



The Life and Teaching of

JESUS
THE
MESSIAH

by Dennis E. Clark

**THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF
JESUS THE MESSIAH**

(SIRAT-UL-MASIH, ISA, IBN MARYAM)

Dennis E. Clark

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Suggested Books in English	ix
Foreword	xi
The announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary	1
The birth of John the Baptist	3
Joseph—protector of Jesus and Mary	6
The birth of Jesus announced	8
Circumcision and purification	9
Simeon and Anna	10
King Herod's attempt to kill the Baby Jesus	11
Jesus in Egypt for Safety	12
The quiet years at Nazareth	13
John the Baptist begins to preach	15
Jesus appears in public for the first time	17
Jesus is tempted	17
The first temptation—by bread	18
The second temptation—popularity and acceptance	18
The final temptation—power by following the devil	19
Jesus returns to John	20
The wedding at Cana	21
Jesus goes to Jerusalem	24
Jesus spends time in Judaea	27
Jesus at Sychar's well en route to Galilee	28
Jesus preaches and works in Galilee	31
Jesus turned out of Nazareth	32
Jesus makes his centre Capernaum	34
Jesus invites Matthew to follow him	38
Jesus tells about God's love for the lost	39
Jesus makes a brief visit to Jerusalem	41
Jesus withdraws from conflict with Jewish leaders	45
Jesus chooses twelve companions	45
The Sermon on the Mount	46
Jesus heals a Roman officer's servant	56
Jesus raises the dead	57
John sends a message from prison	58
A meal in Simon the Pharisee's house	59
Jesus continues to travel and heal	61
Jesus called "devil-possessed"	62
Jesus announces the true family relationships	64
Jesus teaches by parables	64
Parable of the sower	65

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Parable of the fish net	67
Parable of the buried treasure	68
The stilling of the storm	68
The healing of a devil-possessed man	69
The raising of Jairus' daughter	70
Jesus goes back to Nazareth.....	72
John the Baptist is murdered.....	73
Jesus feeds the hungry crowds.....	76
The crowd plans to make Jesus their king	76
Jesus rejects the people's plan to make him King	77
Jesus controls the storm.....	78
The nature of true holiness	78
Teaching about the Bread of Life	80
Tyre and Sidon	83
The Syrophenician woman.....	83
Jesus feeds the hungry again.....	85
Jesus restores sight	86
The question at Caesarea Philippi.....	87
Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah.....	89
The epileptic boy	90
The companions discuss "greatness"	91
Jesus teaches about children	91
Who is for or against Jesus?	93
Entering the Kingdom of Heaven	94
Jesus visits Jerusalem secretly	94
Jesus claims to be the Light of the World.....	98
Jesus says "I am from above"	98
Two months' teaching and travel.....	100
Jesus sends 70, two by two, in advance.....	102
The parable of the good Samaritan.....	103
Jesus' teaching on sundry matters.....	104
Jesus refuses to arbitrate	105
The rich fool.....	106
Jesus teaches all to be ready for the call	107
The cost of obedience	108
The one thankful leper	108
Jesus cures a sick woman on a Sabbath day	109
Jesus explains the vitality of the kingdom of God	110
Jesus teaches the significance of disasters	110
Who will be saved?.....	111
The home at Bethany.....	113

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A blind beggar's eyes opened.....	113
Jesus declares himself the true Shepherd of men	116
The dedication festival	117
Jesus in the house of a Pharisee	119
The rich young ruler.....	120
The cost of becoming a disciple	122
The neglect of the poor and social injustice	122
Jesus warns the Pharisees.....	124
Jesus returns to Bethany to raise dead Lazarus.....	125
Jesus again warns that he is soon to be killed	128
Jesus heals the blind beggar.....	129
Jesus visits the home of Zacchaeus	129
The story of the pounds.....	130
Seven days to victory	131
Day One—The first day of the week	132
Day Two—The barren fig tree.....	134
Day Three—A day of conflict and intensive teaching	135
Two Parables:	136
Jesus silences the opposition	138
Giving alms to God.....	141
The seekers after Truth	142
Jesus speaks of his death	142
Jesus speaks of his second coming and the end of the world	144
The suddenness of his return.....	145
Parable of the Wise Virgins	145
The parable of money for trading	146
The final judgment of the nations	147
Day Four—The supper at Bethany; probably Tuesday evening which was the beginning of the Jewish Wednesday	149
Judas the traitor	150
The anointing of Jesus for burial	151
Day Five—Thursday, Preparations for the Passover	151
A Lesson in humility	154
Judas Iscariot the traitor	155
Final instructions.....	156
Peter and the companions warned against cowardice	156
The companions are puzzled.....	157
The agony of Gethsemane	159
Day Six—The arrest of Jesus	160
The illegal trial of Jesus	161
Jesus before the High Priest Caiaphas	162

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The High Priest questions Jesus	163
The charge of blasphemy	163
Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate	164
Jesus is flogged and mocked	167
Pilate's final attempt to save Jesus	167
Judas Iscariot commits suicide	168
Jesus is crucified	169
Mary the mother of Jesus present at the cross	171
Two criminals converse with Jesus	172
Jesus dies on the cross	173
Jesus is buried in a tomb	175
Pilate ordered the tomb sealed	176
The first day of a new week—and new era—the conquest of death—Jesus rises from the grave!	177
Jesus is seen alive by Mary of Magdala	179
By Cleopas and his companion	180
By Peter privately	181
By the crowd in the room	181
By Thomas—who doubted	182
Jesus prepares breakfast for seven disciples	184
The Implications of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah	186

APPENDICES

Genealogical Table of Abraham	191
Greek Texts of Ancient Records	192-3
Maps	194-5
Comparative lists of proper names, Greek-Arabic	196
Footnotes	197

PREFACE

THE ANCIENT RECORDS

The English text of the Holy Gospel used in this book is a translation by the scholar Dr. J. B. Phillips, who writes in the introduction to the 1972 edition:

I would like to make it clear to my readers that this new edition is in fact a new translation from the latest and best Greek text published by the United Bible Societies in 1966 and recognised by scholars of all denominations as the best source available.

A very brief outline of how the Greek manuscripts came into existence and were preserved to this day is as follows:

1. Following the departure of Jesus from earth, many witnesses to the facts of his life, teaching, death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven, scattered to other nations. The companions of Jesus had been appointed by him as apostles and 'eyewitnesses' of what he had done and said. He charged them with the work of making known the Holy Gospel to the ends of the earth, and this they did. Within 40 years, many communities of believers in Jesus as the Messiah had multiplied throughout the Roman Empire and beyond into eastern lands.

2. The first records began to be compiled and circulated to these early communities of believers in Palestine in the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic. These were later translated into Greek for communities where this language was more widely used. Between 50 and 80 AD three of these records were in existence—Matthew, Mark and Luke. Later a further record by one named John was circulated as well as others.

3. The records continued to circulate for over 100 years, and by the year 200 AD a list was drawn up of the holy books which the early believing communities regularly used. They included the portions of the Holy Gospel named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. During the years 80-200 AD godly leaders of these believing communities wrote learned books and quoted from the texts of the fourfold Gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. By the mid-third century the Greek originals were translated into Coptic, a language used by believing communities in Egypt, and into Syriac used in the Middle East. A translation was also made into Latin which was increasingly becoming the common language throughout the Roman Empire.

4. Writing in the early centuries was on papyrus. This was made from the pith of the papyrus plant out of strips glued together, and often rolled in lengths of 30 feet. Later, parchment made from animal skins (sheep, goats, calves or antelopes) was used. The writing in Greek cap-

ital letters was normal until around 900 AD. Some 3100 manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts relating to the New Testament had been discovered of which more than 80 are papyri and 200 parchment in capital letters. The oldest fragment of parchment dates from around 150 AD and was found in Egypt. Several key papyri containing parts of the four-fold Gospel date from around 350 AD.

5. Among the important Greek records are:

The *Codex Sinaiticus* discovered last century on Mount Sinai by a man named Tischendorf, dating from the fourth century.

The Codex Alexandrius. Dating from the fifth century.

6. No book has been so subjected to attack, criticism and questioning as the Holy Gospel, and yet after nearly 2000 years it stands today very much as it did in the beginning when Jesus was here. Mistakes due to copying by scribes are minor mistakes, such as even the best printers make today. These are acknowledged by careful scholars who compare the many alternate manuscripts in Greek. But none of these copyists' mistakes affect any basic teaching Jesus gave, or the historical facts of his death, burial and resurrection.

7. Translations into over 1000 languages have been made from the ancient Gospel records. To assist translators who cannot compare hundreds of ancient documents and fragments, a Greek text is available with notes on possible variant readings. Translations constantly change with the development of living languages. In English many new translations are made as English changes. This is true in other languages. Some uneducated critics charge that the different translations prove the unreliability of Holy Scriptures. As has been proved, the ancient records in Greek are the standard, not the translation. God wants mankind to understand his truth which we can only do if we read and hear it in the language which we speak and use daily.

In conclusion: Let the story of the discovery of the ancient record of the book of the prophet Isaiah be a lesson of the way archaeological discoveries vindicate the truth, in an age of doubt and criticism.

In the Spring of the year 1947 a young Muslim Arab shepherd named Muhammad Adh-Dhib, explored a cave on the western shores of the Dead Sea, about eight miles south of Jericho, now known among scholars as the Qumran Caves. One of his goats had strayed up a steep path. In following his goat, Muhammed Adh-Dhib found one of the most historical groups of ancient records ever to come into the hands of man. These records are now named the dead sea scrolls. By 1956 members of Adh-Dhib's tribe named Ta-amireh Bedouin, had uncovered more caves.

One of the scholars, Professor Geza Vermes, born in Hungary in 1924, involved in research of *The Dead Sea Scrolls* writes:

The Qumran Biblical documents cover the whole Hebrew Bible, with the exception of Esther, and are about 1000 years older than the ancient codices extant . . . Experts . . . can trace the process by which the text of the Bible attained its final shape. Moreover, they are in a position to prove that it has remained virtually unchanged for the last 2000 years.*

We also are convinced that the ancient Greek manuscripts of the Holy Gospel are essentially the same today as in the days of the disciples of Jesus the Messiah. God has caused them to be kept and preserved from interpolation and corruption.

Suggested Books in English

The New Atlas of the Bible, published by Collins.

The Bible and Archaeology. J. Arthur Thompson. Paternoster Press

The Text of the New Testament. Bruce Metzger. Clarendon Press.

Biblical Archaeology. G. Ernest Wright. Westminster Press.

The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. G. Vermes. Penguin Books.

The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls. J. M. Allegro. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

**The Dead Sea Scrolls* pp 12-13. Penguin Books

FOREWORD

Jesus the Messiah, also named Jesus Christ, lived nearly 2,000 years ago in the Middle East, at a time it was ruled by local princes, kings and governors under Imperial Rome. The teachings of Jesus and his example of compassionate love for fellow men and women in their human need, are known today throughout all nations of the world. Differences of opinion exist as to who Jesus was, but most people of good will are agreed that if the teaching and example of Jesus Christ were followed, there would be more love and compassion in the world and less hatred, cruelty and oppressive exploitation of the poor. The writer attempts in these pages the following tasks:

To link together the Holy Gospel records so that the reader can obtain a picture of Jesus as he taught and served the crowds, and his followers.

To show how Jesus revealed the compassion of God for mankind by his many acts of healing of the sick and concern for the poor.

To provide a simple social, religious and historical background to the period of history in which Jesus lived.

To explain some difficult references and phrases for a reader unfamiliar with the Holy Gospel, and the meaning of the words and phrases in the original language of Greek, in which the ancient Gospel records were written.

To comment on and apply some of the teachings and examples of Jesus to the situations which face us today.

And finally, most important of all, to let Jesus the Messiah, by his teaching and life, reveal himself to the reader. The deep mystery of the person of Jesus Christ is revealed step by step, and the reader is requested to read to the end before a conclusion is reached.

Actual quotations from the Holy Gospel are indented or enclosed in quotes. The language is as nearly contemporary as possible. Certain difficulties in the usage of words and ideas are dealt with briefly in the appendices.

For the advanced reader desiring more information, encyclopedias and commentaries are recommended.

This book is for the reader sincerely wanting to know the accurate historical record of what Jesus did and taught while here on this earth. The writer is convinced of the truth of what he writes, and by the help of God has tried to follow the way of Jesus Christ as he revealed it to his early followers.

DENNIS E. CLARK

The announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary

Nazareth is a small town in Galilee, in the land of Palestine, concealed in the hollow of the hills at the head of the busy Plain of Esdraelon. A climb up the hill that hides and shelters the town gives a rewarding view on all sides. To the north beyond a richly fertile plain, on a clear day, snow-tipped Mount Hermon can be seen. Westwards towards the Mediterranean the purple of Mount Carmel is an inviting reminder that just beyond are the busy ports and ships. In the days of which we are writing, winding caravans carrying commodities of the famous city of Damascus could be seen. One of the three routes for trade to pass from Accho on the seacoast to Damascus passed six miles south of Nazareth.

It was in this small insignificant town of Nazareth that Mary lived, a pure virgin and God-fearer, who was to become the virgin mother of the promised Messiah.

The longing and hope of years in many young girls' hearts had centered on the promise of the coming Messiah. He would be born in one of the households of the people of God. The questions burned in many minds—Which home? Which woman? When?

From the first days of history the promise had been given to Mother Eve—that through the "seed of a woman" (Genesis 3:15) the evil spirit, the devil, the enemy of God and mankind, would be bruised and ultimately destroyed.

Again and again prophets had spoken of the coming of the promised Messiah. Some 700 years previously Isaiah had written:

The Lord himself shall give you a sign: A young woman is with child and she will bear a son (Isaiah 7:14 N.E.B.).

Mary was a pure-hearted girl, she spoke the truth and guarded her chastity. She was a girl who loved and worshiped God and sought to obey his commandments.

One day, suddenly, when Mary was alone, an angel appeared to her announcing himself as Gabriel. Six months earlier this same Gabriel had brought a message to Zacharias that Mary's cousin Elizabeth would have a child even though both man and wife were advanced in years. This child was to become John the Baptist. Gabriel is an angel of God sent in ancient times to strengthen God's true servants, and to give his messages.

From among the many loyal angels of God Almighty the Merciful and Compassionate, Gabriel was sent to Mary with the special announcement that she was to give birth to a son.

The ancient manuscripts of the Holy Gospel describe the event as follows. As Gabriel entered Mary's room, he said:¹

"Greetings to you, Mary. O favoured one!—the Lord is with you!"

Mary was deeply perturbed at these words and wondered what such a greeting could possibly mean. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; God loves you dearly. You are going to be the mother of a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be known as the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his forefather, David, and he will be king over the people of Jacob for ever. His reign shall never end."

Then Mary spoke to the angel,

"How can this be," she said, "I am not married!"

But the angel made this reply to her:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the most High will overshadow you. Your child will therefore be called holy . . . Your cousin Elisabeth has also conceived a son, old as she is. Indeed, this is the sixth month for her, a woman who was called barren. For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled."

"I belong to the Lord, body and soul," replied Mary, "Let it happen as you say." And at this the angel left her (Luke 1:28-38).

Mary's readiness to obey God and accept his miracle in her body involved her in the possibility of pain and the shame of misunderstanding. She was already engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendent of David, but according to custom remained closely with the women of the town of Nazareth.

In that town as the maidens drew water and spun cloth, they talked continually of women's matters—children, engagements and weddings. The older women busy with the children, watched the younger ones. Nothing was hidden, all knew everything.

To become the object of a sudden silence as she drew water from the well, or the centre of a buzz of gossip, or the sharp tongue and look, would wound any sensitive girl's heart.

It was not surprising therefore, that

with little delay Mary got ready and hurried off to the hillside town in Judaea (a journey of three or four days from Nazareth) where Zacharias and Elisabeth lived (Luke 1:39).

Gabriel had told her that her relative Elisabeth, barren for many years, had conceived in her old age. Here with relatives perhaps an atmosphere of understanding would protect her from the public notice, and the shame of an unmarried pregnancy in her own town.

The birth of John the Baptist

In the days when Herod the Great was king of Palestine, about 5 BC, six months before the coming of the angel to Mary, a priest named Zacharias, Elizabeth's husband, was performing his priestly functions in the great Temple at Jerusalem. Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth were both descendents of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and the high priest of God in the ancient days of his people. Man and wife were truly religious people, blamelessly observing the commandments of God. One sadness dominated their lives—they were childless, and now both had reached advanced age, so that hope for a child had died in their hearts.

Like many God-fearing people of the day, Zacharias sought to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He always carried the expectation and hope in his heart that after the many centuries of desolation God would look again in mercy on his people and send the promised Messiah.

One day, when it was the turn of the Abijah section of the priesthood, to which Zacharias belonged, to be on duty, he was chosen to go into the holy place of the Temple to burn incense. Outside the congregation was praying as Zacharias passed from their sight into the darkened interior. As Zacharias approached the incense altar he became terribly agitated as he saw an angel of God appear on the right side of the altar. A sense of awe swept over him. The ancient records describe the scene, as the angel spoke to him saying:

“Do not be afraid, Zacharias; your prayers have been heard. Elisabeth your wife will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. This will be joy and delight to you and many more will be glad because he is born. He will be one of God's great men; he will touch neither wine nor strong drink and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of his birth. He will turn many of (Jacob's)² children to the Lord their God. He will go out before God in the spirit and power of Elijah—to reconcile fathers and children, and bring back the disobedient to the wisdom of good men—and he will make a people fully ready for their Lord.”

But Zacharias replied to the angel.

“How can I know that this is true? I am an old man myself and my wife is getting on in years . . .”

“I am Gabriel,” the angel answered. “I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. Because you do not believe what I have said, you shall live in silence, and you shall be unable to speak a word until the day that it happens. But be sure that everything that I have told you will come true at the proper time.”

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zacharias, wondering why

he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out and was unable to speak a word to them—for although he kept making signs, not a sound came from his lips—they realised that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Later, when his days of duty were over, he went back home, and soon afterwards his wife Elisabeth became pregnant and kept herself secluded for five months.

“How good the Lord is to me,” she would say, “now that he has taken away the shame that I have suffered” (Luke 1:13-25).

The child promised to Zacharias and Elisabeth and named John by the angel Gabriel, became known later as John the Baptist, and to this day is often referred to in this way. From his conception he was a chosen prophet of God. He was a pathmaker, a preparer of the soil for seed-time, a voice announcing the coming Messiah.

Later, in this atmosphere of expectancy, the elderly priest Zacharias speaking like the prophet he was, and looking at his little son John said:

“And you, little child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare the way for his coming.
It will be for you to give his people
knowledge of their salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins.
Because the heart of our God
is full of mercy towards us,
the first light of Heaven shall come to visit us
to shine on those who lie in darkness
and under the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

It was in the sixth month of Elisabeth’s pregnancy that Mary traveled from Nazareth to the hillside town of Judaea, to the south towards Jerusalem, where Zacharias and Elisabeth now lived. As Mary entered the home of Elisabeth her cousin and greeted her the unborn child, now six months within Elisabeth’s womb, stirred and she was suddenly inspired by God to say to Mary:

“Blessed are you among women
and blessed is your child! . . .
Oh, how happy is the woman who believes in God,
for his promises to her come true” (Luke 1:45).

In response to this inspired welcome Mary herself spoke from a full heart words that have brought joy and comfort to many God-fearing women. She said:

“My heart is overflowing with praise of my Lord,

my soul is full of joy in God my Saviour.
For he has deigned to notice me, his humble servant
and all generations to come
will call me the happiest of women!
The One who can do all things
has done great things for me—
oh, holy is his Name!
Truly, his mercy rests on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has swept away the high and mighty.
He has set kings down from their thrones
and lifted up the humble.
He has satisfied the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands'' (Luke 1:46-53).

Two women, one elderly, and the other so very young, found a deep friendship as they pondered the mystery of God's purpose, which each of them held in her heart.

For about three months Mary remained with Elisabeth. In the quiet and godly atmosphere of this home where man and wife feared God and studied the Holy Scriptures, Mary could adjust her mind to what had happened, and what lay before her as the expectant mother of the only prophet after the time of Adam to have been born without a human father. The only strange element in their household to which she soon became used, was the absence of any man's voice, for until the birth of John, Zacharias remained dumb and could not talk. According to the word of the angel Gabriel in the Temple, he had not spoken a word, and would not do so until the naming of his little son.

After three months Mary returned to her home and the time came for Elisabeth's child to be born. Her relatives and neighbours heard of the great mercy the Lord had shown her in granting a child in her old age and they shared in her joy.

At last the day came for the naming of the little boy. It was on the eighth day at circumcision, and they were going to call the child Zacharias after his father. For nine long months Zacharias had remained dumb, unable to talk, according to the word of the angel, and as he could not speak up at the naming ceremony, Elisabeth, the mother, said:

''Oh, no! He must be called John.''

''But none of your relations is called John,''' they replied. And they made signs to his father to see what name he wanted the child to have. He beckoned for a writing tablet and wrote the words, ''His name is John'', which greatly surprised everybody.

Then his power of speech suddenly came back, and his first words were to thank God. The neighbours were awe-struck at this, and all these incidents were reported everywhere in the hill-country of Judaea. People turned the whole matter over in their hearts, and said: "What is this child's future going to be? For the Lord's blessing is plainly upon him" (Luke 1:60-66).

Joseph—protector of Jesus and Mary

Meanwhile, whispers of Mary's pregnancy had reached Joseph. His heart was grieved. He thought of the shame and dishonour which would come on Mary and the child. He pictured how men and women would curse the babe, and call it a bastard.

Joseph was a man who feared God and lived a righteous life. He knew in his heart he could not take to his house in marriage a pregnant girl. It was against all the teaching of the *Torah*.³ As yet he knew nothing of the mystery of her conception, he thought only of that which would come to the mind of all who heard and discovered the fact of her pregnancy.

Being a humble and sensitive man, he decided to break off the engagement very quietly, settle matters with Mary's relatives, and look for another wife.

As Joseph turned the matter over in his mind, trying to decide when and how to approach Mary's household, he had a dream. The ancient record tells us:

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife! What she has conceived is conceived through the Holy Spirit, and she will give birth to a son, whom you will call Jesus ('the Saviour') for it is he who will save his people from their sins."

All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet—

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel . . .

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel had told him. He married Mary, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son. Then he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:20-25).

Few in Nazareth knew the secret Mary and Joseph kept locked in their hearts. Relatives, neighbours and friends were not to witness the

birth of Jesus. Only some years later would Joseph return to Nazareth, by which time Jesus would be a young boy.

Mary and Joseph lived at a time when Palestine was occupied by Roman administrators. Cantonments were set up in strategic areas, and Rome ruled through puppet kings and princes.

At the time Jesus was born, the famous Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, was in power. He had finally thwarted all other contenders for the position of supreme ruler, and as the legally adopted son of Julius Caesar had defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra at the famous sea battle of Actium. His full name was Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, and in the year 30 BC the title "Augustus" was conferred on him by the Roman Senate. His rule lasted from 30 BC to 14 AD and many historians have termed this the golden age of Rome—a time when poets and writers such as Virgil and Horace flourished.

A system of taxation required the registration of names of the heads of households according to their ancestral homes. It was the proclamation of Caesar Augustus that all the inhabited Roman world should be registered that caused Joseph to take Mary, and leaving Nazareth, to proceed some 100 miles southward to David's town Bethlehem, to register his name and that of his engaged wife in the census. Joseph was a direct descendant of King David. Bethlehem was the town in which David's great grandfather, Obed, had been born some 1100 years earlier, as recorded in the writing of the prophets, and where David had himself been born over 1000 years before Jesus.

Mary was now towards the end of her pregnancy.

So many travelers flocked into Bethlehem that accommodation became a problem.

As Joseph and Mary neared Bethlehem, after over four days' travel from Nazareth, they must have longed for a good night's rest. Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem, so the inns were full of travellers, many of them registering their names in the census.

From ancient times—from the days of Abraham the Friend of God—the elders had preserved records of births and names of forefathers according to their tribes. Even during the times when as refugees the people of God had lived in Babylon and Persia, the descendants of Abraham had preserved their genealogical records, and to this day these records are found in the *Torah*, the historical books and the writings of the Prophets.

At the time Joseph and Mary may not have realised that quietly but with sure purpose the plan of God was being worked out to ensure that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. The ancient prophets had pointed to this town as the birthplace of the Messiah as it is written in the prophet Micah:

But you, Bethlehem in Ephrathah, small as you are to be among Judah's clans, out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by (Micah 5:2, N.E.B.).

Joseph and Mary, weary from the days of travel along the dusty roads, came at last to the end of their 100-mile journey. Mary felt very heavy. Joseph could see the dark rings of weariness around her eyes. Drawing her cloak about her she waited, seated on the ground, while Joseph searched for a room in the inn. But there was no room at all. They camped in the courtyard with other travelers and the mules and donkeys.

It was there in the privacy of a corner by a manger where the animals munched their fodder, that Mary as the record states:⁴

gave birth to her first child, a son. And as there was no place for them inside the inn, she wrapped him up and laid him in a manger (Luke 2:7).

The birth of Jesus announced

The night of the birth of Mary's son, Jesus the Messiah, special signs alerted poor shepherds who were watching their flocks of sheep and goats on the hillside near Bethlehem. It is recorded:

Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood before them, the splendour of the Lord blazed around them, and they were terror-stricken. But the angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid! Listen, I bring you glorious news of great joy which is for all the people. This very day, in David's town, a Saviour has been born for you. He is Christ,⁵ the Lord. Let this prove it to you: you will find the baby, wrapped up and lying in a manger.”

And in a flash there appeared with the angel a vast host of the armies of Heaven, praising God, saying,

“Glory to God in the highest Heaven! Peace upon earth among men of goodwill!”

When the angels left them and went back into Heaven, the shepherds said to each other,

“Now let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they went as fast as they could and they found Mary and Joseph—

and the baby lying in the manger. And when they had seen this sight, they told everybody what had been said to them about the little child. And all those who heard them were amazed at what the shepherds said. But Mary treasured all these things and turned them over in her mind. The shepherds went back to work, glorifying and praising God for everything that they had heard and seen, which had happened just as they had been told (Luke 2:9-20).

Circumcision and purification

According to the covenant with Abraham, the friend of God, and his descendants, every boy was circumcised on the eighth day. So at the end of eight days Mary's son was circumcised,

and he was called Jesus, the name given to him by the angel before his conception (Luke 2:21).

Nearly six weeks later after the days of purification for women according to the law had been completed, Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to God. The *Torah* instructed every God-fearing family:

“Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.”

They also offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law—

“A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:23-24).

In the *Torah* a lamb was required for sacrifice, and only if the family was too poor was the woman permitted to offer the doves or pigeons.

Joseph and Mary were poor. Joseph was a hard-working carpenter, and they were travelers away from home. The great wonder and mystery of the birth of the Messiah was God's choice of an artisan family identified with the hard-working proletariat, rather than the rich ruler in a palace, or the learned priestly family in the temple.

In and around the Temple thronged men and women daily worshipping God and longing to know him more fully. They were sickened by the evil, greed, hate and cruelty around them, and were living in expectation of the Salvation of God's people.

One such man was named Simeon.

Simeon and Anna

(Simeon) was an upright man, devoted to the service of God, living in expectation of the Restoration of (Jacob). His heart was open to the Holy Spirit, and it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. He had been led by the Spirit to go into the Temple, and when Jesus' parents brought the child in to have done to him what the Law required, he took him up in his arms, blessed God and said—

“Now, Lord, you are dismissing your servant in peace, as you promised!

For with my own eyes I have seen your salvation which you have made ready for all peoples to see—a light to show truth to the gentiles and bring glory to your people . . .”

(Joseph and Mary) were still amazed at what was said about the child, when Simeon gave them his blessing. He said to Mary, the child's mother,

“This child is destined . . . to set up a standard which many will attack—for he will expose the secret thoughts of many hearts. And for you . . . your very soul will be pierced by a sword” (Luke 2:25-35).

There was also present (at the Temple), Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, who was a prophetess. She was a very old woman, having had seven years' married life and was now a widow of eighty-four. She spent her whole life in the Temple and worshipped God night and day with fastings and prayers. She came up at this very moment, praised God and spoke about Jesus to all those in Jerusalem who were expecting redemption (Luke 2:36-38).

Joseph and Mary then returned to Bethlehem and rented a house, where Mary nursed the babe while Joseph worked at his trade of carpentry.

Joseph was now the legal guardian of Jesus the son of Mary, and Jesus as the adopted son became an heir to the throne of David. Most people assumed that Joseph was the father of Jesus, not knowing the mystery of his conception.

After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary lived as man and wife. They had four sons and several daughters.

King Herod's attempt to kill the Baby Jesus

Far away in eastern lands learned men who studied the stars, named *Maji*, had watched an unusually bright star. As they conferred together they concluded that this was a sign that a child was to be born as King of the people of God. Where else would a king be born than in the holy city Jerusalem⁶ the place of the holy Temple, the city from where David the king appointed by God had ruled?

So they set out on a journey traveling across the deserts,

making for Jerusalem and enquiring as they went, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we have come to pay homage to him" (Matthew 2:1-2).

King Herod's spies at every eating house and inn, soon reported their words, and:

when (the King) heard about this he was deeply perturbed, as indeed were all other people living in Jerusalem (Matthew 2:3).

King Herod the Great of Judaea had already reigned for nearly 36 years, during which time he had cleverly sided with successive Roman rulers. He had executed 45 members of the Sanhedrin,⁷ had killed his second wife Mariamme, and three years before Jesus was born had caused his two sons by Mariamme—Alexander and Aristobulus—to be strangled.

Such a king as Herod the Great lived in constant fear of assassination, and any possible rival to his throne could not be tolerated. As soon as news reached him of the searching of the *Maji* he called the scribes and chief priests,

and asked them where "Christ" should be born. Their reply was:

"In Bethlehem, in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote about the matter—

And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah,

Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah:

For out of thee shall come forth a governor,

Which shall be shepherd of my people . . ." (Matthew 2:4-6).

King Herod then very cunningly called the *Maji* privately and found out from them the exact time the star appeared. They told him it was over a year ago.

Then he sent them off to Bethlehem saying, "When you get there, search for this little child with the utmost care. And when you have found him report back to me—so that I may go and worship him too."

The wise men listened to the king and then went on their way, to

Bethlehem. And now the star, which they had seen in the east, went in front of them until at last it shone immediately above the place where the little child lay. The sight of the star filled them with indescribable joy.

So they went into the house and saw the little child with his mother Mary. And they fell on their knees and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts—gold, incense and myrrh.

Then, since they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by a different route.

But after they had gone the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up now, take the little child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you. For Herod means to seek out the child and kill him."

So Joseph got up, and taking the child and his mother with him set off for Egypt that same night, where he remained until Herod's death (Matthew 2:8-15).

In the first few months of life, Jesus an innocent babe in his mother's arms, became the object of hatred by men who were in rebellion against God by their wicked and sinful lives.

When Herod saw that he had been fooled by the wise men he was furiously angry. He issued orders for the execution of all male children of two years and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding district—basing his calculation on his careful questioning of the wise men (Matthew 2:16).

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold such a tragic and sorrowful event in these words:

A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she would not be comforted, because they are not (Matthew 2:18).

Jesus in Egypt for safety

In Egypt Jesus remained safely with his mother Mary—and Joseph. He was later to make clear in his preaching that God Almighty, the Compassionate and Merciful, has equal love and desire for the well-being of all mankind, not just one section or small clique. He sent the Messiah for protection to Egypt for it was from Egypt according to the prophet the word would be fulfilled:

Out of Egypt did I call my son (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15).

When Herod died, an angel told Joseph to return to his land. Because Joseph feared Herod's son Archelaus, who was ruling in his place over Judaea, he went north to the city Nazareth where the angel had first announced the wonderful news to Mary that she would become the virgin mother of Jesus the Messiah.

The quiet years at Nazareth

From approximately 4 BC to 26/27 AD,⁸ a period of about 30 years, little factual record is supplied concerning the childhood and upbringing of Jesus the Messiah. A number of legends fill in details which are open to doubt. We sometimes wish that the All Wise God had caused details of these important years to be recorded, but in his wisdom he did not protect for permanent written record any but one incident at the age of 12 years.

The record in the Holy Gospel centres around the birth of Jesus the Christ, and on his public teaching and many acts of love and mercy to the human race. We submit to the will of God in the silences as well as the record.

One brief glance at Jesus the Messiah in his 12th year is given in an incident at Jerusalem. Up till this age we are merely told:

The child grew up and became strong and full of wisdom.

And God's blessing was upon him (Luke 2:40).

Once a year at the time of the Passover festival Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem. A crowd of pilgrims from many cities and villages traveled to the Holy City to participate in the ancient customs in the Temple, surrounding the Passover remembrance of their deliverance from slavery over 1280 years previously.

The record states:

When (Jesus) was twelve years old they went up to the city as usual for the festival. When it was over they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, without his parents' knowledge. They went a day's journey assuming that he was somewhere in their company, and then they began to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. They failed to find him, however, and turned back to the city, looking for him as they went. Three days later, they found him—in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All those who heard him were astonished at his powers of comprehension and at the answers that he gave. When Joseph and Mary saw him, they could hardly believe their eyes, and his mother said to him,

“Why have you treated us like this, my son? Here have your father and I been worried, looking for you everywhere!”

And Jesus replied,

“But why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”⁹

But they did not understand his reply. Then he went home with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them (Luke 2:42-51).

At the young age of 12 Jesus was hungering after the Word of God, he was sitting among the learned teachers of the *Torah* in the Temple listening as they taught, asking penetrating questions, memorising their answers, just as he had memorised the *Torah* in the small synagogues¹⁰ in his home city of Nazareth.

Mary gently rebuked her son, but he showed surprise that Mary and Joseph did not realise that he would be spending his time in the Temple among the teachers of the Law of God.

As an obedient son Jesus returned with them to Nazareth and from two passages of Holy Scriptures it appears that the local people of Nazareth knew Jesus as “the carpenter’s son” (Matthew 13:55).

Alongside Joseph, Jesus learned the trade of a carpenter. He dignified the artisan, the manual worker who is skilled with his hands. He could show roughened hands which had earned money for the family, and he was not ashamed of hard work. Later, when apparently Joseph died, for we hear no more of him, Jesus took his place in the shop and became known as

the carpenter, Mary’s son, the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon; and his sisters are living here with us! (Mark 6:3).

Followers of the example of Jesus are not ashamed to work with their hands. In the world of today many idle men sit around talking because a false sense of honour or pride, or of being born in a rich family, prevents their soiling their hands. The cure for poverty among the masses is hard work and productivity. If all the idle in poor countries followed the example of Jesus a change would take place in the first few years.

This one and only incident, between the birth of Jesus and his entry on the public service of God at approximately the age of 30, concludes with the comment:

As Jesus continued to grow in body and mind, he grew also in the love of God and of those who knew him (Luke 2:52).

John the Baptist begins to preach

Thirty years had slipped by since John was named by Zacharias his father. Tiberius was now the Emperor of Rome in place of Caesar Octavianus Augustus. Pontius Pilate governs Judaea; and two sons of Herod the Great rule other provinces. Prince Herod Antipas rules Galilee and Perea, and Prince Herod Philip rules the area east of the River Jordan and Lake Galilee.¹¹ If anything has happened in these 30 years it is a heightening of expectancy, a tingling of the senses. During this period John had grown up in the godly home of his father and mother Zacharias and Elisabeth. In such homes where God is honoured, and harmony and love prevail, God prepares his servants for the work to which he appoints them at the proper time.

The silent years of preparation passed in lonely places where John spoke with God in prayer and became strong in spirit for the task of preparing the way for the coming of Jesus, son of Mary, and the preaching and good works he was to do. The record says about John

He lived in lonely places until the day came for him to show himself (Luke 1:80).

John had become a man of the deserts. He had subdued the cravings of his body and had learned to survive on locusts and wild honey. He dressed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. And it was in the desert that the Word of God came to this great prophet and he began to preach.

According to the record of Luke the historian we read:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius . . . the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, while he was in the desert. He went into the whole country round about the Jordan proclaiming baptism as a mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins, as the book of the prophet Isaiah says—

The voice of one crying in the wilderness,

Make ye ready the way of the Lord,

Make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

And every mountain and hill shall be brought low:

And the crooked shall become straight,

And the rough ways smooth:

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

So John used to say to the crowds who came out to be baptised by him,

“Who warned you, you serpent's brood, to escape from the wrath to come? See that your lives prove that your hearts are really changed! Don't start thinking that you can say to yourselves, ‘We are

Abraham's children', for I tell you that God could produce children of Abraham out of these stones! The axe already lies at the root of the tree, and the tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire'' (Luke 3:1-9).

The records which are continually quoted as the basis for all that we can accurately know of the life and service of Jesus and John are historical documents that interlock with people and places referred to by secular historians. The Emperor is one such person in the above quotation.

John began to preach throughout the region on the east and west banks of the River Jordan, calling on the people to turn from their sins and be baptised¹² in the water, as a public sign that in future they would follow God's standards of righteousness. Many tried to argue that being descendants of Abraham guaranteed them acceptance with God. As today people pride themselves in belonging to this religion or that association with Abraham, the Friend of God. But John argued that they must show the fruit of a good life given to God.

Then the crowds would ask him, "Then what shall we do?"

And his answer was, "The man who has two shirts must share with the man who has none, and the man who has food must do the same."

Some of the tax-collectors also came to him to be baptised and they asked him,

"Master, what are we to do?"

"You must not demand more than you are entitled to," he replied.

And the soldiers asked him, "And what are we to do?"

"Don't bully people, don't bring false charges, and be content with your pay," he replied.

The people were in a great state of expectation and were all inwardly debating whether John could possibly be Christ. But John answered them all in these words,

"It is true that I baptise you with water, but the one who follows me is stronger than I am—indeed I am not fit to undo his shoe-laces—he will baptise you with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He will come all ready to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to clear the rubbish from his threshing-floor. The wheat he will gather into his barn and the chaff he will burn with a fire that cannot be put out."

These and many other things John said to the people as he exhorted them and announced the good news (Luke 3:10-18).

The interest of the people as a result of John's preaching heightened the expectancy that John himself was the Messiah, but all the time the true Messiah remained hidden until the timing of God should urge him forward.

Jesus appears in public for the first time

It was at this time that Jesus emerged from 18 years of obscurity in Nazareth. We read nothing of any historical accuracy covering the years from the age of 12 until he was about 30 years of age, then the ancient records state:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to prevent him. "I need you to baptise *me*", he said. "Surely *you* do not come to me?" But Jesus replied, "It is right for us to meet all the Law's demands—let it be so now."

Then John agreed to baptise him. Jesus came straight out of the water afterwards, and suddenly the heavens opened and he (John) saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting upon him (Matthew 3:13-17).

Without waiting for any public recognition, with only a few who had heard and witnessed what had taken place, Jesus quietly slipped through the crowds and proceeded to a lonely place. The records state:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit up into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. After a fast of forty days and nights he was very hungry (Matthew 4:1).

Jesus is tempted

The discipline of fasting is understood by many. The demands of the body are controlled and bodily desires become the servant rather than the master of the person. Jesus was not pulled here and there by every crying need of his body. At all times he controlled what he would do, and as a final preparation for his public ministry he fasted.

Satan—also known as the devil—the enemy of goodness, the rebel against God Most High, the former mighty angel of light who had seceded from God's kingdom and set up his own rule on this earth, now personally came to challenge the Messiah. We know that finally the devil will be overthrown forever. Sin will no longer spoil this beautiful world, and in the place of hatred and war, love and peace will reign in all God's universe. But up until this moment Satan and evil control mankind to a greater or lesser degree.

In this confrontation between the tempter and Jesus, three differing methods were put to Jesus the Messiah, by which he was offered authority over mankind on earth.

The first temptation—by bread

Coming to him (the devil said), "tell these stones to turn into loaves" (Matthew 4:3).

Promises of cheap food, plentiful consumer goods without much labour, are often the method politicians use to gain votes in an election. The Roman emperors kept their popularity with the masses of the proletariat by distributing free wheat in Rome. Revolutionary promises that the goods of the rich will equalise the misery of the poor are sometimes kept, and the wicked exploitation of the poor minimised. But ultimately this method of offering material things, necessary and important as they are, to meet the deepest cries of the human heart, fails. Jesus rejected this method, knowing that the hungry and thirsty spirit of humanity cannot be satisfied by food.

He answered: "The scripture says 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

How well Jesus knew the fickleness of crowds. Promise and give them free bread and they would acclaim and follow such a leader, but the moment problems arose they would turn on the hand that fed them.

Jesus had no plans to set up an earthly kingdom at that time. His final authority over men and women rests on spiritual principles the first of which is readiness to live by the will of God as expressed in the Scripture.

The second temptation—popularity and acceptance

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the highest pinnacle of the Temple . . . he said, "throw yourself down.

For the scripture says—

He shall give his angels charge concerning thee:

And on their hands they shall bear thee up.

Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Matthew 4:5-6).

Popular acceptance, even by such a miracle as Jesus floating safely down from the pinnacle of the Temple to the great crowds below, would not alter the evil heart. On the surface a change may appear, but deep down in the heart sin and rebellion towards God can remain unchanged. On several occasions Jesus refused to work miracles like a magician to satisfy curiosity. He refrained from using a cheap kind of power. His miracles were used only to benefit mankind. So he rejected this tempta-

tion, and also answered the perversion and twisting of Holy Scripture by the devil.

