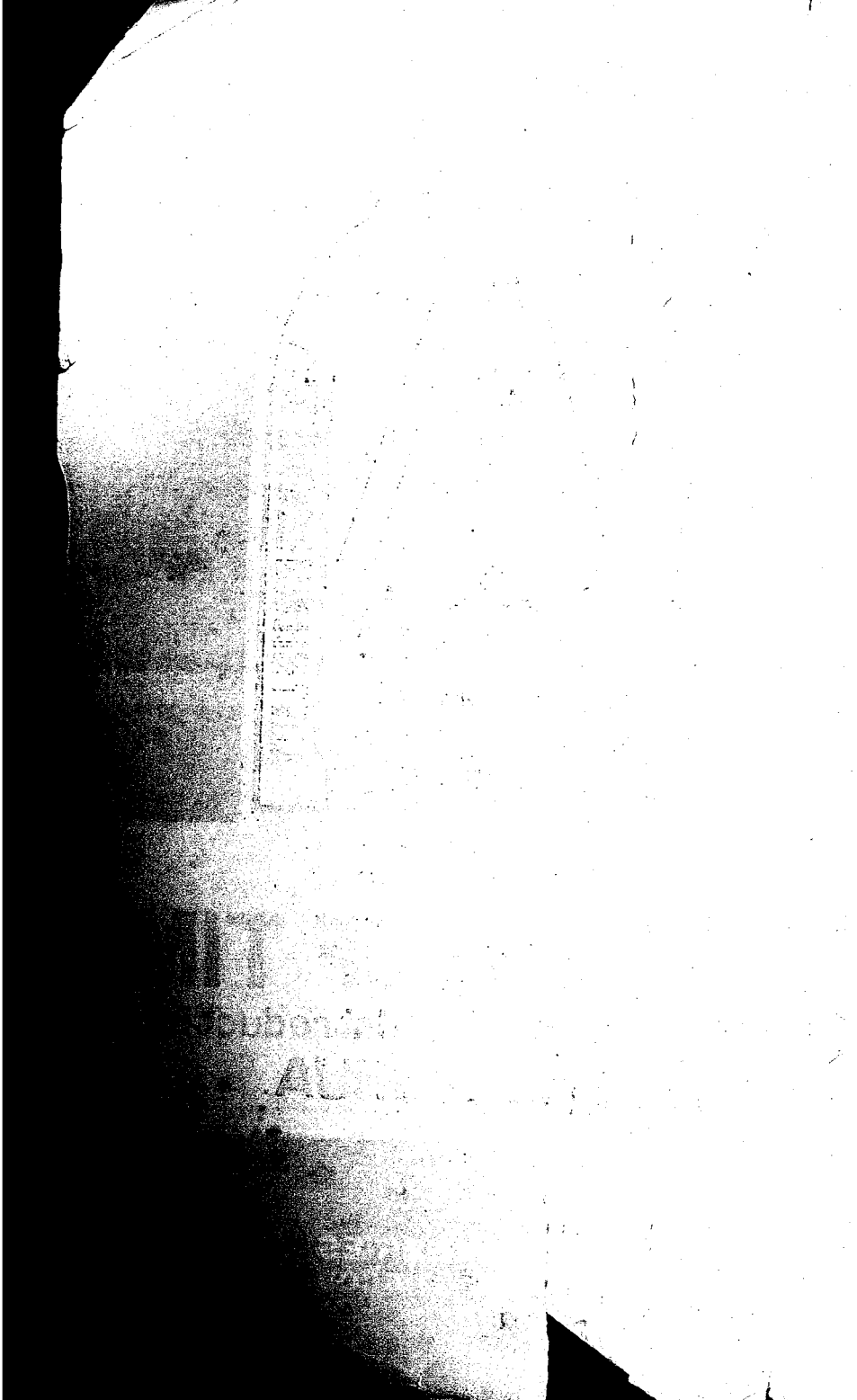


**IN THE  
FULLNESS OF TIME**  
(Gospels and Acts - An Introduction)  
**FR. T. J. JOSHUA.**

**DIVYA BODHANAM SERIES**  
GROWING IN THE WISDOM OF GOD

**1**



DIVYABODHANAM SERIES No: 1

# IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

(Gospels and Acts An - Introduction)

Fr. T. J. JOSHUA



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By Fr. T. J. Joshua, B. A., B. D., S. T. M.

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## FOREWORD

Him we declare to you, teaching every person in all wisdom, so that we may present every human person perfect and mature in Christ. St. Paul. Colossians 1:28.

Trusting in the grace of God, we launch this English series : "Divyabodhanam-Growing in the Wisdom of God." This English adaptation of the Divyabodhanam series in Malayalam, is meant for our lay people outside Kerala who are unable to use the Malayalam series.

This first series can only be on a experimental level. After the books have been used for some time, we hope to revise them in the light of users' comments. So please write to us quite frankly about how the series can be improved.

In our Orthodox tradition, we give only secondary importance to intellectual teaching. The most important thing is to participate regularly in the sacramental life of the Church, in worship and prayer. We grow in divine Wisdom as we separate ourselves from evil and grow more God-like.

The sacramental mysteries of the Church, like Baptism, Mooron (Holy Chrism) and Holy Qurbana are the means by which Christ wants us to grow in Him. Equally important is our life of selfless love and service to our fellow human beings. This study series can help you to grow closer to Christ, through worship, prayer and the sacramental Mysteries and through a life of loving and compassionate service.

As you prayerfully study these lessons, and thereby know Christ more deeply, the Holy Spirit of God will guide you into all truth and into the great mystery of God's love and wisdom.

May the blessing of God abide upon you as you embark on these studies and continue to grow in Divine Wisdom. May your life become a light amidst the darkness of evil, illuminated by the life-giving light of Christ.

New Delhi,

The Feast of the Dukhrono of  
St.Thomas, 1986.

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios,  
President, Divyabodhanam

Divyabodhanam, Growing in the wisdom of God Series:

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are immensely grateful to the Almighty God who enabled us to bring out this English version of "Divyabodhanam-Growing in the wisdom of God" Series. We put all our trust in Him alone, who provides His unceasing mercies to this programme.

We record our homage to H.H. Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews I, the Catholicos of the East who has been always gracious to us with whole-hearted encouragements for this programme.

We cannot forget the powerful leadership given by our President Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, Principal, Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam, who is mainly responsible for all the financial commitments to publish these books in this series.

This book "In the Fullness of Time" is an English translation of the original Malayalam book "PRAKASATHILEKKU", written by Revd. Fr. T. J. Joshua.

We must thank Prof. P. N. Chacko, Manarcad, who translated this book within a short period, and that too, without receiving any remuneration. This prompt and meritorious service of Prof. P. N. Chacko has helped us very much to publish this book at this time. We extend our heart-felt love and deep gratitude towards him.

We are extremely thankful to Mr. Philip Kuruvilla, one of our senior students for his valuable and timely service by way of giving some finishing touches to all Lessons in this book.

Our sincere thanks go to Revd. P. T. Thomas and other workers at the Ashram Press, Manganam for their prompt and neat printing.

For Divyabodhanam Central Committee

Kottayam,  
Feast of Transfiguration,  
August 6th, 1986.

Fr. C. C. Cherian  
(Co-ordinator and Registrar)

## PREFACE

This volume is the first in the series of the "Divya Bodhanam" (Growing in Divine Wisdom) text books. It was first published in Malayalam entitled 'Prakasathilekku', meaning 'Unto the Light.' The lay training programme is now extended to areas outside among the Diaspora of the Church. That necessitates text books to be produced in English.

This is not a word by word translation of the original book. We have made certain changes and adaptations. The length of each lesson is also reduced to make study easy. I express my sincere appreciation and deep-felt gratitude to my good friend Prof. P. N. Chacko (formerly of C. M. S. College, Kottayam) who readily and promptly made the translation. His deep Christian commitment and genuine interest in Biblical and Theological pursuits make him most suited for the task. I also thank Philip Kuruvilla, a student in the Seminary from the Calcutta Diocese for the valuable assistance he rendered in the editing work.

These lessons are written in simple manner for the benefit of the ordinary lay people. So, critical questions are not brought into its purview. It is only a general introduction to the New Testament. It also contains introductory notes to the four gospels and Acts. For the rest of the books in the New Testament, a second volume is planned.

A background knowledge of the formation of the New Testament is necessary for a proper understanding of its message. The book in the New Testament did not appear as bolt from the blue. They were books written by the Church and for the Church. The historical circumstances, if properly understood could explain much of the content in each book.

This is not in the form of a commentary, but a simple introduction to the books, with particular reference to the author, context, purpose and special outlook. This should help us to go deeper into the content of each book and get nourishment in spiritual life.

"In the Fullness of Time" God sent his Son and established his Church for the salvation of the whole world. God always works according to his divine plan. It is the task of man to co-operate with God in the fulfilment of God's economy. I feel that the title of this book "In the Fullness of Time" is quite appropriate and meaningful. May the Lord make use of everyone who reads or studies this book, an instrument to accomplish His divine plan.

Orthodox Seminary,  
23-7-86.

Fr. T. J. Joshua

## UNIT I

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

## LESSON 1

### THE RELATION BETWEEN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

*—New Testament impossible without Old Testament*

*—Meaning of "Testament"*

*—How the New Testament Writers made use of  
the Old Testament*

A friend of mine once remarked, "The Old Testament? I never read it; I read only the New". There may be many others who share this view. They may ask, "Isn't the Old Testament the Scripture of the Jewish nation which deals with the Law and its observance? What is its relevance for believers in Christ?". Under these circumstances it is absolutely necessary to understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

"The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the Old Testament becomes illuminated". This Statement by Augustine is very relevant and meaningful, and in it we can see the relation between the two testaments. A good knowledge of the Old Testament is absolutely essential for a proper study of the New Testament since the Old Testament events and doctrines find their fulfilment in the New Testament.

## Testament

Though we are familiar with the expression **Old Testament** and **New Testament**, sometimes they can be confused. The Hebrew word “**Berith**” means ‘Covenant’, and its Latin equivalent is ‘**Testamentum**’. From this word, we get the English ‘**testament**.’ By **Testaments** we mean the **Old** and the **New Covenants, Contracts or Agreements**. On Mount Sinai Yahweh made a covenant with Israel (Exod. Ch. 19, 24), while Jesus makes a covenant with the Church on Calvary (Mark 14:24). In the Old Testament there is a reference to the covenant to be made in the future, “The time is coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31). This is fulfilled in Christ; hence St. Paul says, “God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:6).

We can hardly overlook the many differences between the **Old** and **New Testaments**, but their similarities and cohesion attract us and we get the feeling that they are two parts of the same book.

### (a) Both Deal With The Same God

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same God who speaks through Jesus in the New Testament. The God who created the universe, delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and who spoke through the prophets, is the same one who accomplished salvation through Jesus Christ. “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The same God, who in former times spoke to our forefathers “. . . in these last days has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb. 1:2).

### (b) Both Testaments Deal With A Chosen Nation

The **Old Testament** deals with Israel, the people of God—their origin and history, victories and defeats and their ultimate aspirations. They are commissioned by God to carry on His mission in the world. Similarly in the **New Testament** the **Christian Church** is the ‘nation’ chosen by God. It is the **New Israel**, the continuation and fulfilment of the **Old Israel**. The new

community centred on Jesus Christ is God's specially chosen people and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6, compare with 1 Pet 2:9). They are commissioned to continue God's work of salvation in the world.

**(c) Old Testament Events Are Examples And Models of New Testament Events**

Many events in the life of Jesus Christ and in the experience of the Christian Church can be seen as symbols and signs in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ's return from Egypt as a child subsequent to Joseph's dream that Herod had died, his fast for 40 days in the desert and subsequent temptations, are all, according to the gospel writers, similar to experiences found in the history of Israel.

**(d) The Old Testament Finds Its Fulfilment In The New Testament**

Many prophecies and Psalms of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament and almost all the New Testament writers share such an outlook towards the Old Testament. Throughout the gospel of St. Mathew we find Old Testament passages scattered to prove that almost every event in the life of Jesus is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This can be seen in other gospels as well, though not so predominantly as in St. Mathew.

In the Epistles, Paul justifies and confirms his ideas. eg. Paul establishes that justification by faith is not a new doctrine introduced by him, but something already exemplified in the life of Abraham. He proves this by quoting Genesis 15:6(See Rom.ch.4 )

The New Testament writers often quote from the Old Testament, not to display their knowledge, but to establish that the Christian Church is not something that emerged overnight. It came into existence as a result of a well-thought out and well-planned preparation on the part of God. The Old Testament is a long preparation for the New Testament, and the hopes and aspirations expressed in it bear fruit in the life and activities of Jesus Christ as narrated by the New Testament.

**EXERCISE :**

- (1) Find out the Old Testament quotations in the gospel of St. Mathew.
- (2) Which events in the life of Christ are pointed out as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy ?
- (3) "The Old Testament is the scripture of Jesus. We in India should adopt in its place the sublime ideas of the Vedas and the Upanishads." Comment on this view of some Indian Christian thinkers.

## LESSON 2

## THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

—*Greco-Roman Cultural Background.*

—*In what period and background did the Christian Church emerge ?*

—*In what way did this background influence the Christian church and its writings ?*

—*A view of the politics, religion, culture and philosophy of this period.*

The most important factor that determines the growth of a plant is the nature of the soil and its surroundings. Similarly, it is necessary to find out in what type of surroundings the Christian Church grew and how it influenced the New Testament. In the previous lesson we learned that the roots of the New Testament are embedded in the Old Testament. But these roots reached further down into the Greco-Roman world and its cultural milieu. Hence we should learn the special features of that world.



### (1) Peaceful Political Atmosphere

The Roman Empire which reigned supreme during the New Testament period was very extensive, mighty and well-organised. After 200 years of bloodshed and violence, peace and order came during the reign of Augustus, and from 27 B C onwards a stable government existed. It was a strong administrative structure in which the whole Empire consisting of most of western Europe, North Africa, Turkey and Palestine, was divided into several provinces. Rome as the centre, exercised control over the provinces by appointing governors and other Roman representatives.

The stability and control of this large and widespread empire was dependant on certain factors. An excellent system of communication, by land and sea, was developed, and the phrase "all roads lead to Rome" was coined. Although Greek was used mainly in the Eastern Empire, and Latin prevailed in the West, the majority of people spoke a "Common Greek" to facilitate communication throughout the Empire, and freely exchange ideas and philosophies. Finally, Roman Law, famous even today helped to establish a sound legal system and bring about justice and peace.

### (2) Social Inequalities

In spite of political unity and a stable government, there was a great deal of social inequality. Rome's conquest threw up a society based on slavery, where the slave was more often than not, a tool, treated like an animal, with no rights whatsoever as an individual. There was a great number of poor people whose wages were insufficient to allow them a decent living. On top of this, the tax levied by Rome was unbearable.

### (3) A Diversity of Religions

Though there was unity in political life, there was a great deal of diversity in the religious field. Especially among the uneducated there were a diversity of gods, and temples of various gods existing side by side. Worship of the emperor became popular and temples sprouted all over the empire dedicated to one Emperor or the other. **Mystery Religions :** Mystery Religions and cults sprang up, mainly in the Eastern countries, but being popular, spread rapidly.

all over the empire. They were begun by the Greeks as they meditated on the gods and showed their exploits through drama, hoping to thus share in the experience of the Gods—thus, the cults of Isis, Mithra, Dionysius, Orphic and Osiris mushroomed, centred around the worship of one particular god. They all had a strange initiation ceremony. Often the devotee hoped to die, resurrect and become immortal like the god he worshipped. Most of these religions were austere against worldly pleasures and held promise of a divine ecstasy to their followers. The nascent Church found them a great challenge, and to its credit, the Church used some of their ideas to spread its message.

### **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism originated in the first century and grew directly out of the mystery religions. According to the gnostics, salvation could only be attained through 'Gnosis' or wisdom—but not the wisdom of rational thought or scientific analysis, rather, wisdom arising out of a mystery cult, obtainable only to a few "chosen". They also attached a great deal of importance to philosophic discussion and ascetic life. It became very popular and a serious threat to Christianity in the second century. Most New Testament writers condemn it, and Paul reveals his Christology when he uses "Gnosis" with a Christian relevance.

### **(4) A World of Diverse Philosophies**

Simultaneously many systems of philosophy were prevalent which aimed at fulfilling man's aspirations and his spirit of enquiry. This was an attraction for the intellectuals. The influence of Socrates and Plato who lived in the fifth century B. C. had not waned. It was generally felt that the basis of the visible world was the invisible world of ideas. They also held the reality of the world to come.

### **Stoicism**

Stoicism emerged and became influential in the fourth century B. C. According to it the good life is a life lived in union with the universe. God is a force pervading throughout the universe and in Him we live, move and have our being. In moral teaching, stoicism comes very close to Jewish religious thought.

### Epicureanism

It also originated in the fourth century B. C. Its noteworthy features are a concern with the world and an outlook of morality. The origin of the universe is believed to have resulted from the tension of the atom. Hence the world and man came into being by accident; there is no place for God. The aim of the Epicurean philosophy of life is to follow one's natural inclinations. Happiness and joy are to be accepted, and pain is to be rejected. Real joy comes from practising real goodness. Never give the conscience an opportunity to accuse you. In spite of all these, Epicurean philosophy finally drifted into the enjoyment of worldly pleasures.

The strong undercurrent of the above-mentioned theories and philosophies was widely felt in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. Their mixed thoughts and outlook were too strong to be ignored.

### EXERCISE

1. Compare the religio-cultural setting of the Greco-Roman world in the first century and that of present day India. What similarities and differences do you notice ?
2. From what philosophies is the Indian Christian Church facing challenges ?
3. If the early church absorbed many things from Greek culture and philosophy, why not the Indian church follow the same example ? Discuss in what way this can be done.

## LESSON 3

# JEWISH HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

—*History Just before the first Christian century.*

—*In what way has the historical background influenced the gospel and the Christian church ?*

The Christian Church gives a very important place to history. The Church believes in a God who controls, works in, and guides history. The Christ-event is a historical one. To understand this we must know the historical background preceding it. In the first century the people of Israel were struggling under a foreign yoke and eagerly awaited the coming of a God-sent Messiah.

