

In Thy Hands

Manual

Part 1



in samewerking met





Fontein Uitgewery

c/o Starkey & Spioenkop street

Waverley, Pretoria, 0186

Office number

(+27) 82 938 0775

email address

info@fonteinuitgewery.co.za

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Introduction

In this workbook, multimedia is used to make the Bible more visually enriched and understandable in user friendly English for young and old. This series is suitable for families at home as well as churches and schools.

It is of the utmost importance that children should know and learn about the Word of God. The texts from Scripture that are discussed, guide and determine the contents of the different lessons which are presented. The King James Bible (<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>), see QR code, was used in the workbook and therefore the King James Bible should be used to complete the assignments in the workbooks.



The complete package falls into three parts

Part 1

- Creation up to Noah
- Abram
- The Gospels: The announcement of the birth of Christ up to Peter's confession.

Part 2

- Isaac up to Joseph
- Moses up to Joshua
- The Book of Judges up to Saul
- The Gospels: Jesus leaves Galilee and the events occurring up to His arrest.

Part 3

- David and Saul
- Kings and prophets
- The Gospels: Jesus is sentenced by Pilate and the events up to His ascension
- Acts and the conclusion of God's revelation

The Instituut vir Christelike Onderwys (ICO) aspire to publish Biblically based school books and study guides. This Biblical teaching program is published in collaboration with the Akademie Reformatoriese Opleiding en Studies (Aros). We realise the importance of Biblical knowledge with regards to the Scriptures and therefore commit ourselves to improve this knowledge in our children, students and parents.

We all contribute to the expansion of the Kingdom of God worldwide and through the Holy Spirit our children, students and parents are equipped with extended knowledge and the necessary values and skills to serve our Saviour. This is accomplished when allowing ourselves to be His witnesses and to let His light shine through us in this world.

January 2022

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1. The days of Creation

Genesis 1 - Genesis 2:3

Praise the Lord, the Creator of All

God the Father is the Creator and through His Word, (in other words His Son), out of nothing He created the heavens and the earth and all things living (Article 12: The Creation of All Things – Belgic Confession 1561). Only God the Trinity can create. This is established, confessed and praised as fact throughout Scripture. God Trinity is the Fountain from which all things good emerges, the source and origin of all. In this chapter we are going to focus on the following main ideas:

- We learn about God from the Creation. God's eternity, omnipotence, magnificence, excellence and perfection is revealed through His Creation.
- In six consecutive days, different portions of God's Creation unfolded.
- God rested on the seventh day, the end of His Creation.
- God's eternal power and divinity is observed during the Creation, and that is why He must be praised.

God is eternal

In the very first sentence of the first chapter of the first book in the Bible, God introduce himself to us with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1). All over the world, believers of all time confess every Sunday "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth ..." (The Apostolic Confession of Faith).

God was not created, He was there before all things because He is eternal, and this means He has no beginning and no end¹. Thus God was always there and will always be there. He created earth, and therefore earth's history start with the Creation. This information about God is revealed to us by Himself.²

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1. **Colossians 1: 17** "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." KJV
 2. **Isaiah 43: 10** "Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." KJV

Belgic Confession

God is altogether perfect, with each and every aspect of His perfection equal in importance. Article one of the Belgic Confession explain that God the Father is “eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.” These are attributes of God, and not a complete description of Him, because one attribute may not be exempted or over-emphasised from the next. The love and sacredness of God is equal in importance to His justness.

God created all

Everything came into existence because of God. He accomplished everything in Creation and announced it to man, because there was no-one else present during the Creation. There was nobody to relate the Creation. God made use of humans as writers of Scriptures later on. They were inspired through the Holy Spirit to write down that which were revealed to them by God.³

Genesis means origin or beginning, and in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the origin of all things are conveyed. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were simultaneously engaged in creation⁴. Scripture confirmed that through the Word of God all came into being. The Word is the Son of God, Jesus Christ⁵. Thus Jesus, the Son, was present and part of Creation. “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1: 2). We read in Genesis 1:26 that God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Creation was therefore the work of God-Trinity.

What does it mean to create?

To “create” means to “make something out of nothing”, and that is exactly what God did. He produced Creation from nothing. Only the decree of God preceded Creation and through His Word everything was created. He invoked all the things that did not exist, through His Word, as if all those

3 **2 Timothy 3: 16** “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:” KJV

4 **Psalms 33: 6** “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” KJV

5 **John 1: 1-3** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” KJV

things already existed⁶. In the Bible, the word create is only used with regard to God.

No new matter were ever established after Creation. God rests in His Creation. Man discover new things or use different elements to create new things, but man cannot create something from nothing, only God can do that. The Bible warns us that the Devil and his followers will attempt to imitate God's Creation⁷. It will seem as if the Devil succeed and people will be deceived because of it.

What did God create?

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void" (Genesis 1: 1-2), but God did not leave it at that. Later in this lesson we learn more about how God changed the disorder on earth.

God created the heavens as an abode for Himself and the angels⁸. We do not read about the creation of the angels in Genesis 1 and 2, but in other parts of the Bible we read that they were created by God, as part of "all things"⁹. Angel means messenger and God sent them out to render service¹⁰. Their aim was and still is to make God's will, known to man. For example we read in Luke 2: 9-15 that it was angels who brought the good tidings of the birth of Christ to the shepherds in the field, close to Bethlehem.

The wonder of God's creation

The act of creation was a wonder from God and no human can rationalise this, we believe this although we can't understand it. Faith is a gift from God and He gives this to those predestined by Him. Through this faith we know and understand that everything was created through the Word of God. God

6 **Romans 4: 17** "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." KJV

7 **Revelation 13: 15** "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." KJV

8 **Colossians 1: 16** "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:" KJV

9 **John 1: 3** "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." KJV

10 **Hebrews 1: 14** "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" KJV

still maintain everything and reign over all through His eternal providence and power, because the things seen did not come into existence from perceptible things¹¹.

Desolate and empty

In the beginning of Creation the earth was uninhabitable. There wasn't order and earth was a shapeless mass, covered by water and in complete darkness. The earth was empty, with no form of life (plants, animals, or humans) but the earth did not remain in this shapeless and lifeless condition because God's Spirit soared above the water and prepared everything for what He was planning to create in the six days that were to follow.

The first day – Light

God said "Let there be light" and there was light on earth. God spoke and the darkness disappeared, because God is light¹². There wasn't a sun yet, only light and it was the very first light on earth. The light surrounding God is unapproachable and impervious¹³, but the light God brought to earth was accessible and approachable because it was different from the light surrounding God.

God then separated the darkness from the light and He called the darkness night and the light day. After each period of darkness there followed a period of light. God saw that the light was good. With the creation of light, night and day arose. "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1: 5).

The second day – Firmament and atmosphere

With daybreak the second day, the earth was covered with water. God separated the abundance of water, where part of the water remained on earth and the other part became the vapour and clouds in the sky. God created the firmament (atmosphere) to cover the earth like a huge tent, in order to

11 **Hebrews 11: 3** "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." KJV

12 **1 John 1: 5** "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." KJV

13 **1 Timothy 6: 16** "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." KJV

keep the vapour and clouds above¹⁴. God named the firmament heaven. The second day's work was completed.

The third day – Dry ground, sea and plants (flora)

On the third day the earth was still covered with water and therefore God brought further separation. He separated the water from the land by assembling the water at specific places and named it sea. Great mountains, highlands and fields emerged above the water and God named the dry land earth. Land and sea were separated and the earth was ready for vegetation.

God said that the earth should bring forth grass, seedlings and fruit trees, and then the plants (flora) sprouted until the earth was covered with a variety of plants.

The fourth day – Sun, moon and stars

On the first day God created light, and on the fourth day God extended His work with regards to the light. He created the sun, the moon and all the stars on the fourth day and henceforth it was the bearers of the light. The position these light-bearers took, serves to this day as signs to determine years, seasons and days. These are also fixed signs and beacons used to indicate direction and location.

The fifth day – Fish and birds

On the second day, God separated the abundance of water, where part of the water remained on earth and the other part became the vapour and clouds in the sky, but on the fifth day God created the creatures living in the water and those flying above the earth in the firmament of heaven (atmosphere). He created these creatures with the ability to multiply. The seas, rivers and lakes were filled with a variety of marine animals, aquatic animals and a diversity of birds flew above the earth. The first living beings dwelled on earth.

The sixth day – Animals (fauna) and humans

On the third day God created plants (flora) which grew on earth and on the fifth day God created marine animals (fauna), aquatic animals (fauna) and a diversity of birds, but there were still no animals on earth. On the

¹⁴ **Psalms 104: 2** "Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain." KJV

sixth day God created all the land animals (fauna) and thereafter He created man. All the land animals created by God were diverse and had unique characteristics, they were divided into three categories namely livestock, smaller crawling animals and wild animals. The wild animals moved freely and could not be tamed. God created man at the very last because man was the most important of all creations. In the next chapter we learn more about the The garden of Eden.

The seventh day – Rest

God rested on the seventh day, Creation was complete and it was very good¹⁵. The rest meant that God did not create new material or matter from which everything exists, the rest doesn't mean that God stopped working. It is important to understand that the seventh day of God is continuous, because God didn't stop working once Creation was completed. In Genesis 1 we read after each of the first six days "and the evening and the morning were..." but we do not read that after the seventh day, and therefore we conclude that the seventh day is continuous.

God still reigns over His Creation, He ensures that His Creation is cared for, and we are assured of this because after the Fall, God Himself brought salvation. In John 5:17 Jesus said "... My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." God rested on the seventh day and commanded that it should be set apart as a holy day.

The seventh day – A holy day of rest

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Exodus 20: 8 – 11). This is the fourth commandment and as with all the commandments, it still applies. The people of the Old Testament looked forward with great anticipation to the coming of Christ through sacrifices, ceremonies and celebrations on the Sabbath day. As believers we also cast our eyes on Christ because He was crucified to save us from eternal death and to restore our bond with God.

15 **1 Timothy 4: 4** "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:" KJV

Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week and thereafter He always appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week. The Church was founded on the first day of the week with the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We don't rest on the seventh day of the week anymore, but on the first. Sunday is a perspective on our eternal rest which in principle already started, and we have to be prepared, because it will become reality with Christ's second coming.

God requires from us to prepare for this eternal rest and complete recovery through:

- the proclamation of the Word of God, thus provision for preachers and their training.
- Christian tutoring, and teaching God's Word to children;
- the diligent seeking of the communion of the saints and gathering with the congregation;
- the use of the sacraments;
- calling upon God and proclaiming the Glory of the Lord;
- the distribution of Christian charity;
- fighting against temptations and evil activities;
- God's Holy Spirit working within us.

In our aspiration to meet God's requirements, we already began with the eternal Sabbath. We do this from the first day of the week, Sunday, through all the other days of the week and of our lives. God would like to exult over us, His children, and mend the relationship between us, because through his grace and mercy we are delivered from our sin. We can now delight in this knowledge and grow in faith.

As believers we therefor look forward to the eternal rest in God, and because of that the seventh day as a day of rest, is a promise. Man as image bearer of God, still work six days a week while the seventh day is a day of rest.

The purpose of Creation

Creation science as learnt from the Word of God, forms the foundation by which God must be worshipped. The ultimate purpose of God's creation is to laud, honour and praise Him, and this is the foundation of Christian faith.

God is introduced as Creator and Ruler and man is one of His creations. The worship, glorification and trust that man must have for God, disappear when the relationship between God, the Creator and man, His creation is not maintained in this exact sequence. The problem comes with the theory of evolution, because evolutionism claims that everything created by God, coincidentally occurred, and denies God as the Creator of heaven and earth. This view about evolution is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

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- De Graaf, S.G. 1935. Verbondsgeschiedenis: Schetsen voor de vertelling van de Bijbelse Geschiedenis. Het Oude Testament. Kampen. 10-14.
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2. The garden of Eden

Genesis 1: 26 – 29 and 2:7 – 25

Man as image bearer of God

- Man's existence and purpose are embedded in God's creation, because God created man as image bearer of Himself, and therefore man is exclusively a creation of God. In this chapter we are going to focus on the following main ideas:
- God created man with a purpose and He gave man a specific assignment.
- God created man from the dust of the ground. (Genesis 2: 7)
- God created man with two different genders: male (man) and female (wife).

Let Us create people

Man was the last creation of God. In the previous chapter we learned that God created earth and all else in six days. On the sixth day after all the animals, plants and light bearers were created, at the very end, God created man. In Genesis 1: 26 we read "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" and this explains that the The garden of Eden differs from everything else which were created by God.

The question comes to mind, who did God speak with when He said this? We know it was not the angels, because man was not created to their image, and the aforementioned text from Genesis in the Bible made very important information known. In God there is more than one Person. In chapter one we mentioned that God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. We find confirmation of this in different texts from the Bible¹⁶.

¹⁶ **Genesis 3: 22** "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:" KJV

Genesis 11:7 "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." KJV

As image bearer of God

Man was created by God, to His image and His likeness. With image and likeness closely related in meaning let us explore their significance further. 'In our image' means that there exists a certain similarity and resemblance between God and man, the same resemblance and likeness found between man and his portrayal. 'After our likeness' (Genesis 1: 26) underline that this image of man (Adam) was also to the semblance of God. The man created by God (Adam) had certain similarities with God, but he was not God¹⁷. God created man in true righteousness and holiness, to truly know God, their Creator, to love Him with all their heart, to live with Him in eternal happiness and blessedness (beatitude) and to praise and glorify Him. (Question 6, The Heidelberg Catechism, <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/pdf/lords-days/Heidelberg-Catechism.pdf>).

Man was created to this image of God, and therefore differ from animals. The characteristics that belong to the image of God, which man (we) received are intelligence, sense, understanding and mental power which helps man (us) to understand God. We can think and make decisions, although some of these characteristics that belong to the image of God are only revealed after we are converted Christians. Qualities like righteousness and holiness are included herein. We (the humans of today) are also created to God's image¹⁸. After the Fall man remained the same even though our nature was spoilt, we never became like animals.

The way God created man

Man was created completely different from animals. God addressed animals and they appeared but when God created man He used the dust of the earth. This means that God used the elements and matter from the earth to create man and in doing so a permanent bond was created between man and earth.

Thereafter God breathed the breath of life into man through his nostrils and in this miraculous way man became a living soul and being. Animals are also

¹⁷ **Colossians 3: 10** "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" KJV

Ephesians 4: 24 "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." KJV

¹⁸ **James 3: 9** "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." KJV

1 Corinthians 11: 7 "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." KJV

living beings but they did not receive the breath of life from God in the same way that man did.

The moment when God breathed the breath of life into man, a profound bond came into existence between man and God. The entity of man consisted of dust and spirit, as well as body and soul. Man's body was kindred to earth but with his spirit to God. God created man in a particularly exceptional, distinctive and sublime way in order to reign over the animals and the earth.

Male and female

Another difference between the The garden of Eden and the creation of animals were that all the animals were created simultaneously both the male and female as distinctive companions were created together, but with humans, God first created man (the male) and thereafter he created an aid and companion for man, the woman or female. The woman was created differently from man, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man and while he was sleeping, He took one of man's ribs and "then closed up the flesh instead thereof" (Genesis 2: 21), then God took the rib to form and create the woman and aid for man. By taking man's rib to created woman, God also created a fervent bond between male and female. When man awoke God brought the woman to him, and man was very pleased because from that moment onwards he also had a partner, just like the animals which were named by him on that special day. Man knew that the woman was formed from a part of his body and man created poetry from joy: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2: 23).

Man knew that his aid was exactly like him, and he named her woman. They cleaved together and formed a unit where they supported and assisted each other. They were not created separately out of the earth's dust, because then they would have been two different people. They were created from one body (Adam's body) to form a unit. This unit man and woman formed were therefore both accountable and answerable to God. This man and woman belonged together and to each other and thus marriage between man and woman was established by God. Jesus confirmed this when He taught the people that God reject divorce¹⁹.

¹⁹ **Matthew 19: 6** 'Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'

Man and woman's position

God created woman to assist man (the head) because man was created first and woman second. The relationship between man as the head and woman as assistant was perfect and harmonious and together they served and exalted God.

Man and woman listened to the words of the devil and ate of the forbidden fruit. This meant that they were disobedient and therefore together with their offspring, became sinners, which resulted in eternal death and damnation. They were torn from God and were godless and sinful, and because of this, their spoilt and depraved nature also disturbed their relationship with each other. After the Fall, as part of the woman's punishment, God let man rule over her "... and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen.3:16). Unfortunately some men are imperious and overbearing with regards to their wives and treat them in an unloving and unkind way because of their sinful nature, however this can also be said of some women who wish for the God-given leadership role men have and thus have a domineering attitude towards their husbands.

With the birth of Christ the original order of creation was restored, because woman was not created inferior to man, but equal. After Jesus's resurrection He appeared to both men and women (for example Mary Magdalene)²⁰.

There are however differences in the respective positions wherein a man and a woman was placed by God. The relationship between a husband and wife are compared to that of Christ and His congregation by Paul²¹. Jesus Christ cherishes His congregation with love and is by no means domineering towards them. Even though man's position in the marriage is as the head and the leader of the family, he should not be overbearing and imperious towards his wife and again the wife should not wish for the God-given coveted position of her husband as the leader.

Garden of Eden

God did not leave man to roam earth alone in search of a suitable home. God

²⁰ **Mark 16: 9** "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." KJV

²¹ **Ephesians 5: 23 – 25** "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;" KJV

planted a garden with beautiful trees producing alluring fruit. Take note that the Old Testament do not use the word “paradise”, but just refer to a Garden of Eden.

There were four rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden, the Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (the Tigris), and Phirat (the Euphrates). It is unknown where the Pishon and Gihon were, but the Hiddekel is now known as the Tigris and the Phirat is known in current times as the Euphrates. Thus the Garden of Eden was located in the vicinity of the Tigris and Euphrates in Asia.

Man was created with a purpose

God gave man an instruction. He had to cultivate and protect the garden. He had to work because there wasn't time for loafing around, and this work was a pleasure for man and part of his everyday life. In addition to this he also had to guard and protect the garden. This fact clearly implies that if he had to protect the garden, there was danger lurking somewhere, and this is found in the form of a power which wanted to invade and infiltrate the Garden of Eden. It was this evil power that man had to protect the Garden of Eden against. The first assignment God gave man was to cultivate and protect the Garden of Eden.

Recommended readings

- De Graaf, S.G. 1935. Verbondsgeschiedenis: Schetsen voor de vertelling van de Bijbelse Geschiedenis. Het Oude Testament. Kampen. 14-20.
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3. Every human being is special

Genesis 1: 11 – 25

God is the Creator

God the Father is the Creator and through His Word, in other words His Son, out of nothing He created the heavens and the earth and all things living. He gave every being He created a unique stature, appearance and purpose through which God should be worshipped. This complementary learning material focuses on the following leading ideas:

- Only God Trinity can create something out of nothing
- God created everything after their kind
- We believe this by reason of the Bible

Through faith we know

In the Bible God reveal himself to us and we learn in the Bible about the history of the creation before man existed. The Bible is authoritative, because the Word of God was not produced through the will of man but through God Himself. God's prophets, servants and apostles were inspired through the Holy Spirit and therefore we can either accept His Word in faith-abiding obedience or we can reject the Word of God with disobedience.

The origin of everything is explained in the first eleven chapters of the Bible, and the interpretation is thus vitally important. Paul, a servant of Christ and an apostle unto the gospel of God, writes in Romans 1: 20-21 "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Through faith we understand earth was created by the Word of God, and that which can be seen, did not come in to being from visible things²². God created each after their kind. We believe this based on the Holy Scriptures and the religious texts we find in the Bible. Our faith is and remains bound to the Bible. God

²² **Hebrews 11: 3** "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." KJV

said He did it and therefore we believe and accept that.

Evolution partisans does not accept God as the Creator and does not accept this as truth. They try to confirm with studies in layers of rock and fossils, that God did not create everything.

The realisation of evolutionism

Evolutionism rely on the theory of a primitive life form which gradually developed over millions of years into a variety of complex life forms. Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace first introduced the idea of natural selection in a journal article published in 1858 and in 1859 Darwin expanded on this idea in his book "The origin of species through natural selection".

Charles Robert Darwin (1809 - 1882) was educated in Theology, but actually was a British physicist. His views and theories about natural selection attracted great interest from scientists. Darwin doubted some of the aspects of his new theory, but his supporters rejected all critique. He even removed a chapter about problems with his theory from his book "On the Origin of Species" on demand of his supporters.

Even today evolutionism still have, just like before, this illusion that it is true, even though the logical principles on which it is supposed to depend, are wanting. Darwin himself wrote that no geological information existed to confirm his theory. Thousands of scientists have also endeavoured, and are still trying, to find evidence (fossils) that will confirm the transition of one organism to the next. However, no evidence to support this theory has ever been found.

What is the theory of evolution (also known as evolutionism)?

According to this theory universe originated approximately 20 billion years ago. A tremendous explosion known as the Big Bang was created through a chemical reaction from which the universe coincidentally emerged.

According to this theory the earth was formed five billion years ago. Dry soil and primitive vegetation developed about 410 million years ago. Mammals appeared approximately 30 million years ago and the ape species appeared 15 million years ago. Ten million years ago quite a variety of apes had already appeared. A 100 000 years ago the modern human developed and only started to dominate earth about 10 000 years ago.

Expansion of the theory of evolution

Darwin's idea that chaos became cosmic is accepted by many people. They claimed that particles led to the existence of everything (stars, planets, plants, animals etc.) without any help from 'outside'. Supporters of this theory reject the fact that God created heaven and earth in six days. Conforming to this theory all forms of life for example bacteria, plants, birds, fish, reptiles, mammals and humans are interrelated to one another through ancestral relation (a single-cell organism).

Evolution thus means ascending development of an extremely simple (or primitive) form of life to extremely complex forms of life. Evolution is a slow process which takes place over millions of years where only the strongest survive.

This theory has far-reaching results, because if man originated from a process of evolution, death would have been there before Adam! This theory proclaims that Adam was not created, but developed from ancestors that had died before his existence. This means that death never was a punishment for sins, but had always been there. This theory is false, because it nullifies the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches us differently: "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"²³. Through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection we are redeemed from eternal death.

The influence of evolutionism on the lives of the faithful

Evolutionistic views today are on television, radio and the printed media and it is no longer presented as a so-called 'theory', but as a fact. Text books in schools are interspersed with the evolution theory. Supporters of evolution theory try to use science in order to prove that creation happened differently from what had been believed and accepted previously. We, as believers should proclaim the only Truth.

In reality evolution is no scientific theory or declaration, but a new worldly view. Theory implies the scientific foundation to explain phenomena although it cannot be observed e.g. gravity. We cannot see gravity, but through experiments scientists repeatedly proved the existence of a reliable pattern,

²³ **Romans 5: 12** "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" KJV

thus gravity exists. Evolution is not measurable, observable or reiterated and cannot be tested. It is rather a deduction, presumption or just an idea.

This idea is not as innocent as it claims to be. It has a big impact on the way humans think about themselves. According to evolutionism man is also an animal that developed through its own adaptability. Man himself determined the guidelines according to which his species should live. With this world view and philosophy, no values outside the human exist. Self-contentment and to enjoy everything has become the standard according to which he is living. No wonder that prostitution, alcohol abuse, drug addiction and homosexuality occur so frequently. Nothing takes a firm stand anymore. Biblical values belong to a culture that has ceased to exist. Everyone decide for himself what is right and wrong. Everything has become flexible and compliant to suit the individual and very few things still have eternal value.

Evolution and the Bible

The remark is often made that the Bible is not a science textbook. The history of Adam and Eve is a myth and they never really existed. The Bible is called into question with these kind of remarks. Man can now decide for himself if earth was created in six days (Genesis 1) and if Jonah really was in a big fish (Jonah 1: 17). Today humanity's thoughts, insights and judgements are deemed more important than the Word of God (the Bible).

There are people who believe that evolution and Christianity can be reconciled. According to them earth originated through six different eras or 'days' that extended over millions of years. If this proves to be true, Christianity does not have a leg to stand on.

The Bible teaches us that God created Adam and Eve as the first eternal humans. They sinned against God (Their Creator) causing the fall of man. Their disobedience brought death along and thus misery emerged.

Scientific assessment of evolutionism

Evolutionists endeavour to prove their views with so-called scientifically proven facts. They attempt to declare the creation of earth through human calculations. There is, however, as much scientific evidence that contradicts these theories, as there is that supports it.

No fossils to confirm the transitional period

The evolutionists claim for instance that the dinosaur gradually changed into a bird over millions of years. That would imply that the dinosaur at some stage would be less dinosaur and more bird. The blending of dinosaur characteristics with the bird characteristics would have produced an “in between animal”. The problem is that such a ‘dinosaur-bird-blend’ would not have been able to exist. The dinosaur’s reproductive and respiratory organs are completely different from that of a bird that can fly. There is also a vast difference between the eggs of reptiles and those of birds. There has also never been an “in between or transitional kind of animal” found in fossils. Should one kind of animal gradually (over millions of years) have developed into a different kind of animal, there would have existed thousands of this so-called transitional fossils. Efforts to find transitional fossils of humans in particular, haven’t been successful. Transitional fossils of humans (e.g. the so-called Nebraska man) were every time rejected as false.

The great number of fossils (rocky rudiments of animals and plants) that exists, rather indicates an enormous extinction of life that occurred at a specific point in time. It possibly happened as a result of the Fall of man in the days of Noah. The Fall offers an explanation. For example, dinosaur footprints could have been retained by a quick deposit of sediment (layers of sand and mud on top of each other) like during a flood.

The likelihood of life.

Evolutionists claim that there was an ideal time for the occurrence of sea life. According to them the chemical composition of the oceans was, coincidentally, exactly right to form ‘an archetype moisture or dampness’. The predecessor of bacteria coincidentally developed within this so-called ‘moisture’. That means that a variety of chemical compositions and established molecules, had the ability to multiply themselves.

When mathematicians try to calculate the possibility for these processes to progress correctly in order to be successful, the improbability (rather the impossibility) becomes clear.

The influence of erosion

Erosion is when the ground and rocks are corroded, eaten away through weathering. Wind and water constantly washes soil from the land into the

sea. Geologists reckon that the earth's surface erodes at an average of 6 centimetres in the course of every 1 000 years. With erosion occurring at this rate an erosion ditch of 150 kilometre deep will be formed after 2 500 million years. Thus if earth is really as old as alleged, and according to those calculations, Africa should have already disappeared underneath the sea after 10 million years.

Approximately 450 million tons of salt annually ends up in the sea. A small percentage of that ends up on land again through evaporation. This implies that if the oceans are as old as 38 billion years, sea water would have been too salty to sustain life.

In addition to that more than 25 billion tons of silt and mud annually ends up in the sea and over millions of years the silt and mud would have changed the geography of the sea quite differently.

The law of decay

Evolutionists teach that the complicated or higher forms of life emerged from the lower forms of life. Thus more genetic information coincidentally led, through a natural selection process, to better and more complicated plants and animals. In Creation it is clear that the opposite happens. In the breeding of a particular dog species a certain characteristic is gained by removing and not adding genetic material. Species annually become extinct but no new ones come into being.

The same applies to energy. Energy, like heat, cannot be created or destroyed, it can only change from one form to the next. No new energy can be created.

Conclusion

Certain changes occur inside creation. An animal species can change over the years to adapt better in their environment. In colder regions animals can get longer and thicker (bulkier) fur, probably because those with shorter fur could not survive the cold. Consequently only the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA information) of the longer furred animals is transferred to the next generation. These animals did not change from species, because the DNA information had been thinned out and sorted through selection, but no new extra information was created.

Evolutionists claim that creation constantly shows progress through natural selection, but creation is deteriorating. The reason being, is simple: because God subjected creation to it²⁴. There are serious disagreements about the scientific correctness of the calculations of the age of the earth that also contradicts the evolution theory.

In reality evolutionism is not a real scientific theory or declaration, but a new worldview. As Christians we know that God created everything from nothing through His Word. We don't exactly know how it happened. Job also did not know: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?"²⁵. With our trust in God we can say, like Job: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." (Job 40: 4)

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4. The snake in the garden of Eden

24 **Romans 8: 20** "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope," KJV

25 **Job 38: 4** "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. KJV

Genesis 2: 17 and Genesis 3: 1 – 24

The influence of sin in this world

God created man and woman to live without sin, but Adam and Eve's disobedience led to the end of this world without sin. Sin dominated man and woman's nature from then onwards. In this chapter we are focusing on the following main ideas:

- The sin of Adam and Eve was disobedience and today disobedience is still the beginning of all sin!
- All humans are immersed in a state of sin because of the first people's (Adam and Eve's) disobedience.
- God's warning, that man and his wife will die if they eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, came true because God punished sin through death.
- Along with the punishment, God also promised salvation because man with his sinful nature is not able to redeem himself, therefore pardon from sin is only found in God.

Life in the garden of Eden

Man and his wife lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden. They heartily enjoyed the fruit from all the trees in the Garden of Eden, except from the tree in the middle of the garden. Man and his wife had a close, personal relationship with God, like that of children with their father. God Trinity created man and woman to His image, as His representatives on earth.

God came to an agreement with man and his wife, if they obeyed Him, then they would live forever without sin, trials and tribulations.

God commanded them to cultivate and protect the Garden of Eden and this covenant is referred to as the "work covenant". Man and his wife had to work (cultivate) in the Garden of Eden, but the fact that they also had to protect the Garden of Eden, implies that there was possible temptation and danger lurking somewhere and that man and his wife had to guard and protect themselves against this unknown temptation and danger.

The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil

In the Garden of Eden there were two exceptional trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. These two exceptional trees served as signs of the “work covenant” between God and man and his wife. We learn from the Bible that the fruit of all the other trees in the Garden of Eden were good to eat and that these fruit provided all the necessities needed by man and his wife.

God forbade man and his wife to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because should they eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil they would become aware of sin, transgression and malevolence. There also were the fruit of the other exceptional tree, the tree of life, if they ate the fruit from the tree of life, then they would live eternally. We read in the Bible, the book of Revelations, that the tree of life would forever be in the New Jerusalem²⁶.

The trial command

Man and his wife were allowed to eat the fruit from all the trees in the Garden of Eden, except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God forbade them to eat fruit of that exceptional tree, but they were allowed to eat the fruit of the other exceptional tree in the garden, the tree of life.

Why did God have a covenant with man, but also gave man the opportunity to fail? God wanted to test their obedience, because He wanted man to be obedient to Him, of his own accord.

The enticement

Man and his wife cultivated and guarded the Garden of Eden. We read about the snake who told the wife to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis, but it is important to know and understand that it was not the snake who conducted the attack, but the devil. The devil formerly was an angel who rebelled against God. The angels were excellent creations of God. They were His messengers and they served His elect. Some of the angels has fallen out of exaltation into eternal decay, while through the grace of God, the other angels persisted and remained in their archetypal positions.

²⁶ **Revelation 2: 7** “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

Revelation 22: 2 “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

The fallen angels became enemies of God and therefore God expelled the devil and his followers from Heaven²⁷. The devil used the snake in his revenge to entice the wife, because he knew that he would rule over God's creation if he could tempt man and wife.

The wife did not realise the imminent danger when she encountered the snake, because the snake appeared to be friendly and interested in them, and with a halve truth, that they were not allowed to eat fruit from all the trees, the snake sparked her interest. The wife explained that they were allowed to eat the fruit from all the trees in the garden, except the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. The wife became doubtful, and the devil knew that when one becomes doubtful, one's faith is not as strong as it should be. The devil convinced the wife that she should not take the prohibition so seriously, because according to him, they would not die. The devil explained that God did not want man and his wife to differentiate between good and evil. The wife desired the fruit and ate thereof. Thereafter the snake did not talk again seeing as the devil was finished with the serpent and he would now use the wife to lure man to sin as well. The devil is the father of lies²⁸.