“Yes,” retorted Jesus, “and the scripture also says ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God’” (Matthew 4:7).

The final temptation—power by following the devil

The records state:

Once again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and from there showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. “Everything there I will give you,” he said to him, “if you will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:8-9).

Many great men have succumbed to this temptation in their lust for power over the world. They use lies to keep facts from the public, and power over the masses is maintained by a mixture of falsehood and truth. On one occasion when certain Jews opposed Jesus he said to them:

“If God were really your Father . . . you would have loved me. For I came from God; and I am here. I did not come of my own accord—he sent me, and I am here. Why do you not understand my words? It is because you cannot hear what I am really saying. Your father is the devil, and what you are wanting to do is what your father longs to do. He always was a murderer, and has never dealt with the truth, since the truth will have nothing to do with him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks in character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. And it is because I speak the truth that you will not believe me” (John 8:42-45).

Jesus refused to worship the devil or to follow any of his methods. His influence over mankind depends entirely on *truth*. He rejects deceit, hypocrisy, lies, false propaganda, and insists that all who believe in him must follow and accept the same standards of truth.

In this temptation the devil claimed all the power and magnificence of all the kingdoms of mankind. Jesus did not rebut or contradict this claim. In his teaching he referred to this world as being in the hands of the devil. What he did announce was the Good News that escape is possible, and entrance into the kingdom of heaven is promised to all who reject the devil and his works, repenting of their sins and turning to God in obedience. Jesus rejected the devil’s method of gaining control over the world and replied:

“Away with you, Satan! . . . the scripture says,

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10).

From the beginning to the end of the teaching and preaching of Jesus he emphasized that the first commandment is:

The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength (Mark 12:30).

His answer to all the devil's temptations was utter obedience to the Lord God.

Defeated, the devil left Jesus for a time, and angels came to him and took care of him.

Jesus returns to John

Following these 40 days of temptation, Jesus returned to the crowds still flocking to hear John. The officials in Jerusalem had meanwhile sent priests to John with the same questions that were being circulated among the crowds. They asked him: who he was.

He admitted with complete candour, "I am not Christ."

So they asked him, "Who are you then? Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he replied.

"Well then," they asked again, "who are you? We want to give an answer to those who sent us. What would you call yourself?"

"I am a voice shouting in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Now some of the Pharisees had been sent to John, and they questioned him, "What is the reason, then, for your baptising people if you are not Christ and not Elijah and not the Prophet?"

To which John returned, "I do baptise—with water. But somewhere among you stands a man you do not know. He comes after me, it is true, but I am not fit to undo his shoes!" (John 1:20-27).

In the person and character of John there is a unique humility and self-effacement. He was a man of God wholly committed to fulfilling his part in the plan of God, and seeking no glory for himself. He said about Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease" (John 3:30).

On the day following the questioning of the priests from Jerusalem:

John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, there is the lamb¹³ of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the man I

meant when I said 'A man comes after me who is always in front of me, for he existed before I was born!' It is true I have not known him, yet it was to make him known . . . that I came and baptised with water."

Then John gave this testimony, "I have seen the Spirit come down like a dove from Heaven and rest upon him. Indeed I did not recognise him, but he who sent me to baptise with water told me this: 'The one on whom you will see the Spirit coming down and resting is the man who baptises with the Holy Spirit!'" (John 1:29-33).

John had perhaps already begun to sense an opposition from official quarters which in a very short time would result in his arrest. The pointing out of the Messiah was now to be made more clearly, and some of John's own followers were directed to join Jesus. The very next day after John's reply to the priests,

(He) was again standing with two of his disciples. He looked straight at Jesus as he walked along and said, "There is the lamb of God!" The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned round and when he saw them following him, spoke to them. "What do you want?" he said.

"(Teacher) where are you staying?" they replied.

"Come and see," returned Jesus.

So they went and saw where he was staying and remained with him the rest of that day. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon). One of the two men who had heard what John said and had followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He went straight off and found his own brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (meaning Christ).¹⁴ And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:35-42).

Andrew and Peter came from the same province of Galilee as Jesus. As young men they had been attracted to John by his bold preaching. By trade they were fishermen, living at Bethsaida on the lake of Galilee. Jesus now planned to leave John and head north on the three to four days' journey back to Galilee. Just before leaving he invited Philip to join them as Philip also lived in Bethsaida. Together they walked the 50 miles north to Galilee, leaving John still preaching to the crowds.

The wedding at Cana

Soon after arriving at Nazareth Jesus and the small group of his follow-

ers were invited to a wedding at a town called Cana. Cana was about eight miles from Nazareth. The mother of Jesus and many friends and relatives had been invited to the festivities. Here Jesus was to display his power by his first miracle.

It was the custom of that land and time to drink wine, the juice of grapes, as we today drink tea or coffee. Grapes grew in abundance throughout Palestine. The supply of wine was running out at the wedding, and the master of ceremonies would be embarrassed if this happened. The mother of Jesus came to him and said: "They have no more wine." Then she told the servants to obey whatever order Jesus would give.

The record tells us:

In the room were six stone water-jars (actually for the Jewish ceremonial cleansing), each holding about twenty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water", and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of ceremonies", and they did so. When this man tasted the water, which had now become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called out to the bridegroom and said to him, "Everybody I know puts his good wine on first and then when men have had plenty to drink, he brings out the poor stuff. But you have kept back your good wine till now!" Jesus gave this, the first of his signs, at Cana in Galilee. So he showed his glory and his disciples believed in him (John 2:6-11).

The blessing of Jesus on this wedding is to be understood in the light of his teaching about the sanctity of marriage and family life. Jesus taught that God's intention from the beginning of the human race was faithfulness between one man and woman in marriage until death parts them.

One day the Pharisees put a test-question to Jesus:

"Is it right," they asked, "for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds whatever?"

"Haven't you read," he answered, "that the one who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said: 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two separate people but one. No man therefore must separate what God has joined together."

"Then why," they retorted, "did Moses command us to give a written divorce-notice and dismiss the woman?"

"It was because you knew so little of the meaning of love that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives! But that was not the original prin-

ciple. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife on any grounds except her unfaithfulness and marries some other woman commits adultery.”

His disciples said to him, “If that is a man’s position with his wife, it is not worth getting married!”

“It is not everybody who can accept this principle,” replied Jesus, “—only those who have a special gift. For some are incapable of marriage from birth, some are made incapable by the action of men, and some have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let the man who can accept what I have said accept it” (Matthew 19:3-12).

The world 2000 years ago and the world of today is corrupted by sin. Among educated Romans there was unfaithfulness between husband and wife and many divorces. Prince Herod Antipas had been guilty of the sin of adultery and John had rebuked him for it. Among rich and poor many men and women indulged their lusts, departing from the standard God had set for human society. Jesus taught that even the mind is to be controlled from adulterous thoughts. In his famous Sermon on the Mount he said:

“You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her—in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

The truest joy on earth is found in a home where God is worshiped and husband and wife live together in love and harmony, bringing up their children to fear and love God. Jesus came to call men and women back to the rule of God which gives the deepest joy and peace possible on earth.

Yet Jesus was loving and merciful to those who had fallen into sin, and sincerely repented and wanted forgiveness, determined to live a life pleasing to God in the future. One incident shows his compassion. Early one morning he was teaching in the Temple. A large crowd sat around him. The record says:

The scribes and Pharisees brought in to him a woman who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand in front, and then said to him. “Now, master, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. According to the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women to death. Now, what do you say about it?”

They said this to test him, so that they might have some good grounds for an accusation. But Jesus stooped down and began to write with his finger in the dust on the ground. But as they persisted in their questioning, he straightened himself up and said to them, “Let the

one among you who has never sinned throw the first stone at her." Then he stooped down again and continued writing with his finger on the ground. And when they heard what he said, they were convicted by their own consciences, and went out, one by one, beginning with the eldest.

Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing where they had put her. So he stood up and said to her, "Where are they all—did no one condemn you?"

And she said, "No one, sir."

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus to her. "Go away now and do not sin again" (John 8:3-11).

It is significant that these self-righteous leaders did not bring the man—why just the woman? Man's exploitation of defenceless women is not the will of God. In the marriage at Cana Jesus blesses the true union of man and wife who are called to a life of partnership. This is described by Peter, one of the companions of Jesus, in these words:

You husbands should try to understand the wives you live with, honouring them as physically weaker yet equally heirs with you of the grace of life. If you don't do this, you will find it impossible to pray together properly (I Peter 3:7).

Jesus taught by his attitudes to people, by the way he handled situations, as well as by the words he spoke.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem

After the marriage at Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum with his mother and brothers for a few days and then he travelled south to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.¹⁵ At the same feast some 18 years earlier, he had asked many questions of the learned teachers of the Law. Now in the courts of the Temple Jesus watched the crowds bargaining for sacrificial animals. Some were getting the best exchange from the money changers, others were arguing over the price of a sheep. The atmosphere was dominated by money rather than thoughts of God and worship. As Jesus observed the greed of the traders in making money out of religion and superstitions of the poor, he burned with righteous zeal and anger.

The record tells us:

In the Temple-precincts he discovered cattle and sheep dealers and

dove-sellers, as well as money-changers sitting at their tables. So he made a whip of cords and drove the whole lot of them, sheep and cattle as well, out of the Temple. He sent the coins of the money-changers flying and turned their tables upside down. Then he said to the dove-sellers, "Take those things out of here. Don't you dare turn my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered the scripture—The zeal of thine house shall eat me up (John 2:14-17).

From the earliest days of history many professional religious leaders have made money for themselves out of the worshippers. Jesus in righteous anger drove the cattle and traders from the holy place. He taught very clearly:

"No one can fully serve two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and the power of money" (Matthew 6:24).

An observer notes:

"Now the Pharisees, who were very fond of money, heard all this with a sneer" (Luke 16:14).

It is a sad fact that some so-called leaders of the followers of Jesus are like the Pharisees. They have made money their god. Some religious organizations have accumulated vast riches which they invest in businesses which exploit the poor. They administrate great estates, buildings and valuable property for selfish ends. All this is a denial of what Jesus taught, and by his action in the Temple he has shown that he is opposed to any making monetary profit out of the worship of God.

Some religious leaders exploit the superstitious and ignorant for monetary profit. They sell charms to the poor and ignorant to ward off the evil eye. Others make money from religious orphanages or the building of religious centres and places of worship.

From the start of his service, Jesus, the true servant of God, took his place in opposition to vested wealth, and taught against exploiters.

The Jews were opposed to the action of Jesus in turning out the money-changers. They said to him:

"What sign can you give us to justify what you are doing?"

"Destroy this temple," Jesus retorted, "and I will rebuild it in three days!"

To which the Jews replied, "This Temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to rebuild it in three days?" (John 2:18-20).

This statement of Jesus was not understood at the time. Later when he was arrested they would repeat it as a charge against him. He was in fact referring to the temple of his body, and prophesying that he would conquer death by rising again on the third day.

While in Jerusalem at Passover-time, many believed in him during the festivities as they saw the signs that he gave. But Jesus on his side, did not trust himself to them—for he knew them all. He did not need anyone to tell him what people were like: he understood human nature (John 2:23-25).

Not all leaders are corrupt. In every nation and among peoples in all levels of society, are true God-seekers, who hunger after truth and righteousness. These men and women wish to know the truth and are prepared to investigate and question any who can help them. Such a one was Nicodemus, a leading Jew, belonging to the Pharisee party. He had listened to Jesus and heard the controversies, so to avoid undue notice he sought a private interview with Jesus one night while he was in Jerusalem.

“(Teacher),” he began, “we realise that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could show the signs that you show unless God were with him” (John 3:2).

Nicodemus was at least more positive than some other Pharisees. He had already had enough evidence to conclude that Jesus was a teacher sent by God. Now he was to listen to deep truths beyond his understanding, even though a teacher of God’s people.

“Believe me,” returned Jesus, “when I assure you that a man cannot see the kingdom of God without being born again.”

“And how can a man who has grown old possibly be born? replied Nicodemus. “Surely he cannot go into his mother’s womb a second time to be born?”

“I do assure you,” said Jesus, “that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit: you must not be surprised that I told you that all of you must be born again. The wind blows where it likes, you can hear the sound of it but you have no idea where it comes from or where it goes. Nor can you tell how a man is born by the wind of the Spirit.”

“How on earth can things like this happen?” replied Nicodemus.

“So you are the teacher of Israel,” said Jesus, “and you do not understand such things? I assure you that we are talking about what we know and we are witnessing to what we have observed, yet you will not accept our evidence. Yet if I have spoken to you about things which happen on this earth and you will not believe me, what chance is there that you will believe me if I tell you about what happens in Heaven? No one has ever been up to Heaven except the Son of Man¹⁶ who came down from Heaven. The Son of Man was lifted above the heads of men—as Moses lifted up that serpent in the desert—so that

any man who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only¹⁷ Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost, but should have eternal life. God has not sent his Son in to the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it—through him. Any man who believes in him is not judged at all. It is the one who will not believe who stands already condemned, because he will not believe in the character of God's only Son. This is the judgment—that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Everybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But everybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God" (John 3:3-21).

Apparently these words had a deep effect on Nicodemus, because he was one of the very few who assisted in the burial of Jesus, which we will read about later.

Jesus spends time in Judaea

Following the talk with Nicodemus, Jesus went with his disciples to the nearby district of Jordan and taught the people and his disciples. He baptised those who became his followers. Some miles away across the River Jordan in Perea, John was also baptising and preaching. But now more and more people were traveling into Judaea to hear Jesus. The disciples of John were worried and they said to him:

"Rabbi, look, the man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified to, is now baptising and everybody is coming to him!"

"A man can receive nothing at all," replied John, "unless it is given him from Heaven. You yourselves can witness that I said, 'I am not Christ but I have been sent as his forerunner.' It is the bridegroom who possesses the bride, yet the bridegroom's friend who merely stands and listens to him can be overjoyed to hear the bridegroom's voice. That is why my happiness is now complete. He must grow greater and greater and I less and less" (John 3:26-30).

Suddenly the work of John was cut short. Prince Herod Antipas sent soldiers and arrested John, and this was the reason. John had preached repentance and holy living. Prince Antipas had taken Herodias the wife of his half brother, Prince Philip, as his wife. John had said:

“It is not right for you to have this woman” (Matthew 14:4).

Herod Antipas could not tolerate the rebuke of John, and was not prepared to repent and put away his new wife, so he silenced John’s preaching to the crowds by putting him in prison.

From the beginning of history when Cain killed Abel, evil men have hated good men who tell the truth. Many true and faithful prophets and servants of God have been imprisoned and put to death for their faithful preaching of the truth.

Jesus at Sychar’s well en route to Galilee

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested he went back to Galilee (Matthew 4:12).

The area near Jordan was now dangerous for him also. On the way north through the province of Samaria they arrived about half way at the famous well called Jacob’s well. The tomb of Joseph was quite near and also the town of Sychar. While Jesus sat down by the well in the shade to rest, his companions went into the town to buy food. A short time later a local woman came to the well with her rope and waterpot to draw water.

The record states:

“Please give me a drink,” Jesus said to her . . . The Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans) (John 4:8-9).

A deep prejudice existed in the minds of the Jews about the Samaritans, they looked down on them as an inferior race who had compromised faith in one God for a mixed religion going back to the division of Israel under King Rehoboam, a thousand years previously, and which had yet further deteriorated when the Babylonians settled some of their idol worshipers there.

Jesus ignored human prejudices when they originated from the pride and sin of the human heart. The love of Jesus extends to all human society, even though he was born into a Jewish family.

Jesus also did not look down on women. He treated them with respect and honour as equally important and valuable to God in heaven. It was therefore a natural request to a human being, who had the means to draw water, that he as a traveler asked for a drink of cold water.

But when the woman displayed her own prejudice against the Jews,

Jesus turned the topic of conversation to the question of God.

“If you knew what God can give,” (he) replied, “and if you knew who it is that said to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you (running) water!”

The woman was now curious:

“Sir,” (she said) “you have no bucket and this well is deep—where can you get your (running) water? Are you a greater man than our ancestor, Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank here himself with his family, and his cattle?” (John 4:11-12).

In answer to this question Jesus used a method of teaching which spread many of his ideas to the ends of the earth. He took the ordinary basic requirements of life and used them as illustrations to explain God’s purpose for mankind. Water is the most important element of life in the world. It is more important than oil and Jesus uses water to illustrate a spiritual truth.

The woman is thinking of her long walk from Sychar and the return with a heavy water jar, for in those days no taps or pipes brought water to a nearby street or into the house.

Jesus tried to turn her eyes away from her physical needs to God. He said to her:

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks this water I will give him will never be thirsty again. For my gift will become a spring in the man himself, welling up into eternal life.”

But the woman could only think in terms of her physical and material needs.

“Sir, give me this water, so that I may stop being thirsty—and not have to make this journey to draw water any more!” (John 4:15).

Jesus now, with very gentle words tried to help the woman face the real problem in her life, the sin which had blinded her to the vision of God, and held her in obsessive preoccupation with bodily needs.

“Go and call your husband and then come back here,” he said suddenly, changing the subject.

“I haven’t got a husband!” the woman answered.

“You are quite right in saying, ‘I haven’t got a husband’,” replied Jesus, “for you have had five husbands and the man you have now is not your husband at all. Yes, you spoke the truth when you said that.”

“Sir,” said the woman again, “I can see that you are a prophet!” (John 4:16-19).

Jesus with deep insight and knowledge of the way of life of this woman had ultimately turned her eyes to the only solution to her sin—God! She went on:

“Our ancestors worshipped on this hill-side, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship—” (v. 20).

Nearly 2000 years ago rival groups were arguing about Jerusalem, about the proper place to worship. The woman tried to hide from the fact of her sin by a religious discussion that was the topic of the bazaars.

“Believe me,” returned Jesus, “the time is coming when worshipping the Father will not be a matter of ‘on this hill-side’ or ‘in Jerusalem’ . . . Yet the time is coming, yes, and has already come, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in reality” (vs. 21-24).

How much bloodshed would have been avoided if mankind had listened to and understood this profound statement of Jesus to that simple woman at Sychar’s well. Places are no longer important for worship, it is the person of God that is important, and the attitude of truth and worship in the worshiper. Many followers have not understood these words. The evil and tragedy of the so-called Crusades—fighting to conquer and control Jerusalem as a holy place—would have been avoided if it had been understood that God is accessible everywhere and for everyone who wants to be a worshiper. Jerusalem is no longer important as a centre of worship, small communities of God’s people with a true heart can worship anywhere.

“Of course I know that Messiah is coming,” returned the woman, “You know, the one who is called Christ.¹⁸ When he comes he will make everything plain to us” (John 4:25).

Very slowly her mind had turned to the hope of her people, to the longing for one to explain the mysteries of God. She was now ready for the words of Jesus when he said:

“I am Christ speaking to you now” (v. 26).

At this point his disciples arrived from Sychar with the food they had brought. They were very surprised to find Jesus talking to a woman. The disciples had their own prejudices, one of which was to exclude women from the worship of God in the synagogue, and to consider them inferior. But they were afraid to ask him, “What are you talking to her about?”

The woman turned and hurried back to Sychar, bursting with her new-found faith and hope. In a small community most knew the kind of life she lived.

(She) began to say to the people, "Come out and see the man who told me everything I've ever done! Can this be 'Christ'?" (John 4:29).

Then the crowds streamed out of the town towards the well, and many of them believed in Jesus through the woman's testimony. They begged him to stay with them, which he did for two days. As they listened to his teaching, many more believed in him, and they said to the woman:

"We don't believe any longer now because of what you said. We have heard him with our own ears. We know that this really is the Saviour of the World!" (John 4:42).

Jesus preaches and works in Galilee

At the end of the two days at Sychar Jesus and his disciples continued their journey to Galilee, and on arrival the people received him with open arms, for many had been present at the Passover feast in Jerusalem, and had seen him turn out the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals.

Jesus now began

proclaiming the gospel of God, saying,

"The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

News of him spread through all the surrounding district. He taught in their synagogues, to everyone's great admiration (Luke 4:15).

In the nearby city of Capernaum, about 20 miles away from Cana where Jesus was staying at this time, an official watched anxiously as his son tossed and turned in the bed. There now seemed no hope that he would recover, for he was at the point of death.

"Jesus has arrived at Cana" came the news, for Jesus was now in the town where he had turned the water into wine. In desperation, as a last hope, the man hurried to Jesus and begged him to come and heal his son.

Jesus said to him "Will you never believe unless you see signs and wonders?"

"Sir," returned the official, "please come down before my boy dies!"

“You can go home,” returned Jesus, “your son is alive.”

And the man believed what Jesus had said to him and went on his way.

On the journey back his servants met him with the report: “Your son is alive and well.” So he asked them at what time he had begun to recover, and they replied: “The fever left him yesterday at one o’clock in the afternoon.” Then the father knew that this must have happened at the very moment when Jesus had said to him, “Your son is alive.” And he and his whole household believed in Jesus. This, then, was the second sign that Jesus gave on his return from Judaea to Galilee (John 4:48-54).

Jesus turned out of Nazareth

Shortly after, Jesus was at his home town of Nazareth with some of his disciples. For years, from his boyhood days, he had gone every Sabbath¹⁹ to the local synagogue. As a youth he had taken his turn reading the Holy Scriptures as part of the Sabbath service.

On this particular Sabbath

he stood up to read the scriptures and the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book and found the place where these words are written—

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:

He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovering of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty them that are bruised,

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Then he shut the book, handed it back to the attendant and resumed his seat. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed upon him and he began to tell them, “This very day this scripture has been fulfilled, while you have been listening to it!”

Everybody heard what he said. They were amazed at the beautiful words that came from his lips, and they kept saying,

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

So he said to them,

“I expect you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Cure yourself, doctor!’

Let us see you do in your own country all that we have heard that you did in Capernaum!” (Luke 4:17-23).

They had heard of the miracle at the wedding at Cana, they also knew of the official's son cured at Capernaum. Jesus had also preached with power in other synagogues of the province, but here in his home town he was not honoured. Even in families today it is difficult for an elderly grandmother grinding wheat by hand in a village to imagine that a little boy crawling on the floor will one day be a well qualified PhD, and perhaps a president of his nation. The men in the synagogue could only say:

“Isn't this Joseph's son?”

So Jesus went on to say what would be quoted throughout the world as a proverb:

“I assure you that no prophet is ever welcomed in his own country.”

He then proceeded to give them two illustrations from the ancient Scriptures of the way in which God's love had been shown for the poor and bruised.

He said:

“I tell you the plain fact that in Elijah's time, when the heavens were shut up for three and a half years and there was a great famine through the whole country, there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was not sent to any of them. But he *was* sent to Sarepta, to a widow in the country of Sidon. In the time of Elisha the prophet, there were many lepers in Israel, but not one of them was healed—only Naaman, the Syrian.” But when they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was furiously angry. They sprang to their feet and drove him right out of the town, taking him to the brow of the hill on which it was built, intending to hurl him down headlong. But he walked straight through the whole crowd and went on his way (Luke 4:25-30).

Why did these two anecdotes, with which all present were familiar and which were accepted as truthful records of their past history, suddenly change the worshipers at the synagogue into a crowd mad with hate and blood lust? They now intended to kill Jesus—the boy who had grown up among them, the young carpenter of the village, loved and respected by many.

The Jews of Palestine 2000 years ago were much like many religious groups today. They were intolerant of all others to the point of repressing any suggestion that truth and God's love could reach to their enemies, or that God's favour could rest on non-Jews.

The widow of Sarepta who kept the prophet Elijah alive in the days of a great famine was a non-Jew. The prophet was sent to her, a Gentile, rather than to his own people. Naaman was an idol worshiper, and

enemy general, and yet God led Elisha to heal him of leprosy, because he truly sought God with his whole heart and longed for God's touch of healing. The full story can be read in II Kings 5:1-14.

Jesus taught clearly in plain terms that God loved the world and *all* its peoples, and that no follower of Jesus should keep in his heart racist prejudices, religious fanatical intolerance, or an unreadiness to extend a helping hand even to enemies.

At the very brink of death, when the crowd was about to hurl Jesus over the cliff, a stillness and awe came over them, and they paused as he quietly turned and walked through the mob, sadly left Nazareth and proceeded to Capernaum about 20 miles away.

Jesus makes his centre Capernaum

Capernaum, on the shore of Lake Galilee, now became a new centre for Jesus after he was turned out of Nazareth, and in this and nearby cities and countryside he taught the crowds of poor peasants and artisans, as well as giving special advanced instruction to his disciples. Here in the province of Galilee he also healed many sick people.

One Sabbath day when Jesus was teaching at Capernaum there was a man in the synagogue under the influence of some evil spirit, for he began shouting out:

“What have you got to do with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to kill us? I know who you are—you're God's holy one!”

Jesus cut him short,

“Hold your tongue and get out of him!”

At this the evil spirit convulsed the man, let out a loud scream and left him. Everyone present was so astounded that people kept saying to each other,

“What on earth has happened? This new teaching has authority behind it. Why, he even gives his orders to evil spirits and they obey him!” And his reputation spread like wild-fire through the whole Galilean district (Mark 1:23-28).

Many people are mentally sick just as others are physically sick. Modern psychiatry and the use of certain medicines have cured many of the mentally ill through meeting a deficiency in their physical or mental systems. Some are physically ill because of worry, repressed guilt, or bitter hatred and bottled-up frustration. For such the road to health necessitates peace of mind and assurance of forgiveness, or a change of heart which produces love in the place of hatred.

But despite all the advance of medical sciences, believers in God maintain that an evil power in the world named the devil—and at times hundreds of thousands of his servant demons—do possess men and women and they become possessed with one or more evil spirits.

On this occasion as on other occasions, Jesus discerned that the man was possessed with a demon, and he therefore spoke with authority to the demon saying, “Get out of him!”

The people observed his power over evil spirits.

After this incident Jesus went to the house of Peter and Andrew with James and John.

(Peter’s) mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever, and they lost no time in telling Jesus about her. He went up to her, took her hand and helped her to her feet. The fever left her, and she began to see to their needs.

Late that evening after sunset, they kept bringing to him all who were sick or troubled by evil spirits. The whole population of the town gathered round the doorway. And he healed great numbers of people who were suffering from various forms of disease. In many cases he expelled evil spirits; but would not allow them to say a word, for they knew perfectly well who he was (Mark 1:30-34).

Earlier when the crowds had been pressing on Jesus by the Lake of Galilee he had asked for a boat. Sitting down in it he taught the crowds on the lakeshore with greater ease. The boat belonged to Peter and Andrew whom he had met when they were together with John at the Jordan River.

When Jesus had concluded his teaching, and the crowd had begun to scatter, Jesus said to Peter:

“Push out now into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

Simon (Peter) replied, “Master! We’ve worked all night and never caught a thing!” (Luke 5:4).

As an experienced fisherman on his home lake he knew the customs of fish. This was his trade. That was not the time or place to catch fish. But his respect for Jesus moved him to say,

“But if you say so, I’ll let down the nets” (v. 5).

As soon as the nets were in the water a pulling and splashing and struggling told them they had caught an enormous shoal of fish, so big that their nets began to tear.

Peter signaled to James and John, in the other boat, to come and help them. They came and filled both boats to the sinking point. This catch was so exceptional that Peter recognised it as the hand of God, and the immediate reaction was to sense his sinfulness in the presence of Jesus.

Falling to his knees before Jesus in the boat, surrounded by piles of gasping fish, he cried out:

“Keep away from me, Lord, for I’m only a sinful man!”

For he and his companions . . . were staggering at the haul of fish they had made (Luke 5:8-10).

Jesus replied to Peter,

“Don’t be afraid, Simon, From now on your catch will be *men*.” So they brought the boats ashore, left everything and followed him (vs. 10-11).

These disciples Peter, James and John, were to become witnesses to the most intimate details of Jesus’ actions and teachings. The grace of God can pick up very ordinary men and change them into bold witnesses ready to be martyred as in the case of Peter, later killed by the Emperor Nero, and James, later killed by Herod Antipas who was shortly to kill John the Baptist.

From now onwards these men, soon to be joined by others, constantly remained with Jesus.

In the midst of many pressures and claims for help by the crowds, Jesus withdrew for quiet meditation and prayer. Often he arose long before dawn to pray. One day he rose very early and went to a deserted place, there to speak with God in prayer and receive direction for the next step. Into his heart came the certainty that he must travel to other cities, towns and villages proclaiming the good news about God’s kingdom.²⁰

Simon and his companions went in search of him, and when they found him, they said,

“Everyone is looking for you” (Mark 1:36-37).

Jesus replied:

“I must tell the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well—that is my mission” (Luke 4:43).

So they left Capernaum and traveled throughout the province of Galilee preaching in their houses of worship and expelling evil spirits.

One moving event of these days was the healing of a leper by Jesus. Leprosy in the days of Jesus was a greatly feared disease, for there was no known cure. Lepers were not allowed into the cities, no one went near them, and certainly no one touched them. Some compassionate God-fearers placed food where lepers later came and took it away. Those in the last stages of the disease looked monstrous and smelt like death.

Yet some had hope!

A leper came to Jesus, knelt in front of him and appealed to him,

“If you want to, you can make me clean” (Mark 1:40).

The expressed longing to be clean to be able to mix with others had driven this leper to ask for help.

Jesus was a man full of compassion for people in their misery. He was filled with pity for the man and breaking all fear, taboo and prejudice he stretched out his hand and placing it on the leper said:

“Of course I want to—*be clean!*” (v. 41).

At once the rosy flush of health replaced the sickly grey of illness, the leprosy left him and he became quite clean.

Jesus was often hindered from effective work because of the huge crowds that gathered wherever he went. So he requested the healed leper to keep the matter quiet, saying

“Mind you say nothing at all to anybody” (Mark 1:44).

Only one exception was permitted, and that was the requirement of obtaining permission from the priest for public readmittance to society. The priests fulfilled the dual role of public health officials as well as religious leaders. So Jesus said:

“Mind you say nothing at all to anybody. Go straight off and show yourself to the priest, and make the offerings for your cleansing which Moses prescribed, as public proof of your recovery” (v. 44).

But the healed leper could not keep quiet. On his way to the priest he spread the story of his healing far and wide.

In a day of no hospitals and only very simple medical cures, any news like this had the effect of causing great crowds of sick people to flock to Jesus as soon as he entered any city, therefore it became impossible for him to show his face in the towns and he had to remain in lonely places. Even so people crowded to him from all quarters to be healed.

The record tells us Jesus

slipped quietly away to deserted places for prayer (Luke 5:16).

But his retreat did not last long. We read of him back in Capernaum, and within a short time

a rumour spread that he was in somebody’s house. Such a large crowd collected that while he was giving them his message it was impossible even to get near the doorway. Meanwhile, a group of people arrived to see him, bringing with them a paralytic whom four of them were carrying. And when they found it was impossible to get near him because of the crowd, they removed . . . the roof over Jesus’ head and let down the paralytic’s bed through the opening. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man who was paralysed,

“My son, your sins are forgiven.”

But some of the scribes were sitting there silently asking themselves, “Why does this man talk such blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Jesus realised instantly what they were thinking, and said to them, “Why must you argue like this in your minds? Which do you suppose is easier—to say to a paralysed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or ‘Get up, pick up your bed and walk’? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has full authority to forgive sins on earth, I say to you, ”—and here he spoke to the paralytic—“Get up, pick up your bed and go home.”

At once the man sprang to his feet, picked up his bed and walked off in full view of them all. Everyone was amazed, praised God and said, “We have never seen anything like this before.”

Then Jesus went out again by the lake-side and the whole crowd came to him, and he continued to teach them (Mark 2:1-13).

Jesus invites Matthew to follow him

As Jesus walked with his disciples one day,

he saw Levi (also called Matthew) the son of Alphaeus sitting at his desk in the tax-office, and he said to him,

“Follow me!”

Levi got up and followed him. Later, when Jesus was sitting at dinner in Levi’s house, a large number of tax-collectors²¹ and disreputable folk came in and joined him and his disciples. For there were many such people among his followers. When the scribes who were Pharisees saw him eating in the company of tax-collectors and outsiders, they remarked to his disciples,

“So he eats with tax-collectors and sinners!”

When Jesus heard this, he said to them,

“It is not the fit and flourishing who need the doctor, but those who are ill. I did not come to invite the ‘righteous’, but the ‘sinners’ ” (Mark 2:14-17).

There was a compelling power in the look and words of Jesus to attract a successful man like Levi, who had obtained such a lucrative contract as tax collecting. The record states very simply,

He got to his feet, left everything behind and followed him (Luke 5:28).

Those who thought themselves superior did not fraternise or mix with 'inferiors'. Today the same attitude is adopted by educated people towards the ignorant and illiterate, and by the rich to the poor. Jesus taught and practised love and concern for all people in every class of life.

To emphasise the truth of God's love and mercy for those who have fallen into sin, he told three stories to the Pharisees and scribes on another occasion when they were critical of his eating with outcasts. He used simple illustrations with which everyone was familiar.

Jesus tells about God's love for the lost

The first story Jesus told to explain God's searching love was about a lost sheep, he said:

"Wouldn't any man among you who owned a hundred sheep, and lost one of them, leave the ninety-nine to themselves in the open, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will lift it on to his shoulders with great joy, and as soon as he gets home, he will call his friends and neighbours together, 'Rejoice with me,' he will say, 'for I have found that sheep of mine which was lost.' I tell you that it is the same in Heaven—there is more joy over one sinner whose heart is changed than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need for repentance" (Luke 15:4-7).

Jesus teaches important truths in his story. *First*, that God although the omnipotent Creator of all things, has the personal loving interest of a shepherd in even one sheep. A shepherd notes the differences between each sheep, and is prepared to leave the ninety-nine to search for the lost one until he finds it.

Second, that in heaven there is rejoicing over one sinner whose heart is changed so that he gives up his sin and turns in faith to God. This is the triumph of God's grace, and it was precisely to save sinners that Jesus came into the world.

The second story was about a lost coin. Jesus says,

"If a woman who has ten silver coins should lose one, won't she take a lamp and sweep and search the house from top to bottom until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbours together. 'Rejoice with me,' she says 'for I have found that coin I lost.' I tell you, it is the same in Heaven—there is rejoicing

among the angels of God over one sinner whose heart is changed'' (vs. 8-10).

The search for the coin throughout the house is successful, and friends and neighbours are called together to rejoice. Jesus explains the wonderful truth that the supreme God of all creation takes the initiative to seek for just one human being lost in selfishness and sin.

The third story has two parts, for two types of individuals are portrayed as being far from God. Jesus continues,

''Once there was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property that will come to me.' So he divided up his estate between the two of them. Before very long, the younger son collected all his belongings and went off to a distant land, where he squandered his wealth in the wildest extravagance. And when he had run through all his money, a terrible famine arose in that country, and he began to feel the pinch. Then he went and hired himself out into the fields to feed the pigs. He got to the point of longing to stuff himself with the husks the pigs were eating, and not a soul gave him anything. Then he came to his senses and cried aloud, 'Why, dozens of my father's hired men have more food than they can eat and here am I dying of hunger! I will get up and go back to my father, and I will say to him, ''Father, I have done wrong in the sight of Heaven and in your eyes. I don't deserve to be called your son any more. Please take me on as one of your hired men.'''

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still some distance off, his father saw him and his heart went out to him, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. But his son said, 'Father, I have done wrong in the sight of Heaven and in your eyes. I don't deserve to be called your son any more . . .' 'Hurry!' called out his father to the servants, 'fetch the best clothes and put them on him! Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and get that fatted calf and kill it, and we will have a feast and a celebration! For this is my son—he was dead, and he's alive again. He was lost, and now he's found!' And they began to get the festivities going.

But his elder son was out in the fields, and as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants across to him and enquired what was the meaning of it all. 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him home again safe and sound,' was the reply. But he was furious and refused to go inside the house. So his father came outside and pleaded with him. Then he burst out, 'Look, how many years have I slaved for you and never disobeyed a single order of yours, and yet you have never given me so much as a young goat so that I could give

my friends a dinner? But when this son of yours arrives, who has spent all your money on prostitutes, for him you kill the fatted calf!’ But the father replied, ‘My dear son, you have been with me all the time and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and show our joy. For this is your brother; he was dead—and he’s alive. He was lost—and now he is found!’ ” (Luke 15:12-32).

The first son is so like many young men today who go to the cities and quickly lose all their money in bad company. Very soon they are living like unmentionable filthy animals. But in this very condition of sin, disillusionment and hopelessness they repent and acknowledge,

“Father, I have done wrong in the sight of Heaven and in your eyes” (Luke 15:21).

Then they turn their steps homeward to their family and their Heavenly Father. The joy of the father and household is representative of God receiving back again into his family the son, or daughter, who takes the first steps of repentance.

The other son was self-centered, surly and resentful at the joy of the household, his father, and the return of his brother. He described his brother in the worst possible way, and if he had been head of the family would have turned him away.

The lesson Jesus teaches is that this self-righteousness is also not pleasing to God. We should truly rejoice at the change of life from bad to good through whatever means this takes place.

The Pharisees and scribes who grumbled that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, many of whom had repented and turned from their sin to faith in God, were very much like the elder brother in the story. They constantly harassed and opposed Jesus, and in the same way many religious leaders continue to do the same to some who wish to believe in him now.

Jesus makes a brief visit to Jerusalem

Some time later at the time of one of the Jewish feast days, Jesus went to Jerusalem again.

There is in Jerusalem near the sheep-pens a pool surrounded by five (colonades), which has the Hebrew name of Bethzatha. Under these arches a great many sick people were in the habit of lying; some of them were blind, some lame, and some had withered limbs . . . One particular man had been there ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus

saw him lying there on his back—knowing that he had been like that for a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to get well again?”

“Sir,” replied the sick man, “I haven’t got anybody to put me into the pool when the water is all stirred up. While I’m trying to get there somebody else gets down into it first.”

Looking at this hopeless case of a man whose only hope seemed to be in the help other men could give him, Jesus spoke with authority.

“Get up! . . . pick up your bed and walk!” (John 5:2-8).

A flowing of strength into the weak muscles, a new flush of health on his sunken face and a fresh alertness in the eyes, amazed the watching public, as the man got to his feet, rolled up his bedding and walked away!

The ancient record tells us:

This happened on a Sabbath day, which made the Jews keep on telling the man who had been healed, “It’s the Sabbath; it is not right for you to carry your bed.”

“The man who made me well,” he replied, “was the one who told me, ‘Pick up your bed and walk.’”

Then they asked him, “And who is the man who told you to do that?”

But the one who had been healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away in the dense crowd. Later Jesus found him in the Temple and said to him, “Look: you are a fit man now. Do not sin again or something worse might happen to you!”

Then the man went off and informed the Jews that the one who had made him well was Jesus. It was because Jesus did such things on the Sabbath day that the Jews persecuted him (John 5:10-16).

According to the law given to Moses the prophet of God, one of the ten special commandments says this:

Remember to keep the Sabbath day. You have six days to labour and do all your work: But the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; that day you shall not do any work, you, your son, nor your daughter, your slave or your slave-girl, your cattle or the alien within your gates (Exodus 20:8-10 N.E.B.).

God the compassionate and merciful provided mankind and domesticated beasts of burden with one day’s complete rest in seven, this was called the Sabbath. On this day of rest man can find joy in the worship of God, and in his family. This law included servants, household members, visitors, and such animals as horses, donkey, mules, camels and oxen. Women’s work was also lightened. Modern medical science has proved that pauses are necessary in the rhythm of life. Even the land

needs rest, and farmers know the importance of rotating crops. Many people who claim to follow God's plan for their lives do not observe this principle of rest, but open their shops, plough seven days a week and never give their servants 24 hours complete holiday. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was instituted for the benefit of mankind.

The tension and persecution which Jesus experienced when he gave sick people healing rest on the Sabbath was due to a legalistic interpretation of the law by the Jewish leaders. They were more concerned at an enforcement of the letter of the law than an application of its principles.

On another occasion Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and the record states,

There was a man there whose hand was shrivelled, and they were watching Jesus closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, so that they might bring a charge against him. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand,

“Stand up and come out here in front!”

Then he said to them,

“Is it right to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do harm?”

Is it right to save life or to kill?”

There was a dead silence. Then Jesus, deeply hurt as he sensed their inhumanity, looked round in anger at the faces surrounding him and said to the man,

“Stretch out your hand!”

And he stretched it out, and the hand was restored. The Pharisees walked straight out and discussed with Herod's party how they could get rid of Jesus (Mark 3:1-6).

Jesus was deeply hurt in his heart at the inhumanity of men who would prevent help and healing to another human being because of their legalistic interpretation of religious laws. He knew that his Father's heart of love for suffering mankind had not authorised such laws. So he came into conflict with religious vested interest, and the hard hearts of leaders who controlled the people's lives. In the case of the sick man by the pool of Bethzatha who had rolled up his bedding and walked away, we read what followed.

In answer to the Jews who crowded to argue with Jesus after the man told them who it was that had healed him, Jesus said:

“My Father is still at work and therefore I work as well.” This remark made the Jews all the more determined to kill him, because not only did he break the Sabbath but he referred to God as his own Father, so putting himself on equal terms with God (John 5:17-18).

This was a major confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Their bitterness and hatred made them determined to kill him.

Another issue was Jesus' use of the word 'Father' for God Almighty. Many readers of this *Life of Christ* may have the same reaction in their minds.

Jesus taught very clearly the oneness of God. When asked by a Jewish leader,

“What are we to consider the greatest commandment of all?”

he answered at once in the words of the *Torah*,

“The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:28-30).

