

# *God's Good News For You!*

*A Brief Overview of the Holy Bible*

by

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one way in which they are trying to share Him with you. Do you still hear Him knocking on the door, seeking entry into your heart?

Or, may it be that you are wondering what more you should be aware of and can do while receiving Jesus in your heart, or how you can help your friends to open their hearts to Jesus. If so, here are a few clues from Jesus' own teaching:

1. Jesus once told a story about two men who prayed. The first, a very religious man of good birth, thanked God that he was not like other people who are sinners, who are greedy, dishonest, lustful, etc. He then reminded God in his prayer (as if God did not know it!) how he fasted, prayed, gave charity. This man saw himself as a very good man, who by his good deeds could earn his salvation from God. But what God also saw in him was his pride, his contempt for others, his self-righteousness, his self-deception.

The prayer of the second man was merely a cry: "O God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am!" This man saw himself as God saw him. He realized that his heart was in need of healing and that God alone could heal him. The prayer of the second man should be your prayer also. And the prayer of your friend.

2. If you can pray the prayer, "O God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am," then welcome Jesus into your heart as your Saviour, as God's mercy for you. Let Him become your Way, your Truth and your Life. Thank God that He is your Heavenly Father and that His Holy Spirit lives in your heart and directs your life on God's straight path of righteousness.

3. Become His disciple. Jesus does not seek people who merely admire and applaud Him. He seeks disciples who follow Him, who do the will of His Heavenly Father, who are even willing to suffer for His sake. You will do works which please Him, not in order to be saved by them but because you have been saved by Him for them. You, too, will await the Second Coming of Jesus, faithfully serving Him now while you joyfully prepare to meet Him and to be with Him forever.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	5
1: HUMANITY'S SIN: HUMANITY'S PROBLEM	7
2: GOD'S LAW, ITS PURPOSE AND FUNCTION	9
3: GOD'S PROMISES THROUGH THE PROPHETS	13
4: THE SAVIOUR MESSIAH COMES	15
5: THE MESSIAH HEALS THE SICK	17
6: THE TEACHING OF THE MESSIAH	19
7: THE DEATH OF JESUS THE MESSIAH	23
8: JESUS THE MESSIAH RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND ALIVE FOREVERMORE	27
9: FOLLOWING JESUS	29

## LESSON 9: FOLLOWING JESUS

After His resurrection, Jesus continued to live on earth for forty days. He met His disciples on several occasions, during which time He continued to teach them and prepare them for His departure into heaven. On one occasion He appeared before more than five hundred people. Can you imagine their joy in being with their Saviour?

Before Jesus departed into heaven, He told His disciples:

Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to Me. Go forth therefore and make all nations My disciples; baptize men everywhere in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time.

As He left His disciples to return to heaven from where He, God's Word and Messiah, originally came, His disciples heard a voice saying:

Men of Galilee,<sup>8</sup> why stand there looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken away from you up to heaven, will come in the same way as you have seen Him go.

Prior to His crucifixion Jesus Himself had spoken to His disciples about His return to heaven. On another occasion He told them that when He returned to earth, He would come in glory to judge all people. (It is the Day for which we all should be ready!) But it was only after Jesus' resurrection that His disciples began to understand much of His teaching.

While the disciples were gathered together some ten days after Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, God's Holy Spirit, whose coming Jesus had promised, came upon the disciples to prepare them for their work. The Holy Spirit assured them that the same Jesus, who had ascended into heaven, was present with them.<sup>9</sup>

As the disciples worshipped together, they understood themselves to be Jesus' co-workers, to be His legs and His arms, His eyes and His ears. They moved boldly from place to place, helping people and telling them the Good News about Jesus.

Today, disciples of Jesus carry on this work of sharing Jesus as they await His Second Coming. In fact, these lessons are just

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<sup>8</sup> The home of Jesus' disciples.

<sup>9</sup> Here is what the Holy Bible describes as the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

brokenhearted. He gave life to the dead. But the Lifegiver Himself now lies dead in the cold tomb. The fate of all is His fate also.

Scene two: These same disciples and friends of Jesus. Jesus has risen from the dead, just as He predicted. His tomb is empty. The disciples have seen Him with their own eyes. They now understand. They are joyful and confident. They no longer hide behind closed doors, frightened by their enemies. They courageously walk the streets, recount Jesus' wonderful teaching and deeds, proclaim Him as Messiah and Saviour.

These two scenes are not imaginary; they are facts of history. They are accurate descriptions of the disciples of Jesus. Why the incredible difference? It can be only explained by the most momentous event in history: Between the two scenes Jesus had risen from the dead! This is why Jesus' earliest disciples soon changed their weekly day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.

