

FRANCIEN VAN OVERBEEKE-RIPPEN

# SHEM ABOUT SEMITES AND ANTI-SEMITES



# INDEX

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SHEM ABOUT SEMITES</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Babylon and Mesopotamië</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ABRAHAM AND HIS THREE FAMILIES</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Arab Bedouins</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Canaan – The descendants of Isaac and Jacob</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Exodus from Egypt</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>In the promised land</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Babylonia</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Return from exile</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Alexander the Great</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>THE KINGDOM OF GOD</b>	
<b>– THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Zechariah and John the Baptist</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Jesus – Son of Mary</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>The Kingdom of God comparable with the daily life</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Passion and death of Jesus</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>After Sabbath</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Pentecost</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>THE WAY JESUS CHRIST’S MESSAGE HAS GONE</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Oral Tradition</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>About the Laws</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>SPREADING OF THE MISSION WORK FROM JERUSALEM</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>FURTHER SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>The apostle Mark to Egypt</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>The apostle Thomas to India</b>	<b>56</b>

<b>INTERCONTINENTAL CONTACTS</b>	
<b>– THE GOSPEL TO ASIA-MINOR</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>The apostle Saulus/Paulus</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>THE MESSAGE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE</b>	
<b>MIDDLE-EAST / THE ISLAM</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>THE PROPHET MOHAMMED</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Mohammed’s Call</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>COOPERATION BETWEEN MY DESCENDANTS ON DISTANCE</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Andalus</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Back to the past</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Antisemitism – against the Semites</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Mission to convert – Francis of Assisi</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>CROSSROADS</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>The work of Francis Xaverius</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>The Message to the Far East</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>THE END OF THE SLAVERY</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>AFRICAN THEOLOGY</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>AFTER SLAVERY – THE BALANCE OF PROFIT AND LOSSES</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Referenced</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Tariqa – The Way</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>LAST WORDS OF SHEM</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>LITERATURE</b>	<b>98</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this book the biblical Shem, son of Noah, tells the story about his life and the lifes of his brothers Cham and Japheth, and their descendants. This all in relationship to the Lord, Who had said to Noah to build an ark.

Shem's story contains a great part of the world's history, spatial and in time. Sometimes he gives some extra information in a sloping-writing framework.

The data were found in the holy Book of Judaism, Christianity or Islam – the Thora, the Gospel or the Alcoran. Besides these holy Scripts, the books mentioned in the Literature list also contain relevant information about the time in between, often told by their illiterate forefathers.

Important questions coming up in Shem's book are: Which divine commands were given by Moses, by Jesus or by Muhammad, and which nations have received the messages by the Apostles?

So a need came up to look back in the millenia past, for a relationship and a connection between many things that happened, as a part of that entire whole. Shem has tried to find and refind a base for his people, to refer to. And many times it took him back to the One, Who masters everybody and everything.

The Author

## SHEM ABOUT SEMITES

My name is Shem.

Long ago I helped my father Noah to build an ark, together with my brothers Ham and Japheth. My father got a message from God to do so. By that time there was more verbal contact between the Lord and the people. But the intention of this especial message was to protect man and beast against a coming flood. More than eleven generations lived already before us.

*And according to the chief-research worker Jean-Jaques Husein, human fossils from 2 to 300.000 years before were already found in parts of Africa.*

*In such a time without written script, people communicated via signs in stone, even about laws of Energy, laws of Materiality and laws of different Consciousness; although difficult to transfer, they were later still adopted by the main monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – according to Tim Wallace Murphy's opinion all from Egyptian origin.*

Since mankind was being addressed by God, they learnt from Him to do what is right and to leave what is wrong; but nevertheless they did what was wrong. They ridiculed my father with his ark, until it was too late: At last many kinds of animals and only eight people survived the disaster. After a long lasting flood, the ark came to rest on the mountain of Ararat in Armenia – the Akkad Urarta. We went out, and there my father Noah built an altar for the Lord and sacrificed a great offer to thank Him. And the Lord made a covenant for all life on earth and all generations to come, putting His rainbow as a symbol in the clouds, that never again the waters will become a flood to destroy all life.

My father Noah has told a lot about events from the past times. It was important for Him that the old stories not be forgotten, but be carried over from fathers to sons, from mothers to daughters, from parents to children, so that they could tell to their own descendants all that has happened in the past. Also I, Shem, did so to my offspring, the Semites. And up till now

they also do so to Semites all over the world. And my brothers Ham and Japheth tell also their stories to the descendants of their forefather Noah. Later on, the leader of that time, Moses, got the order from God, to write down all memories of the folk in the Torah ; we can find that in Deuteronomy 6 of the Bible. And the biblical psalmist Asaph with his choristers and musicians gave voice and sound to the words, growing into songs. Twelve Asaph psalms found a place in the biblical book of Psalms.

*Asaph was a Levite, a descendant from Levi, son of Jacob, who was a grandson of Abraham, nine generations after me, Shem. The Levites got from Moses the special task to assist the priests in the services and during the worship in the tabernacle, the temple and the synagogue, as well as to accompany the worship with song and music.*

*All in all this was a comprehensive task. Therefore the tribe of the Levites did not own a piece of land to cultivate, but they received forty-eight cities to live in when doing their work in the Houses of Worship by day and by night, according to a strict schedule. And the other tribes had to supply their livelihood.*

To memorize all stories, also from the period before the flood, it was important for the trustworthiness, to be able to remember from whom you heard that story and who were your parents, your ancestors, in short: what's your identity? In that time hardly any information was written, most information was a verbal tradition, often given rhythmically and in rhyme, for better memorizing. In this way a lot of names and events of ancestors were saved and later they were written down, also from the time after the flood, when my father Noah's descendants – the Chamites, the Japhetites and we as Semites had grown into nations, spread over the earth.

### **Babylon and Mesopotamië**

That became a time of construction and extension. A grandson of my brother Cham, the well known Nimrod, was not only a great hunter, but also a skilled builder. He went eastwards and built the city of Babel on the primeval ground in Shinar, dating from the stone period. From there Nimrod moved to the place of Assur – name of my second son, near the river Tigris. Later that land was still called the 'land of Nimrud' – by the

prophet Micha. Nimrod also built the city of Nineveh – nowadays called Mosul. By that time, several Assyrian kings built their palaces inside Nineveh and Assurbanipal founded the large Kujundian-library, containing the most important resources of texts for the Babylonian-Assyrian culture.

Centuries and millennia passed by. Meanwhile also the number of my own descendants, the Semites, had increased and they had expanded out towards the mountains eastwards. There we found a good place to build and to live. In an attempt not to lose each other we planned to build a tower. But to finish its height it was difficult to communicate and to understand each other; we lost time and so we decided that the population must spread – as originally intended by God and told by Him to my father Noah. Then we went on into Mesopotamia, the land between the big rivers Euphrates and Tigris; that is also the environment of the caravan routes. To manage those highroads was important, due to the taxes collected by trading in barter.

Because of that work the people of Babylonia knew already the different cultures in the environment. Even archaeologists from the university of Rome found in later time remains of a 4000 years old Sumerian harbour. About the Sumerians it is well known that they lived already 6000 years ago in Mesopotamia – a part of present day Iraq. They developed a writing-script, but also useful objects like a wheel, a plough, as well as technical knowledge about irrigation and calculation of a day of 24 hours. They also possessed old scripts. In Babylon, the Gilgamesh-epos was one of the famous writings. It looked alike the biblical stories about Creation, the Fall of Man and the Flood, told by our ancestors.

*Excavations in later time brought to light a big quantity of clay-tablets with a lot of information items in cuneiform character-writing. Probably this writing is developed by the old Sumerians, 4000 years before Christ. One of these stories was an alternative story about Cain and Abel. The Behistun-inscriptions from West-Iran reported in three languages about the reign of King Darius.*

*Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites – grandsons of my brother Cham – and Persians took over the cuneiform characters, and authors from Ugarit in the present Syria took it to a higher level, by giving it an alphabet.  
(James K. Hoffmeier – The Archaeology of the Bible. Amsterdam 2009)*

It became clear that Babylonians were working already a long time on mathematics and studying the stars. Mainly it was based upon expanding their own experiences. The clay tablets showed that habitants were already familiar with the Sexagesimal system. And some centuries later the Babylonian mathematicians developed methods to predict time and position of the sun and the planets. That was important for their Babylonian calendar, as the appearance of the moon sickle means the beginning of the new moon, like in the Jewish and later in the Islamic calendar. And they knew the system of dividing the day into 24 hours. Later, after the capture of Babylon by Alexander the Great, astronomers took their Babylonian division of the circle and the daytime.

## ABRAHAM AND HIS THREE FAMILIES

In the last 2000 years B.C. Chaldean people, habitants of the Kaidu-country, have settled in the south-west part of Mesopotamia: East-Aramaic families, descendants of my tribe, Shem. Other Semites had left this country already by that time. Those were the family of Terah from Ur, with his sons Nahor, Haran and Abraham. Terah lost his son Haran there, so his grandson Lot became an orphan. Then Terah took his son Abraham with Sara, his wife, and his grandson, leaving the living-place to his son Nahor and went up to Canaan. But on the way he break his journey and settled in a new place and gave the place the name of his lost son, Haran.

Oral tradition taught later that the Lord took Abraham and his family away from Haran because father Terah worshipped there the gods of those inhabitants. God promised to Abraham and Sara a great nation in Canaan. Still later, Israel's leader Joshua told this event to Abrahams descendants, the people of Israel, when they entered into Canaan. It is written down in the biblical book Joshua, chapter 24.

Now for Abraham and his wife Sara, a quite new period began in their life.

Abraham had three wives in his life: Sara, Hagar and Keturah. When Sara thought that the Lord, in spite of His promise, kept her from getting children, she gave her Egyptian maidservant Hagar to her husband, to be his wife.

Then Ishmael was born. But the Lord still kept His promise of a son for Abraham and Sara, and He confirmed that with an everlasting covenant of faith between Him and Abraham's descendants, with the ritual of circumcision as a sign for all males.

Then, really at God's time, Isaac was born. And although the first fruit of the land and all first-born animals should be offered to the Lord, all first male offspring of every womb should be redeemed by a male animal. Therefore, the Ishmaelites offer an animal for the son of Hagar and the Israelites offer an animal for the son of Sara.

By the time that Isaac became a suckling, Abraham sent Hagar away, with water and food and with the promise of God that Ishmael – being the son of Abraham – would grow out to a great nation. Mother and son went up to Arabia, to the desert of Paran, near Mecca. Ishmael became an archer and his mother arranged a wife for him from Egypt. According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, also Hagar was an Egyptian woman, even the daughter of a king from Hidjaz, West-Arabia.

The Qur'an, the later holy Book of the Ishmaelites, mentions that Abraham/Ibrahim by order of God, travelled after Ismail, to build with him a House of Worship in Mecca, the Kaaba, for Ishmael's lineage. When father and son finished the foundation, the father prayed to God for both his sons, and after finishing the building he did it again, asking God to prevent their children from idol worship but to make them real worshippers, and to send a messenger, who would teach them God's Words and Wisdom. Up till now the House of Worship is still functioning, and Mecca is a place of pilgrimage.

Ishmael got twelve sons and at least one daughter, Machelath or Basemath. She became the wife of Esau, Abrahams grandson. All names are mentioned in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

After Sara had passed away, Abraham married Keturah and she bore still six sons to him. And also these sons were sent to Arabia by Abraham, to Al-Medina (the City), later called Al-Medina al Keturah (de city of Keturah). Their names are also mentioned in the Bible.

So the great blessing of the Lord, promised to Abraham, was being fulfilled in the number of his descendants and also in the big numbers of cattle and flocks. Only a large area of grass and water could supply in their needs. Therefore the descendants of Hagar and Keturah became Bedouins.

### **Arab Bedouins**

Bedouins – called after the Arabic name *badus* for nomads – have to wander with their cattle and flocks from one pasture to another, through calcareous earth, called Araba.

Araba bears a little vegetation after nights of dew in wintertime and in spring. In summertime they live in the neighbourhood of cisterns and

small rivers. In rainy seasons they go deeper into the desert until they reach again the cultivated land in the dry season.

In accordance with the provisions Bedouins and their clans, and families have the right to graze on the mowed fields after the harvest of the grain. Moreover they have the right to water and the digging and use of wells and cisterns. In this way food and water for the people and the animals are fairly divided.

### *Classification of Bedouins*

Bedouins, like other Semites, set much value on their origin and their connections. They can be divided in camel nomads and cattle nomads and also in trades and musicians.

The first bible book, Genesis, mentions already as sons of Cain: Jubal who plays the cither and flute, Jabal the first of the tent makers and Tubal-Cain, the ancestor of the copper-smiths and iron-smiths.

### *Classification of age*

Very old desert inhabitants are the Sulaba, probably descendants of previous archers (for instance Ismael) These Sulaba were living separately in the North of Arabia, among the nobility of the Bedouins, serving them as guides, repairers and woodworkers. They married only mutually: the sons married with the daughters of their fathers brothers.

Sulaba did not go on pilgrimage to Mecca, but they went to Haran in Iraq. Some of them took holy scripts with them, looking like bible scripts and written in Chaldees or Syrian language.

### *Classification in history*

Historically the Arab Bedouins can be classified in the descendants of the Kahtans – those are the Semites living in the period between Noah and Abraham – and the Arab Musta'riba – the Semites living after Abraham.

### *Bedouin Chief*

A Bedouin does not inherit his title, but he will be chosen in his function. Courage, generosity and good judgement are the required qualities. They must be able to conduct and to protect caravans as well as the huge pilgrimages to Mecca.

In some places people reared, for these pilgrimages, special lean mountain camels for the narrow mountain passes to Mecca. In such places camels were exchanged, until the pilgrims went home again. There is also a text in the Qur'an, calling up the pilgrims to use lean camels for coming to Mecca.

### *Means of subsistence*

Bedouins could supply their daily needs by using what was growing on the land as well as the benefit of their cattle and flocks. The big animals could be used as pack-animals. The hair of the goats was the right material for the roof of the tents, loosely woven for a good circulation of the air. In the rainy season this material swelled and cover up the roof. So the rain was kept out. In summer time the roof overshadowed the tent. The wool of sheep and camels was used for clothes. And the milk from the cattle and flocks, and also their flesh supplied food for these Bedouins.

### *Living places*

So the descendants of Ishmael – son of Abraham and Hagar – and the descendants of Abraham and Keturah found their living places on the Arabic peninsula. Their names are mentioned in the first book of the Tanach/Tanakh (Old Testament) and their experiences are still a part of the comprehensive Semitic story there, playing an important role, especially in the book of the prophet Isaiah.

### **Canaan – The descendants of Isaac and Jacob**

Long ago, when God told Abraham to leave his father's house in Haran, He promised to give him the land of Canaan for his progeny.

By that time Abraham passed through that land, together with his wife Sara and his nephew Lot. He stopped at several places to build an altar for the Lord to offer thanksgivings to Him. And later, after the death of his wife Sara, he bought in that land a family grave in Machpelah and he buried her there.

After some time Abraham sent his most trustable servant Eliezer back to Ur, his place of birth, where his brother Nahor still lived with his wife Milka and their children. There Eliezer had to choose a good wife for his master's son Isaac. And, praying to God, he fulfilled his task. He took

Rebecca to Isaac. Isaac saw her from far and he guided her into the tent of his late mother Sara. She became his wife and he loved her.

Later, when Abraham passed away, his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the grave of Sara, the family grave in Machpelah.

In the following period many things happened, all being transmitted orally by Isaac and Rebecca and their children: Esau and Jacob, twin-brothers.

### *Jealousy*

Both sons, Esau and Jacob, were blessed by the Lord, but Jacob desired the birthright and this made his brother so angry, that Jacob had to fly away from Esau. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which the Lord promised him that He will not leave him, but will bring him back to this land later, giving it to him and his descendants. All peoples on earth will be blessed through him and his offspring.

And later God realized this, and then He gave Jacob a new name: Israel.

Finally both of the sons turned out to be very rich, a richness in cattle and in children.

Later Jacob's own sons also became jealous, because Father Jacob favoured one of his youngest sons, Joseph. The other sons wanted to get rid of him and sold him to caravan drivers on the way to Egypt. And they told their father Jacob that a wild animal killed Joseph.

### *Joseph in Egypt*

But, touched by a famine in their own land, also Father Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt, to buy grain there. Without knowing that Joseph had become the 'right hand' of the Pharaoh, and without recognizing Joseph, they met there their brother Joseph, who immediately recognized them. A painful examination followed, ending in a disconcerted unravelling. It however resulted in an uncommonly meeting of an old father and a son presumed dead. And in the name of the pharaoh, Joseph gave a place to all his family members. And they lived there for four centuries.

## **Exodus from Egypt**

In those four hundred years, the descendants of Jacob grew out into a numerous folk. Then, a man named Moses, a far descendant of me, Shem, was called by God, to set free from Egypt all Israeli progeny. For the new pharaoh felt the presence of that folk as a threat. So he tried to weaken the male workers by exposing them to extreme hard labour, and to drown the new born sons. After repeatedly refusing by the pharaoh to let God's people go, and an ultimate penalty from the Lord – the death of all firstborn sons of the Egyptians – Moses took by order of God the Israelites with him out of the country. So while the Egyptians were still burying their dead sons, the Israeli people, pursued by Pharaoh's army, crossed the Red Sea, on the way to the promised land of Canaan.

