

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
CLASS 8**

LESSON 2

THE PROPHETS

Prophets or seers as they were called had a very important place in the history of Israelites. God spoke to the people through His prophets in Old Testament time. St. Paul says, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son." (Hebrews 1:1). The same concept is shown in the hymn used at the time of mediatory prayer to the Lord's Mother that the prophets indistinctly and the apostles distinctly revealed the secrets of her Son.

In Old Testament time, Abraham (Genesis 20:7), Moses (Deut. 34:12), Aaron (Exodus 7:1); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Samuel and others like were prophets. However, as their nature of activities was different, they are not included in the list of prophets. Likewise, Elijah and Elisha were engaged in prophesy for many years and did many wonders. The theologians have not given them a place in the list of prophets, as their prophesies have not been recorded. Their messages have been recorded in the history of Israelites. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are considered senior prophets. However, the Jews consider the book of Daniel with their history and not with he prophets. Hosea to Malachi- the 12 prophets are construed junior prophets. Up to the time of Samuel, those who prophesied were called seers.

The prophets or seers foretell events to come. Their mission was not restricted in foretelling future events alone. They were also engaged in other activities -

They were messengers of God who revealed Him to people.

They were the interpreters of the Law.

They were teachers in religious and social matters.

They were advisers to kings. They informed the people the Will of God.

They were social reformers who rebuked the evil practices of the people.

THE PROPHET ISAIAH

(From B.C. 740 to 700)

Aim: Inform the people the word of God without any bias.

In the latter part of B.C. 8th century, Isaiah lived in Jerusalem during the reign of kings Ussiah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. According to Jewish belief, Isaiah was killed at the time Manasseh, son of Hezekiah was ruling Judah. The word Isaiah means, "Help from God," or "God helps."

Isaiah was blessed to have glimpse of the glory of the Almighty. "The Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train (robe) filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1-4). Isaiah saw this heavenly vision. Therefore, the holy Church calls him the glorious Isaiah. "The Lord shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." He also prophesied that Messiah would come from the descendants of David. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; (Isaiah 11: 1-2)

Isaiah knew that he was a sinful man. On seeing this marvelous vision, he thought he was doomed. Then one of the creatures flew down to him, carrying a burning coal and touched his lips with it. He told Isaiah that as the burning coal from the altar of the Lord touched his lips, his guilt was gone and his sins were forgiven. Based on this, we sing the hymn while Holy Qurbana is given in Passover Service, to the prophet Isaiah.....

Isaiah heard the Lord speak, "Who shall I send? Who shall be our messenger?" And he replied, "I will go! Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8) From that time on for about forty years, Isaiah incessantly worked for the Lord.

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Isaiah is called the prophet of Salvation. And figuratively his book is known as the fifth gospel and Isaiah as the fifth evangelist.

Opinion of the scholars that the book of Isaiah should be studied in three parts is generally accepted. We can see that 1 to 35 chapters are prophecies, 36 to 39 are historical facts and 40 to 66 are partly prophecies. Considering the historical background, the differences in language and contents, it is believed that this book is not written by one person alone. For the sake of study, let us make this book into three parts.

PART I

A - PROPHET

He lived in the latter part of 8th Century B.C. From Chapters 1 to 39, we get some hints about life. He got the vision during the year king Uzziah died. He was from the royal family. His father was Amos, the youngest son of King Josha. As he got the vision at the Temple, it is believed that he was an official of the Temple. His wife was a prophetess. They had two sons, Shearjashub and Mahershalalhashbaz. In the book 'Ascendancy of Isaiah' written in AD first century, it is recorded that during the reign of Manasseh, Isaiah was killed by a sword.

B - PROPHECY BACKGROUND

Isaiah shone like a shining star during the latter part of the 8th century BC. He prophesied during the reign of kings Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

In BC 740 when king Uzziah died, Isaiah had God's calling. Under the rule of Uzziah the land progressed in trade and industry and the people were prosperous and rich. They gradually lost the fear of the Lord. They sought a life of pleasure and merry making. They became unjust and oppressed the poor. Wealth remained with a few and the number of poor increased. The condition of the poor and helpless worsened. They suffered miserably under the rich and powerful people. The prophet very vehemently warned against this social injustice.

In BC 735, the Syrians and Israelites made an agreement. Against this Ahaz, king of Judah sought help from the emperor of Assyria. Ahaz took the silver and gold from the Temple and the palace treasury and sent it as a present to the emperor. The prophet opposed this move and warned Ahaz that it would be unwise to seek help from Assyrians and that it would be self-defeating in future. The King did not heed to the counsel of the prophet.

After Ahaz, Hezekiah ruled Judah. He did what was pleasing to the Lord. He destroyed the pagan places of worship, broke the stone pillars and cut down the images of goddess Ashera. In all these the prophet Isaiah was guiding the king. However, influence by the advice of some of his counselors, he made an agreement with the king of Egypt. The prophet advised him that it would be foolish to rebel against the emperor of Assyria. In BC 701, Sennacherib, the emperor of Assyria attacked the fortified cities of Judah. The desperate cry of the prophet and the king reached God. And the Lord told Isaiah to inform the king not to be afraid of the Assyrians. The angel of the Lord killed 1, 85,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army. In addition, a kind of rats went into the Assyrian camps and gnawed the strings of their bows. The dejected emperor withdrew with the rest of his army.

C - IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

We get many important thoughts at this juncture, some of which are listed below:

1. The deep understanding of the prophet about the Lord.

Death of Uzziah was the end of the golden era of the Jews. The mighty Assyrians utterly destroyed Israel, and Judah was weakened. Judah was invited to join hand with Israel and Syria against Assyria. At this point, the counsel of Isaiah was based on his deep understanding of the Lord. Isaiah had a larger vision of the Lord. The sovereignty of the Lord is universal and is founded on the concept of One True God. The idols of the heathen would be destroyed. The God is just and He judges the world. The unholiness of man before the holy God is sin.

2. God who fulfils His Promises:

The God whom we see in the history is not only a righteous God, but He is also the Lord who fulfils His part of the covenant and promises (9:6-7; 11:1-2). The prophet believed that the will of the Lord would be accomplished through a remnant of the Israelites. The expectations of this remnant, the prophesy about

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Immanuel - would take place in history in course of time and the prophet believed that through them the people of the Lord would get salvation and property.

Even though he was from the royal family, he lived among the ordinary people. He criticized the ruling and upper class of society. His royal heritage was never a hindrance to mingle with the common people. He had many friends.

CONTENTS

Chapters	1-12	Introductory messages and the call of the prophet
"	13-23	Speeches against heathen countries
"	24-27	Revelations
"	28-32	Foreign policy of Judah
"	33-35	Visions about end of time
"	36-39	Historical addendum

PART II GOD, THE DELIVERER (Chapters 40-58)

The back ground for these chapters is considered to be BC 6th century (BC 587-539). In chapter 40, the events described were yet to take place after about 100 years. The king Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in BC 588; 597 and subdued it in BC 586. He destroyed the Temple and carried away the majority of the people as slaves to Babylon. This chapter speaks about those prisoners who are helpless in a foreign land. 40th chapter begins with the words of solace, "Comfort my people, Comfort them!" A message of comfort to the people who undergo the pains and disgrace of slavery. The prophet reassures them that they would get deliverance from king Cyrus of Persia. No doubt, both these events are part of history of the Jews.

Theological Thoughts:

When we study the available literature in Hebrews, we can understand the prophets thoughts. The main these of his message is deliverance.

a) God, the Deliverer:

The important theological point is that the Jews who were scattered in Babylon would be led in God's ways and they would be freed. The prophet sees this deliverance in connection with the holiness of God. "Your redeemer is the holy one of Israel." (41:14; 47:4). The redeemer of Israel is the Lord God. The Lord paid ransom for their deliverance. The prophet proclaims that the mighty God, who revealed His omnipotence in the creation and also the mighty hand in bringing out Israel from slavery of Egypt, would reinstate His people from bondage. The Lord God is the deliverer and He gives them the message of salvation (42:6; 4(; 26).

b) His visions about God:

The visions of Isaiah of God are precious. God is the creator. The God who creates can only save. From vanity God brings to reality. Lord God is the everlasting God who created the universe. He is the Alpha and Omega. The Lord God is One God. He is omnipresent and there is none like Him. Chapters 42, 45 and 48 further throw light on the God Almighty. "I am God, and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me." (46:9)

Hymns about a Servant - Isaiah gave many prophetic visions of a Servant of the Lord who suffers. There are four such hymns -

1. 42:1-4
2. 49:1-6
3. 50:4-9
4. 52:13- 53:12

There are many comments about this suffering servant of the Lord which bear witness to Israel, Jesus Christ and the Christian Church.

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Chapters 44 to 55 contain the messages given at various times to the people who were in exile. The inner meaning of these chapters is difficult to understand.

1. The Only One God.
2. God's zeal to the deliverance of Israel (42:14; 44:23)
3. God's hand in delivered of Israel (44:24; 48:22)
4. Promise of the Lord about reinstatement of Israel (49:1; 54:17)
5. The hymn of joy of victory (55:1-13)

PART III - Chapters 56-66

In BC 538 king Cyrus announced that the Jews could return to their own land. The next years itself many people returned to Jerusalem, and they started rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem. In BC 575 the temple work was completed. Thus the prophesy of Isaiah was fulfilled.

Theological Thoughts:

Chapters 56-66 have given prominence to salvation through worship. The prophet declares that salvation has become a reality (60:1). It can be experienced through worship (60:7, 13; 62:9). Salvation also brings peace and prosperity (60:10, 18, 22; 61:4, 11). Salvation would continue till the end of time (60:19-80; 65:16-25).

The prophet stresses the importance of Sabbath with the same zeal of those prophets who had lived before the time of exile. To the humble and repentant flows help of the Lord (66:1, 2).

Contents:

Isaiah's prophesies converges in chapters 60-62. The gospel of salvation is given in the light of social lamentation. The reason for lamentation is that the expectations of those who returned from exile are not fulfilled. Their sorrow is expressed in their worship. Here the heavenly messages can be divided into four:

1. The various hindrances to salvation (56:1)
2. The future glory of Zion (60:1)
3. Prayer for heavenly help (63:7; 64:12)
4. Salvation of Zion (65:1; 66:23)

The Book of Isaiah is compared to the Bible as a whole. The first 39 chapters are like the Old Testament and the last 27 chapters like the New Testament. The first part shows the law and the last part grace. The book of Isaiah contains more spiritual light than any other book of the Old Testament.

