



THE STORY OF

FOR YOUTH



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THE STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR YOUTH



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Printed by: American Pack
Cairo - Egypt +202 22801119
US Branch +1 973 323 2666
ISBN: 2013/9505





The Happiest Moments of Your Life!

The Bible is a love story; God wants to speak with you and hear your voice. He reveals His love to you, so that you may know Him, hence love Him and live happily by Him. God is waiting for you; He is preparing for you a place beyond the human comprehension. The heavenly hosts themselves see what God is preparing for you, and long to see you live with them in an eternal joy.

In this book, we present to you a joyful view of the Bible stories. In order for you to see how God loves you, longs for you, and works for your good, so that you desire to see Him, live by Him, and with Him every day.

When I committed myself to writing these stories, I experienced the happiest moments of my life. I hope you do not deprive yourself of reading them, and follow them by a short prayer, so you may enjoy them as I have.

It is a wonderful compilation of interesting Bible stories that prepare the heart to stay close to the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom yearns everyone who is faithful in his life and wishes to enjoy the Father's bosom through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR HOLY BOOK?

In the Garden of Eden, our first parents used to speak with God directly. Imagine their joy whenever they heard His voice in the Garden (Genesis 3: 8). However, after having fallen in sin, Adam and Eve hid from His face among the trees of the Garden, and they were afraid.

God spoke with them and promised them that out of the woman's seed will come the One who will crush the head of the serpent. The Lord Jesus Christ will come and, by the Cross, crushes the devil that deceived them into disobedience.

God granted their children the ability to understand what is right and what is wrong. However, they often disobey this inner voice and deny even the existence of their Creator. That is why God inspired His faithful people, through His Holy Spirit, to write the Old Testament Books about the love of God, His plan for our



salvation, and what He is preparing for us in heaven with the heavenly hosts when we abide with Him.





The Old and New Testaments

In its Old and New Testaments, the Bible is comprised of Books which people recorded by God's Spirit over approximately 1500 years; between 1450 B.C. to 95 A.D.

The Bible appears to be an encyclopedia that includes God's Commandments, the history of His dealings with humans, poetry, wisdom, proverbs, epistles, and prophecies. Yet, it is in a perfect harmony revealing God's plan for humans, which includes plans from before He created them until after we meet with Him in the clouds and enter His glory in a happiness that cannot be expressed by words.

This Book can be divided into two main sections:

1. **The Old Testament.** Its purpose is to prepare all nations to accept the Word of God when He becomes a man to lift up our shame through the Cross, grants us His righteousness, and transforms us into a new creation, which abides in His Holy Spirit, to prepare us to live in heaven.
2. **The New Testament.** Its purpose is to declare that the prophecies of the Old Testament almost have been fulfilled; as the Word of God, the Savior Jesus Christ, has come to us, practically revealed His love on the Cross, granted us His Holy Spirit, and promised us with His second coming on the clouds to lift us up to the eternal glory.



THE STORY OF THE DIVINE LOVE AND SALVATION

We can narrate the story of the Old Testament, the story of God's love and care for us during the following time periods:

Period 1. The Creator and His Beloved Human [Adam].

Period 2. The Renewal of the World and the Man's Obstinacy [Noah- the Tower of Babel].

Period 3. Preparations for the Consecration of the People of God [Abraham – the Sons of Jacob].

Period 4. The Consecration of the People of God [Exodus].

Period 5. A Land, which flows with Milk and Honey [Joshua – Judges].

Period 6. One Kingdom [Samuel – Solomon].

Period 7. Division and Destruction [Jeroboam – The Babylonian Captivity].

Period 8. Comeback and await the Arrival of the Messiah [Ezra – Maccabees].



The First Time Period

THE CREATOR AND HIS BELOVED HUMAN

The Bible reveals to us the story of the creation in a simple style, far from old urban legends. God did not create the world to display His power and wisdom, nor for His need for people to praise and thank Him. Instead, He wanted to create man in His image and lead according to His likeness. Man has a spirit that resembles the angels' and a body from the earth's dust. He has endowed him with a mind, wisdom, and a free will.

