

The Royal Majesty of the Kingdom

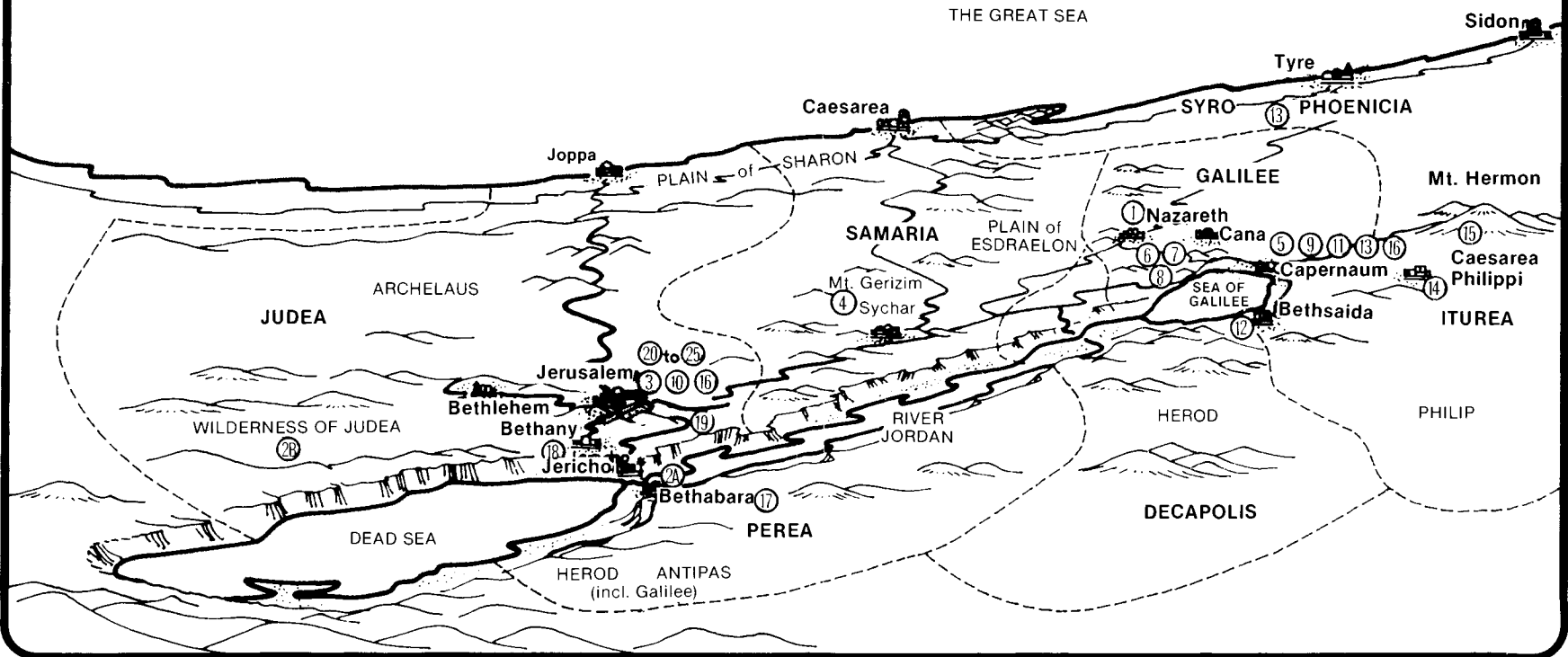


INTERMEDIATE NOTES — 13 to 14 years

STAGE FOUR OF FIVE STAGES

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 121, ST. AGNES 5097, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Landmarks in the life of our LORD



The Lesson Headings are numbered and the map indicates the locality of the events, etc.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Early Life | 5. Disciples Called | 12. Feeding the Multitude | 19. Behold, your King |
| 2. Baptism 2A
Temptation 2B | 6. Beatitudes | 13. Defilement and Hypocrisy | 20. Answering His Opponents |
| 3. Nicodemus | 7. Principles in Action | 14. Gathering Opposition | 21. The Olivet Prophecy |
| 4. Accepted at Samaria | 8. Praying | 15. Jesus is Transfigured | 22. Last Parables (Matt. 25) |
| | 9. Miracles of Healing | 16. Jesus Teaches Forgiveness | 23. Last Supper and Gethsemane |
| | 10. Bethesda Healing | 17. Parables of Finding the Lost | 24. Trial and Crucifixion |
| | 11. The Sower | 18. Raising Lazarus | 25. Alive from the Dead |

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

INTERMEDIATE NOTES — STAGE 4

FOREWORD

The life of Jesus could well be the most rewarding study of our five year series of lessons. Over the past three years we have seen the types, shadows and promises of the Messiah, and now we see before us the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. We will be impressed with the teachings and examples of the Master, and in our appreciation we will earnestly desire the salvation he holds out for us. We will be thrilled with his disciples' response, with the rejoicings of the healed and the power of his teaching. But we will be saddened by the stubbornness of the rulers in refusing to accept the Messiah and sobered by the sufferings they inflicted upon the "Lamb of God". Yet we will capture something of the excitement of the disciples when their Lord was risen and sent them forth as converted apostles.

It is our belief that young minds should be impressed not only by the drama of the incidents but also by the lesson that such incidents present. We have endeavoured therefore to make frequent applications of the "story" to the situations in which young people are placed today, in addition to the concluding "lesson for us" in each lesson. We have also made reference to Old Testament quotations where necessary but not to complicate the lesson. Most of the lessons are centred around one particular chapter in the gospel narratives except for those few lessons where many small incidents, recorded in several chapters, are grouped together.

Let us therefore approach "the ministry of Jesus Christ" with keen interest, contemplating lesson by lesson that wonderful co-operation between the Son and the Father in securing redemption for us all — if we will but pattern our lives on him. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

TABLE of CONTENTS

LESSON NO.	Name	PAGE NO.
1	The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus	3
2	Jesus Meets Nicodemus the Pharisee	8
3	Belief in the Messiah at Samaria	11
4	Rejected by His Home Town — Nazareth	16
5	The Calling of the Disciples	20
6	Teaching His Disciples 1. The Beatitudes	27
7	Teaching His Disciples 2. Discipleship	32
8	Teaching His Disciples 3. How to Pray	36
9	Healing at Capernaum	40
10	Healing at Bethesda on the Sabbath	44
11	The Parable of the Sower	48
12	Feeding the Multitude	53
13	Opposition Gathers in the Shadow of the Cross	58
14	Transfiguration of Jesus	63
15	Teaching Forgiveness	68
16	Healing a Blind Man	73
17	Parables of the Lost	77
18	Resurrection of Lazarus	81
19	“Behold Your King”	86
20	Answering His Opponents	90
21	The Olivet Prophecy and Today	94
22	The Judgment Parables	99
23	Last Supper and Gethsemane	105
24	Trial and Crucifixion	111
25	Resurrection	118

1. THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

“Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” —Matt. 3:15.

Having reached the age of 30, it was now time for Jesus to commence the work for which his Heavenly Father had prepared him. John (his cousin) was already preaching on the banks of Jordan. He was the “voice crying in the wilderness”. John proclaimed the coming of Messiah, urging the people to turn again to God. When Jesus came to Bethabara where John was baptising it was revealed to John that here was the Messiah, whose coming he was proclaiming.

Matthew 3; 4:1-11

JOHN’S MESSAGE AND CALL FOR REPENTANCE (Matt. 3:1-12).

In the days when John the Baptist commenced his ministry, the nation of Israel was more concerned with their every day comfort and problems than they were with the things of God.

The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Lawyers gave the appearance of being deeply religious but, in the main, it was all for outward show. John spoke very forthrightly about their attitude. His strong words aroused the interest of many people and they went to the banks of Jordan to hear him.

He called upon them to repent and to dedicate themselves to God while there was time, for, he warned, the day of Judgment was coming upon them (Luke 3:9; Mal. 3:2).

John was the forerunner of Messiah. As such, the central theme of his preaching concerned one mightier than himself. His message came from Isaiah 40:3-8. He was “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord” (Matt. 3:3). He called upon the people to see that “all flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field”. This meant an examination of self, a confession of past sins and a willingness to be baptised as an act of repentance. This change of heart and mind was to prepare them for the coming of Messiah.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (Matt. 3:13-15).

One day as John was baptising in Jordan, Jesus moved through the multitude and appeared before him. Although it is unlikely that John knew his cousin by sight (Jesus having lived in Nazareth and John spending his life in the wilderness, Luke 1:80), he knew that here was no ordinary man standing before him. As John looked into the face of the Son of God he became conscious of his own need. “I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?” Jesus’ reply shows how

important it is that God's requirements are obeyed. "Suffer it to be so now" said Jesus, "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". Though personally sinless, in being baptised Jesus showed his agreement to the principle that God only is righteous and that "all flesh is grass".

We, too, must recognise this principle of repentance and that, of ourselves, we can do nothing that will make us righteous. We must give our full attention to the Word of God and if we obey His commandments with faith and love, the Father will grant us a place in His Kingdom.

THE RESPONSE FROM HEAVEN (Matt. 3:16-17).

There followed immediately upon Jesus' baptism, the sign confirming his position as Messiah. The spirit of God came upon him (v.16). John had been told by God that this would be the sign identifying Messiah (Jn. 1:32-33). The dove was not the only sign given. A voice from heaven, too, proclaimed the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v.17). Thus began the ministry of the Son of God. He was heralded as such by unmistakable signs and the words that followed left no doubt that here was the Messiah of Israel.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS (Matt. 4:1-11).

Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus was tempted in the three ways that sin arises, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:16). He overcame all these suggestions of the tempter and so honoured God. In the garden of Eden these very same desires caused the downfall of Adam and Eve—thus the second Adam succeeded where the first failed. The table that follows compares these incidents.

The replies of Jesus all came from the book of Deuteronomy. This suggests that Jesus was thinking of God's national son, Israel, and the reproofs and exhortations Moses gave them because they failed. Jesus heeded these lessons and through the strength derived from his Father, overcame these weaknesses common to us all.

ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD	THE DOWNFALL IN EDEN	THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS	JESUS' REPLY TO THE TEMPTER
1 JN. 2	GEN. 3	MATT. 4	MATT. 4
v.16-"the lust of the flesh"	v.6-"tree was good for food"	v.3-"command these stones be made bread"	v.4-"Man shall not live by bread alone"
"the lust of the eyes"	"pleasant to the eyes"	v.8-"sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world"	v.10-"Thou shalt Worship the Lord thy God"
"the pride of life"	"tree to be desired to make one wise"	v.6-"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down"	v.7-"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"

APPEAL TO THE LUST OF THE FLESH: STONES INTO BREAD (Matt. 4:2-4).

Jesus had been in close communication with his Father and had been fasting for forty days and nights. This number forty, is significant, as it can be compared with a time of testing and trial (cp. Num. 14:33-34; Jonah 3:4-10).

The tempter wanted Jesus to demonstrate that he was indeed the Son of God and that he could satisfy the needs of the flesh by turning the stones into bread. But Jesus recalled that God had caused Israel to “suffer hunger” (Deut. 8:3) so that they might learn to place their trust in Yahweh and not depend on their own strength. God’s gift of spirit power to Jesus was not for the purpose of satisfying personal desires. Jesus’ mind centred on the words of Moses as he remembered that God had led Israel in the wilderness that he might “prove them to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no” (Deut. 8:2). His answer demonstrated that his “food” and “drink” was the Word of God and that he would not be turned away from His purpose (v.4).

APPEAL TO THE PRIDE OF LIFE: CAST THYSELF DOWN FROM THE TEMPLE (Matt. 4:5-7).

The tempter then tried a different approach. He appealed to Jesus to demonstrate that he was the Son of God by jumping off a pinnacle of the Temple and being rescued by the angels. Quoting the Psalm, the tempter said that the angels would: “bear thee up lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psa. 91:11-12). The tempter actually twisted the Psalm to suit his argument.

Jesus was not deceived. He knew that the Psalm set clear limitations on how God would protect him. The Psalmist stated that God’s protection was given because he had placed his trust in God and not in the ways of the wicked (Psa. 91:2-4, 8-10). To use this protection to demonstrate fleshly pride was against the whole meaning of the Psalm.

Again the mind of Jesus went to Israel in the wilderness. At Massah and Meribah Israel were athirst and began to murmur and doubt the presence of Yahweh: “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7).

In his answer to the second temptation Christ upheld the supremacy of God by refusing to make God’s will serve his own. He knew that God was with him; at his recent baptism God’s power had come upon him and His voice had spoken approval of him.

APPEAL TO THE LUST OF THE EYES: THE GLORY OF THE KINGDOMS (Matt. 4:7-10).

Finally the tempter portrayed to the eyes of the Lord the glory of the kingdoms of the world, promising them to him if Jesus would submit to him—“all these will I give if you will fall down and worship me” (v. 9). Jesus had the glory before him but he knew that the cross must come first. Again there was no hesitation in his decision. He

remembered the words of Moses to Israel that Yahweh had given them the victory and had brought them to the promised land. In the context of Moses' words he replied, "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13).

The tempter now left Jesus "for a season" and the angels of God came "and ministered unto him" (v.11), in preparation for the days yet to come.

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION.

This record of the temptation of Jesus can help us in our efforts to overcome our own temptations. James reminds us that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:14-15). When the tempter came to Jesus, the Lord immediately caused his mind to dwell upon the lessons that Moses impressed Israel with before he died. From this record he gained strength and the answer to the tempter's suggestions. There are important lessons here for us. The way to overcome temptation is to think upon God's word. It will strengthen our faith in God and show us the answers to our problems. As John says: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4). That faith is developed then by absorbing the Word of God and the example of Christ, so that temptation will find no idle thoughts into which it can intrude and gain the upper hand. Good thoughts will displace evil thoughts by providing no room for them. Thus the apostle likewise encourages us to think positively: "whatsoever things are true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **THINK ON THESE THINGS**" (Phil. 4:8). Our victory over temptation, like Jesus', begins in the mind.

LESSON FOR US.

The message of John the Baptist is as true today as it was then. People today show the same pride in the flesh and a refusal to turn to God as people did in John's day. And in this we can truly see that "all flesh is as grass" (1 Pet. 1:23-25; Jas. 4:13-17) and is fit only for the judgments of God at Christ's return. When Jesus came into Israel he caused people to either accept him or reject him; and to the unrepentant, John prophesied judgment. Let us see the true nature of our position outside of Christ, repent of our independent ways, take into our minds and hearts the Word of God and earnestly prepare for baptism into the sin covering name of Christ. If Jesus considered it was necessary for him to show his agreement with the principle that God's ways are right by submitting to baptism, how much more necessary is it for us, who need the forgiveness of our sins. Coupled with that act of humility and obedience is a daily absorption of the Word of God, to block the entry of ungodly thoughts and to answer temptation with a firm "it is written". "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5-11).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, pages 69-89.

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—chapters 3, 4.

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—chapter 11.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was the role of John the Baptist?*
2. a) *What was Jesus demonstrating by his willingness to be baptised?*
b) *What signs were shown by God at the baptism of Jesus?*
3. *Describe the 3-fold nature of the temptation that Jesus faced in the wilderness.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What was John the Baptist’s message and how can it be applied to our days?*
2. *How was Jesus able to overcome in the Temptation? What lessons can we learn from His example?*

2. JESUS MEETS NICODEMUS THE PHARISEE

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God”

After the wedding at Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum and stayed for a short time with his mother, brethren and disciples. Capernaum was on the great public highway, about two or three days journey from Jerusalem. He was now ready to begin his work among the people. They were to hear many old and wonderful words explained in a new way. The people of Israel, now known as the Jews, had long lived under the Law God gave to Moses (Exodus 19). Many years had passed since then, and men had added to the Law their own commandments, until much of its real meaning was lost.

A beautiful temple had been built in Jerusalem where the Jews tried to maintain the sacrifices and keep the important feasts of God. In some respects, these too had been altered. It was at the time of Passover that Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem for what was now called “the Jews’ Passover” (John 2:13).

John 2:12-16; 3:1-18

PASSOVER TIME AT THE TEMPLE (Jn. 2:13-25).

When Jesus arrived at the Temple the streets of Jerusalem were packed with people and he watched in sorrow and anger as they made their way to the outer court to buy animals and birds for sacrifice. Here people sat and changed foreign money and those who sold animals for sacrifice charged much more than they were worth (John 2:14). This was not the way God intended that they should worship Him. The noise and shouting of the greedy traders stirred Jesus to anger. His Father’s house was being made unclean because of the wicked practices of the rich who robbed the poor.

Twisting some cords into a whip, Jesus ran among the traders, scattering animals and their owners, overturning the money tables and ordering the men with doves to take them and leave (v.10). They fled before him, knowing that they had cared not for the honour of Yahweh’s house. His voice followed them: “Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise”. No-one could argue against the truth of that stinging condemnation. He was right and they feared his zeal for upholding God’s glory. There is a time coming when true religion will fill the whole earth (Mic. 4:1-2; Zechariah 14:20-21) and then God’s Temple will be a house of prayer for all people (cp. Isaiah 56:7). Today we see false religions on every side who teach error and make money out of their religious services, but in the day when Jesus returns, people will be taught the Truth and will worship God as He had commanded.

NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS BY NIGHT (Jn. 3:1-10).

The rulers of Israel did not mix with the ordinary people but rather stayed in their own groups and watched from a distance. However, there was one among the rulers, a Pharisee called Nicodemus, who SAW the actions and THOUGHT on the words of the carpenter from Nazareth. "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi (i.e., Master), we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Jesus replied, "Except a man be born again" or "from above" (see margin) "he cannot see the kingdom of God".

All people are born the first time as babies, but it is the second birth, when a person comes to know God's Word and wants to do as He commands, that is more important in God's eyes. It is the Word of God, which comes 'from above' that causes a man to be "born again" (1 Peter 1:23). It is a moral rebirth (a change of attitudes and life's interests) and those 're-born' in this way are said to be "born of water" (v.5) when they are baptised. In the act of baptism they show that they are dying to the old way of life as when they had followed sin, and will start a new life of obedience to God.

Nicodemus did not understand this. He thought that Jesus meant being born again in the natural way, but Jesus was talking about a change of mind and heart. Jesus then added that a man, to gain the kingdom, must also be "born of the Spirit". Since men are mortal, and the kingdom will last forever, they will have to be given immortality (change to spirit nature) to inherit the kingdom. Only God can bring about such a wonderful change in man's nature.

AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT (Jn. 3:11-21).

Jesus talked about many things to Nicodemus. He reminded him of the time in the wilderness when the people murmured, and God punished them with fiery serpents whose bite caused death (Num. 21:4-9). They then repented, and Yahweh directed Moses to make a serpent of brass, and place it on the pole. Whoever would look upon it in faith, would be healed. Many who did so were spared from what would have been certain death. There was a similarity between what happened then and what would happen through Christ: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). In this way Jesus explained how he himself would be crucified, but after his resurrection the way would be opened to eternal life through belief in him (v.15). Meanwhile, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, the promise of everlasting life was not just limited to Israel, but would be available to all on the basis of faith (v. 16, 17).

NICODEMUS RETURNS.

When Nicodemus left Jesus, he thought upon the things that they had talked about, and in John 7:50-51 we read that he spoke against others

who wanted to bring persecution upon Jesus. Even later still, Nicodemus came to know fully that all that the Lord had said was true. It was he who helped Joseph of Arimathea gently take the body of the crucified Christ down from the cross and place it in the sepulchre (John 19:39, 42).

LESSON FOR US:

Jesus began to show forth his glory as the Son of God in two remarkable incidents, the turning of water into wine at Cana and the driving out of the Temple of those who had disgracefully treated it as a den of thieves. In both incidents his power is exhibited. One to show the joy and happiness that he alone can and will yet provide and in the other to show his zeal for honouring God's house. When we take the Word of God into our hearts we will then find true joy and happiness. Coupled with that will be a desire to honour God in all our ways (Prov. 3:5, 6; 1 Cor. 10:31). The first step in honouring God is to be born again, firstly by baptism into him and after a life long honouring of God, to receive the wonderful "birth" of a change to spirit nature to experience eternal joy and happiness in the Kingdom of God.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- "A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—pages 71-76
"The Gospel of John" (J. Carter)—pages 39-63
"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—chapters 12, 13

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why was Jesus angry when he came into the Temple at the time of the Passover?*
2. *a) Jesus taught Nicodemus about two births. What were they and what do they mean?*
b) Why did Jesus refer to the serpent lifted up in the wilderness in his conversation with Nicodemus?

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the incident when Jesus cleansed the Temple at the time of the Passover.*
2. *What lessons did Jesus try to teach Nicodemus?*

3. BELIEF IN THE MESSIAH AT SAMARIA

“We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world”—Jn. 4:42

For a short period after his meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus was preaching and baptising in Judea, and in fact baptising more disciples than John the Baptist, the man who had announced to Israel the presence of the Messiah. Jesus knew that the hateful Pharisees had heard of his success. Because of their opposition to him he left Judea and turned northward to Galilee. He could either go through hostile Samaritan territory, a direct route, or cross Jordan and go along the eastern side of the river, normally a safe but less direct route. He chose to travel via Samaria.

Our lesson covers the events occurring because of this decision to go through Samaria — we trace the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, leading up to the belief in the Messiah by many Samaritans. The lesson teaches us that God accepts anybody who approaches Him in spirit and in truth.

John 4:1-42

THE SAMARITANS.

The Samaritans were descendants of the people sent back into Israel by the Assyrians after they had taken the ten tribes into captivity about 750 years B.C. (refer stage 3 notes, lesson 14). The remaining Jews intermarried with foreigners and the true worship of Yahweh became mixed with the worship of pagan gods and became a corrupt version of the truth. A temple was built on Mount Gerizim in the region of Samaria and thus began a long argument as to whether Jewish or Samaritan worship was right. Great hostility existed between the two groups, although the Samaritans claimed to be kinsmen with the Jews. They claimed descent from Joseph, the son of Jacob, through Ephraim and Manasseh. It was with a Samaritan woman, one whom, according to Jewish traditions, he should have hated and despised, that Jesus spoke.

JACOB'S WELL.

Jacob's well lay in the valley between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim at Sychar, near Shechem. The well had been dug by Jacob in a parcel of land bought from an inhabitant of the region but which was quite likely the site of Abraham's encampment (see Gen. 33:18-20; Acts 7:16). It was 130 feet deep and the water bubbled, i.e., it was 'living' water. When we look at the history of God's dealings with his people at Shechem we find emphasised the worship of God, the covenants of promise, and the cleansing of works of evil. Salvation

through Christ was to be taught here against this remarkable background.

AN UNUSUAL CONVERSATION (Jn. 4:7-20).

Jesus and the disciples were travelling northward through Samaria. Thirsty and tired, Jesus rested at the well while his disciples went to buy food nearby. He did indeed feel the physical weaknesses that all men feel. While he “sat thus on the well” a Samaritan woman approached with her waterpot. Deliberately Jesus asked for a drink. According to Jewish tradition he should have overlooked her presence completely, but he saw here, a grand opportunity to spread the Gospel net.

The woman had recognised Jesus as a Jew and therefore she answered with some surprise — “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (v.9). He did not rebuke her but encouragingly told her that had she known him, and asked of him, HE would have given HER “living water”. Now “living” water was the usual description for “running” or “bubbling” water, and a spring was sometimes called a “a gift of God”. Naturally the woman took Jesus literally. This unexpected reply puzzled her for she did not understand that Jesus was talking of eternal life.

Responding to Jesus’ reply the woman respectfully said, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob . . .?” He continued by comparing the natural water with the true water of life which He could give — “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”. But because her mind was still thinking about natural water and not the spring of eternal life, she saw the obvious gain of the gift that the stranger said he could give. She now became the one asking for a drink. Eagerly she asked.

At this point Jesus had turned the conversation. She was humble and interested. However, the woman did not yet know who he was and what were his powers. Jesus then made a perfectly reasonable request — “Go, call thy husband, and come hither”, as if he wanted him to share in the gift too. She answered that she had no husband and Jesus by revealing the secrets of her private life, brought her to realise that he was a prophet, not just a mere stranger who talked in riddles. She was not yet at the stage of understanding that Jesus was the prophet greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15-18). She hastily left the subject of her immoral life and seized this opportunity to find a solution to the great question of whether Mt. Gerizim or Jerusalem was the correct place to worship.

TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD (Jn. 4:21-25).

In his answer, Jesus made several things quite plain. These things are important to us, too. He said:

- (a) destruction will come on Gerizim and Jerusalem and so prevent worship in either of these two places (this happened about 40 years later);
- (b) salvation comes from the Jews, through the Hope of Israel, but —
- (c) “TRUE worshippers shall worship the Father IN SPIRIT and IN TRUTH”, i.e., intelligently and sincerely, with the correct beliefs and not with great external display (cp. Josh 24:14 — these words were spoken in almost the same place as Jesus was then standing), neither in confusion as had the Samaritans.
- (d) The Father seeks true worshippers to worship Him, (cp. Isa. 66:1-2). God wants Jews and Samaritans to reverently serve Him in mind and deed.
- (e) God is spirit, i.e., He is an intelligent being and not a lifeless idol.

To a certain extent, Jesus’ reply made the woman realise her responsibility to God. No doubt she felt in the power of his answer that the Samaritans were wrong. She in effect admitted this when she hastened to add that the Messiah would teach the Samaritans the truth when he came.

THE BELIEF IN THE MESSIAH AT SAMARIA (Jn. 4:26-35).

Then came the great revelation from Jesus — “I that speak unto thee am he (the Messiah)”. To a Samaritan woman he had made the first public announcement of his Messiahship.

Leaving her waterpot, the woman hurried back to the city to call her neighbours. Meanwhile Jesus explained to the disciples, who had just returned, that he had a great and joyful work of conversion of men’s hearts in the city of Sychar. With his eye of faith he could see many Samaritans repenting, for the woman was spreading the message that the Messiah was outside the city, and they were coming to see him. What an amazing response the people showed. What a contrast to the Jews who had opposed Jesus prior to his leaving Judea. Many Samaritans believed because of the words Jesus spake to them. Seeking the water of life they besought him to remain. For another two days Jesus showed them the “gift of God”. Indeed the harvest in this place was great.

LESSON FOR US.

Jesus spoke of “living water”. To those who spiritually thirst Jesus can give this water. It is the word of God and this can lead people to eternal life (Jn. 5:39; 17:3). The prophet Isaiah used similar language when he said “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, . . . incline your ear and come to me; hear and your soul shall live; . . .” (Isa. 55:1-3).

But certain requirements are made of those who come to God. They must worship Him in the correct manner. This applies to us too. God seeks our repentance and then a worshipping of Him in sincerity, holiness, truth and spirit. This means that we should learn early to give our lives to God, believing the Truth and not trying to put on a show of serving God. If we believe that Jesus truly is “the Saviour of the World”, then God has promised us eternal life, the highest honour possible for any man or woman.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapter 4.

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, pages 118-127.

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—pages 76-80.

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—pages 111-116.

