

Grade IX

PART ONE BIBLE LESSONS

A. OLD TESTAMENT

1. From Adam to Noah

Genesis 1 - 8

Genesis

Till today Science has been unable to clearly describe who was the first man and how he came into being other than that, when air, water and light came into being on Earth which is one of the planets in the Solar System, amoeba, living things and creatures came into existence following which man may have come into existence. However, the Holy Bible records in detail how man came into being.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. It does not say how many eons ago God created the earth. Nobody knows that. Yet, there came a day when man had to inhabit it. So God began to organise the heavens and the earth for man. Light was what was initially needed in the world. So on the first day there was light. In the following days He separated the heavens and the earth and the waters and the land of the earth. He made all the vegetation; the sun, moon and stars; the fish, birds and animals. The earth was now ready for the man's inhabitancy. Before God could create man He created everything man would need to live in happiness and joy.

First Sin

In the beginning when there was no one else other than God in this world, God thought about all of us... "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4). There was a particular reason why God created man and placed him in the beautiful world - that we should be people who believe in Him, love Him, worship Him and always abide with Him. But Adam, the first man and Eve, the first mother joined together with Satan and toppled God's plan.

Adam and Eve knew only goodness till that day. Since they knew only goodness they knew only love, joy and peace. When they committed disobedience, evil things started gushing into their hearts and minds. That day for the first time they became afraid. Though they grieved God by committing disobedience, God still loved them. As usual God came down

in the evening to talk to them. He called Adam. Though God knew where Adam was, God was just giving an opportunity for Adam to confess his sins. How good it would have been if only they had repented then at that moment! They did not do that. They simply blamed one another... "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" - (1 John 1:9). As long as we do not own up our sins God will not forgive us.

Our first parents brought sin into this beautiful world. What a sad situation they made in this world. Still, God promised a Saviour: That a baby will be born of the woman and that he will destroy Satan forever. They did not understand the need of a Saviour then. Satan had got them under his control so that they would never get away. Many harmful things occurred. After leaving the Garden of Eden they had to toil hard to get something to eat.

Cain and Abel

Cain, the first-born of Adam and Eve, journeyed through the evil path. The younger son Abel chose the good one. Both of them offered sacrifices unto the Lord. God blessed Abel. God did and not bless Cain. When Cain saw that God had not accepted his offering, he became envious of his brother Abel. That was another new sin. If you let envy or anger to dwell in your heart it becomes hatred. Cain started to hate his brother. The more he saw Abel the more he hated him and then angry with him. Anger finally led to murder. What started as a small sin of disobedience became a chain of sins.

God punished Cain; not without giving him a chance to confess his sin. God asked, "Where is your brother Abel?" The reply to it was a lie... "How do I know? Am I my brother's keeper?" Nobody can deceive God. God had seen all of Cain's deeds. As long as Cain does not accept his sin, God will not forgive Cain.

The Flood

Noah who was righteous and blameless among the people of his time was a descendant of Seth who was born to Adam when he was 130 years old. During the period of Adam to Noah, God allowed people to live according to what their conscience directed them to do. God made them think of what is just. But the chain of sin of Adam defeated man and prevented him from obeying his conscience. God saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and how evil was every inclination of the thoughts of human heart. God regretted having created man on earth and His heart was troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created — and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground — for I regret that I have made them."

Noah lived to the east of the Garden of Eden. The Bible tells that everybody sinned. So Noah also would have been a sinner. But he was a

person who was sorry for his sins, trusted in God to be saved and observed the word of God. So God liked Noah. So God commanded to him. And, "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" – (Gen. 6:22). Here there is a lesson for us. God told Noah to do something that was beyond the reasoning of an ordinary man of those times and conditions. The people of that time considered it as foolish.

Noah told through his life, words and deeds and warned everyone who came to him to repent of their sins and receive the forgiveness of sins from God. But the people only ridiculed him and went away. Though Noah spoke for 120 years no one repented. Since God was God, He had to deal with sin. It is not possible for Holy God to let sin pass away without punishment. The floods came; Noah and family were saved. John 10:27-29 – "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

Abraham's father Terah and Noah lived as contemporaries for 128 years after the Floods. All that happened till then was handed down from generation to generation from Noah to Terah, from Terah to Abraham and finally to Moses. According to the command of the Lord, Moses wrote it all down as history.

2. From Noah to Jacob

Genesis 11 - 35

Tower of Babel

Noah who spend more than a year in the ark, in order to say thanks for the release and to receive the grace of God, as soon as he got out of it, built an altar and made an offering there. God replied by promising that He would never ever destroy the earth like this. The rainbow is the sign of God's covenant with Noah.

Noah's children travelled together to many places in search of pastures and good soil to grow grains. And so, they arrived at a fertile ground called Shinar. Shinar lay between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. They pitched tents and started living there. By then their numbers had increased. When Nimrod, who was one among them, found that the soil was good for making bricks got an idea. Instead of humans wandering across the earth, it is better to build a city and a tower that reaches the heavens. Everybody agreed to his proposal and they started to build.

When you examine this Bible passage one thing will be very clear. Their words were filled with pride and disobedience. They had no memory of God their protector, provider and help. Now, if their plans were accomplished, it would mar the principles of God. When Noah and his family came out of the ark, God had said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." God desired that as they increased in number they should move and spread out to the east, and to the west, and to the north and to the south. "Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain..." (Ps. 127:1). These people did not have the vision that David had. So God mixed up their language. And they all moved out to different areas.

Abraham

In those days travelling from one place to another was a very arduous task. They would pack all their things on the back of a donkey or a camel. From among those who got scattered from Babel, one group travelled south-east of River Euphrates that flowed even beyond the Garden of Eden. They settled in a city called Ur that was by the sea coast. While they were in Babel they used to worship the sun, moon and stars and idols. While they continued to practice that and forgot all about the loving God, there was one person who was upset about it and vowed that he would not worship anyone else other than Jehovah the True God.

In order to separate Abram from the midst of these wicked people, and to teach him about Himself (God), and His (God's) ways, God decided to take Abram to an appropriate place and so asked him to move out from Ur. According to God's command Abram collected all his goats and sheep and cattle and camels and, besides his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot whom

he considered s his own son, and set out on their journey. They travelled north past Babel and crossed the desert and reached the land of Canaan. God told Abram I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. All the world will be blessed through you. "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever..." (Gen. 13:14-15). Abram had so much faith in God and loved God that God said Abram was his friend.

This shows a certain level of change in God's approach to man. Till now God was dealing with all of mankind. Not as Jew or Gentile. Everybody was one from the first father Adam. But now, from a human race which was becoming very large, God selects a small portion, the Hebrew race. Now it has become possible for all of mankind to be blessed till the end of the world through this small race.

Lot

Having lived in Canaan for a long time their live stock increased. This caused quarrel between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram. This caused Lot to expose his selfish nature and select the best place and separate from Abram. Lot went and lived near Sodom and Gomorrah which was the centre of all wickedness. His aim was worldly comforts and pleasures. When Lot began to move away from God and think selfishly the enemies surrounded him. There was no one to help him. As soon as Abram heard it he went and rescued Lot.

When Abram returned, the then king of Salem (Jerusalem) and the High Priest Melchizedek received him with bread and wine and blessed him. Bread and wine were elements used for worship those days. It was a forerunner of the Holy Qurbana which is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

The Chosen Race

God said to Abram, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." ... "So shall your offspring^[d] be." (Gen. 15:5). As Abram was to become the father of this great race, and Sarai its mother, God made a change in their name - Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. God also commanded a tradition that Abraham had to observe from that day onwards - Abraham and all his male descendants were to be circumcised.

Though God had promised to make him the father of a great nation, even after he became 99 years old he did not have a son. One day while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent, he saw three unknown men coming. Abraham realised that there was something special about them. He invited them home. Abraham was someone who loved to entertain guests. He brought butter and milk and the tender calf that Sarah had cooked and gave it to the guests. They ate and were satisfied. They were messengers of God. They informed that Sarah would give birth to a son and he should be named Isaac.

When they were leaving they informed Abraham that God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. When he heard this Abraham remembered Lot. He prayed for Lot and his family. While Abraham was praying, before the fire balls of judgement could fall, the Messengers of God had reached Sodom and Gomorrah to save Lot. But Lot's relationship with God was not steady. Therefore, Lot's wife could not believe the words of God's Messengers. And she was unable to escape from the punishment of God.

Isaac

Lot reaped what he had sowed. But God kept showering His grace on Abraham who firmly trusted in God. A son was born to Abraham as by the promise of God. He was named Isaac. Then God, in order to test Abraham's love for Him, asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on Mt. Moriah. This was the ultimate test of Abraham's faith in God. Actually, God was asking for Abraham's heart and his willingness to obey God in everything. When Abraham lifted his hand to sacrifice Isaac, God instantly arranged the sacrificial animal for the burnt-offering. Through this sacrifice, Abraham was credited for pleasing God.

After they returned from Mt. Moriah they lived happily for a long time. When Sarah was 127 years old she died. Abraham and Sarah lived a life in steadfast faith and so they were made worthy to become the father and mother of a chosen race. They had brought up their son in the same steadfast faith. There ended Sarah's role in God's plan for the world.

Abraham's next responsibility was to find a wife for Isaac. As Isaac had been called for a divine aim that was chosen by God, it had to be a believing wife. So Abraham sent his trusted servant Eleazar to look for a girl among his relations in Mesopotamia. Isaac got Rebekah who was chosen by the will of God and was kind, loving and beautiful.

Abraham died when he was 175 years old. He was interred in a cave near the fields of Mamre. Isaac continued to live there. Then there was a great famine. So he moved to the land of the Philistines which was nearby and pitched tent there. As time passed, when the Philistines saw the increase in Isaac's wealth they began to fear. So the Philistine king asked Isaac to leave the place. Isaac who loved to live in peace moved out of there and went and lived in the valleys of Canaan.

Esau and Jacob

It was twenty years after Isaac's marriage that the twin children Esau and Jacob were born. Now though Esau was the older one among them, because he was a food lover, he sold his birth right of seniority to Jacob for the lentil stew Jacob was preparing. As in those days there were no churches or priests, the head of the family was the priest. Birth right seniority gave the older person the responsibility to pray for all the spiritual needs of everyone in the household, to properly discipline them and other such things. This is the privilege that Jacob wished for and Esau abandoned. Actually Isaac decided to give the birth right blessing to Esau

as he was the rightful heir, but due to mother Rebekah's cunning act Jacob received this blessing from the father.

What Rebekah and Jacob did was sin in the eyes of God. Jacob was made to do a dishonest act. He said a lie. They joined together and committed an act of deception. As a result of that Jacob had to leave his house and run away. He had to live without his parents. Rebekah died without seeing her own son whom she loved the most and without receiving his care and attention. Old Isaac was in deep grief. Sin and selfishness destroyed that house which was always happy. Esau also was not acquitted of sin. He did not know God. Because of his selfishness he did not carry out the responsibilities which were endowed on him. He who was to take care of his younger brother, became angry and waited for an opportunity to kill him. That was a darker sin than what Jacob had committed. And he did not regret his sin. But Jacob had the love of God in him. So God helped him to grow daily in justice and in faith. God led him.

When Jacob ran away from home seeking a refuge, he became so tired and lay down by the wayside and slept. There he had a dream. As per history, in the early days there was no Bible or written word of God. Instead, God's will used to be revealed through dreams. Jacob saw in his dream a ladder that went all the way up to heaven from earth and angels going up and down on it. In between he heard the voice of God. What he heard through that voice was a pledge by God that he, Jacob, was chosen to continue the legacy of Abraham and Isaac and that he would be the father of the chosen race. When Jacob woke up he was frightened and realising that God was present there said a prayer, "Lord, all my life I will love and worship only you."

3. From Jacob to Moses

Genesis 29 - Numbers 11

Israel

After a treacherous long journey, Jacob arrived at his uncle Laban's place. He worked and stayed there for many years. During this time, though Jacob wished to marry Laban's second daughter Rachel, Laban gave Jacob his elder daughter Leah as his wife. But as Jacob still loved Rachel and continued loving her, he stayed there itself and worked there. As a reward for it, Laban gave Rachel also to Jacob as his wife. Though Jacob loved Rachel very much, for many years they had no children. Finally God heard Rachel's prayer and she had a son. Joseph was this son. By this time Jacob had eleven sons and one daughter. He had a lot of livestock as his own. One day God commanded him to return to Canaan, his own land. So Jacob set out to travel with his family and wealth and servants. Even then he was scared of Esau.

In the midst of their journey to Canaan, Jacob had a vision by the River of Jabbok. Jacob's intense determination and keenness to receive the grace of God, made him a lame man. In order to transform him into a person who blesses, it was necessary to put him through all this trouble and punishment and hurt. From that day onwards Jacob's name became Israel. Jacob and Esau met the next day itself. They were very cordial to each other. After that, Esau went back to Edom and Jacob to his own home. God had kept Isaac alive in order to receive Jacob and his family and to give him the responsibility as the head of the family. Rachel delivered Jacob's twelfth son Benjamin after they had settled in Canaan. Rachel died after that.

Joseph

Rachel's demise increased Jacob's love for Joseph. Joseph's brothers were jealous about this. Moreover, when they understood the meaning of his dreams their animosity towards him increased. It was following this that Joseph was sold as a slave for 20 pieces of silver. The brothers knew that dreams were messages from God and that one day Joseph would become their ruler. To obstruct that, they acted against God. However, it took them some years to understand that nobody can hinder God from doing what He wants to do.

Joseph who was sold as a slave is later seen as the governor of the Egyptian king. Joseph is never ever seen as disrespecting God in any of his difficult circumstances or trials. It is an amazing reality that even when he did not understand why he had undergone all that hardship, Joseph relied on the true God. But more amazing is the fact that, when he reached the top position in the land, he was able to love God with all humility and faith.

The Israelites in Egypt

When there came a famine in Canaan, Joseph's brothers went to buy grain in Egypt and stood with their heads bowed before him. Joseph's dreams were being fulfilled then. He then praised God for being able to save his brothers and family from the famine and took them all in. The Pharaoh showed mercy to Jacob and his children. He gave them a village and pasture land for the livestock. Jacob lived for seventeen years in Egypt and died at the age of 147.

Moses

Joseph and his brothers lived in Egypt itself. At the end of their time they all passed away. The people of Israel multiplied largely in number and the land was filled with them. When a king who did not know Joseph started to rule Egypt, it marked the beginning of the troubles of the Israelites. When pain and difficulties start to increase in human life, then there is more interest in praying to God and getting closer to Him. But people who are living comfortably by the grace of God, never find time to communicate with Him. When the trials of the people of Israel became more their cry to the Lord became more loud. Out of God's unlimited love for His people and to fulfil His covenant with Abraham, God raised Moses as the deliverer of the Israelites. Through His amazing works, God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. He also gave them a new Passover Covenant.

After having lived in Egypt for 400 years, when the people were finally liberated, there were 6 lakhs men alone. Besides them, their families, and livestock altogether they formed a huge community. When Moses saw the sea of people behind him, he got scared of the great responsibility entrusted on him. But God gave him courage marvellously. On the first day itself Moses saw the Pillar of Cloud that moved along with them. It served as a shade for them in the scorching sun. The cloud transformed into a Pillar of Fire at night giving the people enough warmth and light for them to move on. Whenever they faced any problems, Moses would lift his eyes up. Then he would see the presence of God and the out-stretched arms of God. That way he would get the courage to face the problem.

The Ten Commandments

After dividing the Red Sea into two, and sweetening the water at Mara, and flourishing with Manna in the desert, and drinking water from a rock, and winning the war against Esau's descendants, the Amalekites, the Israelites pitched their camp in the desert opposite Mt. Sinai. The Israelites chose Joshua as the commander of the army to battle against the Amalekites. God called Moses to Mt. Sinai. God descended on Mt. Sinai in a fire. The whole mountain was covered with smoke and it trembled violently. The Lord spoke in a thunderous voice and gave many advices to Moses. God inscribed the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets and gave it to Moses. The Lord commanded to make a Covenant Box and also gave the instructions on how to make it. Moses stayed on the mountain forty days and nights for this.

The Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting

When Moses came down the mountain carrying the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were etched, his face was shining brightly and the people were perplexed. So Moses used to talk to the people covering his face with a veil. Moses made a tent outside the camp in order to talk to God. This was called the Tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting. When Moses went into the tent a pillar of cloud would come down and be at the entrance of the tent and God would talk to Moses. All people would stand at the entrance of each one's tent and worship God.

When it was nearly a year since the Israelites had left Egypt, God reminded them of the Passover. When in Sinai they had observed the second Passover in memory of the redemption through the blood of the lamb, they heard two silver trumpet sounds. That was their call to start journeying from there.

4. From Moses to Joshua

Numbers 12 - Joshua 24

Quails in the desert

Hearing the sound of the silver trumpets the people of Israel set out on their journey again and walked a three-day distance. Then the people grumbled against God for not being able to eat meat for nearly a year. Jehovah told Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short?" And the Lord scattered quail all over.

They travelled further on and when they reached Paran Desert which was at the border of Canaan, according to the command of Jehovah, Moses selected and send twelve brave people one from each tribe of the Israelites, to go and explore the Promised Land. For forty days these spies went around the cities and villages of the Land of Canaan and explored it. They reported that the people who live there were of great size and powerful and their cities were fortified all around. So some of them said that conquering it was not going to be easy. But Joshua and Caleb who were with them did not agree to what these people said. They both strongly argued, "Let's go." Though God in His anger had decided to finish off the unbelieving people, on Moses' plea, He did not punish them. But the Lord declared that those who tested Jehovah will never see the Land of Canaan. Because of this, they had to wander in the desert for forty years.

God punished Miriam, Moses' sister and Aaron, his brother, because they were jealous of Moses' wife. While Aaron repented Miriam was afflicted with leprosy. Then Moses prayed to the Lord and Miriam was healed. In the same way, God punished the people who were jealous of the authorities God had commanded to Moses and Aaron. "The ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, together with their possessions. They went down alive into the realm of the dead, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished" (Num. 16:32-33). It was after this that Aaron's rod blossomed and it was kept safely in the Ark of the Covenant.

For the forty days they spent exploring the land of Canaan, the people of Israel had to wander in the desert for forty years. Of these forty years of travelling, Moses has recorded only the first three years' and the last one year's history. After receiving the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, they pitched camp at many places and finally reached Kadesh in the Zin Desert.

Water from the Rock

This is where the people got drinking water from the rock. This is also where Moses and Aaron lost their right to cross over into the land of Canaan because they did not trust Jehovah God absolutely. So this place

was called Waters of Meribah – ‘Meribah’ meaning ‘Quarrelling’ because the Israelites quarrelled with Moses (Ex. 17).

From Kadesh, the people set out and reached Mt. Hor which was on the border of the region of Edom. Aaron’s son Eleazar was made the High Priest and Aaron died at the age of 123 and was buried. From Mt. Hor, the Israelites’ journey by the route to the Red sea in order to go around Edom was very calamitous. Because of this, the people started grumbling and God in his anger punished them by sending venomous snakes among them. Continuing their journey they then camped in the region of Moab which was to the east of the Dead Sea on the banks of River Jordan. Seeing the number of people, Balak, the king of Moab was terrified and he tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites. But God used Balaam to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them. Besides, from the mouth of Balaam came a prophecy about Jesus Christ, “A star will come out of Jacob...” (Num. 24:17)

The Demise of Moses

When it was time for Moses to die, as per the commands of God, Moses laid his hands on Joshua and anointed Joshua as his successor. Later he saw all of Canaan land atop the Pisgah, and God’s servant Moses died at the age of 120 (Deut. 31 & 34).

After taking over his position, the main duty of Joshua was to cross over to the other side of River Jordan and reach Canaan. The return of the people of Israel to that Canaan land which was in the hands of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was a big event in history. It was a unique experience for the Israelites also. It was the epicentre of their experience of God’s love, presence and providence. Through this journey they learned from experience the truths that God was not someone who was hidden somewhere, instead he involves in their lives and abides with them and blesses them. Now, before entering into their new life, they needed three days of purification to praise God for the blessings He had given them, to cleanse their hearts and minds so as to live a life in hope and trust of God. Joshua spent those days in communion with God. God gave him a draft of what he had to do in the coming days and encouraged him to be strong and courageous so that all the people would obey him. On the third day, they incredibly crossed over to the other side through River Jordan walking through it as if on dry land and camped at Gilgal. Joshua observed the first Passover in Canaan by circumcising those who had entered into Canaan but had not been circumcised. The manna stopped when they started eating the produce and grains of Canaan (Joshua 5).

City of Jericho

The Israelites conquered the city of Jericho by certain tactical moves of the army that was according to the plan of God. As Rahab had accepted in faith, the spies whom Joshua had sent, she and her family were saved by the sign of the scarlet cord, before capturing the city. This scarlet cord was

a fore sign of the redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ (Joshua 6). However, as Achan broke the command of God that all things in Jericho city were devoted to God he and his family were stoned to death (Joshua 7).

