

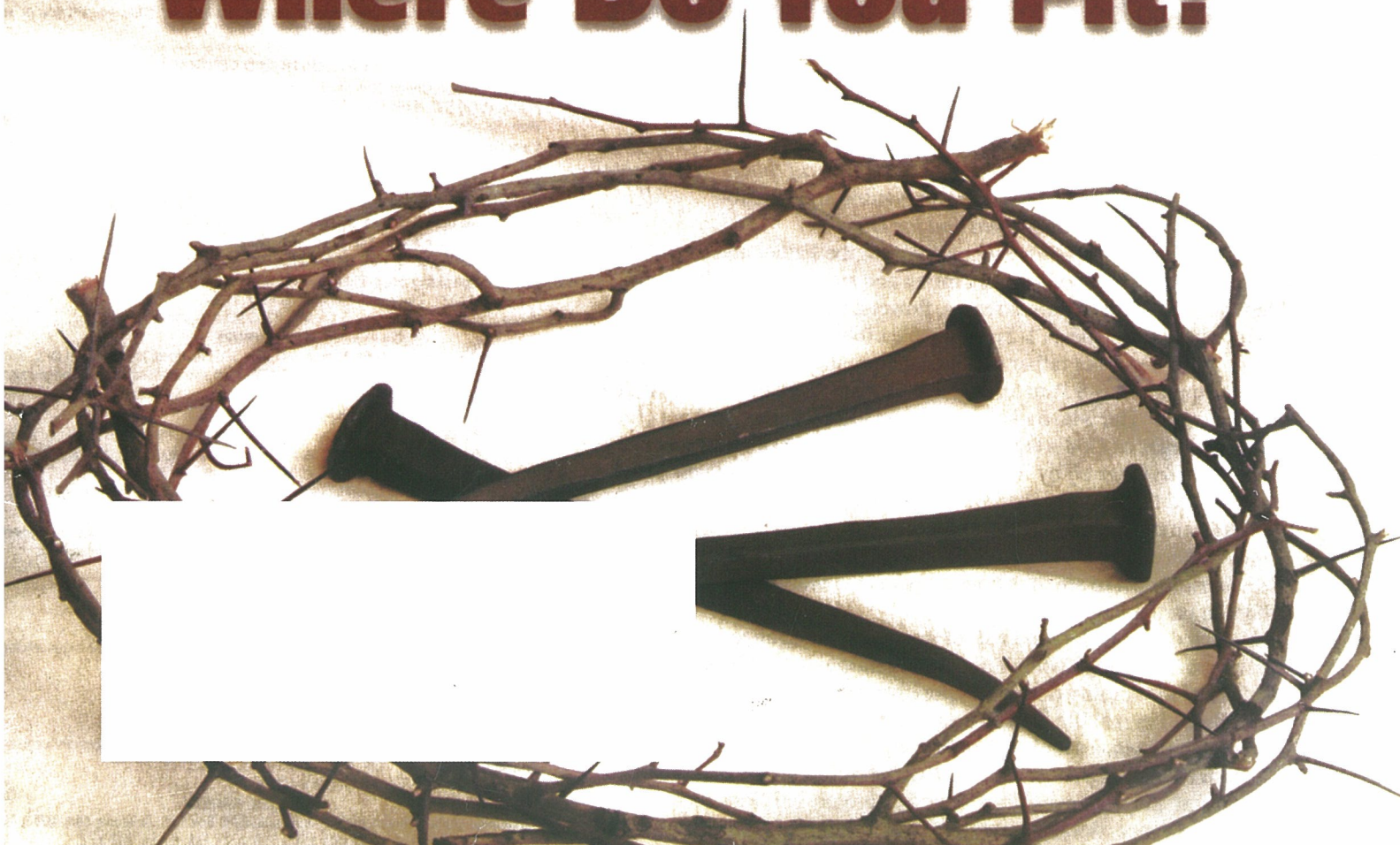
# St. John

ΑΝΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ

Monthly Magazine  
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## The Story of Jesus Christ: **Where Do You Fit?**





# Verse of the month:

*"If you were raised with Christ,  
seek those things which are  
above where Christ is"*  
(Col. 3:1).

## St. John

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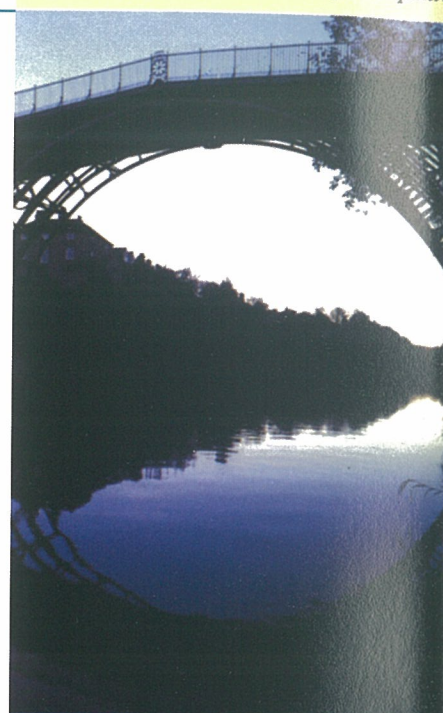


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The Iron Bridge at sunset, Ironbridge, Shropshire



Every word of God  
is pure: he is a  
shield unto them  
that put their  
trust in him.

*Proverbs 30:5*

## April, 2004 Schedule:

Sunday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Divine Liturgy English 7:45 - 10:30 AM	Servants Preparation in Arabic 7:30 - 9:00 PM	Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 AM Women's Meeting Last Wednesday of the month	Food Bank Thursday to Sunday	Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 AM	Vespers & Bible Study 7:30 - 9:00 PM + Beginners' Deacons- Meeting 6:00 PM + Elementary Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 PM
Divine Liturgy Arabic / Coptic 8:00 - 11:30 AM		Prayer Meeting 8:00 - 9:00 PM	Senior Citizen Club 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Arabic Language Youth Meeting 8:00 - 10:00 PM Followed by refreshments	College /Graduate Bible Study 7:30 - 9:00 PM
Servants' Meeting 12:00 - 1:00 PM			Bi-monthly Coverts' Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 PM		High School & J. High Youth Meetings 7:30 - 9:00 PM

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# NEWS

**April  
2004**

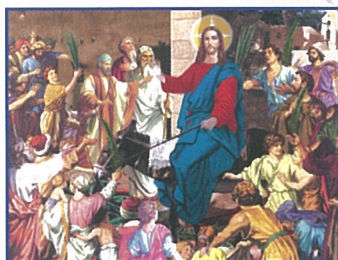


**1. The Feast of the Apparition of Virgin Mary in Zaytoun & the Last Friday of Lent:** April 2, Liturgy from 11:00 am – 3:30 pm.

**2. Lazarus Saturday:** April 3, Liturgy 8:00 – 10:00 am.

**3. Palm Sunday, April 4:**

Two Liturgies in English and Arabic will be celebrated after the raising of incense and procession in the main church starting at 7:30 am. Eve Pascha service from 5:30 – 9:00 pm.

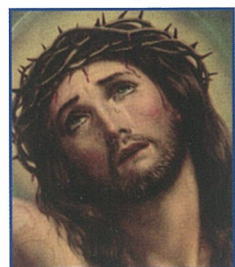


**4. Passion Week 2004: April 5-10**

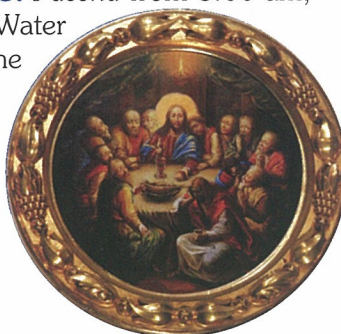
+ **Daily service (Mon-Wed):** 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 pm.

+ **Nightly service (Mon-Wed):** 6:00 – 9:00 pm.

+ **Covenant Thursday, April 8:** Pascha from 8:00 am, followed by the Liturgy of the Water



(washing the feet), then the Liturgy of the Eucharist until 2:00 pm.



+ **Good Friday, April 9:**

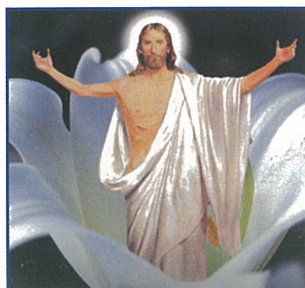
Pascha service from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm, followed with the Vigil of Apocalypse from 11:00 pm until the Liturgy of Bright Saturday at 4:00 to 6:00 am.

**5. The Feast of Annunciation on Job Wednesday:**

On Wednesday, April 7, the feast of Annunciation will not be celebrated since it falls during the Holy Week and the Pascha prayers will take place instead.

**6. Easter Sunday, the Feast of Resurrection:**

On April 11th, the church celebrates the Feast of the Resurrection. The Liturgy will be on Saturday the 10th, from 7:00 pm – 12:00 am, followed by supper in the hall.



**7. H.H. Pope Shenouda III:**

❖ H. H. Pope Shenouda ordained 15 nuns last month in Abu-Sefein / St. Mercurius Monastery in Old Egypt.

❖ The Pope is instituting a big Coptic Public Library that contains many famous libraries such as the Cairo Seminary Library, the Coptic Patriarchate Library, Bishop Gregorius' library, some scholars and monasteries' libraries, plus the valuable and rare books which he provided. The new library also contains copies of manuscripts from the libraries of Vatican, Paris, London, Cambridge and Oxford collected by Mr. Hany Takla from Los Angeles, California.

