

## **B. NEW TESTAMENT**

### **1. Jesus' disciples do not fast**

Matt. 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39

During Jesus' times there was a set of people called tax-collectors. They were Jews but like other sinners they were outcast from the society. They collected taxes for the Roman government. People called them robbers because they harassed the people and levied heavy taxes on them to collect more money for the rulers. Jews were not supposed to be friendly with them or eat with them. It was when such social norms were prevailing that Jesus added a Levite who was a tax collector to his disciples. Not only that, Jesus partook in a dinner this Levite arranged.

Jesus gave importance to respecting and loving people than to such meaningless customs. Levi had called all his friends for the dinner. In the eyes of the religious leaders they were all sinners and tax collectors. News spread that Jesus was dining with tax collectors. The Pharisees and scribes questioned this and protested against it.

Pharisees were people who could explain the Laws authoritatively and were very well-versed with the scriptures. They used to harshly punish any Jew who broke the Law or social customs. They did not like this act of Jesus who claimed to be the son of God and was advising the people. Jesus replied, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people, but sinners." Jesus' intention was to create a guilt-feeling in the minds of the Pharisees and scribes who preached that they were righteous people and judged everybody else to be sinners.

Fasting is one of the Laws given by God. All Jews observed this. John the Baptist and his disciples observed it. But Jesus' disciples did not fast. This is breaking the Law. So the Jewish leadership questioned this. Jesus explained the matter basing it on a tradition that was followed in Jewish weddings in those days. The bride and bridegroom celebrated their marriage for a few days along with their friends with dance and song. After the bride and bridegroom leave, they fast. Here Jesus Christ is portrayed as the Bridegroom and the others as the Church. After Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven then the Church is to fast.

## **BIBLICAL LESSONS**

### **A. OLD TESTAMENT**

#### **B.**

#### **1. Moses' Staff**

(Exodus 3:2 – 4:17)

As little children we have learnt the story of a princess who brought up in the palace a little baby she had got from a river in Egypt. This baby's name was Moses. Moses grew up just like a prince. From the palace he acquired ample learning in Mathematics, Science, Law, Astrology and Medicine under special teachers. Moses was also skillful in sports. Till the age of 40 he lived in the palace itself.

Moses loved very much the Israelites who were his kin. He was very upset that they had to work very hard as slaves in Egypt. One day, Moses saw an Egyptian mercilessly beat one of his brothers (people). Overcome with anger, Moses hit that Egyptian. So hard was the hit that the Egyptian died. Immediately, Moses buried him in the sand. When the king of Egypt heard this he got very angry and send his men to catch Moses. When Moses came to know about this he ran away to the land of Midian in fear, for his life. There he married the daughter of a priest in Midian. Moses lived for nearly forty years there taking care of the sheep. That is the time when God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. God gave Moses the responsibility to deliver the Israelites from slavery and take them to their own land, Canaan. We have learned this Bible portion in the First Grade.

God gave Moses a very responsible task. Moses doubted whether he would be able to carry it out because he stammered and was not a good speaker. Not only that, he was worried in case the Israelites did not accept him.

God asked Moses to drop his staff (stick) to the ground. The staff as soon as it touched the ground became a snake. Then God asked Moses to catch the tail of the snake. When Moses did as God told him to and caught the tail of the snake it became his old staff again. Then God asked Moses to place his hand on his chest inside his robe. When Moses did so and took out his hand it had turned white as snow with leprosy. Again, when Moses put his hand on his chest inside his robe and took it out it returned to its old normal condition. God again told Moses to take water from the river and pour it on dry land and it will become blood.

Even after all this Moses did not feel confident. Moses again told God, "Please entrust someone else to carry out this responsibility." Then God encouraged Moses and told him that He (God) would send Aaron, Moses' brother along with him for his help and that God would be there with them in their every word and deed.

## PART 2

### Worship Order

#### Songs

1. Naadha kripa cheiyyannam alivaal
2. Nintey shariravum thiru raktha
3. Marannamathin uyirey karthavey
4. Suchiyodu sudhya
5. Dheivam srishtichaadhathey

#### Namaskaaram (Adoration)

1. Masmoora (Psalms) 91, 121
2. Swargaadhootharkku

#### General Knowledge

##### 1. Church or Temple

All the Syrian Christians churches have a unified form. Except for slight variations in the width or length, all the churches have been built in an accepted model. There is a similarity seen in the raised platform or a space separated by balustrade found to the east of where the people stand, and further east of that a *Madbaha* that is built on a higher level, *Thronos*, *Evangelion* table, Curtain and Lamp.

In the middle of the people of Israel's journey to Canaan, their Promised Land, God called Moses and told him that He wanted a tent for Him to live among the Israelite people, and showed him how to build it (Exodus 25-30). The Tabernacle (Sacred Tent) was built with cloth so that it could be used in the journey. When David was ruling the Israelites, he thought of building a Temple for God and keeping the Tabernacle in it. At the threshing floor of Araunah, God appeared to David and told him in detail about the temple and the accessories in it (1 Chronicles 21, 28). Solomon, David's son, built the Temple in this land and shifted the Tabernacle into the Temple.

The Jerusalem Temple is similar in model to the Tabernacle Tent. There were three important parts to the Temple: *Prakaram* (Courtyard), *Shudha sthalam* (Holy Place) and *Maha shudha Sthalam* (Holiest place or Holiest of Holies). We can see these three separate places in our churches too. The Holiest of Holies (Sacrificial Table) is the *Thronos* that we have today. In the place of Aaron's Bloomed Staff which was placed in the Covenant Box on the Sacrificial Table, today we place the Cross; the *Evangelion* in place of the Stone Tablets with the Ten Commandments and instead of the *Manna* in the golden plate the Holy Body and Blood in the Paten and Chalice. That is why in the Hebrews it is said, "The work they do as priests is really only a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven." (Hebrews 8:5)

## **2. Are you the one who is to come?**

Luke 7:18-23; Matthew 11:2-6

While John the Baptist was in prison his speeches had come to an end. John doubted whether he would be able to continue his work after his release from the prison. His anxiety was whether he had completed the task that God had expected of him. The Jews of those days believed that the Kingdom of God referred to in the Old Testament prophetic books would be the only nation which would defeat all the enemies in a revolutionary manner and conquer all the countries one by one. For till that day they had seen only various kingdoms coming into power through their physical might. Even John the Baptist's assumption of the Kingdom of God was that.

God had revealed to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah, the real Son of God at the time of Jesus' baptism. Yet, to clear his doubt whether the path that he prepared and the one that he stated about as coming after him was this Jesus itself, he send his disciples to Jesus. They asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" At that time Jesus had cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, gave sight to many who were blind and proclaimed the good news to the poor.

In Prophet Isaiah's book it is written as follows: "In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see." (Isaiah 29:18.) And again it is written: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." (Isaiah 35:5-6.) All such prophecies were being fulfilled. So Jesus instead of saying clearly that he is the Messiah, he turned the attention of John's disciples to the prophecies and his deeds according to that and said to them, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard." Jesus considered the awareness created from seeing and hearing his actions as the most important testimony about himself. Jesus said one more thing, "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." Our personality is assessed according to the relation between our words and our action. Jesus makes it clear that those who have known the love of God and experienced His supporting hand should not go the wrong way.

## 2. Holy Baptism

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19) This is a command that our Lord Jesus gave the disciples before His ascension. According to that the disciples went out and advised people to repent. “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (Acts 2:41) Based on the words, “those who accepted his message” in that statement, many people doubt whether child baptism is Biblical. Those who believed were baptised that day. Even today, those who believe are baptised. However, on that day, over three thousand people together took baptism from Peter and it does not specifically state anywhere that there were no children among them. In the same way, Lydia (Acts 16:15), the jailer (Acts 16:33), Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16) – we read that the whole family of these people were baptised. When it’s said the whole family, it is understood that including the children were baptised. By the fact that little children who had not fully grown in knowledge were really blessed when Jesus blessed them, we can understand that children are able to receive the gifts that are received through sacraments.

David says: “Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.” (Psalms 22:9-10) “Your eyes saw my unformed body...” (Psalms 139:16) God said to Jeremiah, ““Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jer. 1:15) “Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.” (Isaiah 49:1) When Elizabeth heard Virgin Mary’s greetings the baby jumped in her womb (Luke 1:44) and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as these children were able to receive the gifts of grace while in their mother’s womb, we can believe that child or infant baptism is according to the Scriptures.

Lord the Messiah says that those with a child-like heart are worthy of the Kingdom of God because they have not committed any wilful sin. Since they do not have such unbelief as to obstruct the grace of God, grace continues to work in them unhindered. They become eligible for the kingdom of God as the sinful nature in which they were born is pardoned in Holy Baptism. After a date has been fixed for a child’s baptism and unfortunately if that child dies, the child is believed to attain salvation through the Baptism of Hope. Also, if a person believes in the Lord and before taking baptism is killed for the Lord, that person will be saved through the Baptism of Blood. Those who get baptised are bound to grow in faith and obedience to Christ, and live in the fellowship of the Church. However, in the matter of children, mediators (God-parents) are entrusted with the duty to bring up the children according to this.

The Syriac word *Mamodeesa* means bath. It got this name as the person taking baptism is washed in water and the sin stains on his spirit are washed away. This sacrament is also known as ‘Light’ as those who were living in the darkness of ignorance come close to the light of divine knowledge. This is also known as being Born Again or Re-Birth, as all those who are born from a mother’s womb, through this sacrament are re-born as a godly person.

Philip baptised a eunuch who believed in Jesus Christ in water that they found on the way. (Acts 8:38) The Church Fathers opine that Peter would have baptised 3000 people by sprinkling water on them. (Acts 2:41) "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) As per this Scriptural verse, the Syrian Church and other Eastern Churches have adopted the method of pouring water on the head, praying and baptising.

St. Paul explains how the children of Israel entered the Promised Land through the Red Sea under the Pillar of Cloud, (1 Cor. 10:1-2); and St. Peter says how the incident of Noah and his family being saved from the flood in an ark (1 Peter 3:20-21) are forerunners of today's baptism.

The Syrian Christians will conduct baptism only in a round bowl cut out from rock. There are some particular reasons for this.

