.

Before Moses died, God gave the people another great promise through Moses. According to the Holy Bible, Moses said:

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."

Another great prophet from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would appear. Hundreds of years later when Jesus the Messiah spoke about Moses, the Messiah said:

"He wrote about me."

Yes, Moses too wrote about the Messiah. Read on to learn about more prophets who spoke and wrote about the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

And yes, for now and forever, let us remember that the Lord our God is one, that He alone is God and that each one of us is to love our neighbour as each one of us loves oneself!

Lesson 6

Job

Why did God permit the people to mock Noah? Why did God permit Abraham to suffer many trials and sorrows? Why did God allow the Children of Israel to become slaves in Egypt?

True, all people, even the prophets, are sinners. So all prophets suffer the result of their sins. Yet, so often, those who obey God suffer as much or even more than those who disobey God. Sickness, fire, floods, wars and other calamities strike believer as well as non-believer. Why, then, should the faithful believer suffer?

Throughout history people have asked themselves this question. Some people have concluded that they are agnostic or atheist, that there is no God, or, if there is a God, He does not bother with people. Others have said that people's lives are locked in the chains of fate, as if fate were God. They may say that God's will is hidden, that few, if any, have assurance of salvation. With such conclusions, however, the prophets do not agree. How, then, might other prophets and wise persons respond?

Let us turn to the example of Job (Ayyub) who suffered as a faithful believer in God. Job had a large family, much wealth and honour. He served God with true obedience. He helped the blind, the lame, the poor, the widow and the orphan. Yet, asked Satan (the Tempter), "Why does Job obey God and do good? Does not Job obey God for the sake of wealth and happiness? Take away his prosperity and see if Job will remain faithful to God. Does not Job serve God simply to serve himself?"

So God let Satan do his worst. Job soon lost all his children and wealth. His body became covered with boils. Passers-by mocked and spit at him. Even the wise leaders told him he was suffering for his sin. Job became bitter, lonely, despised by all. It seemed as if God Himself had become Job's enemy. Job sank into deep despair.

Why, then, did God permit the faithful Job to suffer such agony? To be sure, after the trial had ceased, God blessed Job with more blessings than Job had before. Yet through his suffering Job received a greater blessing. He learned to know God better. He learned that God's ways and thoughts are better and higher than those of people. He learned to trust and obey God, not for the sake of worldly blessings and reward but for the sake of God Himself and God's Kingdom.

In the midst of his despair a new and powerful hope sprang up within Job's heart. In times of distress, countless believers have sung his words, recorded in the Holy Bible:

"O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!

O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!"

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another."

Is not the life of Job a wonderful lesson for us? We, too, can learn that our troubles are not the curse of fate. Through such suffering, God can bless us and show us His love. Such troubles can make us more faithful servants to Him. They can teach us to love God Himself more than His material gifts. They can show, us first and foremost, that God is great because He is our Redeemer, whom we shall see on the Last Day!

Later we shall see more clearly how God is our Redeemer and how He prepares us for the Last Day.

Yes, God cares for each one of us, for you, too. And, yes, He knows our needs better than we do.

As the Holy Bible says, God is indeed one. But even Satan knows that God is one. More than that, God is love.

Lesson 7

David the King and Prophet

Many years had passed since Moses had brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt and the Children of Israel had occupied the land which God had promised them through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A man whose name was Saul now ruled as king over the people. Some of the descendants of Judah, one of Jacob's sons, lived in a town called Bethlehem. Among them were Jesse and his eight sons.

The last of Jesse's sons was a young shepherd named David (Daud). While he tended sheep, he composed and sang beautiful poems and music. He also learned to shoot a sling-shot with deadly accuracy. One day, God directed the prophet Samuel to anoint this young shepherd as King Saul's successor. How strange that a shepherd boy become a king! Yet God's choice is always best!

David soon proved himself to be a good marksman too. While all the Children of Israel feared the Philistine enemy giant, Goliath, David courageously stepped forward to fight him. Huge Goliath mocked little David. Yet David remembered how God had saved him from the lion and the bear while he had tended his sheep. As the Holy Bible described it:

David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine (Goliath) on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

Thus David saved his people. After Saul died, David became king over Israel. He made Jerusalem (later called *al-Quds*) the capital of his country. During David's reign Israel became a significant nation.

Though David was a great king and prophet, he also was not free from evil thoughts and actions, from the stain of sin. On one occasion he even arranged to have one of his soldiers killed in battle in order to marry that man's wife. David suffered greatly for his sin. Thank God, he later deeply repented. He has left us a beautiful poem of repentance in the Book of Psalms (Zabur), a part of the Holy Bible:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast law;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

O God, that we, too, (as individuals, community and even nation) would recognise our transgressions, our sins of commission and our sins of omission, and that we would know that we sin against you, our Holy God and Creator! O that we, too, would repent and turn from our sins to God, our Saviour! He alone can create clean hearts within us and give us His Holy Spirit.

Yes, David knew that God is Judge; he also knew that God is Saviour. God gave David a special promise that one of his descendants would be a greater king than David or David's son, Solomon (Sulayman). God said in the Holy Bible:

"Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

Thus the promise of God to humankind became ever clearer: a Saviour promised to Adam and Eve. He comes as a descendant of Abraham. Now we learn that He is to come from the royal line of David also. A king whose kingdom would last forever! Through this king God would offer salvation to all people.

Prayer: Almighty God, merciful and compassionate, all the thoughts and desires of our hearts are open to You. Forgive us our sins against You and against our neighbours. Cleanse our hearts by the power of Your Holy Spirit so that we may truly love and praise You and love our neighbours as we love ourselves. This we pray in the name of Jesus the Messiah, our King.

Lesson 8

The Prophet Hosea

Under King David and King Solomon Israel became a great nation. Yet during their reigns the Children of Israel rebelled against God. Toward the end of his reign even King Solomon misused the gifts with which God so richly blessed him. He became a tyrant. His heart inclined toward riches and toward the glory of this world. His lust was too great and his wives too many. When some of his wives worshipped idols, he did not correct them.

It was no surprise that after Solomon the Kingdom of Israel split into two. Few of the rulers of these kingdoms and their subjects feared God. Through the prophet Hosea the Lord spoke these words of the Holy Bible to the people:

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.

Swearing, lying and murder,
and stealing and adultery break out;
bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Yet through the prophet Hosea we learn more about God's faithful love for sinful Israel, despite Israel's sin. Such was God's covenant of love with Israel that God pictured Himself as Israel's husband. But Israel, now unfaithful to God, had become like a harlot. She has fled to idols who are like false husbands. How greatly Israel's sin grieved God!

Similarly God also speaks of Israel as His son¹. But Israel is a faithless son who rebels against his Heavenly Father, the true God. He runs after false fathers, the idols. How tenderly God speaks about His love for His sinful son! In the words of the Holy Book:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals (idols),
and offering incense to idols.
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim (Israel) to walk,
I took them up in my arms;

¹ It may help readers to note that in this lesson God speaks Himself as Israel's husband and of Israel (Ephraim) as His wife and as His son, family designations here and often in the Holy Bible totally free from any sexual implication. Such referencing reflects the nature of God's *divine* love.

but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

Though one of the kings built a strong fort to protect his kingdom, the days came when this kingdom was destroyed. The king and his people suffered much for their sin. But God could not forsake His people forever. God promised that the day would come when the people would return to Him. He would heal their sick and sinful hearts and help them live the way they ought to live. On that day, said God through Hosea in the words of the Holy Bible:

I will take you for my wife¹ forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.

Through the prophet Hosea, God tenderly shows us indications of the depth of His love even for sinners. That is why through Hosea God spoke about Himself as a Heavenly Husband and a Heavenly Father. How God yearned that the people would become faithful! Praise be to God that the day would come when the rebellious hearts of the people would turn to God. Then they would be called, as Hosea says, "sons of the Living God", sons and daughters of their Heavenly Father who loves them.

God had promised that day would come. It would come when David's royal descendant would rule over God's everlasting Kingdom. This joyful hope burned deeply in the heart of the prophet Hosea.

Let us meditate upon the words of the Psalm:

Let all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you.
Let those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"
But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O Lord, do not delay!

¹ See previous page, footnote 1.

Indeed God is great, great in love and righteousness. He is truly greater! In fact the Holy Bible tells us that God the Heavenly Father's love exceeds the love of the most loving earthly father and mother!

Lesson 9

The Prophet Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah was standing in God's beautiful house of worship that Solomon had built. Suddenly it seemed to him as if he were surrounded by a host of angels and the glory of God. God was calling Isaiah to be a prophet. Isaiah trembled with fear. The event is recorded thus in the Holy Bible:

"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs (angels) flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Isaiah had much to tell the people. The darkness of sin continued to surround them. As Hosea had prophesied, the northern part of the divided Kingdom of Israel had been conquered. There remained the little Kingdom of Judah. Yet Judah, too, would fall, said Isaiah, because her people had forsaken the living God for idols; mercy and righteousness had departed from the land.

In the midst of this darkness God through Isaiah spoke many promises which shone as bright stars in the night. More than any other prophet, Isaiah draws us a picture of the coming Saviour, the descendant of David. He tells us many things regarding the person and the work of the Saviour, the one to be recognised as the Messiah. Here are passages from the Prophet Isaiah as recorded in the Holy Bible:

The Lord will give you a sign. Look, a virgin is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel (which means "God with us").

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
Authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

Like Job, Isaiah learned that God is the Redeemer God. Yet more than this, Isaiah saw that God Himself would visit His people to redeem them. Impatiently Isaiah cried out to God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!..." Only some centuries later, God fully answered that prayer in Jesus the Messiah, who was born of a virgin, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, who healed the sick people and who by His death carried away the iniquity of us all.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, our Redeemer, fill our hearts with your Holy Spirit so that with faith and thanksgiving we may receive Your great promises of our Saviour and King. In the name of our Saviour and King, Jesus the Messiah, we pray. Amen.

Lesson 10

The Prophet Jeremiah

Have you ever heard of a prophet who did not want to be a prophet? Jeremiah was such a prophet. In the Holy Bible we read how God called him:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I, Jeremiah said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."
But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you."

Though God was always with Jeremiah, Jeremiah's task was hard and he suffered greatly. Who would wish to tell his fellow-citizens what Jeremiah had to tell the people in the land of Judah? God told Jeremiah to announce to the people that their nation would be destroyed. Many of the people would be moved from their land to Babylon, the land of their enemy. God said that they were not even to fight but to surrender to the enemy. All this God demanded Jeremiah to announce because the people in Judah had turned to idols and committed many evil works.