❖ Pope Shenouda strongly protested, in his weekly meeting on Wednesday, March 17, the new Islamic trend in Egypt which tries to convert Christian girls and women to Islam using force and trickery.



**8. H. G. Bishop Serapion:**

❖ Bishop Serapion returned from Egypt on March 19, and presided the monthly Clergy meeting at St. Marina Church, Tuesday, March 23.

❖ His Grace will give the first sermon of Holy Week, on Palm Sunday night, at St. John's Church, from 5:30 – 9:00 pm.

❖ Our beloved Bishop, while in Egypt, joined H. H. Pope Shenouda in ordaining Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim Ebeid who will serve in Los Angeles after finishing his 40-day-solitude at St. Bishoy's Monastery in Egypt. Congratulations to the new priest, wishing him a blessed service.



**9. The Egyptian Police confiscated "The Passion of the Christ" movie,** by Mel Gibson, from St. George church in Heliopolis, Cairo, and ordered the church to pay a fine of 10,000 Egyptian Pounds!

**10. Senior Citizens Clubs** of the churches of East Los Angeles (Group 4), will gather together on Thursday, May 27, 2004, to spend a spiritual day at Bonelli Park in San Dimas from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

**11. H.G. Bishop Rafail** will hold a 3-day convention for the Arabic Youth at Embassy Suites Hotel in San Diego from May 7 - 9, 2004. No part-timers are allowed.





# The Resurrection Declares the Death of Death and Opening the Way to the Joys of Eternity

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

I congratulate you my beloved children and brethren for the glorious Feast of the Resurrection, wishing you a blessed happy life abiding and firm in God's love. I also pray for the peace and tranquility of the whole world and solution for its national and international problems.

It is fitting, in the occasion of this Feast, to meditate in the resurrection, what is it and what is after it?

## **The Resurrection is victory over death that conquered mankind:**

It is the end of death as the Bible said, "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Because of the resurrection, all the hearts will sing: Death has died forever and the gate to the unending joy of eternity has been opened wide with all its happiness and spiritual delight. The death, which overcame every man, we will overcome it in the general resurrection, and it will be no more. How wonderful that which is written in the Book of Revelation, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:24).

Some people may say, that the resurrection is the return of man to life. But this term is not accurate. Man is composed of two elements: One of them is alive by nature that is the spirit. The other element is vulnerable to death and decay that is the body. When man dies, only his body dies and returns to dust as it is written in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). The spirit will return to God and stay in the waiting place of the righteous with Christ until the day of resurrection then return to the resurrected, glorified body (Phil. 3:20,21).

And because the spirit of man stays living after his death, thus we will have fellowship with the spirits of the saints in Paradise. We ask for their prayers for us, their intercession and sometimes God sends some of these blessed spirits to our world to proclaim a certain message or to perform a miracle. Due to the immortality of the spirit, we say in our prayers for the departed, "There is no death for your servants but a departure." We mean of course the departure of the spirit to the other world.

**By the resurrection, the history of death ends forever** and loses its authority over the faithful and our bodies will be spiritual bodies that are beyond the reach of death.

Death was a penalty from the time of Adam because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), but in the resurrection there is no sin and accordingly there will be no death. Eternity in heaven, after the resurrection, is the

place of perpetual life and therefore it is said of the believers that they have eternal life, "the righteous will go into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46, see also Daniel 12: 2).

## **There is another sort of death, which will end; it is the death of sin:**

Sin is considered a state of death, spiritual death, because it leads to separation from God who is the source of the true life (John 1:4). Notice how the Lord said to the shepherd of Sardis, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1). Also, in the parable of the prodigal son, the father said about his son who went astray, "For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:24). Since sin is a state of a moral and spiritual death, so in eternity where is no sin, then there will be also no death after the resurrection and death will be removed forever from the world of the righteous.

## **Also, the resurrection is a kind of transfiguration to our human nature and this will include both, the body and the spirit together:**

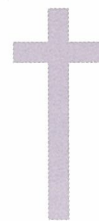
We will be raised in Spiritual, radiant, heavenly and incorruptible bodies (1 Cor. 15: 42-49). The resurrected bodies will not be susceptible to death or decay. They are bodies that do not get sick or tired or complain of pain whatsoever. No lust may subject the spiritual bodies and no material may burden them, but they will be light in movement like the bodies of the angels.

**We will be raised with bodies that have no defect or blemish or lacking anything. The blind will not be raised blind, but they will restore their sight. The weak will be raised in power (1 Cor. 15:43). The maimed will be raised in beauty. In the resurrection there will be compensation for every shortage we may be suffering from in this current age.**

**The transfiguration of the risen bodies will be crowned with righteousness and purity and become like the angels of God in heaven** (Matt. 22:30). Innocent, simple and do not know sin or lust, but will forget about the sins of this world completely, and will be perfected in the fruits of the Spirit which are love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness etc., (Gal. 5:22).

After the resurrection the righteous will live in eternal joy, which we call an everlasting bliss. The joy of victory over sin, death, the world and the devil and hell. The great joy of living with the Lord and His angels and saints. Every one will be rewarded according to his/her works, for "One star differs from another star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41).





# The Shadow of the Cross

## In the Old Testament

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna



THE CROSS OF CHRIST WAS NOT AN accident or just a historical fact, but it was planned from God beforehand and before the foundation of the world.

St. Peter mentioned this teaching more than once. In his first letter, he said, **“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct....but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without**

**blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world,** but was manifested in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:18 ; Acts 2: 22-24).

God kept preparing the minds of His people to understand this “great mystery of godliness”, which is the incarnation of God in the form of the Messiah to redeem mankind and pay off the debt of their sins and restore us to Himself. It was necessary for God’s love, mercy and honor to save us from sin, Satan, death and hell, because it is impossible for Him to create man and cannot protect him. Yes, it is an insult to God, letting the devil destroy man.

Therefore, God revealed His plan of salvation allover the generations through the prophecies of the prophets and the shadows, types, and symbols of His redemption.

In this article, I will present more than 40 examples of these prophecies and types of the cross of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament:

Here are about 40 examples from the OT:

**1) Genesis 3:15**, “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*” Christ is the Seed of the woman who was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). All what the serpent could do, was to bruise His heel which is His human body or His humanity, but couldn’t touch His Divinity that bruised its head by the cross. This virginal birth was necessary for our salvation, because if Christ was born as a regular man He would have inherited the original sin, but through His virginal birth He became the second Adam who saved us from the sin, which we inherited from the first Adam.

**2) Gen. 3:21**, “*Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.*”

Sin caused Adam and Eve nakedness. They tried to cover themselves with sewing fig leaves but failed. So, God covered them with a skin of an animal, i.e., He sacrificed a lamb or a goat and made them tunics of its leather. The blood of the animal sacrifice was a type of Christ’s blood of redemption and its skin stands for His righteousness that cover our sins.

**3) Gen. 4:4, 5:**

In Genesis, chapter four, we read about the second symbol of the bloody sacrifice required. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground, but it was rejected because God had cursed the ground due to Adam’s sin (Gen. 3:17), so He could not accept the fruit of the curse, and also, because it represents the human effort or the self-righteousness. Yet He accepted Abel’s bloody sacrifice because it depicts Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. For this reason St. Paul says, “By faith (in Christ) Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (Heb. 11:4).

**4) Gen. 14:18:** Melchizedek, king of Salem brought out bread and wine to Abraham. It was the type of the body of Christ and His blood that was shed on the cross (see also Psalm 110:4).

**5) Gen. 22:** The sacrifice of Isaac (John 3:16)

**6) Gen. 48:14**, Jacob blesses Joseph’s two sons

**7) Gen. 49:9-12**, The prophecy of Jacob about Judah

**8) Exodus 12** (The Passover)

**9) Exod. 15:22-27:** (Marrah and the green plant)

**10) Exod. 17:6, 7:** (The stricken Rock)

**11) Exod. 17:11:** (The sign of victory over Amalek)

**12) Leviticus** (1 – 5, the four sacrifices & grain offering)

**13) Leviticus 14** (Cleansing the leper)

**14) Leviticus 16** (The Day of Atonement)

**15) Leviticus (17:11**, The key of all the bloody sacrifices)

**16) Numbers 20:8-11**

**17) Num. 21:8,9/ John 3:14**, Healing from the poison of the fiery serpents)

**18) Joshua 2:18-21** (The token of the scarlet cord)

**19) 2 Kings 6:6** (The sinking wood X floating ax)

**20) Job 9:32, 33 21) Job 19:25 22) Job 33:23-28**

**23) Psalm 2**

**24) Psalms 22: (1, 16, 18:** The picture of the cross)

**25) Psalms 31:5 26) Psalms 41:9 (Judas); 55:12 & 109: 8, 17**

**27) Psalms 69: (7, 9, 20, 21) 28) Psalms 85:10, 11**

**29) Psalms 103:10-12 30) Psalms 118:22**

**31) Song of Solomon 3:9-11 32) Song 5:10**

**33) Isaiah 50:6 34) Isa. 53:** The Passion **35) Isa. 63: 2, 3**

**36) Daniel 9:24-26** “Messiah will be cut off but not for Himself”

**37) Jonah 1:17**

**38) Zechariah 9:9-11**

**39) Zechariah 11:12, 13**

**40) Zechariah 12:10**

**41) Zechariah 13: 6**

**42) Zechariah 13:7**, “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd”



# SEVEN WORDS ADDRESSED TO THE CRUCIFIED

By Fr. Gawargious A. Kolta



Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke seven times when He was hanged on the cross. These were the seven last words: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"** (Lk. 23:37).