When Jesus uses the word Father for God he never uses it in terms of a physical relationship. As the story of Jesus unfolds the reader is asked to pray to God to reveal the mystery of the person of Jesus. Towards the end of this book this subject is explained in more detail.

What is clear from the ancient records, the *Psalms* and the *Prophets*—all of which strongly emphasize the oneness of God—is the way in which the word 'Father' referring to God is used. In the *Psalms of David* it is used to describe God's tender concern for mankind.

Let the righteous be glad;
let them rejoice before God . . .
Sing unto God, sing praises to his name . . .
A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows,
is God in his holy habitation (Psalm 68:3-5).
“Like as a father pitieth his children,
so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.
For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust (Psalm 103:13-14).

In the book of the *Prophets* we also hear these words as a promise from God Almighty to his stricken people:

“I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a Father to (Jacob), and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9).

Followers of Jesus use the word 'Father' as a worshipful description of the one God as Creator and source of all humanity. God is known by many names, and the word 'Father' conveys the idea not only that he is the source of human life, but that he is as compassionately interested in each of us personally, as a good earthly father is concerned about his sons and daughters.

Jesus taught that all who truly repent and turn to God are very precious in his sight and in a special way they become his spiritual children for whom He cares. He said to his followers:

“Look at the birds in the sky. They never sow nor reap nor store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you much more valuable to him than they are? Can any of you, however much he worries, make himself even a few inches taller? And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They neither work nor weave, but I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these! Now if God so clothes the flowers of the field, which are alive today and burnt in the stove tomorrow, is he not much more likely to clothe you, you 'little-faiths'?

“So don't worry and don't keep saying, 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink or what shall we wear?' That is what pagans are always looking for; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart first on his kingdom and his goodness and all these things will come to you as a matter of course.

“Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can worry about itself! One day's trouble is enough for one day” (Matthew 6:26-34).

Blind prejudice and an unwillingness to search patiently into possible mysteries and explanations, prevented the Jewish leaders from learning. We must be careful to avoid the same danger.

Jesus withdraws from conflict with Jewish leaders

After returning to Galilee from the Feast at Jerusalem, Jesus spent some time near the shores of Lake Galilee. The record states,

A huge crowd of people followed him, not only from Galilee, but from Judaea, Jerusalem and Idumaea, some from the district beyond the Jordan and from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. This vast crowd came to him because they had heard about the sort of things he was doing. So Jesus told his disciples to have a small boat kept in readiness for him, in case the people should crowd him too closely. For he healed so many people that all those who were in pain kept pressing forward to touch him with their hands (Mark 3:7-10).

Jesus chooses twelve companions

At this time Jesus made his final selection of 12 whom he appointed to be constantly with him. Before the day on which they would be named

he went up the hillside late in the evening and spent the whole night in prayer. Some scholars think he was asking guidance on the final name selection. All the record states is,

Later he went up on the hill-side and summoned the men whom he wanted, and they went up to him. He appointed a band of twelve to be his companions (Mark 3:13-14).

These were Peter (also called Simon), Andrew his brother, James John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew (also called Levi), Thomas James the son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Patriot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who later betrayed him.

From now on these 12 companions would accompany him everywhere, and would be especially taught and trained to spread the good news to the ends of the earth following their Master's resurrection. As Jesus went up the hillside and saw the vast crowds streaming out in the early morning to listen to his teaching, he looked steadily at his 12 chosen companions, the larger group of disciples, and the great crowds from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem, and the coastal district of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of all their diseases. Then Jesus began to teach them what has become known world-wide as "The Sermon on the Mount".

The Sermon on the Mount

In Matthew 5:3-16 Jesus proclaims the true values of the Kingdom of Heaven. A little later we shall consider what he meant by these interchangeable phrases—"Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven"; but now we look at the very high ideals Jesus presents as the will of God for his followers on earth.

Many use the phrase "the will of God" again and again when speaking with each other. Jesus in this message makes clear the difference between those who merely say "the will of God" and those who long to do it. It is to such he speaks, saying:

How happy are those who know their need for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs (Matthew 5:3).

It is to those who hunger and thirst after God that Jesus speaks, those who know they must search after God with all their heart and soul.

How happy are those who know what sorrow means, for they will be given courage and comfort! (v. 4).

Godly men and women who mourn and grieve over the corruption of mankind, the injustice, exploitation and selfishness of sinful humanity are the ones to whom God gives courage and comfort to obey him. He assures them that finally he will intervene in the affairs of mankind and introduce his rule of righteousness.

Happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them! (v. 5).

Fights, wars, litigation and court cases result from conflicting claims over territory and rights. The result of strife is unhappiness, sorrow and in many cases a life of bitter hatred.

Jesus offers a better solution: to look on the world as God's and then to realise that it is for all his children—including yourself. The ultimate end to injustice is also promised after this life. Therefore those are truly happy who claim nothing now, knowing that ultimately God will give them all that is due to them. Abraham fixed his eyes on God and his true heavenly home. He lived on this earth as a pilgrim.

Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for true goodness for they will be fully satisfied! (v. 6).

Jesus makes a wonderful promise to all those who long after God and true goodness—that finally one day they will be satisfied with the ineffable vision of God himself in the world to come.

Happy are the merciful for they will have mercy shown to them (v. 7).

God himself is the Merciful One and his followers are to show mercy to others for they themselves experience and receive mercy from God.

Happy are the utterly sincere, for they will see God!

Happy are those who make peace, for they will be known as sons of God!

Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs! (vs. 8-10).

John the Baptist was jailed and finally martyred because he spoke for God and goodness against sin. Death removed him to the Kingdom of Heaven which is better than all the kingdoms of the earth. After the opening promises of blessing, Jesus goes on to speak to his followers to comfort their hearts in view of the problems they are about to face. He knew that religious intolerance and hatred would be directed at any who turned to him and followed his teaching.

For nearly 2000 years true followers of Jesus have suffered persecution, loss of jobs, economic hardship, enmity and ostracism. It is the same today, despite the United Nations Charter guaranteeing freedom

of religion and human rights.

Jesus said:

And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake! Be glad then, yes, be tremendously glad—for your reward in Heaven is magnificent. They persecuted the prophets before your time in exactly the same way (vs. 11-12).

In some countries followers of Jesus are denied higher education, and are discriminated against in relief programs and job offers. So they remain poor and suppressed, even though they have the intellectual and practical ability to advance. "Don't worry", says Jesus. What is 60 or 70 years on this planet when a magnificent reward awaits you in the eternal realms!

Jesus now gives two illustrations describing the character and quality of his true followers. In the first he says:

"You are the earth's salt. But if the salt should become tasteless, what can make it salt again? It is completely useless and can only be thrown out of doors and stamped under foot" (v. 13).

In days when no refrigeration was available food quickly went bad as it does today in a village home in hot weather. But salt rubbed into fish or meat held back the corruption of decay and death. So Jesus' followers in a hospital or office, refusing bribes and exposing corruption, could hold back the worst decay. It is a fact that the high ethical standards of true followers of Jesus can even alter government or business practise.

The second illustration is light. Jesus says:

"You are the world's light—it is impossible to hide a town built on the top of a hill. Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bucket. They put it on a lamp-stand and it gives light for everybody in the house.

Let your light shine like that in the sight of men. Let them see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven" (vs. 14-16).

On another occasion Jesus explains still further the meaning of light:

Light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Everybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But everybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God" (John 3:19-21).

Just as light shows up dirt on white clothes, that would not be seen on

a dark night, so the quality of the life of the follower of Jesus should show up sin in worldly lives.

In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus outlines the high standards he has established for his followers. These are often in contrast to behaviour accepted by the world. We have already noted his remarks about adultery, now we note other matters on which Jesus spoke:

In reference to human relationships,

“You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days, ‘Thou shalt not murder’, and anyone who does so must stand his trial; But I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother must stand his trial; anyone who contemptuously calls his brother a fool must face the supreme court; and anyone who looks down on his brother as a lost soul is himself heading straight for the fire of destruction (Matthew 5:21-22).

He then goes on to instruct his followers to be reconciled with each other before worshipping God.

“If, while you are offering your gift at the altar, you should remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift there before the altar and go away. Make your peace with your brother first, then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your opponent at law while you are on the way to court. Otherwise he may hand you over to the judge and the judge in turn hand you over to the officer of the court and you will be thrown into prison. Believe me, you will never get out again till you have paid your last farthing! (vs. 23-26).

How can a man worship God from whom he expects to receive forgiveness when he is not prepared to forgive another human being, and refuses to be reconciled? Jesus taught in greater detail on this subject on another occasion. He said,

“If your brother wrongs you, go and have it out with him at once—just between the two of you. If he will listen to you you have won him back as your brother. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two others with you so that everything that is said may have the support of two or three witnesses. And if he still won’t pay attention, tell the matter to the church. And if he won’t even listen to the church then he must be to you just like a pagan—or a tax-collector! (Matthew 18:15-17).

Peter was puzzled over this teaching and wanted to know the extent to which forbearance must be stretched, so he approached Jesus with the question:

“Master, if my brother goes on wronging me how often should I

forgive him? Would seven times be enough?

“No,” replied Jesus, “not seven times, but seventy times seven! For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When he had started calling in his accounts, a man was brought to him who owed him millions of pounds. As he had no means of repaying the debt, his master gave orders for him to be sold as a slave, and his wife and children and all his possessions as well, and the money to be paid over. At this the servant fell on his knees before his master, ‘Oh, be patient with me!’ he cried. ‘and I will pay you back every penny!’ Then his master was moved with pity for him, set him free and cancelled his debt.

But when the same servant had left his master’s presence, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few shillings. He grabbed him and seized him by the throat, crying, ‘Pay up what you owe me!’ At this his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and implored him, ‘Oh, be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ But he refused and went out and had him put in prison until he should repay the debt.

When the other fellow-servants saw what had happened, they were horrified and went and told their master the whole incident. Then his master called him in.

‘You wicked servant!’ he said. ‘Didn’t I cancel all that debt when you begged me to do so? Oughtn’t you to have taken pity on your fellow-servant as I, your master, took pity on you?’ And his master in anger handed him over to the jailers till he should repay the whole debt. This is how my Heavenly Father will treat you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:21-35).

The true follower of Jesus is called to forgive from the heart. A superficial politeness of the greeting of “Peace be with you”, when hatred and bitterness in the heart wish the person dead, is not God’s standard for those whom God has forgiven freely.

Jesus showed that before outward actions of hate like murder or revenge take place, they have already developed and been planned in the heart. The attitude of love and forgiveness, which is the grace of God now shown to mankind in the person and attitude of Jesus, must characterise his true worshippers.

In this famous Sermon Jesus adds yet another dimension of teaching.

“You have heard (he said) that it used to be said ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’, but I tell you, don’t resist evil. If a man hits your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If a man wants to sue you for your coat, let him have it and your cloak as well. If anybody forces you to go a mile with him, do more—go two miles with him. Give to the man who asks anything from you, and don’t turn away from the man who wants to borrow.

“You have heard that it used to be said ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy’, but I tell you, ‘Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you,’ so that you may be sons of your Heavenly Father. For he makes the sun rise upon evil men as well as good, and he sends his rain upon honest and dishonest men alike.

For if you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even tax-collectors do that! And if you exchange greetings only with your own circle, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do that much. No, you will be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:38-48).

Hate for enemies, blood feuds of revenge against other tribes, clans or relatives, by physical or economic force; exploitation and war, are the common experience of mankind. Here Jesus sets up a higher standard of conduct for the true worshipers of God Almighty. Very many have failed to obey this commandment to love their enemies forgetting what Jesus said.

“Whoever now relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do the same will himself be called least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever teaches and practises them will be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that your goodness must be a far better thing than the goodness of the scribes and Pharisees before you can set foot in the kingdom of Heaven at all!” (Matthew 5:19-20).

In this period of history, from the coming of Jesus until his return, grace and forbearance are the approaches his followers are to show to others. Judgment and punishment of rebels, are God’s direct responsibility.

One of the disciples of Jesus adds his comments on the meaning of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Don’t pay back a bad turn by a bad turn, to anyone. See that your public behaviour is above criticism. As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone. Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will for it is written:

“Vengeance belongeth unto me: I will recompense,” saith the Lord. And it is also written:

“If thine enemy hunger, feed him;

If he thirst, give him to drink:

For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”

Don’t allow yourself to be overpowered by evil. Take the offensive—overpower evil with good! (Romans 12:17-21).

Many Christians, unfortunately, live as though Jesus had never

taught them these words. They have taken part in colonial wars and crusades. They have by their modern weapons assisted others to fight cruel wars. Some have made big profits from modern armaments. It will be clear to the reader, therefore, that western nations are not 'Christian', in fact no nation is 'a Christian nation'. Rather in all nations, individuals and small groups accept the teaching of Jesus and become his followers. They are like lambs in the midst of wolves.

Those who openly reject the teachings of Jesus preach force and revenge, in fact practise "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". They announce holy wars to get back what they have lost, or to destroy unbelievers. To them the teachings of Jesus appear soft and impractical.

Here then, is the great challenge of the life and teachings of Jesus the Messiah. Those who have chosen to obey God rather than man in following this teaching have discovered a peace of heart and spiritual power to do the will of God, and to "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect".

Strange as it may seem, the spiritual power of suffering is more influential than force. As we shall see, Jesus, by humility and suffering overcame evil by good and spread his truth to the ends of the earth. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also speaks of truth.

Truth and oaths represent another area of human relationships. Many people, even those who regularly say their prayers use oaths. Jesus said:

"You have heard that the people in the old days were told— 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths', but I say to you, don't use an oath at all. Don't swear by Heaven for it is God's throne, nor by the earth for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King. No, and don't swear by your own head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black! Whatever you have to say let your 'yes' be a plain 'yes' and your 'no' a plain 'no'—anything more than this has a taint of evil (Matthew 5:33-37).

If people are always speaking the truth why do they use oaths—such as "I swear by God . . .?" Do they use oaths to cover their lies?

Giving Alms is an important service. Jesus said it is to be done secretly, not before men, known only to God.

"Beware of doing your good deeds conspicuously to catch men's eyes or you will miss the reward of your Heavenly Father.

So when you do good to other people, don't hire a trumpeter to go in front of you—like those play-actors in the synagogues and streets who make sure that men admire them. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get! No, when you give to charity, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that

your giving may be secret. Your Father who knows all secrets will reward you'' (Matthew 6:1-4).

Prayer is conversation between an individual or group and God. It is not an opportunity to show other men how religious or good we are.

So Jesus said:

''When you pray, don't be like the play-actors. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at street-corners so that people may see them at it. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get. But when you pray, go into your own room, shut your door and pray to your Father privately. Your Father who sees all private things will reward you. And when you pray don't rattle off long prayers like the pagans who think they will be heard because they use so many words. Don't be like them. For your Father knows your needs before you ask him'' (Matthew 6:5-8).

Here Jesus is not referring to the public worship of God collectively in a House of Worship, but the display of religious activity like a play-actor to impress neighbours and friends. Jesus warns against long prayers as a routine and gives a simple example of prayer, saying:

''Pray then like this—

Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured;

May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us each day the bread we need for the day,

Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us.

Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil.

For if you forgive other people their failures, your

Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Father forgive you your failures'' (Matthew 6:9-15).

Jesus uses an illustration to show how willing God Almighty is to answer prayer. He says:

''If any of you has a friend, and goes to him in the middle of the night and says, 'Lend me three loaves, my dear fellow, for a friend of mine has just arrived after a journey and I have no food to put in front of him'; and then he answers from inside the house, 'Don't bother me with your troubles. The front door is locked and my children and I have gone to bed. I simply cannot get up now and give you anything! Yet, I tell you, that even if he won't get up and give him what he wants simply because he is his friend, yet if he persists, he will rouse himself and give him everything he needs. And so I tell you, ask and it will be given you, search and you will find, knock and the door will

be opened to you. The one who asks will always receive; the one who is searching will always find, and the door is opened to the man who knocks. Some of you are fathers, and if your son asks you for some fish, would you give him a snake instead, or if he asks for an egg, would you make him a present of a scorpion? So, if you, for all your evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:5-13).

Three of the most wonderful golden promises made by God to all of mankind are contained in these words of Jesus:

“ASK and it will be given you
SEARCH and you will find
KNOCK and the door will be opened to you.”

Throughout the world peoples of many religions have come to completely opposite and contradictory viewpoints. But Jesus states here that each individual who with the whole heart, mind, soul and body cries out to the One True God Almighty, the Father in Heaven, saying: “Show yourself to me!” will have his prayer answered. No true seeker after God will fail to find him. If an imperfect human father responds to a child’s call, how much more will the perfect Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

These and other remarks on prayer indicate that Jesus expected a true seeker after God to talk to him as a child speaks to a father. God knows the thoughts of the hearts, and understands all languages of the earth; therefore we should speak in our mother tongue rather than an artificial language of scholars. Some even use a language they do not understand, such as Latin, Arabic or Syriac; but that is not how children talk to their father.

Fasting is an important discipline of bodily needs so that the spiritual gains the ascendancy. Jesus taught that any such discipline is to be in secret for God alone, and not a religious demonstration of piety. He said:

“When you fast, don’t look like those miserable play-actors! For they deliberately disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting. Believe me, they have had all their reward. No, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that nobody knows that you are fasting—let it be a secret between you and your Father. And your Father who knows all secrets will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18).

The petty criticism of others is a weakness many indulge in as they talk over the tea cups in the bazaars and in the home.

“Don’t criticise people,” (Jesus said) “and you will not be criticised. For you will be judged by the way you criticise others, and the measure you give will be the measure you receive.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and fail to notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me get the speck out of your eye’, when there is a plank in your own? You hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you can see clearly enough to remove your brother’s speck of dust” (Matthew 7:3-5).

The emphasis in this famous Sermon on the Mount is on obedient and practical living, in contrast to outward profession and vain talking. So Jesus warns against religious imposters who are like the elephant with two sets of teeth—the tusks to show, and the small ones in the mouth with which it eats!

Be on your guard against false religious teachers, who come to you dressed up as sheep but are really greedy wolves. You can tell them by their fruits. Do you pick a bunch of grapes from a thorn-bush or figs from a clump of thistles? Every good tree produces sound fruit, but a rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a rotten tree cannot produce good fruit. The tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and burnt. So you may know the quality of men by what they produce.

It is not everyone who keeps saying to me ‘Lord, Lord’ who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the man who actually does my Heavenly Father’s will.

In ‘that day’ many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we preach in your name, didn’t we cast out devils in your name, and do many great things in your name?’ Then I shall tell them plainly, ‘I have never known you. Go away from me, you have worked on the side of evil!’ (Matthew 7:15-23).

In conclusion he gave the illustration of the wise and foolish men.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a sensible man who builds his house on rock. Down came the rain and up came the floods, while the winds blew and roared upon that house—and it did not fall because its foundations were rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not follow them can be compared with a foolish man who built his house on sand. Down came the rain and up came the floods, while the winds blew and battered that house till it collapsed, and fell with a great crash” (Matthew 7:24-27).

As he finished his words on the hillside, the crowd remained quiet for a few moments. Then a murmur began as they discussed together; for the crowd was astonished at the power behind his teaching.

His words had the ring of authority, quite unlike those of their scribes (Matthew 7:29).

Large crowds followed Jesus when he came down from the hillside.

Jesus heals a Roman officer's servant

As Jesus was returning from delivering the Sermon on the Mount, a Roman officer sent a request to him through some Jewish elders. He was captain of the Roman soldiers responsible for Capernaum in the service of Prince Herod Antipas. All the evidence indicates that he was a heathen, not yet publicly a convert to the worship of the one true God. The Jewish elders recommended the officer's request to Jesus with the words,

“He loves our nation and has built us a synagogue out of his own pocket” (Luke 7:5).

The officer's servant was very seriously ill, at the point of death. The request to come and save his servant's life was an expression of confidence in the readiness and ability of Jesus to heal a man for whom all hope had been abandoned. The message had said:

“My servant is in bed, paralysed, and in dreadful pain” (Matthew 8:6).

As Jesus went with the elders and approached the house, which appears to have been a little outside the town, another group of men came hurrying towards Jesus with a second message from the officer:

“Don't trouble yourself, sir! I'm not important enough for you to come into my house—I didn't think I was fit to come to you in person. Just give the order, please, and my boy will recover. I am used to working under orders, and I have soldiers under me. I can say to one, ‘Go’, and he goes, or I can say to another, ‘Come here’, and he comes; or I can say to my slave, ‘Do this job’, and he does it” (Luke 7:6-8).

The officer knew his house was a ceremonially unclean place. Perhaps the women still burnt incense to idols, and he felt personally unfit to meet the holy prophet himself, yet with trembling faith he

believed in him. So much so that all he wanted was for Jesus to say the word and he had full confidence his servant would be healed. This was exactly what happened—and by the time the officer's friends returned to the house, the servant had become perfectly well. Jesus commented on this incident to those around him:

“I tell you that many people will come from east and west and be fellow-guests with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 8:11).

The door stands wide open to all the peoples, nations and tribes of the whole earth. God welcomes all and any who turn in faith to him. This is a lesson that narrow-minded and prejudiced monopolists of religion were loath to learn. A lesson that Jesus had taught by his service for, and healing of, a pagan outside the covenant of circumcision of the people of God.

Jesus raises the dead

A little later Jesus walked to Nain, a city 25 miles from Capernaum. As usual he was accompanied not only by his companions but quite a crowd of people as well. As they drew near the city they saw in the distance another crowd coming out of the city gate and heading for the cemetery.

That day in Nain a woman had been bereaved of her only child. A young man on whom all her hope had been centred for the future. She was a widow and desolate, having already mourned the death of the boy's father. A crowd of fellow townsmen was with her, taking turns carrying the bier.

Death is the final word to man. Educated and rich, illiterate and landless peasant, men and women, go out beyond this life, many with fear and no certainty of what awaits them.

As Jesus saw the deep distress of the widow, his heart was filled with compassion. With eyes cast down, blinded by tears and her shoulders heaving with sobs, this woman could not have known that deliverance was near.

Suddenly she heard a voice speaking, as Jesus said:

“Don't cry!” (Luke 7:13).

How many had tried to comfort her during the last hours as life ebbed from her son and hope had died. This voice however, carried with it a quiet authority! Before the bereaved widow could even begin to under-

stand, she was already in the presence of LIFE. Jesus walked up to the bier and touched it. The bearers stood still. Then as a hush descended on the crowds, the clear voice of Jesus rang out:

“Young man get up!” (Luke 7:14).

In response to the one who has promised *eternal life* to all who believe in him,

The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus handed him to his mother. Everybody present was awe-struck and they praised God, saying,

“A great prophet has arisen among us and God has turned his face towards his people” (Luke 7:15-16).

John sends a message from prison

John’s disciples, loyal to their teacher now suffering imprisonment for his faithful preaching of the truth, brought news to him of the wonderful acts and teaching of Jesus. So John chose two of them and sent them to Jesus with this message:

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to look for someone else?” (Luke 7:20).

Scholars have debated whether John’s faith had grown weak in the darkness of his prison cell, so that he needed encouragement; or whether he wanted his disciples’ faith strengthened by what Jesus would answer. The ancient record tells us:

At that very time Jesus was healing many people of their diseases and ailments and evil spirits, and he restored sight to many who were blind. Then he answered them,

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind are recovering their sight, cripples are walking again, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, dead men are being brought to life again, and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me” (Luke 7:21-23).

When these messengers had returned, Jesus began to talk to the crowd about John.

“What did you go out into the desert to look at? Was it a reed waving in the breeze? Well, *what* was it you went out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? But the men who wear fine clothes live luxuriously in

palaces. But what *did* you really go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, a prophet and far more than a prophet! This is the man of whom the Scripture says,

Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,

Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

Believe me, no one greater than John has ever been born, and yet a humble member of the kingdom of God is greater than he.

All the people, yes, even the tax-collectors, when they heard John, acknowledged God and were baptised by his baptism. But the Pharisees and the experts in the Law frustrated God's purpose for them, for they refused John's baptism.

What can I say that the men of this generation are like—what sort of men are they? They are like children sitting in the market-place, and calling out to each other, 'We played at weddings for you, but you wouldn't dance, and we played at funerals for you and you wouldn't cry?' For John the Baptist came in the strictest austerity and you say he is crazy. Then the Son of Man came, enjoying food and drink, and you say, 'Look, a drunkard and a glutton, a bosom-friend of the tax-collector and the outsider!' So wisdom is proved right by all her children!" (Luke 7:24-35).

A meal in Simon the Pharisee's house

Jesus was invited to a meal in the house of Simon, a Pharisee in a nearby town. Although the Pharisees had become increasingly suspicious of Jesus, individuals, especially in towns remote from Jerusalem, would feel obligated to entertain a famous teacher who was the centre of such large crowds.

So it was according to custom that Jesus entered Simon's house and took his place at the table as the honoured guest. The word spread quickly, "Jesus is eating in the house of Simon the Pharisee".

In this town lived a woman of bad character. She was already disgusted and tired of the consequences of selling her body to men for a few coins. She loathed their cruelty and selfishness, and longed once and forever to finish with her sordid past and to be clean and pure. The fame of Jesus was now being talked about in many homes and market places. His concern for the poor and the outcasts of society was common talk. He was approachable to all.

"Perhaps", thought the woman "I can find purity and strength for a new life by touching him". Taking an expensive alabaster flask of per-

fume as a gift, she slipped into the courtyard, and unnoticed in the crowd and among the servants, she unobtrusively drew near and stood behind Jesus who reclined at the table in the common manner of eating among such families in those days. Some may have wondered why the host did not order her out immediately, but Jesus was already known to mix with sinners and eat with them.

Simon may have heard of his three parables in which he had taught of God's love for one even as deep in sin as this woman. Some scholars have suggested that Simon may have known the woman too well, and did not want a fuss or commotion!

The woman was under deep emotional stress, for even as she opened the flask she began to weep silently, and her tears dropped on Jesus' feet. Crouching down she kissed his feet and anointed them with the perfume. Simon immediately began to think in his heart:

"If this man were really a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of a person is touching him. He would have realised that she is a bad woman."

Then Jesus spoke to him,

"Simon, there is something I want to say to you."

"Very well, Master," he returned, "say it."

"Once upon a time, there were two men in debt to the same money-lender. One owed him fifty pounds and the other five. And since they were unable to pay, he generously cancelled both of their debts. Now, which one of them do you suppose will love him more?"

"Well," returned Simon, "I suppose it will be the one who has been more generously treated."

"Exactly," replied Jesus, and then turning to the woman, he said to Simon.

"You see this woman? I came into your house but you provided no water to wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss of welcome, but she, from the moment I came in, has not stopped covering my feet with kisses. You gave me no oil for my head, but she has put perfume on my feet. That is why I tell you, Simon, that her sins, many as they are, are forgiven; for she has so much love. But the man who has little to be forgiven has only a little love to give."

Then he said to her,

"Your sins are forgiven."

And the men at the table with him began to say to themselves,

"And who is this man, who even forgives sins?"

But Jesus said to the woman,

"It is your faith that has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:40-50).

Not long after this incident Jesus went through every town and village

in the area preaching and telling the people the good news of the kingdom of God. One aspect of the good news was the word he had spoken to the woman,

“Your sins are forgiven.”

Many are familiar with the wonderful revelation that God Almighty is the All Merciful and the All Compassionate. Yet they live their life in fear of God’s justice, and are uncertain of forgiveness. Many merely *hope* for forgiveness.

The words of Jesus come as wonderfully good news. This good news he proclaimed in every town and village of the province of Galilee.

He also told the crowds of the true character of God and the certainty of his final rule when injustice and exploitation of the poor would be replaced by his Kingdom in which wrongs would be righted, and righteousness, love, joy and peace would be the experience of all true God-seekers.

Jesus continues to travel and heal

With Jesus in his travels throughout Galilee were his 12 companions, a crowd of disciples, and to look after their needs of food, the washing of clothes and arrangements for accommodation, a band of God-fearing women. Among them were older matrons such as Joanna the respected wife of Chuza, a steward of Prince Herod Antipas. Two other women mentioned in the group were Susanna (meaning lily) and Mary of Magdala, from whom seven demons had been exorcised.

Mary of Magdala was later to be the first human being to see Jesus alive again after he rose from the grave—this story in detail comes later. The women used their own money and resources to serve Jesus and his companions as they concentrated on the crowds. They traveled around Lake Galilee and the nearby districts, in a radius of some 30 miles, based on Capernaum.

As the traveling group neared Capernaum on return, two incidents are recorded which focus on the mercy and compassion of Jesus for those in misery.

Two blind men hearing the crowd, began to stumble along toward him crying out:

“Have pity on us, Son of David!” And when he had gone inside the house (which was his base in Capernaum) these two came up to him.

“Do you believe I can do it?” he said to them.

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

Then he touched their eyes, saying, "You have believed and so it shall be."

Then their sight was returned (Matthew 9:27-30).

For a blind man to see for the first time in his life or to see again after a long period of blindness is one of the most wonderful of human experiences. Today modern eye surgery can restore sight to cataract patients, and by corneal grafts a person can read again. But in the days of Jesus this had never been known. To avoid publicity Jesus sternly warned these two men,

"Don't let any one know about this" (v. 31).

But they took no notice and going outside spread the story throughout the whole district.

They could not understand that publicity would bring the leading Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem a hundred miles away, and introduce an element of hazard and hindrance to the work of Jesus.

Later, a dumb man who was possessed by a devil was brought to Jesus. Jesus cast out the devil and the dumb man began to talk normally. The crowd were simply amazed and said:

"Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" (Matthew 9:33).

Jesus called "devil-possessed"

Following these incidents the scribes and Pharisees who had come down from Jerusalem to observe what Jesus was teaching and doing began to say that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub—the prince of devils—and that he drove out devils because he was in league with this prince.

How quickly can a person be called a devil when there is disagreement!

Jesus in a dignified manner answered their charge:

"How can Satan be the one who drives out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, then that kingdom cannot last, and if a household is divided against itself, it cannot last either. And if Satan leads a rebellion against Satan then his ranks are split, he cannot survive and his end is near" (Mark 3:24-26).

Jesus pointed out that:

"No one can break into a strong man's house and steal his property, without first tying up the strong man hand and foot" (v. 27).

This indicates that as the Messiah he had spiritually tied up Satan hand and foot, and was releasing his captives. He announced this fulfilment of prophecy in his first sermon at Nazareth when he said:

“He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18).

This was not the first or last time servants of God have been rejected and charged with being the devil’s children. The opposition to John by religious leaders had resulted in many calling him crazy. This opposition of the Pharisees and scribes created a very tense atmosphere. They continually harassed Jesus with questions of provocative remarks. Some of them said:

“Master, we want to see a sign from you” (Matthew 12:38).

There had been enough evidence for any true seeker to know and understand who Jesus was, but the blind cannot see.

Jesus replied,

“It is an evil and unfaithful generation that craves for a sign, and no sign will be given to it—except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was in the belly of that great sea-monster for three days and nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation in the judgment and will condemn it. For they did repent when Jonah preached to them, and you have more than Jonah’s preaching with you now! The Queen of the South will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and you have more than the wisdom of Solomon with you now!” (Matthew 12:39-42).

The story of Jonah the prophet is well known. He was swallowed alive by a great sea-monster, but after three days was vomited up alive on the land. He then went and preached the message of God to the great city of Nineveh. The one great sign which would be given, proving forever that Jesus was the Messiah, would be his conquest of death and rising to life on the third day. Very few understood this as he replied to the Pharisees.

The crowds were now so clamouring to hear Jesus that it was impossible for Jesus and his companions to get privacy and time to eat a meal. People were beginning to say the same thing about Jesus that they had said about John when they saw his zealous selfless service to the crowds. They said, “he must be mad.”

So Jesus’ relatives set out to take charge of him.

Then his mother and his brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent a message asking him to come out to them (Mark 3:31).

They no doubt intended to urge him to take things more easily, and in Jesus' mother's heart there was the natural desire to see that her son had enough food and rest.

Jesus announces the true family relationships

When the message was brought saying, "Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you". Jesus gave a most significant reply:

"And who are really my mother and my brothers?" (Mark 3:33).

Looking round at the faces of those sitting in a circle about him he went on,

"Look!" he said, "my mother and my brothers are here. Anyone who does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me" (Mark 3:34, 35).

Jesus reasserts by this statement the practical need to show repentance by a life committed to living on earth according to the standards God himself has set up. He opens the door to all who will obey, to enter and become members of God's spiritual family.

Jesus teaches by parables

As a consequence of the increasing opposition to Jesus by the scribes, Pharisees and their party, Jesus from now on introduces a new method of teaching. He teaches in parables. We have already noted three parables explaining God's love in searching for the lost, but the first parables Jesus taught were shortly after the outburst of the Pharisees against Jesus, which we have just noted.

Crowds on the lakeshore stood or sat right down to the water's edge while Jesus taught them from a small boat on the lake. In this natural amphitheatre his voice could be heard clearly, and the boat was a protection from the many crowding to touch him. In these parables Jesus refers constantly to the Kingdom of God, which he also spoke of as the Kingdom of Heaven. It is like no earthly kingdom, it is not a geographical territory, it has no holy places on earth. As then so now, the words

of Jesus and his deeper teaching can be understood only if there is a longing after God and a readiness to obey His will revealed in the teachings of Jesus.

The first parable he spoke to the crowd was about a sower and seed. So many listeners were small farmers and peasants, perhaps within their sight were wheat fields through which they had come to hear Jesus.

Parable of the sower

(Jesus said) "A sower went out to sow his seed, and while he was sowing, some of the seed fell by the roadside and was trodden down and the birds gobbled it up. Some fell on the rock, and when it sprouted it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorn-bushes which grew up with the seeds and choked the life out of them. And some seed fell on good soil and grew and produced a crop—a hundred times what had been sown."

And when he had said this, he called out, "Let the man who has ears to hear use them!" (Luke 8:5-8).

Jesus then explained the parable!

"This is what the parable means. The seed is the message of God. The seed sown by the roadside represents those who hear the message, and then the devil comes and takes it away from their hearts so that they cannot believe it and be saved. That sown on the rock represents those who accept the message with great delight when they hear it, but have no real root. They believe for a little while but when the time of temptation comes, they lose faith. And the seed sown among the thorns represents the people who hear the message and go on their way, and with the worries and riches and pleasures of living, the life is choked out of them, and in the end they produce nothing. But the seed sown on good soil means the men who hear the message and grasp it with a good and honest heart, and go on steadily producing a good crop" (Luke 8:11-15).

Explaining by another parable the mystery of the Kingdom of God he says it is

"like a man scattering seed on the ground and then going to bed each night and getting up every morning, while the seed sprouts and grows up, though he has no idea how it happens. The earth produces a crop without any help from anyone: first a blade, then the ear of corn, then the full grown grain in the ear. And as soon as the crop is ready, he

sends the reapers in without delay, for the harvest-time has come'' (Mark 4:26-29).

The development of truth in the mind is like the growth of seeds in the ground at the proper season. With sun and water the miracle of life bursts into a fine green shoot and roots. The element of LIFE—God's gift, *eternal life*—works wherever there is receptivity.

Jesus goes on:

''What can we say the kingdom of God is like? How shall we put it in a parable? It is like a tiny grain of mustard seed which, when it is sown, is smaller than any seed that is ever sown. But after it is sown in the earth, it grows up and becomes bigger than any other plant. It shoots out great branches so that birds can come and nest in its shelter'' (Mark 4:30-32).

By such parables Jesus gradually unfolded God's plan for all of humanity during the period of history commencing approximately with the present Christian era nearly 2,000 years ago.

He continued further by saying,

''The kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. Then the crop came up and began to ripen, the weeds appeared as well. Then the owner's servants came up to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did all these weeds come from?' 'Some enemy of mine has done this,' he replied. 'Do you want us then to go out and pull them all up?' said the servants. 'No,' he returned, 'if you pull up the weeds now, you would pull up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together till the harvest. And at harvest-time I shall tell the reapers, 'Collect all the weeds first and tie them up in bundles ready to burn, but collect the wheat and store it in my barn' '' (Matthew 13:24-30).

The disciples came to Jesus after he left the crowds and went into the house at Capernaum saying:

''Please explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.''

So he patiently taught them.

''The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,''' replied Jesus. ''The field is the whole world. The good seed? That is the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of this world. The reapers are angels.

Just as weeds are gathered up and burned in the fire so will it happen at the end of this world. The Son of Man will send out his angels and

they will uproot from the kingdom everything that is spoiling it, and all those who live in defiance of its laws, and will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be tears and bitter regret. Then the good will shine out like the sun in their father's kingdom. The man who has ears should use them!" (Matthew 13:37-43).

It is clear from this parable that Jesus thought in terms of the *whole world*, and not just some special nation, tribe or clique. "The field", Jesus said, "is the world." Today we think of all its varied peoples speaking many languages scattered in the far north and deep south. They are spread throughout the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australia, and in the many islands of the sea.

There is no partiality in the heart of God. The door of his Kingdom stands open to all who wish to enter by repenting of their sins and responding to his message. Those who believe then become his children of the Kingdom.

However, Jesus solemnly warned that the sons of the evil one, Satan, are like weeds. God only knows the real wheat.

Jesus will later go into greater detail about the harvest to which he now makes only a short reference. At the end of this age a final separation will result between those who live in defiance of God's laws and are spoiling his beautiful world, and those whose goodness will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom.

In this session with his disciples Jesus added two more parables.

Parable of the fish net

"The kingdom of Heaven is like a big net thrown into the sea collecting all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore and sit down and pick out the good ones for the barrels, but they throw away the bad. That is how it will be at the end of this world. The angels will go out and pick out the wicked from among the good and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be tears and bitter regret" (Matthew 13:47-50).

Parable of the buried treasure

Then to encourage his disciples to give themselves fully to the Kingdom, Jesus says,

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like some treasure which has been buried in a field. A man finds it and buries it again, and goes off overjoyed to sell all his possessions to buy himself that field.

Or again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he has found a single pearl of great value, he goes and sells all his possessions and buys it” (Matthew 13:44-46).

“Have you grasped all this?” He asked them.

“Yes,” they replied (Matthew 14:51).

The crowds were so persistent that the private teaching of his companions became increasingly difficult. To obtain privacy for further advanced teaching of his companions the crowds were sent home and the smaller group set out in boats to a quiet place.

The stilling of the storm

The Lake of Galilee is known for violent storms when the heat sucks the cooler winds down from Mount Hermon or the Golan Heights. The record graphically describes what happened as the men—experienced fishermen—were well into the middle of the Lake.

Then came a violent squall of wind which drove the waves aboard the boat until it was almost swamped. Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion. They awoke him with the words, “Master, don’t you care that we’re drowning?”

And he woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, “Hush now! be still!”

The wind dropped and there was a dead calm.

“Why are you so frightened? Do you not trust me even yet?” he asked them.

But sheer awe swept over them, and they kept saying to each other, “Who ever can he be?—even the wind and the waves do what he tells them!” (Mark 4:37-41).

The companions of Jesus that very day had been introduced to a new type of teaching—the parables.

They had been with Jesus long enough to sense and know that God

gave him power and authority beyond anything they had ever known. Now his quiet control of the forces of nature must have called to mind Moses and Joshua, as they controlled the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan river. So they said to one another "Whoever can he be?"

This question was to puzzle their minds for nearly two more years as they alternated between hope and despair, belief and unbelief, that he was in truth the promised Messiah. Other great prophets had worked great powers, signs and miracles, but now, in an abundance beyond any prophet who had been sent of God they were to see and observe the mighty power of God working in and through his chosen Servant.

The healing of a devil-possessed man

As soon as the boat touched shore on the other side of the Lake, in the country of the Gerasenes,

a man in the grip of an evil spirit rushed out to meet him from among the tombs where he was living. It was no longer possible for any human being to restrain him even with a chain. Indeed he had frequently been secured with fetters and lengths of chain, but he had simply snapped the chains and broken the fetters in pieces. No one could do anything with him. All through the night as well as in the day-time he screamed among the tombs and on the hill-side, and cut himself with stones. Now, as soon as he saw Jesus in the distance, he ran and knelt before him, yelling at the top of his voice, "What have you got to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? For God's sake, don't torture me!"

For Jesus had already said, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" Then he asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is legion," he replied, "for there are many of us" (Mark 5:2-9).

Evil spirits seem to shrink from being disembodied. In this and other cases more than one spirit had entered into and controlled a human being's personality. The spirits who were many knew that a herd of 2,000 pigs were feeding nearby. The presence of these unclean animals suggests that pagans and idol worshipers at that time inhabited the fertile low lands of Gergesa between the Lake and the Golan Heights. The danger of a disease called trichinosis and tapeworm, through eating the flesh of these unclean beasts, was no doubt one of the reasons for God

instructing Moses to introduce laws of hygiene and health for his people, by forbidding certain foods. At that time no true believer would have willingly herded these animals pronounced unclean by the Law of Moses.

The evil spirits implored him, "Send us over to the pigs, and we'll get into them!"

So Jesus allowed them to do this, and they came out of the man, and made off and went into the pigs. The whole herd of about two thousand stampeded down the cliff into the lake and was drowned. The swineherds took to their heels and spread their story in the city and all over the countryside. Then the people came to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they saw the man who had been devil-possessed sitting there properly clothed and perfectly sane—the same man who had been possessed by "legion"—and they were really frightened. Those who had seen the incident told them what had happened to the devil-possessed man and about the disaster to the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave their district (Mark 5:12-17).