Exercise:

1. In what all names Isaiah is known?
2. In how many parts are the prophesies divided? Write the chapters in each part.
3. Quote the related prophesies and explain that God would fulfill His promise.
4. Isaiah is a spokesman of deliverance. Describe.
5. What are the visions of Isaiah about the Suffering Servant of the Lord?
6. What did the Jews do when they returned from exile?
7. a) Who was the father of Isaiah? b) Name the sons of Isaiah. c) The king who made the declaration that the Jews could return to their country.

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LESSON - 3

AMOS

Aim: The prophet conveys the message of the Lord regarding injustice in society. To hear and obey the voice of the Lord is the way to salvation.

Amos has the most important place amongst the Old Testament prophets. He was the spokesman of social justice. The book of Amos is the first one in canonic prophecies. Amos was a prophet in the beginning of the 8th century BC. A clash is observed in his book between worthless rites, ceremonial observations and social justice. Amos is considered a prophet of tribulations. The word Amos means one who carries a burden.

Historical background:

Amos prophesied during the time Jeroboam 2nd was king of Israel from BC 787 to 747. Uzziah, king of Judah, was a contemporary of Jeroboam who regained the prosperity and splendor as of the time of king Solomon in Israel. Jeroboam could bring political stability and financial growth in Israel. However, this security and stability was applied only to a few ruling henchmen. In this group, there were landlords, merchants and government officials (2:6-7, 5:10-11, 8:45).

The traders sold wheat mixed with chaff and used false measurements. The judges took bribes and set aside justice. To pursue hedonism, the women wanted more money and they encouraged their husbands to oppress the poor (4:1). They followed many crooked and immoral ways, and became a shallow society without any love or care for one another because of greed. The religious ceremonies became only a lip service. However, they conducted sacrifices every day (4:4-5). When the people observed Sabbath and full moon, Amos told them that as the Lord is just, He expects justice and righteousness more than religious piety.

THE LIFE AND CALL OF THE PROPHET:

At a place called Tekoa, the southern part of Jerusalem, Amos was a shepherd. He also collected fig fruits for a living. He knew the history and customs of the Israelites (1:2, 2:3, 6:14, 9:5, 9:7). On seeing the moral deterioration of the people, Amos must have been burdened mentally, and we can assume that at the time he saw the visions described in chapter 7. On hearing the call of the Lord, Amos set about to prophesize leaving his occupation. However, Amos could not continue his work in Israel as Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, told Amos to stop his prophesy in Israel and return to Judah.

IMPORTANT THOUGHTS:

The messages strongly expressed in the prophecy of Amos are -

1. The Lord likes justice more than religious rites.

Israelites are the chosen people of the Lord. He accepts religious rites that are just. Amos declares that those people who do not keep justice and righteousness will perish and that their worship and sacrifices are hollow and are not acceptable to the Lord. The main theme of his prophecy is to let justice flow like a stream and righteousness like a river that never goes dry (5:24). As righteousness is preached vehemently, Amos is called 'the prophet of righteousness'.

2. Care for the Weak

In many parts of his prophecy, we can see his concern for the weak. Amos states that the Lord will completely destroy those who amass money illegally and deny justice to the poor (2:6-7, 5:10, 5:12; 8:4-8). Amos also foresees the reinstatement of Judah (9:11-15).

We have to highlight the five visions of Amos in his prophecy.

1. Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)
2. Vision of Fire (7:4-6)
3. Vision of a plumbline (7:7-9)

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4. Vision of a Basket of Fruit (8: 1-3)
5. Vision of the Lord standing by the altar (9: 1)

In his message, Amos has very strongly pointed out punishment. To escape this, one has to listen to the word of God and obey it. "Come to me, and you will live" (5: 4) His prophesy is concluded with words of hope (9: 11-15). The fallen house will be straightened. The Lord God will plant his people on the land He gave them and they will not be pulled out again.

The intentions of the Lord will not come to naught. There is no need to fear the darkness of sin. Those who live justly will have a new dawn, indeed.

CONTENTS:

- 1: 1-2 - Heading and Introduction
- 1: 3-2: 5 - Declaration of punishment to those who are cruel
- 2: 6-9: 10 - Sinful deeds of Israel and their punishment
- 9: 11-15 - Restoration of Judah

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the social setting of Israel at the time of Amos?
2. Why is Amos called a prophet of righteousness?
3. What are the main thoughts in the prophesies of Amos?
4. Describe Amos' visions and their significance.

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LESSON-4

HOSEA

Aim: Inform the people the message of salvation of the Lord.

Hosea explained to the people the laws of the Lord, showing his own life as an example. His wife was unfaithful to him and deserted him, causing him much sorrow. Likewise, he said Israel was unfaithful to the Lord and deserted Him. His prophesy contains messages of God's love, long suffering and salvation. Hosea is given the title as the Prophet of Love. The word Hosea means 'God's help.

The prophet and the historical background:

He was born and brought up in the northern part of Israel and he is the son of Beeri. He prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Heseekiah, kings of Judah and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Except his miserable married life, no other information about him is available either from his prophesy or from the Old Testament.

During the reign of Jeroboam, there was considerable prosperity and abundance in Israel. Along with it there came moral and religious degradation (4:2). The priests were indifferent (4:6), political leaders participated in the Canaanite sacrifices and were engaged in rebellious ways and revolted against the Laws of the Lord (7:3) and depended on the might of the army. In such a scene entered Hosea.

Important Thoughts: The important thoughts in this book can be abridged as follows:

1. Boundless Love and Patience of God. The prophet went out in search of his lost unfaithful wife and bought her for 15 silver coins and 140 kg of barley. Hosea declares that the God loved his people, as Hosea loved his wife. The love and forbearing of the Lord is boundless. The depth of love can only be understood by the magnitude of self-denial. Love is not expressed through lip service stood by the magnitude of self-denial. Love is not expressed through lip service but through tolerance and deeds. The Lord God is the Saviour of Israel. Here we see the Love of God which goes in search of his people. "Yet I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them." (11:3). We can see the infinite love and patience of God to forgive anything and to carry them to their previous state.

2. God likes mercy and knowledge of God. The God is pleased in kindness more than sacrifices and the understanding of God more than burnt offerings. (6:6). This is the crux of his prophesy. As soon as they entered the Land of Canaan, did the unfaithfulness of Israel begin (9:10; 10:9; 13:6) Hosea preached that the reason of their downfall is their Baal worship (4:5, 14; 5:9, 14; 10:4). He reminds them that their sacrifices are not enough to express their gratitude for the Love of the Lord, but they have to know the Lord and live according to his Laws. The Lord is pleased in kindness more than sacrifices and in understanding the Lord more than burnt sacrifices.

Contents: 1 - 3 Preface

1:1 Introduction

1:2-9 The miserable married life of the prophet

1:10- 2:1 Message of Hope

2:2-14 The unfaithfulness of Israel and their judgment

2:15-23 Promise of deliverance

3 Gomer is bought back

II 4-14 Prophecies

4-8 Sin of Israel and their judgment

9-11 Consequences of sin and judgment

11-12;13: 1-16 False integrity of Israel and their downfall.

14 Hope

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This book was given the present form in the land of Judah. The prophesy with 14 chapters is poetic and contain many figure of speeches. Parable from everyday life are plenty - stubborn mule (4:16), Trap (5:1), young lion (5:14), morning mist (6:4), dough ready to bake (7:4), half baked loaf (7:8), silly pigeon (7:11), crooked bow (7:16) are some of them.

The prime message of this prophesy is the unequalled love of the Lord. Rebuke and chastisement are there, but in the end are shower of blessings because of the Love of the Lord. How beautiful is the 14th chapter that ends with hope.

Exercise:

1. Write about the period when Hosea started his prophesy?
2. What was the event which caused Hosea much sorrow?
3. Describe the important points in the prophesy.

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LESSON - 5

MICAH

Aim: God is pleased in kindness and not in sacrifices.

In B.C. 7th century beginning, Micah started his prophesy. At that time both in Israel and Judah there was moral and social degradation and Micah was with the side of the poor and oppressed. The word Micah means who is equal to the Lord! His sense of justice and zeal were equal to that of Amos. So Micah is also called the resurrected Amos. This prophesy is the basis for religious observance and judicious conduct. Therefore, the prophesy of Micah is named the Magna Carta of prophetic system.

The prophet and the historical background:

During the time Jotham, Ahaz and Hizekiah were kings of Judah, the Lord gave his message to Micah who was from the town of Moresheth.

"But as for me, the Lord fills me with his spirit and power, and gives me a sense of justice and the courage to tell the people of Israel what their sins are." (3:8). He received the power of the Spirit and continued his ministry.

The prophet was moved by the prevalent injustice and the difference between the haves and have nots. Before the downfall of Samaria, Micah had begun his prophesy (BC 722-721).

For his pompous life Jotham levied heavy taxes on the poor farmer. Ahaz who ruled later put a heavy burden on the poor again to meet expenses of frequent battles. (1:5, 6). Jerusalem had become a den of evildoers. At this juncture, Micah roared for justice.

Important thoughts: The important thoughts of the prophesy of Micah can be briefed in the following ways:

1. Real religious vision and worship. Micah interprets what is religion (6:6-8). It is not possible to please the Lord with sacrifices. It is not possible for a society where there is no social justice and morals to know the Lord or to serve him. Justice, love and humility have to be practiced amongst the people. Thus Micah gives a basis for religious and social behaviour for the people. He declares that those who walk in unjust ways will be punished (3:2). His prophesies were fulfilled in Jerusalem in BC 586.

2. Reestablishment of Promises: We can see the reestablishment of promises in this prophesy. "He will settle disputes among the nations, among the great powers near and far. They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again to war, never prepare for battle again." (4:3). He states about their exile in Babylon and their return (4-10). Above all, he prophesied that the birth place of Jesus would be Bethlehem. "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times." (5:2).

