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PART 1

BIBLE LESSONS

A. OLD TESTAMENT

1. God Leads His Children

River Jordan was divided (Joshua 1:5)

At the time of Moses' demise, the people of Israel had reached only as far as Shittim which was situated on the east coast the River Jordan. To reach Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Jordan River had to be crossed. The entry into the Promised Land is a great event in the history of the people of Israel. For this, a special preparation was required. Joshua kept aside three days for this. He feared that he did not possess the wisdom that Moses had to guide this huge mass of people. So, God spoke to Joshua for these three days. He made him courageous and committed. God gave him instructions on how to cross the River Jordan. Joshua listened to it attentively and followed it carefully.

After three days, Joshua led nearly 25000 lakh Israelites to the banks of the River Jordan. When the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, stepped into waters of the river, God performed a miracle there. He held up the flowing waters like a bund. Until all the people reached the other shore walking on the dry land, the priests holding the Ark of the Covenant stood firmly in the middle of the river.

In order to maintain a memorial of the miracle, as per the command of God, a monument was built by gathering twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes, from the river bed where the priests were standing and placing them on the land; and twelve stones from land was taken and placed on the bed of the river where the priests were standing. After that, the priests climbed ashore and the waters of the river regained its normal flow.

The uncircumcised males among all the people who had entered into Canaan were circumcised. As with this act the ridicule that existed among the Israelites was rolled away, this place came to be named 'Gilgal' meaning 'rolled away'. The first Passover in Canaan was celebrated here. The day after the Passover, when they ate the unleavened bread that was made from the crop of the land, the heavenly Manna which they had been eating for 40 years stopped falling.

1. God Works a Miracle

The Sun and Moon Stood Still (Joshua 9:3 – 10:43)

In the Second Grade, we learned about how Joshua captured Jericho and the city of Ai. The people of Gibeon plotted a trick when they realised that they could not stand against the force of the people of Israel who was being led and moving under the protection of Jehovah God, So, a few of them came to Joshua wearing some worn clothes and brought old wine skins and dry and mouldy bread. They told Joshua that they were coming from a distant land and requested him to make a peace treaty with them. So Joshua made a promise to them that their lives would be saved. Three days later, Joshua learned about their trick. As the treaty with them was made in the name of God, without killing them, they were allowed to live and work as slaves.

On learning about the treaty made by the people of Gibeon with Israel, the king of Jerusalem which was a big city that was situated to the south west, along with four other kings who were close by, prepared to go to war against Gibeon. When the Gibeonites learned about this, they asked the Israelites for help. According to the promise, Joshua went out to war. And, the Lord was with him. God told Joshua not to be afraid of the enemies and that all the enemies would be killed.

They marched all night and in the morning confronted the enemies. Immediately, they fought fiercely and chased away the enemies. God hurled large hailstones from heaven on their foes. More people died in this hail storm than those who died at the sword of Joshua. All the five kings ran and hid in a cave. By then the day was nearly ending. When Joshua realised that the enemies would escape in the dark, he commanded the sun to stand still where it was. Until the war was over, the sun did not set and the moon stood still. The Israelites searched and found the five kings and killed them and conquered their countries. It was the Lord who is the creator of the sun and the moon who performed the miracle, God taught the sun-worshippers that He is the Living God of the Israelites.

With the help of God, Joshua captured all the other kings of the small states in Canaan and conquered their lands. And so, the vast Canaan land which lay to the west of the Jordan River came under the Israelites' control.

God Fulfils His Promise

Partitioning of the Land of Canaan (Joshua 18 – 24)

When the vast expanse of the whole Canaan land came under the custody of the Israelites, Joshua set the Tabernacle of the Congregation (Tent of the Lord's Presence) at Shiloh. After that he divided the land of Canaan to the twelve tribes.

The tribe of Levi, however, had no right of share in this. It was decided that they were to sustain from what came from the 'Offering Table'. Forty eight cities, situated on either sides of the River Jordan were allowed for them to reside.

Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh were each considered as a separate tribe. The tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh were given land to the east of the River Jordan and the rest of the nine and a half tribes to the west of the Jordan river.

Caleb, a strong and courageous person with a steadfast faith was always close to God. The Mount Hebron, which was part of the allotted share was in the hands of the Anakites. They were wrestlers and their cities were large and fortified. Other than Caleb, there was no one else who could fight and win over them and subjugate them. So, as per the request of Caleb, he was told to conquer them and take Mount Hebron as his share.

After that, in the cities of the Levites, Joshua established Cities of Refuge - three each on either sides of the River Jordan. If a person had killed someone accidentally or deliberately, in revenge, the relatives of the victim used to kill the murderer. These cities of refuge were places to temporarily escape to, from such acts of revenge. This was part of the Laws of the Israelites. The Council would cross examine this refugee. If he was found guilty they would drive him out of the City of Refuge to be killed. If he was found not guilty then they would allow him to live in that city and would be taken care of.

In order to offer sacrifices to Jehovah God, the people on the east of the River Jordan, built an altar called 'Aed'. However, they did not offer there the burnt offerings and grain offerings that were according to the Laws. They used to go to Shiloh itself to make these offerings because, the people on both sides of the river were one children and to create awareness that they were all of one race known as Israel and to be never separated by the River Jordan.

As the time for Joshua's death came close, he called all the people of Israel to Shechem. He told in detail, and made them understand the entire history - from the time God called Abraham to that day. He advised them to live in devotion to Jehovah, and to stand firm in the Laws and Commandments of God given to Moses. Joshua also made them take a pledge. Then as a witness to all this, Joshua placed a large stone near the holy place of the Lord. Thus, Joshua fulfilled his duties and died at the age of 120 and was buried in his share of land.

God Executes Justice

Deborah (Judges 4:1 – 24)

After the time of Joshua the people of Israel broke the commandments of God and became idol-worshippers by following the prayers and traditions of the gentile people living around them. Because of this, God gave them over to enemy kings who made them slaves and persecuted them. But, when the people with one heart turned towards God and prayed and turned away from evil ways, God used to raise up Judges for them and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. Deborah was one such Judge who ruled Israel for 40 years. She was a prophetess who lived under a Palm tree that was situated between Ramah and Bethel in the hill-country of Ephraim. Deborah used to listen to all the arguments and disputes of all the Israelites and give a judgement on issues.

At that time, Jabin, the King of Canaan, had enslaved the Israelites and persecuted them. He had 900 iron chariots and the commander of his army was a man named Sisera. When their oppression became very unbearable the Israelites cried out to Jehovah Lord. When the time to deliver them from their persecution had come, God spoke to Deborah. Accordingly, she called for Barak, the commander of the Israelite Army. She told him that God had commanded to gather 10,000 people from the Israelites and to wage war against Sisera. But Barak's faith was feeble. So he said, "If you go with me, I will go." Deborah who was a firm believer of God and a prophetess replied, "I will go with you. But, because of the way you are going about this, the honour will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman."

Barak gathered all his 10,000 soldiers at Mount Tabor. When Sisera heard about this, he came with his huge army and iron chariots. As the horses pulling the iron chariots could not climb up the steep hills of the Mount, they set camp by the Kishon valley. As per the advice of God, Barak went down to the valley. God fought the war for Israel. The entire enemy army was destroyed. Sisera got out of his chariot and ran away. He ran to the tent of a lady named Jael and sought refuge. But she was a friend of the Israelites. So she pretended to entertain him. She gave him a cup of milk and spread out a sheet for him to relax. When he was in deep sleep, she came with a tent peg and hammer and hammered down the peg into his temple and killed him. Just as Deborah had prophesied, that commander was slain by a woman.

Barak and all the Israelites on realising that God fought the war with them, sang praises to God with Deborah.

05. God Emboldens a Judge

Gideon (Judges 6 & 7)

After the days of Prophetess Deborah, the Israelites began to live, forgetting the true God. Then, the Midianites who lived to the south of the Sinai Desert began to harass them. These Midianites used to come in groups and enter into the land of Israel and take away all their crops and cattle. When the Midianites had harassed the Israelites like this for nearly seven years, the Israelites remembered God, repented and turned to Jehovah. Then, for their restoration, God raised Gideon from the tribe of Manasseh.

Gideon who was an Israelite, remembered God and worshipped Him. One day, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him when he was threshing wheat which he had hidden from these robbers. The Angel said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all these bad things happened to us? The Angel of the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand." So Gideon requested him not to leave without receiving an offering. Hurriedly, Gideon went and made some unleavened bread and cooked a young goat. Then as the Angel instructed him, he placed it on a rock. When the Angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand, fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the Angel of the LORD disappeared.

According to the command of God, Gideon made a sacrifice unto Jehovah and destroyed all the Baal idols in his father's house. When the people came to know about this, they became very angry and demanded that Gideon should be killed. For that, Gideon's father replied, "If Baal is really god, then, let him punish my son."

In order to know whether God's hand would be there with them for the war, Gideon took a bail of wool fleece and kept it out. He said, "If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that God will save Israel by my hand." In the morning, the fleece was wet and the land was dry. Then, apologetically Gideon conducted the test the other way round. At that time, the fleece was dry and the land was wet. With this, Gideon was certain that he would be victorious and called the people to go for war.

As a lot of people had enrolled willing to go for war, God commanded that all those who were afraid could go back. And of those who remained, God asked them to drink water from a stream. Those who knelt down and lapped the water directly into their mouth were sent back. Only the three hundred who cupped their palms and took water in it and drank it joined Gideon's army. Each one was given a trumpet and an empty jar with torches inside. In the middle of the night they went and positioned themselves around the Midianite camp. Then, as soon as Gideon blew his trumpet and broke the jar, all the three hundred of them did the same thing. The Midianites who were woken up by the loud trumpet sound were startled. They thought that behind each torch there was an army and they killed each other and died. The Israelites had a great victory that day. Gideon judged Israel for 40 years.

06. God Raises Another Judge

Jephthah (Judges 11:1 – 12:7)

Jephthah was a valiant person. As his brothers would not accept him, he joined some scoundrels in the locality and lived among them in the land of Tob.

At that time, the Ammonites went out to war against Israel and, there were no judges to lead the Israelites. Jephthah was the son of Gilead an Israelite. So the elders among the Israelites decided to get Jephthah from Tob and make him the commander of their army. He in turn asked them, whether, if he won the war against the Ammonites, he would not be forsaken by them, instead, be accepted as their leader always. To that they promised with God as their witness, that he would be their leader always. So, Jephthah went with the elders. At Mizpah, before Jehovah, all the people gathered and made him their commander and leader.

Before going out to war against the Ammonites, Jephthah send out messengers. He requested them to get along in peace. But they refused to yield to it and prepared for war. So, Jephthah also prepared for war. Before leaving for war, Jephthah made a vow to God, ..."whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

After that he went out to war. He defeated the Ammonites and conquered 20 towns. And, to greet the victoriously returning Jephthah, his only daughter came dancing to the sound of tambourine. When he saw his daughter, Jephthah remembered his vow to God. He was terribly saddened by it and tore his clothes. He cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break." She told him, "If you have made a promise to the LORD, do what you said you would do to me, since the LORD has given you revenge on your enemies, the Ammonites."

So, according to the request of his daughter, he send her to the mountains with her friends to grieve. After two months, when she returned to her father, Jephthah did to her as he had vowed and offered her to the Lord. Since then it has become a custom in Israel to remember Jephthah's daughter once a year. Jephthah remained the judge of Israel for six years.

07. The Mighty Judge Whom God Selected

Samson (Judges 13:1-25)

When the Israelites did not have a strong leadership, they got trapped into idol-worship and sinned against God. So they became slaves of the Philistines for nearly 40 years. After a long time, they began to remember God and were sorry for their sins. They prayed to God to forgive their sins and save them. So God prepared to raise a leader for them.