**"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"** (Lk. 23:43).

**"Woman, behold your son, ... Behold your mother"** (Jn. 19:26,27).

**"I thirst"** (Jn. 19:28).

**"Eli Eli, Lama sabachthani"** that is: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** (Mat. 27:46).

**"It is finished"** (Jn. 19:29).

**"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit"** (Lk. 23: 46).

There are many church fathers and preachers who wrote contemplative passages and books on the seven last words said by our crucified Lord. In this article we are going to meditate on seven words or seven sentences addressed to our Lord on the cross:

**"You who destroy the temple and built it in three days, save yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross"** (Mat. 27:39, 40).

While our Lord prayed for His executioners **"Father forgive them ..."**, the Jews sneered, saying: "If You are the Son of God ...". If He obeyed them, there would be no salvation. Here, they revived the old accusation at the trial (Mat. 26:71). They thought that He would destroy the temple of Jerusalem and make another one in three days, not recognizing that He spoke of the Temple of His body. Satan used the same words when he asked the hungry Lord in the wilderness to change stones into bread but the Lord refuted his temptation.

**2-"If You are the King of the Jews, save yourself"** (Lk. 23:37).

This was said to the Lord by the soldiers, while joining the Jews in mockery, and they offered Him the sour wine. They said those words according to the title which Pilate wrote and put on the cross **"JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS"** (Jn. 19:19). The soldiers were stonyhearted and had already shaken dice for His robe. Those soldiers could sacrifice themselves for the glory of the Roman Empire, but Jesus sacrificed Himself for all mankind to

give them eternal life. His refusal to save Himself was not out of weakness, but rather obedience of the sacrifice law. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). He gave His life as a ransom for many.

**"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him, for He said I am the Son of God"** (Mat. 27:42, 43).

This statement was said by the wicked and prejudiced chief priests and the Pharisees, fulfilling the prophecy of David: **"All those who saw Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him. ... They gape at Me with their mouths like a raging and roaring Lion"** (Ps. 22: 7, 8, 13). Those surpassingly religious people used each of the three titles, which the Lord had acquired, "Savior", "King of Israel" and "Son of God" and turned them into mockery.

**He was called Savior** by the Samaritans (Jn. 4: 42). They knew that He raised some from the death, as the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, but they did not realize the fact that the Lord came to save the world, His creation, from everlasting condemnation (Jn. 3:17).

**He was considered the King of Israel** when He fed the multitudes (Jn. 6:15) and on Palm Sunday (Mk. 11:10). The kings of the world sit on thrones but our Lord ruled from a cross, to be King over our hearts, through love. They mocked Him after they falsely condemned Him, because that was their hour and the power of darkness (Lk. 22:53).

**He was called the Son of God** and this was revealed to St. Peter (Mat. 16:16). It was also said by Satan (Mat. 8:29) and by the high priest (Mat. 26:63). The Centurion who was guarding the cross said: "Truly this was the Son of God", when he saw the veil of the temple got torn, the earth quaked and the rocks split (Mat. 27:51-54).

**"If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us"** (Lk. 23: 39).

On Calvary, goodness was crucified between two thieves, to fulfill the prophecy: **"He was numbered with the transgressors"** (Isa. 53:12). The left thief said the forth word to the crucified Lord. This thief



understood the physical salvation, but not the spiritual and moral ones. Both thieves were suffering from pains of crucifixion, yet each reacted differently to the Man in the midst. The left thief thought that if He was the Messiah, He would have the power to get him down from the cross. If the Lord saved him from crucifixion, would he have faith in Christ! or he would have continued in his evil life? The Lord knows the secrets of every heart, and thus He kept silent. Instead of admitting his sins and asking forgiveness, this thief's dead conscious did not condemn him, but lead him to perdition.

**“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”** (Lk. 23:42).

The good thief was touched by Christ; and his words were the only ones spoken to the cross without reproach. The penitent thief believed, while the other blasphemed. He called Him ‘Lord’ and his faithful words declared that Jesus have a kingdom; but not of this world, as He on the cross bore no outward mark of kingship. The penitent dying thief understood this fact before the apostles. This is the only deathbed conversion mentioned in the gospels, but it was preceded by the cross of suffering. He was touched when he saw Christ forgiving His executioners, and so he did not let his chance slip away. This blessed thief rebuked the other one who blasphemed against the Lord, saying: **“Do you not even fear God, seeing you under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong”** (Lk. 23:40, 41). He confessed his sins, admitting that he deserved the death penalty. He believed that Jesus is the Lord and King, and thus he received salvation. The disciple denied and the thief confessed; despite the Lord's apparent weakness and agony on the cross. So he became worthy to be called the blessed thief.

**6- “Look, He is calling for Elijah .. Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down”** (Mk.15: 35, 36).

When there was darkness over all the earth, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying: **“Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?”** (Mk. 15:35), which meant “My God, My God, what have You forsaken Me? This promoted the sixth verse said to the crucified, which was the fulfillment of the prophecy of king David mentioned in (Ps. 22:1). The Jews, who stood by the cross, misinterpreted the Lord's cry, and they made fun of Him. They knew the prophecy of Malachi that Elijah must come before the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1). To them this meant that Jesus was not the Messiah, since Elijah had not come yet. They did not understand that the prophecy referred to John the Baptist, who came

in the fiery spirit of Elijah as declared by the Lord Jesus Himself: **“And if you are willing to receive it, he (John the Baptist) is Elijah who is to come”** (Mat.11: 14). The Jews did not accept neither the mission of John the Baptist nor that of the Lord Jesus, as mentioned **“For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, look, a glutton and a wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”** (Mat. 11:18, 19).

**7- “Truly this Man was the Son of God”** (Mk. 15:39).

The Centurion, who was in charge of the soldiers, said these words. He gave this testimony when his heart was moved on seeing the sun hid its light, the earth shook in grief, the rocks rent and the graves were opened (Mat. 27:45, 51, 52). This change happened when he saw the man in the central cross gave up the spirit. He had crucified many before, but he felt that there was something mysterious about this Man, who prayed for His enemies and was so strong in giving up His last breath. He did not only confess that He is righteous and innocent, as Claudia the pagan saw in her dream (Mat. 27:19); but he also proclaimed His divinity. The cross started to bear fruits: the Jewish thief had already asked for salvation and received it, and a Centurion of Caesar, the Gentile, bowed in adoration of the Divine crucified Man. This pagan Centurion worshipped Him as the Son of God, while His own people condemned Him of blasphemy and mocked Him.

Our Lord Jesus used many pulpits during His ministry, such as Peter's boat, the temple, the mountain-top, houses and the roads of Galilee and Judea. All faded in significance compared to the pulpit of the cross. Nobody was with Him when he was crucified. The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: **“I have trodden the winepress alone and from the peoples no one was with Me”** (Isa. 63:3).

Three faithful persons watched in agony all what happened to our Savior. Those were the only apostle, St. John the beloved, whose heart was broken out of love to His Master, Mary Magdalene who was smashed with grief, and foremost among all, God pity her, was His own mother, through whose soul, a sword was pierced (Lk. 2:35). Three types of souls can be found beneath the cross of the Savior, St. Mary representing purity and innocence, Mary Magdalene representing the penitence and St. John the beloved representing the sincere love and priesthood. The Lord wants us to live in **purity, penitence and love**, and with priesthood guidance.





# The Light Shines in the Darkness

By Fr. Anthony Coniaris

Ted Turner stopped believing in God when he was 20 years old. Ted Turner, as we all know, is the founder and owner of CNN, owner of the Atlanta Braves professional baseball team, and is one of the richest men in the world. He has also won several awards including Time Magazine's Man of the Year.

During his youth, Ted Turner considered himself a Christian, and at age 17, he even thought about becoming a missionary. But by the time he was 20, Ted Turner found it impossible to believe in God any longer. What happened? When Turner was 20, his 17 year old sister Mary Jane, died after having suffered for 5 years from a horrible disease. As Turner watched Mary Jane suffer and finally die despite countless prayers to God for healing, he decided that there was really no God. How could such a thing happen if an all powerful and loving God is in control of the universe," said Turner. If God could not answer prayers or prevent suffering figured Ted, then there was no God.

Like Ted Turner, many people have watched excruciating suffering among their loved ones. Far from losing their faith however, the faith they already had was strengthened in their suffering, because it was not meaningless suffering, but suffering that was filled with the presence of God. Where is God when we suffer? The answer to that question is that God is exactly where He was when His own Son suffered excruciating pain on the cross. He is supplying His suffering children with much needed strength each day, even as He is preparing a resurrection for them, whereby, He will replace these weak bodies, ravished by pain, with new spiritual bodies not susceptible to pain any more.

Let us contrast Turner's story with a testimony of a young man in his early 20's whose mother died of cancer at age 51. The young man said, "When I looked at her body in the casket lying there, I was filled with the overwhelming feeling that it wasn't her. Yes, it was her body, and yes she was wearing her clothes, but that was not my mother. She was not there. Like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome in the Gospel of St. Mark, it was as if I heard these same words those three women heard that morning nearly 2000 years ago. 'You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here' (Mark 16:6). Now these words are spoken to all of us. They are words that fill us with hope because we know that God does not abandon us, even in death. We belong to Him both for now and all eternity. We can be filled with hope because we know that death is not the final page of our story. God continues to write our story with the words

of the angel, 'He is risen! He is not here.' We can be filled with hope because we know that death will be transformed into new life. No we won't avoid the heartaches and the suffering and the pain, and we cannot avoid death, yet we have hope because we know that God transforms death into new life." The young man concludes by saying, "When I hear the Easter story now, the story of the women who have come to anoint death, and instead find resurrection, I think of my own experience at the empty tomb of my mother. And I am not alone. I stand with many others who have heard the same words in the midst of their grief: 'He is risen! He is not here'."