Before the Fall, man and his wife absolutely and completely trusted in God and his Word, but the devil destroyed this special bond between man and God, by sowing the seeds of doubt. The wife was deliberately misled by the devil when he told her that "then your eyes shall be opened" (Genesis 3: 5). According to the devil God deliberately kept the eyes of man and his wife closed in order to prevent them from gaining greater insight and becoming even more like God. With these words the devil inspired in them the desire to a better position than their destined and intended position, and this desire was the beginning of disobedience and haughtiness. The eating of the forbidden fruit was presented by the devil as being very beneficial for man and his wife, but actually it was the greatest disaster for humanity.

God's words were intentionally and deliberately twisted by the devil. Man and his wife then also rebelled against God – the creation and subject wanted to be God from that moment on. The devil is the master of all the fallen angels and in Genesis 3 the devil deliberately brought man to a fall. He used the serpent and spoke through it. (God also spoke through animals for example

27 **Luke 10: 18** "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." KJV
2 **Peter 2: 4** "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" KJV
28 **John 8: 44** "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because 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." KJV

when He opened the mouth of Bileam's mule.) The serpent's words "ye shall be like gods", "ye shall not surely die" and "your eyes shall be opened" were above the ability of an animal. In further Scripture readings the devil is referred to as tempter, for it was the devil who tempted Jesus in the desert²⁹.

The fall of Man

After the conversation with the snake, the wife desired the forbidden fruit and ate thereof. The devil was victorious and he did not use the serpent again, he found a new instrument to use, the wife. She was deceived at first, but then later she became the deceiver. She persuaded man to have some of the forbidden fruit, and he ate thereof. Their sin thus was disobedience and because of their disobedience their glorious, carefree and peaceful lives were something of the past.

When man and his wife ate the forbidden fruit, they accepted the devils word to the Word of God. The wife was disobedient when she allowed the devil to deceive her and thus transgressed ³⁰ and man was disobedient by disregarding God's command. The covenant God had with Adam as the covenant head of all people, was broken and the burden of sin was on all people from then on. This resulted in all people being born and received into sin³¹.

Sin

Sin entered the world as a result of man and his wife's disobedience and what they did, and through sin came death, which permeated all of mankind³². Man became separated and estranged from God and thus trouble, sorrow, suffering, and death entered the world.

After the Fall, man and his wife were no longer comfortable or at ease in God's presence. They hid behind the trees in the Garden of Eden, because they realised that they were naked. Thus their eyes opened and at the same time they realised that their relationship with God were altered as well as their relationship with one another. This realisation of the altered relationships

29 **Matthew 4: 3** "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." KJV

30 **1 Timothy 2: 14** "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." KJV

31 **Psalms 51: 9** "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." KJV

32 **Romans 5: 12** ""And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." KJV

made man and wife feel unworthy and undeserving in God's presence. Man wanted to be equal to God, but found himself miserably far away from God. The Father-child relationship man had with God was something of the past because the child of God now became His subject. Life is with God and those that do not feel comfortable with God, are on the way to eternal death.

Even today man is still disobedient, and does not want to sin alone, because it makes man feel better if there is someone else to share in the blame of disobedience and sin. But it is important to note that the blame of sin and disobedience lies with each individual himself, and not his partner in crime, someone else or God!

Devine judgment

God still loved man and his wife despite their disobedience. They didn't die right away, because then he devil would win. In Genesis 3: 14 - 15 God said to the serpent "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The first promise to man which referred to Christ, is the curse on the serpent. This is commonly called the "Protoevangelium" – a term that essentially signifies the idea of "first gospel proclamation" and it is the first prophesy of the advent of Jesus Christ, according to <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1571-crushing-the-serpents-head-the-meaning-of-genesis-3-15>. This promise gave hope to Adam and Eve. From the woman's offspring came Jesus Christ and He defeated the devil to deliver man from the sorrows of death (Psalms 18), because man cannot atone himself.

Deliverance only comes from the Son of God. That which the first Adam destroyed was rectified and reconditioned by the second Adam (Jesus Christ)³³. Through His Devine mercy God reinstated enmity between the devil and man, but now man had to fight against sin. God's judgment was righteous and merciful, because He showed no mercy for the devil, only man received pardon.

We find God's pardon and mercy where He made clothes for Adam and Eve, and the animal's skin which had to be used for the clothes, refers to the consequences of the sin. Sin could only be redeemed with the sacrifice of an innocent life. Man needed clothes, and the clothes served as evidence of his sin and redemption. Clothes alone did not help, because the only cover was the innocence and perfect Sacredness of Jesus Christ our Saviour. The cloth

³³ **1 Corinthians 15: 21** "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." KJV

of salvation and the cloak of righteousness³⁴.

After his punishment, Adam accepted this promise in faith, and as proof of this he named his wife Eve, which means “mother of all living” (Genesis 3: 20). Despite all judgment, light kept on shining. The “Protoevangelium” applied to all people, and the God of the covenant is in control of the whole history. Adam and Eve were spiritually dead after the Fall, they could only be saved by the mercy of God. The Fall was man’s own fault, but God’s promise that He would deliver man from his sin through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, gave mankind hope again.

Through the Fall trouble, sorrow, and death entered the world, and this includes plagues, sickness and suffering. The greatest of our wretchedness is our sins and the consequences thereof. We cannot love and honour God on our own anymore, we need the Holy Spirit (He proceeds from the Father and the Son) working in us and in our lives. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the conversion to reborn Christian in us. With rebirth we have to shed aside our bad sins and behaviours, discard the sinful and corrupt persons we are, and renew the spirit of our minds, by becoming new persons in God with true holiness and righteousness (Ephesians 4: 22-24). The workings of the Holy Spirit change our hearts in such a way that we are able to know, love and honour God Trinity as we are supposed to.

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34 **Isaiah 61: 10** “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” KJV

5. The offerings of Cain and Abel

Genesis 4 and 5

Two groups of people from the generations of Adam and Eve

After the Fall two different groups of people developed from the offspring of Adam and Eve, the faithful (Christians) and the non-believers (heathens). Non-believers depend on their own strength, while the faithful trust in God. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- The offerings of Cain and Abel and the consequences thereof.
- The defection of Cain's generation until Lamech.
- The devoted and faithful generation from Seth until Enoch.
- The non-believers (without Christ) descended from Cain and the believers (in Christ) descended from Seth.

Cain and Abel

After their disobedience to God, Adam and Eve no longer lived in the Garden of Eden. Their carefree lives were something of the past and they had to till (work very hard) on a cursed earth to make a living. However, God did not leave them completely to themselves. He was still thinking about them in loving-kindness.

Adam and Eve rejoiced when their first child was born. Eve named him Cain because she said, "I have gotten a man from the LORD" (Genesis 4: 1). With the birth of Cain she saw the first fulfilment of God's promise that a Man will emerge from her descendants that will bruise the serpent's head³⁵. After that Eve gave birth to a second son and they named him Abel.

The sacrifices of Cain and Abel

With hardship Adam worked the ground in order to survive. His two sons, Cain and Abel grew up and also started working. Cain was an agriculturalist

³⁵ **Genesis 3: 15** "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." KJV

(tiller) like his father, while Abel tamed sheep and goats, he let them graze and cared for them and so he became the first shepherd.

With the harvest the two brothers reaped from their hard work, both brought offerings to God. Cain sacrificed the fruit from his first harvest. Then Abel sacrificed the firstborn of his flock to God.

A sacrifice is a gift or present from man (inferior) to God (superior) to thank Him for all his goodness and grace. The burnt offering symbolised the gratitude that also burnt in man's heart. Sacrifice was a symbolic action indicating a person's desire for closer communion with God and to show his dedication to Him, with everything he possessed.

God accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's. God knew the hearts of these two brothers. He knew that Cain was not honest in his gratitude and his attitude was not sincere³⁶. Abel's sincere faith and gratitude made his offering acceptable in the eyes of God.

Cain fumed with fury because God had not accepted his offering, but had accepted his younger brother's offering. He pitied himself and although he had a guilty conscience, he refused to admit it. God reprimanded him to do what was right. He had to take control over his sins, fight against it and conquer it. God was prepared to help him, but Cain refused to listen. He envied his brother and hated him.

Abel's death

Adam's disobedience transferred onto his children and humanity and we read about that in Genesis 4. Cain was furious and jealous, because God accepted Abel's offering but not his. God spoke to Cain and warned him that sin was awaiting him and also told him he should rule over sin.

Cain spoke to his brother and when they were out in the open field, Cain overwhelmed Abel and beat him to death. This is how Abel became the first martyr, because God had accepted his offer which caused Cain to be angry and envious. (A martyr is somebody that's been martyred and killed because of his faith). Cain became the first murderer and alas, not the redeemer his parents had been hoping for. God called Cain to account.

³⁶ **1 John 3: 12** "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." KJV

God addressed Cain after the murder, 'Where is Abel your brother?' With this question God planned to convert Cain, but Cain hardened his heart and he remained adamant in his attitude and asked God, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' He wanted to state it clearly that he was not responsible for his brother and did not want anything to do with him. This is in contradiction with the commandment of love: "love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22: 39). Love was in harmony with creation, but sin brought discord. Cain had not only been his brother's murderer, but he was also the murderer of the faithful seed.

The punishment Cain received

Cain received a more severe sentence than Adam. Adam himself was not cursed, only the earth for Adam's sake. However, Cain himself was cursed. Adam would cultivate the soil and suffer to eat, but Cain's hard work would not be rewarded with any crop. He would be a wanderer and refugee.

The moment Cain had realised that God knew everything after all, he pitied himself and became very scared. Cain's curse implied that everyone coming on his way would want to kill him.

The day of wrath that Cain had feared so desperately, did not commence immediately. God granted him more time to live and gave him a sign so that he should not be struck by everybody that came on his way. Thus Cain was granted another opportunity to live. He, however preferred not to live according to God's will but continued with his sinful existence. This had also been part of God's plan, because Cain's generation was approaching its day of wrath³⁷. They would be banned from earth eternally and earth would be inherited by the kind-hearted.

Cain's generation

Cain departed from the face of God and tried to live without Him. He took up residence in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden. There his first child, Enoch was born. After this Cain engaged in building a city, which he also called Enoch. The word Enoch means self-preservation.

Cain felt 'safe' in his city. Cain tried to uphold himself against God and his curse. He did not want to be a roamer and fugitive. God allowed all this. The

³⁷ **Romans 2: 5** "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" KJV

progression of sin was part of God's plan and would eventually lead to the coming of the New Jerusalem³⁸.

Lamech and Enoch

Abel's death had been the beginning of the sad history of man's fall and decline. Cain had turned his back towards God and his offspring kept on living their sinful lives. They did not even try to live without sin. In Cain's fifth generation his great-great-grandchild Lamech was mentioned. Lamech had been a sinner who took no notice of God. Regardless of what God instructed, Lamech proceeded to take two wives for himself. God said that Cain would be avenged seven times, but Lamech seventy-seven times. Lamech was a boaster, a braggart and a brute, but God remained patient and tolerated everything. He allowed the sons of Lamech to make great discoveries.

Lamech's son Jabal dwelled in tents and had livestock. His other son, Jubal proved to be the founder of musical instruments, the harp and organ which were used to entertain themselves. The other child, Tubalcain was a blacksmith that forged tools of copper and iron. They used the copper and iron to make weapons in order to prove their power. All these inventions had been useful, even to the people who were faithful, but Lamech's descendants never used the weapons in God's honour. They did not know God anymore and they did not serve God any longer. They were estranged from God. The promised Saviour that had to conquer the devil could not possibly emerge from Lamech's offspring.

Fortunately Adam and Eve had more children. To replace Abel God had given them another son. They named him Seth because he substituted the faithful Abel. With regards to Seth and his offspring we are met with completely different people. Seth named his son Enoch, which means man. They had known God and prayed to Him.

Seth and his progeny also toiled and battled on the cursed earth, but they experienced Abel's death differently than Cain. God's wrath brought them misery and grief, but they turned to God in humility to call on Him, while Cain and his offspring did not want to know God.

Enoch was born in the fifth generation of Seth. We read in the Bible that other ancestors died, but Enoch did not pass away. Enoch lived close to God and

³⁸ **Revelation 21: 2** "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." KJV

served Him. Most of the patriarchs lived for approximately 900 years. The oldest patriarch of them all, Methuselah, was Enoch's son and he became 969 years of age. Enoch had become 365 years old, and still alive when God took him to heaven. With the other patriarchs we read "and he died" in Genesis 5, but not when we read about Enoch³⁹.

Two groups of people

From the descendants of Adam and Eve developed both heathens (the faithless) and believers (the faithful). The seventh generation of Adam, from the descendants of Cain, was Lamech and the seventh generation of Adam, from Seth's descendants, was Enoch. They had been complete opposites. Lamech, offspring of Cain, believed in his own power. Enoch, offspring of Seth, walked with God. To walk with God means to trust and depend on God with your whole being. Enoch walked with God, he trusted in God.

The devil used the non-believers and unfaithful in his battle against God and the faithful. He did everything in his power to annihilate the faithful in order to prevent the Birth of Christ. Without Christ the devil would be able to conquer God. God, however, protects His children and did not allow Satan to do so.

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³⁹ **Hebrews 11: 5** "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." KJV

6. The dove returns to Noah's Ark

Genesis 6 up to Genesis 8

The new Earth

The sins of humanity, reached alarming proportions, and therefor God brought a flood of water to the earth to obliterate all living creatures. God mercifully spared the lives of the righteous and honest Noah and his family. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God is righteous therefore sins should be punished by Him.
- God is merciful, so the lives of the faithful are spared. The Flood refers to baptism.
- God promises that He will never again obliterate man and earth in such a way.

Sin increase

The progenies of Seth and Enoch initially served God in all sincerity. The Bible refers to them as the children of God. Believers are also referred to as the sons or children of God⁴⁰. Enoch served God. In his lifetime he had already warned people that the divine judgment of God was approaching to punish the wicked⁴¹.

The wicked people were heedless of those warnings. Their numbers increased because the wicked married the faithful. As a result of these marriages, the wicked enticed the faithful into sin. God's Spirit which give life

⁴⁰ **Deuteronomy 32: 5** "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation." KJV

Hosea 1: 10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." KJV

Psalms 73: 15 "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children." KJV

⁴¹ Jude 1: 14-15 "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, 15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." KJV

no longer existed within them. Their sins had accumulated such proportions that God intervened and destroyed all the wicket with the Flood.

God had warned

God did not immediately execute his terrible judgment. He granted the people 120 years to repent themselves. They, however, did not want to realise that God had been good and merciful unto them. In those ancient times they reached a lifetime of a few hundred years. There also were big, strong and muscular giants among them. They could, in such a long lifetime and with such physical strength, achieve so much to cultivate earth according to God's will.

God, however, saw that the evil ways of man on earth increased and everything man planned was bad. The lord repented because he had made man. Deeply disappointed he sadly decided to annihilate mankind and all animals.

Noah built the ark

Among all people there was only one man who, together with his family, still believed, feared and served God. That was Noah, a great -grandson of Enoch. Noah found favour in the eyes of God. God informed him about His planned judgment. He would annihilate the earth with a flood of water and destroy life.

Only Noah, together with his wife and three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives would be spared. God also wanted to avoid the complete extinction of the animals. Therefore God instructed Noah to build an ark. The word ark means a case or chest. In obedience Noah built the ark according to God's instructions. It had taken years, but at last the three storey ship in the form of a box was completed.

God established a covenant with Noah and his family

In Genesis 6: 18 we read about a covenant for the very first time; not a covenant between two equal parties, but a sole decision made by God Himself. The reason why it was called a covenant was to confirm the solidity and certainty of it. Noah built the ark with gopher wood, 300 cubits (approximately 150 metres) long, 50 cubits (approximately 25 metres) wide and 30 cubits (approximately 15 metres) high. Noah executed God's

commands in faith⁴². He took the Divine warning to heart and obeyed it.

A ship is usually built close to the sea or a big river from where it can be launched after building has been completed. Noah, however, built a ship in the inland, far from any water. The work on the ark attracted a lot of attention from bystanders and Noah was asked what he and his family were doing. Noah used the opportunity to address the people and warn them against God's planned judgment. The wicket did not take notice of him and his warnings and mocked him.

The Deluge

The ark was finally finished. The 120 years God granted the people to repent their sins was over. At God's command Noah allowed the animals into the ark. It wasn't necessary for him to gather the animals in the field; they walked or crawled on by themselves. Even the birds flew to the ark. God sent the animals to the ark. All that Noah needed to do was to let seven pairs, male and female, of the clean animals and birds and one pair of the not clean animals into the ark. Noah and his family had already been in the ark. The wicket were given a last opportunity to repent themselves. Another seven days went by quietly, seven days of mercy.

At the dawn of judgment, God himself locked the ark. No more entry for any non-believer. Banks of clouds gathered and rain came down in buckets. Fountains brought forth raging streams of water. People and animals fled to the mountains, but the water kept on rising. The rising water lifted the ark and it started floating safely on the increasing water level. It rained continuously for 40 days and 40 nights, until even the highest summit was covered under water.

God's judgment was fulfilled and all people, animals and birds were exterminated, except Noah, his family and all other living creatures in the ark. The flood was a tremendous disaster, a judgment from God and the demise of the old world. Yet it was not the end of creation.

Noah left the ark

Water flooded the earth for 150 days. Exactly five months after the deluge

⁴² **Hebrews 11: 7** "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." KJV

had started, the ark came to rest on the mountain of Ararat. After two and a half months the mountain became visible. Noah waited another forty days before sending a raven out from the ark.

The raven constantly flew back and forth until the waters dried up. Seven days later Noah sent out a dove which returned because it could not find anywhere to rest. After another seven days he sent the dove out again, this time the dove returned with a green olive leaf. Noah then realised that the dove must have found an olive tree somewhere at the foot of the mountain. After another seven days Noah sent the dove out again, but this time it never returned.

The earth was now safe for the birds, but not for those who lived on land. It was only on the twenty seventh day of the second month, exactly one year and ten days after Noah and his company entered the ark, that God commanded Noah to leave the ark with everybody else.

Noah and his family rejoiced and they were relieved, because all the wicked were destroyed. All of them drowned. There was now hope for the faithful. Christ could still be born from the progenies of the woman.

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7. The tower of Babel

Genesis 8: 20 up to Genesis 11: 9

Sin continues

The deluge did not redeem Noah and his family from their sins. Noah and his progeny were sinners and they gradually became more and more people. When God commanded them to inhabit the earth, they refused to do it. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God's calling and commands must be obeyed.
- God always honour his promises.
- God is righteous and punish sin.
- God always helped man to fulfil his calling.

God's covenant with Noah

Noah stayed in the ark for more than a year. When the water had sufficiently receded, he and his family left the ark. He immediately sacrificed some of the clean animals and birds to God. In Genesis 8: 20 we read for the first time about an altar on which these animals and birds were sacrificed.

With that sacrifice Noah showed his gratitude towards God, because God had spared the lives of Noah and his family. He devoted himself totally to God. God, to him, was everything and Noah himself was nothing. God accepted Noah's offer.

God introduced new terms

A new era started after the deluge for Noah and his family. God, in his loving kindness and patience, resumed his work on earth. He blessed Noah and his sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth). They and all the animals with them had to be fertile and multiply and fill the earth⁴³. This task was similar to the one given to Adam in the beginning in the Garden of Eden.

⁴³ **Genesis 1: 28** "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." KJV

God granted Noah permission to eat meat as long as it was not raw and full of blood. (Genesis 9: 3 - 4) Blood was connected with the soul⁴⁴. It is important to know that only God can create life. Although the animals were given to man, they still remained His animals. Man have to respect life.

God established new principles. When Cain killed Abel, God protected him so that others couldn't kill him. After the deluge every man that killed a fellow human being, would be sentenced to death, because God created man to His image. Anybody killing somebody else desecrate God's image. The government thus have authority from God to punish offenders with the death penalty⁴⁵.

Before the deluge man had to rule over the animals. The animals in the Garden of Eden were tame and Adam moved among them when giving them names. Sin brought a hostile attitude between man and animal. Dangerous animals would be able to destroy man, but God put a fear of man in every animal's heart, therefore man could still rule over the animals⁴⁶.

God's promise to mankind

God promised Noah and his sons that the world would never be destroyed by a flood of water again. He entered into an alliance with all people and animals and as a token of this alliance He gave the rainbow. Every time a rainbow appears after a shower of rain, man is reminded of God's covenant with Noah. This covenant is called the covenant of nature. This covenant is yet another proof of God's love and mercy. God did not destroy man, because according to the (Protoevangelium) Maternal Promise, Christ still had to be born from Eve's offspring.

Noah's sin

Noah was an agriculturalist and he cultivated a vineyard after the deluge. He did not only enjoy the grapes but also made wine from the vineyard.

44 **Leviticus 17: 14** "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off." KJV

45 **Romans 13:4** "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." KJV

46 **Genesis 1: 26** "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." KJV

Noah was not alert against sin, drank too much of his wine and became intoxicated. He brought shame upon himself by sleeping naked in his tent. Noah was careless and fell into the claws of sin.

Sin was not destroyed by the deluge, because man is sinful by nature. Noah's youngest son, Ham found his father in this shamed condition. He called his two brothers, Shem and Japheth. Ham had not been upset and did not even attempt to cover his father's nudity. The bad rejoices in doing evil⁴⁷. Shem and Japheth had shown so much respect towards their father that they approached him walking backwards with a cloak to cover his nudity. They did not look at him.

Noah's curse

Noah awoke and found out what Ham had done. He was very indignant and bereaved. He uttered a curse not on Ham, but on Ham's youngest son, Canaan. Canaan would be as good as a slave to his brothers. Noah had known Ham's sons and he knew that Canaan had taken after his father. Should Noah have cursed Ham himself, many more people would have been affected by this curse, because Ham had three more sons.

Canaan's offspring settled in the land of Canaan. They filled an inferior position to those of Shem and Japheth's descendants. They lived a sinful life and were later destroyed by God in Sodom and Gomorrah with sulphur and fire. The Israelites (Shem's offspring) later conquered the tribes which remained in Canaan. Noah's curse only ended centuries later.

Noah's blessing

Noah blessed Shem and Japheth. His words to them were: "And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." KJV (Genesis 9: 26 – 27)

Noah saw that Shem and his would be abundantly blessed and he praised God for that. Greatest benediction was that our Saviour would be born from the posterity of Shem.

God granted Japheth and his posterity space; they would be spread over the majority of the earth. They would reside in the tents of Shem and share in his

⁴⁷ **Proverbs 2: 14** "Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the forwardness of the wicked;" KJV

blessings. The Redeemer, from Shem's descendants, would also become their Redeemer.

Noah lived for another 350 years after the deluge and died at the age of 950 years. Nobody after Noah ever reached such an advanced age. In Genesis 10 we find a summary of Noah's generation. This summary comprises the names of the generations of Shem, Ham and Japheth and all nations emerging from them.

Building of the tower of Babel

The progeny of Noah multiplied fast and according to God's command, they had to spread across the earth. Initially they obeyed this command and moved eastwards to the land of Shinar (Babylon). The land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were fertile and they decided to stay there and not to move any further.

There were no stones in those lowlands to build houses from, so they made a plan. They made bricks with which to build. It was a huge success. They became haughty and decided to build a city with a very high tower. They wanted to make a name for themselves and they wanted to stay together. This decision was contrary to God's will.

Confusion of tongues

The work on the tower progressed well; everybody spoke the same language and understood one another. God intervened and foiled their plans. He confused their tongues (languages) and they could no longer understand one another. Their own effort to unite failed. They had divided into different language groups and each group then went its own way to inhabit the earth. God spread them across the entire earth and so the different nations, each with its own language and culture, originated.

It is therefore God's will that there should be different nations. Men are sinners by nature and, since the beginning, desired to rule over one another, because it brought power and wealth to the conquerors. The great Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires of the world were examples of nations which wanted to unite all peoples of the world into one big empire, but these world empires crumbled and disappeared. In the New Jerusalem

descending from heaven, God will be praised in all languages⁴⁸. We read this at the descent of the Holy Spirit where each and everybody could hear and learn about God's great deeds.

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⁴⁸ **Revelation 7: 9** "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;" KJV

8. God's promise to Abram

Genesis 11: 27 up to Genesis 12: 7

All the faithful are blessed in one person

God selected one person (Abram) to execute His plan of redemption. God called upon Abram in grace and made a special agreement (covenant) with him. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God called Abram and isolated him to devote his entire life to God.
- God put the faithful in contrast with the wicked.
- All people and nations are blessed in Christ by Abram.

Abram's descent

The Bible comprises of sixty six books of both the Old and the New Testament. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis the ancient history of creation is told, those that we have already discussed in the previous chapters. The name Genesis means 'origin' or 'birth'. It is important to realise that originally all those first people used the same language and were the same nation. The confusion of tongues (languages) only occurred at the tower of Babel, when God scattered the homogenous group of people (the offspring of Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth). They were disobedient, because they wanted to stay together. God foiled their plans and with the confusion of tongues, they were forced to be different nations with different languages, and they were forced to spread across the earth. After this the book Genesis only provides detail of part of Shem's descendants.

The history of the ancestors starts with Eber, a descendent of Shem. He was the progenitor of the Hebrews. Terah, Abram's father, descended from Eber. Thus, both Abram and his father were Hebrews and they were all descendants of Shem.

Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. Abram married his half-sister, Sarai. Sarai was his father Terah's daughter, but she had a different mother¹. Nahor married his niece, Milcah and Haran had died in his land of birth before his family moved away. Haran had children though: Lot and two

¹ **Genesis 20: 12** "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." KJV

daughters, Milcah and Iscah.

Terah left Ur

The city Ur of the Chaldees was situated on the western banks of the Euphrates River about 200 kilometres from its confluence with the Tigris River and approximately 250 kilometres North West of the Persian Gulf. Terah, a descendent of Shem, with his three sons, lived in the vicinity of that great world City. Terah lived approximately 2000 years before the Birth of Christ (about 4000 years ago). With their visits to Ur, Terah and his family took part in idolatry².

The descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth gradually deviated from God. They no longer knew about the (Protoevangelium) Maternal Promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden and of God's covenant of nature with Noah. God remained merciful and did not forget about His promises. He chose Abram to maintain the true faith in Him. For this reason Abram had to be secluded. God led him to a place of isolation.

Terah settled in Haran

God commanded Abram to depart from Ur. He took his Father (Terah), his wife (Sarai) and his nephew (Lot) with him to Haran in Mesopotamia. Their destination was Canaan, but they had to follow a detour because it was impossible to travel through the Syrian Desert. They had moved in a north westerly direction and reached Haran in Northern Mesopotamia.

The city of Haran was situated along the big caravan route between Mesopotamia in the east and Egypt in the west. Terah decided to stay behind in Haran and there he passed away at the age of 205 years. It was not God's will that he should go to Canaan.

God called Abram to travel further again, because in His decree God reserved Canaan for His people.

The calling of Abram

In Haran God commanded Abram to leave his country, as well as his family to

2 **Joshua 24: 2** "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods." KJV

move to another country, the country God would show him. Together with the command to move, Abram also received a promise from God that he would become a great nation and would be made an important man of distinction. God gave this to Abram as a gift. This blessing had not been restricted to Abram for as blessed, he would also be a blessing to others.

God keeps His promises

God called Abram and isolated his progeny. God did not forsake man nor left him to himself. He visited man and extended Abram's blessing across all generations. God changed the curse, which man brought upon himself and the earth, in and through Abram, into a blessing³. This was an intervening act of God which changed humanity's fate, a divine act of grace that included everything on earth.

In His judgment of the devil, God gave man the (Protoevangelium) Maternal Promise, because He wanted to save His elect. God executed His plan through Abram. This became reality in Christ, the Redeemer. God's blessing to Abram pointed to the promise that Christ would come⁴.

The journey to Canaan

Although Abram did not understand all this, he accepted God's command and promises in obedience. It was a difficult task. One does not easily part from one's country, family and friends and in addition, to an unknown destination. That was what God wanted, because in that way Abram learned to trust in God alone.

In faith and obedience Abram moved without knowing where he was going⁵. Abram had been saved, because he believed⁶. That was the miracle that God created in Abram's heart. God chose Abram and united him with Himself

3 **Galatians 3: 8** "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." KJV

4 **Acts 3: 25** "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." KJV

5 **Hebrews 11: 8** "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." KJV

6 **James 2: 23** "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." KJV

through faith⁷. This wonder of rebirth and faith is raised by the Holy Spirit in anybody that calls upon God.

Abram was 75 years old when he undertook the journey from Haran to Canaan. His wife Sarai and Lot, son of his brother Haran, accompanied him on this journey. The journey progressed very slowly, because the livestock moved that slow. It took several months for the journey of 650 kilometres, between Haran and Canaan, to be completed.

On his way to Canaan Abram crossed the Euphrates River with the help of slaves which he had brought along from Haran. The Euphrates River had only a few permissible fords. He moved past Damascus and made use of the services of Eliezer (a man who was still going to mean a lot to him). Eventually, Abram and his company arrived in Canaan.

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⁷ **2 Chronicles 20: 7** "Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" KJV

9. Abram receives gifts from Pharaoh

Genesis 12: 1 – 20

God kept His promises

In faith and trust Abram left the known for the unknown. God made certain promises to Abram and He honoured the promises He made to Abram. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God is aware of His children's need and will come to their rescue.
- The faithful are not exempted from suffering and ordeals. God is aware of this and still stays true to His promises.
- God protects the faithful even though they have also sinned.

The land of Canaan

The land Canaan appeared on a map of the early Old Testament world, in the centre, among the great countries of ancient times. On the one side was Assyria and Babylon and on the other side was Egypt. Canaan was virtually the centre of the world of that time.

Canaan was a secluded country. To the north were the huge Lebanon Mountains, east and south were the big deserts of Syria and Arabia and to the west the Mediterranean Sea (also known as the Great Sea). God's people could live there in isolation and heathens from neighbouring countries could not tempt them into idolatry.

Much later, with the coming of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, it was easy to spread the gospel from Canaan to all big nations of the world. All main roads led through Canaan (which was later known as Palestine) to all big nations around them.

Abram at Sichem

Abram obeyed God's command and moved to Canaan in faith, without asking any questions. In Canaan he was surrounded by heathens. He was a stranger in a foreign land. He did not know how long he would be there

before overstaying his welcome. He also did not know whether that was the country where was supposed to stay. God then spoke to Abram, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Genesis 12: 7) God gave it to Abram's progeny, but not to Abram himself.

Among the Canaanites (who had already stayed there) Abram was a stranger and a squatter⁸, but he accepted these circumstances in faith⁹. His heart was at peace, because he knew that God was with him. Out of gratitude he built God an altar. Through that gesture he confirmed his faith in the only true God, against that of the heathens and their idols. That was the very first sacred place of God in Canaan.

Abram pitched his tents in Canaan at a large turpentine tree by the name of Moreh, close to the city of Sichem. Moreh means fortune-teller. Moreh apparently served as a 'holy tree' to the Canaanites. They tried to find out from the 'holy tree' what the wishes of their idols were. Centuries later, in the era of Moses¹⁰, the turpentine trees were still there.

Abram travelled through Canaan

Abram knew that his descendants would stay in Canaan, but he and Lot, his nephew still did not have established homes. They lived in tents. They were livestock farmers and owned lots of livestock and were always looking for new pastures.