Contents: 1:1; 3:12 Prophesies against Israel and Judah

4:1; 5:15 About the shining future of Israel

6:1; 7:7 Lord's argument with Israel

7:8-20 Promises of future

The prophet who had been engrossed in gloomy thoughts, concludes his message in hope. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." (7:8).

"There is no other god look you, O Lord, you forgive the sins of your people who have survived. You do not stay angry forever, but you take pleasure in showing us your constant love." (7:18, 19). The prophet had a deep belief of the revival of the people. The above verses show that the prophet was convinced of God's forgiveness and his love are sufficient to reconcile the people to God.

Exercise:

1. What was the reason of Micah starting his prophesy?
2. Why did he raise his voice to bring about social justice?

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3. What is the theme of his prophesy? Explain quoting verses.

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LESSON - 6

JEREMIAH

Aim: To learn that God's words are spoken impartially.

The book of Jeremiah is the biggest prophetic book. In the Hebrew Bible the name Jeremiah is mentioned 147 times. The word Jeremiah means 'extolled by God.' Jeremiah passed through very greater trials and tribulations for his God, and therefore he is considered an exempli gratia of Jesus Christ. As he always had a sad expression, he is also called the 'Weeping Prophet.' As he conveyed the message of judgment impartially, he is also known as the 'Prophet of Judgment.'

The life and activities of Jeremiah: Jeremiah is the son of Kilkiah, a priest of Anathoth, a place north of Jerusalem (1:1). God Chose him from the womb of his mother, sanctified and ordained him a prophet to the nations (1:5). Nothing is written about Jeremiah in 2 Kings. There is no mention of even his name. In the book of Chronicles there are some hints about him. "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah...." (2 Chronicles 35:25). Zedekiah did not heed to the word of God spoken through Jeremiah (36:11, 12). There are a few quotations like these.

There are many statements in the book of Jeremiah about his way of life and activities. From these we can surmise the following:

1. Jeremiah was called and set apart from the ministry of prophesy during the time of King Josiah. He was set in service when Jeremiah was yet a boy. So he told the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, I don't know how to speak..." (1:6).
2. The Lord gave him courage by telling him that he was chosen by the Lord before he was born and that the Lord would be with him to protect him (1:5-8). The Lord reached out and touched his lips and said to him, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." (1:9).
3. His message was mighty. "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant." (1:10). Even though he served in his native place, he had to suffer ridicule and contempt, especially from his own kinsmen (12:6). They caught him and put him in prison. The King, and other people sought to kill him.
4. As a burning fire in his heart, Jeremiah proclaimed the words of the Lord the midst of oppression. He stood steadfast in his ministry of prophesy (15:6). Later, Jeremiah was put in a dungeon (38:6). He was forcibly taken to Egypt (43:1-5). For forty years he served the Lord and at the end he was stoned to death.

Formation of the book: In BC 604 when Jehoiakim was king of Judah, the Lord God told Jeremiah to write on a scroll everything that the Lord told him (36:1). Then Jeremiah called Baruch, one of his disciples, the son of Neriah and dictated all the words of the Lord and Baruch wrote them on a scroll. At their festival, this scroll was read aloud for the whole the people to hear. The king was angry at this and put the entire scroll in fire (36:23). Again, Jeremiah made Baruch write them. It is believed that the prophesies that were made at the time of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were kings and also part of life history of the prophet were added on to the book of Jeremiah.

This book has three parts: -

1. The poetic form of preaching as seen in chapters 1-25.
2. Details about Jeremiah (19-20:6; 26:1-19:32).
3. Messages formed by reason of repletion of writing and influences of the language of the scribe, as prophesies of Jeremiah (7: 1-8; 17:19-27; 25:1-14).

Historical Background:

Jeremiah's ministry was at the crucial time of the land of Judah. The prophet advised in vain Jehoakim, the evil-minded, foolish king not to depend on the king of Egypt, but obey the king of Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied that the Jews will remain slaves in Babylon for 70 years and afterwards they would return. In BC 597 the forces of Babylon attacked Judah. While the war was going on, the king of Judah passed away. In BC, 597, Judah was completely subdued. Jehoiakim's successor, Jehoiachin and a large number of people of Judah,

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all the princes, mighty men of valour, all the craftsmen and smiths, were taken as prisoners to Babylon. The Temple was plundered and all the things of value were taken away.

Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, king of Judah and made him pay tribute. Zedekiah wanted to end Babylonian control. So he entered into a treaty with Egypt. Again, the Babylonian army came and burnt down the Temple and the city (BC 586). Zedekiah was caught and his eyes were pulled out. He was put in chains and was carried to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:1-7). The king of Babylon showed mercy to Jeremiah and let him free. In fact, he was invited to Babylon. But the prophet decided to stay with the people left over in Jerusalem. Later some of the arrogant men of Judah decided to go to Egypt. They did not believe the words of Jeremiah and forcibly carried all the men and women including Jeremiah to Egypt (43:1-5). After the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet looked around the burnt and broken down city and wrote a sad poem which is called Lamentations in the Bible. Hebrew tradition says that Jeremiah was killed in Egypt.

Important Thoughts:

We see the influence of Hosea in the prophesy of Jeremiah. He was called by the Lord to inform the leaders and the people at large who do not keep the moral laws and did not listen to God that they would be punished (7:26).

1. A God who waits for the change of heart of his people.

A tendency to do evil has found a place in men's heart. We notice Israel's unnatural way of life in 2:10-13. He said, "If a person can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then the people who are accustomed to do evil may also do good." (13:23). The relationship with the Lord can be maintained by doing justice. This is the crux of the whole religion of Israel. The prophet shows them a picture of the Lord who laments at the pitiable condition of his people. The Lord is waiting for his people to return to him.

2. The God who is alive in history:

God only controls events that affect the world. The evildoers will be punished (5:22; 8:7). The Lord is bringing disaster and great destruction from the north (4:6). God would use Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen king for this (27:6). All these the prophet told them to prove that the Lord controls the historical events. But the elders of the people portrayed him enemy of the land. The shadow of grace in Jesus Christ has reflected in Jeremiah's messages. The vision of Jeremiah about the new covenant of salvation is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Contents: The important subjects in the prophesy of Jeremiah can be briefly stated as follows:

1. Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem (1:1-25; 38)
2. Promises for Israel and Judah (26:1; 35:19).
3. Sufferings of Jeremiah (45:5)
4. Prophecies against foreign nations.
5. Historical addendum (52:1-34).

Exercise:

1. Why is Jeremiah called prophet of lamentation?
2. What is said about his life and prophesy in the book.
3. What is the important message of the prophesy?
4. How was the end of Jeremiah?

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LESSON – 7

SEPHANIAH

Aim: Turning from worshipping idols, people must serve the true god.

In the latter part of BC 7th century, when people were at its worst of idol worship and immoral life, Sephaniah came forward and preached judgment. Therefore, he is known as the prophet of judgment. Sephaniah says that the day of God would come and it would be a day of judgment. The prophesy concludes giving a hope that there would begin a new era of moral laws after the last judgment. The word Sephaniah means (One who is hidden by God.)

The Prophet and the historical background:

Sephaniah lived during the time of Josiah, king of Judah in the latter part of BC 7th century. He was born in the royal family of King Hezekiah and grew in that background. He started prophesy before the religious reforms brought about by Josiah. He was a contemporary of prophet Nahum. It is seen that Sephaniah is influenced by the prophetic messages of Amos, Isaiah and others.

Important Thoughts: The important thoughts of this prophetic book can be abridged as follows:

1. The Day of the Lord. The great day of the Lord is near - very near (1:14-18). Any generation who breaks the law of the Lord, there would be punishment (Joel 2:28-32). Like Joel, Sephaniah too describes that day. "It will be a day of fury, a day of trouble and distress, a day of ruin and destruction, a day of the Lord Sephaniah meant punishment of Judah and Jerusalem. At many times there came the day of the Lord, and it will continue to come. The day of the Lord came upon Sodom and Gomorrah. In AD 70 it came upon Jerusalem. The reason for this is the sin of man. The long suffering of the Lord postpones this day; certainly there would be punishment over sin.

2. The God who delights in repentance: We can see the calling to repent in this book (2:3). It also describes the blessings such people get (3:10-20). The Lord is their King (3:15), and he delights in his people (3:18-19). The exiled people would be brought home and they would have everlasting joy and prosperity (3:20).

Contents: The main theme of this prophesy can be condensed as follows:

1:1-18 The punishment day of the Lord to Judah and to the rest of the world.

2:1-15 Judgment on Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria1-20 Tribulations that come against Jerusalem. The glory of Israel who are delivered from their enemies.

The book ends with goods needs and much hope that the exiled people would be brought home and they would be famous throughout the world. "The time is coming! I will bring your scattered people home; I will make you famous throughout the world and make you prosperous once again." The Lord has spoken." (3:20). Thus this prophesy begins with judgment and concluded with kindness.

Exercise:

1. What is the viewpoints of the prophet about the Day of the Lord?
2. How does the prophet describe the God who is pleased in repentance?
3. How does the book of Sephaniah begin and how does it conclude?

LESSON - 8

HABAKKUK

Aim: The prophet conveys to the people the truth that the righteous shall live by faith.

The book of Habakkuk tries to find out answer to many important problems. The word Habakkuk means 'dear to God' and also 'embrace'. This book which has three chapters and 56 verses concludes with a beautiful poem full of subjects to ponder on. The prophet is trying to find out the reason why the righteous toil and the unrighteous flourish.

The prophet and the historical background:

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Habakkuk has not mentioned who he is and to which village he belongs. After the prophet Samuel, Habakkuk has influenced the thinking of the nations of Israel and Judah. It is possible that he is a priest who belongs to a group of musicians of Levy Tribe. He gives instructions about musical instruments to be used with Psalm 3. When we refer to the apocryphal book named Behl and Dragon, it can be assumed that he is the son of Joshua, the Levite. Most of the theologians believe that Habakkuk lived between BC 605-597.

Important Thoughts - The important thoughts in this book can be condensed as follows:

1. Hardship of the righteous and prosperity of the unrighteous: Why God allows the cruel deeds of the evil men? Why God is silent when they destroy people who are more righteous than they are (1:13) Israel are unjust people. But the Chaldeans are ferocious evil men. Is it right to punish unjust people with those cruel Chaldeans? The evil man bears seeds of his own destruction. His words of ridicule and curse reveal the same concept. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Cruelty will lead to self-destruction. The history of Hitler and Mussolini teach us this truth.