### **Under Foreign Rule**

Israel had a long history of foreign domination. In the second century B. C. the Syrians, under the cruel Antiochus Epiphanes (175-157 B. C. ) overran the city of Jerusalem. He methodically tried to wipe out the Jewish religion and culture and replace it with a Greek one. His diabolical methods led to a revolt among the Jewish nationalists who organised a guerilla type of warfare from the mountains of Judea under the able leadership of Mattathias. In 165 B C he did succeed in defeating the Syrians and regaining the Temple. After his death his sons Judas and Simon, who called themselves Maccabees took over the leadership with fluctuating fortunes. It was during the tenure of John that the Pharisees and Sadducees came into existence, the former rabidly against the Maccabees, while the latter supported them, and were given the high Priest's position for this support. The Romans already in Syria, were invited to intervene, and thus, in 65 B. C. they entered Palestine which was in a state of civil war.

An Appraisal of the Maccabean revolution is appropriate here:

1. The Political freedom of Israel could be preserved for a short while.
2. There was economic and political progress during this period.
3. The people were brought about to a sense of duty to their country
4. The city of Jerusalem was made secure.
5. The faith of their fathers was preserved by resisting the onslaught of pagan religions.
6. Worship and sacrifices in the Temple, which were stopped were restored.
7. Some fervent religious groups emerged.
8. Certain psalms were composed during the period; for example Ps. 78, 83, 85, etc.
9. The new idea of martyrdom for the faith was generally accepted.
10. Coins were issued bearing the Maccabean name and seal.

#### **Roman Domination (63 B C - 66 A D)**

The Jews who enjoyed a certain measure of freedom under the Maccabees, once again drifted into another foreign domination. This lasted for a century. The Romans were very efficient administrators. They strengthened the Roman control by appointing regional administrators. Antipater was an Edomite who embraced the Jewish religion. With the support of the Romans he became the ruler of Judea. His son was the notorious Herod I. He became the ruler of the whole of Palestine. In 37 B. C. he was appointed administrator and he became King in 30 B. C.

It was this King Herod (The Great) who was ruler over Palestine at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. An efficient ruler, he nevertheless did much to promote Greek and Roman culture among the Jews. Before his death he divided his kingdom

among his three sons. Archelaus became ruler of Judea., Antipas , of Galilee and Perea, Philip of Iturea and Tricoeniah.

#### **Archelaus (4 B. C. -6 A. D.)**

He surpassed his father in cruelty and wickedness, mercilessly putting to death all his enemies. Highpriests were appointed and dismissed according to his whims. The influential families conspired against him and sent representations to the Emperor in Rome to dethrone him. (Luke 19:22-27 Examine the parable in this context). At last Augustus banished him to France and appointed a Roman procurator in his place.

#### **Antipas**

In the gospels he is called 'Tetrarch' (Matt. 14:1). He would do anything to keep his position secure (Luke 13:31). Jesus refers to him as "that fox".

It was he who issued order to kill John the Baptist after Salome's dance. He married the daughter of King Aretus, but divorced her and took his brother's wife Herodias instead. This led to a quarrel with King Aretus and finally to his own down-fall, as the Emperor banished him to Gaul, (modern France) where he died.

#### **Philip (4 B C to 34 A D)**

He was a better ruler than the other two. He rebuilt the ancient city of Pania and named it Caesarea Philippi, to please the Emperor (Matt. 16:12, Mark. 8:21). When he died in 34 A. D., his Kingdom was annexed to the Roman province of Syria.

We know of two other rulers belonging to the Herod family. They are Agrippa I and Agrippa II. Agrippa I persecuted Christians (Acts 12). He was a staunch Jew and earned the respect of the Pharisees. It was with Agrippa II that Paul entered into a discussion (Acts 25, 26).

#### **Roman Procurators**

We have seen how Judea was brought under the rule of Procurators. Pontius Pilate was the fifth Procurator. The Procurators.

were mostly power-crazy. They often had like Pilate, a great hatred and contempt towards the Jews which was reciprocal.

From 66 A. D. the Jews, under the leadership of the extreme Zealots, waged open war against the Romans. As the Jews lacked man-power and organisational ability, they incurred heavy losses in the war. In 70 A. D. Titus, son of Vespasian, completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple was burnt down. The prophecy of Jesus that "one stone will not stand on another" was fulfilled. Nero's successors Trajan and Hadrian also cruelly persecuted and scattered the remnant of the Jews till the Jewish people lost their home-land, and their Temple. They had to emigrate to different parts of the world till in 1948 the state of Israel was formed as a homeland for the Jews by taking land from the Arab nations, which is the root of the West Asia problem today.

### EXERCISE

1. Evaluate the gains made by the Jewish nation from the Maccabean Revolution.
2. What lessons do the tragic experiences of the Israelite nation teach us ?

## LESSON 4

# RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

—*Doctrines of the Jewish Religion*

—*Temple and Worship*

—*Sects and groups in the Jewish Religion*

In the previous lesson we have seen the historical background of the Jews. In this lesson their religious customs and observances are described. Such a study is essential to understand many references in the teachings of Jesus and the exhortations of the apostles.

After the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, more knowledge is available about the Jewish religion of the first century and its religious customs. The Mishnas of the Jewish Rabbis and the Talmuds throw much light on this subject.

### I DOCTRINES

First we shall examine their basic beliefs :

#### (a) Monotheism

Belief in one God was very strong. After the captivity the Jews completely discarded idols and discovered a God who attaches great importance to moral principles. They emphasised His purity, and His righteousness. Because of God's incomprehensibility and holiness they never pronounced the name "Yahweh". The transcendent and inaccessibly brilliant God made his presence felt in the world and its people through his Shekinah or glory.

#### (b) God's own people

There is a special relationship between God and Israel. They were miraculously delivered from Egypt, then God entered into



a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. Hence Israel felt they were God's own people.

### (c) The place of the Law

The relation between Yahweh and Israel is maintained through Torah or the Law. They believed that the Torah existed even before the creation of the earth. When the Torah was given great importance, a group of people called Sopherim (Scribes) rose up to teach and interpret the Law. The Law consists not only in the written form, but also the oral traditions, transmitted from generation to generation. The Pharisees considered both equally important and binding. The importance of the Synagogues consisted in the fact that they were centres to recite and teach the Law.

### (d) Hope for the Messiah

Israel believed in a God who acted in history, in the God who delivered them from Egypt. Hence when they were suffering under foreign rule, they expected that God would send them a liberator, a Messiah who would deliver Israel from all her problems and establish God's Kingship while keeping the people in purity and obedience. Their hope about the Messiah was that he would be a great leader like Moses or a great King like David. Some thought that he would come in a supernatural manner from the clouds.

The people asked John the Baptist whether he was the messiah because the hope of the Messiah was very strong among them. The large majority of the people could not accept Jesus as the Messiah because his character and conduct were contrary to their expectation. Jesus was gentle, meek and humble, not the powerful, all-conquering hero they expected.

### (e) Resurrection

In the O. T. there are not many references about life after death. There are indications in some parts that there is a continuation of life even after death (Psalms 16, 17, 49, 73; Job 14: 13-15; 19:25-29). But this will be a pale shadowy and inactive existence in 'Sheol'.

Yet during times of persecution (like the period of the Maccabees) they began to think seriously about the state of those who laid down their lives for defending the faith. A clearer conception regarding the immortality of individuals arose. As a result of all these, belief in bodily resurrection and final judgment became popular.

The thought about bodily resurrection strengthened during the time of the Maccabees (Dan. 12:2). At the time of our Lord the Pharisees believed in Resurrection while the Sadducees denied it (Mt. 22:23-33, Acts 23:6).

## 2 THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM

From the time of the Prophets, Ezra and Nehemiah the centrality of the Temple was recognised. What was its importance? The glory of God (shekinah) resided there. If God's presence was concentrated any where in the world, surely it was in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies. God granted absolution to His own people on condition that they offer sacrifices and penance.

The Jewish religion believed that on certain special occasions God would miraculously appear and work for them. They observed festivals to remember such events in the past. For example, they observed Passover to remember the liberation from Egypt; Pentecost (Festival of weeks) to remember the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and the Festival of the Tabernacles (Sukoth) to remember their dwelling in tabernacles while they were in the desert. The Feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication were also celebrated in this way. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was a day of fasting, repentance and sacrifice by which they hoped to get reconciled with God.

Besides the Temple of Jerusalem there were synagogues which served as centres for worship. The origin of the synagogues was probably during the captivity in Babylon (587 B. C.). In the Temple the main ceremony consisted of offering sacrifices, but in the synagogues the main features were the reading of scripture and study of the Law.

### 3 PARTIES IN THE JEWISH RELIGION

The Jewish religious life was centred around the Law, The Temple, Festivals and Synagogues. The Jews' attitude to these made them form different parties, eg. faith in the Law itself made them belong to different groups :

#### (a) Am Haarez (the people of the land)

They formed the large majority who had neither zeal nor interest in religious observances and so the religious leaders had contempt for them. They were also called "Sinners" together, with the tax-collectors. Yet they were "the lost sheep of Israel" whom Jesus Christ loved and moved with during his ministry.

#### (b) Pharisees

This word means "Separated" or "Set apart". In the previous chapter we have noted their origins. They gave the highest place to the Law which reveals the will of God. For them the oral traditions that grew were as important as the written part of the Law. They genuinely tried to interpret the Law according to the needs of the times. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, existence of angels and spirits, and also in the freedom of man. The gospels give a rather unsympathetic picture of them but does not reveal their real nature.

#### (c) Sadducees

'Sadducees' might have come from the word 'Sadok.' They belonged to the order of priesthood. Their origin was probably in the second half of the second century B.C. They were often opposed to the Pharisees. As they were involved in the affairs of the temple and the ministry there, they kept themselves aloof from the common people.

They accepted only the written part of the Law, and rejected the oral traditions in toto. The reason for this was clear — the Sadducees enjoyed financial and social security. So they were self-complacent and wanted no change. Hence they accepted only the unchanging written part of the Law and rejected the lively and relevant oral tradition. They did not accept the re-

surrection of the dead. When there was scope for enjoyment and consolation in this world, there was no place or need for believing in another. They believed neither in angels or spirits. They taught that men by themselves should try to find solutions to their problems. They tolerated and actively aided the Roman domination in order to maintain the status-quo.

#### (d) The Essenes

They were a group of ascetics who lived in the desert on the western coast of the Dead Sea. Though we get some information about them from the writings of Philo and Josephus, historians of that periods, more information was available after the recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. Scholars hold the view that the Qumran monks and the Essenes belong to the same community.

The attitude of the Essenes towards the Law was more serious even than that of the Pharisees, and this might be the reason that made them go in for an ascetic life in the desert. They held everything in common and stressed on manual labour. By their correct study and observance of the Law, they hoped that they would be prepared for the coming of the Messiah. This community and their ideas and ideals have exerted a great influence on Christianity and the N. T. Besides these sects and parties there were a set of extremists called Zealots. There were also supporters of the family of Herod, called Herodians. These have been briefly mentioned in the Gospels.

#### EXERCISE

1) To what extent have the doctrines of Israel in the 1st century emerged in the NT and in the Christian Church?

2) If it was their attitude towards the Law that divided the Jewish people, how has the attitude to the Bible divided the Christians into different groups today?

## LESSON 5

### GEOGRAPHY OF ISRAEL

—Where is Israel? What kind of country is it?

—Understand the places in their relation to gospel-events

—Climate

(Note: It would be helpful to keep a map of the land while reading this lesson.)

The gospels describe the activities of Jesus Christ. In them there are a number of geographical references about cities, roads, mountains, lakes, ocean and rivers. It is necessary to understand their location and nature to know more about the Gospel narratives.

### NAMES OF ISRAEL

Israel is known by several names :-

#### **Canaan**

Canaan is the most ancient name, and was derived from the name of the early inhabitants.

#### **Palestine**

Palestine: This name with which we are more familiar, was given by the Greeks calling it 'the land of the Philistines.'

#### **Israel**

Israel: It is commonly known in the Bible by this name and it is also the modern name in use today. The meaning of Israel is "the land of Israelites", "God's own people". In the Bible it is also called the "land of milk and honey" and the 'promised land.'

## Holy Land

It is called the 'Holy Land' because it has religious associations for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

### WHERE IS ISRAEL ?

The land of Israel lies at the cross-roads of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. Today it is surrounded by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. This important geographical location has affected the destiny of the country to a very great extent. "The city of Jerusalem I have set among the nations, with other countries around her" (Ezek 5:5). Generally speaking the boundaries of the land are Dan in the north, Beersheba in the south, the Mediterranean sea in the west and Bashan in the east. The area consists of about 15000 sq. km. Its length is 217 k.m., the greatest width (at the southern end) is 150 k.m. and the least width (north) is 67 k.m. Transjordan on the eastern bank of Jordan was at one time inhabited by Jews. Even when the two parts are taken together Palestine is smaller than Kerala State.

### PHYSICAL FEATURES

Israel, the land of mountains and valleys, was formed as a result of many complicated geological convulsions and changes in pre-historic times.

According to its physical features Israel can be divided into four parts :

#### (1) The coastal plain

This is the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It has no uniform width. This includes three regions :The Pheonician, Sharon and Philistine plains. Some port-cities are also located here : Joppa, near modern Tel Aviv, Lydda Ramlay, Tyre, Sidon. Mount Carmel is between the Phoenician and Sharon plains.

#### (2) Central Mountainous Region

This is on the eastern side of the plains. This is a region covered with hills and pasture lands. Three regions viz. Judea, Samaria and Galilee are situated here. The climate of this region is pleasant. At the southern tip is the Negeb desert with a dry climate.

### (3) Jordan Valley

This valley extends from Lebanon valley in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south. It has a length of more than 580 k.m. This valley has a width of 3 to 5 kilometres. The valley was formed as a result of convulsions in the interior of the earth. This is the lowest region on the face of the earth. The Jordan river flows southwards through the middle of the valley in a zig-zag manner. The river Jordan rises from the foot of Mt. Hermon and reaches the Hula lake which is marshy. From there it flows south and reaches the sea of Galilee. From the southern tip it flows again and falls into the Dead Sea.

### (4) Mountains on the opposite side of Jordan

The fourth region is Trans Jordan. In the Bible it is usually called "the regions beyond Jordan", that is, the regions to the east of river Jordan. This is partly fertile and partly dry plateau. The special features of this place are a mild climate, cool winds from the west and more rain than western Jordan. Here there are many grass-lands and fertile fields. The ancient countries of Moab and North Gilead were situated in this region. The important river in this region is the Yarmuk. The land north to this is called Bashan in the Old Testament.

## ROMAN PROVINCES

The Romans divided Israel into four provinces (1) Judea (2) Samaria (3) Galilee (4) Perea.

### (1) Judea.

This is situated in the south. It is full of high hills and low valleys which are fertile. The slopes of mountains are useful as pasture-lands for sheep and cattle. The important cities are Jerusalem (which was the capital), Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron and Beersheba. The route to the Suez, Sinai and Aquaba passes through Beersheba. The cave of Machphela (where the tombs of the patriarchs are situated) is in Hebron, though now a Muslim mosque is found on the site. The town of Bethlehem and the valley near it have great natural beauty. The city of Jerusalem is 10 k.ms. north of Bethlehem. Jerusalem which has witnessed

so many historic events is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

### (2) Samaria

Samaria is a highland. Three ancient centres of pilgrimage are situated here viz. Bethel, Shiloh and Shechem (modern Nablus). This high-land appears wider and more fertile as we go to the north. The twin mountains of Ebal and Gerizim are in Samaria. Shechem is between these two. The ancient "Well of Jacob" is found here. The city of Samaria (modern Shomron) was the capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel. Its remains now stand as mute witnesses to many historical events.

### (3) Galilee

Galilee is at the extreme north of Israel. It has some lovely mountains eg. Gilboa, Tabor, Carmel and Hebron. The important routes to Damascus in the north and Pella in the east connect Galilee with other places, and make it of strategic importance.

In Galilee mountain ranges and plains are found one after another and the climate is pleasant. Galilee is a place specially blessed by nature and hence it is thickly populated and prosperous. Several towns arose on the coast of the lake of Galilee. The fresh-water lake is known by the names Galilee, Tiberius and Gennasareth. It has a length of 21 km., a width of 13 km. and lies 686 feet below sea level. Because of variations in atmospheric pressure, storms, even now occur suddenly and unexpectedly.

## CLIMATE

The climate of Israel is as diverse as its physical features. While the Hermon region in the north is freezing with cold, the Negeb desert in the south is in scorching heat. When occasional snow falls in Jerusalem, Jericho (23 km. to the east) enjoys a temperate climate.

Generally speaking there is a dry season from the middle of June to the middle of September in Israel when the sky is clear and cloudless. The frost and the humidity of the morning do a lot of good to the plants and trees. The vine grows abundantly



in this climate. Harvest is at the first stage of summer. The sea-breeze which blows inland to the east, moderates the heat. The temperature will be highest in the middle of June and dry season is upto the middle of September when a hot wind comes from the southern desert. When you see the south wind blowing, you say "there will be scorching heat" and it happens" (Luke 12:55).

October begins the rainy season and the cold follows it. At least once a week there will be strong cyclonic winds followed by good weather. When the wind blows from the west the rising and the setting of the sun can be very beautiful (Read Matt. 16:2-3).

After winter, by March-April, spring makes its appearance, the plants and trees which are bare of leaves in winter show a new life, with green leaves and buds sprouting all over. It is then that the Easter celebration comes with its message of new life. During this time throughout Palestine, beautiful, fresh flowers will be blooming on the plants and trees, and the land of Jesus's birth appears like a heavenly garden.

### EXERCISE

1. Draw a map of Israel. Mark the important provinces, cities, lakes etc.
2. Find out how far the physical features of Israel affected the history and outlook of life of the people.
3. Find references in the Gospels to the climate of Israel.
4. "Israel is a land of diversity". Discuss how far this statement is true, regarding its geography and climate.

## LESSON 6

### THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- We can understand the historical background of each book by learning the historical growth of the New Testament.*
- The New Testament is formed by the Church for the Church.*
- How did the Holy Spirit work through the codification of the New Testament to get over false teachings and maintain an authentic faith ?*

What did Jesus Christ and the apostles have as Scripture? Only the existing Old Testament. How did the Gospels and the other New Testament books come into being? This study is useful in so many ways. Because it can help us to know the relation between the church and the Bible and explain the statement that the Bible consists of "books written by the church for the church".