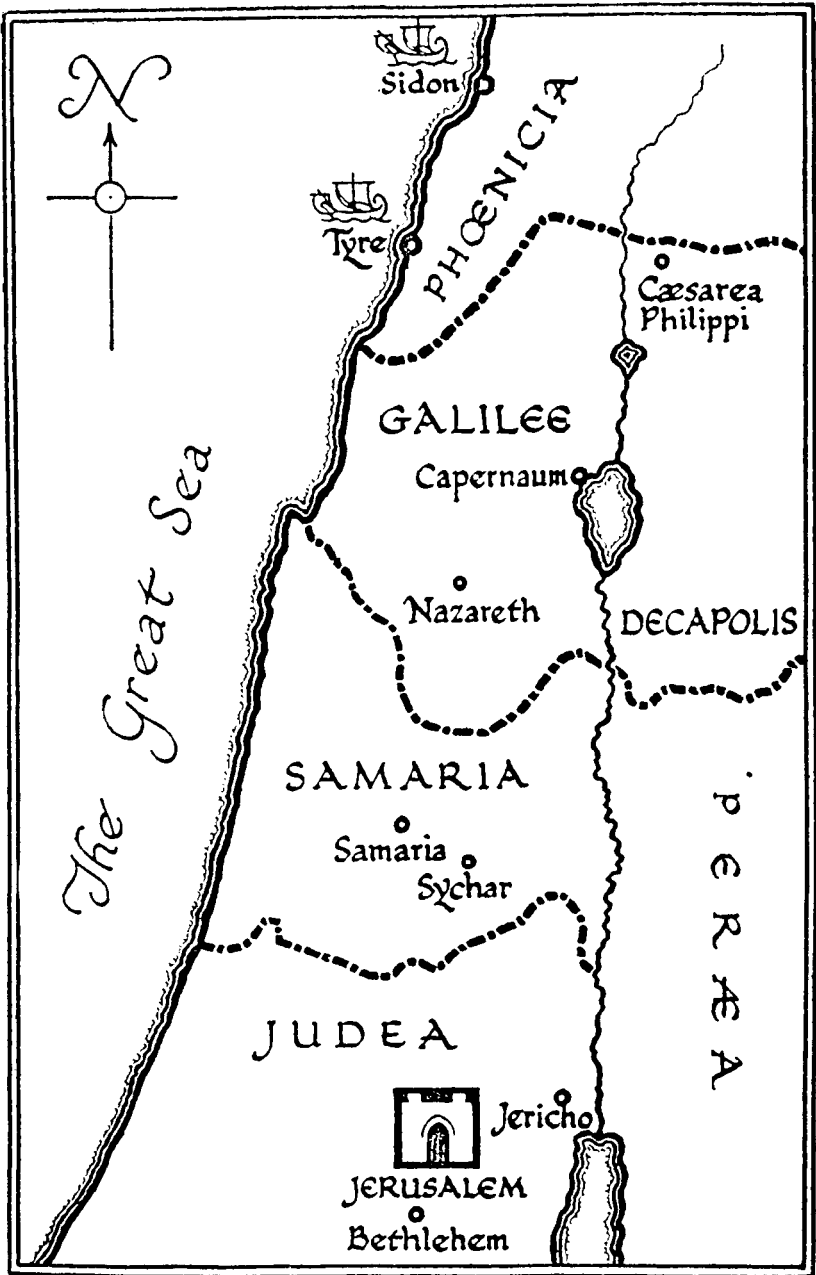
PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Who were the Samaritans and what did they believe?*
2. *What did Jesus tell the Samaritan woman about true worship?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the conversation that Jesus had with the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well.*
2. *What did Jesus say about the dispute that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans and true worship?*





THE PROVINCES OF PALESTINE

4. REJECTED BY HIS HOME TOWN—NAZARETH

**“Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country”
—Lk. 4:24**

Jesus journeyed on from Samaria till he arrived at “Nazareth, where he had been brought up”. What a welcome Jesus of Nazareth should expect here, especially since his fame had spread so much in Galilee and he was “being glorified of all”. However, his own people did not respond to his message and when he declared them to be unfaithful, it became too much for them and they rejected him out of the synagogue and city. Because they were familiar with Jesus and his family, they were not able to recognise that He was more than the son of Mary. Their prejudice stopped them from receiving his message.

Luke 4:16-38

NAZARETH.

A traveller in Israel once described Nazareth: “You cannot see from Nazareth the surrounding country, for Nazareth lies in a basin; but the moment you climb to the edge of this basin . . . what a view you have. Esdraelon lies before you, with its twenty battlefields — the scenes of Barak’s and of Gideon’s victories, of Saul’s and Josiah’s defeats, of the struggles for freedom in the glorious days of the Maccabees. There is Naboth’s vineyard and the place of Jehu’s revenge upon Jezebel; there Shunem and the house of Elisha; there Carmel and the place of Elijah’s sacrifice. To the east of the valley of Jordan, with the long range of Gilead; to the west the radiance of the Great Sea . . . You can see thirty miles in three directions” (Smith, Hist. Geog., page 432).

Nazareth, however, was held in disrepute in Israel, probably because of the people’s lack of culture. The people were quite poor in material goods, but much, much worse than this, they showed themselves to be spiritually poor. As Nathanael said: “can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jn. 1:46).

THE RETURN TO NAZARETH.

Jesus knew Nazareth well — the streets, the people, the rabbi’s school, the well, the familiar carpenter’s shop, the hills round about, and the synagogue. He had lived as a youth in this small town and had worked as a carpenter. Doubtless, many of the townsfolk knew him for he had not been gone from the town for so very long. Yet the people did not really know him because his way of life, his aims and goal in life were far beyond their understanding. They were curious to see if all the rumours they had heard of the fame and power of “Joseph’s son” were true.

THE SYNAGOGUE SERVICE (Lk. 4:16).

The synagogue at Nazareth, the place where the people of Nazareth gathered for instruction in the scriptures and for worship, was probably a simple rectangular building. On entering, there were seats on one side for the men and on the other side, behind a lattice, seats for the women (who wore veils). Out at the front was an ark containing the scriptures which were handed (by the "minister" or attendant) to the person reading them. Included in the synagogue service were prayers, a reading from the Law of Moses, a reading from the prophetic writings and comments on the reading.

As was his custom, Jesus entered the synagogue on the sabbath day. The chief of the synagogue gave Jesus permission to read from the Prophets, and he was therefore at liberty to add his own comments on the reading. The attendant gave him the scroll of Isaiah which he unrolled to the place which we now know as Isaiah 61:1-2. He read only two verses and then, as was customary, sat down near the reading stand to instruct the people.

No doubt there was an air of excitement as the common townfolk prepared to hear the words of the carpenter's son. Every eye was fixed on the one about whom strange and exciting rumours had been spreading.

Jesus spoke — "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears". He had read of the Spirit of the Lord being upon him, to preach, heal and deliver. His reading had closed with the gracious words about his mission — "To preach the acceptable year (= blessed era) of the Lord" (v. 19).

This astonished the people, because Jesus — the carpenter's son — applied the great words of the prophet to HIMSELF. There could be no mistaking the meaning of what had been said (but they were doubtful about his claim). In their small minds the people could not see beyond the fact that Jesus had once been one of their number. This proved a hindrance to their believing him to be the son of God. They were offended at him.

As Jesus proceeded, the wonderment of the congregation turned to indignation. The people were aware of the importance of his words and they wanted proof of his powers in their midst. Jesus said: "No prophet is accepted in his own country", referring to the fact that they would not accept him no matter what he did. Sensing this attitude to him, he gave two examples from the prophets of old, to illustrate that although a greater prophet than Elijah or Elisha was in their midst, it did not follow that the power of God would be demonstrated by him. They were not worthy of that, just as Israel's unworthiness of old had caused Elijah and Elisha to go to a Gentile widow and a Gentile leper respectively, although there were many widows and lepers in Israel. Jesus was telling them that they were no better than their ancestors who rejected the prophets and, in fact, were no better than certain Gentiles who witnessed the power of the prophets. It was too much

for the people. They were filled with wrath, and turned him out of their synagogue, and led him to the edge of the steep hill on which Nazareth was built, intent on throwing him down head first. But almost miraculously, Jesus calmly passed through the midst of them and went his way. No doubt he wondered and sorrowed at the lack of faith showed by the people, which prevented him doing miracles there.

THE SECOND ADVENT:

In the synagogue service Jesus read the following words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

He left out the next words in the quotation from Isaiah: “and (to proclaim) the day of vengeance of our God”.

If he had included these words he would not have been able to add: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. Jesus had not come then to condemn people, but to preach repentance, salvation and the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:16-17). To help people to believe he performed miracles such as healing the blind and curing many of their diseases.

However, when he comes a second time it will be the “day of vengeance”. He will carry out the judgments of God on those who do not believe, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8). By this means, the earth will be cleansed and man will be able to glorify God as He intended from the day of creation.

LESSON FOR US.

Jesus gave two examples of how Gentiles received prophets of old. The widow of Zarephath was saved from dying because of her belief, and obedience to Elijah’s command. Naaman, the Syrian leper, was healed by submitting to the humbling act of washing himself seven times in the dirty river of Jordan in an act comparable to that of baptism. In both situations belief and obedience were necessary.

On the other hand we have the people of Nazareth — who refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah promised in Isaiah. They showed human nature at its worst by being prejudiced against one of their own number. Because of their rejection of him then, they would be rejected by him in the day of vengeance to come.

We all must make a choice sooner or later, because God is calling us and He requires an answer. So while we are young, we should learn all we can about the Word of God in order that when we reach a mature age, we can choose wisely the way in which Jesus would want us to go. If we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God then we can be

cleansed from our sins (like Naaman was from his leprosy) and can be confident that He will provide salvation. The story of the widow of Zarephath who believed and obeyed Elijah, is a type of the salvation offered to those who believe and obey the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, pages 138-143

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—pages 91-94

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 15.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was wrong with the attitude of the people of Nazareth when they listened to his words in their synagogue?*
2. *Why did Jesus not finish Isaiah 61:2 when he read at Nazareth?*
3. *Why did the people of Nazareth try to kill Jesus by throwing him over a cliff?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe what happened in the synagogue at Nazareth when Jesus stood up to read.*
2. *Why did Jesus mention the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian to the Jews of Nazareth?*

5. THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. . .”

The disciples of Jesus were not selected all at once, but in ones and twos. The first of them were disciples of John the Baptist, who directed them to Jesus. As the disciples continued with Jesus their knowledge of God’s Word greatly increased, and they learned from him that true discipleship means that a man should put God first in his life. As time progressed, it was necessary to choose from among the disciples twelve men who would have a special responsibility of preaching and upholding the truth. These men were called Apostles.

If we desire ultimately to become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we must apply ourselves now to find out what the requirements of discipleship are and do our very best to put them into practise day by day.

John 1:29-51; Luke 5:1-11, 27-32, 6:12-16

THE FIRST DISCIPLES (Jn. 1:29-51).

The baptism of Jesus had made a deep impression upon John the Baptist. When Jesus came to him from out of the wilderness six weeks after that baptism, it is not surprising that John should cry out: “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. Not only that, but John instructed his disciples about that baptism: “I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God”. With that introduction, the disciples of John were ready when John pointed out Jesus the next day and said: “Behold the Lamb of God”.

The two disciples who responded immediately were John (who was later to write the gospel narrative) and Andrew, both fishermen of Galilee. They were keen to know more of “the lamb of God” and at his invitation gladly spent a night with him. The effect of those heart-stirring hours with Jesus is seen in Andrew’s rush to find his brother, Simon. Finding him he cried out, “we have found the Messiah”.

Together they returned to Jesus, who when he looked at Simon said some significant words: “Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called Cephas (or Peter)”. Jesus summed up this disciple. Simon was a combination of humility, rashness, and loveableness. He was to be called Peter, which translated means a stone or rock and upon this “rock” would rest a large portion of responsibility in the guidance of the early ecclesia.

The next day Jesus decided to journey northward through Galilee towards the towns of the three disciples. Before he left he called Philip. He too, was from Bethsaida, the home town of Peter and Andrew. Possibly he was also a disciple of John and likewise anxious to meet the “Son of God”. Jesus saw in Philip the qualities of

discipleship and calling him, said: "Follow me". Feeling much the same reaction as Andrew, Philip ran to find Nathanael. Apparently these two friends had been talking together of the Messiah. So we can imagine the excitement of Philip when he described Jesus, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph". Nathanael heard him say: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile". Nathanael was taken aback and asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus knew what was in his heart and recognising a man of prayer and simple sincerity he said: "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". Nathanael was staggered. Here before him was the one of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, one who could "read" the hearts of men beyond the limits of human observation. In wonder he exclaimed: "Master, thou art the Son of God: thou art the King of Israel". Jesus responded warmly to this conviction and promised Nathanael that he would see great things, miracles that would indicate to the eye of faith that the heavens were open above the Son of God and angels ministered, guiding his every action.

He is to come again as Judge (John 5:27) with Yahweh's angels (Matt. 25:31) to assist him in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Nathanael will be there to share the day of Christ's glory.

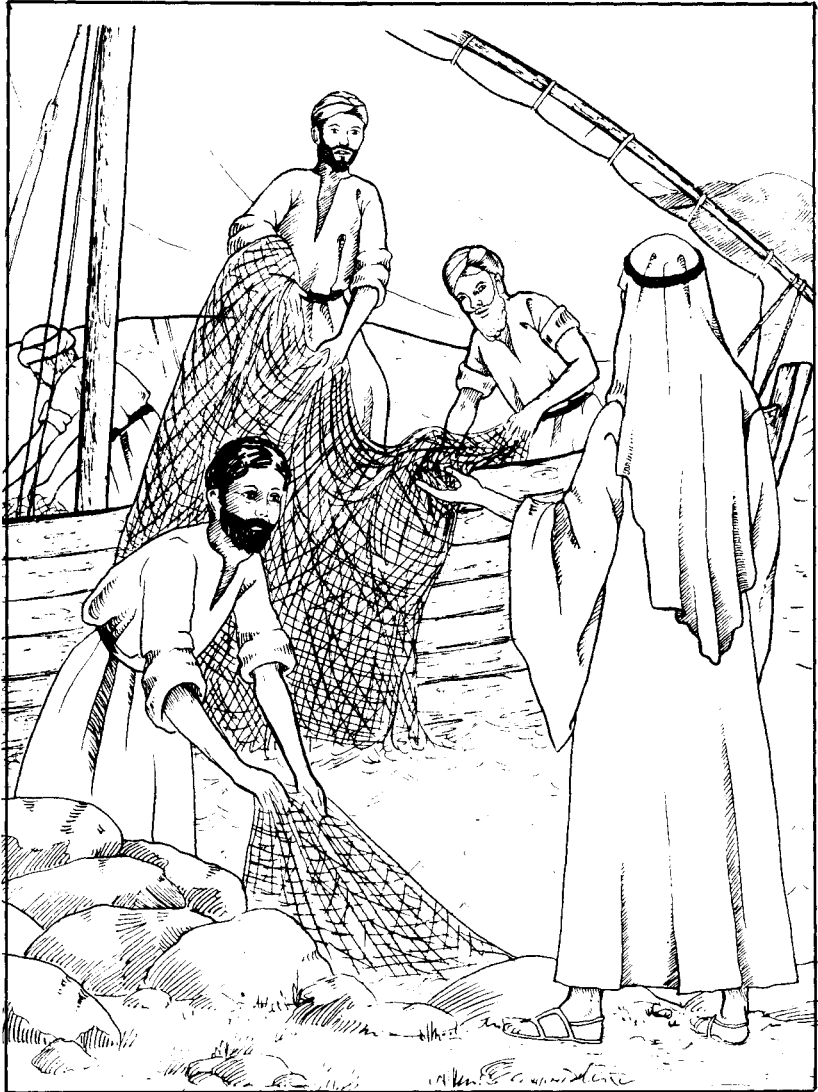
Let us, by a conviction similar to Nathanael's, determine to be there in that glorious day.

FISHERS OF MEN (Lk. 5:1-11).

Jesus left some of his little band of disciples to go home to their families, their nets and their memories. Their minds would return to those eventful months in the Jordan valley, in Jerusalem and in Samaria. In their hearts they knew that he was the Messiah, and now all else seemed relatively unimportant compared with being disciples of his. They no doubt yearned for his return to them. They were ready for his call.

The arrest and death of John the Baptist acted like a starting signal to Jesus who set forth upon his full public ministry. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17).

That ministry involved preaching and calling disciples. We read that Jesus came by the sea of Galilee. Simon and Andrew were washing their nets after a night's fruitless fishing. Looking up they noticed a crowd approaching, milling around a figure they instantly recognised. It was their beloved Master. The crowd, Luke records, "pressed upon him to hear the Word of God" (Lk. 5:1). Ever willing to educate his people in God's ways, Jesus came aboard one of Simon's boats and taught the crowd gathered on the shore. The teaching over, Jesus now turned his attention upon the needs of his disciples — the need for conviction. He demonstrated his power in an example that would strike at the heart of these fishermen.



Jesus told Simon to sail out into the deep and let down their nets for a haul of fish. We can imagine the raised eyebrows of Simon who thought he knew best when, where and how to fish. Their boats had only that night returned empty. All his experience, which would have been considerable, would show the futility of obeying the instruction of Jesus. But in respect to Jesus he didn't protest and argue his better knowledge "nevertheless at thy word, I will let down the net".

Immediately the sea boiled with leaping fish, so much so that the nets were breaking under the strain of so great a haul. Quickly calling for help from the other fishermen, Simon Peter worked frantically, all the time telling himself how foolish he was to doubt that Jesus was master in spiritual things and in every sphere of daily life — including his specialised area, fishing. He had seen miracles before but this was a miracle which stunned him and moved him to fall to his knees and say: "depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord". Feeling utterly unworthy, Peter learnt the essential lesson of discipleship — an unreserved conviction in the Messiahship of Jesus. The feeling of amazement and humility was shared by the four fishermen. Reassuring them and encouraging their belief, Jesus said: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men". The disciples needed no further sign. They landed their ship with its bulging load, and immediately "forsook all, and followed him" (v. 11).

What a lesson there is for us in that miraculous haul of fishes. Jesus is Master — in every aspect of life, including those where we think we know best. Our experiences and confidence in our own little walk of life seem so insignificant when we face up to the Son of God with all his power and his love. We feel ashamed when we look back over our lives and see on occasions that we have in our independence struggled on, getting nowhere, until we respond to the instructions of Jesus and find our problems solved and our lives enriched with his blessings. Then with conviction in his loving supremacy, we respond by going forth — to follow him and to become fishers of men.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW (Lk. 5:27-32).

Matthew was an unpopular Jew. His job was to collect taxes for the Romans — the hated overlords of Israel. But by being stationed at a custom house controlling the main road at Capernaum, he would be in daily contact with people who were travelling, often great distances with their sick folk, to reach this great prophet. He would be familiar with amazing stories of healing, perhaps acquainted with the disciples, and certainly wondering in his heart about the meaning of these sensational happenings. His job also brought hatred and scorn upon himself. He would no doubt hope that as Jesus was sympathetic to the poor and afflicted that that same sympathy and encouragement would one day reach out to him.

Jesus did come to him, one day. He simply said: "Follow me". Matthew needed no prompting: "He left all, rose up and followed

him” (v. 28). As an act of farewell to his old way of life, Matthew invited other tax gatherers to a great feast. It was his farewell but he also saw it as an opportunity for his friends to meet Jesus. But the Scribes and Pharisees tried to arouse the hatred of the disciples towards tax gatherers. Before they could undermine the loyalty of the disciples, Jesus stepped forward and defended his disciples — Matthew included — by saying: “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (v. 31-32). His was the role of a doctor, healing physical and spiritual sicknesses, whereas they, by contrast, were trying to avoid contact with the lower classes of people. In their self righteous attitude they feared “contamination”.

THE TWELVE (Lk. 6:12-16).

The numbers of men and women who attached themselves to Jesus grew rapidly as he preached the gospel of the Kingdom and did miracles. As time went by it became necessary, in order to preserve his work, to devote much attention to twelve of them — one for each of the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). They would be taught by him — the meaning of the word “disciples” — that in turn they might be his “apostles” — i.e., sent by him to instruct others.

It was not an easy task to make the selection and because of its importance Jesus went out into a mountain, “and continued all night in prayer to God”. In the morning he made the choice.

Of many we know little. We do know however, that Judas excepted, they were faithful to the responsibility placed upon them. They showed human weakness and failed at times to carry out their Master’s instructions, but learnt from their mistakes. They were not highly educated, nor were they chosen for their ability to speak, but because of their character.

LESSON FOR US.

Early enthusiastic belief in Jesus can be a means of introducing others to Jesus. We can all show our enthusiasm in the knowledge that we have that Jesus is certainly the Messiah and the Son of God.

Such enthusiasm will be tested by the daily circumstances of life to see if we really believe that Jesus is Lord in every aspect of our lives.

Sometimes we will realise that our belief is not as unconditional as it should be and humbly we will be caused to bow to the wise and loving supremacy of Christ.

Jesus prayerfully selected his twelve apostles. The close communion between Son and Father is a perfect example for our confidence in the power of prayer for great and small needs.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 61-65; 95-98; 114-119; 124-128.
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 12, 16, 22
“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 28-39
“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, pages 90-94; 117-120; 143-145

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Andrew and Peter’s first meeting with Jesus.*
2. *Describe Peter’s reaction to the miraculous haul of fishes.*
3. *How was Matthew called to be a disciple?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the response of John the Baptist’s disciples to Jesus.*
2. *Show how the miraculous haul of fishes taught the disciples the need for total conviction that Jesus is indeed Lord.*

THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

1. **SIMON PETER** — also called Cephas, a stone (from Aramaic for Peter Jn. 1:42), the son of Jonas (Barjona, Matt. 16:17), a fisherman of Bethsaida (Matt. 4:18; Jn. 1:44). Originally a disciple of John the Baptist, married (Mk. 1:30; 1 Cor. 9:5). Wrote two epistles and influenced Mark in writing his Gospel.
2. **ANDREW** — Peter's brother who had been a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35, 40). Introduced Greeks to Jesus (Jn. 12:20-23).
3. **JOHN** — also a fisherman, a son of Zebedee, also of Bethsaida (Matt. 4:21; Lk. 5:10). With James, called Boanerges — "son of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). Probable cousin of Jesus, whom Jesus loved. Wrote Gospel three epistles and Revelation.
4. **JAMES** — John's brother (Mk. 1:19). Like John, mother probably Salome, sister of Mary (cp. Matt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; 16:1; Jn. 19:25).
5. **PHILIP** — also of Bethsaida in Galilee (Jn. 1:44).
6. **BARTHOLOMEW** — means son of Tolmai, and thought by many to be Nathanael mentioned only twice (Jn. 1:45; 21:2). From Cana in Galilee.
7. **MATTHEW** — also called Levi (Matt. 9:9; Lk. 5:27), son of Alphaeus. A publican or tax gatherer in Galilee. Wrote first Gospel.
8. **THOMAS** — called also Didymus, meaning "a twin" (Jn. 11:16).
9. **JAMES** — son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), possibly James the Little or Less (Matt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; 16:1; Lk. 24:10).
10. **LEBBAEUS THADDAEUS** — also called Judas, not Iscariot (Lk. 6:16; Jn. 14:22), thought by some to be brother of James, "the Lord's brother" (Jude 1; Lk. 6:16; Gal. 1:19).
11. **SIMON ZELOTES** — a member of the political party called the Zealots (Lk. 6:15). The term Canaanite applied to him should be Canaanite from Kanan, Aramaic for Greek "Zelotes" (Matt. 10:4).
12. **JUDAS ISCARIOT** — son of Simon Iscariot (Jn. 6:71 R.V.). Iscariot is "ish Kerioth" man of Kerioth in the South of Judah (Josh. 15:25). Betrayed Jesus, and was later replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:23-26).

6. TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES:

(i) The Beatitudes

“He opened his mouth, and taught them”

In the last lesson we saw how Jesus prayerfully chose his 12 apostles who were later to continue the work of spreading the Gospel. Now they are instructed in the moral qualities that they were to show in their lives if they were to be approved by their master and found worthy to participate in the Kingdom of God. The teaching is as a message given from the King to his many servants of all generations. Although this teaching applies primarily to the disciples of Jesus, children can learn what it means to be his disciples. They can thereby understand and respect the attitudes and actions of those who have accepted Christ and who try to live up to the standards outlined in these beatitudes.

Matthew 5:1-12

THE BEATITUDES.

The Beatitudes, meaning blessings, describe a state of happiness of the highest kind, a joy which nothing or nobody can take away because it comes from God. It is an assurance of God's continuing love now and of good to come.

The Beatitudes together form an overall description of a believer who stands accepted by God. The characteristics are not meant to be shown singly in different people, but describe one complete person.

Jesus himself was the best example of the person he describes. Others must try to develop these same characteristics which Jesus says will be rewarded with a place in the Kingdom of God. However, his teaching bears no relationship to those outside the Truth. It describes the moral qualities of individuals who understand God's covenant.

There are eight beatitudes. Verses 11 and 12 are not really in the group of eight because they are an application of the last beatitude (v.10) to the disciples themselves, to encourage them in their striving to develop a righteous character patterned on Christ's. Similar teachings are to be found in Luke 6.

The Beatitudes are as follows:—

1. Poor in Spirit (Matt. 5:3):

The word “poor” here means “completely poverty stricken with no way to turn to get relief”. So “poor in spirit” describes a person who realises his own helplessness, sin, and spiritual poverty and has nowhere to turn but to God. This poor man prays for God's guidance and forgiveness, and realizes that of his own self he can do nothing. Furthermore, he no longer places trust on all

that the flesh finds attractive but realizes that the source of true wisdom is the Word of God (see his attitude to that Word in Isa. 66:2). It is very interesting to see that the end result of this poverty is great riches. To all who develop the character shown in the Beatitudes belongs the Kingdom of God, although they have not yet received their most certain reward.

N.B.: The Kingdom of God is called the “Kingdom of Heaven” because it is the kingdom of the one who dwells in heaven. It is not the “Kingdom in Heaven”.

2. They That Mourn (Matt. 5:4):

It is strange to say that mourners are happy. In what way is this so? Jesus is here referring only to a certain class of mourners. They are believers who are in great sorrow because of such things as sin, or trial, or others’ trials, or the absence of Christ, or because of the wicked state of society. But this mourning brings them closer to God now and they have comfort and encouragement in knowing of the “times of refreshing” to come (Acts 3:19-21; Rev. 21:4; see also Isa. 61:1-3).

3. The Meek (Matt. 5:5):

The meek are the humble ones who accept the will of God gladly. Meekness is not weakness, but a characteristic found in the strongest of characters, e.g., Jesus and Moses (Num. 12:3). It comes from putting down pride and selfishness by cultivating a spiritual mind. The meek are ever ready to listen to God. (Psa. 25:9. See also verses 10-14). Because they are teachable now, God will give them the earth as an inheritance (Psa. 37:11).

4. Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness (Matt. 5:6):

The full force and meaning of this Beatitude is given in, “Blessed is the man who desperately desires total righteousness”. The man described is one who is not satisfied until justice is done on earth. He earnestly desires his own justification by faith (or being looked upon by God as being righteous), and for all men to be virtuous. He desires complete righteousness, not righteousness mixed with a little sin when it is convenient.

The source of righteousness which the spiritually hungry and thirsty man turns to is the Word of God (cp. 1 Pet. 2:2). It is in this Word that he receives satisfaction. Jesus said: “I am the bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (Jn. 6:35, see also Isa. 55:1-3).

5. The Merciful (Matt. 5:7):

The eager desire for righteousness must be balanced with mercy and forgiveness when others fail. Yahweh himself shows us this in His character (Ex. 34:6-7). To continue to obtain mercy from God through Christ, we must show mercy and forgiveness to others

(Psa. 18:25). We must not make quick condemnations of people but try to feel for them, being anxious to solve the problem.

There is a very good reason why we should be merciful. God has loved us and He is a merciful God. If we have truly responded to God's mercy we will show it in our attitude to people around us. There will be a desire to do something for Him who has done so much for us. The quality of mercy is found in those who are obedient to the second great commandment (Matt. 22:39).

6. Pure in Heart (Matt. 5:8):

Pure means "unmixed" or "free from corruption". Purity of heart (= mind) will lead to sincere and righteous actions. The heart is not pure if one's own natural God-dishonouring interests are mixed up with God's holy interests. By nature, men's hearts are not pure and if left to themselves all men would be rewarded by death (cp. Jer. 17:9-10). Purification can only be gained by concentrating on Him who is pure and holy, and accepting His offer to be cleansed in baptism. Drawing near to God now will lead to "seeing God" in the time to come (see 1 Jn. 3:2-3).

7. Peacemakers (Matt. 5:9):

The idea behind the word for peace is "everything that makes for a man's good", not simply the absence of conflict. "Making" of peace indicates that effort is required for peace to occur. Peacemaking is a constructive work. It begins with quietening one's own restless spirit and coming to God. One must then learn to live in harmony with others, accepting their shortcomings and not asking more of them than one is prepared to give himself. This harmony will lead to a life full of a peace which no person or circumstance can destroy.