Every fetus or suckling is unique in the eyes of God and has a specific purpose. God loves him as the most valuable creature in the entire world! He wants him a free master, not a helpless slave with no authority!

God created the world as a royal palace wherein the human being resides as a king or a queen, in God's company, where God speaks with him/her and lifts him/her up in His bosom, if he/she so desires!

He created him/her to live eternally; death may not draw near his/her body if he/she is attached to his/her loving heavenly Father.



1- The Beautiful World!

(Genesis 1)

For a long time, people used to look at the sun, the moon, the stars and the beautiful nature, wondering: “Who made these planets? Who organized them in the sky in this fashion? Who created the human beings? Who made this beautiful world of ours?”

God created hosts of heavenly angels, living in heaven in an amazing joy. They need no food, drink or sleep, as they are always standing in God's presence praising Him and exceedingly longing for Him, wishing to serve Him unceasingly, the One who needs not to be served.

One of the heavenly angels considered defying God and taking over His throne. Accordingly, that angel and all his angels fell from the Divine Light, and turned into an opposing power of darkness, which thrives on violence, cruelty, and evil.

Man did not exist yet, for God wanted to create him with a soul like the angels', and with a material body, to be the object of His love and friendship.

The first story in the Holy Bible tells us about God, who loves you and me, so He created the world and all what is in it for our sake. This resembles a great melody in the form of a simple story, true and simple to understand.

God is the One who has the infinite authority. He is perfect in His love and righteousness. He decided to let others share in His life and happiness, so He offered it to you and me. We were always on His Mind, so He created this beautiful world for us.

The earth was vacant and lacked beauty; it was extremely dark, no human being can live on its surface; there were no vegetation, fish, birds or animals. The Spirit of God was flapping over the water surface. And, God said, “I will make a beautiful world!”

Then, God said, “Let there be light.” Therefore, the light suddenly appeared. God was happy with the light, because without light, it is impossible for man to see what God is preparing for him. God then separated the light from the darkness. He called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” God saw the light and said, “It is good.” This was the **First Day**.



The waters were everywhere, so God separated the sky (dome) from the earth; He decided to keep the upper waters to form clouds, and the waters below to form oceans. Afterwards, the blue sky which was adorned with the white clouds looked so beautiful. This was the **Second Day**.

In the **Third Day**, God moved the ocean waters to the deep areas on earth, so the dry land surfaced in the middle of the waters, which in turn formed separate oceans. On the dry land, the mountains and hills appeared. When the light reflected on the water, the view was marvelous. The waves moved in succession without stopping over the beach sands with their beautiful white color. In some other places, the waves were slamming against the rocks where the cliffs stood. God then said: “Now, let the earth grow grass and fruitful trees, since, we already have sea and land.” God loved this new world, and said, “It was good.”

God knows that the plants need light and warmth! He knew that some of the animals that will be created later would stay awake at night and will need some light. So, in the **Fourth Day**, God created the sun to shine during the day, and created the moon and the stars to sparkle at night. So that man, the animals, and the birds enjoy the light and warmth of the sun by day and the light of the moon and stars at night, and would go to sleep content!

The earth became ready for plantation. Therefore, God made the grass grow on the surface of the soil, and the land produced vegetables and plants that give seeds according to their kind. Trees started to appear and blossomed with colorful flowers; violet, red, yellow and white. When God looked at the green fertile land adorned with plants and flowers of all shapes and colors, He loved what His hands have made. God said, “Soon, delicious fruits good for food will appear.” God was pleased with all that and He said, “It was good!”

In the **Fifth Day**, God saw how the sea waves spray multitude of fine water drops on the sand, how the sun shines on the surface of the water, and how the whole atmosphere is filled with the smell of plants and flowers. God said, “It was good.” These places are suitable for living. Therefore, I will create huge



whales, as well as very small fish and all types of marine creatures to enjoy living in water. Also, I will create birds with smooth wings to fly in the air.” All these creations were able to live happily on earth and find all their needs.