The Manoah couple were from the tribe of Dan. They had no children even after a long time. One day, an Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife. The Angel told her that she would become pregnant and give birth to a son. Since he was being dedicated to God in his mother's womb, the Angel advised her that a razor should never touch his head. The Angel of God revealed that this son would grow up and deliver the Israelites from the slavery under the Philistines. As God was going to fulfil such a great thing, she was told not to drink wine or fermented things and not to eat anything unclean.

When Manoah came to know about this, he prayed to God that he also wanted to see this Angel. So on another day, the Angel appeared again for Manoah and reminded him of all the things that were told before to his wife. As an act of gratitude, Manoah brought a young goat and offered it to the Lord on a rock. While Manoah and wife were watching, the Angel of Lord disappeared in the flames rising up to the skies from the burnt offerings on the altar. Then they fell face down on the ground and worshipped God.

As the Angel had told, Manoah's wife gave birth to a son. As his face was always bright and smiling, they named him Samson which meant 'small sun'. And thus, the Spirit of Jehovah led him on. It was this child who later became the mighty Samson who was the protector of Israel for 20 years.

8. God Foresees for His People

Ruth (Ruth 1 – 4)

The Book of Ruth is a narration of events that occurred during the time when the judges ruled the Israelites. Ruth is one among the few women who have been given a respectable place in the Holy Bible. Though she was a gentile woman, it was because Ruth had a place in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the book of Ruth, which is just a family story, was included in the Holy Bible.

When there was a severe famine in Bethlehem, Elimelek who lived there, took his wife Naomi and sons Mahlon and Kilion and went to Moab and lived there. This place was where the descendants of Lot lived. Moab was not included in the land of Israel. The people of Moab were gentiles and idol worshippers.

Before long, Elimelek died leaving Naomi and her two sons. After some time, Mahlon married Ruth and Kilion married Orpah. These two Moabite girls were very beautiful and of good character. Naomi's family lived there for nearly ten years. Then, Naomi's both sons died. Naomi, who was grieving her husband's death, could not bear the pain of the loss of her two sons. So she decided to send her daughters-in-law back to their homes and return by herself to Bethlehem. By this time, the famine in Bethlehem was over.

Naomi called Ruth and Orpah to her side and kissed them. Then she said to them, "May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me," and weeping aloud she bid them goodbye. But Ruth did not agree to it. She said, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried" and joined Naomi on her journey to Bethlehem.

Ruth arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem. All the women welcomed them with cheer. Then Naomi said, "Call me Mara, I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." Ruth worked very hard for their sustenance and looked after her mother-in-law.

There, in Bethlehem, was a very rich man named Boaz who belonged to the family of Elimelek. According to the traditional laws of Israel, Boaz had the right to marry Ruth. He was really impressed and attracted to Ruth's beauty, innocent behaviour and her incomparable devotion to her mother-in-law. So, according to the decision of the all the elders of the town, Boaz married Ruth. They had a son called Obed. Obed's son Jesse was the father of King David. Thus, Ruth was included in the clan of Abraham and a place in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.

9. God Punishes Those Who Do Not Do His Will

Eli the Priest (1 Samuel 3:12-7:2)

After the mighty Samson, who maintained law and order in Israel for 40 years, Eli ruled over them. Eli was the priest at the Temple of God in Shiloh. He had two sons. They used to steal the offerings from the temple and lived with no fear of God. Their father, Eli did not pay proper attention in bringing up his sons in the right path. Because of this, God revealed to Samuel, that He would punish the home and sons of Eli.

When the Philistines prepared to go for war against Israel, in order to win the war, Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas took the Ark of the Covenant to the battle camp. But the Israelites lost the war and Eli's sons were killed. The Philistines took the Ark and kept it in the temple of their god, Dagon. Eli was a fat person and had very poor eye-sight. When Eli learned of all that had happened in the war while he was seated on a chair that was at the gate near the roadside, he immediately fell backwards from his chair, broke his neck and died.

In the morning, when the Philistines went to their temple, they found the idol of their god Dagon lying face down in front of the Ark. They took it and put it back in its place. The following morning, they found the idol fallen down with his face down before the Ark of the Lord. Its head and hands were broken off and lying in another place. The people got scared and took the Ark and placed it in another town. Then the people there got inflicted by tumours and rat infestation and all their crops were destroyed. So, according to the advice of diviners, they put the Ark on a new cart and tied two milching cows to the cart and send it back to Israel. In the cart, along with the Ark, they also kept models of tumours and rats in gold as offering to Jehovah. The Israelites were glad that they got the Ark back. They lowered the Ark from the cart and cut the cart into fire wood and offered the cows as sacrifice. They took the Ark and kept it in Abinadab's house on the hill. Later, when David became king, he moved it from there and placed it according to the laws, in a tent that David had prepared specially for it.

10. God Anoints a King for His People

Saul (1 Samuel 8:4-10:16)

After the demise of Eli the priest, Samuel was the governor for Israel. Though Samuel made his children administrators when he became old, because of their greed, they turned the law up-side down. So the people hated them. They could not live in peace and their united strength waned because of the unjust judges. Therefore, they wished to have a secure and centralised government under a king, just like their neighbouring countries. For this they approached Samuel.

Samuel tried to turn them away from this idea, because, Jehovah God is Almighty and is reigning as King of Kings. The request of the people would be rejecting the true God. Samuel warned them about what would happen if there was a king. He told them that with a centralised authority, the king would limit their freedom, and the people could be subjected to cruelty in an autocratic manner. Finally, as the people continued to insist for a king, Samuel agreed to anoint a king according to God's will.

Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, had a son named Saul. He was handsome, valiant and taller than all the people. One day, one of Kish's donkeys went missing. He sent his son Saul with a servant to go search for it and bring it back. But, they could not find the donkey even after searching for three days. Then, Saul's servant suggested that they seek the help on this matter from a wise prophet who lived nearby. Thus, Saul and his servant reached Samuel's place.

Samuel had already had a divine word from God about the arrival of Saul and his servant. God had commanded that Saul was to become the king, and so, Saul should be taken aside and anointed as king. Accordingly, Samuel invited the guests endearingly and made them stay with him. Samuel told Saul about God's revelation, that God had chosen Saul as the king of Israel and that he would save the Israelites from the Philistines. Samuel anointed Saul as king by pouring oil on his head and send him on his way.

When Saul reached Tabor wilderness, three people welcomed him and gave him two loaves of bread. Then a group of prophets approached Saul and began to prophesise. Then the Spirit of the Lord came heavily on Saul. Then, when Saul walked on a little further up to Rachel's tomb, two people from his house came and informed him that the donkey was found.

Before Samuel had send Saul on his way, he had told Saul that all these things would happen on the way. When all that Samuel said took place exactly the same way, Saul believed that the anointing with oil which Samuel had done was as per the command of God.

11. God Helps Those Who Trust in Him

King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 19:1-20:33)

“God is not happy that you went for war with a king who does not love God.” These were the words, a prophet of God named Jehu, said to Jehoshaphat when he returned victoriously from war. When he heard this, he regretted that he had done wrong by helping wicked king Ahab. When the prophet saw this, he said, “Because of this, the anger of the LORD is on you. There is, however, some good in you, for you have set your heart on seeking God.”

After this, Jehoshaphat trusted God with all his heart and decided in his heart that he would be a good king and be useful to the people. He travelled all over the land of Judah and urged all the people to love God. He encouraged everyone to be honest and just.

Once, all the neighbouring countries joined together and came for war against this king. When Jehoshaphat heard that they had reached very close to his country, he was terribly frightened. That was because his people lived in real peace. They were not prepared to resist a strong army.

Jehoshaphat, like his father, did not trust in just his men or his army. Jehoshaphat decided to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. He gathered all the people in Jerusalem. He ordered them to pray to Jehovah for help.

Jehoshaphat himself led the people in prayer. After the prayer, God spoke to the people through a priest. He said, “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this huge army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. Be courageous and see the deliverance the LORD will give you.” When Jehoshaphat heard these words, he bowed down and worshipped God. All the people in the temple fell down and worshipped God.

The next day when the army set out, Jehoshaphat arranged in the front line singers to sing praises to God. They sang: “Praise the LORD! His love is eternal!”. When they climbed atop the hill by the boundary of their land and looked down on the enemy camp, they found all of them lying dead.

Here Jehovah God worked for His people. When the armies of different countries joined together and moved against Israel, suddenly some guerrilla fighters stepped out from the crevices of the mount and jumped in front of them. Then the armies started doubting one another and killed each other eventually.

Because Jehoshaphat fully trusted in the Lord, God gave an astounding answer to his prayer. All the people returned to Jerusalem and praised God.

12. God Extends the Life of His Servant

King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-20:6)

Though most of the kings of Judah were wicked, Hezekiah was a good king. This king's mother was the daughter of a prophet. Therefore, he understood what is God's love and did what was pleasing unto God.

Soon after he began his reign in the country, first, he opened the Jerusalem Temple which had been shut down and got it cleaned and purified. He prepared an altar for offerings. He called the Levites and the Priests and entrusted them with the responsibility of the Temple. He also reminded them that, they were chosen to work for God and so, it should be done with a pure heart.

He advised the people that if they forsook Jehovah God again, like their fathers, they would become slaves again. So they were to repent and make offerings for their sins. Accordingly, the Israelites worshipped God with tambourines and trumpets and great joy. The people and the king rejoiced over the fact that they were able to offer sacrifices in the Holy Temple again.

For a long time, the people of Israel were unable to observe the Passover Festival which is a festival in remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. King Hezekiah called all the nobles and other important people and decided to celebrate the Passover Festival. The king sent an invitation to everyone in Israel to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover. Everyone came with gladness and celebrated the Passover.

King Hezekiah destroyed all the idols and altars of foreign gods which were installed in the streets of Jerusalem by kings before him. The people of Israel used to worship and burn incense to the bronze snake of Moses which they called '*Nehushtan*'. This was the snake that Moses made of bronze, as God had instructed, to which those people who had been bitten by vipers in the desert looked at, for their life. King Hezekiah destroyed that also. There has never been a king who placed his trust fully on Jehovah God of Israel.

Later, Hezekiah was struck by an illness that would cause him to die. At that time, Prophet Isaiah went to King Hezekiah and told him that God had proclaimed that he, the king, was going to die. When King Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and wept and prayed to Jehovah. Jehovah heard his prayer. Prophet Isaiah who had seen the king's tears, went back and told him another proclamation of God. "I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life." Thus, Hezekiah who got his life extended, died after successfully reigning for 29 years.

13. God Punishes the Proud King

King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:18-21)

Uzziah was a King of Judah who took upon the reins of the country at the age of sixteen. For all the time he lived in fear of the Lord and listened to the advices of Prophet Zechariah, God gave him prosperity. He prospered more and more when he loved God and did what was pleasing unto the Lord. He triumphed in the war against the Philistines and destroyed their cities.

Uzziah built towers in the plains and dug many wells. He made vineyards in the hills. He had a large army who were well-trained in using all kinds of weapons. And so his fame spread throughout all the neighbouring lands. Many of these foreigners would bring gifts and form friendship with him.

When Uzziah became strong in every way, he became proud in his heart which caused his downfall. In the Jerusalem Temple, only the priests of the Levite family have the authority to enter into the holy place and burn incense on the incense altar. No one else had the right to do it. We learned last year about how the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and his family when they challenged God and burned incense.

King Uzziah went into the Temple of God to burn incense. The chief priest and other priests followed him into the Temple to force the king to stop him from doing so. Only the consecrated priests who are descendants of Aaron are allowed to burn incense. It is improper for a king to burn incense. That is breaking the Law of Moses. This act would not be upright before Jehovah God. So, the priests told the king to leave the Holy Temple. But the king turned in anger towards the priests. When the priests looked closely at the king, they saw leprosy break out on his forehead. He was punished even before he could leave the incense altar in the Temple of Jehovah.