The journey throughout the desert was an event that became well known in all neighbouring countries.

### *Deserts*

Having arrived in the desert of Sinai, the Lord confirmed again His covenant with the people of Israel. Via Moses He gave His commandments and directives for the journey to the new land of Canaan and their stay over there.

Forty years later – due to the disbelief and the unwillingness of the adults – only the grown-up children reached the promised land, under the guidance of Moses' successor Joshua. Then Joshua assembled all the people at Shechem and he said to them:

*'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham out of the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan. I brought you out of Egypt, you crossed the sea. There after you lived in the desert for a long time. Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. I gave Jericho into your hands and I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build and you ate from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant."*

*'Now, fear the Lord', Joshua continued, 'but if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the*

*gods of the Amorites, whose land you reached now. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.’ (Joshua 24:2, 14-15)*

Then the people answered: ‘Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and who performed those great signs before our eyes. We will serve the Lord. We are witnesses.’

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people and drew up for them decrees and laws. And he recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up under the oak near the holy place of the Lord. ‘See!’, he said to all the people, ‘this stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.’

Then they entered the new country. They captured Jericho, a city, thousands of years old.

And Joshua distributed the promised land among the twelve tribes, being the descendants of Jacob’s twelve sons.

### **In the promised land**

As long as the stories about God and his people were orally transmitted to their progeny, the Israeli obeyed the Lord and served Him throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. But after this whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who did not tell to their children about the Lord and what He had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord and they served Baal. So God withdrew from them. This weakened the Israeli. The people around observed it and they mastered them. At such a moment Israel recalled to the state of their parents in slavery. They cried to God for help and for forgiveness.

Then God sent a leader to them, who set them free and showed the right way of life to them and the right behaviour, so that Israel could survive again.

This happened several times, and yet God sent a leader or a king to correct them and they followed him. It was king Solomon who even built with them a Temple for the Lord.

### *Een droom*

King Solomon had a good contact with God.

*Once during the night the Lord appeared to him in a dream and He said: 'Ask for whatever you want Me to give you'. Solomon replied: 'O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child en do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?' (1 Kings 3:5-9)*

Then God gave to Solomon such a great wisdom, that this became widely known. And mighty leaders came to him to measure oneself against him. One of those visitors was the Queen of the Arabic land of Sheba – in the past the domain of a son of Abraham and Keturah.

But this good period did not last long. Israel and its later kings fell into its old mistake of worshipping idols, in spite of all warnings of prophets. This weakened them again and again, until God's patience was at the end. A big part of the northern tribes around Samaria was taken in exile by king Salmanazar of Assur in Mesopotamia – the land where Abraham was born.

### *Exile*

Salmanazar sent some of his own staff to Samaria, to govern it. But when some lions came up there, killing some of the people, it was reported to that king, that this happened because the new governors did not know how to worship the God of Israel. Then Salmanazar sent one of the priests back to Israel. He settled in Bethel and trained the governors how to worship the God of Israel.

Now only the two southern tribes, Judea and Benjamin, were together in the land. But when they also started worshipping idols instead of serving the Lord in the Temple of Jerusalem, in spite of the warnings from the

prophet Jeremiah, then it was the king of Babel, Nebuchadnezzar, who came with his army to Jerusalem. There he plundered from the temple all treasurers and all the gold. Jerusalem was captured and the Temple was destroyed. All inhabitants of Jerusalem, high people as well as lower people, were taken in exile to Babel. From the royal members he selected a number to serve in the king's palace. They were taught in the script and the language of the Chaldees. One of them was Daniel, who later became a famous person.

## **Babylonia**

Since Abraham, descendant of me, Shem, left his region long ago, much had been changed in Mesopotamia. Leaders came up and leaders left. Wars were declared and were carried on, and the people who won the war, became the next owner of the land.

The city Ur, long ago built by Nimrod, de grandson of my brother Cham, had been grown out into one of the most important states of the famous Sumer. Excavations show that the history of the city goes back to 5000 B.C. Graves of the first dynasty of kings of Ur were found, complete with golden ornaments, as well as articles of use and music instruments.

The so called Standard of Ur, decorated with a yellow shell in a blue background of lazuli shows the king and his staff in their daily work. Another picture shows army carriages, pulled by donkeys. Rests of oxen and a wagon were found in the grave of a king, and jewels were buried together with the Queen of Ur, around 2600 B.C.

And recently archaeologists of a university in Rome found the remains of a 4000 year-old harbour of Sumeria. It is the oldest harbour ever found in Iraq. The folk of Sumeria entered into Mesopotamia already more than 6000 years ago.

*Thereafter, around 2000 B.C., thousands of migrating Amorites – a Semitic folk from Northern Syria – entered into Middle and South Mesopotamia and settled in Ur. An important cultural centre was arisen with a long and magnificent history.*

*A large library in Assur was furnished with clay tablets, where almost all literary genres were present. An Assyric book of Law was also present.*

*And one of the successors, Assurbanipal (668-626 B.C.) founded in the capital Nineveh a library, in which he gathered copies of almost the whole cuneiform literature known by that time. Also more than 20.000 clay tablets have been brought to light there, with texts concerning all possible subjects.*

### *The Medes and the Persians*

After Assurbanipal's death (626 B.C.) Babylonia was successful in becoming self-supporting. They joined to the people of the Medes, descendants of Madai, the son of my brother Japheth, and the grandson of my father Noah. By that time it was the desire of my father that I, Sem, would share my living place with this younger brother Japheth.

In 835 B.C. Assyrian inscriptions mention for the first time the Medes, living in the environment of their capital Ekbatana. Before that time Jews were already deported from Samaria to Mede. Sometimes later Mede also founded an own independent state.

A well known family among the descendants of my brother Japheth were the Magicians, called 'the Eastern Wise Men', with sacred functions, a Median priest class who admit the teaching of the prophet Zarathustra. In the Greece world they had the reputation of interpreters of dreams. Later they were seen in connection of the Wise Men who saw an important star in the sky and related this to the birth of a king's son.

There is also a verse in the Qur'an (Sura 22:17, note 2789) about 'the Wise Men from the East, mentioned in the Injil (Gospel), who possess a very old culture.'

### ***The New-Babylonians king Belsassar – successor of Nebuchadnezzar***

*King Nebuchadnezzar was followed up by king Belshazzar. This new king gave a banquet for a thousand of his nobles. He gave orders to bring the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. And they drinking the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace, with the words:*

*'mene, mene, tekel, uparsin. The king watched the writing hand. His face turned pale, his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. The king called out for all his wise men of Babylon, but none could explain the meaning of the words. Then his wife, the queen, came in and reminded her husband of the man Daniel from the time of his father Nebuchadnezzar: 'That man who had the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. This man, Daniel, had the ability to interpret dreams, explains riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel and he will tell you what the writing means.'*

*Daniel was brought before the king and explained to him the meaning of the message:*

*'Mene': 'God has numbered the days of the king's reign and brought it to an end.'*

*'Tekel': 'You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.'*

*'Peres': 'Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.'*

*Then, at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.*

*But that very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain.*

So the God of Israel never forgot me, Sem, and my people during all the years of the exile. He did his prophet Jeremiah, already in the beginning, write a letter to all Israeli in exile with the message that they should build houses in their new places, that they have to marry and to have sons and daughters, to find wives for their sons and to give their daughters in marriage, so that their number of descendants would increase and not decrease. And that they have to look and to pray for peace in their living place, because peace in their neighbourhood would also include peace for themselves. 'And when seventy years of exile would be completed', so the Lord promised, 'then I will come and bring you back to your own place; for I have plans to give you hope.' That was written in the letter of Jeremiah in the Name of the Lord.

By that time, the prophet Jeremiah himself was thrown into a well with mud in Jerusalem, by opponents who were angry about his critical warnings. He seemed to drown. But Ebed-Melek, an Ethiopian courtier in the palace, reported it to the acting king Zedekia and the king ordered him to take more men with him to lift the prophet quickly out of the well before he would die. So they saved the prophet Jeremiah.

Then, a message of God follows to Jeremiah for Ebed-Melek, that God will keep Ebed-Melek from all harm and that He will watch over his life because he trusted in the Lord.

God took also care of the last reigning king of Judea, Jehoiachin, who went also in exile, 37 years long. But when in the year Ewil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a seat of honour and he ate for the rest of his life regularly at the king's table in Babel.

### **Return from exile**

And when the 70 years of exile came to an end, and Babylonia was conquered by the Persians, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, the king of Persia (559-529 B.C.), to give permission to the Jews in exile in Babylonia, to return to Jerusalem for rebuilding the Temple, and to give them back all articles carried away by Nebuchadnezzar who had placed it in the temple of his god.

God's message was clear and Ezra, from the class of priests – a teacher and well versed in the Law of Moses – has written down what was taken to Jerusalem's temple:

gold dishes	30	gold bowls	30
silver dishes	1.000	matching silver bowls	410
silver pans	29	other articles	1.000

### *Rebuilding of the Temple*

The rebuilding of the Temple began in 538 B.C., according to the will of Israel's God and by order of Cyrus, king of Persia. The building has been completed during the reign of his successor Darius. Then the Israeli – the priests, Levites and all who had been in exile – celebrated the consecration of the Lord's House, under the guidance of the high priest Joshua; he was the grandson of Seraja, who was the last high priest before the exile. Then, this man Joshua, sacrificed together with the Israelites, according to what is written in the Book of Moses, a hundred bulls, two hundred rams and four hundred male lambs, as well as twelve male goats as a sin offering for the whole of Israel, one for each of the tribes of Israel.

And on the fourteen's day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover, as well as the feast of Unleavened Bread – with joy, during seven days – for the Lord had filled them with joy by directing the heart of the king of Persia on them, so that he supported them in the work on the House of God, the God of Israel – so Ezra described.

### *Divine words about Cyrus, the Zoroastrian*

King Cyrus entered the history as a ruler who did not affect the faith of the nations submitted to him, but as a ruler in harmony with the divine words of the prophet Isaiah. This prophet praised in his time already Cyrus with the divine words: 'I am the Lord, Who says of Cyrus: He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please. He will say of Jerusalem: Let it be rebuilt, and of the temple: Let its foundations be laid.

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of: "*I will go before you and will level the mountains...I will strengthen you. Though you have not acknowledged me...*"

For indeed, Cyrus did not know the Lord of this message; and in the past he called Him only 'the God of Israel', 'the God who lives in Jerusalem.' Cyrus' own religion was the Zoroastrianism, which he raised to State religion, referring to the person of Zarathustra.

### *Zarathustra*

Zarathustra was born in Persia (Iran) in the 7th age B.C., in a noble family in the city of Rhages, the present Teheran. Probably he was a priest.

At the age of 30 years he got a vision of the God Ahura Mazda – God of the Wisdom. Enlightened by the light of the Lord, the mysteries of creature, celestial spheres and of the past, presence and future were revealed to him. He saw and understood his task to proclaim as a prophet this wisdom to all human beings on earth, starting his preaching in his own environment.

For ages, the sermons of Zarathustra have only been transmitted orally, as they were considered to be of too holy content to put it on paper. Not before the years of 224-651 A.C. they were written in an alphabet especially made for this aim.

## **Zoroastrianism**

*This religion has similarities with the religion of the Israelites. It is monotheistic. Light and fire during the worship are very important symbols for the God Ahura Mazda. In the house of a good Zoroastrian a burning candle is always present. Their holy book is the Avesta. This religion has the belief that after death there is life, heaven and hell, and a judgement of the soul.*

*There are thoughts present about a coming Saviour, a Messiah, born from the seed of a prophet from a virgin mother. He will raise up the deaths out of their grave and they pass the last judgement.*

*Zoroastrians pray five times a day: at sunrise, midday, sunset, midnight and dawn – comparable with the Islamic way of life. During the prayer standing upright Zoroastrians tie and untie a knot that has been bound around the waist.*

*During the worship in the fire temple people pray and sing and listen to the texts in the holy scripts. Bread and milk are being sacrificed and wine is being drunk. Purification rules look like those of the Jews and the Muslims later on. But burying of bodies has to be done conform special rules, for it is not allowed to dirty the earth by dead bodies.*

The Zoroastrian New Year (Persia: Now Ruz) is celebrated on March 21st, the beginning of spring, but the celebrations dated already from thousands of years before, by nations around the old Mesopotamia, like the Sumerians from the South of Persia and by the Elamites – my sons and their descendants – and by the Babylonians and Akkads, the designers of the cuneiform characters.

### *Darius*

Darius, the successor of king Cyrus, was also a convinced follower of the Zoroastrianism, worshipping Ahura Mazda as the One God, Creator of heaven and earth.

But when Alexander the Great, the king of Greece and Macedonia, entered Mesopotamia and conquered Asia Minor, Tyrus and Gaza, trying to establish world domination , then all seemed to change.

## **Alexander the Great**

In contrast with the kings Cyrus and Darius, Alexander himself laid a claim to divinity, declaring to be the son of the god Zeus-Amon. Jewish authors called this the utmost ungodliness. But after Alexander's illness and sudden death, his 'world dominion' was divided into parts.

In the meantime his Greek culture has made a difference within the spiritual structure of Judaism. This led to a revolution of the dynasty of the Maccabeans of father Mattathias and his sons John, Simon the High Priest, Judas, Eleazar and Jonathan. They fought to keep the Temple of God with all accessories and worship. After the murder of Simon, his son Jonathan became the High Priest. At the cost of much fighting the Temple was preserved for the People of Israel, upholding the Law of the Tora, circumcision, the holiness of the sabbat, the faith of resurrection, Jerusalem as centre and as pilgrimage place. But it was a duty to keep in contact with the Roman empire.

### *The Roman Empire*

This Empire was being extending and became 'the city of the seven hills'. It grew into a World Empire with vassal states. Quirinius became the Governor of Syria and Herod became King of Judea, from 31 B.C. until 4 A.C., as vassal of the Emperor Augustus.

### *Herod, 'the Great'*

This Herod, called 'the Great' as being the eldest, was the son of the mighty Antipas and the Nabatean mother, called Cyprus. He worked hard and has done much cruelty, to maintain and extend his might. At the cost of much bloodshed he conquered Jerusalem and killed the king-High Priest Antigonus. His last period of 18 years were troubled by his struggle on the succession. He married ten times; all seven sons of his first marriage were potential and powerful men. And he suspected the sons of his second marriage, and therefore he dispatched them in Samaria.

So it is understandable that this politically ambitious 'king' of the Jews became very frightened, when suddenly high visitors were announced in his residence: Magi from the East – among them a certain Melchior from the Madian Parthia ( Azerbeidzjan). They were in search of a new-born King of the Jews, for whom a particular star had appeared in the sky and to

whom these men – descendants of my brother Japheth – came to worship him.

### *The Magi*

This was a new threat for the succession of this King Herod. Therefore he made haste to call all priests and scribes together to ask them where the king's son was to be born. They looked for the place and found in the book of the prophet Mica the words from the 8th century B.C., saying: *'But you, Bethlehem Ephrath, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.'*

Thereafter King Herod – still having the longing for power – added to all the murder he had already committed, the murder of all little boys from two years and under, to be sure that the one new born king's son was one of them.

And although the star in the sky so clearly had given the sign to the Magi, and the angel joyfully had announced the birth of the young King's son to the shepherds in the field, and although a company of heavenly angels had exulted that night, in spite of that all, an angel from God had to warn the new parents of Herod's plans, and did them escape to Egypt. And the biblical Wise Men from the East – the Magi – after presenting their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh to the child, had been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod; and they took another route.

But the crying young mothers in Bethlehem with their killed baby-sons, could not be comforted – so the Evangelist Matthew recorded.

When Herod also died, an angel appeared anew in a dream to Joseph to inform him, that they could return to Israel. But when Joseph arrived in Judea and heard that Herod's son was the successor of his father there, he dared not to continue his way. After instructions in a dream, he made a diversion to Galilee, where the family settled in the town of Nazareth.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD – THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

The Evangelist Lucas writes about the time of the fifteenth year of the reigning of the Emperor Tiberius. Then Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis; and Lysabias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

In that time, as Lucas wrote, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert.

### **Zechariah and John the Baptist**

This John, son of the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth from the daughters of Aaron, was already known because of his birth from the very old parents. That birth was already announced by an angel in name of God to his father, the priest Zechariah, during his service in the Temple. After much doubt from Zechariah and being struck dumb therefore by the angel, Father Zechariah, eight days after the joyful birth of his son, gave him the name of John.

*He also conveyed on him the promise:*

*'And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.'*

*Because of the tender mercy of our God, which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.'*

And the child grew and became strong in spirit; he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel – so Lucas wrote.