Peace is a "fruit of the spirit" and "the work of righteousness" (Gal. 5:22; Isa. 32:17). Those who do not have pure hearts will not find real peace, for there is "no peace . . . unto the wicked" (Isa. 48:22).

8. Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake (Matt. 5:10):

The character of the saint is not attractive to the world. Just as Jesus was persecuted because he was righteous, so will the true believer be persecuted now. The goodness of the saint shows others to be sinners, who hate the light and do not wish to change their way (cp. Jn. 3:20).

In God's eyes it is an acceptable thing for a person to suffer because of doing right, taking it patiently and even rejoicing (1 Pet. 2:20). These sufferings test one's faith and develop his character making him rely more and more on God's strength. God promises that Jesus Christ will come to bring joy to the righteous sufferers but shame to the wicked persecutors (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

VERSES 11-12:

These verses apply directly to the disciples Jesus was addressing from the mountain side. Jesus knew that severe persecution would come upon them if they believed and acted upon his message. However, they would be comforted by the knowledge that their beloved Master endured and was rewarded with a crown of life (cp. Heb. 12:1-3). When Peter and the apostles were beaten by the authorities in Jerusalem some time later, they rejoiced because they had the honour to suffer in support of Christ's cause (Acts 5:41).

LESSON FOR US:

The character revealed by Jesus in the Beatitudes is that of the complete man of God. In following this character the disciple of Christ must:—

1. realise his true poverty and seek lasting spiritual riches in Christ;
2. be sorrowful for the condition of ourselves and this earth and desire the time of rejoicing eternally;
3. develop strength of character with gentleness, being taught of God;
4. seek for God's righteousness individually and world wide;
5. be ever ready to forgive and not criticise harshly;
6. act with a pure motive, having undivided loyalty to God;
7. make peace—after being freed from sin's power in himself to restore others;
8. be prepared to take opposition and criticism for not lowering standards in the company of other people, realising it is a privilege to suffer for God's sake.

EXERCISE: See if you can memorise verses 1-11. It is a very beneficial exercise to do so.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Teaching of the Master” (L. G. Sargent)—Part II
 “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 129-137.

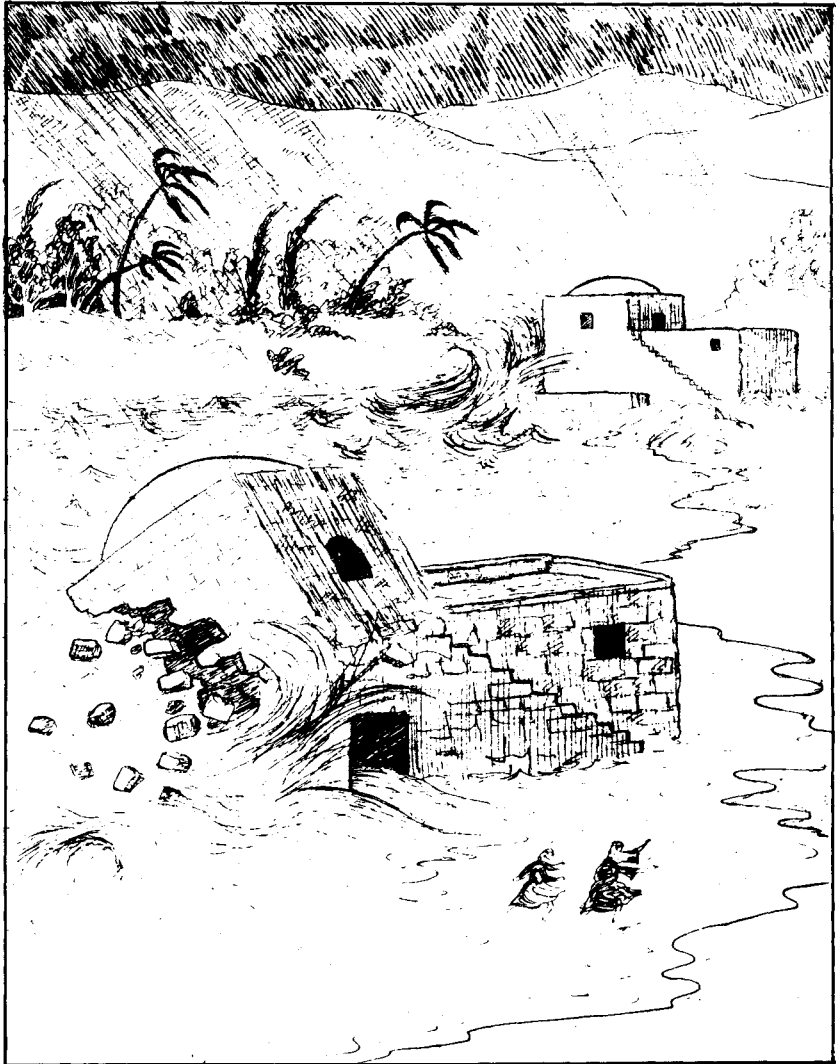
PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Show how the character revealed by Jesus in the Beatitudes is that of the complete man of God.*
2. *Show from the Beatitudes how the poor are blessed and the mourners are happy.*
3. *Discuss how Christadelphian young people can be meek and pure in heart whilst at school.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Briefly describe the character of the saint as outlined in the Beatitudes.*

2. Explain the following terms which Jesus used during the Sermon on the Mount and say to whom they apply: “Blessed”, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”, “they shall see God”, “the children of God” and “righteousness”.



“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock”.

7. TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES:

(ii) Discipleship

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . .
but I say unto you”

Jesus has just described the character of the perfect man. He now spells out the moral conduct which such a character displays. Using striking examples Jesus shows us the right way to think, speak and act in a wide variety of circumstances. The qualities mentioned in the Beatitudes are shown in action in the practical issues of day-to-day living. All disciples of Christ have a responsibility to consistently show these characteristics to their friends and neighbours in the world.

Matthew 5-6

CHRIST AND MOSES — A CONTRAST.

Moses' Law judged outward acts, but Jesus was concerned with the invisible thoughts from which these acts sprang. It is in the mind therefore that obedience must begin. In relation to sin, Jesus taught that thoughts are just as important as deeds. Jesus fulfilled Moses' Law both outwardly and far more importantly, inwardly.

Jesus demonstrates the basis of this example which we are commanded to follow by taking five different illustrations from the Law of Moses.

1. Unjust Anger Forbidden (5:21-26):

Exodus 20:13 said: “Thou shalt not kill”. Jesus saw in anger the cause of murder. Furthermore he taught that anyone who held a bitter anger for his brother, or anyone who was full of contempt for his brother, or anyone who called his brother a moral fool was in grave danger of judgment on himself. Before God will accept any worship from a man who is not at one with his brother, the man must seek a way of restoring unity between them.

Jesus finishes this section by showing how to act in relation to opponents. It is best to get onto good terms with them quickly before troubles pile up and lead to worse problems. Humility and submission are essential elements to achieve this (compare this with part 4).

2. Adulterous Thought Forbidden (5:27-32):

The Law of Moses said: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (i.e., unlawful relationship with another's wife). However, Christ condemns the man who even looks at a woman with evil thoughts in his mind. Such thoughts are just as bad in the sight of God as any outward act.

Jesus goes on to say that if a man's eye and hand cause him to

sin it is better for him to destroy them than to lose eternal life because of them. He was not suggesting that men should literally cut off their hand, or pluck out their eye. Here, Jesus uses the eye to represent the desires and the hand to represent the deeds. Evil desires and actions should be cut short lest they cause one's downfall. To overcome, one must fill the mind with good thoughts, trying to eliminate evil thoughts and thus enable the practising of good actions.

3. Swearing of Oaths Forbidden (5:33-37):

Cp. Num. 30:2. At the time of Christ, Jews were in the habit of swearing oaths (not swearing in the sense of using bad language). To them, any oath containing the name of God was very binding; but any other oath with no mention of God was less binding. This led to swearers of oaths often using an oath to cover up the truth, to enable them to say things they did not really mean, and not do as they said they would. This was quite contrary to the spirit of the Law of Moses and Jesus commanded his followers not to use oaths at all, but to say a direct "yes" or "no" and to stick to it.

4. Resistance to Evil Forbidden (5:38-42):

The system of justice under the Law of Moses allowed a judge to carry out exact punishment of a sin, e.g., "an eye for an eye" (see Ex. 21:23-25). In dealing with the behaviour of individuals one to another, Jesus demands no resistance to evil. There is to be no retaliation (striking back) or feeling indignant in cases of personal injury (v.39), and harsh demands (v.40). There is to be submission to the powers in command (v.41).

The three things the true disciple does NOT do are:

- a) become insulted and resentful because of others' actions;
- b) demand his right, and;
- c) mind doing more than is asked of him.

The object of this cheerful non-resistance and spirit of giving to others is to win over the offender to Christ.

5. Love Commanded (5:43-48):

This is an extremely important section of the Sermon on the Mount. Jewish tradition encouraged Jews to hate their enemies. By contrast, Jesus said, "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES". The word love means to "seek someone's highest good". This attitude is to be kept, no matter what any person does to a believer. Such love conquers a person, whereas fighting back provokes further trouble.

Those who love their enemies will become "children of the Father". They are like Him. God has always shown love to all people even though they sin against Him (cp. Jn. 3:16). He makes His sun to rise on them and sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He wants us to show the same attitude. If we only love those who

love us we are no better than the most wicked of men, who will look after their own children anyway.

THE SIN OF HYPOCRISY (6:1-8, 16-18):

Jesus chose three aspects in which hypocrisy (“play-acting”) was shown by the Scribes and Pharisees. These are:

1. the giving of alms or the doing of works of righteousness, especially giving money to the poor;
2. praying in public;
3. fasting.

Those who are under the Law of Christ should do works of righteousness secretly, pray secretly and fast (or practise self-denial and self-discipline) in private, as acts of devotion to God, not for the praise of others. God will then reward us openly (ch. 6:6).

THE TRUE TREASURE (6:19-34):

Jesus next places before his listeners a challenge to their loyalty to him. Men like to put their trust in material possessions like money and houses which are not lasting. However, Jesus urges his disciples to see the foolishness of this course of action, and to store up everlasting riches with God, i.e., a character acceptable to God (cp. Mal. 3:16, 17).

The word ‘serve’ in 6:24 means “be a slave”. A man may be employed by two people, but he can only be “owned” by one. Since God requires a man to love Him with ALL his heart, soul and might, how can he be a slave to God as well as to material possessions? (see Rom. 6:16).

If God then is Master, He can be trusted to supply all needs. Seeing God has given life and created the body He will maintain them. Why then become anxious? If your heavenly Father provides food for the birds and beautifully dresses the lillies, is He likely to forget the needs of His saints who seek His kingdom? They will most certainly be heard and cared for.

LESSON FOR US:

Jesus has shown us the qualities which disciples must possess if they are to be accepted by the judge of all the earth. The qualities are summed up by Matt. 22:36-40 — “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . soul, . . . and mind, . . . and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

To love our neighbour as ourselves will be the automatic result of our genuine love for God. If we don’t love our neighbour we don’t really love God. We must think of others’ present and eternal well-being, thinking and doing good day by day. The challenge of discipleship is to be obedient, sincere and single-minded in the worship of God. He urges each one of us to make a personal decision which will lead to true discipleship.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Teaching of the Master (L.G. Sargent)—Part II

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 138-148

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, pages 152-159.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How is Jesus' teaching contrasted with the Law of Moses?*
2. *From the Sermon on the Mount show how Jesus promises us that God will care for His children.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS;

1. *What does Jesus have to say about submission and love when dealing with opponents in his Sermon on the Mount?*
2. *Show how Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, encouraged his disciples to place their confidence and desire for security in a loving heavenly Father.*

8. TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES: (iii) HOW TO PRAY

“After this manner therefore pray ye . . .”

In teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus showed in his own example the value of prayer. Throughout his busy ministry Jesus at all times turned to his heavenly Father for strength and guidance. Responding to this wonderful example the disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, hence we have the simple but profound “Lord’s Prayer”. He also showed in a parable the need to pray constantly. Let us pattern our lives upon the perfect example of a man of prayer — the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13; 18:9-14

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.

At the very commencement of his ministry, Jesus is seen in prayer to his Father. Luke records: “It came to pass that Jesus also being baptised, and praying, the heaven was opened” (Lk. 3:21). This is the first of many brief glimpses of the Son of God engaged in prayer. His ceaseless activity found its strength in the power of prayer. We would expect therefore that when Jesus chose his twelve apostles with their present and future work in view, he would pray to the Father for guidance in this important selection. We cannot help but be impressed with the fact that “he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Lk. 6:12). Again we find Jesus going to the quietness of a mountain for prayer and meditation after hearing of the tragic death of his cousin, John the Baptist, and after the feeding of the 5,000.

And yet there were occasions when quietness was denied him. But the presence of his disciples did not prevent prayer: “. . . and as he was alone praying his disciples were with him” (Lk. 9:18), nor did he fail to pray when healing, as seen for example, in the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:41, 42).

It is therefore appropriate that at moments of exaltation, e.g., his transfiguration (Lk. 9:28) and at moments of great personal sorrow, e.g., in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:39-46), that we see the Son of man in prayer. Consider the sufferings of him who gave his life for us. His was the perfect sacrifice but made at great personal cost to himself, as expressed in the words, “who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:7-9).

What about the disciples? The apostle Paul encourages every disciple of Christ, “. . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

THE PRAYER OF HYPOCRITES (Matt. 6:5-8).

The Jewish religious leaders were hypocrites. Their public worship and prayers were motivated, not by a devotion to God, but by a desire to be praised by their fellow men. They went to great lengths to give a show of worship. It was a price they were prepared to pay. Jesus said, "they have their reward". The transaction was over. It was a mechanical, false act of outright hypocrisy.

Jesus showed by his own example that prayer was an act of child-like dependence, a spontaneous expression of love and devotion to his heavenly Father.

His followers would understand therefore the value of praying in secret, closing the door behind them and in private devotion, pour out their hearts to God, "which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (v. 6). Vain repetitions were unnecessary for "your Father knoweth what ye have need of before ye ask Him" (v. 8). A sincere heart full of thanksgiving and simple requests is in sharp contrast to people who think they shall be heard for their much speaking (cp. Eccl. 5:2).

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Matt. 6:9-13).

Luke tells us that Jesus was praying when one of his disciples was moved to say: "Lord, teach us to pray . . ." (Lk. 11:1). Jesus responded by giving them the pattern for acceptable prayer, "after this manner therefore pray ye" (Matt. 6:9). Its plan is as follows:—

1. Our love of God—vv. 9, 10
2. God's love for us—vv.11-13
3. God's ability to grant requests—v.13

Let us briefly consider the prayer, phrase by phrase.

"Our Father which art in heaven" is the opening phrase of love to God in belief that He regards us as His children. Through baptism that relationship is very real and personal. What a great privilege it is then to address the Creator, "Yahweh Elohim", as a loving heavenly Father who calls upon His children to worship Him in holiness.

"Hallowed be thy Name" is the first expression of praise, calling to mind the glorious theme of salvation underlying the name Yahweh. To hallow that Name is to honour those wonderful qualities of mercy and justice which are the basis of God's calling people to His Kingdom.

"Thy Kingdom come" is our heartfelt desire above all else. Our minds go back to the promises made in Eden, to Abraham, to David; and in the full confidence of faith we pray for their fulfilment. For then, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" will be enacted. Then God's glory shall fill the earth, man will worship at the house of prayer for all nations and "on earth peace, goodwill toward men". If we wish to participate in that Kingdom then our will must be brought into line with God's will, after the example of Jesus himself who prayed, "thy will be done".

“Give us this day our daily bread” shows our dependency upon God to provide our needs even in this world where man thinks he can provide for himself. But Jesus teaches that we must not forget our spiritual food, a daily reading of the Word of God.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” shows the disciple that if he would be forgiven then he must be ready to forgive others also. Forgiveness, through baptism into the sin covering name of Jesus Christ, has therefore its responsibilities and conditions.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” is the cry of a disciple seeking deliverance from peril, not that he can expect to be free from trials for they are designed to purify his faith. This is a prayer for relief and protection. It is obvious too, that care must be taken not to fall into temptation by our carelessness.

“For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”. The prayer closes with a final note of praise, like that of its opening. It closes in a note of triumph, that whatever the situation of the disciple, he firmly believes in the supremacy of God who rules in the kingdom of men and will soon reveal His power and glory. With that conviction the disciple of Christ says fervently “Amen” or “so be it”, accepting God’s will in submission to trial and in rejoicing over blessings.

THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT (Lk. 11:5-13).

In this passage Jesus adds some extremely interesting instructions on prayer. He describes a man who had an unexpected visitor at midnight. He had no bread to give him and in desperation he went to a friend, asking him for help. The reply was sharp: “Trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give thee”. This did not deter the host. He kept up his requests to his friend and in the end his persistence was rewarded.

Jesus explained the parable as a lesson in answers to prayer. He says that God will certainly respond to our “asking”, our “seeking” and our “knocking”. As a father would not think of giving his son a stone when bread is asked for, or a serpent for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg; so too, our heavenly Father will respond and give “good things” (Matt. 7:11) to them that ask Him.

The parable is not meant to be applied in every detail, e.g., God is not to be viewed as a grumpy, reluctant “friend”. This story concentrates upon two facts:

1. the urgent need of men for God’s help, and;
2. The ability of God to satisfy that need.

It stresses perseverance in prayer but we might add that sometimes prayers are not answered because some prayers “ask amiss” (see 1 Pet. 3:12; Jas. 4:3; Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1, 2).

LESSON FOR US:

The example of Jesus in prayer should impress us with his absolute

reliance upon prayer to his heavenly Father for strength and guidance. He warned of hypocritical worship and instructed his disciples to pray in secret, for God who is in secret will reward them openly. Vain repetitions are unnecessary and characteristic of the “heathen”. Later he portrays the Pharisee and the publican as contrasts in their attitudes to prayer. A humble prayer uttered quietly in faith will be acceptable to God and what is more to be desired than for God to hear us and lead us into the Kingdom.

To encourage us to share that same confidence in prayer, Jesus presents the “Lord’s Prayer”, the pattern prayer for all disciples. It begins and ends in praise to God and contains a few brief requests for aid. God promises to hear the requests of His children, granting them “good things”—blessings now and in the Age to come.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 102, 125, 144, 250
“Prayer” (M. Purkis and C. Tennant)—Chapters 8 and 9
“The Teaching of the Master” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 190-229

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Contrast the way in which the Jewish leaders pray to that of the true follower of Christ.*
2. *What lessons do we learn from the example of the Lord Jesus Christ engaged in prayer?*
3. *Why should we pray “Thy kingdom come” in our prayers?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Show how the “Lord’s Prayer” is a model prayer for us.*
2. *Explain the parable of the friend who would not at first give the bread requested at midnight, and its application to prayer.*

9. HEALING AT CAPERNAUM

“But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins”

Not only did Jesus preach of those moral qualities required of his disciples as shown in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, but he also had the power of God to work miracles and in these, demonstrated to all men that he truly was the Son of God. These miracles caused the fame of Jesus to spread throughout all the land of Israel and were a great aid in impressing upon the people his teaching concerning the Kingdom of God. But this was met with increasing criticism by the Jewish authorities.

Mark 1:21-45; 2:1-12; Luke 4:31-44; 5:12-14

HEALING AT CAPERNAUM (Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:33-37).

He had not long been in Capernaum when his authority was put to the test, as his teaching in the synagogue was suddenly interrupted by the cry of a man who was mentally unbalanced. “Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God” (Lk. 4:34). What an amazing statement, and from such a man.

It was a tradition held by some Jews that when the promised Messiah came, he would destroy Galilee. Realizing by the gracious words that Jesus spoke and the rumours that he was indeed this promised one, this mentally sick man connected the two thoughts and feared destruction.

Jesus would not accept this statement about him being the “Holy One of God” from such a man. Such a belief should have been stated by the responsible and healthy minded hearers. The embarrassed audience waited anxiously for Jesus’ reaction and were all amazed when with a word he silenced the shouts of the madman. After a violent fit he gave an anguished cry and the terrible conflict was over. The man lay still before them, in his right mind. The power of Christ had prevailed over a sick and tortured mind and “immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee”.

CURE OF PETER’S WIFE’S MOTHER (Lk. 4:38-39; Mk. 1:29-31).

Jesus left the synagogue with his four disciples and went down to the house of Peter and Andrew his brother at Bethsaida. It often became the abiding place of Jesus in his frequent visits to Capernaum. On this occasion he found Peter’s wife’s mother stricken down with a burning fever.

Those around her, seeing the miracles of healing Jesus was performing among the multitudes on the street, earnestly asked for his help. The Lord went immediately to her bedside and taking her hand, lifted her up. In a moment the whole scene was changed and the sick woman was up and preparing a meal for them.

MORE MIRACLE WORKING IN GALILEE

(Mk. 1:32-45; Lk. 4:40-44).

The news of the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue spread rapidly from house to house. In many dwellings in Capernaum there was suffering and sorrow, so as the sabbath drew to a close, the pilgrimage began. Little companies emerged from their homes carrying or leading their sick and gathered outside the house of Peter until it was impossible to get near the house. As Christ moved among this mass of human suffering, he saw before him sick bodies and tortured minds.

Christ laid his hands on every one of them and they were healed. All this placed a tremendous strain upon him and it was late when he eventually retired to rest. After a few short hours of sleep Jesus rose long before daylight and went out to seek solitude and spiritual refreshment that could only be found in prayer to His Father.

Christ's habit of continually seeking quiet communion with His Father is one that all disciples should develop in their lives. For if Christ found it so necessary, how much more is it for his followers to strengthen their faith through the power of prayer.

Outside there was evidence that the activity of the night before was going to be repeated. At dawn people began to collect around Peter's house to wait for the appearance of the great healer. The disciples could not find Jesus and so a search began, led by Peter. They came upon him, in a solitary place, praying. Almost in a tone of reproach they told them, "All men seek for thee". But the time had come in the Master's plans to move on. "I must preach the Kingdom of God in other cities also; for therefore am I sent". This apparently sudden decision to leave Capernaum may have been the result of his prayer. The all important mission of Israel's Messiah was not to be a wonder worker, which would satisfy men's immediate needs, but to reveal the truth of His Father's Kingdom and give to men the hope of eternal salvation.

Refreshed in mind by his close communion with his heavenly Father Jesus led the disciples out on a successful preaching tour of Galilee, teaching and healing all those who came unto him. But Christ was not deluded by the enthusiasm of the crowds as his disciples apparently were (Mk. 1:37), for: "he knew what was in man". The people sought him eagerly for the power of his touch but the power and importance of his message often went unheeded.

THE HEALING OF THE FIRST LEPER

(Mk. 1:40-45; Matt. 8:2-4; Lk. 5:12-14).

It was on this preaching tour through Galilee that we have the first record of a leper coming to Jesus. The confidence which this leper had in Jesus is seen in his boldness to approach. He came "beseeching", "kneeling down" and saying unto him: "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean". He had faith in Jesus' power to heal him, but would Jesus want to? Would he despise lepers, like all other men? Mark tells us that: "Jesus was moved with compassion and put forth his hand and touched him, and said I will, be thou clean". There was no reluctance in Jesus, for "immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean".

Christ told him: "See thou say nothing to any man" for he desired that the cured man go quietly home, meditate upon his restoration, and praise and worship his Heavenly Father. However, Mark 1:45 shows us his failure to heed the Lord's advice and as a result of the publicity concerning the incident, Christ was forced to return to Capernaum.

THE HOUSETOP HEALING (Mk. 2:1-12; Matt. 9:2-8).

Having returned to Capernaum, news spread that he was "in the house". Very quickly Peter's house filled and people were crowding in the doorway until no more could get within hearing. While Jesus was addressing the multitudes, four friends of a poor man suffering from the dreaded disease of palsy (paralysis), came bearing him on a stretcher, anxious that they might bring him to Jesus to be healed. When they approached the house they saw at once how difficult their task was going to be. But great need does not allow for delay and great faith overcomes every difficulty. Most houses in Palestine had flat roofs which were approached from the outside by stone steps. Carrying the man up the outside stairway, they uncovered the roof sufficiently to lower the sick man into the crowded interior until he lay at the feet of the Lord.

When Jesus "saw their faith" (the faith of his four friends) he turned and looked into the eyes of the afflicted and with comforting assurance he said all that really mattered. "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee". No doubt the words of the Psalmist would fit his rejoicing: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psa. 32:1-2).

When the Scribes and Pharisees heard the words of Christ they said in their hearts, who can forgive sins but God; he is blaspheming. Jesus immediately read their unspoken thoughts and said: "Why do you reason this way in your hearts?" They were not wrong to question whether a man had God's authority to forgive sins, but they were wrong in refusing to believe the evidence produced before their eyes.

Who could cure the palsy with a word but God only? And if God gave Jesus power on earth to cure the palsy and do many other works

that no other man could do, why should he not give him power to forgive sins also? the Master turned to the palsied man and said: "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house". Immediately the man rose and walking through the wondering throng, returned home peaceful in mind and whole in body. All who had witnessed the scene wondered greatly and glorified God (Matt. 9:8). The Pharisees could only be silent.

LESSON FOR US:

Jesus was compassionate towards the sufferings of others. His touch and his works brought peace of mind and health to the afflicted. We can be assured of his interest in us and his concern for our spiritual needs. Healing proved the truthfulness of Jesus' teaching. It was a witness to his authority to teach, heal and forgive sins. For many, this proof led them to belief; for others, it led them to jealousy and disbelief. Let us be in the class of those who glorified God at this undeniable evidence. The evidence is there, in God's word, for us to accept gladly and develop a faith similar to that of those who were healed. We can gratefully accept baptism, as the means provided whereby our sins may also be forgiven.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 16

"Life Of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Pages 101-113

"The Gospel of the Son of God" (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 25-36

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did Christ obtain his strength which enabled him to speak with authority and to work miracles?*
2. *From the housetop healing incident show how Christ had authority to forgive sins.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Tell the story of the healing of the demoniac man in the synagogue at Capernaum.*
2. *Briefly describe the healing of the palsied man who was lowered through the roof and what you personally learn from this story.*

10. HEALING AT BETHESDA ON THE SABBATH

“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”

From his work of preaching and healing in the Galilean region, Jesus returns to Jerusalem and there performs a notable miracle at the Pool of Bethesda. The account of this miracle is found in John's Gospel and is the third of 8 miracles (signs) that John records. All the eight signs have an overall theme and purpose — that is — to show that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore in believing, we might have life through his name (Jn. 20:31).

John 5

THE FEAST AT JERUSALEM (Jn. 5:1).

In the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus went up to Jerusalem and 3 years later at the time of the Passover he was crucified by the combined efforts of Romans and Jews. Both had failed to recognise in him God's “only begotten Son”. He alone could bring healing, strength, and rest to them, the sons of men. Passover was a remembering of God's deliverance of His people from bondage. This was still their need and this miracle was to teach them again of this fact.

THE POOL WITH 5 PORCHES—BETHESDA (Jn. 5:2).

The name BETHESDA means—House of GRACE. John tells us it was near the sheep gate (market), which was just to the north of the Temple and through which animals to be used in the Temple sacrifices were brought.

To this pool large crowds of sick folk gathered, waiting anxiously so that they might be first to plunge in after the movement of the waters.

Before dealing with the miracle it is necessary to comment on the apparent difficulty in verse 4. John is explaining the presence of the large crowd of sick folk at the pool, who believed in the tradition that special angels were located in certain springs and rivers. But God's Word does not teach superstitions. The verse should read, “For it was said an angel went down.....” (v.4 Comp. Bible). The “troubling” of the waters would be caused by the action of a spring, which fed the pool and which possibly had some medicinal qualities. However, the “great multitude of impotent folk” waiting hopefully (but mostly in vain) for the healing of their sickness, were but representative of all mankind, who so often trust in superstition or traditional belief rather than seeking for the only one who can lead them to the true waters of life.

HEALING THE IMPOTENT MAN (Jn. 5:5-9).