The Letters of Paul are the first books to be written in the New Testament. They were not written in the hope or intention that they would be regarded as scriptures. Paul was prompted to write these because of the problems and needs that arose in the churches which he had founded and to which he was related, which now faced the problems of disunity and divisions raised by false teachings and false customs. But as they are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they became relevant to any nation at any time. Each of his letters was written to a church or one individual. It was after the time of the Apostle that they were collected together. By the time Peter wrote his second letter, Paul's letters had become popular. See 2 Pet 3:15.

#### **The Gospels : How were they formed ?**

In the early stages, nobody ventured to put the gospel truths into a written form. There were many reasons for this :

1. The apostles and other evangelists preferred evangelism by speech to written-evangelism. They might have felt this to be the command of the Lord (Matt 28:18, 2 John verse 12.)

2. As they hoped that the second coming of the Lord (Parousia) would happen imminently, they never felt the need to leave any written record.

Thus, the gospel spread orally for the first three decades after Jesus' lifetime. The eyewitnesses faithfully told the people what Jesus had said and done (1 John 1:1-2.). The church knew the good news 'by hearing' the apostles teach (Acts 2:42). Later evangelists performed this duty in regional churches (Eph 4:11). Thus the gospel-traditions spread in the church through verbal teaching. This is clear when Luke says "following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the gospel" (Luke 1:2). Paul also states that gospel tradition was handed down by verbal means (1 Cor 15:3). Those who read the gospels carefully can understand that the oral style exceeds the written style, and conversational sentence structure predominates here.

Much research has been done on this oral tradition, and it is obvious that the gospel written, adapted the words and actions of Jesus to suit the times and places (a house "built on rock" in stormy Palastine was common place). This is one reason why the same teaching can be seen in different gospels in different forms or contexts.

### **The circumstances leading to the writing of the Gospels**

The period of the apostles who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry was passing quickly, and the chances of hearing them decreased alarmingly; only then an urge came to keep a written record. It was also a fact that when the church grew and spread to many regions, it was not possible for the apostles and their co-workers to be present everywhere-the written word could travel much faster. They came to realise that the Second Coming was not as imminent as they expected. These were the main factors that ultimately lead to the Gospels being written as memories of the apostles, as articles of the belief of the community, and aids to the study of religious doctrines.

By the end of the first century, the letters of St. Paul, the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, other letters and the book of Revelation were written (some scholars feel that certain books were written only in the second century). But they were not put together in the form of the book we see today. It was recognised as Scripture only later.

### **The New Testament Canon**

During the second century, in addition to the New Testament books generally accepted, certain other books also became popular. Most of them were written by heretics to spread their own doctrines. Thus, two types of books were in circulation, one written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the other containing false and personal teachings. This produced a lot of confusion among the believers. It must be remembered that at that time the term 'Scripture' meant only the Old Testament books. Yet in the worshipping community the Gospels and the letters of Paul were read and gradually the church considered them also as valuable as the Old Testament books.

The New Testament canon was formed to check the activities of the heretics. The example of the Jewish Old Testament influenced the Christian Church which wanted to have a set of authoritative books just as the Jewish Church had its Old Testament books.

The Greek word 'canon' means literally 'measuring rod'. Figuratively it may mean 'norm' or 'standard'. The New Testament canon ultimately determined which were the authoritative books containing the basic teachings.

Three main norms were followed for inclusion in the New Testament canon :

1. The book should have long record of being used in public worship.
2. The contents of the book should be spiritually profitable for the readers and it should also agree to the true doctrines.
3. The authenticity of the book—it should be written either by the apostles themselves or their close followers.

The four Gospels conformed to these norms and so they were accepted. In the same way thirteen letters of Paul also were included in the canon. The other New Testament books got recognition only later in stages. Yet they were also finally accepted. This was on the supposition that their authors had close connection with the apostles.

The Letter to the Hebrews, James, Jude, Revelation, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, these 9 books received universal recognition only very late. Among these the history of two books, Revelation and Hebrews is noteworthy. Though the letter to the Hebrews was recognised early by the Eastern Churches it was recognised by the Western Church only by the end of the fourth century. The book of Revelation got recognition early in the Western Church but the Eastern Church ignored it. Though the Byzantine Orthodox Churches later gave it recognition, the Oriental Orthodox Churches have not yet given it formal recognition.

When the historical enquiries were being carried on, Marcion, a heretic, published a list of the New Testament books for the first time (mid. 2nd century). He completely rejected the Old Testament, instead he chose Luke's Gospel and ten letters of Paul, often making changes in the text to establish his teachings. It may be after Marcion that the Church decided to give equal importance to the New Testament, because they were forced to publish an official list of books acceptable. The ancient writings discovered by Muratori in Italy in the 18th century may have been the official canon of the Church in Rome in the 2nd century. Most of the Church Fathers have given lists of New Testament books acceptable to their tradition and they have not all agreed.

In the encyclical letter issued by Athanasius of Alexandria in AD 365 a New Testament canon was described in which were 27 books. Though the Ecumenical Synods have not made any pronouncement about the canon of the Bible, a list formulated by the Carthage Council of the Western Church (in 397 AD) contained the 27 books that comprise the New Testament today.

**EXERCISE**

1. How can the relation between the Church and the Bible be defined ?
2. What insight can we get from the historical study of the composition of the New Testament about our attitude to the Bible ?
3. "The Bible is God's Word". What is meant by this statement ?

## UNIT II

# SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## LESSON 1

### APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION

*—The Gospels were formed out of the apostolic proclamation.*

*—The fundamental faith of the Christian Church is contained in the apostolic proclamation.*

The origin of the Christian church is in the Jewish church of the first century. In the early stages there were no external differences between them. They worshipped together in the Temple and synagogues bound by a common language and culture, celebrating the same festivals. But there was one thing which separated the apostles from the Jews. That was their conviction about Jesus as the Messiah, and the awareness of His abiding presence with them.

The convictions about Jesus did not emerge from intellectual knowledge or psychological analysis. It was something that the spirit of God revealed and something they experienced in their lives which they proclaimed courageously before the world. The nature of their proclamation can be found in the pages of the New Testament.

#### Examine the following passages

1. Corin. 15:1-11, Acts 2:14-36, 3:12-16; 4:8-12, 10:34-43, 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2:2-24. In these we can see the essence of Christian faith, and the content of the Christian proclamation.

The contents of the Apostolic proclamation can be summarised as follows :

(1) Jesus Christ came into history as the fulfilment of prophecies. He is the fulfilment of the will and purpose of God as revealed in the Old Testament, at the same time, it is the beginning of a new era. Jesus Christ opens a new horizon for the purpose and will of God and makes a new creation. "The age to come", hoped for by the Jews, is realised in Jesus.

(2) Jesus Christ has a unique place in the inauguration and emergence of the new age. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Son of David. In Him all things find fulfilment.

(3) When we speak of Jesus Christ we refer to his ministry in this world. He went through villages, and towns teaching and healing in the most simple manner.

(4) Greater emphasis is often given to the passion of Jesus. The Cross was not something that happened by accident, it was included in the overall purpose and plan of God. God has revealed the passion of Jesus through the tribulations of the "Suffering Servant of God" (Isa. 53) and other prophecies.

(5) Jesus not only suffered according to the scripture but also resurrected according to the scripture (1 Cor 15:3). The apostles strongly proclaimed this fact. This is the basis of faith of the New Testament.

(6) By His passion and resurrection Jesus was taken up to the "right hand" of God. That is, he was appointed as one having authority and lordship over all. He is the nucleus and power-centre of the new creation.

(7) God sent His Holy Spirit upon the small community of those born in Jesus Christ. Hence they had a new power and a new aim. This new community (the church) is the people of God, the new Israel.

(8) Absolution and reconciliation are available to this new Israel.



(9) Lord Jesus Christ who is now sitting at the right hand of God will come again to judge the world. Thus the new age and the new creation which he inaugurated will come to its completion.

All these facts may not have been included in every sermon that evangelists preached, but most of them were unfolded, giving emphasis to the back-ground and surroundings of the hearers. This proclamation was called 'Kerygma' in Greek and 'Korususo' in Syriac (before the reading of the Gospel during Holy Qurbana in the introductory words, the priests says 'life giving proclamation').

The above mentioned facts are only a skeleton of the apostolic Kerygma. It has to be given flesh if it is to become a lively message suitable for our time. This is possible because of the activity and grace of the Holy Spirit. The Kerygma (proclamation) was not in any way foreign to the church's life and its experience in the Spirit and should be seen in the background of the whole ministry of the church- healing, teaching, absolving and so on. The apostolic church proclaimed Christ's life, death resurrection etc., not as events in the past but as present day realities which get immersed in life and transform and guide it. The Christ-event is meaningful and unique to those who abide in Jesus.

Proclamation is not the mere unfolding of past events, it is holding aloft of their meaning and relevance. It is then that it becomes the real 'kerygma'. Proclamation becomes strong and bright when the Christ-event is understood in the background of God's purpose and plan and when the transformation it makes in one's life is revealed.

## EXERCISE

1. We find that a great place is given to proclamation in the New Testament. What is its place in our church? What are its shortcomings today? How can they be remedied? Give suggestions.
2. What should be the basic factors of proclamation?
3. Examine the Sermons of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and find out which are the important subjects dealt with.

## LESSON 2

### THE GOSPELS

—*What is Gospel ?*

—*Are there four gospels ?*

—*Similarities and differences between the gospels*

—*Synoptic gospels*

In the previous lesson we have seen what is meant by apostolic proclamation (Kerygma). The gospel is evolved from the apostolic Kerygma. It is not a mere biography, nor is it the unfolding of a story, nor a memoir, but a combination of all these are found in the gospels.

'Gospel' comes from the Greek word 'Evangelion' which means 'good news.' It contains the good news, meant for the whole of mankind, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 1:1-2) by whose work the whole world is saved.

In the early stages the gospel was spread orally. The Gospel in the written form made its appearance only 35 years or so after Christ. The reasons for this are described in the previous chapter. By the end of the first century four gospels became popular. Yet to say "four gospels" is not really correct. There is only one gospel and that is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But in these four gospels we see four outlooks or four view points. These have taken shape from the different traditions which have been adapted according to the changes in time and place. The living traditions of the church are behind the writings of the gospels. Each writer understands his own environment and needs, he then evaluates and analyzes the traditional facts and unfolds them after codifying them.

#### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE GOSPELS

Although the essential form and message of the gospels are the same, there are obvious differences between them.

What comes first to our notice is the difference between the first three gospels (called the synoptic gospels) and the gospel according to John. We shall describe them here.

### 1. The ministry of Jesus

In the synoptic gospels Jesus has a ministry lasting only one year. But in John it runs to three years because he describes Jesus participating in three Passovers and visiting Jerusalem several times:

### 2. Difference in Teaching

In the synoptic gospels we see sharp statements and lively parables. Conversely, in John, the sermons are long and complex and there are no parables. The subjects dealt with are also different-while the synoptic gospels give emphasis to the Kingdom of God, John highlights who Jesus is, and what is His relation to the Father.

### 3. Miracles and Signs

Miracles and heroic deeds lie scattered throughout the synoptic gospels. John chooses only seven of them and describes them as 'signs'. Through these he explains truths regarding the personality of Jesus Christ the saviour, Christ the Living Bread, Christ the Light of the World.

## PROBLEMS RAISED BY THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The first three gospels are called Synoptic Gospels because they are so similar that they can be arranged into a synopsis, a book in which corresponding passages from different gospels are arranged in parallel columns. Their similarities and mutual relationship are sure to attract students of the gospels because they give rise to the synoptic problem.

### 1. Similarities

(a) **Contents** : Out of the 661 verses in Mark, 606 are found in Mathew and 302 are found in Luke. Hence Mark's gospel is contained in the other two.

(b) **Common form** : The three gospels describe the ministry of Jesus in the same manner and in the same sequence. eg. Baptism, fasting in the desert, public ministry in Galilee, journey to Jerusalem, passion, death and resurrection.

(c) **Word-by-word agreement** : This can be clearly seen only when we read in the original Greek. The same event is described in the same words and in the same style. eg. In Mark 2:10. Matt 9:6, Luke 5:24, the three passages have the same sentence structure and style.

## 2. Differences

The differences between the gospels deserve more to be studied than the similarities. Differences exist in the description of Jesus, baptism, temptation transfiguration, as well as in the order of presentation. For example, Mathew and Luke do not give the second and third temptations in the same order.

Each evangelist has added some portion not found in the others, this is especially so in the case of Luke. The stories relating to the birth of Jesus are different in Mathew and Luke. Mark has not accepted these. There are many instances like this.

The following problems are raised :

1. Why are there so many similarities and differences between the gospels, and why they are more pronounced in the gospels of Mathew and Luke. ?.

2. How did each of the Evangelists get some special parts of their own ?

Basically, similarities and differences are natural since the gospel was propagated in an unwritten (oral) form. When each evangelist accepted something from the common tradition there was similarity, and when they accepted different traditions there were bound to be differences.

### The Two-Source Theory

In the light of a detailed study, scholars conclude that both Mathew and Luke depend on Marks' gospel for their own compo-

sition. Though some feel that Mathew's gospel is the earliest and that Mark's is only a summary of it, as a result of more recent scientific study all accept that Mark's is the earliest gospel.

In Mark the teachings of Jesus are comparatively fewer. In Mathew and Luke we have longer passages containing teachings, and there is much similarity between them. From this it can be inferred that both these evangelists had access to a written form, this document has not yet been found. German scholars call it 'Quelle' (short form "Q") which means "Source", and a large majority of scholars accept this theory. It is generally felt that St Mark's gospel and "Q" are the two important sources drawn upon by Mathew and Luke.

### The Four-Source Theory

The two-source theory was not enough to explain all matters. Mathew and Luke have their own special passages which are unique. What was the source for these? It has been argued that Mathew had a special source, and so did Luke, thus, giving rise to the Four-Source Theory.

None of these theories can be said to satisfactorily answer the problems raised. Form criticism, Redaction criticism and a searching study of the oral traditions behind the gospels are in progress, which hopes to offer a better insight into the aims of the Evangelists.

### EXERCISE

1. What are the similarities and differences between the synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the first three gospels?
3. What is the synoptic problem? Give the most satisfactory explanation for it.

## LESSON 3

### ST. MARK'S GOSPEL

—*Author, Circumstances under which written-Aim-*

—*Special features of the evangelist and theological outlook.*

We have seen that Mark is generally accepted as the gospel written earliest. Yet in the book there is no indication of the author. But in 14:51 a picture is given of an anonymous young man in the garden of Gethsemane who escaped naked. Some scholars think it is autobiographical of Mark.

#### MARK

In the New Testament we have several references about Mark. (Acts 12:12-25; 13:5, 15; 15:36, Col. 4:1; Philm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). He is the son of Mary who owns a house in Jerusalem. (It was in this house that Jesus and his disciples used to gather together). He was a relative of Barnabas, Paul's companion in his first missionary journey, later his companion during his imprisonment in Rome, and beloved follower of Peter. There is a tradition that he is the founder of the Church in Alexandria where the Coptic Church claims the throne of Mark.

It is universally believed that this Mark is the author of the gospel. From what Papias has written, it is generally agreed upon that:-

1. Mark was Peter's companion and interpreter.
2. The basis for Mark's gospel are the sermons he heard from Peter.
3. Mark did not write things in the proper order in which they occurred. Other Church-Fathers also hold the opinion that Mark wrote the gospel after the martyrdom of Peter (Justin Martyr, Ireneus, Jerome). Internal evidence and external traditions prove that Mark is the author who, though was not an apostle, was given so much recognition because of his connection with Peter.

## PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING

The prevalent opinion is that it was written before 70 AD (the year of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans) and after the martyrdom of Peter. This was probably written in Rome around 65 AD for non-Jewish Christians, and this can be inferred from the fact that detailed explanations are provided for Jewish traditions (7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42). Besides, the influence of Latin words shows that it is written for Romans.

## A I M

The author tries to console Christian brothers enduring persecution and also to stress the importance of suffering in Christian life. Mark argues the Cross is not a failure, describing the passion of Christ in great detail. The Cross reveals the love of God since Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, fulfilling the holy will of the Father. The resurrection of Jesus thus reveals the ultimate triumph of God.

## SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE GOSPEL

1. Mark's descriptions are simple and picturesque. They have got the clarity of an eyewitness's account. Jesus takes children in his arms (9:36, 10:13-16). He makes the crowd sit down in ranks by hundreds and by fifties (6:40). He was in the stein asleep on a cushion (4:38).

2. Mark has succeeded in picturing the moods and thoughts of Jesus. He has given some Aramaic words with explanations:

Eg. Thalitha Cumi (Get up, my child) 5:4.

Ephatha (Be opened) 7:34, Corban (offering) 7:11, Abba (Father) 14:36.

Eli Eli lema sabachthani (My God My God why hast thou forsaken me) 15:34.

These show that the mother-tongue of the author who was born and brought up in Palestine was Aramaic. Some Latin words are also found here and there, technical words which were well known to the Roman readers. Eg. dinoro, legion, centurion etc.

3. No attempt is made to hide the defects and the humanness of the apostles; on the other hand they are introduced honestly eg. 4:40, 5:31, 6:49 9:19, 14:27-31. The changes made by Mathew are note-worthy. The sons of Zebadee approach Jesus and ask for favour in Mark's Gospel. Mathew has made it as the request of their mother.

## THEOLOGY OF MARK

### Son of God

From beginning to end Mark upholds the belief of the Church that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah. As a teacher Jesus taught, unlike the doctors of the law, with authority (1:21). He had power even over the Law (7:1-13). The Son of Man is sovereign even over the Sabbath (2:27,28). Jesus exercised the right of forgiving sins which was only invested in God (2:5-12). He claimed power over evil spirits and exorcised them (3:19-27).

### Son of Man

Although Jesus was the Messiah, he hid the Messianic secret by assuming the title 'Son of Man'. This is the equivalent of the Aramaic word "Barnasha" which means simply "man". Ezekiel is called son of man (Ezek 2:2, 3:24). In the book of Daniel 'Son of Man' is the symbol of the people of Israel (7:13-14). Isaiah pictures him as the suffering servant of God (Isaiah 52:13, 53:12), and this has considerably influenced the New Testament writers (Is.53:3-6). This picture of vicarious suffering they saw meaningful only in Jesus. On certain occasions he exercised power over forces of nature (4:35-41; 6:45-52) which are those of God alone in the Old Testament. Through these Jesus affirms he is the real Son of God and the promised Messiah. The gospel begins with the words, "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). The Voice heard at the time of baptism affirms the truth that he is the Son of God. On Calvary the centurion at the foot of the Cross testifies "Truly this man was the Son of God (15:39).