That day had come now. After God had addressed Himself to him in the desert, John came from there to the river Jordan. John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed that the people be baptised, asking forgiveness of their sins, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed before:

*‘A voice of one calling: “The desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a pathway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”’ (Jesaja 40:3-5)*

From Jerusalem, from all Judea and from the area of the Jordan River there was a rush of people to be baptised by John, confessing their wrong deeds. They called him ‘John the Baptist’. And they asked him: ‘What should we do then?’ He answered: ‘The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.’ When the people wondered if John may be the Messiah, he said to all: ‘I baptise you with water, but one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’ And then Jesus came, from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptised by him.

### **Jesus – Son of Mary**

He was the man John the Baptist had spoken of: Jesus, the Son of Mary. Also to her the angel Gabriel was sent by God, with the promise of a son and with a personal task to her. She was not an old woman like Elisabeth but, on the contrary, she was very young. And yet she was being blessed and highly favoured by the Lord. She would give birth to a son and should give him the name of Jesus. He would be great and be called ‘the Son of the Most Highest’. The Lord would give him the throne of his father David, and he would reign over the house of Jacob for ever. And his kingdom will never end.

At the moment she heard from the angel that Elisabeth, her relative, was also going to have a son, in spite of her old age, and that nothing is impossible with God, Mary has answered: ‘May it be to me as you have said.’

Thereafter Mary hurried to a town in the hills of Judea to meet Elisabeth. The pregnant mothers praised and thanked the Lord. And Mary stayed over there for about three months – Lucas wrote. That would have been until John was born.

### *Mary's Song*

*And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me; holy is his Name.*

*His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as He said to our fathers.'*

A short time later it was Mary's time to give birth. She was on the way to Bethlehem with Joseph who was entrusted to her. He had to register, because he belonged to the house and line of David, descendant of Abraham and of Noah and me, Sem.

Arriving in David's place of birth, the time came for the baby to be born. Mary had to give birth outside the inn, as there was no more place inside. So she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.

His birth has not gone unobserved. Shepherds in the area, keeping over their flocks at night, became terrified, while an angel appeared to them, with words: 'Don't be afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying:

*'Glory to God in the Highest,  
and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rest.'*

When the angels had left them, the shepherds wanted to see what they had just heard about; so they hurried to the place and found Mary and Joseph and the child who was lying in the manger. And seeing the child they told

of what was said and sung by the angels. And everybody who heard it was amazed about these words. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart, together with what her was already told by the angel Gabriel.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name Gabriel had given him before he had been conceived.

When the forty days of purification were fulfilled, the parents went, according to the Law of Moses, with little Jesus and with a pair of doves to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him as firstborn male to the Lord.

There in the Temple two old witnesses were also present: the one was Simeon. He was righteous and the Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And moved by the Spirit he went into the Temple courts. The other was the prophetess Anna, 84 years old, a widow who had lived with her husband only seven years after her marriage. She never left the Temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

When the parents did for their child what the custom of the Law required, also Simeon took him in his arms and praised God and blessed parents and child.

And the prophetess Anna came up to them on that very moment and she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

And as the Evangelist Luke wrote after the birth of John, he also wrote about the child Jesus: 'The child grew and became strong: he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.'

Once more Luke wrote something about Jesus' childhood. That was about the time that his parents went up to the Temple with Jesus, being twelve years old. That is for a child the time for exercising in what to do and not to do, to reach the religious majority, the bar mitzvah.

*To be a bar mitzvah, a son has to recite a section from the Torah. From that moment the child takes the responsibility for his religious duties and he becomes part of the 'minjan', the number of at least ten men to be present in a worship for praying.*

After visiting the Temple, Joseph and Mary did not see their son on the way home. They went back to the Temple and after three days of looking around they found him, still being in the Temple and sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions to them. His parents were astonished and his mother said to him: 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' But he answered: 'Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house?' This was a clear sign that the child Jesus was indeed working on his bar mitzvah, taking the responsibility to his heavenly Father.

Nevertheless he went home with them, being obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart, Luke wrote again. And he also ended again: And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men.

### *Jesus baptised*

What Jesus did in his following years is not mentioned in the Bible. But when John the Baptist near the Jordan River exclaimed that after him someone would come who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire, at that moment Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But for John the Baptist such was rather impossible and therefore he tried to deter him, saying: 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied: 'Let it be so now, it is proper for us to do this, to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and John the Baptist saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Jesus. And a voice of heaven said:

*'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'*

And so it was the Lord Himself who had baptised His beloved Son with the fire of His Spirit, in the face of the whole community. No Devil in the desert could overpower Him, even if he tried to break that relationship during forty days and nights. And when at last the Devil gave up, angels immediately came to care for the hungry Son.

### *Jesus and John the Baptist*

So in the desert Jesus had rescued himself from the Devil with the strength of the Spirit. The way to go now had been partly prepared already by John the Baptist. Now both of them were baptising, both were preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as the Kingdom of God was coming now.

But then John the Baptist was put in prison. For the new King Herod Antipas, took the wife of his brother, and John had warned him. Now his punishment was the cell under the palace of Herod.

After some time he began to doubt. He sent his disciples to Jesus, asking: ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’ Jesus did not confirm, nor deny, but he answered with signs: ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.’

John’s disciples took Jesus’ answer to John and meanwhile Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: ‘What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in king’s palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’

Hereafter Jesus withdrew to Galilee. After some time he got the news that Herod had beheaded John in prison. When Jesus heard this, he departed and went by boat to a desolate place, where he could be alone.

### *Jesus alone*

In moments of strong pressure and emotion Jesus had the need of being alone, being in contact with God. Then he climbed a mountain to pray in loneliness, sometimes during the whole night.

Once one of his disciples asked him to teach how to pray to God. Then he taught them not to pray publicly, but to pray in their inner room, and to say:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For thine is the kingdom and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.*

### **The Kingdom of God comparable with the daily life**

During his round trip in the country, Jesus often told about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, where everybody wants to come in. However, the question to everybody is: What do you give up to be welcome there?

Jesus compared the Kingdom of Heaven with events in daily life, to make it understandable for everyone:

For the *farmers* among them he compared God's Kingdom of Heaven with a *treasure*, hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and in his joy he went home and sold all he had and bought that field. So he was also the owner of that treasure.

For the *fishermen* among them he compared the Kingdom of Heaven with a *net* that was dropped into the lake where it caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.

For the *pearl-fisher* Jesus mentioned the *merchant*, looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold all the others and bought that one pearl.

Jesus also compared the valuable Kingdom of God with a *sum of money* belonging to a man. He went on a journey and called his servants to entrust his amount to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents and to another one talent, each according to his ability.

A talent is the most heavy coin in gold and silver, up to tens of kilograms. The servants had to deal with it and to earn. After the man's return he settled accounts with them. If they had gained, they got rewards for the profit. If not, they lost the talent.

And for the women Jesus told about *yeast* that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until *it worked all through the dough*.

*Working in a vineyard* is also an important job in Israel, especially in times of harvest. Therefore Jesus compared the Kingdom of God with a manager in a vineyard. Early in the morning he went to the market to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a 'denarius' for the day and sent them into his vineyard. After some hours he needed more workers; he went out and saw others in the market-place, doing nothing. He told them: 'You also go and work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went.

Some hours later he went out again and found others standing around, He asked them: 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 'Because no-one has hired us', they answered. He said to them: 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman: 'Call the workers and pay their wages, beginning with the last ones and going on to the first.' When the last ones each received a denarius, then the first ones expected to receive more. They began to grumble against the landowner. But the owner had his own arguments to do with his money what he wanted, especially for them who had been standing in the heat all the day and having a family at home that also need to eat. That is what Jesus calls 'good management' of an owner of a vineyard.

### *Another vineyard*

This shows a real difference with another parable told by Jesus about an owner of a vineyard. This owner rented his vineyard to tenants. Once a year, when the harvest time came he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his part of the fruit. But the tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same

way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son’, he said.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other: ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? He will bring those wretches to a wretched end’, they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.’

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew that he was telling stories about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd, because the people held that he was a prophet. But they kept an eye on him.

### *The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven*

All these examples of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, lead to a question of Jesus’ disciples: Who is exactly the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?

Then Jesus called a child. He placed the child in the midst of them and he embraced it and he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me: See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in Heaven.

Later on Jesus rebuked his disciples that they keep the little children away from Jesus, and he said: ‘Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the little ones like them.’ And he laid his hands upon them and blessed them.

And sometimes later, when the High Priests and the Teachers of the law, hearing the children in the Temple calling: ‘Hosanna for the Son of David’ priests and teachers rebuked Jesus: ‘Do you hear what they are saying?’, he answered: ‘Surely! Did you never hear the words: The mouth of children have welcomed you with a song?’

### *The great commandment*

‘What do we have to believe and to do, to get into the kingdom of heaven?’ It was one of the Teachers of the law who put this question to Jesus. And Jesus answered: ‘The most important is: “Hear, o Israel, the Lord our God is One. Love the Lord your God with the whole of your heart and with whole of your soul and with whole of your mind and with all your strength”. The second is this: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” There are no commandments greater than these.’

The teacher repeated Jesus’ words, and said: ‘Indeed, master, what you said is true’. And Jesus said to the teacher: ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ And somewhere else Jesus emphasizes: ‘Therefore, every teacher of the law looks like a master of the house who brings old and new things out into the light from his store-room.’

Bringing new and old things together, comparing and modelling into a richer entirety, that is to get closer to the kingdom of heaven.

The two great laws mentioned by Jesus are truly most important, but they are not the only. He has emphasized that he did not come to abolish the laws or the Prophet words, but on the contrary to complete and fulfill them: ‘The laws and prophecies go back to John the Baptist. But since the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven is being proclaimed and everybody is invited strongly to come in.’ And concerning the law: ‘Even heaven and earth will perish rather than allowing one jot or tittle of the Law to disappear. It is the Father Himself who has laid his Words in my mouth.’ And then Jesus gave some examples.

#### ***Jesus’ examples from the Law***

*‘You have heard that long ago it was said: “Do not murder.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*

*You have heard that it was said: “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks to a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye leads you in the wrong way, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part*

*of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be lost for ever.'*

### *To be lost and be found*

Just to find all what is lost, Jesus came to earth. That was also the reason of his words when he invited himself in the house of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and he was wealthy.

Outside the house the people murmured that Jesus entered into that house. But inside his house Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus: 'Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' And Jesus said to him: 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'

Also a sheep was lost. Jesus told this with a parable because all Israelis know the value of a sheep. Even if someone owns a flock of hundred, he counts them all at the end of each day. And if one is missing, that sheep is so valuable for the shepherd, that he leaves the ninety-nine others in the field, to look for that one lamb. A sheep knows the typical voice of his shepherd, and so they find each other again, also by night. Joyfully the shepherd went home, carrying his lamb on his shoulders. He invited all his neighbours and celebrated with them the fest of finding the lost sheep.

Jesus told also a parable about a woman who lost one of the ten coins from her hair ornament. Immediately she lighted her lamp, looked and swept carefully in her house, until she found her coin. Then she also called her neighbours and friends, saying: 'Join me in my happiness, for I found the coin that makes my ornament complete again.'

At last Jesus said: 'In the same way there will be joy in heaven among God's angels about one sinner who repents'. For a human being can also find himself and repent. This happened already in the river Jordan. There the people confessed their wrongdoings to John the Baptist and they were submerged and cleansed by the water from all their sins ; and they started a

new life. They became learners and disciples of Jesus and sometimes also living witnesses of their healing.

That happened also to a certain man the across the lake from Galilee, who was possessed by a legion of evil spirits. Meeting Jesus they fled away at his command and departed out of the man into a large herd of pigs.

Thereafter the man sat totally calm at Jesus' feet. He begged to go with him, but Jesus said to him: 'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and he told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him. And all were surprised, the evangelist Mark writes.

### *Sick and be healed*

Wherever Jesus went, there was always sickness, and whenever it may be, he is the immediate healer.

In one of the synagogues where Jesus was teaching on a Sabbath, there was a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. When he put his hands on her, she immediately straightened up and praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, who spoke critical words about healing on the Sabbath, got hard words from Jesus:

*'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it go out to give it water? So, should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?'*

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated.

And in the Synagogue of Capernaum Jesus met on Sabbath a man with a wizen hand. Jesus healed him also. And another man was possessed by an evil spirit, crying loudly to Jesus. But Jesus commanded him to stop and to go out of the man, and the evil spirit did so.

That day Jesus went from the synagogue to the house of Simon Peter, whose mother lay on her bed with high fever. Jesus immediately took her hand and raised her up, and the fever fled away. She came up and cared for them.

And after sunset by the end of the Sabbath day, people from around came to the house of Simon Peter with many sick and possessed people to be healed by Jesus. And Jesus healed them.

### *Bethesda*

On another Sabbath Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Later at the pool at Bethesda he saw a great number of disabled people there. One of them was an invalid, who had already been waiting for thirty-eight years. So Jesus asked him: 'Do you want to get well?' 'Sir', the invalid replied, 'I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. When I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.' Then Jesus said to him: 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. And although the Jews said: 'The law forbids you to carry your mat on Sabbath', Jesus said to them: 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.'

Thereafter he sent also his disciples out, two by two, to the people to bring the good message and to cure the diseases. They returned joyfully to him, saying: 'Lord, even the evils submitted to us, hearing your name.'

### *Jesus and Lazarus*

Jesus himself went to his friend Lazarus in Bethany, who died and laid already four days in the tomb. In the presence of many people Jesus prayed to God, saying: 'Father, I thank you that you heard me, as you always do. I know this very well, but I say this because of all people here, that thy may believe that Thee have sent me.' Thereafter he called: 'Arise Lazarus!' And the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped in linen and his face covered by cloth. Then Jesus said: 'Untie him and let him go.'

Many Jews who came to Bethany and who saw what Jesus did, believed in him. But the chief priests and the Pharisees who heard about what happened, called the Sanhedrin, to deliberate: 'What shall we do? This man is performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' And Caiaphas, who was the chief priest that year, spoke up: 'You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.'

From that day they plotted to take his life. They ordered spies to behave like men of justice, to catch him in an injustice saying, so that they could hand him over to the authorities. Meanwhile they also planned to kill Lazarus, because he was the cause that many Jews came to Jesus and believed in him.

One of Jesus' own disciples, Judas, asked to the chief priests: 'What do I receive from you, if I deliver Jesus to you?' As disciple in charge of the money he was still angry about the very expensive perfume, spent by a woman to pour on Jesus' head, when he was reclining at the table. The chief priests offered him thirty silver coins. From that moment Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

### **Passion and death of Jesus**

Jesus, continually in contact with his Father, was prepared by Him about what was going to happen. He also taught his disciples, that the Son of Man should suffer very much by the gentiles, that he even should be killed, but on the third day he would rise from the dead.

They did not understand this, but Simon Peter took him apart, saying: 'That will not happen; God may prevent it.' But Jesus watched the Satan behind Peter, and said: 'Go away from behind me; you do not speak words of God, but of men.'

Another time Jesus took his disciples apart and spoke the same words to them, when they were going to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Pesach.

Nearing the city, Jesus sent Peter and John forward to arrange the upper room and make it ready for the Pesach meal.

Halfway into the meal Jesus got up from his seat, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel round his waist. He put water into a basin and started washing his disciples' feet and drying them with the towel.

Coming to Peter, Peter said: 'You shall never wash my feet.' But hearing Jesus' words: 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'

Peter replied: 'Just not my feet, but my hands and my head as well.' Only when Jesus answered: 'A person who has taken a bath needs only to wash his feet', Peter admitted.

When Jesus had finished washing, he put on his clothes again and sat down at his place, and he asked his disciples: 'Do you understand what I

have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and that is right, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth: no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.’

During the meal Jesus talked about many more points because he knew it was the last time he could do so, as it was the last meal together, the Last Supper. Many of his words have been written by the evangelist John.

Jesus addressed here his disciples as ‘children’ and he told them that he would be with them only a little longer and then would go where they could not come. Peter, who carried a sword, wanted immediately to go with him and give his life to him. But Jesus calmed him down, saying that even before the cock crows on the new day, Peter would have sworn already three times that he did not know Jesus. But Jesus also promised to his disciples, that he would ask to the Father that He would send another Comforter to be with them for ever, the Spirit of Truth, who would stay in them: ‘For I don’t want to leave you as orphans.’

And Jesus made a new Covenant with them after the meal, with a full cup of wine, circulating by him among the disciples to drink from it, and he said : ‘I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s Kingdom.’

It was a Covenant of Love: that they should love each other, like Jesus had loved them. The wine symbolized the blood that always flows in a high priestly covenant.

And he has encouraged them. ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And then I will come back to take you with me, that you also may be where I am. And the way to God – that I am. The Truth and the Life – that is me.’

*Jesus prays for his disciples*

After Jesus had said all of this, he looked towards heaven and prayed:

‘Father, I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

All I have is yours and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one.

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.’

### *Jesus prays for all believers*

‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one.