The next place where Abram and Lot pitched their tents, was in the mountains east of Bethel and west of Ai. Bethel in those days was called Luz¹¹. At Luz Abram built another altar and called on the name of the Lord.

Abram and his company journeyed further to the South to an area known as the Negeb, which means "to be dry" and can also be referred to as a parched region or desert. This means that the rainfall there was very low, and because of the low rainfall there was famine in that parched region of

8 **Genesis 23: 4** "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." KJV

9 **Hebrews 11: 9** "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." KJV

10 **Deuteronomy 11: 30** "Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?" KJV

11 **Genesis 28: 19** "And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first." KJV

the South. Even though Abram was called by God, he experienced the same adversity and setbacks as the heathens around him and therefore he had to persevere in his calling of faith.

Abram moved to Egypt

Abram moved to Egypt to obtain food for his people and livestock. The northern part of Egypt was a very fertile agricultural area and in those days there was an abundance of food, because the Egyptians irrigated their cornfields from the Nile River. The tropical rains of Africa provided water to the Nile River. Abram, a complete stranger depended upon the goodwill of the Egyptians.

Most probably some more inhabitants of Negeb, who also suffered during the famine, accompanied Abram to Egypt. For safety reasons they travelled in large groups. A party of travellers with animals, especially camels, was called a caravan, a general custom in those days. Notes of such a journey of Semites were discovered in tomb paintings. Who can tell, this could have been Abram's caravan.

Abram in Egypt

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, heartily welcomed Abram, but Abram made a serious error in judgment. His wife, Sarai was a beautiful woman and Abram was frightened that Pharaoh would kill him and take her as his wife. He had this fear even before they departed from Haran and there he made Sarai promise that she would pretend to be his sister at every place they arrived¹². Abram reminded Sarai of her promise upon their departure to Egypt. This was not completely untrue. Sarai was his half-sister, because Terah had fathered them both, but they had two different mothers¹³.

They told half a truth, which was as dangerous and wrong, just like a lie. Abram had good reason to fear for his life, because in Egypt it was lawful for the Pharaoh to claim the wife and children of any stranger as his own. In a moment of weakness Abram lost faith in God. He wanted to save his own life and was prepared to sacrifice his marriage to Sarai.

12 **Genesis 20: 13** "And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother." KJV

13 **Genesis 20: 12** "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." KJV

What Abram feared most in his weakness happened. Pharaoh saw Sarai and brought her to his palace. Sarai kept her promise about her true relationship to Abram, to save her husband's life. God brought great plagues upon Pharaoh to prevent him from taking Sarai as his wife. Pharaoh realised that Sarai had been his guest's wife, so he called Abram and blamed him for what he had done. Abram stood embarrassed and ashamed before Pharaoh, an earthly king! That was the result of his lack of faith in God.

Pharaoh sent Abram away

Pharaoh resented Abram because he deceived him and did not want Abram in his country any longer. Pharaoh's men escorted Abram and his people out of the country. Pharaoh did not claim back all the gifts that he had given to Abram and therefore Abram left Egypt wealthier than he had been at his arrival.

Although his visit to Egypt was beneficial to Abram, it had been very careless to tell a lie (the halve truth) like he had done. He exposed his wife to great humiliation and also jeopardised God's promise to him. God prevented Pharaoh from taking Sarai as his wife.

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10. Abram and Lot part ways

Genesis 11: 27 and Genesis 13

God brought separation

In the previous chapter God called Abram. He had to isolate himself from his people by leaving his country. In this chapter the time came for Abram to bid farewell to Lot, his nephew. God's goal was to keep Abram on the right track and his separation point back to Christ. This means that a new beginning had started in one person, Abram, pointing to a new endowment in Christ centuries later. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- We can only share in Christ with the fellowship of the saints.
- The faithful should learn to trust in God alone.
- In the midst of difficult circumstances, God can bless in abundance.

Abram and Lot separated

Abram retreated with the same path as he went with to Egypt, and pitched his tents on the previous stand between Bethel and Hai. The place where his tent had been in the beginning, before he went to Egypt. Abram and Lot's stock multiplied so much that their shepherds started arguing among one another. There was not enough pasture and draw-wells for all the livestock of Abram and Lot. For the sake of peace, Abram suggested that each had to go their own way from there.

Abram, being unselfish, granted Lot the first choice of where to settle down¹⁴. Lot lifted his eyes and saw the fertile Jordan region. The region where Sodom was situated. The inhabitants of Sodom were wicked and great sinners. Lot chose the fertile Jordan area directing towards the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot journeyed east towards the Jordan plains.

Lot could have allowed his uncle Abram to choose first, but he did not. Lot, only thought about his own benefit. He did not realise that the entire country already belonged to Abram's descendants (according to God's promise to Abram). God used the quarrel between the shepherds to separate Abram

¹⁴ **Genesis 2: 8** "And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed." KJV

and Lot. Abram, called by God, alone had to be the bearer of the promise, and that is why the separation had to happen.

God repeated His promise

After Lot departed Abram was completely alone, without any family. He again called on God, like he had done at Sichern. God comforted him and had him look in all directions. The Lord would give his seed (progenies) all the land as far as he could see, and his seed (progenies) would be as much as all the dust on earth. Abram received much more than that which he had left behind. He left his family, and in their place, he received an innumerable large posterity. Abram traversed and observed the entire country and then he pitched his tents at the turpentine trees of Mamre.

It is conspicuous that God repeated His promise of a great posterity when Abram and Lot separated. Abram didn't have children of his own then; he possibly hoped that Lot, his nephew, would be the one who would make this posterity possible. God blessed Abram and that blessing was pledged to the blessing given to the very first people¹⁵. The promise of a big posterity reminds us of Adam who had been commanded to be fertile and multiply.

Lot was led away

A considerable time after Abram and Lot separated, Lot and his company found themselves in extremely dangerous circumstances. Five kings from the Jordan region, among others also the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, had been paying taxes to Chedorlaomer, king of Elam for twelve years. Their cities were situated in the Jordan region, where Lot had pitched his tents up to Sodom.

The five kings rebelled against Chedorlaomer who dominated them. They rebelliously refused to pay any further taxes. In reaction to that Chedorlaomer and his allies had marched against the five rebellious kings and defeated them in the valley of Siddim.

The men of the rebellious kings tried to flee, but disaster struck. The valley was full of slimepits. Some refugees had fallen into these holes, while others fled to the mountains. The hostile kings ransacked Sodom and Gomorrah

¹⁵ **Genesis 1: 28** "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

and took many of the residents as slaves. Among the prisoners of war were Lot, his wife and two daughters.

The Old Testament today is the only source of information where one can still find the names of all the kings of smaller cities like Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim¹⁶. A few years ago excavations in this area confirmed the battle between the five kings on one side and the four kings on the other side. Those were the same cities that were later on destroyed by God¹⁷.

Lot underestimated the covenant with Abram and searched for salvation within himself and the Canaanites. Lot and his company were captured as a result of his own wrong choices.

Abram freed Lot and his family

A refugee informed Abram about Lot's abduction. Although Lot and Abram had separated, Abram did not let Lot down. He immediately, together with his confederates, the three brothers Mamre, Eshcol, Aner and an army of a mere 318 men pursued the large army of Chedorlaomer.

The conquerors, Chedorlaomer and his allies were perfectly calm and never expected any attack. Abram and his army caught up with them in the night at Dan. He divided his men into three groups and attacked Chedorlaomer and his men from different directions. Abram's plan of attack succeeded perfectly. Chedorlaomer's men fled. Abram and his men pursued them to the north of Damascus. Abram freed Lot and all the other captives and recovered all the goods that had been taken by Chedorlaomer.

Abram recovered the stolen goods

On Abram's return trip the kings of Sodom and Salem met him near Jerusalem. They rejoiced in Abram's victory.

The king of Sodom wanted to give the goods that Abram had recovered to him as a reward, but Abram did not accept it. God provided and that, to

16 **Genesis 10: 19** "And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha." KJV

17 **Deuteronomy 29: 23** "And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath." KJV

him, was more than enough. He did not need anything from any human being. God wanted to prevent the king of Sodom from claiming that he had contributed to Abram's wealth.

The king of Salem and priest of God blessed Abram in the Valley of Shaveh, which is the King's dale. (More about this in the next chapter).

Unfortunately Lot did not learn much from all these events. He continued staying in the vicinity of Sodom.

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11. Melchizedek gives Abram bread and wine

Genesis 14: 17 - 24

The inferior blessed by the superior

- Abram implied Christ, but had never been Christ himself. He was the bearer of the promise, but he never brought salvation. For that reason Abram met his superior in Melchizedek. The inferior had to be blessed by the superior. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:
- In God only, man is richly blessed.
- By giving his tenth, man acknowledges God as the Giver of all things.
- Christ is Priest eternally according to the order of Melchizedek.

Abram met Melchizedek

Abram had a remarkable encounter after he had defeated Chedorlaomer and his men. Except for the king of Sodom, the king of Salem (Jerusalem) also met him in the Valley of Shaveh, also known as the king's dale. (Absalom, son of King David, centuries later erected a memorial in this same Valley, just north of Jerusalem, in honour of himself. He no longer had a son to keep his name in remembrance and therefore he named the memorial after himself. It was known as 'Absalom's Place')¹⁸. The encounter between Abram and Melchizedek was very sincere.

This meeting was significant because Melchizedek was a priest of the most High God. It is interesting that this priest-king was not mentioned before in this chapter. This priest-king acted with great dignity and honoured Abram by giving him bread and wine¹⁹. He also blessed Abram.

Like Abram, Melchizedek also believed in God. He was one of the few who still served the true God. He was not only a king but also a priest of God.

18 **2 Samuel 18: 18** "Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place

19 **1 Samuel 25: 27** "And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord."

This made him an exception, because priests in the Old Testament did not serve as kings too. The priest-king Melchizedek indicated Christ. Centuries later Christ did not only sacrifice Himself for our sins, but now also reigns as our eternal King.

After Melchizedek blessed Abram, Abram recognised him as priest of God and gave him a tenth of the loot. By doing this, Abram acknowledged Melchizedek as his superior and he acknowledged God who granted him the victory. Therewith Abram proved that everything, even the recovered goods, in fact belonged to God. In this way God prevented Abram from becoming conceited, because he won the war. Graciously Abram realised that his only value existed in God.

Melchizedek

Some information about Melchizedek is difficult to explain²⁰. The name means king of justice. His city's name was Salem which meant peace. The city of Salem is also called Jerusalem. Melchizedek was king and priest at the same time which was nothing extraordinary in the old Eastern world. There is a difference between the times of the Old Testament and the Old Eastern World. In the Old Testament it was not common for a priest to also be a king, but in the Old Eastern World the king of a country also served as an idol to the priest superior of that country. The God whom Melchizedek served as priest, was called the Almighty God²¹. In other words he was God's priest. He was not the ancestor of a priest generation like all future priests that descended from Aaron (Moses' brother).

There were quite a number of similarities between Abram and Melchizedek regarding their knowledge of God. Both agreed that God was the Creator of heaven and earth. In this pagan country, where Abram was a stranger, there was a king that knew God and served God!

The purpose of the meeting

God used Abram's victory so they (Abram and Melchizedek) could meet each other. For Abram this was an encounter with his superior, because he

20 **Hebrews 5: 11** "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" KJV

21 **Hebrews 7: 1** "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;" KJV

had been blessed by Melchizedek who also accepted his tithes. Melchizedek was a direct representative of God. This meeting encouraged Abram to persevere in his obedience to God.

Melchizedek's priesthood had a remarkable, own order namely the Order of Melchizedek²². According to this order Christ ²³would be the eternal priest. Thus Abram met a man in the King's dale who was a predecessor of the High Priest (Jesus Christ) that would be born 2000 years later from Abram's progeny.

The priesthood of the Jews was present in Abram, for Levi was born of his seed. The progeny of Levi, the Levites, acted as priests in Israel. By doing this they admitted and repented their sins. They themselves deserved death, but killed an animal instead. The animal paid for their sins with its blood. These sacrifices did not pay for their sins but it prophesied the blood of Jesus Christ, who died in our place for all our sins.

Christ, Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek

We read more about the Order of Melchizedek in Hebrew 5: 6-10, Hebrew 6: 20, Hebrew 7: 1, and Hebrew 7: 10-17. The Bible name Jesus Priest for all eternity, according to the Order of Melchizedek. Just like Jesus was king and priest simultaneously, so was Melchizedek. . Nothing is known about Melchizedek's family tree. We know Melchizedek was not an ancestor of Aaron, the first high priest. Jesus did not descend from the priesthood of Levi. Centuries later Jesus Christ descended from the tribe of Judah.

As a priest Christ brought reconciliation on the cross by expiating our sins. The priesthood of Aaron and his descendants expired after Christ had been crucified. Christ is now Priest for all eternity, according to the Order of Melchizedek. This priesthood had also been granted to the faithful, not

22 **Psalm 110: 4** "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." KJV

23 **Matthew 22: 41-46** "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? 46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions." KJV

for the sake of reconciliation, but to devote themselves to God forever²⁴. Melchizedek was consecrated to God.

The priesthood of Aaron is called extraordinary priesthood, because this priesthood had only been temporarily operating for sins committed before Christ's Crucifixion. Melchizedek's priesthood is of much greater value, because it is eternal.

Briefly: Abram was superior to the king of Sodom, because he did not accept anything from him. Abram was inferior to Melchizedek and therefore he was blessed and his tithes accepted.

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²⁴ **1 Peter 2: 9-10** "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." KJV

12. Hagar flees to the wilderness

Genesis 15 and Genesis 16

The God of the covenant

God revealed to Abram what He had meant to him in the covenant between them. To Abram God was everything. God even vouched for Abram because he couldn't do it for himself. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God's promises are always dead certain.
- Man is unable to conclude an alliance with God as an equal partner.
- The right to remove God's anger and judgment on sin, could only be done through Jesus Christ.

God appeared to Abram again

After his meeting with Melchizedek in the King's Valley, Abram return to his home, but he was miserable. He was a stranger in Canaan and felt lonely and forsaken. It did not seem to Abram that God was keeping his promise about his progeny or the promise that the land Canaan would be given to him. He and his wife were old and without any children. Where would the promised descendants that would stay in Canaan come from?

God appeared to Abram once again. It wasn't a dream, he was wide awake. "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." What a joy it was for Abram. He knew the voice of God and he understood what God said to him. There was no reason for worry and fear, because God would protect him against all danger.

This appearance was particularly important because the relation God positioned Abram to Himself, was firmly established in the covenant.

Abram asked for a sign

Abram had always reacted with deeds of faith on God's promises, but he contemplated about the promises and there was uncertainty in his mind. God often referred to the great progeny, but Abram and his wife were childless. He

even considered making his servant Eliezer his heir. However, God assured him that his own son would be his heir.

God showed Abram the stars in a cloudless sky. Abram could not possibly count them. "Thus would be your seed," God told him. It looked impossible to Abram, but in spite of that, he trusted God. It was God who, by grace, bested the faith for him. Thereafter God showed even more mercy.

As a previous example God had used the dust of the earth to refer to Abram's offspring²⁵. This time He used the stars in heaven to explain to Abram how many his descendants would be. Abram believed and was convinced that God would do what He had promised²⁶. This faith of Abram freed him completely of any doubt there might have been²⁷. However, Abram still wanted God to give him a sign. He did not ask this out of disbelief, but to confirm his faith. God's promises are always dead certain.

Covenant Closure

The next day Abram received the sign. On God's command he slaughtered a heifer, a she goat and a ram, each being three years old, a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. He had to divide the animals in two parts, but not the birds. He then laid the two halves of each animal in two parts across each other with a pathway in between. He also laid the two doves across from each other with a pathway in between them.

That was the way people in those day formed alliances. The parties then walked in the pathway between the halves of the animals. This showed that they belonged together, like the pieces of the animals belonged together. Should one party break that alliance, the other party have the right to cut the transgressor into pieces, just as it was done with the animals.

Abram patiently waited on God and had to chase away predators from the slaughtered animals. With sunset Abram fell into a deep sleep and he was overcome with anguish. God appeared to Abram in a dream and repeated His promise that Abram's offspring would inherit Canaan. But they would not get the land immediately. They would first be suppressed in a strange land

25 **Genesis 13: 16** "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." KJV

26 **Romans 4: 21** "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." KJV

27 **Galatians 3: 6** "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." KJV

by strangers for four hundred years. The sins of Canaan's inhabitants would increase with time and God's judgment would eventually come against them. Then only would Abram's offspring be free from suppression to destroy the Canaanites and inhabit Canaan themselves. When Abram heard all that would happen to his offspring, he was sure about God's promise, although he still was childless.

It had already been dark when a smoking oven, from which a flame, like a torch on top moved among the pieces of the animals. Abram knew that God had shown Himself as judge to him²⁸.

Before salvation could be achieved, righteousness had to occur. Christ first had to become human before dying for the sins of man. Without the Crucifixion of Christ, there would be no forgiveness (remission) of sin.

God showed great mercy to Abram. Abram only asked for a sign and gave nothing from his side. Everything came from God and that is why only He could move among the pieces. Everything came from the grace of God. This alliance was a covenant of mercy that God concluded with Abram. Man has never been able to be an equal partner with God. Hagar flees to the wilderness was purely based on God's mercy.

The birth of Ishmael

Abram and his wife Sarai stayed in Canaan for ten years. When moving to Canaan God promised Abram that he would make him a great nation²⁹. This promise brought Sarai great happiness and she was looking forward to having her own son.

After ten childless years Sarai started to doubt about having children of her own. She then decided that Abram should also take Hagar, her slave as wife. Hagar was an Egyptian girl whom Sarai most probably received as gift from the Egyptian king during their stay in Egypt. Sarai's suggestion was made out of scepticism and doubt. Abram accepted this suggestion, which then also made him a doubting Thomas when he took Hagar as his second wife.

28 **Psalms 97: 3** "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about." KJV

29 **Genesis 12: 2** "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" KJV

Hagar despised Sarai

Sarai's plan to give Abram a child through her slave, went completely wrong. Suddenly the pregnant Hagar was no longer content to be Sarai's slave. She was no longer submissive to Sarai and treated Sarai with contempt. Sarai wasn't expecting this at all and she became very angry with Hagar. She treated Hagar badly and Hagar fled from her in the direction of Egypt.

Hagar tried to flee through the desert of Sur on foot. She would have died of starvation. However, she was not alone. God noticed her suffering and paid her a visit when she was resting at a fountain. Although she had been rejected by her mistress, God did not reject Hagar.

God was concerned about Hagar and He sent "the angel of God" to look after her. The angel of God was more than an ordinary angel. The angel spoke as God Himself³⁰. Later on in the Bible there were times that God appeared like this to people. God looked after Hagar and her unborn child in a special way.

Ishmael

God told Hagar to return to Sarai and be humble towards her mistress, then it would go well with her. God also informed Hagar that she would have a son and that his descendants would become a great nation. She had to call him Ishmael. He would be a wild man as a human. That meant that he would be free and unbound when wandering and no one would ever subdue him.

Hagar's heart was filled with joy. God knew about her and cared about her. She named the place Beerlahairoi which means the "Thou God seest me" (Genesis 16: 13). Full of hope and delirious with joy she returned to Abram's tent and told him about her wonderful encounter at Beerlahairoi. At the birth of her son Abram named him Ishmael like God had told him to do. Ishmael was the progenitor of the Arabs.

Abram conceived a child with Hagar in doubt and disbelief. This had far-reaching consequences for his spiritual descendants. The age-long feud between the Jews (descendants of Isaac) and the Arabs (descendants of

³⁰ **Number 22: 22** "And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him." KJV

Judges 6: 11 "And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites." KJV

Ishmael) is ongoing.

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13. Abram gets a new name

Genesis 17

The Almighty God

God Trinity revealed Himself as God Almighty in creation, because what He said, happened. He honoured all His promises. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God fulfil His promises.
- God gives a sign to confirm and strengthen the trust of the faithful.
- God works faith in people's hearts.

God repeated His promise

Thirteen years after Ishmael's birth God appeared to Abram again, when he, Abram, was ninety-nine years old and his wife, Sarai was ninety years old. God repeated His promise to Abram and confirmed His covenant with him, where he, Abram would be the father of many nations and where kings would be born from him. So the Lord changed his name, because his old name, Abram meant exalted father, and his new name Abraham meant father of multitude. God also changed Sarai's name. Her name meant royalty while her new name, Sarah meant princess, for she would become the mother of nations and kings.

Abraham bowed respectfully before God, but he didn't think that Sarai could have children anymore. Sarah had already been ninety and humanly speaking it was impossible to have a baby at that age. He placed his hope on Ishmael: "May Ishmael live before Thee." By doing this Abraham admitted to God that he had been satisfied with Ishmael and that God should fulfil his promises in Ishmael.

Isaac was the promised child

God's message was more distinct than before; the name of Abraham and Sarah's child had to be Isaac. The name Isaac means he laughs, because his parents would laugh of happiness at his birth. God specified the date of birth "over a year at this time". The promise became a reality. Abraham should only keep on believing.

Abraham felt sorry for Ishmael, because he was after all also his son. God comforted him. Ismael would also become a great nation and twelve rulers would be born from his offspring. The covenant however would rest upon Isaac and his offspring and not on Ishmael. Abraham and his descendants had to carry a sign from then on which would distinct them from others, a sign and an authentication that God has made a covenant with them.

The circumcision is implemented

God implemented the circumcision as a sign of the covenant. Abraham and all males in his family, even his slaves, had to be circumcised on the eighth day. The circumcision compelled Abraham and his offspring to live sacred lives to God. The circumcision had to be sustained in Abraham's descendants until the coming of Christ. The circumcision indicated Christ's bloodshed on the cross.

Christening later on replaced circumcision and the act of christening as a sign of the covenant, is also served to the female generation. Christening means much more than circumcision ever did. Circumcision refers to death, which was the punishment for sin, and after the demise of the old person³¹. Baptism refers to the resurrection of the new person in communion with Christ.

The circumcision was the sign and the seal

Somebody who did not apply circumcision had to be annihilated, because he broke the covenant and rejected God. The circumcision connected and obliged Abraham and his descendants to obedience and alliance with God. The circumcision thus was not only a sign but also a seal. Both these confirmed the redemption of sins and righteousness of faith³². Man's heart must also be circumcised. God changes your heart so that you can be His child.

31 **Jeremiah 4: 4** "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings." KJV

32 **Romans 4: 11** "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:" KJV

Three particularly special men visited Abraham

God appeared to Abraham at the turpentine tree at Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent and when he looked up he saw three men standing before him. He received them with great hospitality. All three men, of whom one was God, talked to him. Without knowing it Abraham let God and His angels stay over in his tent³³.

God and His angels had another special assignment after their meeting with Abraham. More about this in the next chapter. They appeared in the shape of men during their visit to Abraham.

Sarah became faithful

Sarah had been preparing food when she heard one of the men, who in fact was God, say to Abraham, “Within a year’s time I’ll come back to you and then your wife Sarah will have a son.” When Sarah heard this she laughed within herself, because she had already been old, too old to have children. God’s promise, however, remained unchanged through the years. This time she also had to hear the promise from God, herself.

Abraham did not hear Sarah laugh and was surprised when God asked him about it. God knew everything, even what Sarah thought. Abraham realised that the Man with him was God and he asked no further questions. Sarah was afraid and denied that she laughed. God reprimanded her, ““Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.” KJV (Genesis 18: 15).

Disbelief and doubt have always been and will always be a sin in the eyes of the Lord. With this brief conversation God deliberately intended to help Sarah believe in His miraculous power. She believed anew and trusted God to fulfil His promise³⁴.

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33 **Hebrews 13: 2** “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” KJV

34 **Hebrews 11: 11** “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.” KJV

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14. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 18 and Genesis 19

God as judge of the whole world

God uphold His law, therefore everything that is not adherent to Him will perish. He will treasure those who live with Him in solidarity. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God made Himself known as Judge who punishes sinful and unrighteous persons.
- Those who desert God are left to their own devices
- God protects the faithful against His wrath.
- God's glory becomes known when He punishes sins.

The destruction / devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah

Abraham's three guests departed in the direction of the Dead Sea (as it is known today). As it befitted a good host, Abraham accompanied his three guests partway to where they could clearly see Sodom, Gomorrah and other cities in the open field. There two of the men (angels) departed and Abraham remained there in the face of the Lord.

God wanted Abraham to know that He intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, because the inhabitants were terribly sinful and wicked. Abraham, from whose offspring the Saviour had to come, had to be notified of this. It was extremely important that Abraham and his descendants should live right and pure before God. They surely would be punished by God if they fell into sin.

Abraham pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah

Abraham began advocating for the conservation of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Shall the Judge of the whole earth do no right? Would the Lord let the righteous who may have been in the cities die with the wicked? Perhaps there were still fifty righteous people in the cities. Would God then not rather spare these cities for the sake of those fifty?"

God assured him that He would spare the cities for the sake of those fifty faithful people. Abraham had gained courage and pleaded further. "Perhaps there were forty five righteous, or forty or thirty or twenty? Or perhaps there were only ten?" So Abraham reduced the number every time and every time God assured him that if there were that many righteous people, the cities would not be destroyed.

Unfortunately there were not ten righteous persons left. God left and Abraham returned to his tent. He had prayed and kept on praying for the righteous and God patiently listened to his prayers. God wants us to pray for the wicked. From this passage we can see that Abraham had already known that God is not only the Creator of heaven and earth, but that He is also the righteous Judge. Abraham's prayers had not been in vain, because his prayers saved Lot and his family.

The angels went to Sodom and Gomorrah

It had already been evening when the two angels (in the shape of men) arrived in Sodom. Their duty was to execute the divine judgement of God. Lot, who stayed with Abraham before, met them at the city gate. He cordially invited them to spend the night at his home but they chose to stay on the public square. Lot knew the wicked ways of the Sodomites and he knew that they would most probably assault the two strangers on the public square. Therefore he insisted that they should stay over at his home, which they agreed to. Just like his uncle Abraham, Lot received them in a friendly and hospitable manner and they dined with him.

News travelled very fast about the two strangers visiting Lot at his home. Even before they went to bed, there was a group of men surrounding Lot's house. These impious men demanded that Lot should hand over the two men so that they could commit abominable deeds to them. Lot had gone outside and locked the door behind him. He addressed these men in a friendly manner. He had been prepared to bring his two daughters instead of the two men outside, as long as they left his guests alone. From Lot's attitude it appears as if he also started to live like the people of Sodom³⁵, otherwise he certainly wouldn't have offered his daughters for them. However, the wicked men of Sodom did not want to know anything about it and charged the door of Lot's home.

³⁵ **2 Peter 2: 7-8** "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)" KJV

With this sinful actions the Sodomites confirmed that they are guilty before God. Through their sinful behaviour and desires, they brought God's judgment upon themselves. God handed them over to their own devices. The two men (angels) pulled Lot inside his house and locked the door. The men then struck the men outside the house of Lot old and young, with blindness so that they could not find the door of the house. Lot had been safely kept from the furious Sodomite men, but not from the disaster that was to follow.

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

The two strangers (angels) then told Lot that they came to destroy the city. Lot, his wife, two daughters and their fiancées had to leave the city to escape God's coming judgment. Lot called his family and informed them about the approaching destruction. They laughed at him thinking that he was joking. The next morning the two men (angels) forced Lot, his wife and two daughters to leave the city immediately. They had to flee to the mountains without looking back and were not allowed to remain standing anywhere in the Jordan region.

Lot didn't know whether he would be able to make it to the mountains and he was then allowed to flee to a small town called Soar. Lot arrived at Soar, behind the mountains of Moab, at sunrise. At that moment the sentence of God erupted over Sodom and Gomorrah. God rained brimstone and fire on the cities. God punished the sinful ways and wickedness of the people. God revealed his divinity, because injustice could not exist before God.

Lot and his daughters was spared, but his wife died. She couldn't part from Sodom and changed into a pillar of salt³⁶. Lot was petrified and fled to the mountains. He and his two daughters went to stay in a cave in the mountains. In that time it was not unusual to life in a cave, and people without refuge lived in caves³⁷. To Lot's two daughters the future did not look too bright; their fiancées died.

Lot's daughters feared that their family would become extinct and to avoid that they committed incest with their father. Later on Lot had a son from each of his daughters.

The son of the older daughter was Moab. He was the father of the Moabites.

³⁶ **Luke 17:32** Remember Lot's wife." KJV

³⁷ **1 Samuel 22: 1** "David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him." KJV

The Moabites were heathens but God also saved Moabite people. Think for instance about the story of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi, an Israelite woman moved back to Judah after her husband and sons passed away in Moab. Ruth was her Moabite daughter-in-law that did not want to let go of her and then moved back to Bethlehem with Naomi. Ruth later on married Boas (David's ancestor).

The son of Lot's younger daughter was Benammi, the ancestor of the Ammon, who were also a heathen nation.

Lot's stay in Sodom brought lots of misery upon him and his house. Although he had known God, he did not want to break completely with the sinful world.

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15. Isaac is born

Genesis 20 and Genesis 21

God confirms His promises

God fulfilled His promises to Abraham in spite of Abraham's doubts about the elderly Sarah giving birth. God honours his promises. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- God helps the faithful when doubt sets in.
- God can create life out of 'death'.
- Outside God's covenant there are only misery and suffering.

Abraham was at Gerar

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Abraham was staying a little longer at the turpentine trees of Mamre, after which he moved with his large flocks to the South to let them graze between Kadesh and Shur. Later on he moved further South for pasture. Eventually he reached Gerar. At Gerar Abraham met the Philistines for the first time, they would centuries later be in warfare with Abraham's offspring.

Abimelech, king of Gerar, was kind to Abraham. The Philistine king liked Sarah a lot because she was pretty despite her old age. He was interested in her, and enquired about her. Abraham and Sarah informed him that they were brother and sister but Sarah was not only Abraham's half-sister, she was also his wife. They kept quiet about that. That was the second time they cheated a king. Abraham was once again afraid, as he was with the Pharaoh of Egypt, that the king would kill him so that the king could marry the beautiful Sarah. Abraham was afraid that he might be killed by the king so that he could take the lovely Sarah as his wife. And again Abraham doubted God's promise and tried to solve his problems on his own with lies.

Abimelech sent for Sarah

A disbelieving Abraham put his wife in a very dangerous and uncomfortable position. Abimelech called Sarah to become his wife. God jumped to Abraham's assistance, because it was important for the redemption plan to continue and the covenant to be kept. After Abimelech and his family became

ill, God appeared to Abimelech in a dream. God warned him that Sarah was a married woman and that he and everybody belonging to him, would die should he have a relationship with her. Abimelech had to send her back and ask Abraham to pray for him in order to stay alive, because Abraham was a prophet. Genesis 20: 7 is the first scripture reference in the Old Testament where somebody is called a prophet; also the only time that Abraham was called a prophet.

Early the next morning Abimelech called Abraham. He blamed Abraham for the lie and gave him back his wife. The king compensated Abraham for what he had done to him by giving him gifts. The king gave Sarah a thousand shekels as acknowledgment that he had acted wrongly. She did not anything to be ashamed of.

After all this Abraham prayed for Abimelech, his wife and slaves and God healed them completely. Abraham had to pray for them to proof that he, like Job³⁸, found approval or favour in the eyes of God. After this Abraham and Abimelech concluded an alliance. He allowed Abraham to keep on staying in his country. This way God provided that Abraham was treated well in a country where he was a complete stranger.