According to the Law of Moses, lepers are ex-communicated from the society. A hut is made outside the city and they are made to live there. Thus, famous King Uzziah, had to live all alone as a leper all his life, in a special place outside the city because of the anger of God that came upon him when he broke the Law,

14. God Takes Anticipatory Actions for His People

Esther Becomes Queen (Esther 1 - 3)

We have learned about Ruth who is given a respectable place in the Bible. It is the history of a queen who was ready to sacrifice her life for her people, which is included as the Book of Esther in the Holy Bible. Esther's family was one among those who were taken as slaves to Babel. Her parents had died when she was young. So it was her cousin Mordecai, who was her father's brother's son, who brought her up. Mordecai was a guard at the Babylonian king's palace.

One day, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) who was the Babylonian king then, invited all the nobles and officials and gave them a banquet. At that time, King Ahasuerus' queen was a beautiful lady named Vashti. After the banquet, when the king was in high spirits with all the wine he had drunk, he felt like showing off his beautiful queen to all the invited noble guests. So he called one of his servants and commanded him to bring the queen to where the nobles were gathered.

When the queen heard of the king's command, she got angry and sent the servant back. When the queen publicly insulted the king by refuting his command, the king got furious. So the king consulted with his councillors on how to punish her. They said that other women would despise their husbands just like the queen, therefore, she should be banished from the presence of the king. And the king passed a command to that effect. They advised the king that in Vashti's place, a beautiful and obedient lady should be selected and made queen.

So, all the beautiful young virgin girls in the country were called to the kingly court for the king to find a new queen. In that, Mordecai send his adopted daughter Esther also. She had a lovely figure, beautiful face and good character. As the king loved Esther more than all the other young ladies, he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Then, one day, Mordecai learned about a plot by two of the king's officers to assassinate the king. Immediately he informed the king about it through Esther. When the king investigated about it, he learned that the plotting was true. He sentenced both those officers to be killed. The king praised Mordecai who gave the information to save the life of the king and wrote it down in the official records.

15. God Hears the Cry of His People

Esther Saves Her People (Esther 3 - 10)

King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) had conquered many countries. When the Babylonian Empire became huge, he appointed Haman as his Prime Minister. All the people bowed down and honoured Haman because the king had commanded so.

When all the people obeyed that command, Mordecai alone would not honour Haman. Mordecai was a Jew. The Law of God did not permit him to bow down and honour anyone other than Jehovah God. Haman, who was intimidated by this, looked for an opportunity to destroy him and the all the Jews. The Jews did not know that Queen Esther was one of their people, a Jew.

One day, Haman misled the king and got an order to kill all the Jewish people. Even the date was fixed. The king's command created panic among the Jewish people. But Esther was unaware of this new order of the king and its content. Mordecai tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ash on his head and went wailing as far as the gates of the palace. Through her maids Esther enquired the reason for Mordecai's bitter pain. Queen Esther realised, that this royal position which God had given her, was an opportunity for the deliverance of her people. She instructed Mordecai to call all the Jewish people and fast and pray for three days.

On the third day, Esther went to the king wearing lovely clothes while the king was seated on his throne. Actually, without the king's summons, no one was allowed to go before him. Esther knew that when she would go in without his summons and if he did not stretch out his sceptre, she would be killed. Still, ready to sacrifice her life for the deliverance of her people, she went and stood in the inner court. At that time, outside the palace, all the Jewish people, with one mind, were praying together to God. She waited patiently. Then, the king stretched out his sceptre. She walked forward and touched the tip of his sceptre. Her only request to the king was that he and Haman should attend the banquet she was preparing that day.

Then, that night the king remembered that he had not rewarded Mordecai for saving his life. In the morning, when Haman appeared in the royal court, the king asked him how a king should show honour to someone. Haman thinking that no one but he himself was worthy of being honoured by the king, told the king all the desires in his heart. The king agreed to all that. Then, he ordered Haman to do all that to Mordecai who had saved the king's life. This was a big blow to Haman who had set up gallows to kill Mordecai.

After the king and Haman were satisfied by the feast that the queen had organised, the king asked her what she wanted. She said, "May the king be pleased and save me and my people. We are going to be killed." When the king learned that Haman was responsible for that, he got him tied up and was hanged and killed on the gallows that Haman had put up for Mordecai. The day that was set to massacre all the Jewish people, Haman and his family and all his friends and followers were killed. And, Mordecai was made the Prime Minister.

B. NEW TESTAMENT

1. Jesus Speaks About John

Man with Elijah's Spirit (Matthew 11:7-14; Luke 7:24-25)

In all of John the Baptist's advices, it was Jesus Christ who was reflected. When Jesus started his ministry after taking baptism from John, the people were with Jesus. When John had preached "He must become greater; I must become less," Jesus did not allow the people to think that John was an insignificant person.

Jesus asked the people: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" When Jesus asked this, John was in prison. John had without fear and at the stake of his own life, spoken about the immoral act that the then King Herod had committed by marrying his brother's wife and warned him about his sin. The king, who was frightened by this, imprisoned John, not giving heed to his wife's instigation to kill John. Jesus made it clear there, that John was the epitome of prophetic courage and life sanctity unwavering by any wind.

"What did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." Up until the time he appeared to the Israelites, John was in the wilderness. There are no royal food and fine clothes in the wilderness. His was a clothing of camel's hair and a leather belt. Jesus made it clear to the people that John was not just a prophet as they thought. He was greater than a prophet, he was a messenger of God who declared the coming of the Messiah and prepared his way.

Then Jesus said that John had the highest position among people who were born as humans. Jesus reminded them that the justifications which the Laws give and the completeness that the devout rituals give are not equal to the experience of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus blamed the people when they said that John was mad. John went about preaching following strict rules of fasting and dressing like Elijah who was the prophet amongst the prophets. That is why the people said that John was mad. At the same time, people rejected Jesus who gave value to social relations and ate and drank with ordinary people without any strict fasting rules. Jesus told them, that no matter who ever distanced themselves, there will be a few who will receive divine wisdom and they will enter into the Kingdom of God experience.

B - 2. Jesus Transforms Individuals

Nicodemus (John 3:1-21)

The Pharisees were a very strict religious sect of people. They were among the people who found fault in the words and deeds of Jesus trying to prove that it was breaking the Laws, and who vigorously worked to remove him from the Jewish religion. Nicodemus was an influential person and a chief who was also a teacher of the Law, a member of the Sanhedrin, from a noble family, wealthy and one who searched for truth. We see that he was a secret disciple of Jesus and actively participated in the burial of Jesus.

One night Nicodemus went to Jesus. He said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Perhaps, it was from fear of the Jews or because he thought that night time was the best time to learn the Word of God that he approached Jesus at night. Aware of the reason why Nicodemus came to him, completely ignoring his pleasant words Jesus told him, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” This is something that money cannot buy or be possessed by hard-work. This is a gift from God. When we start a new life with Jesus Christ in God’s house, this gift is attained. Until that gift is received, there will be no spiritual life.

Since all are conceived in sin and born in sin, a new birth is necessary, because God is holy. No sin is allowed in His presence. Jesus made it clear how one can be born again – by water and by spirit. By water as in the obvious way; and the church teaches that, through the unseen Spirit that is present in the baptism one is born again.

Here, Jesus explains the how the Spirit works using the illustration of wind. Though the wind can never be seen, it can be felt. In the same way, the working of the Holy Spirit cannot be explained by human minds. But the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit and the changes it brings about is very obvious. Jesus spoke with authority about heavenly matters as He came down from heaven. However, Nicodemus who could not understand the inner meaning of all this, continued to ask questions.

As Nicodemus knew the Old Testament very well, Jesus reminded him of the Bronze Serpent which Moses raised on a pole in the desert. When the people of Israel looked at it with faith, they were healed. Jesus said, in the same way, he also would be raised so that the sins of those who die for Him will be forgiven and they would attain eternal life when they look in faith. Jesus also revealed to Nicodemus the great truth, that in order for this great sacrifice to be fulfilled on this earth, God has sent His Son.

Pt 1 B - 3. Jesus has Authority Over Demons

Demonised People Become Sane (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

The first place to which Jesus went where non-Jews lived was Gerasenes. This was located near the place called Decapolis. We also see it as a place called Gadarenes near the Gerasenes Lake. Whichever way, both were places where the non Jews or Gentiles lived and a place where pigs, which the Jews despised very much, were reared as herds.

When Jesus neared the village, a man approached him. He used to live in the tombs (graves). He could not be bound even with chains. This man, who was always screaming, used to hurt himself with stones. Just this description makes it clear that he was a demon-possessed man.

According to modern medical science, this description would not seem proper. Psychologists would call this person only as an owner of a dysfunctional personality. However, the Bible teaches that right from the time of creation, Satan was there on earth, and from that day onwards to this day, the devil is ever watchful to destroy the image of God in mankind.

When the demon-possessed man saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God, please don't torture me! If you are sending us out send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." It was because Satan, who is the enemy of the children of God, was living in him, that he knew Jesus who was a total stranger to him, to be the Son of God, The demon-possessed man knew that because Jesus was united with God the Father, and the Spirit of God was residing in Him, Jesus had authority over Satan. That is why he requested permission to move over to the herd of pigs. The ultimate aim of Satan is to sow destruction, and the ultimate aim of God is to lead a man to salvation. To make this visible there, Jesus allowed his request to be fulfilled.

When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. When the demon-possessed man heard the voice of the Son of God, he became sane and went and sat at Jesus' feet and requested him to make him a disciple. The man attained complete deliverance from the control of evil which had taken over him. Jesus did not agree to his request. His witnessing had to start from his own home. And, that should be about the blessings which God had showered. So Jesus told him to go and tell his family and friends all that had happened to him.

News of this incident spread like wild fire all over that place. All the people came rushing and asked Jesus to leave that place. Just like today, even in those days, there was the haste and urge to slip away from the love of God who heals and comforts and stands with his hands outstretched to bless us.

Pt 1 B - 4. Jesus is One who gives Deliverance from Illness

Heals the Son of a Royal Official (John 4:43-54)

In a place called Capernaum, there was a rich royal official. He had all kinds of comforts and good living. But he was always sad, because his son had an illness that was not curable and he was on his death bed.

At such a time, this royal official heard about the amazing deed that Jesus performed in Cana, when Jesus turned water into wine. Besides that, he had also heard about the incident that happened in Jerusalem Temple a few days earlier, when, in order to cleanse the Temple, Jesus took the whip in his hands and struck out at the buyers and sellers and chased them out of the Temple. He got the news that the very same Jesus had arrived again at Cana in Galilee, which was about 40kms away.

Not waiting for a second thought, the royal official immediately left to see Jesus. As soon as he saw Jesus, he fell at Jesus' feet and worshipped him. He begged, "My son is suffering from an incurable illness and is about to die. You must come and heal him." The Galileans who did not believe in Jesus, believed only in signs and miracles. Jesus who understood that this was temporary and superficial said, "Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe." But the royal official pleaded again, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

Here, the royal official, without any considerations of his worldly positions or boastings, humbly and with full belief, approached Jesus and pleaded sincerely. So, Jesus told him, "Go, your son will live." The man believing Jesus at just His word without seeing any signs went back in peace.

While the royal official was still on his way back, his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. When he learned that he was healed at the exact time when Jesus said, "Your son will live," he rejoiced and praised God.

There are two things to be noted here. The miraculous healing was by the word of Jesus. It is the power of His word that is high-lighted here. Secondly, the strong faith of the royal official - he heard the words of Jesus and returned in faith. That faith became fruitful. Because of that, his whole family believed in Jesus.

Pt 1 B - 5. Jesus is the Deliverer from Sins

Paralysed Man at Bethesda Pool (John 5:2-9)

AS THE Jerusalem Temple had 12 gates, the gate at which sheep and goat were sold for offering was called the Sheep Gate. The Bethesda Pool was near this gate. The water in this pool was always still. At times, the water in the pool would be stirred up over. It was believed that the angels stirred this water. There was a reason for this. When the water was being stirred, the first person to get into the pool would be healed of whatever disease that person had. Therefore, a lot of sick people had crowded at the pool side. Five covered platforms were built by the pool for their convenience. In one of them, there lay a man for 38 years who was paralysed all over. Because of this condition, he could not get to the pool when it stirred and get healed. He saw many people getting healed and returning home happily.