The resurrection of Jesus is indeed the key which unlocks the meaning of His life and death as God's Servant and Messiah. If one takes away the resurrection from Jesus, He is only another great guru, teacher, prophet, guide, who has provided us with good teaching, who has done great works but who now lies dead and buried along with all great teachers and prophets. The forces of evil and the power of sin remain. Death, our last enemy, has seized Him in its power also and continues to have the last word.

It is Jesus' resurrection which clearly reveals to us who Jesus is and what God our Heavenly Father has done through Him for us. A great teacher, messenger and prophet of God? Yes, and much more: He is victor over Satan, sin and death, over all forces of evil. In Him, we find forgiveness of our sin. Through Him, death dies! He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, as He said. He not merely speaks God's Word; He *is* God's eternal Word, God's expression of Himself as man for all people in the world. That is why Jesus could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." He is Immanuel, God with us, God for us. Yes, Jesus is unique!

Because Jesus has risen from the dead, death need not be the last chapter in your life also. Take Him into your heart and you can begin the first chapter of your new life with Him. You can find new peace, purpose and meaning in your life. Good News for you! Is it not the best news you have ever heard? Yes, good enough to share with others also? He, the risen Jesus, continues to knock at the door of your heart! Or have you already invited Him in?

## GOD'S GOOD NEWS FOR YOU!

### Introduction

Can something that was recorded some nineteen centuries ago still be news, even good news? It seems rather hard to believe, does it not?

Yet this is what the New Testament (Evangel, Injil), a book now more than nineteen hundred years old, claims to be. In spite of its old age, it still claims to be news, good news. In fact "good news" is exactly what the word "Evangel" or (in Arabic) "Injil" means.

The New Testament is good news because of the person whom it introduces. It introduces us to God's living Word, Jesus the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> It tells us the good news about God and what He has done for us through Jesus.

"But how can Jesus be good news for me?" you may ask. Indeed, you may feel that you already know something about Jesus and that the good news about Him is no better than the good news about any other great teacher, guide or prophet. What, then, is the difference between Jesus and other prophets, and what is so special about the good news about Jesus?

It is the intention of this short study to tell you what is special about Jesus and how He differs from other great prophets. Its lessons are taken from the Holy Bible, especially that part of the Bible called the New Testament. Read them and see for yourself whether or not the claim of the New Testament to be good news – for you also – is a true claim. As the saying goes: the proof of the pudding is in the tasting of it.

A final word before you read the lessons: As God speaks to you through these lessons, you can learn to speak to Him in prayer in the same way you would speak to your closest and dearest friend or relative. He understands your language, your needs, your joys, your sorrows; yes, He understands you, your heart, your mind, your body. Even more, He cares about you and your behaviour! He has a purpose and a plan for you and for your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Or Jesus the Christ; Christ (Greek) = Messiah (Hebrew) = "the Anointed One", anointed by God's Holy Spirit.

So come, praise God in the words of the Bible's Psalm 117:

Praise the Lord, all you nations!  
Extol Him, all you peoples!  
For great is His steadfast love toward us  
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

## LESSON 8: JESUS THE MESSIAH RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND ALIVE FOREVERMORE

It was on a Friday that Jesus died. Hurriedly, a few friends arranged for His burial before Saturday, the Sabbath,<sup>5</sup> when all work was forbidden. A rich and influential man who had feared the Jewish leaders now gained enough courage to offer Jesus at least a decent tomb. There Jesus was buried, a huge stone was set before the tomb and guards were stationed to keep anyone from molesting it, protecting it with their weapons and their lives!

Jesus, dead and buried: Why, then, another lesson in our account of the life of Jesus? Why not simply add the above paragraph to the end of lesson 7 and conclude our overview of the Holy Bible without lessons 8 and 9? The answer is simple. The death of Jesus is *not* the final chapter in His life. On Friday Jesus had died. On Sunday He rose from the dead!

In fact, for Jesus His death was the opening chapter in His new life. And further chapters in His new life have been written since His death and continue to be written until the present. Here, in the words of the New Testament, is how it began:

Now after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary<sup>6</sup> went to see the sepulchre (tomb). And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women: "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee<sup>7</sup>; there you will see Him. Do as I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said: "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Imagine two scenes. Scene one: Disciples of Jesus followed Him, heard Him teach, saw His wonderful works and fervently hoped He was the Messiah promised by God. Now He is dead and buried, and with Him their hopes. They are dazed and

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<sup>5</sup> The seventh day of the week.

<sup>6</sup> These women should not be confused with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> The northern province of Palestine.