Father, just as you are in me and I am in You, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known, in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'

### *Jesus deeply depressed*

After his prayer Jesus got deeply sad, saying: 'Truly, I assure you: one of you is going to betray me.' Frightened, his disciples stared at one another to know which of them he meant. One disciple, bowing to Jesus, asked him: 'Master, who?' Jesus answered: 'Whom I give him a piece of bread.' And he gave it to Judas Iscariot, saying: 'What you want to do, do it now.' Some of them thought that he had to buy some food for the feast. And Judas, taking the bread, left. It was night.

### *Night*

During the night Judas did his work. He knew where he could find Jesus and he took the soldiers to the garden of Gethsemane.

After the supper Jesus went with his disciples to the upper side of the Kidron. Also Judas with the soldiers was on the way to that place.

In the garden Jesus, extremely anxious, left Peter, John and James behind, asking them to wake with him, when he prayed for himself, but every time that he returned to them, they slept. Then, from heaven, an angel came down to give him strength, so the evangelist Luke told.

With that strength he could meet the soldiers of Judas, asking to them: 'Whom are you looking for?', and telling them that he himself was Jesus, the soldiers fell down by hearing this. Then, by the angel's force, Jesus did his last healing: he healed the ear of the soldier, that Peter had cut off.

Not by the kiss of Judas, but by this healing they could recognized Jesus. Yet the soldiers arrested him, bound him and brought him to the chief priests Annas and Caiaphas. Once, this man Caiaphas suggested already to the Jews, that it is better that one man dies instead of a whole nation.

But, this decision could only be taken by the head of the town, Pilate, so they conveyed him to Pilate. And although Pilate did not find Jesus guilty, he still gave permission to crucify him, as the Jewish people threatened to go to the emperor.

### *The denials of Peter*

In the meantime Peter had already been addressed three times about his friendship with Jesus, but he had also denied it three times. Then the cock crowed, like Jesus had predicted. Jesus looked back to Peter, and Peter suddenly remembering Jesus' words, flew away, outside and wept bitterly.

### *The betrayal of Judas*

And when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse – the evangelist Matthew wrote. He returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned', he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.' 'What is that to us?', they replied, 'that's your responsibility'. Then Judas threw the money into the temple; he went away and hanged himself.

Meanwhile the other disciples had flown away from Jesus. So Jesus remained behind, alone.

### *The next morning*

The palm branches were still laying besides the road, the Hosanna-song of the children from ago was hushed and only one thing was important now: to prepare oneself in time for the Pesach.

The soldiers however took the time for teasing and making a mockery of Jesus. Thereafter he had to carry his own cross to Golgotha. And when he fell, they forced a foreigner, Simon from Cyrene, to carry the cross to Golgotha. No friends were present, only the women from Galilee who constantly had followed Jesus to care for him. They stood at a distance, weeping – so the evangelist Matthew wrote.

### *Golgotha*

At Golgotha Jesus was not fully alone. He was hanging between two other condemned men. One of them mocked with the bystanders. The other however rebuked him, saying: 'Don't you fear God, since you are under

the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said: ‘Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom!’ Jesus answered him: ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’

### *The sixth hour*

It was about the sixth hour, when darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour; the sun stopped shining. At the end of this time Jesus called out in a loud voice: ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani? – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ God’s beloved Son, all his life bearing God’s Word and God’s Holy Spirit, felt God’s Spirit leaving him. And then with all his human spirit he has called to his heavenly Father: ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’

### *Jesus’ death*

At that moment, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs.

At the foot of the cross the centurion – the leader of a hundred soldiers – seeing what happened, praised God and said: ‘Surely, this was a righteous man’; and terrified he exclaimed: ‘He was a Son of God!’

### *That evening*

As evening time approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, went to Pilate, together with Nicodemus and asked for Jesus’ body. With Pilate’s permission they took the body from the cross and wrapped it with spices in strips of linen, and placed it in Joseph’s new tomb in a garden at the place where Jesus was crucified. Then they rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where he was laid.

After Preparation Day the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. They wanted to secure the tomb until the third day. Otherwise, Jesus’ disciples may have come to steal the body and tell the people that he has had risen from the dead, as Jesus had spoken about. They got permission to take a guard and put a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

## **After Sabbath**

In spite of all this, on the third day, at dawn on the first day of the new week, things happened differently from what the chief priests and Pharisees could have planned. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled the stone back from the opening and sat down on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. Some of them went into the city and told the chief priests all what has happened. When the chief priests met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, saying: 'You are to tell: His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we are asleep. If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'

So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And so the chief priests and Pharisees themselves made use of the same lie they just feared from the disciples.

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James went also to the tomb and saw the angel. He said to the women: 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'

So they did, but Mary Magdalene, who stayed close to the tomb, was weeping. She did not recognise Jesus standing behind her in the figure of a gardener, until he called her name: 'Mary!' and she, surprised, replied: 'Rabboni – Master!'

## *On the way to Emmaus*

In another figure Jesus walked along with Cleopas and his friend to the village called Emmaus. They were talking lively about Jesus from Nazareth, a prophet. How he had been arrested by the chief priests and crucified, but also that women had seen angels who said that he is alive. When they arrived in Emmaus they invited him to stay the night over and to have a meal with them. And just when he took the bread, giving thanks, breaking it to give it to them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And at once he disappeared.

Immediately they returned to their friends in Jerusalem to tell that they met Jesus. And while they were speaking so, Jesus himself stood in their midst. ‘Peace be with you’, he said, and he showed them his hands and his side. After eight days he came again, as he missed Thomas before. Thomas wanted to die with Jesus in Jerusalem. He would only believe in Jesus’ resurrection, if he could see the places of Jesus’ wounds. Now Jesus called him to put his finger on Jesus’ hands and to put his hand in Jesus’ side, and to believe, as he also should have to pass over his faith to all to whom he would be sent.

### *Galilee*

One time more Jesus appeared to the disciples. That was in Galilee, at the lake of Tiberias. There he involved also Peter again in the circle of the apostles, applying him three times to his love for Jesus. Then he got from Jesus also three times the task to guard and to herd Jesus’ lambs and sheep.

Thereafter Jesus said to them all: ‘When the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’ But they had to wait in Jerusalem until that moment of the Holy Spirit.

After saying this all and blessing them with his raising hands, Jesus departed from them. And the apostles went full of joy and gladness to Jerusalem. There in the temple they praised God. And they stayed in the upper room with Jesus’ mother Mary and with the other women and the brothers, persisting in praying.

### **Pentecost**

Fifty days – seven weeks – after Jesus’ resurrection, it was the harvest celebration in remembrance of the exodus of my people, the Semites, from the slavery of Egypt and their entrance in the promised Canaan, just at the moment that the grain there was ready for harvest. Since that time it became one of the high pilgrims’ feasts in Israel.

And now, just in the time that they were awaiting the holy Spirit promised by Jesus when he left his disciples, this promise was being fulfilled. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came down from

heaven and filled the whole house where they all were together. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that scattered in other tongues and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

In Jerusalem also God-fearing Jews were present from every nation on earth. When they heard this sound, they came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking, Galilees? Then, how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’

*Which ‘tongues’ had it been? The language of Canaan, spoken by their ancestors in Israel before the exile to Elam, Assyria and Babylonia (Mesopotamia); or the Jews deported to Parthia (Northern Persia), or fled to Egypt? Or those who were moved to Asia Minor? May be the Arabs, the descendants of Abraham and Hagar or Abraham and Keturah, progeny of my father Noah, all Semites?*

Many of these foreign Semitic Jews who came to this Pentecost, returned afterwards to their living places and may have told there what happened in Jerusalem, even before the first apostle was sent into the world.

## THE WAY JESUS CHRIST'S MESSAGE HAS GONE

### *Home-coming*

One of the many pilgrims who were present on Pentecost in Jerusalem was an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had been in Jerusalem to worship, and now, in his chariot on the way home, he took the book of the prophet Isaiah with him and read.

At that time, an angel of the Lord said to the apostle Philip: 'Go up to the chariot on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza and stay near it.' Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet, about someone who suffered and died. 'Do you understand what you are reading?', Philip asked. 'How can I, unless someone explains it to me?' was the answer, and then he was invited to climb up and sat with the official. So Philip could explain him the life and death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, and about the repentance and the baptism of about three thousand people.

When the chariot came to some water also the Ethiopian wanted to be baptised. So both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. And coming out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away; the Ethiopian did not see him again, but joyfully he continued his way homewards. And so the book of Isaiah found already its way in the African continent.

***Ethiopia** was also called 'the land of Kush', corresponding to the first son of my brother Cham/Ham. The Chamites/Hamites were a great nation of shepherds, called Masai, also living in Kenia and Tanzania as nomads. Also the Dorobo and the Kunono, producers of weapons, belonged to the Masai. In the first millennium before Chr. these cattle nomads had been mixed up with Semitic immigrates from the South-Arabic Seba/Saba – descendants from Abraham and Keturah's son Seba; in later time the queen of Seba visited king Salmon, as written in 1 Kings 10. This is also mentioned in the **Kebrä Negäst**, composed of several manuscripts with myths to be found in the large libraries of Ethiopia and Europe.*

*According to certain stories, containing a Jewish as well as a Christian version, the queen of Seba, after visiting king Salmon, returned pregnant of him. In Ethiopia, her son was born, who received the name of Menelik. Grown up to a young man, he went with a blessing of his mother – the queen of Seba – to Jerusalem to meet his father. Thereafter he returned to Ethiopia with the Ark of the Covenant. According to what many Christians in Ethiopia say, this ark would be kept in the cathedral of Zion in Aksum.*

*Also in the Qur'an (Sura 27:20-44) is written about the visit of this queen to king Salmon, putting her questions to him about God. After his sublime answers she converted to Him.*

### *Falasha*

The Semitic immigrants in Ethiopia from Seba/Saba – mentioned before – were called 'Falasha', what means foreigners. Ethiopia has been influenced by Jews. The classic and ecclesiastical language – the Ge'ez – is a pure Semitic language, related to the Arabic, the Hebrew and the Aramaic.

The Ethiopian king Ezana did convert these new inhabitants to the Christianity by two brothers from Tyrus. Already in the first ages an Ethiopian Bible translation had been published. They still save an example of the Orit, the Mosaic Law, translated into Ge'ez.

### ***Martin Luther about the Ethiopian Christianity***

*The later European reformer Martin Luther (1517) was fascinated by the idea that Ethiopia was the first country in the history that converted to Christianity and so the Church of Ethiopia was the forerunner of the Protestantism, with the Bible in its own language and a married priesthood. Luther's theological fascination with the Ethiopian Church had been strengthened during his dialogue in 1534 with an Ethiopian priest, Michael the Deacon. It became clear for him that what he read in the Bible was present already in the Ethiopia Church of Ethiopia.*

### *Influences in Ethiopia*

Ethiopia shows numerous Semitic, but also Jewish influences.

In the past these influences played an important role, especially in the North of the country. From the thirteenth until the ninth century B.C. it was reigned by Jewish royalties and the tradition says that the Ethiopian dynasty directly comes from Menelik, mentioned before, the son of the Jewish king Solomon and the Queen of Seba, who visited him in the past. This Ethiopian emperor himself carried the title of ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’.

Much time later a new Menelik was living in Ethiopia, Menelik II, 1884-1913. His daughter Zauditu became empress. After her death in 1930 a grand-nephew crowned himself emperor, Haile Selassie I. He abolished the slavery. In 1974 he was deposed. He also claimed to be a descendant from king David.

### **Oral Tradition**

Some of the stories taken to the African countries were already known there by oral traditions of the own forefathers, especially the Old Testament stories from the time before the flood, and stories from my father Noah (in their own language called ‘Tumbainot’) and his three sons, C(Ham), Japheth and me, Sem. Also stories about Abraham, Isaak and Jacob and about Moses and the Law. But it became clear, that no stories from the time after Moses were available. The stories from the time before the flood tell that due to the human sins against the Creator, the faithful Tumbainot (Noah) had to build a boat, indicated as ‘a cottage of wood’, as the Masai in that dry territory probably had no word for ‘boat’.

What also became clear was a pure monotheistic faith in God, Creator of heaven and earth. They call Him ‘Ngai’ or ‘Engai’, names with a meaning of creation. Sometimes in Africa ‘creation’ relates only to the earth itself, mankind and animals; the universe is supposed to exist already.

The first son has also a name; in local language he is called ‘Sindello’. He discovered the honey, which is still an important food, but especially as resource of ferment drink.

There is also an indication, that Masai believe in a continuation of life after death. To put a bundle of grass in a stiff hand of a dead person can hardly have another meaning than to show the good intentions to the inhabitants in the place of arrival of the newcomer. And also soldiers who surrender oneself in the battle cut grass and hold it in the straight hand. Beside the grass also sandals and a stick were put with a dead person in his grave.

Masai have only one word for ‘heart’ and ‘soul’: ‘ol tau’, and their opinion is that this ‘ol tau’ survives the death of the body. They keep also a number of laws, given by Engai on a mountain. Sometimes their laws seem to be adapted to their circumstances. The first law is the most important law.

### **Laws**

*There is only one God.*

*One of the following laws is forbidding killing:*

*‘In a war between you and an enemy, you should beat only with sticks, or shoot with wooden arrows, without iron points. Don’t use knives, for God has forbidden to kill a person and He will punish severely when you don’t obey.’*

*Then a law about passionate desire:*

*‘Everyone should be content with what he possesses. It is not permitted to take the property from another Masai.’*

*A law about self-control says:*

*‘You must try to put up with each other and you are not allowed to wage war with each other. Only old men are allowed to drink honey beer, for young men are getting dim and excited, starting to quarrel and to fight.’*

*Then there is a law about adultery:*

*‘No warrior or young man and no unmarried man is allowed to touch the wife of a married man.’*

*About loving one’s neighbour:*

*'When a Masai has lost his property, the other Masai have to help him: He who lost all his cattle should receive something from everybody, so that he quickly can come to welfare again. The needy man should dig-in a pole of the enaunir tree. Then the eldest of the tribe of the needy man and the eldest of the tribe of his wife have to select an old and welfare person. This person has to bind to that pole a beautiful heifer without infirmity.*

*Thereafter each member from both tribes has to give in turn an ox or cow. And the old man who granted the heifer will be rewarded by God.'*

*The seventh law says:*

*'Only one will reign over you. All of you will obey him. Points of controversy will be settled in the board of old men. '*

*The eighth law about marriage:*

*'Each man can only have one wife. Only when she has passed away or has been sent away, he is allowed to marry another one.'*

*Law number nine says about animals:*

*'You should not kill female animals, nor bulls, he-goats, bucks, asses, stallions. Only castrated male animals can be killed and eaten.'*

*The tenth law appoints two festive days:*

*'Day eight of the ninth month and day seven of the seventh month are two festive days.'*

*This law also defines what will be offered on those days.*

## **About the Laws**

Masai do not celebrate a Sabbath, a day of rest, a Holiday, dedicated to Engai.

About the law of the marriage: in later time Masai men got permission to be married with more than one woman. This is comparable with the people of the Kenyan Kikuyo-tribe, where a woman after the birth of her baby looks for another wife for her husband, so that suckling her child will not be disturbed by a new pregnancy.

All these habits are part of an African engagement with the ancestors and with the born and the still unborn children: we are connected together and together with the Lord Engai, and therefore I can exist. This is the African conception of Ubuntu.

### ***Ubuntu***

*Ubuntu is an African Philosophy of spirituality as a healing balance of valuable live power.*

*An example is the African who, waiting during ten months for his salary, gave it to his sick friend. Or it is the woman who had every day so many street-children eating at her market stall, that she at evening time goes home without profit: she feels their hunger in her own body. So she is in balance with her environment, also on balance with all people who already died of hunger, and all who still will be born – balance between the past and the future: we are connected together.*

*The opposite is also true: If I do not treat you as a human being, then not only you will become less happy, but I also. He who kills one time, kills two times, because he himself is also touched. Like the Qur'an emphasizes the words of God, when Cain killed his brother Abel: "If someone kills one person, for Me (God) it is the same as if he kills the whole world, and if someone saves one human life, it is for Me (God) as if he saves all human beings. (Sura 5:32).*

### ***Bishop Tutu***

The South-African Bishop Tutu felt this most. When Mandela came out of prison, the country was deeply divided. The black people called for revenge and the white part wanted amnesty. Bishop Tutu made it possible that an interim-constitution was set up, stating that there will come a Reconciliation Committee, striving after harmony and after restoration of the balance, after Ubuntu.

The Committee came. It called together all offenders, all victims and all relatives who looked for healing –black and white. Everybody could tell his or her story. There was a crying everywhere, confession, pleading and defence, weeping anew, mediation, until in a need of unifying all embraced each other.

And a new harmony found place: Ubuntu: I am back again because we all are together, we are connected to each other, to those who died, to the living ones and those who are still unborn. And to God.

In this way the stories from the very past and later on the new stories of Jesus Christ had come together and they have opened a new way, from the old Africa and the new Jerusalem.

## SPREADING OF THE MISSION WORK FROM JERUSALEM

After Pentecost the apostles shared the territories, to spread the message of Jesus Christ.

The first Christian community, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, was guided by a team of three men: James, Simon Peter and John.