One day Jesus saw him. Till that day no one was ready to help him. Everybody was bothered only about their business. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Then he told Jesus his desire. Jesus instructed, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately he was healed. Satisfied and happy by it, he walked to the Temple to praise and thank God.

The Religious leaders saw this man who had been invalid for decades, take up his mat and walk. That was a Sabbath day. As far as a Jew is concerned, carrying a load and walking on a Sabbath was breaking the Law. They could not see the miracle that had occurred there. Instead, they threatened the man who was healed and tried to find the person who was responsible for this and kill him.

When Jesus saw the healed man again at the Temple, Jesus advised him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

Pt 1 B - 6. Jesus Unties the Bonds of Sabbath

Heals the Crippled Bent Woman (Luke 13:10-17)

ON one Sabbath day, Jesus was teaching in the Temple. That day there was a bend lady over there. For 18 years she was unable to straighten up as she was tied up by a spirit of illness. Jesus called her near to Him and put His hands on her and healed her. Immediately she straightened up and glorified God.

In the previous lesson, we learned that the Jews had a law saying that they should not take up any load on the Sabbath day. Healing is a work. Everyone is allowed to do work only six days in a week. The seventh day should be set apart for God and to relax. Jesus did a work of healing a sick person. This, according to the Jewish perception of those days, was an action. Therefore, they interpreted it as a forbidden act. So, wanting Jesus to hear, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The Law had permitted them to untie cattle and give them water and food on the Sabbath day. Including it within the limits of that law, Jesus asked them publicly, "Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day? Can't you see it as a good deed?" Unable to give an answer to Jesus' question, the synagogue leader quietly slipped away and all the people delighted at this blessed work.

According to the Temple leaders' reasoning, religion should be organised in a disciplined and legitimate way. Jesus never objected to this stand. But the Jewish leadership felt that such life-giving deeds of Jesus, was a challenge to them. But, Jesus' perspective was that religion should be for the total deliverance of man.

Today, that woman's crippling bend can be seen as a symbol of the various bindings that is experienced in the life of man-kind. It could be perhaps, a bondage of being unable to communicate with God because of sin. It could be a bondage of life problems which renders one unable to straighten up. It could be a bondage of being unable to face life without spiritual faith. Whatever kind of bondage it is, Jesus will deliver you from it.

Pt 1 B - 7. Jesus Taught about Forgiveness Through a Parable

The Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

JESUS was teaching the disciples about forgiving and the limits of forgiveness. According to the Jewish Law, one needs to forgive a brother who does wrong, only three times. Peter, being more generous, asked Jesus a doubt, whether seven times was enough. For that, Jesus replied, “not seven, but, seventy times seven”. In this reply, the arithmetical calculation is not the priority, but to forgive without setting limits, endlessly. Jesus made this clear through a parable.

A servant owed the king ten thousand bags of gold. No matter how hard this servant tried, he couldn't repay it. After waiting patiently for a long time, the king called the servant. The king ordered to sell all that the servant had, including his wife, and repay the loan. The servant cried in his inability and fell at the king's feet. He begged the king to give him a little more time. The king felt pity on him and let him go. Not only that, he cancelled all his debts.

As the man was happily returning home, he saw one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins. Immediately, he grabbed that man by his neck, began to choke him and asked him to repay his debt. That fellow servant fell down before him and begged him to give him a little time, but this man would not listen to it, instead, he had him thrown into jail until he would pay the debt.

The king came to know of this matter. He called that servant back and scolded him. The king said to him, “You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” The king had him whipped and imprisoned.

Through this parable, Jesus gave a new form and meaning to the Laws Peter had been following till that day. Jesus' followers should be a community who has been forgiven and forgives. Jesus who showed this noble goodness of forgiveness in His words and deeds tell us, we should forgive the small sins others have done to us, for God to forgive our countless sins. Otherwise, on Judgement Day, God's forgiveness to us will be withdrawn and we will receive punishment.

Pt 1 B - 8. Jesus Taught about Mammon through a Parable

The Shrewd Manager or Steward (Luke 16:1-13)

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (mammon).” This was Jesus’ teaching to his disciples. Jesus taught his disciples this truth through a parable.

A rich man had a manager to look after all his wealth. The manager was wasting his master’s wealth and because of his carelessness lost some of it. But before long, when the master realised that this steward was not loyal, he decided to dismiss the manager from his service.

When the manager heard this, he took a new decision. He called the rich man’s debtors and lessened their debts by twenty and thirty and got their goodwill. The rich man praised the disloyal steward for his strategy.

There is a very confusing situation here. Why did the manager who had reduced all the money that should have come to the rich man become clever? What was the reason for the rich man to praise him for it?

Some stewards will steal the rich man’s wealth, and do unfaithful things in the company of the debtors and make wealth for themselves. There are also people who earn the favour of the master by unjustly putting too much burden on the debtors, more than they can bear, and make them debtors forever.

The first action of the manager in the parable was that of an unfaithful steward. But, he later took on the behaviour of a smart steward. When he went and visited the debtors and took interest in the agricultural matters and gave them necessary instruction, the rich man praised him. When he stopped the manner in which he made excess profit for the rich man, and reduced the need for the debtors’ hard work, he was able to earn the friendship of the debtors also.

Wealth, more than a man needs is dangerous, because, this wealth is the sum total of wealth accumulated through unjust means at different times. So Jesus called it Mammon. The shrewd manager made friends using this mammon. Jesus advises us just that. He continues his teaching: the children of this world are clever. They must work for the Kingdom of Heaven. The faithfulness that we show in the little things of this world will be reason for big wealth in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus makes it clear that, like the unfaithful steward, the Jewish leaders who lived in position and honour, and in pomposity, without giving value to human ethics, are those who adore mammon. Therefore, they will never be able to establish a relationship with God.

**Pt 1 B - 9. Jesus Taught About Inheritors of The Kingdom of Heaven
Through A Parable**

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27)

THOUGH preachers interpret these Bible portions in different ways, Jesus points through these two parables as to who will be joined in the Kingdom of Heaven at the Final Judgement.

When a man was going to a distant land, he called his servants and entrusted them with his wealth. According to each one's ability, he gave five, two and one. The person who received five talents did some business with it and gained five more talents. And the person who got two earned two more. But the person who got one, went and dug a hole and hid the money.

When the master came and looked at the accounts, he was happy with the first man and the second man. He accepted them as good and faithful servants. He made them in charge of many things because they had been faithful in few things and entered them into the master's happiness. But he called the third servant, "You wicked and lazy servant." The master took that one talent from him and gave it to the servant who had ten talents. He said that if he had given the money to gold traders when he went to the distant land, instead of giving it to the wicked and lazy servant, then on his return he could have got the money back with interest. So he pushed the wicked and lazy servant into a dark place far away, outside, where there is crying and teeth gnashing.

In these parables, the talents that each one received and the circumstances for each one to work were different. In the same way, they did not get the same result for their trials. And, there is no dislike seen on the master's part for this. God has given everyone on this earth, different kinds of abilities. How each one uses it is what is being considered here. The third servant in this parable blamed others without any reason. He doubted even the work that was given to him. He was a coward regarding his future. Laziness stood out prominently in his talk and actions. So he was set for eternal hell. As the works of the others were acknowledged, they were set apart for eternal happiness that is heaven.

This parable teaches that Jesus' return and judgement will be like the master who went to the distant land came and surprisingly asked for the accounts.

Pt 1 B - 10. Jesus Requires Us to be Ready

1. The Servant Who Waits for His Master (Luke 12:35-40)

IN all of Jesus' parables a very important calling is 'be ready'. Jesus has given two principles on how to be ready for His second coming.

1. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;- (King James Version v. 35)

Be ready for whatever comes, dressed for action and with your lamps lit.
(Good News Bible v. 35)

It means, you should be like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

2. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. –(NIV Bible v. 39)

The first part of this parable teaches, just as the servants waiting for the master, and the house owner who protects his house from the thieves are alert, we also should be prepared for Jesus' second coming.

What will happen at His second coming is what the second part of this parable teaches.

“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants .” – KJV v. 37

“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.” – NIV v. 37

Because we are not familiar with the Jewish tradition of serving and entertaining, it is quite difficult for us to understand the happy experience in it. Seating them for a meal and entertaining them is a symbol of the promised blessing for those who are found watchful at the time of His second coming. Through this parable, we are reminded that because the Son of Man will come at an unexpected time, we have to be always watchful and prepared.

2. The Unfaithful Servant

(Luke 12:41-48; Matt. 24:45-51)

“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.”

In this parable, characters of two different personalities are presented. The first type is servants who work faithfully, wisely and unselfishly, in the master’s absence. The other is those servants who think that the master will only come very late, and go on to hurt others and live unjustly. Jesus promises that when the master returns, the servants of the first type will be given greater responsibilities and rewards. However, at the same time, the servants of the second type will not only be punished, but they will also have to provide adequate reasons for their deeds, according to their knowledge and what God had given them.

Pt 1 B - 11. Jesus Speaks with the Spirits of the Dead

Transformation of Jesus (Matt. 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-36)

It used to be a norm for Jesus to very often sit in lonely places and pray. Sometimes He used to take the disciples He loved very much to pray with Him. Once, Jesus took Peter, James and John to pray, and went to the-top of Mt. Tabor which lies 10 km south east of Nazareth. There they were praying in the niches of the deserted hill-top.

Then, a halo appeared around Jesus and His face, by heavenly glory, shone as bright as the sun. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth could whiten them. They saw two men talking to Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah who had lived for long on the earth and passed away.

Before they could go to the mountain, Jesus had told them that they would see the Kingdom of God come in power. In this incident, they were being showed the greatness of it. The veil of humaneness that covered the glory of Jesus was removed for a minute's time. It revealed His glory and the presence of God. It is worth remembering here, how when God appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai, Moses' face shone bright.

It was Moses, the Provider of the Laws and Chief Prophet Elijah who appeared here with Jesus. The presence of Jesus with them points to the fulfilment of all the Laws and prophecies of the Old Testament in Jesus. Besides, it makes clear that the souls of the departed people are actively present and is constantly in touch with us.

This incident occurred at the time of the Jewish Festival of the Tabernacle (Tents). So Peter, filled with a spiritual experience on seeing the glorification of Jesus, with the idea of making that glorious spiritual presence permanent there, asked Jesus: "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" Then a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!" When the disciples saw and heard all this, they were bewildered and Jesus pacified them.

A bright cloud denotes the presence of God. For the people of Israel, the Pillar of Cloud and the cloud that covered Mt. Sinai were signs of God's presence. The voice of God they heard from the cloud was a command from God that above all, hereafter, they should follow Jesus.

Pt 1 B - 12. Jesus Predicted His Persecution

1. First Prediction - (Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22)

ACCORDING to the Jewish ideology, the Messiah was the symbol of prosperity, might and victory. And Peter had realised that the Messiah was their teacher Jesus. That is when Jesus said that after He reaches Jerusalem, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." The followers of Jesus could never visualise the Messiah in their minds, to be an oppressed person. So, Peter took Jesus aside and told him not to say anything like that. Through the temptations given to Jesus in the wilderness, Satan was trying to divert Jesus away from His commission. Here, in the garb of devout discipleship, Satan was appearing through Peter. Jesus who understood that, called Peter 'Satan' and rebuked him sternly. This incident made it clear that it was Jesus' duty to fulfil the prophecy and that He would never deviate from it.

2. At Galilee (Matt. 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

WHEN they came together in Galilee, He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." The disciples who were marvelling at the wondrous deeds of Jesus could not understand it. Why should Jesus suffer, was what they were thinking. Also, Jesus' statement that he would rise again on the third day was unintelligible to them. If they were to understand that the will of the Father should be fulfilled, there should be a change in their concept of the Messiah. That is why Jesus was repeatedly telling them about His days of persecution.