When the prophet waited for an answer from the Lord, he got the answer, "The just shall live by faith." (2:4). The concept of justification by faith is further improved by St. Paul and is mentioned in his epistles (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

2. The Lord is in the holy temple.

In the midst of all the evil doings, the Lord is sitting on his throne in his holy temple. Let everyone worship. Many times there sounds cries of woe in the prophesy (2:6, 12, 15, 19). Yes, the reward for the proud evil doers are these. The Lord is in the holy temple to do justice. Let all the nations be silent before him.

Contents: 1:1-17 Conversation with the Lord

2:1-20 The just shall live by faith

3:1-15 Thanks giving psalms.

Chapter 3, verse 2 is a prayer, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." (3:2). Let this be the prayer of all the generations. Then the prophet praises the glory of the Lord. The last three verses are the golden words of his prophesy (3:17, 18, 19). Verses 18 and 19 should be our hope in this world full of complex problems and nobody has time for anything. They will comfort us and give us courage. When our expectations wither and life situations become adverse, let us put our burden on the Lord and face the problems surefooted as a deer on a mountain. The Holy Spirit of the Lord help us to be like Habakkuk.

Exercise:

1. "The just shall live by faith." Describe this statement of Habakkuk.
2. Which is the message for generations given in this prophesy?

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LESSON 9

NAHUM

Aim: We can understand from this prophesy that God is the Saviour of the orphans and the oppressed.

The theme of this prophesy is the ruin of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. We see the judgment of God on wickedness. The word Nahum means 'Comforter'. There are three chapters and 47 verses in this book.

The prophet and the historical background:

The prophet is from Elkosh (1:1). It is believed that Elkosh is 58 km away from Jerusalem in southwestern Judea. Jerome says it is the Capernaum of Galilee.

The prophet did his ministry between BC 664 and 605. We can assume that he lived at the time of king Hosekah and prophet Isaiah. On hearing Jonah, the people of Nineveh repented. Later they were immersed in idol worship (2 Kings 18:35). They challenged the Lord God (2 Kings 19: 10-13). The Lord accepted that challenge (2 Kings 19:22-23). The cruelty of the Assyrians was detested by nations. The Babylonians and Medians attacked Assyria simultaneously. The scene is described, "The crack of the whip, the rattle of wheels, the gallop of horses, the jolting of chariots, cavalry troops charge, and desolate (2:10). It is recorded that in BC 331 the emperor Alexander in his victorious march saw the ruins of this ancient city and he was astonished. This book bears witness that any huge man-made establishment built up without God would crumble down.

Important Thoughts:

1. The God is the Lord of history. The way of war is failure at the end. Kingdoms established by sword would be destroyed by sword. In the first chapter we see God's anger pours out on such a land (1:1-8). Here the anger of the God against his enemies and its fierceness is depicted. In the love of God there are strong enemies and its fierceness is depicted. In the love of God there are strong steps against injustice. The power of the Spirit is stronger than the power of the sword.

2. The God of Hope:

In this book the anger and enmity are prominent. But we can also see some everlasting truth. A hint is given that the enemies of the people of the Lord will fail. In this book in the midst of cry of judgment, we can hear a sweet voice of peace. The Lord is good, he protects his people in times of trouble; he takes care of those who turn to him." (1:7)

For Old Testament verses, this book of prophetic poetry is a golden feather. The holiness of the Lord appears as the judgment against wickedness. He judges the nations and rules the world. He rewards individuals and kingdoms according to their deeds. This book teaches that the Lord is the redeemer of the poor and the oppressed.

Contents: 1:1-10 The anger of the Lord for revenge
1:11-15 God hates idol worshippers
2:1, 3-5 Siege against Nineveh
2:6-13 The fall of Nineveh
3:1-7 Woe to the blood thirsty city
3:8-11 Nineveh and Egypt are alike
3:11-19 Nineveh will fall and will drink the cup of God's anger.

Exercise:

1. How did Nineveh become desolate and empty?
2. What are the important thoughts in the book of Nahum?

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LESSON – 10

OBADIAH

Aim: The Lord God gives his commandments to Israel through his prophet.

The book of Obadiah, having only 21 verses is the smallest in Old Testament books. The word Obadiah means 'God's servant' or 'Worshipper of God'. There are 13 people in Old Testament having the name Obadiah. The main point is punishment of Edom who are enemies of Israel. Obadiah lived at the time of Josiah, king of Judah. He prophesied for five years.

The time of prophesy and the context:

It can be assumed that Obadiah prophesied near about BC 586. It is the time of downfall of Israel.

Edomites are children of Esau. Israelites and Edomites are enemies for a long time. Edomites were very happy when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem and plundered it in BC 586. Because the Edomites were happy at the destruction of Israel, Obadiah describes the judgment that would fall upon the Edomites.

The main points in the book:

1. Anger towards your brethren would cause disaster. On their way to the Promised Land, Israelites requested Edomites permission to pass through their land. "We refuse to let you pass through our country! If you try, we will march out and attack you," (Number 20:8), declared the Edomites. What an evil attitude not to help their brethren in need!
2. Arrogance of knowledge will cause downfall. The cause of the downfall of Edom is arrogance of knowledge. The prophet points out that their pride of wisdom would bring them disaster. "On the day I punish Edom; I will destroy their clever men and wipe out all their wisdom." (Verse 8). Haughtiness of understanding would bring forth unexplainable misery.

The book concludes with the hopeful note that the Kingdom belongs to God. Those who search God will ultimately be successful. God will lift up the humble. The arrogant are like stubbles. This is the message Obadiah gives to all the generations.

Contents: Obadiah in a few words depicts the fall of Edom and shielding of Israel.

Exercise:

1. What is the main point of the prophesy of Obadiah?
2. Write about the time and context of this prophesy.
3. When did Nebuchadnezzar destroy Jerusalem?

PROPHESIES - A REVIEW:

When we look at the prophecies, we can see a glow of moral strength of Israel in them. Old Testament prophets conveyed Lord's commandments to people so that they could correct themselves.

They preached that there would be a life of hope if the people accepted God's ways and return to him.

In the history of Israel BC 8th century was the golden era of prophets. Amos, Isaiah, Hosea & Micah preached during this time. We see Saphaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Obadiah in 7th century BC.

These prophets were men of conviction who understood their calling of God and who impartially and very strongly criticized without fear or favour those who indulged in immoral ways of life whether they were ruling class or not. They had to face strong oppositions. It is a challenge to us whether we would be willing, to question the injustice and immorality in our society as the prophets did and thus accomplish the will of God. If we are willing to do so, then only we could continue the work of Jesus through us. As the prophets suffered ridicule and other consequences, we too may have to suffer ridicule, criticism, banishment from society and so on. On the other side, we would be justified by truth and would have communion with great people and thus we could have joy, peace, contentment and a sense of fulfillment of a useful life. May the Holy Spirit odd the Lord help us to achieve these.

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PART III NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 11

THE GOSPELS

Aim: To understand the similarities between the gospels and that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

After the ascension of Jesus, many people wrote gospels (Luke 1:2). However, only four of them have been accepted as the gospels and included in the Holy Bible. Amongst them, the first and fourth ones were written by apostles and second and third ones were written by evangelists. None of these is a complete history of Jesus Christ or a description of the whole public ministry of Jesus. Each of the authors gave importance to a particular viewpoint in the life of Jesus and quoted events and His words to highlight that point. For example, St. Mathew gives prominence to the fact that Jesus is the King of Jews, born in the family of David, whose native place was Bethlehem and that knowing this, the wise men presented him, while he was still an infant, gold, the symbol of kingship. This was intended for Christians converted from Jews. Also he has quoted many verses from the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

It is generally accepted that the gospel written by Mark is the first one. The necessary information and material was given by St. Peter to his dear disciple, Mark. St. Mathew and St. Luke enlarged this gospel and wrote theirs. These three gospels have many similarities. Therefore, the theologians call them Synoptic Gospels. The gospel written by St. John is different from the other three. However, when we read all the four gospels, then only we get a good history of Jesus.

Questions:

1. Which was the gospel first written?
2. To symbolize his kingship, what did the wise men present Jesus?
3. Which are the Synoptic Gospels? Describe.
4. Who are the evangelists who wrote gospels?

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LESSON - 12

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

Aim: To understand who the beloved disciple of Jesus was and how he achieved that fortunate position.

The author of the fourth gospel is John, son of Zebedee and brother of James the apostle. Of the first church fathers, notable persons like Iranius, Clement of Alexandria, Theophelos of Antioch, famous historian Eusebius and others have confirmed that this gospel was written by John. This belief is further strengthened by the personal references of the author. In addition to the gospel, there are three epistles and the Book of Revelation that were written by John.

John's mother was one of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and helped him (Mathew 27:55-56). In the gospel John has said about himself as the one whom Jesus loved (13:23; 19:26). When Jesus chose the twelve disciples, he named James and his brother John, 'Boanerges' which means 'Men of Thunder' (Mark 3:17). It is traditionally believed that John was the youngest of the twelve disciples. John was lucky to have special consideration of Jesus and the most fortunate opportunity to look after the mother of Jesus after his crucifixion. Hanging on the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to John (19:26-27). Of the twelve, except Jude and James, no clear picture is available about the end of the other disciples. The Church believes that all others were killed and became martyrs except John who was a prisoner in Patmos for a few years. He lived up to his ripe age and died naturally at Ephesus.

Amongst the apostles, John held an important position When Jesus resurrected the daughter of Jairus (Luke: 8:51), at the time of transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:28) and when Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray, he took John also with him (Mathew 26:37). To prepare the Last Supper (Passover), Jesus sent John along with Peter (Luke 22:7). When Jesus was arrested and taken to Annas for trial (John 18:5) and after the crucifixion of Jesus, John was a close companion of Peter. John went along with Peter to the tomb of Jesus (John 20:4) and later when the lame man was made to walk at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:4), and when arrested for preaching about Jesus (Act 4:3) and when the people of Samaria believed in Jesus, there went two representatives of apostles, Peter and John (Acts 8:14), in all these occasions Peter and John were together. The administrative matters were looked after by Simon Peter and preaching by John. During matrimonial ceremonies, our Church remembers both of them in a hymn.

