



BIBLE COURSE

"THE NEW TESTAMENT"

14 LESSONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

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*But unto you that fear
my name shall the Sun
of righteousness arise
(Mal 4:2)*



1 WHO IS JESUS?



READ: MATTHEW 1 AND 2

JESUS CHRIST!

In our country, we hear this name wherever we go. In the streets, in the restaurant, at construction sites, and you could go on. Fifty years ago this was recognized as blasphemy; now it is considered as normal speech. Why might it be that the Name of Him, whose followers comprise the largest religion in the world, is used as a swearword? That is not the case with the names of Mohammed, Buddha or whoever else.

When we try to speak with people about Jesus, we often meet with resistance, or the conversation falters. Meanwhile, we can get wonderful conversations underway about any famous person, whoever it may be. On the other hand, throughout the ages people have gone into the world to speak in His Name. Others were encouraged, happy and driven to exert amazing efforts in His Name - in the political or social realm - in the service of God and their fellowmen. Hospitals were built, the poor were helped, and people were rescued: all out of love to Jesus. Would such a loving dedication to any other great religious leader in the world inspire people to such self-surrender?

WHO IS HE?

We find His life story in the Bible. In the first four books of the New Testament we read the historical accounts about His life on earth.

Actually, we read about Him on every page of the Bible. Jesus is the central Person in the Bible. Yet, although the Bible is the most widely read book in the world, there are more and more people for whom this "is the book which nobody knows". Therefore, Jesus is also "the Man whom nobody knows". In this lesson series we plan to read the Bible together, in order to discover who Jesus is.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Already at the beginning of the Bible, the eventual coming of Jesus was promised by God. In Genesis 3:15 we read: *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* Here God pronounced the curse upon the serpent (= Satan). But He promised to the woman that One would be born someday from her descendants, who would conquer the evil one. We call this promise the mother promise or protevangel, because all the other promises of the coming of the Messiah stemmed from this first promise after the fall into sin.

The thread of God's promise runs throughout the entire Old Testament: the Messiah, the Savior shall once be born! (Malachi 4:2a)

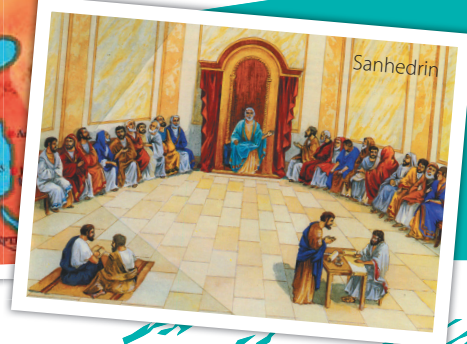
Many have looked forward to His coming. Then, at God's time, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The Bible calls this time the fullness of time: Galatians 4:4, *But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law ...*

POLITICS

The people of Israel lost their independence when the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. The Old Testament ends at the return of the Jews from exile and the rebuilding of the temple. Yet, there was no independence in the following ages. World empires followed upon one another: after the Babylonian Empire came the Persian Empire and the Greek-Hellenic Empire under Alexander the Great. After his death, the empire was divided into four kingdoms. Palestine first belonged to Egypt, and later to Syria.

In 167 BC the Jews managed to regain their independence in a series of fortunate battles under the leadership of the Maccabees. In 63 BC the Romans brought Palestine under their rule. In Jesus' time, the entire region around the Mediterranean Sea belonged to the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire



Herod the Great was not a Jew himself, but he was married to a Jewish princess. He was famous for his cunning, and managed to acquire the kingship over Palestine by declaring absolute loyalty to Rome.

In the final years of his kingship, while Caesar Octavius Augustus (Octavian) ruled over the Roman Empire, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. See Luke 2.

After the death of Octavian, Palestine was divided into four parts. After several years Judea and Samaria came under direct Roman rule. They were ruled by governors, of whom Pontius Pilate is the best known. Under his rule, Jesus was crucified.

Under supreme oversight of the Romans, the Jews had a certain amount of self-government. A large council, called the Sanhedrin, governed over internal affairs to a certain extent. The Sanhedrin also passed judgment in all matters which concerned religious life. This council, of which the high priest was chairman, consisted of 71 members. Three groups were represented in this council: the high priests, the scribes, and the eldest of the people. The scribes were people who studied the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament.

SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS

There was relative prosperity at the time of Ceasar Augustus (Octavian), although there was a great wealth gap between the poor and the rich. Through the influence of Alexander the Great, Greek became the official language for the entire region surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. This **common language** later became a very important benefit for the spread of the message of Jesus by His followers. Religious life was **very depraved** throughout the Roman Empire. The Jewish people represented an exception to this depravity. In the final centuries before Christ, although under political subjection, the Jewish people formed a closed community with a strong cultural identity. The Jews differed from other nations by their belief in only one God (= monotheism). The Law of Moses was the basis of their life. There was a Messianic expectation: God would one day send Someone to deliver His people. For the many Jews who lived in countries spread around the Mediterranean Sea (= diaspora), Jerusalem and the temple remained the central focus of their religious life.

Model of the temple



In Jesus' time, several distinctive factions were discernable within the religious culture of the people of Israel.

The Pharisees

Most of the scribes belonged to the faction of the Pharisees. The Pharisees saw it as their duty to bring the doctrine of the scribes into practice. According to their perception, eternal salvation was dependent upon the observance of the Law of Moses. Also, the interpretations of these laws, and the oral traditions by which the laws were expanded upon in minute details, and applied to every conceivable situation in daily life, counted as absolute regulations. The outward display of religion was often central, and there were all kinds of interpretations by which to make their actual sins seem legitimate. Jesus often pointed to the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

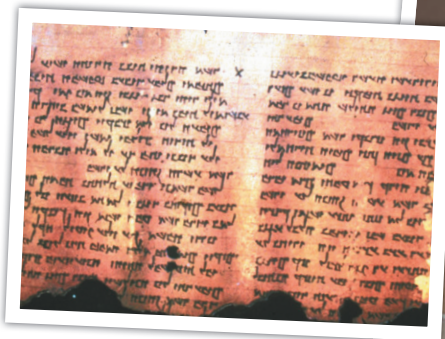
The Sadducees

This group consisted primarily of the aristocracy. They collaborated with the Romans. They only accepted the Pentateuch (= first five books of the O.T) as having authority. They rejected all later writings, and thereby also the doctrinal developments, such as the resurrection of the dead.

De Essenen

The Essenes formed a monastic community, and consequently did not associate in public life. That is why we do not encounter them in the New Testament. Their life was dedicated to study of the law, prayer and work. The finds of the "Dead Sea scrolls" in 1947, by excavating an Essene monastery at Qumran along the Dead Sea, are of real interest.

Reading of the Thora



The Dead Sea scrolls



QUESTIONS

1. Read Mark 8:27
What question did Jesus pose here?
To whom did He put this question?
What was the answer?
What answer did Peter give? (Mark 8:29)
Compare with Matthew 16:16.
2. In the Old Testament we read many “references” to Jesus. Find these:
 - a. Genesis 12:2-3
 - b. 2 Samuel 23:3-4
 - c. Isaiah 7:14
 - d. Micah 5:2
 - e. Malachi 4:2What do these references state about Jesus?
3. Who asked Jesus who He was?
Look up:
 - a. Matthew 11:1-5
 - b. Matthew 26:62-64
 - c. Matthew 27:11
4. After Jesus’ ascension, the gospel went throughout the whole world. It began in Jerusalem. How did Peter briefly summarize who Jesus is? Read Acts 2:36.
5. What did John testify of Jesus?
Read: 1 John 2:22
6. What did Jesus call Himself after He had ascended to heaven?
Read Revelation 1:11, and 1:17-18
7. Read Daniel 2:37-40 and Daniel 7:23
Which four world empires can you name?
8. A state of spiritual and religious depravity prevailed.
Read Acts 19:24-28 and Romans 1:28-32
How is this depravity portrayed here?
9. The time when Jesus was born, has also been called the fullness of time.
Read Galatians 4:4.
List three reasons why this time “was made suitable” for the coming of Jesus and for the spread of His gospel.

10. Quite often Jesus reprimanded the leaders of Israel. What all was he pointing out to them?

Read Matthew 6:2, 6:5, and Matthew 23.

2 AROUND JESUS' BIRTH



READ: LUKE 1 VERSE 26-56, LUKE 2

INTRODUCTION

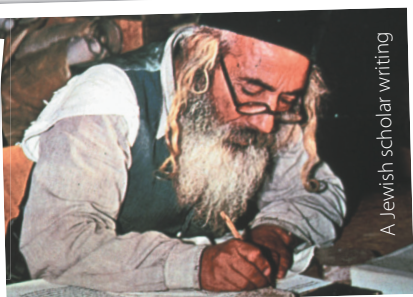
The coming of the Savior was promised in the Old Testament. From the moment when, in His grace to Adam and Eve after the fall, God promised to send Someone who would conquer over sin and death, people have looked forward to His coming. People have known throughout the ages: "Someone is coming". We call this **Advent**.

At Christmas (= Christ's feast) we remember the birth of Jesus Christ. We read about this in the New Testament. Especially Matthew and Luke describe the happenings around His birth. Matthew even begins with a family tree, to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

When the time arrived that Jesus would be born, God sent His angel Gabriel to earth. First to Zacharias, to tell him that he would become the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias could not believe the message, because he and his wife were old already. He received a sign to show that it was really true: he would no longer be able to speak until the birth of John. After John's birth he composed a beautiful song of praise, in which he sang of the grace and mercy of God. John would be the messenger who would prepare the way for the coming Savior. John was the herald of the King.

Elizabeth and Zacharias



A Jewish scholar writing

ANNOUNCEMENT

Mary, an ordinary girl from Nazareth, was engaged to Joseph, the carpenter. But before they were married, God sent His angel Gabriel to tell her that she would have a son:

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest... (Luke 1:30-32).