This was a different kind of opposition, that of men who thought more of the value of animals than the wonderful cure of a man who had become so degenerate he was worse than an unclean beast. Now clothed and sane he looked with wonder on his healer, and as Jesus sadly began to embark in the small boat, the man begged to go with him. But Jesus would not allow this.

"Go home to your own people," he told him, "and tell them what the Lord has done for you, and how kind he has been to you!"

So the man went off and began to spread throughout the Ten Towns the story of what Jesus had done for him. And they were all simply amazed (Matthew 5:19-20).

The hoped for privacy and rest from the pressing crowds for which they longed, was denied the group of companions, but no doubt Jesus was able to teach them as they rowed back to Capernaum the way they had come.

The raising of Jairus' daughter

When Jesus landed again at Capernaum

a great crowd collected around him as he stood on the shore (Mark 5:21).

A movement in the crowd made way for the president of the local synagogue named Jairus.

When he saw Jesus, he knelt before him pleading desperately for his help.

“My little girl is dying,” he said. “Will you come and put your hands on her—then she will get better and live” (Mark 5:22-23).

As Jesus walked towards the home of Jairus a great crowd of people pushed around him talking, asking questions, begging for favours. Among the crowd was a woman who had been sick 12 years with a chronic hemorrhage. Too shy and ashamed to mention her sickness before so many people, she thought within her heart

“If I can only touch his clothes, I shall be all right” (Mark 5:28).

For 12 years she had been from doctor to doctor paying fees for this cure and that. Slowly her savings had been eaten up, so that she spent all her living on doctors, and still had not been cured by the many medicines given to her. Now in fear and trembling faith she touched the edge of Jesus’ cloak—suddenly she felt a surge of strength flow through her body, and instinctively knew that at long last the hemorrhage had been stopped.

Jesus said:

“Who was that who touched me?” . . .

And when everybody denied it, Peter remonstrated,

“Master, the crowds are all round you and are pressing you on all sides . . .”

But Jesus said,

“Somebody touched me, for I felt that power went out from me!”

When the woman realised that she had not escaped notice she came forward trembling, and fell at his feet and admitted before everybody why she had had to touch him, and how she had been instantly cured.

“Daughter,” said Jesus, “It is your faith that has healed you—go in peace” (Luke 8:44-48).

While Jesus was still speaking to the woman he had just cured, messengers came from the house of Jairus saying:

“Your daughter is dead—there is no need to trouble the master any further” (v. 49).

Jesus overheard the message to Jairus, and seeing the deep grief on his face said,

“Don’t be afraid, go on believing and she will be all right (v. 50).

When they arrived at the house many relatives were already weeping and wailing over the girl.

Jesus said,

“Stop crying! She is not dead, she is fast asleep.”

This drew a scornful laugh from them, for they were quite certain that she had died (Luke 8:52-53).

Then he turned them all out of the house where the girl lay. Only Jairus and the girl’s mother, along with Peter, James and John were permitted to see what happened.

Jesus took the girl’s hand and called out to her: “Get up, my child!” (v. 54).

Her spirit came back and she rose to her feet at once, and walked round the room. Jesus ordered food to be given to her and her parents were nearly out of their minds for joy at what had happened. The girl was 12 years old.

Jesus goes back to Nazareth

Then he (Jesus) left that district and came into his own native town, followed by his disciples (Mark 6:1).

When with real courage he went on the Sabbath into the synagogue from which he had been violently expelled and began to teach,

The congregation were astonished at what they heard, and remarked, “Where does he get all this? What is this wisdom that he has been given—and what about these marvelous things that he can do? He’s only the carpenter, Mary’s son, the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon; and his sisters are living here with us!”

And they were deeply offended with him (Mark 6:2-3).

Again Jesus had to repeat with sadness the words,

“No prophet goes unhonoured—except in his native town or with his own relations or in his own home!” (v. 4).

And the ancient record states,

He could do nothing miraculous there apart from laying his hands on a few sick people and healing them; their lack of faith astonished him. (v. 5-6)

Leaving Nazareth Jesus traveled with his companions from village to village continuing his teaching. There were so many villages, the work

so great and his companions now more experienced, that Jesus decided to send them out also to share in the work. So he called the 12

and began to send them out in twos, giving them power over evil spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the road except a staff—no bread, no satchel and no money in their pockets. They were to wear sandals and not to take more than one coat.

And he told them,

“Wherever you are, when you go into a house, stay there until you leave that place. And wherever people will not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, leave them and shake the dust off your feet as a protest against them!”

So they went out and preached publicly that men should change their whole outlook. They expelled many evil spirits and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them (Mark 6:7-13).

Jesus directed his companions to be selective in what they did on this tour, and to concentrate rather on

the lost sheep of the house of (Jacob) (Matthew 10:6).

They were told:

“Don’t turn off into any of the heathen roads and don’t go into any Samaritan town” (Matthew 10:5).

Jesus was gently leading his trainees to do what they were now capable of doing and only later would they be experienced and mature enough to go to the Samaritans with their prejudices, and to the heathen idol worshipers. The time would come later still when he would send them into ALL THE WORLD.

John the Baptist is murdered

During the absence of the companions of Jesus on their tours of healing and teaching, John the Baptist, east of Jordan in the south of Peraea, was nearing sudden death.

The illegal wife of Prince Herod Antipas, Herodias, had been waiting for months to take her revenge on John. He had been one man who had been unmoved by her sensual charms and had sternly warned her and Antipas of their sin in the sight of God.

The ancient record tells us,

Herodias herself nursed a grudge against John for this and wanted to

have him executed, but she could not do it, for Herod had a deep respect for John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and kept him under his protection. He used to listen to him and be profoundly disturbed, and yet he enjoyed hearing him (Mark 6:19-20).

Finally the opportunity came in an unexpected manner

For Herod (Antipas) gave a birthday party for his courtiers and army commanders and for the leading people in Galilee. Herodias' daughter came in and danced, to the great delight of Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl,

“Ask me anything you like and I will give it to you!”

And he swore to her,

“I will give you whatever you ask me, up to half my kingdom!”

And she went out and spoke to her mother,

“What shall I ask for?”

And she said,

“The head of John the Baptist!”

The girl rushed back to the king's presence, and made her request.

“I want you to give me, this minute, the head of John the Baptist on a dish!” she said.

Herod was aghast, but because of his oath and the presence of his guests, he did not like to refuse her. So he sent the executioner straightway to bring him John's head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison, brought back his head on the dish, and gave it to the girl who handed it to her mother. When his disciples heard what had happened, they came and took away his body and put it in a tomb (Mark 6:21-29).

The weeks passed. And rumours, then facts, circulated in two streams from north to south. The wonders of the works and teachings of Jesus and his companions reached Prince Herod Antipas, and the sad news of John's death reached the companions as they traveled from town to town busy in their works of love and mercy.

This no doubt caused them to return hurriedly to Jesus who had also received the heart-breaking news. Prince Herod Antipas became fearful of hearing of the wonderful doings of Jesus. His guilty conscience pricked him. He began to imagine many things and said,

“It must be John whom I beheaded, risen from the dead!” (Mark 6:16).

Yet another voice to be silenced! So Herod Antipas tried some way to see Jesus. One way would be to have him quietly and suddenly arrested by his spies and soldiers, for Jesus was working in his territory in Galilee.

We know from the record as soon as Jesus heard first hand from John's disciples the details of his death,

he went away by boat to a deserted place, quite alone (Matthew 14:12).

We read his companions accompanied him, but by now they had learned to respect the habit of Jesus to leave them to go away out of sight in a lonely spot and there to speak to God in prayer, and to listen for his voice in direction. The boat had taken the group to a deserted portion of the lakeshore in the territory of Prince Philip. Here Jesus was safe from any sudden arrest by the soldiers and spies of Prince Antipas.

Nowadays we are used to passports and border crossings, but in those days no such procedures existed. It was in the territory of Bethsaida that Jesus now spent time in prayer alone on the hillside above the Lake of Galilee. But he was not left in peace long. The crowds had seen the direction in which the boat had gone and flocked to him on foot from the towns and villages.

When Jesus emerged from his retreat he saw a vast crowd and was very deeply moved and healed the sick among them (Matthew 14:14).

His heart was touched with pity for them because they seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd. So he settled down to teach them about many things.

As evening fell his disciples came to him and said,

"We are right in the wilds here and it is very late.

Send away these crowds now, so that they can go into the villages and buy themselves food" (Matthew 14:15).

But Jesus replied,

"You give them something to eat!"

"You mean we're to go and spend (a small fortune) on bread? Is that how you want us to feed them?"

"What bread have you got?" asked Jesus. "Go and have a look."

And when they had found out, they told him,

"We have five loaves and two fish" (Mark 6:37-38).

Jesus feeds the hungry crowds

The companions of Jesus were weary from their labours, from which they had only just returned. Their instinctive reaction to the vast crowds of over 5,000 people as evening came on, was to send them back to nearby towns and villages for the night and to buy food.

But Jesus had deep compassion for the crowd and their physical needs, like a shepherd cares for his sheep. This was one of the few occasions when circumstances of human need moved his heart to give them food by a miracle. To provide the food he multiplied the five loaves and two fishes so that all were fed. The ancient record states:

Jesus told them to arrange all the people in parties, sitting on the green grass. And they settled down, looking like flowerbeds, in groups of fifty or a hundred. Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to Heaven, thanked God, broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. Everybody ate and was satisfied. Afterwards they collected twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish that were left over. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves (Mark 6:39-44).

The crowd plans to make Jesus their king

A murmur began to be heard among groups of men as they talked among themselves of this great wonder. The restive crowds had for years suffered under tyrants and dictators. They burned with animosity against the foreign occupation of the Roman government. Their hopes that John the Baptist would free them had been dashed to the ground as they heard and talked of his murder by Herod Antipas. Those with national pride and zeal who watched the foreign officers and soldiers of Rome as they marched along the Roman-made roads, or arrived in the Mediterranean seaport towns, wanted to revolt and fight. The religious God-fearers loathed the contaminating vice of the Roman occupation with its idols, shrines and sensual luxury. They looked on the rule of the collaborating puppet regimes of Antipas and Philip with contempt, and the governorship of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem was a heathen occupation of their holy city. These groups now intermingled in low-spoken discussions that moved towards one consensus.

“Why wait longer?” they kept saying.

“This is surely the Prophet who was to come into the world!” (John 6:14).

They were thinking of Moses' words in the *Torah* (Deuteronomy 18:15), and their idea of freedom and salvation was a victorious rebellion against imperialistic Rome and foreign appointed exploiters.

Jesus, they reasoned, would lead their rebellion, and again they would become a strong independent nation, as they had been under King David and King Solomon.

The crowds who talked knew nothing at that time of Satan's temptation of Jesus to gain control of the whole world by manufacturing bread from stones. They also had not understood that Jesus had rejected the method of hate, war, violence and force to alter the evils of this world. Even now, 2,000 years later, very few have understood the secret of the power of Jesus' teaching of love to enemies, and meek humility and forbearance in the face of the persecution, harassment and physical violence.

Jesus rejects the people's plan to make him King

Jesus knew that at his final trial before he was killed, in a choice between him and a rebel named Barabbas the crowd would choose Barabbas. So Jesus knowing the thoughts and murmurs of the crowd and

realising that they were going to carry him off and make him their king by force, retired once more to the hill-side quite alone (John 6:15).

And his companions embarked in their boats as unobtrusively as possible.

Jesus disengaged himself from the temptation to become king before the time appointed by God, and he silently slipped away to avoid precipitating a crisis in the crowd, or causing the leaders to lose face. In any case, his kingdom was quite different from any common idea of the time, and only a few individuals were just beginning to comprehend the meaning of his teaching.

Alone on the hillside above the lake, Jesus prayed and meditated. He had rejected the people's plan to make him king. He sensed the agony of the path before him, and the suffering which was the only way to the final position of ruler and king of all the earth. In meditation and conversation with his Father in heaven he drew spiritual strength to obey the will of God.

Jesus controls the storm

Out of the lake a storm had blown the waters into white-crested waves. The moon, now nearly full, for the Passover feast was near, broke through dark clouds from time to time, and Jesus could just see his companions in their boat rowing against the wind.

Here was a situation easier to control than the obstinacy and violence of self-willed men!

The record states:

He saw them straining at the oars, for the wind was dead against them, and in the small hours he went towards them walking on the waters of the lake, intending to come alongside.

But when they saw him walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost, and screamed out. For they all saw him, and they were absolutely terrified. But Jesus at once spoke quietly to them,

“It’s all right, it is I myself; don’t be afraid!”

And he climbed aboard the boat with them and the wind dropped, but they were scared out of their wits. They had not had the sense to learn the lesson of the loaves; their minds were still in the dark (Mark 6:48-52).

Even his closest earthly companions were so filled with current ideas about the promised Messiah that they could not understand the full mystery of the person of Jesus.

The nature of true holiness

The crowds, always the crowds, thronged Jesus whenever he appeared around the northern shore of Lake Galilee. Several attempts had been made since news of John’s murder to withdraw for quiet, but each time Jesus and his companions had been followed. The only way was to travel north to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. But no one traveled on the Sabbath day, so they would pause in Capernaum and then leave on their journey.

Boarding the boat they left Gennesaret and made again for Capernaum. The record states that at the time of a meal,

Jesus was approached by the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem. They had noticed that his disciples ate their meals with “common” hands—meaning that they had not gone through a ceremonial washing. (The Pharisees, and indeed all the

Jews, will never eat unless they have washed their hands in a particular way, following a traditional rule. And they will not eat anything bought in the market until they have first performed their "sprinkling". And there are many other things which they consider important, concerned with the washing of cups, jugs and basins.) So the Pharisees and the scribes put this question to Jesus,

"Why do your disciples refuse to follow the ancient tradition, and eat their bread with 'common' hands?"

Jesus replied,

"You hypocrites, Isaiah described you beautifully when he wrote—

This people honoureth me with their lips,

But their heart is far from me.

But in vain do they worship me,

Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.

You are so busy holding on to the tradition of men that you let go the commandment of God!" (Mark 7:1-8).

Then he called the crowd close to him again, and spoke to them,

"Listen to me now, all of you, and understand this. There is nothing outside a man which can enter into him and make him 'common' (unclean). It is the things which come out of a man that make him 'common'!" (Mark 7:14-15).

There is as much discussion now as there was then about foods and drink that are unclean, and about ceremonial uncleanness and rituals for purification. Jesus' companions did not fully understand what he was saying, so later when he had gone indoors, away from the crowd they asked him what he meant.

"Oh, are you as dull as they are?" he said. "Can't you see that anything that goes into a man from outside cannot make him 'common' or unclean? You see, it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach, and passes out of the body altogether, so that all food is clean enough. But," he went on, "whatever comes out of a man, that is what makes a man 'common' or unclean. For it is from inside, from men's hearts and minds, that evil thoughts arise—lust, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance and folly! All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean!" (Mark 7:18-23).

Jesus taught that cleanness of the soul and heart of man is the most important, so that he may be in touch with the one true God.

The Pharisees, scribes, and even many of today's religious teachers overemphasise physical and external cleanliness as being the basis of acceptance by God.

On another occasion when the Pharisees noticed that Jesus ate without bothering about ceremonial ablutions, he said to them:

You Pharisees are fond of cleaning the outside of your cups and dishes, but inside yourselves you are full of greed and wickedness! Have you no sense? Don't you realise that the one who made the outside is the maker of the inside as well? If you would only make the inside clean by giving the contents to those in need, the outside becomes clean as a matter of course! But alas for you Pharisees, for you pay out your tithe²² of mint and rue²³ and every little herb, and lose sight of the justice and the love of God. Yet these are the things you ought to have been concerned with—it need not mean leaving the lesser duties undone. Yes, alas for you Pharisees, who love the front seats in the synagogues and have men bow down to you in public! Alas for you, for you are like unmarked graves—men walk over your corruption without ever knowing it is there" (Luke 11:39-44).

Jesus clearly warned the Pharisees, and scribes—and today warns any like them—of the danger of breaking God's commandments by an obsessive preoccupation with traditions which have been made by men.

Later on his disciples came to Jesus and said:

"Do you know that the Pharisees are deeply offended by what you said?"

"Every plant which my Heavenly Father did not plant will be pulled up by the roots," returned Jesus. "Let them alone. They are blind guides, and when one blind man leads another blind man they will both fall into the ditch!" (Matthew 15:12-14).

Teaching about the Bread of Life

On the Sabbath when many attended the house of worship in Capernaum, Jesus taught the crowds who had two days earlier been miraculously fed with bread and fishes. They had searched for him after his rescue of the disciples from the storm on the lake, and now crowded to hear him. These were the crowds who had wanted to make him king 48 hours earlier, and Jesus is about to expose their self-centred motives.

"Believe me," (said Jesus, "when I tell you that you are looking for me now, not because you saw my signs but because you ate that food and had all you wanted. You should not work for the food which does not last but for the food which lasts on into eternal life. This is the

food the Son of Man will give you, and he is the one who bears the stamp of God the Father'' (John 6:26-27).

As in the case of the woman Jesus talked with at the well near Sychar, Jesus turns the thoughts of men and women away from material to heavenly and spiritual matters. In the case of the woman he used water to explain the way God satisfies the thirsty soul. Now he uses bread to illustrate how God satisfies spiritual hunger. Water and bread are basic elements of life on this planet earth. Similarly there are basic elements for eternal life and existence in the Heavenly Kingdom.

The crowd then said,

''Then what sign can you give us that will make us believe in you? What work are you doing? Our forefathers ate manna in the desert just as the scripture says,

He gave them bread out of Heaven to eat.''

To which Jesus replied, ''That is true indeed, but what matters is not that Moses *gave you* bread from Heaven but that my Father is *giving you* the true bread from Heaven. For the bread of God which comes down from Heaven gives life to the world.''

This made them say to him, ''Lord, please give us this bread, now and always.''

Then Jesus said to them, ''I myself am the bread of life. The man who comes to me will never be hungry, and the man who believes in me will never be thirsty'' (John 6:30-35).

There is only One who can quench the hunger and thirst of the soul and that is Jesus the Christ.

And he goes on to say:

''I have come down from Heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of him who sent me. The will of him who sent me is that I should not lose anything of what he has given me, but should raise it up when the last day comes. And this is the will of the One who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and trusts him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up when the last day comes'' (John 6:38-40).

Here in very clear language Jesus promises to raise from the dead all who trust in him.

At this, the Jews began grumbling at him because he said, ''I am the bread which came down from Heaven'', remarking, ''Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose parents we know? How can he now say that 'I have come down from Heaven'?''

So Jesus answered them, ''Do not grumble among yourselves. No-

body comes to me unless he is drawn to me by the Father who sent me, and I will raise him up when the last day comes'' (vs. 41-44).

The crowds who wanted a guerrilla leader to lead them in rebellion against the Romans would not now acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah because his revelation of God's plan did not meet with their preconceived ideas. The record goes on to describe what followed:

Jesus said all these things while teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Many of his disciples heard him say these things and commented, ''This is hard teaching indeed; who could accept that?''

Then Jesus, knowing intuitively that his disciples were complaining about what he had just said, went on, ''Is this too much for you? Then what would happen if you were to see the Son of Man going up to the place where he was before? It is the Spirit which gives life. The flesh will not help you. The things which I have told you are spiritual and are life. But some of you do not believe me.''

For Jesus knew from the beginning which of his followers did not trust him and who was the man who would betray him. Then he added, ''This is why I said to you, 'No one can come to me unless my Father puts it into his heart to come.'''

As a consequence of this, many of his disciples withdrew and no longer followed him (vs. 59-66).

Within 48 hours most of the fickle crowd which had wanted Jesus to become their king left him, including a number of his disciples. Would the 12 companions also leave him?

Jesus said to the twelve, ''And are you too wanting to go away?''

''Lord,'' answered Simon Peter, ''who else should we go to? Your words have the ring of eternal life! And we believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God'' (vs. 67-69).

Mankind is so busy scratching in the dirt of this earth for a few coins, that it cannot lift its head to see the wonderful vision of God, and the glories of heaven he has prepared for those who love him.

Jesus taught and worked in a new and different way from the popular image of a leader. He put God first and pointed to the distant horizons of eternity. He promised that sufficiency for material life would in fact result from following his teaching and trusting him.

Many politicians and governments are almost exclusively preoccupied with the food which does not last. They promise many material benefits to gain votes, or to keep the masses happy, but most cannot fulfil these promises, and the misery and suffering of the poor in their inner hearts remains the same. Jesus did not make false promises. He pointed to a hard and difficult road to God, saying:

“Go in by the narrow gate. For the wide gate has a broad road which leads to disaster and there are many people going that way. The narrow gate and the hard road lead out into life and only a few are finding it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus then left that place and retired into the Tyre and Sidon district (Matthew 15:21).

Tyre and Sidon

The journey north now took Jesus and his companions just beyond the boundaries of Galilee, outside the province of Prince Antipas. A network of sympathisers and friends made it possible for Jesus to stay in homes from place to place, and when the group reached the neighborhood of Tyre, Jesus entered a home and requested privacy. He wanted no one to know where he was, but it proved impossible to remain hidden. The record tells of several incidents over this period in which Jesus healed those who were outside the covenant of circumcision, and as such reckoned to be heathen and unclean by the people of God.

The prophetic words

“In His name shall the gentiles hope (Matthew 12:21).

quoting the prophet Isaiah are about to receive partial fulfilment as a pointer to the future when from all nations of the world people will follow the way of Jesus.

The Syrophenician woman

One of the recorded incidents concerns a woman who intruded on the quiet of Jesus in the neighbourhood of Tyre. She was a Greek and a Syrophenician by birth. (Syrophenicia is now part of Lebanon.) Her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit. She had followed the disciples as Jesus walked with them, imploring help saying:

“Have pity on me! My daughter is in a terrible state—a devil has got into her!” (Matthew 15:22).

The priority at this time in the work of Jesus was to develop a nucleus of followers from among the covenant people of God and to offer the good news to Israel. If they had repented and turned in faith to God they could have been the means of blessing to the whole world. He emphasises this by saying that the children must have all they want first, meaning the people of God had first claim on his time and energy. But the woman persisted, kneeling at his feet and pleading,

“Lord help me” (Matthew 15:25).

She was a true seeker, knocking at the door with all her heart and in faith that Jesus would do something. Jesus never turns away such seekers, and with compassion in his heart he commented,

“You certainly don’t lack faith . . . it shall be as you wish” (Matthew 15:28).

And at that very moment her daughter was healed.

Leaving the friendly home in which he was staying, Jesus traveled through territory largely inhabited by heathen in which a few households of believers offered him rest and food for the night. These journeys were no doubt the opportunity for instruction to the 12 companions who traveled with him. Passing through the district of Sidon, heading east and then south Jesus entered the province of Prince Philip and finally the territory of the Ten Towns. The healed man from whom the legion of demons had been cast out had already traveled through these towns, telling how Jesus had cured him. Very soon sick people were being brought to Jesus for healing. One was a deaf man, who as a result could not talk properly. They implored Jesus to heal him. The record says,

Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself. He put his fingers in the man’s ears and touched his tongue with his own saliva. Then looking up to Heaven, he gave a deep sigh and said to him in Aramaic,

“Open!”

And his ears were opened and immediately whatever had tied his tongue came loose and he spoke plainly. Jesus gave instructions that they should tell no one about this happening, but the more he told them, the more they broadcast the news. People were amazed, and kept saying,

“How wonderfully he has done everything! He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak” (Mark 7:33-37).

No wonder that

great crowds came to him, bringing with them people who were lame, blind, crippled, dumb and many others. They simply laid them

at his feet and he healed them. The result was that the people were astonished at seeing dumb men speak, crippled men healed, lame men walking about and blind men having recovered their sight. And they praised the God of Israel (Matthew 15:30-31).

For three days the crowds surged around Jesus as he sat on the hillside serving them and teaching them. The record says:

Jesus quietly called his disciples to him. "My heart goes out to this crowd," he said. "They've stayed with me three days now and have no more food. I don't want to send them home without anything to eat or they will collapse on the way."

"Where could we find enough food to feed such a crowd in this deserted spot?" said the disciples.

"How many loaves have you?" asked Jesus.

"Seven, and a few small fish," they replied.

Jesus feeds the hungry again

Jesus told the crowd to sit down comfortably on the ground. And when he had taken the seven loaves and the fish into his hands, he broke them with a prayer of thanksgiving and gave them to the disciples to pass on to the people. Everybody ate and was satisfied, and they picked up seven baskets full of the pieces left over. Those who ate numbered four thousand men, apart from women and children.

Then Jesus sent the crowds home, boarded the boat and arrived at the district of Magadan (Matthew 15:32-39).

This was the second time Jesus' compassion for the crowds moved him to feed them miraculously. These were quite a different crowd from the 5,000 he fed near Capernaum, a number were from the Ten Towns and heathen in their way of life. When he left them for Magadan on the western side of the Lake of Galilee he was not followed. On arrival at the other side of the lake, however, the Pharisees came to begin an argument with him. They wanted a sign from heaven to prove he was the Messiah.

In those days the Pharisees seemed more interested in religious discussions and arguments than in helping the sick and poor. Today the same attitude often results in theoretical and religious ideas being discussed, rather than tender compassion being shown to the miserable and needy of the earth. What better sign is there than love and compassion for the needy and sick? Jesus was wearing himself out by serving vast crowds, while the Pharisees stood around in their long robes, not lifting

a finger to help, but rather hindering by argument. Jesus gave a deep sigh, saying,

“What makes this generation want a sign?”

Then he left them and got aboard the boat again and crossed the lake. They were making for Bethsaida.

The disciples had forgotten to take any food and had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus spoke seriously to them, “Keep your eyes open! Be on your guard against the ‘yeast’ of the Pharisees and the ‘yeast’ of Herod!” And this sent them into an earnest consultation among themselves because they had brought no bread (Mark 8:12-16).

The disciples were preoccupied with bread. The ‘yeast’ of the Pharisees and Herod was doubt and unbelief in Jesus, and his proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Signs in abundance had been given to any ready to recognise them, but still hearts were hardened and eyes blinded. The disciples were in danger of unbelief and doubt. Jesus knew what the discussion was about, so he said:

“Why all this discussion about bringing no bread? Don’t you understand or grasp what I say even yet? Are your minds closed? Are you like the people who ‘having eyes, do not see, and having ears, do not hear’? Have you forgotten—when I broke five loaves for five thousand people, how many baskets full of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

“And when there were seven loaves for four thousand people, how many baskets of pieces did you pick up?”

“Seven,” they said.

“And does that still mean nothing to you?” he said (vs. 17-21).

Jesus restores sight

So they arrived at Bethsaida where a blind man was brought to him, with the earnest request that he should touch him. Jesus took the blind man’s hand and led him outside the village. Then he moistened his eyes with saliva and putting his hands on him asked,

“Can you see at all?”

The man looked up and said,

“I can see people. They look like trees—only they are walking about.”

Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes once more and his sight came into focus, and he recovered and saw everything sharp and clear. And Jesus sent him off to his own house with the words, “Don’t even go into the village” (Mark 8:22-26).

Jesus and his companions proceeded on their journey northward to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. This area is always remembered historically as marking the commencement of the last six months of the life and teachings of Jesus. Into the final six months’ period is condensed a considerable amount of detail in the ancient records, and there is much that must be considered carefully. In fact the whole emphasis of the Holy Gospel seems to point towards this final six months, and it really commences with the question Jesus puts to his companions.

The question at Caesarea Philippi

As Jesus walked with his companions to the villages of Caesarea Philippi he asked them,

“Who are men saying that I am?”

“John the Baptist,” they answered. “But others say that you are Elijah or, some say, one of the prophets.”

Then he asked them,

“But what about you—who do you say that I am?”

“You are Christ!” answered Peter.

Then Jesus impressed it upon them that they must not mention this to anyone (Mark 8:27-30).

Now at last Peter as spokesman for the companions had voiced their deep conviction that Jesus, whom they had observed for two and a half years in his compassionate service of the sick, oppressed and needy—this great Teacher—was indeed the promised Messiah. Glimmerings of this fact had dawned on them and on others from time to time. They had heard John the Baptist point him out as the Coming One, but only now was there certainty enough to answer the question with assurance. Yet how much they still had to learn. Like the crowds who wanted to make him a guerrilla king to fight the Romans, their understanding of all that their confession of him as Messiah meant, was imperfect.

Jesus now, very patiently explained to the 12 what being Messiah meant. As the ancient record states,

He began to teach them that it was inevitable that the Son of Man should go through much suffering and be utterly repudiated by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He told them all this quite bluntly.

This made Peter draw him on one side and take him to task about what he had said. But Jesus turned and faced his disciples and rebuked Peter.

“Out of my way, Satan!” he said. “Peter, your thoughts are not God’s thoughts, but man’s!” (Mark 8:31-33).

Peter and his companions like many other God-fearing people thought it was a great insult and dishonour for Jesus, such a sinless holy prophet, to be killed. Peter and his companions knew that holy men of God had suffered to death in times past because of their faithfulness to the truth of God’s message, and because of their refusal to compromise. John the Baptist had been beheaded only a short while earlier. Nowadays the word ‘martyr’ is thought to be an honourable title. Why think it a dishonour to be killed in the service of God Almighty?

The mystery of the death of Christ on the cross is unfolded towards the end of his life history, but we note here that he spoke of it in connection with his conquest of death by rising alive again from the tomb three days later. Peter and the 11 did not understand this at all until it actually happened. All they could think of, on hearing Jesus speak, was to prevent their Master from exposing himself to danger and being martyred as John the Baptist had been.

Jesus had to correct the impression that death was dishonourable for a servant of God. The record states that following the confession of Peter and his attempt to turn Jesus away from danger

(Jesus) called his disciples and the people around him, and said to them,

“If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me. The man who tries to save his life will lose it; it is the man who loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s who will save it. What good can it do a man to gain the whole world at the price of his own soul? What can a man offer to buy back his soul once he has lost it? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels around him” (Mark 8:34-38).

In this statement Jesus reveals the price to be paid by any true worshiper and seeker after God—the price of possibly being ostracised by family, relatives and friends; the loss of job security, social advantage and cultural development. Such a price is today being paid by

thousands of followers of the life and teachings of Jesus the Messiah in a number of countries.

Jesus explains that an unashamed relationship with him now will be the basis of his public recognition in the day of glory—the Day when the unseen world of angels and the blessed ones with God will suddenly burst on mankind.

Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah

To introduce his companions to the dimension and reality of the unseen world of the Spirit, Jesus selected three of them—Peter, James and John—and six days later climbed toward a high mountain peak, probably on the slopes of Mount Hermon.

The record states:

Six days later, Jesus took Peter and James and John with him and led them high up on a hill-side where they were entirely alone. His whole appearance changed before their eyes, while his clothes became white, dazzling white—whiter than any earthly bleaching could make them (Mark 9:2-3).

Suddenly two men could be seen talking with Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah—revealed in heavenly splendour, and their talk was about the way he must take and the end he must fulfil in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30,31).

This was one of the few occasions in earth's history when prophets of God have actually returned to this planet after death. Moses is well-known as having been the means by which the Law (*Torah*) was given to the people of God. Elijah had never died, but had gone up to heaven alive. Both histories can be read in the Scriptures (the book of Exodus and II Kings chapters 1 and 2). Moses and Elijah had already been many earth-years in the other world and were more accurately informed about the mysterious plan of God for the Messiah. So they talked with Jesus, strengthening him for the coming conflict with the Jewish leaders and Roman government.

As Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John watched and listened with amazement and fear. Never before had the unseen world drawn so near.

Peter burst out to Jesus,

“Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Shall we put up three (shrines)—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?”

He really did not know what to say, for they were very frightened. Then came a cloud which overshadowed them a voice spoke out of the cloud,

“This is my dearly-loved Son.²⁴ Listen to him!” (Mark 9:5-7).

When they heard this voice the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. Then Jesus came up to them and touched them.

“Get up and don’t be frightened,” he said. And as they raised their eyes there was no one to be seen but Jesus himself (Matthew 17:6-8).

As they came down the hill-side, he warned them not to tell anybody what they had seen till “the Son of Man should have risen again from the dead”.

They were deeply impressed by this remark and tried to puzzle out among themselves what “rising from the dead” could mean (Mark 9:9-11).

Descending from that mountain-top experience to the lowlands to rejoin the nine companions left behind, Jesus, with Peter, James and John arrived in the midst of a crisis. The companions had been unable to cure a mad boy who had been brought to them by his father.

The epileptic boy

The record states:

When they returned to the crowd again a man came and knelt in front of Jesus. “Lord, have pity on my son,” he said, “for he is a lunatic and suffers terribly. He is always falling into the fire or into the water. I did bring him to your disciples but they couldn’t cure him.”

“You really are an unbelieving and difficult people,” Jesus returned.

“How long must I be with you, and how long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me!”

Then Jesus spoke sternly to the evil spirit and it went out of the boy, who was cured from that moment.

Afterwards the disciples approached Jesus privately and asked, “Why weren’t we able to get rid of it?”

“Because you have so little faith,” replied Jesus. “I assure you that if you have the faith the size of a mustard-seed you can say to this hill, ‘Up you get and move other there!’ and it will move—you will find nothing is impossible” (Matthew 17:14-20).

Following this incident . . .

They left that district and went straight through Galilee. Jesus kept

this journey secret for he was teaching his disciples that the Son of Man would be betrayed into the power of men, that they would kill him and that three days after his death he would rise again. But they were completely mystified by this saying, and were afraid to question him about it (Mark 9:30-32).

Again and again Jesus told his followers what would soon happen to him but their minds were prejudiced by the teachings of childhood, and the popular ideas talked about in the bazaars. It seemed impossible for a prophet of God like Jesus to be killed, and they had no idea of the meaning of "rising again". Even now many permit deep prejudice to stop their thinking powers, and refuse to investigate the truth, or will not look at the facts of history.

The companions discuss "greatness"

Jesus and his companions traveled south to Capernaum along the narrow paths used by donkeys and mules. Walking ahead alone, Jesus knew by the low-voiced discussion that something was agitating his companions.

The record tells us:

So they came to Capernaum. And when they were indoors he asked them,

"What were you discussing as we came along the road?"

They were silent, for on the way they had been arguing about who should be the greatest. Jesus sat down and called the twelve, and said to them,

"If any man wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).

Jesus teaches about children

Then he took a little child and stood him in front of them all, and putting his arm around him, said to them,

"Anyone who welcomes one little child like this for my sake is welcoming me. And the man who welcomes me is welcoming not only me but the one who sent me!" (Mark 9:37).

Humility, rather than self-seeking leadership is to characterise true followers of Jesus. True inward humility is the most difficult of all spiritual gifts to acquire. Many will use language which in a superficial way indicates humility. "Come to my poor hut", a man will say when it is really a large house. Another will call himself "your servant", and yet another will protest that he is, and knows, nothing.

Jesus, to test the sincerity of his followers, presents them with this humble task, the caring for a little child. The readiness to care for little children is an act of service to God.

James, a step-brother of Jesus, after he believed, wrote a letter to fellow disciples in which he said,

Religion that is pure and genuine in the sight of God the Father will show itself by such things as visiting orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27).

Followers of Jesus have tried to put into practice this teaching by opening orphanages and starting schools with an emphasis on faith in God, good morals, and behaviour. This fact is known by most readers of this book.

Jesus pointed out to his companions that there was another aspect to the humility of a child. Setting a little child in the middle of them all he said,

"Believe me, . . . unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. It is the man who can be as humble as this little child who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3-4).

One characteristic of a little child is simple trust in his parents, especially if the parents are good and loving. God wants this quality of trust and obedience in his children. The independence and stubborn pride which later develops in adolescents and adults, and which in its disastrous consequences is the character of the devil, is the very opposite of this humility Jesus talked about. As far as God is concerned, humility, and trust in Himself, are the basic requirements for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus adds a note of warning,

"Be careful that you never despise a single one of these little ones—for I tell you that they have angels who see my Father's face continually in Heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

"If anyone leads astray one of these little children who believe in me he would be better off thrown into the depths of the sea with a millstone hung round his neck!" (Matthew 18:6).

On another occasion the record tells us,

Then some little children were brought to him, so that he could put his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples strongly disapproved of this but Jesus said,

“You must let little children come to me, and you must never stop them. The kingdom of Heaven belongs to little children like these!” Then he laid his hands on them, blessed them and walked away (Matthew 19:13-15).

There is a special love in the heart of God for children, and Jesus concluded his remarks on this subject, which had commenced by the argument among his companions as to who was the greatest, with these words:

“You can understand then that it is never the will of your Father²⁵ in Heaven that a single one of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:14).

Who is for or against Jesus?

Another incident on the journey south to Capernaum had aroused intense discussion. The record tells that John said:

“Master, we saw somebody driving out evil spirits in your name, and we tried to stop him, for he is not one who follows us.”

But Jesus replied,

“You must not stop him. No one who exerts such power in my name would readily say anything against me. For the man who is not against us is on our side. In fact, I assure you that the man who gives you a mere drink of water in my name, because you are followers of mine, will most certainly be rewarded” (Mark 9:38-41).

Jesus taught that some by their attitudes and actions may in fact be on his side, even though they have not publicly joined his followers. He warned against a harsh attitude to them, and against a proselytising zeal which tries forcefully to gain adherents to a ‘religion’. Such an attitude can disturb the faith of a humble believer in Jesus, and stumble him.

Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus goes on to say that entrance into the Kingdom of God is so important that no one should hinder another, and every hindrance to one's own entrance should be eliminated. His words are these:

“Indeed, if it is your own hand that spoils your faith, you must cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than to keep both hands and go to the rubbish-heap, where the fire never dies. If your foot spoils your faith, you must cut it off. It is better for you to enter life on one foot than to keep both your feet and be thrown on the rubbish-heap. And if your eye leads you astray, pluck it out. It is better for you to go one-eyed into the kingdom of God than to keep both eyes and be thrown on to the rubbish-heap, where decay never stops and the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43-49).

Jesus visits Jerusalem secretly

Jesus now traveled about in Galilee, teaching and healing according to his custom. Further south in Judaea the Jews were planning to take his life. Autumn harvest was nearly gathered in. In the great city of Jerusalem preparations were being made for the joyous seven days of the “Feast of Tabernacles” to celebrate the harvest and give thanks to God for the ingathering of crops before the winter.

As the Autumn Feast drew near, the step-brothers of Jesus said to him,

“You ought to leave here and go to Judaea so that your disciples can see what you are doing, for nobody works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you are doing things like this, let the world see what you are doing.” For not even his brothers had any faith in him (John 7:3-4).

Later one of these step-brothers, James, was to become a believer and a disciple of Jesus. But now he joined his brothers in ridiculing him and arguing for some public demonstration or proof to the pilgrims that would soon crowd Jerusalem at the Feast.

Jesus replied by saying, “It is not yet the right time for me, but any time is right for you. It is impossible for you to arouse the world's hatred, but I provoke hatred because I show the world how evil its deeds really are. No, you go up to the festival; I shall not go up now, for it is not yet time for me to go.” And after these words he remained where he was in Galilee (John 7:6-9).

A few days later the inner voice whispered guidance to Jesus that he should go to Jerusalem now.

The record tells us,

Later, after his brothers had gone to the festival, he went up himself, not openly, but as though he did not want to be seen (John 7:10).

We are told little if anything about the journey. In a very unobtrusive way Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, probably staying with friends outside the city.

There was an undercurrent of discussion about Jesus among the crowds of worshipers offering their sacrifices.

Some would say, "He is a good man", others maintained that he was not, but that he was "misleading the people". Nobody, however spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews (that is their leaders) (John 7:12,13).

The records tell us that when Jesus did not appear at the festival, they kept looking for him at the festival and asking "Where is that man?" (John 7:11).

The festival lasted eight days, from 15-22 *Ethanim* (October) and had followed the solemn Day of Atonement, called *Yom Kipper*.

In the middle of the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began teaching (John 7:14).

In one sense the crowds protected him. The leaders above all wished to avoid a riot because of the danger of interference by the Roman soldiers, and serious repercussions on their position. In fact,

The Jews were amazed and remarked, "How does this man know all this—he has never been taught?" (v. 15).

For some of them this was their first contact with Jesus, all they knew were the prejudiced reports of their colleagues. Others had heard him before. Now they listened to a discussion between this Master Teacher and their leaders, in which the crowd joined also.

Jesus replied to them, "My teaching is not really mine but comes from the One who sent me. If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I merely speak on my own authority. A man who speaks on his own authority has an eye for his own reputation. But the man who is considering the glory of God who sent him is a true man. There can be no dishonesty about him (John 7:16-18).

Apparently some Jews had charged him with breaking Moses' law the last time he was in Jerusalem when he had cured a paralytic man on

the Sabbath. At that time they had tried to kill him. Jesus asked them to accept the reality of God's healing power as an act of divine mercy to help a sick man, even on the Sabbath.

At the edge of the large crowd,

Some of the people of Jerusalem, hearing him talk like this, were saying, "Isn't this the man whom they are trying to kill? Yet here he is, talking quite openly and they haven't a word to say to him. Surely our rulers haven't decided that this really is Christ (the Messiah)!²⁶ But then, we know this man and where he comes from" (John 7:25-27).

Jesus obviously overheard the remarks and,

in the middle of his teaching, called out in the Temple, "So you know me and know where I have come from? But I have not come of my own accord; I am sent by One who is true and you do not know him! I do know him, because I come from him and he has sent me here" (vs. 28, 29).

This was too much for the leaders and the record states,

Then they attempted to arrest him, but actually no one laid a finger on him because the right moment had not yet come (v. 30).