Exercise:

1. Who are the Men of Thunder?
2. Which is the most fortunate opportunity John got?
3. Describe how John had an important position amongst the twelve.
4. Quote the instances when both Peter and John worked together.

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Lesson - 13

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

(Continuation)

Aim: Believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God and get eternal life through Him.

John clarifies why he has written this gospel, "These have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him, you may have life." (20:31). It is possible that John had read the other three gospels before he wrote his book, giving more importance to the Godhead of Jesus Christ. He has written this book to include those important matters which were not mentioned in the other books and also to highlight to the world the real place of Jesus. Mathew and Luke begin the history of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem. But John sees Jesus as the beginning and end, everlasting, the Word and God, and starts his descriptions. "In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through Him God made all things, not one thing in all creation was made without him" (1:103). He continues, "The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, and lived among us" (1:14). He wrote the gospel of believers:

1. Those who acknowledged the divinity of Jesus but did not approve that Jesus was a man.
2. Those who acknowledged him only as a human being and did not recognize his Godhead. John wrote his gospel in order to refute those blasphemous teachings and to establish true belief.

There are many statements in this gospel which clearly establish the Godhead of Jesus Christ.

1. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him (1:2-3).
2. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known (1:18).
3. "Jesus answered, "You belong to this world here below, but I come from above."" (8:23).
4. "I come from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me" (8:42).
5. "I am telling you the truth," Jesus replied. "Before Abraham was born, 'I am'" (8:58).
6. "The Father and I are one" (10:30).
7. "Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made" (17:5).
8. "Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"" (20:28).

At the same time there are many statements to show that Jesus was Complete Man.

1. "Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well" (4:6).
2. "Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also, his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved" (11:33).
3. "Jesus wept." (11:35).
4. "Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb" (11:38).
5. "I am thirsty" (19:28).

Questions:

1. What is the purpose of St. John writing the gospel?
2. When was this gospel written?
3. Which are the portions which reveal the Godhead of Jesus?
4. Which are the portions that prove that Jesus was complete Man?

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Lesson - 14

THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

Aim: Jesus shows through his public ministry how a true shepherd should work.

The contents of this gospel can be generally divided into three parts. The first part consisting of chapters 1 to 12 has details of the public ministry of Jesus. The second part consisting of chapters 13 to 17 has details about his private ministry with his disciples. The third part consisting of chapters 18 to 21 has details about his passion, resurrection and subsequent events.

FIRST PART:

There is only one miracle; Jesus feeding 5000 people with 5 bread and 2 fish, included in all the gospels. John has also reported another event of Jesus walking on water, which was also written by Mathew and Mark (6:15-21). John has not recorded the other miracles seen in the other gospels. However, he has written some other miracles which are not mentioned in the other gospels:

1. Water was turned to wine at Cana (2: 1-11).
2. Curing the son of a government official in Capernaum (4:46-54).
3. Curing the sick man lying at porch of Bethesda pool for 38 years (5:2-15).
4. Curing the man born blind (9:1-7).
5. Resurrecting Lazarus (11:1-44).

In the first part of the gospel the above miracles and many other events have been described in detail.

- A. Activities of John the Baptist (1:15-36).
- B. Marriage at Cana (2:1-11)
- C. He drove away the money changers and sellers of pigeons and cattle (2:13-22)
- D. The incident of him advising the woman who was caught in adultery and brought before him not to sin again. (8:3-11)
- E. Giving sight to the man born blind (9:1-41)

John has not written continuously about the public ministry of Jesus, as we see it in the gospel of Mathew, chapters 5, 6 and 7. But he has quoted many important conversations Jesus had with people from different walks of life.

1. The discussion with Nicodemus about being born again (3: 1-15). The verse, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life (3:16)" is extolled as one of the most noble verses in the Bible.
2. The incident of Jesus talking with the woman of Sychar, a Samaria town about matters like living water, eternal life, salvation, true worship and Messiah, and the events that followed are vividly described (4:5-26).
3. John also recorded the talk Jesus had about the bread of life which ultimately brought to light the need of eating his flesh and drinking his blood (6:25-65).
4. Verses from 10:1-18, explain who is a good shepherd and how he works.

Questions:

1. Which is the miracle that has been described in all the gospels?
2. What are the miracles John recorded which are not seen in other gospels?
3. Which is the verse extolled as the most noble one in Bible?
4. In the town of Sychar of Samaria, what were the subjects Jesus discussed with the woman?

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LESSON – 15

**THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN
SECOND PART**

Aim: Bring forth good fruits remembering that Jesus is the vine and we are branches.

In his reticent service for disciples, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and taught them magnificent truth (13:3-15). Then Jesus told them without any ambiguity that one of them would betray him. "I will dip some bread in the sauce and give it to him, he is the man. So he took a piece of bread, dipped to and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot" (13:26-27). Jesus then told them of the need to love one another, narrating his own conduct (13:34-35). Peter told Jesus that he was ready to die for his Master. Jesus replied to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you do not know me" (13:37-38).

Jesus told his disciples that he and the Father are one, and that he is going to prepare a place for them. He also gave suitable reply to Thomas and Philip who had asked him some questions. He strengthened his disciples saying that all their requests would be fulfilled and that he would send them the Holy Spirit. He promised them that he would come again to the world (14:1-31).

The relationship of Jesus and his disciples is compared to that of a vine and its branches. The branches can bear fruit only when they are on the vine. Likewise, the followers of Jesus could do good work only when they have lively connection with Jesus. The main theme here is love. As if to prove that John is rightly called the "Apostle of Love," the word love has been mentioned several times in this part (15:1-27). In addition, in his first epistle "God is Love" is said twice in the same chapter (2 John 4:9, 16).

Jesus cautioned them about the sufferings his followers would have. He told them this because it was time for him to depart from them. And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God's judgment. By his departure they will be sad; Father loves those who believe that Jesus came from him. At the hour of need, all the disciples would be scattered and Jesus would be alone. He is not really alone because the Father is with him. Jesus told them to be brave as he has defeated the world.

The 17th chapter is the talk of Jesus with the Father about fulfillment of his work in this world and his prayer to the Father for those who believed Jesus. Theologians call this the "Prayer of the High Priest."

Questions:

1. Why is St. John known as the apostle of love?
2. What is the caution that Jesus gives to his followers?
3. Who will prove to the people of the world about sin and about what is right and about God's judgment?
4. What is called the "Prayer of the High Priest"?
5. Write the context. "Before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you do not know me."

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LESSON - 16

THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

THIRD PART

PASSION – RESURRECTION



Aim: Jesus who defeated death gives us peace through his lively presence with us.

Jesus went with his disciples except Judas to the garden at Gethsemane where he had gone often. Judas went there with a group of Roman soldiers and some Temple guards. They arrested Jesus. Then Peter drew out his sword and smote the High Priest's slave, cutting off his right ear. Jesus said to Peter to put the sword back in its place (18:1-11).

They took Jesus to the house of Annas for trial. At that time Peter went with John and entered the courtyard of the house. There Peter had to say thrice that he was not a disciple of Jesus. Then the cock crowed. (18:12, 27). Later Jesus was brought before Pilate. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal. (Jesus knew that he would be crucified on the Passover day of the Jews, Friday. So he had celebrated the Passover early with his disciples.) When Pilate tried him, he could not find any fault in him, and wanted to set him free (18:28-40).

Pilate was convinced that Jesus had done nothing wrong. However, to please the Jews, he had Jesus whipped. The soldiers made a crown of thorny branches and put it on his head. They then put a purple robe on him and came to him and said, "Long live the King of the Jews!" And they went up and slapped him. Pilate said to them again that he found no reason to condemn him. When the crowd kept on shouting and threatening, Pilate once again sat on the judge's seat in the place called 'The Stone Pavement' (In Hebrew the name is 'Gabbatha') and handed Jesus over to them to be crucified (19:6-16).

So they took charge of Jesus. He went out carrying his cross and came to 'the Place of Skull,' (In Hebrew it is called 'Golgotha'). There they crucified Jesus. They also crucified two thieves, one on his right side and another on the left. It was a Friday. A notice "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" was put on the cross. Jewish authorities wanted to change the notice, but Pilate said, "What I have written stays written." The four

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soldiers who were there divided his clothes into four parts, one part for each. They did not want to tear his robe. So they threw dice to see who would get it (19:23-24).

Standing close to 'Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene and John, his disciple. Jesus lying on the cross told his mother." From that time John took her to live in his home (19:25-27).

Jesus said he was thirsty. Jesus drank the cheap wine which the soldiers gave him, and he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his Spirit (19:31-37). Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus took his body with permission of Pilate, wrapped it in linen with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial and placed it in a new tomb which was in a nearby garden (19:38-42).

Sunday early morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the tomb was open. She did not see the body of Jesus. She went running to Simon Peter and John and informed them. At once they came running to the tomb and saw only the linen and returned. But Mary stood near the tomb crying. Then the two angels who sat there asked her why she was crying. She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but did not recognize him. When Jesus called her, "Mary," she recognized him and said, "Rabboni." Jesus told her to tell his disciples that he is returning to the Father. Mary Magdalene got the first opportunity to see the Resurrected Jesus (20:1-18).

That night when the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive peoples' sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (20-19-25). Thus Jesus himself gave the disciples power to forgive sins. Using this power confession has been established in the church. Those other churches who teach that there is no need to confess before a priest is in fact refuse the resurrected Jesus himself who gave this power to his disciples.

When Jesus visited the disciples, Thomas was not there. When they told him that they saw Jesus, he did not believe them and said that he would believe only after has seen the pierced had of Jesus and put his hand where the spear plunged the side of him. Next Sunday the disciples were together again indoors. Thomas was also there. Jesus appeared and stood among them and wished them peace. Then Jesus showed Thomas his hands and the side. Thomas believed wholeheartedly and said, "My Lord and My God!" (20:21-31).