The apostle James, also called ‘the man of justice’, was assimilated with the Essene leader of Justice. According to the Handbook of the History of Christianity he functioned in Jerusalem as an apostle, bishop and high-priest. A later confrontation between this man of justice and the religious and politic establishment in Jerusalem was at its lowest ebb, when king Agrippa appointed a new high-priest, Ananus, a Sadducee. This man called the Sanhedrin together, to accuse James for – what he called – blasphemy. For this reason he was tortured and died. This happened in spite of the fact that eighty Pharisees supplicated to Rome and in spite of their offering to die together with him.

James was praised because of his constant fasting and praying.

Hieronymus (340-420), who translated the Bible in Latin language, wrote that James was so holy and had such a great reputation among the inhabitants, that the destroying of Jerusalem was considered to be the result of his death, and not of Jesus’ death.

*In the past this James had sent – already four years after the crucifixion of Jesus – some Celtic men from central Europe with letters of credence to England and Ireland, to found a church also there. This mission work caused an especial religion, known as the Celtic Christianity, developing a kind of monastic life, spiritual purity and spiritual simplicity.*

*The priests were encouraged to be married and to have family, for the priesthood was, like in the past, a hereditary function.*

*In Ireland learning had a priority and the monastery possessed well used libraries.*

*The Celts made large parts of Western Europe familiar with the Gospel. They went from Scandinavia in the North to Switzerland, and wherever they came, they left a trace of knowledge behind. The Netherlands were visited by Willibrord and Bonifatius.*

*Away from Jerusalem, after James' death*

After the murder of the man of justice many Jews fled to Europe to settle there. The Ebonites – the early Jewish Christians – and the other members of the 24 families of the ma'madot – the priesthood – left Jerusalem under leadership of James' nephew Simon. They crossed the Jordan to Pella.

There this leadership had a duration of more than 150 years and they were called the Desposyni ('belonging to the Lord').

Others went to Arabia, where the descendants of Abraham and Hagar lived, as well as those of Abraham and Keturah.

## **FURTHER SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL**

### **The apostle Mark to Egypt**

The evangelist Mark, assistant and interpreter to the apostle Peter, went with the Gospel to Egypt during the years 40-49. That was the country that in the past granted accommodation to the child Jesus and his parents, fleeing from the king Herod. Up till now the stay of this 'holy family' is still in remembering in Egypt, also by the Muslims. In the year of 2000 also the Egyptian authorities have paid much attention to it. By that time, the Egyptian Minister of Tourism, the Coptic-orthodox Pope Shenouda as well as the Islamic leaders were sitting together brotherly in an old church at the borders of the Nile in Maadi, Southern Cairo.

As it is said Mark founded the first Christian church community.

According to old Coptic writings he was also the founder of the church in Alexandria, as well as its first bishop. Apocrypha mentions also that Mark was tortured; he died in Alexandria. His body would be buried in the church of Boucolie, that later was swallowed up by the sea.

But Venetian fishermen found that place and took his body to Venetia. There it was placed in their church in the year 828, getting the name of San-Marco-basilica. There Mark is honoured as a patron saint. In June 1973 Pope Paul VI has given back the mortal remains to the Coptic Church during the inauguration of the new cathedral in Alexandria. Body and head of Mark are also reunited and are saved now in the crypt of that cathedral.

After Mark's time in Alexandria, a Catechetical school was founded by Pantaenus, a converted Jew and stoic. He became also the first director. Important students, who succeeded him later, were Clemens from Alexandria (died in 217) and Origenes (died in 254).

### **The apostle Thomas to India**

The apostle Thomas – he who in Jesus' time wanted to die with him – this Thomas heard from Jesus in a nightly vision his destination. He had to go to India, together with the Jewish merchant Abbanes, ambassador of king Gondhophares, called 'the king of the Indians'.

So Thomas departed in 52 by boat from Arabia and arrived in December of that year at the coast of Malabar, later called Kerala, in Southern India.

Oral traditions from this period are to be found in songs on the occasion of feasts of Thomaschristians, sung by members of a certain Hindu-cast. Probably many of these songs are from Jewish origin. The Jewish influence in the liturgy seems to come from the Persian Church with Jewish Christians in a Semitic cultural context of a divine revelation. It was a church in developing, not influenced by Roman laws or Greece acute philosophy. And so these Christians have saved a centuries old theology of rituals and customs.

Long ago the Jews among these first converts in Persia and Mesopotamia belonged to the group of exiles who stayed in Babylonia after their banishment. So these Jewish-Christian converters have influenced the theological thoughts and especially the liturgical worships of the new growing church. They saw the liturgy of the church as an answer on a divine call and all liturgical acts reflected that answer on the divine voice. The Persian church extended its mission activities to China, Malaysia, Siberia and Mongolia and from the first centuries also to Malabar. Because of the commercial relationship between Malabar coast, Mesopotamia and other countries in the Middle-East where the Aramaic language was the commercial language, also Aramaic words were added to the language of the Christians of India. In this way the use of it strengthened the old group of Malabar Jews.

The Thomaschristians had a long contact with the Persian Church. A well known character of these Thomaschristians was the use of the Persian cross: no crucifix, but a cross decorated with flowers. The Thomascross shows traces of Hindu influence, for this cross is resting on a lotus flower, the symbol of purity, that calls for associations with a godly birth.

The Jewish life has indeed not only influenced the lifestyle of this old Indian Church, but also the liturgical ceremonies, for example in the prayers at the beginning of the meals. Present theologians give also examples of oral traditions in stories, legends, songs and dances.

Also the great theologian, poet and composer Efreem the Syrian – ‘the Harp of the Holy Spirit’ – should be mentioned, who was standing at the

beginning of the great tradition of excellent hymns of the Syrian/Aramaic liturgy. An imported aspect of it is the devotion for the mystery according to Isaiah 6:3, in which the Eternal is presented as 'sitting on a high throne, while the hems of his robe filled the temple of Jerusalem; and the seraphs sang: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.

Efrem the Syrian has also composed a hymn in commemoration of Thomas:

### ***Hymn of Efrem the Syrian***

*The only Son has chosen His apostles  
Among them Thomas who He sent  
to baptize the simple people  
who were plunged into darkness.  
Then a light has been raised in India.*

*Like the beams of the light  
so Thomas took the light wherever he came.  
He, the big lamp, filled with oil of the Cross,  
guided India from the darkness to the light.*

*Blessed are you, Thomas Didymus,  
because of your great, glorious deeds.  
During your walk around on this earth  
you raised heavenly signs.  
With your deeds you have convinced the Indians.*

*Thomas, you have founded  
and guided this Church in India.  
And numerous are the martyrs who followed you.  
His bones and his suffering are the witnesses of his works.  
Who would even dare doubt of the purity of his relics?*

After the arrival of Thomas in the year of 52 several Jews and numerous Hindu and Brahman priests as well as militarists would have converted to

the Christianity. Also the king converted and he got the name Andreas; his nephew Keppa became ordained priest.

### *Founding Churches*

After that, Thomas went to the South of India and preached during one year his message, called ‘the Way’, in Quilon, where he baptised 1400 people. He built a Cross there and taught the inhabitants how to worship it. He did it also in the North and in the East and thereafter he returned to visit the Churches he founded before.

In new places he worked in the same way, preaching and founding. He gave instructions to his new followers and he blessed them with the Holy Spirit. He organized each church community around a group of priests and deacons, who were placed under the authority of a Bishop. In this way he spread the Gospel in the whole Kerala – a total number of 17000 souls; among them 6850 Brahmans (priests).

### *Transfer*

Thomas appointed Keppa – nephew of king Andreas – to be his successor as Bishop and he donated him his mantle. So this priest became the spiritual and administrative Head of all Christian communities. One of the main important tasks was that bishops always appointed successors in time, so that also the priests and deacons could continue their functional work.

### *Crossing Frontiers*

It became known that Thomas preached the Gospel to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians, the Hyrcanians, and the Bacterians.

Johannes Chrysostomus, one of the churchwardens of the first centuries, would have said about Thomas, that Thomas during his visit of the country of the Medes (progeny of my brother Japhet) has baptised the descendants of the Wise Men who had seen the Star and had worshipped the child Jesus after his birth. Now these men became the helpers of Thomas in extending the Christian faith among the Medes.

It is also known that Thomas, together with Peter is mentioned in the history of the early Church in Jerusalem as one of Jerusalem’s chief church fathers.

He would have died in the year of 72 as a martyr in Mylapore, where his tomb still can be found. A part of his relics would be taken to Edessa in 393.

### ***Lessons from the twelve apostles***

*In Edessa, the manuscript 'The lessons from the twelve apostles' had been published about the year of 250. About these apostles was written that many letters from them were circulating in the churches and are read out. James wrote from Jerusalem, Peter from Rome, John from Ephesus, Mark from the big city of Alexandria, Andrew from Phrygia and Thomas from India.*

*Also a blessing of a Syrian Christian to his children and grandchildren from his dying-bed has been saved:*

*'The Eternal gave His blessing to Abraham,  
Abraham conveyed this blessing to Isaac,  
Isaac conveyed this blessing to Jacob,  
Jacob conveyed this blessing to my forefathers,  
my forefathers have conveyed this blessing to my parents,  
and my parents have conveyed this blessing to me.  
Now, my dear son/daughter, I convey this blessing to you.'*

### ***Contact between India and Egypt***

In the year 180 the Church of Kerala, founded by the apostle Thomas in 52, has asked to the Bishop of Alexandria to send a missionary. So Pantaenus, mentioned before as the director of the Catechetical School, was sent to Kerala by the Coptic Church. The Church Father Eusebius writes in his Spiritual History that Pantaenus arriving in Kerala, found a living Church, and that these Christians made use of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew in their liturgy. This costly book was decorated with gold and silver and precious stone. It was kept on the altar in the church. Pantaenus has taken a copy of it for taking to Alexandria.

The common trading language of the whole East was the Aramaic, that also was used as liturgical language. Also the Thomas Christians preferred

this language, as it was the language of Jesus and his apostle Thomas. About the Thomaschristians it is said that they were culturally Hindu, religiously they were Christians and in worship they were Oriental.

So Thomas, who was called ‘the apostle of the East’, has listened to Jesus’ call, and his own previous exclamation ‘My Lord and my God!’ has become the ultimate credo of this growing Church; this ‘Adonai Elohai’ became the echo of a liturgical acclamation in Churches like those of India. Several authors have pointed out, that the eastern Christianity with its conviction and religious position was a very important social-cultural element in this period of the Indian society. This eastern Christianity was an Asiatic Christianity, very different from the Hellenistic Christianity of the West and much closer to the ecclesiastical and liturgical customs of the apostles and the first Jewish Christians.

## **INTERCONTINENTAL CONTACTS – THE GOSPEL TO ASIA-MINOR**

### **The apostle Saulus/Paulus**

The well known Saul of Tarsus was a fanatic opponent of the Christians. This man was on the way from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest there the followers of Jesus and to take them back to Jerusalem as prisoners.

Nearby Damascus he suddenly was frightened to blindness by a light from heaven. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him: ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’, he asked. ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’, was the answer. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

Also in the city of Damascus people became frightened. Ananias, one of Jesus’ disciples in that place, got a message from God to meet Saul in the Right Street. He answered: ‘Lord, I have heard much about this man.’ But when Jesus told him that this man would be an instrument in God’s hand to make God’s Name well known for Israel and for kings outside the country, Ananias went up to that house. He put his hands on Saul and baptised him. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

With a new message he returned to Jerusalem. This caused confusion, fear and conspiracy to kill him. Then the brothers took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. After that, the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

So Saul – later called Paul – has found his place as apostle in Asia-Minor. There he visited many cities with his message – first the local synagogue, and when his message was not accepted, he went to the people who were not Jews but who often reacted surprised.

The reports of Paul’s journeys and his letters to places he has visited are included in the New Testament.

### *The Apostles Philip and Peter*

Philip, the man who was called by an angel to go to the Gaza-road to explain some Isaiah-verses to the Official of Ethiopian – and who baptised him – this Philip was later seen in Ashdod.

The city Ashdod was well known in Israel, because once the Ark of the Covenant was captured in Jerusalem by the Philistines, and placed in Ashdod, in the temple of their god Dagon, beside of his statue. But Dagon had fallen two times on the ground before the Ark, so that the people of Ashdod became anxious and wanted to return the Ark of Israel's God. With great ceremonial care they had sent back the Ark to Israel.

Now, so many years later, the apostle Philip was going around in that environment, preaching the Gospel up till Caesarea, together with the apostle Peter, coming from Lydda. There Peter had healed the paralyzed Aeneas – and all inhabitants of that place converted to God.

And in Joppa the female disciple Tabitha – also called Dorcas – who was always doing good and helping the poor, became sick and died about the time that Peter was in Lydda. So they sent two men to Lydda to call Peter. He came to Tabitha, took her hand and said: 'Tabitha, raise up!' and everybody could see that she came again to life. This became known over all Joppa and many people came to the faith in God. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

### *Peter and Cornelius*

And also in Joppa Peter was called by God. In a vision he got three times the instruction to slaughter and to eat a number of impure animals. When he refused it three times, he heard a voice: 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' A threefold instruction has a special validity in the Middle-East; Peter realized this, when at the same time three men came at Simon's door to invite Peter for a visit in the house of a certain Cornelius in Caesarea, a chief of one hundred military men. He was not a Jew, yet a God-fearing man, respected by all the Jewish people. And this Cornelius had also received a vision of an angel, who instructed him to send men to Joppa, to the house of Simon the tanner, to meet a certain Peter who stays the night over there.

So Peter went with them to the house of Cornelius. A good conversation came up between the two men, and Peter memorized what the angel had told about pure and impure. The result was that all people over there – family and friends – did themselves baptise by Peter in the name of Jesus Christ. And they asked Peter to stay there for some days.

Caesarea has been grown out into a Christian community, that in the second age received a Bishop. In the third age it got a famous place by scientists like Origenes and Eusebius. And from Caesarea's Bishop Basilus the Great (370-379), a number of sermons have been saved, telling about the urgency to share our possession with the poor people.

Taken from his sermons are the words:

*'He who steals the robe of someone else is called a thief; do you deserve another name, if you don't help to cloth the naked?*

*The bread that you keep for yourself, while you don't need it, belongs to the hungry.*

*The mantle hanging in your wardrobe ought to hang over the shoulder of someone who is now wearing rags.'*

#### *The apostle Peter back in Jerusalem*

Back in Jerusalem after his experiences with Cornelius, Peter had to do his utmost to convince the other apostles and the community how God since the coming of his Spirit, also is working outside the borders. When they heard this all, they had no further objections and praised God, saying: 'So, God has granted even the gentiles repentance into life.'

Sometimes later it was also decided, circumcising was not to be obliged for them. It was not necessary to become a Jew before being a Christian.

Since that time, the messengers of Jesus Christ were sent from the sending community in Jerusalem into all directions.

#### *The apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus to Armenia*

These two apostles of Jesus went already in the first century A.C. with the Gospel to Armenia, working there in the years 43-66. Out of that work the Armenian-Apostolic Church was growing, also called the Gregorian Church. For St. Gregory, the Lightener (257-331), who was baptised

already, would have got a vision in the year 301 from Jesus Christ himself, saying to him to build a church in this place. In that year Gregory baptised the Armenian king Tridates IV, who thereafter proclaimed Christianity the State Religion of Armenia.

Gregor built the Cathedral of Etsjmiadzin. In 315 he became Patriarch. Later he started preaching. At that time Christian communities were already present, thanks to the previous apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus. Gregory stimulated the mission work among the neighbour folks in Iberia and Albania in the district of the Caucasus at that time. Armenians have been devotees of the Christian faith since 301 and found their own way in religion and culture.

In 318 Gregory resigned; he delegated the leadership to his son Aristakes and retired in a Monastery. In 331 he died and he was buried in Tordan. His two sons Aristakes and Vrtanes became second and third patriarch of the Armenian-Apostolic Church. Since the fifth century that Church belongs to the Oriental-Orthodox Churches.

*The two Apostles of the Slavs – Extension of the Message to the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and Russia.*

Explaining the differences between Churches was often helpful in bringing the Message of the Lord. Also in Eastern Europe a need was coming up for more explanation of the Gospel, like this already happened in parts of Asia.

About the year 860 Rastislav, asked to the Byzantine emperor Michael III to send some mission workers to teach his people in the way of Jesus Christ. The Moravians, ancestors of the present Czechs, belonged to the Slavic tribe that came from Asia and spread in the whole Eastern Europe. The request of Rastislav was sent to the patriarch of Constantinople, and then he sent two Greece brothers, Cyril and Methodius. Later they would become the most influencing mission workers of the world history of that time. And that was caused by their method of working.

### ***Cyril and Methodius***

*These two Greek brothers had grown up between the Moravians, so they knew their language.*

*But that language had no written form. Therefore, before starting their work, they designed an alphabet, so that the people who would convert, could read the Scripture and the liturgy in their own language.*

*This Slavic alphabet – the so called Glagolitic – developed into a writing form, still in use in the south-east of Europe and named after the youngest of both brothers, the Cyrillic script. So the orthodox faith as well as the Byzantine culture could be spread among the Slavic tribes. And Cyril and Methodius got the title of ‘Apostles of the Slavs’.*

In the course of the centuries the students of Cyril and Methodius have taken the Gospel and the scripts also more southwards, first to the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian Tsar accepted Christianity as the religion for his nation, and in 870 he made the Greece emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople recognizing the right of the Bulgarians on independence church organisation, and the right to celebrate the liturgy in their own language. So a new kind of State Church came up that could keep their own language in worshipping.