The same invisible restraining hand of God kept back the efforts of men to silence his voice until the time would come, six months later, at the Feast of the Passover.

The record states,

Many of the crowd believed in him and kept on saying, "When Christ comes, is he going to show greater signs than this man?" (v. 31).

After several more days Jesus appeared again in the Temple. It was the climax of the festival—the last day, when

Jesus stood up and cried out,

"If any man is thirsty, he may come to me and drink! The man who believes in me, as the scripture said, will have rivers of living water flowing from his inmost heart." (Here he was speaking about the Spirit which those who believe in him would receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified) (John 7:37-39).

Jesus again uses the illustration of water, as he had done with the woman at Sychar. This time he promises not only satisfaction to the spiritually thirsty, but that God who is pure Spirit will use the believer to channel spiritual life to those who thirst after himself.

The way Jesus spoke, his use of familiar illustrations, and the quiet authority and confidence which surrounded him, made a deep impression on many in the crowd.

When they heard these words, some of the people were saying “This really is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is Christ!”²⁷ But some said, “And does Christ come from Galilee? Don’t the scriptures say that Christ will be descended from David, and will come from Bethlehem,²⁸ the village where David lived?”

So the people were in two minds about him—some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the officers returned to the Pharisees and chief priests, who said to them, “Why haven’t you brought him?”

“No man ever spoke as this man speaks!” they replied.

“Has he pulled the wool over your eyes, too?” retorted the Pharisees. “Have any of the authorities or any of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who know nothing about the Law, is damned anyway!” (John 7:40-49).

The failure of the temple police to arrest Jesus angered the Pharisees and chief priests. It also worried them. The officers seemed to be in his favour. Like many angry leaders they despised the illiterate crowds and claimed that no educated people had believed. They did not realise that one of their own members—Nicodemus—quietly sitting in the conference, was a secret believer, who had previously had a long private talk with Jesus. In a timid way Nicodemus tried to insist on a proper investigation before judging Jesus.

One of their number, Nicodemus (the one who had previously been to see Jesus) said to them, “But surely our Law does not judge the accused without first hearing what he has to say, and finding out what he has done?”

“Are you a Galilean, too?” they retorted. “Look where you will—you won’t find that any prophet comes out of Galilee!”

So they broke up their meeting and went home, while Jesus went off to the Mount of Olives (John 7:50-53).

Jesus spent the night outside the city wall among the olive groves with a few of his companions. Early the next morning he returned to the Temple and commenced teaching. The time had now come to speak more clearly than ever, after the confrontation of the previous day. Very shortly pilgrims would be departing on the long journey home, traveling by camel, on foot, and by sailing ships to distant parts of the Mediterranean sea.

Jesus claims to be the Light of the World

As the crowd came to hear him in the Temple, Jesus said:

“I am the light of the world. The man who follows me will never walk in the dark but will live his life in the light” (John 8:12).

A disciple commenting on these words of Jesus, some years later, wrote:

Anyone who claims to be “in the light” and hates his brother is in fact, still in complete darkness. The man who loves his brother lives in the light, and has no reason to stumble. But the man who hates his brother is shut off from the light and gropes his way in the dark without knowing where he is going. For the darkness has made him blind (I John 2:9-11).

This *is* the judgment—that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Everybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But everybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God (John 3:19-21).

As a bright light in a dark night shows up the dirt and mud on white clothes, so the sinless life and wonderful teaching of Jesus helps men to see how sinful they are in the presence of God. The result should be a changed life, which is cleansed from all evil.

GOD IS LIGHT and no shadow of darkness can exist in him. Consequently, if we were to say that we enjoyed fellowship with him and still went on living in darkness, we should be both telling and living a lie . . . But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find him reliable and just—he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil (I John 1:5,6,9).

Jesus says “I am from above”

During that day, as he was teaching in the Temple treasury, Jesus said,

The difference between us . . . is that you come from below and I am from above. You belong to this world but I do not. That is why I told you you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am who I am, you will die in your sins” (John 8:23-24).

Jesus announced clearly that he was the promised Messiah sent by God. So few understood what he meant! They asked again:

“Who are you?” (v. 25).

As Jesus answered, explaining that he had been sent by the One who is True, “many people believed in him” (John 8:30).

Turning to these Jews who now professed to believe in him, he tested them by saying:

“If you are faithful to what I have said, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!” (vs. 31-32).

They did not like this,

“We are descendants of Abraham,” they replied, “and we have never in our lives been any man’s slaves. How can you say to us, ‘You will be set free’ ” (v. 33).

Were they truly free? Jesus pointed out that they were slaves to sin. He said:

“Believe me when I tell you that every man who commits sin is a slave” (v. 34).

True freedom is liberation from evil habits and sins. Men and women may be slaves of the devil—even though they live in a nation freed from colonial controls!

When these professed new believers heard these words they retorted:

“Our father is Abraham!” (John 8:39).

meaning that they were not slaves but descendants of a free man, the very Friend of God.

Gently, but firmly, Jesus went on to explain that if they were true descendants of Abraham they would model their lives on his godliness, faith and obedience to the one true God. Their evil lives, the hate and violence in their hearts, and their refusal to obey the teaching of Jesus, showed that they followed their father the devil, who always was a murderer and a liar and the father of lies (precis of vs. 39-47).

In anger the Jews retorted:

“How right we are . . . in calling you a Samaritan, and mad at that!”

“No,” replied Jesus, “I am not mad. I am honouring my Father and you are dishonouring me . . . Believe me when I assure you that if anybody accepts my words, he will never see death at all.”

“Now we know that you’re mad,” replied the Jews. “Why, Abraham died and the prophets, too, and yet you say, ‘If a man accepts my words, he will never experience death!’ Are you greater than our father, Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets—who are you making yourself out to be?”

“If I were to glorify myself,” returned Jesus, “such glory would be

worthless. But it is my Father who glorifies me, the very one whom you say is your God—though you have never known him. But I know him, and if I said I did not know him, I should be as much a liar as you are! But I do know him, and I am faithful to what he says. As for your Father, Abraham, his great joy was that he would see my coming. Now he has seen it and he is overjoyed.”

“Look,” said the Jews to him, “you are not fifty yet—and have you seen Abraham?”

“I tell you in solemn truth,” returned Jesus, “before there was an Abraham, I AM!” (John 8:48-49,51-59).

The claim by Jesus to have existed before Abraham was born was one of the clearest statements he had yet made that he was different from other men. Every other human being commences existence at birth. Jesus claimed to have existed before Abraham.

Serious searchers after truth, seeking to know the mystery of God, should pause and pray for illumination, and to understand what Jesus meant.

The crowds, listening to Jesus then, refused to search for truth, or to try and understand the deep meaning of his words. Instead, in mad fury they picked up stones to murder him.

This was the fifth attempt in a few days to kill or arrest Jesus, but it failed. As silently and secretly as Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem, in the middle of the Feast, he now departed, sad at heart. So few truly searched after God and wished to understand!

Two months' teaching and travel

The Holy Gospel gives several incidents of the travels and teaching of Jesus through the autumn of AD 29 until his return to Jerusalem in late December for the Feast of Dedication. In Jerusalem there were always the bigoted religious leaders with vested interests, jealous of their influence and authority. But in the more distant towns and villages the crowds flocked to hear the great teacher. They came to be healed of their sicknesses and to receive comfort in their poverty and family sorrows.

It seems probable that Jesus had returned to Galilee from Jerusalem and soon a crowd of his friends and disciples had begun again to listen to his teaching.

In preparation for two months' travel southward, teaching and healing as he went, Jesus,

sent messengers ahead of him. They set out and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. But the people there refused to welcome him (Luke 9:52-53).

When two companions of Jesus, James and John, heard this, they became angry that their teacher had been insulted. They said:

“Master, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and burn them all up?”

But Jesus turned and reproved them, and they all went on to another village (Luke 9:54-55).

Jesus never forced himself on people or places. He emphasised the important principle of free choice. God, all mighty in power, invites and persuades, but does not force men and women to follow his way. True love cannot be forced, nor can true love be prevented by force. Only after death and the final judgment are the wicked separated from the good by God’s direct intervention. It is therefore very important to search after God and his truth NOW with all the heart.

Perhaps the incident of the villagers who turned Jesus away, sparked a sense of loyalty in a wavering disciple, who had seen Jesus leave the village and quieten the mistaken zeal of his companions.

The record states:

As the little company made its way along the road, a man said to him, “I’m going to follow you wherever you go.”

And Jesus replied,

“Foxes have (holes), birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:57-58).

Even the home base in Capernaum of Galilee had now been abandoned, and like a homeless nomad, Jesus had literally no place on this earth which he could call his own. Those who followed him also faced the possibility of being ostracised by their families and friends. Even to this day true followers of Jesus are unable to identify themselves with hate, violence and selfish interests, and so find themselves a minority community, denied many privileges and good jobs. This is as true in western nations as it is in Asia, Africa or South America.

Seeing a man listening nearby, and observing in his eyes a longing to obey God, Jesus said to him:

“Follow me.”

And he replied,

“Let me go and bury my father.”

But Jesus told him,

“Leave the dead to bury their own dead. You must come away and preach the kingdom of God.”

Another man said to him,

"I am going to follow you, Lord, but first let me bid farewell to my people at home."

But Jesus told him,

"Anyone who puts his hand to the plough and then looks behind him is useless for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-62).

In both cases the persons thinking of following Jesus put their family first. The first person wanted to await the death of his father before following Jesus. The second wanted to say goodbye to his family. These halfhearted listeners were in danger of losing the only opportunity they would ever have of following Jesus. He would not pass that way again, and in a few months' time he would be gone from visible sight for ever. There is a time in each person's life when the opportunity to make a decision must be grasped firmly, or that person becomes useless for the kingdom of God.

Jesus sends 70, two by two, in advance

To plan carefully for his own visit to a number of centres, Jesus, commissioned 70 other disciples and sent them off in twos as advance-parties into every town and district where he intended go himself.

"There is a great harvest," he told them, "but only a few are working in it—which means you must pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out more reapers to bring in his harvest.

"Now go on your way. I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Don't carry a purse or a bag or a pair of shoes, and don't stop to greet anyone you meet on the road. When you go into a house, say first of all, 'Peace be to this household!'

If there is a lover of peace there, he will accept your words of blessing, and if not, they will come back to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink whatever they put before you—a workman deserves his wages. But don't move from one house to another.

Whatever town you go into and the people welcome you, eat the meals they give you and heal the people who are ill there. Tell them, 'The kingdom of God is very near to you now.' But whenever you come into a town and they will not welcome you, you must go into the streets and say, 'We brush off even the dust of your town from our feet as a protest against you'" (Luke 10:1-11).

Before the 70 left on their assignment Jesus said:

“Whoever listens to you is listening to me, and the man who rejects you rejects me too. And the man who rejects me rejects the One who sent me!” (Luke 10:16).

In one village after another, two by two, the 70 announced that Jesus would soon be visiting them. Wherever there was a favourable response they made arrangements for his visit, and did what they could for the sick and demon-possessed. It was a fact then, as it is now, that the masses of working peoples and landless peasants, were very glad and happy that anyone took a genuine interest in their welfare and tried to help them. The disciples found a ready response in many places, and returned with joy, saying to Jesus as they returned,

“Lord, even evil spirits obey us when we use your name!” (v. 17).

The parable of the good Samaritan

Jesus now traveled to the towns and villages where the 70 had made preparations. One day during a teaching session,

one of the experts in the Law stood up to test him and said,

“Master, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?”

“What does the Law say and what has your reading taught you?” said Jesus.

“The Law says, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind—and thy neighbour as thyself’,” he replied.

“Quite right, said Jesus. “Do that and you will live.”

But the man, wanting to justify himself, continued,

“But who is my ‘neighbour’?”

And Jesus gave him the following reply:

“A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell into the hands of bandits who stripped his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. A Levite²⁹ also came on the scene and when he saw him, he too passed by on the other side. But then a Samaritan traveller came along to the place where the man was lying, and at the sight of him he was touched with pity. He went across to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own mule, brought

him to an inn and did what he could for him. Next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the inn-keeper with the words, 'Look after him, will you? I will pay you back whatever more you spend, when I come through here on my return.' Which of these three seems to you to have been a neighbour to the bandits' victim?"

"The man who gave him practical sympathy," he replied.

"Then you go and give the same," returned Jesus (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus made a very important point in his answer to the expert in the law. Proclaiming that "God is One" is not enough. Love to the One True God must be demonstrated by practical sympathy to the neighbour. The neighbour in this parable was a man left half dead. Official religious leaders, the priest and the Levite, avoided involvement with the man in need. The only one who helped was a Samaritan, despised by the people of God. (Samaritans were looked down on by Jews as spiritually inferior people who did not hold the true faith.) Many people will help their relatives in a time of trouble. Numbers will walk in a funeral procession after a person who can no longer be helped! But deep compassion for the needy and miserable of the earth is not practised enough even today. Jesus calls his listeners to close the gap between the proclamation of religious ideas, and the practical daily concern for people in need, whoever they are.

Jesus' teaching on sundry matters

Sundry teachings of Christ are recorded which are now mentioned as they were given. On one occasion

The crowds had gathered in thousands, so that they were actually treading on each other's toes, and Jesus, speaking primarily to his disciples, said,

"Be on your guard against yeast—I mean the yeast of the Pharisees, which is sheer pretence. For there is nothing covered up which is not going to be exposed, not anything private which is not going to be made public. Whatever you may say in the dark will be heard in daylight, and whatever you whisper within four walls will be shouted from the house-tops" (Luke 12:1-3).

Pretence and hypocrisy were denounced by Christ as sin. He saw through the flowery words and teaching of certain religious leaders. He warned his own followers not to cover up their real lives by a pretended religious life, pointing out that God sees everything. Just as a tape

recording can be replayed, and a film or TV program can be shown of what was said and done, so God will one day reveal what each man and woman has done, said, and thought. All excuses will fail as we are faced with our own recorded words and actions.

Jesus then went on to encourage his true followers to fear God only rather than live a life to please man. God looks after his true followers and knows even the number of the hairs of their head.

“I tell you, as friends of mine, that you are not to be afraid of those who can kill the body, but afterwards cannot do anything more. I will show you the only one you need to fear—the one who, after he has killed, has the power to throw you into destruction! Yes, I tell you, it is right to stand in awe of him. The market price of five sparrows is two farthings, isn’t it? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. Why, the very hairs of your heads are all numbered! Don’t be afraid then; you are worth more than a great many sparrows! I tell you that every man who acknowledges me before men, I, the Son of Man, will acknowledge in the presence of the angels of God. But the man who disowns me before men will find himself disowned before the angels of God!” (Luke 12:4-9).

Sometimes men and women who believe in their hearts about Jesus are more afraid of their relatives or employers than of God. Jesus calls for a bold acknowledgement of himself by all his true followers.

Jesus refuses to arbitrate

In the crowd someone shouted out a request, saying,

“Master, tell my brother to share his legacy with me.”

But Jesus replied,

“My dear man, who appointed me a judge or arbitrator in your affairs?” (Luke 12:13-14).

Jesus refused to settle the dispute. A time will come when Jesus, on return to this earth a second time, will act as judge, but not now. He rather points in another direction.

Turning to the disciples, he said to them,

“Notice that, and be on your guard against covetousness in any shape or form. For a man’s real life in no way depends upon the number of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Most of us are preoccupied with obtaining our rights and accumulat-

ing things. We want a better share of this world's wealth. As we have seen, Jesus met the physical needs of the poor on many occasions, and continually healed their sick, free of charge. However, he always pointed to priorities, and by a parable he now emphasised that the soul's relationship to God is the first responsibility of each individual, and much more important than material things.

The rich fool

Then he (Jesus) gave them a parable in these words,

“Once upon a time a rich man's farmland produced heavy crops. So he said to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have no room to store this harvest of mine?’ Then he said, ‘I know what I'll do. I'll pull down my barns and build bigger ones where I can store all my grain and my goods and I can say to my soul, Soul, you have plenty of good things stored up there for years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and have a good time!’ But God said to him, ‘You fool, this very night you will be asked for *your soul!* Then, who is going to possess all that you have prepared?’ ” That is what happens to the man who hoards things for himself and is not rich in the eyes of God” (Luke 12:16-21).

Pressing home the lesson he adds a comment for the disciples reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount:

“That is why I tell you, don't worry about life, wondering what you are going to eat, or what clothes your body will need. Life is much more important than food, and the body more important than clothes. Think of the ravens. They neither sow nor reap, and they have neither store nor barn, but God feeds them. And how much more valuable do you think you are than birds?” (Luke 12:22-24).

Then Jesus goes on to say:

“No, set your heart on his (God's) kingdom, and your food and drink will come as a matter of course. Don't be afraid, you tiny flock! Your Father plans to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give the money away to those in need. Get yourselves purses that never grow old, inexhaustible treasure in Heaven, where no thief can ever reach it, or moth destroy it. For wherever your treasure is, you may be certain that your heart will be there too!” (Luke 12:31-34).

So many of us, business men, manufacturers, farmers and even the poor, are like that foolish man. We think only of this life, forgetting that

one day or night we will be called before God. This may happen suddenly through a heart attack or accident.

Jesus teaches all to be ready for the call

He said in another parable:

“You must be ready dressed and have your lamps alight, like men who wait to welcome their lord and master on his return from the wedding-feast, so that when he comes and knocks at the door, they may open it for him at once. Happy are the servants whom their lord finds on the alert when he arrives. I assure you that he will then take off his outer clothes, make them sit down to dinner, and come and wait on them. And if he should come just after midnight or in the very early morning, and find them still on the alert, their happiness is assured (Luke 12:35-38).

Jesus adds yet another illustration for the need of alertness, by referring to the many robberies that most of his listeners would have experienced or heard about in their villages and towns. He said:

“Be certain of this that if the householder had known the time when the burglar would come, he would not have let his house be broken into. So you must be on the alert, for the Son of Man is coming at a time when you may not expect him” (vs. 39-40).

Peter and his friends were often puzzled about the meaning of the parables. The record says:

Then Peter said to him, (Jesus)

“Lord, do you mean this parable for us or for everybody?”

But the Lord continued,

“Well, who will be the faithful, sensible steward whom his master will put in charge of his household to give them their supplies at the proper time? Happy is the servant if his master finds him so doing when he returns. I tell you he will promote him to look after all his property. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master takes his time about returning’, and then begins to beat the men and women servants and to eat and drink and get drunk, that servant’s master will return suddenly and unexpectedly, and he will punish him severely and send him to share the penalty of the unfaithful. The slave who knows his master’s plan but does not get ready or act upon it will be severely punished, but the servant who did not know the plan, though

he has done wrong, will be let off lightly. Much will be expected from the one who has been given much, and the more a man is trusted, the more people will expect of him (Luke 12:41-48).

Jesus points out that the meaning and application is for all, but that those with greater privileges in understanding, will be held more responsible. He also warns against leaders abusing their positions of authority, by exploiting others and ruling in a ruthless manner.

The cost of obedience

Jesus teaches that loyalty and obedience to himself may result in bitter opposition by family members. From the first century many followers of Jesus have discovered how hostile and opposed family members can become to any who wish to follow the teachings and example of Jesus the Messiah. His words are these:

“Do you think I have come to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, not peace, but division! For from now on, there will be five people divided against each other in one house, three against two, and two against three. It is going to be father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law!” (Luke 12:51-53).

The one thankful leper

(Around this time as) Jesus crossed the boundary between Samaria and Galilee, and as he was approaching a village, ten lepers met him. They kept their distance but shouted out,

“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When Jesus saw them, he said,

“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

And it happened that as they went on their way they were cured. One of their number, when he saw that he was healed, turned round and praised God at the top of his voice, and then fell on his face before Jesus and thanked him. This man was a Samaritan. And at this Jesus remarked,

“Weren’t there ten men cured? Where are the other nine? Is nobody going to turn and praise God, except this stranger?”

And he said to the man,

“Stand up now, and go on your way. It is your faith that has made you well” (Luke 17:11-19).

Ten lepers—a gruesome sight—keeping their distance, because of contamination, cried to Jesus to heal them. His look of compassion, and word of command to go and get their health certificate from the priest, gave them hope of healing, and in faith they set out. In their hurry to obtain official clearing, they thought only of themselves—only one man remembered his helper and returned to thank him. This man was a stranger to God’s people, a non-believer, a Samaritan. As Jesus told him to stand up, he commented:

“It is your faith that has made you well” (v. 19).

Jesus made clear again and again that God is ready to receive ANY-ONE who turns to him, irrespective of race, social or religious status.

Jesus cures a sick woman on a Sabbath day

One Sabbath day, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue when he noticed a woman bent double, and quite unable to straighten herself. She had been ill for 18 years.

When Jesus noticed her, he called her and said,

“You are set free from your illness!”

And he put his hands upon her, and at once she stood upright and praised God. But the president of the synagogue, in his annoyance at Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath, announced to the congregation,

“There are six days in which men may work. Come on one of them and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!”

But the Lord answered him, saying,

“You hypocrites, every single one of you unties his ox or his donkey from the stall and leads him away to water on the Sabbath day! This woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom you all know Satan has kept bound for eighteen years—surely she should be released from such bonds on the Sabbath day!”

These words reduced his opponents to shame, but the crowd was thrilled at all the glorious things he did (Luke 13:11-17).

In answer to the president of the synagogue who had criticised Jesus

for healing the woman, he pointed out the inconsistency of strict legalists with double standards. For their personal convenience they will do one thing, such as caring for their animals, yet they refuse healing to a poor woman.

Jesus explains the vitality of the kingdom of God

Jesus went on to explain by a parable that the life force of spiritual power cannot be repressed by laws.

“What can I say the kingdom of God is like? It is like the yeast which a woman took and covered up in three measures of flour, until the whole had risen” (Luke 13:20,21).

In Iran, bread called '*nan*' is very delicious. A tub of kneaded dough becomes leavened when a small portion of yeast is mixed in, and later baked into bread. It is a fact that the words of Jesus have spread throughout the whole world. The true historical Gospel is a life force which works today in every nation of the earth.

Jesus teaches the significance of disasters

While Jesus was teaching one day, some people arrived with news of a massacre. Pilate, the Roman administrator of Judaea had given instructions to his soldiers to kill some Galileans who had gone to Jerusalem to make their religious sacrifices. The reason for the massacre was Pilate's taking of the temple offerings to pay for the aqueduct bringing water to Jerusalem and the temple area. This caused a riot among the Galilean worshipers which was put down forcibly by bloodshed in the temple area. The blood of the Galileans had mingled with the blood of the sacrificial animals. The people had concluded that this was some special judgment of God on those who had been killed. Jesus made this reply to them:

“Are you thinking that these Galileans were worse sinners than any other men of Galilee because this happened to them? I assure you that is not so. You will all die just as miserable a death unless your hearts are changed! You remember those eighteen people who were killed at

Siloam when the tower collapsed upon them? Are you imagining that they were worse offenders than any of the other people who lived in Jerusalem? I assure you they were not. You will all die as tragically unless your whole outlook is changed!" (Luke 13:2-5).

Accidents, illnesses, atrocities, famine, plague and violence are all the result of the disease of sin which has spoiled and ruined this beautiful world. This does not always mean the specific punishment of God on those suffering, but must be taken as a warning to all who do not repent and turn to him. Jesus now hints that God's patience with his people, the Jewish nation, is nearing a limit.

He explains by a parable,

"Once upon a time a man had a fig-tree growing in his garden, and when he came to look for the figs, he found none at all. So he said to his gardener, 'Look, I have come expecting fruit on this fig-tree for three years running and never found any. Better cut it down. Why should it use up valuable ground?' And the gardener replied, 'Master, don't touch it this year till I have had a chance to dig round it and give it a bit of manure. Then, if it bears after that, it will be all right. But if it doesn't, then you can cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-9).

Forty-one years later, in AD 70, the Jewish nation was cut down and Jerusalem destroyed by Titus the Roman general. They had an opportunity to repent and turn again to God, but they refused and suffered the tragic consequences.

Who will be saved?

Jesus proceeded

on his way through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way towards Jerusalem. Someone asked him,

"Lord, are only a few men to be saved?" (Luke 13:22,23).

In answer Jesus established some important principles by which a final decision will be made by God. Now he urged his hearers not to be concerned with judging others, but to be sure they themselves would be saved.

"You must try your hardest to get in through the narrow door, for many, I assure you, will try to do so and will not succeed. For once the master of the house has got up and shut the door, you will find yourselves standing outside and knocking at the door crying, 'Lord,

please open the door for us.' He will reply to you, 'I don't know who you are or where you come from.' 'But', you will protest, 'we have had meals with you, and you taught in our streets!' Yet he will say to you, 'I tell you I do not know where you have come from. Be off, you are all scoundrels!' (Luke 13:24-27).

Entrance into the eternal joy of God's presence cannot be taken for granted. "You must try your hardest to get in", says Jesus. This means searching with all the heart, and not relying on such rituals as circumcision—for the ones to whom Jesus was speaking were all circumcised. Merely to proclaim "God is One!" without a life of obedience, could result in the sudden shock of finding the door locked. The words of God to those who do not act on what they know are very serious:

So you believe that there is one God? That's fine. So do all the devils in hell, and shudder in terror! For, my dear shortsighted man, can't you see far enough to realise that faith without the right actions is dead and useless? (James 2:19-20).

Jesus went on to picture such scenes as these at the last judgment:

At that time there will be tears and bitter regret—to see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets inside the kingdom of God, and you yourselves banished outside! Yes, and people will come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and take their seats in the kingdom of God. There are some at the back now who will be in front then, and there are some in front now who will then be far behind" (Luke 13:28-30).

As Jesus was teaching,

Some Pharisees arrived to tell him,

"You must get right away from here, for Herod intends to kill you."

"Go and tell that fox," returned Jesus, "Anyone can see that today and tomorrow I am expelling evil spirits and continuing my work of healing, and on the third day my work will be finished. But I must journey on today, tomorrow, and the next day, for it would never do for a prophet to meet his death outside Jerusalem!" (Luke 13:31-33).

Were these friendly Pharisees, or were they trying to frighten him? Had Prince Herod Antipas decided to kill Jesus as he had killed John? Jesus knew that he would die in Jerusalem, and in a cry of grief at the hatred of men, he said:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wings, but you would never have it. Now all you have left is your

house. For I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' '' (vs. 34,35).

The home at Bethany

One home near Jerusalem, in a suburban village named Bethany, offered a refuge and family care to Jesus at this time. The elder sister, Martha, welcomed Jesus and his companions, and made them honoured guests. In the house with her lived her sister Mary and brother Lazarus. It was a great honour to entertain the respected Teacher. But Martha was so preoccupied with cooking and arrangements for his comfort, that she did not fully appreciate the importance of listening to his teaching.

The record tells us,

As they continued their journey, Jesus came to a village and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. She had a sister by the name of Mary who settled down at the Lord's feet and was listening to what he said. But Martha was very worried about her elaborate preparations and she burst in, saying,

"Lord, don't you mind that my sister has left me to do everything by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

But the Lord answered her,

"Martha, . . . you are worried and bothered about providing so many things. Only one thing is really needed. Mary has chosen the best part and it must not be taken away from her!" (Luke 10:38-42).

This home was to become a retreat in the last weeks and days of Jesus' life. It was also to witness one of his greatest miracles, the raising of Martha's brother Lazarus from the grave, after he had been dead four days.

A blind beggar's eyes opened

Jesus was on his way again to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Dedication which continued for eight days and was celebrated at the end of December. Lights were lit in the Temple and people in their homes made a colourful and joyful occasion. One man could not enter into the

joy of the light at the Festival, for he was blind—until Jesus met him!

Leaving Bethany, Jesus traveled the two miles to Jerusalem,

As (he) walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. “(Teacher), whose sin caused this man’s blindness,” asked the disciples, “his own or his parents’?”

“He was not born blind because of his own sin or that of his parents,” returned Jesus, “But to show the power of God at work in him. We must carry on the work of him who sent me while the daylight lasts. Night is coming, when no one can work. I am the world’s light, as long as I am in it.”

Having said this, he spat on the ground and made a sort of clay with the saliva. This he applied to the man’s eyes and said, “Go and wash in the pool of Siloam.” (Siloam means “one who has been sent”.) So the man went off and washed and came back with his sight restored.

His neighbours and the people who had often seen him before as a beggar remarked, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?”

“Yes, that’s the one,” said some.

Others said, “No, but he’s very like him.”

“Then how was your blindness cured?” they asked.

“The man called Jesus made some clay and smeared it on my eyes,” he replied, “and then he said, ‘Go to Siloam and wash’. So off I went and washed—and that’s how I got my sight!”

“Where is he now?” they asked.

“I don’t know,” he returned (John 9:1-12).

Within a short time this blind beggar who had lived in darkness all his life received the wonderful gift of sight. Up till now people coming for the Festival had only dropped coins in the man’s begging bowl! Crowds gathered when they heard what had happened. Among them were enemies of Jesus, and they dragged the beggar to the religious leaders.

The record states,

So they brought the man who had been blind before the Pharisees. (It should be noted that Jesus made the clay and restored his sight on a Sabbath day.) The Pharisees asked the question all over again as to how he had become able to see.

“He put clay on my eyes; I washed it off; now I can see—that’s all,” he replied.

Some of the Pharisees commented, “This man cannot be from God, since he does not observe the Sabbath.”

“But how can a sinner give such wonderful signs as these?” others demurred. And they were in two minds about him. Finally, they asked the blind man again, “And what do you say about him? You’re the one whose sight was restored.”

"I believe he is a prophet," he replied.

The Jews did not really believe that the man had been blind and then had become able to see, until they had summoned his parents and asked them, "Is this your son who you say was born blind? How does it happen that he can now see?"

"We know that this is our son, and we know that he was born blind," returned his parents, "but how he can see now, or who made him able to see, we have no idea. Why don't you ask him? He is a grown-up man; he can speak for himself."

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews who had already agreed that anybody who admitted that the man was Christ should be excommunicated.³⁰ It was this which made his parents say, "Ask him, he is a grown-up man."

So, once again they summoned the man who had been born blind and said to him, "You should give God the glory for what has happened to you. We know that this man is a sinner."

"Whether he is a sinner or not, I couldn't tell, but one thing I am sure of," the man replied, "I used to be blind, now I can see!"

"But what did he do to you—how did he make you see?" they continued.

"I've told you before," he replied, "Weren't you listening? Why do you want to hear it all over again? Are you wanting to be his disciples too?"

At this, they turned on him furiously.

"You're the one who is his disciple! We are the disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't even know where he came from."

"Now here's the extraordinary thing," he retorted, "you don't know where he came from and yet he gave me the gift of sight. Everybody knows that God does not listen to sinners. It is the man who has a proper respect for God and does what he wants him to do—he's the one God listens to. Why, since the world began, nobody's ever heard of a man who was born blind being given his sight. If this man did not come from God, he couldn't do anything!"

"You misbegotten wretch!" they flung back at him. "Are you trying to teach *us*?" And they threw him out (John 9:13-34).

The beggar was quite clear about what had happened, as he said, "One thing I am sure of—I used to be blind, now I can see."

Why were the Jewish leaders so angry? Why were his parents afraid to acknowledge what had happened to their son? And why today are so many afraid to look at the evidence about Jesus, and say clearly what they believe?

When the Pharisees asked the man what he had to say, his answer was very simple but clear: "He is a prophet," he said.

When the Pharisees argued that Jesus was a sinner because he had healed on a Sabbath, he used his common sense to say "Why since the world began nobody's ever heard of a man who was born blind being given his sight". And at that time it was a fact. No doctors existed then who had worked such a cure. Then he concluded very simply: "If this man did not come from God he couldn't do anything."

That was too much for the Jewish leaders, and with that they threw him out of their religious community.

How tragic that men can be so prejudiced as to hate one who has brought sight and help to the blind. In their spiritual blindness these leaders could not see and recognise Jesus as their promised Messiah.

Jesus heard that they had expelled him and when he had found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"And who is he, sir?" the man replied. "Tell me, so that I can believe in him."

"You have seen him," replied Jesus. "It is the one who is talking to you now" (John 9:35-37).

Jesus declares himself the true Shepherd of men

In talking with crowds after the healing of the blind beggar, Jesus made another claim. He said:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sake of the sheep" (John 10:11).

The meaning was very clear to the many who were involved in sheep breeding. On the hills of Palestine, many shepherds had to protect their flocks from wild animals and robbers—sometimes at the cost of their lives.

David, the great king, as a shepherd boy had fought and killed a lion and bear to protect his sheep. This had been for David a training for the day he would become a great king over the people of God and care for them, as he had cared for the sheep as a shepherd. Jesus the Messiah now says:

"I am the good shepherd, and I know those that are mine and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I give my life for the sake of the sheep.

And I have other sheep who do not belong to this fold. I must lead these also, and they will hear my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd . . .

I lay down my life that I may take it up again! No one is taking it from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again" (John 10:14-18).

To save the sheep Jesus was ready to sacrifice his life, and he did this of his own free will. In so doing he had absolute power to take his life again. Many have sacrificed their lives for others, but no one else had the power to come back from the dead. Jesus claimed this very power, and yet even his own 12 companions missed the point and did not understand that he was speaking of rising from the dead.

One result of the sacrifice Jesus made was the drawing together into one fold, from every nation, those who are prepared to acknowledge him as their Shepherd.

The dedication festival

Jesus appeared in Jerusalem in late December AD 29 for the last time prior to his final arrival in the Spring of AD 30. The record states

Once again, the Jews were in two minds about him . . . many of them remarking, "The devil's in him and he's insane. Why do you listen to him?"

But others were saying, "This is not the sort of thing a devil-possessed man would say! Can a devil make a blind man see?"

Then came the dedication festival at Jerusalem. It was wintertime and Jesus was walking about inside the Temple in Solomon's cloisters. So the Jews closed in on him and said, "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you really are Christ, tell us so straight out!"

"I have told you," replied Jesus, "and you do not believe it. What I have done in my Father's name is sufficient to prove my claim, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep recognise my voice and I know who they are. They follow me and I give them eternal life. They will never die and no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. And no one can snatch anything out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are One" (John 10:19-30).

All mankind longs for an answer to the mystery of life. Jesus makes a promise in answer to this longing of many hearts. He promises that all who love and follow his teaching will receive *eternal life*, that they will *never die*, and that they are absolutely safe in his hand. Jesus affirms

that because he and the Father are One, safety forever in the eternal world of God is guaranteed to all who believe.

Instead of trying to understand what Jesus was saying in answer to their question, "If you really are Christ, tell us so straight out!", the Jews were now determined to kill him. They strongly proclaimed that 'God is One' but were not ready to open their minds to exactly what that meant. Jesus had answered them, but they would not listen.

The record tells us:

Again the Jews reached for stones to stone him to death, but Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good things from the Father—for which of these do you intend to stone me?"

"We're not going to stone you for any good things," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy: because you, who are only a man, are making yourself out to be God" (John 10:31-33).

Jesus never answered violence with violence. He says quietly:

"If I fail to do what my Father does, then do not believe me. But if I do, even though you have no faith in me personally, then believe in the things I do. Then you may come to know and realise that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37,38).

Some hidden power restrained the hands clutching stones ready to throw at Jesus.

The record states:

Again they tried to arrest him, but he moved out of their reach (v. 39).

Leaving Jerusalem,

Jesus went off again across the Jordan to the place where John had first baptised and there he stayed. A great many people came to him, and said, "John never gave us any (miraculous) sign but all that he said about this man was true."

And in that place many believed in him (v. 40-42).

Jesus retreated from the danger and opposition of his enemies in Jerusalem. Crossing to the east bank of the river Jordan he taught the crowds who came to him. Among the several incidents recorded during the remaining months of winter we read of:

Jesus in the house of a Pharisee

One Sabbath day he went into the house of one of the leading Pharisees for a meal, and they were watching him closely. Right in front of him was a man afflicted with dropsy.³¹ So Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees and asked,

“Well, is it right to heal on the Sabbath day or not?”

But there was no reply. So Jesus took the man and healed him and let him go. Then he said to them,

“If a donkey or an ox belonging to one of you fell into a well, wouldn’t you rescue it without the slightest hesitation even though it were the Sabbath?”

And this again left them quite unable to reply (Luke 14:1-6).

Again there was opposition to Jesus healing a very sick man on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisee who would rescue his donkey or ox on the Sabbath could hardly object to a man being rescued from sickness on that day.

In that house Jesus gave advice to both guests and host. He had noticed that the first guests to arrive quickly moved to the most important places at the head of the table.

He said to them,

“When you are invited to a wedding reception, don’t sit down in the best seat. It might happen that a more distinguished man than you has also been invited. Then your host might say, ‘I am afraid you must give up your seat for this man.’ And then, with considerable embarrassment, you will have to sit in the humblest place. No, when you are invited, go and take your seat in an inconspicuous place, so that when your host comes in he may say to you, ‘Come on, my dear fellow, we have a much better seat than this for you.’ That is the way to be important in the eyes of all your fellow-guests! For everyone who makes himself important will become insignificant, while the man who makes himself insignificant will find himself important” (Luke 14:8-11).

Humility should be an important characteristic of Jesus’ followers and calls for self-abasement.

Turning to his host Jesus gave amazing advice. He said.

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner party, don’t invite your friends or your brothers or relatives or wealthy neighbours, for the chances are they will invite you back, and you will be fully repaid. No, when you give a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. That way lies real happiness for you. They have no means of repaying you, but you will be repaid when good men are rewarded—at the resurrection” (Luke 14:12-14).

Most of us invite important people to a feast in the home, hoping it will bring some benefit—developing an influential friendship for a job, some arrangement for a marriage, or some help at a time of trouble. Jesus turned the whole scale of values set by the world upside down. He teaches his followers to help those who have no means of repaying.

One of the guests hearing Jesus' comment that God would reward such actions at the resurrection, said:

“What happiness for a man to eat a meal in the kingdom of God!”
(Luke 14:15).

Jesus replied that few really put God's kingdom first. Most are too busy in their own affairs to hear the call of God. He illustrated his point by the following parable, saying,

Once upon a time, a man planned a big dinner party and invited a great many people. At dinner-time, he sent his servant out to tell those who were invited, ‘Please come, everything is now ready.’ But they all, as one man, began to make their excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I have bought some land. I must go and look at it. Please excuse me.’ Another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please convey my apologies.’ And another one said, ‘I have just got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.’ So the servant returned and reported all this to his master. The master of the house was extremely annoyed and said to his servant, ‘Hurry out now into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ Then the servant said, ‘I have done what you told me, sir, and there are still empty places.’ Then the master replied, ‘Now go out to the roads and hedgerows and make them come inside, so that my house may be full. For I tell you that not one of the men I invited shall have a taste of my dinner’ ” (Luke 14:16-24).

Jesus, no doubt, was referring to the many Jews who had no time for, or intention of, accepting the call to repentance and entrance into the Kingdom of God. So now his invitation is extended to all the peoples of the earth, including the writer and readers of this book.

The rich young ruler

On one occasion a young ruler, probably of the local synagogue, came running up and fell at the feet of Jesus, saying,

“Master, I know that you are good; tell me, please, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?”

“I wonder why you call me good?” returned Jesus. “No one is good—only the one God. You know the commandments—

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.

“Thou shalt not commit murder.

“Thou shalt not steal.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness.

“Honour thy father and thy mother.”

“All these,” he replied, “I have carefully kept since I was quite young.”

And when Jesus heard that, he said to him,

“There is still one thing you have missed. Sell everything you possess and give the money away to the poor, and you will have riches in Heaven. Then come and follow me.”

But when he heard this, he was greatly distressed for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw how his face fell, he remarked,

“How difficult it is for those who have great possessions to enter the kingdom of God! A camel could squeeze through the eye of a needle more easily than a rich man could get into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:18-25).

This young man was not ready to give up his love for money and to put the Kingdom of God first. Jesus did not make giving all one’s possessions to the poor a condition for everyone for gaining eternal life, or becoming his disciple. However, since this young man had made an idol of his money, and loved it more than he loved God, Jesus bade him destroy this idol and seek first the Kingdom of God.

Those who heard Jesus say this, exclaimed,

“Then who can possibly be saved?”

Jesus replied.

“What men find impossible is possible with God.”

“Well,” rejoined Peter (one of the twelve companions) “We have left all that we ever had and followed you.”

And Jesus told them,

“Believe me, nobody has left his home or wife, or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, without receiving very much more in this present life—and eternal life in the world to come” (Luke 18:26-30).

The cost of becoming a disciple

Jesus spoke to the great crowds accompanying him saying:

“If anyone comes to me without ‘hating’ (the quotation marks indicate the word need not be read literally, but understood as a figure of speech.) his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine. The man who will not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26,27).

What Jesus means is that becoming his disciple requires a loyalty to God’s truth and his teaching, above every other loyalty in the world. Nothing must come between the disciple and his Master. Jesus then goes on to explain the need to count the cost.

He says:

“If any of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn’t he first sit down and work out the cost of it, to see if he can afford to finish it? Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and found himself unable to complete the building, everyone who sees it will begin to jeer at him, saying, ‘This is the man who started to build a tower but couldn’t finish it!’ Or, suppose there is a king who is going to war with another king, doesn’t he sit down first and consider whether he can engage the twenty thousand of the other king with his own ten thousand? And if he decides he can’t, then, while the other king is still a long way off, he sends messengers to him to ask for conditions of peace. So it is with you; only the man who says goodbye to all his possessions can be my disciple (Luke 14:28-33).