Jesus came and sought out “a certain man” in that crowd of sick and lame people. Note that Jesus approached him—in contrast to other occasions, when the sick came seeking Jesus. The brief description John records (v. 5) gives us a clue, that this man “had an infirmity 38 years”. He was therefore symbolic of the whole nation of Israel in that they were, in the second year after their exodus from Egypt, condemned to wander for 38 more years in the wilderness (Num. 14:28-35; Deut. 2:14). For what cause? SIN through lack of FAITH; and what was the cause of the impotent man’s condition? “SIN” (see. v.14).

“SIN” here signifies the act of missing the mark or of wandering from the right path. This was exactly the cause of Israel’s failure both in Moses’ time and also in Jesus’s day. Jesus’ work was to show Israel the right way—the way back to spiritual health and strength. Like the impotent man they could not help themselves (v. 7), but Jesus came to them and extended the invitation “to be made whole”. To achieve this, three things were required of the impotent man:—

1. To recognise his own weakness and lack of strength;
2. To look to Jesus rather than the superstitions of men;
3. To accept Jesus’ word—trust his commands and obey them.

At Jesus’ command to “rise, take up thy bed and walk”, he was made “whole”, and took up his bed and walked. His joy and thankfulness to God led him to the Temple (v.14). In that place, Jesus encouraged him and warned him to “sin no more”. The impotent man recognised that having received God’s grace, great responsibility now rested upon him to show all men that he was called of God—as Israel in the wilderness was called into a position of privilege (Jer. 13:11; Deut. 8:2-3, 11). Failure to continue in that way would bring “the worse thing” of which Jesus spoke. This is revealed in John 5:28-29—a resurrection to stand before the righteous judge (v.26-27), to give an account of his walk. If rejected, banishment will be to return to the grave never to rise again.

The wise and faithful course for us is likewise to respond to the invitation of Jesus: “wilt thou be made whole”. We do this today by believing his message and being baptised, and, being made “whole”, to “walk” joyfully in grateful response to that invitation. A new life had begun for the impotent man—the key note of which was his obedience to Jesus’ word. Our new life in the Truth starts with our obedience to his commandments.

THE COMPLAINT CONCERNING THE SABBATH DAY AND JESUS’ WORK (Jn. 5:10-30).

It is obvious from v. 9, that John deliberately highlights that it was a Sabbath day when Jesus cured the impotent man. It is also obvious that Jesus had knowingly chosen the Sabbath to work this miracle, for he could easily have waited one more day—after all, the man had been

in this condition for 38 years. Why then did Jesus act and bring the criticism of the Jews upon himself (v.10)? For two reasons:

1. To show that the Jewish reaction to his work emphasised the impotent (spiritually weak) state of the nation and its leaders. Israel's wandering for 38 years in the wilderness typified this (Heb. 3:17-19). But the impotent man responding to Jesus' words entered into rest from his burden of weakness—on the Sabbath day.
2. To show Jesus' position and authority as God's Son, who was now to continue his Father's work (v.17), and bring release or rest from the bondage of sin and death, to all who would respond.

On similar occasions when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he taught that he, in his role as Son of God, had the dominion over "all things" and this included the Sabbath law (Mark 2:27-28; Psa. 8:2-6). His teaching and miracles showed that he was "Lord of the Sabbath", the one through whom the "rest" of the Kingdom will be established.

We should also note Jesus' emphasis in v.19 and 30; that of himself, he could do nothing. Only by entering into the Father's work could Jesus bring the hope of everlasting life to those that believe in him. The "hearing and believing" (v. 24-25), if put into action in the lives of men and women causes them to become no longer "impotent", (i.e., weak and sick spiritually), but alive and strongly striving to "sin no more". They can look forward to the day when he would become for them "the resurrection and the life", "and they shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life" (vv. 28, 29).

LESSON FOR US:

The grim warning Jesus gave to Israel because they refused to hear and believe can apply to us today. We stand in the presence of God as did the man whom Jesus sought out at the Pool of Bethesda, and depending on our response to hearing the words of Jesus we will be like the impotent man as either:

- a) in despair because there is none to deliver us, because all we know and accept in our lives is the traditions of men; and all we can look forward to is sin, suffering and death;
- or b) ready to rise up in response to his command; no longer unbelieving, but joyful in the knowledge that he who is the Son of God has called us into the grace of his Father. We can thereby walk before him in hope of the resurrection from the dead to inherit eternal life.

Israel's failure to interpret the sign of the impotent man correctly meant for them exclusion from the Rest promised to the people of God. Our refusal to hear and understand will likewise exclude us from that millennial Sabbath. Let us in the vigor of our youth resolve to respond to Jesus' call to life and come humbly to him that we "may be made whole".

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 73-80

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Pages 178-190

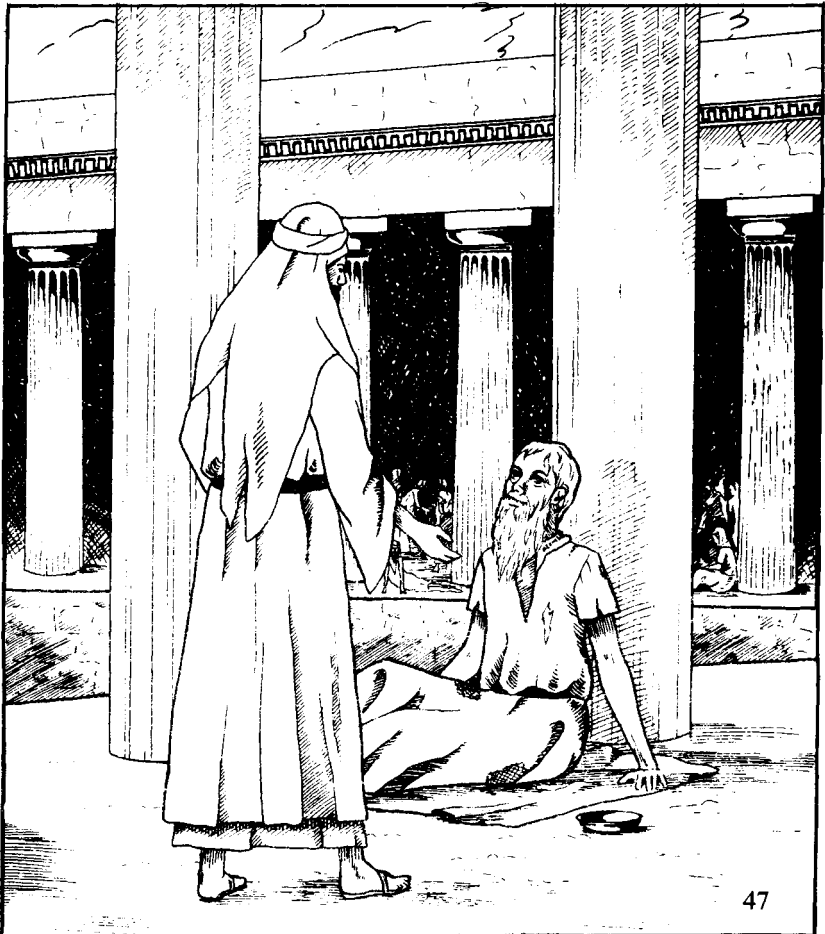
“Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 86-89

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *To make the impotent man whole, three things were required of him. What were they?*
2. *In what ways did the impotent man symbolise the nation of Israel?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Tell the story of the miracle at the Pool of Bethesda.*
2. *The Healing of the Impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda had a lesson: a) for Israel
b) for ourselves.
Briefly outline those lessons.*



11. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

**“And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying:
Behold a sower went forth to sow . . .”**

A parable is a story with a hidden meaning. It was one of the many ways Jesus taught people the truth of God. They were told so that those people who wanted to understand his mission and teaching would remember the story and ponder the meaning of the things he said (see Mk. 4:10-13; Matt. 13:10-11).

The parable of “The Sower” describes the spiritual birth and progress of the individual in preparation for the Kingdom of God. The parables of “The Mustard Seed” and “The Leaven” show how the individual seed develops until the harvest.

Matthew 13:1-52; Mark 4:1-20

BACKGROUND TO THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

In Matt. 12 is recorded the opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees to Jesus and his mission. The disciples had heard how these leaders of the nation had rejected his teachings and criticised his labours. Jesus then wanted to show the disciples that the preaching of the gospel would not always be accepted. This he did in the form of the following parables of the Kingdom.

The crowd which gathered around the shores of Galilee was clearly divided into two classes: those who were sympathetic hearers, and those who were his enemies. His parables had different effects upon these two. Those who desired to be “scribes instructed in the kingdom of heaven” received them thoughtfully, and if they could not understand, they sought him out with the request, “declare unto us this parable”. When they then saw how the divine truth was explained by Jesus’ parable, they became more firmly convinced of his teaching.

In the hearts of his enemies, however, was concealed a desire to condemn the Lord by twisting his words. They saw and heard, but their failure to understand was the result of their willing blindness and hardness of heart.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matt. 13:3-8; Mk. 4:1-8).

In Israel the farmer, sowing his seed with a bag of grain over his shoulder, walked up and down his field scattering handfuls of seed as he went. Where the seed fell, it stayed, and its final fate depended on the quality of the soil upon which it fell.

Some fell on hard ground by the wayside which was picked by the birds. The seed that fell upon stony places where there was not much

earth, sprang up quickly, but rapidly died when the hot sun beat upon the tender plant. The seed that fell among thorns, had little hope of extended growth, as it was soon overwhelmed by the hardier thorns and weeds which choked it; but the seed which fell on good (or prepared) ground sprang up into fruitful plants.

JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLE (Mk. 4:14-20; Lk.8:11-15; Matt. 13:18-23).

The Sower is the Lord Jesus himself (Matt. 13:37). When we read his teachings in the Scriptures of Truth, we are listening to his words calling us to obey him.

The seed which he sowed is the Word of God, or as Jesus said: “the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). The four types of soil upon which it falls are four kinds of people who react in different ways to the Word that is sown:—

1. The Pathway or Hard Ground—Matt. 13:19; Heb. 3:13:

Some people’s minds become “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”. They are too interested in the things of the world. Though they hear, they do not retain the Word of the Kingdom in their hearts and minds. No emotional spark is kindled by the Word in these people. It vanishes from their lives as completely as the seed on the pathway when eaten by the birds.

2. The Stony Places—Matt. 13:20-21:

Where the seed fell on shallow ground the seed developed quickly, but died just as quickly due to lack of moisture. How many people are shallow like this? Some eagerly receive the word of the kingdom, after being influenced by excitement or emotion. It develops quickly in these folk, but they lack the grounding and inward resolve in which the Word can thrive. In time of persecution and trial, they weaken, or become offended and deny the Truth. We must understand that it is “through much tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

3. The Thorns—Matt. 13:22:

Here we have portrayed those who understand the Word of Truth, and are moved by it, but who allow it to be overwhelmed by the cares and pressures of this life. Their minds are filled with worldly concerns. They try to have the best of two worlds, but man cannot serve God and the world for he will inevitably love one and hate the other (Matt. 6:24). It is important to remember that we must “seek first the Kingdom of God”, and the other things of this life must then take their place where best they can. Disciples must take the words of John in 1 John 2:15 to themselves: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him”.

4. The Good Ground—Matt. 13:23:

Here we have typified those who have heard the Word of God, understood it, and received it. In honest and good hearts, having heard the Word, they keep it. Because they allow the Word of God to mould their characters and their lives, they bring forth the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) to the honour and praise of God (Phil. 1:9-11).

THE MUSTARD SEED (Matt. 13:31-32; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-19).

In this parable we are shown that from a small beginning great things can develop. The Mustard Seed is very small but can produce a plant out of all proportion to its own size. It can grow to a height of eight or ten feet with branches filled with seed. Birds flock to it for food.

The Mustard Seed, because of its “minute” or “despised” beginning as a very tiny seed, and its final glory as a flourishing tree, fitly illustrates the call of the Gospel. As men would judge, the preaching of the Gospel would have seemed to be a failure. But the people of the world do not know that from the small beginnings of the Gospel preaching of this time, shall develop a great thing. The end result of this work will be the establishment of a community of people who have been enlightened by God’s Word. These faithful few will have been moulded and reshaped by the indwelling of the Word until ultimately they become fit for rulership in God’s kingdom. When the Kingdom is established, the great result of the growth of the “Mustard Seed” will be witnessed in the putting on of immortality for those who have laboured faithfully in this life. They in turn will distribute to the nations of the world the seed of salvation.

Small indeed were these beginnings. Jesus lived as a penniless and humble carpenter. He was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3) and died the death of a criminal. He will however, return and assume rulership over all the kingdoms of the world, as depicted by the small stone that crushed the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2). The Apostles likewise suffered many afflictions, some even a violent death, and so taught by their example, that followers similarly must “deny themselves and take up the cross . . .” (Matt. 16:34).

Throughout the Scriptures we read that God is selecting a people for His name, but the men and women who are called are not the mighty, or the rich, or the wise (1 Cor. 1:26-31; Phil. 2:5-11). How astonishing it will be to the world when these humble men shall appear in glory as its rulers and teachers (Matt. 19:27-30).

LEAVEN (Matt. 13:33; Lk. 13:20-21).

The Leaven used in Christ’s day was a piece of dough left over from the last baking day and allowed to go sour. It was a means of causing bread to rise. The emphasis of this story rests on the action of the leaven. Its major quality was that of penetration, and its power lay in affecting a mass much larger than its own. Three measures of meal

was a common quantity used in baking (Gen. 18:6). Into this sizeable mass a fragment of leaven was kneaded. Its size was almost insignificant in comparison with the rest, but its effect spread throughout the whole batch.

When Christ returns, the Gospel and the kingdom will likewise spread all over the world. We learn how this will take place by reading the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar, in which the King dreamt that the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands will “break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms and it shall stand forever”. Then “the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Num. 14:21) and all men shall recognise Divine power. Divine wisdom shall be honoured and man shall willingly seek to know God and walk in His ways (Isa. 2:2-4).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Parables of the Messiah” (J. Carter)—Pages 86-105, 190-194
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 216-225
“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, Pages 58-74
“Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 166-169

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did the Lord Jesus Christ speak in parables?*
2. *In a sentence outline the lesson of:—*
 - (a) *the Parable of the “Sower”*
 - (b) *the Parable of the “Mustard Seed” and “Leaven”.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What were the four types of soil, representing four sorts of people, upon which the seed fell? How do the different types of people react?*
2. *What is the main lesson Christ has shown us from the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven?*



12. FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

“I am the bread of life”

The events of feeding the multitude and stilling the storm are described as the fourth and fifth “signs” of the Gospel of John. They show that Jesus is the “Bread of Life” and that he can also still the storms of life which come upon his people. The people of Israel were impressed with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. He did not provide this food merely to satisfy their hunger; he wanted his disciples and the people to understand that he was “the Bread of Life” and that if they would believe him and accept him as their saviour they would ultimately partake of eternal life.

But many found that they could not accept him, especially when he refused their wishes to make him king, causing them to turn from him.

Matthew 14:15-33: Mark 6:32-52; John 6

REST IN A DESERT PLACE.

It was Passover time, twelve months before Jesus’ death, and he was still popular with the people (Jn. 6:4).

After his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus had sent out his twelve disciples in pairs to heal the sick and to preach that men should repent (Mk. 6:6-13). Now the disciples were returning to Capernaum, eager to tell him all they had done and taught. At the same time Jesus had heard that the wicked Herod had killed his cousin and friend, John the Baptist—this had saddened him and reminded him that he was also soon to die.

Jesus therefore felt the need to get away from the noise and bustle of Capernaum, and he said to the disciples “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). So they went by boat across the Sea of Galilee to a desert place near Bethsaida, away from the crowds.

SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD (Mark 6:33-34).

However many people saw him leave and, remembering the miracles he had done, they hurried around the shore by foot, others joining the throng as they went. When Jesus came down from the mountain where he had been resting with his disciples, a crowd was waiting for him. Forgetting his tiredness and sadness, he was “moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things” (Mk. 6:34).

THE DISCIPLES TESTED (Mark 6:35-39).

He taught them until evening, and the disciples came to him, urging him to send the people away so that they could buy food, for in their hurry the people had brought nothing with them. "Give ye them to eat", said their Master "knowing what he would do" (Mk. 6:37; Jn. 6:6). Of course the disciples did not know how they could buy enough food for so many people. Andrew told Jesus that one small boy had five barley loaves and two small fishes,—but how could that feed more than 5,000 people?

At the Lord's command the twelve seated the people in orderly companies of 100 and 50 on the green grass. Now the people and the disciples watched, wondering what Jesus would do.

FOOD FOR THE MULTITUDE (Mark 6:40-44).

Jesus gave thanks and began to break the food. To their amazement the food continued to multiply, so that even when all had eaten sufficient, the disciples filled twelve big baskets with the remainder. Many couldn't help but say "this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (Jn. 6:14).

Jesus breaking the bread reminds us of the Memorial Supper, where he said that the bread he gave the disciples spoke of his body. He was teaching that by the breaking of his own body in death he would be providing true bread, which would sustain many unto life eternal. After he rose to heaven the disciples spoke of the Word of Life, distributing this message among the people. Twelve baskets had been left over, one for each of the apostles. Just as they were to take care that nothing was lost when gathering the fragments, so the Word of Life was to be given only to those who hungered for it, including Gentiles, although it would first be preached to the twelve tribes of Israel.

We can be extremely thankful that the gospel message, which Jesus and his apostles distributed, has reached out to us — as a few of a vast multitude who, since their times, have been fed the bread of life. And we can be filled and satisfied with its nourishment. No longer need we hunger and thirst for spiritual sustenance—here is the bread of life (see Isa. 55:1, 2; Deut. 8:3).

THE PEOPLE DESIRE TO MAKE HIM KING (John 6:14-15).

Most of the people did not understand the significance of this miracle. But, thankful for the food and amazed by the creative power they had seen, they were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the prophet like Moses who would come into the world (Deut. 18:15-19). As surely as Moses had led the people from Egypt, so, they thought, Jesus could deliver them from the Romans. They decided to take him by force and make him king.

Jesus therefore quickly sent the disciples away by boat towards Capernaum and departed from the clamouring crowd up into a

mountain again, to receive strength from meditation and prayer to his Father. Now was not the time for him to be king—before him lay the crucifixion, which the people, and even the disciples, did not understand.

CALMING THE STORM (Mark 6:45-52).

As the disciples rowed in the dark of night, a storm arose on the lake. The little boat was tossed by the waves and they could not pull against the wind. They were powerless against the raging storm. And then through the darkness of the night came a figure walking on the sea, causing them to cry out in fright. But a familiar voice calmed them: "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid". On hearing that it was his Lord, the impetuous Peter asked if he could walk to him on the sea. He started off well, until his eyes went from Jesus to the rough seas surrounding him. His faith failed. As he began to sink Jesus caught him and they both came into the ship—at that very moment the wind ceased and before they knew it the ship was at the land. "Of a truth" they said, "thou art the Son of God". Mark adds, "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened". Peter and the other disciples had not realised that the Son of God could not only multiply bread, but even the winds and the sea would obey him. We must have faith in his power, for when he returns he will end our struggle in the storm of life, as well as calming the troubled sea of international conflict by establishing his reign of righteousness and peace.

THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN (John 6:22-71).

Back at Capernaum the people again flocked round the Master. He told them that they only came to him because they had been filled with food. He said that they should not labour for the meat which perishes but for that spiritual food which would endure to eternal life, which he was willing to give them.

They asked for a sign that they might believe on him—even though he had just miraculously fed the multitude. They said that Moses had given Israel bread from heaven.

Jesus explained to them that he was the true bread sent from heaven, fulfilling the type of manna which their fathers had in the wilderness. Manna means "what is it?" and here at Capernaum the people could not believe that this Jesus was God-given, like the manna, even though they had seen his miracles.

The Master said he was the true or "antitypical" bread of life, and if they ate his flesh and his blood, that is, put into their lives his thoughts, words and deeds, they would not die like those in the wilderness, but would ultimately live for ever.

Of the many that witnessed his miracles, so few grasped his mission and greatness. The power belonging to the Creator had twice been demonstrated. Yet only Peter was quick to say, "thou hast the words

of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Jn. 6:69).

LESSON FOR US:

As Jesus provided bread for the multitude and stilled the storm, so he has the power of salvation. This is available to all those who in baptism accept him as the bread from heaven, who can give life to the world. We must strive to manifest in our lives the mind of Christ in all our thoughts, words and deeds, believing that he can provide also our daily needs and still the storms of life. Let us believe on him, whom God hath sent. But this requires careful thought upon his words and his mission. Only then will we appreciate that he is the only source of the words of eternal life.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 189-197

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 279-292

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, Pages 107-130

“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapter 6

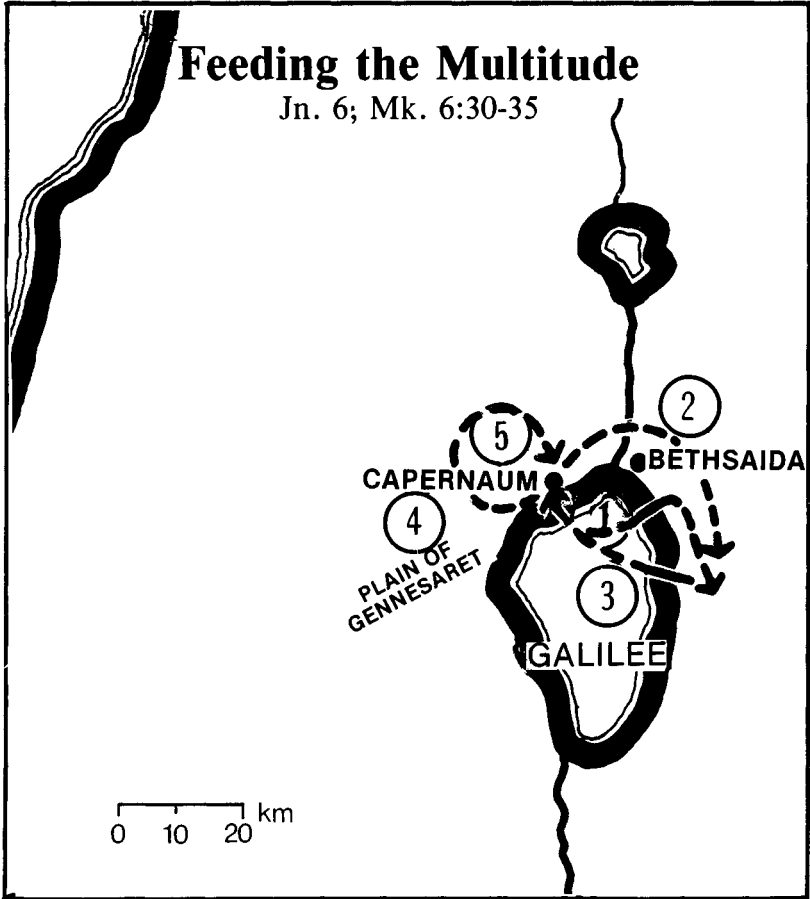
“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 91-99

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was Jesus’ reaction to the suggestion that he should be made king and why did he react that way?*
2. *Before Jesus fed the 5,000 he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it. What does this remind you of?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What is the spiritual significance of the feeding of the 5,000?*
2. *Tell the story of Jesus stilling the storm during the night after feeding the 5,000.*
3. *Explain how Jesus is the “bread from heaven”.*



1. The twelve return from their preaching effort and news of John's death reaches Jesus. Hence they decide to go across the lake to the desert near Bethsaida (Mk. 6:14, 30-31).
2. The multitude follows around the top of the lake (Mk. 6:32-33).
3. After the feeding of the 5,000 the twelve set out across the lake. The Lord walks to them on the water (Jn. 6:15-21). They reach Capernaum.
4. The Lord heals many in the land of Gennesaret (Mk. 6:53-56).
5. He delivers his speech on the bread of life in the synagogue at Capernaum (Jn. 6:59).

The incidents of Lesson 13 follow immediately.

13. OPPOSITION GATHERS IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

“But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God”

Many people could not understand Jesus' words about the bread of life. "From that time", says John, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:60, 66). They did not share the confidence of Peter who had said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life". From this time on, in the last year of the Lord's life, opposition to himself and his teachings increased. It was necessary for Jesus to warn his disciples of this opposition and at the same time to teach them the eternal rewards of discipleship.

Matthew 16

THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES (Matt. 16:1-4).

Crossing the sea by boat Jesus came to Magdala in the area of Dalmanutha. Here a group of Pharisees and Sadducees was waiting for him. It was unusual to find them together so far from Jerusalem. They had combined in a common cause against Jesus, asking for a sign from heaven. This might have seemed reasonable, especially as in Deut. 13 God had said that the leaders of Israel were to test prophets by asking for a sign.

THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH (Matt. 16:2-4).

But the Pharisees and Sadducees had seen many signs. For two years Jesus had healed the blind, the dumb, the lame, had made water into wine, raised the dead, and just recently fed multitudes from a few loaves of bread. Nicodemus, one of the teachers, had even admitted that no one could do the works that Jesus did, unless God was with him (John 3:2).

Jesus condemned them as hypocrites, for they could forecast the weather from the colours of the sky, but they would not understand the signs of their times. A "storm" of judgment was approaching, due to their blind and faithless leadership. This storm of God's judgments upon the nation could be avoided only if they took notice of the sign of the prophet Jonah. He had been three days in the belly of the whale before his "typical" resurrection. The people of Nineveh had repented too, at the preaching of Jonah. Now a much greater man than Jonah was in Israel, whose preaching they refused to heed, seeking only how they could destroy him and put him in the depths of a grave. Though they might appear to succeed, their putting Jesus to death would be made ineffective by his resurrection after three days. But they refused to heed the warning of the sign of Jonah.

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES (Matt. 16:6-12).

Jesus left those hypocritical men and went his way, crossing to the other side of the sea of Galilee. Here Jesus commanded his disciples: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”. The disciples thought he said this because they had forgotten to bring bread—ordinary leavened bread—with them. He was warning of the influence of these wicked men (Matthew 16:12). The symbol of leaven is used because, when a small amount is put in a loaf of bread, it will grow and puff up, until the whole loaf is affected. It is therefore a fitting symbol for sin (1 Cor. 5:6-8) and in this warning, a symbol of the corrupting influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Pharisees believed strictly in the law in every point, though being quite blind to the “weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith” (Matt. 23:23). They could not see that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law and the law was merely a schoolmaster teaching them to accept Christ (Gal. 3:24).

The Sadducees, on the other hand, believed only the first five books of the Bible written by Moses, thus leaving out all those prophets who spoke of Jesus. They did not believe in the resurrection, which was to become a fundamental point of belief in Jesus being the Christ (1 Cor. 15:13-14; Matt. 16:21). The Sadducees also were very conscious of the power of money. They concentrated a large proportion of their time on increasing and looking after their wealth.

All of these influences had spread through the whole nation, like leaven, until very few sought after the truth in Jesus. He was therefore warning the disciples not to be influenced by these men who had joined in a determined opposition to him.

PETER’S CONFSSION (Matt. 16:13-17).

At Bethsaida Jesus cured a blind man, and then moved north to the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi, away from the places where there would be many people. On the way, after praying to his Father, he asked his apostles, saying: “Whom do men say that I am?” The disciples suggested ideas that were being talked about among the multitude: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. No one thought to say he was the Christ, the Messiah, but rather another of the prophets. “But whom say ye that I am?” he asked. Peter’s answer was confident: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. What a significant statement.

Peter had not been told this by any man, but God had shown it to him through his association with Jesus day by day; in his baptism, his miracles, his words of Divine truth — all these bore witness that the Father had sent him (John 5:36). Jesus was therefore no ordinary prophet, nor was he John the Baptist. Jesus was the “Anointed” (Psalm 2), the one whom God would make king on David’s throne (2 Sam. 7), the “seed” of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed

(Gen. 22:17, 18), and the victorious “seed of the woman” (cp. Gen. 3:15).

He was God’s beloved son. How important it was for the disciples to understand this and to go on believing it in the difficult days ahead.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM (Matt. 16:18-19).

Following this confession, Jesus said to Peter: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my ecclesia”. Peter would be used in the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of a strong ecclesia would be based on the truth of Peter’s statement. That truth as to the Messiahship of Jesus could not be affected even by the death of its teachers. Peter was promised the “keys of the kingdom” to unlock the door to the kingdom. In Acts Peter used these keys in preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41), and again in opening the “door of faith” to the Gentiles, in Acts 10.