Isaac's birth

God fulfilled the promise He made the previous year at the turpentine trees at Mamre. While in Gerar Sarah became the mother of a son. Sara and Abraham were beside themselves with joy. They both were old, Abraham a hundred years and Sarah ninety. They waited twenty five years for this promise to be fulfilled. It seemed impossible to have their own child after waiting so long, but it eventually happened!

They were sure that their offspring would become a large nation. God kept His promises. Man must believe, even though it seems impossible. Abraham named his son Isaac which means he laughs, the name chosen by God³⁹. He was the son of God's promise. Humanly speaking it was impossible for Sara to have a child at her age, but God determined that she would have

38 **Job 42: 8** "Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job." KJV

39 **Genesis 17: 19** "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." KJV

a baby. God can even command life from death. Therefore Abraham could, with Isaac's birth, see the coming of Christ in which he rejoiced⁴⁰.

Older Ishmael mocked little Isaac

Abraham held a large banquet when Isaac was approximately two or three years old, which was an important day, the day on which Isaac was weaned. Abraham and Sarah was so grateful that Isaac had been growing up so well, because in those days children easily died from a variety of diseases. Unfortunately Ishmael spoiled all the joy at the feast by mocking little Isaac. At that time he was about seventeen years old and he was very envious of Isaac. For many years Ishmael had been Abraham's only child and he prepared himself to inherit all his father's possessions. After Isaac's birth nothing of the kind was going to happen.

Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac and that hurt her, because she believed God's promise that Isaac would be Abraham's sole heir. Therefore she requested Abraham to chase Ishmael and his mother away. She did not want her slave's son to inherit with her son. With this attitude Sarah not only thought about the materialistic, but also the spiritual inheritance; God also thought about that when He gave Sarah credit. Misery awaits those who despise God's covenant.

Ishmael sent away

To Abraham it was hard to chase Hagar and Ishmael away. After all, Ishmael was also his son, and he loved him. He felt that Sarah was wrong. Abraham did not see the contrast between the carnal seed and the seed of the promise as clearly as Sarah did. What is more, Sarah's demand was in contrast with the acceptable behaviour of those days. God told Abraham to listen to Sarah because his offspring would be built by Isaac. God comforted Abraham with a promise that Ishmael would also become a big nation.

The next morning Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away with bread and water. Hagar travelled south and wandered about for days in the desert of Beersheba in the south of Canaan. Later on the bread and water were finished and Ishmael was completely exhausted. He couldn't go any further. Hagar lay him down under a shrub to protect him against the desert sun. She went away from him, because she didn't want to see her child die. She sat down and then burst into tears.

⁴⁰ **John 8: 56** "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." KJV

God saved Ishmael

God saw Hagar and Ishmael's misery and heard the weeping. It was sad but God had mercy. The angel of God called Hagar and opened her eyes so that she could see a draw pit, which was camouflaged by the desert people because it was their most precious possession. The angel was once again an apparition of God Himself.

Hagar hastily filled the water-bag and ran to Ishmael. God kept His promise to Abraham and saved Ishmael. Ishmael married an Egyptian girl and stayed in the wilderness of Paran where his descendants, the Arabs, became a big nation. This is mentioned later on in Genesis⁴¹.

God parted Isaac and Ishmael. They were Abraham's sons, but God's covenant applied only to Isaac and not to Ishmael. Christ would be born from Isaac's descendants. He would bring redemption, not only for Isaac's descendants but also for those of Ishmael and all other nations that believe in Him.

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⁴¹ **Genesis 25: 12 – 18** "Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham: 13 And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, 14 And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, 15 Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: 16 These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. 17 And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people. 18 And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: and he died in the presence of all his brethren." KJV

16. God provides a ram to offer

Genesis 22

God's providence

God provided the sacrificial lamb as settlement for sins. Man was not capable of doing so as a result of his sinful nature. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- Faith is to sacrifice in obedience to God or to do what He asks of you.
- God Himself provided reconciliation by providing the sacrificial lamb.
- The believer can look beyond death through faith.

God put Abraham and his faith to the test

The boy Isaac grew up and was a pleasure to his parents. Abraham and Sarah had waited so long for him that they thanked God continuously for him. They believed that he would become a big nation according to God's promise. God's covenant with Abraham would live on in Isaac. God had always been good to them despite their frequent doubt of His promises.

God gave Abraham an order that made him tremble. He had to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, on the mountain of Moriah. That meant he had to kill Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering. What a terrible mission! Abraham's hope for the future had been in vain. When Isaac should die there would be nothing left of the promised progeny. The worst part was that he had to kill the prospect of a big nation with his own hands.

Abraham could not execute God's order immediately. He took Isaac on a three day journey to Moriah. This was the same mountain on which the temple was built later on. The same country where Jesus Christ, Son of God, would be crucified on Golgotha for our sins. Could it be that God didn't know how much Abraham loved his son? No, God knew because He Himself said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22: 2).

Faith and obedience

We read in the book, Hebrew, what went on in Abraham's mind⁴². Abraham was convinced that God had the power to raise Isaac from death. Abraham was prepared to offer his son in faith and obedience to God. Abraham, Isaac and two servants departed the next morning for Moriah. They took with them a large bundle of wood for the burnt offering. Their donkey must have carried the wood.

The journey progressed calmly and peacefully. Abraham did not speak; he had been battling with his own thoughts. Isaac and the two servants did not know that Abraham had to offer Isaac on God's instructions. They reached the foot of the mountain on the third day. Abraham left the servants and the donkey there. He told them that he and Isaac were going to pray on the mountain and then return. Abraham still firmly believed that Isaac would return with him.

Abraham and Isaac climbed mount Moriah

A very old Abraham and his young son, Isaac, further climbed the mountain. Isaac carried the wood, while Abraham carried the knife and fire (a container with glowing charcoal). Isaac often joined Abraham in offering, but they always had an animal to offer. Isaac was wondering about the offering and asked his father about it. Abraham answered that God would provide the sacrificial lamb.

It appears from Abraham's answer that he and his son surrendered themselves to God's care. He could not understand why God had given him such a difficult task, but he did what was expected from him. He trusted God to take care of everything. Abraham did not tell Isaac that he was the sacrificial lamb. He focused Isaac's thoughts and trust on God. Isaac had to focus on God, only then would he be able to do what was lying ahead.

Abraham was convinced that God would provide, even if it meant that God would raise him from the dead. That was faith in resurrection. In a manner of speaking Abraham received his son back from the dead⁴³. All those events pointed towards Christ's resurrection.

42 **Hebrews 11: 18** "Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:" KJV

43 **Hebrews 11: 19** "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." KJV

Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac

On top of the mountain Abraham built an altar by stacking stones with sand in between. He then placed the wood on the altar and when everything was ready Abraham took Isaac and fastened him on the wood. Isaac did not understand what was going on, but he did not resist and tried to flee. His father told him that God would provide a sacrificial lamb.

The last moment arrived. Abraham took the knife to kill his son when he suddenly heard a voice calling his name. It was the angel of God, and yes, God Himself intervened. That was enough. God did not want people to be sacrificed. Abraham carried this ordeal of God in obedience and he prevailed. Isaac would not die.

God Himself provided the sacrificial lamb

In the bush stood a ram with his horns trapped in the branches. Abraham hastily unfastened his son and offered the ram in his place. The ram was an image of Christ. Like the ram had been offered instead of Isaac, so was Christ sacrificed on our behalf. God provided the sacrificial lamb for our sins.

God put Abraham to the test. He wanted to see how Abraham would react to this difficult demand. Abraham learned that the covenant also demanded settlement for sins, even if it might have led to Isaac's death. Abraham was obedient, and this was procured by God Himself: "Now I know that you fear God!"

The death of Abraham and Sarah

After the event on Moriah, Abraham stayed a while longer in Beersheba. Then he moved to Hebron where Sarah passed away at the age of one hundred and twenty seven years. She was the only woman in the Bible whose age was mentioned. Abraham buried her in the cave of Machpelah, which he had bought from Ephron. That was the first piece of land in Canaan that belonged to Abraham and that was a sign that his descendants would own the land.

It is clear that through faith Abraham looked past the grave of Sarah. She never received part of the country that God had promised, but from her descendants Christ the Saviour, would be born. This way we as children of God, are comforted. Those who die before us, form part of God's covenant

people who would be in heaven with Christ. What a comfort this is!

After Sarah's death, Abraham lived for another forty three years. He saw the sons of Isaac and Rebekah grow up. Abraham lived to a great age. Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the same cave as Sarah. Later on Isaac and Rebekah, as well as Jacob and Leah, were also buried in this cave.

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17. John the Baptist

Luke 1

God's promise fulfilled

The promise that God gave to his people was fulfilled with the Birth of Jesus Christ. The promise included the pardon of sins through the advent of Jesus Christ (the second Adam), in this way the relationship between man and God could be restored. All prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah.

- God's Word is trustworthy.
- The Messiah came and fulfilled the "Protoevangelium" also known as the first prophesy of Christ's advent
- God remained faithful to his promises

The Gospels

The Greek word for gospel means good news or good tidings. The four gospels in the Bible indicate the good news of redemption. The Old Testament prophesied the advent of Christ because Jesus Christ would come to bruise the snake's head (Genesis 3: 15). The Old Testament was the preparation, the foundation of the New Testament. The first Christians had the Old Testament as their Bible. The history of Jesus Christ and His words were originally spread by word of mouth through His apostles. It was only about 70 years after Christ and even later before the written story of Jesus was put on record in the first four books of the New Testament. Therefore it says in the Bible the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The four evangelists (writers of a Gospel), under the leadership and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put the words and deeds of Jesus Christ on record. The record-keeping (writing down) occurred from their own point of view and initially they wrote to a specific person or specific groups of people. Matthew wrote his gospel for the Jews, Mark wrote his for the oppressed Christians in Rome, Luke wrote his gospel to Theophilus so that he could know "the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1: 4). Luke's gospel was thus for the Christians from the heathenism. John's gospel wanted to indicate that Jesus was, in all His words and deeds, the

revelation of God.

For that very reason God used these four evangelists so that we could get a more complete picture of Jesus Christ¹. The recording of the evangelists were faultless, true and infallible, because they worked under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The four gospels can be divided into two groups, namely on the one side Matthew, Mark and Luke and on the other side, John. The first three gospels corresponds in the use of certain words and sequence of events, while it differs in the gospel of John. The first three gospels are called synoptic gospels. The word is derived from the Greek word 'synopsis' which means review .They describe the history of Jesus from a certain point of view and they are similar to a large extent. Of the 661 verses found in Mark, 600 of those verses are part of the contents of the gospel of Matthew and 350 of those verses occur in the gospel of Luke.

John concentrated less on the history of Jesus, because the history of Jesus has already been described by the three older gospels. In the gospel of John certain events not mentioned in the first three gospels are included, for example the events at the marriage at Cana and when Jesus lectures Nicodemus.

The description of Christ in the respective gospels

The different evangelists described the words and deeds of Jesus Christ while on earth in their own way, each with a distinctive colour and character.

Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew is mainly written from a Jewish point of view. The author used expressions that were familiar to the Jews of that time like "kingdom of heaven," "outer darkness" en "weeping and gnashing of teeth" Matthew was familiar with the customs and institutions in Palestine and emphasised Jesus's Jewish heritage and ethnic allegiance. Although Matthew focused on the Jews, it was clear that Jesus came to deliver all of mankind from their sins and certain death, and not only the Jews.

Mark

1 **2 Peter 1: 21** "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." KJV

Those, to whom Mark wrote, were mainly the Christians in Rome. They were heavily persecuted because they refused to worship the emperor and statues of the different gods. Mark portrayed Jesus to the persecuted Christians in his gospel as the big Sufferer, the Son of man who Himself had been deeply humiliated. He also emphasised that Jesus, as Son of God, performed miracles. This also had to comfort those readers who had been persecuted, punished and pursued. In their suffering they remained the property of the powerful Jesus.

Luke

In his gospel Luke wanted to convince the heathens that Jesus Christ truly was the Son of God. Luke was a medical doctor and he saw Jesus as the big merciful Physician. Jesus did not only heal souls, but bodies too. Luke described Jesus's salvation work for all people, races, classes and nations. Luke emphasised that Jesus (a Jew) involved Himself with the Samaritans, the heathens, the tax collectors and the sinners. The Jews of that time despised all non-Jews (gentiles) and did not socialise with them. Luke stated it clearly that Jesus was different; He was merciful and focused on all people.

John

John's Gospel focuses on the big divine deed of God with the incarnation of Jesus and what His incarnation meant to people. According to John the incarnation of Jesus was a deed of love. Therefore John recorded the words and deeds of Jesus which were focused on love. John described Jesus as Life, Light (in darkness) and Truth which confirms Him as Redeemer.

God destined it so that different authors described the life and work of Jesus in the four Gospels. Each evangelist (gospel writer) saw the history of Jesus during His earthly stay from a different perspective and recorded it accordingly. The different approaches give a complete description of Jesus Christ.

Each gospel started in a different way

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John started his gospel before Creation. His gospel started in eternity, before time began.

The Word was there already. In this way he distinguished himself from the

other gospels. Mark started his narrative by referring to the prophecies. According to those prophecies a messenger would prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Matthew recorded the genealogical register of Jesus to Abraham, the parcener of the promise. (Hebrews 11: 8 – 9) Luke went even further back with the genealogical register to Adam, father of all man.

All the evangelists testified of Jesus' Devine origin. Matthew and Luke confirmed through the family tree history that the Jesus Child was more than an ordinary human being. With the birth of Christ, God's eternity entered the time of man.

In the beginning was the Word

John started his gospel with words referring to Genesis 1: 1 namely, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". Just as God brought forth creation at the beginning of time, He procured a new beginning through a re-creation. During this re-creation the Word became flesh (man) and entered time to become part of the history of man. The Word became man and came to dwell among us.

John was an eyewitness of the incarnated Word and he exulted "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1: 14). The Word was already there in the beginning of creation. The Word, just like God already existed eternally. The glory of God was introduced by the Word at the creation, in all His power and majesty. The Word, as Mediator at the re-creation, revealed his glory in grace and truth. The Word also introduced His Father to us.

The birth of John the Baptist is announced

The history of the New Testament started in the temple of Jerusalem. In the heart of the Old Covenant the New Covenant originated. At that time there were many priests in Jerusalem; therefore each priest had the privilege to put the incense-offering on the altar, only once in their lifetime. Early every morning they would cast the lot to appoint the priest who would have the privilege that day to put the incense-offering on the altar. The old priest, Zacharias (his name meant "God remembers") like all other priests, was looking forward to the day that he would be appointed, which eventually happened.

It was quiet and dark in the sanctuary. Zacharias stood at the incense-offering altar and after he laid the fragrant perfumes on the coals and completed the prescribed prayer, he turned around. Before him, to the right of the altar stood the enlightened form of an angel. He was very frightened, but the angel Gabriel comforted him. He told Zechariah that God answered his prayer and that his wife Elizabeth would have a son. The little boy would bring them great joy.

John would be a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a Jew that devoted himself to God. Such a person promised not to shave, use liquor or any vine products and not to touch any dead (deceased) (Numbers 6). Samson and Samuel of the Old Testament were also Nazarites. The Holy Spirit would fill John so that he would become a powerful prophet, as fervent as Elijah. People would be converted by him to become children of God again. John would be the precursor or forerunner of the world's Saviour, as predicted by the prophet Malachi long before².

The reaction of Zechariah and Elizabeth

Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth were very old and decrepit, therefore it was hard to believe that they would have a child and so Zacharias asked for a sign. Gabriel "man of God" has already conveyed messages from God to Daniel twice before, about the coming of the Messiah. Gabriel was God's reliable messenger. Zacharias shouldn't doubt His word. It was a sin to be so sceptical. The angel Gabriel gave Zacharias a sign but at the same time that sign also served as punishment for disbelieving. Zacharias would be struck with muteness, and would remain mute until the birth of his child.

In the meantime the people waited outside longer than usually. When Zechariah eventually appeared, he immediately stretched out his hands to bless them, but he could not. He was mute, exactly like Gabriel said!

The Birth of Christ is announced

In Nazareth, a small town in southern Galilee lived a girl, Mary, who was of high descent from the family of David. One day a man came to her. Unlike Zacharias she was not frightened although it was the angel Gabriel who also appeared to Zacharias. He greeted her in a special way but this strange

² **Malachi 3: 1** "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." KJV

greeting upset her. Gabriel comforted her and told her that she would become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and she should name him Jesus. This was a meaningful name. The Greek name Jesus and the Hebrew name Jeshua or Joshua, meant saviour or redeemer. This refer to somebody who would save the oppressed and give them a place. Joshua for instance led Israel from the oppression in the desert to the spacious Promised Land.

Mary's Son would be called Jesus, because he would lead His people from the bonds of sins to the freedom of God³. Jesus would also be called the Son of the Most High. He would introduce Himself in such a glorious way to the people that they would call Him Son of God. He was indeed the Son of God because He came forth from God and is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and therefore He is also God⁴.

The angel Gabriel told Mary that her Son would be forever King. In Him all prophecies concerning the Messiah would be fulfilled⁵. "How is it possible?" she asked in astonishment. The angel replied that the Holy Spirit would move like a cloud or a shadow over and through her. The Holy Spirit would conceive the child in her. How was she supposed to believe all this? She remained silent and just accepted everything. She never asked for a sign like Zacharias did, but the angel gave her one. The sign was the fact that Elisabeth her cousin was pregnant at a very old age. God worked a miracle in Elizabeth and He would do the same with Mary.

Mary visited Elizabeth

At once Mary left Nazareth to visit her cousin Elizabeth who lived in a small town in Judaea. A wondrous encounter happened between the two cousins. The unborn John moved in his mother's womb just as Mary entered the house, and Elizabeth then greeted her cousin in a rather unfamiliar way. She referred to Mary as the mother of the Lord. And Mary? She laud and praised God for highly honouring her, a meek and lowly person, by choosing her to be the mother of His Son.

3 **Matthew 1: 21** "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." KJV

4 **John 1:1** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." KJV

5 **Daniel 7: 13 – 14** "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." KJV

An angel of God appeared to Joseph

With her return to Nazareth, Mary could no longer hide her pregnancy. Her biggest concern probably was to explain to Joseph, her fiancé that she was not unfaithful to him. An engagement in those days was regarded as a firm bond between two people. It was equal to a marriage although the couple still lived separately. Breach of promise by a fiancé was as bad as committing adultery.

To Joseph this was a serious problem and embarrassment, because as her fiancé he had already been called her husband. He was a pious person and lived according to the prescriptions of the law. He did not want to marry her anymore, but he also did not want to make her transgression public, that would lead to public disgrace and embarrass her. Therefore he considered to use his right as a man and to hand her a letter in the presence of two witnesses, which would break off the engagement.

While Joseph had been battling with that idea, through a dream God brought the light of truth into Joseph's heart. An angel of God appeared to him telling him that the child in her womb had been conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The angel gave Joseph an instruction

Joseph received the instruction to name the Boy Child Jesus. Joseph knew that name meant "Redeemer" but now he also understood that this Child would "redeem His people of their sins". No man can take away someone else's sins, only God can do that⁶. This Child thus was a Godly being that was conceived supernaturally. The angel also told Mary to name the Child Jesus. She would also tell this to Joseph, because from the mouth of two witnesses, reliable proof is delivered.

Joseph was reminded of Isaiah's prophetic words⁷. It must have been very difficult for Joseph to accept the fact that a virgin (a woman without a husband) could become pregnant. Therefore the angel Gabriel referred Joseph to the words of Isaiah. This miracle that a virgin would become pregnant was exactly the sign of the advent of the Messiah. The name of the

6 **Psalms 49: 7, 8 and 9** "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: 8 (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever :) 9 That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption." KJV

7 **Isaiah 7: 14** "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." KJV

Child, according to Isaiah, would be Immanuel, in other words “God with us”. This prophecy came to fulfilment through the Virgin Mary.

The birth of John the Baptist

Elisabeth and Zechariah’s promised son was born in the meantime. Zacharias was still mute. He was deeply ashamed of his scepticism. They circumcised the baby on the eighth day. There were guests who came to congratulate them, but Zacharias sat aside because he was mute.

Those present contemplated about the child’s name. . They reckoned that he should get his father’s name. Elisabeth insisted that his name should be John. Those present approached Zacharias to hear his decision. Zacharias then wrote on the writing (wax) table, the stationery of those days: “John is his name.”

From that moment Zacharias could speak again. He praised God for sending His Son to this world to redeem Israel. In his song he also sang about his son John, who will be the forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. With the help of the Holy Spirit he prophesied about his own child. John would be called a prophet of the Most High, the precursor of God. He would call the people to repentance and to the rising Light⁸.

Nothing is told about John’s childhood days and youth, except that he had grown up and became strong in spirit. It is believed that he isolated himself in the vicinity of the Dead Sea later on. There he stayed in seclusion until he started preaching.

God sent a forerunner or precursor for the Saviour. That was John the Baptist and he would announce the advent of the Messiah. After several hundred years in which God did not reveal Himself directly to His people, the heavens opened again! God turned Himself to His people in a special way by sending them the promised Messiah.

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- De Graaf, S.G. 1935. Verbondsgeschiedenis: Schetsen voor de vertelling van de Bijbelse Geschiedenis. Het Nieuwe Testament Deel II. Kampen: Kok, J.H. 5-9.

8 **Matthew 11: 9** “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.” KJV”

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18. Joseph and Mary on their way to Bethlehem

Matthew 1: 18 – Matthew 2: 23 and Luke 2

God the Son became man

With the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God became man (a human being) in the true sense of the word. He had to become man, because only a human without any sins could bear to undertake all the sins of mankind. This chapter focuses on the following main ideas:

- The love God have for His children.
- Jesus Christ was truly human.
- God's promises were fulfilled.

The love of God

God's promises, that a Redeemer and Saviour would be born from the offspring of the woman, and that this Redeemer and Saviour would bruise the serpents head, were fulfilled with the birth of His Son. The pious persons (pietists) of the Old Testament fervently looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Everything that happened prior to and everything to do with the birth of Christ, went forth from God on the appointed time. God used normal people, in normal places with normal circumstances to introduce his plan of salvation.

God explained that he loved the world so that His Son had to leave heaven⁹. The incentive being love! Jesus's complete surrender to his calling is also due to his love for man. He left heaven (where he was surrounded with magnificence and majesty), laid down his glory and descended into human nature. Jesus was born in unhygienic and poor circumstances in a stable in Bethlehem.

During his residence on earth He was extremely humiliated. He was

⁹ **John 3: 16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." KJV

misunderstood, renounced, persecuted, beaten, slandered, derided and crucified, to save mankind from sin, ruin and death.

Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem

Caesar Augustus, from Rome, issued an order that a census in the whole Roman Empire had to be incorporated. The evangelist, Luke, indicated the year the census was incorporated was when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Such a census survey was an enormous venture that took a lot of organizing. In current times thousands of enumerators are sent to all the houses in the country, but in Biblical times it worked differently, the Jews clung to their kinship and therefore thousands of family heads travelled through Israel to their tribe's village to be enrolled.

Joseph and Mary travelled for approximately three days from Nazareth, their home town in the north, to Bethlehem. Bethlehem lies south of Jerusalem and it had been designated centuries earlier as the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Saviour¹⁰. After their tiring journey they could not find room in any Inn in Bethlehem. The words of John, that there were no place for him amongst his kinsmen, already came true at that early stage¹¹. Joseph and Mary, tired and discouraged, finally found a stable where they could rest for the night.

The baby Jesus, the Saviour of the whole world, was born in a stable, in some sort of courtyard. Mary wrapped Jesus with swaddling clothes which she brought with her from Nazareth. Up until then nothing of the Son of God's magnificence was seen, instead his pregnant mother only experienced difficulty. She had to walk very far and sometimes she could ride on the back of a mule while she endured discomfort and inconvenience. Later she gave birth to Jesus on a straw pellet and laid Him in a manger.

The shepherds of Bethlehem

God announced the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, from the heavens, but it was not announced to esteemed people or high priests. No, God announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds out in the fields, humble people like the shepherd son, David.

10 **Micah 5: 2** "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." KJV

11 **John 1: 11** "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." KJV

An angel appeared to the shepherds, while they sat under the night sky around their fire, keeping watch over their flock. Suddenly they were surrounded by bright light, the glory of God shone around them. They knew that this light, was not from earth. This light that surrounded them was the light of God, the same light that guided the Israelites through the desert as a cloud¹². It was also the same glory which filled Solomon's temple during the inauguration¹³. The angel told the frightened shepherds: "The Saviour was born", and the angel gave them a sign from which to identify Him. This sign was completely different from what they were expecting. The Messiah was not in a fancy house, but in a stable, and they would find the Baby Jesus covered in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Thus the Messiah was accessible to poor and humble people from the very beginning.

After this message from the angel, the shepherds saw a multitude of angels in heaven and heard them praise God: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The birth of Jesus was a Devine act of mercy, for He was the way to salvation for sin. God expressed his delight in mankind through the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that is why all the praise, honour an

The shepherds immediately went to Bethlehem, because the angel told them about the Child in the manger. They bowed down to the Child and told Joseph, Mary and the bystanders what they experienced in the fields. The bystanders and Mary were surprised and the shepherds left with great joy in their hearts. They praised God for all they have seen and experienced.

Jesus is circumcised

There always was great joy with the birth of a son in a Jewish family. The parents would carefully follow the specific prescripts of the law. Jesus was with his birth also under this law and therefore he had to be circumcised¹⁴. This happened on the eight day after His birth. The circumcision had a dual meaning for the Israelites, firstly as a seal of the covenant that God had with Abraham and secondly as the assurance that God would give all the benedictions of the covenant to the baby.

12 **Exodus 16: 10** "And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud." KJV

13 **1 Kings 8: 11** "So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD." KJV

14 **Galatians 4: 4** "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," KJV

The circumcision placed both the parents and the child in a commitment to God. The parents were to faithfully educate the boy about the Law of Moses; and then later the boy had to voluntarily obey the provisions of the Law of Moses and all the statutes thereof, and for Jesus the circumcision had the same dual meaning. Firstly Jesus's circumcision assured Him of God, His heavenly Father's loyalty and secondly His circumcision placed Jesus under the obligation to obey the provisions of the law. No man has ever been able to obey the provisions of the law, Jesus accomplished exactly that which no man could do, in order to become the perfect end of the law for us¹⁵.

The naming also took place at the circumcision and His parents named the baby Jesus, in obedience to the angel's command. After the circumcision they lived peacefully in Bethlehem for the next thirty three days. According to the law they took the baby Jesus to the temple when he was forty-one days old, to offer a sacrifice to God for their Son ¹⁶ and Mary went to the temple for her purification.

Simeon

After Joseph and Mary completed the prescribed acts concerning the redemption of the firstborn and purification of the mother according to the Law of Moses, they lingered for a while. Among the people, they met two remarkable senior citizens, first they met Simeon (hearing) and thereafter they met Anna (mercy). Luke, the evangelist, does not give information about the elderly Simeon's life, but he was evidently well known in Jerusalem and according to Luke, Simeon expected the consolation of Israel. Simeon was righteous, pious and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Simeon received the assurance that before his death, he would see the Lord's Christ and thus Simeon lived with the expectation that the time was near. He was restless in his longing for the coming of the Messiah. One day the Holy Spirit led him to the temple with the prospect that he would experience something wonderful there. He immediately realised that Mary's Baby was the long awaited Jesus Christ. Simeon did not know this on his own, the Holy Spirit opened his eyes. He praised God, because the promise was fulfilled and he now was prepared to die in peace. His eyes saw the salvation of the Lord, the beatitude that

15 **Romans 10: 4** "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." KJV

16 **Numbers 18: 15** "Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem." KJV

God prepared for his people. He also realised that the words of Isaiah were fulfilled, in that a light has gone up to the relief of the nations¹⁷. It would be to the glory of Israel, because those from the peoples who would become partakers of the light, would know that the Messiah came from Israel.

After Simeon praised the Lord, he looked at the mother, and it was as if he knew that Joseph wasn't the father of the Child, but that Mary was the mother, through a miracle of God. He placed the Child in her arms, lifted his hands and blessed them with his prophetic words that the Child "...is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." KJV Luke 2:34-35).

Anna

Shortly thereafter, Joseph, Mary and the Child met another elderly lady, Anna. She was the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser, and she was an 84 year old widow who served God. She married when she was a young girl, but her husband died after seven years of marriage, and she never remarried.

Every day Anna was at the temple, where she prayed and fasted, and sometimes she continued herewith well into the night. She was known as a prophetess, and occasionally God revealed his favour through her. She also saw the young couple with their firstborn and she praised the Lord for the birth of the Messiah. Quite a few pietists had a great longing for the coming of the Messiah, and Anna gave them the good tiding, the day of salvation arrived.

Wise men from the East

It cannot be determined with certainty exactly how long Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem with the Child, but it is estimated that it was around two years. During the reign of King Herod the Great, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem and they enquired about the birth of the new King of the Jews. They explained that they saw his star in the East and came to worship him. This enquiry about the birth of the King of the Jews caused a major commotion in the city of Jerusalem.

¹⁷ **Isaiah 49: 6** "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." KJV

The wise men's enquiry also reached the ears of King Herod, and he immediately became suspicious and jealous, because Herod was an appointed king. The birth of the true king caused Herod to be greatly troubled, and he did not tolerate any opposition. He even murdered some of his own sons, and that is why he wanted to quickly obliterate the new threat to his throne.

After his meeting with the wise men, Herod realised that this enquiry from the wise men, was about the long awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ. Herod then convened with the chief priests and scribes to find out where the Messiah would be born, and they consulted the Holy Scriptures. They found the answer in Micah, Christ would be born in Bethlehem in Judaea¹⁸. With this information, Herod then called the wise men for a private meeting because he wanted to know how long it has been since they saw the star the first time. That would give him an indication as to when the Child was born. He then told them that the King of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem, and he also want to pay homage to the Child. He gave the wise men the instruction, as if they were in his service, to find out exactly where the Child was and to then come and tell him.

Wise men visit Jesus

Herod well devised evil plans but God thwarted his plans. The wise men travelled in a southerly direction to Bethlehem and to their great joy they saw the star again, which guided them to a house in Bethlehem where they found Mary and the Child. They bowed down before Him and paid tribute to Him. They presented Him with treasured gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The meaning of these gifts are explained in different ways. Gold was the symbol of terrestrial radiance, splendour and magnificence. Frankincense represented a meek and lowly heart and myrrh served as an image to God's loving kindness. The visit of the wise men was of particular significance, because they were representatives of the heathen peoples of the world. The pagan peoples celebrated Jesus Christ and they acknowledged His Kingship over all nations.

The wise men followed the star and found the light of Christ, and in doing so

¹⁸ **Micah 5:2** "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." KJV

the prophecy regarding the light that would rise for the peoples, was fulfilled¹⁹. Their gifts served as a sign and fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies concerning the tribute that the heathen peoples would bestow upon the God of Israel²⁰.

Joseph flees to Egypt with Jesus and his mother

Again, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and he told Joseph that he should flee to Egypt with Mary and the Child, because King Herod wanted to kill Him. Joseph immediately made the necessary arrangements and left without delay. The prophetic words of Hosea are fulfilled this way according to Matthew²¹.

Herod soon realised that the wise men easily outwitted him, and it made him furious. Based on the information he obtained from the wise men about the appearance of the star, he calculated that the Child could not be older than two years. Herod gave without any hesitation the order, that all male children two years and younger and who lived in the vicinity of Bethlehem, had to be executed. These were the boys of his own people, but no deed was too vile for him, if it meant that he would keep power of his reign.