The neglect of the poor and social injustice

On another occasion Jesus told a story to illustrate the way God evaluates an individual’s life. God’s and man’s assessment are so different! So often in this world the well-dressed person with the right friends, quickly gets what he wants, and the poor are ignored.

Jesus said:

“There was once a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. He was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man’s table. Yes, and the dogs used to come and lick his sores. Well, it happened

that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And from the place of the dead he looked up in torment and saw Abraham a long way away, and Lazarus in his arms. 'Father Abraham,' he cried out, 'please pity me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham replied, 'Remember, my son, that you used to have the good things in your lifetime, just as Lazarus suffered the bad. Now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony. And besides this, a great chasm has been set between you and us, so that those who want to go to you from this side cannot do so, and people cannot come to us from your side.' At this he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers. He could warn them and prevent their coming to this place of torture.'

But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets: they can listen to them.' 'Ah no, father Abraham,' he said, 'if only someone were to go to them from the dead, they would change completely.' But Abraham told him, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not be convinced even if somebody were to rise from the dead' '' (Luke 16:19-31).

Those who attempt to create social justice by force often disregard the fact that God will one day right all wrongs. In this story the poor man Lazarus is set at rest with Abraham, while the rich man is in torment. The tables are turned! True justice is finally done.

The effect of the example and teaching of Jesus, however, also changes social structures. Christian hospitals have provided selfless service to the poor. The blind have been helped to learn trades by which they can earn a living. Many followers of Jesus have given very generously to assist famine and flood victims. Others have spoken boldly about self-centred corruption, and by a life of integrity have shown what God truly wants of his worshipers. Those who take the path of violence and force, may assist the poor for a short time, but Jesus warned that ''All those who take the sword die by the sword'' (Matthew 26:52). The path of violence was not chosen by Jesus as his method of righting social injustice.

The lesson taught in this parable is the danger of knowing well what God's prophets truly taught, but disobeying or ignoring what they said, and in the after-world suffering the consequences in torment. The rich man knew that he should have helped the beggar, but did nothing about it.

Some critics have said that religion is only concerned about the poor in the next life, not now, and is therefore like a drug to keep the poor and oppressed quiet and apathetic. The answer is of course that wher-

ever people truly listen to and obey the teaching of Jesus, they will alter their attitude to neighbours and show them love and concern—the opposite of greed and selfishness.

When a man's character is changed, he is capable of improving the income of his own household as well as affecting the standards of his environment. In many nations much suffering and poverty are a result of corruption and self centredness. In his teaching Jesus went to the root of the trouble by emphasising the need for a change of heart and character. He released the power of life and creativity wherever and whenever people repented and believed his words.

Jesus warns the Pharisees

To the Pharisees who were often listening to his words he had said:

“No servant can serve two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or give his loyalty to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time” (Luke 16:13).

The Holy Gospel manuscripts record the following comment:

Now the Pharisees, who were very fond of money, heard all this with a sneer (v. 14).

But Jesus said to them,

“You are the people who advertise your goodness before men, but God knows your hearts. Remember, there are things men consider splendid which are detestable in the sight of God!” (v. 15).

Jesus continually spoke about the danger of self-righteousness.

Then he gave this illustration to certain people who were confident of their own goodness and looked down on others:

“Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, the other was a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this with himself, ‘O God, I do thank thee that I am not like the rest of mankind, greedy, dishonest, impure, or even like that tax-collector over there. I fast twice every week; I give away a tenth-part of all my income.’ But the tax-collector stood in a distant corner scarcely daring to look up to Heaven, and with a gesture of despair, said, ‘God, have mercy on a sinner like me.’ I assure you that he was the man who went home justified in God's sight, rather than the other one. For everyone who sets himself up as somebody will become a no-

body, and the man who makes himself nobody will become somebody'' (Luke 18:10-14).

Self-righteous people like this Pharisee, who pray much, and who fast and give alms, may not actually use these words of the Pharisee, but in their hearts they do consider themselves superior. God knows the true state of the heart, and listens for the penitent cry of a sinner!

Jesus returns to Bethany to raise dead Lazarus

As Jesus taught the crowds on the east bank of the River Jordan where his cousin John the Baptist had preached before he was murdered, a man brought a message from Bethany. The two sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word that Lazarus their brother was very ill. Jesus stayed two more days teaching and serving the sick before turning his steps to cross the River Jordan and travel to Bethany. His disciples were concerned when they knew Jesus was going so near to Jerusalem, for Bethany was in the suburbs, only two miles from the gate near the Temple.

“(Teacher!)” returned the disciples, “only a few days ago, the Jews were trying to stone you to death—are you going there again?”

“There are twelve hours of daylight every day, are there not?” replied Jesus. “If a man walks in the daytime, he does not stumble, for he has the daylight to see by. But if he walks at night he stumbles, because he has no light to see by.”

Jesus spoke these words; then after a pause he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up.”

At this, his disciples said, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.”

Actually Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that he was speaking about falling into natural sleep. This made Jesus tell them quite plainly, “Lazarus has died, and I am glad that I was not there—for your sakes, that you may learn to believe. And now, let us go to him” (John 11:8-15).

Thomas (known as The Twin) realised how dangerous it was to go so near to Jerusalem. He had seen the anger and hatred of the leaders on the occasions when they had attempted to kill Jesus, so he said to his fellow disciples:

“Come on, then, let us all go and die with him!” (John 11:16).

The record of what followed is one of the most striking of all the wonders and miracles Jesus showed to the crowds as proof that he was the Messiah. The record states:

When Jesus arrived (in Bethany) he found that Lazarus had already been in the grave four days. Now Bethany is quite near Jerusalem rather less than two miles away, and many of the Jews had come out to see Martha and Mary to offer them sympathy over their brother's death. When Martha heard that Jesus was on his way, she went out and met him, while Mary stayed in the house.

"If only you had been here, Lord," said Martha, "my brother would never have died. And I know that, even now, God will give you whatever you ask from him."

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus replied to her.

"I know," said Martha, "that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

"I myself am the resurrection and the life," Jesus told her. "The man who believes in me will live even though he dies, and anyone who is alive and believes in me will never die at all. Can you believe that?"

"Yes, Lord," replied Martha. "I do believe that you are Christ, the Son of God,³² the one who was to come into the world." Saying this she went away and called Mary her sister, whispering, "The master's here and is asking for you." When Mary heard this she sprang to her feet and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet arrived at the village itself, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who had been condoling with Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and go out, they followed her, imagining that she was going to the grave to weep there.

When Mary met Jesus, she looked at him, and then fell down at his feet. "If only you had been here, Lord," she said, "my brother would never have died."

When Jesus saw Mary weep and noticed the tears of the Jews who came with her, he was deeply moved and visibly distressed.

"Where have you put him?" he said.

"Lord, come and see," they replied, and at this Jesus himself wept.

"Look how much he loved him!" remarked the Jews, though some of them asked, "Could he not have kept this man from dying if he could open the blind man's eyes?"

Jesus was again deeply moved at these words, and went on to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay in front of it (John 11:17-38).

Jesus made the strongest possible claim when he said I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. In a very short time, by his own

resurrection from the tomb in which he also would be laid, Jesus would prove conclusively the truth of this claim.

A question and fear worrying in the hearts of many people, even those who believe in the One true God, is 'what happens when I die?'

Jesus promised Martha and all others who believe in him that:

"Anyone who . . . believes in me will *never die at all!*"

Death for the believer is an immediate stepping out of a sick body into the joy of the paradise of God.

Why did Jesus weep when he knew Lazarus would come back to life? Was it not at the terrible results of sin in destroying God's supreme act of creation—man and woman?

If mankind had not sinned and rebelled against God death would never have entered the world. Death is the result of the devil's work in men and women. It was to conquer the devil and abolish death that Jesus came into the world.

Standing before the grave Jesus said:

Take away the stone, ". . .

"But Lord," said Martha, the dead man's sister, "he has been dead four days. By this time he will be decaying . . ."

"Did I not tell you," replied Jesus, "That if you believed you would see the wonder of what God can do?"

Then they took the stone away and Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of these people standing here so that they may believe that you have sent me."

And when he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with graveclothes and his face muffled with a handkerchief.

"Now, unbind him," Jesus told them, "and let him go home."

After this many of the Jews who had accompanied Mary and observed what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went off to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Consequently, the chief priests and Pharisees summoned the council and said, "What can we do? This man obviously shows many remarkable signs. If we let him go on doing this sort of thing we shall have everybody believing in him. Then we shall have the Romans coming and that will be the end of our holy place and our very existence as a nation!" (John 11:39-49).

From that day then, they planned to kill him. As a consequence Jesus made no further public appearance among the Jews but went away to

the countryside on the edge of the desert and stayed with his disciples in a town called Ephraim (John 11:53,54).

Jesus again warns that he is soon to be killed

Towards the close of the time in the desert, Jesus and his companions began to make their way slowly towards Jerusalem via Jericho. The Jewish Passover was approaching, and many people were traveling beforehand in groups from villages and towns, to go through a ceremonial religious cleansing. In Jerusalem

The chief priests and the Pharisees had issued an order that anyone who knew of Jesus' whereabouts should tell them, so that they could arrest him (John 11:57).

Matters were moving rapidly to a final confrontation.

As they were going up to Jerusalem,

Jesus walked on ahead. The disciples were dismayed at this, and those who followed were afraid (Mark 10:32).

Something in the seriousness of his face and his determined step, plus the rumours that were circulating, spread a shadow of gloom over all those near him.

Then Jesus took the twelve on one side and spoke to them,

“Listen to me. We are now going up to Jerusalem and everything that has been written by the prophets about the Son of Man will come true. For he will be handed over to the (foreign power), and he is going to be jeered at and insulted and spat upon, and then they will flog him and kill him. But he will rise again on the third day.”

But they did not understand any of this. His words were quite obscure to them and they had no idea of what he meant (Luke 18:31-34).

How many times he had explained what the outcome of his teaching would be, yet how impossible it seemed to them that such a holy prophet of God should be so dishonoured as to be killed. How often he had referred to the prophecies of Moses in the *Torah*, prophecies of David in the Psalms, and the writings of the Prophets, which declared that the Messiah would suffer before entering his glory. But the companions were like many others, unable to understand the plan of God for the reconciling of the world to himself and the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus heals a blind beggar

Before they reached the city of Jericho, about 18 miles from Jerusalem

it happened that there was a blind man sitting by the roadside, begging. He heard the crowd passing and enquired what it was all about. And they told him, "Jesus the man from Nazareth is going past you." So he shouted out,

"Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

Those who were in front tried to hush his cries. But that made him call out all the more.

"Son of David, have pity on me!"

So Jesus stood quite still and ordered the man to be brought to him. And when he was quite close, he said to him,

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, make me see again," he cried.

"You can see again! Your faith has cured you," returned Jesus.

And his sight was restored at once, and he followed Jesus, praising God. All the people who saw it thanked God too (Luke 18:35-43).

Jesus visits the home of Zacchaeus

As Jesus entered the city of Jericho and was making his way through its maze of streets, a wealthy man named Zacchaeus, a chief collector of taxes very much wanted to see

what sort of person Jesus was. But the crowd prevented him from doing so, for he was very short. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a view of Jesus as he was heading that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him,

"Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, I must be your guest today."

So Zacchaeus hurriedly climbed down and gladly welcomed him. But the bystanders muttered their disapproval, saying,

"Now he has gone to stay with a real sinner."

But Zacchaeus himself stood and said to the Lord,

"Look, sir, I will give half my property to the poor. And if I have swindled anybody out of anything I will pay him back four times as much."

Jesus said to him,

"Salvation has come to this house today! Zacchaeus is a descendant

of Abraham, and it was the lost that the Son of Man came to seek—and to save” (Luke 19:3-10).

These two incidents—the healing of the blind man and the meal with a sinful man—when Jesus was facing death in just over a week’s time, reveal the depth of his love and compassion for people in need.

Poor or rich, Jesus was about to die for all, so that they might receive eternal life. As he had said:

“It was the lost that the Son of Man came to seek—and to save.”

The story of the pounds

As the crowd, possibly inside Zacchaeus’ house, listened attentively, Jesus told them a parable:

For the fact that he was nearing Jerusalem made them imagine that the kingdom of God was on the point of appearing.

“Once upon a time a man of good family went abroad to accept a kingdom and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them a pound each, with the words, ‘Use this money to trade with until I come back.’ But the citizens detested him and they sent a delegation after him, to say ‘We will not have this man to be our king.’ Then later, when he had received his kingdom, he returned and gave orders for the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, so that he could find out what profit they had made. The first came into his presence, and said, ‘Sire, your pound has made ten pounds more.’ ‘Splendid, my good fellow,’ he said, ‘since you have proved trustworthy over this small amount, I am going to put you in charge of ten towns.’ The second came in and said, ‘Sire, your pound has made five pounds.’ And he said to him, ‘Good, you’re appointed governor of five towns.’ When the last came, he said, ‘Sire, here is your pound, which I have been keeping wrapped up in a handkerchief. I have been scared—I know you’re a hard man, getting something for nothing and reaping where you never sowed.’

To which he replied,

‘You scoundrel, your own words condemn you! You knew perfectly well, did you, that I am a hard man who gets something for nothing and reaps where he never sowed? Then why didn’t you put my money into the bank, and then when I returned I could have had it back with interest?’ Then he said to those who were standing by, ‘Take away his pound and give it to the fellow who has ten.’

“ ‘But sire, he has ten pounds already,’ they said to him. ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘and I tell you that the man who has something will get more given to him. But as for the man who has nothing, even his “nothing” will be taken away. And as for these enemies of mine who objected to my being their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence’ ” (Luke 19:11-27).

Opportunities and gifts, like money given as capital for a small business, will have to be accounted for when Jesus returns again. Those who use well God’s gifts and opportunities, progress in his Kingdom. Others, who through laziness are neglectful, will forfeit even what they seem to have.

Did many understand from this parable that Jesus would shortly leave the world, like the man in the parable that went abroad to accept a kingdom and return?

It is probable that Jesus spent that night in the house of Zacchaeus, and the next day he walked to Bethany which became his centre for the final days of witness in Jerusalem.

Seven days to victory

The period of history recorded in the next seven days is most momentous and important. Bethany now became the main centre for Jesus and his companions, and the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus provided some privacy and human comfort.

The records state:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the village of Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead (John 12:1).

In Jerusalem the buzz of conversation and the whispers among the crowd of pilgrims centred on Jesus. People

kept saying to one another as they stood in the Temple, “What do you think? Surely he won’t come to the festival?”

It should be understood that the chief priests and the Pharisees had issued an order that anyone who knew Jesus’ whereabouts should tell them, so that they could arrest him (John 11:56-57).

Day One—The first day of the week

On the first day of this momentous week, the day now called Sunday, Jesus set out on the two-mile walk to Jerusalem.

The great crowd who had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, and went out to meet him (John 12:12).

As (Jesus) came to Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, (he) sent two disciples ahead telling them, "Go into the village in front of you and you will at once find there a donkey tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. Should anyone say anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them', and he will send them immediately."

All this happened to fulfil the prophet's saying—
'Tell ye the daughter of Zion,
Behold, thy King cometh to thee,
Meek, and riding upon an ass' (Matthew 21:1-5).

The prophet Zechariah had spoken these words over 500 years before this event³³ and they can be read to this day. This and many other prophecies from the days of Mother Eve through to the prophets Abraham, Moses and David pointed to the coming Messiah. Now at last he was to fulfil these prophecies.

So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. They brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them and Jesus took his seat upon them. Then a vast crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut down branches from the trees and spread them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and the crowds who followed behind him all shouted, "God save the Son of David! Blessed is the man who comes in the name of the Lord! God save him from on high!"

And as he entered Jerusalem a shock ran through the whole city. "Who is this?" men cried. "This is Jesus the prophet," replied the crowd, "the man from Nazareth in Galilee!" (Matthew 21:6-11).

(The disciples did not realise the significance of what was happening at the time, but when Jesus was glorified, then they recollected that these things had been written about him and that they had carried them out for him) (John 12:16).

Mingling in the crowd were a number of people from Bethany who had seen Jesus call Lazarus out of the tomb four days after he had been buried. They had already been in Jerusalem and the crowds of pilgrims from far off places had heard the amazing story.

This accounts for the crowd who went out to meet him, for they had heard that he had given this sign. Seeing all this, the Pharisees

remarked to one another, "You see?—There's nothing one can do! The whole world is running after him" (John 12:18-19).

The common people had always listened to Jesus and now with unbounded enthusiasm they shouted "Praise to God Most High!" and welcomed Jesus as their promised King and Messiah.

The people also shouted:

"God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! . . . There is peace in Heaven and glory on high!" (Luke 19:38).

Among the embittered Pharisees in the crowd some appealed to Jesus saying:

"Master, restrain your disciples!"

To which he replied,

"I tell you that if they kept quiet, the very stones in the road, would burst out cheering!"

And as he came still nearer to the city, he caught sight of it and wept over it, saying,

"Ah, if you only knew, even at this eleventh hour, on what your peace depends—but you cannot see it. The time is coming when your enemies will encircle you with ramparts, surrounding you and hemming you in on every side. And they will hurl you and all your children to the ground—yes, they will not leave you one stone standing upon another—all because you did not recognise when God Himself was visiting you!" (Luke 19:39-44).

For the people of God it was the eleventh hour, their last chance to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and as a prophet. As Jesus looked into the future his eyes turned from the gleaming magnificence of the white stones of the Temple, to the smoke, ruin and bloodshed of AD 70 when the Roman General Titus would encircle Jerusalem with an earthen rampart and destroy the city.

As the tragedy of their unbelief, and all the suffering, pain and death which would result, swept over him, Jesus wept tears of sorrow at the hardness of men's hearts.

Entering into Jerusalem Jesus went into the Temple and looked round on all what was going on (Mark 11:11). He saw the eager fingers of the money changers, the greedy glitter in the eyes of those who sold the sacrificial birds and animals. The whole atmosphere was filled with selfishness of business. Tomorrow he would return to deal with this problem but now "since it was already late in the day, he went out to Bethany with the twelve, and there he spent the night.

Day Two—The barren fig tree

Monday morning as Jesus returned to Jerusalem from Bethany, a significant event added to the prophetic utterance against Jerusalem which he had made on Sunday. The record states:

On the following day, when they had left Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. He noticed a fig-tree in the distance covered with leaves, and he walked up to it to see if he could find any fruit on it. But when he got to it, he could find nothing but leaves, for it was not yet the season for figs. Then Jesus spoke to the tree,

“May nobody ever eat fruit from you!”

And the disciples heard him say it (Mark 11:12-14).

Old fruit should still be hidden among the green leaves of late Spring, or even the new budding fruit could be turning red and be edible to a hungry man. But the tree was barren, with leaves only. The people of God in their rejection of the Messiah were barren, and the words of Jesus lingered in the memories of the disciples.

Passing into the Temple which he had surveyed the day before, Jesus for the second time cleansed the Temple as the record says:

Then they came into Jerusalem and Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of the dove-sellers, and he would not allow anyone to make a short cut through the Temple when carrying such things as waterpots.

And he began to teach them and said,

“Doesn't the scripture say, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a thieves kitchen!” The chief priests and scribes heard him say this and tried to find a way of getting rid of him. But they were in fact afraid of him, for his teachings had captured the imagination of the people (Mark 11:15-18).

Turning from the greedy exploiters using religion to suck money from the poor, Jesus, there in the Temple, opened the eyes of the blind, and touching the withered limbs of the lame, restored them to full health.

The blind and the lame came to him, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things he did, and that children were shouting in the Temple the words, “God save the Son of David”, they were highly indignant. “Can't you hear what these children are saying?” they asked Jesus.

“Yes,” he replied, “and haven't you ever read the words, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise'?” And

he turned on his heel and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night (Matthew 21:14-17).

Day Three—A day of conflict and intensive teaching

On the walk to Jerusalem from Bethany, Tuesday morning, Jesus and his companions passed the fig tree, and the record states,

As they were walking along, they noticed that the fig-tree had withered away from the roots. Peter remembered it, and said,

“Master, look, the fig-tree that you cursed is all shrivelled up!” (Mark 11:20-21).

Jesus caused the fig tree to wither as an acted parable, to show what would be the result of the unbelief of the people. The religious leaders of the people of God and many whose life centred in Jerusalem had refused their chance at the eleventh hour, their end would be like the fig tree, “all shrivelled up.”

As Jesus came into the Temple in Jerusalem, once more the leaders were waiting for him.

The chief priests, scribes and elders approached him, and asked, “What authority have you for what you’re doing? And who gave you permission to do these things?”

“I am going to ask you a question,” replied Jesus, “and if you answer me, I will tell you what authority I have for what I do. The baptism of John, now—did it come from Heaven or was it purely human? Tell me that.”

At this they argued with each other, “If we say from Heaven, he will say, ‘Then why didn’t you believe in him?’ but if we say it was purely human, well . . .” For they were frightened of the people, since all of them believed that John was a real prophet.

So they answered Jesus,

“We do not know.”

“Then I cannot tell you by what authority I do these things,” returned Jesus (Mark 11:27-33).

“But what is your opinion about this? There was a man with two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Go and work in my vineyard today, my son.’ He said, ‘I won’t’. But afterwards he changed his mind and went. Then the father approached the second son with the same request. He said, ‘All right, sir’—but never went. Which of these two did what his father wanted?”

“The first one,” they replied.

“Yes,” retorted Jesus, “and I tell you that tax-collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God in front of you!”

“For John came to you as a truly good man, and you did not believe in him—yet the tax-collectors and prostitutes did! And, even after seeing that, you would not change your minds and believe him” (Matthew 21:28-32).

Two Parables:

Then (Jesus) turned to the people and told them this parable:

“There was once a man who planted a vineyard, let it out to farm-workers, and went abroad for some time. Then, when the season arrived, he sent a servant to the farm-workers, so that they could give him his share of the crop. But the farm-workers beat him up and sent him back empty-handed. So he sent another servant, and they beat him up as well, manhandling him disgracefully, and sent him back empty-handed. Then he sent a third servant, but after wounding him severely they threw him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do now? I will send them my son who is so dear to me. Perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the farm-workers saw him, they talked the matter over with each other and said, ‘This man is the heir—come on, let’s kill him, and the property will be ours!’ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then do you suppose the owner will do to them? He will come and destroy the men who were working his property, and hand it over to others.”

When they heard this, they said,

“God forbid!” (Luke 20:9-16).

It was clear what was meant. The leaders had refused to give the worship and glory to God and had set themselves up as contractors of religion. God had sent his prophets whom they manhandled and wounded. Now at last Jesus had been sent, and they were planning to kill him so that they could control the whole religious program. But this would result in the destruction of the men responsible for the evil deeds, and the privilege of caring for God’s interests in the world would be given to others.

Jesus then warned his hearers in most solemn words:

“Here, I tell you, lies the reason why the kingdom of God is going to be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its proper fruit” (Matthew 21:43).

The second parable emphasised the invitation God gives to his people. Men and women's preoccupation with their own affairs results in the loss of partaking in the great feast.

"The kingdom of Heaven," (Jesus) said, "is like a king who arranged a wedding-feast for his son. He sent his servants to summon those who had been invited to the festivities, but they refused to come. Then he tried again; he sent some more servants, saying to them 'Tell those who have been invited, 'Here is my banquet all ready, my bullocks and fat cattle have been slaughtered and everything is prepared. Come along to the wedding.'" But they took no notice of this and went off, one to his farm, and another to his business. As for the rest, they got hold of the servants, treated them with insults, and finally killed them. At this the king was very angry and sent his troops and killed those murderers and burned down their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding-feast is all ready, but those who were invited were not good enough for it. So go off now to all the street corners and invite everyone you find there to the feast.' So the servants went out on the streets and collected together all those whom they found, bad and good alike. And the hall became filled with guests" (Matthew 22:2-10).

The Pharisees recognised that this parable was a warning to them, so they

went off and discussed how they could trap him in argument. Eventually they sent their disciples with some of the Herod-party to say this, "Master, we know that you are an honest man who teaches the way of God faithfully and that you are not swayed by men's opinion of you. Obviously you don't care for human approval. Now tell us—'Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'"

But Jesus knowing their evil intention said, "Why try this trick on me, you frauds? Show me the money you pay the tax with." They handed him a silver coin, and he said to them, "Whose head is this and whose name is in the inscription?"

"Caesar's," they said.

"Then give to Caesar," he replied, "what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!"

This reply astonished them and they went away and let him alone (Matthew 22:15-22).

This was a day of intense conflict with the authorities in Jerusalem. Every group tried to win an argument against Jesus.

On the same day some Sadducees (who deny that there is any resurrection) approached Jesus with this question: "Master, Moses said if

a man should die without any children, his brother should marry his widow and raise up a family for him. Now, we had a case of seven brothers. The first one married and died, and since he had no family he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened with the second and the third, right up to the seventh. Last of all the woman herself died. Now in this 'resurrection', whose wife will she be of these seven men—for she belonged to all of them?"

"You are very wide of the mark," replied Jesus to them, "for you are ignorant of both the scriptures and the power of God. For in the resurrection there is no such thing as marrying or being given in marriage—men live like the angels in Heaven. And as for the matter of the resurrection of the dead, haven't you ever read what was said to you by God himself, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? God is not God of the dead but of living men!" When the crowds heard this they were astounded at his teaching (Matthew 22:23-33).

Jesus proved to the Sadducees from the *Torah* that there was life after death. He showed that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were at that moment living in the other world with God, for "God is not the God of the dead but living men." He also made it clear that the after life in paradise not a sensual extension of life on earth, where men are obsessed with women. It is rather a superior life, where the redeemed live like the angels.

Jesus silences the opposition

It was time for Jesus to silence these leaders of the people who were so bitterly opposed to him, so he asked the assembled Pharisees this question about the ancestry of the Messiah whom they were expecting.

"What is your opinion about (the promised Messiah). Whose son is he?"

"The Son of David," they answered.

"How then," returned Jesus, "does David when inspired by the spirit call him Lord? He says—

'The Lord said unto my *Lord*,

Sit thou on my right hand,

Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet?'³⁴

If David then calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

Nobody was able to answer this, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any further questions (Matthew 22:42-46).

The prophecies about the Messiah indicated that his human descent must be through David, the prophet and King of God's people, through whom had come the wonderful Psalms. But the Messiah was looked up to by David and called LORD. The mystery of the person of the Messiah was and is beyond the understanding of many. The Pharisees could not shut their eyes to the prophecy in the Holy Psalms. They knew this verse was there, but they would not try to understand the meaning, nor were they humble enough to recognise that Jesus who spoke to them, was himself the fulfilment of this prophecy.

Much of what Jesus now says is applicable today to religious leaders who are self-centred and more interested in their position than the glory and service of God. The record states:

Then while everybody was listening, Jesus remarked to his disciples, "Be on your guard against the scribes, who enjoy walking round in long robes and love having men bow to them in public, getting front seats in the synagogue, and the best places at dinner parties—while all the time they are battenning on widows' property and covering it up with long prayers. These men are only heading for deeper damnation" (Luke 20:46-47).

Then Jesus addressed the crowds and his disciples. "The scribes and the Pharisees speak with the authority of Moses," he told them "so you must do what they tell you and follow their instructions. But you must not imitate their lives! For they preach but do not practise. They pile up back-breaking burdens and lay them on other men's shoulders—yet they themselves will not raise a finger to move them. Their whole lives are planned with an eye to effect. They increase the size of their phylacteries (strips of parchment inscribed with texts from the Law, worn on the arm or forehead) and lengthen the tassels of their robes; they love seats of honour at dinner parties and front places in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with respect in public places and to have men call them ('teacher'). Don't you ever be called ('teacher')—you have only one teacher, and all of you are brothers. And don't call any human being 'father'—for you have one Father and he's in Heaven. And you must not let people call you 'leaders'—you have only one leader, Christ! The only 'superior' among you is the one who serves the others. For every man who promotes himself will be humbled, and every man who learns to be humble will find promotion (Matthew 23:1-12).

The scribes and Pharisees listened with bitter anger, but Jesus had not finished. He now spoke directly to them exposing their hypocrisies and double facedness. He used very strong language against these leaders in public, but every word he uttered was true. They were misleading the

public, they kept them from following God's truth, and even now they were plotting the murder of Jesus the Messiah himself.

"But alas for you, the scribes and Pharisees, play-actors that you are! You lock the doors of the kingdom of Heaven in men's faces; you will not go in yourselves, neither will you allow those at the door to go inside.

"Alas for you, you scribes and Pharisees, play-actors! You scour sea and land to make a single convert, and then you make him twice as ripe for destruction as you are yourselves.

"Alas for you, the blind leaders! You say, 'If anyone swears by the Temple it amounts to nothing, but if he swears by the gold of the Temple he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools, which is the more important, the gold or the Temple which sanctifies the gold? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar it doesn't matter, but if he swears by the gift placed on the altar he is bound by his oath.' Have you no eyes—which is more important, the gift, or the altar which sanctifies the gift? Any man who swears by the altar is swearing by the altar and whatever is offered upon it; and anyone who swears by the Temple is swearing by the Temple and by him who dwells in it; and anyone who swears by Heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who sits upon that throne (Matthew 23:13-22).

When telling lies in business or talking with an employer or neighbour many would take an oath to make it appear they were telling the truth, but in their minds the oath would be a second class oath so their conscience would feel free that they could tell a lie. God Almighty is not blind or deaf. He forbids all lying and a trick does not deceive him.

"Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you utter frauds! For you pay your tithe on mint and dill and cummin, and neglect the things which carry far more weight in the Law—justice, mercy and good faith. These are the things you should have observed—without neglecting the others. You are blind leaders, for you filter out a mosquito yet swallow a camel (Matthew 23:23,24).

The Pharisees were very particular about small details of their religion, such as washing before eating or prayer; but their hearts were unconcerned about social justice. They had no compassion for the poor, and they could not be trusted in business or to keep promises they had made.

Finally Jesus pointed out that they publicly honoured the great prophets of the past, such as Abraham, Moses and David, but killed the prophets of the present who brought God's truth to them.

"What miserable frauds you are, you scribes and Pharisees! You

build tombs for the prophets, and decorate monuments for good men of the past, and then say, 'If we had lived in the times of our ancestors we should never have joined in the killing of the prophets.' Yes, 'your ancestors'—that shows you to be sons indeed of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead then, and finish off what your ancestors tried to do! You serpents, you viper's brood, how do you think you are going to avoid being condemned to the fires of destruction? Listen now to the reason why I send you prophets and wise and learned men; some of these you will kill and crucify, others you will flog in your synagogues and hunt from town to town. So that on your hands is all the innocent blood spilt on this earth (Matthew 23:29-35).

Jesus thought again of the terrible judgment of God which was to fall on the city of Jerusalem and all its peoples in 30 years' time. He also knew that they were planning to murder him and some of his disciples. He mourned as he said:

"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you. How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wings—and you would never have it. Now all you have left is your house—desolate. I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' " (Matthew 23:37-39).

Giving alms to God

Jesus paused in his teaching and sat down opposite the Temple alms-box and

watched the people putting their money into it. A great many rich people put in large sums. Then a poor widow came up and dropped in two little coins, worth together about a farthing. Jesus called his disciples to his side and said to them,

"Believe me, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. For they have all put in what they can easily afford, but she in her poverty who needs so much, has given away everything, her whole living!" (Mark 12:41-44).

Some rich men give money for religious buildings which are named after them. Jesus pointed out that in God's sight the amount of money is not as important as the motive, the sacrifice and the proportion of wealth it represents.

The seekers after Truth

If the official religious leaders would not listen to Jesus, there were some who would. The record tells us:

Among those who had come up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They approached Philip (whose home town was Bethsaida in Galilee) with the request, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew, and Andrew went with Philip and told Jesus (John 12:20-22).

These Greeks were believers in the one true God. They had turned from the polytheism of their many Greek gods. They longed to know and love God with all their heart, and were searching for the truth. They had heard about Jesus and wanted to meet him. Jesus spoke to them, and the crowds around him, of his coming death. He used the example of wheat grain, with which all were familiar.

Jesus told them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you truly that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain of wheat; but if it dies, it brings a good harvest. The man who loves his own life will lose it, and the man who hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. If a man wants to enter my service, he must follow my way; and where I am, my servant will also be. And my Father will honour every man who enters my service" (vs. 23-26).

As a grain of wheat dies and gives life to a new shoot which ripens to bear many many grains of wheat, so Jesus the Messiah would die. His dying would result in a harvest of many believers. This principle of self-giving and sacrifice would be required of all his followers.

Jesus speaks of his death

As Jesus thought of his death in a few days' time he went on to say:

"now comes my hour of heart-break, and what can I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very purpose that I came to this hour. 'Father, honour your own name!'"

At this there came a voice from Heaven, "I have honoured it and I will honour it again!"

When the crowd of bystanders heard this, they said it thundered, but some of them said, "An angel spoke to him."

Then Jesus said, "That voice came for your sake, not for mine. Now is the time for the judgment of this world to begin, and now will the spirit that rules this world be driven out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." (He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die) (John 12:27-33).

Jesus knew that he would die by the painful death of crucifixion³⁵ in which he would be lifted up on a cross. As a result of this men and women from all nations would be drawn to him and thank him for his great act of love in dying for them so that by faith their sins could be forgiven. God spoke directly from heaven in confirmation of this act of sacrifice.

But the crowd could not understand what Jesus meant, they said:

"We have heard from the Law that Christ lives for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be 'lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

At this Jesus said to them, "You have the light with you only a little while longer. Go on while the light is good, before the darkness comes down upon you. For the man who walks in the dark has no idea where he is going. You must believe in the light while you have the light, that you may become the sons of light (John 12:34-36).

The eyewitness John records that:

though he had given so many signs, yet they did not believe in him, so that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, when he said,

'Lord, who hath believed our report?

And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?' (vs. 37,38).

Isaiah said these things because he saw the glory of Christ, and spoke about him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities did believe in him. But they would not admit it for fear of the Pharisees, and in case they should be excommunicated. They were more concerned to have the approval of men than the approval of God.

Later, Jesus cried aloud,

"Every man who believes in me, is believing in the one who sent me rather than in me; and every man who sees me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as Light, so that no one who believes in me need remain in the dark" (John 12:44-46).

Jesus speaks of his second coming and the end of the world

Leaving the Temple and the crowds, Jesus passed through the gates of the city and walked to the Mount of Olives. With his small group of disciples he climbed the slope and sat down facing the Temple where an hour earlier he had been teaching. It was at this time towards the end of an exhausting day of conflict with the religious leaders, that they said:

Tell us . . . What will be the signal for your coming and the end of this world?" (Matthew 24:3).

In reply Jesus outlined events which would take place before he returned to this world in glory. He said:

"Be careful that no one misleads you, for many men will come in my name saying 'I am Christ', and they will mislead many. You will certainly hear of wars and rumours of wars—but don't be alarmed. Such things must indeed happen, but that is not the end. For one nation will rise in arms against another, and one kingdom against another, and there will be famines and earthquakes in different parts of the world. But all that is only the beginning of the birth-pangs. For then comes the time when men will hand you over to persecution, and kill you. And all nations will hate you because you bear my name. Then comes the time when many will lose their faith and will betray and hate each other. Yes, and many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many people. Because of the spread of wickedness the love of most men will grow cold, though the man who holds out to the end will be saved. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to men all over the world as a witness to all nations" (Matthew 24:4-14).

Jesus went on to say that at the very end, just before his return to earth conditions would become very terrible:

for then there will be great misery, such as has never happened from the beginning of the world until now, and will never happen again! Yes, if those days had not been cut short no human being would survive. But for the sake of God's people those days are to be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).

Only now are we beginning to realise the implications of the prophecy of Jesus. Modern warfare utilising the hydrogen and cobalt bombs, could so devastate the planet that "no human being would survive."

Wickedness, a rejection of God and his established principles and laws, has spread through the whole earth on an unprecedented scale. In the great debates of the nations God is ignored. Many have lost their faith and become atheists and materialists.

Also for the first time since the days of Jesus it can now be said that the "good news of the kingdom" has been proclaimed to all nations." The end may be much nearer now than most people think possible.

The suddenness of his return

Jesus warned,

“about that actual day and time no one knows—not even the angels of Heaven, nor the Son, only the Father. For just as life went on in the days of Noah so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage until the very day that Noah went into the ark, and knew nothing about the flood until it came and destroyed them all. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left behind. Two women will be grinding at the handmill; one is taken and one is left behind. You must be on the alert then, for you do not know on what day your master is coming. You can be sure of this, however, that if the householder had known what time of night the burglar would arrive, he would have been ready for him and not have allowed his house to be broken into. That is why you must always be ready, for you do not know when to expect the Son of Man to arrive (Matthew 24:36-44).

This teaching session to his companions in private provides instruction to all the followers of Jesus on the need for vigilance, and to be ready at all times for his sudden return to earth. Jesus illustrates by another parable:

Parable of the Wise Virgins

“In those days (the end of the world) the kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. But the sensible ones brought their lamps and oil in their flasks as well. Then, as the bridegroom was a very long time, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But in the middle of the night there came a shout, ‘Wake up, here comes the bridegroom! Out you go to meet him! Then up got all the bridesmaids and attended to their lamps. The foolish ones said to the sensible ones, ‘Please give us some of your oil—our lamps are going out!’ ‘Oh, no,’ returned the sensible ones ‘there might not be enough for all of us. Better go to the oil-shop and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they had gone off to buy the oil the bridegroom arrived, and those bridesmaids who were ready went in with him for the festivities and the door was shut behind them. Later

on the rest of the bridesmaids came and said, 'Oh, please, sir, open the door for us! But he replied, 'I tell you I don't know you!' So be on the alert—for you do not know the day or the time'' (Matthew 25:1-13).

Many believe that Jesus the Messiah, as he promised, will return to this earth a second time. All ten bridesmaids knew the bridegroom and his party would come, but only five actually prepared for his coming with oil for their lamps, and only they went into the joy of the feast. The foolish five who did nothing to prepare were shut out.

The parable of money for trading

''It is just like a man leaving home who called his household servants together before he went and handed his possession over to them to manage. He gave one five thousand pounds, another two thousand and another one thousand—according to the man's ability. Then he went away.

''The man who had received five thousand pounds went out at once and by doing business with this sum he made another five thousand. Similarly the man with two thousand pounds made another two thousand. But the man who had received one thousand pounds went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Some years later the master of these servants arrived and went into the accounts with them. The one who had the five thousand pounds came in and brought him an additional five thousand with the words, 'You gave me five thousand pounds, sir; look I've increased it by another five thousand.' 'Well done!' said his master, 'you're a sound, reliable servant. You've been trustworthy over a few things now I'm going to put you in charge of many more. Come in and share your master's rejoicing.' Then the servant who had received two thousand pounds came in and said, 'You gave me two thousand pounds, sir; look, here's two thousand more that I've managed to make by it.' 'Well done!' said his master, 'you're a sound, reliable servant. You've been trustworthy over a few things, now I'm going to put you in charge of many. Come in and share your master's pleasure.'

Then the man who had received the one thousand pounds came in and said, 'Sir, I always knew you were a hard man, reaping where you never sowed and collecting where you never laid out—so I was scared and I went off and hid your thousand pounds in the ground.

Here is your money, intact.'

“ ‘You’re a wicked, lazy servant!’ his master told him. ‘You say you knew that I reap where I never sowed and collect where I never laid out? Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and when I came I should at any rate have received what belongs to me with interest. Take his thousand pounds away from him and give it to the man who now has the ten thousand!’ (For the man who has something will have more given to him and will have plenty. But as for the man who has nothing, even his ‘nothing’ will be taken away). ‘And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be tears and bitter regret’ (Matthew 25:14-30).

Many have invested money in education so that they can read, but do not use this to understand the teachings of Jesus, so that they can help others. Some have training as doctors or nurses but do not serve the poor in the villages where they are really needed. Others have agricultural and technical skills. The lesson of the parable is clear. Only what is produced for the Master’s use is of value and will be recognised. Those who have nothing to show will receive severe condemnation. A life can be lived for self, or for God.

The final judgment of the nations

Looking forward to the day when he would return to this earth, Jesus spoke very clearly to his disciples in the privacy of the olive groves. He said:

“But when the Son of Man comes in his splendour with all his angels with him, then he will take his seat on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men from each other like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

“Then the king will say to those on his right; ‘Come, you who have won my Father’s blessing! Take your inheritance—the kingdom reserved for you since the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you made me welcome. I was naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you came and looked after me. I was in prison and you came to see me there.’

Then the true men will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see *you* hungry and give you food? When did we see *you* thirsty and give you

something to drink? When did we see *you* a stranger and make you welcome, or see *you* naked and clothe you, or see *you* ill or in prison and go to see you?

And the king will reply, 'I assure you that whatever you did for the humblest of my brothers you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Out of my presence, cursed as you are, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you never made me welcome. When I was naked you did nothing to clothe me; when I was sick and in prison you never cared to visit me.'

Then they too will answer him, 'Lord, when did we ever see *you* hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick or in prison, and fail to look after you?'

Then the king will answer them with these words, 'I assure you that whatever you failed to do to the humblest of my brothers you failed to do to me.'

And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the true men to eternal life'' (Matthew 25:31-46).

Mankind is to be called before the glorious throne of the Supreme Judge of mankind—Jesus the Messiah. Surrounding him as attendants are his own angels. He will separate the vast crowd of all the nations of the earth into two groups, one to enter into eternal joy, the other to go cursed as they are, into torment. This passage makes clear that practical deeds of kindness and mercy which show the inward belief of the heart, will determine whether those being judged are true men and thus worthy of eternal life.