Mary was troubled by this. She did not know what to think of this, because she was still a virgin. But Gabriel told her that she would become pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

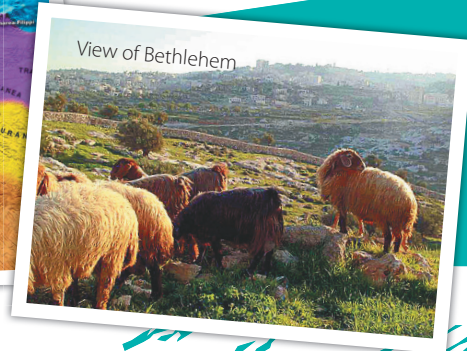
The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). The angel also told her that her niece Elizabeth would have a son. Mary then hastened to the south, from Nazareth to Judea, to visit Elizabeth. The angel put Joseph's mind at ease regarding the cause of Mary's pregnancy, and he married her.

BIRTH

Luke described the occasion of Jesus' birth very precisely. This was probably about the year 4 BC, and not in the year 0, because a mistake was made when later calculating the era.

During the reign of Ceasar Octavianus Augustus (Octavian), a population census was held in connection with taxation. Cyrenius (or Quirinius) was then governor of Syria. God used this census to cause Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, as was foretold in the Old Testament (Micah 5:2). Joseph and Mary travelled to Bethlehem in order to be registered there. Bethlehem was, after all, the city of David, a forefather of both of them. Once they arrived in Bethlehem, it was soon apparent that there was no room for them at the inn. Finally they found a space in a stable, a barn for animals. Here Jesus was born. His cradle was a crib, a feeding trough for animals. The King, promised by God, certainly was not received with a very royal welcome.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).



SHEPHERDS

Away from the stable, in the open fields around Bethlehem, in the plains of Ephrata, shepherds were sitting together. They were keeping watch over their flocks because of the wild animals. Suddenly an angel from heaven - in radiant appearance - stood by them, which terrified them. But the angel spoke to them: *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger* (Luke 2:10-12).

Then there was suddenly a choir of angels: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Luke 2:14). Upon hearing this glad news, the shepherds hastened to the stable, where they worshipped their Savior. Afterwards they told this good news in the streets of Bethlehem, where the people briefly wondered about this, but soon returned again to their daily routines.

SIMEON EN ANNA

When Jesus was "presented" in the temple by Joseph and Mary, Simeon came and took the Child out of Mary's hands. He had been led to the temple by the Holy Spirit. He had once been promised that he would see the Christ before his death. Now the Holy Spirit showed him that this Child was the Savior promised by God. Anna, an old widow in Jerusalem, also came to stand by them. She also saw the promised Savior, and passed along this happy message to *all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem* (Luke 2:38).

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

God made the birth of Jesus known to several Eastern wise men (astrologers), but in a very different manner. During their meteorological observations, they saw a special star. They took this as the sign of the birth of the "King of the Jews". Then they travelled to Jerusalem, where nobody could tell them anything about the born King. The scribes could only quote Micah 5:1: *And thou Bethlehem, Ephratah ...*

*For mine eyes have
seen thy salvation
(Luke 2:30).*



King Herod also heard of the news, and he asked the wise men to bring a report to him on their return journey, so that he could also go to worship the Child. He prepared his plan. Later he murdered all the children in Bethlehem who were under two years old. The wise men travelled further, and again saw the star, which went before them to the place where they found the Child and His mother. There they knelt in worship before their King. They also gave costly presents: gold, incense and myrrh. God revealed Herod's plan to them in a dream, after which they travelled homeward by a different route. Also, in a dream Joseph received the instruction to bring the Child and His mother to safety, because Herod was seeking to kill Him. They had to flee to Egypt. They lived there until Herod was dead.

NAZARETH

Joseph then settled in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. There is only one story recorded about Jesus' youth. Luke relates that, when He was twelve years old, Jesus went with His parents to the Passover feast at Jerusalem. On the return journey He could not be found. After three days they found Him in the temple. He said: *Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?* (Luke 2:49). Here He already spoke about His true Father. He lived in Nazareth until His public appearance. *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man* (Luke 2:52).

QUESTIONS

1. Where was Jesus before He came into the world? Read: John 1:1 and John 17:5
2. For what reason did God send Jesus to the world? Read: Genesis 3, John 3:16-17 and Romans 5:17-18
3. What did Jesus Himself say about the purpose of His coming?
Read: Matthew 9:13b and John 12:47
4. What does the name "Jesus" mean? Read: Matthew 1:21
What does the name "Immanuel" mean?
Read: Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23

Nazareth



3 JOHN THE BAPTIST



READ: MATTHEW 3 VERSE 1-12, LUKE 1 VERSE 5-25 AND 57-80

BIRTH

The birth of John the Baptist is recorded in Luke 1. While performing his duties in the temple, the priest Zacharias received a message from an angel, who said: *Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John* (Luke 1:13).

John had to announce the coming of the Messiah to the people of Israel. The name John also means: God is gracious, which is to say: what God has promised will now occur soon. Zacharias could not believe it. He and his wife were already old, and it was unthinkable that they would still have a child at their age. Due to his unbelief, Zacharias received a sign, by which he could know that the report was actually true: he would not be able to speak until the child was born. After the child's birth Zacharias sang a song of praise to the glory of God: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people* (Luke 1:68). He also sang about the task of John and the purpose of his work: *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins...* (Luke 1:76-77). When John was grown up, he went to live in the desert to prepare himself for his task. He wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his waist, just as the prophets did before him, and he walked on sandals. His food consisted of grasshoppers and wild honey.

Desert



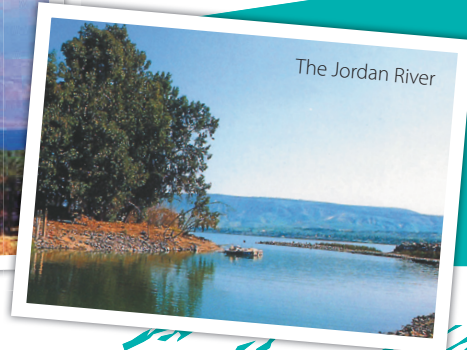
PREACHER AND BAPTIST

When the time arrived that God wanted to make His message known to mankind, John came out of the desert to the Jordan River. *And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins* (Luke 3:3). People came from everywhere in the land to hear John. His preaching made a deep impression on the people, and many repented of their sins and confessed their sins, upon which they were baptized by John. He had a distinct message for every class of society. For the ordinary person, for the tax collectors, for the soldiers. His message to the religious leaders of the people, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, was especially clear: *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance* (Matthew 3:7-8).

HERALD

When the Jewish leaders asked him who he was, John answered: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias* (John 1:23). John was also called the herald of the King. He warned the people that they must be prepared for the coming of the King. One day the Lord Jesus came to John at the Jordan River to also be baptized by John. But, surely Jesus did not have sins which needed to be “washed away”? Therefore John said: “No, I need you to baptize me, and do you come to me?” But Jesus said that John must not hinder Him, because He must fulfill all the righteousness of God in this way. Jesus was willing to voluntarily take upon Himself the punishment for the sins of His children, and to stand before God’s judgment seat in their place. That is why He also had to be baptized: as a sign that the sins of others (which He took upon Himself) must be washed away. After Jesus was baptized and emerged from the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus in the form of a dove. There was also a voice, which said: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* (Matt 3:17). When Jesus came to John again at a later time, John pointed Him out: *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29).

Oasis of Engedi



What did John mean by this?

In the Old Testament, animals (including lambs) were sacrificed by the priests, for the sins of the people. The image presented by this is that man had earned death through his sins, but that another bore the punishment, in this case an animal. The sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. Here we see that Jesus has come to stand in the place of His children, the believers. He offered Himself as the Lamb in this way, so that they can go free, delivered from the punishment upon their sins. Several students (= disciples) of John followed the Lord Jesus after this, and they became His first disciples.

HIS END

After this, John quietly continued with his work. He spoke openly to people about their sins. Even to King Herod, because he was living with the wife of his brother Philip. Herod did not want to be reproved about this, and became so angry that he had John put into prison. Yet deep in his heart he had respect for John. In prison John's faith was severely tested. He sent a couple of his friends to Jesus with the question: Are you truly the real Messiah whom we have been expecting? The Lord Jesus gave the following answer: *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me* (Matt 11:4-6). Now John knew that this was the work of the Messiah, because that is how it was described in the Old Testament. Isaiah 29:18-19.

One day, Herod was celebrating his birthday. He had invited many prominent people. Herodias, the woman he was living with, had a daughter called Salome. She danced so nicely at the feast that she was allowed to choose whatever she wanted to have, even if it was half of the kingdom. Upon her mother's urging, she chose the head of John the Baptist. Thus John was beheaded in prison. Here on earth, Herod could continue his sinful life undisturbed. John, on the other hand, entered into the joy of the Lord in heaven.

Masada, a palace of Herod



QUESTIONS

1. Read Isaiah 40:1-11
How did Isaiah speak about the forerunner of the Messiah?
2. Read the Song of Zacharias in Luke 1:67-79
What was the purpose of the coming of the Messiah (vs. 77-79)?
3. Read Luke 3:7-14
What did John call upon his various hearers to do?
 - a. The multitude (the ordinary man)
 - b. The publicans
 - c. The warriors (soldiers)
4. Read Matthew 11:1-19
What did Jesus say about John?