1. Truly he is my rock and my salvation... (Psalms 62:6)
2. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge... (Psalms 18:2)
3. Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. (Psalms 95:1)
4. Praise be to the LORD my Rock... (Psalms 144:1)
5. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)
6. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger — A manger is a feeder that is made of carved stone and is used to hold food for animals (as in a stable). (Luke 2:7). This stone trough is still seen in the church that St. Helena built in this place in the fourth century.
7. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. (Luke 23:52-53)
8. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. (1 Cor. 10:3-4)

Through Holy Baptism we go through death which is the punishment for mankind's sinful nature with which he is born and attain re-birth that comes from Jesus Christ's resurrection. As Jesus came down to this world to suffer and die for our sins and died and was buried and resurrected on the rock, the Baptismal Font cut out in stone is kept without becoming unclean in a holy place in the House of God where God resides. The round shape which has no beginning and no end is likened to our eternal God. Seating the child in the Baptismal Font is interpreted to be the death for sin, and pouring the water three times on the head to the three days the Lord stayed in the tomb, and taking the child out of the font to re-birth. Through the sacrament of Holy Baptism:

1. Our sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38)
2. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)
3. Receive son-ship (Romans 8:15)

4. Wear Jesus Christ and become parts of His body (Gal. 3:27 & 1 Cor. 12:12-13 & 27)
5. Become partakers in the death of Christ and receive re-birth.
6. Become the members of the Church and partakers in the communion of the saints.
7. Eligible for the Heavenly Kingdom and participate in other sacraments.

The Sacrament of the Holy Baptism has three parts:

- a. Preparation for the baptism
- b. Baptism by water
- c. Anointing of *Mooron*.



## 2. The Biblical Basis of the Worship

On the eve of His Passion Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it and giving it to His disciples instituted the Holy Qurbana and commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me." According to the command, since we have to perform this sacrifice till He comes the second time, we continue to do so. Besides the breaking of the bread our fathers have arranged certain other services and prayers. Let us find out why we need all this and do these have any Biblical basis.

Isaiah the visionary gives a vivid witnessing of the Heavenly Worship. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 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!" He said, "Go and tell this people:"

The Holy Qurbana service is based on the above Scriptural verses. Now pay attention to the explanations given below.

1. The *Thronos*, which is the throne of God is as Isaiah the prophet saw it – high and raised. Moreover, the priest invites us all to the presence of God: "Nammudey bhothangallum.....uyarangallil aayirikkannam," "May our mind, thoughts and hearts of all of us be on high at the right hand side of Father God where the Lord Messiah is exalted and seated."
2. Just as the Seraphims (angels) stand around God and call out Holy is the Lord God Almighty... We who partake in the Holy Qurbana join the angels in praising God and say, "Thantey sthuthikallaal.... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty whose glory fills the heaven and earth..."
3. This vision evoked repentance in Isaiah and he said, "I am a man of unclean lips..." Before experiencing the Holy Qurbana we also out of penitence and repentance confess our sins before the priest.
4. For Isaiah who is standing with a heavy heart in God's presence a smouldering coal is taken with tongs and touching his lips is told, "...your guilt has gone..." When the Holy Qurbana is given this is what the priest repeats, "The burning coal which is His Holy Body and Holy Blood is being given to the true believer for the atonement of debts and forgiveness of sins."
5. Just as Isaiah who is comforted by the forgiveness of his sins and is sent with a duty to perform the priest also sends us telling us to pray.

## **2. The Ten Plagues**

(Exodus 7:1 – 11:10)

The king of Egypt, Pharaoh, had kept God's people, the Israelites as slaves. In those days if anyone spoke against the king they would be immediately put to death. Moses who lived for forty years in the palace as a prince knew this very well. That was the reason why he was so afraid. He was emboldened by the miraculous power he received from God and the assurance that God would be with him always and the fact that Aaron would be with him as a companion.

Moses and Aaron went to the presence of the king. They requested that the Israelites should be allowed to travel three days into the desert to worship Jehovah, the Living God of the Israelites. Since it was a religious request they escaped from being killed. But the king did not allow their request. "Who is the LORD?" the king asked. "Why should I listen to him and let Israel go? What is the proof that what you are saying is the truth?" so Aaron dropped his staff-rod on the ground and immediately it became a snake. The king then called the palace magicians and asked them to do the same magic. When they put their staff-rod to the ground, those also turned to snakes. But Aaron's staff swallowed all the other staffs. The king's heart became hard that he not only did not allow them to go but ordered to make their work harder.

Next the day, the king went to the river banks to take a bath. Moses approached the king with their request. The king did not agree. Then, Moses struck the water with his staff and the water in the river turned to blood and all the living creatures in the water died.

Magicians can perform wonders under Satanic influence. So, the king believed that their gods were greater than Moses' and Aaron's God and would protect the king and his people. But these magicians failed with the wonders that God performed through Moses.

There were ten plagues in Egypt including the water turning into blood. It was with the tenth plague that the king decided to let the Israelites go. When the life of the people became miserable with each plague, the king would call Moses and Aaron and ask them to pray to their God to remove the plague. When they prayed to God, the difficulties by plagues would disappear. Then Pharaoh's heart would harden and become crueller than before and against his earlier decision, he would decide not to let the people go. When the last

plague spread across the land of Egypt loud cries and wailing came out from the palace to the smallest house in Egypt. So the king decided to let them leave in the middle of the night itself.

### The Ten Plagues

1. Water turned into blood
2. Frogs increased
3. Gnats (a kind of lice) increased
4. Swarms of flies
5. Livestock died from disease
6. Skin boils on humans and animals
7. Thunderstorms of hail stone and lightning
8. Locusts destroyed the crops
9. Three days of total darkness
10. Death of the first-born son

## **2.a Holy Baptism contd.**

### **1. Preparation for Baptism**

Here, disassociation or ousting of Satan is what takes place first. This is one of the authorities that Jesus had given His disciples. For this the priest draws the sign of the cross on the baptismal candidate's forehead nine times and prays that all kinds of demons leave and go away. Then the priest says, "Ithu pishachintey....." "As this is not the indwelling place of Satan but is the sanctuary of God you are ordered to leave." Then the person is turned to the west and says, "Mamoodeesa mungunha njaan...." "I who am being baptised, renounce you Satan, and all your hosts, your angels, all fears in you and all your deceits." This is said three times by the baptismal candidate or if it's infant baptism, then whoever is standing as the mediator. Thus after denouncing Satan again, the person turns to the east and accepting Jesus says, "Mamodeesa mungunha njaan..." "I who am being baptised, believe and accept you O Lord the Messiah, and all the divine teachings – entrusted to our holy fathers through the Apostles and Prophets." After this the Creed is said and the Faith Declaration is made.

### **2. Baptism by Water**

The second part of the baptism starts with smearing the Holy Oil (*Sythe*) on the candidate. This smearing of Holy Oil denotes Jesus coming with happiness, peace and joy. After that, when the priest sanctifies the water for the baptism, the water which is the allegory of Christ's death and resurrection, gets purified by the working of the Holy Spirit and becomes the water that purifies the impurities of the body and soul and brightens it. After the purification *Mooron* is poured into the water. This is to make the old man into a new creation. Then the candidate is baptised in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the hope of remission of sins and eternal life.

### **3. Anointing with the Holy Mooron**

After the baptism, the candidate is towelled dry and while saying that this person is being sealed by the Seal of Eternal Life, the Holy *Mooron* is put on the forehead in the sign of the cross and smeared all over the body. With this, that body becomes a body where the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 6:19). What Peter said in Acts 2:38 is also worth mentioning here - "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Paul says to the Ephesians in the epistle to the Eph. 1:14, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." In the last benediction of the Holy Qurbana, the priest says, "... and those who have been sealed by the blessing of baptism..." because all those present are considered as believers who have acquired re-birth by baptism and are the Temple of the Holy Spirit by the anointing of the Holy *Mooron*. The person who took baptism is dressed in white as a symbol of having rejected Satan and wearing the glorious Jesus Christ.

## **Beheading of John the Baptist**

(Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9)

“But before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah.” (Malachi 4:5) Elijah was a prophet who lived centuries ago. God had taken up this prophet into heaven with his body. John’s birth was to fulfill Malachi’s prophecy. Gabriel who came from the Lord’s presence said, that in order to prepare a people ready for the Lord, he would go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. In those days the prophets used to give good advices inspired by the Spirit of God, and raise their voices against injustice and crime and harshly criticised all evil deeds. John’s speeches and actions also were like that.

Palestine under the Roman government consisted of four regions – Galilee, Samaria, Judea and Perea which was ruled by middle nobles. Accordingly Judea was ruled by Herod. A king who is supposed to rule his land with justice and truth did a great wrong. HerodYet, imade Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, to be his wife. John questioned this immoral act. He knew that he was opposing the king who had the right to have him killed. It was the duty of a prophet to fight against injustice. Not only did Herodias hold a grudge against John the Baptist because of this, she even wanted to get him killed somehow. Fully aware that John was a prophet and harming him would bring God’s wrath, Herod imprisoned John in order to protect him from Herodias.

King Herod in celebration of his birthday had invited all the nobles and gave them a banquet. To make it more entertaining a dance was arranged. It was Herodias’ daughter who had danced there. Everybody who was present including Herod appreciated it very much. Forgetting himself in his thrill he promised her a gift and told her that he would give anything she asked.

She immediately ran to her mother and told her. Evil Herodias mercilessly used this opportunity to seek her revenge on John. She told her daughter to ask for the head of John on a platter. She went and asked the king exactly that. Herod was very upset. Even then, as he had to keep his word, and because he had to keep up his status in front of the guests he immediately gave orders to his soldiers. So the soldiers went to the prison and cut off John’s head, put it on a platter and gave it to her. She went and gave it to her mother.

### 3. Holy Mooron

This sacrament is an anointing with fragrant oil that gives the believers a stability in Christian life by receiving the Holy Spirit and defeating Satan. Our fathers believe that it is a symbol of the anointing our Lord obtained for our sake. In the Old Testament times Patriarchs (High Priests) and Kings were anointed with the Holy Oil. This *Mooron* is a continuation of that. 2 Cor. 1:21-22 and 1 John 2:20-27 speak about this anointing. It is made by combining pure Sythe oil (Olive oil) and rare fragrant things prayerfully in a special service by the heads of the church. Through this *Mooron* given at the time of baptism every member who receives the anointing is connected to the head of the church. Some other churches call this service as the Confirmation Service.

In the sacrament of the Holy Baptism before being sealed with the Holy *Mooron* there is a beautiful prayer that goes like this: "O Lord, may this Thy servant who is counted among your soldiers receive this holy seal and sign in Your name through belief in baptism. Let him be filled with every fragrance through this *Mooron* and remain unyielded to all hostile forces. May he never fear wickedness or evil forces, let him walk in Your glory, become a son of light and come near to You by going with You." The oil is smeared only after that. "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit may you be cleansed and sanctified, may your debts and sins you have committed willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly be forgiven and all bad thoughts and evil dealings be removed from you." Saying this prayer, the *Mooron* is smeared by the sign of the Cross on the candidate's forehead, chest and knees. And then saying the name of the candidate, in order to sanctify the inner and outer senses, it is smeared on the eyes, nose, abdomen, ears, hands and feet and below the navel.