The darkness is still with us. But it is now an inhabited darkness, inhabited by Him who is the joyful light, the "light of the world" (John 8:12). "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it," says the Apostle John (John 1:5). The glorious and resplendent light, emanating from the empty tomb dispels the darkness and replaces it with a resplendent light.

The first Christians in the book of Acts didn't explain the resurrection of Jesus because only God can explain it. But they proclaimed it with an uncontrollable ecstasy of joy. And this is precisely what the Coptic Church does in the Divine Liturgy of the Resurrection on Easter Eve. The church literally acts out the resurrection of Jesus during the liturgy.

*The resurrection of Jesus means:*

There is no fear so great that there can be no calm.

And no death so final that there can be no life.

And no grief so deep that there can be no consolation.

And no injustice so insidious that there cannot be justice and truth.

And no sin so serious that there cannot be forgiveness.

And no war so fierce that there cannot be peace.

And no hatred so deep that there cannot be love.

Someone once said, "I went to the funeral home to choose a casket for my oldest sister. We were taken to a showroom in which there were many open caskets at various price levels. With the lids open it seemed as though they represented the very jaws of death. Then a few days later, we stood by an open grave and it seemed as though again, the jaws of death were open to swallow our loved one." Indeed, death swallows up everyone! The young and the old, the strong and the weak, the holy and the unholy. It is always hungry. It is never satisfied, never



gorged. It swallows up everyone. Death even swallowed up Jesus. But that is where death met its nemesis! Though death swallowed up Christ, it was unable to digest the Lord of Life. And the result is that life is now liberated. The result is that death itself, as St. Paul says, was "swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). And this is the greatest victory this universe will ever see. It's the victory we proclaim every time we read the words of the Nicene Creed: I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come." "For as by a man came death," writes the Apostle Paul, "by a man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Grief stricken widow, weep no more for your husband if he died in the Lord. And heartbroken mother, weep no more for your child snatched so soon from your embrace. "For in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, we shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). We shall see again the eye that has just now been closed. And we shall grasp again the hand that just now fell motionless at the side. And we shall touch again the cheek that just now is clay cold and white. And we shall hear again the sweet voice that is now silent in the tomb. The dead shall live again. And those who fear death, why fear to die? Jesus died before us, and He has already passed those iron gates. And since He has passed before us, He will be there to meet us. "For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him" (Luke 20:38). Why should we weep? For as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we, and He tells us to "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We are not lost when we are placed in the tomb. We are but seethed, sown to ripen against the eternal harvest. Our spirit mounts to God. Our body slumbers for a while only to be quickened into eternal life at the resurrection. It cannot be quickened except it die. But when it dies, it shall receive new life. It shall not be destroyed. For Christ is risen from the dead, and to those in the tombs He has bestowed life!

We give here an example of one of the many deathbed testimonies that speak so powerfully of life after death, that is, eternal life. A well known oncologist and professor of pediatrics at Yale University said that for nearly 25 years she has stood at the deathbeds of children and listened to the calm hopeful visions of their dying moments, which she says echo the stories told by other children who have had near death experiences. Early in her medical career, she (the doctor) sat with a family beside their 7 year old daughter who was in the last stages of leukemia. The little girl had the final energy to sit up in bed and say to her parents, in the presence of the doctor, "The angels. They're so beautiful. Mommy, can you see them? Can you hear their singing? I've never heard such beautiful singing." Then the child died. After witnessing this, the doctor said, "The word that most closely described what I

felt is the word gift. It wasn't just that the child was given the gift of peace in the final moment of her life, but this was a gift to her parents and to me personally."

Life after death, eternal life, is indeed a gift that God gives to all who believe in His name and are baptized. But the existence of life after death is not based on the gift of deathbed visions of angels or brilliant light, or whatever. Our faith in eternal life is based rather on the solid rock of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Such beautiful deathbed testimonies, and there are many of them, are given to us by God as a bonus of His grace to help bolster our faith in life after death. What we need to remember is that for those who live in faith and surrender themselves to the will and love of God, the resurrection becomes a daily reality: souls are quickened and sins are forgiven, and the mind is illumined and the heart is purified every day as the Holy Spirit forms the mind of Christ in each one of us.

A woman once visited a military cemetery at the end of the second world war, and this is what she said. "There are graves in the lonely sands of Africa where a brother who died bravely was buried. A dear beloved friend. A boy who won at tennis and swam across the lake with strong steady strokes a few short months ago. They were buried where they fell and the tide of battle roared on leaving a mound across a flag. Above such graves there is a voice saying, 'He is risen! He is not here' (Mark 16:6). 'Because I live, you will live also' (John 14:19). In a far away land, they buried a nurse who was good and very caring, a doctor who had ministered to those in pain, and a patriot who was one of his country's finest sons. Over their graves, there was a clear voice in the wind saying, 'They are risen! They are not here. Because I live, they will live also'." Over the grave of our loved ones, there is a constant voice whispering in the wind as a result of the resurrection of Jesus. This is the voice of the risen Christ saying, "They are risen! They are not here. Because I live, they will live also."

We close here with words placed rhetorically in the mouth of Jesus by one of the saints in a 15th century Paschal homily:

"Come to Me all you families of humankind sullied by sin and receive the forgiveness of your sins. For I am your forgiveness. I am the Pascha of salvation. I am the Lamb sacrificed to you. I am your redemption. I am your life. I am your resurrection. I am your light. I am your salvation. I am your King. I lead you to the heights of heaven. I show you the Father eternal. I will raise you by My right hand."



# MY WILL (1)

By Fr. Paul George

St. Paul wrote of this dilemma in the Book of Romans, chapter 7:

*"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (15-19).*

St. Paul was not referring to himself here but the person who is distant from the work of grace in his life. He says, "Inside me there is something wrong. I want to do good and I love what's good, but as much as I try to do good I find myself doing evil. I have the desire to do good, but I don't know how. I just can't do it."

The Apostle Paul here discusses a state that characterizes 90% of people. Approximately 90%, want to do good but instead of doing what they want to do, they do the wrong which they don't know how to stop doing. This is why he says in verse 24: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" How often have I wanted to live for God but as I looked closely I discovered that my actions are ungodly. How often did I want to serve God and be a servant, but once I leave church... What happens to me?

## The Human Will:

St. Paul talks about something called "*The Human Will*."

The will is the desire that turns into an action. If it doesn't turn into action then it is just a dream. There is a difference between someone who has a dream and someone who has the will to turn it into reality. We all want to be Godly. If I asked you if you would like to be like the saints? You would say "yes." If you don't accomplish it then it is just a dream, but if you do, that's the determination of your will. The Apostle Paul talks about the weak will here.

The will is important because it is the foundation for all of man's decisions. A person with a weak will won't go to heaven. For example, Christ passed by someone who was paralyzed for 38 years. He wanted to get better but didn't know how. The Lord Jesus

asked him one question, "Do you want to be made well?" [Jn 5:6]. Of course Lord, why would You even ask someone who is suffering for 38 years? The Lord would reply, "in order to teach you that unless you have the will, you will not be healed." So the man replied, "I do but I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is moved." Christ responds, "leave this part to Me, but do you want?" The man said, "I want," so Christ said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." Therefore, without a will that's alive and genuine, a person can't go to heaven.

This is our topic in these 2 parts. This article will discuss the reasons our will is weak and next month we will address how to strengthen our will.

## The Reasons Our Will is Weak:

### First: LUST

Lust is the one thing that most weakens the will of man! For example, Eve did not want to leave paradise. Eve *wanted* to live with God, but her will was weakened. Satan came and seduced her into eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil. The Bible says, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes..." she couldn't take her eyes off it, because she had a desire/lust for it. Eve fell!

Someone who wants to lose weight goes out and buys a treadmill for \$300. They thought that now that they bought this the goal is reached. We all do this. . . you go get a gym membership, but then you find that you've lost weight for a month or two and then, four months later you discover that you're even fatter. Why? Because you were defeated by lust.

Someone will say, "I can't look at chocolate and not have it, I just can't." Well, as long as you can't then you will fall. The will is defeated before many weak-



nesses. And as long as the heart lusts after a desire, the will is weak.

Esau returned home from the field one day and found his brother Jacob cooking a pot of lentil stew. (Please note that this was not steak or chicken; but when you're hungry lentil is very tempting). Esau told Jacob, "give me of that stew." Jacob told him "give me your birthright first." Esau, in a state of hunger, told him, "big deal, you can have it but just give me some stew." That birthright is God, it is God's blessing to you, but Esau said, "I don't want it, I want stew." So the will was broken down in front of the lust, even for lentil, and Esau lost everything and was rejected by God.

Lust, therefore, transforms a human to a type of animal. "I can't help myself! I can't control myself." A lust will destroy man. This is why the saints warn us against the lust of the eyes, flesh, etc., because they know that lust, if it enters man, will not leave without destroying him.