“GET THEE BEHIND ME SATAN” (Matt. 16:21-23).

As they continued on their way after Peter’s confession, Jesus taught more about his coming death. No doubt with the sign of the prophet Jonah in mind, Jesus showed them that he must die, but that he would be raised again the third day. Peter, who had just confessed Christ, opposed his master, thereby becoming a “stumbling-block” and an adversary (as the word “Satan” means) saying: “This shall not be unto thee”. Jesus turned and in a stinging rebuke said: “thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP (Matt. 16:24-27).

Jesus showed Peter and the other apostles that any man who will be his disciple must:—

1. Deny himself;
2. Take up his cross;
3. Follow him.

Whoever tries hard to save his own life will lose it, but those who give up the worldly pleasures for Christ’s sake, will receive everlasting life. Of what real, lasting value are riches and pleasure in this world? For at the coming of Christ all those things will pass away, and those who have renounced them will be rewarded just as Christ gave up his life and was rewarded with immortality. We would do well to seek security in Christ, rather than to place our confidence in the things of this world.

Jesus warned his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Such a confession would only bring more opposition, for even the disciples did not fully understand. His death at Jerusalem was before him and his resurrection would declare before all men that he was truly God’s Anointed, “the Christ the Son of the Living God”.

LESSON FOR US.

Jesus is coming in judgment to those who refuse to discern the signs of the times. The signs we can see in the world of the coming overthrow of this godless society are as clear as the signs which the Pharisees and Sadducees saw, yet ignored. We should believe, too, the evidence that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. Let us strive to become part of his ecclesia built on the truth in Peter's confession. Through the keys of the kingdom the gospel has been preached to the Gentiles and thereby to us, so that we have the hope of eternal life. Just as he died and rose again, so we can be with him in his coming Kingdom, if we are prepared to live as "disciples" now.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Pages 206-214

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 36, 37

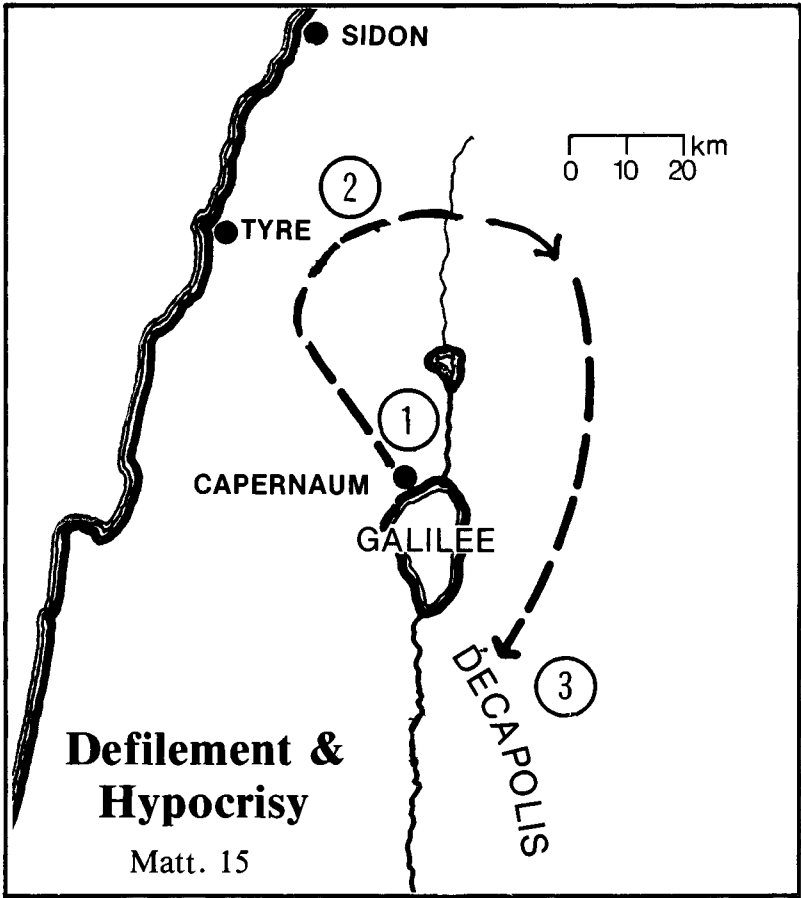
"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, No. 10, 11

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was the sign of the prophet Jonah?*
2. *What was the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?*
3. *What is so important about the statement by Peter that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God"?*
4. *What are the 3 principles of discipleship and how do they apply today?*

ESSAY QUESTION.

1. *Peter declared of Jesus: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". Describe:—*
 - a) *the circumstances surrounding this confessions and;*
 - b) *the importance of the statement.*



1. In Capernaum the Lord was confronted by a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees and was questioned about his breach of the tradition of the elders (Matt. 15:1-21).
 2. Then he departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon where the Syrophenician approached him and her daughter was healed.
 3. He returned to Decapolis where he fed the 4,000.
- The incidents of Lesson 14 follow immediately.

14. TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

**“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;
hear ye him”**

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus taught his disciples that whilst it was true that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, yet they must understand that he would suffer before receiving the glory of the Kingdom. Jesus took this opportunity to promise a few of the disciples a foretaste of that kingdom.

One of them, Peter, recorded later that they were “eyewitnesses of his majesty”. That event was the “transfiguration” of Jesus.

Matthew 16:28-17:13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-36

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples concerning discipleship, he told them: “There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom”, or as Mark says: “till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power” (Matt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1). About a week later Jesus took his three foremost and beloved disciples, Peter, James and John, up into a high mountain (probably one of the lower heights of Mt. Hermon).

Here Jesus was transfigured (meaning “a change of form”) before them. As he prayed to his Father, his appearance changed. His face shone “as the sun” with a Divine light, and his garments became as white as snow (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29).

MOSES AND ELIJAH (Matt. 17:1-3).

Peter, James and John had fallen asleep, tired by their climb up the mountain and a period of intense prayer with Jesus. Now they were awakened by a scene of glory around them. They heard their Master speak with these great men, Moses and Elijah, who represented the law and the prophets which Christ came to fulfill. As they spoke of Jesus’ death, the disciples would have wondered about their Lord’s death, as it was an aspect of Messiah’s mission they did not understand, and one against which Peter had recently spoken.

As they watched in awe, Elijah and Moses began to depart. Peter, not knowing how to respond but amazed by this awe-inspiring sight and wanting Moses and Elijah to stay, cried out without thinking: “Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles” (Luke 9:33). In the wilderness there had been one tabernacle in which God’s glory dwelt, but Peter wanted three tabernacles, so that this glory could remain with these three men.

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON (Matt. 17:4-5).

A bright cloud overshadowed them, so that the disciples fell on their faces in fear. Out of the cloud came a voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him".

Peter's hasty and rash request was answered. Jesus was not equal with Moses and Elijah. His standing far excelled theirs. He was the only son of the living God. They should listen and believe him said the Father, for he fulfilled the law and the prophets.

He was "the Word made flesh", and the "only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth . . . for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:14, 17).

SUFFERING BEFORE GLORY: (Matt. 17:7-9).

Presently a hand touched them and a familiar voice said: "Arise, be not afraid". Looking around they saw that the cloud had gone and they were alone with Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain he charged them to tell no one of what they had seen, until he arose from the dead. Words could not adequately describe the events they had witnessed, and might only arouse opposition, or encourage a misplaced desire to make him king over Israel at that time. Before the vision of glory could become a reality in the Kingdom, Jesus' suffering and death lay before him. The disciples were unable to understand the meaning of the resurrection because they then believed that the kingdom would soon be established. Jesus, however, explained that as John the Baptist had been killed, so must the Son of Man yet suffer at the hands of men. The cross would come before the crown. Nevertheless, the vision of the everlasting glory that lay before him in the coming age must have strengthened Jesus, as he continued on the path to the cross.

THE EFFECT ON THE DISCIPLES.

The three disciples would never have forgotten the vision, and would have reflected upon it many times in the difficult years ahead as they faced persecution for Christ's sake. In 2 Peter, chapter 1 the apostle makes reference to the incident. He writes: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven ye heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (v.16-18).

This was Peter's assurance to the new ecclesias that his words were inspired and true, confirming those of "holy men of old" such as Moses and Elijah (v.21). He was able to confidently affirm in v.19, "we have also a more sure word of prophecy": more sure because

they had seen the personal and physical revelation of Christ's glory from his Father.

“HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF” (Matt. 17:14-21).

From the glory of “heavenly things” Jesus and the three disciples returned to find the remaining nine disciples engaged in argument with some Jewish scribes, and surrounded by a multitude. Many of the people, seeing Jesus, ran and saluted him, sure that he could settle the dispute.

The problem was explained by a man in the crowd. He had brought to the disciples his son, an epileptic, who could not speak and who suffered frequent fits which caused him to fall into fire and water. The disciples had been unable to cure him, much to the sarcastic delight of the Scribes. What a contrast there was between the glorious sign on the Mount of Transfiguration and the depressing failure on the plains below. As if yearning for the time when the Kingdom should come and the suffering and human weakness would be no more, he addresses them all — the mocking Scribes, the ashamed disciples, the anxious father: “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me” (v.19).

As the boy was brought to Jesus, a fit seized him and, in agony, he fell on the ground, foaming at the mouth. “If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us”, pleaded the father. Realising the weakness of his faith, but believing that Jesus could heal his son he cried: “Lord, I believe”, and desperately: “help thou mine unbelief”.

Upon this confession Jesus immediately spoke to the boy to cure him and although some who were watching at first thought him dead, he arose cured, and all present were “amazed by the mighty power of God” (Lk. 9:43).

LESSON FOR US.

We should be encouraged by the account of the Transfiguration just as the “joy set before” the Lord Jesus Christ helped him to endure even to the end (Heb. 12:2). Let us try to show in our lives the unshakeable faith of the beloved Son of God, in whom God was well pleased. We must develop a strong faith despite the faithless times in which we live, for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6), but “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk. 9:23). With this reassurance we can view the future with hope and not despair and tread with confidence the path to the Kingdom.

We look forward to the time when the Kingdom of God will come in power to transform the society that we live in, when he who cured the sick will heal our mortal natures. In that day God's glory will be seen throughout all the earth and in all those who in this day believe in Him and His glorious son.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 6, Chapter 8

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 37

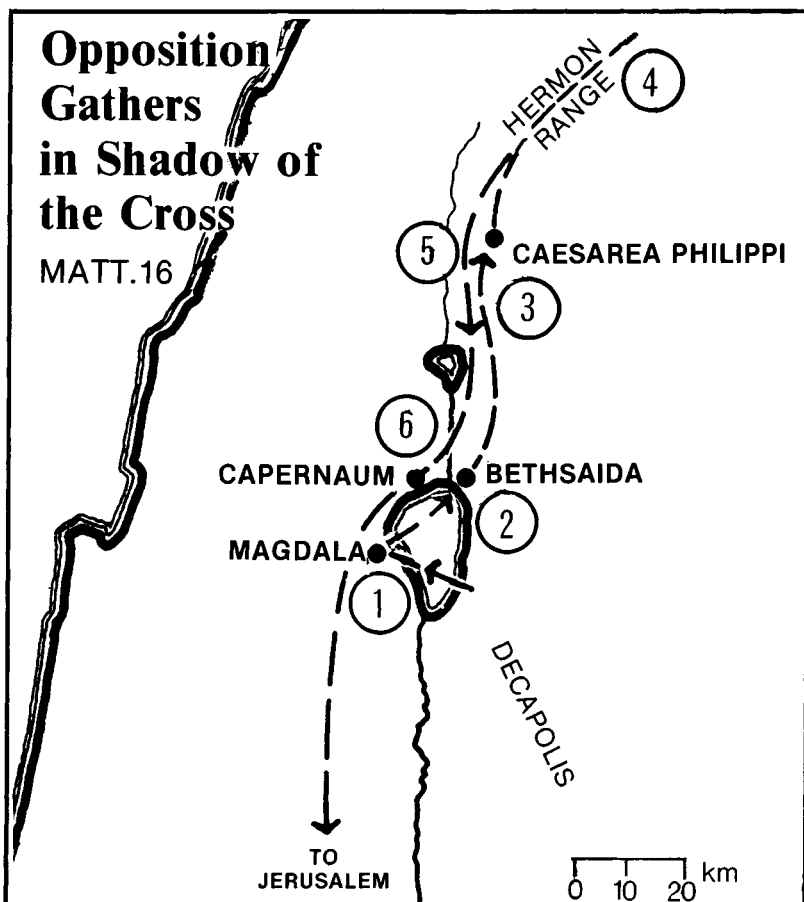
“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, Pages 166-172

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did Peter wish to build three tabernacles at the Transfiguration, and how was he answered?*
2. *How did the Transfiguration strengthen Jesus?*
3. *Why could the disciples not cure the epileptic boy at the time of the Transfiguration?*

ESSAY QUESTION:

1. *What was the purpose of the Transfiguration and what lesson does this contain for us?*



1. After feeding the 4,000, Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake and landed at Magdala (Dalmanutha). There he was confronted by Pharisees and Sadducees seeking a sign (Matt. 15:29; 16:1-5).
2. They left by ship for Bethsaida where he healed a blind man (Mark. 8:22).
3. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:13).
4. Jesus was transfigured on a high mountain near Hermon (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2).
5. Jesus healed an epileptic boy near Caesarea Philippi (Mark 9:14-29). He returned through Galilee to Capernaum (Mark 9:30, 33).
6. At Capernaum he provided tribute money, warned the disciples who were arguing who was the greatest, and taught importance of forgiveness (Matt. 17:24-27; 18:1-35. See Lesson 15).

15. TEACHING FORGIVENESS

“The son of man is come to save that which was lost”.

Jesus had been travelling through the far north area of Galilee and was now “setting his face to go to Jerusalem”. He was determined to go down to keep the feast of Tabernacles. However, because of the opposition of the Jews, he did not go down to Jerusalem immediately, deciding to tarry a while in the northern areas of Israel.

Arising from the discussions that were conducted between Jesus and his companions, we realise that the disciples did not understand the mission of their Lord and Master, nor their relationship to each other as disciples.

Matthew 18

WHO IS THE GREATEST.

Throughout his ministry Christ tried to warn his disciples of his betrayal and death, but they did not understand (Matt. 16:21; 17:22). Jesus had described himself openly as the “Son of God” to the disciples and they assumed him to be their “Messiah” who had come to save all Israel from the Romans. They did not understand that “the cross comes before the crown”, so as they journeyed that day they argued as to who should be the greatest in the Kingdom (Mark 9:33, 34). They got nowhere in their discussions and brought the question to Jesus: “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” In their ignorance they thought that by doing things they considered great, God would be impressed and grant them status over their brethren. Do we in our weak moments think that by doing some great deed we will earn greater status in God’s eyes? Is God impressed by our petty jealousy, when we think we are better than others? Jesus showed that there was a need for them, (and for us too), to humble themselves and work harmoniously together with the glory being to God and not to themselves.

NEED FOR HUMILITY AND HARMONY (Matt. 18:3-6).

To show them the attitude they should manifest one to the other, Jesus took a small child and putting him in their midst declared that they must have the characteristics of a child. He said: “Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3, 4). They must in their dealings one with another, work together, not having a grudge and not bearing malice (cp. 1 Cor. 14:20). We too, must be willing to learn that we might grow in the Truth with the teachableness of a child. Jesus showed by his example

that, in God's sight, he who humbly serves is greater than those he ministers to, and to apply the characteristics of a little child is in effect to receive Christ and his example (1 Cor. 11:1-2; Matt. 18:5). In working together they were not to "offend" each other. The word "offend" means to cause one to stumble from the sure path of Truth. We are not to upset our friends in the Truth to cause them to "stumble". Their belief in Christ could easily be weakened if we exhibit selfish and God-dishonouring ways.

CUT OFF OFFENSIVE HABITS (Matt. 18:7-9).

Jesus warns of the influence of the world and if we allow the natural desire of our own minds to imitate the world we can easily stumble. Christ indicates that there will be a falling away from the Truth in the last days, but woe to that man who causes his brethren to stumble.

The parable of verses 8 and 9 has often been treated lightly, but rarely do any think seriously enough about it. Literally to the natural thinking it would mean, if we steal, cut our hands off; if we speed in cars, sell the cars; if we swear, cut our tongue out; etc. But the parable can be understood as the apostle Paul shows in 1 Cor. 10:14 where he says we would be wise to flee from that which will take us from the Truth. We must not mix with company where the Truth is not upheld; if words or actions in the group indicate that the Truth is not respected, quietly tell the group and leave. It is better for us to get into the Kingdom without these distractions than to run the risk of having them lead us away from the Kingdom.

THE FATHER'S LOVE (Matt. 18:10).

The "eyes" of God are His Angels. All that we do, say or think is noted by them. Psalm 34:7 indicates that angels have the specific duty of overlooking the affairs of God's children to bring about the blessings and the trials that God decides will help form their characters. So as well as being messengers bringing about God's great purpose, the angels care for those "little ones" who obey Him. These children (vv.3, 4) are given individual guidance, unseen but nevertheless, effectual. There is great encouragement in that realisation, but with it also comes the necessary appreciation that they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister (to run errands) for them who shall be heirs of salvation". What an honour it is to receive such care. What a need to respect that guidance.

NEED FOR RECONCILIATION AND GAINING (Matt. 18:11-22).

The theme of the previous verses is here expanded, "for the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost". From verse 6 he has warned against causing the "children of God" to stumble from the way of the Truth; Christ now shows by parable and practical instruction that we have responsibility to help each other to walk in the Truth. Not only are we to refrain from actions and behaviour which would cause others to stumble, but we are to help those who stray.

As a shepherd checked his flock when he penned them for the night, so we should observe others with the view of keeping them within the shelter of God's Truth. The shepherd, noticing one sheep was missing would go and make every effort to find it. Does not this clearly show that we must seek those who stray from the "fold of God" — not to condemn them, but with the view of bringing them back to the fold?

Peter quickly saw the human problem: some people offend us often; how many times then do we forgive them in the attempt to "gain them"? We, like Peter, forget that the "gaining" or "losing" of an individual is the gaining or losing of them to the hope of the Gospel, and not that we are gaining or losing personal friends. Our forgiveness by God is based upon us being forgiving. We do not forgive seven times and then avenge, but as long as a person shows an attempt to repent, we must accept it. To put it simply, if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.

APPEAL IN PARABLE OF UNFORGIVING SERVANT (Matt.18:23-35).

To illustrate the importance of forgiving others, Jesus tells a parable of a King who takes account of his servants and one is found owing 10,000 talents (equal to \$2 million today). For a servant, this amount was an impossible debt to pay. To obtain his money the king decided to sell the man, his wife and family and all that he had. But after the servant gave a desperate plea for mercy and patience, the King decided against carrying out this threat and instead forgave the debt. However, as the servant went his way, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 pence (equal to about \$20 today).

Angrily he took that servant by the throat and demanded immediate payment. The fellow-servant fell at his feet and pleaded the same words that had been previously used to the king: "have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". But feeling no compassion, the servant mercilessly threw his fellow-servant into prison "till he should pay the debt".

But some of the other servants saw the injustice and complained to the king. He summoned the unmerciful servant and charged him: "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?"

The servant was speechless. The king ordered him to be thrown into prison till he repayed the debt which he had originally been forgiven.

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses".

Thus in the language of the parable although our sins are like a debt we cannot pay, God, like the king, can graciously blot them out. But once having been forgiven such a large debt, we must manifest the same spirit to our fellows by forgiving their "small debts". "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy" (Jas.

2:13). And we must forgive from the heart. There must not be the feeling, — “I can forgive, but I cannot forget”. God has promised to forgive our many sins, but the basis of His forgiveness is our willingness to forgive (Matt. 6:12). We cannot afford to harbour bitterness and malice towards our fellows.

The words of Paul to the Ephesians are almost a comment on this parable: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31, 32).

LESSON FOR US:

The fundamental attitude that Jesus would have us show is that of being humble, “as a child”, in our approach to God. In our walk to the Kingdom we must separate ourselves from all evil; not only evil itself, but we must cut ourselves off from those influences and habits which can lead to evil.

In our dealings the one with the other, we must remember that God does not want any to perish. All our dealings therefore must be with the aim of helping each other to keep to the way that leads unto life everlasting. But so that we may avoid feeling self-important and better than others, we need to remember that we are weak and sinful creatures and need God’s mercy and forgiveness to gain a place in His Kingdom. To gain His mercy and favour we must show ourselves merciful to others, remembering that God only forgives those who are forgiving.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 5, chapter 10

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 31, page 262; Ch. 38

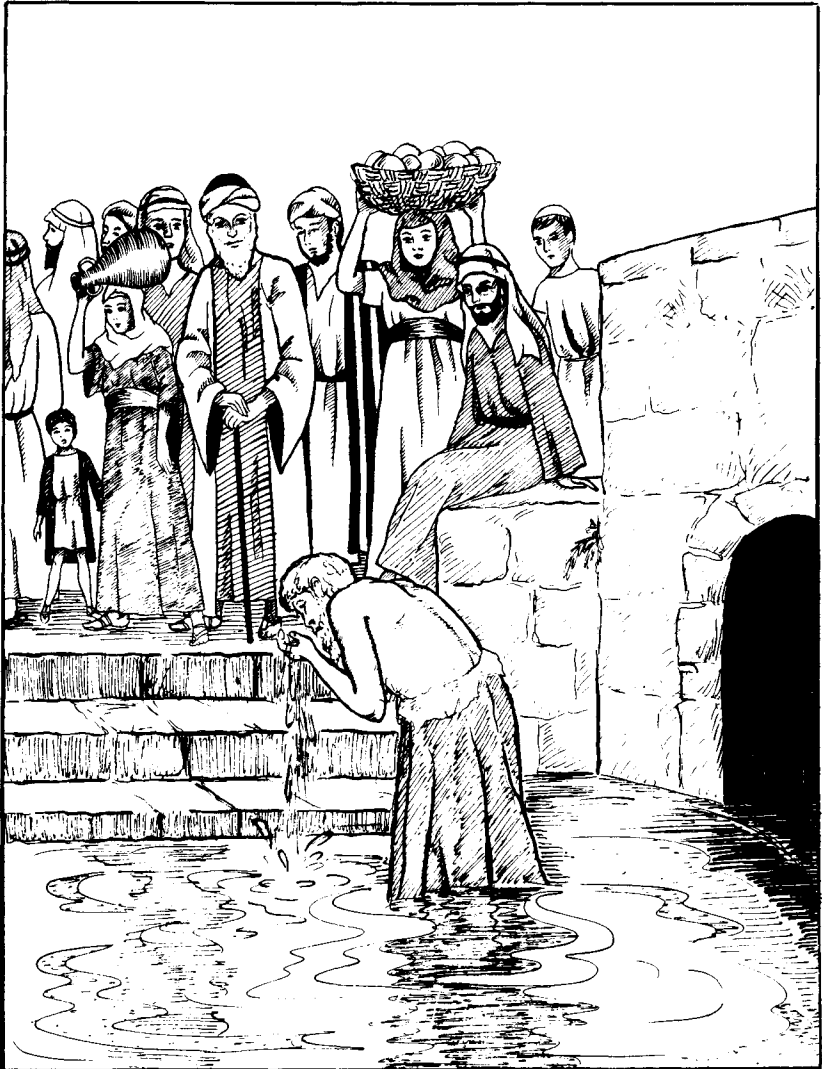
“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Book 5, chapter 2

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What did Jesus mean when he said: “Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”?*
2. *Show how you can cut off offensive habits in your daily life to better prepare you for the kingdom.*
3. *What parable did Jesus give to show that we must forgive from the heart? Summarise that parable.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *How did Jesus answer the question: "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?"*
2. *Jesus uses several illustrations of forgiveness in Matthew, chapter 18. What are they? And what lessons can we gain from them?*
3. *Explain the parable of the unforgiving servant and its lessons for us.*



16. HEALING A BLIND MAN

“I am the light of the world”

In our last lesson we learnt of the teachings of Jesus as he journeyed toward Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus travelled secretly to this feast (Jn. 7:1-10) because the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were planning to kill him. His journey was extended as he stayed in Judea teaching for almost two months. His teaching, however, only served to increase the hatred of his opponents for him, to the extent that when in Jerusalem, they took up stones against him (Jn. 8:59). If we remove the chapter division between John 8 and 9 we read a remarkable change in events — from a scene of outrage and hostility to one of tender healing. In fact this contrast of hostility and love will be seen later in the greatest trial of Jesus when, upon the cross he overcame the hatred of men by the greatest expression of love — the giving of his own life to heal the effects of sin.

This lesson shows us that as wonderful as the healing of blindness is, there is a basic need for all to “see” the Truth of God.

John 9

REASON FOR CURE (John 9:1-5).

The blind man was probably begging near the Temple as Jesus and his disciples passed by. The disciples, puzzled by the vexed question of sin and suffering, asked Jesus whose sin had caused the beggar’s affliction, this man’s or his parents’. It could not have been this man’s fault as he was known to be born blind, neither was it his parent’s fault as God does not send definite physical evils for certain sins. Jesus was not interested in getting involved in lengthy debate. He saw this incident as an opportunity that “the works of God should be made manifest in him” (v. 3). Despite the closing “day” of his life, Jesus found another opportunity to heal before the “night” came to end his opportunities (v. 4). He was intent on radiating light by healing physical and spiritual blindness. He was truly “the light of the world” (v. 5).

THE HEALING OF BLINDNESS (John 9:6-11).

The blind man heard those words, scarcely comprehending their significance, and suddenly felt moistened clay pressed against his eyelids. He was told to “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”. Without hesitation he went his way seeking directions to the pool. Imagine the task. He had to find Siloam, for Jesus did not go with him. This meant groping along the streets of Jerusalem with clay over his face, determined to reach his goal, his faith driving him on. He believed that if he washed there, he would see. Quickly he washed and stared in

joyful amazement as the clay dissolved away in the waters and looking up, all his previous sightless experiences took beautiful form. John simply says he “came seeing”.

We can imagine his earnest search for his healer. But before he could go far, his friends and neighbours questioned his identity. They knew him as a blind man but now his clear eyes and happiness puzzled them. They argued amongst themselves until he finally assured them that he certainly was that blind man and that Jesus had in a strange and wonderful way, healed him of his blindness.

THE PHARISEES CONFOUNDED (Jn. 9:12-34).

Unable to grasp this miracle, his friends brought him to the Pharisees. He faithfully told of the process of his healing. In their jealousy, the Pharisees would not accept that Jesus was of God, because Jesus had, in their view, broken the Sabbath by mixing clay and working a miracle. And yet a few of them were prepared to admit the obvious. They said: “how can a man that is a sinner do such miracles” (v. 16). The sincerity of the healed man and their differing opinions caused a division amongst them.

The Pharisees asked a question which only resulted in their deeper confusion. What did he think of his healer. Naturally the “blind” man replied: “He is a prophet”. At this, the Pharisees decided to sidestep the obvious and question his parents. Yes, he was their son and he had been born blind. But with a threat of being cut off from the Temple and the Jewish community, the parents did not want to get involved: “He is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself”.

With a growing feeling of frustration the Pharisees returned to their attack upon the young man: “Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner”. To which he simply said that he could not judge if Jesus were a sinner or not, but he knew that he could see.

Again the fact of the miracle was a stumbling block to them. Could he explain it again? At this the young man grew impatient. Why should he repeat his explanation, he reasoned, did they want to become Jesus’ disciples? We can imagine their anger at that tactless reply. Furiously they denounced him as one of Jesus’ disciples. They prided themselves in knowing that God had spoken unto Moses, but where was Jesus’ authority?

The “blind” man could now see a flaw in their argument. Previously he couldn’t say if Jesus was a sinner or not. Now the fact of the miracle proved to his simple belief that Jesus certainly was not a sinner. And since God responds to those who worship and obey Him, obviously Jesus must be such a one, for he said: “If this man were not of God, he could do nothing” (vv. 30-33).