By *Mooron* anointing we are able to constantly keep ablaze in us the Holy Spirit we have received. We have to try to always produce the Fruit of the Spirit that are mentioned in Gal. 5:22 -Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

Besides baptism, *Mooron* is used in the consecration of a church building and in the *Thabaleetha Koodaasa*. Here the word sacrament is used in the sense of sanctification.

### **3. Taksa**

Taksa is the Holy Book that contains the order and prayers for the Holy Qurbana service. Today there are about 88 taksas in existence. It was James who was Christ's brother, disciple and the first Patriarch of Jerusalem Church, and martyr, who first wrote a taksa in order to offer the Holy Qurbana in a systematic and orderly manner. Before this taksa was compiled in the first century what the believers used to do was, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." (Acts 20:7); "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42). In the eighth century St. James of Edessa (Urhoy) revised the taksa by rewriting and expanding it. The 13<sup>th</sup> century Maphrian of the East, Gregorius Bar Hebraeus abridged it. A hand-written copy of this is preserved at the British Museum. All other taksas are based on the taksa known as St. James Taksa. Without making any change in the order there is only slight changes in the words in prayers.

## **The Angel of Annihilation**

Exodus 1:1 – 12:36

Each plague that Moses brought upon the land of Egypt by the command of the Almighty God caused the king's heart to become more cruel and the work under slavery tougher. However, the plagues only went to prove that the gods the Egyptians were worshipping were powerless.

When the water in the river turned to blood all their water gods were destroyed. Frogs got into the places of worship and made the temples unholy. Because of the increase in gnats (lice) the priests could not perform their duties. When the dog-flies increased the animals they considered gods and worshipped all fell dead. The hailstones destroyed the idols made of lifeless stone. The locusts destroyed all the grains and flowers they used for worship. When they suffered three days of total darkness, the king realised that the sun that they worshipped was under the control of the Jehovah, the Living God.

The king called Moses and said, "You may go and worship the LORD; even your women and children may go with you. But your sheep, goats, and cattle must stay here." The king knew that only if they left their cattle and sheep and goats they would return. Moses insisted that they would not go unless they could take all their belongings with them. In anger the king sent them out of his presence. He commanded that they were not to come before him anymore. So Moses replied to the king, "You are right, you will never see me again."

The tenth and final plague that was very severe and which God had decided upon in order to free the Israelites from Egypt was the death of every first-born son of Egypt. One day it happened. From the first-born son Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, every first-born male of Egypt was killed. Not only humans, but all the animals and birds that they grew were affected.

This happened at midnight. Cries and wails were heard from the houses of all the Egyptians. Finally it was heard from the king's palace, a most pitiful wail... it was the destruction carried out by the angel whom Jehovah, the Living God had sent. At the same time, nobody among the Israelites died.

God had given Moses certain instructions. At evening every man who is the head of each household should kill the lamb of a goat or sheep and smear its blood on the doorposts and above the doors of their houses. The door should be closed. The Angel of Annihilation whom God was sending to Egypt on seeing



the blood would go away. They were to eat the flesh of the animal roasted on fire. They were to eat it in a hurry as ready to go on a journey with their belt on and sandals on their feet and walking stick in hand. They were to wait patiently with all their bags packed and things and domestic animals ready to leave, without wasting even a minute, as soon as the king's orders to leave came. Everybody was to get all the gold and silver ornaments and dresses from their neighbouring Egyptian families so as to leave when the king's orders arrived. That would be in compensation for their work as slaves. Every Israelite was saved by the blood of the lamb.

The wailing that arose from Egypt melted the hard heart of the Pharaoh. He send messengers to Moses and informed him that the people of Israel with all their possessions should leave the place immediately. Thus after about 400 years of bonded slavery they were set free and started their journey to their own land Canaan.

#### 4. The Preparatory Service of the Holy Qurbana

The Service known as *Thuyobo* is performed by the priest in private. Though this is done privately, the priest sees all the people in the church as one, and as their representative he places everyone before God. Those who want to leave by receiving the blessings should be present in the church from this time onwards. In this service every incident in our Lord's human life is specially remembered. The priest prays in the great mediation of Jesus the Messiah who is the only mediator between man and God and the mediation of the Holy Virgin Mary. In this prayer there is included a long list of saints right from Adam. Besides, all those who have come for that day's service and all those whose names have been given to be remembered in that day's Holy Qurbana service are specially remembered. People have a misunderstanding that these names are remembered only in the prayer before the Creed or proclamation of Faith. The priest at this time also prays for the sick, the repentant and the departed.

The priest who enters the church after washing his feet and wearing a black robe symbolises the return of the Prodigal Son. Any person, no matter however high they would have grown spiritually, is a sinner till they reach their completeness with Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, this reminds us that we all need a change of heart with true repentance like the Prodigal Son. "Though I am not worthy, O Lord, to live wholly in You or to receive from You the gift of Your divine mysteries, I earnestly pray that You protect my thinking from all dealings and snares of the adversary, my eyes from lustful looks, my ears from hearing vain things, my hands from abhorrent deeds, and beseech You to be the citadel of my inner being so that I may be used by You, and You alone...."

Taking in his hands the paten with the bread in it, the priest prays as follows: "Our Lord was led like a lamb for slaughter, He was silent as a sheep before her shearers. He did not open His mouth in His lowly state. O first-born of the Heavenly Father accept these first-fruits from the hands of Your meek and sinful servant. "

Taking the chalice with the wine in his hands, the priest while pouring water into the wine prays, "O Lord God, I pray that just as You joined Your godliness with our humanness, join this water to the wine."

In order to make us worthy to offer the Holy Sacrifice with those who have come prepared to sacrifice themselves as a pleasing offering unto God, the priest takes the paten with the bread in his right hand and the chalice with the wine in His left hand and crosses his hands over to form the sign of a cross and prays, "O Messiah, the blameless and pure lamb who offered Himself as an offering to His Father as an acceptable *qurbana* for the purity and salvation of the whole world, make us worthy to please You and to offer ourselves as living sacrifices forever as You offered Yourself." Then the priest places the paten and the chalice on the *Thronos* and covers it with the *Shoshappa*.

Then taking the incense and the priest prays, "Like Aaron who upon offering the pure incense at the Tent of Meeting of the congregation with which the plague was stopped from among the people of Israel, O Lord we offer this incense before You..." In this prayer they also pray for the Mother of God, other saints, living people with various needs and those

who have departed and for ordinary people. "For our father Adam, our mother Eve, divinely born Holy Mary, prophets and disciples..... so that their souls may find comfort in the Heavenly Jerusalem, please accept this fragrant incense that we offer in our weakness..."

Once the prayers for the incense are concluded with the worship of the Trinity, then it's the prayers for the mediation of the saints. Praying for the mediation of the saints is a humble inter-related approach to Holy Qurbana. This makes it clear that we participate in the Holy Sacrifice depending not on the priest's or our own righteousness or preparedness, but on the mercy of God and the mediation of the saints.

After this prayer a kauma and the Creed is recited and the *Thuyobo* prayers are concluded. Then the screen is parted and the public service of the Holy Qurbana begins.

#### **4. The First Passover**

Exodus 12:37 – 13:22

The people of Israel were slaves. Now they had been set free. God commanded to them that the day they started their new life as free people should be the first day of the first month of their yearly calendar and that day should be celebrated as a festival day every year.

It was by the blood of the lamb that they were delivered from their slavery in Egypt and from the sword of the Angel of Annihilation. God knew that perhaps one or two generations may remember the difficulties of working as a slave, the bitter experiences and painful punishments of the king's anger because of the various plagues. But as generation go by people may forget how the wondrous hand of God was helpful to the people of Israel. Therefore, God gave instructions and rules on how to celebrate the Festival of the Passover so that they would forever remember it.

The man of every household was to take a one-year old lamb of either a sheep or goat. This lamb had to be without any defect. The lamb was to be killed in the evening. The doorposts and the beam above the door was to be smeared with the blood of the lamb using a sprig of hyssop dipped into the blood. The flesh of the lamb was to be roasted on fire. Bitter herbs should form part of the meal of the day. The bread made for the day was to be made of unleavened dough using no yeast because on that night they had to travel unexpectedly. They had to take the dough kept for leavening for the next day wrapped in cloth. They made bread necessary for that day with dough that had not leavened. If the meal prepared was too much for their family they had to share it with their neighbouring family. They were not to keep any remainder of the meal for the next day. If at all anything was left over, it was to be burned in fire. When they eat the meal they should eat it like those people ate it then in a hurry, with sandals on their feet, belt tied and stick in hand.

All the first-born sons of the people of Israel were to be surrendered unto God. They could be got back from God by offering a sacrifice of a lamb or baby doves. But the first born males of animals had to be surrendered to the Lord with a sacrifice.

When they started the journey under the leadership of Moses, men alone were six lakhs. When they moved with their wives, children, household items and tents to live in, it seemed like a sea of people on the move. When Moses

saw this great crowd of people he became afraid. But God made him confident in a strange way. He made a big pillar of cloud in front of them and over them. It went with them in the day time to show them the way and to give them shade. At night it became a pillar of fire giving them light. This helped in creating an awareness among the Israelites about the presence of God with them.

#### **4. THE SOWER'S PARABLE**

Matthew 13:19-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15

The audience of Jesus were mainly ordinary people. Therefore, Jesus' advices were very simple. When presenting good thoughts, he used parables related to their customs and tradition, daily life-style and those which had timely importance. So Jesus said a parable to understand how the word of God should become find place in our hearts.

Everybody is familiar with a sower sowing seeds in a field. Here Jesus illustrates an event about a sower going to the field to sow the seeds. When he sowed or scattered the seeds, some fell on the sides of the path way. The birds eat them away. The seeds are likened to the word of God. Though the word of God is accepted, by the temptations of Satan they are removed. Some fell on the rock. Because there is not enough moisture on the rock for the seed to grow and not enough soil for the plant to take root they do not germinate. In the same way some people accept the word of God in all joy. But as there is no strong faith when they face hard trials they back slide. Then Jesus said, some seeds fell among the thorns. Though they germinate the thorns crush them and do not allow them to grow. Likewise, when this worldly desires take hold of us the word of God growing in our heart starts withering away and become lifeless. The seeds with the sower that fell on good ground grow up and gives more yield. So do some people who hear the word of God and keep them in their heart and live according to that. It spreads light into this dark world. Their life and deeds become a glory to God and for the good of the society.