The people of Gibeon frightened on hearing Joshua's war victories went to Joshua with a trick. Believing them, the Israelites made a treaty with them. When the truth was revealed they made the Gibeonites their slaves (Joshua 9). After the treaty with the Gibeonites, Joshua had to face the joint attacks of many kings. He won all those wars and destroyed thirty three kings and captured their lands. In the war with the Amorites who ruled Jerusalem, the Lord hurled hailstones down on the Amorites, and as Joshua prayed to not let the sun set on the day until all the enemies had been destroyed, the sun was commanded to stand still for a whole day (Joshua 10). That day is considered a special day as God listened to the request of a human being. This event made the idol worshippers understand the might of Jehovah God. Joshua divided the land that the Israelites captured to the twelve tribes of Israel. He also set aside six cities as Cities of Refuge (Joshua 20). The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there (Joshua 18).

The end of Joshua

When Joshua realised that his life was nearing the end he called all the people together. He narrated a historical summary from the time God called Abraham till that day. Joshua had foreseen his people who would leave the path of their fathers who loved God in righteousness. So he exhorted them to be devoted to Jehovah and firmly adhere to the Laws and commandments given by Moses. He made them pledge that all people would serve God and fear Him and Joshua blessed them. The Lord's servant Joshua died when he was 110 years old. He was buried in his land of inheritance.

4.2 Vattipannam

In the olden days, when money was lent and interest on it was acquired, it was known as *Vattikkiduka* (Saving it with interest) in Malayalam. In the time of Metropolitan VI or Metropolitan Mar Dionysius, 3000 *Poovaraahan* (a financial denomination) which would have been equal (Rs. 10,500 - teachers to check with vicar on its equivalent today) was deposited in the British Treasury for savings. In those days, only charity institutions were given the highest rate of interest of 8%. Now there are two views to this – that this amount was given by the Metropolitan to East India company as a continuing debt and the other being, that Col. Colin MacCaulay, the first Resident of Travancore, borrowed that money from the Metropolitan when he faced a financial crisis. Anyway, every year, the Metropolitan used to obtain *vattipannam* or interest from the Travancore Treasury.

Meanwhile, the difference of opinion between Geevarghese Mar Dionysius Metropolitan and all the trustees about the reception to be awarded (going to Bombay [Mumbai], receiving and bringing) Patriarch Ignatius Abdul Masih II, who was arriving on hearing about the demise of Joseph Mar Dionysius, increased. Finally in 1911, Patriarch Ignatius Abdul Masih II suspended Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. Then ensued the problem as to who would receive the *vattipannam* (interest money). This case which went on for 17 years was finally judged in favour of Mar Dionysius.

4.3 Arthattu Palli

It is seen that the first Bava of Thozhiyur, Kattumangattu Mar Coorilos had filed a petition to Shakthan Thampuran, the then King of Cochin. In that petition he had requested that the *Chattukullam palli* should be brought under his authority. However, there are no records of this request as having been granted or denied. Yet, as per the historical accounts written by Sri P.C. Kunjathu and certain later incidences it can be presumed that the *Arthattu Palli* was under the authority of the Thozhiyur Church. The following are a few pointers.

1. In 1811, Rev. Cheeran Skaria (Kidangan) who was the vicar of *Chattakkullam* Church was consecrated as the Metropolitan of the Thozhiyur Church.
2. This enthronement was conducted in the presence of the clergy and laymen of the *Chattakkullam* and *Pazhanji* parishes.
3. On the demise of Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, the sixth Metropolitan of the Thozhiyur Church, the *Arthattu Palli* members reached there immediately and collected all the valuable items of the church, locked it in safe custody in the *Melpoot Maallika*, sealed it and gave the key to *Arthattu Palli* vicar, Rev. Panackal Geevarghese Joseph.
4. It was this same vicar who was invested as the seventh Metropolitan.
5. Geevarghese Mar Philexenos (*Kidangan*) who was the fifth Metropolitan of the Thozhiyur Church, consecrated for the Malankara Church, Rev. Ittoop Kathanar of *Pulikottil, Kunnamkullam* on March 22, 1816 (Malayalam Almanac 991 *Meenam* 9th) at *Pazhanji* Church and he was installed with the Episcopal title Joseph Mar Dionysius.
6. It has been documented that when Euyakim Mar Coorilos, a bishop sent by the Patriarch of Antioch, lost the civil case filed for all the properties of the Thozhiyur church, 'therefore, *Anjur* church has separated itself as an Independent Church' and '*Anjur* Church and *Arthattu* Church joined and our parish vicars conducted the rituals'.

It cannot be definitely said whether the nearly a century's strong relationship as one shepherd and his flock has been because of perhaps having availed the permission on the petition filed by Mar Coorilos to the Cochin King or because of the fraternal fellowship demonstrated then and still is being demonstrated in Christian love .

4.3 Some other Apostolic Churches

1. Eastern Orthodox Church

After the Pentecost, St. Thomas went to preach the gospel in the Eastern countries of Persia, Mede and India. Making Edessa the centre, the Eastern Orthodox Church was established by St. Thomas the Apostle, in these Eastern regions. This Church is one of the most ancient of Churches. One can be proud of its Apostolic origin by the fact that this Church was founded by St. Thomas who was one of the apostles of our Lord, who is the high priest chosen by God. Since the Greeks who lived in Urha, a place that lies towards the north west of Mesopotamia, used to call this place Edessa. Hence, it has come to be known as Edessa.

In AD 152, the Seat of the Church was moved from Edessa to the then Persian capital Seleucia and then again in AD 629 to Tigris and further again in 1912 the Seat was established at Kottayam in Malankara. Ensuing the famous *Vattippannam* (Interest) case, there arose a split and the '*Methran Kakshi* or (Orthodox) group is currently seated on this throne.

As Kattumangattu Mar Coorilos Bava (Bishop) who was consecrated in 1767 for the Malankara Church is the founder of our church, all the faith traditions are the same. The Thozhiyur Church has also consecrated, in 1815 Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius, in 1817 Punathra Mar Dionysius and in 1825 Cheppad Mar Dionysius to this Eastern Orthodox Church.

2. Malankara Jacobite Church

St. Thomas came to Kerala and baptised those who believed and also ordained some to priesthood. This sect mainly argues that beyond the above mentioned acts, St. Thomas had not established a throne here or install a bishop here. This Malankara Church is under the control of the Patriarch of Antioch and his representative, the Noble Catholica Bava who rules it because whenever there were problems like shortage of priests and a void in leadership, they would get in touch with Antioch and the Metropolitans who were commissioned by the Patriarch there, would come to the Malankara Church and fulfil all the needs and solve the issues.

Following the judgement of the *Vattipannam* case over dispute that arose in the Malankara Church, the group that split away in 1913 from the Malankara church (the *Bava Kakshi*) is the one leading this Church now. They follow the same traditions of our Church which separated from the Malankara Church in 1772.

3. The Chaldean Church

With its seat in Thrissur, this church is known as an Eastern Church, or Syrian Church in order to be distinguished apart from the Alexandrian Church and the Antiochan Church which lie to the east the Roman Empire.

Basically the faith decisions of the Councils - the one personality of the Messiah, the faith in the Holy Mother is different from ours. Also, the Holy Sacraments, the Ecclesiastical orders, the different rites in the order of Child Baptism are all different. When we draw the sign of the Cross from the left shoulder to the right shoulder, this Church draws it from the right shoulder to the left.

This Church is also part of the Church that was established in Edessa by St. Thomas the Apostle of India. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, advanced a Christological doctrine that was contradictory to the tenet approved by the First Council of Ephesus. In AD 428, though they were known as Nestorians or Nestorian

Believers, for following Patriarch Nestorius and his doctrine of the twin nature of Jesus, in reality, currently they do not follow the Nestorian theological belief.

4. C.S.I. (Church of South India)

Protestants are one of the sects that broke away in protest against the difference of opinion on certain faith traditions of the Roman Catholic church. Martin Luther was the main leader of the Protestants and they had the support of the King of England. That is why the City of London became the Seat of the Protestant Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the head of the Protestant Church and has all authorities equivalent to the Pope, who is the supreme authority of the Roman Catholic church. Though in membership it stands just behind the Roman Catholic Church, there are many organisations in it. The missionary work carried out by these groups in India, China and Africa is always particularly noteworthy. Missionary work in India was mainly carried out by C.M.S. (Christian Missionary Society) and Basel Mission. The CMS had a strong-hold in South Kerala and the Basel Mission in North Kerala.

When it became obvious that the Christian Church, which constituted only two and a half per cent of the total population of India, would not grow as long as it remained as separate groups, there came an awareness that unity of churches was a necessity. Following this conviction, as a result of constant prayer and many consultations and negotiations, in 1947, five churches joined together and the South Indian Church (C.S.I) was formed. Basel Mission which was a sect in this church did not have a bishop. When they realised that there had always been an Episcopal position in the church from the old times itself; that it had a historical relevance to it; and that it would facilitate church administration, they consented to be subjected to an Episcopal leadership. Except for the Anglican Church, the other sectarian churches, besides bishops had ordained priests too. They were all accepted in their same positions but laying-on of hands was made mandatory for those who came into priesthood later.

Similar to the Church of South India, in North India also, unity of churches came about and is known as C.N.I (Church of North India).

5. Roman Catholic Church

After the Coonen Cross Oath of 1653, when the majority of believers came back to the true faith, turning away from the Roman faith that was slapped on them by the Archbishop of Goa, those who continued to remain in the Roman faith are those who are in this Church. Those people who left after the Coonen Cross Oath came to be known as '*Puthen Koorukaar*' (People of the New Stand) and those who remained there as '*Pazham Koorukaar*' (People of the Old stand).

This church which accepts Pope of Rome as the supreme head of the Church, is known in various Orders. Though there are more than twenty Orders in the Roman Church, in Kerala, there are only three. After the Coonen Cross Oath, the Roman Catholics known as the *Pazham Koorukaar* is called the Syro Malabar Catholic Church. The second Order in Kerala is the Syro Malankara Catholic Church which deviated from the beliefs of the Malankara Syrian Church faithful, and accepted the Roman faith, but continued with no difference in their practice of rituals. The third Order is known as the Latin Catholics who continue to conduct their rituals in Latin itself. However, these three Orders use the non-fermented bread known as *Patheera* for Holy Qurbano instead of the '*Lahmo*' used by the Syrian Christians.

5. The Judges

Judges 1 - 16; 1 Samuel 1 - 10

The people of Israel defeated all the kings in Canaan, divided the conquered land among the twelve tribes and started living there. Because this was a generation that had never resided permanently anywhere, and were used to getting manna and quail from heaven, they had no experience in agriculture. The previous inhabitants of Canaan were great agriculturists. They used to worship Baal whom they considered as the god of fertility. There were other gods like the goddess Ashtoreth and idols like Asherah. Because some of the Israelites married Canaanite women, and slowly the superstition that for good crops they needed the blessings of the Baal god came into their midst, they began to forget the laws of Jehovah God and the righteous ways of their fore-fathers. They adopted the wicked idols of the Canaanites and their unlawful living.

The Israelites were unable to understand and believe that the true God who led them giving them heavenly food and rescuing them from their enemies, was also the God of their agricultural lands. As divine punishment to the Israelites who showed such unbelief, they were often given into the hands of enemy kings and made slaves and subjected to many kinds of persecution. Then when the people with one mind turned to God, prayed and turned away from their wrong ways, God would raise leaders for them and free them from their enemies. They were judges who advised solutions for all the problems that rose among the Israelites. God used to select the judges from among the heads of families - those won fame by their courageous mighty deeds and those who walked in piety obeying the laws of God. Over a period of two centuries, fifteen judges ruled the Israelites.

1. Othniel - Judges 3:7-11

After the life-time of Joshua, the first to attack and conquer the Israelites was the king of Mesopotamia, Cushen Rishathaim. They had to live as slaves under this king for nearly eight years. As a result of crying out to Jehovah in their hardship, Othniel was risen as Israel's first Judge. He ruled Israel for forty years.

2. Ehud - Judges 3:12-30

When Othniel was the Judge, there was freedom and well-being in Israel. After his demise, because there was no one to lead them, the Israelites again turned to wicked ways. As a result of this, for eighteen years they were persecuted as slaves under the Moabite king, Eglon. Then when the Israelites repented and cried out to the Lord, God was pleased and appointed Ehud the Benjamite as their Judge for their safety. Ehud murdered Eglon and provided the people of Israel eighty years of peaceful life.

3. Shamgar - Judges 3:31

With the demise of Ehud, when there was nobody to lead the Israelites, the Philistines attacked them. Then Shamgar son of Anath, by the command of God, came with an oxgoad and killed six hundred Philistines and saved Israel.

4. Deborah - Judges 4

As Shamgar was not a long-serving Judge for Israel they became orphaned and walked in evil ways. This caused them to become the slaves of king Jabin for twenty years. Deborah, a prophetess, who lived in the hill country of Ephraim was leading Israel at that time. She held court under a palm tree and delivered the Lord's messages to the people. Deborah judged over Israel for forty years.

5. Gideon - Judges 6-8

The Midianites were the enemies who came after the time of Deborah. They were the descendants of Midian, a son of Abraham by his wife Keturah, and who lived in the southern area of Sinai. For seven years, they kept attacking Israel and plundering them. Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh, was the one commissioned to save the Israelites from the Midianites. According to the instructions of Gideon, the soldiers of Israel attacked the enemy camp at night and completely destroyed them. When the Israelites forced him to become their king, he reminded them that Jehovah is their king - "The LORD will rule over you" (Joshua 8:23). Gideon was also known as Jerub-Baal and Jeru-Besheth. He judged over Israel for forty years.

6. Abimelek - Judges 9

After Gideon's death, Abimelek, Gideon's son by one of his maids, became their judge. Abimelek became their ruler, with the help of the people, after having killed all the other sons of Gideon except for the youngest one. However, within three years, all the people turned against Abimelek and a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head cracking his skull and he died.

7. Tola - Judges 10:1-2

Tola, from the tribe of Issachar was the next one to be appointed as Judge of the Israelites. He is unique in the sense that he was selected by the people. He ruled for twenty three years.

8. Jair - Judges 10:3-5

For the next twenty two years, Jair from Gilead was the Judge for Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty donkey for them to ride. They controlled thirty towns. After the death of Jair there were no judges for eighteen years. The people started idol worship and lived in wickedness.

9. Jephthah - Judges 10:8-11:7

Deviating from being a nation of Jehovah God, because the Israeites worshipped the Canaanite idols of Ashtoreth, the unity among them was lost and the enemies easily subdued them. The Ammonites and Philistines became the enemies of the Israelites and began to crush them. To stand against the enemy it was necessary for the Israelites to come together. They repented of their evil deeds. They cried out loud and prayed that their sins be pardoned and they be saved. Jehovah did not accept their prayer. God said, "When your enemies (the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites) oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

The Israelites were in deep sorrow. They got rid of the foreign gods among them. They prayed with a broken heart, sorry for all their sins. Finally God relented and was compassionate to them. He appointed Jephthah the Gileadite who was a mighty warrior as their leader. Because of a vow that he took just before he went to battle against the Ammonites, he had to sacrifice his own daughter to Jehovah. Jephthah was judge over Israel for six years.

10. Ibzan - Judges 12:8-10

After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem was the Judge. He judged over Israel for seven years and died.

11. Elon - Judges 12:11-12

The next person to become the judge of the Israelites, after Ibzan, was Elon the Zebulunite. He led Israel for ten years.

12. Abdon - Judges 12:13-15

Following the death of Elon, for the next eight years, Abdon son of Hillel from Pirathon was the Judge over Israel.

13. Samson - Judges 13-16

After the time of Abdon, for forty years there were no judges over Israel. Meanwhile the people of Israel forgot the true God and began idol worship. So God gave them into the hands of the Philistines. When the oppression by the Philistines became unbearable, with one heart they turned to Jehovah and He selected Samson, a mighty Judge. As he was a Nazarite from the time of his birth, a razor had not touched his head. So God had made him very strong. In earlier classes we have learned of the mighty deeds he had done during his twenty years of rule. Finally because his vow was broken, he lost his strength and died in the temple of the Philistines.

14. Eli - 1 Samuel 1-4

For forty years after Samson, Eli was the priest and judge of Israel. Because of the evil of his sons he fell backward off his chair and died.

15. Samuel - 1 Samuel 1-10

Samuel was the son born to an old couple Elkanah and Hanna who prayed that if they get a son, they would devote him to God for all his life. After the death of Eli, Samuel ruled over Israel. He was the last among the Judges. According to the will of God Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel.

6. The Kingly reign in Israel

1 Samuel 8 - 2 Samuel 6

A king for Israel

When Samuel became old he appointed his sons to maintain the law. They were greedy for money and used to twist the law around for bribe and could not provide a proper leadership for the people. So, all the elders in Israel gathered together. They informed Samuel to appoint a king for them, because, like all the other nations they also wanted a king to rule over them. They thought that the leadership of a king would be helpful in defeating the enemies. For Samuel who considered Jehovah to be their king, this was an unpleasant request and he was displeased. He forewarned the people of the trouble they would face with a kingly reign. But, the people were stubborn and asked for a king. So, God allowed Samuel to anoint a king.

A king is selected

A young man named Saul, while searching for his lost donkeys, found himself in front of Samuel. Samuel had the order from God that this young, brave, handsome man, who was a head taller than anyone else, should be anointed as king over all Israel. So, Samuel took him separately and anointed him as king. Samuel prophesied to Saul all that would occur on his return journey so that Saul would understand that all this had occurred according to the command of God.

King Saul

Then, Samuel called all the people together to select the king of Israel. Lots were cast among tribes, families and individuals. The cast fell on Saul, son of Kish from the Matri clan of the tribe of Benjamin. The people received him with joyful celebrations. Samuel wrote and gave all the laws that a king had to observe.

Saul was a brave king. He won many wars. But he was arrogant. He ruled to his own whims without considering the will of God. Even though only the priests from the tribe of Levi had the right to offer sacrifice among the people, Saul performed a sacrifice before going out for war against the Philistines. Then when he acted against the command of God

during the war against the Amalekites, Samuel said that Saul had been removed from his kingly throne.

David, the shepherd boy

Because he broke the command of the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. Instead an evil spirit took over him. Later, God chose David, the youngest son of Jesse from Bethlehem, to the king's post. Samuel anointed David as king according to the will of God.

When Saul's aids found that the evil spirit that took over him went away when he heard the harp being played, David who was an expert harp player was brought to the royal presence. The king found comfort in his harp playing.

David and Goliath

When there was no one in the Israeli army to confront a Philistine mighty fighter, David defeated him quite easily. So when the Israeli women cried out in joy, Saul got annoyed. It was Saul's envy of David that raised hatred and enmity in Saul. But Jonathan, who was a son of Saul, loved David with his life. Saul tried to kill David many times and at such times David used to run away from the kingly presence. Meanwhile Samuel passed away and was buried in his hometown Ramah.

David runs away

Once, David ran seeking refuge with Philistine King Achish thinking that he would die at the hands of Saul. Though King Achish wanted to place David in the war front against the war with the Israelites, the nobles and leaders of Philistine objected to it because they suspected David as he was an Israeli. The Israelites were defeated in that war and King Saul and his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua were killed. David grieved over the news that Saul and his sons were killed and fasted till dusk and even prepared a dirge.

David becomes king

As per God's command David moved from Ziklag to Hebron. When they saw David, the Israelites anointed David as king. At the same time, some people amongst the Israelites with the help of the commander of Saul's army made Saul's son Ish-Bosheth the king. As he did not have any administrative

abilities the people began to dislike him and he was secretly murdered.

Consequently, David was anointed king over all of Israel. As soon as his kingly position was confirmed he defeated the Jebusites who were in Jerusalem and conquered that city and built a palace there. He moved his capital seat to Jerusalem. Immediately he brought the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Abinadab on the hill of Kiriath Jearim to the place that he had prepared for it in Jerusalem.

KINGLY REIGN IN ISRAEL - II

2 Samuel 6 - 1 Kings 2

David Commits Sin

David, a devotee of God, also became a slave of sin. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah a soldier in David's army, was very beautiful. In order to marry her, David sent Uriah to the battle front and got him killed. God sent Prophet Nathan to David. He spoke against David's injustice. "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you." The words of the prophet led David to repentance. He prayed, fasted and did penance. Psalm 51 is David's Song of Penitence. By repentance one receives forgiveness of sins and salvation from eternal punishment. But, worldly punishments will have to be endured.

David's Perils

The first blow in David's life was the death of his son born to Bathsheba. Wise Solomon was the son born to Bathsheba after that. One of David's son, Absalom, after getting Amnon who was another son of David murdered, fled to Geshur. Joab who was the commander of David's army, with the consent of David brought Absalom back. Absalom using cunning words attracted the people to his side. Since he wanted to become the king, he started plotting against David. When the strife became too much, David with some soldiers left Jerusalem to another place. Absalom seized the throne during this time.

David, at the age of sixty, had to fight a war against Absalom. In the battle that took place in the forests of Ephraim, Absalom was defeated. While he was fleeing on a mule, his hair got caught on a branch of an oak tree and he was left hanging on it as his mule rode away. Then David's men beat him to death. David was grieved by the news of Absalom's death.

Following this another calamity struck David. A man named Sheba from the tribe of Benjamin gathered some people and rose against David. Though only the people of the tribe of Judah stood by David and all other tribesmen went with Sheba, David's men easily defeated the other side.