## **Second: YOUR ASSOCIATIONS**

We are all like a sponge. If the sponge is put in milk, which is white, what color would it be when you removed it? And if put in black ink, what color would it be when you remove it? Where are you? How does the environment around you affect you?

Before I was ordained, I used to work for a company that required that we all wear a white shirt and tie. Some days, we had to go out of the office to visit certain factories and write reports. On days that I went out to coal factories and returned back to the office, I noticed the following: Those who did not go out on the field were wearing white shirts while mine was gray. Where did this grayness come from? I couldn't help keep my shirt white in that environment.

Many youth come to confess and intend to repent of their sins but are not able to repent, because of who they are friends with. Often I tell someone, "As long as you're friends with this person or that group of friends, you will never repent or come to God." They often reply, "anyone but that person," but it is precisely "that person" who poisons the entire body.

It is not just friends but society overall. Fr. Tadros Malaty tells of many youth in America who have taken in poison from the society around them. He once told of a college-age youth who once told him, "why do you and the Coptic church forbid an unmarried couple from living together?" Fr. Tadros told him, "actually we don't forbid it, it is God who forbids it and we obey His words." The young man replied, "No, God didn't say that! Sin is when a married person cheats

on his spouse." Where did this definition come from? It is society's definition, not the Bible's. But this person's standards were lowered because society's standards are lower.

Someone who never used to swear joined the army. When he finished his service, he was swearing at everyone else. Why? Because he was surrounded by people swearing all the time. Just like some people who start a new job. At first they escaped hearing the unclean jokes that others said, then they started listening to the jokes, and after a year or two they started saying the unclean jokes that others said. How did this change happen? Just consider the environment around you!

A young man who used to confess to me spent some years abroad studying and while he was there he became friends with a group of gay men. He returned home and told me, "Why is our church intolerant of homosexuality? Why does the church forbid a homosexual from taking communion?" Where did he get these ideas?

Therefore the question is, where are you? Are your surroundings making you weaker?

## **Third: CONVERSING WITH SATAN**

Here is how Satan works: Let's say he wants to ruin someone's will to fast... He goes to that person at 11:00 p.m. on Wednesday night and tells him, "go ahead and eat whatever you want." That person replies, "but I've been taught that you're supposed to fast [eat vegan food] the whole day," to which Satan replies, "there's only one hour left. God cares about your heart, go ahead and eat." Or, "the saleslady at [Costco] reached out to give you a sample of cheese. Are you going to say 'no' and embarrass her?" Satan always says, "what's the big deal." "Everyone takes supplies home from work. Go ahead take whatever you want! Stealing is taking something big, not this. This is trivial!" At first you said to yourself, "taking anything without permission is stealing," but then Satan comes and says, "Everyone does it, even the boss takes stuff home" and you start thinking, "what is the big deal?" It may start with petty theft and turn into grand-theft. But it always begins with something small that breaks down your will.

Satan will approach a girl who dresses modestly and say to her, "now if you were to wear a shorter dress, do you really think you'll offend anyone?" The girl will initially say, "yes, that's what I've been taught." Satan will reply, "you won't offend anyone, the whole church is like this. Have you seen what everyone wears at weddings?" If she questions further Satan is



ready with his next attack, "If there is any problem, it is with the males' eyes! It's the guy that looks!"

So, whatever you do, never get into a conversation with Satan and never consider his opinion. Whatever you do, avoid his counsel because he will justify and get you to compromise so that your will *will* be weakened. You are strong in Christ. But anyone who converses with Satan will fall. Always think of Adam and Eve who conversed with Satan and fell.

#### Fourth: LAZINESS

This is a sin and the most dangerous thing about it is that no one realizes that it's a sin. You may think, "can this weaken one's will?" Of course, someone who always pampers them-self, what can you expect from them? You'll find that their will is very weak. Satan has no need to bother this type of person, he would be pleased with him/her as they are.

What is King David's greatest sin? You'd probably say, "Adultery." Right? No, it was laziness and self-indulgence. The moment that David did not go to war, and instead took a stroll on his roof top, when his whole nation was at war... that was the moment of his fall, because he got lazy, pampered himself, forgot about his psalms, forgot his struggle and vigilance with God. And when he forgot all this, his eye wandered, lust entered, and he fell in adultery.

This is why St. John Cassian, one of the church fathers, wrote of the eight principle faults which attack mankind. He wrote of gluttony as the number one vice. He wrote that this sin creates a lust (for food) and this destroys a person. After gluttony, he considered fornication number two! Everyone was surprised at his advice, so he explained that gluttony and laziness (or slothfulness) will lead to someone's fall into the sin of fornication. This is why a person's will is broken down completely in front of Satan. It is a state of emptiness as if one is rolling in a trash heap. Satan will have fun with this one, engaging him/her in conversations. This type of person has no vision or practical plan for his/her life and this is why they always say "I'm bored!" This person is always involved in very difficult sins that they aren't aware of. This is why the Bible says, "Be sober" [1 Pet. 5:8]. This type of person laying paralyzed on one's bed, because of laziness, cannot complete his/her journey with God. You need to have a goal for tomorrow... know where you're going and what you're doing. Be vigilant!

*Fr. Paul George is one of the priests at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Heliopolis, Egypt.*



## Beginning With Ourselves

By Fr. Wayne Wilson

### MY DEAR SPIRITUAL SONS AND DAUGHTERS:

**What a difference it would make in our lives if we would begin with ourselves.** If we would repent without waiting for the other to repent first. If we would seek forgiveness, without waiting for other to seek forgiveness first. If we would take the blame instead of casting it on others. If we would see not so much the faults of others as much as the fault that lies in us.

**How different our world would be!**

**How different our homes!**

**How happy our marriages!**

**How different and how wonderful our friendships!**

**How gentle our judgments and how gracious our relationships to people!**

**The difficulty is that while most of us are eager to reform our neighbors,** few of us are so eager to tackle ourselves, the one and only part of the world that we can conquer for Christ.

**If we must criticize,** then, let us criticize first our own imperfections and shortcomings; **if we must fight,** let us fight first our own sins and weakness; **if we must destroy,** let us destroy first our own ignorance and prejudice; **if we must condemn** let us condemn first our own false pride and arrogance.

It's all summed up in the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim.

**LOVE IN CHRIST,**  
Fr. Wayne





# Bible Study through Questions

## 4 – The Book of Numbers

By Fr. Augustinos Hanna

### 1. Numbers derived its name from which of the following?

- A. The Israelite nation had grown much in numbers.
- B. God instructed Moses to number the people by taking a census.
- C. Moses wanted to organize living arrangements.
- D. The Israelites wanted to establish numerical system

### 2. In case of war, who would serve as Israel soldiers?

- A. Healthy males over 25 years and unmarried females
- B. All able-bodied persons over the age of 16.
- C. All men over the age of twenty.
- D. A specially trained group of about 10,000 men.

### 3. Why the tribe of Levi was not included in the army?

- A. They were appointed to care for the tabernacle.
- B. They were involved in politics.
- C. They have so few young males.
- D. Because they had disagreement with Moses.

### 4. Which of the following were among requirements of taking the Nazirite vow? (3 answers)

- A. Must abstain from alcoholic drinks.
- B. Must refrain from sexual relations.
- C. Must not cut his hair.
- D. Must have no contact with alien tribes.
- E. Must not go near a corpse.

### 5. What were the main elements in the blessing that God ordered Aaron to bless the children of Israel with, in chapter 6?

- A. It is triune blessings as in 2 Corinthians 13:14.
- B. It contained dew of heaven and fatness of the earth.
- C. Included keeping, being gracious to them plus peace.
- D. (A & C)

### 6. What determined the traveling or camping of the Israelites while wandering in the desert?

- A. God's speaking through the Ark of Testimony.
- B. The movement of the cloud or the pillar of fire.
- C. Reports from the scouts to ensure safety.
- D. Moses mood and the weather.

### 7. What was the primary purpose of the two silver trumpets the Lord told Moses to make?

- A. Calling the community together & directing the movement of the camps.
- B. To announce the beginning of feasts and celebrations.
- C. God's preparation to destroy the walls of Jericho.
- D. As a memorial to be sounded over burnt offerings.

### 8. Why did Moses encourage Hobab, his brother-in-law, not to leave them and return to his homeland?

- A. Because Moses knew that Zipporah, Moses' wife, would be heartbroken if Hobab left.
- B. Because he owed Moses money, and Moses knew that if Hobab left, he'd never see a dime of it.
- C. Because Hobab could be a valuable advisor regarding encampment sites in the desert as their eyes.
- D. Because Hobab was a well-known warrior.

### 9. Why did God consume part of the outskirts of the Israelites' camp with fire?

- A. To prevent their enemies to attack them.
- B. He was angry because they were always complaining.
- C. He wanted to destroy the tribe of Gad who conspired.
- D. To scare their enemies.

### 10. Moses told God that if He wouldn't lift his burden, he would prefer God do what?

- A. Let the people return to Egypt.
- B. Let Aaron become their new leader.
- C. Give him couple of weeks vacation on the beach.
- D. To put him to death.

### 11. What was the manna like, and a symbol to, EXCEPT?

- A. Coriander seed.
- B. A pastry prepared with oil.
- C. A mustard seed.
- D. It was a symbol of Christ's body.