4 JESUS' DISCIPLES



READ: MATTHEW 4 VERSE 12-25

JESUS' DISCIPLES

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15). During the time that John was kept in prison by Herod, Jesus began to do His work in public. Just like John the Baptist, He proclaimed the Kingdom of God. Jesus presented Himself as a rabbi, which is a teacher. He selected His students Himself. At the statement of John the Baptist: *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,"* two of his students, a different John and Andrew, followed Jesus. Andrew called his brother Simon. On the way to Galilee, Philip was called: "Follow Me." Philip then said to his friend Nathanael that they had found the Messiah. Nathanael did not believe it at first: Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? This was not mentioned in the Old Testament, according to him. The Messiah from the despised Nazareth? Jesus demonstrated to Nathanael that He already knew everything about him. Then he cried out: *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel* (John 1:49). Nathanael was later also called Bartholomew (Bar = son of). So the disciples were all called by Him personally. But how that happened is only recorded of some of them. Thomas had the nickname Didymus (= twin). Matthew, who was once Levi the publican, wrote the Gospel according to Matthew. He was called while working at the tollbooth of Capernaum. Simon was a Zealot. The Zealots were an anti-Roman group. Judas Iscariot later betrayed Jesus.

Sea of Galilee



DISCIPLES

Simon and his brother Andrew were fishermen and lived in Capernaum, a fishing village along the Sea of Galilee. Simon received the name Peter (= rock). John's brother James was called while they were repairing the nets of their father Zebedee. Almost all the disciples came from the northern region called Galilee. A number of them were fishermen. That is why, when He called them, he said: *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men* (Matt 4:19).

So He called them to follow Him. First they received His teaching. Disciple means student. The teacher did not stand in front of the class, but formed a communal living arrangement with his students. The rabbi indicated to his students how they were to follow His example in all types of life situations. He also revealed how He thought about certain issues. They had to learn by means of living with Him. The Hebrew word "dabar" means: word and deed together.

- The word disciple contains "discipline". That means accepting guidance and forsaking other causes. Focusing yourself entirely upon what the rabbi teaches.

SENT OUT

The Lord Jesus later openly appointed the disciples as His messengers.

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor (Luke 6:13-16).

After having been His students for a time, the disciples were sent out. Then they were called apostles. Apostle means: one who is sent out. They received an assignment: They had to go amongst the Jewish people and preach about the coming of the Kingdom of God. They must heal the sick, cast out devils, and raise the dead to life. (Matthew 10).

Ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum



At a later time, the Lord Jesus again sent out seventy men with the same assignment. They came back full of enthusiasm. But this soon disappeared, when the Lord Jesus told them about the foundation of His Kingdom. He must suffer and die on the cross. On the third day He would arise again from the dead, and after 40 days He would ascend to His Father in heaven. They finally understood this after His resurrection. Then He sent out eleven apostles into the world. Matthias was later added to this, to replace the traitor Judas. (Acts 1:15-25).

WITNESSES

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. Through this, the disciples received the boldness to testify of the Lord Jesus, as He had also instructed them to do. That is how the message of His Kingdom went out into the world:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt 28:19-20).

QUESTIONS

Fill in the names from the lesson material or from the Bible:

1.came to testify: Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God (John 1:50)
2.brought his brother to Jesus.
3.betrayed Jesus.
4.believed in Him, saying "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28)
5.wrote the first book of the New Testament
6.was later exiled to the isle of Patmos (Revelation 1)
7.was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa (Acts 12)
8.confessed Jesus (Matthew 16:16) but denied Him three times
(Matthew 26:69-75)
9.and his brother..... wanted to be the greatest.
(Matthew 20:20-28)



“The fall into sin”



5 JESUS AND THE DEVIL



READ: MATTHEW 4:1 – 11

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Matt 4:1). Immediately after His baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, Jesus was tempted of the devil. Tempting is trying to lead to sin.

WHO IS THE DEVIL?

The devil is spoken of at various places in the Bible. Thus, the devil is not just a human fantasy. In Genesis 1 we read about the creation of heaven and earth. First heaven, then earth. That means that the “heaven dwellers”, the angels, were also created at that time. In the book of Job, we read that when the Lord created the earth ... *the morning stars (angels) sang together ...* (Job 38:7).

And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good (Gen 1:31). Yet sin came into that perfect creation. This is one of the greatest mysteries, for which we humans have no answer.

The devil was a highly placed angel, who wanted to exalt himself above God. And who thereby fell so very deeply, and dragged along many angels in his fall.

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day (Jude 6)

- The Greek name for the devil is “diabolos”. This means “the one who divides”. The devil tries to damage God’s creation. He distorts God’s words and laws and causes people to think that they can be happy without God, and that they can do everything themselves.
- In Paradise he caused man to believe in him, and he made God appear to be a liar. He is called the father of lies: ... there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).
- Another name for the devil is “Satan”. That means “opposer” or “accuser”. He always acts contrary to God’s law and will. For this, he sometimes even uses texts from God’s Word to deceive people.

- He is no creator, but he lets people believe that by following him, they “can be as God” and can create their own world. So, after the fall of Adam (Genesis 3), every person lives as though God does not exist. A life under the rule of Satan. We see the consequences throughout the entire history.
- Man is unable to resist the devil, but is his slave. Only Jesus has conquered the devil. For this He used the best weapon which exists: the Word of God.

We read how Jesus did this in the history of Matthew 4:1-11

JESUS TEMPTED

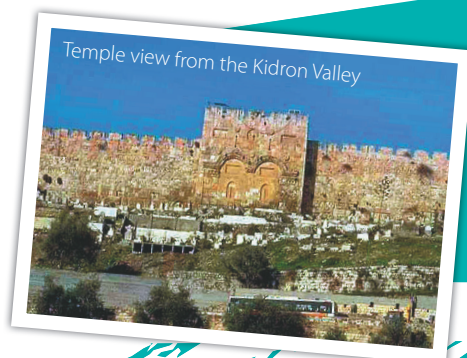
After Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness. There He fasted for forty days. Here the devil called on Him and tried three times to tempt Him to sin.

The first temptation

- The devil always looks for a person's weakest point. Jesus had not eaten (fasted) for forty days. He was hungry. Then the devil came with the deceptive comment: *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. The devil wanted to create doubt about what God had said at His baptism: This is My Son ... (Matthew 3:17).* If Jesus had followed the counsel of the devil, He would have acknowledged the doubts about this, and thereby as it were, opened up the Word of His Father for discussion. Jesus replied from God's Word: *It is written: man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live (Deuteronomy 8:3).* By this He meant that our life lies in God's hand, and that He was not dependent upon bread. He wished to receive bread only in obedience to the Word spoken by God. He trusted that God could also care for Him without bread.

The second temptation

- The devil took Jesus along to the top of one of the annexes (side-buildings) of the temple; almost 200 meters high above the Kidron Valley. He said: “If you are really God's Son, just jump down, because it is stated in the Scriptures that: *He (God) shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and (that) in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*”



Now the devil himself also used God's Word. Very deceitful! But now again Jesus answered from Scripture: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*. That means: you may not "put God to the test". It is wrong to extort a miracle from God.

The third temptation

- Then the devil's true nature became apparent. Twice he had tried to tempt Jesus to disobey God the Father. Now he asked Jesus to worship him. In a vision, he brought into view all the kingdoms of the world. The devil would give all this to Him if Jesus would bow down to him. His purpose was clear. Jesus could become ruler over the entire world without having to suffer and die. There we see the original sin again: to possess the world outside of God. Here we see the image of a thief, who acts as if the plunder is his property, and who can also distribute this as he pleases. The devil posed as the supreme head of the world, who in his own power, without God, had the world at his disposal. But fortunately Jesus had the final word: *Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*.

Jesus defeated the devil. He remained obedient to His heavenly Father. Fortunately, because otherwise He Himself would have had sins. And then He would not have been able to bring His sacrifice as a "spotless" Lamb for sinful people.

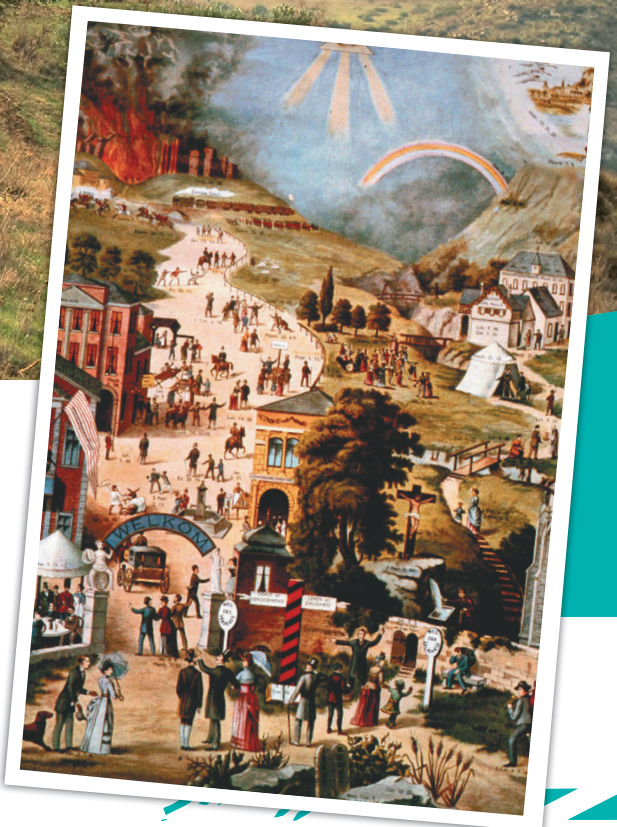
Therefore Paul wrote to encourage all those who have received faith in the Lord Jesus: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

QUESTIONS

1. Read Luke 4:33-37, Luke 8:2. What shows why Jesus came to earth?
2. Read Luke 8:26-39. In verse 30, what does "legion" mean?
3. The devil knows the Bible well. He can also quote texts, but he uses them in a wrong manner. Compare the words which he quoted from Matthew 4:6 with Psalm 91:11-12.