The soldiers had to execute this vile act against humanity, killing hundreds of innocent baby boys with their swords.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus's return to Nazareth

It is unknown how long and exactly where Joseph and Mary lived in Egypt. We assume that they lived there for at least six months, although it could be longer. An angel brought them the tidings of the death of Herod the Great and ordered Joseph to return to his country, and without delay Joseph made the trip home.

They probably wanted to return to Bethlehem, but when they crossed the border, they received some unsettling news. Herod the Great divided his

19 **Isaiah 60: 2-3** "2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." KJV

20 **Numbers 24: 17** "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." KJV.

21 Hosea 11: 1 "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." KJV

kingdom between three of his sons. One of his sons was Archelaus but he didn't have a good name among his subjects. Thus when Joseph and Mary realised that Archelaus were the new king of Judaea, they were unsure of what they should do.

God did not leave them with this uncertainty, because in a dream God told Joseph to rather go to Galilee. Another more sensible son of Herod, namely Herod Antipas, reigned there, and after a long absence they returned to Nazareth.

Boy Jesus in the temple

According to Jewish custom, a twelve year old boy was able to participate in the festivities and therefore when Jesus was old enough, He accompanied his parents to the Passover in Jerusalem. The duration of the festivities lasted about seven days. After the third day, Joseph and Mary returned but the boy Jesus stayed, unseen, behind in the temple. He joined a group of people who rallied around a rabbi (Jewish teacher) and sat a whole day in one of the temple's passageways to ask the rabbi about religion. For three days their conversations continued and those present were surprised by Jesus's wise and insightful questions and comments.

Joseph and Mary were unaware that Jesus visited the temple. They already started their return journey (probably already after the third festive day), and were part of a big departure to the North. They were with family and acquaintances and under the impression that Jesus was with someone in the trek.

That evening they realised that Jesus was not with them on their return journey. Overcome with dismay they returned to Jerusalem. They searched everywhere for Him, but without success. Finally they searched at the temple and found Jesus there, where a group of people stood and listened to Him.

The moment his mother Mary, reproached Him, Jesus answered her that He must busy himself with his Father's things. Even though Jesus was only twelve years old, He knew that He was the Son of God, which is why He wanted to be in the temple (the House of God). He left with Joseph and Mary to return to Nazareth and was submissive to them.

Joseph trained Him to be a carpenter and to produce furniture, yokes, stairs

and roof beams from wood and nails. In Mark 6:3 we read that Jesus later also became a carpenter. In the Bible we learn that He grew in wisdom. Jesus thus was a special child: clever, wise and without sin. He grew up to be a strong and healthy man. He increased in favour and grace with men and also with God. His neighbours and acquaintances were very kind to Him and most people loved Him because He was always kind, friendly and willing to help everyone.

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19. John wears a robe of camel hair and eats locusts and wild honey

Matthew 3 to 4; Mark 1:1 – 11; Luke 3 to 4 and John 1:15: 34.

Preparing for Jesus's Tenure

- John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus's tenure. Through his and Jesus's actions it became clear that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and the Saviour. Jesus would deliver humanity from their sins. In this chapter we are going to focus on the following main ideas:
- Jesus, the anointed was baptised with the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus assumed his tenure as Messiah.
- Jesus resisted all enticements.

John the Baptists Childhood

As a child Jesus lived in the North, in a city called Nazareth and when He grew up He became an accomplished carpenter. John the Baptist lived with his parents in the Southern parts of Judaea, on the border of the desert. There John "grew and became strong in Spirit", although early on in his life he moved to the desert because God prepared him there for his particular lifework.

John had a life full of hardship in the wilderness, and luxury was a novelty for him. He wore a rugged raiment (garment) of camel's hair with a leather girdle around his loins (waist). His appearance is reminiscent to Elijah's²². His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey.

John the Baptist was Jesus's forerunner and precursor

In the old days, when a king went somewhere, one of his subjects went on before him. This subject would then blow loudly on a trumpet to announce that the king was on his way. This forerunner was called a herald. John

22 **2 Kings 1: 8** "And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite." KJV

the Baptist was the forerunner (herald) for Jesus, the heavenly King who came after him. John prepared the way for the Lord Jesus with his fervent preaching. He was the crying voice of which Isaiah prophesied centuries before²³.

God appointed John with this vocation and prepared him for this in the wilderness. In the tranquil silence of the desert John was receptive for the great thoughts God laid in his heart. John's way of life and his appearance (a raiment of camel's hair with a leather belt) were strange and that is why people from far and wide came to the desert to see John the Baptist and to listen to his captivating sermons.

The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand

John's preaching can be summarised with the words "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3: 2). The crowd listened intently to this potent and powerful preacher about the Kingdom of Heaven. They knew the expression well, but they expected the future Messiah to free them from the Romans (their oppressors). They believed the Messiah would forcibly submit all the peoples of the world to Jewish power and that the Jews would reign forever over all the other peoples in the world. John however told them a different story. The Kingdom of Heaven wasn't an earthly kingdom under the reign of the Jewish people, it was a heavenly and spiritual. And it was opened to believers all over the world.

If someone wanted to become a citizen of this heavenly realm, he or she had to convert. They had to start a new live and if a Jew did not want to convert, it would not help him to appeal to his ancestor, Abraham. According to John, the Messiah would be a Judge and as a Judge He would pluck the wicket and unconverted, as a gardener would cut trees that bear no fruit. Like the farmer, the Messiah would separate the wheat (the believers) from the chaff (the wicket) and just like the farmer who would burn the chaff, the wicket will burn eternally in an infernal, hellish fire.

What should these people do?

The crowds were overwhelmed with John's message and they anxiously asked "if the kingdom of heaven is at hand, what is expected of us?" John gave them the same answer every single time, they had to convert. He

²³ **Isaiah 40: 3** "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." KJV

emphasised that they must love all people in need and he warned them that those who act unlovingly towards their neighbour, would receive a terrible judgment from God. He urged the tax collectors to not steal from the community, and he advised the soldiers that they had to be satisfied with their wages and not extort money from defenceless people. John indignantly called the Pharisees “generation of vipers” because they pretended to be pious and godly, but they did not treat their fellow man with love and justness. They would experience the inevitable judgment of God.

The crowds were baptised by John

The crowd who gathered at the Jordan knew about the practises and procedures when being baptised. At that time baptism was usually served to the gentiles who accepted the Jewish faith. John proclaimed the baptism from conversion to remission of sins. In the water of the Jordan John baptised the people with immersion. This ceremonious action had two notions, firstly baptism was a sign of purification and cleansing that through the grace of God, already took place in the heart of the person being baptised. Secondly baptism was a symbolic act of the death of the old sinful life and the resurrection of a new life.

People flocked from all corners of the land to listen to John’s message and to be baptised. Some even wondered if he himself were the Messiah, but John stopped those rumours and declared: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3: 11). In comparison with Jesus, John was only a humble servant, and the baptism he served was only done with water. On the other hand Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire to cleanse man’s innermost being from sin.

We don’t know if there were any Pharisees and Sadducees baptised by John. We do know that the Pharisees and Sadducees informed the Jews in Jerusalem about John’s preaching, because the Jews in Jerusalem send a committee to John to question him. “Who art thou? ... What then? Art thou Elias? Art thou that prophet?” (John 1: 19-21). John answered a definite no to all these questions. The committee was embarrassed because they did not know what their feedback to their leaders in Jerusalem should be. John’s only answer was “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord,” (John 1: 23).

Jesus is baptised by John

John the Baptist was busy baptising people at Bethabara beyond Jordan. Bethabara means place of crossing. After a long journey from Nazareth Jesus arrived there one day. Jesus was thirty years old. Jewish Rabbi's never spoke publicly before their thirtieth birthday and Jesus respected this custom.

God prepared Him in a particular and special way for this great task. It started when John the Baptist baptised Jesus. John was unwilling to baptise Jesus, because he thought: "How can I, a sinner, baptise the Lord Jesus who is perfect and without sin?" Jesus insisted and thus John baptised Jesus.

Why was Jesus baptised?

Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old, because He was human and He was subject to the law. Although he was without sin, He was treated like a sinner, because He had to redeem us. For this very same reason Jesus had to be baptised, baptism was a symbolic act of the death of the old sinful life and the resurrection of a new life. Thus baptism point to death and the funeral of the old person and at the same time baptism point to the resurrection of the new person. John led Jesus into the river, he submerged Jesus and let Him up out of the water again.

Jesus died three years later. He was buried and then He rose in glory and magnificence. It is the same for everyone who truly believes in God. The old person (with sin such as pride, hate and selfishness) is buried when converted, and when baptised, either through the sprinkling of water or by immersion, the new person is aware of the impurity of his/her soul. The new person has an aversion to him- or herself and seek purification and salvation with God. Through the guidance and workings of the Holy Spirit, the new person is called daily to renew his or her life by renouncing and fighting sin.

Jesus, baptised, receives testimony from heaven

Jesus started praying when He came out of the water, and in that moment heaven opened like a curtain, with a wonderful otherworldly light (brighter than the sun) shining on Jesus. The Holy Spirit descended like a dove from the heavens onto Jesus. The Holy Spirit equipped Jesus for His great task on earth and favoured Him with wisdom and strength. The Holy Spirit accompanied Jesus on this arduous journey. Isaiah, the prophet foretold this

many years ago²⁴.

John heard at the same time the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, a voice from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:17). God assured Jesus in public that He was Jesus's Father and that He won't forsake Jesus. Jesus, the Saviour knew this and He often turned to His Father. Time and again He prayed to His Father. In the Old Testament, the Psalmist sang about the King who was to come²⁵.

Jesus was no longer the carpenter of Nazareth. It became clear with his baptism that he was the Messiah (or Christ), Messiah means "anointed one" in Hebrew and "Christos" in Greek. God the Father anointed Jesus at His baptism with the Holy Spirit who descended on Him and therefor Jesus was the anointed one. At that time a person who was appointed as high priest, prophet or king had to be anointed. Fragrant oil was poured over him, and with this action the person then entered into the particular position, for example: king. Thus Jesus was anointed by God to the three positions he held: at the same time he was the Prophet who teaches, the King who reigns over His followers and the Priest who sacrificed himself (on the cross) to save His elected people.

The voice of the John the Baptist is cruelly silenced

Herod Antipas (4BC – 39AD) reigned as tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 3: 1). He was one of Herod the great's sons. Herod Antipas divorced from his wife approximately 29 - 30AD, she was the daughter of the Arabic Monarch, Aretas. Herod Antipas wanted to rather be with Herodias, the daughter of his older half-brother Aristobulus, but she was the wife of another half-brother Herod (Philip) Boëthos. Philip was not interested in the power of government, but his wife Herodias was. She therefore left Philip for his more ambitious half-brother Herod Antipas, to live in sin with him. Herodias was an evil woman and Herod Antipas was a poor character. The courageous and fearless John the Baptist openly admonished the king about his sins and Herod Antipas then threw John in prison because of his outspokenness in public. Salome (Herodias's daughter) danced at the birthday celebration of

24 **Psalm 2:7-8** "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." KJV

25 **Psalm 2:7-8** "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." KJV

her stepfather, Herod Antipas. He was very pleased with her and promised her that she could ask anything of him. Her mother, Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Notwithstanding the fact that he felt very bad about Salome's request, Herod still gave the order for John to be beheaded.

Jesus's temptation in the wilderness

The devil also heard during Jesus's baptism that He is the Son of God and he did everything in his power to thwart and ruin the work of the Messiah.

Jesus had to conquer Satan to free the world from his evil hold. Thus before performing His important life's work, Jesus had to meet Satan and resist his temptations. The Holy Spirit led Him to the wilderness for this unpleasant task.

This meeting was terrible. Satan gave Jesus three difficult and dangerous choices. Satan easily seduced the first human couple (Adam and Eve)²⁶. Would he be able to do it with Jesus?

The first temptation

For forty days and forty nights Jesus was alone in the wilderness, far from inhabited regions. He prayed to God in the silence and He prepared Himself for the coming temptations and for his work of salvation later on. Jesus didn't eat anything during that time and after forty days of fasting, Jesus was very hungry. The devil thought that this was the right time to tempt Jesus, because He was hungry and He would have less resistance. The devil knew that when a person is that hungry, bread would be very welcome, so he came with a seductive suggestion "If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread" (Luke 4: 3). Jesus averted the temptation with a reproof that one cannot live from only bread but that one must walk in obedience with God and His Word. This means that there is more important things than food and clothes.

²⁶ **Genesis 3: 6-7** "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. 7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." KJV

The second temptation

For a second time the devil tried to tempt Jesus. He took Jesus to the Holy City, to the highest point of the temple roof. Jesus could see from there the valley of Josepha (Kedron). He looked down into a dizzying abyss and again he heard the voice of the devil "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matthew 4: 6). It was as if the devil wanted to say "proof your power as the Son of God". And the worst of it was that the devil used a text from the Bible to seduce Jesus²⁷. Jesus was not in favour of the devils sanctimonious proposal. He reproofed Satan with "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4: 7). Man insults God by unnecessary and wilfully endangering oneself to test God's power. Man should not do this.

The third and last temptation

The devil risked a last cunning attack. He knew Jesus would rule over the world in the future, but this magnificent throne would only be His after His death and suffering. Therefor Satan offered Jesus an easier way where He could escape the pain, suffering, death and humiliation. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4: 9). This was a very tempting proposition. Jesus would instantly reign over the whole world without any pain and suffering and humiliation. Again Jesus did not fall for it. He would never bow down before Satan and He would never receive the kingship from the devil. That is why Jesus told the devil to leave Him alone "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4: 10). He reminded the devil that God was infinitely higher than the devil and that we must only ever bow down to worship God. Thereafter the devil left. He however, still opposed Jesus very much on earth.

Satan wanted to stop Jesus with his three temptations from carrying out his Messianic commission. Jesus possessed Devine power, but He did not use it for His own gain. He did not use His Devine power to get Himself a life of abundance and luxury, nor to take over the religious leadership and state power.

He did not choose a life of riches, glory and power. Jesus remained faithful

²⁷ **Psalms 91: 10-12** "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." KJV

to His Divine commission. He chose to completely depend on God, in humbleness and obedience. He offered Himself on the cross for humanity's sins.

Jesus honoured once again

After Jesus's agonizing spiritual struggle He was again honoured as Saviour. In His heart Jesus had an indescribable sense of peace. Jesus successfully resisted the temptations of the devil, unlike Adam and Eve centuries before. Adam and Eve's disobedience immersed mankind in sin.

The devil's purpose with the temptations was to eliminate our Saviour Jesus, because then God's first Gospel about the recovery of fallen humanity or "Proto-Evangelism" could not come true, but Jesus conquered the temptations of the devil. Thus guaranteed us deliverance and victory over sin in His power. There in the wilderness together with the wild animals, the angels appeared to serve Jesus as their Lord and God.

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20. Jesus' work as Saviour begins

John 1: 35 – John 3: 36, Luke 19: 45 – 46 and Mark 11: 15-17

Jesus truly is the Son of God

After the temptations a new phase arrived in Jesus's life on earth. His official duty as Son of God began. In this chapter we will be focusing on the following main ideas:

- Jesus summoned his disciples to act as collaborators in the service of the Kingdom of God.
- From Jesus's actions it was clear that He truly was God.
- Jesus acted against people who did wrong with holy anger.

The calling of John and Andrew

After the temptation, the Lord Jesus returned to Jordan. John the Baptist saw Jesus and said "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1: 29). John the Baptist, the priest's son, saw Jesus as our only High Priest, and as the sacrificial lamb who would die for our sins. The next day, John the Baptist together with two of his disciples John and Andrew, saw Jesus again. John told his disciples "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1: 36). The disciples John and Andrew, immediately understood that John the Baptist is pointing Jesus out as the Messiah, and when Jesus departed, they (the disciples) followed Him. The whole day John and Andrew stayed with and listened to Jesus.

We do not know what Jesus told them or what they talked about because there is no record of the conversation between them. Most likely Jesus talked about the Kingdom of Heaven and He might have explained the Scriptures to them. On that day John and Andrew met, came to know and believed in their Saviour.

The call of Peter

John and Andrew left the place where Jesus stayed that night, after they met Him. Andrew left to find his brother, Simon Peter, and told him that they found

the Messiah, which means Christ. Andrew then brought his brother Simon, to Jesus and when Jesus saw Simon he said “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas” (John 1: 42). Cephas has the same meaning as Peter. Even though Simon was still doubtful in his heart, he would later change to become a rock²⁸, because both names, Peter and Cephas, means rock.

Jesus the Messiah, knew Simon’s heart inside and out, and Jesus also saw Simon’s future like an open book before Him. Simon, or rather Peter, also became one of Jesus’s disciples. This is how Jesus got his first three disciples, and henceforth they would stay with him and learn.

Jesus called Philip

The next day Jesus left for Galilee. John, Andrew and Simon Peter followed Jesus Christ (the Messiah and their new teacher).

John the Baptist, did not follow Jesus, because he had his own special job to do. He had to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, he made the hearts of Andrew and John receptive to Jesus. They were first his disciples, until he showed them Jesus. After a while John the Baptist stepped more into the background, and the Lord Jesus more to the foreground.

With Jesus’s departure to Galilee he found Philip and told him “Follow Me” (John 1: 43) and these words would be heard henceforth more from His mouth. After all He was the Seeker who came to save and thus He continuously called on people to follow. He taught and trained them to preach the Gospel of Heaven. Philip was from Bethsaida, the same city as Andrew and Peter. Philip immediately followed Jesus in obedience.

The caling of Nathanael

Philip was so happy that he found the Messiah that he told his friend Nathanael. Nathanael was surprised and sceptical when he heard that the Messiah came from Nazareth, after all the Messiah was supposed to be come from Bethlehem²⁹. He asked Philip “Can there any good thing come

28 **Matthew 16: 18** “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” KJV

29 **Micah 5: 2** “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” KJV

out of Nazareth?” (John 1: 46). When Jesus saw Nathanael He said to him that he was an Israelite without deceit. Amazed Nathanael asked “Whence knowest thou me?” (John 1: 48) and Jesus answered him “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.”

Nathanael exclaimed “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1: 49) and the Lord Jesus answered “Thou shalt see greater things than these.” (John 1: 50). And this was indeed so, for all of Jesus’s disciples later saw much greater things. For example just like in the Old Testament Jacob at Bethel, they saw a ladder to heaven, with angels ascending and descending against it³⁰. Besides the angels (serving spirits), they also saw and heard the way in which Jesus did the work of God, His father. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of man. In this reference, the Son of man, there are two thoughts summarized: the incarnation and the death on the cross, and the glory thereafter to forever reign as Heavenly King³¹. Nathanael followed the Lord Jesus and became one of his disciples with the name Bartholomew.

The calling of Matthew

It is not known how the other disciples came to follow Jesus, but Matthew (or Levi) the tax collector’s calling is described in the Bible. The people hated the tax collectors because the tax collectors had to collect the tax for the Romans. They usually collected too much tax in order to enrich themselves. When Jesus passed Matthew’s (Levi’s) house, he called him with the words “Follow Me” (Mark 2: 14), and Matthew (Levi) immediately got up and followed Jesus.

The role of the disciples

The Church had to come into existence. Jesus chose twelve men as witnesses of his powerful words and deeds. These disciples are also referred to as apostles. Their purpose was to expand the Kingdom of Heaven. They had to continue with Jesus’s work after His Ascension to Heaven. They went everywhere with Jesus and learned from Him every day. They called Jesus Rabbi (Master).

30 **Genesis 28: 12** “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” KJV

31 **Daniel 7: 13** “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.” KJV

A marriage in Cana

Jesus, His mother Mary and His disciples attended a wedding in Cana (a small town in Galilee). During the reception the guest enjoyed delicious food and wine, but when the feast was in full swing, the wine was finished. The bridegroom was in a real embarrassment. Mary heard about his predicament and out of compassion and concern went to Jesus and said “They have no wine” (John 2: 3), because she knew that Jesus would help them.

The answer Jesus gave Mary sound strange and almost impolite “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (John 2: 4). Yet Mary understood what He meant and what his intention was, therefore she did not admonish Him. When He address her as woman and not mother, He uses a form of speech which was by no means impolite. On the cross Jesus addressed His mother again as “woman”³². And yet this form of address implies that something changed in His relationship with her.

Jesus' first miracle

Mary was not discouraged, she told the servants that “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2: 5). Jesus then told the servants to fill the empty waterpots with water. Jesus then turned the water into wine and He told the servants to pour the wine and let the ruler of the feast taste thereof. The servants did as they were told and when the ruler of the feast tasted the wine, he called the bridegroom and said “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (John 2: 10). With this wonder, the Lord showed that He does not condemn joy in life, He regards joy in life as something good, as long as it is in His honour.

That first miracle made a huge impact on the apostle and evangelist John because he declared “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14).

Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem

After the wedding in Cana, Jesus and his disciples travelled to Capernaum, their new home. Jesus's mother and brothers also moved to Capernaum.

³² **ohn 19: 26** “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!” KJV

The Jewish Passover was at hand and Jesus together with His disciples departed to Jerusalem for the feast.

They went to the temple in Jerusalem. Inside the temple Jesus didn't find sacred silence, instead He found an ear-splitting noise, as traders auctioned sheep and cattle and money changers issued cash. The money changers exchanged pagan coins for sacred Jewish coins, which the Jews had to pay for temple tax. The money changers made huge profits with those swap deals.

The sheep, cattle and doves was also for sale at the temple for people who did not have the opportunity to bring their own sacrificial animals from afar, (because the priests could turn away their animals as unsuitable sacrifices) bought their sacrificial animals at the temple. It was safer and easier, but much more expensive, due to the fact that the priests enriched themselves with the sales of the animals.

Jesus drives the buyers and sellers out of the temple

Jesus saw all these things happening in the temple and his soul and spirit was opposed by what He saw. The words of the Psalmist came true³³. The temple was the house of God, His Father and those who pretended to watch scrupulously over the sanctuary, desecrated it.

Jesus braided a whip in holy anger and with the whip He drove everyone out of the temple, including the cattle and sheep. The change from the money changers were thrown out and the tables overturned. He ordered them to take everything away and commanded that they should stop making the house of God a place of business! No one had the courage to oppose Jesus. They took their merchandise and escaped.

When the noise subsided, everyone looked at Jesus with respect. He was the perfect example of holy indignation. Jesus said to them "It is written, My house is the house of prayer³⁴: but ye have made it a den of thieves³⁵" (Luke 19: 46). The Jews had already profaned the house of God at the time of the

33 **Psalms 69: 9** "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." KJV

34 **Isaiah 56: 7** "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." KJV

35 **Jeremiah 7: 11** "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD." KJV

prophets and they just continued to do so. It had to stop. Jesus took the necessary action to purify the temple.

Jesus speaks with the superiors

The Jewish superiors later addressed Him and asked Him for a sign. A sign which verified that He had more authority than they did and Jesus said to them “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2: 19). The superiors did not realise that Jesus referred to His own body when He said this. With the crucifixion, His body (the temple) would be broken down. Three days later He would rise from the dead (thus the reconstruct the temple in three days). His disciples also only understood Jesus’s strange answer after His resurrection.

Jesus sufficed with his answer and did not give the superiors any sign. What He did do, was to cure the blind and crippled people who came to see Him in the temple. These miraculous healings was proof that Jesus was the Messiah. The high priest and scribes saw the miraculous way in which Jesus restored the health of the sick, but they refused to acknowledge its meaning.

There were children in the temple who saw this miraculous way in which Jesus cured the blind and crippled people and spontaneously they exclaimed “Hosanna to the son of David!” The high priest and scribes were outraged and they talked to Jesus about this. Jesus answered them by quoting a passage from the Scriptures “Children and infants will proclaim God’s praise”³⁶.

During that Passover many people began to believe in Jesus, because they saw His wonders and signs. Jesus’s actions and behaviour spread a strong symbolic character, through His work He purified and cleansed all things. All His people had to do was to conform to Him, and He would cleanse them, too.

Nicodemus visited Jesus at night

Jesus began to openly teach the people in the temple, just like Malachi predicted³⁷. He continued with his teaching for a while. Everyone realized

36 **Psalms 8: 2** “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.” KJV

37 **Malachi 3: 1** “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.” KJV

that He was a minister of God, because only with God's help could He perform His powerful works, wonders and signs.

Nicodemus, was a man who held a high repute. He was a Pharisee and a superior among his contemporaries and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was under the influence of Jesus's teachings and desired to talk to Jesus about the expected kingdom. The Jewish leaders raised all sorts of objections against Jesus. Nicodemus therefore did not want to talk to Jesus in public, because he could lose face with his contemporaries and thus he visited Jesus at night.

Jesus spoke with Nicodemus

Jesus immediately exposed the core problem in Nicodemus's thinking. Even by keeping all the commandments man cannot enter God's kingdom, only with rebirth can man enter into the kingdom of God. No act of man bring salvation, only an act of God can.

Jesus said to Nicodemus "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3: 3). God gives the Holy Spirit to His chosen ones. The Holy Spirit transform the sinner through rebirth in a new person and this new person can hear God's voice in the Bible. He can experience the love, goodness and mercifulness of God in his life and in the world around him. The Holy Spirit also empower man to hate sin, to flee from it and to overcome man's sinful desires. Rebirth is necessary because all of mankind is born and received in sin and are dead in sin. It is not possible for man with his sinful nature, to love en serve God on his own. Jesus revealed Himself to Nicodemus as Prophet and Priest, and Jesus also proclaimed to Nicodemus that He will suffer and die, He will be crucified, in order to save us (His chosen ones) from eternal death. He explained it to Nicodemus by comparing his own eminence with the way Moses elevated the serpent in the desert. Only the Israelites who looked up at the snake were healed³⁸. In the same way only those that believe in Jesus Christ will receive life eternal.

Nicodemus was lethargic with acceptance of this message, although the Holy Spirit was already working inside him. Later he admonished the Jewish council to not violate the law with their actions against Jesus. After the death

³⁸ **Numbers 21: 8** "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." KJV

of Jesus, Nicodemus openly came to the fore as a follower of Jesus³⁹.

Further testimony of John the Baptist

John the Baptist continued to baptise the converted in Jordan, his disciples gathered that the disciples of Jesus also baptised the converted, and they told John about this. He answered them “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him” (John 3:28). He explained that he was a friend of the Bridegroom and that he rejoiced at the voice of the Bridegroom. Jesus was the Bridegroom and He had to become more and John the Baptist less. With the reference to Bridegroom and the bride John alluded to the metaphorical language of the Old Testament, where Israel is referred to as the bride of God⁴⁰. The bride (Israel) looked forward to the arrival of the bridegroom (Jesus). John was thus very happy that the bride (Israel) listened to the voice of the Bridegroom (Jesus). He himself preached to lead people to Jesus and not to himself. To this day it is still the calling of every preacher to lead people to Jesus and themselves.

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39 **John 19: 39** “And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.” KJV

40 **Jeremiah 16: 9** “For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride.” KJV

21. Jesus in Samaria and Nazareth

John 4, Luke 4: 14 – 44, Luke 5: 1 – 11, Mark 1: 21 – 28, Mark 6: 1 – 6 and Matthew 13: 53 – 58

Jesus' own people rejected Him

The earth and all that is on it belongs to God Trinity. God is one being, in whom there are three entities, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Son came to his belongings, but his own people rejected Him. The following main ideas are discussed in the next chapter:

- The Gospel was not preached to the Jews only
- Jesus's own people rejected Him
- Jesus showed his Divine power through the wonders and signs He performed

From Judaea Jesus travelled to Galilee

For approximately eight months Jesus worked in Jerusalem and Judaea. We do not know the particulars and events during that time except for what we read in John chapter 3. It appears that there was a growing resistance on the part of the Pharisees and Jesus most probably left Judaea, because of this resistance, to travel to Galilee in order to continue his work unhindered.

The shortest way to Galilee was to travel north from Jerusalem to Bethel and then onwards to Samaria. The Jews rarely used this road due to their dislike for the Samaritans. They would rather travel through the land of the gentiles than through Samaria. The detour passed the Jordan at Jericho and went north to the Sea of Galilee. The Samaritans were the offspring of the people mentioned in 2 Kings 17: 24 – 41. They feared and served God, but they also served their own gods.

The Samaritans build themselves a temple on the mountain Gerizim because they did not want to go to the temple in Jerusalem due to the Jews attitude towards them. (That temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus during the Maccabee time and never rebuilt again.)

The Samaritan woman

Although Jesus was a Jew, He had no hatred towards the Samaritans. Jesus and his disciples travelled through Samaria and when they came to Jacob's well near the town Sychar, Jesus sat on the well to rest after a tiring journey. His disciples left Him there and went further to buy food. While Jesus waited for his disciples to return, a Samaritan woman came to fetch water from the well. The Lord Jesus asked her for water to drink. It was strange for the Samaritan woman that a Jewish Rabbi would ask her for some water. Normally a Jew would not even speak to a Samaritan. They never mingled with the Samaritans for in their eyes the Samaritans were impure and unclean. Jesus said to her "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4: 10).

In the Old Testament God is called the fountain of living waters⁴¹, and when God's Kingdom comes He will bring living water out of Jerusalem⁴². Jesus later revealed that the living water was the Holy Spirit⁴³. He wanted to give the Samaritan woman this gift from God (the Holy Spirit), so there could be new life in her heart (rebirth).

The woman said to Jesus "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4: 15), Jesus then said to her "Go, call thy husband, and come hither" (John 4: 16). The woman replied "I have no husband" (John 4: 17). Then Jesus said to her that she is talking the truth. She already had five husbands and the one she currently had was not hers.

Jesus did not treat this woman unlovingly or with malicious joy. He also did not disclose any distasteful information about her relationships with the men. He revealed only the fact of a sinful life. Jesus did this, in order that the woman could be renewed by the living water (Holy Spirit).

The Samaritan woman realised that Jesus had been a prophet.

41 **Jeremiah 2: 13** "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." KJV

42 **Zechariah 14: 8** "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." KJV

43 **John 6: 63** "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." KJV

The woman realised Jesus was a prophet and she asked Him where to worship God, in Jerusalem as according to the Jews, or on the mountain of Garizim where the Samaritans did. The Lord Jesus answered her “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4: 23 – 24). The woman replied that she knows that when the Messiah comes, He will come and declare all things to them. Jesus then told her that He is the Messiah.

At that moment the disciples returned and they were surprised to find Jesus in conversation with a Samaritan woman, but none of them dared to say anything about it. The woman left her ewer and returned to the city. She told the inhabitants of the city about Jesus and everything that was said between them. She found Jesus Christ and wanted to share her joy with other people. The Samaritans came to Jesus in large numbers. They listened to Him and believed what He told them. They pleaded with Him to stay with them, and Jesus then stayed for two days.

The testimony to the Messiah was, to the shame of the Jews, firstly heard in Sychar in Samaria and not in Jerusalem. Jesus came for those who were lost, in order to save them, and it did not matter where He found them.

Jesus left for Galilee

After His two day stay in Sychar, Jesus travelled further north to Galilee. He wondered, true to human nature, how He would be received there. He talked to His disciples about it. Between strangers in Sychar He found people with open hearts who eagerly listened to his preaching. But according to the proverb a prophet is not received with honour in his own land. Jesus was on His way to his own region, Galilee. The reception was above expectation, cordial.

According to Luke, Jesus went to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. Rumours of Jesus’s arrival soon spread. Many people already saw what Jesus did during the previous Passover in Jerusalem, for they also attended that feast. Afterwards more reports of his work in Judaea reached their ears. As a result of this, Jesus was received with joy and expectation.

Unfortunately that was where Jesus learned about Herod who threw John the Baptist in prison. John the Baptist’s work was completed, but people

flocked to Jesus's ministry to listen to Him. John's words that Jesus should be more and he himself less, was fulfilled at that time.