## **A PRAYER YOU CAN ALSO PRAY WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. For the sake of Jesus the Messiah have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us by your Holy Spirit, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

(From a Christian Hymnal)

## **LESSON 1: HUMANITY'S SIN: HUMANITY'S PROBLEM**

Our universe, including the planet earth on which we and all things exist, did not come into existence by itself. God is the Creator of all. So also God created Adam and Eve and all human beings. This is an article of faith which is shared by Jews, Christians, Muslims and others. We really belong to God and should be responsible and accountable to Him and to His commandments. He should be first in your life. So also His will and purpose for you.

Why, then, are we so often and so easily tempted to do the things we should not do, and to not do the things we should do? Why so often do we find it so difficult to do good, so easy to do evil? Why do we sin so freely against God and our neighbour? Why are even our worship, prayers, fasts and alms so often unworthy of God and unacceptable to Him? Why are we, as one common expression says, "a compound of sin and forgetfulness"? Why are we humans so often more interested in what we want than what God wants for us? Did God create us this way? Indeed not!

We know that when God created heaven, earth and all things, He created them good. We know that He also created Adam and Eve good. Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden and had everything they needed for a good life. They knew God, they spoke with God and God spoke with them. Under God they had authority to rule over the whole creation. They had liberty to do what they wanted. Only one thing God forbade them to do in this vast and beautiful Garden: to eat of the fruit of a tree (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) that was in the Garden. It was a small and simple examination to demonstrate their obedience.

O that Adam and Eve would have enjoyed all the blessings of the Garden and avoided that one tree! Sadly, both chose to forsake the abundance of the Garden and, instead, to eat the fruit of that single tree. Satan indeed had tempted them. They should have fled for refuge to God. Indeed, their eating of the forbidden fruit was their own sin. They had sinned against God and against themselves. For this, they could blame only themselves.

Yes, Adam and Eve had sinned against God. That is why their sin was so terrible. They had broken God's commandment and, therefore, they had broken the relationship which existed between themselves and God.

It is no small matter to unjustly disobey a ruler. How much worse, then, to rebel against one's Creator, the Holy One, the King of kings and the Lord of lords! Adam's and Eve's tragic act brought tragic consequences upon themselves. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden, never to return there as long as they lived in this world. They had broken their relationship with God and they became foes to each other. Pride, ingratitude, disobedience, deceit, fear, shame, enmity: these are some of the sins and consequences of sin which plagued Adam and Eve after their transgression. They have been plaguing their descendants ever since. You and me also.

Can the leopard change its spots or those of its offspring? Adam and Eve were never restored to the Garden of Eden; nor were their descendants, who also bore the results of their transgression. How sad to read about their elder son, Cain, envying and finally murdering his brother Abel! How tragic to trace the spread of sin through their descendants as they increased in numbers and began to spread throughout the earth! So pervasive were their sins against God and their neighbours that God's judgement fell upon them. A flood destroyed them all – except Noah (Nuh) and his family. (Is it not only by the grace of God that we escape a similar punishment now?) This is why the Bible so frequently laments over the evil condition of people's hearts and even says: "They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt."

Yes, the story of all people, all tribes and nations, has been a very sad story and it continues to be the same. It is as if sin, like blood in our bodies, continuously flows through us and affects all our thoughts and actions: pride, selfishness, jealousy, covetousness, bribery, hate, lust, disobedience, revenge – the same ones that plagued Adam and Eve. You, too, could easily add to this list. Even our good works are stained by our selfish motives, for example, when we do good for a bad reason. We become slaves to ourselves, to our selfish desires and evil actions, rather than true servants to God and to His will and purpose for us. How much sadder when one sees this condition in others but remains blind to one's own condition!

God did not create us to be this way and is not satisfied that we so remain. God willing, in the following lessons we shall see how He wants to help us change our ways. You, too, will learn about God's Good News for you! For God, our Heavenly Father, wishes that all people would be saved, that none would perish.

power is love and righteousness, not hatred, vengeance and killing. Though Pilate realized that Jesus was no danger to Roman rule, he finally handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders and told them to do what they wanted. Then Jesus was beaten, spat upon, bitterly mocked and finally nailed on a cross. While He was on the cross, the ridicule continued:

"He saved others," they said, "but He cannot save Himself. Let the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross. If we see that, we shall believe."

After several hours on the cross, as the New Testament says, "Jesus gave a loud cry and died."

Yes, Jesus died on the cross and was buried. He was misunderstood, forsaken, despised and ridiculed. Indeed, He had the power to save Himself! On the other hand, His enemies were correct in stating that He could not save Himself. Why? It was His love for all people, not the nails, which held Him on that cross!

As the prophet Isaiah had foretold (see lesson 3), the Messiah suffered and died for us. He died that we might live!