On some other occasion, Peter, John, Thomas and some other disciples went fishing. All the night they did not catch a thing. As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge and told them to throw the net on the right side of the boat. They got 153 big fish. When they reached ashore, Jesus gave them bread and fish to eat. This fishing and latter events are not mentioned in the other gospels. Then Jesus called Peter separately and asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lamps." When Jesus asked him again the same question, he repeated his reply. Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." A third time to him, "Lord you know every thing, you know that I Love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." (In a weak moment Peter had denied Jesus thrice. He repented immediately and begged for pardon. He has now publicly announced his love for Jesus thrice and did penance for his sin.)

Jesus himself gave Peter authority to lead and look after the church in the presence of other apostles. It can be seen that this authority was accepted by other apostles from the activities of the apostles and the first church, as observed in the Acts of Apostles.

Jesus also hinted that at his old age Peter would be bound and taken to a far away place which he would not like (21:18-19).

John concludes his gospel saying that he was an eyewitness for all the events that had happened and that he himself has written this book (21:24).

Questions:

1. What was the notice written on the cross of Jesus?
2. Who got the first opportunity to see the Resurrected Jesus?
3. How did Jesus give the authority to Peter to lead and look after the church?
4. Why did Pilate hand over Jesus to Jews, even though he could not find any fault in Jesus?
5. The Jews did not enter the palace of Pilate when Jesus was being tried. Why?

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LESSON - 17

PECULIARITIES OF THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

Aim: Understand clearly the peculiarities of the Gospel of John.

A. *John has written in his gospel matters others said about Jesus.*

1. John the Baptist told the people, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29).
2. Andrew told his brother Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah."
3. Philip found Nathaniel and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth" (1:45).
4. "Teacher," answered Nathaniel, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:49).
5. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy one who has come from God" (6:68).
6. "Yes Lord!" Martha answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (11:27).
7. After the resurrection, Thomas told Jesus, "My Lord and My god!" (20:28).

B. *Parables and similes:*

Parables of the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, the farmer who sows and the like, seen in other gospels are not included in the gospel of John. He has written many similes which Jesus spoke about himself. The important ones are given below:

1. I am the bread of life (6:48)
2. I am the light of the world (8:12)
3. I am the gate (10:9)
4. I am the good shepherd (10:11)
5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
7. I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener (15:1)

C *The main differences the gospel of John has with other gospels.*

1. The other gospels describe mainly the ministry at Galilee and the other side of Jordan. But John gives importance to the ministry at Galilee and the other side of Jordan. But John gives importance to the ministry in Judea. John has recorded those events the other gospel writers omitted.
2. The other gospels say about one Passover only. John has described about three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 12:1). This shows that Jesus had his public ministry at least for three years.
3. The other gospels revealed more of the human nature of Jesus. John gave more importance to the God head of Jesus.
4. By driving away the merchants, Jesus cleared the Temple. The other gospels say it happened at the end of the public ministry of Jesus. John says it happened at the beginning of the public ministry (Mathew 21:12; 16, Mark;-11; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:15).
5. The other gospels have recorded many parables. John has not written even one.

Exercise:

1. What are the similes Jesus used to describe himself?
2. Write the important differences the gospel of John has with the other gospels.

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LESSON - 18

THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

Aim: We learn the common etiquettes through the Epistle of St. James.

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, excluding the four gospels, Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation, 21 books are epistles. Out of these 14 epistles are written by Paul to various churches and individuals. You would have learned about some of these in your previous classes. Out of the remaining 7, three are written by John, 2 by Peter and one each by Jude and James. Let us learn about them briefly. None of these epistles are written specifically for a church or individual. As they were written generally for the church, they are called general or Catholic Epistles. During the Holy Qurbana, either from the Acts of the Apostles or from these Catholic Epistles, the deans read standing at the left side of the holy sanctorum. These four different people have written these epistles except for the difference in the language, there is much similarity among themselves and with the epistles of Paul.

The Epistle Written by James: Most of the theologians believe that this epistle was written by James brother of Jesus (Mathew 13:55). James was a perfect pious man. He, however, did not believe Jesus as the Son of God during the life time of Jesus (John 7:5). When the resurrected Jesus appeared to him, there was tremendous change in him. He became a member of the church and he was recognized as an important leader of the church. Paul, after his conversion reached Jerusalem, and he stayed with Peter and it is recorded that he met James, brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19). Moreover, James, Peter and John were considered the pillars of the church. The first named is James, brother of Jesus. In the synod held at Jerusalem, James presided over and we remember him in the 5th diptychs as the first chief priest, blessed, apostle and martyr. (James, son of Zebedee and brother of John was put to death by sword at the early stage of the church. At that time, the church was not large enough for James to write a letter to far away churches. So it is illogical to think that James, son of Zebedee wrote this epistle.)

From whom it is written:

In the beginning verse itself it is noted that this epistle is written to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad. "12 tribes," and "Dan to Bersheba"- these words mean all Israelites. Israelites' Promised Land is Canaan. Joshua divided the whole land of Canaan among all the tribes of Israel. In course of time, many Israelites due to various reasons were staying in other countries outside Canaan. People of all tribes were among such people. The scattered 12 tribes mean this group of people. James accepted Jesus as Messiah, Son of God; and he believed those people staying in other countries who receive Jesus Christ as the Son of God, are true Israelites. He has written this epistle for them around AD 60.

The subject of the epistle:

The subject matter is not very deep nor related to the religious rituals. He has written about practical wisdom and guidance for Christian attitudes and conduct. He exhorted them to treat fellow believers with brotherly love who are poor (2:1-13). Faith should not restrict itself, but should be shown in deeds. Though tongue is a small limb, unless it is controlled as we put bits in horses' mouth to control them, there are chances of great danger. You should be humble (4:10), and so on are mentioned in the epistle. He concludes the epistle by pointing out the importance and need of praying for the sick and anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Exercise:

1. What are general epistles or Catholic Epistles?
2. Name the apostles who are called the 'pillars of the church?'
3. Who are the scattered 12 tribes?
4. What are the advices James gives to us?

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LESSON - 19

EPISTLES WRITTEN BY ST. PETER

Aim: Our church is built on the faith proclaimed by St. Peter, the leader of the Apostles.

The Author:

Peter who became the leader of the apostles was from Bethsaida, an important fishing centre near Capernaum, the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). His father's name is recorded as Jona in Mathew 16:17 and John in John 1:44. Both these are synonyms. At first Peter was known as Simon. Jesus called him Peter (Mark 3:16); Luke 6:14). When some other disciples withdrew, Jesus asked twelve, "Would you also like to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God." (John 6:66-69). When Jesus asked his disciples who he was, Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." (Mathew 16:16). Jesus was pleased with his reply. Jesus described his firm faith as a rock and he gave a new name to Simon as Peter which means a rock. Our church is built on this faith proclaimed by him. Cepha also means rock.

In most of the events where his name is used, Peter is mentioned, e.g. where names of the apostles are mentioned (Mathew 10:2); when the daughter of Jairus was resurrected (Luke 8:51); where the event of transfiguration is described (Mathew 17:1); when they went to the garden at Gethsemane (Mark 14:29); and when Jesus foretold him that he would deny Jesus (Luke 22:34). But when personal matters are written about him, the apostles mention his old name Simon, e.g. when catching fish at Lake Galilee is described (Mathew 4:18); when he was told to go to the lake and drop a line to catch fish for a coin to pay Temple tax (Mathew 17:25); when his mother-in-law was laid up with high fever (Luke 4:38); and when Jesus speaks to him about the test by Satan.



The resurrected Christ in the presence of the other apostles entrusted Peter the responsibility of looking after his lambs and taking care of his sheep (John 21:15-17). Jesus also told him to strengthen his brothers. (Luke 22:32). Jesus foretold him that in his old age, he would have to leave bound his native place (John 21:18).

Peter worked in accordance with the trust Jesus had in him. He understood the responsibility of church leadership in Jerusalem. He established his apostolic throne in Antioch. We remember this day on February 22. Later he went to Rome and it is traditionally believed that there also he fulfilled his work as the leader of the church. Peter and his brother Andrew were fishing at the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called them and told that he would make them catch people. Peter made his calling a reality by guiding many to Jesus Christ.

At the time of persecution by Nero the emperor in AD 67, in Rome Peter was killed by crucifixion head down. The Church holds the memory of Peter on June 29.

Exercise:

A. Name the following:

1. Native Place of St. Peter.
2. Father of St. Peter.
3. Meaning of the word Cepha.
4. Place where St. Peter established his apostolic throne.
5. The emperor who crucified St. Peter.

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B. Write the context.

1. I will make you catch people.
2. With you there is word of eternal life.

C. Write the dates:

1. Commemoration day of the establishment of the Throne at Antioch.
3. Commemoration day of St. Peter.

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Lesson - 20

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PETER

Aim: We who are cleansed by the precious blood of the Lamb of God can attain eternal salvation and enter the eternal kingdom.

Of the general epistles, the most important one is the First Epistle of Peter. The author describes himself as "Apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1); "A witness of Christ's sufferings," "One who will share in the glory that will be revealed" (5:1). As dictated by Peter, Silas has written it. Mark was also there with Peter (5:12-13). The epistle says that it is from Babylon. In fact, it was written in Rome which city is referred as Babylon. At the time of persecution by Emperor Nero in AD 64; this epistle was written from Rome to give courage to those who were withdrawing from the church fearing the persecution and to convince them that all oppressions were only for a short-while.

The original of this epistle was in fine linguistic style and so some learned people doubt that it could not have been written by Peter, a fisherman who had no formal education. If we look into the tremendous change Peter had after receiving the Holy Spirit and to the many beautiful orations of Peter, such doubts have no standing. In addition, Silas who wrote it was a linguist by himself.

In the Acts of Apostles three important speeches of Peter have been included. They are - 1. At the day of Pentecost Acts of Apostles 2; 14-36), 2. At Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:11-26), and 3. Before the High Priest and elders of Jews (4:5-12). Not only the ideas but the same verses used in the above speeches are quoted in the epistle and it is an added evidence that this epistle is written by Peter.

It can be understood that the first church itself has recognized that this epistle was written by Peter, as elders of the early church such as Iranius, Clement and others have quoted verses from this epistle and said that Peter had written so.