“The broad and the narrow way”



6 JESUS' DOCTRINE



READ: MATTHEW 5 TO 7

LAYOUT

In chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew we read the Sermon on the Mount - so called because Jesus preached this on a mountain in Galilee. This is the most comprehensive speech which is recorded of Jesus. In this speech the constitution (as it were) of His Kingdom is announced. Herein we can discern several components:

- Who are called blessed
- What commission His subjects have
- What their life is to be like
- How they are to pray
- How one enters into the Kingdom
- The foundation on which His Empire is built.

BEATITUDES

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with the so-called Beatitudes (supreme blessedness(es)). They are called thus because they begin with the words: *Blessed are ...* Here He provided the features of those who belong to His Kingdom. They are declared to be blessed, that is, viewed to be happy. Not merely happy, but perfectly happy ("blessed" comes from "blissful", which means: full of happiness). In the deepest sense of the word: happy in God. Many have applied the words found in this story only to our life on earth. In the sense of: people who live in poverty on earth, those who have sorrows, as well as they who suffer hunger, etc. will hereafter be blessed. Yet the Beatitudes have a far deeper meaning. Jesus was actually speaking of the relationship which man has to God, his Creator. The poor in spirit are those who discover that they are living outside of the Kingdom of God, and who realize that they are therefore immeasurably poor. They who mourn are those who are sorrowful because they are without God, and who mourn over their sins. Such sorrowing ones are pronounced blessed, because they will be comforted

by Jesus. He came to die for the guilt of their sins. He paid with His life, on the cross. When we read the Beatitudes from this perspective, we see that all these pronouncements are about our relationship towards God. Jesus concluded the Beatitudes with two examples: “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. He compared His followers to these. They are standing in a world without Christ which is tasteless, corrupt and dark. They must be as salt and light, in order to point others to Him.

THE LAW

Afterwards, Jesus' position is described regarding the Law of Moses as found in the Old Testament. He said: *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil* (Matt 5:17). By this, He was saying that the people must not think that they can now just forget about the laws of Moses. These laws will not become obsolete. What is the contents of these laws? To love God above all and your neighbor as yourself.

Can we then earn the Kingdom of God by keeping these laws in our daily lives? No, we cannot earn it! We must keep the law, but not from a legalistic principle, as the Jewish leaders taught. How then? From an inner spontaneity. This does not originate from ourselves. Because nothing that is perfectly good originates with us. Such love towards God and our neighbor can only arise from a new heart. An inward change is necessary for this: regeneration (new birth). God must and also wants to change your heart, that is, your inner being. In order that - out of this new principle of life - you will learn what it means to love God above all, and your neighbor as yourself.

THE PRAYER

You no longer have your life in your own hands when you are poor in spirit, when you hunger and thirst after the right relationship with God, or are persecuted for His Name's sake. You then pray if God will rescue and help you. For that purpose, the Lord Jesus has taught a prayer, the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). In it everything is expressed that we need, both to live on earth, and to be able to live forever.

ENTRANCE

By using the example of a city, He explains how we enter into the Kingdom of Jesus. Roads lead to a city, and you enter the city through a small gate in the city wall. Every person is on a journey. To enter the Kingdom of God, a narrow way must be travelled, and we come inside through a strait (tight or small) gateway. Jesus calls the easy road a broad way, upon which each person lives by nature: trying to draw everything to ourselves, and doing everything in our own power. But entering through the strait gate, by means of the narrow

road, means “coming off our high horse”, without baggage, and going through the small opening, all alone. In order to enter in, to be rescued by grace, as a poor sinner through Christ, a person must thus stoop and be emptied of all pride. Where is this road? Where do you find this gate?

THE FOUNDATION

In the parable of the house built on a rock, Jesus gave the answer to this all-decisive question about where to find this good way and this strait gate. Jesus compared those who heed His words to the man who built the “house of his life” on a rock, which means a firm foundation. Such a foundation will withstand even the heaviest storms. This foundation is Jesus. Someone who does not need Him and who lives without Him, is like a man who built his house on a sandy foundation. Such a house is not going to withstand the storms and the torrents of rain. The last and heaviest storm is the judgment, at which every person will once come to stand, at his death. Without Jesus as our foundation, our house of life will collapse forever. Therefore, in the Sermon on the Mount, He pointed to what is most important for every person: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you* (Matt 6:33).

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly fill in the beatitudes from Matthew 5:3-10 in the following diagram:

Blessed are, because:

- vs. 3 poor in spirit.....
- vs. 4 who mourn.....
- vs. 5 the meek
- vs. 6 who hunger and thirst after righteousness,.....
.....
- vs. 7 the merciful.....
- vs. 8 the pure in heart
- vs. 9 the peacemakers.....
- vs. 10 who are persecuted for righteousness sake
-

2. Read the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13. This prayer consists of three sections.

List them after the following headings:

Worship of God the Father

.....

.....

.....

A threefold request or petition

.....

.....

.....

Praise

.....

.....

.....

“Foundation”



7 JESUS' MIRACLES



READ: MATTHEW 8 TO 11

INTRODUCTION

The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matt 11:5).

This was Jesus' reply when asked whether He really was the promised Messiah. He then pointed to the miracles which He performed and to His preaching. Jesus supported His message with "special powers", the miracles.

PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLES

The purpose of the miracles was:

- To show that there is a God who lives
- To show who Jesus is
- To show what Jesus will do
- To point people to their responsibility.

In the first place, by means of miracles God showed that He has concern for mankind. That He enters their lives to repair what has been broken by sin. He wants to rescue, repair and help. God Himself wants to be in the midst of His people: *He (God) will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing ... (Isa 35:4-6).* Jesus wanted to show by means of the miracles that He was the Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament. John 11:1-19.

In the second place, Jesus clearly showed who He is: the Almighty God, who not only pardons sin, and clears us from its punishment, but who also removes the consequences of sin, such as sickness and death. The One who, just like in the Old Testament, multiplied the food (as seen in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4:42-44) and fed the hungry.

In the third place, by the miracles Jesus showed what He intended to do. He made it abundantly clear that He wanted to start a spiritual turnaround. When He raised Lazarus from death, He pointed to the costly gift which He wanted to present: a new and everlasting life. A life of peace with God, and to the glory of God.

Finally, Jesus pointed the people to their responsibility. Now that He had come, they could not hear His words and avoid making a commitment, and they could not see his deeds and remain non-committal. Jesus' coming always has one of two results. People hear His voice: follow Me. But while one follows Him, the other lays it all aside and continues to live his own life, without Him. *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (...) And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell ...* (Matthew 11:20-23).

TYPES OF MIRACLES

We can distinguish four types of miracles:

- The healing of bodily ailments
- Wonders in nature
- The casting out of devils
- The raising of the dead

HEALINGS

It happened precisely as we read about this in Isaiah 35. God came to deliver. The blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked and lepers were cured. By this God showed who Jesus really is: He opens the eyes of the blind for their own spiritual need. He opens the ears of the deaf so they can hear His call and follow Him obediently. He gives strength to the spiritually lame to walk to Him. So He shows: God is in our midst, and He rescues.

Ruins of Chorazin



Pool of Siloam - Here the blind man was healed.



WONDERS IN NATURE

Here Jesus also showed who He is and what He wants to be for His children.

In a storm during a nighttime journey on the lake, He was suddenly with them. He spoke to the waves and the wind: "Peace, be still" and the storm abated and the waves calmed down. With this He wanted to teach His anxious disciples: Jesus is Almighty. He is God and with Him they are safe. Because in the Old Testament already, as in Psalm 65:8, it was written that God causes the storm to be calm and the waves to cease. What God does in the Old Testament, Jesus does in the New Testament. So He shows that Jesus helps and rescues all who believe in Him.

CASTING OUT DEVILS

As we read, for example in Matthew 8:28-34, He delivered people who were possessed by devils. How must we view devil-possession? We must be very careful not to draw parallels with people who are mentally ill nowadays, where we might encounter the same symptoms. Devil possession was an unusual occurrence which occurred particularly during the time when Jesus was on earth. Luther already said that the devil is the ape of God. He wants to imitate God. At that time, the devil tried to so control people that he, as it were, became one with them and dwelt in them. But Jesus is Almighty. Even the devil had to obey Him and depart from these people, in order to make room for Jesus, who delivered them from Satan, and gave them peace with God.

RAISING THE DEAD

The great power of God became apparent very remarkably in the resurrections from the dead. God hath visited His people Luke 7:16). This was said after Jesus raised a boy from the dead in the village of Nain. The raising of the young daughter of the ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum also made a great impression. When Jesus raised His friend Lazarus, who had already lain in the grave four days, Jesus got so much attention that the Jewish leaders decided to kill Him. With these miracles Jesus showed that He has power, even over death. By this means He also showed what He had come for: to again grant new and everlasting life with God to spiritually dead sinners.

Ship in a storm



QUESTIONS

1. In Matthew 9:1-8 Jesus showed that He wants to relieve the deepest need of mankind. What does this mean?
2. With which powerful tool did Jesus command the devil? Read Matthew 8:32.
3. In Matthew 10:7-8 Jesus gave assignments to His disciples. Which?
4. What do we read about the disciples after the first wonder in nature, in John 2:11?
5. What answer did Jesus give to John the Baptist, when John was in prison and began to doubt about Jesus? Read Matthew 11:4-6.
6. Read John 11. In verse 4 Jesus Himself indicated why He would raise Lazarus. How?

“An open grave”



8 THE DEAD BECOME ALIVE



READ : JOHN 11

INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson we have already seen that Jesus also raised dead people. We read of three resurrections performed by Jesus. In Nain, a small village in Galilee, He raised the son of a widow. In Capernaum he raised the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. In Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, He raised His friend Lazarus.