For months the Pharisees had been confronted with the undeniable evidence of Jesus’ Messiahship. And to have such a testimony thrown up to them again, this time by a young man, only served to enrage

them. Being unable to disprove the logic of his argument, they resorted to personal abuse. "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" In their hatred of Jesus and anyone who believed in him, they cast the young man out.

AN OUTCAST (Jn. 9:35-38).

He was now socially cut off from the synagogue, from employment and probably from friends and neighbours. We do not know how long he experienced the loneliness of being an outcast, but soon Jesus approached him. Jesus asked him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God". The young man had never seen Jesus before, but he recognised the voice, and in growing faith and confidence he said: "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" In one of those comparatively rare moments when Jesus spoke personally of his identity as the Son of God, he said: "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee". We can imagine the overwhelming feeling of praise and adoration which swept over the man "that was born blind" as he earnestly searched the face of Jesus and bowed in total conviction that before him stood the Son of God.

John records his response, "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him" (v.38).

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SIGHT (Jn. 9:39-41):

Jesus had declared that he was "the light of the world" and now he shows that that light could both give sight, and yet blind the "seeing". He could enlighten the hearts and minds of those seeking the light of Truth and expose the blindness of men who, though they claimed to "see", were in fact, lost in the darkness of iniquity and prejudice. Some of the Pharisees who were nearby, obviously felt the accusation against themselves and spoke up: "Are we blind also?" His reply shows the enormity of their crime in their wilful refusal to believe the evidence of his Messiahship: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth" (v. 41; see also chapter 15:22-25).

LESSON FOR US:

This man "blind from birth", is typical of all mankind who are ignorant of God and cannot "see" His Truth. As Siloam means "sent", people are told to go and in faith be cleansed. We need to believe the instructions of Jesus, follow his directions and in faithful obedience be washed in the waters of baptism. Our lives will then be enlightened. But though we may be shunned by those around us, we will find the fellowship in Christ a joyful experience. We will have reason to believe that truly Jesus is the Son of God.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Pages 236-241

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Pages 349-357

"The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 10, No. 3

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did Jesus heal the man born blind?*
2. *Describe the clash that arose when the Pharisees questioned the man born blind whom Jesus had healed.*
3. *How did the man born blind come to believe that the one who had healed him was Jesus, the son of God?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Tell the story of how Jesus healed the man who had been born blind.*
2. *Jesus healed the man who was born blind:—*
 - a) *Why were the Pharisees angry?*
 - b) *What did the blind man who was healed say when the Pharisees said that Jesus was not a man of God?*
 - c) *What did the Pharisees do to the man?*

17. PARABLES OF THE LOST

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”

Jesus finally turned his face towards Jerusalem. His ministry was now measured in months. As opposition from the Pharisees increased, the message in Jesus' parables became more directed at their hypocritical self righteousness. The parables of the Good Samaritan, his teaching when casting out demons, his dining with Pharisees and condemnation of their hypocrisy all served to expose them as false shepherds. Jesus turned his attention to the people who flocked to him. He warned them of the leaven of the Pharisees and encouraged them to seek singleheartedly the Kingdom. He appealed for repentance and discipleship. To this the publicans and sinners responded, drawing near to hear more. This response brought more criticism from the Pharisees and Scribes who murmured: “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them” (Lk. 15:2).

This is the cause of the theme chosen by Jesus in the three parables which follow. The Scribes and Pharisees had forgotten that explanation, “they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Lk. 5:31). In the Pharisees' eyes separation from sinners was the mark of righteousness. In these parables Jesus shows the happiness of the Father in the recovery of the “lost” and the rejoicing of the “found” far surpassing the attitudes of the self righteous.

Luke 15

LOST SHEEP (Lk. 15:1-7).

The true shepherd will go out of his way to find a lost sheep. He may have 100 sheep in his flock, but if one should go astray and become lost, the shepherd will seek it out though he may have to struggle over rocks and thorns in his search. Jesus shows that the shepherd rejoices when he has at last found the helpless little animal. He doesn't show anger. He doesn't rebuke it and drive it back towards the pasture. But acting as a true shepherd he gently lifts it onto his tired shoulders and joyfully returns to the flock.

Jesus says that: “likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over 99 just persons which need no repentance” (v. 7).

He appeals to the Pharisees and Scribes (“what man of you” v. 4) to show the same concern for people who stray and become lost, as they would if they themselves had lost a sheep. But they were guilty of scattering the flock (people) by their words and actions. They were not seeking those who had strayed. They shunned sinners who, if left in

their “lost” state, would be unable to save themselves. Christ showed that it is God’s way to seek out and to restore. He was lifting the repentant among the publicans and sinners out of their perilous position to a state of security in God’s flock. When that recovery was made there was joy in heaven, in contrast to the unrepentant murmuring of the Pharisees on earth.

LOST COIN (Lk. 15:8-10).

The setting of this parable changes to a poor widow who has lost one of her ten coins. She sweeps through her house, carefully looking in every corner until, after a long search, she finds it. She is so relieved that she calls her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. Again Jesus brings out the lesson that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (v. 10).

The obvious point is that the lost coin was important to her. If she couldn’t find it at first by a quick look around, she fetched a light and swept thoroughly through the house. The other point is the contrast between the lost “sheep” and lost “coin”. The sheep strayed. The coin couldn’t lose itself — it was lost by the carelessness or oversight of the owner.

The Pharisees and Scribes by their selfish, careless attitude were allowing people to be lost to the hope of salvation. They were not bothering to seek out those who, like the coin, didn’t realise that they were lost. Unlike the angels in heaven the rulers acted as though they would rather the “lost” people remain lost.

If such people remain lost after an initial search, it would necessitate a search with a light, which can be likened to the light of the Word. There is therefore an application to our daily lives, when it is sometimes necessary to use the Bible and patient effort to bring a person back to the Truth, even though they may not realise that they are in a “lost” position. We certainly should not take the attitude of the Jewish rulers and in our carelessness cause people to be “lost” and then not bother to recover them. When one who was “lost” is “found”, the whole community rejoices together with the angels in heaven.

LOST SON (Lk. 15:11-32).

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a very personal appeal to his listeners — both to the publicans and sinners and as well as to the Pharisees and Scribes. The story concentrates upon the love of God seeking to restore the lost and the unforgiving.

A father had two sons. The younger son decided to leave home and asked: “give me the portion of goods”. He wanted what he could get immediately, without work or delay. The father obliged. The inheritance was granted and the younger son went to see the world. He travelled great distances and lived carelessly, wasting away his living. But the country where he was staying was hit by a famine and finding himself without any money, he found a job as a servant “to a citizen

of that country” (note, not his father’s country). He was given the distasteful job of feeding swine and finding himself starving, he was at the point of eating the pig’s food. When he came to his senses and realised his foolish position, he decided to return to his father, for, he thought, even the servants are well fed. He repented of his foolishness and being ashamed he prepared his humble apology. His attitude was: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants”.

The father had never given up hope for his younger son. He was constantly on the lookout for him. One day he saw him coming “when he was yet a great way off”. He was overjoyed and immediately arranged a feast to celebrate his son’s return, saying: “this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (v. 24).

However, the elder brother was jealous of the attention being showed his brother. He refused to enter into the celebrations. Angrily he protested against the favoured treatment of his sinful brother, claiming that he had never let his father down and yet a feast was never held for him and his friends. In a stinging rebuke he criticised his father’s favouritism to “thy son” (not his brother), whom he alleged was one of the worst of sinners.

The father tried to appeal to him for an attitude of love whilst pointing out he still had the right of inheritance. He intreated the elder brother to share in his father’s spirit of rejoicing, since his younger brother had, in effect, returned from the dead.

THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE.

The “father” represents God, who in His love for His children goes out to meet the “younger son”, who represents the publicans and sinners. That love is also shown in God’s plea to the “elder brother”, who represents the Pharisees and Scribes, appealing to them to share His attitude of rejoicing over the recovery of their brethren and entering into His feast, to share His blessings.

Let’s look at the parable in more detail.

The publicans and sinners are in a “far country”, not in the “father’s” country. The far country represents sinful desires and the master represents the power of sin. These people become servants to sin but God is always desirous of their repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Upon their repentance God shows loving compassion and welcomes them unto His household. When we repent of our sins and humbly draw nigh to God, He will certainly welcome us, cleanse us and treat us as His beloved children (see Jas. 4:8; 2 Cor. 6:17, 18; Isa. 55:7).

The Pharisees and Scribes were self-righteous about their service to the “father”. Their deeds were self-glorifying, e.g., “these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment” (v. 29). Claiming to be in the family they in actual fact had their own “friends”, who were not the “father’s” friends. They did

not share the attitudes of God but inwardly desired to make merry as had the sinners (cp. Lk. 11:39-44). Though they were in the “house”, in their hearts they were not as near to God as the sinners who were turning their back on sin and flocking around Jesus. Let us never be guilty of self importance and lack of love towards others because our self righteousness would be foreign to God’s character and bar the way to sharing His blessings.

LESSON FOR US.

We can show those shepherd-like qualities to each other for if we see one straying from the ways of God we should try to direct that one, in love and patience, back to God.

We all have a responsibility to care for each other so that none of us becomes lost to the world. Rather than being selfish and careless we need to be concerned for others, so that if one is lost we should diligently try to recover that one again.

The younger son was foolish in leaving his father and going to the world. Let us never leave God. The pleasures of the world may seem attractive but a servant of sin finishes up spiritually “starved” and ready to eat the husks of wickedness. Before we are baptised we are all sinners in need of turning to God, wanting to become His servants, seeking to be cleansed and forgiven. If that is our attitude God is looking out anxiously for us and a feast of blessings awaits us.

Let us not be self-righteous and hard-hearted to the repentant. It is God’s desire that we share His attitude of rejoicing, when “he who is lost is found”. God knows our hearts. Let us therefore respond to the love of God, and attract others to that love, for in doing so we can rejoice with others of like mind and with the angels in heaven.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 269-272

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 252-254

“Parables of the Messiah” (J. Carter)—Pages 227-236

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What was the lesson intended for the Pharisees and Scribes from the parable of the Lost Sheep?*
2. *What is the lesson for us in the parable of the Lost Coin?*
3. *How is the love of God shown in the parable of the Lost Son?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, giving their lessons for us.*
2. *Whom do the two brothers represent in the parable of the Prodigal Son and what lesson can we learn from the story?*

18. RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

“I am the resurrection, and the life”

The Lord Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem discussing with the Jews the charge of blasphemy laid against him, but the Jews continued to misunderstand him, because “they sought again to take him” (Jn. 10:39). However, “he escaped out of their hand and went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptised; and there he abode” (v. 40) in the area known as Bethabara. It was here the messenger came to tell Jesus the news of Lazarus’ illness.

Before his own death and resurrection, Jesus saw this illness as another opportunity to glorify God by performing the greatest of all miracles, the raising of the dead to life (cp. Lk. 7:14; 8:55).

John 11

JESUS HEARS OF LAZARUS’ ILLNESS (Jn. 11:1-6).

Bethany was a small village approximately two miles from Jerusalem and is significantly described in v. 1 as “the town of Mary and her sister Martha”. These two sisters, together with their brother Lazarus, were faithful followers of Jesus and no doubt they extended their hospitality to him when he was preaching in the area. Joy and happiness would have often been felt in that household, particularly during the visits of the Master. The sickness of their brother, however, brought distress to Mary and Martha and their thoughts immediately turned to the Lord. They remembered his miracles and, knowing that he could heal their brother, they sent a messenger to convey the news: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick” (v. 3). Jesus, upon hearing this message, remarked: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby”.

He could have, there and then, miraculously healed Lazarus, but Jesus did not make a move. In fact he stayed two more days at Bethabara, only after which he made ready to go to Bethany to help his friend. Meanwhile Lazarus died.

It may at first appear that the Lord’s response and delay indicates a lack of concern for his friend, but John immediately assures us of Jesus’ care by declaring, “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (v. 5).

Jesus knew that the two sisters’ grief was heavy upon them and must have felt an urge to hurry to Bethany to comfort them, but to have done so would have defeated the purpose of his Father. “Not my will but thine be done” was the thought ever in his mind, and as much as he loved these people, his love for his Father was greater and compelled him to submit to His will. In any case, he knew that finally the family would be better served, and would come to understand the purpose of God more perfectly.

THE DISCIPLES' CONVERSATION WITH JESUS (Jn. 11:4-15).

The disciples, upon hearing their Master's reply to the messenger (v. 4), rejoiced, knowing that their friend would recover. The fact that Jesus remained in the area for two days after hearing this bad news did not surprise them. What did astonish them however, was that he was going to return to Judea — because earlier the Jews had "sought again to take him" (Jn. 10:39). The disciples became fearful of what might happen to Jesus if he were to go there again and pleaded with him saying, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" (v.8).

Jesus replied (vv. 9 and 10) in the form of a parable: "I have not completed my day yet, my last hour is not yet come". In other words, it was impossible for the Jews to harm Jesus until the time appointed by the Father. The "day" speaks of the time of life, and this contrasts with "night" which refers to death. After this explanation, Jesus told his disciples it would be necessary for him to go to Bethany to wake Lazarus out of his sleep (v.11). The disciples, however, could not understand his intention, and puzzled, they declared, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well". It was then that Jesus told them bluntly that Lazarus was dead and that he had delayed purposely at Bethabara, in order to, later, miraculously prove his possession of Divine powers as the Son of God.

MARTHA'S CONVERSATION WITH JESUS (Jn. 11:17-27).

Mary and Martha had become concerned at the absence of Jesus. Lazarus had been dead and buried four days now — and still there was no sign of their Master. If only Jesus had come quicker, they thought, he might have saved him, but it was too late now.

Martha, on hearing that Jesus was at last heading towards Bethany, ran out to meet him, and cried: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (v. 21-22).

Jesus responded decisively, "Thy brother shall rise again" (v. 23).

Martha answered: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24). Although not daring to imagine that Jesus' promise was immediate, Martha in so saying clearly confirmed her certain future hope. Jesus thereupon seized the perfectness of the situation to declare, "I am the resurrection and the life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (v. 25-26). He then asked for Martha's statement of faith by questioning her: "Believest thou this?"

"Yea Lord", she replied, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God which should come into the world" (v.27).

MARY COMES TO JESUS (Jn. 11:28-32).

After making this confession of faith Martha ran to Mary, who was

meditating and lamenting in their house (v. 20), and told her that Jesus had arrived in Bethany. Together they quickly ran to meet him. When the Jews who had been comforting Mary over the previous few days saw her run out of the house, they followed her, thinking she was going to the tomb where Lazarus lay.

When Mary met Jesus, she fell at his feet and repeated her sister's words of faith, "Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (v.32).

THE MIRACLE (Jn. 11:33-44).

Jesus could see the grief of these sisters of Lazarus, whom he loved so dearly and as he heard their weeping and felt the sorrow of those around him, he became very upset, and asked, "where have ye laid him?" (v. 34).

They led him to the tomb and when he arrived there he broke down and cried (v. 35).

The Jews amongst the mourners could see the depth of Jesus' love for Lazarus, and said: "Behold how he loved him" (v. 36). But there were undertones of criticism amongst them too, for some said (v.37) "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

Jesus became "agitated within himself" (Diaglott, v. 38) and groaning, stepped towards the tomb and said: "Take ye away the stone" (v. 39). A tomb in those days was in the form of a cave with a large stone rolled over the entrance.

Martha commented in surprise, "Lord by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (v. 39), but Jesus insisted that the stone be removed.

The Lord turned his face toward heaven, and prayed to his Father that He might show forth His power and purpose, and by a miracle, those present might know, believe, and declare that Jesus was truly the Messiah (v. 41, 42).

In perfect faith, the Lord then turned to the tomb and cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43).

What amazement and joy filled the hearts of those present as they saw Lazarus walk forth from the tomb. Lazarus had been raised from the dead. By this wonderful miracle the Father confirmed the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to truly be "the resurrection and the life".

THE LEADERS MAKE PLANS (Jn. 11:47-53).

Some of the Jews present were astonished at what they had witnessed, and, in their unwillingness to believe, concluded that they had been deceived by trickery. These doubters hurried to tell the Pharisees what had happened and it was then finally decided by the rulers of the Jews that Jesus must die.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIRACLE.

Lazarus — “Eleazar” in Hebrew, means “El (God) will help”.
Bethany — “house of the poor or afflicted one”.

Hence from this lesson we learn the principle that He who is the great strength (El) of the Universe will help the house of the afflicted one. That help is through Jesus who is now set forth as “the resurrection and the life” (v. 25). This principle is emphasised by the condition of Lazarus prior to his death. It was a condition of weakness and helplessness as a consequence of sickness, the end result of which would naturally be death. This is a position common to all of mankind. Unless help is given us, death will inevitably be our end. However, in the mercy of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ has now come to show that for those who are beloved (Jn. 11:5), there will be sent help from God, in order that His Name might be glorified.

Jesus’ delay in acting upon the message from the sisters had a twofold purpose:

1. to raise Lazarus from the dead after his death, and so glorify God;
2. to teach the Truth concerning the death state (v. 11-14).

Lazarus’ death demonstrates that life is the time to serve the Lord. In death there is no remembrance, no work, and no hope (Psa. 88:3-12; Ecc. 9:10). The Lord Jesus Christ illustrates this by contrasting day with night. While the sun shines man can labour and hope, but when night comes, man’s striving and ambitions will cease. Christ’s disciples must walk straight and faithfully in the days of their lives (v. 9, 10), for when they are taken by death their time of opportunity will certainly conclude. If we continue in the ways of truth, even though death may claim us, as it did Lazarus, yet shall we live (v. 25).

Jesus, then, raised up Lazarus from the state of death, thus guaranteeing for the faithful a hope of resurrection at the last day. Those found worthy will not only share the resurrection, but according to the great and precious promises will be granted everlasting life (e.g., Dan. 12:1-3).

Notice the repetition of the words “believeth” in verses 25 and 26, stressing this requirement, and then Martha’s confession (v. 27), “I believe . . .”. Belief in God, His Word and His son is the required basis for all who would be saved and raised to life “in the last day” (Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 3:16; Acts 8:12, 35-37).

Jesus’ cry: “Lazarus come forth” awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death, and he came forth to renewed life. But though he lived, he was still bound with the bonds of death (v. 44), and would in due course return again to the grave.

By way of contrast, Jesus’ own resurrection was to life eternal, in which the bonds of death are for ever put away (Jn. 20:2-8). Jesus was to become the “first fruits of them that sleep” in order that all those who are loved of God and His son, may later be raised to everlasting life at his coming (1 Cor. 15:19-23).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield) — Vol. No. 8, 9
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts) — Chapter 42
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis) — Book 6, chapter 8
“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter) — Chapter 11

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did Jesus delay his departure from Bethabara to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus?*
2. *What did Jesus mean when he said “I am the resurrection and the Life”?*
3. *In the raising of Lazarus, what do we learn about:—*
 - a) *the state of the dead?*
 - b) *the day of resurrection?*
4. *From the story of the raising of Lazarus, what do we learn of the characters of Mary and Martha?*

ESSAY QUESTION:

1. *Briefly tell the story of the raising of Lazarus, outlining the major lessons in this incident.*



19. "BEHOLD YOUR KING"

"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"

The news had spread that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Many had heard of the raising of Lazarus, and rumours of the decision of the Sanhedrin which followed. With that sentence of death pronounced upon him, the Lord would have to pass through crowds of curious and expectant people. It was evident to all that the coming week was to be a momentous one. Many had great hopes that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to overcome his opposition and establish the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 21:1-22; Luke 19:1-10

ZACCHAEUS AT JERICHO.

Enroute to Jerusalem lay the beautiful town of Jericho, fifteen miles to the north-east and slightly north of the Dead Sea. Although its climate was hot, there grew there lush plants, palms and flowers. The hills of Moab provided a charming background.

One of the town's richest and most influential citizens was anxious to see Jesus as he passed through that area. Zacchaeus was the chief of the tax gatherers of that region. He was a little man and as he pressed forward amongst the throng of people to gain a better viewing position, the common folk expressed their dislike for him by pushing him to the back of the crowd. Frustrated and very anxious, the little man ran ahead as Jesus' group approached. Suddenly he thought to climb a large sycamore tree that lay ahead of the route. Sitting up on one of its limbs, Zacchaeus could see distinctly as the Lord and his disciples approached. With a pounding heart, he watched Jesus stop beneath him, and say: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide in thy house".

After the Lord had spent time with that man, Zacchaeus' attitude to life was changed. His reputation among the people had been of a greedy and unfair tax gatherer. After his meeting with Jesus, he declared "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold". The Lord responded: "This day is salvation come to this house".

The Lord stayed with Zacchaeus all that night. He would enter Jerusalem the following afternoon. As a result of this and because the disciples thought that the time was appropriate for the setting up of the Kingdom (Lk. 19:11), Jesus delivered unto them the Parable of the Nobleman. He represented himself as a nobleman who had to go into a far country (heaven) in order to receive authority, and then to take it up. It clearly taught that a period of time must elapse before Christ returns to reign on the earth from Jerusalem, the very city he was nigh unto at this time. The attitude of his servants during his absence

would determine their fate when he returned. Again the parallel with the disciples of Christ is plain. They will be judged when the Lord returns according to their works (2 Cor. 5:10).

“THY KING COMETH” (Matt. 21:1-16).

At Bethphage, Jesus instructed his disciples to fetch him an ass. He mounted it, and continued his journey in lowly dignity. In so doing, he fulfilled the prophecy of Zech. 9:9. “Behold”, wrote the prophet, “thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass”. News of his coming had gone before him, and crowds had come forth to meet him. The air was rent with shouts of triumph. “Hosanna”, they cried, “blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”. Palm branches and personal robes were laid in his way. And so it was, that as Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was given the welcome of a conqueror. The city dwellers rushed to their doors, climbed on their roofs, and heard the jubilant cry: “This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee”. All the city was moved.

Yet, for those multitudes, there was an anticlimax to this momentous day. Gradually it became evident that Jesus was not going to take advantage of his unprecedented popularity. No miraculous acts were performed to support his claim of Messiahship. As the day wore on, the disappointed crowds became dis-illusioned and drifted away.

The people’s desire was fleshly, not spiritual. In a few short days their enthusiasm was to turn to hatred for they would crucify their king. How fickle is human nature. Coming to the Temple, Jesus “looked around about on all things”—observing the evidence of bartering in the House of God. That night he returned to Bethany with his disciples (Mk. 11:11).

“LET NO FRUIT GROW ON THEE . . .” (Matt. 21:17-22).

After a night of rest at Bethany, Jesus came again to Jerusalem the following day. His route led him past a particularly lush fig tree, rich in foliage. Being hungry, the Lord approached the tree expecting the promise of its leafy appearance to be fulfilled in its bearing of much fruit. Alas, he found the tree was barren of fruit. Struck by the parallel of the tree to the nation of Israel, Jesus declared: “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever”.

As Jesus had hungered for the figs, so God had hungered spiritually for the response of the children of Israel. Having been “judged” by the Lord, the tree quickly withered. The incident typified the tragic withering of Israel, when it finally collapsed under the military might of Rome.

“. . . A DEN OF THIEVES” (Matt. 21:12-15; Luke 19:45-48).

Leaving the fig tree, the Lord made his way into the city to the courts of the Temple.

Commercial activity in the city was at a peak. With the advent of the Passover the traders and dealers could look forward to a profitable period of quick turnover as the crowds increased. When Jesus came to the temple, he found then, as he had before, that some hardened opportunists had established their business in that holy place of worship. Angered, he swept through the Court of the Gentiles evicting the materialistic traders. Overturning their tables, he sent the money changers scurrying. Above the angry curses and frantic activity of the transgressors, his voice rang clearly: "Is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves".

So those who falsely claimed to be children of God were replaced by those who humbly admitted their need for His care. The blind and the lame came meekly to him, seeking his healing power. The little children flocked to him, drawn by his love and sincerity. Echoing the cries of acclamation they had so recently heard, they shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David".

This wonderful turn of events had not gone unnoticed. The Scribes and chief priests having witnessed his wonderful deeds, had no choice but to angrily acknowledge the effect of his action. Stirred up to a state of bewilderment, fear and hatred, they decided to question his authority, in the hope that Jesus would condemn himself.

When Jesus reached the Temple his enemies were ready to take him. "By what authority doest thou these things?" they asked (v. 23). It was a question conceived in hypocrisy, as Jesus' answering question revealed: "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" They were caught. If they said "Of heaven", he would then say, since John testified of him: "Why are you not supporting me, instead of opposing me?" If they said "Of men", they would have to contend with the people, for no one (except them) doubted John's qualifications. So they replied: "We cannot tell", and he said that if they could not tell, he would not answer their question (Matt. 21:23-27). These hypocritical men had been justly and adequately silenced.

Both the fig tree and the temple were luxuriant in their outward appearances. They were pictures of beauty and promise. Beneath their show however, they were barren, and stood condemned. It would not be long before the external splendour of the temple in Jerusalem would be trodden down and destroyed by the savage armies of Rome.

LESSON FOR US:

We cannot help but be impressed by the determination Zacchaeus showed in coming close to Jesus. His past activities were such as to make it difficult for him to come before the Lord. There was doubtless much that Christ could have criticised in his past behaviour and the crowds were determined to deny him access to the Lord.

Undeterred, however, he struggled to come to Jesus. If with all our heart we truly seek him, we shall surely find him — and be found by him. Our desire to be with him must compel us to go to great lengths, and we must “make haste”. The outcome of such a search is guaranteed.

No more descriptive picture of Israel at the time of Christ can be imagined than the fig tree with its abundance of green leaves. But we must not confine the picture to natural Israel. It is a challenge to those who strive to be “Israel after the Spirit” also. The richness of the promises held out to us by God, must be matched by our producing fruit in glad service. They that lay hold on the promises must strive to reflect the glory of the Father in this life, so that they might be partakers of the Divine nature for ever.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapters 3-8

“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 134-136

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 48, 49

“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 150-160

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 10, No. 12; Vol. 11, Nos. 1, 2.

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did Jesus fulfil prophecy when he entered Jerusalem in triumph?*
2. *What did the fig tree and the temple have in common?*
3. *The Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus by asking him “By what authority doest thou these things”. What was Jesus’ answer and how did it affect his questioners?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Why was Zacchaeus a good example of how we should seek Jesus?*
2. *Describe the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.*

20. ANSWERING HIS OPPONENTS

“And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions”.

The third day of Passover week marked the end of Christ’s public work. It was a day full of incident, and at its conclusion Jesus left the temple for the last time. The Jewish leaders were seething with hatred toward Jesus.

They were determined that Jesus must be destroyed and in a way which appeared to be right. They thought up three questions. They were sure that if he attempted to answer them he would be sure to say something that they could use to convict him.

So they came to Jesus with mock sincerity but in reality they were hypocrites (Matt. 22:18) and spies (Lk. 20:20).

Matthew 22:15-46; Mark 12

GIVE UNTO CAESAR . . . GIVE UNTO GOD (Matt. 22:15-22).

Although the Herodians and the Pharisees were at loggerheads with each other, they had in common a deep seated desire to destroy Jesus. The Lord was their greatest threat to power, influence and respect. Accordingly the Herodians sought to trap Jesus by presenting him with a question they themselves could not resolve, and one which they hoped would bring about the Lord’s fall from the Galileans’ favour or his arrest by the Romans for treason. Cunningly, they asked him: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” There was an air of genuineness. They tried flattery: “we know thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the persons of men, but teachest the way of God in truth”. Why did they do this? Because they expected a “No” answer, so that they might accuse him before the governor (Lk. 20:20). If they received a “Yes” answer then the Pharisees would be able to expose him as not being loyal to their country.

“Show me the tribute money” he commanded. “Whose is this image and superscription?” “Caesar’s”, they replied. “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”. In so replying, the Lord not only avoided the cunning trap set for him by his foes, but set out for us our guidelines in deciding our responsibilities. Our obligations to God must be acted upon and only when the claims of the world do not interfere with this service to God, should we also render service to those things of the world.

“YE DO GREATLY ERR . . .” (Matt. 22:23-33).