Then why was it that the heads of the Jewish religion did not recognise him as the promised Messiah? Jesus was rejected not only by the politically minded Sadducees, and Herodians but



also by the spiritually minded Pharisees; a problem which even now perplexes many people. In his gospel Mark tries to answer this question. The hearts of the religious leaders hardened and their mind became cold: so they could not understand reality and accept the challenge raised by Jesus. Mark points out that Jesus was a stumbling block for them, because he rejected the request to prove his Messiahship by showing signs.

When Jesus is described as the Son of Man in Mark's gospel, two facts about him are revealed:-

(a) Jesus who emptied himself, assumed the nature of servant and offered his life in service and suffering (8:31; 9:11, 10:33,14:21).

(b) He is the authoritative and glorious Christ who comes at the end of the world to judge men (8:38; 13:26-27; 14:62).

These two apparently contradictory ideas are combined by Jesus in the title 'Son of Man.'

### Christ—Model of Suffering

In Mark's gospel special emphasis is given to the sufferings of Christ and its climax is the Cross. At the time of the composition of this gospel, suffering and tribulation were inseparable ingredients of every Christian's life. Peter and Paul had to accept martyrdom. Through the gospel Mark gives the call to take up the Cross and follow Jesus.

### EXERCISE

1. What are the features of Mark's gospel which specially attract you ?
2. Mark introduces Jesus as both Son of God and Son of Man. What is the need of holding aloft the real manhood of Jesus ?
3. Is Jesus a stumbling block to the heads of non-Christian religions in India in the same way as he was to the Jewish leaders ? Why do they reject Christ ?

## LESSON 4

### ST. MATHEW'S GOSPEL : "A CHURCH GOSPEL"

—*Author and Circumstances of Writing.*

—*Aims of the author.*

—*Theology of the Author.*

We have seen the aims of Mark's gospel and the circumstances under which it was written. Different circumstances and different aims are behind the composition of Mathew's gospel which is written combining parts taken from Mark's gospel, the document called Q, and traditions the author collected. The author's special theological bias is clearly seen in the selection and in the introduction of facts.

### MATHEW

Mathew (surname Levi) was a tax collector and one of the twelve apostles of Jesus (Luke 5:27, Mk 2:14). The following statement of Papias is the basis of this tradition that Mathew wrote the gospel: "Mathew collected "sayings" in the Hebrew (i. e. Aramaic) language and each one translated them as best as he could." Ireneus who lived in the second century agreed with this view.

No scholar today thinks that the gospel of Mathew is a Greek translation of the above mentioned Aramaic gospel because Mathew's gospel hasn't got the idiom and style of a book translated from another language.

Besides that, this gospel contains a lot of words which are used in the Greek language alone. From all this we can conclude that it has been written on the basis of Mathew's Aramaic gospel, its Greek translation, and other documents. But who wrote it is as yet unknown. This can be called Mathew's gospel as it claims the traditions of Mathew.

## CIRCUMSTANCES OF WRITING

The circumstances behind this gospel are those prevailing in Syria and Palestine two decades after the writing of Mark's gospel. In 70 AD the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. Among the Jews the influence of the Pharisees increased. Their hypocrisy and very strict observances distracted them from true religion, giving too much importance on observances and neglecting compassion and love. They rejected the promised Messiah. They presented a serious challenge to the Christian Church.

There was a growing view in the church that after Christ, the Law and the Prophets held sacred till then, were irrelevant. The false prophets (Matt 7:15) who claimed to prophesy and exorcise evil spirits, also created problems. Under these circumstances the writer did two things. First he criticised the Pharisaic religion and pointed out its dangers. Secondly he stated that Jesus Christ came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it (Mat 5:18).

In the gospel the condition of the church seems to be growing and expanding, and from this we can conclude that the gospel was written in Syria between 80 AD and 90 AD for Greek-speaking Jewish Christians.

## AIMS OF THIS GOSPEL

1. To establish the relation between the Jewish religion and Jesus Christ, and thus prove that the Law and the prophets find their fulfilment in Jesus.
2. To prove that the Christian Church is the new Israel, and a new Moses can be seen in Jesus. In the context of the destruction of the Temple, new worship instead of the temple worship is possible in the Christian Church.
3. To show that the teachings of Jesus Christ are more sublime and authoritative than the Old Testament teachings.
4. The writer of the gospel has certain ecclesiastical interests. As false ideas regarding the foundation of the church are prevalent he wants to reveal its true nature and purpose.

5. There was the "apologetic motive", to give answers to so many questions that had arisen among believers and nonbelievers. eg. Why did Jesus receive baptism from John ? Was not the body of Jesus Christ removed from the tomb by the apostles ? There were also some scandalous rumours relating to the Virgin birth of Jesus. The evangelist took a special interest in giving answers to all these questions.

### THE THEOLOGY OF THE AUTHOR

*Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, the Messiah promised by God:* He is the one hoped for by the fathers and the prophets, but the Jewish leaders rejected him. Christ is the liberator of mankind in the same way as Moses was the liberator of Israel from Pharaoh. Mathew introduces Jesus as a parallel to Moses, at the same time greater than Moses. On the mountain Moses gave Law to Israel. Jesus, the new Moses, gave them exhortations on the mountain. But he was not a go-between like Moses. "You have heard it told to your forefathers, but I tell you", Jesus used to repeat this authoritatively whenever he issued commands. Moses gave his teachings in five books. The New Moses also gives his teachings in five parts :

1. Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7)
2. Missionary Exhortation (Chapter 10)
3. Parables about the Kingdom of God (chapter 13)
4. Church discipline (chapter. 18)
5. Eschatological exhortation (chapter 24-25)

All events in the life of Jesus, great and small, are proved to be a fulfilment of prophecy. For this the Old Testament is quoted 41 times, with the explanation "to fulfil what was prophesied." Thus the evangelist, with the witness of scripture, establishes that Jesus is the real Messiah and that the Old Testament finds fulfilment in him.

### A KING DESCENDED FROM DAVID

Jesus is really the Messiah because he is the promised descendant of King David. He is the liberator of Israel, the ad-

ministrator of justice, and protector of peace. He is believed to be born in the family of David (Jer 23:5, Isa 11:2, Micah 5:1). Thus Jesus was descendant of David (1:1, 16) and was born in Bethlehem, the town of David (2:1). During his public ministry many people called him "Son of David" (9:27, 12:33; 15:23). When Pilate asked Jesus "Are you the King of the Jews", he replied "I am" (27:11). He is a King, but his Kingdom is not of this world. He preached and taught about the Kingdom of Heaven which cannot be destroyed. He was the ruler of that Kingdom. "Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me" (28:16-20).

### THE CHURCH THE NEW ISRAEL

This gospel is called the ecclesiastical gospel or Church gospel. The Greek word 'ecclesia' which means Church is found only in this gospel (16:18; 18:17). The maximum number of lessons for our Sunday worship are taken from this gospel. This Gospel was proved very useful in providing instruction for catechumens.

As the first step to the establishment of the Church as the New Israel, Jesus chose 12 men as his disciples (10:1-4), reminiscent of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus commissions them to proclaim the Kingdom of God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:19). The church is committed to do this duty even today.

At Caesarea Philippi Jesus said to Peter: "You are Peter (the Rock) and on this rock I will build my church and the powers of death shall never prevail against it" (16:18). This verse has many interpretations. One of them being the supremacy of Peter, but the most acceptable is that the church is built on the rock-like faith confessed by Peter. Church discipline is also described in this Gospel. "If he will not listen to the Church, you must then treat him as you would a pagan or a tax-collector" (18:17).

The spiritual centre of the Church is Christ. Christ who is Emmanuel (God with us) is always present in the Church. "For where two or three are met in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18:20). "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of time" (28:20). The glory and the excellence of the Church consist in

its being the community where Jesus lives. The creative power of the Church is the living Christ.

### EXERCISE

1. Find out the occasions in Mathew's gospel where quotations are made from the Old Testament. Using a concordance find out the references. See whether any change has been made.
2. What are the aims of the evangelist in writing this gospel? How can the church fulfil them?
3. On the basis of the theology regarding the church, what are the matters to which the church of today should give attention?

## LESSON 5

### ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL

#### UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF SALVATION

—*Common Statement about the gospel*

—*Author, place and time of writing*

—*Special Features*

—*Theology*

Mark, in the background of persecution, introduced Jesus as the model for suffering. Mathew, in the background of Jewish Christian dialogue, introduced Jesus as the expected Messiah and as the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Luke sees Jesus as the Saviour of the world. This gospel, splendid in its simplicity and literary excellence does not stand alone. Its second part—the Acts of the Apostles—should be studied only with this; only

then can we get an idea of the evangelist's insights and aims. The introductory verses of the gospel reveal this (1:1-4). The author introduces the gospel after examining all the documents, sources and facts available, accepting some and rejecting others. Who is this author ?

### LUKE

There are both internal and external evidences to prove that Luke is the author of the gospel.

1. If we compare this gospel and the Acts, we shall come to the conclusion that both are written by the same person. The language and the style of narration of the two books strengthen this view.

2. If we examine the second part of the Acts (chapters 16-28) we find the plural pronoun "We" is used in several places. (16: 10-17; 20:5-21; 27:1-28:16). If these passages are taken from the jottings in his diary, he must be a companion of Paul in his missionary journey. At last he went with Paul to Rome and stayed with him the possibilities are for this person to be Luke. Paul in his prison letter sends greeting from "Luke the beloved physician" (Col 4:14, Philem. 24).

3. In both these volumes scholars find the use of medical terms. Peter's mother-in-law was in the grip of a "high fever" (4:38). In the description of the leper it is said that 'he was covered with leprosy (5:12). He softens the criticism against doctors (8:43 compare with Mk 5:26). Yet such expressions are found in the writings of non-medical men of the time and need not prove the author was a doctor.

The tradition from the second century is that the author is Luke. In the Muratorian canon (Second century) the gospel is called the work of Luke. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian and others are also of the same opinion. This tradition has held its own to this day.

There are only three references about Luke in the New Testament (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24, 2.Tim. 4:11). From these and other traditions we learn the following about him: He was by birth a pagan

(the only pagan among the evangelists); by profession a doctor; by conversion, a Christian. He was a friend and co-worker of Paul.

### PLACE AND TIME OF WRITING

According to tradition, the gospel was written in Caesarea around 85 AD. The author has surely seen Mark's gospel and made use of it, besides, many documents were available (Luke 1:1-4) to the author to compile this work.

### AIM OF THE AUTHOR

The aim is to give an objective description to the "most excellent Theophilus, of the life and teaching of Christ.

Who was this Theophilus? He may have been a Roman noble man of high social status. Luke is writing not only for him, but for cultured people who are interested in the new "way". He uses a language and style which they can understand. Hence Aramaic words are left out and Greek equivalents are given. Jesus is not introduced as the fulfilment of prophecy, hence quotations from the Old Testament are very few. The main purpose of Luke was to give real Christology to those who have come from paganism.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

According to tradition Luke is an artist who spent his spare time, painting. At any rate, he is a gifted artist who could draw beautiful pictures with words. We shall examine some special features of the book:-

#### 1. Social vision

His attitude to wealth and wealthy people is specially noteworthy. He is a strong spokesman for social justice. eg. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" in Mathew's gospel becomes "Blessed are you poor" (Matt 5:3; Luke 6:20). Several parables highlight the evil of wealth in the gospel (16:1-31). Luke encourages alms-giving, "Sell your possessions and give in charity (12:33). Luke had a clearer financial outlook than others.



## 2. Compassion of Jesus to sinners and the downtrodden

There are several parables illustrating God's love and mercy, eg: The parable of the prodigal son (15:11-32), the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9-14), the parable of the good Samaritan (10:30-36). Jesus had special consideration for those who were generally considered to be degraded and outcast. He grants forgiveness to the sinful woman who wet his feet with tears of contrition (7:37-50); Jesus receives the hospitality of Zachaeus, the tax collector hated by his community (19:1-10); He promises paradise to the penitent thief (23:43).

The Jews treated the Samaritans as untouchables and hated them, but Jesus had a special affection for them. He did not curse the Samaritan village that boycotted him (9:55). The grateful Samaritan is a pointer to the ungrateful Jews (17:18). The doubts of the Scribe are removed through the story of the Samaritan (10:25-37).

## 3. Interest in the welfare of women

During Jesus time women had no place in society. The women's liberation movement of today will accept Luke as one of their great spokesmen.

There were several women among the followers of Jesus. Luke described saintly women like Mary, Elizabeth, and Hannah (8:3). Only Luke describes the close friendship of Jesus with the sisters, Mary and Martha. Again in his gospel there are three women who directly experienced the compassion of Jesus. (7:11, 7:37, 13:11). The main characters of certain parables are also women (15: 8 and 18:3). The daughters of Jerusalem lament over the sufferings of Jesus and some women accompany Jesus to the Cross (23:27).

## 4. The importance of Prayer

Luke several times gives the picture of Jesus praying alone. We see Jesus praying just before baptism (3:2), before choosing the twelve apostles, (6:12), before the Transfiguration (9:29), in the garden of Gethsemane (22:42) and on the cross (23:40).

Luke gives three beautiful parables about prayer (a) the tax-collector and the Pharisee (18:10-14) (b) the unjust Judge and the widow (18: 2-8) (c) the friend who knocks at midnight (11:5-10).

Thanksgiving and praise are also parts of prayer. Luke alone describes the four songs (1) Song of Mary (1:46-55) (2) Song of Zachariah (1:68-79) (3) Song of Simeon (2:29-32) (4) Song of angels. (2:14).

### 5. Gospel of the Holy spirit

By giving emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit, Luke reveals the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit worked among those who waited for the coming of the Saviour (1:42, 1:67-79) and among those who recognised him when he came (2:25). Luke sees the Holy Spirit as the supreme gift of God (11:43).

### 6. Universal appeal of the gospel

Jesus is the Saviour not only of Israel but of all people (2:29-32). This truth is clear from the beginning to the end. Holding the infant Jesus in his hands Simon sees "a light for revelation to the gentiles". Repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be preached to all nations in the name of Jesus (24:47). We need not be surprised at Luke's seeing a universal relevance for the gospel because he himself has come to Christian faith from paganism.

1. Theology of Luke : We have seen above the emphasis on the gentiles in this gospel. Luke is visualising the doctrine of universal salvation. The Acts of the Apostles begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the opposite of the experience at Babel (Genesis 11), where because of man's arrogance, language became confused and the community scattered. But when the Holy Spirit was received at Pentecost, the experience of unity and mutual fellowship came about. In his second volume (Acts) Luke makes this very clear-the gospel should reach Jerusalem, Judea and to the end of the world.

2. Eschatology of Luke : Along with the other Evangelists, Luke also believes that the history of the world finally culminates

through the history of Christ who has redeemed it. But he makes some changes to the eschatological views of Mark. He does not emphasise the view that it is imminent (The message "The Kingdom is at hand" in Mark, is dropped in Luke). In fact he gives a warning to those who feel the time is imminent (21:8 and 10:11).

The eschatological faith of the earlier gospels has been changed by Luke. Since the second coming was delayed, Luke paid more attention to Church history, highlighting the Church's mission and its place in history.

### EXERCISE

1. What are the ways in which the gospel of Luke is different from those of Mathew and Mark ?
2. How far is Luke's picture of the Holy Spirit helpful for the renewal of the Church ?
3. How can we plan a doctrine of social justice from the two books of Luke ? (Luke and Acts).
4. What are the features which attracted you most in Luke's Gospel ?

## LESSON 6

### ACTS OF THE APOSTLES FIRST HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

—*About the name of the book.*

—*Importance of the book.*

—*Aim of writing the book.*

—*Contents.*

—*Theology.*

If the gospels contain the teachings and actions of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles contains the teachings and activities of the Apostles and their co-workers. This book begins as a continuation of Luke's Gospel, as we saw in Lesson 5. The gospel ends with the ascension of the Risen Christ, while the Acts describes what Jesus did through the Apostles after Ascension. The book does not describe the acts of all the Apostles, that was not the author's intention. The first part describes the acts of Peter, and the second part, those of Paul.

Luke was a historian and at the same time, a theologian. This book can be evaluated only on that basis. Luke, who carefully used original sources in the writing of the gospel, follows the same method in Acts also, though it is difficult to find out what the original sources were. Some feel that notes from a diary containing Paul's travels might have been used. In the first part (The Gospel), the facts and traditions obtained from the church centres Jerusalem, Caesaria, and Antioch might have been used. Luke has visited these centres and stayed there.

#### IMPORTANCE

The letters of the Apostles can be rightly understood only by studying them in the context of the Acts of the Apostles. We also

get an accurate study of the early church from the Acts of the Apostles, and so it can be called the first work of Church history. This book reveals not only the origin, growth and structure of the Church, but also its social and spiritual state. The history of the system of ordination and the sacramental rites deserve much importance.

### AIM

1. The basic aim of the Acts, is to depict the growth of the apostolic Church. Here we can see how the christian church which began as a small community in Jerusalem, got over the boundaries of race and class, and spread over the Empire, even to Rome, the capital." "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will bear witness for me in Jerusalem and all over Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8). This book reveals how far this promise could be fulfilled, and ends with a picture of the uninterrupted preaching of the Kingdom of God and the spread of the gospel.

2. The Church's growth among the gentiles was of special interest to Luke who was himself a gentile; hence he gives more emphasis to the missionary work among the gentiles. The conversion and baptism of the first gentile family of Cornelius is described in detail (Acts 10). This incident is discussed in the Jerusalem Conference. The conversion of Paul, is described thrice (Chapters 9, 22, 26), highlighting God's call to Paul to preach the gospel among the gentiles.

3. The Church had to face much persecution and suffering from the Romans. It was therefore necessary to prove that the members of the church were neither rebels nor enemies of the government. Luke tries to do that through this book. He argues that the Church maintained friendly relations with Roman rulers. For example: the incidents at Corinth (18:12-23) and at Ephesus (19:35-41).

4. It is clear that Luke is interested in highlighting Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. He goes to great lengths to show that Paul is in no way inferior to Peter : Paul worked the same kinds of miracles as Peter had done ; just as Peter reprimands Simon the magician, Paul reprimands Elimas and punishes him. If Peter

brings back to life the dead Tabitha, Paul gives life to Eutyches (20:10).