Contents of the Epistle:

The contents of the first epistle of Peter can be summarized as follows. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives hope to those who follow him. The sinners were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God. He was there at the beginning of the world and he will reveal himself in the last days. Only the members of the family of Aaron of the Levy Tribe were chosen as priests. The heathens were away from God in those days. But all, all those who received Jesus Christ as their Saviour, without looking their ancestry, according to the grace of the Lord, are "the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation and God's own people" (2:9). Christians should be examples to others and should obey all lawful authority (2:13-15). Men and women should lead an exemplary family life (3:10-17). He then states about the importance of baptism. To suffer for the name of Jesus Christ is a blessing and thus we have to live a holy life. We should give time for prayer and love and serve one another (4:1-11). And the priests of the church should live a model life and love and lead the people whom they serve (5:1-6). He advises to leave all the worries with Jesus, because he cares for you (5:7). Peter affirms that if you will stay firm in your faith, the temporary difficulties will vanish and you can attain eternal salvation and he concludes his letter with benediction.

The Second Epistle of Peter:

There has not been raised any objection about the author of this epistle. It begins saying that Peter is the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. He entreats us to add to our lives faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, Christian affection and love and if we observe these, entrance to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour is possible. "I know that I shall soon put off this mortal body," wrote Peter knowing that his death is near. So this letter should have been written in AD 66. He was killed in AD 67. He foretold them about false teachers who will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines. He reminds that the band of angels who will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines. He reminds that the band of angels who sinned were not spared; the flood, destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sinners were destroyed and the just were saved (2:1-19). It is more dangerous to have church members who live wicked lives and their sin among them than the enemies from outside. He admonishes such people in very strong language. He has compared them with dogs with turn to its vomit and pigs which are cleansed that turn again and roll in dirt (2:20-22).

Peter clarifies that this is his second letter and it is written to those who have received the first letter (3:1). Therefore, any doubt about the author of the first letter is set naught. At the time of Noah, God punished the earth with a flood and God had given an assurance after the flood that a flood will never again destroy all living

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beings" (Gen. 9:15). The apostle says very clearly that the next destruction will be by fire (3:7, 10). God has extended the time of destruction of all, as he wants all to turn away from their sins. Peter mentions about the significant letters written by the dear friend Paul (3:15-16). In the New Testament this is the only reference about another writer. The letter concludes with exhortation to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Exercise:

1. How does the author describe himself?
2. Who wrote the letter when Peter dictated it?
3. What are the proofs that the author of this letter is Peter himself?
4. What are the counsels Peter gives in his first letter?
5. Through his second letter what counsel Peter gives?

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LESSON - 21

THE EPISTLES WRITTEN BY ST. JOHN

Aim: Live in fellowship with God, knowing the true faith that Jesus Christ was Complete God and at the same time Complete Man.

The author describes himself in the introduction of the letter.

The First Epistle of John:

"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us." (1 John 1:3). Thus John said about his intention of writing this letter.

Once Jesus said to his disciples, "As for you, how fortunate you are! Your eyes see and your ears hear. I assure you that many prophets and many of God's people wanted very much to see what you see, but they could not and to hear what you hear, but they did not" (Mathew 13:16-17). Thus John the apostle was fortunate to see the incarnate Son of God with his own eyes and to hear his voice with his own ears; and he writes this letter to those who were not so fortunate.

John clarifies that the subject matter of his letter is the words that he heard from Jesus. Atonement of sin is through the blood of Jesus. A sinner has to repent and confess his sins; then only shall he receive forgiveness. A Christian who understands all these things but does not obey his words is a liar (2:4). One who loves his brother lives in true light.

In course of time false teachings spread in the church and the activities of the enemy of Christ strengthened. Some questioned the God head of Jesus. Concerning them John wrote, "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son" (2:22). Some others denied the complete Manhood of the Son of God. Concerning them John wrote, "By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (4:2-3). The main intention of this epistle is to warn the believers against such false teachings.

The usual prelude or the concluding blessings are not seen in this epistle. For whom it is written is not clear. It is assumed that while the apostle was staying in the Island of Patmos, he wrote this epistle to the various churches in Asia Minor.

The Second Epistle of John:

In the beginning of the letter, John calls himself 'Elder.' It is not clear for whom it is written. It is addressed to the 'Elect Lady and her children; and the letter ends with, 'the children of your sister greet you.' There are two schools of thought among theologians that the letter is addressed to an important lady and her children, and the other is that the Church is personified as mother and its members as children.

The epistle is very short. The main counsel of this letter is to make the true believers alert against the false teachers who deny the Godhead as well as the Manhood of Jesus Christ. It was written near about the time when he wrote the first epistle from Ephesus.

The Third Epistle of John:

As in the second epistle, John describes himself 'Elder' in the third letter also. It is addressed to Gaius. The relationship John had with Gaius was as strong as the relationship of Paul and Timothy. Tradition says that later Gaius became a bishop in Asia Minor. This letter was also written from Ephesus.

In this small letter, the apostle has used the word truth six times. He desired that the members of the church must understand and believe the true faith that Jesus Christ is the Complete God and Complete Man.

It was the accepted custom in those days to receive traveling evangelists and attend to them. In certain churches some local leaders were there who rejected the apostle. John praised the work of Gaius and concluded his letter with the hope of seeing him personally in the near future.

Exercise:

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1. What was that many prophets and righteous people wanted to see and hear? Where they could not fulfill their desire, the apostles had that fortune. What was that fortune the apostles got?
2. Who is an Antichrist?
3. What is the spirit of Antichrist?
4. There are two different opinions amongst the theologians about the second epistle of John. What is that?
5. What is the main theme of the second epistle?
6. What is John's desire as to the belief and life of the church members as revealed in the third epistle?

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LESSON - 22

THE EPISTLE WRITTEN BY ST. JUDE

Aim: Those who reject Jesus Christ cannot bring forth fruits.

The author describes himself in the beginning of the letter as a bond servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James. Among the theologians there are many opinions as to who is the Jude. When he says that he is brother of James, James must be a well known person so that others can know him easily in the early church. Such a James is brother of Jesus.

Paul says three names as pillars of the church. First name is that of James (Gal. 2:9). James had a younger brother named Judas (Mathew 13:55). Most of the theologians believe that this Judas is the author of this epistle. It is not clear for whom it was written or from where it was written. In the beginning the author says that it is written "To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." Even though it is not specified for whom it was written; the epistle points towards the false teaching about Jesus Christ spread by enemies of the church.

He forewarns those who reject Jesus Christ telling them about the punishment of God, received by the angels; Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, and Balaam. He compares such people to clouds without water, later autumn trees without fruit, raging waves of the sea, wandering stars and so on. He calls those who cause trouble in the church as sensual persons not having the Spirit. Believers have to observe certain things. They should live a clean life and wait for eternal life. They should try to bring back those who had gone astray and should show compassion to others. Jude concludes the letter give in praise to the God our Saviour.

Exercise:

1. How does Jude introduce himself?
2. With whom does he compare those who reject Jesus Christ?
3. How does he rebuke those who cause division in the church?
4. What are the duties of a believer?

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THE TRUE FAITH OF THE HOLY CHURCH

LESSON 32

PRAYER

The Holy Church follows the example of the "Lords Prayer" – "Our Father in Heaven", for its prayers. When you study closely this prayer, you will understand that the word "prayer" does not merely imply "pleading" or asking". The actual prayer has three parts:-

1. Praise (Our Father.....your name) We Glorify the Lord's holiness, goodness and greatness in this part.
2. Pleading, spiritual needs come before physical needs-(your will, daily bread, forgiveness)
3. Thanksgiving, self surrender- last part.

Human beings are weak in themselves and subject to worldly desires. Their spiritual and physical growth rests in the hands of the Lord. So we should ask the Lord for spiritual protection and growth, for the strength to face trials and come out victorious, and for physical protection. We should know the Almighty Lord and glorify him. We should remember the blessings showered upon us and offer him our praise, our gratitude.

When we ask for our needs, we should keep in mind mainly four aspects:-

1. Following the example of Christ's prayer at Gethsemane, all our prayers should be subjects to His holy will.
2. We should not pray for selfish or unfair needs but only for the victory of truth, righteousness and goodness.
3. We should pray for the glory of the Lord's name and for blessings for other but never for loss for other and gains for oneself.
4. We should pray in strong faith and adoration. The prayer in faith has great strength. (Matt 21:22, James 5:15). If we pray with all our heart and according to God's will, it will certainly be answered.

The prayer in faith will be answered in three ways

1. "So let it be" Elijah prayed for fire to descend from the sky. Immediately fire came down.
2. "No" St. Paul prayed for the removal of the thorn in his flesh. It was not removed. "My grace is sufficient for you" was the reply given to him.
3. "Be patient" The priest Zacharias prayed for a child. Though he did not get a sudden answer to his prayer, later he was blessed with a child.

God knows our needs but still we should always keep praying because prayer is communion with God.

The way to Pray

Christ has elaborated in St. Mathew 6:9-13 the way a real Christian should pray.

Here are some things that the Holy Church teaches us about the way to pray.

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1. Pray facing the east "This has been followed from the apostolic ages" (St Basselios)." This custom was followed worldwide. (Origen) "We pray facing the east" The Jacobite Syrian Church alone retains this custom of the apostolic times.
2. Face the east and draw the cross and after, place your hands on your chest and pray. "We draw the cross while engaged in any work". (Tertullian) "They never started anything without first drawing the cross." (Cyprian)
3. Stand while you pray. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (St. Mark 11:25)" "Standing while praying is a Christian tradition followed by the Eastern Church even today."
4. While praying you should kneel and bow down at specific times. Only those who are seriously ill are exempted from this. We do not need to kneel down on Sundays, on Maranaya Festival on the days from Easter to the Day of Pentecost, on days on which we have received Holy Communion.
5. Confession, Ordination Service, Pentecost Service- on all these occasions our Church orders "us to kneel down and pray.

Prayer Timings

There is nothing like we should pray at a specific time only. We should pray without ceasing lest we fall into temptation. The Holy Church orders us to pray 7 times in a day-evening, soothera, mid-night, morning, third hour, noon, ninth hour. For the convenience of strict followers of the timings, it has been arranged as twice for the 3 days fast and thrice for Lent. A church member who does not pray accordingly is committing a grave sin.