God's punishment

When David took a census and he became swollen with pride thinking that it was his huge army that was the cause of all his victories, he was subjected to the ire of God. In a three-day plague, seventy thousand people were killed.

David's unfulfilled desire

David was very upset by the fact that the king was living in the palace and the Ark of the Covenant was resting in a tent. So he informed Prophet Nathan about his desire to build a temple for Jehovah. God gave his commands to the prophet. David had fought many battles and shed a lot of blood. A temple for God should not be built with blood-stained hands.

Solomon, who would come as his successor, was to fulfil that. David collected all the wood, gold, silver and precious stones needed to build the temple and entrusted it to Solomon and showed him the model of the temple which God had shown David.

King Solomon

David had become old. Another son of his, Adonijah, like Absalom, wanted to become the king. For that he got Joab the commander, a priest and other princes and started to plan things. Prophet Nathan and Solomon's mother Bathsheba together informed David about this development. Immediately, according to David's command, prophet Nathan, Zadok the priest and Benaiah the commander of the armies, and David's many soldiers all gathered together and took Solomon and anointed him as king. When Adonijah and his men heard the loud voice of the people shouting "Long Live King Solomon", each one started to flee in different directions.

With great celebrations, Solomon was brought ceremoniously to the palace and seated on his throne. People started to come one after another and greet him. 'May your God make Solomon's name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!'. Then David prayed 'Praise be to Jehovah, God of Israel, who allowed me to see my son sitting on my throne.' He advised Solomon on all matters of kingly rule. He deceased like his fathers. He died after he was king over Judah in Hebron for seven years and 33 years over all of Israel.

David's Psalms

David had suffered many difficulties and trials in his life. His troubles were so numerous that he said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest... (Psalms 55:6). If he committed sin, he would cry and repent over it, and even in his difficulties he was particular to sing out more and more to the Lord in praise. His Psalms are examples of that.

David was God's most beautiful singer, warrior, king and also His prophet. Honest heart, undeceiving love, fear of God, mercy to even foes, trust in God, steadfast faith in God, true repentance, interest in worshipping and many such valuable pearls can be found in David's life.

8. Kingly Reign in Israel - III

1 Kings 2 - 11

Wise Solomon

Just as Jehovah had promised David, after the demise of David, Solomon became king. He loved God with all his heart. After David's time, Solomon very cleverly subdued his renowned enemies like Adonijah, Joab, Priest Abiathar and Shimei the Benjamite and made safe his throne.

In wisdom and wealth there was none at par with Solomon in those days. When Queen of Sheba visited him he was seen as a surprisingly diplomatic king. All the kings in the area from River Euphrates to Egypt were Solomon's dependants. His wife was the daughter of the Pharaoh. Jerusalem became the prime place for religious and political matters. God had also told David about Solomon - "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands" - (2 Samuel 7:14). That God appeared to Solomon and allowed him to ask any gift that he wanted. "a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong"(1 Kings 3:9) is what Solomon prayed. Jehovah was pleased with his request and blessed him giving more than what he asked for.

Solomon was able to deliver a wise and just ruling in a dispute between two women over a baby. When the news how Solomon had given the baby to its real mother spread, everyone said that the Spirit of God was dwelling in him and were amazed at his wisdom. Solomon brought about many administrative plans and strengthened his army power.

The Temple of Jerusalem

Just as God had promised David, Solomon was allowed to build the Temple of God. Using cedars and juniper logs from Lebanon, he completed the building of the Temple and all its accessories in seven years. He called all of Israel for the Dedication of the Temple. From where David had kept the Ark of the Covenant, Solomon brought it with the priests carrying it and kept it in a place specially arranged for it. For the dedication he sacrificed 22,000 cattle and 122,000 of sheep and goats. Then Solomon stood before the altar of Jehovah God in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and prayed. When he had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrificial matter. The glory of the Lord filled the Temple.

Solomon's Wisdom

Solomon was famed as the great wise man. His name was known all over. He wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs. He had wisdom about everything from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall, animals, birds, reptiles and fish. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are all great works that portray the wisdom of Solomon.

Besides the Temple for Jehovah, Solomon built a palace for himself. He also built a place for his wife called the Forest of Lebanon and another palace for her. The throne he made for himself was unique. All the utensils of the king were in gold or pure gold.

Solomon's faults

Solomon collected new taxes from the people for his luxurious living, selling of 20 cities of Galilee to King Hiram of Tyre and forceful conscription of armed forces, all these things made the people unhappy. Besides the opposition of the people he was also subject to God's anger. Besides his own wife, he took many women from among the foreigners to be his wives. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines. According to their wishes he built temples and idols of Ashtoreth and appointed many priests for it. All these were breaking the Law.

Punishment of God

When His servant, who enjoyed the Lord's blessings and experienced His love broke the commandments, God became very angry with him. The Lord appeared to him and said, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11:11-13)

Solomon after a splendid reign of 20 years over Israel, cursed by the Lord, began to see his own downfall. His enemies increased – Hadad the Edomite, Rezon Of Zobah became Solomon's adversaries. One of his officials, Jeroboam also rebelled against Solomon.

Solomon reigned for 40 years and died at the age of 60. Though he was famous as the wisest man in all things, the fall of Solomon when he forgot Jehovah, is an example of the weakness, sinful nature and pitiable state of mankind.

9. The Kingdom of Israel

1. Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17

The Nation Splits

Following the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam became the king. As the Lord had proclaimed, the nation was grabbed from his hands and given to Jeroboam who was one of his subjects. Ten tribes formed this group which came to be known as Israel or the Northern Kingdom and its capital was the City of Samaria. Rehoboam got only two tribes – Judah and Benjamin. The areas where the two tribes that were separated from the Kingdom of Israel lived came to be known as the Kingdom of Judah or the Southern Kingdom. Jerusalem was the capital of this kingdom.

King Jeroboam

Jeroboam who was installed as king of Israel turned out to be an idol-worshipper. He made two golden calves and placed it in two different places for his subjects to worship. Though he was warned by Prophet Ahijah that his family would be destroyed, Jeroboam did not heed to listen and turn away from sin. Therefore, his son who was sick died.

King Ahab

Jeroboam deceased after reigning for 22 years. Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri and Ahab were those who succeeded him and enthroned. They were all idol-worshippers. Not only that, they took it to its highest level and kept the people of God away from Jehovah. Ahab was the worst of them all. He married a Phoenician princess Jezebel who suited to his name. She was the pinnacle of all evil deeds. Actually, though Ahab was the king, the governance was done by the cruel Jezebel. She made temples for foreign gods all over the kingdom and appointed priests for them.

It was the age of prophets. They were great men who were commissioned by God to admonish the kings and lead the people in the right path. They used to turn the people who went astray to repentance by explaining to the kings and the people about the Divine wrath that would come upon them and the punishments because of it if they broke the Law. Some of them who were really pure have also performed miracles. Jezebel used to give commands to kill so many of these prophets. Obadiah, the palace administrator, was a very devout man of God. He used to hide many prophets in caves and save their lives.

Prophet Elijah

Elijah who was the greatest of the prophets appeared during this period. His messages spread fast like a wind storm all over the country. Jezebel's fury

engulfed over this pious man. After prophesying that the country would reel in drought without rain, Elijah had to go and hide on the other side of River Jordan. It was at this time that Elijah was fed by the ravens and the house of the Widow of Zarephath was blessed.

Elijah's sacrifice

Three years later, by the command of God, Elijah the Prophet went to the royal presence of the king. During this occasion, the Carmel Sacrifice, he made the people understand that the Baal idol was not god and that Jehovah God was the true God. When many of Baal's prophets fell to the sword that day, Jezebel's heart became harder. Elijah fled from there to Horeb, Jehovah's Mountain, fasting for forty days. From there he went to Damascus and selected Elisha as his disciple and anointed him as prophet.

Ahab who was a greedy man wanted to make Naboth's vineyard his own. For that, Jezebel got Naboth killed and made the vineyard their own. Elijah went to the king's presence to question this injustice and prophesied that the dogs would lick Ahab's blood and Jezebel would be devoured by dogs. Shortly, the king of Aram attacked Israel and Ahab was killed in the battle field.

King Ahaziah

Following the death of Ahab, his son Ahaziah became king. He was an idol-worshipper. One day he fell through the lattice of his upper room and lay injured. He sent messengers to the Philistine gods to find out whether he would lie there and die. On their way they met Prophet Elijah who admonished them for seeking foreign gods and told them that Ahaziah would die. The king on hearing this was angered and sent soldiers to catch Elijah. But fire fell from heaven and killed them. This happened twice. Then, according to the will of God, Elijah went to the king and said, "Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.

While walking with his disciple Elisha, Prophet Elijah went over to the other side of River Jordan and was taken up bodily to heaven. Elisha returned having received the blessings and gifts from his master. He was able to walk across the River Jordan by the strength of his master's coat.

King Joram or Jehoram

Ahab's son Joram was on the throne at this time. As he acted against the will of God he was subjected to the anger of God. It Was Elijah who had anointed Hazael as king of Aram (Syria). In a battle with this king, Israel was defeated

and the king of Israel returned to his land seriously injured. Prophet Elisha gave timely advices and did miracles to bring these people who were idol-worshippers and wicked. But they did not change their ways. So Elisha ordered Jehu who was anointed as king over Israel to seize the royal palace and throne as God had commanded. Jehu did as he was ordered to and captured the palace and king Joram and murdered him and annihilated the whole family. Jezebel who was still alive was pushed over from the palace upper room and killed. The dogs ate her flesh and the prophecy of Prophet Elijah was fulfilled. Jehu ruled for 28 years. During his reign many idol-worshippers were put to death and temples razed.

Evil kings

After the time of Jehu his son, Jehoahaz succeeded him as king. He ruled for 17 years. Then his son Jehoash ruled for 16 years (2 Kings 13:10). The demise of Prophet Elisha was during this period. Then Jeroboam II became king and reigned for 41 years. His son Zechariah succeeded him and ruled for 6 months. Then Shallum ruled for one month, followed by Menahem who ruled for ten years and Pekahiah his son succeeded him as king for two years. They were all evil, wicked and idol-worshippers.

The end of Israel

The last king of Israel, Hoshea assassinated the ruling king Pekah and took the kingdom from him. He reigned for nine years. As the Assyrian king was favouring him, he paid tributes to the king of Assyria. Seeing how Assyria was getting stronger, he entered into an agreement with the Egyptian king to cut the might of Assyria. Learning about this, the king of Assyria came with his forces and destroyed the city of Samaria. This siege lasted for three years. Meanwhile, Shalmaneser who was king of Assyria deceased and his successor Sargon continued the siege. In BC 722 he captured Israel totally. When he took a majority of the people as slaves to Assyria, the kingly reign and royalty of nearly 200 years in Israel came to an end. He brought people from other places and resided them there. These foreigners made Samaria their home. The children born out of marriage between these foreigners and the remaining Israelites in Samaria are known as the Samaritans in the New Testament. Their experiences teach us that the wrath of God gave the Israelites endless troubles.

10. The Kingdom of Judah/Judea

1 Kings 11 - 2 Kings 24

King Rehoboam

When Solomon's son Rehoboam became king he tried to bring back the ten tribes which had parted ways with the rest, but as he was told by Shemaiah, a prophet of God, that it was against the will of God, he abandoned his efforts. As time went by, Rehoboam, the first king of Judah also began to forget Jehovah God and began to break the Laws. As a result of this, the king of Egypt attacked Judea and invaded it and plundered the Temple of Jerusalem.

King Asa

Following the demise of Rehoboam, his son Abijah succeeded him and reigned for three years and died. After that, for 41 years the kingdom of Judah was ruled by his son Asa. Asa was devoted to God and tried to revive the worship of Jehovah all over the place. But when the Israelites came for war against them, he took silver and gold from the Temple treasury and gave it as bribe to the king of Syria and made them fight against Israel. Prophet Hanani informed Asa that this act had angered God. Asa immediately put him in prison. As punishment God gave a terrible disease on his feet and he died.

King Jehoshaphat

Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, was the greatest king among of the kings of Judah. He had firm faith in Jehovah and followed the Laws to the letter and encouraged his subjects to follow the Law. He appointed judges and teachers of the Law all over the kingdom and maintained law and order. However, God did not like his son Jehoram marrying Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. Jehu, the prophet told King Jehoshaphat about this. After that he was all the more submissive to God and did good deeds. He died after reigning for 25 years.

Evil kings

Then, his son Jehoram became king. As his wife was the daughter of Jezebel, he became the epitome of all evil and was a merciless person. As a result, enemies easily overcame him. He was sick for a long time and died in great pain with no one to care for him.

His son, Ahaziah, who succeeded him, ruled the land was worse than his father. When Jehu, king of Israel annihilated the family of Ahab, Ahaziah, who was then the king of Judea was also killed. When Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, heard this, she rejoiced because she considered that as the entire family was done away with, she could rule by herself without opposition. She ruled for seven years.

King Joash

Joash was a prince who escaped the total evil destruction of the royal family heirs that Athaliah carried out. Then by the efforts of Jehoiada, a priest, with the help of commanders and guards he was brought to the Temple. Jehoiada put them under oath and crowned Joash as a young king and killed Athaliah. Joash ruled under the guidance of Jehoiada. He destroyed the altars of the foreign gods and repaired the Jerusalem Temple and set an order in the service of the Lord. But after the demise of Jehoiada the young king started to do evil. King Joash even got Zechariah, the chief priest killed for admonishing him for his wrong doing. His end was rather pitiable. He was assassinated by his own officials.

The proud king

The history of Amaziah his son is a repetition of his father's. Amaziah's son, Azariah (Uzziah) was a godly person. Yet, when he won the war against the Philistines, he became proud and angered God. He entered the Temple of the Lord to burn incense at the incense altar. God afflicted him with leprosy and he had to live the rest of his life shunned from society.

A godly king

When the king became a leper, his son Jotham took charge of the palace and ruled the land. He was a pure soul who lived all his life in the fear of the Lord doing good deeds. This king remained as a silver star among the people of Judah who were mired in darkness.

Ahaz who was an idolator and wicked person became the next king. He destroyed all the utensils used for the offerings in the Temple of the Lord and stopped the worships there. He built altars for foreign gods and with his 16 years of reign ruined Judah completely.

King Hezekiah

Succeeding him Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, was enthroned as king. This king was a godly king who when afflicted by a fatal disease prayed to God and got his life extended for 15 years. He restored the Temple of the Lord which was destroyed by his father and started services there. In his time, in a war with the Assyrians, an angel of the Lord came down and killed many Assyrian soldiers and King Hezekiah won the war. On hearing that King Hezekiah was ill, the king of Babylon sent envoys to convey his well wishes. King Hezekiah greeted them and showed them all the gold, silver and gems he had in his possession as his own splendour, which angered the Lord. God informed King Hezekiah through Prophet Isaiah that all this would be taken away the Babylonian king. The period when Judea was ruled according to the instructions of Prophet Isaiah is considered to be the golden age of Judea.

King Manasseh

The reign of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah was terrifying. Many prophets including Isaiah were killed by him. As God's punishment he was shackled and taken as prisoner to Babylon and tortured. This led to his

repentance and the repentance of Manasseh became famous. God brought him back and he lived the rest of his life totally trusting in the Lord.

King Josiah

Manasseh's son Amon in two years of reign was killed by his own officials and his son Josiah became king at the age of eight. He destroyed all the idols and cleansed the Temple area. The Book of Law which went missing during the time of Manasseh was found during the time of Josiah. He did everything according to the will of God according to the guidance of Prophetess Huldah. But because of the Lord's anger against Manasseh Josiah was killed in a war against the king of Egypt.

Under Pharaoh's captivity

Jehoahaz (Shallum) was a son who brought disgrace to his father Josiah. By the time he ruled for three months, Pharaoh took him in chains. As Judah was under the rule of the Pharaoh, Jehoiakim (Eliakim), another of Josiah's sons was made ruler of Judah. He also chose the path against the Lord. So they were taken as exiles into Babylon. That is the history next to be learned.

B. New Testament

1. Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

If the Gospels contain the teachings and deeds of Jesus Christ, the Acts of the Apostles contains the teachings and works of the apostles and their co-workers. All the works of all the apostles are not seen in this. The works of two people, Peter and Paul has been discussed to a great length. Just as more than the people who preached the gospel, it is the gospel which they preached which is of importance; similarly, the writer gives more importance to the apostles' works than to the apostles themselves. 'Acts' is a word that comes from the Greek word *Praxeis*. Literary works that describe the works of great men used to be normally called by this name.

The author

The Acts of the Apostles is written as a continuation to the Gospel according to St. Luke. Though the author's name is not mentioned in both books, in certain phrases in the book it is said that he was a co-traveller of Paul. Paul refers to that co-worker in his epistles as Luke. According to historical inferences and the statements from the early church fathers, it is believed that the author of both books was Luke.

There is not much known about Luke the writer in the Scriptures. It is considered that he is one among the gentiles who joined the Disciples of Christ. If that is so, then Luke would be the only writer in the Holy Bible who is not a Jew. By race he is Greek. At a young age itself having acquired enough education he goes to Tarsus to do his medical studies. It is considered that he got acquainted with Paul while in Tarsus, accepted Christianity, travelled with him to many places and worked for the gospel. Besides this, there are no reliable facts about Luke. However, according to tradition, of the 72 messengers, one person was an artist and this person had sketched a picture of the Holy Mother. One tradition has it that at the age of 72, he died a natural death at Bethany, while the other tradition says that at a place called Patras in Achaea, Greece, which was his gospel field, he was hung to death by his opponents.

Period of writing

St. Luke Ch. 21:20-24 is written as if the destruction Jerusalem had taken place. **(The Bible portion speaks in future tense. Please check this before teaching.)** The destruction of Jerusalem happened in AD 70. Therefore, it is considered that the gospel was written after AD 70, and the Acts of the Apostles some time between AD 75-80.

Aim

1. The main aim of this book is to give a detailed account of the early church history in an orderly manner. It shows how the Christian Church which was a small group in Jerusalem breached and crossed the boundaries of race and colour and reached Rome, the capital of the empire.
2. As Luke was a gentile Christian the growth of the Church to outsiders was of interest to him. He tries to make it clear that the gospel is beyond the boundaries of racism. The word 'gentiles' means anyone from any other caste, tribe or race other than Jew. In those days, the Jews used to think that these non-Jews were created to fuel the fires in hell. But one of the most important aims of the book is to proclaim the revolutionary statement that such people are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. St. Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles. That is how the message of salvation went beyond the borders of countries and empires and was made available for all the world.
3. The first century was the time when believers of Christ were tormented continuously. The enemies portrayed the Christian Church as a group that opposes the government. It was necessary to prove that the members of the Church were not riotous or opposers of the government. For that, Luke takes special interest to show how some people in authority had shown interest and magnanimity to the Christian Church.
4. Luke also wants to prove that Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles was in no way lesser than Peter himself. As evidence, he narrates all the miracles that Peter performed as being performed by Paul also.

Subject description

After describing the birth of John the Baptist and his service, Luke's gospel discusses topics like the public ministry, the suffering, resurrection and ascension into heaven of Jesus. As the second part of this gospel, in Acts of the Apostles we first see that, as said and decided at the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven, the disciples all gathered together as a group and were waiting to receive the Holy Spirit, and receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the Day of the Pentecost. In the gospel propagation that followed, the Spirit leads them on. Next come the martyrdom of Stephen and the work of Philip. After that the conversion of Saul and the works of St. Peter are narrated. However, a major part of the book is a vivid description of the missionary journeys of St. Paul. It also records that when arguments in the church arose, the Synod is called and the matter is settled.

The persecution that the early church had to suffer has been well described. Beating, imprisonment, chains, stoning, man-handling, murder are all included in it. The terrifying efforts of the Jewish people to nip out the Christian religion while it was just bedding are seen here.

We get a very accurate picture of the early church in it. It reveals not only the origin of the Church, growth and structure, but also its social and spiritual state. We are also able to understand matters relating to the

experiences of worship and fellowship. The history of the beginning of the ecclesiastical order that existed in the Church and sacramental practices are certainly of importance.

On the basis of the above stated facts, this work is known as the history of the early Church. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is also known as the 'Book of the Way'.

Not recording anything about the end of St. Paul who established the Church in various places, and closing the book by showing the readers a scene of Paul who is living under house arrest and waiting for the judgement is rather disappointing. So this book is also said to be the only book in the Bible that has not been concluded. As the work for the everlasting Christ who lives forever continues, without concluding the book, the acts of the apostles continues on till the end of the world.

B. 2. Peter's First Speech

Acts 2: 14-41

The background to the speech

In the Seventh Grade, we studied the amazing occurrence that took place on the Pentecostal Day. The Jews allege that what happened that day is the result of being drunk with new wine. The apostles are strengthened by the working of the Holy Spirit; all fear is removed and they face the people. So, Peter rises up, stands in their midst, and makes the first speech of the proclamation of the gospel, over there.