## **The House Builder**

Luke 6:46-49

In the previous lesson we learnt the parable of the sower. Jesus taught all such good things through parables which the ordinary people could understand. He likened the people who listened to him as two types. One to a man who dug deep and built his house on the rock and the other who built his house on the sand.

Jesus divided the people into these two sectors taking into consideration the landscape of the Palestinian land. There, everywhere, the upper level of the ground soil is sand. But if you dig deeply in and remove the sand there is solid rock underneath. When wise people build their house, they remove the sand till they see rock and lay the foundation there and build a strong firm house. During rainy season, water floods in all places. Sometimes there are stormy winds. In such times, this house will be able to strongly withstand nature's fury and not be destroyed. But some people will not remove all the sand as required and lay the foundation on the weak sand and build their houses. They stand firm temporarily. But when strong winds and rains come it's unable to stand firm and is destroyed.

People like the wise man who built a strong house, accept wisely and live according to what Jesus taught at various times through parables. Whatever unfavourable circumstances may arise, they are able to stand firm on Jesus the foundation. The foundation of the Christian church is such people.

However, people who have not accepted Jesus as their saviour are like the man who built his house on the sand. It may be beautiful. You can think that there is no problem if you do not believe in God and have faith in Him. But when troubles come like storms there may not be anyone to help. They will fall when they commit mistakes and their life will be destroyed.

## **War against the Amalekites**

Exodus 17:8-16; 8:13-27

The Israelites who are the people of Israel during their journey had to wage a war against the Amalekites who were the descendants of Esau. Moses appointed Joshua, his servant, to be the commander to lead this war. Joshua was a good soldier and a person of steadfast faith. When Joshua and the army moved to the battle field, Moses went up a nearby hill lifted up both his hands and prayed to Lord up in heaven. Moses had in his right hand the staff (rod) that was helpful in following the instructions of God when he faced all the times of trials during the journey.

As they were gaining forward successfully in the war, suddenly they suffered a setback. The failure in the war was because the hands of Moses which were lifted up were lowered. So Aaron and Hur went up the hill and they held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. The others stood around and held up his hands. Till sunset his hands were lifted up. Hands that are raised up to the heights is a symbol of strength. The Israelites fought the war getting their strength from it. At the same time they prayed to God. God did not forsake them. Joshua defeated the Amalekites and their army with the sword.

Amalekites were war heroes and skilled in war tactics. While on the other hand, those with Joshua were ordinary people, who had no training in war and were timid. Because of Moses' prayer God destroyed the Amalekite army and their sword.

Last year we learned how God destroyed the whole world in a flood and saved only Noah and his family. What Noah did as soon as he got out of the ark was to build an altar for God and pray to him for all the goodness God had provided. In the same way, here Moses also built an altar and prayed to God. He named that altar, 'Jehovah Nissi' meaning 'Jehovah is my Banner' so that this great victory that God gave over the Amalekites would always be remembered and be always grateful to God for.

When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all the wondrous things that God was doing through Moses who was leading this great crowd of people, he visited Moses in the desert. People used to approach Moses to settle their quarrels and arguments they had among themselves. In the olden days all



religious and social matters were the responsibilities of the men of God. People used to come in the morning itself, and even by evening the problems of the people could not be solved. Jethro felt that this was a tiresome responsibility with no break or relaxation. So Jethro advised Moses to select capable men from among the people and appoint them as leaders and give them the authority to listen to the arguments and find a solution for their problems. Moses was to pay attention to Godly matters alone. Moses felt that Jethro's advice was good and did according to it.

## **6. Secret of the Samaritan Woman**

John 4:7-26

The Jews who used to go from Judea to Galilee would always travel by the banks of River Jordan even though it was a longer route. The alternative route was through the city of Samaria. The Jews considered the Samaritans as unclean people and people of another race. Talking to or eating or drinking with or from people of another race, according to the Jewish Laws prevalent at that time, was unlawful. Therefore, they used to travel by the River Jordan shores. It was in this circumstance that Jesus decided to travel through Samaria.

Just before reaching the town of Samaria there was a well at a place known as Sychar. It was near this well that Jacob first met Rachel whom he later married. We learned this story last year. Jesus sat there to rest a little while. The disciples went to the next town to buy some food. That was when a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw some water. Then Jesus asked her for some water to drink. She was surprised when a Jew asked her water against the traditions and laws that existed then. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." Not only that, Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."

So that she will not thirst again and she would never have to come to that well to draw water, she asked Jesus for that water. Then Jesus asked her to bring her husband. When she replied that she did not have a husband, Jesus said, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband." Then she became aware of her sinful life. She thought she was not talking to an ordinary Jew but a prophet. The Samaritans used to worship in a Temple built on Mt. Gerizim that was located close to Samaria. But the Jews used to worship in Jerusalem. So the Samaritan woman asked where exactly one should worship God. Jesus answered that better than the offerings in the Temple, God wishes for worship in spirit and truth. Like the Jews, the Samaritans also hoped for a Messiah who would come to deliver the people from their sin. So when Jesus revealed that He is the Messiah, "I am he, I who am talking with you..." she believed Jesus and immediately ran into the town and brought everybody and they believed in him.

## **The Ten Commandments**

Exodus 20:1-17

Three months into their journey, the Israelites reached near Mt. Sinai. They pitched their tents there. As God had commanded Moses went up the mountain. There God spoke to Moses. God reminded Moses how he had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and how he had led them and provided them with all the food and drink and all that they needed during the journey. Therefore, God told Moses, that if they remain faithful to Lord God Jehovah and obey His commands, they would become princely priests and a pure people.

So, Moses came down from the mountain and explained to the people all that God had commanded and they answered that they would do so. All the people washed their clothes, made themselves clean and fasted for three days. On the third day morning they heard a big sound and a trumpet blast. As God was coming down onto the mountain in a fire, the mountain shook and became invisible in smoke. They heard God's voice like a heavenly voice. That was the Ten Commandments God gave to the people.

1. I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods before me.
2. Do not make for yourselves images or idols of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. You should not bow down to any idol or worship it.
3. Do not use the name of the Lord your God for false swearing.
4. Remember to observe and keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Respect your father and your mother so that you may live long.
6. Do not commit murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not accuse anyone falsely.
10. Do not desire anything that belongs to someone else.

## **7. The Golden Calf**

Exodus 32:1- 34:35

The forty days that Moses was up on the mountain he was in communion with God. When the people saw that Moses had not come down for a long time, they went to Aaron and asked him to make a god to go before them. They asked such a thing when they remembered the faith they had observed and the idols they had worshipped in Egypt.

Seeing the insistence of the people, Aaron asked them to bring him the gold earrings of their wives, daughters and sons. They did as Aaron asked them to do. He made a bull-calf out of the gold. Then he built an altar in front of that golden bull-calf and announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival day." The next day morning they made burnt-offerings and other offerings to that idol. They drank and ate and danced and enjoyed themselves in front of the idol.

When the people had agreed to obey the Ten Commandments that God had commanded, God wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to Moses. When Moses came down the mountain carrying the two stone tablets in his two hands what he saw was the golden bull-calf and the sacrificial offer in front of it with the people dancing in joy. This was against the first and the second commands of God. Moses was shocked to see this. A furious Moses threw down both the stone tablets and broke them. He took the bull-calf which they had made, melted it, ground it into fine powder, mixed it with water and made the people of Israel drink it.

Moses went to the gate of the camp and shouted, "Everyone who is on the Lord's side come over here!" All the Levites gathered around him and according to the order of Moses they killed many people with the sword. Nearly 3000 men died that day. The people were sorry for the sin they had committed and went to Moses and asked his forgiveness. Moses went back to the mountain top and asked God to forgive the people. God's anger on the people was removed and He blessed them.

Moses took a tent and pitched it outside the camp, some distance away. He called it the 'Tent of Meeting'. As Moses entered the tent, a pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance of the tent and the Lord would speak to Moses. The people inside the camp would stand in front of their tent and look at the pillar of cloud and worship God.

As God had commanded Moses chiselled out two stone tablets like the first one and carrying them in his hands he went up the Mount Sinai to the presence of God once more. There he bowed to the ground and worshipped God. Moses spend forty days and forty nights there in fasting. The Lord wrote down again the Ten Commandments on the new stone tablets like on the first stone tablets. When Moses came down from the mountain his face was shining with radiance. It was the glory of God that shone on his face having spoken to the Lord many days and nights. When the people saw the bright radiance on Moses' face they were afraid. So Moses covered his face with a veil when he spoke to the people. But when he spoke to God he would remove it.

Besides the Ten Commandments, God had given them many laws. Moses wrote it all down in the Book of Laws. He built an altar at the bottom of the mountain and made a sacrifice unto the Lord. Half the blood of the sacrificial animal he sprinkled on the altar. He took the Book of Laws and read it out for all the people to hear. When the people promised to obey all the laws that God had commanded Moses took the other half of blood and sprinkled it on the people. This is the blood of the Old Covenant or Old Testament.

## 7. THE HEALER

### 1. The deaf and the mute receive healing Mark 7:32-37; Matthew 15:29-31

One day Jesus went to Galilee through the region of Decapolis. The majority of people there were not Jews. So Jesus was able to heal many sick people and bring many to his fold through his preaching and teaching. When the people there came to know that Jesus was in the place, a great crowd gathered to see him. Some among them brought to Jesus, a man who was both deaf and mute. They requested Him to lay His hands on that man and heal him.

This sick man had not known anything about Jesus. Neither did he know that Jesus had healed many sick people, because he was unable to hear or speak. Jesus wished that, that sick man should know what He was going to do for him. So Jesus lovingly removed him from among the crowd and concentrated on that man alone. To make him understand that He was going to give him the ability to hear, Jesus put his finger in his ear. In the same way to let him know that He was going to give him the ability to speak Jesus put some spit on that man's tongue. In those days there was a concept among the people that saliva had healing properties. That is why Jesus did so. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "*Ephphatha!*" Jesus had used a word from the local language that meant 'Open up'. Jesus' aim was to make the sick man understand that the healing he was about to receive was a gift from the Heavenly Father. Immediately his ears opened and his tongue loosened. Then he and all the people who had gathered there began to praise God.

### **The man with the paralysed hand is healed** Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

One Sabbath day Jesus went with His disciples to the Temple to worship. Wherever Jesus was, a large crowd of people would gather to see Him. It was the appeal in His speeches and the healing He gave that attracted people. Among them was a group of Jewish leaders who wanted to check if Jesus was doing or saying anything against the existing Laws.