### 12. What was the food, the children of Israel lusted to eat from the Egyptian foods, they remembered?

- A. Stuffed grape leaves and baklava.
- B. Fish and meat.
- C. Cucumber & melon.
- D. Onions & garlic.
- E. All except A

### 13. What kind of birds God showered His people with, to eat in the desert?

- A. Chicken
- B. Ducks
- C. Quail
- D. Ravens

### 14. Who criticized Moses and God stroke him/her with leprosy?

- A. Aaron
- B. Miriam
- C. Joshua
- D. Pharaoh

### 15. Who were the only two persons that entered into the Promised Land out of 3,000,000 Israelites?

- A. Moses and Aaron
- B. Miriam and Hur
- C. Joshua and his wife
- D. Caleb and Joshua

### 16. How did God show Aaron's authority as a priest?

- A. Selected his staff to sprout blossoms
- B. Struck all other tribal leaders mute.
- C. Had Aaron hit a rock with his staff and water came out.
- D. The ground split apart under Korah, Dathan and Abiram who rebelled and swallowed them alive.
- E. (A & D).

### 17. What was the brazen serpent a type of?

- A. The Ark
- B. The cross
- C. Priesthood
- D. Victory

### 18. Balaam's donkey spoke to him regarding:

- A. Balaam's meeting with Balak
- B. Complaining about being beaten.
- C. Balaam's greed
- D. Blaming him for not seeing the angel

### 19. Who were the prophet that prophesied about Christ and the Star of Bethlehem and perished?

- A. Joseph Smith
- B. Korah
- C. Ishmael
- D. Balaam



# Following A Well-Trodden Path

By Mark M. Hanna



Perhaps the obstacles in the form of little foxes and distractions were not that difficult to get past, but surely carrying the cross is not easy. You see, the devil will not pose a fierce opposition from the start. This is why Satan starts easy with "little foxes" that trip us up when

we begin to draw closer to God. It is the same thing with the various distractions<sup>ii</sup> that hinder our progress. These are minor, but when we get past them to the bigger challenge of the cross<sup>iii</sup> and endure it, the devil realizes that we are not playing games. He realizes that we are determined to lay hold of Christ, the Prize. He now knows that we were serious when we drew that line in the sand,<sup>iv</sup> purposing not to return to our old ways.

As we run the race for our eternity we must follow the same path that Christ and those who loved Him passed through—that is the way of the cross first before reaching the victory of the resurrection. This we need to do looking unto Jesus and the innumerable cloud of witnesses surrounding us (Hebrews 12:1, 2). We need to run a disciplined race without being hindered by the many distractions, which prevent our crowning. In order to run such a serious race we must have a tried and proven plan, a pattern to follow and a guide that shows us how to lay hold of Christ, the Prize.

## **Following In the Footsteps of the Flock**

King Solomon advised the Shulamite (the woman representing the human soul in the Song of Songs), "if you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock..." (1:8). This advice the Holy Spirit gives us all so that we follow the well-trodden path of Christ and His saints. The path that the Spirit means here is the path of holiness, a serious path, a disciplined path, a difficult path but a path leading to glory at the end. The path or way is our life here on earth that we all go through, with its difficulties, pains and troubles. How does one actually get through it? This is where we need to pay attention to the cloud of witnesses all around us. They like us, lived in the flesh, experienced difficulties, pains

and persecutions, but endured because they looked unto Jesus who first overcame all obstacles, completed the race, and opened the gates of His kingdom for all who endure to the end. Therefore, His footsteps, and theirs, leading to Him, we must carefully follow.

All around us in the Orthodox Church we find that the Holy Spirit guided our fathers to set before us and all around us the images of the saints who, ran and finished the race victorious in Christ Jesus. These saints remind us that no enticement the world has to offer can compare to the ultimate Prize of Christ. For Him they were willing to lay everything down, even their lives here on earth. No desire, goal or achievement was worth comparing to the excellence of knowing Christ. Like St. Paul wrote,

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7, 8).

## **Who Are The Flock?**

The flock King Solomon was referring to is a group of trusted examples who successfully ran, ran well and won the Prize. They are a flock who faithfully followed their Shepherd to green pastures. They are a flock who put on Christ so that He became one with them and they were victorious in Him. These are great heroes and heroines of faith like St. Paul, St. George, St. Mercurious, St. Demiana, St. Abanoub, St. Antony, St. Moses the Black, St. Marina, St. Monica, St. Justina, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Photonee, to name a few. Some of these were great heroes of faith and others were ordinary lay persons, not monks or nuns, but they all shared a great love for Christ. They all in one way or another realized that anything the world had to give was needless baggage that either impeded their progress or made the Prize unattainable. Having this understanding they all ran a focused and disciplined race. They all set a pattern for us to imitate, as St. Paul



wrote, "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

### **Looking at the Footsteps of the Flock**

By looking at the footsteps or footprints before us we are guaranteed to keep our eyes from wandering at all that is around. For "The eye is not satisfied with seeing" ... "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them" King Solomon said, "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure ... Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done...; And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was* no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:8; 2:10-11)

### **Looking to the Victorious Church**

Our Orthodox Church surrounds us with a great multitude of examples of those who have run, arrived and received the crown of life (James 1:12). In Hebrews 12:1, the Apostle Paul directs our attention to all the victors around us: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."

Translated to our everyday struggles, we need to look to those who have gone before us, who triumphed in the face of many obstacles, oppositions, and struggles, and set a pattern for us to follow. Looking to their example we are strengthened in our resolve to keep going. Our earthly friends and companions teach us and influence us and this influence has a strong bearing on whether or not we can finish our race. But looking to those who have made it in Christ's fold we cannot be misled.

### **Looking to the Struggling Church**

Along with our triumphant friends in paradise, we need friends here on earth to surround us in a holy atmosphere. These are the earthly flock we must join. We must surround ourselves with friends who similarly desire God above all else, who have their priorities straight. Friends who similarly realize the necessity of drawing near to God. Friends who similarly drew lines in the sand and began moving forward towards a new common goal. Friends who realize the difficulty of the struggles of discipleship and with you make a lifelong effort to overcome them. These are friends that pray together, read the Bible or a spiritual books together. They encourage one another to go to church early, to confess regularly, to be united with Christ in holy communion, to go to

retreats and grow together. Friends who encourage each other to live in holiness and to avoid evil. Why is it that friends only gather together to have worldly fun? The friends we must follow, on the other hand, are friends who bond together when it comes to doing good.

### **A Misleading Flock**

"Evil company," St. Paul says, "corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). He writes to Titus: "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (1:15-16). This is a description of the flock not to follow or associate with. It could be a church flock for he writes, "they profess to know God." We must be wise enough to follow those who will lead us to Christ. We similarly need to be wise enough to turn from anyone who misleads us away from Christ and His path. We must seek holiness and righteousness at all costs. It is an eternity that we are potentially going to lose if we don't seek Him with all that is within us. Will your friends help you get to where you are going or will they be friends who will help you get further from your goal, like the friends of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Depending on who you surround yourself with and who you choose to follow will depend your eternity.

### **Who Are We In Fact Following?**

It always amazes me how we as a church all feel such a strong love for our crucified Lord, during Holy Week as He is going to the cross, but once the feast of the resurrection comes along we so easily forget His pain and agony. We forget that it was for our sins that He endured the cross. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way," Isaiah 53:6 says. I am afraid that the saying, "we have turned, everyone, to his own way" is true about us so that rather than feeling true remorse for the passion and death of Christ we feel justified in living for ourselves. We think that we no longer need to dwell on the suffering of Christ since He rose from the dead. "You only live once," the saying goes.

Rather than following the footsteps of the Shepherd and His flock, we followed the groove in the ground of the slithering serpent, the lie rather than the Truth. I am afraid that one day as we all stand and shout with emotion the words of the hymn, "Thine



is the power, the glory and majesty," that we may hear Satan's laugh in the background at our hypocrisy knowing that these are merely empty words and feelings soon to be replaced by dancing and partying. I am afraid that Christ will come suddenly and find our church community feasting unexpectedly, drinking, dancing and dressing inappropriately at the first wedding to follow this Holy reminder—Holy Week.

### A Disciplined Run

"For you were bought at a price;" St. Paul writes, "therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Having just come out of Christ's Passion Week and feasting in the joy of the resurrection, let us not forget the price that our Lord Jesus paid to give us true eternal joy. Let us not forget our emotions during the Passion Week when Judas betrayed our Lord and similarly betray Him by our actions. Let us not make these emotions turn out to be inspired by the general mood of the week but rather that they are lasting tears of repentance and renunciation of our old ways.

One thing our Christian faith lacks today is the discipline to run a straight line to the finish. I mean we try to find shortcuts to the end, whatever makes our route smoother and easier. It is perhaps human nature to look for the easier way but the path to the Prize is by the way of the cross. It is a difficult path, a challenging one, that does not make much sense if made easy. Yet the difficult path can be made easy when we realize that we are not alone, that we are struggling toward the same Goal along with our friends and community. The Lord set up various methods known as *the means of grace* to help us on our way, such as the Church services, the sacraments, the holy readings of the Bible, praying the holy canonical hours (the agpya), fasts and holy seasons.

### REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> *Wary of the Little Foxes*,  
St. John Magazine, January 2004.
- <sup>ii</sup> *On Your Guard for Distractions*,  
St. John Magazine, February 2004.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Looking Unto Jesus*,  
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- <sup>iv</sup> *A Line in the Sand*,  
St. John Magazine, December 2003.

## READERS' CORNER

### A Letter from Tanzania, Africa:

Dear in Christ Fr. Augustinos,

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox youths and deacons in Tanzania, I like to express my gratitude for sending us spiritual teachings through the St. John monthly magazine. It might be difficult to believe my words that these teachings have built big Orthodoxy faith to God in hearts of many youths and kids in our church. Thanks again.