We see here a model of the speeches the apostles made even before the gospels or the epistles were written. There is presentation of truths in this. All the main philosophies of faith are discussed in it. The main theme of the speech is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This speech can be divided into three parts. The first part, which is from verses 14 to 21 describes the incident that necessitated this speech. Then, the mission of Lord Jesus which caused this incident is stated from verse 22 to 28. In the concluding verses 29-41, the meaning of Jesus Christ's resurrection is made clear. Each part begins with an individual address.

The First Part of the Speech (v. 14-21)

In the first part, Peter quotes the prophecy found in Joel Ch. 2:28-32 "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;" declares the Lord.

On the Day of the Pentecost it is at the third hour, which is 9 in the morning, when the Disciples get the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is the time of worship in the Jerusalem Temple. Until the services in the Temple are over, no Jew will enjoy food or drink. Therefore, they remind the people that the allegation that they had drunk new wine is baseless; but at the same time what they saw there was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel.

The Second Part of the Speech (v. 22-28)

The second part speaks of the activities of Jesus which caused that incident. Jesus the Nazarene was known to many among the audiences. They were also witnesses to many of his miracles. But their difficult problem is, how could the messiah who is to come for the uplift of Israel die like the worst sinner. St Peter states three things for it.

- (1) Jesus was handed over by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.
- (2) The Jews were responsible for his death.

(3) Jesus rose up being superior to the bondages of death. The main proof to this Messianic status is just that.

Therefore, Jesus knew of God's life giving ways and was his holy one, Peter established.

The Third Part of the Speech (v. 29-41)

In the third part Peter explains the meaning of resurrection from Psalm 16:8-11 - "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." He stresses that Jesus is the person referred to here and that they are witnesses to it. Though Jesus Christ has resurrected and ascended into heaven, he has got the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and distributes it to people. Peter says that it was as a result of receiving that divine gift that he proclaimed the great deeds of God which created surprise among the onlookers as they understood it in their own languages.

Distressed with Regret

The devout people who heard the words of Peter are pained in their heart and distressed. They ask what to do. Peter replies, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." By 'far off' Peter means all the Jews who are living scattered far away and people of other religions. Peter pleads with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

The people who listened to Peter's speech become conscious of their sins. They may have been people who crucified him or witnessed it. They did not know that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They repent and take baptism and receive the Holy Spirit. That day about three thousand people joined the Church.

3. Peter's Second Speech

Acts 3: 12-26

Background of the Speech

In the Seventh grade we studied about how Peter healed a lame man who used to sit begging at the Temple Gate called Beautiful, how all the people were amazed at it and Peter addressed them in a speech. This speech is Peter's second speech. The reason why Peter felt like healing this man who was lame from birth could have been because he took pity seeing the helpless condition of the man. Or it may have been the lame man's strong faith, or it may have been with Peter's intention of making it an opportunity to witness Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever it may have been, Peter in his speech first revealed the power in the name of Lord Jesus Christ.

Men of Israel

Peter started his speech by addressing it to his fellow Israelites - "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see."

The second part of the speech starts from the 17th verse. Here, the stress was on the special hope that Jesus Christ had given to Israel. Therefore, Peter brought closer to Jesus, the fellow Israelites whom he addressed in the first part of the speech and started the second part by addressing them as "Brethren". (Not in NIV or Good News Bible) "I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Peter justified his stand by saying that Jesus was the prophet that Moses referred in Deuteronomy 18:18-19 by quoting the verses. And he quoted the Scripture saying that those who would not listen to His words would be punished.

Imprisonment

While he was talking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came and seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

It is stated that, as many people began to believe hearing the speech of Peter, the number of men who believed were about five thousand. We saw that the number of people who believed on the day of Pentecost were 3000. Was it only men who believed in Jesus then? We can justifiably ask whether there were no women and children. According to the culture of those days, only the count of men would be taken. It is not because women and children stood away from the society or were made to stand apart from society. With every man, his family of women and children became believers in Jesus Christ.

B. 4. Imprisonment and Trial

Acts 4: 1-31

Allegation

In Peter's speech, he cast the entire blame on the Jews for hanging Jesus Christ. Peter provided the scriptural proof for it. And thousands of Jews joined the Christian faith on hearing the message. This agitated the Jewish leaders. According to the Jewish laws of that time, only those who were trained by the Rabbis and got permission were allowed to preach or interpret and explain scriptural matters. But when Peter and John who were ordinary people, spoke more knowledgeably than what the Jewish leaders expected, and led the Jews to baptism of repentance the religious leaders of that time could not tolerate it.

Sadducees

Among the people who came to arrest the disciples, there was one group known as the Sadducees. We have learned about them earlier in the 14th chapter. The Sadducees who were an independent group, believed that after man's death, there is no resurrection, and that there were no angels or messengers of God for the help of man. When Peter preached that they were witnesses to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, and it was the belief in the risen Jesus that healed a man who was lame from birth, it really made the Sadducees furious.

When a good majority of the Jews joined the disciples, the Jewish leaders feared that these people would become a force and create trouble against the Roman government. That is why the disciples were jailed in order to deter them from their endeavour.

Trial

Peter and John were tried the next day. It was their complete Sanhedrin, which as per the law, that had gathered there. This group had the authority in matters of civil and criminal offences and also to sentence a person to death. Peter, who knew this, fearlessly answered their mocking questions in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:8-12)

Peter is warned

Though Peter and John had no educational qualifications or standing in society, their courageous and learned reply astonished the gathering of scholars and authorities. Moreover, they were surprised when they learned that Peter and John were the disciples of Jesus whom they

conspired and crucified. And since the miracle that Peter had performed had become famous, they could not even deny it. They had also noted that the followers of Jesus were increasing day by day. So they thought about it together and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. To that Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They could not punish the disciples, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. So they threatened them and let them go.

The Power of prayer

On their release, Peter and John went back to the other disciples and reported all that had happened. They all joined together and raised their voices in prayer. They prayed to put an end to the threats of the opponents and to give them the strength to speak the word of God with great boldness. When they prayed the place where they were gathered shook and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

This was the first incident in which the apostles had to face the Law council. They were able to handle it successfully. From this incident there are certain matters we need to pay attention to:

- 1) In the sight of the Jewish leaders the apostles were uneducated. But when they got into communion with Christ they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to face any situation.
- 2) The memories of the persecution of Jesus gave them more instigation to suffer torments.
- 3) By adopting the model of their lord who prayed for those who tortured him, and not adopting the way of revenge, they found refuge in God through prayer.

B. 5. Second Imprisonment and Release

Acts 5: 12-42

Second imprisonment

In John 10:23, we read about Jesus walking in Solomon's Colonnade which was located on the east side of the Jerusalem Temple. Peter's first speech was in this portico. Gradually this portico came to be the special gathering point of Christian believers. They all came here with one mind. As the meeting of the believers who gathered at Solomon's Colonnade became strong by every passing day, the Chief Priests and the Sadducees became jealous. Usually the Jewish leaders would make an attempt to advise and correct the people who go wrong. If that does not work, then their next step is to punish the wrong doers. That was how the apostles Peter and John were sent off with a warning. When the Jewish leaders found that it didn't work, they caught the apostles and put them in a dungeon with other criminals. Their idea was to call the Sanhedrin again and give the apostles a hard punishment. But before that, a miracle took place in the prison.

Release from the jail

An angel of the Lord came at night and opened the doors of the jail and released the apostles. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said to them, "and tell the people all about this new life" and then he brought them out of the prison. In the morning, the apostles entered the Temple courts, and began to teach the people.

The Sanhedrin gathered and send their guards to get the apostles for their trial. The guards found the jail securely locked, with the sentinels standing at the doors. But when the guards opened the doors, they found no one inside. They were perplexed. They wondered what might have happened to them. As they were wondering, a man came running and told them, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." So the captain of the temple guard along with the other guards went and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

The apostles were tried in front of the Sanhedrin. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in Jesus Christ's name," they said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." That was the accusation they brought on the apostles.

Witnesses

For these allegations Peter replied that he obeyed God more than men. Peter accused the Jewish leaders that they were fully responsible for the sufferings of Jesus. The one who was judged was exalted by God as Prince and Saviour of the world, and to this the apostles and the Holy Spirit given by God and working in the Church is witness he added.

The Sanhedrin

In the New Testament times, the Sadducees were a majority among the Jewish priests. They had an important position in the Temple and in the governing council of the Jewish religion as Temple Chiefs. The Pharisees were the other group in the Sanhedrin. Among the Pharisees there was a sect known as Sopherim. Sopherim is a Hebrew word. Its English is 'Scribes' and Malayalam is '*Shasthrimar*'. Sopherims were known as Scribes also. These people, who strictly observed the religious orders, were also religious scholars and moral advisors. These scribes were the ones who used to transcribe and copy the religious books. In the Jewish ruling council they also had an important place.

Gamaliel's explanation

The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. But the Pharisees believed in resurrection. Because of this, the apostles' reply angered the first group (Sadducees). Moreover, they had decided to stone the apostles to death. At this time, a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up made an observation. Gamaliel was a teacher of the Law, a wise man, respected by all people, and the grandson of the famous theologian, Hillel, and the teacher of St. Paul. He pointed out two rebels from Jewish history who failed. He said that if the activities of Christ's disciples were like that of those rebels, it would die away by itself. On the other hand, if this is of God, then killing these two men will not stop it, besides, they would be found worthy of punishment for working against God.

The disciples are set free

From Gamaliel's calm consideration, we see that he took a stand in favour of Christ. Perhaps, this advice was given to defeat the Sadducees who were the opposition. Whatever, the Sanhedrin could not reject the stand of Gamaliel. So they dropped from the plan to stone the apostles to death and instead to flog them and send them away. This way of punishment is stated in Deut. 25:2-3. Though being flogged by whips was physically very painful, the apostles were glad because they were made worthy to suffer humiliation and pain for His name's sake.

B. 6. The Miracles of St. Peter

Acts 3:1-10, 5:1-16, 9:32-43

Signs and Miracles

In the early days, when the Church began, many miracles and signs occurred. The majority of them were by the apostles. They had a very important place amongst the believers. Many were attracted to the Church seeing these wondrous acts. As in the times of Christ, different types of sick people were there among them. And all of them were healed.

The First Miracle

The first miracle that Peter performed was healing the lame man who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. We have studied this Bible portion in detail in the Seventh Grade. Here, Peter shows the attitude that Christian workers should have. Instead of trusting in his own ability or gains, Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Every incident that occurred in the lives of the apostles they used it as an opportunity to lift up and show Jesus who was crucified and had resurrected.

Many are healed

People used to bring the sick into the streets and lay them on beds and mats, so that Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by and get healed. And so, many sick and those tormented by impure spirits were healed.

Ananias and Sapphira

The death of Ananias and his wife Sapphira was an incident which instilled a lot of fear in the hearts of the members of the First Church. What was hidden was revealed to Jesus Christ. When the Samaritan woman in Sychar lied and said, "I have no husband" (John 4:17) her statement which was not exactly true, Jesus by His transcendental knowledge revealed the truth. In the same way, Peter understood the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira by the power that he received through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. He questioned Ananias about it. The moment Peter said, "You have not lied just to human beings but to God," Ananias fell dead. Peter asked Sapphira who came there unaware of what had happened, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" She also lied against the Spirit. Immediately she also fell at the feet of Peter and died. This also we have studied in detail in the Seventh Grade.

The Gospel Spreads

The martyrdom of Stephen was a great blow to the Church which had to face a lot of difficulties. Except for the apostles, all the believers fled to Judea and Samaria. When these scattered people preached the Word to the people there, they repented. Peter and John visited all those

places to lay their hand on the heads of these people and pray, so that all of them would receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is particularly noteworthy, how Luke has described the spread of the Christian faith from the Jews to the non-Jews in the Acts of the Apostles. First on the Day of Pentecost, Jews who had settled in foreign countries and those who were followers of the Jewish faith accepted the Christian faith (2:9-6:1). Later the Samaritans and Ethiopians came to the Christian faith (8:5-40). After that, foreign city dwellers, Cornelius and all who were there with him, the Greeks in Antioch (8:40, 10:1-11:20) proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Saviour.

Aeneas is Healed

As Peter travelled everywhere, he came to where the saints in Lydda were living. In the Old Testament times this place was known as 'Lod' (1 Chr. 8:12; Ezra 2:33; Neh. 11:35). In ancient Greek it was known as 'Diospolis'. Lod and Sharon were not Jewish areas. But there were believers living in those places. There was a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

It does not clearly state whether the paralyzed man Aeneas was a believer in Christ. What is important is that he was a cause for the spread of belief in Christ. When it states here 'bedridden for eight years', in the original version it says 'since the age of eight'. When Aeneas was healed, what Peter said was, "Jesus Christ heals you." You would remember what we learned in the last lesson as to what Peter said when he healed the lame man. This indicates Peter's humbleness before Jesus Christ. Peter does not see this as an opportunity to show his own ability and fame, but proclaims that Jesus Christ is the real healer and makes that belief firm in them and the onlookers. The apostles stood as a means to transfer the power of Christ to others.

In the Bible passage we see Peter saying, "Get up and roll up your mat." This statement can be misleading. In those days this usage was said when one is asked to get ready the seat for eating a meal. Giving food to those who have been healed is one of the traditions of those days. When Jesus Christ raised Jairus' daughter he said to give her something to eat (Luke 8:55).

Dead girl is raised

After the healing of Aeneas, while Peter was staying in Lydda itself, Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek), a disciple of Christ had died. She was kind and worked for the welfare of others, worked for the glory of Christ's name; saw everyone as brothers and sisters and did whatever help she could for everyone. Suddenly one day, she was taken ill and she died because of the illness. The Christian sisters bathed her body and lay it in an upstairs room.

As the news of Aeneas' healing had spread like wild fire all over the place, the Christian brothers in Joppa which was close to Lydda also

heard about it. So they sent two people to inform Peter and to bring him along. As soon as he heard the news, Peter went with them. All the widows were standing around the body and crying. They showed Peter all the robes and clothes Tabitha had made for them.

Peter sent them all out of the room and knelt down and prayed. Then he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter took her hand and helped her to stand up. He then presented her alive to all the people who were gathered there. Many people believed in the Lord seeing this miracle of Peter.

Moral or Lessons to be Learnt

1. Christ's disciples devoutly observe the time set apart for prayer. (3:1)
2. The apostles care to look around them and see the people who were suffering, and help them by giving what they had. (3:6)
3. The lame man, who received the gift of healing from God through Jesus Christ, goes with the apostles into the temple and praises God and witnesses for Jesus with the apostles. (3:8)
4. Although it is men that we commit falsehood to, it is committing sin against God. (5:4)
5. Instead of being flattered about his own abilities, Peter points to Jesus as the one who gives healing. (9:34)
6. Wherever the Jesus Christ is lifted up, there the Church grows. (9:42)

B. 7. St. Peter's Vision

The Church grows

In the previous chapter we learned that in the beginning days of the Church, many signs and wonders took place. Many people were attracted to the Church by these amazing incidents. By the evangelisation of the apostles, belief in one God and righteous principles took form in these new believers and they were ready to accept it. Many among them, followed the Jewish religious rite and were circumcised and baptised and made true Christians. However, some of them, maintained their fear of God, but, at the same time did not perform the rite of circumcision, yet continued in the faith of the Jewish religion and all other rituals for daily life.

According to the Jewish beliefs of those days, a non-Jew was not rightfully eligible for the promise of God. So, it was not only that a Jew should not have any cooperation with a person of another race, and, if he ever did so, he would become unclean. Those who followed the Jewish tradition strictly would not ask or get from a person of another race ordinary food items like milk, oil or bread. The Jews were forbidden from even entering their houses.

Crisis in the First Church

We saw that there were a group of people who had accepted the Christian faith but did not take circumcision. The law in those days allowed them to see these people who did not receive baptism after circumcision only as people of another race. This became a huge hindrance for the growth of the Church. It became a matter of concern and consideration for the first Church on how to deal with this Christian group. It was at this time that Cornelius a centurion in Caesarea got a vision.

Caesarea was a non-Jew city. In the Seventh Grade we have studied about an Ethiopian eunuch who was converted by Philip. After the eunuch was baptised and Philip came out of the water, the Spirit of God took Philip to Azotus. He travelled all over there preaching the gospel and finally landed in Caesarea. Many people repented and converted and became Christians by the evangelisation of the gospel by Philip. But, Cornelius in Caesarea accepted the Christian faith without circumcision and was living a life of piety.

The Roman army was divided into squads of Legions, and in each squad there were ten units of hundred people. A Centurion was one who led the unit of hundred people. In the early days of Jesus' public ministry, there is a narrative about a Centurion. Jesus says about the Centurion, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10). We see that all the centurions referred to in the New Testament were people who lived a good life. It is believed that Cornelius was the head of the soldiers who were the personal guards of the Roman governor. Therefore, he had a high position in the society and was well

respected by all. He was a humanitarian and one who prayed according to the Jewish religious orders.

The ruling nobles considered the early Christian Church members, as a group of people who conspired to acts of rebellion against the Roman government. That is why the Christian believers were imprisoned and tortured. This also was a hindrance to the growth of the Church. However, when some of the high officials who believed in Jesus Christ and were members of the governing body, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, removed the veil and came forward into the scene, it became clear that the Christian stand was blessed, lawful and blameless.

Cornelius' vision

Day time, ninth hour, means in today's timing three in the afternoon which is the Jewish prayer time. When Cornelius, who had become a Christian believer, was sitting prepared for prayers at this time, an angel of God came to him and called him "Cornelius!". A frightened Cornelius asked him, "What is it, Lord?" The angel answered, "Your prayers and charity have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send some men to Joppa and ask them to bring a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel had left, the Centurion called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants and told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa to bring Peter.

They had to travel about 40 kilometers. By the time they neared the city gates, it was nearly the sixth hour. Sixth hour means noon time. This is prayer time for the Jews. The house top or roof top was the place the Jews kept aside for prayers and meditations. By the time Cornelius' men reached the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa, Peter was steeped in prayer.

God's revelation to Peter

That day, at that time, Peter felt very hungry. While he felt uneasy about his hunger, he got a revelation. God was opening a way for Peter through a vision, on how to relate with Cornelius. A large sheet came down from heaven before Peter. It had all the living creatures of the earth in it. Then a voice told the hungry Peter to cut and eat whatever he wanted. A list of the creatures that Jews who carefully observe the rules could eat is given in Leviticus 11. Four-legged animals that have divided hooves and chews cud, water creatures that have fins and scales and insects which have jointed legs for hopping were the only living creatures that were declared clean and fit for consumption. When Peter saw all the unclean animals he said, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." Then he heard a voice saying, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken up to heaven. This vision was to make Peter understand that people of other races should not be considered unclean and kept apart instead they should be joined into the communion of the Church.

B. 8. St. Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10:17-40

Peter receives Cornelius' Servants

Peter had not understood the meaning of the vision he had at noon time. While he was still sitting in the roof top wondering what would be the meaning of it, Cornelius' men arrived at the door step. At the same time, the Spirit revealed to Peter about those men. "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." Peter went down and welcomed Cornelius' men. When he found out their mission, he received them and they stayed the night there.

According to the Jewish law, they are not supposed to be hospitable to non-Jews. The tradition then said that associating with people of other races would make them unclean. But Peter acted above the Law. In the light of God's mercy which purifies mankind, there is no difference. In Christ all are one human race, one society. This is a unique message of the Christian gospel.

Peter goes to Caesarea

The next day morning, Peter journeyed with six of his co-workers and Cornelius' men to Caesarea. When they arrived there, Cornelius warmly welcomed them. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends to his house. They were all ready to receive Peter. Perhaps, Cornelius may have wished that everyone should be part of this rare opportunity that God had arranged. Cornelius knelt before Peter in reverence and bowed to him and then only invited him into the house. In those days only nobility and messengers of God were given this kind of a greeting. Cornelius greeted Peter in such a manner considering him as a representative of God. In the redemption through Christ Jesus all of humanity created in God's image are partakers. Therefore, all humans are equals. It is because Peter thought that the greeting which Cornelius extended to him was unnecessary that he said, "I am only a man myself" and raised Cornelius from the ground. The universal nature of the gospel is evident in this act of Peter.

Cornelius' hospitality

If it was two days earlier, Peter would not have been prepared to enter into a gentile's house, sit there and eat with his friends. God brought about a great change in Peter. Peter understood that the sheet he saw was the Church and all the living creatures he saw in it pointed to the people of different races.

Peter's speech

When they had all gathered in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord had to say through Peter he began to speak. It was a very pertinent speech that Peter made. This speech is also similar to the other speeches of Peter.

We can see the model of Peter's first Church speech in these speeches also. The Gospel of Mark was written following this pattern. This gospel discusses John the Baptist's speech following which there was Jesus' baptism and the ministry of Jesus in Judea, Galilee and Jerusalem. We find a summary of this gospel in Peter's speech here. The only difference in this speech is that it is a gospel message to the non-Jews.

Peter began his sermon by saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism." Though we consider it to be the absolute truth, the Jewish contemporaries of Peter would not have said this. For the first time, Peter proclaimed there, in Caesarea, this truth that God had revealed to him in a vision. Then, Peter went on to say, Jesus was not the Lord and Saviour of just the Jews, but the Lord and Saviour of all people. This is a gospel declaration. For God there is no Jew or gentile. God accepts all those who fear Him and do justice. This is an ideology special to the New Testament. In the letters that followed also, we see that this philosophy is stated.