On that day, among the people who had gathered in the Temple, there was a man with a paralysed hand. It was a very strict rule in those days that no one should do any work on the Sabbath day. Doing medication for healing was forbidden on Sabbath days. However, Jesus who observed God's Laws did not consider the Sabbath rules to be against healing someone who came to Him for healing. There were rules that allowed punishing those who broke the Sabbath law. So, in order to catch Jesus red-handed, the Jewish leaders very cautiously sat right in the front row in the Temple.

Jesus was fully aware of the obstacle that he was going to face. Knowing the thoughts of their minds, so that all the people could see, He asked the man with the paralysed hand to get up and stand in the centre. Then he asked the Jewish leaders a very forceful question. "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save someone's life or destroy it?" It is not written in the Laws that one should not do good or save a life on

Sabbath day. So the Jewish leaders were unable to say anything. They moved away embarrassed. Jesus asked the man standing in the centre to stretch out his hand. He obeyed Jesus and his hand was completely healed. When Jesus was trying to save a man's life on the Sabbath day, the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Jesus on the Sabbath day. It only increased their burden of sin.

## **Miriam's Leprosy**

Numbers 12:1 -16

It was while Moses was taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro in Midian that he went to Egypt according to the command of God. In the earlier lessons we have learned how God delivered the people of Israel from slavery under Pharaoh, the Egyptian King and led them to Canaan, God's Promised Land. Before leaving Egypt, on the insistence of Aaron, Moses had sent his wife Zipporah to her house.\*\*

In the earlier lesson we learned how Jethro had come to visit Moses when they had pitched camp near Mount Sinai. Jethro had brought Zipporah and Moses' two sons with him. They lived in Moses' tent itself.

Zipporah was not a pretty woman. Moreover, she belonged to another race. But the fact that she was Moses' wife was her honour and greatness. Miriam was jealous of this. When the jealousy grew and became enmity it started affecting Moses' work. Quarrel between women can become a real problem. God had spoken about it to not only Moses but to Aaron also. Miriam wanted the honourable position Zipporah had in front of the people of Israel. That was their demand.

God realised this. Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. There could not be any opposition to such a man as Moses. So God asked Moses to tell Aaron and Miriam to come to the Tent of Meeting. So they went and stood there as Moses said. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. God said to them, "If there are prophets among the Israelites, He would reveal himself to them in visions and proclaim His laws to them in their dreams. However, as Moses was faithful in the House of the Lord God spoke to him face-to-face. Why do you object to it?" The anger of God burnt against them and with that the pillar of cloud which was the presence of God also went away.

\*\*\* When Aaron turned and looked at his wife Miriam, her skin had turned white as snow. She had become a leper. Aaron realised the intensity of God's anger. He was sorry for the sin committed. He confessed to Moses his wrongs. Moses prayed to God for his sister Miriam. God said "Let her stay outside the camp for seven days like a leper." Then the leprosy will be healed and she could join the camp again. So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days.



The Israelites did not move camp for those seven days. After seven days God healed her leprosy. Aaron took her back.\*\*\*

\*\* This is not mentioned in the Bible anywhere. This is an assumption by some theological historians.

\*\*\* There is no Biblical corroboration to this. As per Exodus 6:23 Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. Miriam was Aaron's sister. She was a prophetess. The Mar Thoma Church does not teach the children that Miriam was Aaron's wife. I do not know your church's stand. As my job is that of a translator I have maintained it as written in the text. I just wanted to bring it to your notice. A picture of the said portion from the text is attached.

## **8. The Greatest Commandment**

Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28; Mark 12:28-34

Among the ruling heads of the Jews there was one group called the Scribes or Teacher of Law. They were people who had learned the Laws and explained it to the ordinary folks. They used to sit on the daises of the Jerusalem Temple and explain the Laws to the people. In those days the Jews were forced to follow 613 laws based on the teachings of Moses regarding the Ten Commandments. It was the people's need that there should be a law which is a summary of these laws. But there were differences of opinion on this. Therefore, no one could come to a decision.

It was a habit to critically listen to Jesus' preaching and teachings and ask questions in order to trap Jesus in word or action. However, one scribe who respected Jesus' wise responses in his preaching and teaching asked this question in order to get a proper answer to this controversial subject. He asked, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus replied, "The most important one is this: 'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two. The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments." Jesus summarised all the Laws and the prophets' messages into these two basic laws.

The Scribes who were experts in the Laws fully accepted Jesus' reply. He also opined that the crux of the Laws is above burnt offerings and sacrifices. To the Scribe who was going back satisfied by Jesus' answer, Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." We show our love for God through our love for our brothers and sisters and neighbours.

## **9. HEALS A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY**

(Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43)

To get away from His busy life, Jesus used to go to deserted places or mountains so that he could get some rest and to pray to His father single-mindedly. So one day, Jesus went up Mt. Tabor to pray. He took along with Him Peter, James and John whom Jesus loved the most. He told the other disciples to wait at the bottom of the hill. While Jesus was praying on the hill-top His face became lit with heavenly brilliance. The disciples who were with him were witnesses to this. We will be learning in detail about this next year.

The people who learned that Jesus had arrived and had gone up the hill to pray, started gathering in the valley. Among them was a boy who was possessed by an evil spirit. When Jesus had sent out His disciples to preach the gospel, He had given them authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal the sick. So the disciples when they tried to heal this boy they couldn't.

Jesus came down the hill at this time. When Jesus learned that the disciples could not heal this boy He got angry with the disciples and the boy's father. That was because Jesus noticed lack of faith in both of them. That is why the disciples could not heal the boy.

The boy's father told Jesus, "But if you can do anything..." Jesus did not like this statement. It is not whether He could heal the boy. Jesus said that healing depended on the faith a person has in Him. To begin with one has to believe that nothing is impossible with God. One must speak out that belief. The boy's father repented for his mistake and sought forgiveness for his unbelief.

Jesus rebuked the evil-spirit in the boy and told the spirit to never ever enter the body of that boy. It screamed and left him. Jesus took the hand of the boy who was lying still and raised him up. The disciples were very sad that they couldn't heal the boy. They asked Jesus why they had failed. He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."

## **Exploring the Land of Canaan**

Numbers 13:1 – 14:39

The people of Israel after a long journey reached near their Promised Land of Canaan. They just had to cross over River Jordan. Before that, God told Moses to select twelve men - one man from each tribe – and send them there to explore the land. They could cross over after these twelve men came back with a report about the land that God was going to give to them.

As God had instructed, Moses selected twelve men – one from each tribe – men who were leaders among them. He asked them to look properly and find out how many people lived there, and how strong they were, whether the people lived in tents or in fortified cities, what kinds of crop they grew there and to be sure to bring back some of the fruit that grew there.

All the people were happy when they left. They became very excited on the thought that they were going to make that land their own. The head of the tribes entered the land of Canaan. For forty days they went around the place, observing and understanding everything. The whole place was beautiful. It was a fertile land. They brought to Moses a branch which had one bunch of grapes on it which was so heavy that it took two men to carry it on a pole. They also brought back sweet figs and pomegranates.

When the people saw that the grapes which they brought were big and sweet many people wished to make that land their own as soon as possible. The tribal leaders who went to explore the land gave their report. They said it was a wonderful and beautiful land – there was lot of green pasture, lots of rivers and fields and fruit trees. All the fruits were big and sweet. Really a land that flowed milk and honey! But the people there were all tall and powerful. Their cities were very large and well protected with strong forts. They said that they could never go over to that land and win a battle against them and live there. When the people heard that they all became afraid. But two people among these leaders did not agree to that opinion. That was Joshua and Caleb. They both believed firmly in God's promises. They believed that God would protect them wherever they were. They said, "That land is very good. Just as God has promised He will give us this wonderful land which is full of plenty of food." The people did not believe Joshua's and Caleb's words. They stood with the ten people who did not believe the word of God. Not only that, they desired to go back to Egypt. The ten people and the people who stood with them could not put their trust in the Living God who amazingly freed them from slavery

under the Pharaoh of Egypt and abundantly experienced the grace of God who brought them safely to the boundary of the Promised Land. Though it was proven many times during their journey that what is impossible for man is possible for God, they were not ready to believe in God. They shrank back in fear.

A difference of opinion had arisen between the tribal leaders. When ten leaders from among the twelve and the people of Israel said that they did not want the land of Canaan, Joshua and Caleb – two tribal leaders only- stressed that the land should be made their own. Moses was in a difficult situation. He prayed to God in the Tent of Meeting. God said, “I have heard the people of Israel grumbling against me. I will not let anyone who is not interested in entering into the Promised Land, set foot into it. They will all die and be buried here. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days they explored the land—they would suffer for their sins and wander in the wilderness experiencing the bitterness of being separated from God.” God also declared that only Joshua and Caleb who put their trust in God and all those who were under twenty would enter into the Promised Land. The land of Canaan was only a month’s travel distance from Egypt. But because of the unbelief and hard-heartedness, they had to suffer living in the wilderness for forty years.

## **Rival Israelites**

### Presentation of the censer and the earth splitting open

Numbers 16:1-30

God had commissioned Moses and Aaron to deliver the people of Israel from their bonded slavery under the Pharaoh and to lead them to Canaan the Promised Land. Because they belonged to the tribe of Levi, God gave them the responsibility of priestly duties among the people. So they had authority and command over the people.

We have already learnt how Miriam was jealous of Moses' wife Zippora. In the same way many people began to feel jealous about the influence Moses and Aaron had among the people. Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On came forward against Moses and Aaron. They alleged that it was out of his pride that Moses made himself our leader without consulting anyone; all the people were holy and God's presence was there among the people; therefore we cannot accept Moses making himself greater over the people; every Israeli person was eligible to become the leader.

Moses could not accept these allegations. Moses fell prostrate on the ground and prayed to God. So according to the instruction of God, Moses said that as the next day the Lord would show who is for the Lord and who is holy enough to go near Him everyone was to take the censer and appear before the Lord and put burning coal and incense in it.

From the early times till Aaron's time the heads of the family were the priests. They were the ones who used to take care of the spiritual needs of the family. Moses' opponents got this evil desire when that was blocked.

As Moses had told them they gathered 250 people and assembled in front of the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The glory of God manifested over all the people. Since God had planned to put an end to all the people immediately, He told Moses and Aaron to move away from their midst. So both Aaron and Moses fell face down before the Lord and prayed that all the people should not be destroyed for the sin of one man. So God commanded the people to move away from the tents of these wicked men and not to touch anything belonging to them, so that everybody would not perish. The people moved away. Then the ground under Dathan and Abiram split open and swallowed them and their families, together with all of Korah's followers and their possessions. Soon the

earth came back to its old form. All the people of Israel who stood there heard the cries of the enemies of the Lord. The 250 people who had come with their censers as per the instructions of Korah started to run away crying out loud in fear that the earth would swallow them too. Then fire came down from God and burnt all of them up. God commanded to take all the censers because they were holy and beat it up to thin plates and make them into a covering for the altar.