Various Prayers

Public Prayer:- The Holy church has created and arranged public prayers for each occasion. There should be family prayer at home. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." (St. Mathew 18:20) The apostles and believers prayed to the Lord "with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2: 46).

Short Prayer:- We can have communion with God each and every second. No matter what work we are engaged in, we can praise the Lord in our mind and with our lips.

Secret Prayer:- Thanking the Lord for the blessings showered upon oneself and praying to the Lord for one's own personal needs is termed as 'Secret Prayer'. This prayer should be done in private.

Intercession:- The prayers offered by the saints before the Lord for us and the prayers offered by us for others can be termed as 'intercession'. St. Paul has made the request "pray for me" on many occasions. James 5: 16 says "Pray for one another".

We should pray for the Holy Church, our spiritual fathers, our rulers who are appointed to shepherd and govern the church, those who work for the church, our national leaders, our whole world, our brothers and even for our enemies.

Model Questions

1. Which example do the prayers of the Holy Church follow? Which are the three parts of a prayer?
2. Which four aspects should we keep in mind while we pray?

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3. Which are the three ways in which a prayer can be answered?
4. Describe the way of prayer decided by the Holy Church.
5. Which are the prayer timings? How has the church adjusted the timings for our convenience?
6. Which are the various kinds of prayers?
7. What is meant by intercession?

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LESSON 33

THE HOLY CROSS



Two thousand years ago the Persians, Medes, Romans, Syrians, Carthaginians etc used the cross as a punishment for grave offences like murder, theft, treachery and strife. The accused were hanged to death on the cross. But ever since Christ has been crucified, the cross has been looked upon with the utmost faith, respect and adoration.

The Salvation of mankind, the freedom from sin and the defeat of Satan all rests upon the crucifixion of Christ. The apostles and early Christians, who understood the truth very well, looked upon the cross with respect and adoration. St. Paul says about the Gospel as "the message of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18)" We make the sign of the cross while engaged in any work". *Tertullian* That great lady bowed down before the cross as if Christ was lying crucified on the cross" says Jerasne about Queen Helena. Protestants who don't usually make the sign of the cross, during baptism draw the cross on the forehead of the one getting baptized. "The Book of Common Prayer" says about this- "Though this is not mentioned in the Holy Gospel, this (drawing the cross) is performed."

Why should we draw the cross?

1. When we draw the cross, we escape from all Satanic influences and come nearer to the Holy Cross, our fortress of refuge.
2. As we are made heirs to the kingdom of heaven by the crucifixion of Christ, we should always remember and take refuge in it by drawing the cross.
3. As Christ's sufferings on the cross were on our behalf, we should draw the cross on ourselves with the same intention.
4. As Christ says, "He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me," we express our readiness to take up any cross (sufferings) while we draw the cross.
5. As a sign of victory over Satan and as a symbol of Christianity, we draw the cross. We should consider the drawing of the cross as an honor. Bowing before the cross is not idol worship.

When we bow down before the cross, we are bowing before the crucified Christ and his death on the cross, which gave us salvation. We keep in mind all these aspects when we draw the cross. When David brought up the ark of God, he sacrificed oxen and sheep, danced, shouted and blew the trumpet but all this was not considered idol worship by the Jewish Church (2San 6:-14-16). Making idols and worshipping them as God is idol worship. When we keep the cross and other things in the Church for the knowledge and in memory of Biblical happenings, it does not constitute idol worship.

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We should make the sign of the cross wherever we see a cross laid by believers or when the name "Sleebea" is mentioned. In this way we worship and remember the crucified Christ. When a cross is laid in a place or it is newly made, the priest does not perform the sacrament rites and consecrate it. The cross is only glorified and its foundation laid.

The main idea behind the drawing of the cross.

The first part of the drawing of the cross from the forehead to the chest signifies the coming of the Son of God from heaven to earth for the salvation of mankind and the second part from left to right signifies the transformation of us from Satan's children to God's children (Mor Severiose).

The cross also signifies the inseparable Godliness and human nature of Christ, his human incarnation, his ministry, the salvation of mankind and a host of other truths.

Model Questions

1. Why should we respect the cross?
2. Why should we make the sign of the cross?
3. Bowing before the cross is not idol worship why?
4. What is the main idea behind the drawing of the cross?

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LESSON 34

THE DEPARTED

Those who have lived and died in true Christian faith are called "the departed" or those "asleep in Christ".

The custom of burying the dead according to the religious practices, existed from the ancient times. This was done due to the belief in life after death. The funeral prayers for the faithful departed are done in accordance with the principles set by the Holy church.

The belief of other religions in life after death is mere guesswork, but we truly believe that everything does not come to an end with death. Based on the evidence of our Christ and resurrection on the third day, we also have resurrection.

The specialty of the Christian religion is the resurrection of Christ. "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty".(1Cor 15:14). "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" (John 11:25)

When is the resurrection?

On the second coming of Christ, there will be the resurrection of all the departed. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first " (1 Thess 4:16). At this coming those who are in the grave will hear his voice and those who hear will live. (St John 5:25). Jairus' daughter, the widow's son and Lazarus four days after his death all heard the voice of Jesus Christ and this signifies that Christ's voice can raise up the dead. On the day of resurrection we rise up with glorified new bodies. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."(1 Corinthians 15:53). Some think that resurrection is only for the righteous, which is wrong. For Christ says "those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (St John 5:29). Therefore resurrection is for everyone.

Judgment

Christ himself teaches us about the judgment on his second coming. Christ will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him. He will separate them. The righteous to the right and the evil to the left. He will lead those who are on the right to the kingdom of heaven and those who are on the left will be punished and put away into the eternal fire. (St Math 25:31-46). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor 5:10) A Christian should have hope of resurrection and fear of judgment.

The new life constitutes both resurrection and judgment. To be resurrected judged according to one's deeds and to have attained eternal salvation is termed as new life.

The theory of rebirth is completely different. According to this theory, when one dies one's body also dies and depending on whether one's deeds are good or bad, the spirit takes birth in another body. This cycle goes on until total goodness is attained and thus one has salvation. The people who believe in rebirth do not believe that they have to face judgment, we should take care to do good and have faith in God. We should bury our deed in faith and pray that they will be shown mercy on judgment day. For this reason, we fast and pray for the departed for forty days, take part in the Holy Communion and do charitable deeds.

We should conduct the funeral of little children also with prayers, even for those who died before taking baptism, because they are the children of Christian parents, covenant- heirs, children of the church.

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Believers should not take part in the funeral of those excommunicated from the church, those who negate the Bible or those who have committed suicide.

Model Question

1. There is proof that man has resurrection, which are the proofs?
2. When is the resurrection? What does the Holy Bible say about resurrection? Which are the miracles that Jesus performed as a sign of resurrection.
3. How do we know that resurrection is for everybody?
4. What has Chris said about judgment?
5. What is meant by (I) new life (ii) rebirth?
6. Why should we honor the departed and pray for them?
7. Why should we conduct the funeral of little children also with prayers?

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LESSON 35

PRAYER FOR THE DEPARTED

We form our basis for everything on the Holy Bible, on the Holy words of Christ and on the teachings of his apostles and those who came after them. As Christ says in St John 6:47 and 56-“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”- we understand that the spirit is active even after the body is dead. Christ says in St. Luke 20:38. “For he is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to him.” So, according to the Holy Bible, the church teaches us that the spirit of the departed are alive and active.

According to some reformationist churches the spirit of the dead, though alive are in an unconscious state and so praying for the dead and seeking intercession from the saints are meaningless. The Holy Bible proves that this theory is wrong. Psalms 115:17 which says “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence.” is taken as the basis of this teaching but as verse 18 says “But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forever more” (Psalms 115:18) “forevermore” means that we will bless the Lord even after death. So Psalms 115:17 should be understood in another sense. Eph 2:1 says “and you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Christ also says “Let the dead bury their own dead” So we understand that the dead mentioned in Palms 115:17 are those who are dead in sins. In the parable of the Prodigal son. (St Luke 15:32) which says.....for this my son was dead and is alive again, Christ teaches us what it is to be alive and to be dead.

The fact that a believer will live even though he died and will bless the Lord forever shows that the dead are conscious.....the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God” (St John 5:25) “For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead.....”(1 Pet 4:6) “You will show wonders to the dead, the dead will stand up and praise you” (Psalms 88:10-11) In the CMS Bible version, this verse is intentionally misinterpreted as “ will you show wonders to the dead? Will the dead stand up and praise you?

As mercy is granted till the day of judgment we should understand that it is right to pray “Show mercy also to the dead”.

Our Christ is the example of perfect love . As he has shown us the way of salvation, we should hope and pray for the salvation of all mankind from the very beginning. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” (Romans 14:8-9). “The Lord, who has not forsaken his kindness to the living and the dead! (Ruth 2:20).

The dead also belong to the Lord. He shows mercy to them. Judgment is the right of Christ alone. We have not right to judge anyone but instead we should be hopeful and pray for the dead to our ever patient Lord. In this aspect our attitude is much more Christ like than that of the Reformationists.

The practice of fasting and praying for the departed existed during the Old Testament times also (1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:12) The Jewish Maccabees people (3 Maccabees 12:42) made offerings and sacrifices for their dead. St. Paul takes about being “baptized for the dead” in 1 Cor 15:29. Though one is not sure about this baptism, it is to be understood that the living cared for the salvation of the souls of the departed and to ensure this adopted certain spiritual means. According to Tertullian the practice of offering Holy Communion for all the departed once a year existed in the second century also. The Holy church follows this even today. In the Book of common prayer-P-198 of the Protestants a prayer which says –“Lord, let all the faithful departed along with us be able to enjoy complete spiritual and physical happiness when we are brought into your eternal glory”- is included.

We remember the departed in prayer and in the Holy Communion. We pray, fast and offer Holy Communion for the departed, all which is in accordance with the Holy Bible.

The Roman Church teaches about a place named Purgatory where the souls of the departed are punished and thus made holy before the Judgment Day. The Holy Church has not adopted this theory, as there is not the slightest hint of such a theory in the Holy Bible or in the early church.

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Model Questions

1. Give proofs from the bible that the souls of the departed are alive..
2. How can we prove that the souls of the departed have consciousness?
3. Praying for the dead is in accordance with the Bible. Why?