Soon all the people began to hate Jeremiah. They called him a traitor. They did not understand that those who disobey God by their evil lives are the greatest traitors to their country! When Jeremiah continued to urge the people to forsake murder, adultery, theft, false-witness and other evils, they put him in prison and even wanted to kill him. Jeremiah suffered much because he boldly proclaimed the judgement of God upon the people whom he loved.

Through Jeremiah God clearly shows us why humankind is so stubborn, proud and rebellious. The cause of such sin is the sinful and diseased heart. In the Holy Bible God said through the prophet:

The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse --
who can understand it?

Because the heart is so perverse, Jeremiah understood that only God, not we ourselves, could heal our hearts and correct our lives! In the words of the Holy Bible:

I know, O Lord, that the way of human beings is not in their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.
Correct me, O Lord, but in just measure;
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

Since people's hearts are so corrupt and since God alone is able to change their hearts, God promised that He Himself would remove sin from their hearts and give them new life. Through the prophet Jeremiah God tells us about His new covenant:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, though I was their husband¹, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Like the prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah announced that God would fulfill this promise through that blessed descendant of King David.

Let us meditate upon the words of another Psalm:

Make me to know your ways, O Lord
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

¹ Again, as in Lesson 8, the Holy Bible speaks about God as a loving husband -- and, again to clarify, whose divine love for His beloved is free from any sexual implication.

Lesson 11

The Prophet Daniel

Did you ever hear about a great king who spent a sleepless night in his palace? As the prophet Jeremiah had foretold, the Children of Israel were defeated by their enemies and taken into captivity because they were unfaithful to God. Some years later, another king ruled over them and many other nations. And now because of one of these Jews (Children of Israel), whose name was Daniel, the king fasted and lay awake all night.

The king knew that Daniel was a very wise and honest man. He honoured Daniel so much that he made him chief minister, just as the Pharaoh in Egypt many years before made Joseph, son of Jacob and grandson of Abraham, his chief minister. But many of the other officers in the kingdom became jealous of Daniel and began to hate him. "Why should Daniel, a Jew and a foreigner, become the chief minister in our kingdom?" they asked themselves. "This is our country, not his!" (Does this sound familiar?)

Soon they plotted against Daniel in a very evil way. Cleverly, they suggested to the king that the king was so great that no one in the kingdom should pray to any man or god except to the king alone. The king was flattered and became very proud. He made a law that all the people in his kingdom could pray only to him. Anyone who disobeyed this order would be thrown into the lions' den.

When Daniel continued to pray to the true God, his enemies immediately reported him to the king. They reminded the king that he could change no law he made.

Like a trapped animal, the king now saw he was caught in the net of pride. He himself had set the trap for himself! That evening the king sadly delivered Daniel into the lions' den. Sleep fled from his eyes. Early next morning he quickly went to the lions' den and called to Daniel. Could the living God deliver Daniel from the mouths of the hungry lions? When the king heard the voice of Daniel and saw him unharmed, he was much relieved and very happy. God had saved Daniel! Then he punished the enemies of Daniel and issued a law which is also written in the Holy Bible:

"I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel:

For he is the living God,
enduring forever.
His kingdom shall never be destroyed,
and his dominion has no end.
He delivers and rescues,

He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth;
for he has saved Daniel
from the power of the lions."

The Kingdom of the living God endures to the end. In visions the prophet Daniel saw the final destruction of all earthly kingdoms. But of God's heavenly and eternal Kingdom, Daniel prophesied, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

I saw one like a Son of Man
coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
and was presented before him.
To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
That all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Who, then, is this Son of Man who comes from heaven? And what is this everlasting dominion which He is given? Read on with patience, O reader, and you will find the answers to your questions. For the living God, who was faithful and true, fulfills the promises which He spoke through His prophet Daniel.

Let us meditate on words of encouragement from this Psalm:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

And, while meditating, to take measure or the level of our own pride, comparing ourselves with others: who we are, what we do.

Lesson 12

The Prophet Zechariah

Hundreds of years prior, God had delivered the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt through Moses. Now God delivered them from captivity in the land of Babylon according to His promise. Once more the people built the house of worship in Jerusalem. Once more they could praise and give thanks to God that they were a free nation.

During this period, God called the prophet Zechariah (Zakariyya) to serve the nation.¹ Zechariah reminded the people of God's commands which He had given to the Children of Israel. He also reminded them how in the past the people had constantly rebelled against God. In the words of the Holy Bible:

Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor, and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. They made their hearts adamant in order not to hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts.

Yet Zechariah did not only remind the Children of Israel of God's commandments and their rebellious hearts. Through Zechariah, God renewed the covenant which He had made through the previous prophets. A more glorious day than the days of delivery from Egypt and Babylon would appear. On that day, the Lord Himself would come to dwell in the midst of His people, and many nations would join themselves to the Lord. Yet in what a strange manner this victorious King would come! Said God through Zechariah in the Holy Bible:

Lo, your king comes to you,
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim (Israel)
and the war horse from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations,
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹ Not Zechariah, the father of the prophet John the Baptist, the latter, perhaps by some better known as Yahya ibn Zakariyya (lesson 13).

The Lord Himself comes as King! His Kingdom is a universal Kingdom which brings peace to the nations! Yet the King is clothed in humility and rides on a humble beast! A servant King! A strange King indeed!

Before we turn to the second part of this course, *The Promises of God*, let us join the prophet King David in a song of praise he once sang:

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
Your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:
'I will establish your descendants forever,
and build your throne for all generations.'"

Thus far The Promises of God prior to the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of His promises. Then onto the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the fulfilment of *The Promises of God*. Can you single out the major themes of these promises and the names of the prophets whom God used to prophesy?

Lesson 13

The Prophet John the Baptist

Several hundred years had passed since the prophet Zechariah proclaimed God's Word among the Children of Israel. Many of the Children of Israel, who now lived in their native land again, forgot how God had saved them from their enemies. Some even worshipped idols. Others confessed with their mouths that there was no other god except God. Easy to say. But their hearts were far from the true Lord God because they did not obey God's commandment to love their neighbour. Once more the Children of Israel, now often referred to as the Jews, became subjects of another nation, this time Rome and the Romans. As our account continues, the Romans are ruling over the land.

Thanks be to God, a number of people continued to trust in God with their hearts. They patiently waited for Him to fulfil the promises which He had given to the prophets in the past ages and about which we have read in past lessons. Among these pious people were Zechariah (Zakariyya) and his wife Elizabeth. Though they had often prayed for a child, they remained childless and now were very old.

One day during a special festival Zechariah was serving in God's house of worship. Zechariah suddenly realised that he was not alone. The angel Gabriel (Jibrail) was present with him. The angel said: "God has answered your prayer. You shall have a son and shall call him John (Yahya)." For in Hebrew "John" means "God answers prayer".

All were amazed that such an old lady as Elizabeth could have a child. Probably many remembered how Abraham's wife, Sarah, gave birth to Isaac in her old age. Surely John, like Isaac, must be a special child also. God had not forgotten His promises! Indeed, so special was this child that his father, Zechariah, prophesied about him. In the Holy Bible (Holy Injil), we thus read about this prophet:

"... And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Some thirty years later, John began his ministry as a prophet. The Holy Bible significantly dates the beginning of the prophet John the Baptist's ministry during the 15th year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius and during the priesthood of the Jewish leaders Annas and Caiaphas in AD

26/27. There was something different about John's message. All the previous prophets had indicated that the Kingdom of God was about to come. But John said: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." He also told the people that they should check their own character and actions and thereby prove their repentance.

John preached so powerfully that some of the people wondered if he was the expected Messiah, the King, whose coming God had promised through prophets referred to in our previous lessons. He strongly denied that he was the Messiah whom God had promised to send. He reminded the people that the prophets Isaiah and Malachi had spoken about a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah. God had called John to be His messenger. "But," added John, "the Messiah is so great that I am not worthy to untie His sandals." Later, when Jesus the Messiah was with John, John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah and then made this remarkable statement to the people about Him: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

No doubt, the people did not fully understand what John meant when he called Jesus the Messiah "the Lamb of God". Did he mean that the Messiah was God's sacrifice of love for all humankind? Later they would understand more fully. And so will you, if you have not yet fully understood but want to understand and read on. Could it be that God's sacrifice of love in this world would be His most important gift to you and the greatest event in your life?

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank You that through Your prophet, John, You announced the nearness of Your Kingdom and Your salvation. Save us, Lord, that we may serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. In the name of Jesus the Messiah, our Saviour, we pray. Amen.

Lesson 14

The Promised Messiah Comes

At the same time that the angel came to Zechariah to announce the good news of the birth of John (lesson 13), there lived in the village of Nazareth a young lady named Mary. Though Mary was a descendant of the great king David, she herself was only a humble young lady and lived in a humble home. She, too, had heard and treasured in her heart the promises God had made through the prophets to send the Messiah. No doubt, on occasions the hope crept into her heart that during her lifetime she, too, might see the Messiah.

Can you imagine how Mary felt when the angel Gabriel actually came to visit her? Only six months after Zechariah received the good news about the prophet John, Mary heard the most astonishing news. The angel said that the Messiah was about to come into the world and that Mary would be the mother of the Messiah. She was to name Him Jesus.

That Mary had no husband was really no problem for God. Gabriel said that Mary would have this holy child through the power of the Holy Spirit of the Most High God. "Let it be to me according to your word," said Mary to Gabriel. For Mary knew that the Holy Spirit could also place the very Word of God within her womb. Had not the prophet Isaiah, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, declared that a virgin would conceive and bear a son?

The Holy Bible gives us an account of the birth of the Christ, the Messiah:

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sin." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"
which means, "God is with us."

In God's good time, Jesus the Messiah was born in the little town of Bethlehem, a short distance from Jerusalem, just as another prophet, Micah, had foretold centuries before.

Then the angels announced to shepherds in the surrounding areas, grazing their sheep, that a Saviour, the promised Messiah, had been born. Just think about it: How wonderful that God Himself would visit our earth in Jesus the Messiah! And to come as a human being, so that we,

too, would understand Him as one of us! And, even more, that He did not stop at a king's palace but came "all the way down" into the midst of our humble society! He must really care for all people!