Korah and his friends were people who worked against God. The Israelites knew that the 250 people who were burnt by the fire from God's presence were also enemies of God. But they started complaining against Moses and Aaron asking whether they had brought Jehovah's people out of Egypt to kill them and finish them like this. This was also displeasing to God. Immediately God sent a plague among them. People started dying. Then Moses told Aaron to make atonement for the people. Aaron took a censer put fire from the altar and ran to the midst of the people and swung it and offered the atonement. Thus, the plague was removed from them.

### **The Budding of Aaron's Staff**

Numbers 17:1-13

The people continued to grumble about Aaron's leadership. So God decided to end the longing of the people for authority and to let them know that it was God himself who had chosen Aaron to be their spiritual leader. He told the heads of each tribe to write their name on their staff and keep it in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron wrote his name on his staff for the tribe of Levites and kept it before the presence of the Lord. Moses told them that whomever the Lord is pleased with their staff would bloom and bear fruit by the next morning. The next day morning when the people had gathered before the Tent of Meeting they saw that Aaron's staff had budded, sprouted, bloomed and bore fruit. So Moses told the people that they should respect the leadership that was bestowed upon Aaron by God or else they would suffer loss in the hands of God. Everybody became scared. Aaron's staff was kept back in the Tent of Meeting as a sign of the problems that were created by the people's unbelief and their greed for authority.

## 10. SON OF GOD

### 1. Who do they say I am?

Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21

As Jesus approached the last part of His public ministry, it was necessary for Him to inform His disciples all about Himself and His mission. So Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do the people say I am?" So they told Him what was popularly believed among the people - "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

As John the Baptist had died a martyr for fighting against unrighteousness, people had hoped that he would come again. Jesus' appearance with the good news about the Kingdom of God was sudden. So the people's belief that He was John the Baptist became stronger.

The people also believed that Prophet Jeremiah would appear before the advent of the Messiah. There is also such reference to Elijah in Malachi's prophecy. So some people really believed that He was one of the prophets.

Jesus asked again, "Who do you say I am?" Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Peter's response was not something like an ordinary man's reasoning and intelligence. Because it was time to reveal to the disciples who Jesus was, the Heavenly Father revealed it to the world through Peter. Then Jesus said to Peter, "And I tell you that you are Peter (rock) and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be<sup>le</sup> loosed in heaven."

### 2. Request of James and John

(Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:3-35)

It had become clear that Jesus is the Son of God. So the disciples strongly believed if that was so, then there would come a reign with Jesus as the king. So James and John, whom Jesus loved a lot, wished that they should get the important positions in that kingdom. Since their mother was a relative of Jesus, they asked their mother to tell Jesus their wish.

Jesus replied, "You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" The baptism and cup Jesus was referring to here was the sufferings He was to undergo and the death on the cross. Not understanding what Jesus was talking about, they said they could. Jesus knew that later on they would drink the cup of shame and ridicule, and be baptised in blood. So Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with."

Then Jesus spoke about the high positions in ruling. To receive that one should earn the merit for it. Only people who deserved it would obtain it. It was not Jesus who did that, but God the Father.





## **The Fig Tree And The Vine**

### **1. The Unfruitful Fig Tree**

Luke 13:6-9

Normally in a vineyard fig trees are planted here and there. They will blossom in the third year and bear fruit. If the tree does not bear fruit in the third year then it is very unlikely to ever bear fruit.

One man planted a fig tree in his vineyard and waited. He went and looked at it in the third year. There was not a single fruit on it. So he told the gardener to cut it off. The gardener replied, "Sir, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." The owner accepted that request.

Here we see the merciful Heavenly Father who patiently waits to see each person bear good fruits. Despite Jesus pouring so many good things for the Jews, they just stood stumped without bearing any good fruit and were finally cut off.

### **2. The Vine and The Branches**

John 15:1-10

Viticulture or grape growing is not like other agriculture. As the vine grows canopies have to be put up so it can spread out well. Lots of grape bunches grow out from the branches of the vine. But some branches, like the fig tree we read about earlier, will not bear fruit. They will be cut off from the base. The branches that bear fruit also will be pruned once the harvest is taken. From the bottom of the branches that were cut off many new branches shoot up and bear good fruit.

Once Jesus said that He is the vine and His Father the gardener, and we are the branches that shoot off from that vine. The Father will cut off all those branches that do not repent and change their ways after hearing Jesus' advices. In the same way, branches of the believers who bear good fruit in their life also will be cut off and pruned and they will have to tolerate trials and hardships in order to bear more fruit and become stronger. Jesus said, "A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me... Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me." Just as the cut off branches when dry are thrown into the fire, so also the Heavenly Father burn away the branches that do not remain in Jesus. When those who have received baptism grow up like a branch of the vine and do not produce good fruit, they will be cut off and thrown into hell and eternal fire.

## **11. Contentious Water and Poisonous Snakes**

Numbers 20:1 – 21:9

According to God's punishment that the people would wander through the desert till the death of all those who were afraid to enter into Canaan the beautiful land that God had promised, they walked and walked and reached a place where there was no water. People were tired and thirsty. They began to grumble against Moses and Aaron. Those days they used to eat Manna which God dropped from heaven. If God could provide food for His people He could certainly provide them water without doubt. But the devil's evil works provoked the people to grumble against God.

When the Israelites became really parched with thirst, they began to blame Moses. They said, "We want water. Our cattle will die. We will also die. We have only Manna to eat. We are fed up with it. We long to eat figs, grapes and pomegranates. There is no grain for the cattle. Now there is no water also for us."

If the people had obeyed God they would not have had to suffer any of these hardships. God had promised them the Canaan land which flowed with milk and honey. Moses had been seeing, hearing and forgiving all this and leading the people for many years. Moses and Aaron went to the presence of God and knelt down on their knees and prayed.

The Israelites often committed sins and God would punish them. When the punishment became harsh they would cry out to the Lord. God would forgive them. Likewise God forgave them this time also. So God told Moses to take his staff and to lead Aaron and the people to the rock and speak to the rock and then enough water for the people and their cattle would flow out of the rock.

As per God's instructions, Moses gathered the people before the rock. Moses stood with his staff before the rock. However, instead of speaking to the rock as God had commanded, in anger he said to the people. "Should we give you water. It is God who gives water for the people." Not only that, Moses hit the rock two times with his staff. This was displeasing to the Lord.

God was merciful to the people and gave them lots of water. All of them and their cattle drank to their content. But Moses and Aaron had become guilty before the Lord. As the people of Israel had grumbled against the Lord, and Moses and Aaron did not according to the Lord's command speak to the rock but in self pride and anger hit the rock twice, God punished them. God did not let them enter into Canaan, the Promised Land.

The Israelites continued their journey and they had to pass through Edom. But the king of Edom did not allow them to go through that place. Therefore, they had to go around Edom. Since it was a long way, the people became tired. Again, the people began to grumble. They began to dislike the Manna from heaven and they started to speak against God and Moses.

God decided to punish them again. He send poisonous snakes amongst them. People who were bit by the snake died. When the people realised that these snakes were the result of their sin, they ran to Moses. They pleaded with him to remove these snakes for their midst.

Moses prayed to God and God told him to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Those who got bit by the snake if they looked up at the bronze snake would be saved he said. That way all those who were bitten were saved.

## **12. The Donkey Spoke**

Numbers 22:1-39

The Israelites continued their journey and reached a place called Moab. The name of the king of that place was Balak. This king was afraid of the Israelites. "This horde will soon destroy everything around us, like a bull eating the grass in a pasture," is what this king said about the Israelites. So he thought of a way to destroy them.

At that time there was a prophet named Balaam who belonged to a different race. This man who was a magician and an expert in divination loved money and wealth. Balak decided to use him and curse the Israelites. So Balak send messengers to Balaam with expensive gifts. Balak believed that if Balaam cursed the Israelites, they would perish. But he didn't know that the God of the Israelites is almighty.

Balaam knew that cursing the Israelites would do him harm. Moreover, that night, Jehovah God appeared to him and told him that the Israelites were the people of God and not to curse them. So Balaam sent back the messengers of Balak.

Then Balak sent more gifts with distinguished and noble people to Balaam. Balaam's heart was filled with greed. Instead of sending Balak's nobles back he told them, "Please stay the night, let me ask the Lord." He created a situation where he could easily fall into temptation. God who knew Balaam's intention told him, "Go with them, but say only what I tell you." Accordingly Balaam started his journey. He thought, though Jehovah had said that he was to say only that which God was going to tell him, it would be better to say what the king wants in front of the king and keep all these gifts for himself.

God did not like this. God got angry with him. An angel of the Lord with a sword came and stood in front of Balaam who was riding on a donkey. Though Balaam could not see the angel, the donkey could see him. The donkey moved away from the path into the fields. Then Balaam beat the donkey. The angel then went and stood in a path which had walls on either sides. The donkey moved close to one side and Balaam's leg got hurt scraping against the wall. Balaam got angry and beat the donkey again. Then the angel went and stood in a very narrow path. The donkey could not pass through that way. So that donkey lay down on the ground. Instead of finding out why the donkey was behaving so, he beat the donkey again.

Then something strange happened there. Donkey that cannot speak, spoke. "What wrong did I do to you that you beat me three times?" Immediately Balaam's eyes opened and he saw the angel. Balaam's anger turned to fear. He threw himself face-down on the ground. The angel told him, "If the donkey had walked forward I would have killed you." Actually it was the donkey that saved Balaam's life. Feeling offended Balaam decided to return home. But the angel said, "Go on with these men, but say only what I tell you to say."

Balak received Balaam very happily. He took the prophet to three different hills and showed him the Israelite camps. He urged him to curse the Israelites three times. But Balaam decided to obey God than man. Balaam blessed Israel three times.

## **12. The Passover**

Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:1-31; John 13:1-30

Almighty God, who had liberated the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage of slavery, who amazingly saved them from the sword of the Angel of Destruction and led them to the Land of Canaan, had given them a Passover Law. We have studied this in the Old Testament lesson. This is observed as a festival every year on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan. It is known as the Festival of the Passover. They sacrifice a lamb with no imperfection as a burnt offering and cook its meat and eat it at night. Besides the meat there will also be bitter herbs, unleavened bread and wine. The bitter herbs have been included in the meal to remind them of the hardships their ancestors suffered in Egypt.