## **HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT**

We have seen that this book contains the history of the development of the early Church. By examining the contents, we can understand how the Church expanded from Jerusalem.

### **1. Jerusalem Church : (1:1—6:7)**

The beginning of the Church is in Jerusalem. Here we can see the Church waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost. After receiving the gift, the Apostles strongly bear witness to Christ. The history of the Jerusalem Church closes with its surmounting opposition and challenges. "The word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly and very many of the priests adhered to the faith" (6:7).

### **2. The Church spreads to Judea and Samaria : (6:8-9:31)**

The story of Stephen is very important since it prepares the background for the coming of Paul, the apostle of the gentiles. God's actions cannot be contained in the Mosaic Law or in the temple at Jerusalem. The Christian Church is the new Israel and Stephen visualises a universal church. Because of this he was martyred. But the subsequent persecution paved the way for the growth and expansion of the church, since it expands to Judea and Samaria. The conversion and entry into the church of Paul are historic events.

The second part ends thus: "Meanwhile the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied" (9:31).

### **3. Church at Antioch : (9:32-12:24)**

This marks a new stage in the growth of the church. Admitting gentiles into the church was matter of much hesitation, but Peter received the necessary guidance from a heavenly vision and Cornelius and his family were baptised and admitted.

The scattered believers founded the Antiochean church. Antioch was a great centre of the pagan world which may be why missionary effort of Paul starts from there and is proved successful. This part ends with the statement; "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

#### 4. Church in Asia Minor (Modern Turkey) (12:25-16:5).

Paul carried on his work under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He went to many pagan centres in Asia Minor and established churches there. The church expanded to the island of Cyprus and to the towns in Pisidia and Lycaonia. Paul and his fellow-workers admitted gentiles into the church without circumcising them, since it was alien to their culture.

This brought about a crisis. An opinion arose that it was not right to admit gentiles into the church without circumcision. The Apostles assembled in Jerusalem under the leadership of James to decide the matter. After much discussion they came to a unanimous decision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit—the gentiles need not undergo circumcision. It was enough if they observed certain other moral and ritual laws. This decision raised the Christian Church from the position of an "appendix" of the Jewish religion to that of a universal church.

With new awakening and enthusiasm Paul carried on his mission. "And so day by day the congregations grew stronger in faith and increased in numbers" (16:5).

#### 5. Church in Europe : (16:6-19:20)

With renewed spiritual vigour, Paul entered Europe and established churches at important and famous cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Athens. There were obstacles but he overcame them. The word spread and the church expanded. Luke gives these remarks in conclusion. "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20).

#### 6. Gospel in Rome : (19:21—28:31)

Now we enter the sixth stage of the expansion. In this stage there are many dramatic and adventurous incidents, especially

the uproar at Ephesus. Paul made up his mind to visit Macedonia and Achaia and then go to Jerusalem and he said, "After I have been there I must see Rome also" (19:21).

Following his Master's example, Paul with a determination reached Jerusalem where he was imprisoned as the result of conspiracy by his enemies. He is then sent to Rome where he continues to preach with vigour. The curtain on Luke's revelation of history falls with the message that the gospel knows no obstacles.

## THEOLOGY

Luke was not merely a historian, he was a theologian with views of his own:—

### 1. Work of the Holy Spirit

In Mathew's gospel the Risen Christ promises, "I am with you always to the end of time" (Matt. 28:20). Luke's version is that the presence of the Risen Christ will be through the Holy Spirit. Just as Christ's ministry began from the fullness of the Spirit, the ministry of the church should also begin with the fullness of the Spirit.

Some scholars call this book a "Gospel of the Holy Spirit" By the power of the Spirit real witnessing took place in the church. It is the gift of the Spirit that gives them the courage to embrace martyrdom. Paul and Barnabas were chosen and sent by the Holy Spirit and their work was controlled and led by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that enables the church to make important decisions. (15:28). The Holy Spirit is neither a power nor a force, He is a personality who can decide, lead, control and punish. All the power and inspiration of the church are based on the work of the Holy Spirit.

### 2. Eschatology

When Luke understood that there was delay for the second coming, he wanted to convert the time before the coming, to a time of activity for the church. During the interim period, he felt the church should bear witness to all nations. The power for discharging this duty could be obtained from the Holy Spirit.



It is because of the above-mentioned outlook that Luke gives great importance to the mission of the church and to the discharging of its duties.

### 3. The place of Jerusalem.

In the gospel and in the Acts, Luke gives a very important place to Jerusalem. The Christ-event happens only when he reaches Jerusalem, urged on by his Father. In the same way the Apostles should wait at Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church in Jerusalem then grows, controlled by the apostolic group. The first council of the Apostles is also held there. But time robbed the city of its importance among the great Sees.

### EXERCISE

1. In the Acts we see a Church growing because of the work of the Holy Spirit. How will you evaluate the "Charismatic Movement" of today in the light of this ?
2. Analyse the Sermons in this book and reveal their essential points.
3. Show the ways in which the Acts of the Apostles throw light on the church life of today ?

## UNIT III

# THE IMPORTANT MESSAGE OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

## LESSON 1

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*—about the phrase*

*—Old Testament Background*

*—in the teaching of Jesus*

*—Kingdom of God and the Church*

We have made a general study of the mutual relationship, special features and the theology of the synoptic gospels. Next we are going to enter into the contents and study the various themes found there :

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

If we can summarise the teaching of Jesus in one phrase it would be the "Kingdom of God." This is the message that resounds in the parables and in the miracles. John the Baptist and Jesus preached, the same message "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2 and 4:17). This was a suitable theme to capture the attention of the hearers.

Mathew used the phrase "Kingdom of God" only twice (12:28; 19:24). On all other occasions he uses 'Kingdom of Heaven'. Both mean the same thing. Since the Jews had very great reverence for God, they avoided using the term "God", as far as possible; hence Mathew's reluctance to use the word. The

expressions "Kingdom of the Father" and "Kingdom of the Son of Man" can also be seen. All these mean the paternal rule of God to provide eternal salvation for man.

Although the expression 'Kingdom of God' is, rare in the Old Testament, the idea that God as King is common to semitic thinking. God commands, people obey; God provides and protects them, and His reign is eternal. "The Lord shall reign and for ever and for ever, (Ezek. 15:18, Ps. 145). God's reign is related to Israel, His people. When they prayed for a king to be appointed for them, God was displeased (1 Sam 8, 12:12). When they believed in His Kingship and obeyed Him, He reigned over them and cared for them.

But when they denied God, God rejected them, and disasters occurred. After they came under foreign domination, "Kingdom of God" became a hope for the future (Isa. 24:21-23).

The phrase was a favourite of the contemporaries of Christ. Yet their expectations were varied, eg. those reflected by Mary in the Magnificat (Luk 1:46-55) or by Zachariah in his song (Luke 1:68-79). Another view can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in 1947.

Jesus announced his arrival with the declaration that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and by miracles proved he was the expected Messiah. He proved, through healing and exorcism that the Kingdom of God was present-day reality: "But if it is by the spirit of God that cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt. 12:28).

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE FUTURE

Yet evil continues, then how can we claim that the Kingdom of God is a reality? The Evangelists answer that the fulness of the new Kingdom of God has not yet come. The coming of Christ marks the beginning of a new age, whose culmination is still in the future "...there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the Kingdom of God has come with power" (Mk 9:1). In the Lord's Prayer we ask "Thy Kingdom come" (Mt. 6:10).

The Kingdom of God is a stage when the will of God is fully realised, either in an individual, or mankind as a whole. The requirements of entry into such a Kingdom would be love, brotherhood, equality and justice. To this end Jesus preached, and the evangelists elaborated. The manifesto of the Kingdom was elaborated by Jesus in his Nazareth preaching. "He has sent me to announce good news to the poor to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4:18-19). The social and economic dimensions of the Kingdom are reflected in these words.

### CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There is a relation between the two. There was a time when it was felt that the Kingdom of God meant the Church, but now nobody limits the Kingdom of God to the Church. The Church is the first-fruit of the Kingdom of God, and is commissioned to bring it about. The Church is the earthly plane of the Kingdom of God which is yet to be realized. Christ is not only its founder but also the ruler and judge. The primary duty of the Church, therefore is to reveal the Kingdom of God to the world and hence, it cannot withdraw from the world. At times it will have to criticise and judge the world, and if it has to do this, it has to correct itself, retain its purity and identity.

### EXERCISE

1. "The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but justice, peace and joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). If so, should the church work in the economic and political scene ?
2. How far is the message of the Kingdom of God relevant in a poor country like India ?
3. Examine the parables relating to the Kingdom of God and find out what are the insights they give about the Kingdom of God.

## LESSON 2

# THE ETHICS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, SERMON ON THE MOUNT

—*not merely a sermon, a collection of teachings*

—*opinions about its relevance*

—*contents*

In the gospels the passage which attracted Mahatma Gandhi the most was the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7). It was the compelling force that influenced Leo Tolstoy's out-look on life. The Sermon on the Mount has attracted and influenced both Christians and non-Christians.

The essence of the Kingdom of God that we studied about, is the purity and morality in the life of the members of the Kingdom. In the early church it was the subject of study for the catechumens and new-comers, and it may be from this tradition that the Syrian Church has introduced readings from the Sermon on the Mount for the prayers during Lent.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a single Sermon, but an anthology of relevant parts from many sermons. This will be clear if we examine Luke's gospel where the contents of the Sermon lie scattered in different parts of the gospel. Mathew introduces it as a sermon Jesus made, standing on a mount, while Luke introduces it as a sermon on the plains (6:22-49). Both sermons begin with the Beatitudes and end with the parable of the house-builders.

The Sermon on the Mount is arranged in such a way that it is followed by Jesus' attitude to the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17) because this was a source of much discussion. He goes on to those who may be slack when he says, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). His mission clearly was not to abolish the Law, but to complete it.

## IS THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT PRACTICAL ?

The severity of the Sermon on the Mount has disappointed many people. For example, Any one who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgement; if he insults his brother, he must answer for it to the court, if he calls him a fool he is liable for the fires of hell, (Mat. 5:22). if your right eye is your undoing, tear it out and fling it away, (5:29) love your enemies. How can all these be put into practice, they seem so impossible.

### Certain opinions which have arisen

1. Certainly these are necessary for entering the Kingdom of God. Good discipline, obedience and zeal in observing laws are fundamental. "Enter by the narrow gate" (Mat. 7:13). But one thing is to be remembered - the Kingdom of God is a gift by grace which does not come by man's effort or achievement.

2. Luther and other protestant thinkers feel that these impractical ideas are given so that man can understand his helplessness and dedicate himself to God's grace. From unfathomable depths of disappointment he will be able to look at the Cross with faith and find justification there.

But this was really an imposing of their views on the Sermon on the Mount. It is nowhere found that man cannot fulfill God's will. The Sermon on the Mount reveals that Christ expects his disciples to perform his commands.

3. The laws are not for the present-day which has limitation of time and space. It is for the ideal and beautiful world to come.

This opinion takes seriously the severity of the laws, but the teachings of Jesus are given, related to this world and relevant to it. "Do not commit adultery; do not steal," have only relevance in this world of today.

4. These severe laws are not meant for all, they are only for ascetics and others on a high spiritual plane who should renounce the world and live according to the laws of the Sermon on the Mount. This was a view commonly accepted in the Roman Catholic Church

at one time, but not now. The Lord does not give such a differentiation here, they are laws meant for all the members of the Kingdom of God.

5. Albert Schweitzer advanced a theory. According to it, such severe laws were given by Jesus because He thought the end of the world was near, and hence this was for the interim period before His second coming. This has come to be called "Interim Ethics". This is not substantiated, hence we cannot accept this view:

6. The Sermon ethics are not based on human nature since it is impossible for the ordinary man to observe them. Hence it is a new law for the new creation in salvation who does not emphasise his own capacity, but always leans on God's grace. He is not concerned about rewards, he lives in gratitude for what God has done for him.

### Contents

We should know the contents of the Sermon on the Mount

1. Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12) The Beatitudes are the experience of the heirs of the Kingdom of God. In Luke's gospel they are only 4 in number (6:20-23). The qualities that the Beatitudes depict are all basically the qualities of Jesus since the Kingdom of God is centred on Christ.

2. How should the followers of Christ (the Church) behave in their relation to the world? (5:13-16). They are the salt and the light. The salt preserves and gives taste, while light reveals reality, and leads to truth.

3. A new interpretation of the Old Testament (Luke 6:17-48). The Old Testament is not to be abolished, it has to be given a new meaning and scope. Taking as examples the commandments "do not kill; do not commit adultery", Jesus teaches that the thought is more important than the action itself.

4. New interpretations for old observances (Mt. 6:1-18). Alms-giving, prayer, fasting, these are "pillars of spiritual

ife". How the children of the Kingdom of God should observe these is based on how they are observed in the religion of the pharisees. When he refers to prayer, Jesus gives a model prayer also. (In Luke it appears in a different context (11:2-4).

5. Norms to be observed in life. Mt. 6:19—7:23)

Jesus stress the importance of his followers having a correct inner motive in their daily practical life. There is the call to be in this world, but not of the world. The real investment should be in heaven. First, they should have the readiness to seek his righteousness. Second, instead of judging others, one should correct oneself. Precious values should not be ignored as if having no importance.

The Sermon on the Mount closes with the valuable parables of the fruit-bearing tree and the house built on rock (Mt. 7:15-28) reminding us of the duty of accepting God's word with a concentrated mind and living according to it.

### EXERCISE

1. Describe the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount in the Church and society today.
2. In Luke's gospel find out the place where parts from Mathew's Sermon on the Mount can be found. Point out similar passages from Paul's letters.
3. Can the teachings of Jesus (Sermon on the Mount) claim any originality? What are similar tenets in other religions and philosophies?



## LESSON 3

### THE PARABLES OF JESUS

—*Special features of the teachings of Jesus*

—*Classification of parables*

—*things to be remembered in interpreting the parables.*

#### JESUS AND PARABLES

“No man ever spoke like this man” (Jn 7:46). The sayings and teachings of Jesus were so unique as to arouse this comment. They had the power to attract the scholar and the ordinary man alike, especially because of His use of parables.

Is this way of teaching special to Jesus? We can see that it is not so when we study the Old Testament. We see a lot of parables in the book of the prophets (Isa 5:1-7, Jer 23:1-4; Hos 4:16; 13:5-6; Judge 9:7-15). Later, Jewish Rabbis also resorted to this method especially in the Mishna, Midrash and Talmud. Jesus thus spoke in parables to a people acquainted with this tradition. Then what speciality is there for the parables of Jesus? His parables had a novelty and attractiveness of their own as is clear from the reaction of the hearers who said, “what is this? A new teaching?” (Mk. 1:27). Jesus introduced in His parables, the ordinary items and incidents of every day life. eg. the lilies of the field, wheat, grapes, figs, birds of the air etc. all came to his observation and attention. The farmer, shepherd, fisherman, even children playing on the street, all found place in his parables.

About the parables :

#### 1. Novelty in the Introduction

The parables of Jesus were so simple and natural that people of all walks of life enjoyed them. Yet there were certain parts which attracted the attention of the hearers. For example the young

prodigal son wins more sympathy than the eldest son who remained at home doing the will of the father.

Also the untouchable Samaritan captures our respect more than the Levite and the priest on the road to Jericho. The lost sheep's recovery gives more pleasure to the shepherd than the obedient ninety-nine. Such unprecedented thing not only attract the attention but also rouse the thoughts of his hearers.

## 2. Novelty of the Message

Jesus used the parables to unfold his new message though the stories may have been old and relating to ordinary incidents. The Rabbis' parables were intended only to smoothen their moral teaching, but the parables of Jesus are meant to describe the nature and working of the Kingdom of God which has been unfolded through his coming. This does not mean that there is no moral teaching in them. Most parables challenge individuals to accept the Kingdom of God.

## 3. The novelty of the teacher

The centre of Jesus' teaching was he, himself. His teachings never pointed to anything else. His parables shed light on his personality and mission. The subject of the proclamation through the parables was his life and mission as the Son of God.

### HOW CAN PARABLES BE CLASSIFIED ?

We see the parables only in the synoptic gospels. Professor Manson is of opinion that there are 65 parables of them. Many have tried to classify them using several norms, though easiest method is to divide them according to the subject. Professor Dodd has divided the parables on the Kingdom of God into two:- (1) parables of the crisis of the Kingdom of God and (2) parables of the growth of the Kingdom of God. Professor Manson divides the parables into three. (1) Parables which reveal human nature:- the good part and the evil part. These parables help the hearers to examine themselves by arousing their conscience. eg. The good Samaritan, the unjust steward, the five wise virgins who had enough oil in their lamps, and the pharisee and the tax-collector prayer.

2. Parables which reveal God's reign and God's activity. The aim is to create in human heart, faith and a spiritual insight. They can then understand God personally and create deep love and devotion in their lives.

eg. The mustard seed, the leaven, the precious pearl, the widow who prays persistently, the friend who knocks at midnight and the lost sheep.

3. Parables in which human nature and divine activity are connected together. Certain truths are revealed by comparing human nature with the divine. eg. in the parable of the prodigal son we see the father's merciful love as compared to the elder son's hard-heartedness. The purpose of these parables is to produce repentance and conversion. They throw light on man's moral and spiritual side and lead men to conversion. The parables of Jesus teach God's real nature and at the same time make man understand the spiritual heights he is capable of reaching.

### INTERPRETING THE PARABLES

Difficulties are faced in the interpretation of parables because the context and background of them are not clearly expressed. The evangelists seem not to know where, when and why Jesus said a particular parable, so they make their own inference and contexts for the parables. Thus the context and background of the same parable will be found different in two gospels. For example the parable of the lost sheep (Matt 18, Luke 15).

When the evangelists do not know to whom Jesus directed the parables, they describe it in the context of the Church.

There are certain things to be remembered when we try to find the meaning of the parables.

1. Why is it given in the gospel in a special context ? Find out how it agrees with the other parts of the gospel.
2. How did the church of that time view the parable before the evangelist made use of it ? What was the aim of the Christian community to include it in their teaching and exhortation ?

3. What meaning did Jesus give at the time of speaking? What had Jesus in mind? Who were his hearers? How did they understand it?