From Bulgaria this ‘Byzantine Christianity in Slavic garment’ reached the adjacent Serbia. And also the Church of Rumania ranged oneself under the eastern-orthodox ‘umbrella’. In 988 the leader Vladimir of Kiev made a study of the great religions, to choose one of them as State Religion. That became the Eastern-orthodox religion and Vladimir called his nation up to be baptised, following the Eastern-orthodox tradition. Hereafter the Slavic scripts of Cyrillic and Methodius were taken to Kiev. In this way the Slavonians had, more than the Christians in Western-Europe, for a long time the benefit of using the local language in the religious literature.

In Russia, the Orthodox Church remained the established Church. One of the most important marks was the ceremony, the ethic character of it. The word for ‘religion’ in Slavic language ‘Pravoslavlic’ means ‘the pure worship’ or ‘the pure glory’.

The son – and from 1019 successor – of Vladimir of Kiev, Yaroslav the

Wise, reinforced the connection between the Russian Church and the Byzantine Orthodoxy, by accepting a Bishop on his territory, who was appointed by the oecumenical Patriarch. He became the Archbishop, the Metropolitan of Kiev; so Kiev got a cathedral.

Yaroslav died in 1054 – also the year of the definitive separation of the Latin and the Greece Orthodox Churches.

Later the Orthodox Church of Ukraine asked to the patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople permission to separate from the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Cyrillic script is still in use. And thanks to this the Message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has gone out in many directions.

## **THE MESSAGE IN THE DIRECTION OF THE MIDDLE-EAST / THE ISLAM**

Because of its geographical situation the Middle-East had an important function since long, especially for shipping movements. It is a kind of bridge that connects three continents together. The Arabian peninsula never belonged to one of the big empires, as its natural state made it unapproachable for military expeditions. Yet its harbours and roads were often an important part of the trade routes, connecting East and West, already since centuries. South-Arabia was always well known because of its spice-culture, and the harbours were the departing places for the shipping to India and the other countries of the Far East.

Inside Arabia several Bedouin tribes were living with their flocks. In these tribes we recognise the Semites, descendants of me, Shem, and sons of Abrahams wives Hagar and Keturah, mentioned in the Old Testament, who were sent by their father to this land. By order of God Abraham built there with his son Ismail a House of Worship (the Kaaba) in Mecca and prayed to Him for his children, that He may prevent them to worship other gods, and to send a messenger from their midst to teach them God's words and wisdom.

But much later the descendants worshipped also primitive gods and ghosts (djinns). Mecca became even the centre of it. The Kaaba was still there. And every year the pilgrims went up, but the religious aspect was nearly lost. Each family had put its own statue in the House, hundreds together.

## THE PROPHET MOHAMMED

In the 6th century things changed. A descendant of Abraham's son Ismail, Mohammed, born in the year 570, got in 610 a vision from the angel Gabriel (in Arabic: Djibril) with a message of God (in Arabic: Al-Lah, the Only God).

### ***The Prophet Mohammed***

*He was an orphan from a poor Quraish tribe. His father Abdullah died already before Mohammed's birth, and his mother died when he was a child. He grew up by his grandfather Abdulmutallab and, after his grandfather's death, by his uncle Aboutaleb.*

*As a young man Mohammed guided, for a long time, the caravan of the rich widow Chadidja to Yemen and Syria. He became so honest and trustworthy, that Chadidja, although she was much older than he, asked him to marry her. They got four daughters and also two sons, but these two died early.*

His marriage gave him the opportunity to take time for religious meditation. Then he withdrew in the loneliness of a rock under the mountain Hira in the neighbourhood of Mecca. That became the place where the angel Djibril appeared to him, and showed to him a piece of cloth, saying: 'Recital in the name of your Lord!'. There was written: 'He, Al-lah is One'. However, Mohammed could not read. Therefore, he had to gather a group of trustable friends, who helped him to learn by heart the texts he would hear. The friends wrote it down on papyrus, on tree bark and on shoulder blades of camels. Later on all these verses were totalised to the content of the Qur'an, 114 chapters, called Sura's. The most important message of the book were the words of the angel: 'There is only One God!'

### **Mohammed's Call**

Convinced of God's Call, Mohammed immediately began to call up his own tribe and the people of Mecca to Islam – that means to surrender oneself in peace to the will of God, the One God. So he persisted in rejecting all Mecca's idols. The people of Mecca felt threatened in their religious opinions and also in their way of life and worship. They tried to prevent Mohammed in bringing the Divine Message. In Islam such an opposition is called 'sjirk'.

In 615 he felt obliged to send a part of his believers to the Christian Ethiopia to the Negus (Emperor) for shelter. They were kindly welcomed and afterwards they returned safely. But when in 619 anew opposition came up, and Mohammed's uncle Aboutaleb died and shortly later Mohammed's wife Chadidya also, the situation in Mecca became more dangerous. In 620 he was invited to come to Jathrib – in the past Al-Medinah al Keturah, the city of Keturah, to be there as peace worker; now the name of the city changed into Al-Medina Al-Nabi (the city of the Prophet).

In 628 an armistice opened up, followed by a pilgrimage to Mecca in 632. It became the 'hadj (pilgrimage) of the farewell', as Mohammed had just laid the base for the future pilgrimages, but he himself was not able to participate in it; returned to Medinah he became ill and died in that same year, at the age of 63 years.

From that moment the Divine messages also ended. All verses together became an Arabic recitative in rhythm and rhyme, with repeatedly refrains, giving a feeling of transcendence to the people by hearing the Koran-recitations for the first time.

### *Peace*

In this new period of peace, the old sounds of the Divine messages could be spread over the whole Arabic peninsula – which was up till now the living place of the descendants of Abraham's wives Hagar and Keturah. By recognizing and reinforcement of the earlier stories, that were more or less known for these Arabic Semites, it was understandable that in this same age Arabia surrendered oneself in peace to the One God. Since that time, this faith grew until it extended from the Atlantic Ocean of Northern Africa until the borders of China. And the greatest command of it was still:

*Say: He, Allah is One!*

Also like Jesus' answer in the Gospel on the question: Which command is the first of all? was:

*The first is: Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is One!*

No worship to other gods, no ‘partners’ or ‘companions’ or ‘associates’ besides Him; no idolatry (‘sjirk’) – the heaviest evil in Islam: there is no forgiveness for it.

### ***The Qur’an***

*In the Qur’an it is only God who is speaking. He is speaking via Djibril (Gabriel) to Mohammed, in singular and plural form. God (Allah) is telling Mohammed all about what happened in the past, when Mohammed was not yet born, and what is important for him to know: stories, also mentioned in the Torah of the Jews and in the Gospel of the Christians, about Abraham/Ibrahim, Isaac/Ishak and Jacob/Yakub, about Moses/Musa and David/Dawud and many others. Other parts of the Qur’an contained commandments and prohibitions that the Israelites also received on the Sinai-mountain (Arabic: Al-Tuur).*

*And Mohammed also got instructions how the messages should be given: not to the believers – Jews, Christians, and the Sabees in Arab – for they are brothers and they know this already, but all who are unknown should receive the messages to surrender in peace to God. And when Mohammed himself would doubt, he may ask the people of the Book, who read the Book already before his time. This is God’s first call-up to a dialogue and a trialogue with those believers. And then the message is: ‘We believe in what is sent to us and in what is sent to you. Our God and your God is One and the Same, and we surrender us to Him.*

In the contacts with the Jews in Medinah, Mohammed saw how they on Friday afternoon prepared the Sabbath, and impressed by this, he established this moment also for the Muslims. Since then, everywhere on the earth Muslims come together in their mosques on Friday afternoon for praying and preaching.

Mohammed established also a day of fasting and reconciliation, following the Jewish Day of Atonement; later this was extended to a moon-month (4 weeks) of fasting, as a time of intensive devotion and mutual forgiveness – the Ramadan month, also the month of the first revelation to Mohammed.

In Medinah the Qur'an received its definitive form. The sayings and advises of Mohammed himself, the Hadith, were gathered separately, apart from the messages of Allah. Mohammed's youngest wife, Aisha, did a lot of work on it.

In Medinah the first study on Arabic language and verses took place. From all neighbour countries students, scholars and teachers, Arabs and non-Arabs, born Muslims and converted Muslims, came to Medina to study the pure apprenticeship of the new religion from the men who had lived each day with the prophet Mohammed.

### *Reflection*

There where the violence is stopping, time becomes available for reflection on the divine Words given to the prophet Mohammed.

*One of those messages was: 'Say: He, Allah, has created for you the stars, so that you could guide yourself in the darkness of land and sea. For people who have knowledge, we have made clear those signs.'*

With reference to this verse Arabs in Bagdad (Iraq) opened a 'House of Wisdom', as a scientific research institute. A Nestorian prosecute Christian, became its leader. And up till now Bagdad has a Nestorian Church of Chaldean people – being an effective force of Eastern Christianity – and a Jewish community of significance.

### *Freedom of Religion*

Where the Jews came under the administration of Islam, they observed rather more autonomy for their communities. The common language also united the different nations, for the holy Qur'an had to be read or recited in the original language (Arabic). Therefore all new converts had to learn Arabic. This led to a rapid growth of literary as well as a growing interest for science, so that the signs of God's work in the world could be better understood.

From the House of Wisdom in Bagdad ambassadors were sent to Constantinople, looking for Greek manuscripts suitable for translation into Arabic language. And Persians were appointed to connect Greek scientific

knowledge and Arabic eagerness to learn.

Jacobites and Nestorian clergymen speaking Arabic and Greek got a leading role on translating classical texts of Greek science and philosophy into Arabic.

Mathematics and Astronomy were important to define the direction to Mecca for praying as well as for building mosques. Also the times of praying were defined according to the astronomic observation, with water clocks.

Arabs taking the algorithms of the Greeks started astronomic observations and with goniometry degrees of longitude and latitude were defined to make charts. So influences of sun and moon on earth's life could be predicted. In this way Vasco da Gama saw on his journey around Africa Arabs navigating using the stars. Perhaps these men had listened to the Divine words spoken to Mohammed and written down in the Qur'an. Their schedules of star positions were later on still in use by Western scientist in the 16th century in their theories about the turning of the earth around the sun.

## COOPERATION BETWEEN MY DESCENDANTS ON DISTANCE

The results of the scientific contacts between the several families of descendants from Abraham are still to be seen in the architecture, especially in Toledo and in Cordoba.

Cordoba is the place of the Mesquita (Spanish for Mosque) – the basilica that became a mosque and later a cathedral. But the municipality calls this complex ‘the property of each citizen, wherever in the world’, and therefore the official name is still Mesquita-cathedral.

From the 8th till the 15th century Spain (Arabic: Andalus) has a prosperous culture of Jews, Arabs and Berbers.

### ***Berbers***

*The Berbers (or Imazighen – free people) are inhabitants who lived in Northern Africa already before the arrival of the Arabs, especially in the present-day Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania and Mali.*

*These Berbers of Northern Africa were the descendants of Canaan, son of Cham – brother of me, Shem.*

*Berbers’ languages are parts of the Afro-Asiatic languages-family and related to the Semitic and the Egyptian language.*

### **Andalus**

In the year 711 Arabic-Berber military, led by Tariq, crossed from the Northern of Africa to Spain (Andalus). This was the beginning of eight ages of Islam on this Iberian peninsula.

From the beginning Islam maintained a high extent of tolerance to other religions – according to a commandment in the Qur’an. Jews and Muslims even received important government posts. They also contributed to the medical branch, geography, cosmology, the development of measurement instruments as well as in translations from Greek into Arabic and from Arabic into Latin and other European languages. But the translation of the Arabic Qur’an was forbidden for a long time, because translating easily leads to mis-interpretation. Yet, with the spreading of the Qur’an message to other parts of the world a need came up for expression in the own language. Then the name ‘Qur’an’ was changed into ‘*Expression of the meaning of the Arabic Qur’an text in the local language.*’

This period in Andalus has been considered as a heyday of the Spanish Islam. With a plenty of religious and spiritual schools in all great numbers of Islamic communities, Sufi-mystery schools (madrasa's), Jewish Talmud schools (jesjiewes) and Christian seminaries worked side by side, all in agreement with the religious conditions of their community. Jewish scholars who were familiar with Latin, Hebrew and Arabic were an indispensable link in the international spreading of knowledge. The frequently visited universities of Andalus became later the model for the Oxford and Cambridge universities in England, mostly bilingual, Latin and Arabic. One of the first persons who entered in the Arabic culture was Sylvester II, the future pope who, using his translations of Arabic scientific scripts, introduced already in the end of the 10th century the use of the decimal system and the concept of zero, 0. So faith and science were growing together.

#### *Mohammed al-Ghazali – Faith and Science*

The theologian who became famous in the grow of faith and science together is the Sufi Mohammed al-Ghazali (1058-1111). Into his theology he integrated a full concept of the Sufi practise beyond the dull jurisprudence, striving to an intensity of the faith and a more intimate relationship to God. So striving he became one of the scientist with the most authority. In the next centuries this would become still more clear.

#### ***Sufism – turning to the mysticism***

*For al-Ghazali it is clear that for the group of Sufis the theory is not sufficient to understand the mystic way, even with all existing books. Necessary here is the personal experience in feeling the words spoken by the mystics. For: was it up till now in fact more the own honour and fame rather than the love to God? At a certain moment there was for al-Ghazali no more authority for his own identity.*

*In 1095 this lawyer takes the radical decision to give up his professorship and to live the life of a Sufi. In a woollen cowl he flees to Bagdad to live in a cell of the large mosque, in loneliness and poorness, beyond all intellectual knowledge and loyalty to the law, fully concentrated on the deepness of the heart, cleaning it and invoking God's Name (dzikr) with the ultimate absorbing in God ('fanaa').*

*At the same time, al-Ghazali was hard working on scientific work for the believers, a theology for the people who are striving to reasonableness and deepness of experience. A revival of the religion within the normal mind, in a life like a pilgrimage.*

After some years he returned, possibly due to health problems. When he felt his life ending, he did his washing, asked for his shroud, kissed it and put it on his eyes, speaking: 'I listen and obey, now up to the King.' He passed away on December 18 of the year 1111, as a man who later by many people will be considered as 'the greatest after the Prophet'. The main work he left behind was titled: 'The Revival of the Science by the Faith.'

### **Back to the past**

In spite of the 'prime of life' in Andalusia in these past centuries – the contacts between Jews and Arabs from the East and the Berbers from Northern Africa – still ages of violence followed. More foreigners converted to the Christianity. The Christians grew in numbers and also in force. They occupied Spain. Non-Christian scientists there were forced to convert or to return to their own country. And then pope Urbanus II calls up his believers to a 'holy war' against the Islamists, who had moved from Arabia to Jerusalem.

### **Antisemitism – against the Semites**

A holy war from the pope against these Semites – my descendants, the progeny of Abraham, Hagar and Keturah – meant a military expedition, 'blessed by the Church'. A number of 'crusades' follows, from 1096-1254. The main object was the recapture of Jerusalem that was still in possession of the Muslims. They completed already in 691 building the Dome of the Rock and in 710 the al-Aksa Mosque. Later the Pope was successful in recapturing the Holy City at the cost of a massacre of Jews as well as Muslims. But the Christians lost Jerusalem again and all the surrounding land to Sultan Saladin, General and new Leader of Egypt.

### **Mission to convert – Francis of Assisi**

However, there came also an opposition from the side of Christians against this crusade mentality. The Order/Friar of Francis of Assisi pleaded for another approach to the Muslims.

### ***Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)***

*Francis was the son of a rich trader, but he chose for a life of apostolic poorness, based on the words of Jesus from the Matthew Gospel: The Kingdom of Heaven has come nearer. Heal the sick people, raise the deaths, heal lepers, cast out devils. Costless you received it, so give it costless.*

Francis founded the Order of Minor Brothers. He considered this also a mission movement. Their mission extended even to the Saracens/Arabs – Muslims.

In 1219 Francis stayed in the Crusade army, that prepared themselves for the day of definitive battle concerning Jerusalem. He said to a friend: ‘I hope that they will not fight that day. The Lord made me clear that it will not finish well.’ But when I tell it to them, they will hold me for a fool. But if I do not say it, it will be for me a heavy burden.’ His friend replied: ‘Father, don’t worry the words of the people. Do what your conscience tells you what to do. And fear God more than human beings.’

Then Francis made his choice. He was deeply impressed by the prayers of the Muslims, where everybody called them ‘unbelievers’. He behaved as a brother and servant among the Muslims. He went for a visit to the Sultan, the Kurd Salah-ada-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub, Saladin.