Can you hear God's claim upon you: "You are twice mine. I have created you and I have redeemed you!"?



understand the meaning and the importance of Jesus being the Messiah as Jesus understood it?

Only after this confession did Jesus reveal to His disciples the deeper significance of His Messiahship, His Kingship. He told them plainly: "You have confessed correctly that I am the Messiah. Now I want to tell you that I am the Messiah because I am God's Servant who will suffer and die." On another occasion He said about Himself:

The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to surrender His life as a ransom for many.

It was at this point that the disciples reacted. The Messiah, they insisted, cannot suffer and die a shameful death. God would never allow this to happen to His faithful Servant. Thus Jesus' disciples rejected even Jesus' own words and thoughts as nonsense. (Do we today as Jesus' disciples understand them better?)

The Jewish leaders soon openly planned to put Jesus to death. They finally succeeded in seizing Him one night, while He was engaged in prayer with His Heavenly Father. That same night they held a mock trial. They brought forward witnesses to testify against Jesus so that they could condemn Him according to their Law. When the testimonies of the witnesses failed to agree, the Jewish leaders asked Jesus, in the words of the New Testament:

"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"<sup>4</sup> Jesus said: "I am and you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven." The High Priest tore his robes and said: "Need we call further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What is your opinion?" Their judgement was unanimous: that He was guilty and should be put to death.

Because Jesus had confessed that He was the Messiah and the Son of God, the Jewish leaders condemned Him to die.

Quickly they led Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Before Pilate they charged Jesus with calling Himself a king, that He was therefore a threat to the Roman emperor who ruled over the Jewish nation also. When Pilate questioned Jesus, Jesus agreed that He was a king but stated that His Kingdom was not of this world. His Kingdom is in this world but not of this world. His

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus is Son of God in a spiritual sense, not in a physical sense. In the same way He is called the Word of God, He is called the Son of God, as we have already noted.

## LESSON 2: GOD'S LAW, ITS PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

About a century ago, Roentgen, a man from the country of Holland, discovered a machine whereby he was able to take pictures of inside parts of the human body. You probably know the name of this machine. It is called an X-ray machine. Doctors everywhere are able to use this machine to discover infections in parts of the body, where bones are broken, how some of the members of our body are functioning, etc.

A person may look perfectly healthy. But at times he may be feverish, coughing, perhaps even spitting blood. The doctor can use the X-ray machine to determine whether these problems are caused by T.B. (tuberculosis). If the X-ray machine reveals patches on the lungs, then the doctor will understand the lungs are diseased, in need of treatment. The patient may insist nothing is wrong and all is well. In fact, the X-ray reveals he is sick, even critically sick.

In our previous lesson we saw how the disease of sin took hold of Adam and Eve and spread through the hearts of their descendants. They forgot God and ignored His will. No doubt, they sometimes suffered the negative results of their sin. But generally they thought that they were good people and better than others, that they never, or only rarely, did evil and that there was nothing wrong with the spiritual condition of their hearts. They were like the man who thought he was quite healthy even though he had a fever and coughed badly, until the X-ray machine revealed the true inner condition of his lungs. His lungs were diseased. He really was sick!

For this reason God gave the people His holy Law through the great prophet Moses (Musa). God was not pleased that they continued to think they were well, when their hearts were spiritually sick. He wanted people to see what spiritually healthy hearts are really like and what spiritually healthy people should do and should not do. He wanted them to see what their relation to God and to their fellow human beings should really be. To help them to understand and to guide them, He gave them the following Ten Commandments:

1. I am your God. You shall have no other gods beside me.
2. You shall not make idols and bow down to them.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God without

thought.

4. Remember the day of rest to keep it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work.
5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall do no murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not steal.
10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbour's.

These Ten Commandments He also summarized in the following two great commandments:

1. You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, your mind and your body.

This is the first and great commandment.

2. And the second like it is this:

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

Do you think you are a good person, that you always do right and do no wrong, that all is well between you and God and between you and your neighbour? Would it be helpful to have a trustworthy neighbour's opinion about how good you are? Still, more important than what you or your neighbour thinks about you is *what God thinks about you!* The above commandments provide you with His measure of you and your behaviour; they serve as His X-ray machine to let you see the spiritual condition of your heart as He sees your heart.

Do you love God with your full heart? You may claim you have no idols of stone or wood. But, in practice, are you more concerned with money, sex, power, wealth, education or some other thing or someone than with God? Or do you idolize them?