Try to find the answers to the above questions. Each parable will have a central message which it is necessary to find out. Giving a meaning to the different parts of the parable should be done only after finding the central message.

The parables of Jesus remain for all time bearers of good principles for mankind. Our study and meditation should concentrate on discovering their contemporary relevance and meaning. Modern biblical scholars are attempting to unravel the parables by looking into their original context. This study is called "situation in life."

#### EXERCISE

1. Mark 4, Mathew 13, Find the differences in the descriptions of the parables in these two chapters.
2. Which are the parables that reveal the special features of the Kingdom of God?
3. Which are the parables that are related to eschatology?
4. "The parables throw light on the nature and personality of Jesus" Describe how this happens?

## LESSON 4

### WHO IS JESUS CHRIST

—*How is Jesus pictured in the Synoptic gospels?*

—*The titles used, and their meaning.*

In the previous lessons, we discussed the message of Jesus Christ especially through parables and learnt about the Kingdom of God and its ethics. But, who is this Jesus, what is his mission, and how did the synoptic gospels introduce him ?

We see that Jesus was known by different titles. They can be understood only in the context of the Old Testament.

#### 1. The Messiah (Christ)

We hear this title very rarely from the lips of Jesus. But the writers of the Synoptic gospels recognise Jesus as the Messiah and introduce him as such. Note the following passages; the temptations of Jesus (Mk. 1:1-11), the reply Jesus gives to John the Baptist (Mat. 11:2-6); Jesus' glorious entry to Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9); All these reveal that Jesus was and is the Messiah.

The word 'Messiah' means 'the anointed'. This was a title used for the Kings and highpriests of Israel. It was given to Jesus as the one in whom the hopes of the Israelite nation were to be fulfilled—meaning that the prophecies of old about the Messiah to come were fulfilled in him.

What did the Jewish people think of Jesus ?

Certain scholars like Joseph Clausner felt that the Messianic hope sprung from Moses, since he miraculously delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Others believed that the Kings of Israel were proto-types of the Messiah (with their special relationship with Yahweh) and hence the Messiah would be the model King, more-or-less like David, who gave them both freedom and security.

This Messianic hope, though long present, was especially strong while they were groaning under foreign rule, which is why the extra-ordinary appearance of John the Baptist led people to ask if he was the expected Messiah.

The Synoptists present Jesus as the real and expected Messiah, but emphasise that his supremacy is moral and spiritual, not political. He shows his power over nature and Satanic forces, nothing is beyond his control. They go on to show him as the fulfilment of prophetic expectations.

## 2. Son of God

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is called directly or indirectly 'Son of God' twenty-four times.

"All things have been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mat. 11:27). But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk. 13:32). These are the two important passages where Jesus calls himself "Son of God". In certain passages "Son of God" is used as a synonym of Messiah (Luke 22:66-70). From this we can understand the title "Son of God" which was given to Jesus.

If we examine the Old Testament we can find that the Israel was given the name 'Son of God' "Israel is my first-born son. I have told you to let my son go, so that he may worship me" (Exod. 4:23). These are the words of Yahweh. Prophet Hosea also speaks similarly (Hos. 11:1, 3-4). In what context is Jesus called the Son of God? Is it because he is the representative and symbol of the Israelite nation? Mathew suggests that Jesus has undergone experiences similar to that of the Israelite nation: ie. return from Egypt (Mat. 2:25; Hos. 11:1); being in the desert; temptations similar to those faced by Israel etc. But the title Son of God, has a meaning higher than that. We see that Jesus has a relationship with God which neither Israel nor anybody else can claim. The Evangelists understood that Jesus had such an awareness. The Jews believed in the overall fatherhood of God, but Jesus?

relationship was different; his was an eternal relationship with the eternal Father. The Evangelists do not venture to define or explain it further.

### 3. Son of Man

In the gospels we usually find Jesus calling himself "Son of Man", but we do not find this expression elsewhere. In the Hebrew and Aramaic languages "Son of Man" means a human individual or simply "man". Did Jesus use this expression with this meaning? From the Old Testament context we have to say it was not so. This name has a history of its own: (a) Ps. 8:4,5, "What is man that thou shouldst remember him, the son of man that thou shouldst care for him". Here 'Son of man' means only 'man'. This verse says that before God, man is nothing, but at the same time, before other creation he is the highest.

(b) Ezek. 2:1 "Son of Man stand upon your feet and I will talk with you." In this book God addresses the prophet as 'Son of Man' 87 times. It is only a name to show the insignificance of man before the glory of God.

(c) Ps. 80:17. 'Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself'. Here 'Son of man' is not a single individual but the whole Israelite nation.

(d) The above mentioned idea is more developed in Dan. 13-14. "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. . . . And there was given him dominion and glory and a Kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." From Dan. 7:18, 22, 27 we can see who the above mentioned 'Son of Man' is. He is the Israelite nation, called "Saints of the Most High". He appears when other beasts (nations) are completely destroyed. Son of Man is the representative and symbol of a holy community that appears at the fulfilment of history.

From the above references we understand that this term, Son of Man, has a special meaning which further developed during the first century and became more specific.

Jesus as the Son of man is fully human. He acts within the limits of manhood-one who has taken the form of a servant; one who has endured suffering and the most painful crucifixion. He calls the people to repentance and conversion. The destiny of all men depend upon their relationship and response to him, and the right response will lead them to salvation.

#### 4. Son of Abraham; Son of Adam

Mathew , writing to the members of the Christian Church who have a Jewish background calls Jesus 'Son of Abraham'. Luke, who has a universal outlook when describing the genealogy shows him to be the 'Son of Adam' (Luke 3:23-28).

We have seen in the synoptic gospels, Jesus is introduced by different titles. They understood Jesus as a real man born within a Hebrew background, and at the same time, having might and power. He is the fulfilment of all expectations and the controller of the destiny of history. His character is clear. He forgives sins, he is the healer who is strong in word and power and it was he who inaugurated the Kingdom of God.

#### EXERCISE

1. What are the answers of present day society to the question "Who is Jesus Christ"? What is the fundamental answer ?
2. How much importance should we give to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi?(Mat. 16:16-20).
3. How can we make Jesus Christ better understood in India ?
4. Which title given in this chapter, is, in your opinion, the most important ? Give reasons.



## LESSON 5

### MIRACLES OF JESUS

—*a large part of the ministry of Jesus consists of miracles.*

—*the personality of Jesus is revealed:*

—*What are miracles ?*

—*Should we believe in miracles ?*

A prominent place is given in the gospels to the miracles of Jesus. In the synoptic gospels they are called 'mighty work' and in John's gospel they are called 'signs'. Jesus is introduced to the church from the very beginning as a miracle worker.

#### WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

An uncommon incident, something that happens beyond rules of nature - an act that happens by super-human power - these are the usual explanations given. Reason and scientific knowledge have tried to evaluate miracles, and though they have helped to remove many superstitions and misconceptions, many phenomena in nature remain beyond their grasp. They can be understood only if they are viewed through the eye of faith. What are the truths which the miracles of Jesus teach us ?

1. They point to the personality of Jesus, and his divinity. "The Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn. 14:10). Jesus reveals the power vested in him as the Son of God. At the same time it reveals his complete manhood. His full confidence in his Father and his complete dependence on Him are behind his miracles. We can see his faith and prayer at the time of raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:38-44). Jesus accepted the limitation of full manhood and by the power of his faith worked miracles. We can fully understand his miracles only when we grow in the knowledge of Jesus and in his divine love.

2. Fulfilment of prophecy. The Jews had been waiting for centuries for the coming of the Messiah. Prophets predicted that in the period of the Messiah, the blind would see, the deaf hear and the lame would walk. They cherished such expectations (Is. 26:18; 35:46; Isa. 11:6, 55:7; Ezek. 34:11).

After reading Isa. 61:1-3 in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus said "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." By this he revealed he was the expected Messiah (Luke 4:21). When John the Baptist sent his followers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one who is to come"? Jesus replied "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean... the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news" (Mat. 11:4-5).

3. Proof that the Kingdom of God has come: The message of Jesus was "The Kingdom of God is close at hand", and his miracles were proof of this. The miracles should be seen not as an appendix of his message, but as an integral part of it. John Chrysostom says, "Jesus prepared the way by his teachings and confirmed them by his actions."

In his answer to the Pharisees he says: "But if it is by the spirit of God that I drive out the devils, then be sure the Kingdom of God has already come upon you" (Mat. 12:28, Luke 11:20). The miracles prove that the fight against Satan has begun and that his end is certain. When the seventy disciples returned and reported that they could drive out devils, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:17).

Miracles should not be seen as mere wonders. But they should be understood as signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Hence in John's gospel the word 'sign' is used. Only those who have understood the secret of the Kingdom of God can understand the miracles in the proper meaning.

Jesus never performed miracles to satisfy men's curiosity or to create a sense of wonder. When the Pharisees and the Sadducees approached him for a sign from heaven, he rejected their request. (Mat. 12:39, Mark 8:11-12). The miracles he performed lead to the love of God, mercy and faith.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MIRACLES

They are mainly of three kinds:-

### 1. Healing

In this group we can see different kinds of healings.

(a) From evil spirits. Exorcism is seen only in the synoptic gospels. Some diseases believed to be caused by evil spirits, are now treated as mental disorders. In those days it was felt that many diseases were caused by evil spirits. This impression has changed with the development of psychology and medical science. Even then we cannot deny the existence of demonic forces because they are such a reality, but we should strongly believe that Jesus has power over them.

(b) Diseases arising from a sense of guilt and inner tension:

The cause for many physical diseases are both mental and spiritual. Mental tensions and sense of guilt produce various diseases. Jesus heals such people also, as is clear from the words Jesus said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mt. 2:5). Before receiving physical healing, he has to receive mental and spiritual healing by forgiveness of sins. In psychosomatic systems of treatment, mental and spiritual factors are given due importance.

(c) Common physical diseases;

Patients of diverse diseases common to the day were brought before Jesus and he healed them. eg. He gave sight to the blind and cleansed lepers.

### 2. Miracles performed on inanimate objects

There are many miracles conducted on inanimate objects of nature:- walking on the sea, turning water into wine, multiplying bread etc. These prove that God has power and authority not only over mankind but also over nature. After creating the universe, God does not stand aloof, He controls and guides it, till the day when it will be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth at the end of the age.

### 3. Raising the dead

Three incidents are recorded :

- (a) The raising of Jairus's daughter (Mk. 5:22).
- (b) The raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11).
- (c) The raising of Lazarus of Bethany (John 11).

These miracles reveal that Jesus is the 'resurrection and the life'. Death came into the world through sin but Jesus came to abolish sin and to redeem mankind. Death, the last enemy was defeated and we are brought to the experience of eternal life.

#### CAN THE MIRACLES BE BELIEVED

Today, man naturally questions miracles. Miracles surpass the laws of nature and so they are impossible, argue some. Augustine gives this answer: "Miracles are not contrary to nature but to what is known of nature". We must remember that our knowledge of nature even now is very limited.

The miracles of Jesus should be evaluated after taking into consideration his character and personality. What is our basic idea about him, and how much faith do we have in him? Our belief in the miracles depend much on this. If Jesus was, the Son of God become man, and if he had incomparable personality, then his miracles can be believed. If we believe in the great miracle of the Incarnation, then there will be no difficulty to believe in the miracles that followed during his life, and the Resurrection that took place after Calvary.

#### EXERCISE

1. What explanation can be given for Jesus cursing the fig tree? (Mt. 21:18-20; Mk. 11:20-24).
2. How can you answer the arguments that rationalists raise against miracles?
3. How can you reconcile scientific knowledge and belief in miracles?
4. Arrange in four columns the miracles recorded in the four gospels.

## LESSON 6

### RESURRECTION THE GREATEST MIRACLE

—*Resurrection - its reality*

—*Doubts arising - answers to them*

*Why believe ?*

In the previous lesson our study was about the miracles of Jesus. Now we turn our attention to the greatest miracle, Christ's Resurrection, which is the foundation of the Church. This was the foremost subject in the apostolic kerygma (proclamation). The outstanding truth of the New Testament is the Resurrection. St. Paul says "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faiths is in vain" (1Cor. 15:14).

We read in the Bible that several people were raised from the dead. eg. Lazarus, the widow's son, and Jairus's daughter. But Christ's resurrection is different from these. All the others died again and returned to dust, but Jesus was changed and sanctified, and he lives eternally. This was a unique event in the history of mankind and naturally it became a great claim of the Church. Simultaneously it was a target for attack by the enemies of Christianity.

The gospels do not describe when and how the resurrection took place as there were no eye-witnesses. It is recorded, though, that at that time there was an earthquake (Mt. 28:2) and that the soldiers guarding the tomb were filled with fear. It is an undeniable fact that many persons saw the resurrected Christ. Those who went there found an empty tomb without the body of Christ.

From the beginning so many questioned the truth of the resurrection. The description in the New Testament serve as answers to some of them. To the criticism that no body saw the risen Christ other than the disciples, Peter answers: "God allowed him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses" (Acts 10:41). To the criticism that the apostles stole

the dead body, we find Mathew's answer (Mat. 23:13; 27:64). He asserts that the soldiers were posted there precisely to guard the tomb. It is to establish beyond doubt the truth of the resurrection that the facts of Jesus eating, drinking and showing his wounds, are recorded.

### **WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION**

If the life of Jesus had come to an end with the crucifixion, it would have been just a miserable tragedy because an innocent man was put to death. Justice, goodness and truth would have failed there. But it ended or rather began again with the glorious resurrection. Defeating death, Christ resurrected as the victor.

#### **1. There is reliable evidence for the resurrection**

The oldest document about the resurrection is the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1Cor. 15:3-20). If we read this passage carefully we conclude that the apostle was quoting a creed current at that time. All those who were converted to the church were taught this important and strong tradition though they belonged to different social strata, all of them courageously testified to the resurrection, ignoring threats from enemies of Christ. The most important point stressed in the sermons of Peter, Stephen and Paul is the resurrection. The apostles were testifying to the living truth which they had personally heard, and seen. Peter boldly spoke before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12).

#### **2. The Empty tomb and the cloth that was wrapped around the body**

Some scholars point out, that in the earliest Christian tradition there was no place for the empty tomb as it was not mentioned in Paul's speech (Acts 4:5-12). That is not correct. The three synoptic gospels do speak of the empty tomb (Mk. 16:4-5; Luke 24:2-3; Jn. 20:5-8).

Peter and John ran towards the tomb and entered within. "He saw the linen wrapping lying and the napkin which had been over his head not lying with the wrappings but rolled together in a place by itself" (Jn. 20:7). It is clearly mentioned that they believed, seeing the empty tomb and the wrappings. They were soon

convinced that nobody had taken away the body, and that the body inside the clothes had been transformed into another state.

### 3. Sunday observance

The apostles and the early disciples were firm believers in the Jewish religion. They had a tradition which was very strict in the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday). Leaving this tradition and observing the first of the week (Sunday) for worship was certainly because of faith in the resurrection. In Acts 20:7 we see "on the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread." If the resurrection had not been a reality, Sunday would not have been fixed as the day of worship.

### 4. Origin of the Church

The greatest evidence of the Resurrection is the origin and existence of the Christian Church. The Crucifixion of Jesus made the apostles a defeated and demoralised group. They were filled with fear and bereft of faith and hope. But it was the reality of the Resurrection that invigorated them, gave them a new power and purpose so they could stand in the face of persecution and pressure, even until death. Their courage and faith were so strong that they turned the world upside down. The reason for all this was that they believed in risen and living Christ.

### 5. Origin of the New Testament

If Jesus Christ were only a martyr nobody would have ventured to collect the documents about him and his life on earth. The New Testament writers were moved by a faith in his resurrection that compelled them to write what they had seen and felt and believed to be true. The basis of the New Testament is the resurrection of Christ.

## MEANING AND RELEVANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

The Resurrection should be viewed not only as a means to prove the divinity of Christ, it is a mystery of our salvation, because we received both liberation and salvation through the death of Jesus and his resurrection. Although the death and resurrection are two events, they are in essence one salvific act, indivisible like

the two faces of a coin. The Resurrection is not an isolated incident. Because of it, Christians can unite themselves with Christ and enjoy a resurrected life in Christ.

### EXERCISE

1. Try to write the post-resurrection appearances in the proper order. Read and understand the passages relating to the resurrection in the four gospels and also in 1Cor-15:3-8.
2. Rationalists and others raise objections against the Resurrection. What answer have you to tell them ?
3. The Eastern churches give great importance to Easter. Find out the reason.
4. What is the central message of the resurrection ? How much relevance has it in the society of today ?



## UNIT IV

# ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

## LESSON 1

### THE EVANGELIST AND THE BACKGROUND

—*Author of the Gospel - internal and external evidences, inferences.*

—*Two-backgrounds - the Jewish and the Greek.*

When we study John's gospel after the synoptic gospels, we have a new experience. No other book of the New Testament has such sublime and illuminating thoughts about Jesus Christ. Indian philosophers value it the most and quote profusely from it. This is different from the synoptic gospels in many ways, differences which have attracted students of the gospel from the very beginning.

Who is the author? Traditionally it is believed that John, son of Zebadee and one of the apostles is the author of this gospel. The Church Fathers testify to this. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and disciple of the apostles has recorded that it is the work of John. Ireneus (AD 180) writes "This is written by John the apostle who used to lean on the chest of Jesus." Theophilus of Antioch (180 AD), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Origen (186-254), Tertullian (160-240) and Jerome (342-419), all give the same testimony.

### INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF JOHN'S AUTHORSHIP

1. In John 21:24 the author claims "It is this same disciple who attests what has here been written. It is in fact he who wrote it and we know that his testimony is true.

2. The writer is well acquainted with Jewish ceremonies, traditions and the interpretation of the Rabbis (5:10, 7:22, 7:51, 1:17). Besides, the style reveals semitic background.

3. The author's knowledge and information about places show that he is one who is born and brought up in the areas about which he writes.

4. The author corrects some discrepancies found in the synoptic gospels. For example he mentions that Jesus partook of the last Supper on the night previous to the Passover, because he has first-hand knowledge of it.

5. 'The disciple whom Jesus loved' is the author. He is John. This phrase is referred to in the following passages. Jn. 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20.

Although there are references about the other apostles, John's name is never mentioned. Probably because he is the author. When references are made about the Baptist, in the synoptic gospels, he is called John the Baptist, to distinguish him from John the disciple. But in the fourth gospel the term Baptist is dropped. John, as the author, did not need to distinguish the two.