When the day to prepare the Passover neared, the disciples asked Jesus where to arrange it. Jesus replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." The disciples arranged it accordingly.

When it was time, Jesus sat with the disciples to eat the meal. Then Jesus said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." After the main proceedings of the Passover were over, Jesus took the bread and blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." After supper He took the cup in the same way, gave thanks and gave it to them saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." Just as the lamb is sacrificed in the temple for the atonement of sins, it became necessary for the Lord to sacrifice himself for the atonement of the sins of the whole world. So, on the cross He offered His body and shed His blood. With that, the blood-soaked Passover sacrifice came to an end, and the blood-less sacrifice, the Holy Qurbana, with the bread and wine was instituted. Jesus also said that this should continue till He comes again the second time.

### **13. Death of Moses**

Numbers 20:22-29; Deuteronomy 34:1-12

The Israelites then pitched camp in the valleys of Mt. Hor. There the Lord said to Moses. "It's time for Aaron to die so take Aaron's priestly robes and put it on his son Eleazar." God had selected Aaron's son Eleazar as the chief priest in the place of Aaron. The consecration ceremony was very simple. The main event in this ceremony was the change of cloth. After that Aaron died. He was buried on Mt. Hor itself. All the people mourned the death of Aaron for thirty days.

The people travelled further. When they came near Mt. Nebo they stayed there. Since Moses had displeased God at the waters of Meribah God had told Moses that he would only see the Promised Land and never enter it. God had planned to take Moses up Mt. Nebo to the peak of Mt. Pisgah and show him all the Promised Land and then cause his death.

Moses gave his final speech to the people. He called all the people of Israel together to select a successor for him. He reminded them of all the major events that had occurred from the amazing deliverance of the people from Egyptian slavery till that moment. Moses reminded them of the Commandments that God had given and the Laws that God gave from time to time. He also told the people of the blessings that they would receive if they obeyed the Laws and the punishments they would suffer if they did not obey the Laws. He taught them how to live with a sense of justice and lead a healthy life. He also instructed them on how to worship God at the Tent of Meeting.

God had selected Joshua who was from the tribe of Ephraim and like a son to Moses as his successor. Moses called him to the Tent of Meeting to give him the necessary advices and to install him as the leader. As per the instructions of God, Moses lay his hand on Joshua and blessed him in front of all the people and the chief priest Eleazar. God also strengthened Joshua telling him to "Be strong and courageous."

After that God asked Moses to go up the hill. On the peak of Mt. Pisgah of Mt. Nebo Moses saw the beautiful Canaan land and later died. As per the command of God, having been denied entry into that land Moses died there and was buried there itself. Till today no one knows where he has been buried. Moses was 120 years old when he died. Till the day he died his eye sight never failed or his strength weaken. The people of Israel mourned the death of



Moses for thirty days. Since then there never has been a prophet like Moses in Israel.

### **13. The Anguish at The Garden of Gethsemane**

Matthew 26:30-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-11

After instituting the Holy Qurbana, Jesus gave His disciples His final advices and prayed for them to God the Father. Then, he led them to the Gethsemane Garden near Mt. Olive. When they entered the garden He told His disciples, "Sit here while I pray," and from among them He took the disciples Peter, James and John and went in a little further. These disciples had always been close to Jesus. Jesus was experiencing great temptation and pain and He began to be greatly sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." He went a little further in and fell with his face to the ground and prayed. In order to come out victorious from the great confrontation that Jesus was going to face, the only way was to pray to the Heavenly Father. When facing death His soul was deeply pained. The anguish was so great that His sweat was like drops of blood on Him. When He took the burden of the sin of the whole world He felt as if He was being separated from His Father. So then Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

After some time, when Jesus went to the disciples they were sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, Jesus went to pray. He prayed to the Heavenly Father. After a while when He came back to the disciples their eyes were heavy with sleep. Once again He went back and prayed. Returning the third time, after being strengthened by the Father, He found them still sleeping. He woke them up saying, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners." By then the people who were coming to catch Jesus had already entered the garden.

## **14. Joshua**

Joshua 1:1 – 6:27

The word Joshua means 'Jehovah is the redeemer'. Joshua came to the leadership position among the Israelites when he was selected as the commander of the army during the war with the Amalekites. Till then he was just a helper to Moses. Joshua became noted when that war was won in a marvellous manner. Joshua was one among the twelve tribal leaders who were sent out, as per God's command, to examine the Promised Land. Also, he was one among the two people who strongly believed that God would give His people the Promised Land. Moses understood Joshua's courage and faith. He saw the perfect successor in him. God gave guide lines to Moses to select Joshua for this huge responsibility. That is how Moses installed Joshua to that position in front of all the people and Eleazar the chief priest.

Joshua felt that he was actually not capable of executing the great responsibility in front of him. God gave Joshua all the strength and courage needed for it. Just as God was with Moses God was with Joshua also. God worked many wonders through him also.

After the taking charge, the first thing Joshua had to do was take possession of Canaan Land and make it their own. After crossing the River Jordan, City of Jericho was the first place to be defeated and conquered. But the city walls and gates were very fortified. Joshua knew that it could not be easily defeated by a war. So Joshua send two people there. Secretly they entered the city and studied their army's strength and war tactics. When the king there came to know that two spies had entered the city he ordered the soldiers to capture them.

When these two people realised that they were going to get caught, they found refuge in the house of a woman named Rahab. When the people of Jericho learned how God had separated the Red Sea and led the Israelites through and the way they won the wars later, they all lost their courage. Rahab told these two Israelites how the people of Jericho saw the Israelites with fear. Then she rescued them in a dramatic way through a window on the city walls. They had given Rahab a promise that in return for the favour she did to them, they would rescue her when they capture the city. As a sign a red cord was tied on the window. The two spies went and told Joshua all that had happened. Joshua decided to capture the place.

Once they entered the Land of Canaan the Israelites had to follow a new life-style. Before that, in order to praise God remembering all the blessings He had given them, in order to purify their hearts to live a life relying only on God and placing their hope only on Him, three days were spent in prayer.

On the third day, as God had told, Joshua brought the people to the banks of River Jordan. When the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant put their foot into the river, the river split into two and the water piled up on one side like a heap. All the people crossed over to the opposite bank walking through the dry land that appeared there. In memory of the wondrous event, Joshua placed twelve stones from the land in the river and twelve stones from the river on land. As soon as the priests climbed on to the banks of the river, the river started flowing normally like before.

We have studied in the Second Grade how the City of Jericho was conquered according to the plans of God in a certain manner. As Rahab had accepted the two spies from the people of God, she and her family alone were saved by the red cord.

#### **14. TRIAL 1**

Matthew 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:12-27

1. Before Annas

The soldiers arrested Jesus, bound Him up and took first straight to Annas. Though Annas was a high priest who had resigned from his position, he continued to get the respect and acceptance of the people. But, only Caiaphas who was the chief priest then, had the authority to make legal decisions. This Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas.

Annas' plan was to gather enough proof to report to the Roman government that Jesus was the leader of a rebellious group. So for that, Annas asked Jesus certain questions. This procedure was actually against the law. The proper way was to first question the witnesses and then the accused. Jesus questioned Annas on this twist of Law. Annas was trapped by Jesus' question. In order get the favour of his boss, one of the officials slapped Jesus on the face. Jesus replied, "If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I am right in what I have said, why do you hit me?" After that Annas did not question Jesus. He bound up Jesus and send Him to Caiaphas.

2. Before Caiaphas

Jesus was tried twice before Caiaphas - first, at night, before a small group of the Sanhedrin and then in the morning before the full gathering of the Sanhedrin. The small group's aim was to gather enough proof and evidences to enable the large Sanhedrin to make a decision. At that time, the Jews were under the rule of the Roman government. As there was not enough proof to take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, who had no respect for the matters of the Temple, they took Him to Caiaphas who asked him, "Are you not going to answer? Have you no answer to the accusation they bring against you?" Jesus did not reply to that. As there was a clause that under oath by the living God one had to answer Caiaphas asked Jesus the same question under oath by the Living God. And then Jesus replied, "I am and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." As soon as Caiaphas heard this he tore his clothes. By tearing his clothes he wanted to conclude that what Jesus said was blasphemy. Then all those who were gathered there said that there was no need of a witness anymore. He was worthy of death. With that ended the trial. The Jews tormented Jesus and ridiculed Him and spat on His face.

The actual Sanhedrin met in the morning and decided that He should be punished according to the Law which states that those who blaspheme against God should be stoned to death. The Sanhedrin had the authority only to pass the judgement but not to execute the judgement. So they bound Jesus and send Him to Pilate.

## **15. Job**

### **Job 1 – 42**

In the early history times, there lived a man named Job who was a contemporary of Jacob the patriarchal father. He was a good man who did good deeds, feared the Lord and kept away from evil ways. He was also a very wealthy man. God blessed him immensely above everyone else because he loved God and lived in the ways of God.

Satan told God that as long as Job had all the earthly wealth, Job would praise God, but if all that were to be taken away from him he would turn away from his faith. To prove Satan wrong, God gave Satan permission to take away all that Job had and test him in any way as long as he did not touch his body. As a result of that, troubles came in Job's life, one after another. All his animal-wealth was stolen, his servants killed by the attackers and his sons and daughters were killed when their house fell down in a storm. Even when troubles came pouring, his faith in Jehovah God did not shake. He said, "The Lord gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Satan argued that there is one thing that a man gives more value to than anything else in his life. He said Job would deny God for his own safety. Therefore, God gave Satan the authority to do whatever he wanted with the body of Job as long as it did not endanger his life. Troubles started again in Job's life who had stood strong in his love for God even in his deepest sorrow. Job got painful boils all over his body from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Since they feared it to be an infectious disease he was not even allowed inside the house.

The only comfort and reliance that he had in this world was his wife. But she also when it became unbearable and crossed the limits of tolerance said, "You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?" When troubles reach its peak Satan provokes us to think that death is the easiest way out. But Job said, "We who have enjoyed goodness from God should also suffer the bad times."

Three friends came to see Job who was suffering. They shared in his sorrow. Job cursed the day he was born and wished to die. Then one of his friends told Job the real sin that was hiding in him. He said that though Job did not sin through his deeds or heart or eyes, he said that Job committed a great sin because he always showed that he was a righteous man and that he was a very

wise man. Then the Lord appeared to Job in a storm. When he saw the Almighty God's power and holiness he realised his ignorance, imperfection and weakness. On becoming aware of his sin of self-righteousness Job said, "I am ashamed of all I have said and repent in dust and ashes." It was his faith in God that strengthened him. He understood that human life was more meaningful, deep and beyond understanding.