Moreover, do you love your neighbours as yourself? Do you love them for their sake or for your own sake? If you lie, cheat, deceive, bribe, covet, steal, quarrel, envy, hate, you know that these are signs that something is wrong with your heart, something is wrong between you and God, between you and your neighbour. Then, of course, God is also aware of the things that

## LESSON 7: THE DEATH OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

In the previous lessons we have tasted some samples of Jesus' wonderful works and teachings. Large crowds came after Jesus to listen to Him and to seek His help. But many people were disappointed that He, with all His powers, did not drive out the Roman ruler from their country. How much better it would be, they thought, if they would rule over the Romans, rather than the Romans rule over them! On one occasion Jesus fed some 5000 people with only a few loaves of bread and some fish. With such power, surely Jesus could teach the Romans a lesson about power. However, when He then told them that they needed Him, the Bread of Life, for their hearts more than they needed bread for their stomachs and liberation from Roman rule, the number of people who followed Him began to dwindle. They were more interested in full stomachs than in changed hearts. Gradually they became less interested in accepting Jesus as their Messiah.

The Jewish leaders, too, were never comfortable with Jesus. In fact they accused Him of breaking the Law. They resented that He helped people on the Sabbath Day, the day of rest when no work was to be done, even when He healed people from their illnesses. They criticized Him for associating with sinners, thinking themselves to be better and more holy than many of the people with whom Jesus associated. As we have seen in a previous lesson, they accused Him of blasphemy when He forgave the sins of the paralytic. While they could not deny His great works, they even suggested that He did these works with the help of Satan. They also feared that His popularity with the common people weakened their own personal power and their influence over the common people. In fact, they considered Jesus a dangerous enemy, a real threat to their power and influence. He would be better dead than alive! They would never accept Jesus as their Messiah!

Was, then, Jesus the promised Messiah? All frustration and antagonism towards Jesus, this man of power, focused on this point. Power, the nature and purpose of His power.

Even Jesus' closest disciples did not really understand the significance of His being the Messiah as He understood it. They also had seen Jesus' works and heard His teachings. Often Jesus had taken them aside and given them special lessons about the Kingdom of God. And when Jesus once asked them who He was, they eagerly confessed Him to be the Messiah. But did they really

## A BIBLE QUOTATION

Dear friends,  
let us love one another, because love is from God.  
Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God,  
but the unloving know nothing of God.  
For God is love;  
and His love was disclosed to us in this,  
that He sent His only Son into the world to bring us life.  
The Love I speak of is not our love for God,  
but the love He showed to us in sending His Son  
as the remedy for the defilement of our sins.  
If God thus loved us, dear friends,  
we in turn are bound to love one another.

1 John 4:7-11

Would you like to memorize the above Bible passage and plant it deeply within your heart and your life? God bless you and make you a blessing to many others.

we have not done but ought to have done.

God gives us His holy Law for these two great reasons also:

1. Because He is holy and righteous. He wants us to know He really is holy and righteous, a just judge. He wants us to know that He is good and hates evil. He wants us to know what His will for us is and what He expects from us.
2. Because He loves us. As a good father wants his child to avoid disease and sickness, so God wants us to avoid evil. As a good father will take a sick child to the hospital to find out what his sickness is, so God wants to show us through His commandments what the nature of our spiritual sickness is. The good father does not want his child to die. So God does not want us to die spiritually. Yes, He wants you, too, to see and understand yourself as He sees and understands you.

Now what would you think of a person who paid no attention to the X-ray that told him he had T.B.? He is like the person who pays no attention to the Law of God. The T.B. patient who denies he has T.B. and ignores the treatment soon dies. So also the person who ignores God's Law, thinking he needs no treatment for the evil in his heart, dies spiritually.

So what is your choice? Are you ready, willing and courageous enough to measure your heart and your life performance in the light of God's Law? Do you really want to be honest with yourself? Do you want God to help you?

If you do, you will freely confess: "Yes, God, there is sickness in my heart. Thank you for showing me. Please help me! Please forgive me, change me!"

In the next lesson you will begin to see the way God has promised all people His help. Meanwhile, would you like to memorize God's Ten Commandments?

For your thought and prayer: Yes, it is true that God's Ten Commandments are His Ten Commandments, not simply ten suggestions!

Through the wise King Solomon (Sulayman) God said: "My child, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments."

## A MORNING PRAYER

Father, we thank You for the night,  
And for the pleasant morning light;  
For rest, and food, and loving care,  
And all that makes the world so fair.

Help us to do the things we should,  
To be to others kind and good;  
In all we do, in work or play,  
To love You better day by day.

Or even, in other words of Jesus:

Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so  
can you be children of your Heavenly Father, who makes  
His sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the  
honest and the dishonest.

Can you imagine a world in which we love others – for their  
sake and not for our own sake? Or a world in which we love even  
our enemies, perhaps even love them into friends?

It is wonderful to be a child of God, to be able to call God  
“Heavenly Father.” True, it may be hard and costly to love and  
forgive. But how much harder and more costly for God to love and  
forgive us! We shall soon learn more about the price God Himself  
paid to offer us His forgiveness.