In the **Sixth Day**, God created the animals. He created small ones like ants, as well as large ones such as elephants and dinosaurs. God created some animals that can run, others that can walk, and the rest can crawl. God created animals with soft fur and others with hard shells. He made animals in all different shapes and various sizes. Monkeys have strong tails to help them in climbing; owls have wide eyes to see in the dark. All animals, whether in the sea, in the air or on the ground had all what they needed. God looked around to all He created and was pleased, and said, “Now, the world is ready for man to live in it. The man can live, work, enjoy, and take care of this beautiful world. Then, We will place him here.” God created man in His own image and according to His likeness. God created him to become a master and ruler over all that was created in the world, and he should not need anything else. Then, God said, “It was very good.”

God created man from the soil of the earth, breathed into him the breath of life, and he turned into a great specimen. He called him “Adam.” Then, God created Eve from Adam's rib to support and match him; she was equal to him in dignity and greatness. Adam and Eve loved God who created them; they continuously kept thanking Him for all He granted them. They also praised Him for talking to them and fulfilling all their needs.

Adam and Eve were naked, but they were not ashamed, because their bodies were a beautiful, good, and pure gift from God. All animals were also happy surrounding them, and the birds were joyously singing to them.

In the **Seventh Day**, God rested when He saw that the human beings are happy, and He sanctified that day, as if it was the day God met the happy humans, and God was pleased.





2- A King in the Garden of Eden

(Genesis 2)

The Lord God planted the Garden of Eden, in the East, near the region of Iraq. The Garden included trees, which were pleasing to look at and good for food. At the Garden border, there was a river and its water was enough to irrigate all of Eden. The river branched into four rivers. In the middle of the Garden, there were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam was very happy to work in the Garden; he found pleasure in taking care of it! He, like an angel, never felt tired or bored. He was like a flying swallow, which did not experience anger, hatred or the sought prestige. He had no worries nor was troubled by his tomorrow. All that occupied his attention was God's friendship with him.

God did not deprive Adam from anything. However, because of His love, God gave Adam a simple commandment, so that he can enjoy God's blessing as a sign of their friendship. For Adam to meet God's love for him by following His commandment. God asked Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is in the middle of the Garden. God had surrounded that tree with so many other great trees that Adam would not feel deprived.

Adam looked around him, and he saw so many beautiful and varied creatures. He saw animals walking on four legs, making strange sounds, but they did not speak. Beasts were huge and powerful, yet submissive to him, and willingly serve him. Others were too small to see. He also saw creatures that flew in the air, which he was not able to do (no airplanes or spaceships were invented yet). Nonetheless, he enjoyed these flying creatures around him. He then observed the water, and the marine creatures swimming in it and diving into the deep. He watched them while he was on the beach; for he did not have a submarine at the time, to reach the depths of the seas.

God used to meet with Adam, who would run towards Him to talk and praise Him:





- Is this is the work of Your hands, my God?

- Yes, this is My work, I made it all for you, Adam. I offered you all the animals, birds, and everything around you, and I gave you the freedom to give them any names you like.

- To that extent You love me, O my God?

- Yes, I do love you Adam, and I honor you before all the creatures of the world!

- I thank You, praise You, and glorify You O wonderful Creator! I love You my Lord!

The animals and the birds gathered around Adam, as if they came to greet him. Adam rubbed one of those large beasts, which had big teeth and strong claws. Adam talked to it, "O strong beast and king of the animal kingdom, you will live in the forest, and I will call you: Lion." The lion wiggled his head in joy, and roared loudly, not scaring Adam.

He saw another animal jumping between tree branches, as if it was greeting Adam in its own way. Adam called it Monkey. The monkey jumped onto the lion's back playfully.

Birds flew off the tree branches, and landed on the back of a huge animal. They sang together in harmony. Adam called that animal: Dinosaur and he called those birds: Nightingales and Canaries.