Job overcame all the hard trials that Satan brought to destroy him. When he won over the trials of Satan, God healed him. God blessed him and gave him twice as more than what he had earlier.

## 15. THE TRIAL II

1. Judas' sense of guilt – Matthew 27:3-10

Judas saw Jesus going in chains to Pilate and learned that Jesus was sentenced to death. Judas was witness to many of the miracles that Jesus performed. So Judas thought that Jesus would somehow escape from the hands of His enemies. As that did not happen Judas became sad about his despicable deed. He went to the priests with the thirty pieces of silver coins that he took from them. He asked them to release Jesus. But they refused. "I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death!" he said. He threw those thirty silver coins into the Temple and went and hung himself to death. As that money was blood money the priests did not allow that to be put back into the Temple treasury. So they used that money to buy the Potter's Field to bury foreigners. That place is known as Field of Blood.

2. Before Pilate - Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15: 2-15; Luke 23: 2-3, 18-25; John 18:28-19:16

Jesus was taken to Pilate with cuffs on his hand and a rope round His neck. The people raised some allegations against Jesus. But, Pilate did not find anything worthy of death. However, the people continued to shout against Jesus. While Pilate was finding it difficult to make a clear decision he learned that Jesus was a Galilean. So he send Jesus to Herod Antipas who was the King of the Jews. Pilate thought let the king of the Jews decide what to do.

3. Before Herod – Luke 23: 8-11

Herod had never seen Jesus, but he had heard about His teachings and miracles. In fact, Herod wanted to see Jesus and that was when Jesus was sent to him for a trial. Though Herod asked Jesus many things Jesus did not answer anything. Herod considered that as an insult. So he dressed Jesus in an elegant white robe that Jewish rulers wear and send Him back to Pilate.

4. Once more before Pilate – Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:28-19:16

Pilate realised that as Herod had not put any charges on Jesus, Jesus was an innocent man. "I cannot find anything he has done to deserve death!" he said. There was a tradition of releasing a prisoner that the people wanted during the Festival of the Passover which commemorated their freedom from slavery in Egypt. So in that context Pilate asked the people whom they wanted to be released. The people replied that they wanted Barabbas who was in prison. Barabbas was a murderer. As Barabbas was a murderer Pilate thought that the people would not want the release of him instead he could release Jesus. Moreover, Pilate's wife send him message saying, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man..." So Pilate said, I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him flogged and then release him."

So from there, the soldiers took him to the palace grounds. Since Jesus had claimed that He is the king of the Jews the soldiers put the Roman king's scarlet robe on Him



and a crown of thorns on His head. Instead of the royal sceptre they gave a rod in His hand. Then they kneeled down before Jesus and mocked him saying, "Hail, hail, King of the Jews." They spat on His face and slapped Him on His cheeks. They took the rod they had given Him and hit repeatedly on the crown of thorns on his head. Blood was flowing all over His body. It was thought that, that heart-rending sight would bring compassion to the hearts of the people. But there was no change in them. Instead they called out, "Crucify Him. Crucify Him."

Pilate who realised that these people's devilish craving would only end with the blood of Jesus took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

As per the wishes of the Jews he let the murderer and robber Barabbas free and send Jesus to be crucified.

### C. Memory Verses

1. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6
2. Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. Psalm 127:1
3. The LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. Psalm 146:8
4. Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice. Proverbs 24:17
5. Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Proverbs 28:13
6. "Turn to me now and be saved, people all over the world! I am the only God there is. Isaiah 45:22
7. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24
8. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48
9. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Matthew 6:19
10. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matthew 18:18
11. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Mark 2:17
12. If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Luke 6:29
13. Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. John 3:3
14. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16
15. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not have life. John 3:36
16. Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. John 14:1, 2
17. If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. John 14:16
18. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 1 Corinthians 3:16
19. For no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God. 2 Peter 1:21
20. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:17

## PART 4

### CHURCH HISTORY

#### 1. Establishment of the Malankara Independent Syrian Church

The Malankara Independent Syrian Church was established by Bishop Kattumangat Abraham Mar Koorilos (Cyril) in 1772. Mar Gregorios Yuhanon Metropolitan of Jerusalem consecrated Kattumangat Abraham Mar Koorilos to Bishop-hood.

Due to certain reasons (a detailed study is in the Fifth Grade) Bishop Koorilos who had to leave the Malankara Church came and resided in Kunnamkullam. In those days he lived at a two-storeyed bungalow of an aristocratic family called Panackkal. Later he moved around Pengamuck and Kattakambal and then went and stayed in Anjoor which was part of Malabar then. During his journeys through Pengamuck and Kattakambal which were backwater agricultural fields the farmers there informed the *Bava* about the pestilences that were attacking their crops. So the *Bava* in his compassion over their grief prayed specially for them. In remembrance of the divine assistance they received then, the people of that land even today celebrate the Memorial of Kattumangat Junior Bishop on May 29<sup>th</sup> with a Food Gifting.

#### 2. Service to the disabled

When the revered bishop reached Anjoor, with the help of the local residents he made a small hut with palm fronds so that he would be sheltered from the sun and rain and started living in it. At that time a Muslim Chieftain's son got bitten by a mad dog and started becoming wild. As in those days there were no anti-rabies injections, one had to just stand by and look helplessly at the victim slowly dying away. The local people who had realised that it was a seer with divine powers who was living there, brought the boy to the *Thirumeni's* presence. As he was a very compassionate person, he prepared to pray. After praying for a long time, with tears in eyes, he took the young boy in his arms and he put a tablet that was soaked with the *Thirumeni's* tears into the boy's mouth. Miraculously the boy was healed. The father who was over-joyed on getting back his only son from the brink of death, gave land to the *Thirumeni*. It is on this land that our Diocesan church stands.

After this event, many people have come here and taken medication for rabies and been healed. On another instance, a priest was bitten by a dog which was reared in the Bishop's palace. As nobody paid much attention to it, in three months' time the priest began to grow wild. The then Bishop Joseph Mar Coorilos (*Valiya Methran* of Alathur) was greatly pained that a priest at the church which provides relief for people who suffer from rabies, should die of rabies himself. The pious bishop got into the church immediately and did not come out of it for two days. On the third day, early morning he prepared for Holy *Qurbana* and brought the priest whose hands and legs were tied-up into the church and gave him Holy *Qurbana*. Subsequently, the priest was miraculously healed completely. The *Thirumeni* then proclaimed that healing those who had become wild with rabies was not an easy matter. It was this priest who was healed that later was consecrated as Joseph Mar Athanasius. The visitors' book reports that this Metropolitan also healed those who were bitten by mad dogs.

When the priest prays in his faith in Lord Jesus and the intercession of the Holy Fathers and says I command you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit to depart from this person, it will leave the sick people and they will be completely healed. Even today there are many incidents of sick people who have received healing from here and left glorifying God. In the early days the Kattumangat bishops used to give a singular healing potion against serpent bites. The shepherds of Thozhiyur continue to follow the traditions of the disciples who set out obeying the command to preach the kingdom of God, heal the sick and set free the demon possessed.

### **3. Behnam Chapel**

The first church in which the *Thirumeni* after reaching Anjoor and began to reside there and celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* is called after the martyr Behnam. It is considered that there were particular reasons for it. *Thirumeni* who was forced to leave the Malankara Church, built a small *Dayara* in a thick forest called Thevanalthadam near Vettikkal and lived there in anonymity. This *dayara* in which he celebrated the Holy *Qurbana* and prayed for the guidance of God to know God's purpose was named after the martyr. It is thought that the spiritual strength he received while in hiding in this place and which helped him in later years must have led to naming it after the martyr. It is said that he lived for nearly five years in this place.

Today the Behnam Chapel is the small church seen to the north of the small bridge situated four kilometres to the west of Kunnamkulam which in the old days separated the province of Thirukochi and Malabar. When the place and funds necessary to build the Thozhiyoor Diocesan Church was donated, he moved in there and this was named as *Kurishupally*. In 1895 it was renovated by Bishop Geevarghese Mar Koorilos (*Karumankuzhi*) who was the ninth Metropolitan. Though Bishop Geevarghese Mar Koorilos (*Cheeran*) who was the 12<sup>th</sup> Metropolitan arranged to rebuild this church in a modern way, he deceased before the work could start. Bishop Paulose Mar Philixenos III who was his successor completed its work and consecrated it in 1970. The new shepherds who are invested to the position of Metropolitan do not take part in other matters until they offer incense prayers in this church which was the asylum of the Kattumangat fathers and seek refuge in their intercession and receive blessings from them.

### **4. The Panakkal Ground**

The place that the *Thirumeni* received as a gift for the healing of the young Muslim boy from mad dog rabies, *Thirumeni* wrote in the name of Tharu of Panakkal family who had given him their two-storeyed bungalow to stay in Kunnamkulam before he reached Anjoor. There is some area to the east of the coconut grove of the church which is even today known as the '*Panakkal Parambu*'. This family had also donated one and a half acres of their paddy field towards the expense of conducting the food gift (*Anna Dhaanam*) during the Passover time. This bungalow in which the *bava* spend a few days is still preserved.

##### **5. *Sabha Suvisesha Sankham* or the Church Evangelical Association**

In 1948 during the time of Bishop Geevarghese Mar Koorilos (*Cheeran*), the Evangelical Association was formed for the organised running of the parish Sunday schools and Evangelical meetings. The main income for this association is the once-a-year cover-collection conducted every year and the grant that is given by the church. The members in this association are representatives from the priests, the Sunday school teachers and those who are permitted to work as evangelists by the church.

With a unified curriculum, the studies start at the beginning of a new year and at the end of the year a common exam is conducted. Activities that lend priority to spiritual matters like those that increase inner spirituality and Biblical knowledge, conduct special camps every year to encourage spiritual fellowship, help missionary workers who suffer because of illness and financial difficulties, print the yearly Scripture reading cards that provide enough of teaching and guidance and distribute them freely to every member's home, are the areas of functioning of this Evangelistic Association.

##### **6. *Yuvajana Prasthaanam***

It was during the time of Bishop Matthews Mar Koorilos (*Kuththurey*) in 1984 that an organisation like Youth League was formed in the Malankara Independent Syrian Church. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). The main of this organisation is to reach this Scriptural verse to its peak and maintain a spiritual level that would be a model for others and walk forward in the way that our loving Lord of the Calvary Cross showed us, and help them to become eligible to receive the gracious gifts from our God the Creator.

The magazine, *Kunjadukalludey Vellicham*, is a product of this organisation in order to develop the various abilities of the young people and dedicate them for the glory of God, and to be a source of blessing to the church and society. Moreover, to spread their activities to many areas of good deeds.