The Holy Bible has much more to say about the person and nature of the Messiah, the following statement a small but critical portion:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us...."

Yes, Jesus the Messiah, the Word of God, who came from God into our world and became a man. Because Jesus is the eternal Word of God, He is also called "The Son of God" and "Immanuel" ("God with us").¹

Let us join Mary in her proclamation of praise, as it is recorded in the Holy Bible (Holy Injil):

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...."

Does this not introduce us to the unlimited dimensions of God's love?

¹ Sometimes the meaning of Jesus as "The Son of God" in the Holy Bible is misunderstood. As Jesus is "The Word of God", so He is also "The Son of God", God's personal self-expression on earth -- spiritually and not physically. To interpret the Holy Bible otherwise, is to misinterpret the Holy Bible.

Lesson 15

Light for the Gentiles

Do you remember the promise that God gave to Abraham: "By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves"? Jesus the Messiah was a descendant of Abraham and David. Through the Messiah God would fulfill all His promises of salvation.

In the previous lesson we saw how shepherds came to visit Jesus in Bethlehem shortly after His birth and how they shared the Good News of His coming with others. Shortly thereafter, when Jesus was in the Temple in the city of Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph, Simeon¹, a man who feared and loved and trusted God, took Jesus into his arms, praised God and prayed:

"Lord, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles (non-Jews)
and for glory to your people Israel."

Yet, it must be added, even while Jesus was still in Bethlehem, people from other nations came to visit Him. In the words of the Holy Bible:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East² came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it had been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the King, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the

¹ Not to be confused with Simon Peter, one of Jesus' twelve disciples.

² That is, a learned class from Persia, perhaps priests among the Medes, in any case clearly concerned with stars.

child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chest, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The wise men found great blessing in meeting Jesus the Messiah, Abraham's descendant. How happy they were to see the newborn Messiah! But Herod, the king, who ruled over the Jews, was not so happy. He insisted that he was king and no other king should take his place! Later, Herod even tried to kill the Messiah! Thanks be to God, he failed. Already, happily, some foreigners received the new king with joy; yet, sadly, already some of his own people began to oppose him.

With the wise men let us bring our hearts to the Messiah. In the words of the Psalm, let us praise God, the Saviour of all nations, and seek His blessed guidance:

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praise you.

Imagine yourself as one of the shepherds watching your sheep, or one of the wise men from the east invited to Bethlehem to meet the newborn Jesus. Would you wonder how you could meet Him, or if He was too big or too important to pay any attention to you? Would you have liked to have given Him a gift or even to have become His friend?

Lesson 16

When Jesus Was Twelve Years Old

For the Children of Israel there was no more important festival than the Passover Festival. As we saw in lesson 5, the Children of Israel celebrated their birthday every year as a free nation during the Passover Festival. On this day, they remembered how God through Moses had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. To commemorate the festival the people sacrificed a lamb. Then they remembered the blood of the lamb which their forefathers had smeared on their doorposts in Egypt in order that all their children escaped being killed in Egypt. This is why thousands of Jews, the Children of Israel, crowded into the Temple in Jerusalem for this festival.

The Holy Bible tells us how Jesus went to the house of worship with Mary and Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus:

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Jesus the Messiah loved to talk about God, discuss God's Holy Bible, His great commandments and His promises. I wonder how many of our youth -- our mothers and fathers too -- like to learn about God. So often we have time to learn about the things of this world, to study our school books, to watch cinema and TV, to read novels and newspapers, play sports, even to waste time and get into trouble. Or if we have a copy of the Holy Bible, do we regularly study it and try to understand and to practise its message? Or should we try to get a copy? Surely the Messiah sets us a good example for understanding and obedience also.

There was another special reason why Jesus the Messiah studied the Holy Bible. He knew that the Holy Bible spoke about the coming of the Messiah into the world, as God had promised through the prophets. He knew that He Himself as God's Messiah, had come from God as God's eternal Word into a temporal world for all people, God's self-expression of His love and care for

all. That is why the Messiah was especially happy to be in His Heavenly Father's house of worship and as a growing boy to be obedient to Him.

May we remember the words of the Psalm:

I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your Word.

Then you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind and your soul and you will love your neighbour as yourself. Then, also, would it be a good time to consider acquiring the Holy Bible and feed your soul, your heart and your mind? Or do you already have a copy? The Word of God, spiritual food for your spiritual welfare and growth, regularly. God talks to you. You respond in prayer.... Would you care to speak to your friend about this?

Lesson 17

Jesus the Messiah Prepares for His Ministry

Have you ever thought about all that God has done for you and has given you? He has created you: your body, mind and spirit; He has given you your family, your land and house, your food and drink, your clothes and all you possess. Not only does He give you these things; He proportions and preserves them for you, too. God is always giving and you are always receiving. How sensible and meaningful the Holy Bible's question: What do you have that you have not received! Then, why not, what do you do with what you have received?

From this we can learn a simple, yet important lesson which we should try hard to understand and not forget. The lesson is this: Since the Lord is always the giver and we are always the receivers, this means that the Lord God is always serving His servants! Did you ever think about God in this way? And why He does this? The answer: He wills to serve His servants because He loves them and cares for them. Out of His love He created us and is always taking care of us -- even when we are too foolish and too dull and too ungrateful to realise it!

God loves us! For this reason, too, God has sent His eternal Word, to live among us in this world as a human being, Jesus the Messiah. Yes, He became one of us! What better way for God to speak to us, to show us who He is and what He wants to do for us! We have already seen how this happened when the Messiah became a baby, then a youth and then a full-grown man. He ate, slept, played and worked. He understood the various stages of life through which people pass, the joys and sorrows which people experience. In every way He, the Word of God, was like all people, yet with one big difference: Among all people He alone was always perfectly obedient and completely sinless.

Perhaps we would expect a sinless Messiah to withdraw Himself from the rest of us who are sinners. But no, He had come into this world to befriend and to help sinners. For this reason the Messiah told the prophet John (lesson 13) that He wanted to be baptised, that is, the Messiah wanted to be washed in the waters in which sinners, who confessed their sins to the Lord God, were cleansed from their sin by the command and grace of God. John strongly objected; he said he should not baptise the Messiah, because he knew the Messiah was sinless. On the contrary, John added, the Messiah should baptise him.

Then, according to the Holy Bible, a most wonderful thing happened:

When Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, by whom Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, alighted upon the Messiah. As the Messiah heard the voice of His Heavenly Father, He surely remembered the words which God had spoken about Him through the prophet Isaiah:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations

Through the Messiah God would continue to serve humankind, as He promised those prophets of ancient times. How marvelous, indeed, that God's Word and Son had become God's Servant to bring righteousness and justice in our midst! The response, of course: Our Heavenly Father's love.

In the words of another Psalm, let us again praise God, our Saviour:

What shall I return to the Lord
for all His bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.

Lesson 18

Satan Comes to Jesus the Messiah

When Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, they lived a blessed life together in fellowship with God. Then the Tempter, Satan, came and sowed the seeds of disobedience, pride and idolatry in their hearts (lesson 2). Adam and Eve followed Satan's advice and thus they fell into sin. Before the judgement of God fell upon them, God promised them a Saviour who would also come into conflict with the Tempter. The time for that conflict had finally come.

As we all know, Satan is very crafty. He understood very well that Jesus the Messiah was God's Word, the Son of God, who had come into this world as the servant of God. He also knew that the Messiah possessed great power. As he tempted Adam, could he not tempt Jesus and sow the seeds of sin within the heart of the Messiah? He would tempt the Messiah to use His great power to serve Himself rather than His Father. He would tempt the Messiah to become King over men by using magic, war or any other doubtful means which the Heavenly Father would not approve. This is the account of the temptations according to the Holy Bible (Holy Injil):

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Iblis). He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written,

'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour, and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only Him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Adam and Eve had fallen into sin. But the Messiah overcame the temptations of Satan. He refused to disobey His Heavenly Father, to serve Himself or to use false means to become King of people's hearts. He had come into this world to serve and to do the will of His Father. Now the Messiah was ready to begin His ministry among the people in the world for the people of the world, His ministry as the Messiah. In short, Satan's devilish strategies failed. As we will see later, His ministry cost Him His life. It cost Him more than the metaphorical throwing of a rope to save a drowning child.

Be not deceived, my friend. As the Holy Bible says, Satan, like a roaring lion, seeks to devour whomever he can. Let us give thanks to God that for us also the Messiah has overcome the temptations of Satan. Let us ask God that the Messiah would help us also to overcome the temptations with which Satan confronts us.

Prayer: O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have sent the Messiah to overcome Satan rule and power over us. Mercifully protect us from falling into temptation, so that we may never be separated from You but always follow You. In the name of Jesus the Messiah, we pray. Amen.

Lesson 19

Jesus the Messiah Heals the Sick (1)

Jesus the Messiah was born in Bethlehem in the province of Judea. Most of His life, however, He spent in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. Jesus began His public ministry when He was about thirty years old. The Holy Bible (Holy Injil) gives us a brief summary of His healing ministry:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

Only the New Testament (Holy Injil) gives us full accounts of Jesus' healing ministry. This lesson and the following lessons will provide us some examples of how Jesus healed people. First the blind:

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Can you recall who David, mentioned above, was (lesson 7)? And would you have liked to be one of those who called the blind man: "Take heart; get up, He (Jesus) is calling you"? (Wow! I would still be bragging about it!)

Similarly Jesus healed the deaf and dumb:

Then Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

The following examples of how Jesus healed the sick are drawn from one chapter of the Holy Bible:

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve him.

That evening, at sundown, people brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him.

But why did Jesus the Messiah perform such great works? One reason, according to the Holy Bible, is the following:

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

While Jesus did these works, surely He also remembered other promises which God had spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame leap like a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.

Indeed, the healing ministry of Jesus the Messiah extended beyond His teaching ministry. Clearly His healing ministry did not intend to dramatise or self-aggrandise. Rather it revealed God's compassion for people, His care for their bodies, their minds and their souls, His identification with them in the person of Jesus the Messiah, Immanuel, God with us.

Your hand, O Lord, in days of old
Was strong to heal and save;
It triumphed over ills and death,
O'er darkness and the grave.
To You they came, the blind, the mute
The palsied and the lame,
The lepers in their misery,
The sick with fevered frame.

Your touch then, Lord, brought life and health,
Gave speech and strength and sight;
And youth renewed and frenzy calmed
Revealed You, Lord of light.
And now, O Lord, be near to bless,
Almighty as before,

In crowded street, by beds of pain,
As by Gennes'ret's shore.