THE BOY AT NAIN (LUKE 7:11-17)

One day Jesus approached the small city of Nain, along with His disciples and a great crowd which followed Him. He came here with a purpose. Here He wanted to display His glory in a special manner. As they came close to the gate of the village, a funeral procession approached them.

The bier was followed by a very sorrowful widow who was bringing her only son to the grave. First, Jesus comforted the sad mother: *"Weep not."* After this, He walked to the bier, touched it and said *"Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."*

Upon these words the boy sat upright and began to talk. Jesus gave him back to his mother. Then the reaction from the crowd was: *That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people* (Luke 7:16).

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS (LUKE 8:40-56)

One day, Jesus returned from a journey across the lake, to His hometown Capernaum. Many people were waiting for Him. Then the ruler of the synagogue suddenly fell at His feet and begged Jesus to come along with him. His twelve year old daughter was very sick; she was at the point of death. Jesus went along. Along the way He was held up by the crowd. A woman was also cured of a blood disorder. Meanwhile the tidings came that the child had died. Jesus said to Jairus: *Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole* (Luke 8:50). So He encouraged the desperate father.

Once they arrived at the house, He requested everyone to go outside. He went inside with only the father and mother, and with three of His disciples. There he grasped the hand of the lifeless child and said: *Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.*

LAZARUS (JOHN 11)

When Jesus was in the country across the Jordan River, a message arrived that His friend Lazarus of Bethany was sick. Only after two more days did Jesus travel that way. By this time Lazarus had been in the grave for three days. Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha already came walking to meet Jesus, and said: Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Then Jesus said: *Thy brother shall rise again. Yes, Martha knew that, because she knew that all the dead will arise again someday.* Then Jesus expressed this very important sentence: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

When Jesus came to the grave, He wept. After the stone was rolled away from the grave, He called with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth! Then Lazarus came out of the grave and went along home. Many people came from far and wide to see Lazarus. The Jewish leaders became vexed by this. Then they decided to kill Jesus.

MEANING

These miracles did not serve a purpose in themselves. Jesus did not do this just to make these particular people alive again, but He had a higher purpose.

- He showed that the God who raised people from the dead in the Old Testament through the prophets Elijah and Elisha, was the same God who was now upon earth. Thus the people in Nain said: *God hath visited his people.*



The daughter of Jairus



- However, the main reason is that in this way Jesus made clear what the purpose of His work was. The dead became alive. In a dead person we see the spiritual likeness of every person: spiritually dead before God. Through the fall in Adam, man has torn himself loose from God, his Creator, and likewise, thereby torn himself loose from spiritual life. Because man is spiritually dead, there is no longer a relationship with his Creator. Jesus had come to restore this. That is why He said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

When we read the history in John 3 in this context, the purpose of Jesus' coming becomes entirely clear. Here He said to the scribe, Nicodemus: Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). He makes it clear that it is necessary for every person to be born anew, spiritually, through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Then the relationship with God will be restored, through faith in Jesus. That is also why He said: *He that believeth on me hath everlasting life* (John 6:47).

Jesus gives new life. When He talks about everlasting life, He does not only mean the life of the believer after he dies. Everlasting life begins here and now. At regeneration a person already receives everlasting life. Even death cannot destroy this.

Therefore it is necessary for everyone to be born again. Therein lies the great distinction: *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him* (John 3:36).

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus arose from the dead at Easter. Many question this. Why is it so important to believe in the resurrection?
2. All people die. What is the cause of this? Read Romans 6:23
3. What is the greatest miracle a person can experience in this life? Read Ephesians 2:1-5
4. What does everlasting life consist of? Read John 17:3

Synagogue at Capernaum





*“Het zaad is het
Woord van God.”*



9 TAKE HEED

... HOW YE HEAR



READ: MATTHEW 13

INTRODUCTION

We have seen that Jesus revealed His doctrine in the Sermon on the Mount. He also preached in the synagogues, where He explained the Scriptures. He reinforced all this with miracles. However, more opposition gradually arose. As a result, His method of working also changed. He began to speak more through parables. These are stories which everyone recognized. They were borrowed from daily life. A deeper meaning exists in such a story, which is not always easy to discover. In this way He wanted to make the things of God, His law, and His Kingdom clear to His disciples. The things of His Kingdom were hidden, “concealed”; also for His disciples. By degrees, He taught them the “mysteries of the Kingdom of God”.

For others, who refused to believe in Him, these matters remained hidden. Read: Mark 4:11 and 12. They saw what Jesus did, and heard what Jesus said, but refused to repent. They would not listen to received instruction, and became increasingly more blind and deaf. This was their own fault, but meanwhile also a punishment from God because of their unbelief. Only those who are renewed internally by regeneration, can understand Jesus’ words, because Jesus teaches them. Therefore Jesus’ advice to every person is vital: *Take heed, therefore, how ye hear* (Luke 8:18).

For the disciples, and for many after them (perhaps also for us) the specific question was: Why is there so little fruit on the preaching of Jesus and of His followers? Think of all the churches, manners of preaching, Bible exposition, etc. Why do we see so few true Christians? Why does the teaching of Jesus meet with so much opposition? The disciples also did not understand all this.

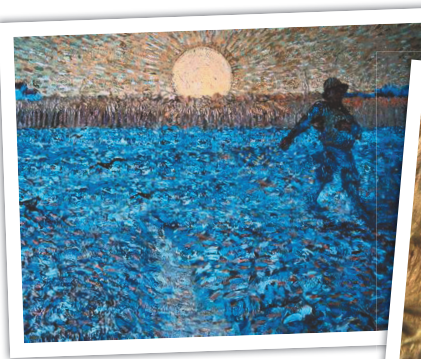
In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus provided answers to these questions.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Jesus told about a man who went out to seed grain. When he scattered the seed, some seeds fell on the hard pathway, and some fell on rocky ground where there was not much soil. Some also fell amongst the thorn bushes. Fortunately, some seed also fell in the good soil. The seed on the hard pathway was soon picked up by the birds. The portion which fell on the shallow soil over the rocky bottom, sprung up rapidly, but did not have deep roots, so that the sun made it wither. The seed among the thorns was soon choked by the thorn bushes. Only the seed in the good ground came up and produced fruit and provided a plentiful harvest. Later Jesus told His disciples the meaning of this parable. The seed is the Word of God. The seed which fell on the pathway refers to those people who hear God's Word, but in whom the message is soon taken away again by the evil one, the devil, the opponent of God. The seed on the rocky bottom is like people who hear the Word, and who immediately accept this with joy and happiness, but with whom this all disappears rapidly again when a setback occurs. Their faith is a superficial, temporary faith. The seed which is choked among the thorns, represents the Word of God which receives no place, because earthly cares and riches choke it. Everything seems to come to nothing. Yet, some seed also reaches the good soil. Through the Holy Spirit, the Word of God descends into the heart. Faith arises, as well as obedience, to do God's will and to persevere in this. *Take heed therefore how ye hear.*

PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of heaven is like a ..., so Jesus often began His parables. In this way He taught His disciples the mysteries of His Kingdom. So we see Him as their teacher. Through the parable of the sower He pointed out to His disciples that, on one hand, their future preaching would bring disappointment. But on the other hand, there would certainly be fruits, although they would not always see this immediately. To illustrate this, He told the parable of the tares in the field: one day the harvest shall come in. But a warning: He who does not believe, is as the tares: these shall be burned with unquenchable fire.



Fruits: thirty, sixty and hundred fold

In the parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven, He told about the seemingly tiny and insignificant seeds, from which something great appeared. We also read about the so called "I am ..." parables. In these, Jesus compared Himself to everyday examples: I am the good Shepherd (...), I am the door (...), I am the true vine (...).

He also told parables about what it is like in the Kingdom of God. These are often stories about persons. Examples of this are the parable of the prodigal son, of the Good Samaritan, and of the laborers in the vineyard. We will discuss the first one in more detail.

THE PRODIGAL SON

A father had two sons. On a certain day the youngest asked for his portion of the father's property and then went away to enjoy these riches in the world. The oldest son stayed home to work on his father's farm. After the youngest son had spent all his money, and had reached a low point as a caretaker of pigs, he came to himself and said: "I will arise and go to my father, and ask for forgiveness. Perhaps my father will still accept me as a hired laborer." When he was still far from home, his father already saw him coming, ran to him, and welcomed him as his son. There was joy and feasting. This was a thorn in the eye of the oldest son. Although his father urged him to share in the joy, he made the accusation to his father that he had never been paid anything even though he had done his utmost. But the father said: *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found* (Luke 15:32). With this story Jesus wanted to make clear that the keeping of the law as a duty and in one's own power does not give entrance to the Kingdom of God. Jesus receives sinners, and in a way of forgiveness and love, gives them a place in His Kingdom.