Adam named the animals, including the dog that kept playing with him and licking his feet and hands, he named the horse that he used to ride through the east and west of the Garden. He named the rest of the animals, the birds and the reptiles, then lastly naming the serpent.

The days passed, and Adam's heart was full of love and appreciation, and he was saying: "O my Master, You have given me many friends and helpers, what can I do to repay You for all Your labors of love?"



3- The Happiest Couple in the World!

(Genesis 2)

While God was walking in the Garden, where everything was plentiful and in abundance, He saw the animals and the birds all in pairs, but He found Adam by himself. God said, “It is not good for man to be alone, I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him.” We might imagine the following dialogue take place between God and Adam:

- What do you think about the animals, birds and fish?
- They are marvelous! Thank You O my God, I love them, since they are my helpers.
- But they do not speak with you Adam. They do not eat with you. So, I will create for you a companion, to help you, she will be refined, understanding and loving, she will speak with you and support you, and you will support her.

God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and when he woke up, he found the woman whom God created from his side. He created her from Adam's rib, so she would remain very close to his heart. God did not create her from Adam's head; lest she would control him, nor He created her from his legs, lest he would prevail over her.

Adam was very pleased with this woman, and he said, “This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!”

He stretched his hand and held hers, and then they became used to walking together in the Garden. Adam told her about his pleasant experiences with God, and how he meets Him every day to talk with Him.

He told her about his interactions with the animals and birds, and how he named it all. He also told her about God's Commandment concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the Garden, and how he should avoid getting close to that tree.

They lived together with a joyful spirit, picking fruits to eat, swimming in the river during the day; they rested in the shadow of the trees. They were naked but not ashamed. They were working together in full harmony, and they discovered new things every day.



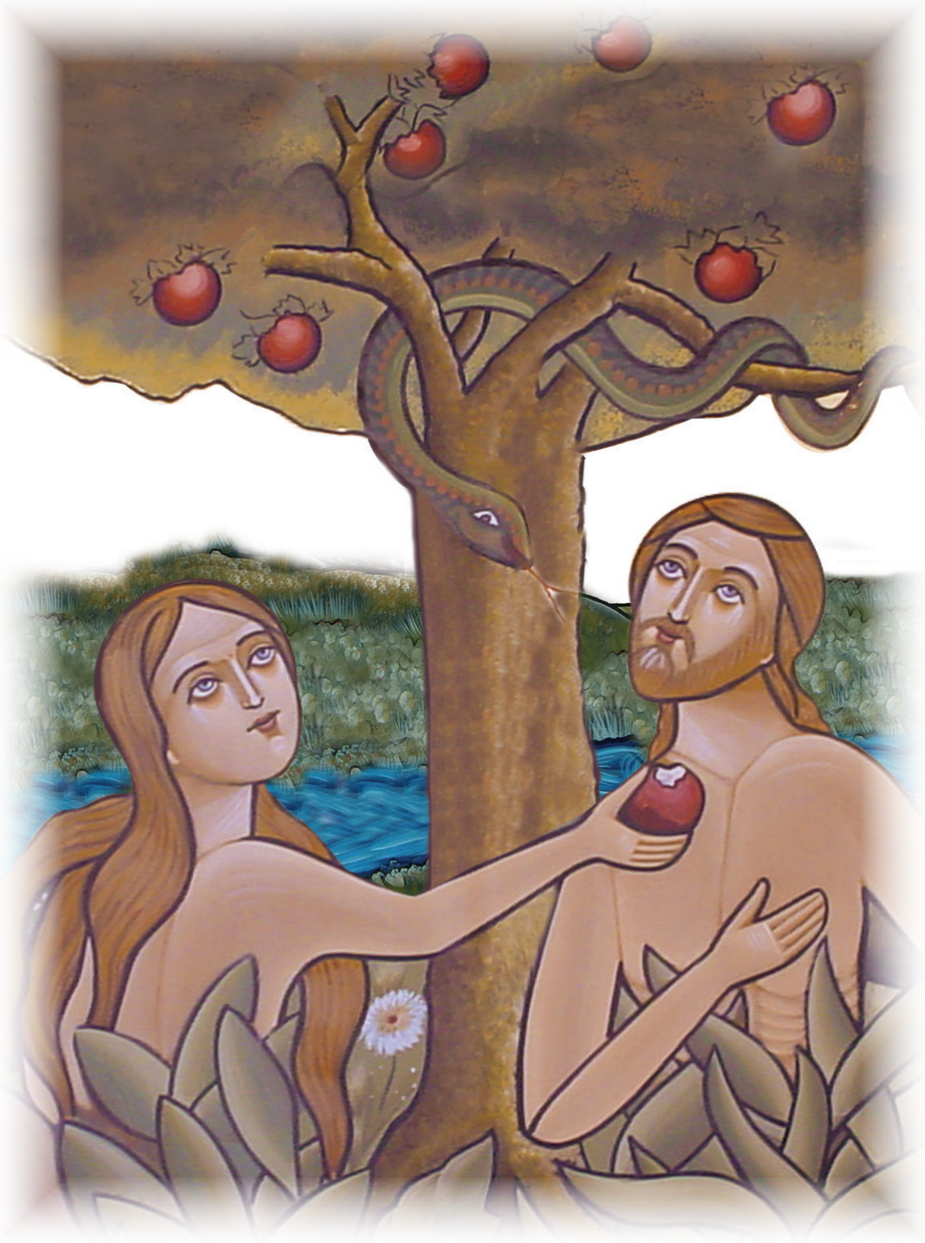
God appeared to them to converse; they would tell Him about what happened during the day, because He was their dear Friend.