From your loving son,  
**Deacon O'Daw Kefa**  
Coptic Orthodox Church  
P.O.Box 14  
Musoma, Tanzania.

\* \* \*

### Regarding the protest for fasting Ramadan in Royal Oak, Covina Public School:

Dear St. John Magazine,

In response to the two Copts who disapproved of the exposure of the teacher who asked his students to fast Ramadan for extra credit, I would like to say a few words back. First of all, sir/madam, from reading your opinions on that subject, I really wonder about what our fellow Copts in Egypt go through everyday? How Muslims terrorize our families in Egypt and how they drove us out of our own country and forced us to leave our families and lives behind, to escape the persecution that we faced everyday in work and schools. Now if you don't want this from a religious point of view, we can talk about that from a political point of view. In the American Constitution, Bill of Rights, Amendment One, it allows very clearly freedom of press, religion and speech. When we finally come and start to take advantage of our rights, you would come and tell us that we are not being tolerant and loving to others! Why aren't they tolerant of us? Why do they force their religion in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum? And when we come to speak about Christ and Christianity, oh no please don't speak about religion in school. Why do they force children in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade to learn verses from the Koran and to fast the Islamic Ramadan, and to force our children to wear the head cover just to "practice a play and know what Muslims have to go through" and all that under the mask of studying history?! I have no right to judge you on what you believe because it is not my position. However, this is my religion and it is my position to stand up for it. Thank you- Sincerely,

Anonymous



# Misinformed by the Media

## *Making Islam Look Good to the West*

By Mark A. Gabriel, Ph.D.

Former Professor of Islamic History at Al-Azher University, Cairo, Egypt

One of the indirect results of the events September 11, 2001, was a wave of attention in the media regarding Islam. Islam was almost always represented as a religion of peace. It was made to be palatable to the Western ears.

The experts who were interviewed tried to separate the religious side of Islam from its political side, which cannot be done. When you see a Muslim on TV, or print media saying that Islam is a religion of peace, it can be explained one of two ways:

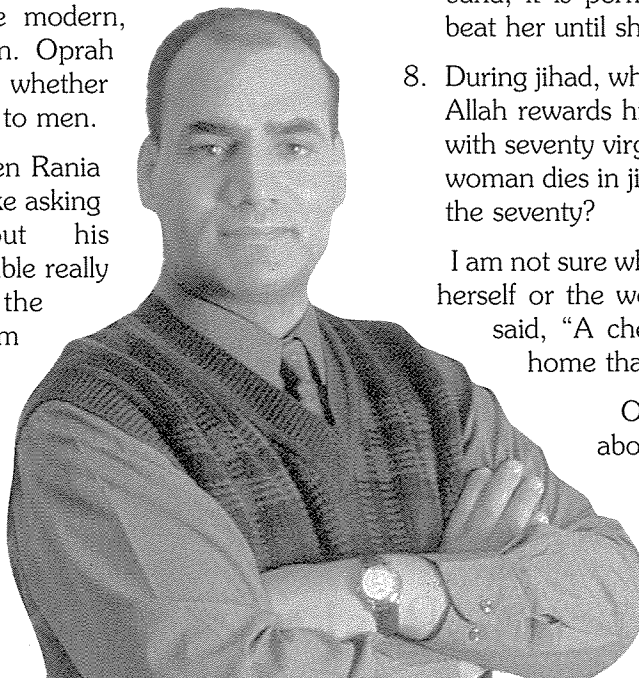
1. *Wishful thinking.* Although this is not the Islam taught in the Quran, this person really wishes that it were. He sincerely believes he can explain away the unpalatable parts.
2. *Deceit with the intent to attract converts.* This is jihad practiced a different way. Instead of killing the enemy, you convert them with lies.

### Wishful Thinking

An excellent example of wishful thinking about Islam is the show aired by popular talk-show host Oprah Winfrey. "Islam 101" aired on October 5, 2001- after the attack on America but before the U.S. took action in Afghanistan.

Oprah has a few Muslim guests on the show to educate the audience about the basics of Islam. One of the show's guests that day was thirty-one-year-old Queen Rania, the modern, Westernized queen of Jordan. Oprah asked her to comment on whether women in Islam were equal to men.

First of all, asking Queen Rania about anything in Islam is like asking Michael Jackson about his Christianity and what the Bible really teaches. Nevertheless, the queen and other Muslim women on the show acted as if they were the highest authorities on Islam. With great conviction, the queen stated, "Islam views women as full and equal partners to men, so [women's] rights are guaranteed by Islam."



Her answers made Western viewers feel good, but they do not accurately reflect the teachings of the Quran regarding women. If women were equal to men, why does the Quran say:

1. A Muslim man can be married to four women at the same time, but a Muslim woman can only be married to one man. "Marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four" (Surah 4:3, *The Noble Quran*).
2. Men have the right to ask for a divorce, but not women (Surah 2:229)
3. Women only inherit half of what men inherit (Surah 4:11).
4. Women may not serve as imams, and they are not allowed to lead prayer in the presence of men. (Man must always be above women according to Surah 4:34).
5. A woman is not allowed to answer the door at home if her husband is not there, even if it's her brother or relative at the door. (This is derived from Surah 33:53, where Muhammad was giving instructions to people who visited his home. He said that if he wasn't home, they had to talk to his wives through a screen.)
6. Women should stay in their houses (Surah 33:33). Many Muslim women cannot travel without the permission of their fathers or husbands.
7. If a wife refuses to have sexual relations with her husband, it is permissible for the husband to physically beat her until she submits (Surah 4:34).
8. During jihad, when a man dies, he goes to heaven and Allah rewards him with incredible energy to have sex with seventy virgins the first night. What happens if a woman dies in jihad? What is her reward- to be one of the seventy?

I am not sure whom the queen was trying to convince- herself or the world. The prophet Muhammad once said, "A cheap rug is more valuable in a man's home than a woman."

Oprah also questioned Queen Rania about the veil (*hijab*) that some Muslim women wear. The queen said, "It's a personal choice. Some people are more conservative than others." She pointed out that she herself chooses not to wear one.



About the issue of the veil in Islam, the following are the Quranic verses that command women to cover themselves.

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see that way).

-Surah 33:59, *The Noble Quran*

And stay in your houses, and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance...

-Surah 33:33, *The Noble Quran*

The only people allowed to see a women's face are her husband, children, siblings, and parents:

It is no sin on them (the Prophet's wives, if they appear unveiled) before their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or the sons of their sisters or their own (believing) women, or their (female) slaves.

-Surah 33:55, *The Noble Quran*

Islamic law has generalized these instructions to Muhammad's wives to apply to all women. (See Surah 24:31.) Queen Rania and other wishful thinkers like her do not recognize that they cannot interpret the Quran to suit their own preferences.

Oprah Winfrey's show was just another opportunity for these Muslim women to present the secular, Westernized, compromised, and Christianized Islam that is not supported by the Quran and Islamic teaching. I hope that Oprah will find the truth about Islam and present the correct information to her audience on this subject.

## Deceit

During one of my visits to the United States in August of 1998, I was staying with a family friend near Los Angeles. As we were surfing through the TV channels, an Islamic program caught our attention. To my amazement, I heard the announcer say, "In a minute we will enjoy a spiritual journey through the prophet Muhammad's life with Brother Paul."

I did not move from the TV set until I saw Brother Paul. I almost hit the floor when I laid eyes on him. He was a dark man with black hair and a thick, long, black beard, and he was wearing a long white robe and a tiny little head covering. Paul probably graduated from some Islamic institute in the Middle East and came to the US as a missionary to spread Islam in the West.

I am thinking, *Paul? Paul is a Muslim name now? This guy is 100 percent Middle East Muslim who grew up just like me. There is no way that is his real name.*

What flabbergasted me was how Brother Paul used familiar Christian lingo like, "The Lord bless you; the grace of our Lord be with you; God bless you." He talked about God the Creator and how mankind can have a relationship with Him, how we can hear His voice and He can hear our prayers, and that we should allow the Spirit of God to work in us.

My head was spinning listening to this program that was broadcast from California. I was thinking, *Now I understand how they are spreading Islam in the U.S. and Europe.* I jumped out of my seat and cried out, "O God, have mercy on America! God, protect America and Your people in this great country. Please expose the great deception! Rescue this nation from this great deception!"

My friend and his family tried to comfort me by saying, "God's protective hand has been on America since day one and it always will be."

I asked my friend, "Why is this man lying to Americans about his name? Why would he present to America a new Islam that is totally different than the one that I grew up experiencing for most of my life? Why would he present an Islam that is much closer to Christianity than to the real Islam that I studied for so many years?" I told my friend, "This man should tell America his real name. Most likely it is Muhammad, Ahmed, Mahmoud, Mustaffa, Omar or Osama, not Paul.

This was the first time I witnessed Muslims presenting a totally new Islam to the West. The average Muslim from the Middle East would never have recognized it as the Islam that he practiced.

It is now obvious that many Islamic leaders are doing their part for jihad by influencing the Western media. Yes, they are doing their part when they fool the majority by getting them to believe that Islam is not for killing; that it is only a religion, not a political system; and that it is for peace, love, forgiveness and so on. That will keep Islam the fastest growing religion in the world. It is just a different practice of the same principles of jihad.