The royal official

While Jesus and his disciples were in Cana in Galilee, a royal official hurriedly came to Jesus. He asked Jesus to cure his dying son who were in Capernaum. Jesus said to him "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4: 48). The official pleaded with Jesus in distress "Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4: 49) and Jesus answered the official with "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4: 50). With this Jesus confirmed that He had the power to speak and it came to pass. With this He showed that He truly was God⁴⁴.

The official believed Jesus and went home. On his way home, he met some of his servants and they informed him that his son was cured. He asked them about it, and then realised that his son was cured on the exact moment that Jesus said "thy son liveth". The official and his whole family believed in Jesus from then on.

Preaching in Nazareth

At one stage the Lord Jesus lived in Cana and He travelled from there to Nazareth. According to custom Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath for the public worship. The residents of Nazareth heard about the Kingdom of Heaven and about Jesus's miracles. The superior of the synagogue asked Jesus that morning to preach. He read from the book of the prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4: 18 – 19). These words from Isaiah clearly indicated the coming of the Messiah.

After reading it, He sat down and everyone in the synagogue's eyes were on Him. He then said to them "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4: 21). They listened, astonished at the wise words, but then later they asked with disregard "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4: 22). They did not believe in Him, because they saw Him grow up. Even though they wanted to see miracles, like He did in Capernaum, Jesus did not perform any miracles

44 **Psalms 33: 9** "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." KJV

with them. Jesus only perform miracles when people believe in Him and the Nazarenes did not believe in Him. He did however lay his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

Nazareth rejected Jesus

For the inhabitants of Nazareth, Jesus was a carpenter. For them He was the son of Joseph and Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Jude and Simon. They also knew his sisters. When the Lord Jesus saw that they rejected his words He said to them “A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.” (Mark 6: 4). For example there were many widows in the time Elias was in Israel and still God send him to the widow in Sarepta, a city in Sidon. Likewise there were “many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4: 27).

The Nazarenes weren't dense, they understood that Jesus meant the God would also pass them by to help strangers who were more receptive than they were. They leaped to their feet, grabbed Jesus and lead Him to the side of town, to throw Him off a high cliff, and yet no one could lift a hand against Him. Jesus walked unscathed between them and went away from Nazareth. His own people did not honour Him, but expelled Him. He then lived in Capernaum.

Unforgettable fishing

Jesus went from Nazareth to Cana, but He did not want to stay there. He bid the hospitable people in Cana farewell and travelled to Capernaum. One day a crowd in Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee, insisted to hear God's Word. Jesus got into Simon's boat, sailed a short distance from the land and preached to the crowd from the boat.

The content of this preaching is summarised in a few words “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1: 15). After He completed his preaching He told Simon to sail deeper and to throw the nets into the deeper water to catch fish. Simon an experienced fisherman, protested a bit. After all, it was not a good idea to catch fish in clear daylight. Besides they worked hard during the night and didn't catch any fish. They were tired and knew there were no fish nearby.

However Simon was willing to act on the word of the Lord Jesus, because

he had already learned to obey Jesus with great respect. They went deeper and threw out the nets. The nets filled so quickly with fish, it wanted to tear. Their friends in another boat came to help and their boats were so full of fish they almost sank.

Fishers of men

Simon Peter realized a great miracle took place there. Full of shame he fell to his knees before the Lord; because he remembered his own lack of faith. He said to Jesus "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5: 8). Jesus then said to Simon "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5: 10). With this Jesus meant that in future Simon would preach the gospel to bring people to repentance and faith. He would lead people to Jesus, the way and the truth of eternal life. At that stage Simon Peter and his companions did not understand Jesus's words well.

There were a lot of work after the big catch. The fish had to be stored or sent to the city and the nets had to be cleaned and repaired.

After a while Jesus stood and walked on. He went past the boat of Peter and Andrew and told them to follow Him so that He can make them fishers of men. Without second thought they left their nets and followed Jesus.

They walked on and at the boat of Zebedee Jesus called two brothers James and John, to also follow Him. Their father Zebedee did not protest this, they could follow Jesus. Zebedee was wealthy and had other servants in his service.

The disciples soon realized that discipleship meant more than being attached to a teacher and accepting his teachings. "And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." (Mark 1: 17). They had to reach people and bring them to faith in Christ.

Jesus in Capernaum

Jesus went to Capernaum. At the time this city of fishers, was a thriving city on the banks of the Galilean Sea. Some of the residents already believed in Jesus. Simon Peter and Andrew had a house there and Mary, the mother of Jesus most probably lived there. In Capernaum there was a big, beautiful synagogue. After his arrival as per usual on the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue and just like in Nazareth Jesus was asked to continue with the

service.

The people were deeply moved by his words, for his teachings was different than those of the scribes. The service was not completed when the attention was disrupted by screaming "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1: 24). This was the devil who spoke through a man possessed by the devil. The Lord ordered the devil to keep quiet and to leave the body of the possessed man. The devil threw the man down and then left his body.

After the healing of the possessed man, Jesus and his disciples went to Simon's house. There they found Simon's mother-in-law ill and with a high fever. Jesus cured her and she got up and served them. Luke explained that Jesus rebuked the fever the same way He rebuked the evil spirit. From this we conclude that the illness of Simon's mother-in-law, was not merely high fever. An evil spirit or the devil had something to do with her illness, just like with the possessed man at the synagogue. The devil tried in various ways to oppose Jesus's work, with which he continued until Jesus's crucifixion and death. But Jesus, the Prince and Light would rise victoriously from the dead.

The sick were brought to Him until the late evening of that Sabbath, and one by one He laid his hands on them and healed them. He also cured other people possessed by the devil. Jesus won a great victory over the devil that day in Capernaum. Early the next day, Jesus went to a deserted place to pray.

The purpose of Jesus's miracles

A miracle is an extraordinary phenomenon, which occur outside the usual order of things and cannot be explained with the mind alone. It is an immediate intervention of God. The purpose of the miracles was to reveal God's glory. God is almighty. He is not bound by the laws of nature.

The purpose of Jesus's miracles therefore was always about glorifying God. Christ also performed miracles to reveal his own glory. The miracles was proof that Jesus was the great Prophet and teacher, who proclaimed to us the sound advice and will of God concerning our salvation. Jesus always performed miracles to proof his words and through his miracles Jesus showed himself to be more powerful than the devil. He successfully delivered man from the evil rule of the devil!

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22. The miracles of the Lord Jesus creates enemies

Matthew 4: 23, Matthew 8: 1 – 4, Matthew 9: 9 – 13, Matthew 12: 1 – 14, Luke 5: 12 – 39, Luke 6: 1 – 11, John 5 and Mark 2: 13 – Mark 3: 6

The Jews opposed Jesus

The devil wanted Jesus's work of redemption to fail, and he used the Jewish religious leaders in his evil efforts. The religious leaders rejected Jesus and they wanted to discard of Him. In this chapter the following main ideas are:

- During his time on earth Jesus cured the sinners from their sickness and delivered them from their destitution.
- Jesus was King of the Sabbath.
- The Jewish religious leaders were the first to oppose Jesus's work of redemption.

A leper cleansed

In biblical times leprosy was a dreaded disease, because there was no medicine that could cure this disease. Leprosy is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae* and *Mycobacterium lepromatosis* that eats away the skin, mucous membranes and nerves of the sufferer. The persons who suffered from leprosy (lepers) were considered to be impure and pushed from society. They had to live outside the city in the field and in the mountains. A person with leprosy was not allowed to come within three feet of a healthy person. There were no mercy in society for people who suffered from leprosy. In one of Galilee's cities a leper walked straight to Jesus and fell to his knees before Him begging "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Matt. 8: 2) to which Jesus answered "I will; be thou clean" (Matthew 8: 3). The sick man was cured immediately.

After the healing Jesus's tone of voice changed. He forbade the man to tell anyone else about the healing. The man had to go to the priest and he had to

complete the requirements of the Law of Moses⁴⁵. The priest had to examine him and if there wasn't any signs of the disease visible on him certain sacrifices had to be made to purify the person. This purification process took eight days, but this never happened before, because during that time, the disease were incurable. Leprosy could only be cured by a miracle from God.

The leper went to the temple

Jesus sent the leper He healed, to the temple. The healing of this man was a sign that God send the Messiah, who could heal leprosy. Thus Moses's requirements for such a healing was not senseless, it pointed to the Saviour who was to come.

However the man did not do as Jesus commanded. He was so excited about his healing, he told everyone as far as he went. His happiness was understandable but he was disobedient. His thoughts was selfish, thinking only about himself and the miracle that happened to his body.

His disobedience complicated Jesus's work. Huge curious crowds came from all over to see the miracles of Jesus. He went to deserted places to pray to God, but the curious people followed Him even there.

The cripple in Capernaum

Jesus entered the city of Capernaum unnoticed, but the news soon spread that He was at home with His mother Mary. The people heard about what He did in Galilee and they were eager to see Him and to listen to Him again.

The house was filled to capacity, no one could get in through the doors. There were Pharisees who came to find out what Jesus did and what he preached so that they could accuse Him of something. They, the doctors of the law, could not bear to see so many people listening to the unlettered Nazarene.

While Jesus were talking to the people in the full to overflowing house, above Jesus a few men opened the roof of the house. They led a paralysed man down from the roof into the room at the feet of Jesus. It was the only way they

45 **Leviticus 14: 2 – 4** "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest: 3 And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; 4 Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:" KJV

could get the paralysed man to Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralysed man “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee” (Luke 5: 20). And the Pharisees immediately took notice, because according to them Jesus were blasphemous. “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (Luke 5:21). Jesus knew what they were thinking and He said to them “Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?” (Mark 2: 8 – 9).

The Pharisees had to realise that Jesus (the Son of man) had the competence to forgive sin here on earth. He was named Jesus, for He would deliver his people from their sins. He was send from God, so “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”⁴⁶. To confirm his words to the Pharisees, He healed and said to the paralysed man “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.” (Mark 2: 11). The healing was immediate. The paralysed man was healed before everyone and he carried his bed home.

The calling of Matthew

One day the Lord Jesus passed the tollhouse of a certain tax collector, Levi (or Matthew). The tax collectors were hated among the people. They collected tax from their fellow man for the Romans. To do this they had to pay a huge amount to the Romans, they therefore collected as much as possible to make it profitable for them. They didn't spare anyone, they were harsh and avaricious. Matthew was just like that. He was rich, but lonely and unpopular. His fellow man avoided him. When the Lord Jesus passed the tollhouse of Matthew, He told Matthew to follow Him. Matthew stood and followed Jesus immediately.

Matthew became a trustworthy disciple of Jesus. There is little about his work as an apostle in the Bible, but we know the he wrote the Gospel of Matthew. After Jesus told him to follow Him, he arranged a dinner to bid farewell to all his old friends. Jesus and the disciples were the guests of honour. The other guest were tax collectors and sinners. For the Pharisees who followed and watched Jesus this was too much, and they wanted to know from the disciples why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus talked to the Pharisees

⁴⁶ **John 3: 16** “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
KJV

The disciples were embarrassed by these questions. Jesus heard the Pharisees and answered them Himself. He wanted to know from them if they knew the proverb “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick:” (Mark 2: 17). This proverb applied to Himself. He came to heal those who were in the clutches of sin. The Pharisees who in their own opinion were “healthy” (whole), could not blame the Physician if He came to heal the sick? But in reality the scribes who boasted about living according to the Scriptures, had to study the Script⁴⁷.

Compassion and love to those in need, is more pleasant to God than a strictly regulated life in which there is no place for mercy. Jesus and his disciples were acting according to Hosea’s word, because they showed mercy and compassion to the tax collectors and the sinners who was rejected by society.

Jesus explained that He did not come to call the righteous to repentance, but the sinners. Those who are of the opinion that they complied with all the regulations of the law, have no sense of sin and thus are not in need of forgiveness for sins or a Saviour and Redeemer. So Jesus passed them to reach out to the sinful. He went to those who fled to Him in their need.

Those who fast and those who don’t

The dinner in the house of Matthew lead to another objection against Jesus and his disciples. Not only did they eat with the tax collectors and the sinners, they also did it on a day when they were supposed to fast. The provisions of the law determined that on certain occasions there should be a fast, for example the day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The people of that time fasted for prayer on the days of seclusion, and the days of mourning. The Pharisees used two days to fast, Mondays and Thursdays. They believed that Moses went to the mount Sanai on a Monday to receive the tablets of the law, and that he returned on a Thursday with the tablets, thus the practice was created. The Pharisees strictly followed the custom, but Jesus and his disciples however did not maintain this self-imposed rule.

Jesus spoke to John the Baptist’s disciples

A few of John the Baptist’s disciples were surprised to find that Jesus did not maintain the fasting days. Jesus explained to John the Baptist’s disciples that the wedding guests cannot grieve while the Bridegroom is with them.

47 **Hosea 6: 6** “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” KJV

There would however be a time when the Bridegroom was not with them anymore and they should fast then (Luke 5: 34 – 35).

John the Baptist's disciples understood this imagery very well, for in the Old Testament Israel is called the bride of God, who look forward to the union with the heavenly Bridegroom⁴⁸. When the Bridegroom comes, it must be a day of great joy for the whole of Israel. John the Baptist already pointed Jesus out as the Bridegroom. Then John rejoiced over the voice of the Bridegroom⁴⁹. It was important for the disciples of John the Baptist to understand that the Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus. The Bridegroom came to his bride, thus it had to be celebrated and not fasted.

The Lord Jesus told two parables arising from the question about fasting. "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. 37 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish" (Luke 5: 36 – 37). With these parables Jesus showed the unwillingness of the people to accept his new doctrine. They were satisfied to continue with the old form of religion to which they were accustomed. They struggled to admit that they were sinful. Such an admission is painful for the haughty, who believe he is righteous. That is why they preferred the form religion, that salve one's conscience. They rejected the true teaching of Jesus.

The healing of the sick man in Bethesda on the Sabbath

During the festivities Jesus went to Jerusalem. It was probably Easter. At the sheep gate in Jerusalem there was a bath with five pillar passages, and this bath was called Bethesda in Hebrew. There lay a great deal of blind, lame, cripple and sick people. They were convinced that from time to time an invisible angel moved the water and they believed that the bath water right after such a movement, had a special healing power. The first sick person who can bathe in it, had the best chance to be healed. Many of the sick lay near the edge of the bath on their beds or mats, waiting for the stirring of the water.

48 **Isaiah 49: 18** "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth." KJV

49 **John 3: 29** "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." KJV

A certain man who had an illness for 38 years, also lay next to the bath. Jesus saw him and asked Him if he wanted to be cured. The man explained that he had no one to put him in the bath when the water is stirred. With that Jesus told him to take his bed and to go. The man was healed immediately, he took his bed and left. The Pharisees stopped the man with a reproof "It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed" (John 5: 10). The man explained that the Person who cured him, said he had to take his bed and go.

The Pharisees were so concerned about keeping the Sabbath, they did not seem to realise or care that a miracle took place. After an illness of thirty eight years, God cured that man! With that man's answer they only took note of another offence. Someone healed a sick person on the Sabbath! They immediately thought that it was Jesus. The Jews were so envious of Jesus, they wanted to kill him.

The man Jesus healed was so thankful that he went to the temple to meet Jesus. Jesus explained to him that he had his health back, but that he must not sin anymore, so that nothing worse can happen to him. He had to live a new life, one who would be pleasing to the Lord.

Jesus declare that He is the Son of God

The Jews wanted Jesus dead, and they accused Him because He healed a man on the Sabbath. Jesus answered them that his Father is working until now, and so is He. God works every day to sustain all. He even send his angel to stir the water on the Sabbath to cure the ill. The Lord Jesus works like his Father. Jesus had to be honoured because He was not bound to the human rules of the Pharisees. However the Pharisees judged Jesus and they did not honour Him. Indeed, for whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.

Jesus explained that He and the Father are one, but the Pharisees did not notice that Scripture testified about Him; and thus they did not receive live eternal. "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. 47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5: 46 – 47). These words from Jesus made the Pharisees angrier, they hated Him.

The disciples pluck the ears of wheat

The Pharisees had a lot of rules with regards to what can and can't be done on the Sabbath. Anyone who disobeyed those rules, was cast from the Synagogue as a Sabbath-breaker. According to them Jesus was a Sabbath-breaker and they needed a reason to accuse Him.

After the healing of the sick in Bethesda, Jesus and his disciples walked through a wheat field on a Sabbath. The disciples were hungry so they rubbed the ears of wheat and ate. To pluck ears and rub them was one of the thirty nine deeds the Pharisees forbade people to do on the Sabbath and thus the Pharisees immediately accused the disciples. They said to Jesus "Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" (Mark 2: 24). Jesus reminded them of King David's actions. David went to the House of God and because of his hunger he ate the showbread although he was not allowed to⁵⁰. It was clear that God did not judge David because of this. Just so the disciples did not transgress when they rubbed the wheatears and ate it. Jesus also pointed out that the laws allow the priests to continue with their duties on the Sabbath, without it being a violation of the law⁵¹. They were exempt from the regulations of the Sabbath, because they were on duty in the temple. Jesus was much bigger than the temple, and therefore He and his disciples were also exempted from maintaining the regulations.

Again Jesus healed on the Sabbath

Jesus went back to the Synagogue, and there was a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees were disappointed when Jesus didn't heal the man's hand. They then asked Jesus "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?" (Matt. 12: 10). They wanted to provoke Him but Jesus said to them "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? 12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." (Matt. 12: 11 – 12). The Pharisees kept quiet. They did not really want to know, they only wanted something with which they could accuse Him. The Lord Jesus knew this, He looked at them closely with anger and said to the man "Stretch forth thine hand" (Mark 3: 5). The man did as requested and his hand was healed.

50 **1 Samuel 21: 6** "So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away." KJV

51 **Numbers 28: 10** "This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering." KJV

The Pharisees' hatred for Jesus was so all consuming that they colluded with the Roman-minded supporters of Herod Antipas. In this way the religious authority of the Jews united with the representatives of the political authorities to kill Jesus.

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23. Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5 – Matthew 7: 29, Mark 3: 13 – 19, Luke 6: 12 – 49, Luke 11: 1 – 13, Luke 12: 22 – 34, Luke 13: 24 – 27 and Luke 14: 34 – 35

Jesus the Teacher

God send his Son Jesus Christ to earth to make his will, known to man. This chapter focus on the following main ideas:

- Jesus chose his disciples and taught them so that they can act as his witnesses.
- No man can inherit eternal life by keeping the law.
- Jesus taught us how to pray to God.

The twelve disciples

As time went on the work of the Lord Jesus assumed a fixed form. A circle of believers grew around Him, separate from the synagogue.

One day the Lord Jesus went to a mountain alone and spent the entire night there, praying. Early the next morning He called his disciples. He chose twelve and called them his apostles. He gave unto them the power to exorcise unclean spirits and to cure the sick. The meaning of apostle is “one who is sent in His Name” or “commissioned one”. The number twelve is a holy number in the Bible, and these twelve apostles had to become the spiritual founders of his congregation.

The apostles stayed with Jesus. He taught them to preach the gospel and to do the work of the Kingdom. They became the foundation of his church, of which Jesus Christ is the corner stone⁵². Their names were: Simon Peter, Andrew, James (the son of Zebedee), John, Philip, Bartholomeus (or Nathanael), Matthew, Thomas (Didymus), James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), Judas (Thaddeus, son of James) and Judas Iscariot (the traitor).

52 **Ephesians 2: 19 – 20** “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;”
KJV

These men had to leave their homes and their families and they had to follow Jesus Christ.

The Sermon

After Jesus the Lord called his twelve apostles, He went down the mountain with them. It was as if light and power radiated from Him. A huge crowd gathered at the bottom of the plain. It wasn't just local people, there were people from remote parts of the country, some came from Jerusalem and Judaea, but there were also strangers from surrounding and adjacent areas. Pagans from Idumaea in the south, Decapolis in the east, as well as Tyre and Sidon in the north.

The Sermon of the Mount was the only Sermon Jesus preached on the mountain. The mountain served as a pulpit. Before Jesus started with his Sermon, He healed the sick people in the crowd, but He did not only heal their bodies, He also healed their souls. He began to speak to them about the nature of the eternal Kingdom.

The beatitudes

Jesus and his apostles were on their way down, but when they saw the crowd, Jesus went a bit back up the mountain. He sat there and taught everyone. The crowd listened intently to the Sermon on the Mount. To teach them, Jesus used proverbs just like those found in the Old Testament, in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The Lord Jesus explained in a series of eight beatitudes how the children of the Kingdom should be. The word blessed has to do with contentment, enjoying the bliss of heaven, and happiness, but it actually has more to do with the relationship in which man stands to God.

The entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven

The Jews were under the impression that they as a nation, would share in the Kingdom of God. They expected that with the coming of the Messiah, this Kingdom would come into existence in all its glory here on earth. But they were wrong; they expected an earthly kingdom with an earthly king, who would deliver them from their earthly enemies. Jesus explained to the crowd that God's Kingdom is different than what they expected.

Jesus explained further that the Kingdom of God belongs to everyone who seeks and acknowledge God as King. There is only one entrance into this Kingdom. It is the narrow gateway, and it is a hard struggle to get through. Man must first die in himself and through the Holy Spirit convert into a new person (rebirth), to obtain the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' love and mercy, He helps believers through this narrow gate.

We cannot enter ourselves because we are impure, unholy and full of sin. Jesus, our Lord transform us through his love and grace to his children. With the second coming of Christ, we will be able to see the Kingdom in all its perfect gloriousness⁵³. Then our Lord Jesus will appear as our King and all will see Him as He really is.

The reward in Heaven

The Lord Jesus added a ninth to the eight beatitudes which was personally directed to his followers. Jesus prepared them that as his followers they would have to endure all sorts of insults, persecution and slander. Just like the prophets before them were persecuted⁵⁴, they would be too. This opposition would be proof that they were no longer from this world, but that they were from the Kingdom of God. That is why, in spite of the sorrows inflicted on them, they should rejoice, because they are assured of their reward in heaven.

The eternal Judgement of God

Jesus, the Lord spoke four pronouncements that began with "woe unto you" as opposed to the nine beatitudes. Just like the "blessed are ye" the "woe unto you" also has meaning in view of the eternal life. It did not only announce the unhappy and disastrous life here on earth, but it also announced the eternal judgement of God. The "woe unto you" strike the rich, the satisfied, the cheerful and those of whom all speak well.

Opposed to the poor in spirit, there was those who thought they were spiritually rich like the Pharisees. Opposed to those who hunger and thirst

53 **Revelation 5: 13** "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." KJV

54 54. 2 Chronicles 36: 16 "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy." KJV

for righteousness, there were those who felt that by their own good deeds and by keeping the law, they were replete with righteousness. Opposed to those who mourned over their inner shortcomings, there were those who went through life with a cheerful laugh, because they thought that they were perfect.

Opposed to those who were insulted and slandered, there were those of whom everyone spoke well and who was praised by all. Take note that they are all under the “woe unto you” from the Divine Judge.

The children of the Kingdom

The Lord Jesus points out at the end of the beatitudes that the children of the Kingdom who already experienced heavenly bliss here on earth were called to stand in service of the expansion of the Kingdom of Heaven. He used three short parables.

Jesus explained that those who quietly and invisibly exert their good influence in the world, are the salt of the earth. They are the light in the world, who in the darkness of the world, make their heavenly light shine by the good works they do. They are like city on a mountain top. The white houses in a city like that are seen from afar. That’s how clearly the world sees the life of the believers and thus their Heavenly Father is exalted.

The authority of the Prophets and the Law

For the simple minded among the people the beatitudes were truly a joyful Gospel. For the Scribes and the Pharisees, who kept to the law so scrupulously, the beatitudes were a mystery. Not once did Jesus refer to the law, while in the Psalms ⁵⁵ it is said that those who live by the law will be blessed and happy. Did he want to set aside the law and bring in beatitude?

With the Authority of the Messiah, Jesus gave them a double meaning as answer. He did not come to disband, he came to fulfil.

The binding authority of the law

Jesus maintained the binding authority of the law of God. That is why he expected good deeds from his followers, deeds done in complete obedience to the law. The Pharisees also did this, but there was a huge difference.

⁵⁵ **Psalms 119: 1** “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.” KJV

They prescribed good deeds as a prerequisite in order to be blessed. Jesus expect good deeds from those He already called blessed, so the Father could be glorified in heaven⁵⁶.

The Jews awarded an apparent connotation to the law. Jesus indicated the deeper meaning thereof; it was not a doglike devotion to the commandments. The law must be written in the heart. A believer had to obey with the freedom of thought in order for the spirit and intent of the law to come to fruition. In the following section of the Sermon Jesus used five examples to explain what He meant with fulfilment of the law.

God's Children

We are God's children and not his slaves. The Pharisees tried to fulfil the law of God, to be blessed this way, but in the Kingdom of the Heavens it works differently. We love God and we are very grateful to God for delivering us from the devil and our sins; that is why we do God's will with joy. So we don't just carry the law out to the letter, but strive to fulfil the intent of the law.

Jesus further explained that a child of God does not take an oath, because his (or her) yes and no is sufficient. A true believer loves the truth, and don't take revenge, but turn the other cheek⁵⁷. Furthermore a child of God is afraid of wrong and sinful desires, and not only view active adultery as sin, but also the mere thoughts thereof. True believers pray for their enemies and also bless their persecutors.

The Lord Jesus explained with great emphasis that before heaven and earth should perish, not one jot or tittle will fall away from the law. The jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and the tittle is the small bracket or line by which one letter is distinguished from another. Herewith the Lord Jesus declared that the whole law, even the seemingly unimportant commandments had to be kept until the purpose of each commandment was reached. This same thought is confirmed by Paul in his letter to the pious in Rome⁵⁸.

Godly duties in the Kingdom of Heaven

56 **James 2: 12** "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." KJV

57 **1 Thessalonians 5: 15** "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." KJV

58 **Romans 3: 31** "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." KJV

The Jews knew three godly duties namely: dispense alms, prayers and fasting. The Jews considered the giving of alms to the needy as an important duty. They readily gave alms, because they wanted other people to see how “great” they are. Opposed to that were genuine piety, when a person helped another in need because of inner compassion for a fellow human being. By means of speaking the right hand does not need to know what the left hand does, because actual love does not seek recognition. An act of assistance, born of compassion for fellow man, is noted by God and will be richly reward for it.

Lord, teach us to pray

The Pharisees had certain prayer hours they maintained. They prayed long prayers on the streets and in the synagogue, so that other can see and praise them for it. Jesus explained that prayer is not a show of piety, but the pure motive for a childlike conversation with the heavenly Father. A prayer is the sincere community practice between the faithful and God, and thus it should not happen before the eyes of spectators. Prayer at its purest, happens in the enclosed inner room, where no one will disturb the silence and where man, in his minuteness and unworthiness, can be humble before the Lord.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He disapproved of the long verbosity and the saintlike language the Pharisees used. They were like the heathens who though that their god heard them when they used a bunch of words⁵⁹. As an example of the real prayer he spoke the “Lord’s Prayer”. The disciples could repeat the prayer or they could pray their own prayer, build on the same structure as the Lord’s Prayer.

The form of this prayer is quite simple. First it is the introduction were God is addressed as Our Father. This is followed by three lines in which God is honoured and glorified. The next three lines is about us and our human needs, our confessions and requirements and the prayer then ends with eulogy to God. In this simple form and in the concise wording rich content is included. In the Lord’s Prayer, man has everything needed to worship God.

The practice of fasting

The third religious act Jesus pointed out was the practice of fasting. The

⁵⁹ **1 Kings 18: 26** “And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.” KJV

Pharisees put great value to fasting, as a religious duty. Jesus spoke out against the way people fasted and not against the practice of fasting. He told them they should not walk around with long sad faces to show everyone that they are fasting. Jesus said they should wash their faces and look like people who are not fasting. God can see in their hearts and would openly rewards them. (Matthew 6: 16 – 17).

Earthly goods and the Kingdom of the Heavens

After Jesus talked about the religious duties He taught them about the practical matters of life, like the possession of earthly goods. He wanted them to understand that the true religion leaven a person's whole life. Man's wealth and the use thereof, must be in service of God. He stressed that the riches of the world are tangible and passing, it has no lasting value.

Man's personal fame and achievements can lead them to a fall, if not built on the Rock, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3: 11). They place so much trust in their own achievements and wealth, that they do not need God anymore. Unfortunately nobody can save themselves. Man must seek his spiritual salvation from God and trust in God completely.

Treasure in Heaven

Everyone who strive to gather treasures in heaven, will want for nothing here on earth⁶⁰. Thus the persons to whom God gives riches, have a great responsibility to not rely on that. They have to make every effort for the interest of the Kingdom and they have to use their earthly wealth for it. Life must be aimed at serving the Kingdom with self-denial and unselfishness. If man understands that to build treasure in heaven in this manner, his heart will be bound to heaven and thus the heavenly Father will bless him with everything else.

Man cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. Mammon means wealth and man can make an idol of wealth. You should not worry about what you would eat or what you would wear, for the Lord who cares for the birds in the sky and the lilies from the field will also take care of you⁶¹. If you are constantly worried, you are like the pagans who do not know the Father.

60 **Psalms 37: 25** "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." KJV

61 **Philippians 4: 6** "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." KJV

Attitude toward fellow humans

The Lord Jesus ended his Sermon on the Mount with a warning that man should not judge his fellow man. “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matthew 7: 3).

The same hypocrisy of which the Pharisees were guilty, can also pollute the children of the Kingdom. Therefore there can be no haughtiness with the faithful, only humiliation, self-examination and a willingness to have every beam or speck that is in our own eye, removed by the Spirit of God. Only when this attitude is present can a person lovingly point a brother at his faults.

The correct attitude toward a fellow human is summarized in the golden rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7: 12). He earnestly insisted that we had to fight severely to enter the narrow gateway. Our desire to belong to the Kingdom of Heaven, must be clearly visible in our lives, when we fight hard against our own sins, and seek the good with all our hearts.

False Prophets

If we are obedient to Jesus’s words, we will encounter false prophets⁶². For the children of God the false prophets are extremely dangerous beings: predatory wolves in sheep’s clothing. They will pretend that they declare Jesus’s true intention, but through their falsehood men would stumble⁶³. There is a reliable way to identify them, because a tree is known for its fruit. If these prophets bring forth fruit that does not fit with being converted, they are false and must be avoided. The tree that does not bear good fruit, must be cut out and thrown in the fire. The only right attitude towards the words of the Lord is that of “listening and doing”.

Jesus’s words made a deep impression on the crowd. They were astonished about his teaching. It was not only the content of the Sermon they found moving, but his authoritative actions made it clear that He was sent by God.

62 **2 Peter 2: 1** “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” KJV

63 **Matthew 24: 11** “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” KJV

Recommended readings

- Booyens, M.J. 2005. Laat my lammers wei. Pretoria: EFJS Drukkers. 143 - 146
- Groenewald, E.P. 1968. Handboek Bybelse geskiedenis: Die Nuwe Testament. Pretoria: DBU. 152 - 176.
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24. Jesus' appearance in Galilee

Luke 3: 19 – 20, Luke 7 – Luke 8: 3, Luke 11: 14 – 28, Matthew 8: 5 – 13, Matthew 11: 1 – 19, Matthew 11: 25 – Matthew 12: 50 and Mark 3: 20 – 35

Jesus truly is God

The human Jesus, was not only human, He was simultaneously also the veritable God. The following main ideas are discussed in this chapter:

- Jesus showed his Divinity by exercising power over death.
- The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about Jesus's good deeds.
- Jesus had power over the devils, which is why He could cast them out of those possessed.