Jesus started his ministry only after a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," at the time of His baptism. Peter preached stressing on Jesus' public ministry of healing the sick and comforting the distressed during his service. Peter's idea was to clarify that Jesus was a historical person who was anointed right from his birth. The word 'Messiah' and 'Christ' evolved from the Hebrew and Greek words for 'to anoint'.

Then, Peter told the people who had gathered at Cornelius' house, the story of the heinous crime that the Jews had committed on Jesus who was the anointed one and who did only good. "They killed him by hanging him on a cross," (NIV and GNT) "whom they slew and hanged on a tree" (KJV and Malayalam only. They have used the word 'tree' for Cross, here.) It is after saying, "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem," that Peter proceeded to describe the terrible cruelty. Being witnesses is the prime qualification of an apostle. This proclamation helped the listeners to relate to that incident and make them convinced of the reality.

The Speech continues

Peter continued, "But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." God showed his reaction against the injustices that the Jews had done to Jesus through Jesus' resurrection. Peter said that after the resurrection they ate and drank with Jesus. That was a usage to show that Jesus' resurrection was not an illusion.

Before concluding his speech, Peter told them the command that the resurrected Christ had given the apostles including him - "to preach to the people about the kingdom of God and to testify that Jesus is the one whom God had appointed as judge of the living and the dead. Not just judgement, but also that everyone who believes in him would receive

forgiveness of sins through his name.” Prophet Isaiah had foretold about this authority of Jesus in Is. 53:11.

Gift of the Holy Spirit for the Gentiles and Peter's Justification **Acts 10:44 - 11:18**

Gift of the Holy Spirit

'While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. When the circumcised believers who had come with Peter heard them speaking in tongues and praising God, they were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.'"

Some Biblical scholars call this event that took place at Cornelius' house as 'The Gentiles' Pentecost'. When the Jewish Christians got the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the first time at the Upper Room of Mark's house in Jerusalem, the Gentiles first got the anointing of the Holy Spirit at the residence of Cornelius in Caesarea. However, there are real differences between the two. On the day of the Pentecost, the apostles and nearly 120 believers who had gathered with them received the Holy Spirit. Here also it happened so. But, on the Pentecost Day, after hearing Peter's speech, those who were touched in their hearts asked, "Men and Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So they all took baptism, and after the baptism, only when the disciples laid their hand on the head of the newly baptised believers, did they receive the Holy Spirit. But here, while Peter was preaching itself the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Cornelius and the people with him were not circumcised. The first Christians were mostly all Jews. So, they were all circumcised. Therefore, it was kind of considered that non-Jews, when they accept the Christian faith, should get circumcised. But here, God condescended to give the Holy Spirit even without observing any such customs. Through this incident, Peter learned that God had no intention of keeping the Gentiles away from the holy Church; and that there should not be any hesitation to give them baptism.

The Gentiles are Baptised

Peter ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Though according to man's planning, it can be arranged in the order of first baptism, then laying of hand and then the anointing of the Holy Spirit, God worked preceding all human plans. There could be people who wonder whether Cornelius and the others who after receiving the Holy Spirit needed to take baptism. Baptism is necessary for the fellowship in the Church, that is membership in the Church. Moreover, we all have sin by birth. Baptism is the only way to wash away that sin. After baptism, the sins we commit can be solved through confession. Cornelius and his people though they had received the Holy Spirit should necessarily be baptised. So Peter baptised them and joined them to the Church.

Difference of Opinion in the Church

Perhaps, after Cornelius joined the Church he may have requested Peter to stay on in Caesarea for some more time (10:48). After that Peter went to Jerusalem. Before he could reach there, the news had spread all over the place, that he went to the house of a gentile, ate food with them, and baptised them and made them Christians without circumcision. This became a big matter of discussion among the believers. In their sight it was never justifiable. Grumbling, greed, trying to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit with money - we saw all this in the first church. But none of this had led to a difference of opinion or strong feelings of separation. Yet this event was sufficient to affect the spiritual unity of the Church.

A group of believers who opined that the Laws should be followed, questioned Peter as soon as he entered Jerusalem. They did not oppose the baptism of Cornelius, because, the Lord's command clearly was to baptise all people. But their argument was that when gentiles become Christians, then they should be circumcised.

The other group who argued with Peter was those who accepted Christian faith, yet they continued to follow the Jewish religious tradition in everything as they did before. They believed that though the gentiles had become Christians they were still people of a lower caste or race and if they ate with the Jewish Christians that would amount to breaking the Law.

Peter's Justification

Apostle Peter gave a justification for the accusations made on him. He gave them a detailed account of what actually took place there, deciding not to depend on his own authority. When Peter gave his explanation, the men of Joppa who had gone with him to Caesarea were present there. They were six of them. According to the Egyptian law, if there are seven witnesses to a case, then it can be accepted as a fact. According to the Roman law, any important document should be attested by seven seals. The explanation was given by a group of seven people which was Peter and his six men who went with him.

In those days it was impossible for a gentile like Cornelius to get membership in the Church. Cornelius was a God-fearing man who lived a righteous life. So, he was accepted in the presence of God. Because of that, God gave him the salvation gift of Holy Spirit. Peter told the Jerusalem Church, "God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." If the gift of God is distributed equally, how can there be a distinction between them? Finally Peter asked them, "So, if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" Peter actually left it to the members of the Church to arrive at a decision on this.

When they heard Peter's explanation, they all kept quiet. The Jerusalem Church could not deny the deeds that Peter had done according to the will of God. So they praised God saying, "Then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

B. 10. Church in Antioch

Acts 11:19-20

Antioch

Antioch was the capital of Syria which lies to the north of Palestine. In BC 64, when this city came under the Roman government, Antioch became the seat of the Roman governor. The other two major cities in the Roman territory were Rome and Alexandria. Today, Antioch is part of Turkey. Situated three hundred miles to the north of Jerusalem and north-east of the Mediterranean Sea, this city was established by Seleucus, the Greek general of Alexander the Great in BC 300 on the banks of the River Orontes. The name of this city's seaport was known as Seleucia. Antioch city was the happening centre of all that the wealth of the Romans, the aesthetics of the Greek and the luxury of the Orient combined together could create. Greek language and culture prevailed here. As this city was the connection for the merchants of the Orient, the royal highways and entry port to the Mediterranean region it was a major trading point.

The growth of the Church

In the Seventh Grade we learned about the martyrdom of Stephen. Stephen's death, the first martyr victim of Paul's persecution, came in fact, helpful for the growth of the Church. One among the believers who fled and were scattered when the persecution increased, was the preacher Philip who went to Samaria and preached about Jesus Christ and brought many to repentance. We have studied this also in the Seventh Grade. Some of the people who were scattered like this, first reached Caesarea. Caesarea was a seaport city in Palestine. We can presume that some of them would have sailed to Phoenicia, the next normal port of call from Caesarea and preached the gospel there. The island of Cyprus is very close to this place. There are chances that the gospel was preached there also. As Antioch was a place which could be accessed by sea, some people could have reached there also is what the Biblical scholars opine.

Gospel to the Greek

When they reached Antioch, they proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Greeks also. There are people who argue that the word 'Greek' would refer to the gentile Greek while some others say that it referred to the Greek-speaking Jews. Whichever way it is taken, there are two things clear in it:

1. The Greek-speaking Jews were enemies of the first Church believers and the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 9:29) If that was so, then the scattered people paid particular attention to preach the gospel to their enemies.

2. The scattered people proclaimed the gospel to the Greek-speaking Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene. The converted ones spoke the gospel to the gentile Greeks of Antioch.

Gospel to the Gentiles

Though the evangelists who reached Antioch could have preached about Jesus to the Jews there, they paid more attention to proclaiming it to the gentiles. They had to adopt a different approach itself for this. To the Jews, they could show by the life and teachings of Jesus, that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah or Christ who was part of their religious hope. But when preaching about Jesus to a non-Jew, that would not suffice. The Christian missionaries who realised this, when talking about Jesus in Antioch did not use the term 'Christ'. Instead, they used words like, 'Lord' and 'Saviour'. Based on this they could emphasize on the fact that Jesus was a man who ministered to the people who lived in Palestine to free them their sickness, difficulties, social evil and other such things. This strategy proved fruitful to their mission in Antioch.

Favourable Circumstances

The spiritual level of the people living in Antioch was favourable to the agenda of the missionaries. This city which was known as the Queen of the Orient was in all ways at its peak. In the same way, injustice, corruption and sexual immorality was riding high in their life. It became a part of their lifestyle. However, there was one lot of people who were uncomfortable with all this. They wished for redemption from their sinful ways and liberty from corruption. That was when the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who has the authority to forgive sins and is able to save reached their ears. "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:21) The majority of them were non-Jews. That is why Antioch is the first Church of the Gentiles. So in Antioch, for the first time, people started calling those who believed in Christ as 'Christians' meaning people of Christ.

Barnabas to Antioch

What happened in Antioch was a new footing in the spreading of the gospel. When this news reached Jerusalem, it was the duty of the apostles and the mother church to take some decisions about this. We have already seen how God had prepared Peter for the gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit, and how the Church of Jerusalem who had a difference of opinion on that matter, accepted Peter and those with him based on their testimonies. To enquire as to what was happening in Antioch and to take the responsibility of the activities there, the Jerusalem Church unanimously chose Barnabas and send him to Antioch. 'Barnabas' which means 'Son of Encouragement' was a Cypriot. He was a man who could think broadly and rejoiced in goodness. 'He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith' (Acts 11:24). Barnabas was not one among the 12 apostles, but he had the status of an apostle. Perhaps, that is why he was sent to Antioch.

A helper for Barnabas

For the ordinary people of the Church in Antioch, which had been filled with the Holy Spirit and did amazing works, the advent of Barnabas was exciting. Barnabas who was happy with their work wished to stay there with them and help them, and teach them about the deep love of God so that they would be faithful to God no matter what happens. But, as he was meek-hearted, he felt he would not be able to do it. Barnabas realised that Saul (Paul), who knew the Greek mentality well, would be of help to associate with the Greek believers. He went to Tarsus to bring him.

Paul who astonished the Jews of Damascus and Jerusalem was sent to Tarsus to witness to his own people. So the Church ignored Paul. Because he accepted Jesus, Paul lost his relationship and privileges with his own family and had to live outside. This was a very painful time for him. He was waiting impatiently to get a chance to tell the world, the amazing truths he learnt when he spent time alone with God in the Arabian desert.

Saul to Antioch

We see in the Bible that Barnabas went to Tarsus to 'look' for Saul. By this word we understand that the Church was unaware of Saul's solitude and his waiting after that. In Greek, the word used for 'look' is 'searched with a lot of difficulty facing many hardships'. After many days of tireless searching, Barnabas found Saul's residence. When Saul heard Barnabas' intention of coming, he was excited. He was ready to go anywhere in the world if the Lord would use him. So, the two of them went to Antioch and did Christian work there. In Antioch, where Jews lived outside of Jerusalem, the Christian disciples depended on Jesus and worked hard in the midst of the gentiles so that they would be subject to their attention. Since they lived according to the word of God, they could understand the needs of others. As a result, the Church in Antioch became a 'Giving Church' (Acts 11:29-30). The Church in Antioch is an example of the fact that if an individual or society gets into a relationship with Christ, there will be a noticeable change in their life.

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B. 11. Famine and Tribulations

Acts 11:27 - 12:6

Prophecy about the famine

In those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire world. Prophecy was an important spiritual realm of the Old Testament. They proclaimed how life should be aligned as per the will of the one and only God in social, financial, political and in all walks of life, and in the light of it, assessed world events in general and in particular, that which would affect the people of Israel. During the Old Testament times, during a particular period, the prophets had the highest position in the society. They were people whom God used to actively interact with the people by analysing history and advising the people. However, in the New Testament times, their place was just behind the apostles. This is made clear in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians 12:28.

Agabus was a prophet of the New Testament times. World events proved that Agabus' prophecy was true to a certain extent. The prophecy was that there would be famine all over the world (KJV). However, such a famine never occurred. The original texts read as 'places that were inhabited by people'. Though there is no record of a famine that had struck the entire Roman empire during the reign of Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54), the ancient books record that due to fall in agricultural yield and furies of nature, in many places people experienced scarcity of things and wreck and ruin. Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in those times has recorded that food stuff was brought from Mesopotamia and Cyprus for the famine relief of people in Jerusalem.

Aid from Antioch

When the Christians in Antioch learnt of the difficulties that the people in Jerusalem and Judea suffered due to the famine, they reached out to the famine stricken people with necessary aid. Thus, the non-Jewish Christians in Antioch helped with an open hand, the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. Considering the social and cultural background of the times, they were people of two different levels. But when the two groups accepted Jesus, they became one fraternity. The separation that existed between them was removed. They became happy in giving and taking.

The Pillars of the Church

It was Paul and Barnabas who brought the aid from the Church in Antioch to Jerusalem. In Galatians Ch. 2 it is stated that Paul came to Jerusalem again. It is believed, that he would have given the aid from Antioch to the Church in Jerusalem, at that time. Here, it states that he went because of a revelation. In the continuing verses a very important matter is understood. The people who were the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, at that time include James (the Lord's brother), Cephas or Kepaha (Peter) and John. They are known as the 'Pillars of the Church'.

The apostles came to Jerusalem and spoke to the church elders about gospel work. From this Biblical passage we understand that they used to come to Jerusalem and inform the Church leaders about the gospel work going on in various places, and discuss with them and decide on future plans. Paul says, "For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles ...gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me." At that time the Church leaders reminded Paul and Barnabas to "remember the poor". It meant that while they were steeped in their gospel work among the gentiles, they should also have in mind the welfare of the poor folks of Jerusalem. In the verses 16 and onwards of 1 Corinthians 16 it is seen that they took this responsibility seriously and made the necessary arrangements for it.

People waiting on the table

When the leaders of the Church who were considered the 'Pillars of the Church' were in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas entrusted the aids from Antioch with the elders in Jerusalem. There is a reason for this. In Acts Ch. 6, it states that the elders had chosen seven people who were 'full of Spirit and wisdom'. They were selected to wait on tables to handle a certain problem that had arisen in the Church and which could happen again. The apostles focused on prayer and ministry of the Word. It is understood that the position 'Elder' (Presbyters, Kasheesha) took form in the Church from then and they did the administrative work.

A Crisis is Overcome

We saw that when there was a famine in Jerusalem, the unwavering courage of the first Christians and united brotherhood in Christ helped to nurture the growth of the Church. It is notable how using the Jerusalem Church as an example, it is described that in the same way, the terrible persecution and crisis that the Church faced, God used it as a means for the growth of the Church. An active Church has always faced opposition. Opposition has to be faced only when active. If the first persecution was against the Greek-speaking Jews, now it was against the Hebrew speaking Jews that the wind of persecution was severely blowing. But what was supposed to be a means of destruction, actually produced good effects is the specially notable point here.

James' Martyrdom

'It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.' (Acts 12:1-3) The King Herod we see here is Agrippa I, who was the grandson of Herod the Great (the one who tried to kill baby Jesus) and son of Aristobulus who was the brother of Herod Antipas who cross-examined Jesus and beheaded John the Baptist. Agrippa I was Herod III. He was brought up in Rome and was very close to the imperial family. Therefore, in AD 37, he was installed as the ruler of the north-eastern border territories of

Judea. Later, he was able to acquire more power and higher ranks and fame. He had zealous wanting to appease the Jews. That was how he was able to keep up the good will of the Roman emperor. The persecutions that happened during his time were mainly against the Church leaders. There was a reason for it. The activities of the Christian believers which were against the traditions of the Jewish Laws were increasing day by day. The Jews were worried about this. It was the responsibility of King Agrippa I to relieve them from this apprehension. That may have been the reason why James the son of Zebedee was put to death by the sword.

Peter in Prison

The king who found satisfaction in the death of James, the Zebedee son, in order to please the Jews more, arrested Peter. As it was the Passover time, he planned that he would parade the apostle before the people after the Passover celebrations and then execute him. It is generally thought that the Passover Festival and the Festival of the Unleavened Bread is the same. The Passover Festival is only for one day on the 14th day of the month of Nisan (Jewish calendar month). The one week following it is the Festival of the Unleavened Bread. This is a week of celebration for the Jews. But for the Christians this is Passion Week, the days reminiscing the Lord's suffering and death on the cross. Peter was in the prison all those days. All the necessary arrangements were made so that Peter would not escape from there by any means. His hands and feet were shackled by chains. There were guards to his right and left, outside the prison door and outside the main gate of the prison.

When Peter was locked up in the prison the believers prayed day and night without cease for him. While the Church was praying God was working. Herod was the king then and had all the worldly power with guards, sentries and soldiers. However, we shall see in the next chapter how this king fails before the King of kings and the Almighty God.

B. 12. Peter's liberation from Prison and Martyrdom

Acts 12:7-25

A Praying Community

The reaction of the Church when Peter was imprisoned is notable. The members of the Church spent their time whole-heartedly in prayer. Prayer is always the weapon for the Church. They faced this crisis through prayer. On the night before Peter could be presented before the Jews, the Christian Church had gathered in the upper room of Mark's house and were praying for Peter when God delivered Peter miraculously.

Peter is set free

Peter who was fully prepared to die for Lord Jesus Christ, was sleeping peacefully in the prison. Suddenly, someone tapped him on his side. Peter opened his eyes. An angel of the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him. When Peter tried to get up he saw his chains falling off him. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals" and led Peter out of the prison. The doors of the prison opened one by one by themselves. They passed the iron-gate and entered the street. Immediately the angel disappeared. Peter walked from there to Mark's house where the believers normally gathered.

The greatness of Prayer

Though the believers were praying for Peter, they did not think that God would do such a miracle. When Rhoda, the girl who answered the door on hearing the knock, recognised the voice of Peter, and in her joy, ran back to tell the believers without opening the door. The people in the house did not believe her word. However, Peter kept knocking at the door. Then when they came and opened the door and saw Peter they were astonished. Just as Lord Jesus Christ had promised, their pleas were answered. God did more than they asked for. Peter told them to inform James, the brother of Jesus and the other brothers and left for a safe place.

The King is Punished

King Agrippa I, who pleased the Jews and became the well-liked son of the Emperor, as a result of the terrible crimes he had committed, was finally punished by an angel of the Lord. After the release of Peter from the prison, Herod went from Jerusalem to Caesarea. The two cities, Tyre and Sidon, were situated on the western sea coast of Palestine. As from the times of Solomon, (1 Kings 5:9) these cities depended on the king of Galilee for their food supply. The king who knew this, used to harass these people by blocking their food supply. So they approached Blastus, a trusted servant of the king and sought an audience with the king. While they were talking, these people flattered the king up to be equal to god. The king enjoyed the flattery. Here, the king who is a man, a creation of God, elevated himself to be like God and insulted God. So an angel of the Lord came and punished this king who was the enemy of the first Church. While he was still alive he was eaten up by worms and died. Many believers were killed till the death of King Agrippa I. The apostles were imprisoned and some were even martyred. After the rule of this king, Palestine went directly under the rule of Rome. The Roman rule, as it was for the country, gave peace to the Church also. But, even in the times of opposition, the word of God spread without any hindrance.

Jerusalem Council

It is not clear to where St. Peter retreated after the escape from prison. However, he was present at the Jerusalem Council that convened in Jerusalem in AD 50. It is believed that till then he went around many places, founded churches and ordained priests and bishops. At this council, St. Peter was commissioned to work among the Jews and St. Paul among the gentiles. According to that, St. Peter went to Antioch and worked there till AD 60. The Church believes that at Antioch, with the cooperation of St. Paul, Euodios was consecrated as

bishop to rule over the Gentile Christians and Ignatius Nuroño (the illuminator) was consecrated as the bishop of the Jewish Christians.

Emperor Nero

From there, while visiting many places as part of an apostolic visit, Peter went to Corinth and from there to Rome. Nero Caesar was the Roman emperor then. He was the epitome of all evil. He spent most of his time in womanising and alcohol. His past time was hurting women and seeing them cry. This man had no trouble in watching a man being skinned alive and even laughed at it. Cruel-minded Nero, for his enjoyment, set fire to a part of the city and the flames spread and a lot of loss was suffered. The emperor enjoyed seeing a lot of people writhing while being burned. Then, at the end, he put the entire blame for this catastrophe on the Christians. What happened after that was a huge Christian man-hunt.