O be our great deliv'rer still,
The Lord of life and death;
Restore and quicken, soothe and bless,
With Your life-giving breath.
To hands that work and eyes that see
Give wisdom's healing pow'r
That whole and sick and weak and strong
May praise You evermore.

Lesson 20

Jesus the Messiah Heals the Sick (2)

Jesus' healing ministry touched men, women and children. It touched Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), knowing no gender, racial or national boundaries. In this lesson we will share just a few more of Jesus' wonderful works of compassion, as recorded in the Holy Bible (Holy Injil).

A large crowd followed Jesus and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well. Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Clearly, here as elsewhere, Jesus healed by the power of God, not by magic or any power of evil. Here, too, Jesus commended the woman's faith in Him.

Then there is the remarkable incident, occasioned by the request of a Roman centurion to Jesus for help. Keep in mind that the centurion was a Roman army captain, not a Jew, and, hence, a representative of the Roman enemy rulers ruling over the Jews! Here is the account:

A centurion there (in Capernaum) had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus they appealed to him earnestly saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I am a man sent under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Just look at the centurion's faith in Jesus! Clearly he embraces a trust and confidence in God alone and in His grace, not in the idolatry of his fellow Romans, nor in his own good works, such as his prayers, fasts, and gifts to the poor, whether for Jews or for Romans.

Then there is Jesus' similarly amazing concern for the lepers, often seen as outcasts wherever they reside:

On the way to Galilee Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except the foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Once more Jesus demonstrates how He extends His healing not only to Jews but to Samaritans, half-brothers and often enemies of the Jews, the Children of Israel. But, significantly, as Jesus vividly indicates, only the Samaritan returned to give thanks. Is there a lesson for us here? (lesson 25)

How appropriate the verses of the following Psalm:

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
he sent out his Word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.
Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

Ponder: Elsewhere, the Holy Bible tells us how Jesus touched a leper while He healed him. Would you touch a leper? Would you pray for lepers? For their healing, for Leprosy Missions in countries which help lepers in Jesus' name? Would you wish to contact them?

Then may we also thank God for the many hospitals and schools of medicine throughout the world that in past and present reflect God's love and the Messiah's concern for the sick and the needy.

Lesson 21

Jesus the Messiah Heals Our Hearts

Have you ever asked yourself what you need most in this world? If you asked your friends this question, you would probably get many answers: for example your friends, honour, health, wealth, beauty, a good job, happiness, peace, education, good family. What would your answer be?

God's Holy Book tells us that our greatest need is a clean heart and a right relationship with God and the care for our neighbour. This is our greatest need just because our hearts are unclean and full of sin. "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse -- who can understand it?" asked the great prophet, Jeremiah (lesson 10). Sadly we all have left the straight path, gone astray and fallen into the ditch. If you think otherwise, ask yourself: Have I always loved God with all my heart and my neighbour as myself? Those Ten Commandments: Do I do what I should not do and do not do what I should do?

With our unclean hearts, then, how can we worship and have fellowship with God, who is always holy and just? How can we be good servants of God now? How can we stand before God on the Day of Judgement?

Sometimes we may think that the Messiah came into the world only to cure people's physical disease and to teach them God's commandments. In fact, as His name "Jesus" signifies (lesson 14), the Messiah came especially to save people from their sins, to give them God's forgiveness and to give them a new heart, a new life and a new relationship with God. How beautifully Jesus shows us this when He healed the man who was paralysed in body and in heart! As we read in the Holy Bible:

Then some people came, bringing to Jesus a paralysed man, carried by four of them. When they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes (religious leaders) were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man¹ has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- He said to the paralytic -- "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up and immediately took the mat

¹ Jesus the Messiah often called Himself "the Son of Man". He used this name for Himself, even as the prophet Daniel had called the Messiah, whose Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom (lesson 11).

and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The Messiah said that He, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sins. God forbid that Jesus would blaspheme, as the scribes thought. He proved His authority to forgive sins by healing the paralytic in his body also.

Indeed both works were the works of God. The scribes, it seems, forgot or did not understand the reference to the prophet Daniel about the Son of Man and that the Son of Man who spoke the word of God's forgiveness and healing was Himself the Word of God! (lesson 11).

Does this help you to understand your need for the forgiveness of your sins? And are you now beginning to see the way in which God grants you this most precious gift?

Consider: How many people in the world -- among them you, your family, and friends -- sincerely yearn for peace and contentment? Only through our Creator God's forgiveness can we experience true peace and contentment.

In the words of the Psalm let us also praise God who delivers us from sickness and sin:

Bless the Lord, O my soul
and all that is within me, bless His holy name
Bless the Lord, O my soul
and do not forget all His benefits --
who forgives all your iniquities,
who heals all your diseases
who redeems your life from the Pit
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Lesson 22

Jesus the Messiah Raises the Dead

In the previous lesson we learned that every person's greatest need is God's forgiveness of sin. We saw that it is impossible for people, with hearts corrupted by sin, to be good servants of God and to walk according to His commandments. On the Day of Judgement who can stand in the presence of the holy and righteous God in heaven with hearts diseased by disobedience and rebellion?

God's judgement upon sin is death. As God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel in ancient times in the Holy Bible: "The person who sins shall die." It speaks of death as "the last enemy". As surely as water makes us wet or fire burns us, so surely does sin kill us when it rules within our hearts. Sin makes us servants to Satan and obedient to his will and his commands. It makes us idolaters. That is why sin always sows the fruits of death within us.

Since we are sinners and since God's judgement upon sin is death, how can we escape eternal death? Is there no hope for us? By God's grace, there is hope. As Jesus the Messiah has power to forgive sins, so He has the power to remove the sting of death.

The Holy Bible actually records three incidents in which Jesus raised people from the dead. The following is one of these:

Jesus went down to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favourably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Can you imagine the sad scene: A mother, already widowed and now without her only son. Would not all her livelihood, security, hope and joy be buried with him in his grave? But, then, look at what happens when Jesus' compassion and power confront such a tragedy!

To the woman, Jesus the Messiah said: "Do not weep." To the dead man, He said: "I say to you, rise!" Yes, the Messiah can wipe away the tears of sorrow from our eyes. Even the powerful hand of death loosens its firm grip on us in obedience to the Messiah's command.

On another such occasion, the Holy Bible reports that a leader of a synagogue hurriedly came to Jesus, knelt before him and said, in the words of the Holy Bible:

"My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed her with his disciples When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

The people who witnessed either of these strange scenes correctly understood that the Messiah was the prophet whose coming Moses had proclaimed. Like Moses, the Messiah was also a son of the Children of Israel. Yet more, the people began to understand that in Jesus the Messiah, God Himself had visited His people! Indeed, as the eternal Word of God, Jesus the Messiah can truly speak this word of life:

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

In time of sorrow, despair and even death, the Messiah offers you this tremendous promise, hope and assurance of salvation. Could you memorise this verse? Then let us meditate upon these words from the Holy Bible:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Might we still comment: Is there anyone, reasonably stable, who has not wondered or pondered that, by all appearances in all places, ultimately we are in this world to live subsequently only to die? Yes, Jesus the Messiah challenges this conclusion and even reverses it, that is: We die to live, to live with Him.

Lesson 23

Jesus the Messiah Stills the Storm

In lesson 1 we learned that God created the world and all that is in it and belongs to it. It did not come into existence by itself. God created it; it all belongs to Him and He controls it. He kindly places us humans within His creation to be His tenants and puts all nature at our disposal, to use it and share it and, as a friend, not to abuse it. Indeed nature is our friend. Through nature God feeds and clothes us and gives us whatever we need to support ourselves. How thankful we should be! And, would you agree, humbly?

Yet, often we hear of violent storms, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, famines and plagues in nature which destroy life. Then, it appears, nature becomes our enemy. When such difficulties face us, we may wonder whether we are in the hand of fate. Or has God forsaken us? Does He no longer take care of us? (lesson 6)

In the past few lessons we read how Jesus demonstrated His power over those aspects of nature we know as disease, sickness and even death. What a blessing His power is! In this lesson He provides us with an example of how His control extends over all nature. At the same time He shows us how God takes care of us and asks us simply to trust Him. In the words of the Holy Bible:

When he (Jesus) got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he (Jesus) was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Where was the faith of the Messiah's disciples? With the Messiah in their boat why should they fear the violent storm?

Let us look into our hearts to see if we can find faith there. If Jesus the Messiah is present with us, why should we fear the storms which arise in our lives, when we know the winds and the sea obey Him? When troubles come to us, why should we think that perhaps God does not care for us or that we are simply in the hands of fate? Should we not remember that God rules over all nature through His eternal and mighty Word? And through His Word, the Messiah, He cares for every one of us!

Indeed, these past few lessons have revealed a few of the great works of the Messiah. All these works are signs which direct people to the Messiah Himself. They show that the Messiah is indeed the King whom God had promised through the prophets. These signs call all people to

turn to God and His Word and to turn from their evil ways. They invite all of us to trust in God and His Word of salvation.

In time of sorrow, doubt and despair, let us be confident in God and joyfully confess these words of the Holy Bible:

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a proclamation: God's love and the dimensions of His love! Could you, should you share this proclamation? Given such love, would He wish to be your Heavenly Father and to have you call Him your heavenly Father?

Lesson 24

Jesus the Messiah Teaches and Preaches

As God's Messiah and His Word, Jesus brought the Kingdom of God into our world through His preaching, teaching and actions. In the past few lessons we have experienced Jesus in action: His power over nature, His healing of our sickness, His control even over death. In this and the next few lessons we learn more about the Kingdom of God through His teaching and preaching. The following few examples are in Jesus' own words, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

Faith in the Lord God, the Heavenly Father:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear Your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (lesson 8). God is good.

Idolatry:

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Killing:

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with a brother or sister shall be liable to judgement"

Adultery:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at women with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Charity:

"Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Heavenly Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Prayer:

"And wherever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogue and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly, I tell you, they

have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Fasting:

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Love:

"You may have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?"

"I give you a new commandment, that you may love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Teaching about Jesus' Teaching:

Again the Holy Bible refers to Jesus and His disciples as they move from village to village:

"Now as they went on their way, he (Jesus) entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

If you have a copy of the Holy Bible, it may be of interest to you to note references to other women also who listened to Jesus the Messiah and became His disciples.