PARABLES OF JESUS

- **A light under a bushel**
Read: Matthew 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-22, Luke 8:16, Luke 11:33
- **A house on the sand / on a rock**
Read: Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 6:47-49
- **A new cloth on an old garment**
Read: Matthew 9:16, Mark 2:21, Luke 5:36
- **New wine in old bottles**
Read: Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37-38



The prodigal son

- **The seed**
Read: Matthew 13:3-8, Mark 4:3-8, Luke 8:5-15
- **The mustard seed**
Read: Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19
- **The tares in the field**
Read: Matthew 13:24-30
- **The leaven**
Read: Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21
- **The hidden treasure in the field**
Read: Matthew 13:44
- **The costly pearl**
Read: Matthew 13:45-46
- **The fishing net**
Read: Matthew 13:47-48
- **The lost sheep**
Read: Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:4-7
- **Two debtors**
Read: Matthew 18:23-35
- **The laborers in the vineyard**
Read: Matthew 20:1-16
- **The two sons**
Read: Matthew 21:28-32
- **The wicked husbandmen**
Read: Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-9, Luke 20:9-16
- **The royal wedding feast**
Read: Matthew 22:2-14
- **The fig tree**
Read: Matthew 24:32-33, Mark 13:28-29, Luke 21:29-31
- **The wise and foolish virgins**
Read: Matthew 25:1-13
- **The talents**
Read: Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27

- **Sheep and goats**
Read: Matthew 25:31-46
- **A creditor and debtors**
Read: Luke 7:41-43
- **The Good Samaritan**
Read: Luke 10:30-37
- **A friend in need**
Read: Luke 11:5-8
- **The rich fool**
Read: Luke 12:16-21
- **The watchful servants**
Read: Luke 12:35-40
- **A faithful steward**
Read: Luke 12:42-48
- **A fig tree without figs**
Read: Luke 13:6-9
- **A place of honor at the wedding**
Read: Luke 14:7-14
- **The great feast and unwilling guests**
Read: Luke 14:16-24
- **Recalculating the costs**
Read: Luke 14:28-33
- **The lost penny**
Read: Luke 15:8-10
- **The prodigal son**
Read: Luke 15:11-32
- **The unjust steward**
Read: Luke 16:1-9
- **The rich man and Lazarus**
Read: Luke 16:19-31
- **Master and servant**
Read: Luke 17:7-10

- **A persistent widow and an unjust judge**
Read: Luke 18:1-8
- **The Pharisee and the publican**
Read: Luke 18:10-14
- **I am ... the Bread of life**
Read: John 6:31-59
- **I am ... the light of the world**
Read: John 8:12
- **I am ... the good shepherd / the door**
Read: John 10:1-21
- **I am ... the true vine**
Read: John 15:1-17

QUESTIONS

1. The Lord Jesus gives 7 parables in Matthew 13. Write them down and add the text locations to them. Can you also understand their meaning?
2. Read Matthew 13:10-17. Who only can understand the Kingdom of heaven?
3. Jesus spoke in parables for two reasons. What are these?
4. Read John 6:22-59
What would be meant by "eating His flesh and drinking His blood"?
5. What is the result of this parable? Read John 6:66
What does Jesus ask His disciples? Verse 67.



10 THE JEWISH LEADERS



READ: MATTHEW 23, LUKE 20, JOHN 11:47-57

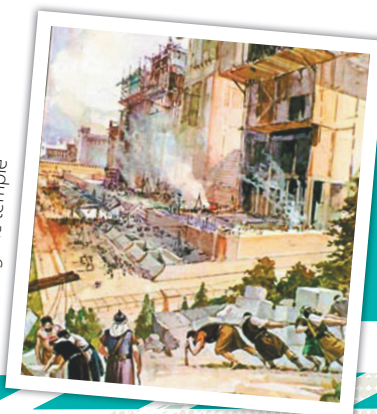
INTRODUCTION

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem after the exile, from 538 BC, one of the first things they did was to rebuild the temple. A vibrant Jewish society developed again, both in and outside of Palestine. There was a desire to again serve God according to His institutions. This society was marked by a collective desire for the coming of the Messiah. He would descend from the family of King David. So it had been foretold by God in the Old Testament. God would restore divine rule over the world through Him: the Kingdom of God. Although Jewish society was held together by a true unity of beliefs worldwide, there were also many internal differences. We see these differences most clearly in several sectarian groupings: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Jesus had many interactions with representatives of these two groups.

PHARISEES

The Pharisee group was by far the most important faction amongst the Jews in the New Testament era. The name probably means “separated ones”: they separated themselves from those who did not follow the Law very strictly. They insisted upon a strict observance of the Law of Moses, the Thora. But they also recognized the existence and the value of an oral tradition from “the ancients”. Hereby it was possible to repeatedly adjust the laws to changing circumstances. In this way writings were developed with a total of 613 extra rules of behavior, for every conceivable situation in life. This led to a rigid legalistic life. The Pharisees

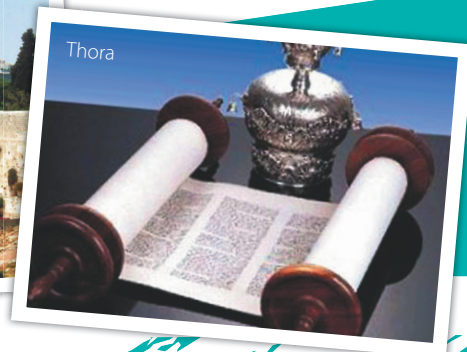
Rebuilding the temple



looked down on people who did not know the Law, and who did not live according to all their regulations. But nobody could satisfy these requirements. Jesus said of the Pharisees: *All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men ...* (Matt 23:3-5). In contrast with the hard yoke of the Pharisees, Jesus presented His soft yoke: the yoke of the command of love (Matthew 11:29 and 30). This attitude of the Pharisees resulted in the opinion that salvation could be earned by strictly keeping the Law. Pride and willfulness were inevitable. In opposition to this attitude, Jesus showed them a different way: there is only salvation through the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who came to suffer and to die. This salvation is only obtained through faith in Jesus Christ. Many were vexed by this. But not all. Just read John 3.

SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were a conservative group, in the sense that they strictly adhered to the Law of Moses. They emphasized the prescriptions regarding the priesthood and those regarding the sacrifices. Most of the priests also belonged to this group. But they did not recognize any oral tradition, and they did not feel bound by any laws other than those written in the first five books of the Bible, in the Law of Moses. They also rejected the concept of a continued existence of the soul after this life. Neither did they believe in angels, demons, and evil spirits. Read Luke 20:27-40 about this. Since their view of the Thora was closely associated with the temple service, this group disappeared after the destruction of the temple. From the four gospel accounts, we get the impression that Jesus debated with the Pharisees more than with the Sadducees. The Pharisees lived more amongst the ordinary people, while the Sadducees were aristocrats who hardly paid attention to what happened in rural life. But, in their common hatred of Jesus they found each other, and together they decided upon His



death. Also, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Sadducees led in the persecution of the first “Christian” churches, because the Christians preached the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:1-4; 5:17).

THE SANHEDRIN

The Sanhedrin was also called “the Council of Elders”. According to tradition, this was a continuation of the seventy eldest who had stood at Moses’ side (Numbers 11:16-17). This Council consisted of seventy one members; the high priest was chairman. The people had no influence at all. It is not certain how the members were nominated. The members belonged to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Most chief priests belonged to the Sadducees. These were mostly the aristocratic leaders. On the other hand, the Pharisaic scribes could count on the support of the people. Their meetings were held in the temple complex at Jerusalem. During the Roman occupation, the Council had authority over the finances, management of the nation’s domestic affairs, and the administration of justice. The approval of the Roman governor was needed for the death penalty (Matthew 27:1-2). With the fall of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin also disappeared.

OPPOSITION

Jesus experienced much opposition from the leaders of the people. Most of them were blind to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah of the Scriptures. Their hatred finally led to Jesus being condemned to the death on the cross. At this time, the high priest Caiaphas spoke the meaningful words which we read in John 11:49-50: Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

During His life, Jesus sharply criticized the leaders of the people. We read this clearly in Matthew 23. Yet, we also find people from these circles amongst the friends of Jesus. Besides Nicodemus, we also read of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a Councilor. Together, after Jesus death, these two buried Jesus in Joseph’s grave. We also read: Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him (John 12:42). And we read in Acts 6:7: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. Jesus conquers His enemies through the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Mark 2:14-17
Here Jesus was being called to account. What was His answer?
2. Read Mark 3:20-30
What was Jesus being accused of here? Which sin did Jesus here call unforgiveable?
3. Read Matthew 19:16-22
What lesson was Jesus teaching here?
4. Read John 18:28-31
Why would Pilate have said: Take ye him, and judge him according to your law?
5. Read John 11:49-50
How did the high priest speak the truth, unawares, about the purpose of Jesus' coming into the world?



11 SEPARATION CAUSES PAIN



READ: JOHN 11; MATTHEW 26:1-35

INTRODUCTION

One day, Jesus asked His disciples who the people thought He was. Then, very directly: “But whom do you say that I am?” Peter answered spontaneously: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16). Upon this, Jesus said that Peter did not arrive at this truth of himself, but that God had revealed this to him.

Now that it was clear to the disciples that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior; they entered a time period during which they had to learn how He would deliver: by suffering and dying, but also by arising from the dead afterwards. Through suffering, He moved towards His glory. Although Jesus repeatedly prepared them for this, they did not understand this. *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee* (Matt 16:22). At the end of His three years of public activity, Jesus departed from Galilee and headed towards Jerusalem. The opposition from the Jewish leaders increased. They came to the conclusion that Jesus had to be killed. Especially after the raising of Jesus’ friend Lazarus. They tried to prevent having “the whole world” follow Jesus of Nazareth. That is why the high priest Caiaphas spoke the prophetic words: *Nor (do you) consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not* (John 11:50).

THE ANOINTING BY MARY

Jesus lodged with His friends – the two sisters, Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus - in Bethany, a village near Jerusalem. During a meal, Mary anointed Jesus with spikenard, a costly ointment. Speaking for the disciples, Judas expressed that this was a waste: this money could have been better spent on the poor! Jesus pointed out to them that Mary had done an excellent work, in preparation for His burial. Mary understood more about His upcoming suffering than the disciples did.

PALM SUNDAY

A week before His death, Jesus went to Jerusalem on Sunday. There were many pilgrims because the Jewish Passover feast would soon be held. Then the crowd suddenly began to wave palm branches and to spread their coats on the ground as a carpet for Him to ride on. Jesus Himself had given instructions to fetch a foal of a donkey, and on this He rode to the city with royal dignity. The crowds brought Him the Messianic greeting from Psalm 118: *Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord* (John 12:13). Later the disciples came to understand that this was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass* (Zechariah 9:9). During this journey, Jesus shed tears over Jerusalem, because it rejected Him as the Messiah. The whole event drew the ire of the Pharisees. The people had to be silenced: what would the Romans say of this? This really was a very moving occasion: the religious world did not need the Savior whom God had promised, because they thought they could exist before God in their own righteousness.