But the disciples had to be brought back from their dreams of the future to the realities of the next few days. The record states:

When Jesus had finished all this teaching he spoke to his disciples. 'Do you realise that the Passover will begin in two days' time; and the Son of Man is going to be betrayed and crucified?'' (Matthew 26:1-2).

The crowds in Jerusalem and the Temple were occupied with preparations for the Feast of the Passover. Jesus and his disciples were hidden in the olive groves on Mount Olivet. At the same time in Jerusalem serious discussion was taking place among the chief priests, the elders of the people and the scribes.

At that very time the chief priests and elders of the people had assembled in the court of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and were discussing together how they might get hold of Jesus by some trick and kill him. But they kept saying, 'It must not be during the festival or there might be a riot'' (Matthew 26:3-5).

The people seemed to be increasingly in favour of Jesus as they had listened to his teaching, and the fearless denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, so that

fear of the people made the chief priests and scribes try desperately to find a way of getting rid of Jesus (Luke 22:2).

Day Four—The supper at Bethany; probably Tuesday evening which was the beginning of the Jewish Wednesday

In contrast to the hatred and scheming of the chief priests, friends of Jesus were entertaining him at an evening meal. In the house of a man called 'Simon the Leper' (perhaps a leper who had been healed by Jesus, for otherwise he would not host a supper), Jesus was seated with his companions.

a woman came to him with an alabaster flask of most expensive perfume, and poured it on his head as he was at table. The disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "What is the point of such wicked waste? Couldn't this perfume have been sold for a lot of money which could be given to the poor?" Jesus knew what they were saying and spoke to them, "Why must you make this woman feel uncomfortable? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You have the poor with you always, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she was preparing it for my burial. I assure you that wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what she has done will also be told, as her memorial to me" (Matthew 26:7-13).

One of the witnesses, John, tells us that:

Judas Iscariot (the man who was going to betray Jesus), burst out, "Why on earth wasn't this perfume sold? It's worth thirty pounds, which could have been given to the poor!" (John 12:4-5).

It seems that Judas said these words at supper earlier in the week, on the Saturday evening soon after the arrival of Jesus in Bethany. At that time they ate in the house of Mary and Martha, and Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead was seated at the table. When the news spread that Jesus was there a great crowd gathered to see Lazarus as well as Jesus, for one of the results of the raising to life of Lazarus had been a growing belief that Jesus was the Messiah. This had worried the chief priests. The record states:

Then the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus as well, because he was the reason for many of the Jews going away and putting their faith in Jesus (John 12:10-11).

Judas the traitor

Judas Iscariot had become a thief. As the treasurer in charge of the group's meagre funds he had become greedy. John's comment on Judas' apparent concern for the poor during the supper makes this clear:

(Judas) said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was dishonest, and when he was in charge of the purse used to help himself from the contents (John 12:6).

How many treasurers have followed the way of Judas into corruption and dishonesty? The record proceeds to tell us:

Then Satan entered into the mind of Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve. He went and discussed with the chief priests and officers a method of getting Jesus into their hands. They were delighted and arranged to pay him cash for it. He agreed, and began to look for a suitable opportunity for betrayal when there was no crowd present (Luke 22:3-6).

As Judas made his bargain, the sum agreed on finally was 30 silver coins. The record of the interview tells us:

"What will you give me?" he said to them, "if I hand him over to you?" They settled with him for thirty silver coins, and from then on he looked for a convenient opportunity to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:15-16).

The chief priests were worried at the growing support for Jesus. They had joined with the Pharisees in a council meeting at the time Lazarus had been raised from the dead some months earlier and said:

"What can we do? This man obviously shows many remarkable signs. If we let him go on doing this sort of thing we shall have everybody believing in him. Then we shall have the Romans coming and that will be the end of our holy place and our very existence as a nation!"

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, addressed the meeting: "You plainly don't understand what is involved here. You do not realise that it would be a good thing for us if one man

should die for the sake of the people—instead of the whole nation being destroyed.” . . . From that day then, they planned to kill him (John 11:47-52).

The final firm decision to kill Jesus had actually been made some months earlier when Jesus had raised Lazarus. Truth and justice had no part in their reasoning, but rather political scheming in order to keep power in their hands.

Judas the traitor was used as a tool in their hands and Judas who had eaten bread and salt with Jesus for several years, was ready to sell his Master for 30 silver coins! As Judas silently and secretly went to the priests from the joyous atmosphere of that evening meal, very opposite emotions were at work in the heart of one woman.

The anointing of Jesus for burial

This woman, had sensed the atmosphere of tension, the danger closing in on Jesus and his companions, so opening an expensive flask of perfume she anointed the head of Jesus. The house was filled with the sweet odour of the perfume. Jesus said:

“When she poured this perfume on my body, she was preparing it for my burial” (Matthew 26:12).

He knew this loving act was prophetic, and pointed to his final confrontation with death; and he added that throughout the world this deed would be remembered.

Day Five—Thursday. Preparations for the Passover

Preparations were being made in many households for the killing of the sacrificial animals. Each household would sacrifice a lamb or a goat and partake of the food at evening time with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. It was a busy day of household preparation, and Jesus wished to celebrate the feast in private with his companions.

Judas was constantly looking for an opportunity to pass the word to the chief priests to arrest Jesus when he was in a quiet spot with no crowds to cause an uproar. Jesus knew this although no other com-

panion realised matters were quite so serious, nor did they suspect Judas.

On the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus with the question, "Where do you want us to make our preparations for you to eat the Passover?" (Matthew 26:17).

Conscious of the listening ear of Judas, who could have informed the chief priests, Jesus answered with directions that gave no indication at all where the room was located. Calling two of his most faithful companions he entrusted them with arrangements. The record says:

Jesus sent off Peter and John with the words, "Go and make all the preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where would you like us to do this?" they asked.

And he replied,

"Listen, just as you're going into the city a man carrying a jug of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he is making for. Then say to the owner of the house, 'the master has this message for you— which is the room where my disciples and I may eat the Passover?' And he will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished for our needs. Make all the preparations there."

So they went off and found everything exactly as he had told them it would be, and they made the Passover preparations (Luke 22:8-13).

It took Jesus and the remaining companions less than an hour to walk to the room where Peter and John had prepared the evening festival meal.

For the people of God this was one of the most important festivals of the year. This night of the Passover Feast held many memories.

On the table was roast lamb and unleavened bread. Some 1500 years previously, when the descendants of Abraham, the people of God, were slaves to Pharaoh, a King who was an idol worshiper, God promised them freedom, and sent his servant Moses to deliver them.

This King, Pharaoh, would not let his slaves go. Finally a last warning was given by Moses. "The firstborn of every household will die this night if my people are not freed."

Moses was told by God to instruct every household to sacrifice a lamb or a kid and to smear the blood on their door posts and lintels. Then they were to roast the lamb and eat it with unleavened bread inside the house.

When the Angel of Death visited every home to carry out the sentence of death of every firstborn, the blood would be a sign that the sentence had already been executed. The lamb had died in the place, and instead of, the human firstborn. All who were inside the house with the sign of blood were safe from death.

For the people of God at that time this great event was the beginning of their freedom and a new epoch in their history. Now in commemoration of that historic event, Jesus reclined at the table in an upper room provided by friends. Peter and John had prepared everything. The roast lamb was on the table with unleavened bread.

After Jesus had asked God's blessing, he said:

“With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer. Believe me, I shall not eat the Passover again until all that it means is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” Then taking a cup from them, he thanked God and said,

“Take this and share it amongst yourselves, for I tell you that from this moment I shall drink no more wine until the kingdom of God comes.”

Then he took a loaf and after thanking God he broke it and gave it to them, with these words,

“This is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me.”

So too, he gave them a cup after supper with the words,

“This cup is the new agreement made in my own blood which is shed for you” (Luke 22:15-20).

Jesus made a new agreement between God and the human race by the shedding of his blood. All who believe in him are protected from the wrath and judgment of God, just as the firstborn of the people of God, in the house with the sign of the blood on the door, were protected from the Angel of Death.

John the Baptist as a prophet, had seen that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and as such would be the fulfilment of the prophecies and symbols in the *Torah*, *Psalms* and writings of the Prophets.

John had pointed at Jesus, when he had been with him on the west bank of the Jordan river and said:

“Look, there is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the man I meant when I said ‘A man comes after me who is always in front of me, for he existed before I was born!’” (John 1:29-30).

The deep meaning of this Feast of the Passover was fulfilled in the death of Jesus. From that day onwards it became more commonly called by his followers “The Lord's Supper.”

Many followers of Jesus celebrate “The Lord's Supper” every first day of the week, Sunday. Some celebrate it every day, and others on special occasions. For them it is a most holy remembrance of the death of Jesus for their sins, and an expression of obedience to the request of Jesus when he said: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

A Lesson in humility

Just before Jesus and his 12 companions settled themselves to eat, a dispute arose among them as to who should be considered the most important. But Jesus said to them,

“Among the (Gentiles) it is their kings who lord it over them, and their rulers are given the title of ‘benefactors’. But it must not be so with you! Your greatest man must become like a junior and your leader must be a servant” (Luke 22:24-27).

Did the dispute commence when the question arose of who should serve, who should wash the hands and feet according to custom? While the 12 companions were arguing, Jesus rose from the table quietly and

took off his outer clothes, picked up a towel and fastened it round his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel around his waist.

So he came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

“You do not realise now what I am doing,” replied Jesus, “but later on you will understand.”

Then Peter said to him, “You must never wash my feet!”

“Unless you let me wash you, Peter,” replied Jesus, “you cannot be my true partner.”

“Then Lord,” returned Simon Peter, “please—not just my feet but my hands and my face as well!”

“The man who has bathed,” returned Jesus, “only needs to wash his feet to be clean all over. And you are clean—though not all of you.”

(For Jesus knew his betrayer and that is why he said, “Though not all of you”.)

When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his clothes, he sat down again and spoke to them, “Do you realise what I have just done to you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and you are quite right, for I am your teacher and your Lord. But if I, your teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you must be ready to wash one another’s feet. I have given you this as an example so that you may do as I have done. Believe me, the servant is not greater than his master and the messenger is not greater than the man who sent him. Once you have realised these things, you will find your happiness in doing them. (John 13:4-17).

Deep humility and the attitude of service was a characteristic of Jesus, and by this example he teaches true greatness. Many leaders like to become dictators and rule with authority and severity. Jesus influenced people by life and service.

Judas Iscariot the traitor

As the meal progressed,

right in the middle of the meal, Jesus remarked,

“Believe me, one of you is going to betray me—someone who is now eating with me.”

This deeply distressed them and one after another they began to say to him,

“Surely, I’m not the one?”

“It is one of the twelve,” Jesus told them, “a man who is dipping his hand into the dish with me. It is true that the Son of Man will follow the road foretold by the scriptures, but alas for the man through whom he is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had never been born” (Mark 14:18-21).

As Jesus said these words

“He was clearly in anguish of soul” (John 13:21).

The record fills in some details:

And it happened that one of them, (John) whom Jesus loves, was sitting very close to him. So Simon Peter nodded to this man and said, “Tell us who he means.”

He simply leaned forward on Jesus’ shoulder, and asked, “Lord, who is it?”

And Jesus answered “It is the one I am going to give this piece of bread to, after I have dipped it in the dish.”

Then he took a piece of bread, dipped it in the dish and gave it to Simon’s son, Judas Iscariot. After he had taken the piece of bread, Satan entered his heart. Then Jesus said to him, “Be quick about your business!”

No one else at table knew what he meant in telling him this. Indeed, some of them thought that, since Judas had charge of the purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what they needed for the festival, or that he should give something to the poor. So Judas took the piece of bread and went out quickly—into the night (John 13:23-30).

No one overheard the whispered answer to the quiet question: “Who is it Lord?” asked by John reclining next to Jesus. Judas in his arrogance even said as did all the others.

“Master, surely I am not the one?” (Matthew 26:25).

But the sign was given as Judas took the piece of bread offered by Jesus.

“Be quick about your business” said Jesus. The companions apart from Peter and the one next to Jesus thought Judas was going out on

business for the group. Judas knew very well what he was going to do as he stepped out into the darkness of the night.

Final instructions

The record tells us what happened after Judas went out into the night to plan Jesus' arrest with the chief priests.

When he had gone, Jesus spoke (to his companions) "Now comes the glory of the Son of Man, and the glory of God in him! If God is glorified through him then God will glorify the Son of Man—and that without delay. Oh, my children, I am with you such a short time! You will look for me and I have to tell you as I told the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow.' Now I am giving you a new command—love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another. This is how all men will know that you are my disciples, because you have such love for one another (John 13:31-35).

Love for one another should be the mark of followers of Jesus Christ.

Peter and the companions warned against cowardice

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"

"I am going," replied Jesus, "where you cannot follow me now, though you will follow me later."

"Lord, why can't I follow you now?" said Peter, "I would lay down my life for you!" (John 13:36-37).

Turning to Peter, Jesus said:

"Oh (Peter, Peter,) do you know that Satan has asked to have you all to sift like wheat?—but I have prayed for you that you may not lose your faith. Yes, when you have turned back to me, you must strengthen these brothers of yours" (Luke 22:31-32).

Then Peter said to him,

"Even if everyone should lose his faith, I never will."

"Believe me, Peter," returned Jesus, "this very night before the cock crows twice, you will disown me three times."

But Peter protested violently,

“Even if it means dying with you, I will never disown you!”
And they all made the same protest (Mark 14:29-31).

The companions are puzzled

The disciples could not understand the great mystery Jesus was trying to teach them. He said:

“In a little while you will not see me any longer, and again, in a little while you will see me” (John 16:16).

“I am going away to the Father and you will see me no longer” (John 16:10).

“You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the way I am going to take.”

“Lord,” Thomas remonstrated, “we do not know where you’re going, and how can we know what way you’re going to take?”

“I myself am the way,” replied Jesus, “and the truth and the life. No one approaches the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, you would have known my Father. From now on, you do know him and you have seen him.”

Then Philip said to him, “Show us the Father, Lord, and we shall be satisfied.”

“Have I been so long with you,” returned Jesus, “without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not my own. It is the Father who lives in me who carries out his work through me. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you have seen me do. I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father. Whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will do—that the Son may bring glory to the Father. And if you ask me anything in my name, I will grant it” (John 14:1-14).

These words of Jesus spoken in the upper room around the supper table to his small group of followers open to us still further the mystery of his person.

He is quite certain that he is going to his Father's house, and he is there going to prepare a place for his disciples who will follow later. He claims himself to be the way there, and announces that the only possible approach to God is through faith in him, the Messiah.

The relationship between Jesus and the Father is so close and intimate that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. A unique oneness exists between Jesus and the Father that is far above and beyond the relationship between God and any other prophet and man. He goes on to say:

"I have been speaking to you in parables—but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that day comes, you will make your requests to him in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. Yes, I did come from the Father and I came into the world. Now I leave the world behind and return to the Father."

"Now you are speaking plainly," cried the disciples, "and are not using parables. Now we know that everything is known to you—no more questions are needed. This makes us sure that you did come from God."

"So you believe in me now?" replied Jesus. "The time is coming, indeed, it has already come, when you will be scattered, every one of you going home and leaving me alone. Yet I am not really alone, for the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find your peace in me. You will find trouble in the world—but, never lose heart, I have conquered the world!" (John 16:25-33).

One of the important evidences that the ancient records are true history is the honest description of what was actually said, and what truly happened. One moment the companions are saying "Now you are speaking plainly . . . this makes us sure that you did come from God." But then Jesus told them that they would all run away and leave him alone, and in a few hours this happened. The doubt and uncertainty, then the strong belief, and again the doubt, are experiences of all followers of Jesus. That is why he said, "Never lose heart, I have conquered the world."

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Cedron valley to a place where there was a garden, and they went into it together. Judas who betrayed him knew the place, for Jesus often met his disciples there (John 18:1-2).

As they went out of the city of Jerusalem and up to the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his companions,

“Pray that you may not have to face temptation!” (Luke 22:40).

The agony of Gethsemane

On the Mount of Olives was a place called Gethsemane. There Jesus said to his companions:

“Sit down here while I go over there and pray.” Then he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be in terrible pain and agony of mind. “My heart is breaking with a death-like grief,” he told them, “stay here and keep watch with me.” Then he walked on a little way and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me—yet it must not be what I want, but what you want.”

Then he came back to the disciples and found them fast asleep. He spoke to Peter, “Couldn’t you three keep awake with me for a single hour? Watch and pray, all of you, that you may not have to face temptation. Your spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.”

Then he went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me without my drinking it, then your will be done.”

And he came and found them asleep again, for they could not keep their eyes open. So he left them and went away again and prayed for the third time using the same words as before. Then he came back to his disciples and spoke to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your ease? In a moment you will see the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of evil men” (Matthew 26:36-45).

Why was Jesus so “horror stricken and desperately depressed?” (Mark 14:33). Many other men had gone boldly to death as martyrs with fearless, triumphant joy. What was the meaning of his prayer three times? “If it is possible let this cup pass from me.” What was the cup, and what did it mean?

The mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the very heart of God’s revelation of his love for mankind, and the climax of the purpose of his coming as Messiah to this earth.

Jesus had said plainly:

“The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free” (Matthew 20:28).

To set men and women free from sin and reconcile them to God was the goal of Jesus' life. Jesus was going to take on himself the sin of the world, and to suffer in our place the consequences of our sin, so that we could escape the wrath and judgment of God.

It was from this horrible experience of assuming the curse of sin in our place that his sinless and holy soul shrank, NOT from the physical suffering and agony of the most cruel death of crucifixion by which the Romans used to frighten the public into submission. This cup of the wrath of a Holy God against sin was what Jesus drank in his love for the human race.

Day Six—The arrest of Jesus

If Jesus had wanted, he could have escaped. As it was he could hear the rustle of the leaves, the clink of swords and see the glimmer of lanterns through the trees. But instead he would complete the work for which he had come. Waking his sleeping companions he said:

“Wake up, let us be going! Look, here comes my betrayer!”

And while the words were still on his lips Judas, one of the twelve, appeared with a great crowd armed with swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and Jewish elders. (The traitor himself had given them a sign, “The one I kiss will be the man. Get him!”)

Without any hesitation he walked up to Jesus. “Greetings, Master,” he cried and kissed him affectionately. “Judas, my friend,” replied Jesus, “why are you here?” (Matthew 26:46-50).

“Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48).

Jesus had moved forward to meet the Temple police as they approached, The record tells us

Jesus fully realising all that was going to happen to him, went forward and said to them, “Who are you looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered.

“I am the man,” said Jesus. (Judas who was betraying him was standing there with the others)

When he said to them, “I am the man”, they retreated and fell to the ground. So Jesus asked them again, “Who are you looking for?” And again they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I have told you that I am the man,” replied Jesus. “If I am the man you are looking for, let these others go.” (Thus fulfilling his previous words, “I have not lost one of those whom you gave me.”)

At this, Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and slashed at the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus). But Jesus said to Peter, (John 18:3-11)

"Put your sword back into its proper place. All those who take the sword die by the sword. Do you imagine that I could not appeal to my Father, and he would at once send more than twelve legions of angels to defend me? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled which say that all this must take place?" (Matthew 26:52-54).

With a tender hand of compassion Jesus touched and healed the ear of Malchus, and spoke

to the chief priests, Temple officers and elders who were there to arrest him,

"So you have come out with your swords and staves as if I were a bandit. Day after day I was with you in the Temple and you never laid a finger on me—but this is your hour and the power of darkness is yours!" (Luke 22:52-53).

"At this point all the disciples deserted him and made their escape" (Matthew 26:56).

There happened to be a young man among Jesus' followers who wore nothing but a linen shirt. They seized him, but he left the shirt in their hands and took to his heels stark naked (Mark 14:50-52).

The illegal trial of Jesus

Then the guard, with their captain and the Jewish Officers, took hold of Jesus and tied his hands together, and led him off first to Annas, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year. Caiaphas was the man who advised the Jews, "that it would be a good thing that one man should die for the sake of the people." Behind Jesus followed (at a distance—Matthew 26:50) Simon Peter, and one other disciple who was known personally to the High Priest (probably John). He went in with Jesus into the High Priest's courtyard, but Peter was left standing at the door outside. So this other disciple, who was acquainted with the High Priest, went out and spoke to the door-keeper, and brought Peter inside (John 18:12-17).

Jesus is first taken before the elderly Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, and a man of much influence. Historians think that he held a monopoly of the Temple market which greatly enriched his family.

Jesus before the High Priest Caiaphas

After this private interview of the prisoner by Annas, Jesus was taken before Caiaphas the

“High Priest in whose house the scribes were assembled” (Matthew 26:57).

Like many homes today the rooms were built round an open courtyard and in one large room the chief priests sat surrounded by the scribes and Pharisees with Jesus standing before them. In the open courtyard Peter warmed his hands over a fire where the servants also huddled, watching the proceedings from a distance. Historians think that John was the unnamed disciple who had friends in the household and was known to the servant girl who watched the door. John had spoken for Peter and the girl had remarked to Peter when he came in

“Are you one of this man’s disciples too?” (John 18:17).

Peter then took the first step in denying that he knew Jesus and said:

“No, I am not” (John 18:17).

The chief priests and the whole council tried to find false evidence against Jesus and get him condemned to death. The records tell us:

“They failed completely, even after a number of perjurers³⁶ came forward” (Matthew 26:60).

This interrogation of Jesus continued for several hours through the night. During this period Peter was questioned twice about his relationship with Jesus. We are told:

When he had gone out into the porch, another maid caught sight of him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath—“I don’t know the man!” A few minutes later those who were standing about came up to Peter and said to him, “You certainly are one of them, it’s obvious from your accent.” At that he began to curse and swear—“I tell you I don’t know the man!” Immediately the cock crew, and the words of Jesus came back into Peter’s mind—“Before the cock crows you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:71-75).

The prophetic words of Jesus to Peter had sadly come true for Jesus knew the weakness of all his disciples.

The High Priest questions Jesus

The record states:

the High Priest interrogated Jesus about his disciples and about his own teaching.

“I have always spoken quite openly to the world,” replied Jesus. “I have always taught in the synagogue or in the Temple precincts where all Jews meet together, and I have said nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Why not question those who have heard me about what I said to them? Obviously they are the ones who know what I actually said.”

As he said this, one of those present, an officer, slapped Jesus with his open hand, remarking, “Is that the way for you to answer the High Priest?”

“If I have said anything wrong,” Jesus said to him, “you must give evidence about it, but if what I said was true, why do you strike me?” (John 18:19-23).

The charge of blasphemy

At last two men stood up and said:

“This man said, ‘I can pull down the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’” Then the High Priest rose to his feet and addressed Jesus, “Have you no answer? What about the evidence of these men against you?” But Jesus was silent” (Matthew 26:61,62).

What was the point of further words when the council was determined to put him to death and were not prepared to try and understand his spiritual meaning, for he had spoken of resurrection, not the physical temple in Jerusalem.

Now in a tense silence, as the dawn began to lighten the sky, the high priest rose to his feet, and addressed Jesus,

“I command you by the living God, to tell us on your oath if you are Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. Yes, and I tell you that in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of Heaven” (Matthew 26:62-64).

Then they all said,

“So you are the Son of God then?”

“You are right; I am,” Jesus told them.

Then they said:

Why do we need to call any more witnesses, for we ourselves have heard this thing from his own lips?" (Luke 22:70-71).

the High Priest tore his robes and cried, "That was blasphemy! Where is the need for further witnesses? Look, you've heard the blasphemy—what's your verdict now?" And they replied, "He deserves to die."

Then they spat in his face and knocked him about, and some slapped him crying, "Prophecy, you Christ, who was that who hit you?" (Matthew 26:65-68).

Jesus as a sinless prophet would never utter a lie or make a false claim. Many who say they honour Jesus and believe the Holy Gospel must face the meaning of the clear words of Jesus when he said he was the Messiah, the Son of God.³⁷

So they charged him with blasphemy, insulted him, and planned what charge to bring against him when they asked the Roman administrator for the death sentence.

Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate

When the morning came all the chief priests and elders of the people met in Council to decide how they could get Jesus executed. Then they marched him off with his hands tied, and handed him over to Pilate the governor (Matthew 27:1-2).

The charge they now laid against Jesus was political.

(They) began their accusation in these words,

"Here is the man whom we have found corrupting our people, and telling them that it is wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, claiming that he himself is Christ, a king."

But Pilate addressed his question to Jesus,

"Are you the king of the Jews?"

"That is what you say," he replied.

Then Pilate spoke to the chief priests and the crowd,

"I find nothing criminal about this man."

But they pressed their charge, saying,

"He's a trouble-maker among the people. He teaches through the whole of Judaea, all the way from Galilee to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he enquired whether the man were a Galilean, and when he discovered that he came under Herod's juris-

diction, he passed him on to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was delighted, for he had been waiting to see him for a long time. He had heard a lot about Jesus and was hoping to see him perform a miracle. He questioned him thoroughly, but Jesus gave him absolutely no reply, though the chief priests and scribes stood there making the most violent accusations. So Herod joined his own soldiers in scoffing and jeering at Jesus. Finally, they dressed him up in a gorgeous cloak, and sent him back to Pilate. On that day Herod and Pilate became firm friends, though previously they had been at daggers drawn. (Luke 23:2-12).

At last Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist, Christ's cousin, had seen Jesus, but in his presence Jesus remained silent. When Herod could not provoke Jesus into argument, even with violent accusations he returned him to Pilate.

Then Pilate summoned the chief priests, the officials and the people and addressed them in these words,

"You have brought this man to me as a mischief-maker among the people, and I want you all to realise that, after examining him in your presence, I have found nothing criminal about him, in spite of all your accusations. And neither has Herod, for he has sent him back to us. Obviously, then, he has done nothing to deserve the death penalty. I propose, therefore, to teach him a sharp lesson and let him go" (Luke 23:13-16).

One of the records mentions a custom of the Passover Feast in these words:

it was the custom at festival-time for the governor to release any prisoner whom the people chose. And it happened that at this time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they assembled, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to set free, Barabbas or Jesus Christ?" For he knew very well that the latter had been handed over to him through sheer malice. And indeed while he was actually sitting on the Bench his wife sent a message to him—"Don't have anything to do with that good man! I had terrible dreams about him last night!" But the chief priests and elders persuaded the mob to ask for Barabbas and demand Jesus' execution. (Barabbas was a man who had been put in prison for causing a riot in the city and for murder (Luke 23:19).) Then the governor asked them directly, "Which of these two are you asking me to release?"

"Barabbas!" they cried.

"Then what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?" asked Pilate.

"Have him crucified!" they all cried (Matthew 27:15-22).

Pilate was very uneasy. He had privately interviewed Jesus inside, the record tells us of the conversation:

“Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked

“Are you asking this of your own accord,” replied Jesus, “or have other people spoken to you about me?”

“Do you think I am a Jew?” replied Pilate. “It’s your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done, anyway?”

“My kingdom is not founded in this world—if it were, my servants would have fought to prevent my being handed over to the Jews. But in fact my kingdom is not founded on all this!”

“So you are a king, are you?” returned Pilate.

“You say that I am a king,” Jesus replied; “the reason for my birth and the reason for my coming into the world is to witness to the truth. Every man who loves truth recognises my voice.”

To which Pilate retorted, “What is ‘truth’?” and went straight out again to the Jews and said:

“I find nothing criminal about him at all (John 18:33-38).

Again Pilate spoke to the Chief Priests and the crowd that had gathered.

“What is his crime, then? I have found nothing in him that deserves execution; I am going to teach him his lesson and let him go.”

But they shouted him down, yelling their demand that he should be crucified.

Their shouting won the day, and Pilate gave the decision that their requests should be granted. He released the man for whom they asked, the man (Barabbas) who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and surrendered Jesus to their demands (Luke 23:22-25).

Pilate was not however, going to accept final responsibility for the death of Jesus, whom he knew was innocent of any crime, and the record states:

“When Pilate realised that nothing more could be done but that there would soon be a riot, he took a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I take no responsibility for the death of this man. You must see to that yourselves.” To this the whole crowd replied, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” Whereupon Pilate released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus flogged and handed over for crucifixion (Matthew 27:24-26).

Jesus is flogged and mocked

The Roman flogging was part of the death punishment of crucifixion. The prisoner was whipped with leather thongs in which lead or iron was knotted and it was very brutal and painful. Jesus was now no longer in the hands of the Jews, but had been handed over to the pagan Roman imperial soldiers who made the most of the opportunity for sadistic punishment. Following the scourging

the soldiers marched him away inside the courtyard of the governor's residence and called their whole company together. They dressed Jesus in a purple robe, and twisting some thorn twigs into a crown, they put it on his head. Then they began to salute him,

“Hail, your majesty—king of the Jews!”

They hit him on the head with a stick and spat at him, and then bowed low before him, on bended knee (Mark 15:16-19).

Then they slapped him with their open hands (John 19:3).

Pilate's final attempt to save Jesus

Apparently Pilate tried yet once again to release Jesus.

Then Pilate went outside again and said to them, “Look, I bring him out before you here, to show that I find nothing criminal about him at all.”

And at this Jesus came outside too, wearing the thorn crown and the purple robe.

“Look,” said Pilate, “here's the man!”

The sight of him made the chief priests and Jewish officers shout at the top of their voices, “Crucify! Crucify!”

“You take him and crucify him,” retorted Pilate, “He's no criminal as far as I can see!”

The Jews answered him, “we have a Law, and according to that Law, he must die, for he made himself out to be Son of God!”

When Pilate heard them say this, he became much more uneasy, and returned to the palace and again spoke to Jesus, “Where do you come from?”

But Jesus gave him no reply. So Pilate said to him, “Won't you speak to me? Don't you realise that I have the power to set you free, and I have the power to have you crucified?”

“You have no power against me,” replied Jesus, “except what was given to you from above. And for that reason the one who handed me

over to you is even more guilty than you are.”

From that moment Pilate tried hard to set him free but the Jews were yelling, “If you set this man free, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who makes himself out to be a king is anti-Caesar!”

When Pilate heard this, he led Jesus outside and sat down upon the Judgment-seat in the place called the Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was the preparation day of the Passover and it was now about midday.* Pilate now said to the Jews, “Look here’s your king!”

At which they yelled, “Take him away, take him away, crucify him!”

“Am I to crucify your king?” Pilate asked them.

“Caesar is our king and no one else,” replied the chief priests. And at this Pilate handed Jesus over to them for crucifixion (John 19:4-16).

Pilate was too weak a man to do the right thing. He feared for his job. The crowd shouted him down, so he compromised the truth, and washed his hands in public to signify his innocence.

The Roman Emperor Tiberius had appointed Pilate administrator of the province of Judaea in AD 25. Later he was ordered to Rome by Vitellius the governor of Syria, because he had used armed force to suppress a fanatical movement in Samaria and finally he was deposed.

Judas Iscariot commits suicide

When Judas finally realised the consequences of his betrayal of Jesus, he was shocked into remorse. The record states:

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was overcome with remorse. He returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders, with the words, “I have done wrong—I have betrayed an innocent man to death.”

“And what has that got to do with us?” they replied. “That’s your affair.”

And Judas flung down the silver in the Temple and went outside and hanged himself. But the chief priests picked up the money and said,

* This should probably be amended to about 6 am and would then synchronise with the other witnesses. John may have calculated his timing from midnight. The actual Greek reference states “the sixth hour”.

“It is not right to put this into the Temple treasury, for it is the price of a man’s life.” So, after a further consultation, they purchased with it the Potter’s Field to be a burial-ground for foreigners, which is why it is called “the Field of Blood” to this day (Matthew 27:3-8).

There is no doubt at all that this actually took place. For many years the residents of Jerusalem would point to the burial ground for foreigners who died when they were in Jerusalem, and say in their own language “*Akeldama*” which means “Field of Blood”.

Judas Iscariot was one of the most able of the 12 companions, and for this reason was appointed the treasurer. Lust for money and power depraved him. He committed suicide by hanging himself.

Some have confused the word ‘hanging’ with crucifixion, and thought that Judas was crucified in the place of Jesus. As we shall see too many witnesses saw Jesus die for such a mistake to have been made.

Jesus is crucified

The place where criminals were put to death was outside the city wall and called Skull Hill. The soldiers took charge of Jesus after Pilate concluded the case. Taking off the royal purple robe they put his own clothes back on him, and according to custom, made him carry on his shoulder the instrument of his death—a cross.

Crucifixion on a cross was a method used by the Romans for criminals given the death sentence, and it is described in many historical records. The criminal was forced to carry his own cross to the place of death. Jesus was sinless and not a criminal. In his readiness to suffer the shame and humiliation of the death of crucifixion he showed his great love for each one of us.

So they took Jesus and he went out carrying the cross himself to a place called Skull Hill (in Hebrew, Golgotha) (John 19:17).

Jesus had spent a sleepless night. He had been seriously injured by the scourging, therefore he could not walk very far with the heavy wooden cross on his shoulder. As he stumbled, perhaps the Roman centurion in charge became nervous at the atmosphere of the large crowds which lined the narrow alley to the gate of the city and beyond, to the place of execution. Looking around, a man was spotted and ordered to assist in the carrying of the cross.

On their way out of the city they met a man called Simon, a native of

Cyrene in Africa, and they compelled him to carry Jesus' cross (Matthew 27:32).

A huge crowd of people followed him, including women who wrung their hands and wept for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Women of Jerusalem, do not shed your tears for me, but for yourselves and for your children! For the days are coming when men will say, 'Lucky are the women who are childless—the bodies which have never borne, and the breasts which have never given nourishment.' Then men will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and will say to the hills, 'Cover us up!' For if this is what men do when the wood is green, what will they do when it is seasoned?"

Two criminals were also led out with him for execution, and when they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified him with the criminals, one on either side of him (Luke 23:27-33).

Many readers of this book will have seen symbols of the cross³⁸ on which Jesus was executed. Nails were driven into the wood through the hands outstretched on the cross-piece. The two feet were nailed onto a wedge of wood on the upright. The upright was then set in a hole in the ground. As the cross jerked into the upright position the victim suffered agonising physical pain. Some remained more than a day in this agony before dying.

Right to the end of his life, Jesus maintained compassion and love, even for his enemies. As the nails were driven into his hands and his feet Jesus prayed in his pain and agony:

"Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Some rich benefactors provided drugged wine to alleviate the pain of victims, but Jesus after tasting it, refused to drink.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross (Mark 15:25).

Pilate had a placard written out and put on the cross, reading, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This placard was read by many of the Jews because the place where Jesus was crucified was quite near Jerusalem, and it was written in Hebrew as well as in Latin and Greek. So the chief priests said to Pilate, "You should not write 'The King of the Jews', but 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"

To which Pilate retorted, "What I have written, I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes between them, taking a quarter-share each. There remained his tunic which was seamless—woven in one piece from the top to the bottom. So they said to each other, "Don't let us tear it; let's draw lots and see who gets it."

This happened to fulfil the scripture which says—
They parted my garments among them,
And upon my vesture did they cast lots³⁹ (John 19:19-24).

Very many prophecies from the *Torah*, the *Psalms* and other ancient records pointed to the coming Messiah, and the events surrounding his life and death. These ancient manuscripts existed before Jesus was born, and there was no possibility of changing them after his birth.⁴⁰

Mary the mother of Jesus present at the cross

Jesus' mother was standing near his cross with her sister, and with them Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved (John) standing by her side, and said to her, "Mother, there is your son!" And then he said to the disciple, "And there is your mother!"

And from that time the disciple took Mary into his own home (John 19:25-27).

In his death agonies Jesus made arrangements for the care of his mother, and appointed John, his beloved disciple, responsible for her. There can be no doubt of the historical fact that it was truly Jesus on the cross.

The very mother of Jesus could not mistake the son she had borne. The other women disciples of Jesus could not mistake him. The Roman officer, the chief priest, and even the beloved companion of Jesus, John, could not mistake the one on the cross. For his whole attitude, and now the words he utters, are just what they would have expected from their great Teacher.

For three hours in the bright light of the day, Jesus suffered publicly on the cross, and it was only at 12 noon that darkness began to creep over the area as though a great storm was about to break. Standing watching Jesus die were the crowds, and the rulers mocking him. Many pilgrims in Jerusalem for the religious festival which lasted for a week, also mocked him.

The passers-by nodded their heads knowingly and called out to him in mockery, "Hi, you who could pull down the Temple and build it up again in three days—why don't you save yourself? If you are the Son of God, step down from the cross!" The chief priests also joined the scribes and elders in jeering at him, saying "He saved others, but he can't save himself! If this is the king of Israel, why doesn't he come

down from the cross now, and we will believe him! He trusted in God . . . let God rescue him if He wants to. For he said, 'I am God's son'. Even the bandits who were crucified with him hurled the same abuse at him (Matthew 27:40-44).

Two criminals converse with Jesus

The two bandits hanging in agony crucified either side of Jesus viewed him differently.

One of the criminals hanging there covered him with abuse, and said, "Aren't you Christ? Why don't you save yourself—and us?"

But the other one checked him with the words,

"Aren't you afraid of God even when you're getting the same punishment as he is? And it's fair enough for us, for we've only got what we deserve, but this man never did anything wrong."

Then he said,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus answered,

"I tell you truly, this very day you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

During the last hours of his life one criminal recognised Jesus as sinless and himself guilty. His repentant cry was answered by Jesus with forgiveness and a promise of entry to paradise that very day. There is hope for the most wicked of men!

But the taunts of the chief priests revealed their complete ignorance of the plan of Jesus to conquer death by entering its doors and taking the keys from the Devil, the king of death. If Jesus had not died he would not have conquered death. A comment by a disciple of Jesus, recorded very soon after Jesus rose from the dead said:

he (Jesus) also became a human being, so that by going through death as a man he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil; and might also set free those who lived their whole lives a prey to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14).

In the hours of spiritual anguish on the cross, Jesus took on himself the sin of the world.

For God caused Christ, who himself knew nothing of sin, actually to *be* sin for our sakes, so that in Christ we might be made good with the goodness of God (II Corinthians 5:21).

It was the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the cross as an atonement for sin that provided the basis for God who is just also to forgive us. As it is written:

No shedding of blood, no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

and

He made one sacrifice, once for all, when he offered up himself (Hebrews 7:27).

The words of John the Baptist as he pointed to his cousin Jesus were now being fulfilled when he had said:

“Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the man I meant when I said ‘A man comes after me who is always in front of me, for he existed before I was born!’” (John 1:29,30).

Jesus dies on the cross

Jesus on the cross was fulfilling the prophetic meaning of 1500 years of Passover sacrifices of lambs, by himself shedding his blood in death, instead of the sinner, from whom judgment can now be averted. In the agony of this spiritual experience of taking on himself all the evil and sin of the world, Jesus cried in agony from the cross:

At midday darkness spread over the whole countryside and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon, and at three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

“My God, my God, why did you forsake me?”⁴¹

Some of the bystanders heard these words which Jesus spoke in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke from childhood) (*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?*) and said,

“Listen, he’s calling for Elijah!”

One man ran off and soaked a sponge in vinegar, put it on a stick, and held it up for Jesus to drink, calling out,

“Let him alone! Let’s see if Elijah will come and take him down!” (Mark 15:33-37).

The final words were uttered by Jesus around three o'clock in the afternoon as he moistened his lips and said:

“Father, I commend my spirit into your hands” (Luke 23:46).

and then with a great shout he cried:

“It is finished!”

His head fell forward, and he breathed his last breath (John 19:30).

The work on earth that Jesus had come to do was now finished. He had defeated Satan, the devil, he had offered his life a ransom for many, and in three days' time he would publicly announce this to his companions by rising from the dead. But before we look at the meaning and implication of the triumphant conquest of death by Jesus the Messiah, we must trace the events which prove conclusively that Jesus truly died and was buried; for on this is based the whole history of what followed.

Several events follow one another with rapid succession. At the time Jesus uttered the final shout of victory: “It is finished!”

the sanctuary curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The ground shook, rocks split and graves were opened. (A number of bodies of holy men who were asleep in death rose again. They left their graves after Jesus' resurrection and entered the holy city and appeared to many people.) When the centurion and his company who were keeping guard over Jesus saw the earthquake and all that was happening they were terrified. “Indeed this man was a son of God!” they said (Matthew 27:51-54).

The record states that:

There were many women at the scene watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to look after his needs. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons (Matthew 27:55-56).

And the whole crowd who had collected for the spectacle, when they saw what had happened, went home in deep distress. And all those who had known him, as well as the women who had followed him from Galilee, remained standing at a distance and saw these things happen (Luke 23:48-49).

Eyewitnesses give us details of what followed:

As it was the day of preparation for the Passover, the Jews wanted to avoid the bodies being left on the crosses over the Sabbath (for that was a particularly important Sabbath), and they requested Pilate to have the men's legs broken and the bodies removed. So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to him, they saw that he was dead already and they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there was an outrush of blood and water. And the man who saw this is our witness: his evidence is true. He is certain that he is speaking the truth, so that you may believe as well. For this happened to fulfil the scripture,

“A bone of him shall not be broken.”

And again another scripture says:

“They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

After it was all over, Joseph (who came from Arimathaea and was a disciple of Jesus, though secretly for fear of the Jews) requested Pilate that he might take away Jesus’ body (John 19:31-38).

Pilate was surprised that he could be dead already and he sent for the centurion and asked whether he had been dead long. On hearing the centurion’s report, he gave Joseph the body of Jesus (Mark 15:44,45).

Joseph of Arimathaea was

a member of the Jewish council. He was a good and just man, and had neither agreed with their plan nor voted for their decision” (Luke 23:51).