The Little Children:

"Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs."

The Messiah Jesus always practised what He preached. The Messiah understood that God has spoken through the prophets about His coming and His service to mankind. He Himself perfectly obeyed the Law of God for us and brought the promises of God's salvation to us. The Messiah thus told His disciples:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we praise You that You have given us Your Holy Bible in our language for our learning. Graciously grant us your Holy Spirit that we may read, understand and share Your message of guidance and salvation. Mercifully help us as our Heavenly Father to become Your spiritual sons and daughters so that we may faithfully and gladly serve You and our neighbours also. In the name of Jesus the Messiah we pray. Amen.

Lesson 25

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Previous lessons have offered us a brief overview on some of the key teachings of Jesus that characterise the Kingdom of God. In this lesson Jesus demonstrates how these teachings are not merely taught and learned but also practised. What is the point of learning about a violin or a piano but not playing it? Or learning about good food but not tasting or eating it?

I wonder if there is any parable in the world which is so widely spread and yet in many ways as little understood as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When Jesus told the parable, His Jewish compatriots easily understood it. But in our world today it often requires explanation. Here is the parable:

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He (Jesus) said to him, "What is written in the Law? What do you read there?" He (the lawyer) answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you must love your neighbour as you love yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down to Jerusalem from Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half-dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii (two days wages), gave them to pay the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour of the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Indeed, Jesus says, as you have correctly quoted from the Holy Bible (Torah; Tawrat), "Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbour as yourself and you shall inherit eternal life." Still, the lawyer may have felt it his obligation to determine who qualifies, who is and who is not his neighbour: relatives and friends within the Jewish community, but surely not robbers, prostitutes, heretics, traitors and other such sinners, not to speak of foreigners and especially open enemies among them!

Perhaps the following comments may add to the clarification of Jesus' parable and Jesus' response to the lawyer:

1. In this parable Jesus is responding to a Jewish lawyer who asks Jesus what it means to be a neighbour.
2. Generally the Jews despise the Samaritans, considering them to be enemies, an inferior people, a people who had turned from God and His commandments.
3. The Jerusalem-Jericho road was a dangerous road to travel in those days
4. In the parable, it was probably a Jew (though this is not clear) who was robbed and wounded. In his condition it would have been difficult to identify him.
5. In any case, the Samaritan focussed *on the needs of the wounded man* (his wounds and their treatment), *not on who the wounded man is* (his tribe, caste, colour, religion, a friend or an enemy) -- and *not even on his own personal safety* on that dangerous road!
6. Should not the priest and Levite, as religious leaders of the Jews, have been the first to have helped the wounded man?
7. But it was a Samaritan, a member of the alleged enemy of the Jews and the Jewish lawyer, who helped the wounded man.

The following event also adds to our understanding of the parable. Jesus and some of His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, the city of the Jews. Then, the Holy Bible continues:

And he (Jesus) sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he (Jesus) turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

Jesus turned and rebuked his disciples. How often Jesus notes that He has come not to destroy but to give life.

Indeed, the lawyer correctly answered Jesus that the Samaritan, not the Jew, was neighbour to the beaten man. Briefly summarised, Jesus states in this parable that God's mercy is not confined. His goodness extends to all kinds of people, to all nations, to all men and women, to the rich and to the poor. Hence, He tells us, do not confine your mercy to your family, your people, your co-religionists. Extend your kindness to the stranger, even to those unkind to you. Be like the good Samaritan!

Finally, then, what are we to think about the lawyer's quest for inheriting eternal life? If all the lawyer's works (his good works, his bad works and his neglected works) resemble the works of the rest of us, like the rest of us also he had better turn to God's grace rather than to his own works to inherit eternal life.

Indeed, as we proceed in our study, it should become clear how only God alone can forgive, save us and provide us with eternal life!

Does all this help you recall the lesson on Moses and the Ten Commandments? (lesson 5)

Ponder: if God is present to help us, surely He is present also to help us love, or learn to love, our enemy.

Lesson 26

Jesus the Messiah Seeks the Lost

Have you ever met people who thought they were better and more important than other people? Among the Jewish religious leaders there was such a group of people called the Pharisees. Many of them thought: "Since we are descendants of Abraham, by birth God has made us better than other people. We know the law better and we keep it better than other people. Look at how often we pray, fast and give alms! Because we do so many good works, God blesses us and exalts us above other people. We are not sinners like other people. Such people we avoid." Sound familiar? If not verbally, perhaps mentally?

Do you think that God was pleased with these Pharisees? Really, they boasted much and their hearts were full of pride. Though they praised God with their tongues, they were really praising themselves and their good works. Such self-praise, of course, is just another form of idolatry.

When the Messiah associated with sinners, the Pharisees objected. How could He be a prophet, a religious leader, if He did not avoid sinners? Through several parables Jesus showed the Pharisees why He associated with sinners. We read in the Holy Bible:

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him (Jesus). And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "Which of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

If a man searches out his lost sheep and a woman her lost coin, will not God search out people, both men and women whom He has created, men and women who are lost because they have sinned against God? Yes, God loves sinners -- though that, of course, does not mean that God is pleased that we sin and with the sin! Moreover, lest we forget, God calculates not only our sins of commission but also our sins of omission. God turns to every sinner and calls the sinner to repent and to turn to Him, the Heavenly Father.

As the work of a doctor is to cure the sick, said Jesus the Messiah, so He had come to remove the disease of sin from the hearts of sinners and call them to repentance. Whether or not the Pharisees realised it, the Messiah was calling them also to repentance. He wanted to heal their hearts from that ugly sin of pride. He wanted to fill their hearts with love for God and for their sinful neighbours, neighbours sinful just like themselves.

Let us meditate upon the words of one of Jesus the Messiah's apostles, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners.

Space allowing here, may we refer to a heated conversation between two priests/gurus/imams etc. When one of them concluded: "But I am more holy than you!..." Would you mind responding on behalf of the other one?

Lesson 27

Jesus the Messiah Teaches Forgiveness

Have you ever been able to forgive with your whole heart someone who has badly hurt or offended you? Perhaps there seems to be nothing more difficult in the world. It is usually much easier to pray, to fast or to give alms than to forgive our neighbour his fault. Or even just to be angry and to hate the neighbour.

But let us think how often we sin against God. We cannot even understand how often we sin against Him and how much we hurt and offend Him. Yet we know how greatly we need and expect His forgiveness. Without His forgiveness we cannot live before Him, for He is holy, righteous. Or worse, perhaps, that we just ignore Him.

Now if we expect God to forgive our sins, should we not be ready to forgive our neighbour who sins against us? Jesus once told His disciples a beautiful parable about forgiveness. In it He compares sin with a debt. It is thus recorded in the Holy Bible:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."

Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents¹; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred denarii² and seizing him by the throat said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servant saw what had happened they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, until he would pay all of his debt."

How great is our sin against the holy God! And how little our neighbour's sin against us! Surely the forgiveness of God also gives us forgiving hearts so that we can truly forgive our pleading

¹ 10,000 talents = lots of money

² 100 denarii = about Rs. 500

neighbour. But if we do not forgive our neighbour, we show that we trivialise the forgiveness which God freely offers us by sending the Messiah, the Saviour from sin.

Then, lest we forget the following event noted in the Holy Bible:

Early in the morning he (Jesus) came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again."

Still one more useful passage from the Holy Bible:

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ....

"Forgive our sins as we forgive,"
You taught us, Lord, to pray;
But You alone can grant us grace
To live the words we say.

How can Your pardon reach and bless
The unforgiving heart
That broods on wrongs and will not let
Old bitterness depart.

In blazing light Your cross reveals
The truth we dimly knew:
What trivial debts are owed to us,
How great our debt to You!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls
And bid resentment cease;
Then, bound to all in bonds of love,
Our lives will spread Your peace.

Prayer:

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, through Your mercy revealed to us in Jesus the Messiah we beseech You to forgive us our sins against You. So open and rule our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may gladly and willingly love and forgive those who sin against us. In the name of our Saviour, Jesus the Messiah, we pray. Amen.

Lesson 28

Jesus the Messiah Calls His Disciples

Jesus the Messiah knew that He had come into this world from God and that after some time He was going back to God. After His work on earth was finished, He would need men and women to tell others what He did and said while He was on earth. That is why the Messiah called disciples, about whom we have already heard something.

Many people followed the Messiah when He did His wonderful works. But so often they were more interested in His works than in the Messiah Himself. They were ready to follow the Messiah as long as He helped them in their physical difficulties. But they were not ready for the Messiah to change their selfish hearts in order that they could serve God and their neighbour. So Jesus called a group of twelve special disciples to follow Him. Later eleven of them became apostles (which means 'sent ones'). Let us see how the Messiah called some of these disciples. According to the Holy Bible:

As he (Jesus) walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

And he (Jesus) found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ... Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth"

Most of the Messiah's disciples were simple people. They were not highly educated or important men in the community. In fact some of them were despised as sinners. Such men the Messiah called to follow Him. He sought only that they would trust Him, not in themselves and their good works. Then they too would serve others and call them to repent and follow the Messiah.

The Messiah spent much time teaching and preparing these special disciples to serve in the Kingdom of God. For their service He never promised them riches, glory and honour in this world. In fact He told them they should be ready to suffer and be persecuted for His sake, just as He Himself would be persecuted and suffer. Throughout His teaching He especially reminded them how closely they were all united with Him and with one another and how they should love all humankind as He loved all humankind.

Said the Messiah, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing: but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

"Follow me." These are words spoken by the Word of God, Jesus the Messiah. He speaks these same words to us today. He calls you also to become His disciple and friend, to share in His joy and to serve in the Kingdom of God. Like Philip, could you tell your friends that the Messiah, whom God promised through Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and the prophets, has come into your heart? (lessons 1-12)

Then look again at the above Bible quotations: "that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Just one more measure of the nature of love and a clue to the rationale of Jesus the Messiah's personal sacrifice on the cross.

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank You that through Your Holy Word, Jesus the Messiah, You have called us to follow You. Grant us Your power and grace to be true disciples and friends of the Messiah so that we may love one another as He has loved us. In the name of the Messiah we pray. Amen.

Lesson 29

Obstacles to Discipleship

Rachel, the wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph, knew that she should worship and serve the Lord God only. But one day she was surprised when it was discovered that she had an idol hidden near her which she cared for very much.