3. During the last trip to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34)

Prophet Isaiah has prophesied the details of the sufferings that the servant of God was going to bear, the rejection He was going to receive and the depth of the ridicule He would get. Perhaps, it was by the insight He got from these prophecies that Jesus was able to give a clear picture of the persecution He was going to suffer. It was because they would have to endure the blow they would receive when all the prophecies would come true, that Jesus when he was going to Jerusalem for the last time, reminded them of these things again. "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

The Son's determination to carry out the duty that the Father had entrusted Him is what is seen here, too. Whenever Jesus talks about death, he also says about the resurrection on the third day. It is this hope of resurrection after death that helped Him to face even death.

Pt 1 B - 13. Jesus Wept

1. At the Tomb of Lazar - (John 11:28-37)

VILLAGE of Bethany is situated on the eastern slope of the Mt. Olive which lies three kilometres east of Jerusalem. Here, there was a home that Jesus loved very much. Lazar and his sisters Martha and Mary lived in that home. Jesus used to come to this house often to relax. In the Gospel according to St. John, it says that it was this Mary who poured the perfume on Jesus' feet when he was attending a reception. But, as per the Gospel according to St. Luke, it was a sinful lady. Perhaps it was two different incidents.

When Jesus was living on the banks of the River Jordan, He had learned that his friend Lazar was lying sick. Even after He heard the news, Jesus stayed there itself for two more days. By that time Lazar died. Fearing the Jewish leaders, the disciples kept discouraging Jesus from going there. But St. Thomas encouraged everyone saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." And they set out for Bethany.

By the time Jesus reached there, it was four days since Lazar had died. When Mary saw Jesus she said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her crying and all the Jews who were with her crying, Jesus was pained and troubled in his heart and He wept. Jesus was in a very deep emotional distress, then. The height of his anger was reflected here. In this occasion, Jesus' absolute humaneness was revealed.

St. Ivaneos has given three reasons for this: (1) Irritation over Martha and Mary's little faith. (2) The ire over the insincere show of sympathy that the Jewish leaders present there exhibited. (3) Man who was created in God's image being under the control of Satan - the anger over Satan's domination over man, through death. Jesus does not blame the sisters who were grieving over the death of their brother, neither does he evade from it. Instead of that, Jesus joined them and comforted them.

2. When He Thought About the Future of Jerusalem (Luke 21:12-17)

FROM Bethany Jesus was coming to Jerusalem on a donkey. When coming down from Mt. Olive, on the west side, the magnificent Jerusalem Temple can be seen. 'As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it' Luke 19:41.

Before the Babylonians could attack Jerusalem, Prophet Jeremiah had lamented about the destruction of Jerusalem. Because Jeremiah's insight was not heeded, Jerusalem and its residents came under the slavery of Babylon. In the same way, people who did not accept Jesus would be destroyed by the Romans. That was the reason why Jesus wept.

Pt 1 B - 14. Jesus Counted as a Criminal

Jesus Being Crucified Between the Thieves

(Matthew 27:32-38; Mark 15:21-32; Luke 23:32-43; John 10:1724-37)

IN the history of mankind, the Cross of Jesus is the most horrible, at the same time the most glorious, and a death that became the cause for the salvation of the world. In order not to defile the city, all death penalties were conducted outside the city. To hold the death penalty of Jesus, He was taken outside the city, but, not too far from it, to a small hilltop that had the shape of a skull and so was called The Skull. In Hebrew this place was known as Golgotha (meaning the place of the Skull) and in Latin as Calvary. Legend has it that Adam's skull was there and that Melchizedek made his offerings there. Perhaps it was God's plan to join together the first Adam whom God formed and created and the second Adam who was formed by the Spirit of God.

Those who were sentenced to death had to carry their own cross to the place of crucifixion. Therefore, Jesus' had to bear a huge cross and go to the place. The soldiers used to whip Him on the way. To whip a person, the Romans used to use a type of leather whip on to which pieces of metal were attached. If you got whipped by this sort of a whip, then the skin along with flesh would be ripped off. Having been whipped by such a whip, Jesus was covered in blood and totally exhausted. That is why the soldiers forced Simon who was a passerby, to carry the Cross. Simon who was from Cyrene in North Africa, was there for the Passover Festival.

When Jesus was crucified in the midst of two thieves, Isaiah's prophecy came true: '... he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors'. Isaiah 53:12

Death by crucifixion was normally given to revolutionists, traitors and slaves who run away. The Romans intended this sort of a punishment as a warning to others. This was also a warning to the people to keep away from any sort of treason. So they wrote and nailed the charge against the convict on the head of the cross: 'He is the King of the Jews'. That was the charge against Jesus.

The people who followed Him there gave Him wine mixed with myrrh to drink. This was a drink to make the person unconscious and ease the pain. But Jesus did not drink it. He was willing to bear and suffer in whole, the agony of dying on the cross in full consciousness.

The thief on the left side insulted Jesus. He told Jesus to save himself and prove that He is Christ. Even the Jewish leaders had not understood who Jesus was. Jesus' tolerance and patience attracted the heart of the thief on the right. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He scolded his friend on his ignorance. The thief requested, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus gave forgiveness of sins to the thief who realised at least on the verge of death believed and repented of his sins. Jesus gave him the promise, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Pt 1 B - 15. Jesus' Body is Interred

Joseph and Nicodemus

(Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:40-47; Luke 23:49-56; John 19:38-42)

ACCORDING to the Roman tradition, the body of a person who dies on the cross is left there itself as food for the animals and birds. They would also release the body to the family and friends who asked for the body back.

Jesus died on the Passover Festival Preparation Day. That year, since the Passover Festival and the Sabbath coincided, it was an important day. The dead bodies were not supposed to lie on the cross on Sabbath Day. Usually the live body of the person would be left hanging on the cross for three days. So in order to die fast, there was a practice of breaking the legs. Accordingly, the Jews got permission from Pilate to break their legs and get them. The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves who were hanged with Jesus. As Jesus had died by then, His leg was not broken. One soldier pierced his side. Then, blood and water flowed from there - that which redeems and sanctifies the whole world. This was a miracle and the fulfilment of a prophecy.

The disciples were not capable of getting special permission to get Jesus' body and bury it. At this difficult situation, Joseph of Arimathea, (Arimathea was 30 km north-west of Jerusalem) reached for their help. He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, wealthy, a secret disciple of Jesus, good, just and looking forward for the Kingdom of God. He had also strongly expressed his objection at the time of Jesus' trial.

Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisee who believed in Jesus. He removed the veil that hid his discipleship, publicly joined Joseph, and decided to bury the body of Jesus according to Jewish religious traditions, in a decent way. The Jews counted burying the dead as a blessed rite. Since Joseph and Nicodemus thought of Jesus as a blessed person, they considered this opportunity as a great luck. In a previous lesson we have studied about this Nicodemus going to see Jesus at night.

As Joseph had good influence among the rulers, he asked Pilate to release the Body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon. He ordered the release of Jesus' body to Joseph. Joseph had made a new grave for himself. Jesus was formed in a womb where no one else lay. He was mounted on a donkey on which no one else had ridden. Likewise, they decided to bury Jesus in a tomb in which no one else was buried. Nicodemus brought about 40 kilos of a scented ointment of myrrh and aloes. All the preparation to bury Jesus was complete. At that time they were willing to sacrifice anything for Jesus. They bathed the body of Jesus, rubbed the scented ointment, and with that scented ointment and spices, wrapped it in fine linen and buried Him in the grave. Then they rolled a huge stone over the entrance.

All the women who were there waiting at the time of Jesus' death were still there including Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jose watching all that was happening. Tradition has it that, after Jesus had entrusted his mother to John, they both left the place and came back in time to bury Him.

Just as Jesus had told His disciples whenever He spoke about His persecution that he would rise again on the third day, on the first day of the week, He rose, gathered His disciples who had become scattered and entrusted them some responsibilities and ascended into Heaven on the fortieth day.

C. Memory Verses

1. The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. – Psalm 14:1
2. Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. - Psalm 32:1, 2
3. Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. – Psalm 103:1, 2
4. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. – Psalm 103:10
5. 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 loosed in heaven." – Matthew 16:19
6. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' – Matthew 25:40
7. Truly I tell you, whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin." - Mark 3:29
8. "Dear children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." - Mark 10:24, 25
9. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." – Luke 6:38
10. "My food," Jesus said to them, "is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do. – John 4:34
11. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12
12. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. – John 15:1, 2
13. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8
14. Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. - Romans 5:12
15. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? – Romans 8:35
16. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. – 1 Thessalonians 4:16
17. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. – Hebrews 11:1
18. So then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the Devil, and he will run away from you. – James 4:7
19. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. – 1 Peter 3:17
20. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. – 1 John 3:1

PART TWO

WORSHIP ORDER

A. Songs (Geethangall)

1. Mariyaamin Smarannam...
2. Prarthanayil samayamithalo...
3. Aadhyacharyathwam...
4. Dheiva prasavithri...
5. Nhiney varichoru...

B. Worship (Nhamaskaaram)

Evening Worship - Sanhdhya Nhamaskaaram (Complete)

C. General Knowledge

1. Reflections on Holy Qurbana in Old Testament

1. The Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden where our first parents were placed is the first reflection. If the Holy Qurbana is the Bread that came down from Heaven and gives eternal life, the fruit of this tree was the promise of eternal life. Because they ate the fruit of this tree in an unworthy manner, God drove them out, so that they would not live forever,
2. We refer to Holy Qurbana as 'offering'. Cain and Abel gave offerings to God, and God was pleased with Abel's offering. This is a reflection of the Holy Qurbana. Abel's lamb that was slaughtered is an advance act of Golgotha.
3. Noah's Ark that saved mankind from the floods, is seen as a reflection of our Lord's Divine Sacrifice. The prepared ark without ruin which was sent from Heaven for the salvation of all mankind, was what became salvation for us.
4. The sacrifice that Abraham offered at Mt. Moriah, without hesitating to offer his only son, is a reflection of Holy Qurbana. In this sacrifice, He who made advance preparations to save all of His people, Israel, offered His own Son as sacrifice for the salvation of mankind itself.
5. The bread and wine which Chief Priest Melchizedek offered before God is seen as a reflection of Holy Qurbana. (Genesis 14:18) There is a tradition that Melchizedek made his offering near the grave of the first father Adam, and the Cross of our Lord was also erected there.
6. Jehovah God had given many commandments (Leviticus Chapters 1 to 7) for the forgiveness of sins and thanksgiving to Israel, His own people. All these are interpreted as an advance sign.
7. "Taste and see that the LORD is good..." (Psalm 34:8) which David sang was about the Divine Body and Blood of Lord the Messiah.
8. The sacrificial bread kept on the table in the presence of God by Moses and all those who followed, (Leviticus 24:5-9) was an early act of the offering we make today. God had commanded that only the priest should eat the bread so that the ordinary people would not eat it in an unworthy manner.

9. Jesus himself says in John 3:14, "Just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up..." He gives a reason for it: "that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." (John 3:15)
10. The live coal which touched the mouth of Prophet Isaiah for the atonement of his sins (Isaiah 6:6-7) was a depiction of the Divine Body and Blood of today. That is why the priest when he dispenses the Holy Qurbana says, "The live coal that is the Divine Body and Divine Blood."
11. Joshua removed his filthy clothes and became clean. (Zechariah 3:4). This is a reflection that points out, that we become children of God when our filthy clothes of sins are removed by His Divine Sacrifice.
12. The Israelites cut a lamb and smeared the blood on the frame in order to escape from the last plague that Jehovah cast upon Egypt to deliver them from their bondage under Pharaoh. To redeem each one of us from slavery under Satan, sinless blood had to be poured out in Calvary.