Some wise person offered this good advice: “The best way to  
make friends is to *be* one.”

But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved to pity. He went up and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him on to his own beast, brought him to an inn, and looked after him there. Next day he produced two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back."

"Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He answered: "The one who showed him kindness." Jesus said: "Go and do as he did."

We can best appreciate Jesus' final command in this parable when we remember these facts:

1. In this parable Jesus is responding to a Jewish lawyer who asks Jesus what it means to be a neighbour.
2. Generally, the Jews despised the Samaritans, considering them to be enemies, an inferior people, a people who had turned from God and His commandments.
3. The Jerusalem-Jericho road was a dangerous road to travel in those days.
4. In the parable, it was probably a Jew (though this is not clear) who was robbed and wounded. In his condition it would have been difficult to identify him.
5. In any case, the Samaritan focused *on the needs of the wounded man* (his wounds and their treatment), *not on who the wounded man is* (his tribe, caste, colour, religion, a friend or an enemy) – and *not even on his own personal safety* on that dangerous road!
6. Should not the priest and Levite, as religious leaders of the Jews, have been the first to have helped the wounded man?
7. But it was a Samaritan, a member of the alleged enemy of the Jews and the Jewish lawyer, who helped the wounded man.

After reading these seven points, would it help to reread the parable again?

In this parable Jesus states that God's mercy is not confined; His goodness extends to all kinds of people, to all nations. Hence, He tells us all, do not confine your mercy only to your family, your people, your co-religionists. Extend your kindness to the stranger, and even to those who are not kind to you, however costly it may be. Be like the Samaritan who was ready to help anyone in need.

### LESSON 3: GOD'S PROMISES THROUGH THE PROPHETS

Suppose someone you trusted hurt you badly, verbally, physically or both. Would you be ready to continue your friendship with that person and help that person?

Even though Adam and Eve sinned against God and no longer were worthy to live in the Garden of Eden, God continued to care for them and did not abandon them. We read in the Bible how He even provided clothes for them so that they would not be ashamed of their nakedness – a shame they experienced after their sin.

God also knew that the hearts of Adam and Eve had been corrupted by sin. He, therefore, promised them and their descendants a Saviour through whom He would offer them forgiveness of their sins and a clean heart. Here was a clear sign of God's good will and good news for them.

Eventually God chose a man, whose name was Abraham (Ibrahim), telling him to leave his land, his people and their evil customs so that He might show him a land where his descendants would live. To Abraham God also said: "By your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Through these words God was renewing His promise to send a Saviour for the whole world. This promise God repeated with greater clarity to the Children of Israel, who were the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob (Yaquob). Abraham trusted God and did as He commanded. Surely that is why Abraham is known as "the friend of God." (Can you imagine yourself as the friend of God, having a personal relationship with God?!)

Centuries later, God once more promised that the Saviour would be a descendant of the great King David (Dawud) – the same David who, as a shepherd boy, defeated the giant Goliath in battle.

Who would this Saviour be? And what would He do? Especially through the prophet Isaiah God gave the people more information about this Saviour. He would be the Messiah, the One anointed by God's Spirit to be king. As king He would be God's servant, obedient to God in all His ways. He would heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, give hearing to the deaf. But more, so submissive to the will of God would He be that He, the sinless One, would give His life as a sacrifice and ransom for sinners – for

you and for me. In Him God Himself would be present with us.

Here are some Bible passages that the great prophet, Isaiah, proclaimed hundreds of years before the Messiah actually came into the world and that the Messiah fulfilled when He came:

The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel (which means "God with us").

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.

Behold My Servant (said God) whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him (the Servant) the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgement He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of My people?

In the previous lesson we have seen how God shows us through His Law the evil of our hearts. His Law, as we have seen, is like an X-ray machine diagnosing our sickness and indicating that we are in need of treatment.

The X-ray machine, however, can only show us what is wrong with us. It cannot heal us! To provide healing is the work of the doctor. So God's Law can only guide us, reveal God's will for us and show us our sins against God, against our neighbours and, yes, against ourselves. (And, lest we forget, God is our Creator; He owns us!) The X-ray can never treat the illness of our hearts. *Nor can we through our good works attain God's forgiveness and purify our hearts. For this we need a Saviour, God's salvation. All this is by God's grace! By God's grace alone!*

God is faithful, true, holy, merciful and loving. He not only gives us promises; He fulfils His promises. In the next lessons we shall learn how He sent the Messiah Jesus to be the fulfillment of His promises to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to David, to Isaiah and other prophets, to the Children of Israel, to all people. Praise be to God! Jesus, the Messiah: He Himself is God's Word and God's Good News for all! For you, too!