God blessed Adam and Eve and showed them all He made for them to enjoy.

Adam and Eve said to God, “We thank You because this earth is a beautiful place. All You have created is amazing, useful and good. You have prepared for us a magnificent palace. Indeed, we feel Your love O God, and we love, worship, and praise You for it.”

The heavenly hosts rejoiced for Adam and Eve, and they knew for whom God created this beautiful world. They saw in Adam and Eve a king and a queen created in God's own image and after His likeness. The entire creation was in complete harmony and happiness for Adam and Eve, except Satan and his angels, who envied them for the blessings they received.







4- Whispers of the Serpent

(Genesis 3)

God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so they would not be blemished with an experience leading to death. By following the Commandment, they would enjoy the mutual love with Him, proclaim their love for Him, and be blessed with greater honor and glory.

Satan envied Adam and Eve, so he used the serpent to tempt Eve, causing her to doubt the love of God, and disobey Him along with her husband.

Eve weaved a basket to hold the fruits she picked from the trees of the Garden. One day, while picking fruits to eat, she reached the middle of the garden, where she saw a big tree full of fruits. She then remembered that God gave her husband, Adam, freedom to eat from all trees except the tree of knowledge or he would die.

Eve stood before the tree; surrounded by the animals playing and the birds flying above. Everything was in a joyful daily celebration; all joyous except for the Serpent, which was full of sadness and jealousy because of Adam and Eve's relationship with God.

The Serpent then said to Eve, "Is it true that God said not to eat from all trees of the Garden? God knows that the day you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, your eyes will be open and you will become like God."

Eve did not usually listen to any voice except for God's and her husband Adam's, but in that day she heard and understood the words coming from the hissing of the wicked Serpent, "Eve, Eve, why will you not taste the fruit of this tree in the middle of the Garden? Did not God allow you to eat from any tree you want? Did God forbid you from eating from any tree of the Garden?"

Eve then answered, "We can eat from any fruit or plant of our choice except for the fruit of this tree, or we shall perish."

The Serpent whispered to Eve, "Foolish! Do you really believe this? You will not die! If you eat of this tree, you will gain



knowledge and wisdom and become like God, and can distinguish between good and evil. You will be like God, and for this reason, God did order you not to touch the fruit and not to eat from it! Try it yourself, and you will see that this is the truth!”