The next development in the series of public debates in which Jesus was involved that day, came when some Sadducees approached him

with a similar contentious question. This sect only accepted the authority of the first five books of the Scriptures, and did not believe the doctrine of resurrection. Their question, they believed, made the whole belief of resurrection appear ridiculous. A man with six brothers died, they said, and one brother took his widow as his wife as was the custom under the Mosaic law. As one brother after another dies, so a surviving brother married the dead man's widow. Such a progression continued, for no couple had children, until all men had in turn been married to the same woman. In the resurrection, they asked, whose wife should the woman be? "Ye do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, or the power of God", scolded Jesus. "When they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven". The Sadducees were impressed and soundly defeated by the wisdom of the Lord's teaching, and shrank away from the authority of the Master.

"THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD" (Mk. 12:28-34).

Jesus' words were overheard by many who marvelled at his authority and teaching. Amongst these was a Scribe who was very moved by his reasoning. Motivated by a desire to resolve a frequently debated issue, he enquired of the Lord: "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Without hesitation, Jesus asserted, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength".

The profession of love for God was easy to make, but Jesus added a test, whereby the profession could be tried to see if it was genuine: if a man truly loves God he will also love his fellow man: "the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". It was here that the hollowness of their profession to love God could be seen (vv. 38-40). Disregard for the poor and the widows, coupled with self-righteousness, revealed quite plainly that the Pharisee loved neither God nor man but self. Jesus said the two commandments were inseparable. The scribe responded, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth". Recognising a spark of new appreciation and humility in the lawyer, Jesus gave him quick encouragement: "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God".

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION (Mk. 12:35-40).

The confidence of the participants in the temple drama had weakened considerably. There was little confidence left in those whose aim it had been to destroy the Master's teaching. To the subdued Pharisees, Jesus directed a straightforward query: Whose son was Messiah to be? They knew well that he must be in the line of David, and said so. But Jesus exposed their incomplete understanding by responding, "David himself called him Lord, so how is he his son?" How could David refer to Messiah as his ruler and son? The authorities were baffled, and could not answer. Jesus' question highlighted their lack of

appreciation of the critical fact that Messiah was to be the Son of God, as well as the son of David by natural descent. It was a combination of this ignorance, and their sense of self-importance, that compelled the Pharisees to plot the death of Jesus.

“SHE CAST IN ALL THAT SHE HAD” (Mk. 12:41-44).

Jesus showed a keen interest in the ways of men, and as he sat in the Temple, he was interested to observe the many different folk placing their offerings in the treasury boxes. Of all those classes of people he observed at that time, he singled out a poor, mourning widow as worthy of comment. To many she would have passed unnoticed. She was alone, and it was very apparent from her appearance that she was desperately poor. Her gift of two mites was the smallest offering legally acceptable. The Lord, however, could see a heart rich in faith and commented: “This poor widow hath cast more in than all they that have cast into the treasury, for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living”.

Her example, in a certain sense, bears upon the three incidents of the day.

1. She was too poor to be troubled by taxation. She paid what she owed and what was left over was given to God. Her wants did not matter.
2. She was a widow — of the class whose houses were devoured by the rich (Matt. 23:14). She depended upon God and waited patiently for a better day.
3. Her whole life — “all her living” — was devoted to God, as the commandment required. Jesus commended her but rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees.

BLIND GUIDES.

The significance of this day so full of incident lay primarily in the exposure of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus denounced their sin and hypocrisy in eight specific accusations and woes, recorded in Matthew 23. Not only did they shut themselves from the kingdom of God, he said, but, tragically, also those whom they influenced. They were blind guides of the people. It would not be long before they climaxed their evil deeds by putting to death the Son of God. He taught them clearly that judgment would come upon that generation.

LESSON FOR US:

When Jesus commended the response of the Scribe who questioned him on the greatest commandment, he taught us too, that it is our understanding of God, and our love for Him that is important. Mere observance of religious traditions is meaningless, unless founded on truth. From our understanding and love of God will

stem love and care for our fellow man, and in that frame of mind, we can set our feet firmly on the way to the Kingdom.

The unrepentant attitude of the Pharisees to the teaching of Christ should be a lesson to us all. It was the pride of these men that prevented them from accepting the wisdom of the Lord. Although they inwardly realised they were at fault in their observance of the Law, they were unable to give up their hold on worldly satisfaction. The teaching of the Master still requires us to submit humbly to his ways, and this sometimes requires us to forsake other ambitions. May we all show wisdom in seeking after the glory of the kingdom that is set before us, and renounce the temporary attractions of this world.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 302-317

“Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 11, Pages 71-93

“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 161-169

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 423-432

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *From the answer of Jesus to the question “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” make an application to our circumstances today.*
2. *a) Which is the greatest commandment of all and;
b) Show how the poor widow was an outstanding example of a person living up to this commandment.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *After Jesus had entered Jerusalem, before his crucifixion the Jewish authorities tried to trap him with questions. What were the two problems with which the Herodians and Sadducees tried to trap Jesus?*
2. *What lessons do we gain from the widow giving her last two mites into the treasury?*

21. THE OLIVET PROPHECY AND TODAY

“When shall these things be: and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

The disciples had listened to the terrible condemnation which Jesus heaped upon the disobedient leaders of the Jews (Matt. 23). They had heard too his sorrowful conclusion, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate” (v. 38). With sorrow the disciples realised that some great calamity was near, for Jesus had said: “this generation” would see it (v. 36).

As they were leaving the temple, the disciples drew his attention to the beauty and grandeur of the temple’s architecture. But again he emphasised the approaching desolation by saying: “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). The disciples were naturally worried about this impending destruction, so when the group reached the Mount of Olives they enquired further: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

The answer Jesus gave is termed the Olivet Prophecy. He described the national destruction of A.D. 70 and looked beyond to those events which will usher in the Kingdom of God, without reference to the long period of time between those two epochs. The prophecy may therefore be divided thus:—

Matthew 24:1-28: Signs of events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Matthew 24:29-35: Events prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

We live in the very shadow of the coming of the “Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. Let us be prepared for that day which shall come as surely as that terrible desolation came upon Jerusalem.

Matthew 24

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS (Matt. 24:1-14).

In his description of events leading up to the overthrow of Jerusalem, Jesus firstly warned his disciples that false Christs would arise. Some self-styled Messiahs did try to gather support for their schemes of “deliverance” for Israel from the Romans (e.g., Acts 5:36, 37; 21:38).

As a result of some of these imposters opposing the power of Rome, Jesus said that there would be many rumours of wars (v. 6). He cautioned his followers against getting caught up in these patriotic revolts. Similar turmoil broke out outside Israel too. Nations and kingdoms warred, usually against Rome (v. 7). Jesus warned of famines, pestilences and earthquakes to add to the distress of the

times. One such dearth was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28), and an earthquake struck as Jesus died (Matt. 26:51). Historians recorded many such shattering events (see Josephus — Wars 6:5:3).

Jesus went on to warn his disciples of their own danger. Persecutions would be unleashed upon them, he said. Some of these are graphically described in the Acts of the Apostles. Not only would these trials be inflicted upon them by the Jewish authorities, but the disciples would be “hated of all nations” because of their witness for Christ (v. 9). Their determination to preach Christ would also be tested by the enmity of friends and families (v. 10). Concerning the same general time, the Lord warned that false prophets would gain a foothold in the ecclesias causing deception and departure from the truth. Jesus encouraged his disciples in the face of such unrest “to endure unto the end”, for in so doing they would be saved. A positive side to the outbreak of persecution would be that many disciples would scatter, taking with them the gospel message “for a witness unto all nations”. So it was that during the first century, preaching extended throughout the then known world. It was not until these things had been accomplished, said Jesus, that the end of Jerusalem would come.

THE ROMAN INVASION (Matt. 24:15-28).

Jesus continued to outline the destruction of Jerusalem. He described the invasion by the Roman armies as the coming of the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel in Dan. 9:27. The city, he said, would be “compassed with armies” (Lk. 21:20), and this would be the sign for believers to flee. After the Romans encircled Jerusalem, a strange thing happened. The Romans unexpectedly withdrew their forces from the city. Remembering the Lord’s words, faithful disciples fled to the mountains, not delaying to gather household goods. Prior to the Roman withdrawal, escape had appeared impossible to the besieged occupants of the city. But many at that time fled to such places as Pella, thus saving their lives. At the time of his prophecy, Jesus encouraged them to pray that their flight should not be on a Sabbath, for they would then risk the opposition of Jewish Zealots forbidding activity on that day. Winter, with its cold and discomfort could also be a hindrance, he said.

The desolation, however, finally became a dreadful reality. “The Ways of Providence” (Roberts Roberts), Chapters 24 to 26, provides an absorbing summary of the shocking, nightmarish destruction. It was a time of great tribulation, the greatest catastrophe since the beginning of the Jewish age. The word for “world” in verse 21, is “kosmos” meaning “an order of things, or system”. Jesus predicted that the Mosaic national and religious system, which commenced at Mt. Sinai, would, in A.D. 70 be destroyed. But we should note that such destruction will never happen again. For though the Jewish people have been persecuted and scattered, they will eventually be

regathered and restored to their land in peace.

From verses 22 to 28, we read that the terrible destruction of Jewry was controlled by God, and that Jesus taught that “the elect”, His chosen people, would not be totally destroyed in the desolation — “the days shall be shortened” for their sakes, he said. As the time approached, many false rumours would arise, but they were to remain firm in the knowledge that the “coming of the Son of man” would lighten the face of the earth like the flashes of lightning (v. 27). The coming of “the Son of man” here has an application to the Roman army, for it was this army that God used to bring His vengeance upon Jerusalem. The legions were therefore styled “His armies” (Matt. 22:7).

In a graphic word picture, Jesus likened the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans to the dead body of Israel being torn by vultures (eagles). It was a horrible portrayal, but nonetheless an accurate prophecy of the work of the Romans as “birds of prey”. Moses too, had earlier prophesied of a ruthless plundering of God’s land by a nation, identifiable as Rome (Deut. 28:49-57).

EVENTS LEADING UP THE SECOND EVENT OF CHRIST (Matt. 24:29-35); Luke 21:23-33).

Before we read on in Matt. 24, we need to refer to Luke 21, where are added these words, “for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (v. 23, 24). There are then included in Luke’s gospel the same signs as recorded in Matthew and Mark, speaking of the second advent of Messiah. It can be seen then, that verses 29 and 30 of the Matthew account have reference to the second coming of the Lord. Only Luke briefly refers to the long period of down-treading by Gentiles between A.D. 70 and the time of the Son of man coming “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”.

So these verses comprise a description of our own times, and how true a picture it is. The meaning of the signs of the sun, moon and stars is understood when we compare these heavenly bodies which govern the orbit and movements of the earth, with the political and religious authorities who govern the peoples of the earth. This figurative language is established in the prophets (cp. Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:10, 11, 30, 31; 3:15; Isa. 1:2, 10).

What does this mean to us? It means that Jesus accurately foretold the political unrest and chaos of our times. We see a spirit of madness at all levels of political and religious power. The only solution to this “distress of nations with perplexity” (Lk. 21:25), will be found through God’s judgment, when He gathers all nations to “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14, 15), and the blessings that will follow. We can take encouragement therefore from the fact

that though the world fears, we can have faith in the return of Christ. Luke recorded: "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (v. 28). After the coming of Christ, the angels will be sent to gather the "elect from the four winds". Since Christ and his saints will have already intervened in world affairs, this later work of gathering the elect obviously speaks of a gathering other than of the saints. "Elect", means chosen, and indicated here is the national "resurrection" of God's chosen people, Israel; called back to their land from the four corners of the earth. Israel's return today is but a return in part, and scarcely to be compared with that future regathering, described as the "second exodus" to be led by such people as Elijah (see Mal. 4:5, 6; Ezek. 37; 20:33-38; Jer. 16:14-17).

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE.

Jesus described Israel's revival as a sign (v. 32-35). Israel had been likened to a fig tree in other places in Scripture (e.g., Joel 1:6, 7; Matt. 21:19-21). The budding forth of the fig tree is seen in the establishment of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948, and the ending of Gentile oppression of Jerusalem in the "Six Day War" of June 1967. These are signs of life springing forth from the "dead trunk" of Israel. Although sorely pressed by hostile neighbours the little nation will survive to become the basis of God's Kingdom on earth. Israel in their land today is the greatest witness we have ever seen to the near return of the "Son of man".

Because the prophecy does not take into consideration the lapse of time between the first and twentieth centuries, it is of particular interest to those two generations, i.e., the one prior to the overthrow of Jewry and the one prior to the overthrow of the Gentiles. We form a part of the latter. A generation is reckoned to be forty years, and almost that amount of time lapsed from the giving of this prophecy in A.D. 33 to its first fulfilment in A.D. 70. We could not therefore, have very long to wait to see the fulfilment of the second stage of this remarkable prophecy which began in 1948.

LESSON FOR US:

As we read the signs heralding these great events of the first and twentieth centuries and understand how accurately Jesus foretold the future, we cannot help but be gripped by a realisation of how near we are to the time when "all these things shall be fulfilled". With that realisation comes the recognition that the future events will just as surely come to pass as did the former happenings. Knowing then that our Lord's return is near, let us take heed to the signs of the times and be in a state of readiness for him. Jesus warned "know ye that it is near, even at the door".

After warning us against being sidetracked by the temptations of the world, Jesus added the words recorded in Luke 21:34-36,

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man”.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Ways of Providence” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 24 to 26

“Wars of the Jews” (Josephus)— Book VI, Chapter V (3)

“Logos” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 17, No. 12 to Vol. 18, No. 10

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *From the Olivet Prophecy describe the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Roman armies.*
2. *Show from the parable of the fig tree what is the greatest sign of our times.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Explain how the Olivet Prophecy applied to the Jewish people in A.D. 70.*
2. *How does the Olivet Prophecy describe our times?*

22. THE JUDGMENT PARABLES

“Watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh”

Turning from a discussion upon the signs of the times, Jesus concentrated his attention upon the needs of his disciples. He sought to strengthen them in their preparation for his second advent, despite the perils of the days prior to that event. The exhortation obviously applies to us; as we are in the last days and as the difficulties of this age increase, we need to be found ready for the sudden appearing of the judge of all the earth.

Matthew 25

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (Matt. 25:1-13).

The key to our understanding of the parables in this chapter is the question from chapter 24, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant?” (v. 45). The parable of the ten virgins emphasises the wisdom of God’s servants, whilst the parable of the talents teaches the lesson of their faithfulness.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins . . .”. We ask the question, when? The answer again comes from chapter 24 where we read, “The Lord of that servant shall come in a day . . .” (v. 50). In this parable the bridegroom is about to come, and ten virgins go forth to meet him. They all had lamps, but half of the group did not have sufficient supplies of oil to last a long time. The ten settled down to wait and after a while it became apparent that the Lord’s coming was going to be later than expected. They all fell asleep: Suddenly they were awakened by his coming. Five picked up their lamps and went forth to meet him but the others had to go and get fresh supplies since their oil had all been used up. By the time they had returned the “wise” had already been welcomed by the bridegroom. The “foolish” pleaded to be admitted to the marriage but were rejected.

Let us now glean some lessons from this parable.

The ten virgins represent all those who have come out from among the people of the world to live lives of purity and devotion to their Lord. They “wait for the Son of God from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:10). In the parable they are divided into two groups with all of them having lamps. Half of them have sufficient reserves of oil to be able to trim their lamps and step forward to accompany the bridegroom. The others find their oil supply exhausted. What is this oil? It represents the Word of God, understood and loved. They all made a start in their preparation for the bridegroom’s coming, but the “foolish” group represent those disciples whose interest wanes and because of their

carelessness they become spiritually deficient. At Christ's coming these disciples will feel unprepared and will desperately try to improve their position. But it will be too late. Now is the day of opportunity (see Isa. 55:1, 3).

The "wise" represent those who absorb the oil of the Word daily. It burns brightly in their hearts, illuminating their lives and attracting others to the Truth (see Phil. 3:15, 16; Matt. 5:14-16). Paul says "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly" (Col. 3:16). This class of Christ's disciples do not allow the oil to fail and the light to go out. By prayer and reading they are in constant readiness for the call and have sufficient spiritual reserves to go forth to meet him and be accepted of him.

They all slept. This speaks of the long wait by Christ's disciples during which time, death overtook them and they "sleep" in the grave awaiting the resurrection. At "midnight" they are awakened. Those who were ready went in with him to the marriage. The others missed out, despite their pleadings (cp. Matt. 7:21-23).

What a dramatic lesson for us. We must be ready for Christ's coming, not just by watching (although this is important too) but by being in an active state of readiness each day. Death closes the times of opportunity to prepare ourselves. We do not know how long we have before us. Let the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God" shine in our hearts and in doing deeds of Truth let us come "to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (2 Cor. 4:6; Jn. 3:20, 21). We know not the day nor the hour of his coming. But we do have today in which to prepare ourselves.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Matt. 25:14-30).

As indicated before, this parable emphasises the faithfulness of God's servants, highlighting those who are the "good and faithful servants".

After giving his servants several "talents", a certain man travelled into a far country. The talents were distributed in proportion to the capabilities of the servants. One had five, another two, and a third, one talent. The first two servants used their talents well, succeeding in doubling their worth, for which they were warmly commended by their Lord at his return. The last servant however, hid his talent with the poor excuse that he thought the lord was harsh and therefore he would not even try to use it. If this fearful servant did think of his master as he said, then he should have been much more conscious of the need to put his talent to good use. He was wrong both in his attitude and in his neglect. He had the ability and could have shared in his master's joy but showed himself to be unfit for further service.

What lessons would Jesus have us learn from this parable?

The man travelling into a far country certainly represents Jesus himself who repeatedly told his disciples of his death and resurrection. After his ascension, the disciples would appreciate that they had been

left with certain responsibilities in his absence. In the parable, the talents are likened to money which, when put to good use, can gain in value. In the first century various Spirit gifts were given for the establishment and growth of the new ecclesias (1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-13). Today, we are given the word of the gospel for us to use profitably, e.g., in developing our own character towards the perfect example of Christ, in sowing the gospel seed, in building each other up in the Truth. These are faithful works. Our individual capabilities differ: some have more ability than others: some, five talents; some, two; some, one. It is not the number of talents that is the rule of judgment, but the use of them. Increase by faithful use—that is the rule of acceptance.

The first two servants were blessed because of their industrious use of the “talents”. So too, at the Judgment seat of Christ, he will warmly welcome his faithful servants and grant them various positions in the administration of the Kingdom, as the parable of the pounds indicates (see Lk. 19:12-27). Here in the parable of the talents they are commended as having “been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things”. As Paul says, “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Cor. 3:8). Jesus also spoke of the fruitfulness of the gospel as being productive “some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some an hundredfold”. Therefore the future joy of immortal co-rulership with Christ and other saints is dependent on present, energetic use of our capabilities in Christ’s service.

To neglect our opportunities is to hide our talent. Even if we have but one talent, that can gain increase, and we too can share the joy of our lord. But to be fearful and faint-hearted is to have a wrong view of God and to underestimate our ability to perform useful service. This is a tragic mistake. To talk ourselves out of our responsibilities, to complain, to envy, is to show a lack of trust. It was not so much success that was commended but faithfulness. God knows our capabilities. He knows our potential. Let us serve Him to the limit of our ability. To do otherwise is to risk being one of those cast out with a grief stricken heart at seeing the joy, which could have been his, lost for evermore.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS (Matt. 25:31-46).

The judgment is presented as a parable with the righteous likened to sheep and the rejected as goats. The dramatic return of Christ in company with the angels will be with the objective of judgment. He comes first to individually judge his brethren, (his disciples gathered by the angels out of all nations). This is a judgment of his household (cp. 1 Pet. 4:17-19). Disciples are assessed on their service to his brethren; for in doing service, OR lack of it, to his brethren, they rendered it unto him.

We should note in passing that these acts of kindness are not the only things which are taken into consideration by Christ in his judgment. In parables a certain topic is considered. So too, here, we have only

unselfish acts of mercy highlighted. Previously we found “wisdom” and “faithfulness” are qualities sought after by the Lord. Doctrinal purity and faithful works are elsewhere shown by Christ and the apostles to be matters for judgment.

Sheep and goats are easily distinguished by the shepherd. The sheep, with their docile qualities and preference for contact with a flock, are ideal figures for the righteous class. The goats on the other hand tend to roam independently and show disobedient, mischievous characteristics. These and other characteristics and habits help us identify the “sheep” and the “goat” class at the judgment.

The “sheep” class show surprise when told that they had ministered help to Jesus personally. But as he explains, “in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (v.40). It is a thrilling point to consider that Jesus does so closely identify himself with his brethren, that an act of kindness done unto them is regarded as being done unto him. By contrast Saul of Tarsus was found guilty of persecuting not the ecclesias, but Jesus himself (Acts 9:5). There is great encouragement in the phrase, “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11). Paul says, “As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

The rejected are thrust from his left hand into “everlasting fire”, a symbol of eternal death. They had not lived a life of “faith in action”. They are rejected for not doing acts of mercy to him. They repudiate his charge on the basis that they never saw him in need and so lacked the opportunity to do what he is now demanding. But his answer confounds them: he reveals again that acts of mercy shown to the least of his brethren are counted as acts of mercy to himself. It was in every day life, where opportunity abounded, that they had failed.

Thus judgment depends on what we do here and now: we will not change into “sheep” or “goats” in the day of judgment: we are becoming one or the other as we live our lives now.

Those who are found worthy, however, go forward to enter the joys of life eternal. These are said by Daniel to be the wise who having awakened from the grave, go forth to everlasting life “to shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:2, 3).

LESSON FOR US:

To be wise virgins is to be in a state of readiness for Christ’s coming and to be commended by him necessitates our industrious use of our talents in his service. Such service, though rendered to his brethren, will be regarded as a ministration to Christ. To be found thus occupied will be to experience the wonderful thrill of hearing those words of welcome at the judgment seat of Christ: “come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Parables of the Messiah” (J. Carter) — Chapter 56-58

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 32, 33, 50

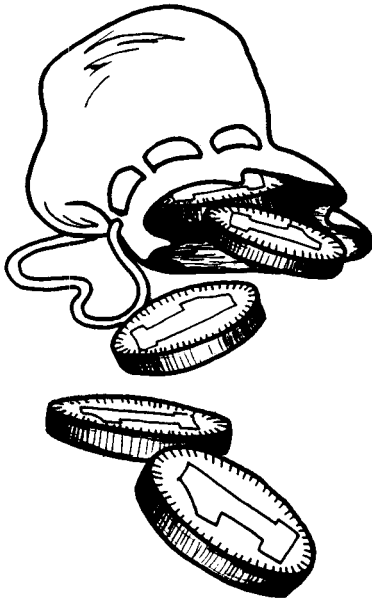
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapters 4, 8

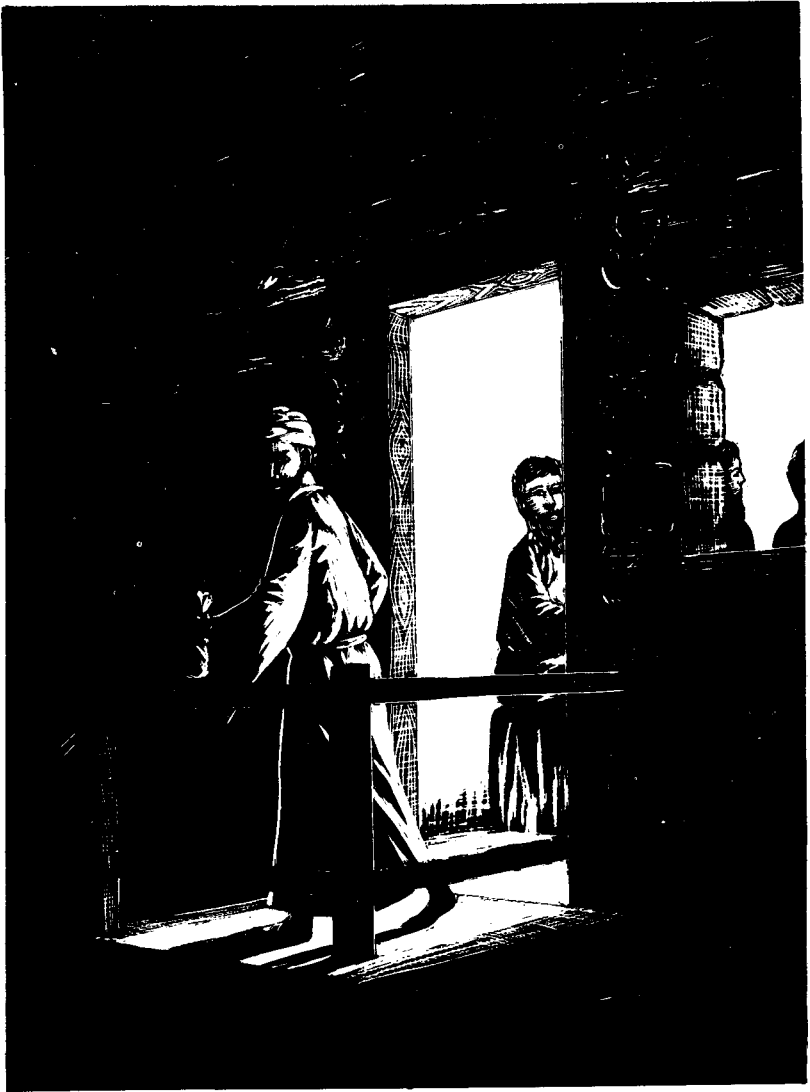
PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe how the 5 wise virgins prepared themselves for the coming of the Bridegroom.*
2. *From the parable of the talents show what the talents are and how we should use them today.*
3. *Explain why the “sheep” class are approved at the judgment seat of Christ.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the characteristics of the “wise and foolish virgins”.*
2. *Contrast the attitude of the servant with five talents to that of the servant with one talent.*





23. LAST SUPPER AND GETHSEMANE

“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

The life of the Lord was now measured in hours. The storm of hatred was about to break loose upon him, but, before the horror of that darkness engulfed him, Jesus sought refuge and refreshment with his beloved companions—with the exception of one, the betrayer, who was to trigger off the violence of the rulers upon his Master. Despite this approaching betrayal, Jesus continued to teach his disciples at the Passover supper and the memorial feast, with the beautiful illustration of service demonstrated in the washing of the disciples feet. Then comes the sadness of Gethsemane and the arrest by the murderous crowd. The hour was at hand, the final instructions by Jesus and the completion of the murderous plot by his enemies. The crisis was imminent.

Matthew 26:1-56

PREPARATION FOR MURDER.

Again Jesus tried to impress upon the minds of his disciples that his crucifixion lay before him; in fact, now it was but two days away. Others were also conscious of the passing days, but with murder on their minds. The Jewish authorities debated the moment when they might best be able to seize Jesus, but, in the face of the approaching Passover and the consequent multitudes milling around Jerusalem, they put aside their final plans. They desperately wanted to rid themselves of the “Galilean” who had repeatedly exposed their hypocrisy.

Their problem was solved by the visit of Judas Iscariot. He had wanted Jesus to be made King for his own material advantage. He now knew that Jesus had no such present intentions. He felt cheated. Pushing into the back of his mind the nagging realisation of who Jesus really was, he filled his heart with hate and contempt. Thus we see him promising to help the opponents of Jesus in securing his arrest. Evil was about to triumph, if but for a moment. The traitor’s reward was thirty pieces of silver.

There had been one incident filled with love and tenderness that had been the last straw for Judas. It was the anointing by Mary.

THE ANOINTING (Matt. 26:6-13).

Jesus rested in the house of Simon, “the leper”. He may well have been one of those unfortunate victims of the dread disease, whom Jesus had cured from a state of living death.

Knowing in her heart that Jesus’ death was close, Mary was filled with a love mixed with sorrow. The opportunities to sit at her Master’s feet were coming to an end. Soon they would be but a memory. No

doubt with eyes brimming with tears, Mary approached the meal table and broke a box of spikenard, pouring the fragrant perfume over the head and feet of Jesus. Bowing, she silently wiped his feet with her hair. She had come to bid her beloved Master farewell.

That expression of pure and sympathetic love was not appreciated by all of the company. Led by the covetous Judas, some of the disciples protested at the apparent waste of valuable perfume. Judas was a thief and one who disguised his greed by questioning why the worth of the perfume could not have been given to the poor.