There are some scholars who feel the author is not John, son of Zebedee. They argue that some parts of the gospel contain ideas long after John's time, especially its anti-gnostic stance, since Gnosticism gained ascendancy in the 2nd century. Again there is much inclusion of Greek religion and philosophy. Again, if this book was John's, why did it not get much recognition in the early church?

Gnosticism did raise its head in the 1st century itself, even Paul opposes it in his letter to the Colossians. The Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls show that Greek religion and philosophy exerted much influence in Palestine. The generally accepted idea now is that though the Gospel may have been edited on, even touched up by some disciple or disciples of John, the core of the book is genuinely his.

### **Time of writing**

It may be in the last decade (90-100 AD) of the 1st century. A manuscript discovered in Egypt in 1955 proves that the gospel was popular in Egypt in the 1st century. Since the book would have taken some years to reach Egypt from Asiaminor where it was written, the above date is most acceptable.

### **THE AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND**

The difference between this gospel and the others is also reflected in the background. The author might have seen at least some of the synoptic gospels, or he may be acquainted with the traditions behind them. The roots of his gospel go deep into the soil of Palestine. The source for growth has been received from the Jewish religion while the prologue and some other parts show a nearness to Greek philosophy. Actually this gospel has a dual relationship with Hebrew traditions and the Greek realm of thought.

#### **1. Hebrew Background**

The author is very much indebted to the Old Testament. Although direct quotations are few, he knows the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish Law, and is familiar with the festivals. He even connects the Christ-event in the background of the festivals:- Passover (2:23, 6:4, 13:1, 11:56). Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) Feast of Dedication (10:22).

The Evangelist is very familiar with the interpretations and teachings of the Rabbis. Certain statements that Jesus makes about himself as the Living water (4:11-15), bread of life (6-35), light of the world etc. are epithets given for the Law by the Jewish people. The evangelist saw them suggesting the mission of Jesus.

The gospel has a relationship with the ideas of the Qumran ascetics (Essenes). They were also part of the Jewish religion of Jesus' time and Son of light, spirit of truth, lord of life, messenger of darkness the contrast between light and darkness, all these are found in the Qumran works. The connection the evangelist had with these works is quite evident.

The evangelist knew the expectations of the Jewish people about the Messiah. The origin of the Messiah will be unknown (7:27). He will work wonders (7:31). He will live for ever (12:34). These hopes can be expressed only by one who is strong in Jewish faith. The above-mentioned facts show that the Evangelist is one who lived in Palestine and is one who is deeply rooted in the Jewish traditions.

## 2. Greek background

In the first century there was a universal influence of Hellenism throughout the Roman Empire. Scholars see this influence in several books of New Testament, especially the gospel of John. The protestant scholars of the last century viewed this gospel in the Greek background only but now they state that there is only a strong Greek influence. What are the signs of this influence ?

(a) The description about ' Logos ' (Jn 1:1-14). The Logos idea is very strong among the storics. This idea was accepted and developed by Philo (20 BC-50 AD). He saw Logos as the link between God the universe. The supreme God has no direct relation with the sin-filled universe, the connection is only through the Logos. Logos is the thought in the mind of God and the echo of that thought . These ideas can be seen in the prologue to the gospel.

(b) Importance of Wisdom : Great importance is given to wisdom in Greek thought. Gnosticism was a natural corollary of it. Wisdom, some felt, is the basis for salvation. It is not merely intellectual but something above it. Wisdom is given great emphasis in John's gospel. "This is eternal life that they know thee, who alone are truly God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (Jn. 17:3; 10:14-15; 14:5-10).

(c) Truth : This idea can be found in Plato and other philosophers In Plato's thought, there are two worlds. One is the world of ideas and the other is the visible universe. The first alone is real and that is truth. In John's gospel the word truth is used 25 times (4:23-24, 8:32; 17:17 etc.....).

(d) Life and Light : These also have a place in Greek philosophy. The word 'life' is prominent from the beginning

to the end of the gospel. Hence it is sometimes called 'the gospel of life'. The light that came to the world and illuminated it, equally is an important idea.

In this way we find many ideas, words and principles of the gospel are related to Greek thought. It is there that we can understand the success of the evangelist. The gospel of salvation is not merely for the Jews, but for Gentiles also. So the Jews have to be convinced of the gospel and the Greeks have to be brought to that faith, which is why he tries to introduce Jesus Christ in a language they can both understand.

### EXERCISE

1. What are the main differences between the Synoptic gospels and John's gospel ?
2. What is the information we get about John, son of Zebedee from the New Testament ?
3. Describe the similarities between John's gospel and the first letter of John.
4. Establish the relation between John and the gospel attributed to him.

## LESSON 2

### AIM OF THE EVANGELIST

—*Religious aim*

—*to establish the true faith against heresies.*

To understand a gospel, we have to know the aim of its author. In this gospel certain aims are clear while others have to be found by careful study.

#### 1. Religious and Spiritual aims

The evangelist makes himself clear, "But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31).

When the gospel was spread beyond the boundaries of the Jewish religion, it had to be introduced in a way that outsiders would understand. John attempts this. He is not satisfied by merely representing Jesus as the Messiah, he has an aim beyond. He writes with the Jews, gentiles, and the whole of mankind in mind when he describes the life of Jesus, reveals Jesus' personality, and interprets his words and actions. His exalted aim is to bring all to the experience of life.

#### 2. Polemical Aim

The evangelist had certain polemical aims. If we examine the long discourses ascribed to Jesus, we find in there polemical nature. This can be understood only through John's contemporary background.

(a) The references to Jews in this gospel make us feel that the evangelist has an unfavourable opinion about them possibly because the Jews rejected Jesus. The word 'Jews' occurs 71 times in the gospel, a technical word, used to denote the Jewish religious authorities especially those in Jerusalem. The enmity and friction

between the Jews and the Christians of the early Church is clearly manifested in the gospel. Controversy about Sabbath, descent from Abraham, rejection from the synagogues, questions relating to the Holy Communion all these reveal the controversies existing at that time between Jews and Christians.

(b) Against the disciples of the Baptist :

The disciples of John the Baptist considered the Baptist superior to Jesus. We find a reference to such a community in Acts 18:25-19:7. They went outside Israel even upto Ephesus in Asia minor. In a book, "Clementine Recognitions" written in the third century, it is said that they recognise the Baptist and not Jesus as their master and Christ.

In this gospel wherever the Baptist is referred to, it is highlighted that he remained subordinate to Jesus (2:5, 19:33; 3:13; 4:1). Even the incident of Jesus receiving baptism from John is left out. The Baptist is only a witness to Messiahship of Jesus, pictured not as bridegroom, but as a friend of the bridegroom.

(c) Against mystery religions :

The mystery religions of the first centuries in the Greek world were a great challenge to the Christian church. These religions had baptism, re-birth, communion with the god through taking the offered food. Their influence might have reached Ephesus also. He makes some pointed remarks against these.

John's remarks about the sacraments are noteworthy. The rebirth through baptism is by the action of the Holy Spirit. "It is Spirit that gives birth to Spirit" (Jn. 3:60). When he speaks about the Eucharist, he says, "The spirit alone gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn. 6:63).

(d) Against the Gnostics :

The greek work 'Gnosis' means wisdom. Gnosticism laid emphasis on wisdom and upheld certain other doctrines. Some people think that there is no strong criticism to it in the gospel. The reason could be that it grew into a strong thought-pattern only in the second century. Though in Syria certain gnostic tendencies had taken form and in the letter to Colosseans

it is said that it reached Colossea (Col 2:8-25; 1:15-20). According to the Gnostic salvation is through wisdom. John makes an indirect attack on their ranks by giving a Christian interpretation to the terms they use. He argues that the Word took flesh without depending on any intermediary, and denies their theory about the universe.

Docetism is a special kind of Gnosticism which grew in Asia Minor. According to this, God cannot take human body. That means incarnation was impossible to happen. So Jesus was not a real human being; he only appeared to be so. In other words he was only a phantom. John fiercely fought against this line of thought. "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). This statement reveals the mystery of the incarnation. In the first letter of John those who do not accept the fact that Christ has come in flesh are called anti-Christ (Jn. 4:2,3). He talks of Jesus' humanness, and emphasises having seen, heard and touched Jesus in order to refute Docetism. Jesus, tired after the journey, sat near the well (Jn 4:6). Jesus wept (Jn 19:28). One of the soldiers stabbed his side with a lance and at once there was a flow of blood and water (Jn 19:34).

While revealing the full manhood of Jesus, John wants to prove his full god-hood, because gnostics argued that Jesus was only an emanation from God. "The word was God" (Jn 14:9). St. Thomas's confession "My Lord and my God" (20:28) all prove the god-hood of Jesus.

John did not aim at writing a historical treatise. That does not mean that he ignored or forgot history. He corrects some of the historical references in the synoptic gospels (eg. the time of the last supper of Jesus). Taking into consideration the current needs and challenges he reveals who Jesus is and what his mission is.

### EXERCISE

1. How does John's approach guide missionary activities today ?
2. "John's aim was to write a spiritual gospel". Discuss.
3. Is there any difference between the picture of Jesus given by the synoptic gospels and by John ?



## LESSON 3

### THE WORD BECAME FLESH

—*Study of the introductory verses - structure - nature*

—*relation with other parts*

—*Greek - Hebrew background.*

The beginning of John's gospel is different from that of the synoptics. Here we have a brilliant narration about the Word. In the original form it is in poetry. Some are of the opinion that John has taken a part of an Aramaic song praising the Word and placed it here. Others say that John took a gnostic song and made changes in it. Anyway two things are clear (1) In style and structure this is different from the other parts. The term 'Word' is nowhere used for Jesus. (2) This part has very close relation in ideas with the other parts. For example Word is eternal (1:1). Son is eternal (17:5) Word is life (1:4). There is life and light in the Word (1:4) Christ is the light of the world (8:12). Though light has come into the world and men loved darkness (3:19). These introductory verses which reveal similarity in ideas are inseparably connected with the common subject of the gospel; John's aim is not to describe the Logos but to explain the Christ who came into history.

### BACKGROUND OF LOGOS

Behind the idea of the Word there are two streams of thought, one from the Greek tradition and another from the Hebrew tradition.

#### 1. Greek Tradition :

Logos is a greek word, and has a definite place in Greek philosophy. It is Heraclitus of Ephesus who first used the word. Logos is the mighty power that spreads and works through-out the universe. The rhythm we find in nature is caused by the logos.

Stoic philosophers also gave great importance to the logos. They taught that everything in the universe is controlled and led by the logos. Everything is keeping to its real structure because of logos.

This has a relation to the human mind. The thought that arises in the mind and the word which is its expression come through the logos. Philo of Alexandria (died 50 A. D.) was a Hebrew scholar who imbibed greek philosophy and interpreted it. He made an attempt to incorporate the logos idea with Jewish thought. He made the creation to come out of the logos i. e. logos was before anything in the universe. It can be called God's thought or God's mind. It is this logos that works in the human mind to give it the ability to think and to know. Logos acts as a link between God and the universe and it makes them work together. It is not clear how far John accepted Philo's ideas, but we can note many similarities:- They are in agreement that the creation and existence of the universe are through the logos. But there is an idea in which John differed from Philo: 'Word became Flesh' is something which cannot be visualised in Greek thought. Logos always remains an idea without maintaining any relation with the universe. But John affirms that the logos became flesh.

John's aim is to reveal who Jesus is. He does not try to explain the logos theory. For his purpose he accepts a word common in the Greek world, and through it interprets Jesus. To an educated man John seems to say: "You make a lot of discussion and arrive at conclusions about the logos. You should see logos, not through your inferences, but through Jesus of Nazareth. However developed your wisdom is it cannot lead you to logos. The Logos is Jesus and all true wisdom is centred in him."

## 2. Hebrew tradition

We can see the roots of logos in the Hebrew tradition also. In Hebrew tradition logos is not a mere voice. It has the power to act and also to exist. In the Old Testament this thought is manifested.

(a) The word of God is mighty, it can create and reveal. God said "Let there be", and it happened (Gen 1:3, 6, 9). Crea-

tion of the universe was through the word containing the command of God. Many of the Psalms reflect this idea (Ps 33:6, 32:6, 147:15). Creation is done by the outward expression of God's mind and will.

It was God's word that was to be revealed to the prophets. God revealed his will through the word. The prophets wanted the people to respond favourably to that word, but they often refused to do it (Isa. 1:3) "He came unto his own and his own received him not" (Jn. 1:12).

(b) The Jewish ideas about wisdom are another factor behind the logos. In the first century it was believed that wisdom was personified; that it was in existence before creation and that it was the cause for creation. Wisdom was considered the moral teacher and guide.

When a Jew with faith and knowledge in logos reads John's description of logos, he will understand that what he has known about wisdom is all given to Jesus of Nazareth. This will surprise him and challenge his conception, because wisdom was identified with the Law of Israel. The Law is eternal, complete and perfect; all knowledge is contained in it. Religiously thinking, the Law is the supreme authority. It is in place of such a law that John introduces Jesus of Nazareth. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17).

We have seen that the concept of logos is neither foreign or strange to the Jews. John invites their attention and faith towards Jesus who is Word made flesh; John describes logos in the introduction because John wants to introduce Christ through an idea which is acceptable both to the Greeks and to the Jews.

What does John say about the Logos ?

Jn. 1:1-18 This passage can be divided into four parts:

- A. Logos as God and creator (Verses 1-5)
- B. Baptist's status and Mission (Verses 6-8)
- C. The Coming of Logos (Verses 9-13)
- D. Word made Flesh and plan of salvation (Verses 14-18)

A. Matters told about logos in the first part:- It remains eternal; with God; really God; cause for creation; preserver of creation; light that defeats darkness etc.

B. It is made clear that Jesus has a higher position than John the Baptist. John is sent only to bear witness.

C. The Word reveals all things ; it was in the world before the Incarnation, yet the world did not know it; the world rejected it.

Those who receive him can claim to be children of God. They will become children of God not through any human act or will but by the will of God and his heavenly power.

D. **Incarnation** : The Eternal word was born as man, real man. The apostolic community saw his glory. During the Old Testament times there was the glory of God in the tabernacle. The Incarnate Jesus Christ takes this place in the gospel of John.

#### EXERCISE

1. Is there any similarity between the idea of Logos and the Hindu idea of "OM" ? Can we integrate the two?
2. Explain the relation between the prologue and the latter part of the gospel.
3. Compare and find out the mutual relation between this portion, Col. 1:15-20, Hebr. 1:1-3, and the definition of the Son, in the Nicene Creed.
4. How is the idea in Jn. 1:14 different from the idea of Incarnation in Hinduism ?

## LESSON 4

### “SIGNS” IN ST. JOHN’S GOSPEL

—*differences with synoptic gospels*

—*works and signs meaning and relevance of these words.*

—*the seven signs and their meanings.*

Jesus did many signs in the presence of his disciples (Jn. 20:30). With a particular aim John selects seven of them and introduces them in the earlier part of this Gospel. They are described as ‘Signs’ and ‘Works’ which testify that Jesus is Son of God and Messiah.

When we compare with the synoptic gospels we find certain well-marked differences :-

(a) While the Synoptic gospels call them ‘miracles’ or ‘mighty-works’ John calls them ‘Signs.’ The reason is that John tries to bring out the spiritual message of the miracles done by Christ.

(b) Synoptic gospels view miracles proof of the coming of the Kingdom of God. In John, it is to show who Christ is, and what his mission is. When we go deep into it, we find there is not much difference between the two.

(c) In the Synoptic gospels miracles are signs that man is liberated from the rule of Satan and so there are many instances of exorcism. But in John there is not even a single exorcism because John’s aim is different.

(d) In the synoptic gospels faith was necessary in the beginning for the miracles to take place. But in John miracles lead to faith (John. 14:11).

(e) John’s aim is to reveal the theological meaning and relevance of the miracles. Hence the description of the miracles is often accompanied by a long theological discourse. For example-

after feeding the crowd with five loaves (6:32-63) we find a discourse on the "bread of life." Before raising Lazarus from the dead, there is a discourse on Jesus as resurrection and life (Jn. 11:25).

We need not give undue importance to the above differences. We need only consider that the evangelists have some difference in their outlook and aim when writing gospels.

### Signs and works

**Signs:-** We must know the background and extent of meanings of these words used by John. "Signs" is to be understood in the Old Testament background. In the greek language the word "Semeion" means a mere sign, to recognise an object. In the outlook of John this word has a deeper meaning than simply sign. John uses it with the same meaning as in the Septuagint where this word is used for a sign of God's action, as a promise of God's help and faithfulness. During the Exodus Yahweh asks, "How long will these people provoke me? How long will it be before they behave me for all the signs which I have showed among them?" (Numb 14:11). In John we hear an echo of this "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not in him" (Jn. 12:37). Just as the signs revealed the glory of Yahweh the signs of Jesus reveal his glory (Jn. 2:11; 12:37, 41).

**Works :** To refer to his miracles Jesus uses the word "works" more than "signs". Christ himself uses 'works' seventeen times (In the synoptic gospels Jesus uses the word for miracles only twice (Matt 11:2; Luke 24:19).

This word also has to be understood in the Old Testament context. The creation of universe is called the work of God (Gen. 2:2). Salvation is also a work of God (Exod 34:10, Ps.66:5; 77:13, Deut 3:24). God's delivering Israel through Moses and working miracles are called God's works (Acts 7:22).

By calling the miracles of Jesus, "Works" John is establishing the relation between Jesus on the one hand and the creation and redemption of the world on the other. "My father is working still and I am working" (Jn. 5:17). Here the unity and agreement in work between the Father and the Son are quite evident.

The whole ministry of Jesus is seen as his 'Work.' "I have glorified thee on earth by completing the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 17:4). Not only the miracles of Jesus but also his words are 'Works', "The words that I speak to you I speak not on my own authority but the Father that dwells in me does his works (Jn. 14:10).

Whereas "Signs" are performed by Christ alone works are shared by the Father and the Son (Jn. 5:17). This reveals the unity between the Father and the Son.

The signs and works of this gospel testify to the divine origin and holy mission of Jesus. Through these the inspiration is given to believe in him and to be saved through the faith.