Pt. 2; Sec. C. Les 2.
The Common (Public) Worship of the Holy Qurbana

IN THE early days, those who had not been baptised used to take part in the Worship Service. Till the recital of the Creed, which is the foundation of a Christian's faith, those who had been baptised, used to stand on the north side, and those who had not been baptised on the south side inside the church. The unbaptised people, who had not yet affirmed their faith in the Creed, would not partake in the Holy Worship after the Creed. Two different Epistles were read to the two separate groups. Even today, in some churches this custom is followed. In the greetings, while reading the Epistle itself, the Lay Leaders say 'Habibaa' (Dearly Beloved) to those on the north side (1 John 2:7; 4:1, 7; 3 John 2:5) and imitating St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, 'Ahaai' (My brothers and sisters) to those on the south side. (2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:1; 3:1). At the same time, when the priest pronounces the Roosma, he addresses both the groups with 'Ahaai habeebaai'.

In the common worship of the Holy Qurbana, the first part is the birth and baptism of Jesus and in the second part, the common worship.

Pt. 2; Sec. C. Les 2. Les. 3 – Birth and Baptism

THE *MADBAHA* or the Altar is covered with the curtain because Heaven is hidden from sinful man. Heaven opened up at the time of Jesus' baptism, and the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in bodily form as a dove. (Luke 3:22) That was when the people on earth got an opportunity to see heaven opened. That is why the screen is moved aside at this time.

The prayer by the priest, "*Nhiney prasavichchavallaaya Mariamum, nhiney mamodeesa muckiyavanaaya Yohanaanum...*" (Born of Mary and baptised by John), is what we hear first. Holy Virgin Mary reminds us of the birth of baby Jesus; and John the Baptist reminds us of His baptism. When the priest goes around the *Thronos* (Altar Table) with the incense, the Lay Leader who goes in front with the lit candles represents John the Baptist who came as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. The verse in Luke 3:4, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him...' is noteworthy here. At this time the Holy *Thronos* represents the manger of baby Jesus.

Pt. 2; Sec. C. Les. 4 – Common Service

INDICATING that the gospel was first told to the Jews, The Epistle and the Bible portion taken from the Gospels is read by the priest as the Gospel or *Evangaelion*. In the early days there was a custom to give a sermon based on this Bible passage. However, as there are no 'to be baptised people' coming to the church, and as the people come in late, the sermon has been moved to the final part.

The *Evangaelion* is to be listened to with faith. The verses and responses said at this time remind us of the fact that it has to be listened to with faith. Swinging the censer, the lay leader says, (*Nhaam adakkathodum, bhayathodum, sathya vishwasathodum, nhalha dheiva bakthiyodum nhinhe... kellkkannam*) "let us stand in silence, awe and reverence and listen to...". When the priest says (*Jeevan nhalkunha prasangamaaya*) "proclamation which gives life" about the *Evangaelion*; and (*nhammudey karthaavum nhammuday dheivavum, nhammudey rakshithaavumaya*) "who is our Lord, God and our Saviour", about our Lord, we say in response, (*Anganey vishwasiche njangall aetu parayunhu*) "So we believe and affirm." Celebrating the memory of the holy ministry of our Lord - His teachings and the miracles that He performed - is the idea of reading the *Evangaelion*. We enter into the most dignified Holy Qurbana in the light and circumstances of these Bible passages. Only those who believe in the Words proclaimed from the *Evangaelion* Table will be able to see the Words that incarnated from the Table of Life.

Pt. 2; Sec. C. Les. 5 – The Need for the Rituals in the Worship Service

DURING the Divine Supper, He took up the bread and wine in His hands, looked up to Heaven, gave thanks, blessed it and broke it and gave it to His disciples. After that He commanded them to do this till His second coming, in remembrance of Him. The rituals are a reflection of the presence of God. Through these rites we are able to affirm our faith. The visible signs are able to wake up the sense of worship that lies dormant in our hearts and to give it energy. Therefore, it helps to bond the Supreme God who is invisible to external eyes and beyond man's understanding, with elements and signs that are visible to human senses to create an awareness of the presence of God, and so that through it, our worship would be meaningful and rising from our inner self and we become aware of receiving the gifts of grace.

PART THREE

FAITH TRUTHS

(Continuation from Grade IV)

3. Holy Confession

THOUGH we have received freedom, through baptism, from sin that is in us from birth, the evils of this world tempt us and we become sinners. Confession is a sacrament to cleanse ourselves from our filth and walk in the newness of the Kingdom of God. In the early days, the tradition was to publicly confess in front of the church and the priest. The punishment for that was also given publicly. Public punishment sentence was given for publicly confessed sin. However, the Church, realising the flaws of Public Confession, from the Fourth Century onwards enforced Private Confession.

“I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So the Lord said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Jesus Christ, who proved that He has the authority to heal both physically and spiritually, gave the same authority to His disciples - “If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven.” (John 20:23) From the disciples, through the Laying on of Hands, today our priests also have this authority. The last part of that verse says, “If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” So if the believer has not prepared and repented to be worthy enough to receive forgiveness of sins, the Lord has given authority to not forgive sins. ‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’ (1John 1:8-9) ‘Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.’ (Proverbs 28:13)

Jesus’ washing the feet of His disciples is interpreted as a sign of confession. When St. Peter said, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” For that, when Simon Peter replied “Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well,” Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.” We who have been forgiven of our birth sins through baptism is likened to the disciples who are bathed. Jesus has equated the sinful stains that can occur from this worldly life, to the dirt on the feet. His Last Supper and the Institution of the Qurbana was after this service. Through this act, Jesus taught us a great lesson: participation in the Qurbana should only be after removing the dirt on the feet, which are the sin stains, through confession. St. Paul especially reminds us to never participate in Qurbana without preparation – ‘Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.’ (1Cor. 11:28)

Violation of law is sin. Not doing what God has commanded to do, and doing what God has commanded not to do is sin. Even after knowing that it is sin, sins which are committed deliberately without heeding to the prompting of the conscience are deadly sins. Pride, jealousy, anger, laziness, stinginess, covetousness, avarice are all deadly sins. Besides the sins of commission by deeds, sins are committed by the tongue and mind. Saying to a

brother, 'you good for nothing' and looking at a woman with desire are such sins. (Matthew 5:22, 28)

To attain atonement of sins, first find out which are the sins that have been committed against the Laws of God and Church. For that, one needs to pray for the light of the Holy Spirit to spread into their hearts. Victory over sin depends upon the depth of repentance of sin. The repentance of David and Peter and that sinful woman are examples to follow. Following are the signs of true repentance:

1. Will be careful not to commit again the sin for which forgiveness has been attained.
2. Not only sin, but also the people and circumstances which led to sin will be avoided.
3. Will have real repentance to say like the Prodigal Son, "I have sinned against You and Heaven."
4. Will not be reluctant to make amends, just like Zacchaeus who was prepared to pay back four times of what was taken unlawfully, because his repentance was true,
5. Will be ready to accept Christ as Saviour and grow in His grace and live a new life.

In the Worship Book, Confessional Prayers are given separately. Say this with fasting, and confess the sins to the priest who is the representative of the Lord and then partake in the Holy Qurbana with a pure mind.

4. Holy Qurbana

HOLY QURBANA is a sacrament which is a participation in the divine Body and Blood of Jesus Christ the Messiah, for the life and salvation of our souls. Holy Qurbana can be offered only according to the Order (*Taksa*) which has been decided on earlier with the Chalice and Paten in which the wine and leavened bread has been placed and kept on the sanctified *Thabaleetha*, on the *Thronos* (Altar Table). The Holy Qurbana cannot be offered in the Three-day Lent, on Monday and Tuesday, and during the Great Lent on all other days except Saturday and Sunday, Half Lent and Fortieth Friday. We learn about this sacrament in the 'Worship Order' which is in the Second Part.

5. Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

MARRIAGE is a sacrament that inseparably bonds a man and woman spiritually, and grants them and their children heavenly favours and blessings from God. The Church accepting and blessing the decision of two members in the body of Christ to live together in happiness and peace, which are the fundamental factors of the Kingdom of God, is the substance of the Sacrament of Marriage.

When our First Father and First Mother were married, Adam said, “‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh’, (Genesis 2:23, 24). In the Old Testament times, not having children was seen as a curse and the luck of having many children like the stars in the sky and the sand on the beach was considered as a blessing from God. However, in the New Testament, having children is not the aim of marriage. Woman should live in ‘faith, love and holiness with propriety’ (1 Tim. 2:15b). Though divorce and polygamy (many wives) used to be the custom in the Old Testament times, Jesus objected to it. Jesus compares marriage to the bonding between the Church and Christ and says: “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:9). Married people whose relationship had ended in the death of one partner are allowed to remarry. ‘But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.’ (1 Cor. 7:9)

When we understand the teaching in the New Testament on marriage on the basis of resurrection and life in the Kingdom of God, we can see that satisfaction of temporary bodily desires and continuation of descendancy is not the main aim. Two individuals, through a unique bonding, unite with one another, and become one in Christ. This is the will of God, ‘...male and female he created them.’ (Genesis 1:27)

The Marriage Service Order or Taksa that we use today was set by St. James of Edessa in the 8th Century. There are two parts to this Service – Blessing of the Rings and Blessing of the Crown. The ring signifies the inseparable bonding between the husband and wife. God’s promise and faithfulness are stressed in the prayers that are said while putting on the ring on each person. It reminds us that just as God is faithful to His promises, people should love and be faithful to God and these virtues will be revealed in married life. The second part is the Blessing of the Crown. This crown is placed as a foretaste of the ‘Unfading Crown Of Glory’ which will be received by those who have brought to destination their boat of family life, without destroying it living a Christian life which is a fight against evil. Till the 19th Century, it was a real crown that was used in the marriage sacrament. Later, for convenience sake, gold chain started to be used as crown for the Blessing of the Crown.

Sportspersons wear a crown of fame, while Christians who got victory over sin will wear a crown that will last forever – 1 Cor. 9:24-25. Crown is our eternal reward also. So with hope, Paul talks about the Crown of Righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8 and Peter about the ‘Unfading Crown of Glory’ in 1 Peter 5:4. May this crown that is donned on the bride and groom, be the ‘Crown of Life’ stated in Revelation 2:10 (KJV) which the New Testament portrays as the sign of victory and immortality.

Towards the end of the Wedding Service, the man ties a golden *thali* around the neck of the woman. This tradition is confined to some religions and in religions itself in some

areas in our country. Syrian Christians continue this tradition. This is an imitation of the tradition that existed in the Hindu religion and was later transformed with the coming of St. Thomas. There are no particular services for the tying of this golden *thali* in the Sacrament of Marriage.

Family is a small church. The bride and groom are appointed as administrators of one family and are blessed and send out. St. Paul tells them: 'Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. – Ephesians 5:24-25. Of all human relationships, family relationship is the most superior. The Lord has compared the experience of the Kingdom of Heaven and its characteristics to the family. For husband and wives who love each other and are forbearing are able to lead a good family life with the experience of the Kingdom of Heaven. Their sacrificial life helps them to bring up their children to be inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Pt 3. Les 6. Holy Ordination

ORDINATION or Priesthood is the sacrament by which authorised people are appointed to offer sacraments, and through sacraments grant spiritual gifts to the believers.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” - Matt. 28:18-20

“...do this in remembrance of me.” - Luke 22:19

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.... If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”- John 20:21, 23

“...whatever you bind on earth will be^[a] bound in heaven” - Matt. 16:19

He entrusts the disciples with complete authority to conduct the Lord’s Sacrifice, to perform the Baptism, to grant the Holy Spirit and so on.

Firstly, we have to understand how this authority as the only Chief Priest came by. Adam was created to be a priest in order to be an intermediary between man and God. However, because of the sin he committed he became unable to do it. The search for the perfect only Chief Priest continued through the Old Testament and was completed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the sacrifices to God were performed by the male head of the family (Genesis 22:13, 35:7; Job 1:5). After that, in the place of the head of the family, the first-born son is separated (Exodus 22:29). Then, Aaron and his sons were chosen from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 28:1). They were anointed and made priests (Leviticus 8:12). Only they were given the authority to conduct the services before God. When those who did not have the authority performed services to God, they and all their belongings were put down (Numbers 16:11, 28-32). The priesthood of the Old Testament was completed when His own Son was commissioned as the only Chief Priest in order to create a New Israel because Israel had deviated from the ways of God (1 Peter 2:9).