On the one hand we see loving devotion, on the other deceit and covetousness. But Jesus understood. Seeking to commend her ministrations to him who was “poor” in the world’s estimation, he praised her good work and rebuked the selfishness of her critics. She had done what she could as an act of pure love. She was attending to his burial even before the event. Jesus was deeply moved by Mary’s unstinting devotion.

PREPARING THE GUEST CHAMBER (Matt. 26:17-20).

With hostilities mounting outside and treachery within the heart of Judas, Jesus gave detailed instructions as to the passover meal. His instructions were guarded in secrecy. He did not want these final, precious moments to be disturbed by the intrusion of his opponents. So Peter and John were sent looking for a man bearing a pitcher of water. He would lead them to the upper room where they were to prepare the passover feast; bread, and wine and bitter herbs.

In the evening they gathered together. “His hour was come” and now he stepped forward to administer his last act of service, which in itself was a lesson in humility and the Father’s love. He washed their feet.

THE WASHING OF THE DISCIPLES’ FEET (Jn. 13:4-11).

Taking a towel and a bowl of water he washed his companions’ feet. He was their Master and Lord, yet here he was performing the role of a lowly servant. One by one they submitted amazed and baffled by his action. He came to Judas and did likewise, knowing that those feet were about to run on an errand of death. Only Peter protested out loud. Quietly Jesus showed him the need for the cleansing, if he was to be identified with him. Impulsively Peter asked for his whole being to be washed. Jesus showed that those who have been washed (in Baptism) are clean and need only a regular washing of their feet (forgiveness of their sins along the way) to remain clean. We do not literally wash each other’s feet, but we can help cleanse the staining effect of coming into contact with worldly influences — for ourselves and for others. We must humbly serve each other in love even as Jesus loved his disciples (see Phil. 2:3, 4).

But Jesus said, “ye are not all clean.” He went on to say that, “he

that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me” and it was at this moment that he keenly felt the tragedy of betrayal. Depressed at the thought, he said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me”.

Immediately they looked at each other in shocked unbelief. Turning from an examination of others they looked inwardly and anxiously asked: “Lord, is it I?” His answer only served to emphasise the enormity of the betrayer’s crime: “Woe unto that man”, he said, “good for that man if he had not been born”. Judas’ inquiry was, “Master (not Lord), is it I?” Jesus said quietly, “Thou hast said”. His answer appears to have been lost upon the others as they examined themselves to see if their own hearts were guilty of disloyalty. The traitor had been identified. His terrible deed of betrayal now only awaited the passing of a few hours.

THE BREAD AND THE WINE (Luke 22:14-20).

“With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” were the words of deep-seated love to his disciples. They sensed the sacredness of this meal. He solemnly broke bread, offered prayer and gave a portion to each, with the words “take, eat, this is my body. Do this in remembrance of me”. Thoughtfully, they tried to understand the significance of his instructions.

He took a cup of wine, gave thanks, passed it to them, saying: “Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins”. Scarcely comprehending they heard him speak of the day when he would “drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:28-29).

We are called through baptism to that memorial feast. We are to think seriously about the emblems of the bread and the wine; those symbols of a life given in dedication to secure redemption — for himself and for us. We are to meditate upon sin conquered in the life and death of Jesus in whose crucifixion we see demonstrated the victory of the woman’s seed over the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

PETER’S OATH (Matt. 26:34-35).

Judas having departed, Jesus speaks to his disciples with strong affection as his “little children”. He warns them that he will soon go, and when he leaves them, they cannot follow. At this Peter was upset and protested that he would follow even if it meant the laying down of his own life. Knowing the time of testing that lay ahead of Peter, Jesus said: “Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice”.

How easy it is for us to profess that we will serve Christ without wavering and yet when a moment of testing comes, we fail to live up to our word. To realise this, is to feel a sense of sympathy and understanding with Peter. However, we can be encouraged to confess Christ,



without wavering, when we see the transformation in Peter when he saw the resurrected Christ.

GETHSEMANE (Jn. 18).

Encouraging them to love one another “as I have loved you” and warning them of the need to look after themselves when he would be taken from them, Jesus now noticed a sense of despair and fear in the hearts of his companions. With love and compassion he said: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (Jn. 14:1) and so commences a series of loving instructions through to John, chapter 18.

“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch”, were his words as Jesus led his little band of disciples to the olive trees of Gethsemane and with three of his disciples watching, he threw himself down in terrible grief and sorrow of heart: “Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”. Jesus was not grief stricken so much at the prospect of physical torture, agonizing as it would be, but at the reproach and shame that would be heaped upon him by his tormentors. The Psalms give us an insight into his state of mental anguish, e.g., Psa. 22, 69:7-20. He felt too, the crushing burden of the sin of the world. He knew he would be alone, a sacrifice for sin, the iniquity of us all laid upon him. He was as a lamb led to the slaughter, a sacrificial death from which every nerve in his body and mind naturally shrank.

His reaction to the thought of the terrible trials that lay before him, was to pray: “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done”. His “strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7-9) revealed his mental anguish. His sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Three times he returned to his disciples seeking their watchfulness only to find them exhausted. It was the hour of his greatest grief and desolation.

Yet out of it he arose strengthened by prayer and determined to do his Father’s will. He now calmly faced the murderous throng who rushed upon him. Judas stepped forward and brazenly kissed Jesus. With remarkable calmness Jesus addressed him: “Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” Then addressing the unruly mob he revealed who he was. Awed by his calm, dignified manner they fell back amazed. Though he was master of this situation he allowed them to seize him and drag him away. Peter’s anger flashed and in a wild blow he cut off the ear of a servant. Jesus quickly freed himself and immediately healed the servant, warning Peter that they who use the sword will perish. He had come to save and in fact, twelve legions of angels could have been used to deliver him, but he was now ready to suffer “that the scriptures might be fulfilled”.

Seeing their Lord dragged away, the panic-stricken disciples fled.

LESSON FOR US:

We marvel at the love shown by the Lord toward his companions, even to his betrayer. In his last few hours he prepared them for humble service by his example when washing their feet and establishing the memorial feast so that they would remember his sacrifice in the difficult days and years ahead.

We should stand back in awe and humble gratitude for his supreme love in giving his life for us. We should therefore feel a need for dedicating our lives to him, in baptism, and in following his example by constant reading and meditation upon the word and in our unstinting service to others. This is the manner in which we should strive to remember the Lord, until his return.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 51, 52, 56
- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, chapters 9, 10, 11
- “The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 144-149
- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 11, pages 158-187
- “Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 180-190

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did Mary anoint the feet of Jesus?*
2. *What lesson was Jesus trying to teach when he washed the disciples’ feet?*
3. *Describe the breaking of bread and drinking of wine in the upper room and show their significance to us today.*
4. *Describe the decision that Jesus faced when alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Contrast the attitudes and actions of Mary and Judas.*
2. *What is the significance of the memorial bread and wine?*
3. *What was the trial that Jesus overcame in Gethsemane?*

24. TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

“Truly this was the Son of God”

Jesus was betrayed by his own disciple, Judas Iscariot, taken captive and led away. Throughout the night he was questioned, mocked and scourged, first by the Jews and then by Gentiles. Finally on the day before Passover he was led away and crucified. Despite the hatred of men he opened the way to salvation for all who will follow him.

Matthew 26:57-75; 27:1-61; John 18:28-40; 19

BEFORE ANNAS (Jn. 18:13-24).

The soldiers who had arrested Jesus in the garden now brought him back to Jerusalem. We can imagine them hurrying their quiet prisoner through the dark streets, obeying the orders of the priests and rulers who wanted to carry out their dreadful business before the rest of the city knew what was happening, and before the Passover preparations got under way. It was “their hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk. 22:53).

Jesus was first brought to the High Priest’s palace and questioned by Annas, the father-in-law to Caiaphas. Annas had been High Priest and was still a very rich and important man, being acknowledged as the leader of the Sanhedrin (the 70 rulers of Israel). Doubtless Annas was keen to meet this man of whom he had heard so much. He cross-examined Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus replied that he had spoken openly in the temple and that he should consult those who heard him. Jesus was appealing to the law, which required that witnesses should testify, but for this answer he was smitten by an officer. That was the first of many blows he was to feel that day. That noble figure was now the victim of cruel and savage treatment at the hands of ruthless men.

BEFORE CAIAPHAS (Matt. 26:57-68).

Without a charge laid, Annas sent Jesus back through the courtyard to another part of the luxurious palace, where Caiaphas had quickly assembled many of the chief priests, scribes and elders, and the Sanhedrin (“council”), so that the trial could be quickly completed. This was unlawful because a charge had to be laid by at least two witnesses (Deut. 17:6-7; 19:15) between sunrise and sunset.

Many false witnesses were sought, for the Jews had to find a case against Jesus serious enough to warrant the death sentence in the eyes of the Roman Governor, since they did not have the power to carry it out. However no two witnesses agreed, including the two who accused him of rebellion by misquoting his earlier words: “This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days”



(see Jn. 2:19). To all this Jesus answered nothing, causing frustration to those evil men. What could be done? The night was almost gone and no charge had been made.

Jesus should therefore have been released, but these men were desperate. "I adjure thee by the living God" said Caiaphas, "That thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God". In the face of this oath Jesus could no longer be silent. "Thou hast said" he said, "nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". Though they might destroy him, he knew the glory which was beyond the suffering. Caiaphas, with all those who reject Christ, will be there in that day, for "He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him" (Rev. 1:7).

But for the moment Caiaphas thought he had the victory, and pretending to be horrified, he tore his clothes. To him it was blasphemy to claim to be the Son of God (cp. Jn. 10:36), and he appealed to the assembly who declared Jesus to be "guilty of death".

They had to wait for the morning to make the decision legal at a formal assembly of the Council. Through the rest of that sleepless night the soldiers spat at Jesus, hit him with their hands, and even blindfolded him and then called on him to use his power to prophesy who was hitting him. Can we imagine the suffering the Son of God endured? Throughout it all he never lifted his voice nor answered back, but "committed his cause to him who judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

PETER DENIES HIS LORD (Matt. 26:69-75).

Peter had impetuously promised his Master, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" and Jesus had answered, "the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice". As Jesus was being questioned, Peter had followed into the Palace courtyard and warmed himself by a fire with the soldiers and servants. Many looked at him suspiciously. To all their questions Peter answered: "I know not the man". The third time he began to curse and swear that he knew nothing of Jesus and at that moment there was the noise of a cock crowing. Jesus turned and looked steadily on Peter. Suddenly, realising what he had done, Peter rushed out into the night to shed many bitter tears of sorrow.

JUDAS COMMITS SUICIDE (Matt 27:3-10).

Judas also saw the dreadful deeds done to Jesus and in a fit of shame and guilt he rushed back to the Temple to give the "blood money" back to the priests. Contemptuously they refused the money. Throwing the thirty pieces of silver on the temple floor Judas dashed out and hung himself. The priests later used his reward for the betrayal to buy the field where Judas came to his sad and useless end. The pathetic figure of Judas seeking to escape his guilt by taking his own life, shows us the dark picture of one who lost eternal life by turning his back on his master.

BEFORE PILATE (Matt. 27:1-2; Lk. 23:1-7).

At last it was morning. The council having formally taken counsel to put Jesus to death, bound him and led him to Pilate. Jesus was taken by the soldiers while the leaders waited outside—they thought that they would have been defiled and unable to eat the Passover if they had entered a Gentile building. They did not realise that in God's eyes their hearts and minds were shockingly defiled because they were killing an innocent man, and more so because he was the Son of God.

Pilate, knowing that they had delivered him for envy (Matt. 27:18), required a proper trial—"What accusation bring ye against this man?" The Jews answered that they would not have brought him if he was innocent, to which Pilate replied that they should judge him after their law. But the Jews did not want that—they wanted him put to death. So they convicted him of rebellion and treason. But Jesus showed that his Kingdom was not at this time a threat to the Roman Empire, because his servants would not fight. His Kingdom was not of this world, or order of things. "Art thou a king then?" asked Pilate. To this Jesus gave a very significant answer: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world" (Jn. 18:36, 37). Impressed by this answer Pilate told the people that Jesus was not guilty of their charges.

On hearing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate sent him to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem for Passover. Though the Jews accused Jesus of many things, he did not answer and Herod, finding no fault, resorted to mocking him and sent him back to Pilate.

The Governor was now worried, for he found that his prisoner was not guilty of death and he was further disturbed when his wife sent him a message, saying that she had had a dream about Jesus and that Pilate should have nothing to do with him. Pilate put on him a purple robe and a crown of thorns and after inflicting the shocking pain of scourging led him out to the people, hoping that they would consider that sufficient punishment. There was a custom that at Passover one criminal should be released, but the people, spurred on by the rulers, cried out to release Barabbas, a robber, and to crucify Jesus. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend", they cried.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

Eventually Pilate yielded to their demands in order to save his own position. They led Jesus "as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7) to a place outside of the city called Calvary or Golgotha ("The Place of the Skull"). He struggled to carry his cross, helped by a man named Simon, and there they nailed him to it, with two criminals one on either side of him. Above the cross Pilate put a sign in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews".

And so the Son of God was crucified in fulfilment of many passages of scripture, such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, in accordance with “God’s determinate counsel and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23).

Some of his disciples and friends stood by the cross mourning, shocked and grief-stricken at the sufferings of their beloved Lord. But many others came mocking at him: “If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross . . . He trusted in God; let him deliver him now” (quoted from Psa. 22:8). In the hour of extreme physical agony and mental anguish, Jesus still had no hatred—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”. “When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (see 1 Pet. 2:21-25). What an example for us.

From the 6th to the 9th hour (mid-afternoon) an ominous darkness covered the land, and about the 9th hour Jesus cried out: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (quoted from Psa. 22:1). He was alone, bowed beneath the burden of bearing the sins of the world. The reproach of his adversaries was breaking his heart. And yet he determined, despite the pain and sorrow, to fulfil his Father’s will. He was given vinegar to drink but refused it and gathering his strength he cried out: “It is finished”. With his last breath Jesus gasped, “Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit”.

The Son of God was dead. God’s displeasure at the death of His Son was immediately felt. There was a great earthquake, the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom and many of the saints came out of their graves. A Roman centurion near the cross was moved to say: “Truly this man was the Son of God”. Even in his death a hardened centurion was impressed. In life and death, Jesus testified to his Messiahship.

Usually they broke the bones of crucified men to hasten their death but when they came to Jesus he was already dead. Yet a soldier thrust a spear into his side. Blood and water flowed forth, thus indicating the extreme stress of his sufferings in his sacrifice for sin. In this we can see that Jesus was the true Passover lamb:—

- blood and water were features of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt;
- no bones of the lamb were to be broken;
- when Israel had their first Passover, the blood of the Lamb saved the families and their firstborn;
- they were then “baptised” by water in the Red Sea.

BURIAL (Jn. 19:38-42).

There were two men amongst the elders of Jerusalem whom we know would have strongly objected to Jesus’ death. After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man, came and took Jesus’ body to a new sepulchre in his garden. And in this, he remarkably fulfilled scripture (see Isa. 53:8, 9). Nicodemus came too, and brought myrrh and

aloes. Together they buried Jesus, wrapped in linen clothes with the spices. Though they hesitated to show their loyalty to Jesus in his life, they disregarded the criticism of the authorities in openly identifying themselves with him in his death. Tenderly they laid him to rest, a brief rest.

LESSON FOR US:

It is good for us as young people in this godless age to think about the dreadful acts done to the Son of God, which he suffered so that we might have life. Surely it is a small thing in comparison, for us to apply our minds to the Word of God, which was his continual delight and which helped him to manifest righteousness, even before evil doers. Let us not be guilty of denying the Lord Jesus Christ or of despising his sacrifice with its agony and shame, which he endured for our sakes (Heb. 10:29).

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, chapters 12, 13, 14
- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 12, pages 56-134
- “Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 493-515
- “The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 191-205
- “The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapters 18, 19

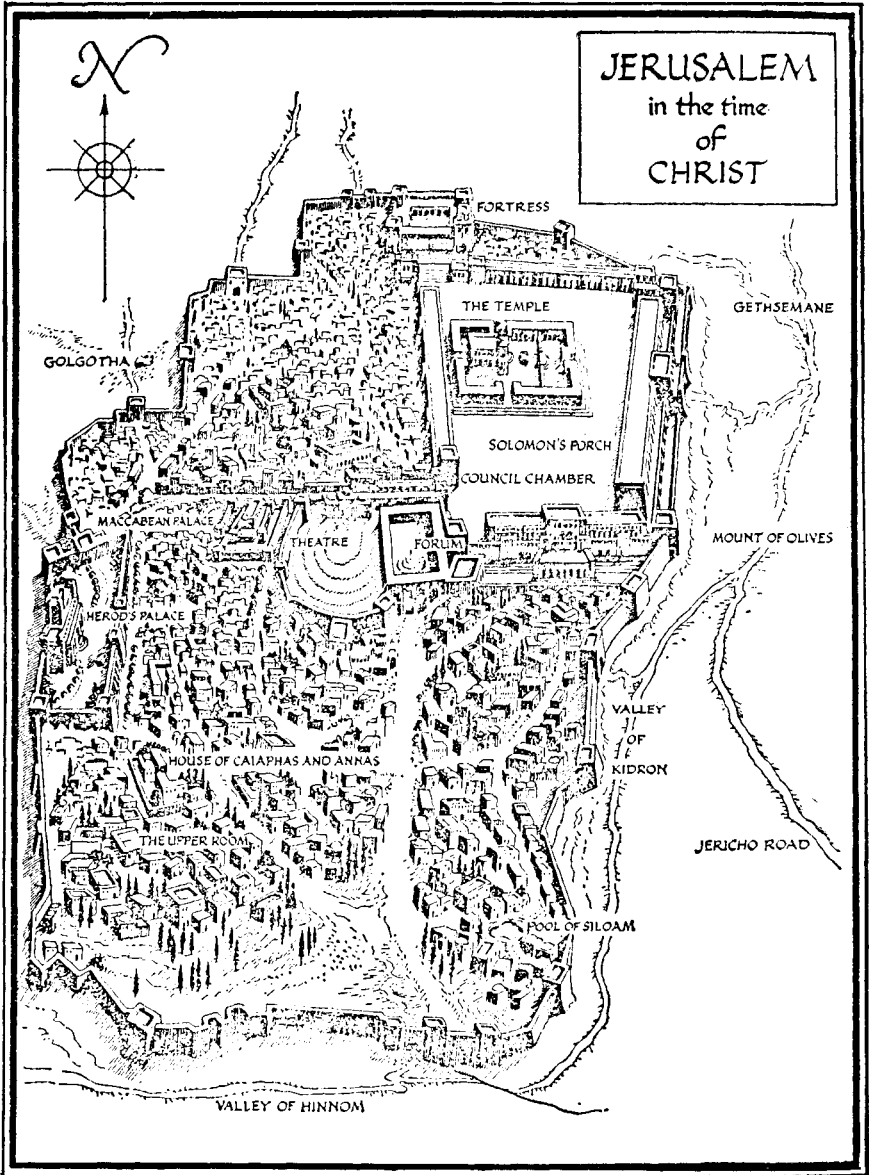
PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Show how the Jewish trial of Jesus was unlawful.*
2. *Describe Peter’s denial of his Lord.*
3. *Describe Jesus’ trial before Pilate.*
4. *Describe the reactions of the centurion Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea to the events surrounding Christ’s death.*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Trace the desperate efforts of the Jews to secure the death sentence of Jesus.*
2. *Show how Christ’s trial, death and burial fulfilled Messianic prophecies.*

JERUSALEM in the time of CHRIST



25. RESURRECTION

**“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here,
but he is risen”**

Although Jesus had been slain by wicked hands, the grave could not hold him. He rose on the third day, according to the scriptures, “the first fruits of them that slept”. The fear and sorrow of the disciples changed to joy as they met their risen Lord, and from that time “the power of his resurrection” worked in their lives. Through his resurrection all men have hope of sharing with him the glories of eternal life.

Matthew 27:62-66; 28; Luke 24:1-48; John 20

THE PHARISEES SET A GUARD.

The rulers had crucified the Christ and perhaps felt uneasy at the events which surrounded his death. They remembered his claims that he was the Son of God and that he would be killed and rise again on the third day. What could they do to prove conclusively that he was an imposter? They gained from Pilate permission to have soldiers guarding the tomb, so that the disciples could not steal the body away and tell the people that Jesus had risen as he said he would. The special guard sealed the tomb and kept a constant watch. It was humanly impossible to move the stone.

THE RESURRECTION.

But what were soldiers compared with the power of God to exalt His obedient Son? On the third day an angel, in shining white clothes and radiant with God’s glory, came down from heaven, accompanied by a great earthquake. Breaking the seal of the tomb, the angel rolled away the stone and sat on it. At such a sight the soldiers were terrified and fainted with fear. The desperate schemes of the rulers were shattered. Their attempts to destroy the Son of God were rendered useless by the undeniable fact of the open tomb.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and other women with them, having brought spices to carry out a last act of love in embalming the body, arrived at the garden sepulchre to find the stone rolled away. Startled they looked inside, but there was no body. Quickly Mary Magdalene hurried away to tell Peter and John, and as the other women looked again they saw two angels. The women, like the guard, fell to the ground in fear, but one of the angels reassured them—“He is not here: He is risen”. He reminded them of the words of Jesus, that he would rise again. “Go quickly,” said the angel, “and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and that he goeth before you into Galilee”.

JESUS IS SEEN.

On the way Jesus met them and recognising him they joyfully worshipped (Matt. 28:9). By this time Peter and John, followed by Mary Magdalene, had come running to the tomb. The angels did not appear, but the two men looked and saw the grave clothes lying as though someone had taken them off and neatly put them in their place—surely no-one taking a body would bother to do that. Although Peter was bewildered, John knew. His hopes rose in his heart as they returned home. But Mary Magdalene stayed by the sepulchre, weeping for the loss of her Lord. Looking in again she saw the two angels, but being full of grief she did not recognise them and told them she was weeping because somebody had taken Jesus. She was conscious of another person, and turning around she spoke to him, thinking that he was the gardener. Jesus said one word, “Mary”, and instantly her sorrow changed to joy and understanding.

Meanwhile the other women had come to the disciples, with the glad news that Jesus had risen. But the disciples could not believe. They thought the news was too good to be true. The unnerving events of the last few days still clouded their minds. The faint glimmer of hope had not yet burst into flame. Peter even went again to the tomb, but seeing only the linen clothes, “departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass”. Later Jesus appeared to Peter (Lk. 24:34). What a moving experience that would have been. What a climax after hours of despair and uncertainty.

THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS.

On the same day, two disciples went to the village of Emmaus, seven or eight miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along, their hearts heavy with sorrow, they talked of the events of the crucifixion. Suddenly Jesus met them, and without letting them recognise him, asked what they were talking about, and why they were sad. They confided in him that they had hoped that this Jesus of Nazareth would redeem Israel. And, they added, they were even more puzzled because some women of their company had been to the sepulchre and spoken to angels, who said he was alive.

Jesus set their minds at rest and quoting the words of Moses, the prophets and the rest of the scriptures, he proved that it was right for the Christ to suffer such things before entering into his glory (Lk. 24:25-27). Their hearts burned within them as they relearnt the scriptures of Messiah's sufferings. What a thrilling instruction that would have been. Those scriptures, describing the glorious king (e.g., 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 2) and his suffering (e.g., Psa. 22; 69; Isa. 53), would have become so clear and convincing. On reaching Emmaus the two persuaded Jesus to spend the night with them, and as they ate Jesus broke bread and blessed it. Suddenly, their eyes being opened, they realised with amazement who their visitor really was. Just as suddenly he vanished, leaving them to hurry back in great excitement to Jerusalem, full of the words spoken to them.

JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES.

On reaching the city, they found the other disciples discussing the fact that Jesus had appeared to Peter, and they were able to add their wonderful news. As they all spoke excitedly together, Jesus appeared in their midst. At first they were stunned, because they had all the doors locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus showed them the marks of his hands and his feet, but they were so overcome with joy they could still scarcely believe it. So while they “yet believed not for joy”, Jesus asked for food and ate before them, to prove his physical presence and life. Yes, he was indeed their Lord and Christ. He had conquered the grave. He was alive for ever more. We can imagine how wonderful it must have been for these men and women to see their dear Lord, who had undergone the agony of the crucifixion, and whom they had wondered if they would ever see again.

Jesus further explained to them what they had failed to understand, that suffering must come before glory. His death, burial and resurrection had fulfilled all the scriptures, and that through it, all nations would have the opportunity to repent and through following the example of his suffering, seek for glory, honour and immortality (Rom. 2:7).

DOUBTING THOMAS.

Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. Although they told him that they had seen the Lord, he wanted irrefutable proof in the personal presence of Jesus to see and touch. He wanted to believe. He wanted undeniable evidence. We can understand his feelings, if we picture the horror of his recent experiences and his natural desire to be safeguarded from the bitterness of being deceived. Eight days later Jesus again appeared suddenly to them, and Thomas' early doubts faded away with the undeniable evidence of the risen Son of God standing before him with the marks of crucifixion still upon his hands, feet and side.

Jesus added: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”. This applies to us in these far-off days. We have not seen the risen Christ, but we have the Old Testament prophecies of him fulfilled in the New. The empty tomb and the transformation of the disciples, from men filled with despair and panic to fearless apostles, are clear proofs of his resurrection. And around us every day we have signs of the times showing us that soon the Lord of Life will descend from heaven, just as surely as he ascended, to raise the dead and reward his followers with eternal life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINAL EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION.

The Jews stubbornly refused the evidence of the resurrection. When the soldiers came confessing that Jesus had indeed risen, the priests and scribes bribed them and put around the story that the disciples

had stolen the body while the soldiers slept. And today the Jews still believe this, although the resurrection is a historical fact which cannot be denied.

The resurrection fulfilled Old Testament scriptures such as Psalm 16, which speaking of Jesus says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell" (or "my life in the grave"). In Acts 2, where Peter uses Psalm 16 to prove the resurrection, he shows that Jesus could not be held in the grave, because he was sinless and death and corruption are the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). Therefore God raised him up, "having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24).

What is the importance of the resurrection to us? It is a basic doctrine to our understanding of the truth, for though it is true that Jesus died for our sins, it is because he rose that we can be made righteous or "justified" (Rom. 4:25). As Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:17-18, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished". God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet they are dead. We know that God is the God of the living (Lk. 20:37-38), and he will raise all those faithful men of old, such as David, who was promised that he would see the kingdom established forever, and who said, "thou shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (Psa. 71:20). David will be there to see his house and kingdom established by his greater Son (2 Sam. 7:12-16). The resurrection of Jesus CONFIRMS all those great promises. We await, in sure faith, the unfolding of those momentous events by the hand of him who is alive for evermore.

LESSON FOR US:

Like the disciples, we can place absolute confidence in that plan of salvation. It is as sure as Christ's resurrection. Because he overcame sin by perfect obedience, God will forgive our sins. That's the basis upon which salvation is extended to us as long as we identify ourselves with Christ. We do that by belief, baptism and obedience to the commandments of Christ. To have life everlasting we must therefore leave our old ways and commence a new way of life (Rom. 6:4). The apostle Paul's great hope was that he might pattern his life on "knowing him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings"; that he might "attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:9, 10).

May our studies this year of that wonderful man, Jesus the Christ, assist us to a greater appreciation of that marvellous co-operation between the Father and Son in the plan of salvation and prompt a desire in us to live more worthily before our heavenly Father, following the example we have seen in His glorious Son, now raised to His right hand.

REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 8, chapters 1, 2

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 59

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Volume 12, pages 150-158

PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the activity of the angels at the resurrection of Christ to:—*
 - a) *the soldiers;*
 - b) *the women.*
2. *Describe what happened on the way to Emmaus.*
3. *Describe the conversion of Thomas*
4. *How important is belief in the resurrection of Christ?*

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What happened at Christ’s resurrection and what effect did it have on the soldiers?*
2. *Describe the transformation of Christ’s disciples immediately after his resurrection.*