Jesus heals a Roman centurion's servant

After the Sermon on the Mount Jesus went to Capernaum. The elders of the Jews asked Jesus to heal a Roman centurion's servant. This Roman centurion was a chief and a friend of theirs and he build them a synagogue. The elders told Jesus all of this and prompted Him to help the Roman chief.

Jesus went with them to the Roman chief's house, but on the way there friends of the Roman chief met them with a message: "Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: 7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." (Luke 7: 6 – 7). The Roman chief said to Jesus that He could just command the illness to leave his servant, and it would. Jesus was surprised when He heard this. He turned to the crowd and said to them: "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." (Luke 7: 9).

Jesus's announcement opened a missionary perspective

Just like the pagan Roman chief became partaker in the Kingdom through his faith, gentiles from all nations of the earth, shall glorify together with the

patriarchs, the name of God⁶⁴. On the other hand many of the biological offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (to whom the Kingdom was promised) would be cast out, because they had no faith. Those unfaithful ones will end up in outer darkness. In outer darkness there will be a weeping and gnashing of teeth.

With the announcement about the missionary perspective, Jesus opened the Kingdom of the Heavens. It was no longer about lineage or hereditary undertaking. Through sincere faith in Jesus Christ any person becomes worthy to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven. The friends of the Roman centurion chief found the servant healed upon their return.

Jesus raises a widow's son

The Lord Jesus and his apostles were on their way to a town called Nain, at the foot of the Little Hermon Mountains, the following day. Many people followed them and when they reached the city gate, the locals carried out a dead person. The deceased was the only son of a widow, and there was a crowd with her.

According to Jewish custom Jesus and his followers had to wait on the side of the road for the funeral procession to pass. Death took precedence. Jesus, the Prince of life⁶⁵, went closer to the funeral procession and brought it to a standstill.

The Lord felt sorry for the mother and comforted her. He said to the carriers to stop and then He told the young man to rise. The young man immediately sat up and started talking. This miracle made a huge impression on the crowd. They were terrified and praised God and said that a great prophet rose among them and that God visited his people.

Only God can raise a dead person. This event at Nain proved that Jesus was sent by God. The news that a great Prophet appeared and that He does the work of God, spread throughout the country. Jesus made a dead person alive, and He calls us, who are dead in sin, to a new life in Him.

64 **Malachi 1: 11** "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts." KJV

65 **John 11: 25** "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" KJV

Herod Antipas had John the Baptist captured

One day John the Baptist was arrested by the soldiers of Herod Antipas, where he was busy preaching and baptising people. John was not afraid of anyone, he even admonished king Herod Antipas for living with his half-brother Herod Philip's wife, Herodias.

John was held captive in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. That fortress was one of the palaces Herod Antipas and his family sometimes called home. Herod would sometimes call the handcuffed John to listen to him, but he did not have the courage to break from his sins. Just like Ahab, Herod Antipas was a weakling too. (Ahab was a king of Israel, he allowed his wife Jezebel to kill Naboth and his sons for a vineyard 1 Kings 21: 1-16). The crafty Herodias easily seduced and manipulated Herod Antipas to achieve her goal. Herod Antipas most probably wanted to let John the Baptist go, because he was afraid of John and he knew John was a great prophet. Herodias hated John the Baptist and had evil plans to kill him. Herod Antipas prevented Herodias from killing John the Baptist, for he was afraid that the people would start a rebellion, they also regarded John as a great prophet.

John the Baptist begin to doubt in Prison

In the dark hole of Machaerus, John had doubts about whether Jesus really was the promised Messiah. He no longer understood the way of the Lord, and what happened to the Kingdom of the Messiah? Earlier at the Jordan, John announced through the Holy Spirit, the He who is to come, will appear as Judge. His winnow (the act to remove the chaff from the grain) is in his hand and He will lay the axe at the root, and He will clean the threshing floor. But the news John received were not news from judgement but from compassion. He heard nothing from the king, only from a traveller which preaches, heals the sick and exorcise evil spirits.

John then send some of his disciples to Jesus with the question whether Jesus is the one they were expecting or were there another one still to come? At the same time, the Lord Jesus healed many sick people, and those possessed. Jesus told John's disciples to tell John what they had seen and heard; namely that the blind can see, the cripple can walk, the death can hear, lepers are healed, the dead are alive and the poor received the gospel.

Jesus did not answer John with a straight "yes" or "no". He was quoting from the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesised about the coming of the

Messiah and the goodness of his Kingdom was revealed⁶⁶. Every religious Jew who knew the Scriptures, (thus also John the Baptist) would now that what the prophets said about Him was being fulfilled.

Jesus defended John the Baptist

John the Baptist's disciples left with Jesus's answer to share the good news with John and to reassure him. With this reassurance he could wait peacefully in prison, for whatever lay ahead of him.

After John's disciples left, Jesus said to the crowd that John was much more than a prophet. He was the Elijah of whom Malachi prophesied, the forerunner of the Messiah⁶⁷. No prophet was greater than John the Baptist, but the smallest in heaven were more blessed than John. With that the Lord wanted them to understand that the people who listened to his words, and who saw his miracles, would be witnesses of his life, death and resurrection and ascension. They were therefore more privileged than John the Baptist.

Jesus forgave the sins of the female sinner

During his stay in Galilee a Pharisee, a certain Simon, invited Jesus to dinner. While they were at the table, a woman with an alabaster jar full of precious ointment entered, she went to Jesus' feet while crying. It was unheard of and abominably rude for a woman to enter where men were dining and on top of that this woman was a stranger in the house of the Pharisee. The Pharisee and the other men there knew that she was a woman of ill repute.

The woman wept so much, her tears dripped on Jesus's feet. She used her hair to dry His feet. She kissed His feet and anointed it with the precious ointment. This was too much for the Pharisee. He thought in his heart: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner." (Luke 7: 39).

The Lord Jesus knew the Pharisee's thoughts and He said to him: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

66 **Isaiah 35: 4** "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." KJV

67 **Malachi 3: 1** "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." KJV

(Luke 7: 41 – 42). The Pharisee answered Jesus that the one who owed the most would love the most.

Jesus explained to Simon then that he invited Him to dinner to his home, but he did not provide the water to clean his feet. The woman, on the other hand used her tears to wash his feet and she dried it with her hair. Simon, as the host did not kiss Jesus, but the woman kissed his feet. Simon, as the host, also did not anoint Jesus, but on the other hand the woman anointed his feet with precious ointment. She loved Jesus very much, she knew all her sins and she repented at her sins. Simon, the Pharisee thought that he did not have many sins, and therefore he did not show Jesus much love. Jesus told the woman that her sins were forgiven.

Jesus dealt with Simon just as the prophet Nathan had dealt with King David. Without realising it, Simon condemned his own behaviour⁶⁸. The Pharisee and his friends didn't care about what Jesus said. They rather took offence, because Jesus said to the woman that her faith has saved her.

Women who served Jesus

There were three women among the crowd who followed Jesus all the time. They were Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza and Susanna.

Mary was from the town Magdala, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, south of Capernaum. The Lord Jesus saved her from the seven devils, but how and where it happened is not known. Afterwards she stayed in Jesus's presence and she cared for Him with dedication, together with the other woman. Later she stood with Jesus's mother at the cross⁶⁹ and she sat at Jesus's grave⁷⁰. She was one of the first at the empty grave⁷¹ and also the first to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection⁷².

68 **2 Samuel 12: 7** "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;" KJV

69 **John 19: 25** "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." KJV

70 **Matthew 27: 61** "And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre." KJV

71 **Matthew 28: 1** "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." KJV

72 **Mark 16: 9** "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." KJV
John 20: 16 "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." KJV

Joanna was the wife of Chuza, a steward in the service of Herod Antipas. She was one of the woman who followed Jesus to Jerusalem and served Him⁷³ and she was also a witness to the empty grave⁷⁴.

Susanna (her name means Lily) is only mentioned in Luke 8:3. We do not know anything about her.

Faithful women therefore have a duty to co-operate in love with the gifts, talents and possessions they received from God, to the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus heals a demon-possessed man

A man was taken to Jesus most probably in Capernaum. The man was possessed by a demon and therefore he was mute and blind. The Lord Jesus healed the man and the demon left him. The man could see and talk again. It made a great impression on those present, they wondered if Jesus was the son of David, and with this they meant that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah from the house of David⁷⁵.

Jesus's family did not understand

Jesus did not have any time to rest and sometimes He didn't even get a chance to eat, for He was always surrounded by a multitude of people with so much suffering and misery among them. His family found out about this and they wanted to intervene. They may have been concerned about his health, but maybe they just thought that He completely lost control of the situation. At that stage Jesus's family did not fully comprehend that Jesus had to do the will of the Father. His obedience to the will of the Father created new relationships. To indicate this Jesus said: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" (Matthew 12: 48). He looked at the people around Him and said "Behold my mother and my brethren! 50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12: 49 – 50).

73 **Luke 8: 3** "And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." KJV

74 **Luke 24: 10** "It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles." KJV

75 **Isaiah 22: 22** "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." KJV

The blood relation (relationship by blood) between family members is not the most important, but the bond (the established ties) between the faithful who know and obey God, is. Jesus's biological family only understood this truth at a later stage and then they also became part of his spiritual family.

Jesus convinces the Blasphemy of casting out demons by Beelzebub

A group of scribes followed Jesus everywhere, because they wanted evidence against Him. Mockingly they whispered to each other that He casted the devil from the possessed in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Although Jesus did not hear them, He knew their thoughts, and that is why He asked the scribes how the kingdom of Satan could stand if he was divided against himself?

If the opposition weren't so stubborn, they would have to admit that Jesus acted through the Holy Spirit and not through Beelzebub. The power Jesus had over the devils was the proof that the Kingdom of God had come⁷⁶.

Sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgiveable

Jesus used another parable. He asked the scribes if someone can enter the house of a strong man and steal his possessions if he didn't even handcuff the strong man? He, the Son of God, handcuffed Satan and saved the people from his power. At the same time, Jesus also warned that every sin and slander will be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.

The Pharisees acted out of enmity against Jesus. It was awful that they clearly saw the works of the Holy Spirit, but that in their stubbornness they closed their eyes thereof and said that it was the work of the devil. This was blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and unforgiveable⁷⁷.

76 **Isa. 53: 12** "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." KJV

77 **Luke 12: 10** "And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven." KJV

Jesus warned against human conversions

Jesus used two parables in an attempt to convince the Pharisees about their spoiled inner life: first He used the tree which is recognised by the fruit it bears and secondly He used the image of the house wiped clean.

The Pharisees pretended that they bear “good fruit” through their saintlike lives, their compliance with the law and their godly advice to the people. They wrongly advised the people that Jesus cast demons from those possessed with the help of the prince of demons. Jesus saw through their falseness and referred to them as the generation of vipers. Their hearts was filled with injustice and nothing good ever came from their mouths. The tree must be anchored correctly and the fruit will be good⁷⁸. The heart had to be purified and then the words of the mouth would be good.

Jesus used another parable: when a demon leaves a man, it wanders about, searching for a new home. If it cannot find a new home, it returns to the home it left. It could be that it then finds the home empty, wiped clean and decorated, but uninhabited. The demon will then go in search of seven more spirits, more corrupt than itself and move all into that empty house. Then that person will be worse off than ever before. Jesus warns that this would be the same for that evil generation.

Jesus thus warned against human conversions. After a tragedy man can decide to improve his life by stop doing what is wrong. The heart of his home is wiped clean and decorated. This, however creates a very dangerous condition, because the demon could return and found that the Holy Spirit is not living there. The demon would move in again together with other evil spirits. When that happens, a disastrous end awaits that person.

The sign of Jonah pointed to Jesus

The Pharisees could not handle the judgement of Jesus. Again they asked for a sign, as if He didn't perform enough signs and miracles. They did not want to believe and Jesus did not want to give them a sign, except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jonah was a sign, firstly because he was in the belly of a big fish for three

⁷⁸ **Psalms 1: 3** “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”
KJV

days and three nights⁷⁹. Just like Jonah, Jesus would be in a grave for three days and three nights. Jonah in the big fish referred to Jesus's death and resurrection. Secondly there were the preaching of Jonah. Jonah had to preach against the great city Nineveh because they were so evil. Jonah himself was thus the sign of the coming judgement of God⁸⁰. The inhabitants of the wicket city repented themselves and God saved the city. Jesus was far greater than Jonah, and He acted to bring the Pharisees to repentance, but they refused to repent.

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79 **Jonah 1: 17** "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." KJV

80 **Jonah 3: 4** "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

25. Jesus teaches through parables

Matthew 13: 1-52, Mark 4: 1 – 36, and Luke 8: 4 – 18

Jesus announced the will of His Father

God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to earth, to deliver mankind from their sins. The Lord Jesus announced God's will to us, and taught us how to serve God. In this chapter we will discuss the following main ideas:

- Jesus explained his Father's Kingdom to people in an understandable way
- Jesus's kinship must be recognised in all areas of life
- True faith is to serve, honour and trust God in complete obedience.

What is a parable?

The high priests, scribes and most prominent of the Jewish people became very hostile towards the Lord Jesus, and they sought an opportunity to prosecute Him. Jesus was aware of this and He no longer spoke so openly and plainly about the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore He preached through parables, and comparisons to prevent them from accusing Him falsely.

The parables Jesus told the crowds, were stories about everyday life that Christ told to convey his Salvation and his Kingdom. Certain details about the story were used to explain deep spiritual truths, things about the Kingdom of God that was not known to man. Heavenly things could only be described with comparisons. In each parable there is a main idea. We must always try to see and to understand the main idea.

Jesus led his listeners from the known to the unknown⁸¹. He used things in nature and from his listeners life's to clarify God's Kingdom to them. Jesus thus pointed out the connection between the natural and spiritual world. As prophet, and by means of parables, Jesus revealed to us the council and deliverance of God. The parables are indicative of the way God used the prophets previously in order to speak to His people⁸².

81 **Psalms 78: 2** "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:" KJV

82 **Hosea 12: 10** "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." KJV

Jesus taught his followers through comparisons

The priests and scribes did not fully understand what Jesus meant with his comparisons and parables. Their lack of understanding made it difficult for them to slander, mock and blaspheme Jesus. The faithful listeners, always asked Jesus afterwards to explain the parables to them. The meaning of the comparison or parable then became clear. Later Jesus did not teach them through parables, but taught them openly⁸³.

The people who accepted Jesus and who were convinced about the coming of the Kingdom of God, had the ability to understand more about God than the unfaithful. The parables were a new way for them to understand the wonder of God's love and mercy.

Opposed to the faithful and the believers, were the unfaithful and disbelievers who refused to accept anything good from Jesus and the Kingdom of God. For them the parables were incomprehensible. They deliberately hardened their hearts and this way the word of Isaiah was fulfilled⁸⁴. They see and still doesn't see, they listen but without understanding. God decided in His council that they would not come to repentance. The salvation of the faithful is therefore a deep matter on which God has made a decision and He never changes. Forever he will remain the same.

The parables Jesus told at first, especially dealt with the matters of the Kingdom of the Heavens. The seven parables in Matthew 13 belong to this group. The first parable in Matthew 13 is concerning the sower, here Jesus explains how the realm of God is hindered in his growth and progression.

The parable of the Sower

The Lord Jesus taught the crowd at Capernaum, on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. He told them about a sower who went out to sow.

These seeds fell on four places:

- On the hard trodden road along the land, on the way side, where the birds quickly picked it up.
- On rocky, stony places (like an outcrop or stone reef, with not much

83 **John 16: 25** "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father." KJV

84 **Isaiah 6: 9** "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." KJV

land or ground) where the seed immediately began to grow, although it withered soon in the hot sun, because it had no roots and therefore withered away.

- Between the weed, and the seed grew with the weed, but the thorns of the weed choked the little plants.
- In fertile soil, it grew and produced fruit, some hundredfold some sixtyfold and some thirtyfold.

Jesus explained the parable to His disciples. The sower was someone like a preacher who proclaimed the Word of God. The seed thus was the Word of God and the sow was the proclamation.

If someone heard the Word of God but did not understand it, the wicket came to take what was sowed in the heart. The birds (who quickly picked the seed up) referred to the wicket.

The persons with whom was sowed on a rocky, stony place, were people who heard the Word and accepted it with joy, but this was only for a short while. As soon as those persons were oppressed or persecuted, for the Word's sake, they forgot and forsake their faith immediately.

Those with whom the seed fell between the weeds and the thorns were people who heard the Word, but the struggles of the world and the temptations of riches quickly made them forget the Word, and they remained barren.

The people with whom the seed was sown on good soil heard and understood the Word. They bore the fruit of salvation, for the Word worked and grew in them. They believe and are pious, peaceful, noble, and loving.

The disciples then understood that a lot of people will hear the Word, but few would truly come to faith and repent. The seed (Word of God) is good, but it does not take root in some people's hearts. With this parable Jesus prepared His disciples for the future. The expansion and survival of God's empire in the world is experiencing much opposition. The Apostles and everyone who is in service of God, shall sow the Word, and be mindful that many of the seed shall not bear fruit⁸⁵. This fact, however should not discourage them, because the listeners that understand, would bear plenty of fruit.

85 **Luke 13: 23 – 24** "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, 24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

The parable about the growing seed

Jesus also compared the Kingdom of the Heavens with a farmer that sow seeds. Jesus explained that when a farmer finished sowing, he could do nothing but wait. He continue to sleep and get up, while the seed germinates itself in the ground and first rise up as a blade, then a vein, and finally a full wheat, after which the farmer reaps what he sowed, the wheat harvest.

With this parable Jesus wanted the teach people, that even though the farmer sow the seed, he's not the one that makes the seed grow. Just the same we can preach the Word, but only the Holy Spirit can make the Word grow in the hearts of the listeners⁸⁶. We patiently have to wait for the blessing of the Lord. A preacher performed his task when he preached the Word of God. Paul explained that he cannot make the Word bear fruit, only God can do it⁸⁷. That is why the sower does not have to worry about when the seed germinates. He must do his work well and faithfully, leaving the task of growth to God. With God's blessing the Word would not miss its purpose.

The parable of the weed

The previous two parables dealt with the sower and the seed that grows on its own. These parables can bring one under the impression that everything always goes according to plan when the seed falls into the correct place (soil). But that is not the case. There was, is and will always be opposition and problems in the expansion of the Kingdom of God, for to the devil no deed is too foul.

Jesus told the following parable about the weed in the land, to illustrate this. The Kingdom of the Heavens is like a man who sowed good seed in his lands, but while the people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds between the good seed of the farmer. Later, when the grain appeared so did the weeds. His servants were surprised about the weeds but the owner said that a hostile man sowed it. His servants wanted to pull the weeds out, but the owner told them that they should not do that. He was afraid that they might also pull the wheat out. At harvest time they had to gather and burn the weeds, thereafter they had to store the wheat in the barn.

Jesus explained that He, the Son of man, were the sower. The land was the

86 **1 Corinthians 3: 7** "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." KJV

87 **1 Corinthians 3: 6** "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." KJV

world where He proclaimed his Word (sowed the seeds). The good seeds were the children of the Kingdom; and the weeds were the children of the wicket. The devil were the weed sower who secretly prowled and poured his evilness (the weed seed) out. The harvest will happen with Jesus's second coming. The angels will then separate the good from the bad⁸⁸.

This parable about the weeds between the wheat, point to the mixed characters of mankind and on God's patience. There are both faithful and unfaithful people in the world. It is important to realise that not everyone who belong to a church community are people who fear and worship God. Many churchgoers only pretend to be faithful. God save them until Judgement day. Just so, we have to patiently wait for God to reveal who belongs to Him⁸⁹.

The declaration ends with a prophetic announcement about the last Judgement and the appearance of all men before Christ on his judgment seat. What started with a seed in the acreage, will result in an eternal condemnation or glorification. Jesus emphasised the seriousness to the audience with the words "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 13: 9).

Leaven and the mustard seed

The following parables are usually paired together because it explains the same truth with regards to the Kingdom of God.

The parable of the mustard seed show the expansion of the Kingdom of the Heavens under all nations. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds known to man, but it grows into a huge tree, where the birds can nest. Just like the mustard seed, the Kingdom of the Heavens was small at the beginning, with only a few disciples, and from this small group, God's Kingdom expanded. This parable encourages every person who works for God.

The parable about the leaven (yeast) also has to do with growth. A woman took a small amount of yeast and worked it through a lot of flour, and although there was a small amount of yeast, the yeast fermented through the dough

88 **Revelation 19: 11** "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." KJV

89 **James 5: 7** "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." KJV

(flour) until it was completely leavened through and the dough proved.

The parable of the mustard seed was about the expansion of the Kingdom of Heaven, but the parable about the sourdough or yeast was about the inner work of the leaven (Scripture and Holy Spirit) among believers and churches. Just like all the dough proved with a small amount of yeast, so men are gingered up with the leaven of Scripture and the Holy Spirit. The gospel becomes a force in our lives and in the lives of many people in the world. The gospel brings hope for all who look forward to the Holy Spirit leavening the fellowship of man.

The treasure and the pearl

In both the parables of the treasure and the pearl, the one who found the treasure or the pearl must be prepared to sacrifice everything in order to own it.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that is hidden in an arable land (cultivated field). A man found it, he sold all his belongings to be able to buy the arable land. The Kingdom of the Heavens was like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and when he found that precious pearl, he sold everything he owned and bought the pearl.

In these parables Jesus wants to show that man had to sacrifice everything for the Kingdom of the Heavens. It is the most precious spiritual treasure man can own⁹⁰. All else is supplementary.

Some people find the Kingdom of the Heavens is like the treasure in an arable land. They do not search for it, but find it unexpectedly in the Word of God. They are so happy about this treasure they repent and sacrifice all other worldly things and serve God.

Other people search for the Kingdom of the Heavens like the merchant searched for pearls. They seek rest for their souls, but can't find it anywhere. One day they find peace in the Word of God. Rebirth take place and with the enthusiasm of a new believer, they part from their old sinful ways and only focus on God and his calling.

⁹⁰ **Philippians 3: 8** "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," KJV

Thus in both these parables man has to part ways with everything man once held dear, and decisively seize the treasure. In faith man must make a firm decision and carry it through, regardless of the cost. For such a step man is rewarded by possessing the great treasure and the precious pearl, which refer to the true Kingdom of God.

The parable of the net

Finally Jesus told a short parable about a fish net, which was known to the fishing industry (fishermen). By means of this parable about the fish net it became clear that one day a separation would come into the Kingdom of Heaven. Everyone on earth who came into contact with the Kingdom of Heaven weren't necessarily true subjects thereof. Separation on earth is not possible, it will only happen on Judgement day.

In this parable Jesus compared the Kingdom of the Heavens with a net thrown into the sea that catch all sorts of fish. As soon as the net is filled the fisherman would pull the net from the sea and gather the good fish while the bad fish are thrown away. The church of Christ is like this fish net, thrown out in the world, it catches good and bad people. The separation only happens on Judgement Day, when God decides who stays and who goes⁹¹.

For the disciples who were called to be fishers of men, this was of special significance. They were part of the Kingdom of the Heavens, because they had to stretch the net and pioneer the Church of Christ. Jesus prepared them for this specifically.

The treasure of the old and the new

After his teachings Jesus asked his disciples if they understood what he said. Initially there were two parables, the one about the sower and the one about the weed which they did not understand. Jesus had to declare these parables first, before they understood it. Little by little they comprehended more of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and that is why they answered in the affirmative on Jesus's question.

Jesus went one step further with the teachings of his disciples, because in the future they would be send out as envoys of the Kingdom. Jesus point out to them that greater insights carry greater responsibility. They were scribes,

91 **1 John 4: 17** "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." KJV

not because they were trained and taught by the Jewish scribes, but because every day they learned from Jesus how to interpret the Scriptures. In this way they became apprentices of the Kingdom of the Heavens and through the parables they learned so much more. They acquired new knowledge and insight, thus a spiritual treasure, which they had to use for the benefit of others. They had to learn and enrich other people from the treasure of insight. The knowledge of the Kingdom must be shared. They were not allowed to repeat the same things, until people became weary of it. The disciples had to bring forth new things from the great treasure they owned.

By means of parables, Jesus always revealed something new. Just so the disciples had to come forth with new things, in order for the audiences to also become rich in the knowledge of the Kingdom.

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26. Wonders of salvation

Matthew 8: 18 – Matthew 9: 34, Mark 4: 35 – Mark 5: 43 and Luke 8: 22 – 48

Jesus has Devine power

- Jesus is God's only begotten Son, and He has Divine power. Jesus was also human (with human nature, and all its weaknesses, but without sin). Jesus performed miracles while He was on earth and this showed that He was simultaneously man and God. This chapter focus on the following main ideas:
- To follow Jesus require sacrifice and dedication.
- Even nature was subjected to Jesus's authority.
- Jesus have power over the devil and death.

Discipleship demanded great sacrifices

Great crowds followed Jesus, but only a small group of people was committed to Him. Many people came to Him to receive help, but most were just there out of curiosity. They wanted to see the miracles He performed. Therefore Jesus explained the demands for a true disciple or follower during his conversations with three different persons.

The first conversation was with a Scribe. He became influenced by the Words of Jesus and admired Jesus as a great Rabbi. He wanted to join Jesus in learning. He came of his own and said to Jesus that he wanted to follow Him. Jesus did not welcome him, but earnestly declared to him that "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Luke 9: 58).

The Word's Jesus uttered were not intended to alienate the man, but to call him to level-headedness (sobriety). Imitation of Jesus was not a matter on which one could decide lightly, in a moment of enthusiasm. It was a serious decision because it required great sacrifices. Jesus had no permanent address on earth. He was a drifter, with less shelter and protection than the foxes or the birds in the sky⁹². He was despised and persecuted. As the Son

⁹² **John 1: 11** "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." KJV

of man He found himself on the way of suffering⁹³. Those who wanted to follow Jesus would thus have to tread the same road as Him⁹⁴. The scribe who was probably used to the finer things in life, the more luxurious way of living, therefore had to think about it first. We do not know what he decided, but we get the impression that he was not up for it.

Jesus called people to follow Him

The second conversation was with a man that was called by Jesus Himself. He probably followed Jesus for a while together with the crowd. Jesus spoke to him personally "Follow me" (Luke 9: 59). He was called in the same way Jesus called Peter, John and the other disciples. It seemed this man had a good reason to not immediately obey Jesus. He wanted to bury His father first, in other words his father may have been elderly, and he wanted to do his duty as a son towards his elderly father to care for him until his death. That was what the fifth commandment expected of him⁹⁵. Thereafter he would follow Jesus.

The answer Jesus gave, that the dead must bury their dead, sounds harsh. With that Jesus meant that those who didn't follow Him in faith, was spiritually dead and they must be the ones left to bury the dead. One must immediately obey Jesus's calling. Even the fifth commandment may not stop you. In this way James and John were obedient, when they left their father at the boat. Zebedee honoured the calling of his sons when he let them go.

The third conversation was with a man who came and declared that he was prepared to follow Jesus, but he wanted to say goodbye to his household. Thus he thought about the sacrifice and the consequences there might be, but he wanted to first care for his interests at home. Jesus showed him that once a person made a decision to follow Him, that decision was decisive and final. He could not serve Jesus and then turn back to all kinds of worldly interests and activities⁹⁶.

93 **Isaiah 53: 2** "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." KJV

94 **2 Timothy 3: 12** "Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good," KJV

95 **Exodus 20: 12** "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." KJV

96 **Matthew 6: 24** "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." KJV

Jesus calms the storm

Every year Palestine have cold, wet winters with accompanying strong winds over the Sea of Galilee. One day Jesus requested his disciples to sail to the other side of the lake. Upon their departure from Capernaum, the sea was calm, but when they reached the deep sea a storm broke out. Big, large waves beat the ship, and this made the disciples very afraid. They were skilled fishermen who knew the sea, but they realized that they were in grave danger. The ship was filled with water and they were afraid that they would perish.

The Lord Jesus however lay quietly and slept, while the wind bellowed and the ship bobbed up and down between the large waves. The disciples did not want to bother Jesus, but eventually the danger was so great that they could do no other. They woke Jesus with a cry of anguish to save them, because they were about to die. Jesus stood immediately and rebuked the wind and the sea: "Peace, be still." At once the wind died down and the water calmed down⁹⁷. A vast silence followed afterwards. Jesus asked the disciples why they were afraid and had so little faith? A great terror overwhelmed them, and they were astonished over the fact that even the wind and the sea obey Jesus when He speaks.

That group of men met the demands of discipleship, because they left everything and followed Jesus. They still had to learn to trust in Jesus unconditionally⁹⁸. Only then would they be able to fly in the face of any storm. They were filled with wonder and awe. Jesus did what the Psalmist said⁹⁹. He calmed the storm. They realized that Jesus truly was God.

Jesus in Gadarenes

Jesus and his disciples safely reached the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee that evening. For the first time during His ministry He entered pagan country. It was the country of Gadarenes. The city Gadara lay in a south-eastern direction, far from the sea.

There they found two men, both of who was possessed. (Mark and Luke only

97 **Psalms 89: 9** "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them." KJV

98 **2 Corinthians 1: 9** "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:" KJV

99 **Psalms 107: 29** "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." KJV

referred to one man. Most likely one of the men were more on the foreground and Jesus had more to do with him.) This particular possessed man was cruel and strong, and nobody could handcuff him with chains. People were afraid of him, because he screamed day and night, and he lived between the graves and he beat himself with rocks.

Jesus healed the possessed of Gadara

The possessed man saw Jesus from afar. He ran to Jesus, fell to his knees before Jesus and called out: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." (Mark 5: 7). This way the devil made the man call out, because the Lord Jesus already told the devil to leave the man. The devil spoke through the mouth of a pagan who did not know the religion of Israel. Thus the man could not from himself have called Jesus, "Jesus, thou Son of the most High God". He would not have known that Jesus had the power to inflict pain on him. It was the devil and his demonic spirits who knew who Jesus was and that He had the power to hurt the devil¹⁰⁰. That is why the impure spirit beg Him, not to hurt them before the last Judgement.

The Lord asked the man his name. And the man answered Jesus "My name is Legion: for we are many." (Mark 5: 9). The devils then asked Jesus to send them into a great herd of swine feeding nearby. The Lord allowed this. The moment the demons went into the pigs, the herd of swine rushed down a cliff into the sea and drowned. It is important to note that the devil always destroys: first the two unlucky men's lives and then the herd of pig's lives.

Jesus banished from Gadara

The keepers who had to watch the pigs, saw what happened and ran away. As far as they went they told the news to everyone they met on their way. The inhabitants of the town went outside and found Jesus and the two men. The two men were fully clothed and in possession of all their faculties. However, the people were not happy about the two men saved from the devil, they were rather upset about the herd of pigs they lost. They begged Jesus (the Saviour) to leave their country, and he left.

One of the saved men, begged Jesus to take him with, but Jesus said to him he should return to his house and to his people. He must tell them about the

¹⁰⁰ **Matthew 28: 18** "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." KJV

great things the Lord did for him. Thus although the people of Gadara send Jesus away, Jesus left the redeemed man as his envoy to preach his Works and Words.

The man was very happy to do this, because the saved heathen, was the first apostle Jesus sent out. This heathen had a message although he met Jesus for but a short while and probably knew nothing of Israel's expectations. A few months later Jesus again travelled through the area of Decapolis and during this journey the residents welcomed him with jubilation.