Our Lord is the Eternal Priest in the order of Melchizedek and the Chief Priest of the Priestly Class. Melchizedek’s was a bloodless offering and Aaron’s a blood offering. Our Lord was King by way of the tribe of David, Eternal as he is the Son of God, and Chief Priest when He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at the baptism by John the Baptist who was born by the will of God to Zechariah who is a descendant of Aaron. He was consecrated as the Only Chief Priest when the two priesthoods one of the bloodless offering made in the Upper Room of Mark’s house and the other of the blood sacrifice at Calvary were combined and completed.

In the Old Testament, the king, the priest and the prophet were the only ones anointed with oil. However, in the New Testament, every believer is anointed with *Mooron*. Therefore, in the Syrian Church, every member is a priest. Both the priests and the laymen (non-priests) are equal participants with the same experience in accepting the faith and pursuing it, in rituals and sacraments. However, for the administrative matters of the church and to channel the mercy gifts through sacraments, selected people are required.

There are three types of priestly positions in the church. (1) *Episcopa* or Bishop, (2) *Kasseessa* or Priest and (3) *Shemashen* or Deacon. They are to be specially selected and anointed with ‘Laying on of Hands’ and other special prayers.

St. Paul describes the qualities they should have. - 1 Timothy 3:1-10.

The Laying on of Hands which the Apostles bestowed can be seen in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts 6:3, 6 '...choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.... They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.'

Acts 13:3 – 'So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.'

Acts 20:24 - 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.'

The root word for the word 'overseer' is the Greek word '*Episcopos*'. Therefore, the overseer of the Church is known as the *Episcopa*. Next are the '*Kasseessas*' or Priests.

Acts 14:23 - 'Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.' Here the word 'elders' in Greek is '*presbuteros*' (presbyters) and in Syriac '*Kasseessa*'. Since from long ago this term has been in use in our country, this word is still in use today.

Philippians 1:1 'To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...'

Here for the term '*Shushrushakar*' or 'helpers' the word 'deacons' is used in English. This word originated from the Greek word '*diakonos*'. The word 'deacon' is translated in Malayalam as '*Shemashan*'. They serve or assist the *Episcopa* (Bishop) and the *Kasseessa* (Priest) in their duties.

From among the seven deacons the apostles had selected and laid hands to appoint them as helpers in the Church, when Philip baptised the Samaritans, they did not get the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who have received the necessary blessings to conduct each service in the Church, are the ones who perform it. For whichever position the *Episcopa* had intended and laid his hands on, they will receive the gift only for that.

The *Episcopas* who are in ruling positions are known as Metropolitan, Catholicos (Mapreeyana) and Patriarch. No special 'Laying on of Hands' is required for this. Those who were in ruling positions in the villages were called *Cor-Episcopa*. Today that name denotes just a higher position among the priests. There is also a post called *Ramban* in the Church. These are people who have separated themselves to live the life of a *sanyasin* or monk. Those who are raised to the rank of *Episcopa* must first become a *Ramban*. In all the traditional churches including ours, it is compulsory that, for ranks from *Ramban* upwards, they should be unmarried. Also, once they receive the priestly ordination, they cannot accept the matrimonial sacrament. However, before receiving the priestly ordination, while they are *shemashen* they can get married.

Pt 3. Les 7. Anointing the Sick with Holy Oil

OUR Lord shared all the authority that He had Himself to the twelve disciples and send them out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. While preaching about the Kingdom of God, the disciples 'anointed (smear oil) many sick people with oil and healed them' – Mark 6:13. In the parable of the Good Samaritan we read that the Good Samaritan bandaged the wounds of the half dead man with oil and wine. From this we can infer that the sick were treated with respective oils according to their ailments. That is why St. James who was the Metropolitan of Jerusalem advises, 'Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective' James 5:14-16.

Sickness and sin are incompleteness. For deliverance from it, repentance is required. Healing and forgiveness of sins is attained by smearing oil and praying. This is a service done by the whole church for the healing of a member of the church. What is important in the service of anointing with oil is the plea to God to accept the repentance of the sick person who has repented and turned to God and to heal him.

This sacrament is also known as '*Uppurshma*'. When we hear this word, we normally think of a dead person or a person about to die. This is a misunderstanding that arose among the people out of their ignorance. Making this misunderstanding of the name for this sacrament more valid, a wrong name, '*Andhya Koodhasah*' or 'Last Rites' has also spread in the church. The meaning of the word '*Uppurshma*' is 'Anointing'. As far as a sick person is concerned, when this sacrament is offered, when that person repents of sins and receives forgiveness of sins, the patient receives mental and spiritual healing. The uniqueness of this fellowship is that, though the patient's condition is such that it may not be humanly possible to confess sins, the sins are forgiven. There is a part set aside for Qurbana also so that Qurbana also can be served. If necessary, after forty days, this sacrament can be repeated.

Olive oil that has been sanctified with special prayers by the Bishops is what is used for this sacrament. It is believed that Christ is the real Olive tree and that through the olive oil we are joined with Christ, and therefore, we are delivered from sin and sickness.

This service has also another form of a very extended service known as the '*Kantheela Service*' where five wicks are lit. *Kantheela* means five wicks. A round pan shaped thing is made of wheat flour and unsanctified olive oil is poured into it. The *Kantheela Service* has five parts. At the end of each service, one wick is lit. It is believed that it helps to heal the five senses of man. This service can be offered for both the priests and the laity.

PART FOUR

CHURCH HISTORY

1. THE SYRIANS

AFTER the demise of St. Thomas, by AD 345, due to the insufficiency of priests and bishops, the Malankara Church had begun to decline. At that time, St. Thomas appeared in a vision to the Metropolitan St. Joseph of Edessa (Uruha) and informed him about the scarcity of priests in the Malankara Church. When the Metropolitan learned that St Thomas had also appeared, like this, to King Abgar of Syria, he called a prominent merchant named Knaii Thoma, who had trade relations with the Malayalam Coast, and inquired about the situation to confirm that the vision he had was true.

During this period, Christianity was gaining strength in the Roman Empire and spreading to the East Persian countries. In those days, as the Syrian King Shapur II was cruel to the Christians and oppressed them, the Syrian Christians had begun to migrate from there. So in 345 AD, from a place called Cana, under the leadership of Knaii Thoma, 400 Syrian Christians who were members of 72 families from seven tribes of the Jewish race, according to the will of God, along with Bishop Mar Joseph of Edessa, four priests and some deacons landed at Kodungalur (Cranganloor) which was a port city 32 kilometres north of Cochin.

Foreseeing a boost in trade, the then ruler of Kerala, Cheraman Perumal heartily received them. The Mahadhevar town near Kodungalur was given to them to reside and build churches; and 264 linear measures of land, free of tax was assigned and many low-caste people were given to them as servants. Accordingly, the king gave them 72 copper plates on which it was recorded that he had bestowed on them this elevated status. The people to the south of the Mahadhevar town are known as the Southists (*Thekkumbhagar*) and those to the north of the town as Northists (*Vadakkumbhagar*). To rule over them a king from the Villarvattom family was crowned with Udayamperoor as his capital. However, in the course of time, this royal family ceased to exist and became just a name because there were no heirs. The descendants of Knai Thoma who had settled in the South side maintained the purity of their lineage by not intermingling through marriage with outsiders.

There are two versions as to why they are called 'Syrians' (*Surianikar*). One is that since Knai thoma and his friends came from Syria, they are called Syrians. The other is that since they worship in the Syrian language 'Syriac', they are called Syrians. After establishing relationship with the Syrian Patriarch, in our worships we use the Syrian language Syriac.

Pt 4. Les 2. Selection of The Church Leader

IT WAS during the time of Mar Thoma II that Bishop Mar Andrew (Andreos) came to Malankara in 1676. Along with him, there were two of his brothers. While bathing in the Kallada River, the bishop slipped and fell in the river and expired. The bishop's brothers lived first in Piravom and then in Mullamthuruthy. They married from a very famous Nasrani family Palastha (Palathinkal), and settled in Mullamthuruthy. The elder brother cleared the Thannangkadu and lived there, while the younger brother Abraham Kattuumangatt, after clearing the Kadumanga kadu settled there. Abraham's grandson had eight sons and two daughters. The Holy Fathers of our church, *Valia Bava* was the fifth among them (Kurian) and Abraham, *Illaya Bava* Geevarghese was the seventh among them.

Since the enthronement of the Fifth Metropolitan of the Malankara Church was not proper as according to the Ecclesiastical Laws, a letter was sent to the Patriarch of Antioch to send a Bishop to regularise the matter. As per the request, in 1740, Bishop Mar Ivaneos came to Malankara. However, Mar Thoma V could not get along with the work style of Bishop Mar Ivaneos.

Bishop Mar Ivaneos was a quick-tempered and easily provoked person. Yet, he was a Bible scholar and well-versed in the Syriac language. He stayed at the Mullamthuruthy church and taught Syriac to the deacons. The sons of the Kattuumangatt family mentioned above, used to regularly go to the Mullamthuruthy church and listen attentively to the songs the deacons were reciting and learning. One day when the deacons sang one song incorrectly, these boys sang it in the right tune for them. When the Bishop heard this, he was very glad. So he included them among his pupils. Pleased by their interest in studies and intellect, he ordained them as deacons and later as priests at the Mullamthuruthy church itself.

Mar Thoma V had to continue without any validation of his position because he could not get along with Bishop Mar Ivaneos. Another letter was sent again to the Patriarch in Antioch with Deacon Antony who had come to Malankara on trade purposes. Accordingly, a group of five people – the Catholios of the East, Shakrallah Mar Baselios, Mar Gregorios who was the Patriarch of Jerusalem, one Ramban and two deacons – landed in Cochin. Mar Thoma V had an agreement with the Dutch to meet the expenses of these people's travel. Because it was a huge amount, Mar Thoma V could not repay it. Cases and quarrels started on account of this, and there was even a threat that Mar Thoma V would be expelled from the country. Perhaps, because the circumstances were not favourable, Mar Thoma V could not meet with the invited five senior foreign delegates or get along with them. Not only that, in 1761, he also consecrated a Mar Thoma VI as his successor. By this action, Mar Thoma V who had from the beginning itself not received the Laying on of Hands blew away in the wind all our faith traditions and rites that was being received by the disciples of the church.

Pt 4. Les 3. Receives the Order of Ramban

AS THE top leader of the Malankara Church was committing mistakes one after the other, the Bishops had to think about the believers in the Malankara Church. They decided to bring someone to the high priest level in order to maintain the Malankara Church in its traditional faith. At that time, they came to know about the Kattumangatt youngsters who had grown up in the affection of Mar Ivaneos and had received priesthood from him. Having learnt about their fluency in Syriac language, they called them up and appointed them to teach Syriac to the deacons. All the qualities required for an ideal shepherd was found in Rev. Abraham who found contentment in leading an unselfish prayerful life. Bishop Mar Ivaneos who recognised this, gave him the Ramban position at the Mattancherry Church.

Pt 4. Les 4. Consecrated as Metropolitan

WHEN Metropolitan V deceased in 1765, Mar Thoma VI (Valia Mar Dionysius) who had received his ordination from Mar Thoma V came into authority. He did not bother to see Bishop Mar Gregorios who was residing in Malankara, neither tried to set in order the shortcomings in his ordination. Instead, contradicting all the norms, he continued as the Spiritual Head of the Malankara Church. Bishop Mar Gregorios who was pained by all this, in the year 1766, on Friday, *Vrishchikam* 17 (date and month in the Malayalam calendar), at the Elisheema Church in Mattancherry, consecrated Kattumangatt Abraham Ramban as the Metropolitan of the Malankara church with the Episcopal name Mar Koorilos. Thus, the desires of the Catholicos of the East, Shakrullah Mar Baselios, was fulfilled. We can see from the history of the church for the subsequent years that the foresight of the Bishop was not out of place. Mar Koorilos who was the recipient of the love of the Church Fathers received from Antioch a Sceptre (*Amshavadi*), Pectoral Cross (*Sleebe*), Mitre (*mudi*), *Sythe* (holy olive oil) and *Mooron* (holy oil mixed with herbs).