THE PASSOVER MEAL

On the Thursday before the Passover feast, Jesus asked two of His disciples to go to Jerusalem in advance. Here they were to prepare an upper room for Jesus and His disciples to celebrate the Passover. Afterwards, when Jesus came with His disciples to celebrate the meal, there was no slave there to wash the feet of the guests, as was customary. Jesus took the towel and the water basin and washed the feet of His disciples. Filled with shame, the disciples underwent this lesson in humility. Judas was sent away during the meal. He went to the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus to them for the price of 30 pieces of silver. Then Jesus spoke in detail to His disciples about everything which awaited Him and them. Hereby He intended to strengthen their faith. In order that they would regard Him as the Mediator, in spite of all the desperation during His suffering, throughout all their anxieties and temptations. He is the only way back to God. Through His suffering and dying, He would pay to His heavenly Father for the guilt of all His children. He delivers them from the curse upon sin and grants them everlasting life. With all the questions which they still had, He pointed them to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would come to explain everything to them: *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth (it), give I (it) unto you.* (John 14:26-27).

THE NEW COVENANT

After eating the Passover (a Jewish meal to commemorate the departure from Egypt) Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. He took bread and broke it. He gave it to His disciples to eat, saying: *Take, eat, this is My body.* After this He passed around to them the cup with wine, saying: *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* (Matt 26:28). From now on they had to do this in remembrance of Him. With this, a new period arrived in God's plan of salvation. He spoke about a new covenant, into which the old covenant of God with Israel would be absorbed. The broken bread and the poured out wine are the signs of this covenant. These point to His death and dying. This is the foundation for salvation to all who believe in Him. In the form for the Lord's Supper this is expressed thus: ... *whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given My body ... and shed My blood for you.* After having sung the customary song of praise, they left the hall and shared a nighttime walk from Jerusalem to Gethsemane.

QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 16:22 and Luke 22:24
What does this say about the insight of the disciples regarding the work of Jesus?
2. Read John 11:25
Jesus spoke these words just before He raised Lazarus.
What do you think Jesus meant by this?
3. Read John 15:18-27
Jesus spoke these words just before His bitter suffering. What was He preparing them for?
4. Read Matthew 26:31-35
What was Peter being warned about here?



Communion setting



*“Garden of
Gethsemane”*



12 IF . . . YE SEEK ME,

LET THESE GO . . .



READ: LUKE 22 AND 23:1-32; JOHN 18 AND 19

GETHSEMANE

Jesus and His disciples were walking through Jerusalem during the night. Judas was not with them anymore. They crossed the Valley of Kidron and went to an olive orchard at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This garden is called Gethsemane. The name means “olive press”. Jesus often resorted here to pray. He left His disciples behind at the entrance, except He selected three of them to go farther into the garden with Him: Peter, John and James. Farther inside the garden, He left these three behind as well. And He said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch (Mark 14:34). Then, at a stone’s throw distance from them, He knelt three times to pray. We read that Jesus became sorrowful and very anxious. Why?

Here he struggled through the temptation from Satan. The purpose of this temptation was to keep Him from being obedient to His Father by giving His life for all who believe in Him, His children. During this temptation, during this suffering in His soul, His sweat became as drops of blood which fell on the ground. Jesus prayed to His Father three times over, to allow “this cup” (this suffering) to pass Him by, but not *My will, but Thine be done*. An angel supported Him during these moments. Jesus came back to His disciples three times over, but they were sleeping. Then He said: *Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand*.

TAKEN CAPTIVE

After Judas had been sent away from the Passover meal, he informed the high priests. Now, during this night, would be a good opportunity to catch Jesus. Although it was not really the intention to do this before the Passover feast, they did not let this extraordinary opportunity pass them by. Hastily a band of warriors was assembled. With torches, and armed with swords and staves, they proceeded towards Gethsemane. So they entered the garden. Amongst the dark trees, it was hard to find the right man. Suddenly a figure walked toward them. He calmly asked: *Whom seek ye?* They answered: *Jesus of Nazareth*.

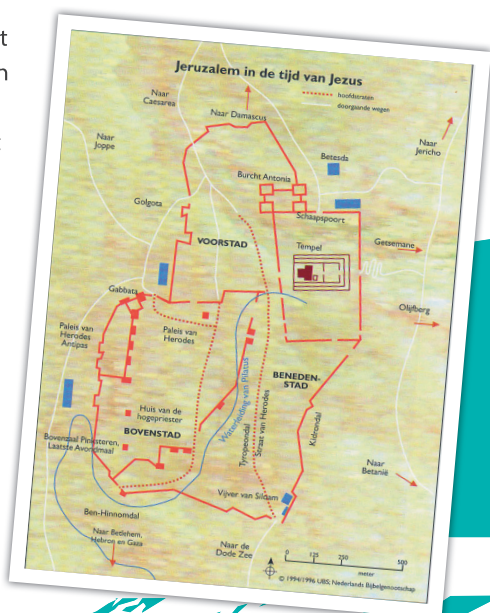
While they were saying that, the whole band of soldiers fell backwards to the ground. After they stood up again, Jesus said: *If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way* (John 18:8). Judas stepped forward, and with a kiss, as if in greeting - which was the sign they had agreed upon - he showed the band whom they must take captive. Painfully, Jesus rebuked him: *Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?* (Luke 22:48). Meanwhile Peter had taken his sword and chopped off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus picked up the ear and restored it. After this, all His disciples fled and Jesus was seized and carried away. Here the words of the prophet Isaiah became true: *he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter* (Isa 53:7).

BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL

First Jesus was brought to the house of Annas. He had been high priest previously for almost twenty years; a man with great authority. Here Jesus remained silent to all the questions which were posed to Him. Meanwhile the Jewish Council was called together at the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. The sentence had already been determined: He must be brought to death, as soon as possible, before the Passover began. However, there was one difficulty. What accusation could they find on which to base the death sentence?

Many witnesses were heard, but not a single accusation came forward for which the death sentence applied. Finally two witnesses came who said that Jesus had said that He was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. That was sacrilege, and the death penalty applied to this. But Jesus remained silent. By His silence, Jesus wanted to register a protest against the unworthy manner of this process, and to have his innocence become apparent. But even more, He wanted to

focus the attention on the great question at issue here. And indeed, Caiaphas came with this question: *Art thou the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed?* Now Jesus was silent no longer. He acknowledged solemnly and openly that He is the Son of God! He wanted His condemnation to be based on this fact alone. And although they did not acknowledge Him, they shall one day see Him, coming on the clouds as their Judge, clothed with divine majesty. Upon this, His sentence was soon passed: He was worthy of death. Someone who openly declared that He is God's Son, must be brought to death.



Then He was delivered to the soldiers to be mocked and abused. Before the sentence could be carried out, permission must be given by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

DENIED

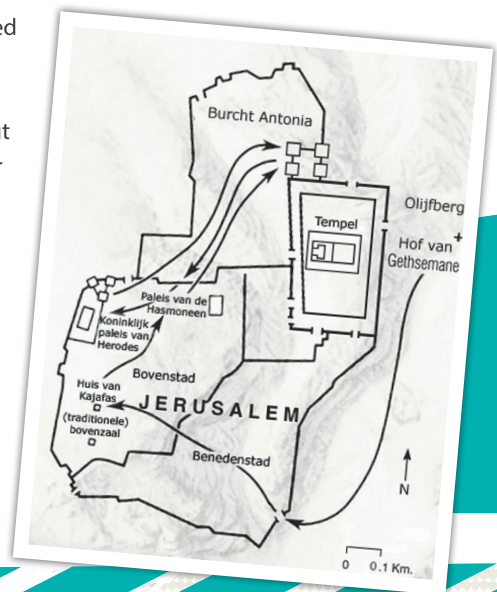
After Jesus was taken captive, Peter and John also went to the house of Caiaphas. From the courtyard, they could follow the hearing. While Jesus was being questioned, Peter was warming himself by a fire. Here he was asked three times whether or not he was one of Jesus' followers as well. He denied with increasing intensity that he knew Him and even called a curse upon himself.

Jesus had warned him about this, although Peter had not been able to believe it at the time. Now the rooster crowed. Jesus looked at Peter, and this glance crushed the heart of Peter: *And Peter went out, and wept bitterly* (Luke 22:62).

PILATE

At this time the Romans were the boss in the land of the Jews. The "province" of Judea was under direct Roman rule. The Roman governor Pilate had a palace in Jerusalem. Because the Roman governor needed to approve of any death sentence, the members of the Sanhedrin departed early in the morning towards the judgment hall. Here they delivered three accusations, because they could not use their religious accusation before Pilate. He would have misled the people, He would have forbidden to pay taxes to Caesar, and He would have claimed that He was king. Then Pilate questioned Jesus, but he was clearly not comfortable. Pilate found no fault in Him. According to Roman law, he was supposed to let Jesus go free. Moreover, Pilate was also warned by his wife. She had suffered a horrible dream the previous night about this "Righteous One". Pilate still looked for another way to free Him. According to custom, he would release a prisoner on the day before Passover. He proposed two prisoners for the crowd to choose from: Barabbas, a murderer, or Jesus. The high priests stirred up the crowd which had meanwhile assembled against

The Via Dolorosa (way of suffering)



Jesus, and a great cry arose: Away with this man, crucify Him! When they finally threatened to file a complaint against him with Caesar, he gave in and “washed his hands in innocence”. Thus Jesus was condemned to death while innocent, and Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified.

QUESTIONS

1. Read John 18:8 and Isaiah 53:3-5
Can you explain why Jesus conducted Himself this way?
2. Read Luke 22:63-71
What were the grounds for the death sentence of Jesus?
3. Read John 18:17-27
How is this behavior of Peter to be explained?
Was this the end of Peter’s relationship with Jesus?
4. Read from John 18:28 to John 19:16
Trace how Pilate tried to rescue Jesus.