So, while the Pope called up for the 5th Crusade to recapture Jerusalem, ‘if need be by fire and sword’, Francis with his brothers went to the Sultan in Damiate with a message from the Lord God.

At the end of his visit to Sultan Saladin – the moment of farewell, the Sultan asked to Francis: ‘Pray for me that God will condescend to reveal that law and that faith that pleased Him most.’

When afterwards the crusade army lost the battle because of a strategic mistake, and the troupes of the Islam occupied Jerusalem again, Sultan Saladin accepted a peaceful surrender, and the inhabitants got the opportunity to redeem themselves. Many inhabitants for whom the cost were too high, it was the Sultan and his family who paid it themselves. Moreover the Jews were allowed to settle again in Jerusalem. There was no plundering and nobody was wounded.

The Christian chronicler reporter Jean de Joinville approvingly quoted the pronunciation of the Sultan: ‘that you are never allowed to kill a man, with whom you have shared one time your bread and your salt.’

### *Theology of God’s Pleasure*

Back in Italy Francis wrote in his ‘Letter to the Clergy’, that they have to display more respect for the written godly Words of the Lord, together forming the Scripture. And he warned the leaders of the nation ‘that they should not take this too easy, for they have to render an account of it on the day of the last Judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ.’

In this way Francis wants to realize the vision coming up to him during his stay among the Saracens (Muslims) concerning a ‘Christian-Muslim ecumene in praising the Almighty God.’

In his *Regula non bullata* (rules of life) Francis writes of his experience, that fruitful contacts with the Muslims are possible if you, being yourself a minor brother without violence and weapon, meet him humbly. In that way going into the world with the Good News, you manifest yourself vulnerably. You may be disgraced, but then the world should know as brother, that the shame is not for those who suffer from it, but for those who cause it.

### *Social Action*

In fact the brothers with their Gospel texts developed a new model of social action: taking the cross, following Jesus Christ, leaving behind everything and getting in return a hundredfold, giving also the other cheek, this all is an invitation to follow Jesus in dispossession, and without violence, even without the weapon of the word, but with the will of peace making between Christians and Muslims, and so be able to take away many negative ideas about Islam, to come more into the mystery of God, who oversteps the borders of the Christianity – this is Francis’ Theology of God’s Pleasure.

### ***Theology of God’s Pleasure***

*This theology is a valuable contribution to the Theology of the Religions and the Dialogue. This theology offers the foundation for a real dialogue*

*between Christians and Muslims, especially a dialogue of the life in which they find each other to be humble to God, and to work together in peace on a new world. Children of Abraham, all Semites and not 'anti-Semites', all from the same house, the same 'nest', and so each other's brothers and sisters. Francis' way of approaching is a learning process, a 'voyage of discovery', that shows us the presence of God among all the others and makes us listening to all that God has to say us in our life and our history.*

## CROSSROADS

On the crossings of their world-routes Abraham's children – all descendants of me, his forefather Shem – Semites –, met each other throughout all centuries. In good times they combined and compared each other's divine Words and human traditions. In bad times they abused and combatted each other and behaved in an anti-Semitic way, even up till now, being all creatures of the One God, Whom they want to serve, and being descendants of their patriarch Abraham and one of his three wives – Sara, Hagar and Keturah – all family members.

These children also met each other on the sea-routes, and together they found new continents. So the Portuguese Vasco da Gama arrived at the coast of India, with the help of Arabic pilots, who navigated by consulting the stars. However, his work there would not be comparable to the mission work of the Apostle Thomas. On the contrary, the purpose was to overpower the country by Portugal.

### *Colonization*

This resulted in taking possession of India's richness, breaking off the trade treaty of India with Ethiopia and the caravan routes via Egypt, Syria and Iraq.

Visiting a House of Prayer in India, to thank God for his good arrival, Vasco da Gama mistook the building, as Church and Hindu Temple look like each other, and so the newcomer was kneeling for the swastika, a cross with hooks, a holy Indian symbol.

Portugal also had other wrong intentions with India. It built war ships with better models for a war against the ships of the Indians. The conquest of India had terrible outcomes for the cities of the early Thomaschristians. The first victims who died were Brahmans, priests, who once were consecrated by the Apostle Thomas. Several of them were crucified and their temples were destroyed so that with its stones new churches could be built for future Christians. In the period thereafter warships transported thousands of Portuguese annually there, as tradesmen and soldiers.

### *Colonization and Faith*

In the meantime three Christians from Kerala went to the Patriarch of Babylon to ask for religious help, as there was already a great need of Bishops; it was in the year 1490. On their way one of them died; the other two reached the Patriarch and became consecrated priests by him. Then he sent them to a monastery to get also two monarchs from there to be consecrated for the Church of Malabar/Kerala. Coming back at that place the new clergy men worked fully together with the local leaders to realize four new Church buildings, the new founding of the monastery of the Apostle Thomas and the extension of the church to other districts and the Christian education generally.

When later Franciscan men arrived, they found there Syrian-orthodox Churches with communities of Thomaschristians, who were in their eyes like one of the greatest miracles of the Eastern world. It seems that the Apostle Thomas had converted many people, among them also the son of a monarch from that region who had become a deacon by him in the past. And the Christians there were called: ‘the Folk that has a Law’.

Due to the work of the new monarchs the local churches enjoyed a period of revival. In 1540 a famous Jesuit from Spain, Francis Xaverius was appointed by the Pope for mission work in India. After a boat-trip of one year he arrived in Goa, north of Malabar. He stayed there until his death in 1552. Meanwhile he also travelled to the Far East: Malay, Ambon, (Indonesia) and Japan.

#### ***Francis Xaverius the missionary***

*With the image of the crusade still in mind Francis Xaverius expected a conflict with the Muslims, but when he came in contact with these people he discovered that they were not at all combative, but rather peaceful towards their non-Muslim co-inhabitants and Christians. Nevertheless it was difficult for him to understand the Hindu-spirituality in the Jesuit way: to dedicate his life to the knowledge and the service of India, with only one longing: a life of prayer and contemplation suitable within the Indian culture.*

Francis would have changed the attitude of the Indian nation according to the ideas of Marco Polo. But instead he found many small communities around a group of priests and deacons under the authority of a Bishop.

## **The work of Francis Xavierius**

So Francis chose to give more attention to the non-Christians and therefore he opened in Goa a Centre for education of local missionaries. He did it with more emphasis on Latin dogmatic theory. But this gave conflicts with the local Bishops. The Thomaschristians were not fully against the Latin character of their Church, but they wanted to remain faithful to the Law of the Apostle Thomas. By that Law they were not only attached to the Syrian (Aramaic) liturgy, worshipped by the priests, but they gave also an important role to the Laity and the meetings of the people. To understand the messages of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament in a better way, the Thomaschristians admit the value of the Jewish inheritance, and they have always drawn upon the richness of the Jewish Law, the Torah, to express their Christian faith; for instance they celebrate the Pesach together with the Jews, in the 14th Nissan.

Now Francis Xavierius directed his Gospel work on the pearl-fishers, a group of 2000 to 3000 people living in about 30 small and large villages at the seacoast on Malabar and belonging to the poorest inhabitants of the country. Francis baptised more than twelve-thousand people, until his arms became 'tired and like lamed'. All baptised persons received a Christian name and a Portuguese family-name. Francis preached the Gospel and he did them recite in their own language the Ten Commands, the Lord's Prayer and the Credo.

Because of his good contacts with the King of Portugal, Francis got his permission to move to places in the Far East: first Malay and then Ambon, the other part of the Indonesian Archipelago – all islands in Portuguese hands. He travelled from Mylapore on the south-coast of India, after a reflection at the grave of the Apostle Thomas.

Back in India Francis Xavierius hoped to get permission to bring the Gospel also outside the India-territory, as inside India the economy was already in the hands of Jews and Thomaschristians, together with Syrian tradesmen. He got permission and departed to Japan. Combining the theology with the economy, he stimulated the Portuguese in his homeland to set up a trade with Japan, and he called up the Jesuits in Malabar to re-organise the mission of India by using the sailing departures to Japan.

### ***Extension of the Christianity***

*After Francis Xavierius also many other Jesuits and Franciscans spread the Christianity in Japan. At the same time they founded parishes, schools and hospitals. Wherever they came they left an element of faith behind, that slowly but surely germinated.*

However, the Franciscans inside India came into opposition to the authority of the Portuguese and their Archbishop, who excommunicated ‘disobedient’ people. And the leaders of the Thomaschristians planned to found an own religious Order: ‘the congregation of the holy Thomas the Apostle’; this together with a very sober life style of their Christian tradition. But the Portuguese bishops and priests rejected this. And one bishop was arrested by the Portuguese.

To be able to cope with all this misery, the mutinous Thomaschristians came together in Mattancherry in 1653 at the foot of the ‘Coonan Cross’ in Cochin. There they made a stately vow, that they would no longer be true to the Portuguese, and that they only would obey the Jesuits and the Patriarch of Goa. They confirmed that promise by holding on to a thick cord that was tied up to the Cross. In similar meetings in Edappally and Alangatt these decisions were confirmed anew. Six months later the Arch-deacon Thomas a Campo – belonging to the family of the Brahmans (priests of the first Thomas-converts) was consecrated to Bishop and Metropolitan. Twelve priests laid their hands on his head. He got the name Mar Thom I.

In 1665 he has been officially consecrated to Bishop by Mar Gregory, metropolitan of Jerusalem, who gave him all help in organizing his Church and explaining to him the differences in dogma’s between the East-Syrian Church and the Roman-Catholic Church.

### *Thomaschristians under a new government.*

After the Thomaschristians with a stately vow at the ‘Coonan Cross’ had freed themselves from the Portuguese domination, the Netherlands made use of this situation with the support of the – just founded – United East and West Companies, V.O.C. and W.I.C. They got the right on sovereignty over the territories that were already in the hands of the Portuguese. Several trade principles were made.

### ***Principle of exchange***

*This principle implied that goods could be exchanged without changing the surplus from or to Amsterdam or to Batavia or other harbours. As of 1795 Cochin – place of the Cross – had to be handed over by the Dutch to the British, who also took the whole region of Malabar ('Mother of the pepper'). Meanwhile the Dutch had taken from the Portuguese the African Fort Elmina – the present Ghana. They stayed there until the mid of the 19th century and gathered a fortune with the so called 'threefold exchange' between Europe, Africa and America: Ships of the W.I.C. with goods from the Netherlands were unloaded in Ghana and thereafter loaded with slaves for America. In America, the slaves were exchanged for sugar and other plantation products, destined for Amsterdam.*

### ***Mission and slavery***

But the mission work did not grow as long as it was associated with such slave trade by the inhabitants of these countries: 'That does not match with the Gospel' was their reaction.

### ***Gospel and British East India Company (VOC)***

Invited by the Metropolitan Dionysios I a pastor of the VOC was sent to Kerala (India) to inquire into the Church of the Thomaschristians.

There it became clear to him that the Portuguese had burnt the historical documents of the Thomaschristians and the Syrian scripts. Now they had only some examples of the Holy Scriptures and the liturgical books. But the priests, who still knew the Syrian language had the habit to translate their texts from the Syrian into the local Malayalam. However they had no written texts in the Malayalam and in the Syrian language neither.

Therefore, Mar Dionysios I, started translating the Syrian text of the New Testament, more than one thousand years old, in the Malayalam. When the translation work was finished, it was printed in Bombay in 1811. Next some copies of that New Testament in Malayalam was handed to Mar Thomas VIII. The manuscript is still saved in the Library of Cambridge.

### **The Message to the Far East**

Gradually the Mission in Western Europe became a part of European colonialism. In that option the work of the missionary could also be seen.

### *Colonial Mission*

On their route to the far and exotic places missionaries normally accompanied the traders and the colonial administrators. At hardly any time was the Church the first. Rather more there was some talk of mutual European conflict about the colonies. There was combat on territories in India, Malaya, Ceylon and Java, between France, Great Britain, Denmark and The Netherlands. The Dutch got more and more influence on the spice-islands, especially when they received in 1677 land and trade from a Java-leader, in exchange for military assistance. Europeans went to Africa and Asia only for trade, although China resisted.

During all of this time Catholic and Protestant missionaries from Europe travelled along the several trade routes to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 1622 pope Gregor XV founded the ‘Congregation of the Propaganda Fide, (‘the Propaganda’), to place the Catholic mission more directly under the management of Rome, because the Monarchs of Spain and Portugal neglected the care of the clergy. Now ‘The Propaganda’ appealed more to France. Then the French Jesuit Alexander de Rhodes worked in Vietnam from 1623-645. He studied the Vietnamese language and wrote it down. Up till now such written form of teaching is the best guarantee for the success of missionary work, and also because of his medical instructions a flourishing Vietnamese Church of 30.000 members grew up in the same age. There in Ayuthia also the first local seminar was opened.

However, because of different opinions about changes in the local habits, especially about the Chinese language during the worship a mutual clash came up between the religious orders, leading to a conflict. The emperor Kang Hsi of China appealed urgently to the Catholic Church in Rome to give up the changes. But his protest got hardly any attention. Angry with it, the emperor issued a law in which each mission was forbidden. Seven years later all missionaries, except some Jesuits, were driven away out of China. Only after the midst of the 19th century this Church could flourish again, although the Vatican did not want to reconsider the request to the correct method.

### *Australia*

Australia, for long time unknown in mission work, came into the news, when it was discovered in the second half of the 18th century by western navigators. Tradesmen followed. As a result of illness and violence most Aboriginal inhabitants lost their lives. The remaining people were driven to the desert; their culture disappeared for the greater part. Great Britain sent its convicts also to this far land. Later mission workers arrived there with their message, but the frustrated inhabitants had no feeling for their words. Nowadays many of the remaining inhabitants live in reservations and the present religion in the country is derived from 95 % of westerners.

## THE END OF THE SLAVERY

At the end of the 18th century liberated African slaves – under pressure manumitted out of America, Britain and the West-Indies – and returned to Africa. Mainly they settled in Liberia and in Sierra Leone, calling its capital Freetown; 1.100 people founded there a ‘Province of Freedom’. When they still were slaves they chose already for Christianity and took their own denominations and preachers with them. The first Church dated from 1792. Also the location of the University of Sierra Leone – the Foura Bay College – was founded there. The country became the centre for all intercepted ships of the whole West Coast of Africa.

In the United States the black church had for the greater part come into being as a reaction on the exclusion of the ‘black people’ from the ‘white’ church communions there. This black church was in fact the only social institution of importance for the former slaves to survive in a racial society. Later this group increased with slaves from intercepted ships coming since 1809 from all parts of West-Africa – a mass movement to the Christianity in the modern mission history. Sierra Leone became a self-assertive and developed community, searching their way back to their native land. All through these initiatives the mission reached Nigeria after 1840. When mission workers arrived there, the Church was already present. The relation between opposing slavery and introduction mission work led to accepting fully Christianity by the former slaves.

The emancipated slaves would become of great importance for the extension of Christianity in West-Africa. Within two years’ time 120.000 people converted to Christianity. Since 1960 also a great number of refugees from Guinee Bissau joined them. They passed wholesale to the Roman Catholic Church.

The next half age Sierra Leone certificated tens of preachers and catechists for West-Africa, especially for the territories of the Niger. Changes in the mission theory showed more preference for direct missionary.

Agriculture and Trade was also taught, but mission work was more concentrated on Education. Schools admitted young people within the Christian atmosphere. In 1845 Freetown had already higher education for boys and in 1865 also for girls. In 1876 The Foura Bay College was associated with the University of Durham in England, so that Africans in Sierra Leone could reach a degree in Literature and Theology.

## AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Liberia and Ethiopia remained free from mission work. People over there know already about the Old Testament by Jewish immigrants. And in Ethiopia a Christian kingdom was founded, of which the king and the emperor pretended to be descendants from king Solomon and the Queen of Sheba – both descendants of Abraham. The Ethiopian Christianity got its own image with its saints and celebrations, its Old Testament's elements, its calendar of thirteen moon-months and its mono-physical belief about Jesus Christ. The rather isolated development of Christianity on the 'table-land' – also called 'the roof of Africa' – continued until the 20th century. God, already worshipped for a long time, is their only God, Creator of Heaven and earth. 'This God is and remains the same old and well known God', so is said by the African theologian Kwame Bediako.

### *Kwame Bediako*

This theologian puts the proposal, that God was already in Africa long before the mission workers came to proclaim Jesus Christ. This emphasizes probably the oral tradition of the ancestors, dated from the time of the Divine Law to the forefathers and the arch-fathers. For Bediako the real God is the God of their forefathers, the Creator, revealed in Jesus Christ. This is what Bediako calls 'the at home bringing of Christ in Africa'.

Dr. Kwame Bediako was a 'Church-historian' and came from Ghana, that in 1957 became the independent 'Gold Coast'. In 1987 he founded there in Akropong an institute in an old mission post from 1843, that was since 1787 inhabited by rescued slaves from England.

In 1792, when Freetown was founded by Afro-American ex-slaves from Nova-Scotia and by rescued Africans from slaves ships this first important Church leader came from there.