Pt 4. Les 5. The Ruler Abdicates

METROPOLITAN Mar Cyril I (Coorilos I) was acceptable in the Malankara Church, especially among the Northerners, as the Metropolitan had received the Apostolic inheritance, and obtained the blessings and greetings from the Holy Fathers. His graceful, gentle and loving nature helped the Metropolitan to fetch the favour of high ranking personalities like the King of Cochin, Paliath Achen, and officials of the Western companies. This turning point in the Malankara Church, caused a great fear in (*Valia*) Mar Dionysius I. He feared whether this would be the end of the status of Metropolitan, the Spiritual Head of the Malankara Church, that was considered as the right of only the Pakalomattam family. So he started movements to bring down Mar Cyril I from his authoritative position. Using the influence of Karavatt Aypora Tharakan who was a famous person in Kandanad, Mar Dionysius I obtained a ruling against Mar Cyril I, from a county court that was under the control of the Dutch Company. The ruling was that, because he was given the status of Metropolitan he should take over the debts that were incurred as per the request of Mar Dionysius I. On the strength of this ruling, Mar Dionysius ordered that Mar Cyril I was to be brought to the Kandanad Church, which was his seat, and make him remove the sceptre, mitre and red robe, and the next day make Mar Cyril I offer the Holy Qurbana as an ordinary priest. But Mar Cyril I put a wet cloth on his head at night and made himself sick with a fever, and so escaped from following the order. From history we understand how an incident that occurred later, proved true the Bible verse 'For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.' (Luke 6:38)

Pt 4. Les 6. Great Mar Dionysius I

THE FAMOUS historical event '*Koonen Kurisse Sathyam*' or 'Oath of the Bent Cross' is the public declaration made by 25,000 Syrian Christians together to be free from the bondage of the Roman Catholic Church. After this Oath taking, there was an incident when Mar Dionysius I who was the Supreme Head of the Malankara Church, conducted the Holy Qurbana in the Raman Catholic Order at the Nannam Church near Alappuzha. While we use the leavened bread (*pullippulla appam*) for the Holy Qurbana, the Roman Catholics use the unleavened bread (*pullipp ilaathe appam*). This was a disgrace to the true beliefs that had been sincerely followed down the generations. It can be considered that this incident could have been foreseen by the Prelates and perhaps, may have prompted their decision to confer the Ramban Title on Kattumangatt Abraham Mar Cyril (Koorilos). The actions of Mar Dionysius I was contrary to the beliefs. If the bishops had not taken such a decision then, there would have been no one to join together again the links of faith, which was outraged by such an irresponsible act.

This Metropolitan, who had using his authoritative powers, desired to make Mar Cyril I remove the symbols of authority given to him when he was consecrated Metropolitan, and make him offer the Holy Qurbana as an ordinary priest, had many other bitter experiences. Salt Contractor, Maathu Tharakan, was a close friend of then Travancore King, Karthika Thirunhaall. Mar Dionysius I failed in a dispute with him, and was sentenced by the government to pay Rs. 25,000 as penalty. To procure this amount the Metropolitan's insignias of authority were taken. Moreover, valuable things from Nirannam Church and Chengannur Church were confiscated.

Pt 4. Les 7. Thozhiyur and the Malankara Church

AMONG those who were baptised by St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, four families – Kalli, Kaalliyangkaal, Shankarapuri and Pakalomattam – were aristocratic Brahmins. St. Thomas had ordained some members from these families as priests. The Malankara Christians, who had thrown away the yoke of Rome with the Oath of the Bend Cross, were leaderless. So to select a Church Leader, they gathered at the Alangad Church. There, twelve priests together laid their hands on Archdeacon Thoma of Pakalomattam Family, conferred him as Mar Thoma I and made him their Supreme Head. Mar Thoma I received the rank in the proper Canonical Order in 1664, when the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Mar Abdul Jaleel Gregorios arrived in Malankara. With the assistance of Mar Gregorios, Mar Thoma I performed the Laying on of Hands on Mar Thoma II. However, because of the sudden demise of Mar Thoma II, Mar Thoma III could not be consecrated. The Mar Thoma III and Mar Thoma IV were consecrated by the Catholicate of the East, Mar Baselios and Mar Ivanios who had come to Malankara.

When Mar Thoma IV became sick, he wished to consecrate his sister's son as his successor. However, as he kept slipping in and out of consciousness, he could not properly consecrate him as the Metropolitan. Then a priest took the Mitre of Metropolitan IV, and placed it on the head of the successor. As it was not according to the Traditional Order, many people in the Church raised objections. We have learned about Mar Thoma V and Mar Thoma VI in detail. It was Mar Thoma VI who tried mean tricks against Kattumangatt Abraham Mar Coorilos and tried to remove him from his authoritative position. Whether out of his regret and repentance of the deeds he had done, or so that no one else would become the Head of the Malankara Church, above him, he fell at the feet of Mar Gregorios, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was present in Malankara at that time, and sought pardon. He also requested to solve the defects in his consecration. Patriarch Mar Gregorios extended his hand of brotherhood, embraced him and in 1770 gave him the Prelate Laying on of hands and re-consecrated him. Therefore, Mar Thoma VI's bestowing of appointment of Mar Thoma VII was validated.

Mar Thoma VII could not consecrate a successor for him. However, when the sick Mar Thoma VII became critically ill, his hand was just placed on the head of Thoma *Kathanar* (Rev. Thomas) who was standing with sceptre in hand and dressed in the Episcopal robes. Rev. Thomas was an adopted heir of the Pakalomattam family. The problems that Mar Thoma V faced, was repeated here. Therefore, there was difference of opinion in the Church. Ignoring the problems, Mar Thoma VIII, consecrated Mar Thoma IX. This led to a good number of people of the Malankara Church showing their protest against Mar Thoma IX who unrightfully (not according to tradition) was holding the authoritative powers of the Malankara Church. Considering the request of the true believers who believed in the Apostolic Laying of Hands, the Fifth Metropolitan of the Thozhiyur Church, Kidangan Geevarghese Mar Philixenos, consecrated a Supreme Leader for the Malankara Church - Kunnamkullam native Pulikoattil Ramban Ittoop with the Episcopal name Joseph Mar Dionysius. He filed a complaint with the Resident, against Mar Thoma IX who was ruling Malankara Church inappropriately and without the acceptance of the people. With the help of the government, he made the Ninth Metropolitan to surrender his crozier, mitre and cross and remove his red robe. That put an end to the Pakalomattam family's hereditary claim to the Metropolitan's throne.

This Metropolitan from the Thozhiyur Church who was consecrated for the Malankara Church deceased in 1816 without appointing his successor. Thereafter, at the insistence of the missionaries working in Malankara at that time, the Resident and the priests of the Malankara Church, the Supreme Head of the Thozhiyur Church, Geevarghese Mar Philixenos (Kidangan) accepted the temporary rank of Acting Malankara Metropolitan in accordance with the decision taken at a meeting held at the Resident's bungalow which was in Ponjikkara Island in Ernakulam.

Accordingly, a royal decree was also released – “It is hereby announced that Metropolitan Mar Dionysius has expired and as Metropolitan Philexenos seated in Chavakkad has been appointed in his place, all the ‘Puthenloor’ Nazaranis in the Malankara Parishes should obey the orders of the above said Metropolitan Philexenos. – 992 Dhanu 26th.”

Before long, Metropolitan Philexenos consecrated as Metropolitan for the Malankara Church, Punnathara Kathanar with the Episcopal name Mar Dionysius III. He ruled over the Malankara Church for nearly eight years and met with an untimely death when he succumbed to Cholera. Malankara Church which was again in a widowed state, needed the assistance of the Metropolitan of the Thozhiyur Church a third time. Thus, Cheppad Philippos Kathanar was consecrated with the Episcopal name Mar Dionysius IV.

The Patriarch of Antioch had sent a Bishop by name Athanasius to Malankara. In order to read out in public Mar Athanasius’ *Statbicon* and other credential papers, it was Thozhiyur Metropolitan Philexenos who sent the notice to the representatives of all churches, to gather at Kottayam. There was a reason for this. Though the Thozhiyur Metropolitan had consecrated a Supreme Head for the Malankara Church, the rank of the Supreme Head of the Malankara Church that was awarded to the Thozhiyur Metropolitan Philexenos by a Royal Proclamation had not been retracted. Therefore, Metropolitan Philexenos himself had to preside over this meeting.

The declarations that Mar Athanasius made while he was in charge of the Church caused confusion among the people. His demand was that all those who received ordination from the Thozhiyur Metropolitan should obtain ordination again from Mar Athanasius because Thozhiyur Metropolitan’s position as Supreme Head of the Malankara Church was invalid. They had one main argument for it. It was that they had become bishops without the knowledge or consent of the Patriarch of Antioch. Perhaps, Mar Athanasius was unaware of the many installations to the throne that had occurred before he had arrived at Malankara. Even if he had understood, there was no way he could have called all those deceased Fathers from their interred tombs and re-ordained and re-consecrated them. Without knowing the actuality of Thozhiyur Metropolitan’s ordination and consecration, Mar Athanasius with the support of some people who had been misled by these new arguments, released a public attack against him. Moreover, Mar Athanasius sounded a threat that if the Thozhiyur Metropolitan was not prepared to obey him, he would de-robe him of his red robes, and break into pieces his Cross and Crozier.

Meanwhile, Punnathara Mar Dionysius III passed away in an untimely death and the elevation of Cheppad Mar Dionysius IV had taken place. Because the Royal Decree had not been revoked and because the threat of Mar Athanasius was prevailing, with the help of the then Malankara Metropolitan, Geevarghese Mar Philexenos of Thozhiyur was residing at Kottayam *Pazhaya Seminary* (Old Seminary). One day, Mar Athanasius along with an European Ramban and some people forcefully tried to cease the Old Seminary. However, nothing untoward happened because of the courageous stand that the Thozhiyur Metropolitan had taken then and the intervention of Rev. Fenn who was one of the famous missionary workers at that time. But when their attempts became more aggressive, the government intervened and Mar Athanasius was deported from Malankara by ship.

FOREWARD

The Syrian Christians have been continuing the various traditions which are according to the Bible and commanded by Jesus Christ and have been observed from the time of the Disciples. Many of the children of the Church who have not understood the purity and holiness of these traditions are going astray on to the wrong path. Therefore, it has become a necessity to learn and teach objectively about our Church and the church's rites and traditions, and faith truths. So it was decided that the Sunday School Curriculum should be revised including these matters along with supporting Bible portions and a Committee was formed for the same. The Committee, in a praise-worthy manner, have so far prepared and published the curriculum for three classes. This book, which is the fourth publication, has been allotted for the use of the Fifth Grade.

This Text Book has been published with not just the Sunday School students in mind, but for all believers in the Church, and all those who are interested in studying about the faith of the Church.

Nobody vouches that the lessons prepared are flawless. We presume that in this endeavour of the *Sabha Suvisesha Sangham*, many defects may have occurred. It is requested that if any notable mistakes are observed by anyone who reads this book, to kindly write and inform it to the address given below.

In the General Annual Examination conducted by the *Suvisesha Sangham*, the mark for each part is listed below.

Part One: Bible Lessons

A. Old Testament	20%
B. New Testament	30%
C. Memory Verses	10%

Part Two: Worship Order

A. Worship Songs	5%
B. Adoration Bible Portions	5%
C. General Knowledge	10%

Part Three: Faith Truths 10%

Part Four: Church History 10%

Secretary
Malabar Independent Syrian Church
Suvisesha Sangham, Thozhiyur