Remember, Muslims declared jihad worldwide, but every Muslim is playing by different rules. One is using guns and bombs, and another is using words and lies to increase the number of Muslims worldwide. The method makes no difference; they are both sincere Muslims and it is one jihad according to the Quran- jihad against the enemies of Allah who resist the spread on Islam worldwide.

What amazes me is the audacity of these people. They hung American flags over their centers, schools, mosques, and Islamic institutes. They posted signs saying, "God bless America" or "United We Stand." In the meantime, their fellow Muslims in the Middle East were burning American flags and posting signs supporting bin Laden and his act of terrorism on America.



In all fairness, some “wishful thinking” Muslims really did support America at this time. But other Muslims were doing what was simply expedient at the moment. They are a good example of Islamic politics in non-Islamic lands. These Muslims will lie and say anything they do not believe at any moment as long as doing so would help Islam. Their loyalty is to Islam, not to the nation where they are living.

## National Loyalty

I know that many people will disagree with me by saying, “There are many American and European Muslims who are loyal and sincere to their countries. After all, these countries have been their homes for many years.” I would like to address this comment by pointing out that Islam does not believe in the national organization of non-Islamic peoples or any countries that do not follow Islamic law.

In Islamic law there are only two types of nations- a nation that is of the house of Islam or a nation that is of the house of war. We all know that America and most of the European countries are not “the house of Islam”, meaning they do not live by the Islamic law; therefore, they are the “house of war.”

Any good Muslim who is living according to Allah’s law and the Quran will never choose loyalty to their citizenship over loyalty to Islam. This is not a personal opinion; this is 100 percent Islamic law.

A good example of this is the way that Egyptians, Algerians, Sudanese, Saudis and many others deny their citizenships and loyalty to their countries when they become members of one of the fundamentalist movements. These movements teach their members, “Islam is your flesh and blood.”

All of the fundamentalist movements in the Arabic countries prohibit their members from serving in the military or defending their countries. They believe they should not support renegade and infidel countries that do not apply Islamic law to the whole country.

Shokri Moustafa, a person you will learn much more about later in the book, took this principle to an even higher level. His movement prohibited its members from working in any government job.

Muslims who have any sense of loyalty to Islam will have a hard time justifying their loyalty if that country is not Islamic. The true Muslim believes that the whole world is his home and that he is commanded to submit the world to the authority of Islam. A sincere believer of Islam will not die for a patch of dirt called the homeland, but he is willing to die for Islam and Islamic holy places.

When you see Palestinians fighting and dying, understand that non-Muslims or shallow Muslim Palestinians are fighting for the land, but true Muslim Palestinians ( Hamas)

are passionate because they are fighting the enemies of Allah and defending an Islamic holy place, i.e., the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Muslims believe that the Dome of the Rock is the third most important holy place in Islam. The prophet Muhammad told his followers that Allah miraculously transported him from the Arabian Desert to this place in Jerusalem, and anointed him as imam to lead prayers for all of Allah’s missionaries and prophets who came from that day. After the prayer, the prophet Muhammad said he went to heaven to meet with Allah. (This is known as the Miraculous Night Journey [*Al-Asrah waal MahRag*].)

Groups of Palestinians are fighting the same enemy for different reasons. One group is fighting for some land that they can call home and establish a government- perhaps a communist government, according to George Habash’s leadership. Habash has a Christian name, but he is not a Christian; it’s just his name. Another group wants the land so it can establish a socialist government according to the mindset of the former renovation engineer and businessman Yasser Arafat.

The final group is the die-hard Muslim Palestinians who look at the other two groups as betrayers who abuse the name of Palestinians to gain power. This group is the Hamas movement, and their leader is Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

## Telling True From False

At this point, I think you will be able to do a much better job of telling true from false when you see what amounts to Islamic propaganda in the media.





# KIDS PAGE

## What will I do in Heaven with no friends?

*"In My Father's house there are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2)*

If your friends believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, eventually they will be in heaven with you, and you will have a great time together. Jesus is preparing a place for all who believe in Him, and He won't keep believing friends apart from each other. You will make new friends in heaven, too. If you aren't sure whether your friends will go to heaven, tell them about the Lord Jesus. If they put their faith in Christ, when you will eventually all be in heaven together.

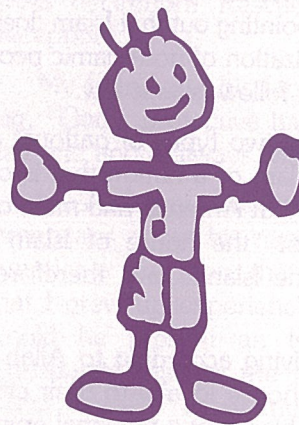
You don't have to worry- heaven won't be boring. Remember, God created butterflies, sunsets, electrical storms, mountains, oceans, and all of nature. He will give us so much fun, beauty, and joy in heaven that there is no way we can imagine it now.

■ **This is a suggestion:** Make a list of your friends. Circle those who already know Jesus and go to church, who you expect to see them in heaven. Pray that the others will know Christ too and can make it to heaven that your joy may be full.

## What part of the body of Christ am I?

*"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:4, 5).*

The Bible uses word pictures to explain how Christians relate to each other. We are a "family", with brothers and sisters in Christ. And we are a "body" with each person serving as a special part. God talks about us being



a body to show how Christians should treat each other and work together. God has given each Christian special gifts. That means each person has talents and abilities that can be used to help other believers.

In St. Paul's letter to the Romans 12:6-8, you can read about some of the gifts God gives his family. You can see what part of the body of Christ you can be right now and what part

you might play as you grow up. The gifts include: helping others, teaching, sharing money, being a leader, and showing kindness.

## Why can't we put new books in the Bible?

*"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of the this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of this book, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life and from the holy city" (Revelation 22:18,19).*

We can't put new books in the Bible because the Bible is God's message, not ours. It contains His words, which He inspired His prophets and apostles to write in a special way.

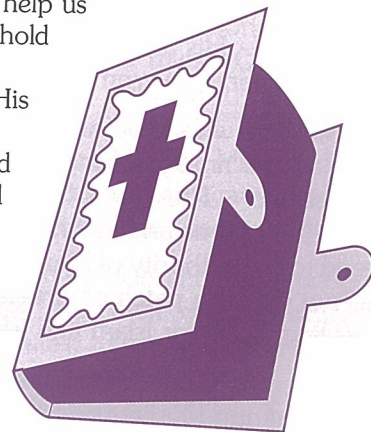
God's written story is complete and perfect. He has told us all we need to know to help us understand how much He loves us and how we can obey Him. Just think, you can hold God's story in your hand and read it! Today, thank God for giving you His Word.

In the final verses of the Holy Bible, God warned that if anyone adds anything to His words, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

Some cults, such as the Mormons, claim that they believe in the Bible, but they wanted to add another whole book to it, called "the book of the Mormon". Therefore, all Christian churches reject them as heretics and consider them non-Christians, and of course reject their false book.

### ACTIVITY:

Begin memorizing the names of the books of the Bible. Start with the first five books of the Old Testament-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Then memorize the names of the first four books of the new Testament- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are called the Gospels.





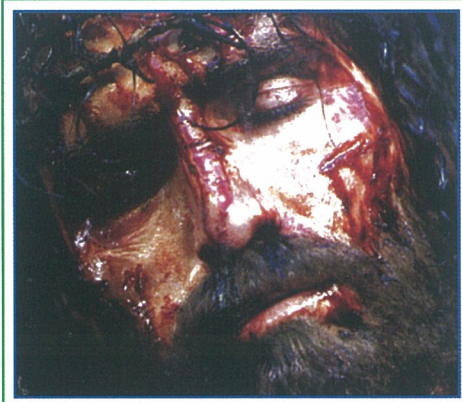
# The Passion for Youth

By Mark Atia

People quibbled as they watched the film "The Passion of Christ." Satan is present and converses with Jesus at Gethsemane. Some shots in Christ's cross-bearing journey from Jerusalem to Golgotha were excruciating. It was easy to see that this was THE PASSION. It was painful to watch but more importantly it was what brought silence in our hearts. It was clear what the cost of sin in pain and suffering was. It is evident in the reactions of several characters in the movie that it is our sin. Seeing such agony up close, we cannot help but feel our own responsibility for Jesus' death because of our own sin as youth.

The beating, the nailing, the bloodletting usually completed in about 10 minutes in most telling of the Crucifixion is stretched to two hours. The depiction is truly

masterful, it is painful. It is relentless. It is two hours in our life that shows us the price of our sin.



As youth we struggle and even forget to carry the cross that God has given us. Yet Jesus carried his cross for all of humanity even though he was mocked and spat upon. When the soldiers took him to the cross and laid him next to it, Jesus crawled to it because of our sins. Jesus

eagerly carried his cross for us, but we struggle to carry our own cross for ourselves.

For Christian youth, "The Passion of the Christ" aroused not only passionate opinions, but a deeper understanding of the drama of salvation and the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness. For many, seeing Jesus' torments vividly, graphically and relentlessly illustrated only serves to heighten their appreciation of Christ's love for humankind. It is not about what men did to God, but what God endured for humanity. We must live a life worthy of the label "CHRISTians," and become followers of the one who died for us to give us life.



## YOUTH CORNER



*"Words can't explain this movie. It taught me so much and touched my heart."*

– Amir Tadros



*"I really really liked it. It was painful to see someone who loves you suffer so much for you."*

– George Guirgis



*"Even though it's hard to watch, and it is so sad, I am glad I watched it."*

– Jenny Sedrak