Peter's Martyrdom

According to the orders of the merciless Nero, the soldiers caught all the Christians and massacred them. Some were thrown as preys to wild beasts. Some were burnt alive. Nero used to go to the arena just to watch all this and enjoy it. Among the people whom the soldiers brought were Peter and Paul. When he learnt that they were the two who propagated the Nazarene teaching, Nero questioned them. "Are you the people who upset this city of ours?" The emperor asked them where they came from. For that Peter replied, "O King, if you understood the message of the one who send me, you would not take the burden of the country on yourself, but, prepare a throne for yourself in heaven. We have come to this city to work here and to remove the thorns here and to sow the advices of my lord." When Nero realised that by 'thorn' Peter meant their god Zeus and the emperor's women he was furious and ordered that St. Peter who had insulted their god should be put to death. Then Peter told the emperor what Jesus had said, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. (Matt. 10:32-33) By the resurrection of Jesus, death's rule over mankind was wiped away. He destroyed the bondages of hell. Therefore, we are not afraid of those who kill the physical body." When Peter informed Nero that he was ready to accept any punishment to glorify the name of the one who is able to destroy the spirits, the Emperor Nero replied, "Let your master come and save you. I order that you should be crucified." Peter requested that, as he was not worthy to be crucified with his head on top, like his master, instead he should be crucified with his head down as he wished to die kissing the feet of his master. And, Peter was crucified accordingly. As Paul was a Roman citizen, he was not subjected to a heinous death sentence. As worthy to a Roman citizen, Paul was taken outside the city of Rome and beheaded. The Church commemorates the martyrdom of Peter and Paul on June 29th following 13 days of lent.

The after effect of this death sentence was just the contrary to what the Romans thought it would be. It is said that even Nero was surprised by the reaction of the Christians who in their boundless love for their Saviour were calm and courageous even when they neared death. Many Romans who witnessed those terrible events, believed that the God of the martyrs is indeed great and accepted the Christian faith.

B. 13. Epistles to the Persecuted

Of the epistles (letters) found in the New Testament, some were written while suffering the tribulation times, and some to find solutions to problems in the Church.

Judaism was the religion accepted by the Roman government. Those who worked against it were put in prison or killed and their followers were persecuted. The first century was the period of persecution for the Christian Church. It was only natural that the people would have become perplexed and troubled. When one crosses the limit of tolerance then one tends to lose faith. The three epistles, Epistle to the Hebrews, First Epistle of Peter and Revelations were written to embolden the believers undergoing persecution and to make them stand firmly under the loving arms of Jesus Christ.

1. Epistle to the Hebrews

It is not clear for whom this letter was written. In the early days, they did not use the phrase 'for the Hebrews' or 'to the Hebrews'. It was towards the end of the 2nd century that this usage came into being. It is clear that it concerned the Jewish Christians, but, it is not clear whether it is for the Jewish Christians in a particular place or all Jewish Christians residing all over the world.

Writer

It still is not absolutely clear who the author of this epistle is. The Oriental Church considers it to have been written by St. Paul. Substantiating this theory they show that the matters discussed in the final part of the epistle is similar to Paul's letters. But, there are people, who, taking into consideration the letter's opening, presentation style, the theme and, the language think that it is not St. Paul's writing.

Period of Writing

The time of the writing of this letter is unclear. The letter discusses about Christians who were of Jewish descendancy, those who were familiar with Greek ideology and those who were being persecuted. Therefore, some Biblical scholars date this epistle to have been written in AD 64.

Subject Matter

Jesus Christ is the son of God at the same time he is fully man. God spoke through this son. Jesus Christ is superior to the angels, the prophets and the greatest prophet of all prophets, Moses. (Ch. 1-3)

Because the Israelites did not listen to the warnings of the prophets and rebelled against it, they lost the comfort of Canaan and were punished. None of the believers who have heard the voice of God through Jesus Christ should fall away. His unparalleled status and glory is so great that faith in Him should be held on firmly. (Ch. 4-6)

Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem, ministered with bread and wine. This was accepted by God. Melchizedek did not have a priestly ancestry. But it is an eternal priesthood. In the same way Jesus Christ also, though not being of priestly descendancy, as king and permanent priest of Israel, ministered with bread and wine. Jesus Christ like Aaron is ordained by God. He took complete human form. Through the agony that he suffered, he learned obedience and became perfect. In such a way, Jesus the high priest is blameless, pure, set apart from sinners and exalted above the heavens. (Ch. 7-8)

As the Levite sacrifices were not complete, they had to be repeated. When the sinful priests offer sacrifice with speechless animals in a tabernacle built by human hands, Christ, who was sinless, made himself the sacrifice. He was exalted to the heavenly tabernacle. Through that we obtained entrance into the presence of God and now can communicate with God. (Ch. 9-10)

A list of the names of the faith heroes of the Old Testament is presented and says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Ch. 11-13)

2. The First Epistle of Peter

This epistle is also known as one of 'spiritual emboldening', pilgrimage', 'hope' and 'encouragement'. Giving courage to those under persecution, a call to stand steadfast is what is mainly here. This epistle was written for the Christians spread out in Asia Minor. The intention of this letter is to comfort and give courage to the believers in the Church as the authorities widened their torture of Christians who were being perceived to be conspirators against the Roman government.

Writer of the Letter

In Ch. 1, v.1 it says that this epistle was written by the Lord's apostle, Peter. The Church fathers also believe so. However, in this modern age, some Protestant scholars have questioned the authenticity. Their basis of argument is its usage of perfect language, and quotes from the Septuagint. It is because Peter sought the help of Silas (5:12) in writing this epistle, that such a difference of opinion arose. Our Church fully believes that this book, which has as its basis the sermons of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, was written by Peter himself.

Period of Writing

It is not clear from the letter the nature of the tribulation that is referred to in the epistle. The description is that of the condition which existed before the time of Emperor Nero. Therefore, it is considered that to have been written before AD 66 in Rome. In the Book of Revelations, Rome is referred to as 'Babylon the Great'. This is because the Babylonian empire was destroyed because of its injustice and crime. Perhaps, as Babylon was the mother of prostitutes and abominations, it was considered synonymous to all injustice, and that may be the reason why Rome is referred to as Babylon in 5:13.

Subject Matter

People who have got a new life through baptism will have to go through many trials. The privileges in eternal life in the midst of sorrows and the perception of glory are reasons for joy. Just as gold is refined, the believers, if they face their trials and testing, they can obtain the experience of the priceless hope. (Ch. 1)

The old Israel tripped on Jesus Christ the corner stone and stumbled. Today, the real Israel is the Christian Church. They are a holy people, a royal priesthood. A living spiritual house is being built with these priests who are like living stones and offer spiritual sacrifice that is accepted and pleasant to God. (Ch. 2)

Our ways and walks should be good, so that when others see it they must glorify God. A woman's adornment should be in her character. They should obey their husbands. Husbands should respect their wives. Christ went down to hell and proclaimed the gospel. Since he is going to come to judge everyone we should leave our wicked ways. (Ch. 3, 4)

He advises the elders of the Church not to have vain longings or seek positions of authority, but lead a model life for the flock. As the devil is always standing around like an enemy, be alert always. (Ch. 5)

3. Revelation to John

Great was the eagerness to know the future by the people who were going through the religious and political harassment that took place during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (**The dates given are wrong – BC counts in the descending order**) and the Roman government. The 'Apocalyptic books' was a literary style that took form in

those days, in order to console these people and strengthen them in faith. The Greek word 'apocalypse' means 'unveil' or 'reveal'. The Book of Daniel in the Old Testament is the first book in this style of literature. Following that, many such books were written. But those books are not acknowledged by the Oriental Church. The Book of Revelations, which is included in the Apocalyptic Writings was only recently accepted by the Church and included in the Scripture readings. The author has tried to write it in the New Testament epistle style.

As this book records listening to the Word of God and writing according to it, this work is also considered as the Prophetic Book of the New Testament.

The Author

In the book itself it says, that it was written by John. He describes himself as a Prophet, servant of God, your brother, partner in Jesus' sufferings, kingdom and tolerance. Since the book was written in Patmos, and as the Church believes, that the Lord's disciple John was deported to Patmos, the author of this book is considered to be Apostle John.

Period of Writing

There was a proclamation sent out during the Roman Emperor Domitian's rule that a statue of him was to be made and everybody was to bow down before it. When the Christians did not comply with it, they were either beheaded or sent out of the country. Since there is a reference to such harassments, it is considered that this book was written some time, between AD 81 to AD 90.

Subject Matter

The Book of Revelations is a book of the New Testament which is a complete collection of problems. This is different from all other works in its substance, presentation and everything else. An angel or a messenger of God appears in a dream or a vision and leads him to heaven and the extraordinary sights and happenings there are explained to him. Therefore, the writer is able to prophecy about the future.

Ch. 1, 2, 3 – The exhortation to the seven churches in Asia Minor which John received from Jesus Christ.

Ch. 4, 5 – The Lamb of God, Christ, opens the book in which the punishment on the sinful world has been recorded by the enthroned God the Creator .

Ch. 6 – Different-coloured horses appear which reveal the different punishments.

Ch. 7 – The grace and help the people of God receive – the Lamb saves them from hunger, thirst and grief.

Ch. 8, 9 – The punishment that come upon the wicked – hail storms, fire, water turning to blood and pestilence of locusts.

Ch. 10, 11 – Christian Church is safe-guarded – The reign of Christ.

Ch. 12, 13 – The troubles by Satan which comes about through the Roman government which is symbolised as the beast with ten horns.

Ch. 14, 15 – Victory of the saints, the fall of the Great Babylon, rejoicing of the victorious, praise songs.

Ch. 16, 17, 18 – God's judgement on the kingdoms of the earth.

Ch. 19, 20, 21, 22 – The final victory of the saints, the millennium years reign of Christ, judgement over the wicked, the new heavens and the new earth, the inheritance of the those who have their names in the Book of Life.

B. 14. Universal Epistles

Among the epistles in the New Testament, seven are known as 'Universal (Catholic) Epistles'. They are the Epistle of James, the two Epistles of Peter, John's three Epistles and the Epistle of Jude. We learned about Peter's First Epistle in the previous chapter. So let us learn about the other epistles.

1. The Epistle of James

This epistle is also sometimes referred to as 'The Epistle of Works' or 'Summary of Moral Advices'. This is because, there are a lot of advices in this book, which are needed to live a dutiful moral life. This book which strongly echoes the call for social justices, also raises the issue of a balance between faith and works. It is considered that James wrote this letter to attract, the people of his own race, the Jews, to Christ. Though this letter is addressed to the twelve tribes, it should be interpreted as addressing all Christians who believe in Jesus Christ.

Author

The opening statement of the epistle is "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." There were two James; one was one of the sons of Zebedee and the other the brother of John. In the eleventh chapter we learned that this James, the brother of John was killed by King Agrippa I in AD 44. In Luke 6:16, we see also James the son of Alphaeus and James the brother of Judas (in English, only in KJV). We don't see these people in history any more.

James who was considered to be the central pillar of the Church (Gal. 1:19), the head of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13) and one of the advisors of the Church (James 3:1) was also our Lord's brother. The Lord after His resurrection had appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). His deep devotion and proclamation of the gospel had attracted many to the Christian Church. Theological scholars opine that James who was the brother of our Lord and consecrated as the first bishop of Jerusalem, was indeed the author of this epistle.

Period of Writing

As there is a nature of indebtedness to Paul's letter to the Romans is found in this letter, therefore, it must have been after Paul's writing of that epistle, but as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, or anything about the blasphemous teachings that rose as a threat against the Church in those days are absent from the letter, it is presumed that it must have been written before those occurrences. When talking about Unction (*Thailaabhishekam* - Anointing of the Sick with Holy Oil), it says, 'in the name of Lord'. This was the way of the early Church. Later on, it was changed to 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19). Terminologies such as Teachers as leaders of the Church, Elders, the assembly of Christians as Synagogues, these were terminologies used in those days when it was difficult to differentiate as Jew or Christian. Therefore, it can be considered as having been written somewhere between AD 57-60.

Subject Matter

The aim of this letter is to give comfort, advice and to rebuke the Christians who were going through the fiery test of tribulations. Topics of ethical nature which are practical and should be remembered are presented very clearly, at the same time not connected to each other.

Just as there is interest in listening to the Word of God, one should bring it into practice. Real devotion is keeping oneself pure and doing good works. (Ch. 1)

The rich should not become slaves to their money. Don't insult the poor. Faith without works is dead. Don't strive to become teachers. Control the tongue. (Ch. 2, 3)

Keep away from quarrels and fights. Humble yourselves before the Lord. Don't depend on this temporary world. Brazen your hearts and suffer your troubles with patience. Do not swear. Prayer for the sick and anointing with oil. (Ch. 4, 5, 6)

2. Second Epistle of Peter

This is a universal letter which written in a background of conflicting theologies. During the young days of the Church, there were teachings that were false, mistaken and confusing. There were many disorders because of that. The aim of this letter is to confront those problems.

Author

As it is pointed out in the epistle itself that Apostle Peter is the writer of the letter, then there is no room for any doubt. But there is no resemblance to the words and style of language found in Peter's First Epistle. The contradicting theology criticised in the epistle arose in the Church after the time of Peter. As there are a lot of similarities to the Epistle of Jude, it is clear that it was written after Jude's letter was written.

So then, the question remains, if this is not Peter's epistle, then whose letter is it? Perhaps, it can be inferred that one of Peter's disciples who heard his preaching and understood its ideas, wrote it in Peter's name. There is proof that such things existed in the early Church. The Church has accepted this letter as a Canonised one.

Period of Writing

If Peter is not its actual author, then this epistle must have been written in AD 80 after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Subject Matter

The first part says that the advices discussed in this epistle, is based on Agnosticism, and therefore, one should be careful about them. The second part is an attempt to get rid of certain misunderstanding about the end of the ages.

Those who have been called and chosen by God, should always remember and be conscious of true faith. He has a right to advice so, because he was a witness of the Lord's ministry on this earth. (Ch. 1)

Be careful of false teachers who teach wrong things. Their end is damnation. (Ch. 2)

As Christ wants everybody to be saved, he is patiently waiting and delaying His second coming. Remain devoted God and holy as that day will come like a thief. (Ch. 4)

2. Triple Holy Praise (Trisaggion)

Dheivmey nee parishudhan aakunhu... which is part of the *Kauma* is a prayer which is said three times. It is known as 'Triple Holy Praise'. In this only the first three lines were recited in the early Church. It is said that the line *njangallku vendi kurishil...* was added on later. There is a tradition behind it.

The occasion when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus together were interring the body of the Messiah, in later years was revealed in a vision to 'Fire-bearer' Mor Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch. What the holy father saw was that when the divine body was being placed in the tomb, angels came down from heaven and sang the first part of the Triple Holy Praise and then Joseph and Nicodemus together said the last part. It is considered that this was added into the worship order from then on.

Biblically also there is an explanation to this prayer. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips,..." (Isaiah 6:5). When this prayer of Isaiah rises from us, we realise that we are unholy. In that realisation we are persuaded to call upon the Holy God - "apart from me you can do nothing" John 15:5b. When these words remind us that there is only one who is able to do everything, and, that is the Almighty God, the fact that we are weak, persuades us to call upon the mighty God. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death,..." reminds us that we are sinners and are under the curse of death. On realising that only the Lord God is immortal, we are persuaded to call on the Holy Eternal God. In this condition, we who are selfish and malevolent, when we behold the sight of Lord Jesus the Messiah, the embodiment of love, dying for us sinners as the sacrifice on the cross, we pray crying out... "O Thou that was crucified for us, Have mercy upon us and bless us" – "*Njangallku vendi kurishil... anugraham cheiyannamey*".

Visualising the Lord's almightiness, and absolute love, this prayer can be said as an intercessory prayer for mercy in redemption of any kind of sin, or for the ability to grow in any kind of goodness. This prayer helps us to remind us of our sins and to develop a meek character in us and to live a life of hope by the fullness of the Holy spirit.

C. 3 - Leavened Bread

Aptly enough as to fulfil the word of God, the Lord who knew that He was going to be arrested, took the Bread and blessed it and gave it to His disciples, after the Supper of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Here, we see that in the Syriac Bible it is said that “during the ‘*Patheera*’ Feast ‘*Lahmo*’ was taken and blessed. ‘*Pattheera*’ means unleavened bread and ‘*Lahmo*’ means leavened bread. In the Gospel according to St. John, there is a hint that the institution of the Qurbana was before the Feast of the Passover. According to the Jewish traditional practices, on the Day of Passover, which is during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, all traces of yeast or anything that leavens or ferments is removed from the house and they eat only bread that is not leavened. So, if on the Passover day they ate only unleavened bread it becomes clear that on the other days they ate leavened bread. Therefore, because the Institution of the Qurbana was done before the Passover, it can be assumed that the bread the Lord used was leavened bread. It is believed that the disciples securely kept the remainder of that bread and used it for the later Holy Qurbanas and that there is a tiny bit of that leaven in the leaven that we use today.

There is a particular purpose for having used the leavened bread at the divine sacrifice that was voluntarily offered at the house in Sehion (Jerusalem). Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven” – (John 6:51). Here also, in the Syriac Bible, the word ‘*Lahmo*’ is used. From this we see that Jesus had likened His body to leavened bread. It denotes a life that is leavened and risen. The Lord himself says that a little leavened dough ferments the whole batch of new dough. Just as what has life grows, dough into which yeast is added will rise. Besides we know that humans are made of five elements. Therefore, the bread that has to be the divine body is made of five elements – wheat flour, water, salt, yeast, and fire.

It is seen that our Lord took the bread, blessed, broke and divided it and gave it to his disciples. “And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf” – (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). That is why small pieces of bread broken from one loaf of bread are given as Holy Qurbana.

C. 4 – KISS OF PEACE (*Samadhana Chumbanam*)

After the Creed or Declaration of Faith (*vishwasa pramaannam*), when the priest stands on the Altar Step (*Padhavi or Darga*) and starts the second part of the Holy Qurbana, the Deacon or Altar Assistant (*Shusrushakan*) says, “By the love of our Lord, let each one with the pure and divine kiss, give peace to one another by giving it to those next to them.” (*Nammudey karthavinte sneham moolam.....samadhanam kodukkannam.*) Then the priest and the assistants and deacons kiss a corner of the *Thabaleetha* on which the Bread and Wine are arranged, and receive the Kiss of Peace or *Kayyasthoori* from the priest, and then the lay assistants give it to the congregation. The priest’s prayer after that is as follows: “We beseech You to make us worthy to greet and give peace to one another; freed from all insincerity and united in love.” (*Vanchana ilaththathum, snehabendhathaal.....nee yogyarakkannamey*) In the early Church this peace was given in the form of a kiss. However, the present day style of *kayyasthoori* was adopted by our Church fathers who did not desire to continue the earlier style of greeting. The present form of *kayyasthoori* has been accepted by all the South Indian churches and some Western churches. Bishop Pekenhan Walsh, a theological scholar, has commented on our mode of *Kayyasthoori* as follows: “As far as I know, your this beautiful manner of using the censer and the palms of hands as symbols, is a unique ritual that is found nowhere else in the Christian world.”

There is a particular reason for this kind of exchanging of peace at this occasion as we approach the main part of the Holy Sacrifice. At this time, only the true believers who have become a member of the Church having taken the Holy Baptism, and declared their Faith Truths through the Creed are present in the church. There should be no enmity or revenge between anyone to another. Jesus says, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” – Matthew 5:24-24. If the Lord’s new commandment ‘Love one another’ (John 13:34) is to come into effect, those who have ill-feelings against others must make peace and be reconciled. Only those who resolve all animosity between one another and participate as brothers in the Holy Sacrifice can experience the selfless peace that is given through the *kayyasthoori*. Moreover, this kinship is needed to receive the blessings that are gifted by God on accepting our offerings and presentations.

After having received the peace, again the deacon or altar assistants call out, “Let us our heads before the merciful Lord after the holy and divine peace that has been given.” (*Kodukka pettirikunha.....kumikkannam* – 2 Chronicles 29:30). Immediately we say the response and bow our heads. But this is becoming just an exhibitory tradition. Only those who are worthy to receive peace are given the peace. Only they can offer their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” – Romans 12:1.

C. MEMORY VERSES

1. No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you. **Deuteronomy 16:16b-17**
2. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. **Psalms 32:8**
3. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. **Psalms 91:15**
4. “The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. **Isaiah 1:11**
5. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Isaiah 9:6**
6. But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. **Isaiah 40:31**
7. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. **Isaiah 41:10**
8. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. **Isaiah 43:2**
9. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. **Jeremiah 24:7**
10. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. **Daniel 12:3**
11. Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. **Malachi 4:1**
12. 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. **Matthew 28:19, 20a**
13. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” **John 5:28, 29**
14. Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. **2 Corinthians 7:1**
15. Therefore he is able to save completely^[c] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. **Hebrews 7:25**
16. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. **James 4:4**

17. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. **1 Peter 1:22**

18. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. **2 Peter 1:3**

19. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:9**

20. “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple... **Revelation 7:14, 15**

Order of Worship

A. Geethangall (Songs)

1. Nin maadhavu vishudhanmaar..... Luke 2:14
2. Makkallil appan kripa Psalms 103:13, 14, 15

B. Namaskaaram (Salutation or Worship)

1. Dheivamey nhee enikku cheithittulla
2. Karthru karthavey

C. General Knowledge

I. Other names for the Holy Qurbana

“Do this in remembrance of me...” (Luke 22:19). These words is the commandment that our Lord gave to the disciples after He instituted the Holy Qurbana. According to this, today, Christian churches of all the different sects observe these rites in various names and rituals.

1. Theshmeshtho

This word means Order of Service. This name has been accepted by the Syrian Church. The Greek Church uses the nomenclature *Liturgy* which means the same.

2. Evukaristhia (Greek terminology - Eucharist)

This terminology means ‘Thanksgiving Service’. This name has been accepted by the Syrian Church.