Now why is it that people, even though they know that they should worship and serve God alone, make idols to worship and serve? Why do people so often choose their own guidance rather than the will and guidance of God? Like the prophet Jeremiah, Jesus the Messiah pointed to people's evil hearts as the source of idolatry, disobedience and all other sins. In the words of the Holy Bible:

He (Jesus) called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand; there is nothing outside a person which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a person are what defiles the person." And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile the person, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and so passes on?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles a person. For from within, out of the heart of a person, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Because people's hearts are evil, people sin (lesson 2). For this same reason people make idols which they cherish and worship. People's idolatry is a sign of their ingratitude to God. May God preserve us from it.

But people do not make idols from wood, stone and metal only. Nor do they choose only the sun, the moon and the stars for worship. How many people make idols of fortune, fame and glory, or nation, friends and family! So often the heart treasures what God has created more than the Creator Himself.

Still one more idol remains which people may make and treasure above all idols. This idol, which is also not made from stone or metal, is so near us, yet often even better hidden from our sight than Rachel's idol. But here is how to find it. Look into your mirror and honestly ask yourself; "Do I love God with my whole heart and trust Him above all things? Do I love my neighbour as myself?" To these questions I fear that we all must answer: "No." Now as you look at yourself in the mirror and hear your answer, "No", you will detect this idol. Yes, as strange as it may sound, the idol is yourself.

How many idols people can make for themselves which keep them from God and hinder them from following His Word, the Messiah! This is why the Messiah told His disciples:

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

Says the Holy Bible to all of us:

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Give thanks to the Lord because He is good;
his love is eternal.

Give thanks to the greatest of all gods;
his love is eternal.

Give thanks to the mightiest of all lords;
his love is eternal.

He alone performs great miracles;
his love is eternal.

By his wisdom he made the heavens;
his love is eternal;

he built the earth on the deep waters;
his love is eternal.

He made the sun and the moon;
his love is eternal;

the sun to rule over the day;
his love is eternal;

the moon and the stars to rule over the night;
his love is eternal.

Prayer: Almighty God, Creator of the world and our Creator, purify our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, so that we may forsake all idols and seek refuge in You. Grant us grace and power to praise and worship You alone with joy and thanksgiving. In the name of Jesus the Messiah we pray. Amen.

Lesson 30

What Sort of Man Is This?

"What sort of man is this?" This question the disciples of Jesus asked themselves after the Messiah had stilled the stormy sea (lesson 23). How often they must have asked themselves this same question when they heard the wonderful teaching and saw the great works of the Messiah. When He healed the sick or even raised the dead to life, He needed only to say: "I say to you" He even had the power to forgive sins!

Now the disciples knew that Jesus was also a human being and even a prophet about whom Moses and other prophets spoke. But could it be possible that He was even more than a prophet, yes, even the Messiah whom God had promised through previous prophets? If you had been with Jesus, surely you would have asked yourself the same question.

The Messiah knew that His disciples often considered who He was. And so one day He asked them this question. Here is the account according to the Holy Bible:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah (Simon son of Peter)! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Not John, nor just another prophet, but the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God! Simon Peter did not confess that Jesus was only a prophet who spoke about the coming of the King and the Kingdom of God; Simon Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the King Himself. Nor did Simon Peter confess that Jesus was only a prophet who spoke only the words of God; Peter confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, God's Word, who had come out of God and into this world. Simon Peter had begun to understand the blessed truth that in the Messiah, God Himself is with us, speaks to us and acts among us. In Jesus the Messiah, God Himself is present. This great truth Simon Peter, the simple fisherman, had begun to grasp. But he understood only because God, not people or all the wisdom of this world, had revealed it to him.

Once, when people rejected Him and refused to repent, the Messiah spoke these words as recorded in the Holy Bible:

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my

yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What tremendous claims Jesus the Messiah makes about Himself! Because He is the Messiah, He is able to give you the rest and the peace He promises you. Will you come to Him and accept Him as your Saviour and King? Through Him you too can become a child of your Heavenly Father.

Let us ponder other words of the Holy Bible:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

Still there remains much more to tell about who Jesus the Messiah is, what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, what He teaches and preaches and how He practises what He teaches and preaches, the great works He has done -- and, at the same time, to recollect clues the earlier prophets have provided with reference to the Messiah's person and work.

Lesson 31

Jesus the Messiah as the Good Shepherd

Do you remember the story of David, the humble shepherd boy, who became king of the Children of Israel? Like other shepherd boys at that time, David loved his sheep very much. He knew his sheep by name, he went before them as he led them to fresh pasture and he even risked his life to save them from the bear and the lion. His voice alone the sheep recognised. No other shepherd would they follow. When David became king of Israel, how often he would recall the happy days of his youth as a shepherd (lesson 7)!

How strange that David, a humble shepherd, should become king of a great nation! Stranger, however, the story of the King who came from heaven to become a humble shepherd. Strangest of all that this King, who became the shepherd, also became the Lamb who sacrificed His life for the flock. This strangest of strange stories is the story of Jesus the Messiah whom God had promised to David as David's descendant. Hear the words of the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, as they are recorded in the Holy Bible:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

Read this passage again and count how many times the good shepherd says that He lays down His life for his sheep! One, two, three, ... as if He wishes to show us that His most important work is to sacrifice Himself for His sheep; as if He were saying to us: Just as the prophet John the Baptist told you, I am the Lamb that gives His life into death so that my sheep may escape from the vicious wolf (lesson 13).

The Messiah is our Good Shepherd too. For us also He has become the Lamb of God who lays down His life to free us from the clutches of Satan, sin and death. By His life He serves us. Yet, even more, by His death He serves us so that we may have life!

But this is not the end of the story. He lays down His life, He says, in order that He may take it again! To show us that through His death He is the victor over the powers of evil, He rises from

the dead. That is why He is our living Messiah, our living King, whom we can trust to be our Saviour.

As the prophet Isaiah said about the Messiah in the Holy Bible:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to one's own way; and the Lord has laid on him (the Messiah) the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

Yes, what sort of person is the Messiah and what does He do? He is both shepherd and sheep! His story is not simply story imagined but story that happened, that was revealed, real, and is history. Yes, History! Fact, not fiction!

Christ our human likeness sharing,
Heaven's love on earth portrayed;
Christ the Shepherd tending, caring,
In His death our ransom paid:
Christ the Saviour, Christ the Servant
Be Your life in us displayed.

Hear the word that Christ has spoken,
Help the weak, the hungry feed;
See the pow'rs of darkness broken,
Sinners pardoned, captives freed:
Christ the Saviour, Christ the Servant,
Help us meet our neighbour's need.

Christ, in ev'ry congregation
Build Your temple, stone by stone,
With Your word as firm foundation
For a faith matured and grown:
Christ the Saviour, Christ the Servant,
Make in us Your Gospel known.

Come, O living Christ, renew us,
As of old in wind and flame;
With the Spirit's pow'r endue us,
Servants of Your saving name:
Christ the Saviour, Christ the Servant,
Christ whose kingdom we proclaim.

Lesson 32

Jesus the Messiah as the Living Bread

The hour was late. The place was lonely. The vast crowd, who had come great distances to ask Jesus the Messiah to heal their sick and to hear Him preach, were hungry. One lad among them had provisions: five barley loaves and two fish. He was probably a little surprised -- and happy -- too, that the Messiah asked him for his food. But he was much more surprised and even happier when he saw the Messiah bless his food, distribute it through the Messiah's disciples and with it feed more than five thousand people! After all the people ate as much as they wanted, twelve baskets of fragments remained!

Perhaps no one was surprised that the people immediately tried to make Jesus the Messiah their king. But what kind of a king did they want to make Him? Jesus knew the answer to this question. The matter is thus recorded in the Holy Bible:

Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you; for on him has God the Father set his seal.

"I am the bread of life. Your Fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Messiah, the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep so that they may not perish! The Messiah, the Bread of Life, whose body is broken so that the world may have life! Even though death and the grave overcome us, we who partake of the Bread of Life have eternal life. Through His broken body He breaks the power of death and the grave.

Yes, it is Jesus the Messiah Himself whom we are to seek. By trusting Him and becoming His disciples, we partake of Him. Through fellowship with Him we can really know God, take measure of God's love for us and experience Him as our Heavenly Father, ourselves His children, each one of us His child, each child precious.

Meanwhile, the Messiah reminds us through this sign that He also knows our daily needs while we remain on this earth. He, who can heal our sicknesses and can still the winds and the storm, can free us from the pangs of hunger with daily bread.

Consider once more what the Messiah can do with five loaves and two fish. After the Messiah fed this great crowd with the young lad's food, perhaps the young lad also gave himself to the

Messiah. But this the Holy Bible does not tell us. In any case you know that you can give yourself to Him, as He has given Himself to you. No matter how poor or humble you and your possessions may be, just imagine what He can do when you put yourself and your possessions into His hands.

Said God through the prophet Isaiah in the Holy Bible:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come by and eat! ...
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David."

Lesson 33

Jesus the Messiah as Judge on Judgement Day

The Messiah Jesus taught His disciples much about the resurrection from the dead and the Day of Judgement. Said He:

"Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

When the Messiah first left heaven to come into this world, He came in all humility as a little child, born in the town of Bethlehem. Hardly anyone knew He had come. But on the Day of Judgement we will see Him return in glory with all the angels and heavenly powers at His command. When the Good Shepherd came into this world, He came to lay down His life. When He comes again, He will separate the sheep from the goats. All nations and all people He will judge. Said the Messiah:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothed you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my family members, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty or a stranger, or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Surely, on the basis of this discourse, we may add "Judge on Judgement Day" to the list of Jesus the Messiah's divine activities -- and if necessary, Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (lesson 25).

My friend, are you ready for the Messiah's Second Coming? On that day He will finish the work He began when He first came into our world. Do you understand that as you treat your

neighbour now, you are treating the Messiah also? For as the Son of Man who is King of the eternal Kingdom, the Messiah is the representative of every person.

Prayer:

Almighty God, our living Heavenly Father, rule our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit so that we may be ever ready for the Messiah's Second Coming and the Day of Your just Judgement. Grant us Your grace so that we may faithfully use those gifts You have given us in service to You and to our neighbour. In the name of the Messiah we pray. Amen.