13 JESUS, WHO WAS

CRUCIFIED, IS RISEN



READ: MATTHEW 27 AND 28; JOHN 19 AND 20

CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion was used by the Romans for the worst offenders. The crucified person carried the cross-pole himself to the place where the crucifixion was to occur. The condemned person was nailed to the cross naked, and put on display along the public road. Here the crucified person died a slow death through total exhaustion. This could last up to three days. It was a degrading, humiliating death; but especially, a death accursed of God.

(Deuteronomy 21:23) Jesus carried His cross through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, a hill outside of Jerusalem. Along the way, a certain Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross. To His right and to His left, two murderers were crucified.

While the crucifixion was taking place, He prayed for His ignorant enemies: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

Many people from Jerusalem had followed them to Golgotha and mocked Him.

His mother and several friends were also amongst those who followed. John was asked to care for His mother Mary: *Woman, behold thy son! (...) Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home* (John 19:26-27).

The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus, mocked along with the crowd. However, after a while one of them came to repentance. He rebuked the other one, admitted to having righteously deserved this punishment, and asked Jesus for mercy. His prayer was heard: *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise* (Luke 23:43).

In the middle of the day, from twelve to three o'clock, it became dark. Towards the end of this period, the Lord Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22: *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Then he cried out: I thirst* (John 19:28). A soldier gave Him a drink. The work which He was assigned to do in order to provide redemption, was now done. He cried out: *It is finished* (John 19:30), as a sign of conquest over the devil and over sin.

He committed His soul into the hands of His Father: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* (Luke 23:46) ... *and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost* (John 19:30).

SIGNS AT HIS DEATH

At the same time as His death occurred, the veil of the temple tore (the curtain which separated the holy from the holy of holies in the temple). Amazingly, it tore from top to bottom. This meant that God wanted to remove the separation which existed between God and sinful mankind, through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. An earthquake also occurred, the mountains were torn, graves were opened, and deceased believers were raised up, and they appeared to believers in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection.

BURIAL

The Jews asked Pilate to remove the bodies of the crucified men before the Sabbath. The soldiers broke the legs of both murderers. Coming to the body of Jesus, one of the soldiers saw that He had already died. He poked a spear in His side to be certain: *and forthwith came there out blood and water* (John 19:34), as a sign that He had really died. Then Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, two prominent Jewish men, came and buried the body in a rock grave in the garden of Joseph. The women who followed Him were also present at this occasion.

MEANING

It appears as though the Lord Jesus died as a result of the evil of the Jews. Nothing is less true! It was God's intention. Jesus came to earth as the Son of God, who voluntarily gave His life as a sacrifice, as payment for the sins of all believers. He also regularly proclaimed this Himself: *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom (redemption price) for many* (Matt 20:28). Jesus' death was the only means by which to deliver people from the guilt of their sins, to rescue them from everlasting punishment, and thus to clear the way towards peace with God. He, the Innocent One, grants redemption with God for the guilty.

RESURRECTION

When the Sabbath, on which they rested, was past, the women again went to the grave to further care for the body of their beloved deceased friend. To their amazement, the stone was rolled away from the grave, and there was an angel who said to them: *... I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen* (Matt 28:5-6).

APPEARANCES

The Lord Jesus had told His disciples repeatedly that He would arise on the third day. However, now that it had happened, they could not believe it. But when the women returned from the grave, Jesus met them. Also, when the disciples were sitting together in Jerusalem one evening, Jesus suddenly stood in their midst. First they were afraid and thought they had seen a ghost. He told them that they must not fear, and set them at ease. Another week later, He appeared again. Then Thomas was there also. He was absent the previous time because he could not believe the report of Jesus' resurrection. So Jesus appeared a number of times during a period of six weeks. Sometimes, others who believed in Him were also present. One time, He even appeared to more than 500 believers at once. (1 Corinthians 15:6) During this period He explained to them from the Scriptures that it was necessary that He must pay for sins, by dying; but that as Conqueror over death and the devil, He lives forever.

MEANING

The resurrection is an important doctrine. Paul said: *And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain* (1 Corinthians 15:14). Anyone who does not believe in the resurrection of Christ, also cannot believe in the forgiveness of his sins. *And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17). There is forgiveness of sins and everlasting life with God, only through a true faith in Jesus Christ. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him* (John 3:36).

Closed grave



Open grave

QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 27:1-10
What was the end of Judas who betrayed Him?
2. Read Matthew 27:54
What did the centurion who was in charge at the crucifixion eventually confess?
3. Read John 19:38-42 and Luke 23:49-56
It appeared that Jesus' life had failed.
What becomes apparent from the actions of the people who buried Him?
4. Read 1 John 1:1-4, in the back of the New Testament.
What did John call the Lord Jesus in this epistle?
Why did John tell and testify of the Lord Jesus?

“The Mount of Olives”



14 THIS JESUS, WHO ASCENDED, SHALL SO COME



READ: ACTS 1 AND 2; REVELATION 20:11-15 AND REVELATION 21

ASCENSION

Only the evangelist Luke described the ascension of Jesus. Briefly in his gospel account, but in greater detail in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles.

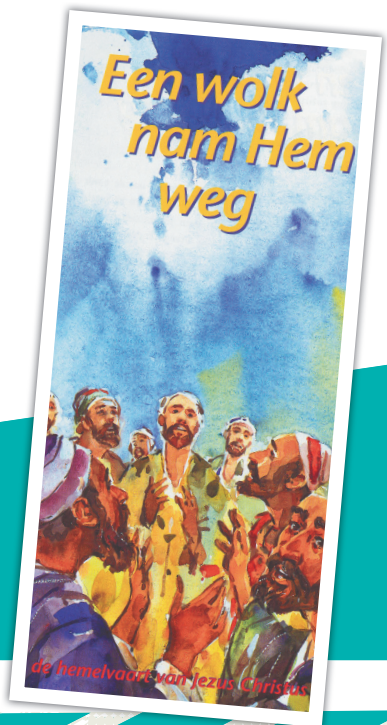
Towards the end of the time of His appearances, on the fortieth day after Easter, Jesus was again with his disciples. Then He taught them regarding the Kingdom of heaven, because the disciples continued to expect this on earth. Jesus did not tell them when His Kingdom will arrive in its full glory. What He did promise them was the coming of the Holy Spirit. He reminded them that they had to be His

witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and in the whole world. Meanwhile, they arrived at the Mount of Olives. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

As they stared after Him, they saw two angels, who said: *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11).

Then the Lord Jesus was in heaven, at the right hand of His Father, and the disciples turned back to Jerusalem.

A cloud took Him away



Upon the command of the Lord Jesus, the disciples had to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Ten days after the ascension, during the Jewish Pentecost, there were many pilgrims in Jerusalem. Suddenly there was a sound as of a mighty rushing wind in the house where the disciples were gathered together. *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:3-4). Many people who just happened to be going to the temple, were attracted by these unusual signs, and came to the house where this was all happening. People from various nations heard the disciples speak about the great deeds of God, each in their own language. While some, in amazement, were asking themselves what this might all mean, others mocked about it and said that the disciples were drunk. Speaking for all the disciples, and through the Holy Spirit, Peter explained what was happening here. He preached about the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. During this sermon, the Holy Spirit gave a powerful conviction in the consciences of many listeners. They were being placed before the judgment of the holy God and they realized that God's wrath rested upon them through their sins. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (Acts 2:37).* Peter pointed them to the riches in Christ: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).* On that day, three thousand people received faith and were baptized. This was the beginning of the Christian church. Closely knit to each other through their love towards Jesus Christ.



What must we do?

FROM ASCENSION TO RETURN

During His life on earth, the Lord Jesus was physically with His disciples. This was no longer so after His ascension. But He has given them His Holy Spirit from heaven. He has said: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* (Matt 28:18-20).

That is how He has sent His disciples, who would be called apostles (sent ones) from now on, as His witnesses into the world. So His gospel (= glad tidings) has gone into the world to this very day. The Lord Jesus still makes His salvation known. By means of His Word and Spirit, people are brought to repentance, and to acknowledgement and confession of sin and guilt. But also to faith in Him, who came to bring lost sinners back again to their original purpose: a life to the glory of God, in peace with God, and in love to God. Thus He works the new life in the hearts of people, throughout the ages, until He will return.

RETURN

One day the Lord Jesus will return. He often spoke about that Himself. The angels also spoke of His return at His ascension: *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11). Then He will return to judge all people, the living as well as the dead.

Just like all the other salvation events involving Jesus (birth, death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost) this is beyond our understanding. We read about His eventual return in (for example) Matthew 24 and 25, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 20. The following text applies to all people: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). There the great divide will become apparent, between those who have learned to know Him and love Him here through true saving faith, and those who did not acknowledge Him. The Lord Jesus made this clear in the moving parable of the five wise and the five foolish young girls (Matthew 25).

This will be the beginning of the reunion of soul and body for all His children, in order to live in total happiness with the Lord in a new heaven and on a new earth. For all those who did not acknowledge Him, this will be the beginning of an eternal separation from God, and the bearing of His wrath against sin. Here the seriousness of our lives clearly comes to the fore, and therefore we end this Bible course with this appeal: *as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:20).

QUESTIONS

1. Read Acts 1:14
How did the disciples spend the time period between ascension and Pentecost?
2. What do we reflect upon with the following Christian holidays: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost.
What is still to follow upon these?
3. Can you give a summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
Read for this: John 3:36, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and 1 John 1:5-7
4. What is the essential difference between Christianity and all other religions?
For this see: Acts 4:12, Romans 5:15, and Ephesians 2:8.







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