Jesus went back to Capernaum

The Lord Jesus went back to Capernaum and a multitude of people awaited him on the beach. An important man, a certain Jairus, a superior of the synagogue approached Jesus. He was the man who asked Jesus on different occasions to preach in the synagogue. He also knew how hostile the Pharisees and scribes were towards Jesus, and that they would resent him for approaching Jesus for help. But Jairus didn't care, because he was in desperate need of Jesus's help and he knew that only Jesus can help him. That is why the opinions of the scribes and Pharisees and the steps they could take against him, at that moment was irrelevant to him.

He fell to the feet of Jesus and urgently begged Jesus to heal his little girl that was dying. The Lord Jesus immediately went with him, but the multitude of people made it difficult to move. The man was anxious and impatient, because his little girl could die at any moment and then it would be too late.

The woman with the issue of blood

Suddenly the Lord Jesus stood still and searched for the one who touched his clothes. His disciples were surprised, because there were a lot of people who pushed and shoved against Him. Jesus knew that someone deliberately touched Him, for He knew that power had left from Him. A woman fell down trembling before Him and said to Him that she had an issue of blood for twelve years. She already paid all her money to the doctors, but they could not cure her.

The prescripts of the law made it more difficult for her, because according

to the law she was impure and not allowed to touch anyone¹⁰¹. Everyone avoided her and she had to spend her days in solitude. She also decided to get her help from Jesus, and in the crowd, from behind, touched his clothes. She was healed immediately. The Lord told her to have courage for her faith saved her¹⁰².

Jesus raises Jairus's Daughter from the dead

Impatient and restless Jairus waited while Jesus conversed with the women with the issue of blood. Jesus was still busy with her when word came from Jairus's home that his daughter passed away. Jesus said to Jairus that he should not be upset, because his daughter will be saved, Jairus just had to believe. They went to Jairus's home where Jesus took the father and mother together with Peter, James and John with Him into the home. Jesus send everyone outside and assured them that she was still alive, she was only sleeping and there was no reason to weep. However they laughed at Jesus, because they knew she was dead.

Jesus meant what he said. He was the resurrection and the life¹⁰³. That is why Jesus viewed death as a deep sleep from which He can raise man. After everyone left the house, He took her hand and called: "Talitha, cumi" (Mark 5: 41) which translates to "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise". The girl immediately got up and walked around.

The Lord Jesus did far more at Jairus's home than Jairus and his wife asked for or believed He could do. He called their daughter back from the dead. They had to realise that death was not final. Wherever Jesus was He spoke life-giving words. With His departure, Jesus requested them to not tell anyone about what happened. But such a remarkable event could not be kept secret.

Jesus healed two blind and one mute

Jesus came to earth to cure man from his spiritual blindness. The stain of sin cleave to man and makes man spiritually blind and spiritually kills man. In the gospels we read about four cases where Jesus made the blind see.

101 **Leviticus 15: 25** "And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean." KJV

102 **James 5: 15** "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." KJV

103 **John 11: 25** "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" KJV

After Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus He travelled further. Two blind people followed Him and called that He, the Son of David should have mercy on them. Jesus went into a house and the blind followed Him inside. Jesus then asked them if they believed He could do it. They answered affirmative, Jesus touched their eyes and their eyes were opened, they could see.

Take note that Jesus said to them, “According to your faith be it unto you.” (Matt. 9: 29). The amount of help they received were determined by how strongly they believed. If their faith was lacking (small), they would only receive something small, if their faith was big, He would give them great things. Thus, everyone who have the faith to expect great things from Him, can count on receiving great things from Him¹⁰⁴. Because everything the faithful receive, is a gift from merciful Jesus.

It was not necessary for Jesus to touch them in order to heal them. Jesus’s words were powerful enough, but Jesus deliberately touched their eyes as a sign to the bystanders that He was responsible for their wondrous healing. Jesus instructed them to not tell a soul about what happened, but they did not obey Him and told everyone in the countryside.

The people brought a mute demon possessed man to Jesus after he cured the blind men. The Lord Jesus cast the devil from the man and the mute man could speak again. The multitude of people were astonished “It was never so seen in Israel.” It was a day filled with miracles.

On that day Jesus proved His power over death and the devil. Thus even before the crucifixion and the resurrection, Jesus had power over death and the devil which is a great comfort to us.

Jesus commiserates with the crowd

Jesus went to all the towns and cities. He taught people at the synagogues and proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He healed every illness and ailment the people brought to Him. The crowds were filled with people who experienced pain, suffering and misery. They were spiritually starved. Jesus felt deep sympathy with them, because they were exhausted and overwrought, like sheep without shepherd.

The imagery of “sheep without shepherd” is used early on in the Old

¹⁰⁴ Luke 18: 42 “And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.” KJV

Testament to describe the Israelites¹⁰⁵. Thus they came to Jesus in the hope that He will be a Shepherd for them. When Jesus observe the multitude in need and in search of rescue¹⁰⁶, He direct His disciples to the great harvest and He encourages them to pray for more workmen.

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- Booyens, M.J. 2005. Laat my lammers wei. Pretoria: EFJS Drukkers. 154 - 156.
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¹⁰⁵**Numbers 27: 16 – 17** "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, 17 Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd." KJV

¹⁰⁶**Isaiah 53: 6** "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." KJV.

27. Progress and resistance in Galilee

Matthew 10, Matthew 14: 1 – 34, Mark 6: 14 – 56, Luke 9: 1 – 9 and John 6: 1 – 71

Jesus as human

In all respects Jesus was completely human, except He had no sin. He was in the body of the virgin Mary, called into being by the power of the Holy Spirit, without the aid of man. God could not leave man's sin unpunished. He therefore sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the penance of man. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, because He was without sin. In this chapter we will focus on the following main ideas:

- Jesus know and understands how great Satan's attacks are, which we face daily
- Man cannot save himself from Satan, and that is why the predestined are saved by Jesus from their sinful lives.
- The Lord Jesus wants to be known and honoured as Saviour.

The twelve Apostles and their mission

Jesus focused his attention on the teaching of his apostles (disciples) as envoys (representatives) of the Kingdom of God. Through his instruction and parables He taught and guided them. He sent the apostles in twos to proclaim the Gospel and to heal the sick. His assignment to them was to preach that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. It was the same message John the Baptist proclaimed and with which Jesus started his preaching. The apostles also had to spread this important message. In their preaching they had to bring forth both old and new things from the treasure they received. They were not allowed to profit from their preaching, because they received this spiritual treasure for free and thus had to share this treasure for free.

According to God's plan of salvation, they were not allowed to go to the heathens or the Samaritans, because at that stage, the time was not yet ready for that. In God's council it was decreed that the revelation of salvation should be done within Israel. Only after the plan of salvation was completed and Jesus died on the cross in Israel, the gospels could be proclaimed to the gentiles.

God would provide

Jesus commanded the apostles not to take extra clothing, food or money with them. They had to realise that God would ask great sacrifices from them, but that He would provide for their daily needs¹⁰⁷. They had to stay with those who received them kindly and hospitably, but where people refused to receive them, on their departure had to shake the dust of their feet. For example, Paul and Barnabas did this later on, when the people of Antioch and Pisidia rejected the Gospel¹⁰⁸. The residents had to realise that their refusal was a very serious matter. God's judgement on such a city, rested more heavily than on the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The apostles also had to understand that they would come across opposition and persecution. They were sent to the people like sheep are sent to wolves. That is why they had to pay attention to their own safety, act honest and be absolutely honest, so that no one could accuse them of anything. They had to be as careful as the snake and as sincere as the dove.

The apostles' experiences

The Lord Jesus prepared the apostles for a time when He would no longer be with them. He warned them that they would be persecuted and charged before kings and governors. They did not have to worry about that; not even about what they had to say in their defence, for on that moment the Holy Spirit would tell them what they must say.

The apostles, the church and Christians would be persecuted, because if the world would persecute Jesus, the Son of God, how much more would his followers be persecuted¹⁰⁹. A student was not greater than his teacher. Even the families of the apostles would persecute and hate them, on account of Jesus's Name. But they did not have to fear, for even the very hairs of their

107 **1 Corinthians 9: 13 – 14** "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? 14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." KJV

108 **Acts 13: 51** "But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium." KJV

109 **1 Thessalonians 2: 14 – 15** "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: 15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:" KJV

head were numbered¹¹⁰.

The apostles were to become fearless witnesses

The envoys of the Kingdom of the Heavens must continue to fearlessly preach and attest. Jesus taught them in silence, but they had to proclaim everything in the open. They would be threatened with death, but they should not let it deter them. They should rather fear the wrath of God, because He could in his righteous judgment, throw body and soul into hell. At a later stage Peter and John asked the Jewish Council if they should obey man or if they should rather obey God¹¹¹? They then told the Jewish Council that it is impossible for them to keep quiet, they had to tell of what they had seen and heard and experienced.

Those who would endure to the end, would receive life eternal. These words of Jesus is still valid today, everyone who remains faithful and confess His name to men will receive eternal life.

The return of the apostles

The apostles went out and proclaimed to the people that they must repent their sins. They returned in early spring, at the time of Easter, and were gone for about two months. Details and information about that time is not known to us. There is only the brief communication that they left, preached, cured the ill and casted out demons and devils.

When the twelve returned to Jesus, their hearts was filled with joy. It was wonderful to experience how the powers of the Kingdom worked through them and that nothing was impossible. The Lord Jesus gave his disciples the strength to complete their task¹¹². Jesus thus prepared them for what awaited them later on, when He would not be on earth anymore.

Gratefully Jesus received his students back. There was however great sadness about the death of John the Baptist. This event was worrisome,

110 **Psalms 31: 5** "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth." KJV

111 **Acts 4: 19 – 20** "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." KJV

112 **2 Timothy 4: 17** "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." KJV

because Herod Antipas moved his focus to Jesus. Herod thought about moving against Jesus, and because of that Jesus retreated to a quiet place, to continue there with his teachings of the apostles. They sailed with a boat to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The death of John the Baptist

Herod Antipas held a great feast on his birthday and Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced for the guests on Herod's birthday. Herod and his guests were very pleased with Salome and therefore Herod promised her with an oath that he would give her anything she wanted. Her mother, Herodias, hated John the Baptist, and she incited Salome to ask for John's head.

After she talked with her mother, Salome re-entered the hall and kneeled before Herod's throne. She then asked for John's head in a dish. Herod startled when he heard her request, but he was too ashamed to break his word in front of his guests and thus he send a soldier to behead John. The soldier brought John's head on a dish for Salome, who in turn gave it to her mother.

Like a shockwave the news of John's death travelled through the country. The Jewish people rejected and killed yet another prophet, as was previously done on numerous occasions in history. In that regard John received a prophet's reward. It however was a very disturbing situation. If the prophet John came to his end in that cruel way, what would the future hold for the prophet Jesus? John's disciples heard about John's death and they took his body and buried him.

Too late Herod realised what heinous crime he committed, when he complied with Salome's request. He later heard that Jesus preach, perform miracles and raise the dead in Galilee. This frightened him, for he was afraid it was John, who was raised from the dead. This was Herod's conscience which frightened him for the revenge of the "risen" John.

The Jews near Herod were not prepared to accept his declaration. They had different opinions. Some though Jesus was actually Elijah, who would come as the forerunner for the Messiah. Other saw Jesus as a prophet, but did not know His place in the line of prophets. Then there were those who agreed with Herod, that Jesus was in fact John who rose from the dead.

After the death of John the Baptist, the apostles had a better understanding

of what awaited them. John also was an envoy of God and he had to pay with his life, because he had the courage to admonish Herod and Herodias about their sin.

Jesus feeds the multitude

Herod Antipas anticipated trouble, because the residents of Galilee regarded John the Baptist as a great prophet. The people threw their lot with Jesus, expecting Him to lead a rebellion against Herod. Jesus were not a political leader and thus He left for Bethsaida also known as Julias, on the eastern side of Jordan. Philip, the brother of Herod, ruled over that area.

With the arrival of Jesus and his disciples, there were already a multitude of people from Capernaum, who travelled by foot to meet Him. Jesus had heartfelt compassion for them and He cured their ill¹¹³. It was late and the place was deserted. His disciples came to Him and said that He must send the people to the nearby towns in order for them to buy food, but Jesus said to them that they (the disciples) had to give the crowd food.

Five loafs and two fish

The disciples could only found a boy who had food with him. The boy had five loafs of bread and two fish but it was not enough food for the crowd of which five thousand men needed to be fed. And there were an unknown amount of women and children in the crowd who also needed to eat. The Lord Jesus ordered the crowd to sit down, because He wanted to learn his disciples a profound lesson. They had to be willing to place everything they owned, no matter how trifling, at God's disposal and to trust that He would use it to bless the multitude.

The disciples placed the people in groups of fifty or a hundred on the grass, everything was ready and all the eyes were on Jesus. He looked to the heavens and blessed the food. He broke the bread and then the fish and gave it to His disciples to serve to the crowd. Everyone was served and had enough food to eat.

Afterwards when they were finished, Jesus send his disciples to collect the uneaten portions left, so nothing would go to waste. Only after they filled twelve baskets with leftover food, did they realise the great miracle that occurred. Five loafs of bread and two fishes fed five thousand men and an

¹¹³ **1 Peter 5: 7** "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." KJV

unknown number of woman and children, with twelve baskets of leftover food.

This miracle was a sign and it revealed the glory of the Lord Jesus. He maintain and care for all¹¹⁴.

The people wanted to make Him King

The crowd was deeply impressed by what happened and they knew that He truly was the Prophet, who would come to the world. With force they wanted to crown Him king! It was their change to get rid of Herod! Jesus send his disciples away and compelled them to sail to the other side. He send the multitude away and then He went up the mountain alone, to pray. On the mountain He prayed to His Father and was once more strengthened by God for the difficult task that lay ahead for Him (crucifixion).

Jesus walked on the water

The disciples did not understand why Jesus send them away on the boat, and initially objected, but Jesus forced them to sail to Bethsaida. Early morning a strong wind brewed up, and they had to row hard, but it was in vain. The storm caught up with them, and they were afraid that the ship would be destroyed. While they were in a struggle for survival, they saw at daybreak, a figure across the water approaching them. They thought it was a ghost and petrified with fear started screaming. The figure on the water immediately talked with them: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." (Matthew 14: 27). They recognised the voice of Jesus.

When Peter heard Jesus speaking he insisted that Jesus should order him to walk on the water to Him. Jesus acceded and Peter got out of the boat and began to walk towards Jesus. He looked around him and saw the waves and the wind. The huge waves and the high (boisterous) winds scared him, and he began to sink. In his need he called to Jesus to save him¹¹⁵. Jesus held out his hand and reprimanded him for his little faith. A moment later both of them were back in the boat and the storm calmed.

114 **Ezekiel 34: 12** "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." KJV

115 **Psalms 34: 7** "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." KJV

The disciples were astonished about the extraordinary and supernatural event they witnessed that morning. This exceptional event forced them into introspection. They realised that they were used to Jesus's miracles and therefore did not consider it to be Divine interventions anymore. They once more understood that they were in the presence of the Holy One of God. The disciples bowed down in deep reverence, confessing that He truly was the Son of God.

Jesus rejected in Capernaum

The morning after the storm, Jesus and his disciples returned to Capernaum. The news travelled that Jesus was back again and people came to Him from all over the land. He had no intention to stay long in Galilee, but he did visit the nearest towns and cities to provide assistance to the people. The sick were carried on beds where people put them next to the street and on marketplaces, for Jesus to heal them.

The people wanted to call Jesus king instead of Herod. That morning they went to the synagogue full of expectation and with hope that they will experience political change. Jesus knew about their plans. He could not and would not be part of political matters. He did not come to earth for an earthly kingdom, but he came for a Heavenly Kingdom. Should the people call Him king, Herod would then forcibly suppress the rebellion and the Kingdom of Heaven could not be established that way. That is why Jesus had to make it clear in no uncertain terms, to the people of Galilee and especially those in Capernaum, He had a spiritual mission and only the people who believed in Him would acquire a share in the benefits of his Kingdom. In that sense He was the bread of life.

In the synagogue, Jesus had the opportunity to address the people. He did so in a long speech and firstly addressed the people about their wrong expectations. He explained that the many signs He performed, was proof that He did not come to establish an earthly kingdom. God sent him as Messiah for a Heavenly Kingdom.

The audience was not satisfied with this and asked Him for a sign. Moses brought the bread down from heaven, but Jesus did a lesser sign by increasing the bread. They wanted to know if Jesus could not also give manna from heaven and Jesus answered them that it was not Moses who gave the bread

from heaven, but God the Father¹¹⁶. God gave the true bread, Jesus, who came down from heaven to give life to the world.

Jesus, the bread of life

It became clear to the Jews that the Lord Jesus did not want to become an earthly king. They were extremely disappointed in Him. They did not understand that Jesus is the propitiatory sacrifice for the entire human race. Jesus took upon Him the wrath of God, and He had to suffer with body and soul, for the sins of man. His body had to be broken for the faithful¹¹⁷. The Lord Jesus said to them that those who eat His flesh and drink His blood would have eternal life. Jesus Christ were the living bread of life eternal. We experience it when we eat the visible bread as a sign of his body and drink wine as a sign of his blood, during the Holy Communion.

The crowd was disappointed about the harsh truth to which they did not want to listen. Jesus became lonelier, because a lot of his followers and disciples left Him, for He did not want to become king in the place of Herod.

It looked like everything He built, collapsed that Sabbath. Only a handful of followers were left, the huge crowd disappeared. The initial enthusiasm was gone and a spirit of deviance was rising. Jesus wanted to know from His twelve disciples if they also wanted to leave. Simon Peter answered that Jesus had the words of eternal life and acknowledged that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. They cannot live without Him.

Peter's words touched Jesus deeply. Although he was grateful, He also felt sad. Not all of the twelve disciples would remain faithful to Him. He chose twelve of them, as the Father gave them to Him, but one of them was a devil. It was a shocking revelation. They would later understand, that Jesus already knew Judas Iscariot would betray him and in view of him, Jesus declared that one of them was a devil¹¹⁸.

116 **Exodus 16: 8** "And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD." KJV

117 **1 Corinthians 11: 23 – 24** "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

118 **Mark 14: 10** "And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them." KJV

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28. That which comes from the heart is what makes man pure or impure

Matthew 15 – Matthew 16 and Mark 7 – Mark 8

The people rejected Jesus

With great longing Israel looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, but when Jesus did not want to set up an earthly kingdom, they rejected Him, because He did not meet their expectations. This chapter's main ideas are:

- God send his Son to His property, but God's people did not want to accept Him as their owner.
- The prophetic messages in the Old Testament were fulfilled.
- The Lord Jesus formed a congregation that would follow and serve Him.

Dispute about pure and impure

The members of the second commission of inquiry was at that time in Capernaum. They heard how Jesus gave food to more than five thousand people. Instead of rejoicing in this miracle, they thought of a reason to criticize the actions of Jesus. They came to the conclusion that all those people could not have washed their hands before they ate the food and according to them it was an offence against the traditions of the ancestors. They watched Jesus and His disciples closely and found that the disciples also eat with unwashed hands. They wanted to know why the disciples violated the tradition of the ancestors.

In the law there was no provision for the washing of hands before a meal. God commanded his people to be Holy¹¹⁹. The Jewish scribes translated the "holiness" as a matter of outward nature. That is why they prescribed all sorts of rules with regards to the cleansing of the body and commodities in order to ensure the "holiness".

119 **Leviticus 19: 2** "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy." KJV

Jesus began his answer from Isaiah¹²⁰. From the section in Isaiah where God declared that the people honour Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him. They observed all manner of tradition, while they transgressed God's commandment.

God's commandment demand that man should love and care for his parents¹²¹, but according to the Jewish use of tradition man could devote his possessions by a promise to the Lord, without actually giving them. This means that man thus does not have to help his parents.

The Lord Jesus explained to his disciples that the food man eats, can't make man unclean. When you swallow the food goes through the oesophagus into the stomach and the food is digested in the stomach. The useful parts of the food are absorbed in the bloodstream and the rest which are not absorbed, leave the body. Thus food cannot make man unclean.

Man must rather guard against the words that leave his mouth. Those unfriendly, insulting, nuanced, mean and bad words that so easily leaves one's mouth when feeling angry, irate or jealous. It is those words that makes man unclean¹²². Jesus warns that from the evil heart of man come evil thoughts: murder, adultery, prostitution, thievery, false witnesses and slander. Man must be aware of this.

Insults, damnation, blasphemous language and filthy obscene speech can hurt – sometimes more than a physical attack. "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." (Proverbs 12: 18).

Jesus laid down the principles that put an end to the ritual purification-regulations of the Jews with this pronouncement of Him. This opened the way for the ministry of the Gospel to the gentiles, who was regarded as the unclean. Jesus further showed that He regarded the outer purity ritual as a mask, which hides a spoiled and unclean heart. He had no delight in outward cleanness and purity, but He did have delight in a pure heart. During the

120 **Isaiah 29: 13** "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:" KJV

121 **Exodus 20: 12** "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." KJV

122 **James 3: 6** "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." KJV

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus already declared that those with a pure heart, would see God.

Jesus and the woman of Canaan

After the conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus travelled with his disciples to regions of Tyre and Sidon.

The people of those regions quickly sought Jesus's help. A Greek-speaking woman, a Syrophenician by nation, was the first to approach Him. Even though she was a pagan, she heard about Jesus's miracles and also that He is called "Son of David". Her daughter was possessed by a demon. She continuously called "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." (Matthew 15: 22). She begged Jesus to cure her daughter. The Lord ignored her and kept quiet. She walked after them and kept calling. His disciples later requested that Jesus should help her, for they wanted to be rid of her. Jesus answered them that he was only sent for the lost sheep of Israel.

During his ministry in Israel, Jesus saved some gentiles who believed and sought his help. His main purpose on earth was to reveal Himself as Messiah to Israel. After his crucifixion, his mission to Israel would be fulfilled and then the gentiles would have a turn.

The woman of Canaan fell to her knees before Him and begged Him to help her. He answered her that it was not nice to take the food of the children and to give it to the dogs. With this Jesus meant that He only came for his own people and not for the heathens. The Jews viewed the heathens as dogs. It sounds harsh and mercilessly, but the Lord put the woman deliberately to the test. She faithfully answered that the dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from the table. Because of her humility and great faith, Jesus immediately healed her daughter.

The healing of the deaf-mute and many other

Jesus did not return to Galilee, it was safer for Him in Decapolis. Multitudes of people brought their sick to Him, so He could heal them.

Matthew wrote about cripple, blind, mute, disabled and many more. People put their sick at Jesus's feet, for Him to heal. The crowd were surprised to see that the mute could talk, the cripple could walk and the blind can see.

They worshiped the God of Israel.

Just as the Jews came under the impression of the miracles of Jesus and exalted God; the gentiles also praised the God of Israel¹²³, and turned away from their own gods.

The second increase of bread

The gentile was so impressed with Jesus, they stayed with Him for three day. The place was inhospitable and the food was finished, but the people did not want to go home. Jesus noticed their hardships and felt sorry for them. He did not want to send them home hungry.

His disciples were concerned because they could not buy any bread in the desert. They answered on Jesus's question that they only had seven loafs of bread. Jesus order the crowd to sit down. He took the seven loafs and thanked God. He broke the bread and some fish, and gave it to his disciples to share it among the people. After the crowd of four thousand men, apart from the women and children, all ate and were satisfied, they collected seven more baskets full of leftovers. Jesus's miraculous power and mercy abounded toward the need of mankind. When all were satisfied, Jesus send them home. He and his disciples travelled by boat to Magdala.

A wicket and adulterous generation

A delegation of Pharisees and Sadducees interrogated Jesus upon his return to Galilee. The delegation did not only request a sign like the previous time, but specifically a sign from heaven. Jesus thus had to do something that would convince them God granted Him authority and favour from heaven. They reasoned that Moses brought the manna down from heaven and that God confirmed the authority to Moses with his voice from heaven on Mount Sinai. They wanted to see if Jesus would get a direct sign from heaven, to prove that He really was sent by God.

In his answer, Jesus also referred to heaven to join their reference. He pointed to the sky and said that they know how to interpret the signs in the air, if the sky was red in the evening, they expected nice weather, and if the sky was dark red in the morning, they predicted a storm. He wanted to

¹²³**Galatians 3: 8** "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."
KJV

know from them, why they could understand the signs of nature, but couldn't discern the signs of the times? Jesus already performed so much miracles, that it was obvious that God worked through Him. Jesus's miracles was far beyond human capabilities. The scribes knew the Prophecies concerning the Messiah, was about to be fulfilled. Jesus also alerted John the Baptist to it when he began to doubt Jesus.

The "pious" delegation of Pharisees and Sadducees, proved that they were a wicket and adulterous generation through their continued reluctance to understand the events correctly. They were riddled with sin, and therefore very wicket and evil. With allusion to the Old Testament thought that Israel was the bride of God, Jesus called the adulterous and unfaithful, a bride who was no longer worthy of the name bride.

To such a sinful generation Jesus would not give a sign, accept the sign of Jonah. On a previous occasion He explained what he meant with the sign of Jonah, and that is why He did not repeat it again.

Jesus warns of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Jesus sailed with his disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. During this journey he warned his disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees¹²⁴. His disciples did not understand that he warned them against the teachings of the Pharisees, they thought he talked about real leaven, because they forgot to take bread with them.

They, just like us, learned so hard to trust in God and forget about God's goodness so quickly! The disciples already forgot how Jesus multiplied the bread on two different occasions. Few loafs of bread fed thousands and left baskets filled with leftover food. The Prophetic word of Jeremiah ¹²⁵ applied to them; there was still a hardheartedness in them. That is why they did not understand what Jesus actually meant when He said that.

Jesus meant that the teachings of the Pharisees, was like corrupting sourdough working and leaven through the people and that evil teachings could influence the people and possibly also the disciples, negatively.

¹²⁴**Galatians 5: 9** "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." KJV

¹²⁵**Jeremiah 5: 21** "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:" KJV

The healing of a blind at Bethsaida

Jesus and his apostles came back to the neighbourhood of Bethsaida, where the first miracle of the increase of bread took place. They were not there for long, when a blind man was brought to Jesus with the request that Jesus had to touch him. The people believed that the touch of Jesus would bring the cure, but Jesus wanted to show them that it could also happen in another way. He did not want to encourage them in their superstition.

Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him away from the crowd. He wanted everyone to see that his touching did not do the healing. When Jesus and the blind man were alone outside the town, Jesus spat in his eyes and laid his hands on him. Jesus then asked the man if he could see, the blind then looked up and replied that he only saw unclear images. People looked like trees to him. Again Jesus laid his hand on him and then the man could see everything clearly from a distance.

Jesus did not want any form of superstition to originate with the people. That is why He cured the sick in different ways. It was not the act or the means that brought healing, but He Himself (Jesus Christ) that brought complete healing.

That which comes from the heart is what makes man pure or impure

Jesus travelled with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a land of the gentiles. It was a beautiful area with bushes, birds and waterfalls surrounded by high mountains. There were also a huge heathen temple and a strong Roman fortress. Jesus and his disciples were alone there, no crowd followed them.

In a lonely place the Lord Jesus went to pray alone. After his prayer He called his disciples. He wanted to know from them "Whom do men say that I am?" (Mark 8: 27) and in Matthew 16: 13 "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am". They answered Him that some thought He was John the Baptist and some thought Elijah and there were others who thought that He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. The people thus had high regard for Him and assimilated Him with to the great prophets of Israel, but to them He was a human, and not the Mediator or Messiah. Jesus then wanted to know from His disciples who they thought He was.

Simon Peter answered: "Thou art the Christ." (Mark 8: 29) and in Matthew

16: 16 “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” These words we call the confession of Peter. He knew that Jesus was far more than any prophet or man. Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. That which comes from the heart is what makes man pure or impure filled Jesus with great joy. Even though his disciples understood little, they realized that He was Christ!

Jesus beatified Peter, because it was His Father in heaven that declared this Devine knowledge to Peter¹²⁶. Jesus also said to Peter that his name meant rock and that He will build his church on this rock (That which comes from the heart is what makes man pure or impure), and the power of the realm of the dead would not overpower his congregation.

Jesus started his congregation

Jesus continuously called the faithful to follow Him or to become his brothers and sisters in the spiritual sense. Jesus made it clear that He was creating a congregation. A Jewish religious community are called a synagogue. Jesus formed a similar community with all who believed in Him and they became his congregation (Church). He presented his new unit as a building. He, himself was the cornerstone and his Apostles, who has testified as Him being Christ, was the foundation¹²⁷.

Christ would protect his church, for He has the keys to the realm of the dead¹²⁸. This did not mean that the church were untouchable, uncorrupted or uncontentious but that the church in all circumstances is connected to Christ and so receive eternal life.

Jesus said to Peter that He would give him the keys to the Kingdom of the Heavens; and whatever he my bind on earth (lock up), would be bound in heaven (locked up); and whatever he may dissolve (unlock) on earth, would be dissolved (unlocked) in heaven.

In the name of the church, Peter received the keys to open and close the

1261 **John 4: 15** “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” KJV

127 **Ephesians 2: 19 – 20** “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;” KJV

128 **Revelations 1: 17 – 18** “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” KJV

Kingdom of Heaven. These keys is the preaching of the Word of God, and the Christian Ban or Ecclesiastical Discipline. With these acts the Kingdom of the Heavens is opened to the faithful and closed for the unfaithful.

The key power of the Apostles, is transferred to all future church tenure. The church tenure thus had a huge responsibility to increase and sanctify the church of Christ by preaching and the application of ecclesiastical discipline. (The ecclesiastical discipline is the vindication of God's honour by the implementation of the demands of his Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This means that when one of the members of church sin, the Church Council will lovingly reprove him to undergo a change of heart and thus save him for the congregation.)

Jesus foretold His own death

The Lord Jesus told his disciples about his coming sufferings. His words were extremely difficult for them to understand, because it was contrary to all they (as pious Jews) believed and expected about the Messiah.

After That which comes from the heart is what makes man pure or impure Jesus told them that He had to go to Jerusalem. There He would suffer at the hands of the elders, the high priests and the scribes. They would kill Him, but on the third day He would rise from the dead. At that stage, His disciples already realized and acknowledged that He was the Messiah and it troubled and confused them, to hear that He must suffer to deliver mankind from their sins. Peter was very unwilling to accept this. He expressed the wish that God should prevent it. Peter still hoped Jesus would erect a glorious earthly kingdom for the Jewish people.

Jesus reprimanded him and said that he, Peter was a stumbling block, for he thought about the things of man and not the things of God. At that moment Jesus called Peter a Satan, because he let Satan use him in order to hinder Jesus's way to the cross. Jesus had to die on the cross to deliver mankind from all sin and the devil new this and therefore tried everything he could to stop Jesus from becoming mankind's Saviour.

To take up the cross

Again, Jesus said to his disciples that someone who wants to follow him, had to deny himself, bear his cross and follow Him. He who confesses that Jesus is the Christ, may not think of himself. He must forget about himself

and follow Jesus¹²⁹.

All their own desires, needs and preferences should be placed on the background, so Jesus may receive their full devotion. Just so all your strength must be aimed at pleasing God. In this way you bear your own cross to follow Jesus.

The sacrificial way of Jesus Christ leads to the victory of Glory with God. Jesus gave us the reassurance of eternal life, when He referred to the future. The son of man would return one day, just like Daniel predicted¹³⁰. Jesus, as Judge, will compensate us for our work done on earth, which means that as Christians who follow and are willing to sacrifice everything for Him, we will receive eternal life with God.

Recommended Reading

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- Ingwersen, G. 2008. Die Bybel oorvertel vir oud en jonk. Pretoria. 566 - 569.
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¹²⁹**Timothy 2: 11 – 12** "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:" KJV

¹³⁰**Daniel 7: 13 – 14** "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." KJV