Lesson 34

The Disciples Oppose Jesus the Messiah

We have seen how the twelve disciples of Jesus the Messiah had confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. But when the Messiah told the disciples that as the Messiah He must suffer, die and rise from the dead, they began to quarrel with the Messiah. How could their King, on whom the favour of the Heavenly Father rests, suffer and die? In no way is the Heavenly Father so weak! The Messiah's conversation with His disciples is thus recorded in the Holy Bible:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are not on the side of God, but of people.

Not only might the disciples of Jesus quarrel with the Messiah, as did Peter. It is also clear that they engaged in quarrelling among themselves about their own status under the Messiah's rule. The Holy Bible records one such struggle and the Messiah's response:

And the disciples James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?"¹ And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to grant but it is for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard it they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles (non-Jews) lord it over them, and their great men are tyrants over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Yes, Satan was certainly active among the Messiah's disciples also. What more suitable people in whom to plant the seed of opposition to the Messiah, thought Satan. Let the disciples follow the Messiah to serve not God and their neighbours but to serve themselves, their own

¹ That is, can you accept persecution and suffering?

ambitions, their own stomachs, their own glory. In that case, thought Satan, though they think that they are following the Messiah, they are really following Satan.

People think that kings are to be served and not to serve. But in fact the Messiah has come to serve and not to be served. He has come to serve His subjects by giving His life to release them from the slavery of Satan, from sin and death. This is why the Messiah is also called the servant of God by the prophets (lesson 9). As the Servant of God He is our Messiah and Lord.

May God preserve us from the wiles of Satan when Satan tempts us, as he tempted Peter to deny that the Messiah must die. For if the Messiah did not die for us, then He is not our Messiah. Nor is He the Son and servant of God who submits Himself to the will of His Father even unto death.

Let us meditate upon these words of the Holy Bible:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich."

How strange Jesus, our Messiah! How central the love and righteousness of God and His self-revelation in Jesus the Messiah!

Lesson 35

Other Opponents of Jesus the Messiah

As darkness opposes light, so people have misunderstood and opposed Jesus the Messiah. When the Messiah was an infant, the wicked King Herod tried to kill Him (lesson 15). Even Mary and Joseph did not understand the twelve year old Messiah in His Heavenly Father's house (lesson 16). When He was about to begin His ministry, Satan tempted Him (lesson 17). When He preached in His hometown of Nazareth, His own people rejected Him. Toward the end of His life on earth, His disciples were few. As already indicated, His special twelve disciples even misunderstood Him (lesson 32) and one of them, Peter, rebuked Him.

The religious leaders of the Jews also opposed Jesus as the Messiah. Said these leaders: "This Jesus breaks the law of the Sabbath¹ rest by healing people on the Sabbath; He does not keep all the traditions of the elders; He associates with sinners; He blasphemes when He claims authority to forgive people their sins." (Most of these objections against Jesus the Messiah you may recall from previous lessons.)

Jesus the Messiah knew that the religious leaders were even plotting to put Him to death. In the following parable recorded in the Holy Bible, the Messiah tells them that they would succeed -- yes, succeed in killing their Messiah:

"There was a householder who planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, built a tower, lent it out to tenants and went into another country. When the harvest time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. But the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' So they took him, cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits at harvest."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

'The very stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner;
this was the Lord's doing
and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

¹ The seventh day, Saturday, in the week; the day of rest.

The Heavenly Father had planted a vineyard, the nation Israel. Repeatedly He sent His servants, the prophets, to call the people to repentance and obedience to God. These servants, the Children of Israel, persecuted and even killed. At last, the Heavenly Father sent His Son, the Messiah. But Him they also killed.

The religious leaders clearly understood the parable. Burning with rage and firmly convinced that Jesus was not their Messiah and the Son of God, they sought to arrest Him. Said the Messiah:

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate."

Lesson 36

The Messiah Enters Jerusalem

In ancient times when a king conquered the country of his enemy, he marched through the capital city so that all the people might know that he was victorious. As he rode on a white stallion, trumpets sounded his coming. Soldiers bearing polished swords and wearing shining armour surrounded the king. Everyone bowed low before him.

Only five days before Good Friday¹, the Messiah told His disciples that it was time for Him to enter Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews. He wanted to show the people that He was King. The Holy Bible records this strange sight the people saw when the Messiah entered Jerusalem:

When they had come near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the prophet, saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
'Look, your King is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their garments on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted,

"Hosanna² to the Son of David!
Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!"

Instead of riding on a white stallion, the Messiah rode on a humble donkey. Instead of trumpets, only voices shouted blessings upon the Son of David, the promised Messiah. Instead of soldiers, humble disciples surrounded Him. Instead of gleaming swords and shining armour, they wore ordinary clothes and carried palm leaves. Surely the King, who praised the gentle and the humble, was Himself gentle and lowly in heart. Yet through His lowliness we see His greatness. His humble entry into Jerusalem is the sign of His majesty.

¹ Or, more clearly, the "bad Friday" that soon revealed itself as Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified.

² Hosanna = "save, we pray".

The Messiah, too, entered the house of worship. He drove out the money-changers and the merchants who used the house of worship for their own gain -- but not with soldiers and swords. The Messiah reminded them of the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "My (God's) house shall be called a house of prayer."

When the Messiah was in Jerusalem, the great and noble people of the land did not bow before the Messiah. But the blind and the lame came. And them He healed. That same night when His work was finished, the King immediately left the city.

Now turn back to lesson 12. From this lesson you will understand the Messiah's humble entry into Jerusalem. The Messiah knew He was fulfilling the promise of God which He made through the prophet Zechariah.

O that we, too, would understand the greatness of lowliness, the majesty of humility! Indeed, this is the way of God Most High.

Elsewhere, the Holy Bible says:

... Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you.

Lesson 37

The Lord's Supper

During their annual Passover Festival, the Children of Israel remembered how God delivered them from the land of Egypt. They also remembered how God made a covenant with them and gave them His commandments at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness (lesson 5). The Children of Israel were always to remember God's salvation and obey His commandments. But, sadly, how often they broke this covenant!

Four days after the Messiah entered Jerusalem on a donkey, He returned to celebrate the Passover Festival with His disciples. He knew that it would be His last supper with His disciples before He would die. He therefore celebrated it in a most remarkable way. Jesus said:

"Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The teacher says, my time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" The disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were greatly distressed, and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man to have not been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely, not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I shall never drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

During the Passover meal the Messiah was making a new covenant with His disciples. He was giving them His body which was to be broken for them. He was giving them His blood, His life, for the forgiveness of their sins. Would not the disciples remember Him as the Bread of Life and the Lamb of God?

A new covenant. The Messiah was fulfilling the promise of God's new covenant which God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah (lesson 10). Because of this new covenant, God would write His law on the hearts of men and women and forgive them their sins. As the first covenant between God and the Children of Israel was sealed with the blood of the lamb, this new covenant was also to be sealed with blood -- the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus the Messiah.

How humble this supper which Jesus the Messiah ate with His disciples! Yet never has there been a more glorious feast on earth -- better described as "heavenly", for from heaven the Messiah came to earth and soon would return to heaven. Ever since the Messiah's Last Supper, the disciples of the Messiah have regularly celebrated this heavenly feast according to the Lord's command. With grateful hearts, they remembered how the Lord poured out His life into death for them. And this is why God's Book, the Holy Bible, is called The New Covenant or The New Testament, a portion of God's Holy Bible.

Praise be to God for the promise of this New Covenant, which He made through the prophet Isaiah also. As we read in the Holy Bible:

"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations."

1. Cup of blessing that we share, Does it not his grace declare?
Is it not the blood of Christ Who for us was sacrificed?
As one body, we are fed; Christ we share, one cup one bread.
2. Is it not one bread we break? Of his body all partake.
Casting out distrust and fear, let us love with hearts sincere.
One by God's design are we; let us live in unity.

Lesson 38

Jesus the Messiah is Betrayed

After Jesus the Messiah had finished His Last Supper with His disciples, He went to a lonely garden to pray. He asked His Heavenly Father to strengthen Him in His final hours. For He knew that His death, however violent it would be, would be more than a violent death; He would die for the sins of people. He would die not merely as a martyr, but as the people's Saviour from all the powers of evil. He who did no sin would die in the place of sinners, the righteous for the sinners, the motivation the love of God the Heavenly Father.

The hour had come. The Messiah told His disciples that Judas, His disciple, was about to betray Him. The Holy Bible continues:

While he (Jesus) was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Hail Master!" And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

The religious leaders of the people and the elders, men renowned for their knowledge of the law and respected for their piety, conspired with a disciple of the Messiah, Judas Iscariot, to put the Messiah to death. With soldiers armed with swords and clubs, Judas approached the Messiah as though the Messiah were a dangerous criminal. He betrayed the Messiah with a kiss!

In a moment of bravery -- or was it bravery? -- one of Jesus the Messiah's disciples drew a sword. Soon the disciples fled. But the Messiah refused to defend Himself or spread His Kingdom by the power of the sword or all the heavenly angels. Once more, He had refused this temptation from Satan. He knew that He would be seized and killed by sinners who thought that He was a sinner. In this way He would fulfill the Holy Scriptures.

Surely in this dark hour Jesus the Messiah remembered how God spoke about Him through the prophet Isaiah in the Holy Bible:

By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

Lesson 39

Jesus the Messiah Before the Religious Leaders

When the soldiers brought Jesus the Messiah to the Jewish religious leaders and the elders that Thursday night, they were all gathered to put Jesus on trial. They had called several witnesses to speak against the Messiah. But their testimony was either false or they could not agree. Meanwhile the Messiah remained silent. It was obvious that the Messiah was innocent.

Yet the trial did not close. The chief religious leader, the high priest, had one question to ask. In the words of the Holy Bible:

"Are you the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed One?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his mantle, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? What is your decision?" They all condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards took him over and beat him.

Jesus openly confessed that He was the Christ (the Messiah, King), the Son of the Blessed. But what did He mean by this confession? Did He mean that He was a king like other kings in this world? Indeed not! Did He mean that God took a wife and He was Son of God as we are children of our mothers and fathers? God forbid! As Messiah He confessed that He was the King whom God through the prophets had promised to send into this world. As Son He confessed that He was the eternal Word of God who had come out of God and had come into this world as a man to show us God's nature and His salvation, God's righteousness and love.

The Messiah's confession continued. He claimed to be the Son of Man also about whom God had spoken through the prophet Daniel (lesson 11). His Kingdom is eternal. The day would come when, with all the angels of heaven, He would come to judge the world. On that Day of Judgement the Son of Man would judge those also who were judging Him now (lesson 33).