### *Theology in the own African context*

In that new institute Dr. Kwame Bediako has studied theology in the own African context, to find answers on questions from the African point of view. In this theology it is important that Africa in its own way and in its own language can express the Biblical truth, to emphasize God and Christ in the own specific culture. Even God's Names (Greece/Hebrew), giving a

meaning in those languages, need a match with the African religion. Then it will become clear that the name of a God, existing already for a long time in Africa, is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He becomes the African Immanuel, living among Africans. And new names are sometimes evidently old African words, with only a difference in language.

So, when mission workers came among the Bantu-people in Cameroun, speaking their language and telling the stories about Jesus and Peter and John, but also about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and about the kings and the prophets, this impressed them, especially when it became clear that those stories in fact had the character of their 'Zambe', the God of their own forefathers. So these storytellers – evangelists, preachers and missionaries – became at once famous in Africa. And Bible songs came up with a sound of the previous slavery, in the mother language, that means the language of the heart, not of the head, namely French.

### ***Spoken theology – theology of the base***

*Bediako points out a similarity between the Middle-East and the present Africa. It is about the question whether the converted Christians can maintain their commitment with their own culture. The translations of the Old Testament into their own language brought the Message closer to African thinking than the thinking of the New Testament did.*

*An example: In John Chapter 1 verse 1 is spoken about 'The Word', translated from the Greece 'Logos'. But Jesus himself was thinking and speaking in Hebrew, the Semitic language, and then 'Logos' has to be explained from the Old Testament 'dabar', which in Jewish thinking means 'Word' as well as 'Deed', and not only 'Word'. So we believe not only with words, but also with our deeds, the good things we do for God and our neighbours.*

### ***John Mbiti – Oral Tradition***

For John Mbiti from Kenya, a Christian philosopher, Jesus was an example who gave his teachings orally, never in writing, although Jesus could write. Even many years after his death Jesus' words and deeds were still transferred orally.

*Dr. Lamin O.Saneh – Liberation Theology*

Dr. Lamin O. Saneh, born and grown up in Gambia, studied in Birmingham and graduated in London. He converted from Islam to Christianity and became a practicing Roman Catholic. An important part of his academic work was the study of ‘World Christianity’ and he wrote extensively about the translation of the Christian Message. He emphasized the importance of language and religion inside the own culture: ‘It is the process of the searching for the ‘naked Gospel’, the translation of the Bible in the own African language, that promotes the ‘own-lands’ answers. In this way Christianity becomes a mass-transformation to a new consciousness.’

***Liberation-theology***

*African theologians compare the liberated slaves of Africa also with the folk of Israel, liberated out of the slavery in Egypt, on the way to the promised land of Canaan. The translation of the Old Testament in their own African language gives the African the feeling that God has now revealed Himself clearly.*

*Independent Churches – Theologia Africana*

The creation of songs from stories in the Bible, not in French – the language of the head, but in the own mother-language – language of the heart – stimulated the coming up of the Independent Churches, where the believers are going their own way to a Theologia Africana. In the Independent Churches Jesus’ resurrection gets more emphasize than his dying. Also his dying as ‘sacrifice’ does not match with their image of God: ‘He who loves his child, does not do such’. Unwittingly they used the words of the Lord of the vineyard in Jesus’ parable: They will respect my son.’ Therefore the Pesach of many African Churches begins on the graveyard. So the faith in the resurrection of Christ is being connected to the resurrection of their ancestors, who passed away.

## AFTER SLAVERY – THE BALANCE OF PROFIT AND LOSSES

The western colonist was, after the export of slaves, now looking for the export of other ‘products’, perhaps agricultural food or industrial goods. Also the Portuguese had its slave trade. But that was finished when Berbers became Muslims; not because Islam forbids slavery, but because Islam forbids that Muslims become slaves.

### *Exploitation*

Two times a bid for power was made in Africa. The second time it happened on a conference in Berlin in 1885, when the Belgian king got international recognition for his private Congo State. This was the beginning of dividing of the African continent between the European authorities: English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Belgian or Italian. So Africa was disclosed by the European countries and cut in straight pieces to be exploited. Freedom of religion was promised. But the inhabitants of this continent saw in their religion in the first place Jesus from Nazareth as their liberator from violence and suppression. They looked into the biblical sources to express the Message in a way that touched the heart of all of them. For they feel that announcing a God who would not see the situation of these impoverished people and who would not stand up for his poor people would be a ‘God of death’, a dead God.

### *God of the poor*

And they were indeed poor and impoverished, those who had come back from the slavery. They find back their land, empty and destroyed. Empty because of the export of their costly oil; destroyed because their fruit trees and palm trees have been removed out of their gardens to make place for pipe-lines for the oil. It would take at least nine years to have new full-grown fruit trees. Moreover it is empty and destroyed because all the old and thick trees which always protected land and inhabitants against the heat, had been cut and taken away for the industry in western countries. There are also countries that have become poor because the richness of thousands objects of art, made of bronze and brass have been robbed – a value of hundreds of million dollars. Museums in western countries still keep now a big number of these collections.

In the balance of profit and losses, the losses are still in majority, caused by lust for mighty and possession – colonizes the land, while the Almighty already says in the Torah (Leviticus): 'The land is Mine, and you yourselves have only been foreigners in Egypt.' Foreigners are allowed to share and care God's property and to offer to Him the fruits of it. All the land and whole the world, heaven and earth, high atmosphere and deep-sea, that all is and remains His.

Sometimes people seem to share or to make place for others. In Brazil, the Ministry of Labour has liberated a big group of young pickers of fruit, from terrible life circumstances, comparable with slavery. They would receive a high amount as compensation from international traders being responsible for these precarious situations. And in England a small but meaningful mission movement developed with more openness to other religions, emphasizing the Christian mercifulness, to prevent offending Hindu's and Muslims. Also a sense of guilt came up because of the richness by taking away the Benin Bronzes with a value of a millions of Euro's. These are the art treasures still lying in western museums in London, Leiden and in Berlin – all robbed during a punitive expedition in 1897 from the palace of the King (oba) of the Benindom in the present Nigeria.

### *Profits*

On the balance of Profits and Losses Ethiopia remained free of foreign intervention. The Jewish immigrants knew already the Old Testament and so the Ethiopian Christianity got an own vision. This isolated developing on 'the roof of Africa' continued until the twentieth century.

### *Ethiopia – outpost of progression*

*Ethiopia is the only African country that remained independent during three-thousand years. It was only temporally occupied by Italy from 1936-1941. But the Ethiopian spirit remained the same and its beauty untouched, so is said. Its emperor, Menelik II, a far descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, would have transferred his passion for the unique pentatonic music on his successor Haile Selassie, also descending from the House of David.*

Now, for the first time in twenty years, Ethiopia and its neighbour Eritrea have entered into conversation with each other: the new Ethiopian prime-minister Abiy Ahmed, the new Ethiopian president Sahle-Work Zewde – the only female Chief of a State in Africa – in conversation with president Asaias Afewerki of Eritrea. The new Ethiopian prime-minister Abiy Ahmed – son of a Muslim father and a Christian mother, studied at the Institute for Peace and Security in Addis Ababa. In the meantime he has presented his new cabinet, the half of it female. Even the Minister of Defence is – for the first time – a woman, and her Ministry is for the first time a Ministry of Peace.

A Peace-accord has been signed between both countries. Both flags were hanging in Addis Ababa, where thousands of Ethiopians welcomed the Eritrean president Asaias Afewerki. And after 22 years he attended again an open-air concert where Ethiopian and Eritrean artists performed. And many people have seen again their family members.

Meanwhile the first commercial flight between the capitals Addis Ababa and Asmara has taken place. The telephone connections are repaired and Eritrea, often suffering from a lack of electricity, can now import their electricity from Ethiopia, that built its biggest waterpower Centre in Africa, while Ethiopia, not lying at the sea-side, can now make use of the facilities of the Eritrean harbours Massawa and Assab. And the old Eritrean embassy was restored within a few days, so that president Asaias could visit it again. The international community welcomed all these developments and hopes that the 72 years old Asaias will follow in the tracks of prime-minister Abiy, who realized democratic reforms in Ethiopia.

In the meantime Ethiopia has carried out a law that gives more rights to nearly one million refugees in the country. They are allowed to look for work and to live outside the camps. This measure has been taken to give them a better life and to make them less dependent on international help. In Ethiopia more than 900.000 refugees are living, the biggest population of refugees in Africa, after Uganda. They are mostly coming from the conflict territories in Sudan, South-Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea.

## **Overview**

At the end of this overview I, Shem – whose numerous descendants, the Semites, have crossed land and sea – I feel that, although there is still a long way to go and many restore work is to do, nevertheless in the course of the ages on our ways special hand-posts had been given to realize hope for understanding and reaching the final purpose – peace through faith.

Those given hand-posts appeared already in the 11th century by Mohammed al-Ghazali, theologian and Sufist with his own experience in his love to God. He was the first on the following list of theologians, described already on the pages before.

## **Referenced**

Al-Ghazali (Bagdad, 1058-1111) – Theology of Faith beyond science

Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226) – Theology of God's Pleasure

Theologica Africana – Independent Churches

Theology of Freedom – Dr. Lamin O.Saneh

Spoken Theology – Kwame Bediako

Oral Tradition – John Mbiti

Ubuntu – Bishop Tutu

Tariqa

## **Tariqa – The Way**

The Tariqa brings us back to the path of Al-Ghazali. It is a Revival of the religion with our normal mind, with an emphasize on the inner and inter-religion's life as a religious pilgrimage – the Tariqa of al-Ghazali in Bagdad, Iraq/Mesopotamia.

In later ages people also referred to this way:

In France the Alawiyya-Darqawiya-Shadilya Sufi-way Tariqa was founded in 1909 by the Community-life.

In 1948 the first inter-religious World-union was founded, called Les Amis de l'Islam.

In 2017 on December 8th, the United Nations in their 68th meeting proclaimed the 16th of May as the yearly International Day of Living Together in Peace.

The Dutch AISA-NGO has joined its way of life from the beginning of the 21st age to the International Alawiyya Sufi Union, founded by Sheik Ahmed Mustafa al-Alawi, born in Mustaghanam, Algeria, 1869. The present Sufi leader of this Tariqa is Sheik Khaled Bentounes and the present chairman of AISA-NGO of The Netherlands is Alaeddine Touhami. Their point of view is:

*Peace is not a utopian end, but a way inside to go, a Tariqa to a trust in yourself to discover there what you have to give. This all is based upon the inner theology of Al-Ghazali in the 11th and 12th century: faith and science are wrapped in a contact with the Eternal.*

One of their pillars was the imam Hamza Zaid Kailani from Palestine.

*Imam Hamza Zaid Kailani*

During fifty years he was the friend, the confidant and model for the present AISA of The Netherlands. He came in 1964 on a temporal base to The Netherlands as an interpreter of a group own countrymen who came to work in a Dutch company. But because of the 6 days-war between Israel and Palestine Hamza did not get permission to enter back into his country. This has given him the feeling of being 'stateless with scars' and 'an exile in his own country'. Only after years of waiting his wife and child could reach him here in The Netherlands, via Jordan. Nevertheless, as an interpreter he also contributed to setting free a group of Dutch hostages in the first Gulf-War.

From that moment the Imam has focused his life on the society in The Netherlands. This became his Tariqa and for this country he was a hand-post. He made himself strong for the Inter-Church foundation of Churches and Foreigners and for the Universal Peace Federation as a symbol of love and peace and healing of the soul.

On a voluntary base he was working as an Imam for Muslim prisoners, keeping in contact between these young people and their anxious parents. In 2009 his great devotion has been rewarded with a Royal order, given by the mayor of his place of residence, the City of Utrecht.

***Imam Hamza himself had also a word for his Utrecht:***

*'The dialogue must go on. The present grim situation of the world forces us to approach each other in a positive way. We have to be ready to share the richness of the earth. Environment filthiness can only be fought together to be successful. Because the dirty water and the acid rain move from one country to the other, from one continent to the other, without any difficulty. Neither a permit nor a visa is necessary: the wind drives all forward. Churches and mosques have to raise their voices louder. The faith has to play a role in life, and that is the role of the controlling conscience.'*

In September 2017, the Imam passed away, 83 years old. Under many words of love and thanks, coming from representatives of many fellow-institutions, and under songs and prayers of his Sufi-friends, he has been carried on their shoulders to his last place of rest on earth.

His day of birth – November 3rd – has become a day of remembering in the House of Peace in Almere, under the name ‘Hamza Kailani Forum for living in Peace’, where people will work in the way of his spirit.

## **LAST WORDS OF SHEM**

My name is Shem. Once upon a time I helped my father Noah to build an ark, together with my brothers Cham and Japhet. It was to prevent people and animals for a coming flood. At last many kinds of animals and only eight persons survived the disaster.

Thereafter I followed this group – to which I also belong – on their way of life. Also my descendants did so. Sometimes they seemed to lose track, but all what was found became a small part of a wider total, a kind of puzzle, of which each part was welcome. But how large the mid-part will be is still unknown. What remains is a piece of hope that many more pieces will supply and give more information of the descendants of me, Shem, and all children of the One God, the Eternal, to Whom we all belong.

SHEM

## LITERATURE

- De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling NBG. Haarlem 2004.
- De Bijbel, vertaald in opdracht van het Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap. Amsterdam 1964.
- De Koran, uit het Arabisch vertaald door J.H. Kramers. Amsterdam 1984.
- De Koran – een weergave van de betekenis van de Arabische tekst in het Nederlands door F. Leemhuis. Houten 1989.
- The Holy Qur'an. English translation of the meanings and Commentary, by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah (King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex).
- The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol.I-XII. Brill Leiden.
- Bo Reicke/Leonhard Rost – Bijbels/historisch woordenboek I-VI. Utrecht 1969.
- Bos, D.J. Het Evangelie in Afrikaans gewaad. Kok, Kampen, 1974.
- Brongers, H.A. De Literatuur der Babyloniërs en Assyriërs. Servire, Den Haag, 1951.
- Derkse, M. De weg ligt onder je voeten. Over het lef om te leven. Ten Have, Utrecht, 2011.
- Gibb, H.A.R. De Islam. Een historisch overzicht. Boom, Meppel, 1985.
- Halik, T. Raak de wonden aan. Kok, Utrecht, 2019.
- Hamza Zaid Kailani. Kernmomenten in de Islam. Gooi en Sticht, Baarn, 1993.
- Hoebrechts, J. Franciscus en de Islam. Van Gorcum, Assen, 1994.
- Hoffmeier, James K. De archeologie van de Bijbel. Ark Media, Amsterdam, 2009.
- Ibrahim, S.B. & Dinet, E. The life of Mohammad, Prophet of Allah. Studio Editions, London, 1919.
- Jelsma, A. Handboek van de geschiedenis van het Christendom. Voorhoeve, Den Haag, 1979.
- Julien, P. Zonen van Cham onder Oost-Afrikaanse steppevolken. Scheltens & Giltay, Amsterdam, 1960.
- Klijn, A.F.J. Apokriefen van het Nieuwe Testament I en II. Kok, Kampen, 1984-1985.
- Mulder, D.C. e.a. Religies in nieuw perspectief. Kok, Kampen, 1985.
- Oikumene, bezinning. Is dit ook kerk? Raad van Kerken, Amersfoort, 2019.
- Potok, C. In den beginne. Brandaan, Barneveld.
- Rabbijn Awraham Soetendorp. De Rebbe ontmoet. Stichting Trialoog, Amersfoort, 2005.
- Schaaf, Y. Hij ging zijn weg met blijdschap. VBK Media, Kampen, 1990.
- Schaaf, Y. De Afrikaanse weg van Jezus. Allerwegen jrg.26. Kok, Kampen, 1995.
- Schaaf, Y. Verteren op eigen wijze. Boekencentrum Zoetermeer, 2001.
- Sugana, G.M. De groten van alle tijden – Mohammed. Mondatori Verona, 1970.

- Vandenbroeck, P. Berbervrouwen en hun kunst. Ludion, Gent, 2001.
- Van Slageren, J. Joodse invloed in Afrika. Historische en religieuze verkenningen. Skandalon, Vught, 2012.
- Van Slageren, J. De Thomaschristenen van India. Skandalon, Vught, 2013.
- Waardenburg, J. Islam – Norm, ideaal en werkelijkheid. Fibula, Houten, 1994.
- Wallace-Murphy, T. Wat de Islam voor ons heeft gedaan. De bijdrage aan de westerse beschaving. Ankh Hermes, Deventer, 2008.
- Weber, H.R. The Cross Tradition and Interpretation. Grand Rapids, 1975.
- Wessels, A. Jezus zien. Ten Have, Baarn, 1986.
- Wessels, A. Arabier én Christen. Ten Have, Baarn, 2002.
- Witteveen, H.J. Universeel soefisme. Servire, Utrecht, 1995.
- Yaa Gyasi, Weg naar huis. De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam, 2017.
- Young, W.G. Patriarch, Shah and Caliph. Christian Study Centre, Rawalpindi, 1974.
- Zahurul, H.S. De 99 schone namen van Allah. Islamitisch Cultureel Centrum, Den Haag, 1992-1993.