#### SEVEN SIGNS AND THEIR MEANING

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Turning water into wine<br>(Jn. 2:1-11)    | It shows the transformation made by Christ.    |
| 2. Curing the son of the official (4:4, 6-54) | Jesus cures by faith.                          |
| 3. Curing the paralytic (5:2-9).              | Christ restores the lost power of mankind.     |
| 4. Feeding the five thousand (6:4-13).        | Christ is the bread of life which sustains us. |
| 5. Walks on the water (6:16-21)               | Christ is our guide.                           |
| 6. Curing the man born blind (9:1-7).         | Christ is light of the world.                  |
| 7. Raising Lazarus (11:1-44)                  | Christ is the resurrection and the life.       |

1. Miracle of Cana (2:1-11). This was the first of the miracles and shows the power and authority of Jesus Christ over nature. Water symbolises the old religion based on the law. Turning water into wine shows the transformation of the old into the religion based on the gospel. Wine is a sign of joy. Joy and gladness can be experienced by Christian life.

2. Curing the official's son (4:46-54). Jesus by his word cures the boy who is on the verge of death. The words of Jesus are strong and life-giving. But the place of faith is clear. "And the man believed the word Jesus had spoken to him and went his way" (4:50). Cure is obtained when we completely believe in Jesus and put our trust in him.

3. One who had been a paralytic was cured (5:2-9). Hoping for a cure he lay thirty-eight years by the side of Bethesda pool. When he responded to Jesus's commanding words he was cured. This shows that Jesus gives power to the weak.

4. Feeding five thousand with five loaves (6:4-13). This is the only miracle common to the four gospels. Jesus satisfies the physical hunger of the multitude. Along with this he reveals that he is the Bread of life, and those who come to him believing, will be satisfied. It is through the Holy Qurbana that Jesus, the Bread of Life, offers himself to the faithful.

5. Walking on the sea (6:16-21). The Synoptic version is almost the same. The roaring sea, the frightened disciples, Christ approaches them, walking on the water and strengthens them. He travels with them and they seem to immediately reach their destination. Christ is our fellow-traveller, guide and strengthener.

6. Curing the man born blind (9:1-7). Jesus revealed the truth that he is light of the world (9:5).

Jesus cures the blind man on the Sabbath for which the pharisees blamed him. Their spiritual blindness which sees good as evil is revealed here. The words of Jesus about it are note worthy (See 9:35-41). The blind regained their sight while those who claimed to have sight (the Pharisees) continued to be blind.

7. Raising up Lazarus (11:1-44). This is not described in the synoptic gospels though there are two similar incidents (raising the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain). Though Jesus knew Lazraus was ill, he deliberately delayed going to Bethany because Jesus wanted to reveal, his glory through this incident. Jesus reached Lazarus's tomb in Bethany four days after



his death. Through the ensuing conversation with Martha Jesus reveals that he is resurrection and life and that those who believed in him would resurrect at the second coming.

### EXERCISE

1. Are miracles, signs and works possible in this age when technical and scientific knowledge has made so much progress ?
2. What importance did John give to the seven miracles he had chosen ?
3. What are the differences between the Synoptic gospels and John's gospel in the introduction of miracles ?

## LESSON 5

### THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE

—*Background of the Discourse*

—*Aim of the discourse*

—*Death and coming again*

—*Relation between Jesus and the disciples*

—*High priestly prayer.*

The first twelve chapters of John's gospel contain Jesus, public ministry and his teachings. From the thirteenth to the seventeenth chapter, we have a detailed description of the last Supper, the Passover meal he shared with his disciples, and his exhortation during the meal. The last four chapters give details of the betrayal, crucifixion and glorious resurrection.

The discourse during supper : It was customary for the head of the group sharing the meal to tell the story of the original

Passover in Egypt. But Jesus has other things in his mind - he is trying to drive home his message before his imminent betrayal. The words he uses are recorded by John. Since the Synoptists do not describe this part, we can only conclude that John wrote this with the counsel of the Holy Spirit. The 'hour' that he often speaks about in the earlier part of the gospel has come (13:1). In the discourse he says "Father the hour has come; glorify thy Son so that the Son may glorify thee" (17:1).

### **CHRIST'S DEATH AND COMING AGAIN (CH.14)**

Jesus Christ's death is imminent. He knows it well and he reminds the disciples not to be disheartened for he will come again, but they do not understand this. "I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you" (14:18). Does this refer to the eschatological coming on the clouds with trumpets and the shouts of the archangels? John does not mean that. Though John does not forget about coming in the end, here he refers to the Risen Christ with the Holy Spirit coming and living in the Church. "If you love me keep my commandments and I will pray the Father and he will give you another comforter that he may abide with you for ever" (14:15; 16:25-26). They should show one another the same love that is in Christ, the Holy spirit will help to bring it about.

### **RELATION BETWEEN JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES (CHAPTER 15,16)**

Inviting our attention to the present day experience, the evangelist explains the relationship between Christ and the church on the other. He has accepted the Old Testament symbol of the vine (Ps. 80:9-19). "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman" (15:1). Jesus is the true vine or the true Israel (people of God) In that state Jesus has two relationships: first to God, second, to those united to him in faith. From him the energy of life flows to the believers. He lives in them and they in him. The fruit that the vine should produce is love (agape).

He predicts that the church will be hated and persecuted in spite of being based on love. When the believers suffer hatred or persecution they will not be helpless orphans, because the comforter

or Paraclete will be with them. (This refers to the Holy Spirit.). Paraclete is a term used only by John and means comforter, steward, advisor, helper etc. From his calling the Holy Spirit "another comforter", it is implied that the Holy Spirit will be to them what Jesus was, a comforter, and helper. Christ is also called a paraclete (1Jn 2:1).

It is the Holy Spirit that guides and strengthens the church during times of crisis. The Holy Spirit will also judge the world. The Spirit continues to remind people of the teaching of Jesus and leads men to the fuller light of Christ.

### **HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER (CHAPTER 17)**

The two previous chapters described how the church should function as a love-based community, guided by the Holy Spirit. But when Jesus summarises his thoughts and hopes about the church in a beautiful prayer, he sees before him not only the church of that time but the church of the future.

This prayer has been called the High-Priestly prayer. This is a heart-rending prayer made by Christ, the high priest of our souls. This has also been called the Consecration prayer because Christ is offering himself as a supreme sacrifice. This has the nature of a prayer constantly offered by the Risen Christ to the Father.

Three things are contained in the prayer:

- (a) Christ prays for himself (Verses 1-5)
- (b) Christ prays for the apostles (Verses 6-19)
- (c) Christ prays for the universal church (Verses 10-26)

In the first part, prior to his death he glorifies the Father as he glorified him during his earthly life. He has completely fulfilled the mission entrusted to him not only spreading the message of love, but forming a community (church) based on love.

His prayer for the disciples (verses 6-19) is for protecting them from the world of sin, faithlessness and enmity. He prays that they may dedicate themselves to fulfil their mission firmly rooted in love.

In the third part (verses 20-26), Jesus prays for the universal church. He visualise all who have come to the church in faith as a result of the missionary activities of the apostles. It is this prayer that provides inspiration for the modern ecumenical movements. "That they may be one as we are one, I in them and You in me, may they be perfectly one" (Jn. 17:23). The unity in the church should be the unity as strong as the bond of unity between the Father and the Son.

### EXERCISE

1. Summarise (in order) the teaching about the Holy Spirit in chapters 14-16.
2. From the allegory of the vine and the branches (15:1-9) what spiritual lessons can be learnt ?
3. What is the meaning John has given to the word, "world"?

## LESSON 6

### SACRAMENTAL TEACHINGS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

—*What is a Sacrament ? - Incarnation is the greatest sacrament.*

—*Baptism and Qurbana are the two most important Sacraments.*

—*Hints about other sacraments.*

John gives great importance to the sacraments compared to the other evangelists. What do we mean by the sacraments ? Are they something secret and mysterious ? If so, can magic and charms also be included in sacraments ?

A sacrament is when an unseen Divine power works through external objects, and through this, man gets grace and blessings. Viewed from this point, the Incarnation of the Son of God is the most important sacrament. John makes this clear in the prologue of this gospel. "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). The invisible spirit, God, assumed the visible object, flesh. God and man become one in Christ. Matter is itself neither good nor evil. It becomes a medium for the work of divine grace.

The Evangelist begins by recognising the Incarnation as the basis for sacramental teachings. In the subsequent parts he refers to the important sacraments of Baptism (3:3,5) and Qurbana (6:35-63) which is also called the Eucharist. Indirectly he refers to the other sacraments also: Confession (Sacrament of penance) Jn. 13:10; 20:22; priesthood 20:22; marriage 2: 1-11. While many scholars agree that John's gospel teaches more about sacraments than the synoptists some scholars, like Bultmann, introduce John as an anti-sacramentalist.

#### About Baptism (Jn. 3: 3,5)

Jesus explains in his conversation with Nicodemus, that rebirth comes from water and spirit. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven

one should be born again. He gives the reason for this. What is born of flesh is flesh and only the spirit can create spirit. One who is in the natural state cannot come to the spiritual state unless God raises him up. Just as he made man by breathing into dust at the time of creation, new life can be obtained only by the work of the Holy Spirit. "No one went up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the son of Man whose home is in heaven" (John 3:13).

The cure of the man born blind helps us to understand and compare the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. 'If you were blind, said Jesus, 'You would not be guilty, but because you say "We see" your guilt remains' (9:41). Many church fathers take this incident to mean a parallel with the experience gained in baptism namely the opening of the spiritual eyes. The name "Photismos" given to baptism means "to be illuminated." The expressions "have once been enlightened" (Heb. 6:4) and "after you were enlightened (Heb. 10:32) both refer to Baptism. Many ancient paintings depict baptism connecting it with curing the man born blind.

A man who has bathed needs no further washing (13:10). Here the bath refers to baptism. It is made clear that a man who received baptism need not have a second baptism even if he has sinned.

'At once there came blood and water from his side' (19:34). This is given to prove the manhood of Jesus, against the Docetists. At the same time St. Chrysostom and other Fathers say that indirectly it points to the two sacraments of Baptism and Qurbana.

### HOLY EUCHARIST

It appears curious why John left out the establishment of the Holy Eucharist. He describes only the washing of the feet taking place, at the supper, but he describes at length Jesus teaching about the living bread from heaven as he describes the feeding of the multitude with five loaves. These two can be understood only in connection with the Holy Qurbana.

We can understand the descriptions in chapter 6 only in the background of the Eucharist which was established by Jesus and continued by the church :

(a) Background of the event and the teaching : John specially says that the miraculous feeding was performed at a time approaching the Passover (6:3).

(b) Description of the miracle : There is close similarity to the establishment of the Eucharist.

“And Jesus took the loaves and when he had given thanks, distributed it to the disciples” (John 6:11).

A special feature of John's description of the miracle is noteworthy. Just like the Last Supper, Jesus himself distributes the loaves after giving thanks. When we look at the number of people, it is not possible for Jesus alone to distribute it. Surely the distribution has been done through the disciples. The change that John made is to keep up a similarity with the Eucharist. The action at the Last Supper and the multiplication of loaves have a great relationship even in the early gospel proclamation.

(c) The conversation about the bread of life : The people look to Jesus as a wonder-worker and Jesus takes this opportunity to tell them about the food of eternal life. There are two parts to this discourse (1) 6:25-35 (2) 6: 36-58. Scholars try to find the differences between these, but we can see they both deal with the Holy Eucharist. The first part deals with “coming near” or “believing in” Jesus, while the second, with “eating my flesh” and “he who drinks my Blood.” Both suggest the experience of the Holy Eucharist. One should partake of the Eucharist in faith. This may be considered simply bread, as some people do. But only those who eat this in faith will feel that it is the bread of life (6:40,47). The importance of faith is emphasised by strongly asserting that it is a gift of God. It is impossible to have faith unless it is given by God.

‘Eat the flesh’ and ‘drink the Blood’ are expressions totally repugnant to Jewish tradition. Therefore the words “Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (6:53) can be understood only in the context of the

meaning of the new institution - the Holy Eucharist . "The bread that I give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world" (6:51). In place of this verse in the synoptic gospels we find "This is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19).

(d) What one hopes to achieve by receiving the Holy Eucharist Jesus hints that there are mainly three results. (1) Eternal Life (2) Unity or Fellowship with God. (3) Resurrection.

Eternal life : "If any man eats this bread he shall live for ever" (6:51). There is repeated mention of the eternal life or life through Christ , received through the Eucharist (6:53, 54, 58). It is a partnership in the life lived by the Father and the Son (6:57).

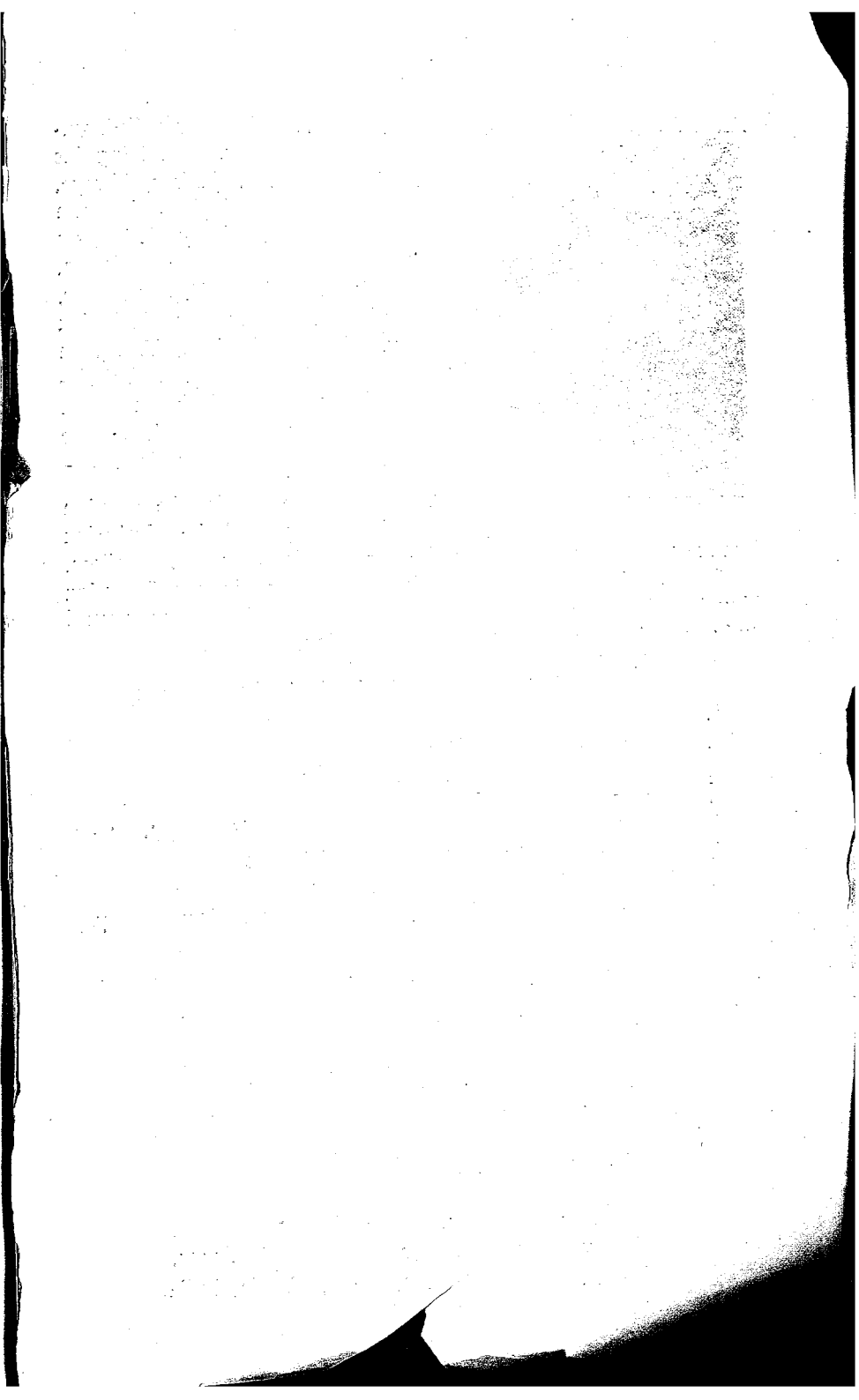
Unity : "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him" (6:56). This unity is an interpenetration of two personalities. The relation between the Father and the Son is transferred to the relationship between the Son and the christian. John describes the experience of living in Christ by comparing it to the branches of the vine (Jn 15:1-10). A believer can bear fruit only in union with Christ. Holy Eucharist is the glorious source of the growth of mutual love and activity of the believer with Christ.

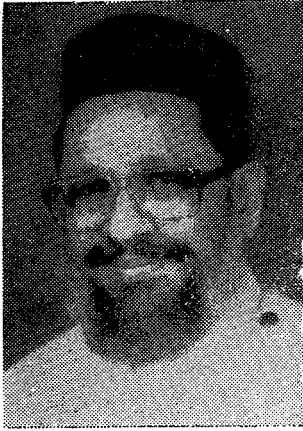
Resurrection : "Who-soever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:54). Two things are said in this verse; viz. those who receive Holy Eucharist can expect eternal life; in the end Jesus will raise him up; here we see both eschatological promise and hope, and it is the Holy Qurbana that is the guarantee of our resurrection in Christ.

### EXERCISE

1. "John's gospel gives more importance to the sacraments". Substantiate this statement.
2. Compare the passage in John's gospel about baptism with the passages on the same subject in Paul's letters (Rom 6:3-6; Gal 3:27; Colo 2:12).
3. Summarise John's teaching about Holy Eucharist.





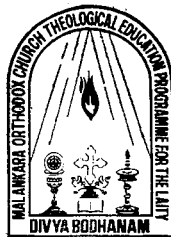


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At present he holds the position of the Vice-Principal of the Orthodox Seminary and is vicar of the St. Pauls Church, Pallom. A Theological Lay Training Project is launched in the Orthodox Church and Father Joshua is its Director. He has written several study materials for the course of Instruction.

Here are the titles of some of the books he has written :

1. In the Holy Land (Malayalam)
2. In the Fullness of Time
3. Exhortations of the Apostles (Malayalam)
4. Prayers of Paul (Malayalam)
5. From Water and Spirit (On Baptism-a study) (Malayalam)
6. Freedom in Christ - Epistle to the Galatians
7. Unto the Light (Malayalam)
8. Epistle to the Ephesians - A Devotional Commentary



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