Now let us understand this matter clearly. The Jewish leaders did not deny that the prophets spoke about the coming Messiah. They knew and agreed that the Messiah should also be called the Son of Man and the Son of God. About what, then, did they object. The religious leaders objected that this humble and despised man, Jesus of Nazareth, would dare to call Himself the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. According to the religious leaders, He spoke blasphemy. Because of this blasphemy, they thought that He should die. In any case, how could this Jesus, unarmed and without an army, overthrow the Romans who ruled the nation!?

Do we now understand why the Jewish religious leaders wished to put Jesus the Messiah to death? The Messiah had confessed about Himself what His disciple, Peter, confessed before the Messiah: He is the Messiah, the Son of God. But the eyes and minds of the religious leaders

focussed on their nation and themselves as leaders of their nation -- devoid of and free from Roman ruler and Roman soldiers. They did not understand or wish to understand the true nature of Jesus' Messiahship.

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, guide our minds and hearts by your Holy Spirit, that we may recognise Jesus the Messiah as your Son and receive him as our King and Saviour. In the name of Jesus the Messiah we pray. Amen.

Lesson 40

Jesus the Messiah Condemned, Crucified, and Entombed

It was now very early Friday morning. The Jewish leaders quickly led Jesus the Messiah to the Roman governor, Pilate, who ruled over the Jews. They told Pilate that the Messiah was worthy of death because He called Himself a king. "Only the Roman king rules over us Jews," they said. "This Jesus is not the Messiah, our King." So Pilate examined the Messiah. The Holy Bible records this event as follows:

Pilate entered the praetorium again, called Jesus and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Pilate knew that Jesus the Messiah was innocent. Without an army how could He fight against the Roman king? Even Pilate's wife related that in a dream she saw that the Messiah was a just man. But when Pilate tried to release the Messiah, the Jewish chief priests and officers cried out: "He has called himself the Son of God. Away with him! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar (the Roman ruler)." Then Pilate, fearing the people, handed Jesus the Messiah over to the religious leaders to be crucified. The Holy Bible says:

So they took Jesus and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of the Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgatha. There they crucified him After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of sour wine stood there. So they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The Messiah had died on the horrible cross. Even while suffering the torment of the cross, the Messiah prayed for his enemies: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." After Jesus died, a rich man, Joseph, with Nicodemus, both secret disciples of the Messiah, obtained permission from Pilate to bury the body of the Messiah in Joseph's fine tomb. As the Holy Bible states:

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the

garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. So because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Perhaps Joseph and Nicodemus remembered the words which God revealed through the prophet Isaiah in the Holy Bible:

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

"What is truth?" Pilate asked Jesus during the course of His trial. Sometime before, Jesus the Messiah had said to His disciples:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

Could you always remember these words of Jesus?

My Song is Love Unknown

1. My song is love unknown, my Saviour's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.
Oh who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?
2. He came from His blessed throne, salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But oh, my friend, my friend indeed,
Who at my need His life did spend;
Who at my need His life did spend.
3. Sometimes they strew His way and His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day Hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,
And for His death they thirst and cry.
And for His death they thirst and cry.
4. Why, what has my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run, He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these
Themselves displease, and 'gainst Him rise;
Themselves displease, and 'gainst Him rise.

Lesson 41

Jesus the Messiah Rises from the Dead

Do you know the saddest event that ever happened in this world? Could it be that no sadder event ever occurred than the death of Jesus the Messiah on the cross? It was as if all the world's sin and evil had assembled together from every age and every place to put the Messiah on the cross -- the evil of humanity's idolatry, ingratitude, pride, selfishness and disobedience -- yes, your sin and my sin, too. The life of the sinless Messiah dying on the cross clearly shows us the darkness of sin and evil living in the hearts and actions of all people.

Yet this saddest event God turned into the gladdest event in the world. In the words of the Holy Bible this is how God turned "bad Friday" into Good Friday (lesson 40):

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him. This is my message for you.'" So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" and they came to him and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The Messiah had risen from the dead! How glad the disciples were! And how sad the powers of evil! Now the disciples began to understand why the Heavenly Father did not rescue the Messiah from his enemies or from the cross. It was the will of our Heavenly Father that Jesus the Messiah should die so that through His death the Messiah would conquer the devil, sin and death. Thus through the death and the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah God shows His intense love for humankind. All this He did for us -- for you and for me, too. Indeed, as the Holy Bible says:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

When the Messiah met some of His disciples after his Resurrection, He spoke these words that are in the Holy Bible:

"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their

minds to understand the Scriptures and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations...."

How clearly the proclamation of Job spoken centuries ago (lesson 6) now echoed in the ears of the disciples:

"For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last He will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed
then with my flesh I shall see God."

Portions of the Holy Bible elaborate on the significance of Jesus the Messiah's resurrection from the dead:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you....

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."

Lesson 42

The Ascension of Jesus the Messiah

Jesus the Messiah had risen from the dead. After His resurrection, He appeared to several people. The first time the risen Messiah appeared before His disciples, one of them, Thomas, was not present. Thomas refused to believe the reports of the other disciples that the Messiah had really risen. Let us see what happened according to the report of the Holy Bible:

Eight days later Jesus' disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and place it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

Are you among the blessed who have not seen and yet believe that the Messiah has risen from the dead and is your Saviour? Several other times also the risen Messiah appeared to His disciples. One time He appeared to more than five hundred people at once. For forty days after He had risen from the dead, He continued to live on earth. Then it was time to return to His Heavenly Father, from whom He had come. Before He left, He spoke His last words to His disciples. These are written in the Holy Bible:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always till the close of the age."

In the words of the Holy Bible, this is how the Messiah ascended into heaven:

When he (Jesus) had said this, as they were waiting on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing up toward heaven as he went, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking upward? This Jesus who was taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

When the Messiah died the disciples were sad, lonely and full of despair. All their hopes that He was their King and Saviour were crushed. Now the Messiah had risen as the victor over death and evil! Their hearts were filled with joy, even when He departed from them into heaven. They knew that He would return as He promised, and even now they knew He was always with them.

Before the Messiah went into heaven, he called his disciples to become "fishers of man" so that others too might share in this new joy. In order that you, too, might share in this new joy and hope of your certain salvation, this course, *The Promises of God*, has been prepared for you.

A long time before, the Messiah told His disciples that He would return to His home in heaven. His words recorded in the Holy Bible have comforted and encouraged countless people everywhere.

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also."

Do you want Him to prepare a place for you, too, so you can be with Him always?

Lesson 43

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Before Jesus the Messiah went to heaven, He promised to send His disciples the Holy Spirit. "When the Spirit of Truth comes," said the Messiah in the Holy Bible, "He will guide you into all the truth. He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses to the end of all the earth."

Only ten days later, when all the disciples were gathered together, the Messiah fulfilled His promise to send the Spirit of God. The Holy Bible reports thus:

And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the crowd gathered and were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his/her native language. Amazed and astonished they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in our own native language?"

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they were filled with power and courage. No longer were their hearts filled with fear and anxiety. Boldly Peter stood up before the multitude and announced that God was fulfilling His promise, which centuries before he had made through the prophet Joel:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....

Boldly Peter declared that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who had died on the cross and had risen from the dead. Said Peter to all who heard him, as recorded in the Holy Bible:

"Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Truly the disciples of Jesus the Messiah had now become apostles -- men sent out by the Messiah to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to all people. The same disciples who once denied that the Messiah would die, now joyfully and courageously proclaimed that the Messiah had risen from the dead for the salvation of all people. Just as the Messiah had promised, the Spirit of God was now working in their hearts. With the help of the same Holy

Spirit disciples of the Messiah continue to proclaim the Gospel of God to all nations according to the Messiah's command.

Then also God's Holy Bible pronounces the gifts available to the followers of Jesus the Messiah. As the Holy Bible declares:

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is nothing against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

The Gospel of God, God's Good News of salvation, is for you too. Receive it, my friend with praise to God and joyfully share it with others.

To the one God, the merciful and compassionate, the Father Almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth who has graciously come to us in His Word, Jesus the Messiah, and who is ever present with us by His Holy Spirit: to Him be the praise, the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

Lesson 44

Conclusion

In this course we have seen the wonderful promises which God made through the prophets. We have also seen how God fulfilled these promises in Jesus the Messiah. It is our prayer that the Spirit of God Most High would impress this message upon your heart so that you would ever hold fast the promises of Almighty God and His Blessed Word, the Messiah.

In conclusion may we turn to the inspired words of two apostles as recorded in the Holy Bible. Said the apostle Paul:

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, in what terms I preach to you the Gospel, which you in turn received, and on which you also stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast -- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures....

Said the apostle John:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them. In this his love is perfected among us, that we may have confidence for the Day of Judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and anyone who fears has not reached perfection in love. We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that those who love God should love others also.

And now that you have finished this course, could you write us telling us how you liked it?
Could you tell us also what you will remember especially about this course?

Perhaps you have some friends who would also like to take this course. Please send us their addresses and we shall be happy to send the course.

God bless you and keep you and grant you His peace.

The Promises of God

Correspondence Course

Revision

1. Original prepared in English, translated into Tamil, operated from Vellore, North Arcot Dt., a well-established office. Then as now the course has been slanted toward Muslim students, yet possibly useful for others also. Virtually no remnant currently with me. Began about 1960, probably expired from the Vellore office in 1990 +/-.
2. The only English copy of *P. Of G.* Still available to me was published by the Good News Centre, Calicut, Kerala, but printed at Concordia Press in Vaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu in 1976.
3. About the same time *P. Of G.* Was translated into Urdu by Dr. Samuel Bhajjan and to which Dr. Bhajjan added considerable Urdu Christian poetry which he had written. Published in Lahore, North India by the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies
4. A preface to the 1976 edition of *P. Of G.*
5. Available from the English copy are lesson question sheets and a separate sheet which cites all the Bible references, lesson by lesson. Currently, of course, the Bible reference sheet requires updating.

Briefly, for some years, we have been wondering about the continued value of *P. Of G.* Simply in the form of a brief Bible history or, again, in the form of a correspondence course -- or in whatever form it may still be helpful. Meanwhile, periodically, we have had enough encouragement and time to add content and generally attempt improvement upon the original text. Hence we hope to be able to share copies of it (about 100 pages) electronically. For the most part, the poetry has been taken from Christian hymnals, useful for at least any English edition and perhaps others.