When the council had voted to put Jesus to death, two men had not voted, one was Nicodemus who had secretly interviewed Jesus one night. In all nations, men and women highly placed in responsibility and social life, admire and respect Jesus and his teaching. Fear keeps them from declaring their faith as it did Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. But when a crisis calls for action, they often show themselves as bold followers.

Jesus is buried in a tomb

It was these two men, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus who arranged the burial of Jesus. The eyewitnesses tell us:

So he (Joseph) came and took his body down. Nicodemus also, the man who had come to him at the beginning by night, arrived bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. So they took his body and wound it round with linen strips with the spices, according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. In the place where he was crucified, there was a garden containing a new tomb in which nobody had yet been laid. Because it was the preparation day and because the tomb was conveniently near, they laid Jesus in this tomb (John 19:38-42).

Strict religious laws forbade any work on the Sabbath which commenced at sunset on the Friday evening. By the time Joseph had obtained permission from Pilate to take the body it must have been after four o’clock. So the burial took place in a cave like a tomb which

Joseph owned and which may have been prepared for his own family.

A large stone shaped like a big millstone and which could be rolled in a groove cut in the rock closed the entrance of the tomb. The record tells us that

the women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph, noted the tomb and the position of the body, and then went home to prepare spices and perfumes (Luke 23:55).

The proper burial rites and preparation of the body was not possible in the short time available before the Sabbath commenced at around 6:30 p.m. Friday evening. The friends of Jesus planned to return early in the light of Sunday morning and complete the burial in an honourable and proper manner. None really believed Jesus would rise from the dead. This continuous emphasis in the teaching of Jesus had not been understood.

Pilate ordered the tomb sealed

(But) the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said, "Sir, we have remembered that while this impostor was alive, he said 'After three days I shall be raised again.' Will you give the order then to have the grave closely guarded until the third day, so that there can be no chance of his disciples' coming and stealing the body and telling people that he has been raised from the dead? We should then be faced with a worse fraud than the first one."

"You have a guard," Pilate told them. "Go and make it safe as you think necessary." And they went and made the grave secure, putting a seal on the stone and leaving it under guard (Matthew 27:62-66).

Under the guidance of God the evidence of the reality of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was protected. A Roman guard of very well trained professional soldiers stood watch over the sealed tomb. No tampering of the evidence was possible because of the Roman government seal. A Roman soldier had already made doubly sure of the death of Jesus by piercing his heart with a spear.

Jesus had prophesied that he would rise on the third day following his death. Days were counted from sunset to sunset. On the first of the three days—Friday—Jesus had died around three in the afternoon and had been buried. During the second day—Saturday (the Seventh Day of the momentous week)—all remained quiet, with the disciples of Jesus disheartened and mourning the death of their leader. The third day com-

menced quietly enough with the guard being changed during the watches of the night according to Roman military discipline.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, just before dawn, the most significant and dramatic event changed the whole course of human history.

THE FIRST DAY OF A NEW WEEK—AND NEW ERA—THE CONQUEST OF DEATH—JESUS RISES FROM THE GRAVE!

The sequence of historical events which are now presented deserve the most careful consideration by all God-seekers, who wish to know and believe the truth.

Two groups of women had purchased and made ready the burial spices with which to anoint the body of Jesus, which they expected to find laid in the rock-hewn tomb. They probably knew nothing of the soldiers who had been placed as guards. Their only worry was the heavy stone wheel which would have to be rolled away from the entrance for them to enter the tomb. As Salome and her group comprising Mary of Magdala and Mary the Mother of James set out in the darkness, the record tells us:

“Who is going to roll the stone back from the doorway of the tomb?” they asked each other (Mark 16:3).

At about the time they set out

there was a great earth-quake, for an angel of the Lord came down from Heaven, went forward and rolled back the stone, and sat down upon it. His appearance shone like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards shook with terror at the sight of him and collapsed like dead men (Matthew 28:2-4).

The angel had rolled away the stone for all to see that the body of Jesus was not there. As the women drew near the tomb in the early dawn, they realised something had happened. The soldiers were crouched down like dead men. In their confusion, and as they had no man with them, they sent the youngest woman, Mary Magdala, running back to fetch Peter and John. The others probably paused in fear and apprehension some distance from the tomb. The record tells us

she ran, found Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, (John) and told them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have laid him” (John 20:2).

After some time, as the dawn spread across the horizon, Salome and

Mary (the mother of James), looking again discovered now that the Roman guard had fled. Moving forward to the tomb in great fear they saw an angel:

the angel spoke to the women, "Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here—he has been raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was lying. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead. And, listen, he goes before you into Galilee; you will see him there! Now I have told you my message." Then the women went away quickly from the tomb, their hearts filled with awe and great joy, and ran to give the news to his disciples (Matthew 28:5-8).

In the meantime the second group of women in which probably Joanna was present, came to the tomb knowing nothing of what had taken place.

They also had with them

the aromatic spices they had prepared. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on going inside, the body of the Lord Jesus was not to be found. While they were still puzzling over this, two men suddenly stood at their elbow, dressed in dazzling light. The women were terribly frightened, and turned their eyes away and looked at the ground. But the two men spoke to them,

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has been raised! Remember what he said to you, while he was still in Galilee—that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, and must be crucified, and must rise again on the third day."

Then they did remember what he had said, and they turned their backs on the tomb and went and told all this to the eleven and the others who were with them . . . But it struck them as sheer imagination, and they did not believe the women (Luke 24:1-9, 11).

As they also went hurriedly to tell the news that Jesus was alive. Peter and John came running to the empty tomb followed by Mary of Magdala. The record states that as soon as Mary had given them the news:

Peter and the other disciple set off at once for the tomb, the two of them running together. The other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. He stooped and looked inside and saw the linen cloths lying there, but did not go in himself. Hard on his heels came Simon Peter and went straight into the tomb. He noticed that the linen cloths were lying there, and that the handkerchief, which had been round Jesus' head, was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself, a little way apart. Then the other disciple,

who was the first to arrive at the tomb, came inside as well, saw what had happened and believed. (They did not yet understand the scripture that said that he must rise from the dead.) So the disciples went back again to their homes (John 20:3-10).

Jesus is seen alive by Mary of Magdala

Mary of Magdala remained at the tomb. Perhaps Mary was waiting for the other women to come back as she as yet knew nothing of their talk with the angel and their departure. Or perhaps she was waiting for Joanna with her companions to arrive as planned with the aromatic spices. At any rate what happened was this:

Mary stood just outside the tomb, and she was crying. And as she cried, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white who sat, one at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain.

The angels spoke to her, "Why are you crying?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him!" she said.

With these words she turned and noticed Jesus standing there, without realising that it was Jesus.

"Why are you crying?" said Jesus to her. "Who are you looking for?"

She supposing that he was the gardener, said, "Oh, sir, if you have carried him away, please tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

At this she turned right round and said to him, in Hebrew, "Master!"

"No!" said Jesus, "do not hold me now. I have not yet gone up to the Father. Go and tell my brothers that I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

And Mary of Magdala went off to the disciples, with the news, "I have seen the Lord!", and she told them what he had said to her (John 20:11-18).

By Cleopas and his companion

At mid-day and ignorant of the real facts, Cleopas, a disciple of Jesus, with a friend had set out to return to their village from Jerusalem.

As they went they were deep in conversation about everything that had happened. While they were absorbed in their serious talk and discussion, Jesus himself approached and walked along with them, but something prevented them from recognising him. Then he spoke to them,

“What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?”

They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas replied,

“You must be the only visitor to Jerusalem who hasn’t heard all the things that have happened there recently!”

“What things?” asked Jesus.

“Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man—a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God’s eyes as well as the people’s. Haven’t you heard how our chief priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we were hoping he was the one who was to come and set Israel free . . .

“Yes, and as if that were not enough, it’s three days since all this happened; and some of our womenfolk have disturbed us profoundly. For they went to the tomb at dawn, and then when they couldn’t find his body they said that they had had a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of our people went straight off to the tomb and found things just as the women had described them—but they didn’t see *him!*”

Then he himself spoke to them.

“Oh, how foolish you are, how slow to believe in all that the prophets have said! Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find his glory!”

Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them everything in the scriptures that referred to himself.

They were by now approaching the village to which they were going. He gave the impression that he meant to go on further, but they stopped him with the words,

“Do stay with us. It is nearly evening and the day will soon be over.”

So he went indoors to stay with them. Then it happened! While he was sitting at the table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other.

“Weren’t our hearts glowing while he was with us on the road when he made the scriptures plain to us?”

And they got to their feet without delay and turned back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and their friends all together, full of the news—

“The Lord is really risen—he has appeared to Peter now!”

Then they told the story of their walk, and how they recognised him when he broke the loaf (Luke 24:14-35).

By Peter privately

Jesus showed his love and concern for Peter in appearing to him privately. Peter’s heart had been broken by his failure and denial. But now confusion and disbelief give place to assurance, and his joyful announcement:

“The Lord is really risen!” (Luke 24:34).

By the crowd in the room

It seems that the room in which three days previously Jesus had eaten the Passover with his disciples, now became a meeting place for the disciples. The record tells us,

In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples had met together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews (John 20:19).

In this room, as the two from Emmaus talked with the disciples about the wonderful walk with Jesus to their home,

Jesus himself stood among them and said,

“Peace be with you all.”

But they shrank back in terror for they thought they were seeing a ghost.

“Why are you so worried?” said Jesus, “and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet—it is really I myself! Feel me and see; ghosts have no flesh or bones as you see that I have.”

But while they still could not believe it through sheer joy and were quite bewildered, Jesus said to them,

“Have you anything here to eat?”

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he said,

“Here and now are fulfilled the words that I told you when I was with you: that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must come true.”

Then he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures, and added,

“That is how it was written, and that is why it was inevitable that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day. So must the change of heart which leads to the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:36-47).

These records are authentic, and are compiled from eyewitnesses. But it would take time for the disciples to accept the fact that Jesus was alive; that he had actually conquered death, and as Messiah had fulfilled the prophecies of the *Torah*, *Psalms* and *Prophets*.

Although Jesus was present with them in the room, this completely new experience shocked them as it would have us. The resurrection body of Jesus could pass through the grave clothes, the rock walls of the tomb, and through closed doors. He now was no longer subject to the planetary laws which govern human bodies. No wonder some doubted.

By Thomas—who doubted

one of the 12, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples kept on telling him, “We have seen the Lord,” but he replied, “Unless I see in his own hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe!”

Just over a week later the disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood in the middle of them and said, “Peace be with you!”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here—look, here are my hands. Take your hand and put it in my side. You must not doubt, but believe.”

“My Lord and my God!” cried Thomas.

“Is it because you have seen me that you believe?” Jesus said to him.

“Happy are those who have never seen me and yet have believed!” (John 20:24-29).

For nearly 2000 years there have been many like Thomas who have found it difficult to believe that Jesus died and rose again. The proofs given to Thomas are evidence for us all, and Jesus says to Thomas words of great importance for us today.

"Happy are those who have never seen me and yet have believed!"
(vs. 29).

Those who were enemies of Jesus, and hated truth and goodness, and were in rebellion against God, never saw him. And when the Roman soldiers came running to the chief priests with the news of what had happened they were shocked and tried to cover up the facts. The record tells us:

Some of the sentries (guards) went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. They then joined the elders, and after consultation gave the soldiers a considerable sum of money and told them, "Your story must be that his disciples came after dark, and stole him away while you were asleep. If by any chance this reaches the governor's ears, we will put it right with him and see that you do not suffer for it." So they took the money and obeyed their instructions. The story was spread and is current among the Jews to this day (Matthew 28:11-15).

It is impossible to believe that ALL the followers of Jesus would unite in a lie and that they, men and women, could keep absolute silence. If the body of Jesus had been stolen away, surely one honest person would have told the Jewish leaders where the body was buried. And would the early followers have been ready to suffer and die for a lie? No! The radiant joy, certainty and boldness of the eyewitnesses was proof enough that they believed what they said: "He is risen indeed!"

Many conflicting rumours have been circulated about the death of Jesus. Two facts should be noted:

1. Many pay respects to the burying place of a holy man, but not to the 'shrine' of Jesus, for the tomb of Jesus was empty. He alone rose from the dead forever. Others raised to life by him died again, and were buried. The fact that he rose to life, and showed himself alive for 40 days is the strongest proof that he is who he claimed to be, the Messiah, the Son of God.

2. Sunday is an official holiday in many countries. Why is this so? This is the first day of the week when Jesus rose from the dead. Followers of Jesus meet on this day to worship him, study his words, and thank him for dying for their sins and rising to life again.

Jesus appeared several times more over a total period of 40 days, before withdrawing from the planet earth.

At that time the majority of believers in Jesus lived in Galilee. They

had gone to Jerusalem only for the Passover festival. When they returned to their homes

He (Jesus) was seen simultaneously by over five hundred Christians (I Corinthians 15:6).

Five hundred witnesses to a fact are enough evidence for any serious thinker.

Either at this time, or very soon after, the record tells us:

The eleven went to a hill-side in Galilee where Jesus had arranged to meet them, and when they had seen him they worshipped him, though some of them were doubtful. But Jesus came and spoke these words to them. "All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. You, then, are to go and make disciples of all the nations and baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you, and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:16-20).

Jesus prepares breakfast for seven disciples

Another appearance of Jesus took place on the Lake of Galilee, this time to seven disciples. The record tells us:

Later on, Jesus showed himself again to his disciples on the shore of Lake (Galilee), and he did it in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were together, when Simon Peter said,

"I'm going fishing."

"All right", they replied, "we'll go with you."

So they went out and got into the boat and during the night caught nothing at all. But just as dawn began to break, Jesus stood there on the beach, although the disciples had no idea that it was Jesus.

"Have you caught anything, lads?" Jesus called out to them.

"No," they replied.

"Throw the net on the right side of the boat," said Jesus, "and you'll have a catch."

So they threw out the net and found that they were now not strong enough to pull it in because it was so full of fish! At this, the disciple that Jesus loved so said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

Hearing this, Peter slipped on his clothes, for he had been naked, and

plunged into the sea. The other disciples followed in the boat, for they were only a hundred yards from the shore, dragging in the net full of fish. When they had landed, they saw that a charcoal fire was burning, with a fish placed on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring me some of the fish you've just caught."

So Simon Peter got into the boat and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three altogether. But in spite of the large number the net was not torn.

Then Jesus said to them, "Come and have your breakfast."

None of the disciples dared to ask him who he was; they knew it was the Lord.

Jesus went and took the bread and gave it to them and gave them all fish as well. This was now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead (John 21:1-14).

James too (a step-brother of Jesus) was one who had not believed that he was the Messiah. As soon as Jesus rose from the dead and showed himself alive, James believed, and the record states:

He was seen by James (I Corinthians 15:7).

The record of his last conversation with the disciples, 40 days after he conquered death, says this:

On one occasion, while he was eating a meal with them, he emphasised that they were not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise.

"You have already heard me speak about this," he said, "for John used to baptise with water, but before many days are passed you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."⁴²

This naturally brought them all together, and they asked him,

"Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

To this he replied,

"You cannot know times and dates which have been fixed by the Father's sole authority. But you are to be given power when the Holy Spirit has come to you. You will be witnesses to me, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judaea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4-8).

Jesus was counseling with the men whom he had chosen and trained to carry on the work when he left them. He was opening their minds to deep truths, and directing them to be his witnesses to the very ends of the earth, and to make more disciples.

He said to them:

"You are eye-witnesses of these things. Now I hand over to you the

promise of my Father. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with power from on high'' (Luke 24:48,49).

Following this conversation at meal time, as they went out towards Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke to them for the last time, and suddenly,

he was lifted up before their eyes till a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still gazing up into the sky as he went, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said,

''Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This very Jesus who has been taken up from you into Heaven will come back just the same way as you have seen him go.''

At this they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives which is near the city, only a sabbath day's journey away. On entering Jerusalem they went straight to the upstairs room where they had been staying. There was Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Nationalist, and Judas the son of James. By common consent all these men, together with the women who had followed Jesus, Mary his mother, as well as his brothers, devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:9-14).

We learned previously from the records that when Jesus chose 12 men to be his companions, to be with him always to see what he did and to hear what he said, he gave them the rank of ''Apostle'' (Luke 6:13-16). These men who were eyewitnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were given authority by him to explain the Christian teaching and to convey Christ's message orally and in writing to the people of the world, and this they did.

The Implications of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave was very different from the resurrection of Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus and the young man given back to his mourning mother. They died again, and were buried like all humans. Jesus never died again. His body was no longer the same, although it was similar. His hands, feet and side carried the marks of the nails and spear. Jesus could suddenly appear in a closed room with doors and windows locked. He could be in Galilee 100 miles north of Jerusalem and then he could be again near the Mount of Olives. When he finally withdrew from the wondering eyes of his disciples, he was

“lifted up before their eyes”, and without any modern aids such as a helicopter, he traveled higher and higher until “a cloud hid him from their sight.”

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave was the public proof that he is different from all other human beings.

Did he not say, “Before there was an Abraham I AM?” Also: “I am from above,” and “My kingdom is not of this world.” Jesus had also controlled nature by stilling the storm and walking on the surface of the water.

On several occasions Jesus had said “Your sins are forgiven you.” Did he not heal the paralytic by saying: “My friend, your sins are forgiven”. As a result the Pharisees said: “Who is this man who talks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins? Only God can do that!”

At Jesus’ birth he was given the name “Immanuel”, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). The angel Gabriel sent from God said to Mary:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Your child will therefore be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

At the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, men heard the voice of God saying:

“This is my dearly loved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

We have seen that the charge against Jesus by the religious leaders was that he claimed to be the Son of God, and this is why they had him killed. They were not prepared to investigate the mystery of his person.

One of his Apostles wrote soon after Jesus’ resurrection:

The gospel is centred in God’s Son, a descendant of David by human genealogy and patently marked out as the Son of God by the power of that Spirit of holiness which raised him to life again from the dead. He is our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom we received grace and our commission in his name to forward obedience to the faith in all nations (Romans 1:3-5).

The Apostles and early disciples of Jesus the Messiah were strong believers that God is one. They rejected at all times any thought of several gods or of three gods. Only very slowly did the truth begin to enlighten their minds that in Jesus the Messiah, the one true God was revealing himself to mankind.

Philip’s great cry to Jesus was:

“Show us the Father and we shall be satisfied!” (John 14:7).

and Jesus answered:

“Have I been so long with you, without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not my own. It is the Father who lives in me who carries out his work through me. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you see me do!” (John 14:8-11).

Learned scholars who love and serve Jesus the Messiah have puzzled their minds over the great mystery of how God being one can reveal himself to mankind in the person of Jesus.

One early disciple, a witness of the life and teaching of Jesus put it this way:

“At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God, and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life and this life was the light of mankind . . .

So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory (the glory like that of a father’s only son), full of grace and truth. And it was about him that John stood up and testified, exclaiming: “Here is the one I was speaking about when I said that although he would come after me he would always be in front of me; for he existed before I was born” . . . no one has ever seen God at any time. Yet the divine and only Son, who lives in the closest intimacy with the Father, has made him known (John 1:1-4, 14, 15, 18).

In the life and teaching of Jesus Christ the full radiance of God’s being is displayed to mankind. An early disciple wrote:

God, who gave to our forefathers many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son . . . This Son, radiance of the glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God, himself the upholding power of all that is, having effected in person the cleansing of men’s sin, took his seat at the right hand of the majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1,3).

Much confusion and misunderstanding in the minds of readers over references to Jesus being “the divine and only Son . . . the Son of God” may by now have been resolved, as it has become increasingly clear that in so many ways he is different from, and superior to, the greatest of all other prophets and apostles.

The mystery of the person of Jesus the Messiah, born without a human father, of the Virgin Mary, named The Word of God, is far

above human understanding. In worship, praise and adoration of the One True God, we are thankful that the one called the Word of God was that expression of God in a visible person that humans could understand. One of the apostles of Jesus the Messiah, three years an eyewitness, wrote this about his Teacher:

We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually heard and saw with our own eyes: something which we had opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, something of the Word of Life! For it was *life* which appeared before us: we saw it, we are eye-witnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it (I John 1:1-2).

One very important reason for this physical revelation is related to the perfect harmonising of God's attributes of justice and mercy. It was to accept in himself the punishment due to mankind for their many sins that Jesus offered to die in their place—cleansing believers from all their sins—like the ram offered in the place of Abraham's son, and the Passover lamb in the place of the first-born. In a unique way the devil lost his power over all repentant believers as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. An early disciple summarised this truth in these words:

Since then, "the children" have a common physical nature as human beings, he also became a human being, so that by going through death as a man he might destroy him who had power of death, that is, the devil; and might also set free those who lived their whole lives a prey to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Nearly 2000 years have passed since that day when Jesus ascended to the glory on the right hand of the majesty on high. Many of his followers obedient to his instructions, have spread his message to every nation in the world. The invitation has been given and many have responded. True followers of Jesus are being trained and prepared for executive responsibility in God's new heavens and new earth. Soon the waiting period will end and in a great shout of triumph Jesus will return again to this earth in the final judgment. The picture of that day, in which all history will draw to a climax is given in the inspired writing of an early apostle:

This judgment will issue in the final appearance of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power. He will bring full justice in dazzling flame upon those who have refused to recognise God or to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Their punishment will be eternal loss—exclusion from the radiance of the face of the Lord, and the glorious majesty of his power. But to those whom he has made holy, his coming will mean splendour unimaginable. It will be a breath-tak-

ing wonder to all who believe—including you, for you have believed the message that we have given you (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

* * *

A second volume should follow this book. It would cover the history of how and where the early followers of Jesus spread his message. How many were martyred for their faith, and how they were inspired and strengthened by the Holy Spirit of God. The reader may discover some of these facts in a book called *The New Testament*, in the section named *The Acts of the Apostles*.

To all who read with a searching heart the promise of Jesus is given:

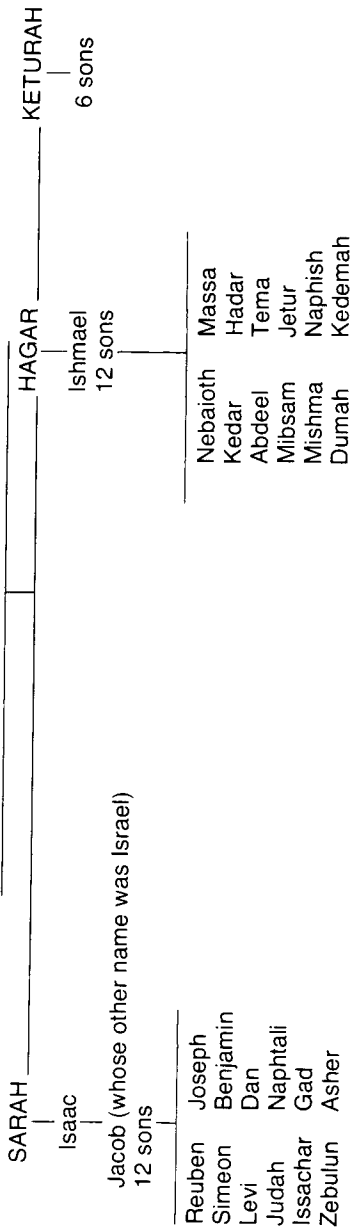
“Search and you will find . . .

The one who asks will always receive;

the one who is searching will always find” (Matthew 7:7-8).

GENEALOGICAL TABLE

Some descendants of ABRAHAM the Friend of God



ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ

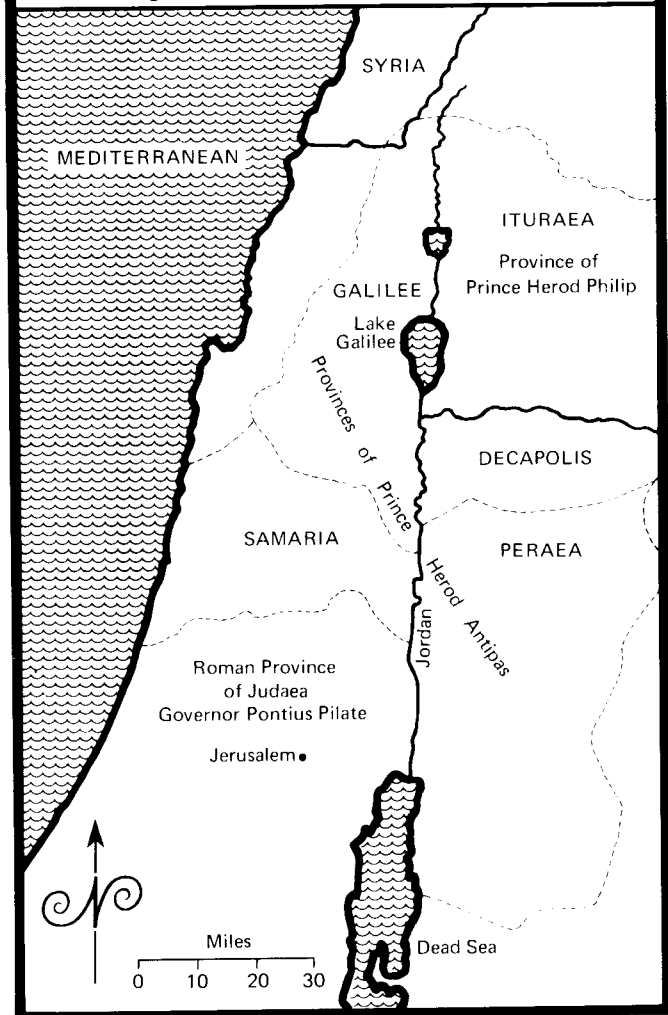
1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. **2** οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. **3** πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν **4** ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· **5** καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης· **7** οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ. **8** οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. **9** Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. **10** ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. **11** εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. **12** ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, **13** οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ^a **15** Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον, Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. **16** ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος

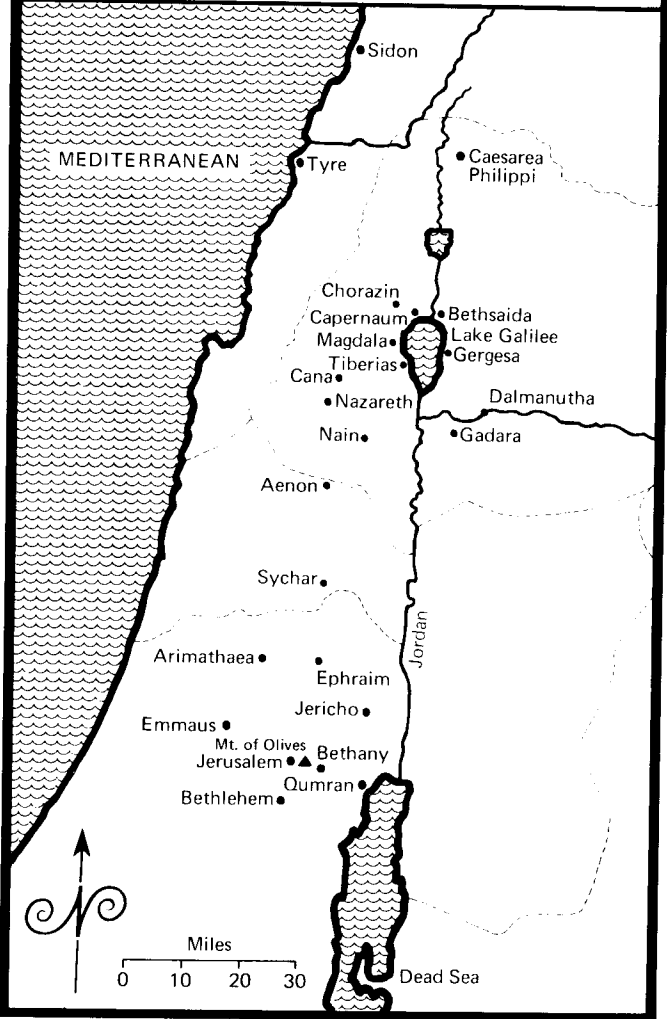
THE PROVINCES OF PALESTINE

during the public service of Jesus the Messiah



PALESTINE

during the public service of Jesus the Messiah



A COMPARATIVE LISTING OF SOME PROPER NAMES IN THE HOLY GOSPEL.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>	<i>Arabic</i>
1.	Ἀαρών	Aaron	Haroon	هُرُونَ
2.	Ἀβραάμ	Abraham	Ibrahim	إِبْرَاهِيمَ
3.	Ἀδάμ	Adam	Adam	آدَمَ
4.	Χριστός	Christ	Khristus	الْمَسِيحُ
5.	Χριστιανός	Christian	Nasara	النَّصَارَى
6.	Δαυεΐδ	David	Daud	دَاوُدَ
7.	Διάβολος	Devil	Iblis	إِبْلِيسَ
8.	Ἡλίας	Elijah	Elias	إِلْيَاسَ
9.	Γαβριήλ	Gabriel	Jabriel	جَبْرِئِيلَ
10.	εὐαγγέλιον	Gospel	Injil	الْإِنْجِيلَ
11.	Ἰακώβ	Jacob	Yaqub	يَعْقُوبَ
12.	Ἰησοῦς	Jesus	Isa	عِيسَى
13.	Ἰουδαῖοι	Jews	Yahud	الْيَهُودَ
14.	Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων	John the Baptist	Yahiya	يَحْيَى
15.	Ἰωνᾶς	Jonah	Yunus	يُونُسَ
16.	Ἰωσήφ	Joseph	Yusuf	يُوسُفَ
17.	Μαρία	Mary	Maryam	مَرْيَمَ
18.	Μεσσίας	Messiah	Masih	الْمَسِيحُ
19.	Μωυσῆς	Moses	Musa	مُوسَى
20.	Πεντατευχῶς	Pentateuch	Torah	التَّوْرَةَ
21.	Σαχαρίας	Zechariah	Zakarya	زَكَرِيَّا

FOOTNOTES

1. Refer to Preface, page vii.
2. See Genealogical Table, page 191.
3. *TORAH*. Called *The Pentateuch* in English. The first five books of the ancient Scriptures through Moses.
4. Refer to Preface, page vii.
5. *CHRIST—MESSIAH*. The words *Christ* and *Messiah* are synonyms. That is they have the same meaning. Both words were used, and can be used as titles, such as "Jesus the Messiah". The word *Christ* comes from the Greek language, and *Messiah* comes from the Hebrew language.

In this book the custom and method of the ancient records are followed in the comments. That is, the custom of mentioning the name of JESUS without adding honorifics or a title. The writer holds Jesus the Messiah in the highest esteem, and it is only to make for easy reading that the flow of the ancient records is carried through into the comments. The great title of honour on the cover of this book is applied to all references to Jesus within its covers.

6. Refer to Map, page 194.
7. *SANHEDRIN*. The high council of the Jews; 71 men who exercised not only civil jurisdiction, according to Jewish law, but also, in some degree, criminal jurisdiction.
8. *DATES AND CHRONOLOGY*. The dates of important events in the ancient world are more or less known with a considerable degree of accuracy. The science of digging up the past called archaeology, has enabled historians to cross check events and dates.

From Roman history we know that Herod the Great died in 4 BC and we also know that he tried to kill the baby Jesus when he heard of his birth. This enables us to fix the birth of Jesus the Christ as not later than 4 BC and for the purpose of this book the date we have accepted is about 5/6 BC.

9. *FATHER*. Jesus the Messiah taught clearly that God is one, and on more than one occasion repeated the great declaration of the *Torah*:

"Hear . . . the Lord our God the Lord is one." (Mark 12:29)

Therefore any reference to God as *Father* cannot detract from the truth of his oneness. It is also clear that the word *Father* was never used in a physical sense, but rather to show the spiritual relationship between God and men and women who have come to love him and become his true followers.

The prophets referred to God as Father is such psalms as:

"Let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God:

Yea, let them rejoice with gladness.

Sing unto God, sing praises to his name:

Cast up a highway for him that rideth through the deserts;

His name is Jehovah; and exult ye before him.

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows,

Is God in his holy habitation." (Psalm 68:3-5)

“Like as a father pitieth his children,
So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him.
For he knoweth our frame;
He remembereth that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13-14)

For further references on this subject see page 187.

10. *SYNAGOGUE*. Jewish meeting place for the reading and exposition of the Holy Scriptures.

11. Refer to Map, page 194.

12. *BAPTISM*. An initiatory religious rite with water by which the new convert declares his repentance for past sins and commitment to follow God's will.
a) It was used by John the Baptist. b) Jesus commanded this *baptism* for all who declared they wished to become his true followers.

13. *LAMB OF GOD*. Early in the history of the people of God a lamb or kid was sacrificed as a symbol of deliverance. Abraham when called to offer his son was stopped by an angel, and shown a ram which was sacrificed instead of his son. On the night of the departure from slavery under Pharaoh the people of God were told to sacrifice a lamb or kid and smear the blood on the house door posts as a sign to the angel of death. The lamb died instead of the firstborn of the house.

When John pointed to Jesus as the *Lamb of God* any true God-fearer instructed in the history of his people, would know that somehow Jesus would die to save others, and that he would take away the sin of the people of God.

Details of the Passover Feast are given on pages 151 to 153.

14. See Note #5, page 197.

15. *PASSOVER*. The meaning of this feast is given on pages 151 to 153. It is suggested that this be read at the appropriate place in the book rather than at this time in the beginning of the life of Jesus the Messiah.

16. *SON OF MAN*. At the time of Jesus the Messiah many of the people of God were familiar with this phrase. It had been used by the prophet Daniel. Holy men in other books had written of the coming of *the Man* whom the Most High would send as the Messiah (Ezekiel 13:1-53). In using this phrase a true God seeker should have realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who would save God's people from their sins.

Another aspect to this phrase is the close identification of Jesus with ordinary men and women. He lived as a carpenter and mixed with the poor. He was indeed a *Son of Man* in the sense of closeness to mankind, despite his unique origin.

17. *HIS ONLY SON. SON OF GOD*. A fuller discussion of this phrase is postponed to a later section of the book, page 187. It is sufficient at this point to re-emphasize that:

Jesus taught clearly that God is one and only one.

The word *Son of God* used in reference to Jesus, never refers to any physical relationship. God is pure Spirit, and neither marries nor has any physi-

cal relationship with a woman. He is above this as are also the angels of heaven.

This phrase *Son of God* is the other side of the phrase where God is called *Father*. A close spiritual relationship must be understood, rather than a physical one.

Many are confused at the way *Son of God* is used by the followers of Jesus. Any reader puzzled or offended by the reference here is requested to read the whole life of Jesus the Messiah to the end, before reaching a conclusion as to this mystery.

18. See note # 5.

19. *SABBATH*. The seventh day of the week, declared a day of rest and worship for the people of God. God's concern for mankind and domestic animals such as oxen, camels, asses is seen in the command to rest one day in seven.

20. *GOD'S KINGDOM. KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. KINGDOM OF GOD.*

The first and basic meaning of this phrase is rank, authority, and rule of a king.

In the Holy Gospel it does not refer to physical territory on earth, rather to the kingship and authority over people who obeyed the will of God from the heart, and thus became his subjects and citizens of his spiritual kingdom.

Citizens of the *Kingdom of God*, or *Kingdom of Heaven* are all those who have repented of their sins and accepted the rule of God through his appointed Messiah, Jesus.

21. *TAX COLLECTORS*. The Roman government auctioned the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder. The tax collectors therefore became the Roman agents to collect taxes from the public, and were looked on as unpatriotic, traitors and collaborators with the hated foreign imperialists. They used force and the law courts to extort money from the public, and were despised by the people of God. Jesus took no notice of these prejudices, and mixed with all who wished to hear God's message, whoever they were.

22. *TITHE*. Abraham, the Friend of God, gave one portion in ten—a tenth—which is the meaning of *Tithe* to Melchizedek the priest of God. The custom developed among the people of God of giving one tenth of their income to God. This money or the goods, financed the worship of God and his servants the priests, as well as providing for the needy and poor.

23. *RUE*. A scrubby plant approximately two feet high and listed as one of the basic ten herbs. It was valuable in medicine, so a tenth of its value would be given in tithe.

24. See note # 17.

25. See note # 9.

26. See note # 5.

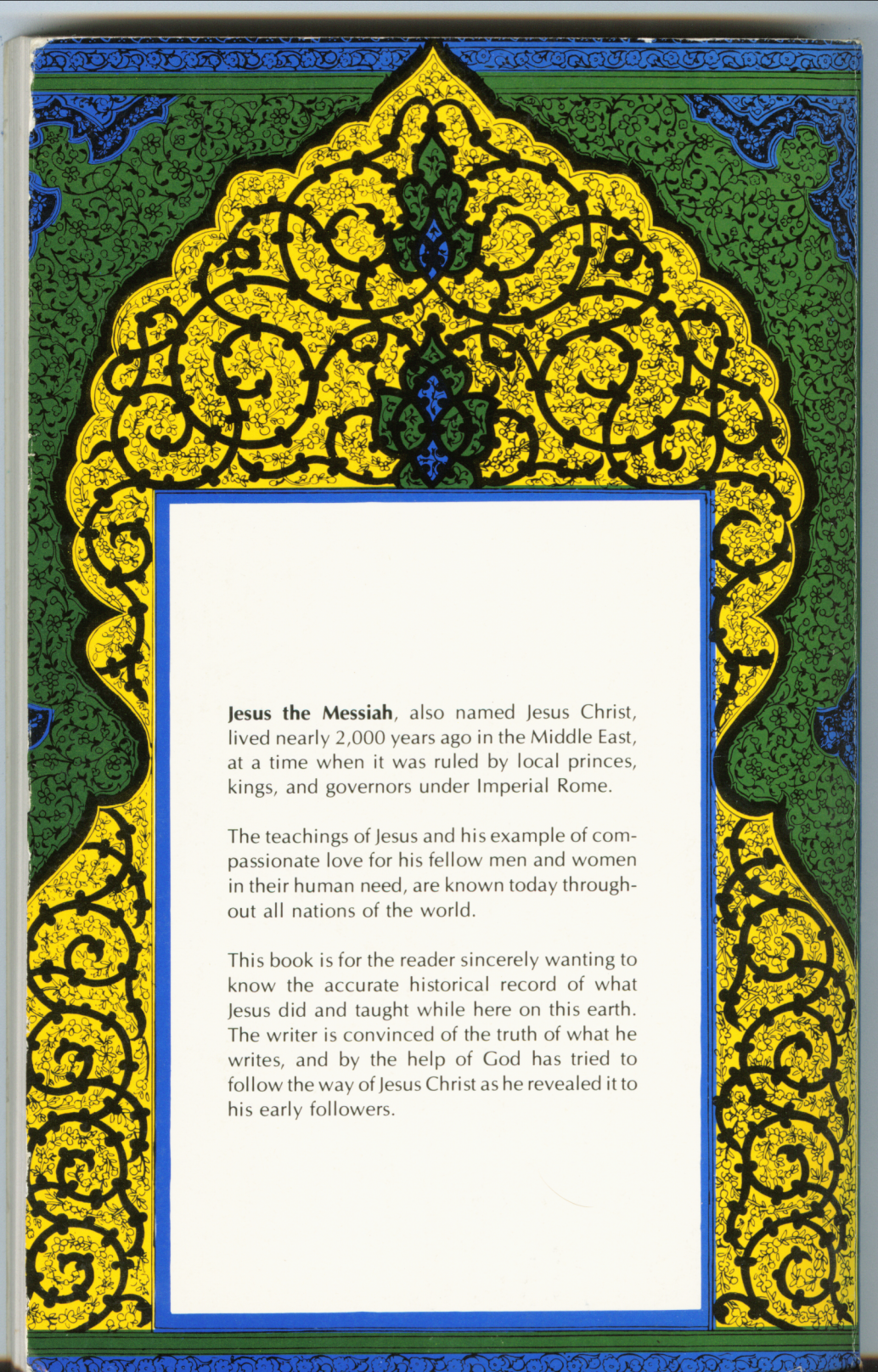
27. See note # 16.

28. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

29. *LEVITE*. A member of the priestly tribe of Levi with the responsibility of assisting in the Temple services.
30. *EXCOMMUNICATED*. Expelled from the community of God's people. Treated as an outcast.
31. *DROPSY*. A disease causing watery fluid to collect in the body.
32. See note # 17.
33. Zechariah 9:9
34. Psalms 110:1
35. *CRUCIFIXION. CROSS*. A painful death on an upright stake or pole to which a cross-piece was fixed like this:



36. *A PERJURER*. A person who takes a solemn oath to tell the truth in a court of law, but tells lies.
37. See notes # 5 and 17
38. See note # 35
39. Psalm 22:18
40. See Preface ``Ancient Records``
41. Quoted from Psalm 22:1
42. *HOLY SPIRIT. SPIRIT*. Jesus spoke at some length on the Holy Spirit, who was to come to earth after Jesus had conquered death and returned to heaven. God is Spirit and God is Holy. In a special way God the Spirit poured himself over the earth fifty days after the death of Jesus and ten days after his ascension to heaven. The day of this special descent of the *Holy Spirit* is celebrated among many of the followers of Jesus and is called *the day of Pentecost*.



Jesus the Messiah, also named Jesus Christ, lived nearly 2,000 years ago in the Middle East, at a time when it was ruled by local princes, kings, and governors under Imperial Rome.

The teachings of Jesus and his example of compassionate love for his fellow men and women in their human need, are known today throughout all nations of the world.

This book is for the reader sincerely wanting to know the accurate historical record of what Jesus did and taught while here on this earth. The writer is convinced of the truth of what he writes, and by the help of God has tried to follow the way of Jesus Christ as he revealed it to his early followers.