## LESSON 6: THE TEACHING OF THE MESSIAH

The teaching of the Messiah is like a precious diamond with many facets. How brilliantly the facets sparkle in the light of the sun! So each and every facet of Jesus' teaching sparkles more brilliantly in the brighter light of Jesus Himself. He not only provides us with good teaching; He Himself acted according to it!

In this lesson we can offer you only a few facets of Jesus' teaching. For more of Jesus' teaching, please get a copy of Jesus' Book called the New Testament (Injil), which is a part of the Holy Bible. (Or get the whole Bible!) From it you can learn what Jesus said about praying, fasting, giving charity, etc. Here we highlight only two of Jesus' teachings: our relation to God and our relation to our neighbour.

Jesus continually called God His Heavenly Father. For Jesus the name "Father" was the most beautiful of all God's beautiful names. He continually taught His disciples that God was their Heavenly Father and that they were His children. To illustrate His point, He used the simplest of incidents from everyday life which everyone could understand. For example, He said:

Is there a father among you who will offer his son a snake when he asks for a fish, or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you, then, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

If God takes care of the birds and the flowers, Jesus added, will He not take care of you, since you are of more value to Him? He even knows the number of the hairs of your head and cares for them. Still more, He wants to give you His Holy Spirit, that is, His own personal power to change your heart and your life. How then, Jesus concluded, can we refuse to trust Him as our Heavenly Father!

God wants us to love Him because He loves us. He wants us to demonstrate our love for Him by loving our neighbours, even those whom we do not like or who are our enemies. To illustrate this, Jesus told the following parable of the Good Samaritan:

A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell in with robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down by the same road; but when he saw him, he went past on the other side. So too a Levite (priest's assistant) came to the place, and when he saw him went past on the other side.

on earth to forgive sins” – He now addressed the paralytic – “stand up, take your bed, and go home.” Thereupon the man got up, and went off home. The people were filled with awe at the sight, and praised God for granting such authority to men.

What is it that finally separates us from God? What will condemn us on the great Day of Resurrection when God will judge all people? Is it leprosy or blindness or paralysis or some other physical disease or mental disorder? As we have already seen, it is the heart, spiritually diseased by sin, that turns us from God, from friendship with Him and from trust in Him: the heart spiritually blind to God’s goodness and holiness, the heart spiritually deaf to God’s commands, the heart spiritually paralyzed by selfishness. Here is the great need of every person: God’s forgiveness of sin; a heart that is clean; a heart free from selfishness and free to live and love God and one’s neighbours. And, yes, a mind that thinks God’s thoughts and a tongue which speaks God’s blessings and avoids human gossip and the devil’s cursing.

Have you ever asked your friend what your friend’s greatest need is? Is it health, wealth, honour, education, happiness, a job, a good family? Like you and me, who does not? Your friend also needs, first and foremost, God’s forgiveness and a clean heart.

Listen to the words of Jeremiah, another great prophet, through whom God spoke:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt;  
Who can understand it?

And hear words from the Psalm (Zabur):

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name!  
Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all His benefits,  
who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.

Now, do you recall that the name “Jesus” means “God saves”? Yes, Jesus is God’s Word of forgiveness and healing for us all, God’s Word of light for the blind, God’s Word of sound for the deaf, God’s Word of life for the dead.

Jesus stands at the door of your heart and knocks. He wants to enter and to be your guest. Will you open the door and welcome Him? You will, if you seek God’s peace!

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- b. The Son of God. By this title, the New Testament does not mean that God has a wife and through a wife, a child. Nor does it mean that Jesus is another god alongside God. As Jesus is called the Word of God, so He is called the Son of God. Through Jesus, His Word and His Son, God speaks to us His Good News.

## LESSON 4: THE SAVIOUR MESSIAH COMES

Do you know why Christmas is a national holiday in many countries? On Christmas, the festival of the Christ (the Messiah), we remember the birthday of Jesus Christ.

As God had promised Abraham, Abraham’s descendants (called the Children of Israel) had grown into a nation and occupied the Holy Land (now often called Palestine). But because they disobeyed God, God allowed other nations to rule over them. Some 2000 years ago, the Romans were ruling over the Children of Israel in this land. One of the greatest Roman emperors, Caesar Augustus, ordered a census. All had to go to the native town or village of their forefathers to register their name.

Joseph and Mary, to whom Joseph was engaged, could hardly have been happy with this order. Both of them lived in Nazareth, a town located in a hilly region in the north, far from Bethlehem, the home of their ancestor David (Dawud), the great king and prophet. They had to travel about 130 kilometers. In those days, of course, one could not simply buy a ticket and climb into a bus or a train for a comfortable ride. The carpenter Joseph and Mary, his betrothed, were such ordinary people. No one who did not know them would have ever thought that they had royal blood flowing in their veins.