3. Sauthopuso

This word means ‘Holy Communion’ or ‘Fellowship’. Though the Syrian Church does use the terminology, it is more commonly used by the CSI Church.

4. Lord’s Supper or Last Supper

This term meaning the Divine Supper or the Last Supper is used by the Protestant Churches. It is based on the Biblical passage (1 Cor. 11:20)

5. Mass

The Roman Catholic Church uses this name commonly for the Holy Qurbana.

Terminologies used only in the Syrian Church

1. Holy Qurbana

This word originally meant ‘offering’ or ‘gift’. Later it also took the meaning ‘sacrifice’ or *Debaho*. Holy Qurbana has also got the meaning ‘dedication’, as we ourselves and the whole universe is presented before the heavenly Father through the divine sacrifice of the Lord. Many Biblical scholars have opined that more than any other name, the meaningful name Holy Qurbana is the most suitable one.

2. Knusio

This word which means re-union came about because a life which is separated from God, through the Holy Qurbana is united with God.

3. Koorobo

There is a reason why this word meaning 'submission' or 'closeness' came to be used for this holy service. Through this service all those who are far and near, earthly beings and heavenly beings, those who are departed and those are still living all come together. The Lord himself had destroyed the wall that separated the foreigners and the natives.

4. Rosso

As what was entrusted secretly to the disciples in the Upper Room, and the changes that occur to the bread and wine is beyond explanation, this word which means 'secret' is absolutely meaningful.

5. Ga Meerus gir Voso

Perfector of the perfections. It was given this name because all other sacraments are perfected by this one sacrament.

PART III

FAITH TRUTHS

1. State After Death

The state after death is a subject with a lot of apprehension and uncertainties. Everybody is interested in knowing as to what happens after death. While some religions teach that everything ends with death and there is nothing beyond that, some other religions believe that man's spirit takes the form of an animal or a bird.

Even among Christians who believe in resurrection and Kingdom of Heaven there are some who teach that after death they go into a senseless voidness and inertness. As a basis for this teaching, they point out to a verse from the Old Testament – “It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence; “ - Psalms 115:17.

The contend from this verse is that though the spirits are alive, they are in an inactive state. However, if you read the continuing verses, you will see that this argument has no substance in it. “It is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore.” This is a verse from one of David's Psalms. When David said ‘forever’, he did not say it with the idea that he would never die and would remain praising the Lord forever. What David intended was that though the body dies, the spirit will never die and that the spirit will praise the Lord. Refer to some other Biblical portions from the Old Testament.

1. Psalm 9:17 - The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.
2. Psalm 31:17 - ...let the wicked be put to shame and be silent in the realm of the dead.
3. Isaiah 66:24 - ...the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched.
4. Daniel 12:2 - Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.
5. Ezekiel 37:13 - Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.
6. Hosea 13:14 - I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.

From the above verses, it is understood that the dead are divided into two groups - the ones who committed evil will be condemned to hell, and those who do good will be redeemed from hell. It is also clear from these verses that the souls of the dead will know shame and are conscious enough to know Jehovah. There is nothing clearer than these verses from the Old Testament from which we can infer about the state after death. However, our Lord Messiah who opened many of the hidden truths in the Old Testament, has not said anything about this topic to understand it clearly. Yet, many of his teachings shed light on this. He has never taken the stand that everything ends with death. Instead He showed that the spirits live in consciousness and awareness. He revealed that though the spirit leaves the human body the spirit remains in contact with God and in the life-force of God.

1. The Parable of the Richman and Lazarus
(Luke 16: 19-31)

Though the Lord narrated this as a parable, our fathers firmly consider this as an actual occurrence. Even if it's a parable the ideas in it will never be false.

It is clear that when Lazarus and the Richman completed their life on this earth, their spirits as a continuation of their earthly life existed with full awareness and vigour. They are seen as thinking and anxious about those who are remaining on earth.

2. The Lord's Transfiguration
(Luke 9:30-31)

It is seen that when Jesus went up the Tabor Mount with His main disciples, there Moses and Elijah who had passed away many years ago appeared and talked to Jesus about the kind of death He was going to experience. From this it is understood that the spirits of the dead know then and there, all things about the people on the earth.

3. The Promise to the Repentant Criminal
(Luke 23:42-43)

The promise to the criminal who repented while on the cross was "today you will be with me in Paradise". Since no promise was given to the criminal on the other side, it can be justifiably concluded that there was no place for him in Paradise and he was removed to Hades which is the place for the unrepentant. Till the Second Coming of Jesus, Paradise is the dwelling place of the believers who have died. When it is says 'will be in Paradise' with the Lord, it means to be always in association with the Lord. If that is so, from this incident, it can be understood that the spirits of the dead are able to know one another and be in contact with one another.

4. Raising of Lazarus from Death
(John 11:43-44)

It was four days after Lazarus had died and was buried that Jesus reached there. Jesus went near the tomb, called him by his name and commanded him to come out. Immediately, Lazarus came out of the tomb as a live person. It is seen that the spirit of the dead Lazarus was in such a state, that it was able to hear the call and act according to the command.

5. God of the Living
(Matthew 22:31, 32)

Jesus proclaimed: "But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." This does not mean that they are alive in the flesh but remains with a lively spirit.

6. Proclaiming the Gospel to the Spirits of the Dead
(1 Peter 3:19)

Before Jesus resurrected after His death and burial, He went to Hades and preached the Gospel to the spirits of the dead. If the Gospel is to be preached to the dead people, then their spirits should be conscious enough to hear it and accept it.

In the light of these Scriptural references, it is understood very clearly, that the spirits of those who have passed away, keep growing as a continuation of this worldly life; that they are conscious and are able to relate to the world. Science teaches us that no living matter remains still. It should either grow or deteriorate. No matter whichever state it is in, it is an undeniable fact that it needs food. Where does this food come from?

All those who believe in life after death, attends the funeral service conducts it prayerfully with reverence and piety. Right from the time of the funeral service, these spirits are being fed. Their food is the prayers that rise from us and the holy offerings that we make in their names. The souls of all those who have passed away participate with us in the holy offerings that we conduct. The words of Apostle Paul are pertinent here. After giving a long list of faithful believers who had departed, he says, "...we have this large crowd of witnesses around us" – (Hebrews 12:1). Just as the Richman requested Abraham, they are also praying for us when we, by our prayers, nourish their spirits. Christian fellowship as members of the one Body of Christ is being carried out there.

If we think that we can live as we like in this world and can be saved by the prayers and offerings of others, that would be foolish. "...unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:5). There is no redemption for them. But those who repent will be led by the angels to Paradise and be comforted; and at the Second Coming of Christ, resurrect as imperishable, and experience the everlasting fortune along with Jesus.

In this way, the souls who live in the hope of resurrection, need God's mercy, grace and protection. The promise they have received – the Fullness of Everlasting Life – is yet to be received.

For the dead, Holy Qurbana is offered, while observing the fasting rites with prayers. Besides this, on their memorial day, special Holy Qurbana is offered. Their spirits keep growing through these acts. Apostle Paul says, "...grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15); "...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Our prayers help them to achieve that.

In our prayers for the dead we pray mainly for four things.

1. At the resurrection, include those who died as believers in the Eternal kingdom – "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day" – (John 6:39). Since we have been given the assurance that we will be raised, it is absolutely necessary that we should pray for dear ones who have passed away to be joined in the Eternal Kingdom. This also develops a faith and hope in us.
2. Give them comfort and peace: Matthew 11:28 says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." These are the words of comfort that Jesus Christ gave us. In the prayers for the dead this desire is submitted as a supplication.
3. Be merciful unto them: According to Psalm 88 verses 10 onwards, David says, "Their spirits rise up and praise you. Your loving-kindness is declared in the grave; your faithfulness in Destruction. Your wonders are known in the place of darkness, and your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion. (According to the Peshitta Bible or Syriac Bible, that is followed by our Church. Not in other versions of the Bible). It is confirmed that God will be merciful to the dead. Yet, according to the teaching of our Lord, that fervent prayer will produce results. So we pray, 'Have mercy upon them'.
4. Forgive their sins and mistakes and give them your divine presence. "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life" – 1 John 5:16. Even if the brother is unaware of that sin, when we pray, God will forgive him because of our prayer.

Besides praying for the deceased, fasting for them also is helpful. This was practised during the Old Testament times. "Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days." – 1 Samuel 31:13. "They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword." – 2 Samuel 1:12. Therefore, on the

memorial days of our deceased people we should offer Holy Qurbana remembering the sacrifice of our Lord, and pray with fasting and plead for God's mercy on them.

2. Saints or Righteous People

These saints are people who were born into this world as ordinary men just like us, lived a holy life that was pleasing unto God and died according to the will of God. They now exist in Paradise with the Lord and are praying for us. There are people who doubt whether they can hear our prayers or see us.

Prophet Ahijah through his insight was able to recognise Jeroboam's wife. – 1 Kings 14:4-6. Elisha was able to know what his servant Gehazi was doing and what the Syrian king was plotting – 2 Kings 5:25; 6:8. St. Peter was able to comprehend the deception of Ananias and Sapphira – Acts 5:1-11. It is difficult to think that the souls of these saints who remained in communion with God while living in this perishable world and are continuing to live in Paradise as a continuation of this earthy life, would lose these abilities.

We can also doubt whether God will accept the intercessory offerings that the saints make when we pray, "O saints pray for us". When Elijah, who was as human in attitude as us, prayed, God stopped the rain – 1 Kings 17:1; fire came down and burned the offering – 1 Kings 18:38; 'The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective' – James 5:16; 'For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer...' - 1 Peter 3:12. The Righteous People who have earned the security of everlasting life, if when they were living in this world, suffered for mankind and was sympathetic, and if the purpose of their life was the salvation of mankind and prayed for them to God, and if God had heard their prayers and answered them, these holy men who have left this mortal flesh and reached the presence of God, will not their intercessory prayers be fruitful?

"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." - (Acts 7:56) By the Holy Spirit, St. Stephen, who was just an ordinary man, was able to see the secrets in heaven. The prophets of the Old testament, by their close communion with God, were able to prophesise accurately the events that were to come. There is no validity in thinking that the ability of these godly men who understand the heavenly mysteries and worked miracles, would become less, when they become super natural. On the Transfiguration Mount when Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke to Jesus, their clothes became dazzling white. After they had finished talking, '...a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud and said "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"' (Mark 9:7) 'At the resurrection ...; they will be like the angels in heaven.' (Matt. 22:30) After being born as human onto this earth; having overcome all the hardships of life as a man and after having died as a human being, their souls have become equal to heavenly angels. From the Scriptural verses given below, we understand that by the spiritual strength God gives them, they will know all that is happening on the earth, and will never hesitate to flow down the merciful gifts of God who is the source that never dries up.

1. In the prayer of Jacob, (Gen. 48:16) we see that man is protected from harm and is blessed.
2. In Zechariah 1:12 we see that they pray and sympathise over God's wrath towards Jerusalem and the towns of Judea.
3. Luke 15:10 says that they rejoice in heaven when a sinner repents.
4. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those on earth who wish to be saved.

Then, there justifiably rises a doubt, will not the awe of God lessen by praying to these holy people. But, from the words of our Lord, we learn that these doubts are baseless. Matt. 10:40 records Jesus as saying, "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." These words are one of the commandments which Jesus gave after He had selected twelve people as his disciples and sent them out to preach about the Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, Jesus formed a chain whereby when we respect His dear holy people, through them that respect will reach the presence of God. St.

James has said in 5:16 'The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.' When we love and respect these holy men and request them to intercede for us, the honour for God does not decrease at all. As Lord Jesus, who is the only mediator, is capable of doing anything, the holy men receive strength from Him. It is based on this belief, that the Church right from the beginning, gave importance to the prayers to the saints. When we observe the memorial days of these holy people, and meditate on them, we receive blessings through these intercessors. It enables us to perceive their pure life and steadfast faith and to follow it in our life.

3. *Thirussheshippukall*

(Holy Remains or Mortal Remains of the Holy Men)

It is not enough to just honour the memorials of these Holy Men and find refuge in their intercessory prayers, but the mortal remains of these holy men should be devoutly and worshipfully preserved and followed with honour. We can understand from the verses given below, that the blessings received by following this custom, was a tradition from the Old Testament times.

1. After burying him, (the man of God) he (the old prophet in Bethel) said to his sons, “When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. (1 Kings 13:31)
2. The king asked, “What is that tombstone I see?” The people of the city said, “It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it.”

“Leave it alone,” he said. “Don’t let anyone disturb his bones.” (2 Kings 23:17, 18)
3. 2 Kings 2:13, 14 - Elisha then picked up Elijah’s cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.
4. 2 Kings 13:21 - Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man’s body into Elisha’s tomb. When the body touched Elisha’s bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.
5. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11, 12)

The huge gathering of believers and the miracles that occur there are irrefutable proofs of the mercies they receive by seeking refuge in the intercessory prayers, and by preserving their power giving mortal remains with piety and respect. These holy people are in the hands of God (Deut. 33:3 - all the holy ones are in your hand...), their feet are protected by God (1 Sam. 2:9 - He will guard the feet of his faithful servants...), they praise God (Psalms 145:10 - your faithful people extol you...), they are appreciated by God (**Psalm 143:14 – reference incorrect, please check with your vicar for the correct reference**), their ways are safe-guarded by God (**Prov. 2:3 – reference incorrect, please check with your vicar for the correct reference**), they have received the kingdom and will always have it (Dan. 7:18 - But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, forever and ever), they will come with Jehovah (Zechariah 14:5 - Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him...)

PART – IV
CHURCH HISTORY

1. Mavelikara Padiyola fMavelikara Ewsolution)

During the reign of Marthoma VI alias Mar Dionysius Metropolitan over the Malankara Church, Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchanan, as per the orders of the Calcutta government, arrived in Malankara to study the Faith Rites and Traditions of the ancient Syrian Church and to translate the Syriac Bible to their own language; and to collect all related ancient tomes. He was the Vice Principal of the Fort William College in Calcutta and a prominent priest in the Anglican Church. When he visited Mar Dionysius while he was residing here as a royal guest, the Metropolitan gifted him a hand-written copy of the Syriac Bible. Dr. Buchanan got many copies of this printed and distributed it to many churches in the Malankara Church. This copy which is more than a thousand years old is now deposited among the Oriental Manuscripts in the Public Library of the University of Cambridge in England.

At this time, Col. Munro who was the Resident of the Princely State of Travancore-Cochin, was a well-wisher of the Syrian Christians. It was he who donated sixteen acres of land and the Munroe Thuruthu (Islands) which was nearly 2000 acres, to the Malankara Church. At that time, as a result of Dr. Buchanan's visit to Malankara, the Western Missionaries were attracted to Malankara and they came down, and visited the various parishes for the uplift of the Syrian Christian and preached the gospel and provided theological education facilities for the priests. Revds. Thomas Norton, Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker were the most noted among these missionaries. From among them, it was Rev. Benjamin Bailey who translated the Bible into Malayalam. Besides that, the contributions of the missionaries towards the growth of the Church were unlimited. They encouraged and provided inspiration to conduct the worship in the vernacular of the place, proclaim the gospel, promote literary education, conduct a theological seminary, establish places of worship, and other such activities.

The Malankara Metropolitan had given them permission to preach in the churches. In the early days, the missionaries handled these privileges with great respect and care. Even though certain traditional customs of the Syrian Christians were not acceptable to them, they did not publicly criticise it. However, missionaries like Rev. W.J. Woodcock and Rev. Joseph Peet who came later were very young and immature; they were unable to subtly tackle situations according to the circumstances. And, there were occasions when they dealt insolently. So Metropolitan, Cheppad Mar Dionysius, wrote to the Metropolitan in Calcutta. In 1835, Rt. Rev. Dr. Daniel Wilson, the Bishop of Calcutta came and met with Mar Dionysius and discussed matters with him. He put forward certain suggestions such as - modernise the Holy Qurbana Taksa to the Protestant style, revoke the religious sacrifices to propitiate the souls of the departed, constitute a fund to increase the income of the priests, ordain only people who have passed out of the Theological Seminary as priests, send a resident every year in order to audit the accounts of the parishes, and conduct the church services in Malayalam.

In 1836, on Makaram 5 according to the Malayalam almanac, Mar Dionysius convened a meeting at Mavelikara Puthiyacavu church, to discuss and decide on the suggestions of Rt. Rev. Dr. Wilson. Metropolitan, Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of the Thozhiyur Church also attended this meeting. At this meeting, it was decided to stand firm in the original faith traditions. The Documents pertaining to these decisions are known as the Mavelikara Padiyola (Mavelikara Resolutions).

The friendly relationship that had existed with the western missionaries and which had lasted for nearly 20 years, was severed in 1840, according to a decree by a committee of three Europeans of The Cochin Panchayat Court.

11. The Babylonian exile of the Jews

Under the control of Babylon

While Jehoiakim was ruling under the Egyptian government as the Chieftain of Judah, Babylon attacked Judah and carried him away as prisoner. Then, Jehoiachin, the son of the chieftain who was taken away as prisoner became the king. Barely three months had passed and Babylon attacked again and took away gold, silver and other articles of value from Jerusalem Temple of the Lord. Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled here.

Babylonian exile

Following the order of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Zedekiah (Mattaniah), a member of the royal family (Jehoiachin's uncle) was made the ruler of Judah. He continued a rule of evil, not having learnt anything from the history of his ancestors. Though Prophet Jeremiah advised him, he did not change, instead he put Jeremiah in the dungeon. So the punishment he received from God for that was greater than what his ancestors got. The Babylonian army attacked Judea for the third time. They burned down the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord. They murdered everyone in the royal family. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then, they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. They took away all the city dwellers and nobles as slaves to Babylon. Prophet Jeremiah was one among them. However, when they reached the place called Ramah, as per the instructions of the Chaldean (Babylonian) King Nebuchadnezzar, the shackles of the prophet was removed and he was given the freedom to return to Jerusalem or go with his people to Babylon. The prophet decided to return to Jerusalem with his good friend and aide, Baruch. He was given provisions and money to live.

Rule of Governor

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, appointed Gedaliah, who was Jeremiah's friend to be the Governor of Judah and rule over the people he had left behind in Judah. The new governor chose Mizpah, a small town about 4-5 miles north-west of Jerusalem, as his seat of governance. When he had run a peaceful governance for 3 months, some of the army officers remnant of King Zedekiah's military, under the leadership of an officer named Ishmael, allied with the Ammonite king and conspired against the Babylonian king. The foolish Ishmael thought he could win by the power of the sword. He killed Gedaliah the governor and many others. Prophet Jeremiah also was caught in that. Then, Johanan, a friend of Gedaliah fought against Ishmael and defeated him.

Prophet Jeremiah

From the Book of Daniel we understand that during the Babylonian exile which lasted for 70 years, in general, the people had liberty except occasionally when the rulers wanted to oppress them. At such a time, the

people used to ridicule Jeremiah saying, "Has Jehovah's arm shortened? Can't he save his people like before?" But Jeremiah did not fear. In order to make the people understand his message he tied a yoke on his neck and walked along the streets of Jerusalem.

God gave Jeremiah a vision of good figs and bad figs. Its message was that through the people in exile, there would come a good time for the people of Israel and, to wait patiently for it. Jeremiah wrote a letter to Babylon noting this matter. Then the people were comforted. This was an opportune time for the people to look back into their lives and get closer to God.

Prophet Ezekiel

There are no historical documents that say anything about these people in exile after this time. However, we know the story of a group of Jewish people who lived in exile to the north of Babylon, situated quite far away, near Nineveh, in the village of Tel-Abib on the banks of River Kebar. To settle some Jews, far away from the cities and their flamboyant lives, to a very confined lifestyle, the authorities might have feared that these people who were aware of realities might join with the other exiles and create some trouble, and so moved them away to a lonelier lifestyle. They built small mud houses and grew grains for the food of the city dwellers. Though there were no hard and fast rules over them, they did experience a certain political bondage. Psalm 137 describes the heart aches of these people. The young priest Ezekiel rose up from among them.

Daniel

The Babylonian people knew that it was not good to restrain the freedom of the enemies and keep them as slaves forever, because, they would one day raise their heads and that would be bad. So they dealt in a decent way with the slaves. They taught the intelligent youths among the slaves the Persian language, some were given good jobs and appointed into the service of the king. Among them were the four youths - Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They were given the Persian names - Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respectively. Of them, God gifted Daniel especially with the gift of visions. That is how Daniel was able to interpret the dreams that King Nebuchadnezzar had. Wonder-struck and impressed by Daniel's knowledge and wisdom the king gave him many gifts and high-ranking position as ruler over the entire province of Babylon.

While Daniel was away for some official matters, by some connivance of some flattering Babylonians, the king erected a golden statue and gave the order to throw the three youngsters into the blazing furnace. Seeing this miraculous episode, Nebuchadnezzar became a believer of Jehovah God. And he gave these young men higher positions in the government.