Eve moved towards the tree while still struggling between God’s Commandment and the Serpent’s advice. Calmly, she looked at the tree and found the fruit appealing to the eye!

Eve hesitantly raised her hand and held a branch of the tree. She then asked herself, “Why did God deprive us from this beautiful fruit? Does He take pleasure in our suffering? What would the Serpent gain if we do not eat from this tree?”

Eve doubted God in her mind, and believed the Serpent’s advice. She stretched out her hand to pluck a fruit of the forbidden tree while saying, “I will try only one fruit.” Then, after taking one bite, she thought, “What a tasty fruit!” All happened while the Serpent was watching her carefully.

When Adam noticed that Eve was late, he went looking for her, and found her hiding behind the tree’s branches. Adam asked her, “Where have you been Eve?”

She answered, “I was picking the fruits as we agreed. Look at this fruit; it is very tasty. It may not make you full, but it will fill you with knowledge.” She hid her fears with a broad smile.

Adam said, “Is this not the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?”

She answered, “Do not worry for it is the best tasting fruit in the Garden.”

Adam said, “But God commanded us not to eat of it or we shall perish.”

Eve came closer to Adam and said, “Do you not believe your eyes? I ate from the fruit, and I am still alive!”

Adam quietly and attentively listened to Eve saying, “Look I am alive, yet I have gained more knowledge. Taste of the fruit so we can both become like God, knowing good and evil!”

The Serpent was listening to the dialogue between the couple with a conniving smile.

Adam took the fruit from his wife’s hand, and he shared it with her and ate from it.



He and his wife sensed a feeling that they have never experienced before; a feeling of great fear accompanied with shame and dishonor, as they realized they were both naked.

Adam said, "We are naked. God gave animals skin and fur, so they stay warm, and gave birds feather, but He did not give us either."

They both ran to a fig tree to hide behind it. They picked few of its wide leaves and they sowed them together in the form of cover up.

What would happen to a beautiful flower that refuses watering or deprives itself of sunshine? Would it not wither in just a few hours? This is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve who through their disobedience deprived themselves from God's friendship and felt deprived from life and happiness; they had become poor in spite of all they had: all of the paradise! Fear, hate, and envy had slowly crept into their hearts and they knew evil for the first time.

By sunset, Adam told Eve, "Listen. I can hear a sound. It's the sound of God walking in the Garden!"

For the first time, both of them hid from the face of God as they lost His friendship when they disobeyed His Commandment.

God called, "Adam, where are you? Why are you afraid?"

Adam and Eve came out from their hiding place and Adam shamefully answered, "I have heard Your voice in the Garden, but was afraid because I am naked, so I hid myself." God asked him, "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat from?"

Adam replied, "The women whom You gave me; she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

God asked Eve, "What is that you have done?"

Eve answered, "The Serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The Lord looked at the Serpent and said, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go in the dust all your life. 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.**"



The Serpent left creeping away with the dust covering its skin, while Eve was smiling gladly because God punished the Serpent. But God turned to Eve and said, “You have sinned and broke My Commandment, and listened to the lies of the Serpent. Therefore, from now on, you will know the pain every time you bring forth children.”

The Lord then turned to Adam saying, “You have spoiled everything that I have arranged for you. Because you have not obeyed My Commandment, you will have to get out of the Garden, and you will have to toil hard. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat food. Life will not be so easy anymore. It shall be full of pain. You come from earth and you will die here. You are from dust and to dust you will return. Come you and your wife, so I will make leather clothes for you, so you will be no longer naked.”

Adam and Eve left paradise as a punishment. God was saddened when He saw them lose their dignity as their lives had completely changed. He knew that their descendants would face a bitter life. Their nature was corrupted. Therefore, God wanted to expose that through chastisement in order for them to yearn to reforming their spirits and bodies.