Mary was really in no position to make this journey, since she was shortly expecting the birth of her first child. Even when she and Joseph finally arrived in Bethlehem, their troubles did not cease. Try as hard as he could, Joseph could find no place to stay. Other travellers already occupied all the rooms. Mary was terribly tired from the journey and now even in pain. Finally Joseph and Mary settled in the corner of a stable which sheltered the animals. It was a chilly night and no one stirred from slumber to help. Here, with no one except Joseph at her side – perhaps a few animals looking on – Mary gave birth to her first born child. Good News for all! But did anyone understand or even care to help?

Some distance away, shepherds were watching their flocks during the night. They were humble people, ignored by others who thought themselves higher and more important in society. But we can imagine that they trusted God and His promises, recorded in the writings of the prophets, and that they often wondered when He would fulfill His great promises to send the Messiah and Saviour. After all, King David called the Lord God “my Shepherd.”

While the people slept and the shepherds tended their flocks,

the sky suddenly became bright with light. While the shepherds were stunned by its brilliance, an angel of God proclaimed:

Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David (Bethlehem) a Saviour, who is Christ (Messiah) the Lord.

Soon darkness once more covered the sky and all was again quiet. The shepherds immediately proceeded to Bethlehem and quickly discovered the child, his mother Mary and Joseph. Everything was as they had been told. As they related their own story of the angel's pronouncement about this little child, they praised God for all that they had seen and heard. For them, this particular night must have passed unusually quickly. It was a night they could never forget.

No doubt, Mary, too, was amazed at this incident as she pondered the visit of the shepherds. It reminded her of an even stranger visitation some months previously, when the angel Gabriel (Jibril) had brought her a message from God, saying:

Do not be afraid. For God has been gracious to you. You shall bear a son and you shall give Him the name Jesus (which means 'God saves').

Can you imagine how you would have felt if an angel of God brought you such a special message? Mary was able to overcome her fears and her doubts because she trusted God. She knew that God's Word was powerful enough to create heaven and earth. So she understood that if God said that she, a young and unmarried woman, would have a child without a man, then she *would* have a child. For God is God and He does what He says He will do. Later, Joseph also understood what had happened. He resolved to take care of Mary, no matter what other people would say and think.

One wonders if Mary remembered the words of God recorded in the book of the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before:

The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His Name Immanuel (which means "God with us").<sup>2</sup>

How honoured she felt to be the mother of this child, the Saviour of the world! Her Saviour and Joseph's Saviour, too! She and Joseph could only praise and give thanks to God. Can you, too? Read on why you can and should.

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<sup>2</sup> See lesson 3.

## LESSON 5: THE MESSIAH HEALS THE SICK

Jesus the Messiah began His public ministry when He was about 30 years old. The New Testament (Injil) tells us how He went around all the villages and towns, teaching and preaching about the Kingdom of God (that is, about God's will for people and His rule over them and all creation) and healing the sick.

It seemed that there was no end to disease and sickness. He gave the blind their sight, the deaf their hearing, the speechless their speech. He cured the lepers, drove out evil spirits, even raised the dead. As His hand of healing touched the sick, how often the Messiah Himself would have recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah in the Holy Bible: "He took away our illnesses and removed our diseases from us." Through His ministry of healing He revealed Himself to be the friend of the people and He identified Himself as the Saviour about whose coming God had spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He refused to use His power for show or to serve Himself. Through His mighty works, He directed people to God, His holiness, goodness and mercy.

Indeed, the healings of Jesus were signs of God. They were signs specifically intended to point people beyond the signs themselves to the Giver of the signs. It was as if Jesus added: You have accepted God's gift of healing. Will you now turn to God Himself, accept Him, thank Him, serve Him?

So often people were content with the gift of healing and forgot the Healer. That is why Jesus was as much concerned with the illness of people's hearts and minds as with the diseases of their bodies. The New Testament reports a remarkable incident:

Some men brought Jesus a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith Jesus said to the man: "Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven." At this some of the lawyers said to themselves: "This is blasphemous talk."

Jesus read their thoughts and said: "Why do you harbour these evil thoughts? Is it easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say: 'Stand up and walk'? But to convince you that the Son of Man<sup>3</sup> has the right

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<sup>3</sup> The New Testament often refers to Jesus as:

- a. The Son of Man. As we have seen, God's Word became a man, like us in every way except that He was without sin. This is one reason why Jesus is called the Son of Man. He is God's representative for us and He is our representative before God. He is human the way God wants every human being to be.