The king's dream

When Nebuchadnezzar conquered all the neighbouring countries and acquired immense wealth and dignity, he became proud in his heart that it was all his might and glory. God could not forgive that. It was when

Daniel interpreted the dream that the king had that the king understood that all what he had was not acquired by his might, but received from God. As seen in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar ate grass like and ox, drenched in the rain and wandered about like a wild animal in the wilderness. All that time, because he followed Daniel's advice and prayed to God constantly, he was re-instated to his sovereignty and continued reigning.

The end of the Babylonian Regime

All the Babylonian kings who came after Nebuchadnezzar were fun-lovers who did not care about the welfare of the country but their own comforts. In the meanwhile, Persian king Cyrus, was capturing all the neighbouring countries. One day, the Babylonian king Belshazzar gave a royal banquet. He brought in the silver and gold goblets that were in the Jerusalem Temple and the palace women drank wine from it. God could not tolerate this. Suddenly there appeared on the wall some words in Hebrew. Daniel was called in to explain its meaning. Daniel revealed that it was God's message saying: "God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." The king and his nobles who were in panic were captured by the Medes and Persians before dawn. They murdered the king and divided the kingdom between themselves.

The Persian Empire

When King Darius of the Medes started his reign over the conquered land, he came to know about Daniel. Seeing his extraordinary intellect, meticulous life and integrity, he made Daniel one of the three administrators over his kingdom. Once again, seeing Daniel in authority, people who were jealous of him set a trap for him and the king fell for their scheming. With great sorrow Daniel was put into the lion's den and was amazingly rescued by the mighty hands of Jehovah God. The last Mede kings were poor rulers and because of it there was a lot of uprising and law and order became nearly impossible. Seeing this situation, the Persian king Cyrus attacked and conquered Babylon and then captured all the small kingdoms around it and formed the great Persian Empire. Daniel held a high position even in the royal palace of Cyrus. Even when he became the highest official of the empire Daniel always lived according to the Holy Laws and in constant prayer.

12. The Return of the Jews to Jerusalem

The disgruntled exiles

Daniel provided life of good governance for the Jews living in exile in Babylon. Even then, the majority of Jews were dissatisfied. They knew that man's high standing is nothing before God, the ups and downs, power of rule, slavery were all controlled by God, and that He will send punishment over those who become proud and unmindful of Him. So they were willing to sacrifice anything for their father's land as they were passionate about the city of the Temple of Jehovah and determined to worship Him in His Temple. They were uncomfortable living with the foreigners. Prophet Ezekiel was the only ray of hope among them. He taught them how to live a dutiful life worshipping Jehovah. He advised them that unless they went through great hardships redemption would not happen.

The exiles are liberated

Wise King Cyrus who realised that the dissatisfied Jews living as exiles would soon be a danger for the country, and was considering of sending them back to their own land, when he got a vision from God. Jehovah who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, had commanded him to build a temple for Him in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1, 2). So, in BC 536, through a proclamation, he declared that, those people who wanted to return to Jerusalem were free to do so, and those who preferred to stay back should give gold, silver, goods and livestock for the building of the temple. He send orders to all provincial rulers to provide them with all assistance in their journey.

During this time, from among the Jewish exiles, Zerubbabel, who was the son of Shealtiel son of King Jehoiakin became a Jewish leader. Under his leadership, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and the Levites and the priests, 42,360 people in all, left Babylon. Zerubbabel was also entrusted all the things that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple of Jerusalem. He was also known by the Persian name Sheshbazzar.

The return

As soon as the people reached Jerusalem, they built the altar and conducted the services and feasts as per the Law. In the meantime, the kingdom of Israel which was the land of the other ten tribes became the residents of many foreign people. The northern part was filled with the mixed race of Samaritans. The southern part was taken over by the Edomites, the western area and the coastal region by the people of Philistine and all the other place by other foreigners. Only Judea, which was in the centre of all this was left as a haven for the people of Judah. God had safe-guarded a remnant of people purified to live a life according to the will of God. We can understand this from the Jews who returned from Babylon, that they prayed constantly for the will of God to be fulfilled.

Rebuilding of the Temple

Isaiah Ch. 35 states the attitude, in general, of the people who returned to their homes. Filled with a noble concept of life which had never touched the Jewish people before, they looked forward to a fresh and modern future. They began the necessary works to build a new temple where Solomon's Temple stood and was destroyed. It took two years to gather all the wood and other material and the required labour for it. Then, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the then High Priest, Joshua, the foundation stone was laid. The priests blew the trumpet and sang psalms and the people cried out praises to the Lord and the work commenced. The foreigners who ruled Jerusalem did not like this. They tried to obstruct the building of the temple. They came forward with the argument that the Samaritans who lived in the north were also worshippers of Jehovah, and therefore, should participate in the building of the temple. Since they were a mixed race, this was not permissible. So they blocked the building of the temple which lasted for fourteen years.

Prophet Haggai

In BC 520, Prophet Haggai rose up and asked the people the insulting question, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" (Haggai 1:3) Prophet Zachariah also told the people of the vision he had about the bright future of Jerusalem. He prophesied that Jehovah would stand around them as a wall of fire. As a result, Zerubbabel started his work again. All the people, with renewed energy, started the work of building the temple. In BC 515, after 20 years, they completed the building of the temple. All the people rejoiced and celebrated the occasion.

Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Temple of Solomon. But, in this newly built temple, the Ark of the Covenant was missing. No one knows how this was lost during the attack of the Babylonians. There were many stories on what happened to the Ark - some were of the opinion that it had been buried under the earth and some others that it was taken up to heaven. During the time of Pilate, a Samaritan religious fanatic cried out that it was placed on Mt. Gerizim. People searched there also, but found no evidence.

Zerubbabel expelled

The Persian emperor was misinformed that Zerubbabel was preparing to declare an independent Judean state by re-enforcing the broken walls of Jerusalem city. So, Zerubbabel was expelled from his authoritative position. Following this, the history of the Jews for another 70 years is unknown. Historians say that the people of other races prospered. The Book of Esther is proof to that. As the historical books also prove that the King Xerxes referred to in the Book of Esther was the Persian king Xerxes, we can presume that the Jews were under the rule of the

Persians. It is also evident from this book that the special freedom that they enjoyed then was not there before.

During this period of seventy years, because of the unlawful trespasses, unbearable taxes, the Jewish people groaned; peace and oneness was lost when they broke the Law, discontinued the rituals and entered to inter-racial marriages. Each one lived as he wanted.

13. Restoration of Jerusalem

Ezra

The condition of the Jews who lived in Babylon was somewhat better. Financially and culturally they had reached a very high level. There were a few families, who though they lived among the natives of the land, they did not follow the local rituals but placed their faith in Jehovah God and lived a vigilant life. They studied the Hebrew Scriptures attentively and maintained a copy of it.

Ezra was a Jewish scribe who was well-versed in this. When Ezra came to learn about the moral degradation of the Jews in Jerusalem, he realised that he had the responsibility to redeem them.

It was in BC 457, during the reign of King Artaxerxes that Ezra decided to journey to Jerusalem. He had received his freedom papers from the king. He knew that naturally, there would be a lot of problems in bringing back to the Jewish faith, a society that had been living totally astray from the Jewish faith. So, before he left Jerusalem, he selected 1500 men who were devout, their women and servants and took them with him. Ezra firmly believed that Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts was strong enough to deliver His people from all their enemies. The king had ordered the royal treasurers to give all the finance needed for the Jerusalem Temple and everything else that Ezra requested. The king entrusted to Ezra all the Temple articles that had been given to Zerubbabel and all that were still remaining in the royal palace. He selected a few Levites and 12 priests who were able to follow the rules of the Law of Moses, and gave the Temple articles to them. They started their journey to Jerusalem after assembling at the canal that flows towards Ahava. They encamped there and fasted and prayed for three days.

Ezra in Jerusalem

Ezra appeared in Jerusalem as a renewing saviour. The aim of his teachings was the observance of the Law and leading a pure life separated from other people. He cried and prayed for the forgiveness of their sins. This touched the hearts of the people. They fell prostrate and vowed to God that they would live a holy life. For 13 years he was in charge of Jerusalem. There are no historical records of him after that.

Nehemiah

In BC 445, Hanani, a Jewish leader, who went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, on his return spoke of the ruined state of the city of Jerusalem to his own brother, and the king's cup-bearer, Nehemiah. He informed him that as the city walls were all broken down, the enemies could attack them at any time. This news was distressing for Nehemiah who was a devout follower of God. Realising this was a good opportunity to work for his own country using his special freedom in the royal

presence, Nehemiah took some special permissions from the king and travelled to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah, who reached Jerusalem, walked around the city for three days studying its condition without telling anyone of his purpose. Then he called a meeting to discuss the matter and made them understand the need to rebuild the walls of the city. He told them of the permission and the financial help from the king to build the city walls. Each family was given the responsibility of a particular section. All the people enthusiastically started the work. The wall started coming up everywhere at the same level. Nehemiah led the work, going about everywhere, night and day, without any rest. The Samaritans and other foreigners who lived near-by became jealous and plotted to kill him.

Building of the city walls

Realising that the enemies could strike any moment, Nehemiah placed half the people outside the city as watch guards. He told the workers to work holding a weapon in one hand. The poor people left their livelihood behind and worked to build up the walls of the city. Nehemiah who was satisfied and impressed with it provided all kinds of assistance the people needed. He completed the building of the city wall in 52 days. Then the Jewish people carried out a great celebration. They reached the Temple in a procession. Ezra, who was out of contact with the people for some time, had reached the Temple at that time. He stood on a raised dais and read out the Laws of Moses to the people. The Levites who were with him interpreted it for the people.

Nehemiah collected all the old tomes and letters and established a library. He made the Jewish people into a group whose faith was founded firmly on the Laws. In short, more than re-enforcing the city walls and the rampart gates, by his sacrificial efforts and clever diplomatic dealings, Nehemiah raised the Jewish race from a down-trodden people to a recognised society. Nehemiah returned to the Persian palace after having lived for 12 years in Jerusalem. After having served the royal palace again for another nine years, he returned to Jerusalem and lived there till his death.

Malachi

There are no clear evidences about the history after the time of Nehemiah. Though the priestly rule that Nehemiah had installed was continued, we understand from the prophecy in the Book of Joel that the morality of the people declined. The old prophets had warned the people of idol worship and evil deeds. But in the time of Malachi, there was no need for such a teaching. From the time of Ezra the people had knowledge about the scriptures. When they had to restrict life to within the limits of the Laws, spiritual purity was only in outward rituals. So Malachi changed his style of prophecy according to the time. "Fear the Lord and obey His commands". Malachi addressed a people who were disheartened from the life of bondage under the Persian authority.

Malachi is the Hebrew word for 'my messenger'. Therefore, we can't for certain say who the author of this book is. There is an opinion that it could be Ezra.

14. Greek culture for the Jews

Under the Greek supremacy

Towards the end of the Persian sovereignty which lasted for two centuries, in 333 BC, Greek king, Alexander conquered all the Oriental (Eastern) countries one by one. He established his authority till India. Thus, the Persian Empire came under his control. Jaddua was the high priest in Jerusalem then. Historian Josephus has recorded that, this priest received Emperor Alexander who was coming for war against Jerusalem in such a way that Alexander changed his mind and entered the Temple to make his offerings. This gave the Jews a lot of freedom and earned many favours.

The country is split

Emperor Alexander who had reached the zenith of his victory, died before he could return home. Following this the country got divided. The eastern part of the empire in Africa came under the control of Seleucus, a Greek commander of Alexander's army, and the western part under the control of Ptolemy. Seleucus' seat was in Syria and Ptolemy's in Egypt.

Greek culture in Judea

Alexandria in Egypt was a prominent port. Jews who were capable of prospering this place into a city were invited to Alexandria. That caused many Jews to settle in Alexandria. They built synagogues there and worshipped the Lord. As Ptolemy II was an art lover, he established a museum in Alexandria containing many books and tomes of all the races and their history. So for this, the Hebrew religious books were translated into Greek. Many language experts were brought from Jerusalem and were resided in Alexandria. For this purpose, the Old Testament was also translated into Greek in BC 227. This is known as the Septuagint Bible. As the Jews were able to understand the Greek language they were able to study religious books and literary works of other races. Slowly the Greek culture crept into and spread in Judea also.

Above all this, the world could know about the true Jehovah God and the Messiah to come. Philosophers like Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato who were considered as gentiles began to lead the people to the concept of mono-theism (one God) and as far as a Jew was concerned, the fact that Socrates gave up his life for truth was a turning point of his own awareness of the truth. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was remodelled in the form of the Greek Council. The Chief Priest had the controlling position in this. Till the time of the Ptolemy kings, BC 247, there was peace. This was the golden age of Judea.

The Liberals and the Believers

A group of Jews of that time, tried to make the religious rules, daily rituals and advisory methods practical. Though they respected the Laws and prophecies, other than being just laws and teachings useful for the

worldly life, they did not see it as a means of being made worthy of heaven. These people who gave a different meaning to the existing rites were called the Liberals. At the same time there was another sect who made the existing laws harsh and brought in rules for very ordinary daily matters. They believed that the reward for worldly deeds depended on the observation of the law and would be given in heaven. This sect was known as the Believers. It is considered that the Liberals are the descendants of a priest named Zadok who lived during the time of King David, and later during the time of our Lord Jesus Christ they were known as the Sadducees; and the group called Believers later came to be known as the Pharisees.

Syrian rule

When the Egyptian rule became weak, the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Judea in BC 217. Since the Jews were favourable to the Syrian king they received a favoured governing. He permitted financial aid for the necessary repairs of the Temple.

On the other side of the river Jordan, there was a fearless fighter by the name Hyrcanus. This man used to loot the Arab merchants and travellers who came that way and made a lot of money. When this continued for about seven years, the Syrian king sent a company of soldiers to control him. When it was obvious that he could not escape in any way, he committed suicide. Before dying, through his relative Onias III, the High Priest, he entrusted all his plundered wealth to the Jerusalem Temple.

The joined fast of the Jews

Since Onias the High Priest safely guarded the Temple treasury wealth, Simon the Benjamite, who was the Temple superintendent and guard was dissatisfied. By his conspiracy, the then Syrian king, Seleucus tried to plunder the Temple and steal all of Hyrcanus' loot. But the Jewish people wearing sack-cloth all gathered together and fasted and prayed to protect the Temple valuables. At that time a soldier of the Lord in golden-armour riding a horse appeared and confronted the enemies. The Syrians soldiers were all panic-stricken and returned to Syria.

The Treasury is looted

In BC 175, Antiochus IV Epiphanes became the King of Syria. He was cruel and wicked. As Jerusalem was under Syria, the Jews also had to suffer the ill-effects of his bad governance. When the attempt to rob the Temple treasures according to the schemes of Simon did not work, the next plan was to remove Onias from the position of Chief Priest. When the plot to appoint Onias, the brother of Simon the Benjamite was going on, the then High Priest Onias III's brother Jason approached the king, bribed him and secured the position of the High Priest. This caused a split among the Jewish people. The quarrel among the Jews affected the law and order situation in Jerusalem. At this, the Syrian army entered Jerusalem and killed many Jews and took captive many of them as slaves.

After appointing a governor to rule Jerusalem the king took all the wealth from the Temple and returned to Antioch, his capital in Syria.

The rule by the governor was the beginning of the hard times for the Jews. His aim was to thrash the Jews and completely destroy the Jewish religion. He placed the idol of Zeus, a Greek god, in the Jerusalem Temple. He ordered that everybody should bow down to it, worship it and offer sacrifices to it. The Jews were forced to eat the forbidden pork meat. Many old and holy religious books were set on fire. Thus Daniel's prophecy of "the abomination that causes desolation" was fulfilled.

The Last Phase of Jerusalem Monarchy

In BC 168, some Jews who were undaunted by the religious intolerance of Antiochus disregarded the royal decrees against the Jewish faith and held on to faith in Jehovah were martyred. Performing the lawful circumcision that was told to Abraham by God was breaking the royal command. Two women were brought for judgement. The two babies were killed and hung on the necks of the women and they were tied and dragged through the streets of the city. And if that wasn't cruel enough, both women were made to climb the city wall and then they were pushed over beyond the wall.

Eleazar

The king's birthday used to be celebrated every month, and on that day many pigs would be sacrificed. There was a rule that all Jews should participate in this and eat this meat. There was ninety-year-old and highly respected teacher of the Law by the name of Eleazar who did not comply to this. He said, "This is not worthy of a man of my years. Many young people would think that I had denied my faith after I was ninety years old. If I pretended to eat this meat, just to live a little while longer, it would bring shame and disgrace on me and lead many young people astray. For the present I might be able to escape what you could do to me, but whether I live or die, I cannot escape Almighty God. If I die bravely now, it will show that I deserved my long life. It will also set a good example of the way young people should be willing and glad to die for our sacred and respected laws." So he was sentenced to be beaten to death. His last words were: "The Lord possesses all holy knowledge. He knows I could have escaped these terrible sufferings and death, yet he also knows that I gladly suffer these things, because I fear him."

A devoted mother

The case of a devoted mother and her seven sons are famous for the way they were martyred by the cruelty of Antiochus. This widow was bound and tortured for breaking the royal command. Her sons' tongues and arms and legs were chopped off and the skin of their scalp ripped off. Then that mother told her sons "I do not know how your life began in my womb, I was not the one who gave you life and breath and put together each part of your body. It was God who did it, God who created the universe, the human race, and all that exists. He is merciful and he will give you back life and breath again, because you love his laws more than you love yourself." God's power filled all her sons with divine vigour. Finally each one of them was put into boiling oil and killed.

Regret

The Jewish people realised that when they forgot Jehovah God and His Laws they had to suffer a lot of terrible hardships. As atonement for their sins, they turned to Jehovah and cried and prayed. They endured all their troubles. When they approached God with regret and prayerfully

repented, they understood that they should be perseverant in their deeds as well. Mattathias, a good priest and devotee of God showed them the way. He and his five sons stood against the government and started the rebellion. They took courage and all the Jews joined together and an army was formed. When a king's messenger ordered them make a sacrifice that was against Jehovah, they refused to do so. Then when one Jewish man came forward to do the sacrifice, Mattathias killed the Jew and the royal messenger.

Knowing that the Jews observe the Sabbath Day as holy and would not go to war on that day, King Antiochus IV led the army into Jerusalem. They killed many Jewish men, women, children and their cattle. They set fire to a cave, in which many people were hiding. From that day's predicament a truth was revealed – even if it's a Sabbath, they could fight an attacking enemy – and they made it a law. They courageously faced the Syrian army and felled their commander. The enemy ran back having suffered a huge loss. They used the sword that they took from the Syrian commander for the rest of the battles. The Jews entered into the battle only after prayer and fasting. So within a short period they were able to capture a wide area of the country.

The Maccabeus

Meanwhile, Mattathias demised and two of his sons were also killed in their battle against the enemy. It was Judas/Judah, his eldest son who led them after that. Since Judah got the surname 'Maccabee' meaning 'sledge hammer' for the ferocity in his battles, the family came to be known as Maccabeus. Till BC 63 it was the Maccabeus family that governed Jerusalem.

Pompey

The Maccabeus rulers depended on the Roman government for help. In BC 63, when Julius Caesar was in power, Pompey, his commander-in-chief, conquered Jerusalem and brought it under the control of Rome. Pompey was not just a valiant soldier, he was intelligent and wise. He had instructed the soldiers not to defile the Temple. He entered into the Temple to see the God whom the Jews had placed in the Temple. When he saw that there were no idols for the Jewish worships, he understood that the God of the Jews had to be worshipped in truth and spirit. Then, for the next 20 years, there was continuous rioting in Judea. At this time the city walls were broken by the attack of the enemies, but it was rebuilt.

Herod

When Caesar became the emperor of the Roman Empire, Antipater was made the ruler of Judea. For easy governance, he made his elder son governor of Jerusalem and the younger son governor of Galilee. It was this second son, Herod, under the Roman government, who was appointed as king of the Jews in BC 37. It was difficult to determine the character of this Herod. When there was a great famine in Judea, he sold all the valuable in the palace and procured grains and distributed it to

the people and took care of them. When his compassionate and generous mind was made evident, in order to safe-secure his kingly position, he killed his own wife and children and many others and showed the evil side of his character. Beyond the aesthetic concepts of Solomon and Zerubbabel, King Herod tried to make the Temple more beautiful in an artistic way. He showed his love and loyalty to the Jews in this way. However, when he gave the order to kill all children under the age of two so that the child who was born as the King of the Jews would not live, it showed the satanic nature that was underlying in the bottom of his heart. His end was very pitiable. Finally in BC 4 he expired.

Pontius Pilate

After the decease of Herod, the country was divided for the three sons. When Augustus Caesar joined Judea to the Roman state, under the Syrian Governor's leadership, a Roman chief was appointed there. Pontius Pilate was the fifth among them. And so Jacob's prophecy in his blessing of his sons, "The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his" was fulfilled.(Gen 49:10)

Incarnation of the Saviour

When the aesthetic sense of the Greeks and the political power of the Romans and the external observations of the Law all combined together family life decayed. The lack of inner devotion to God caused the loss of brotherly love. Five centuries before Christ, prophets had foretold that in order to redeem mankind that had fallen into the pit of damnation by sin, a noble king would appear. The Old Testament was completed when Daniel's prophecy that the Heavenly God would establish a kingship that will never fall was fulfilled.