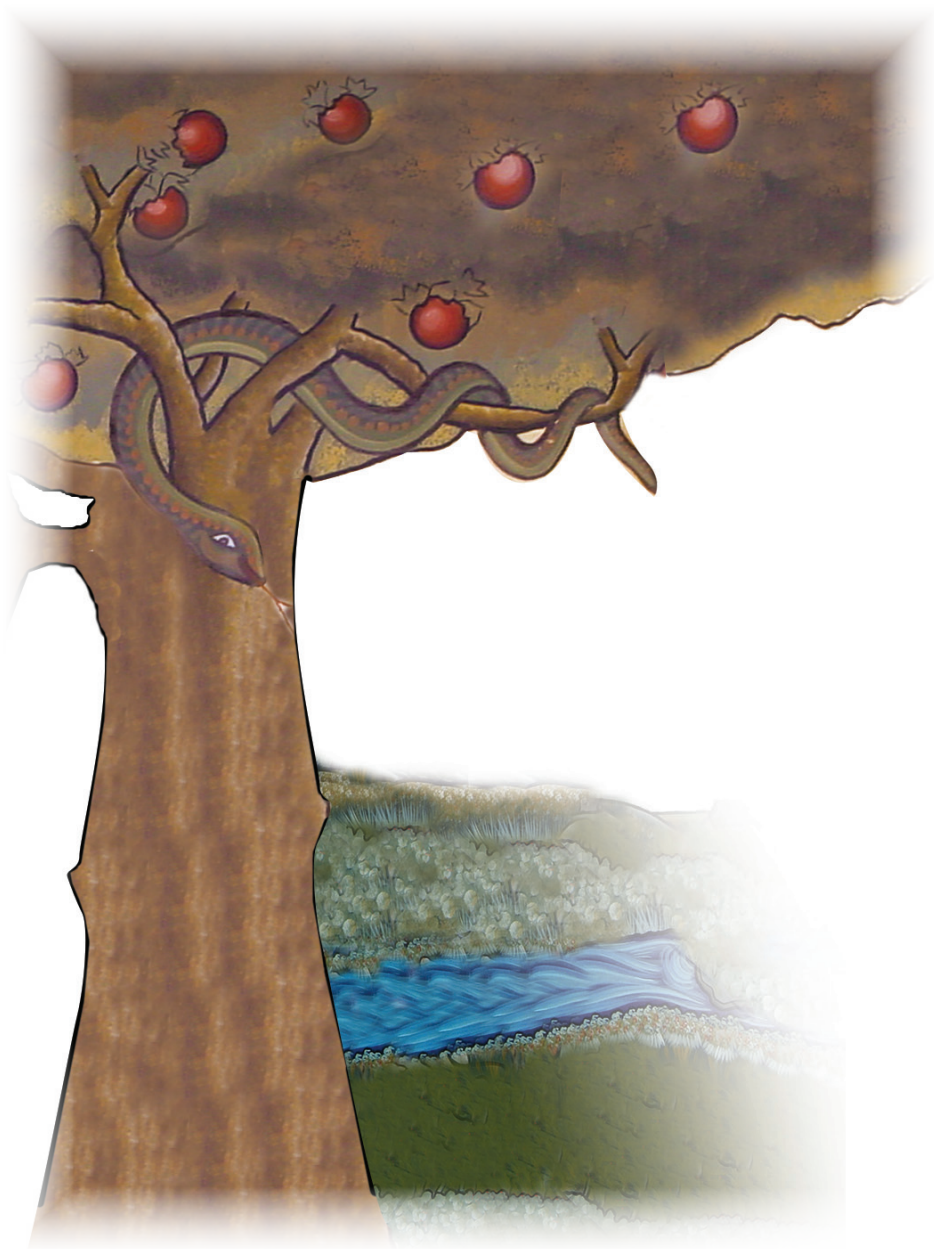
Adam and Eve looked behind and saw a great angel standing by the door of paradise carrying a sword of fire, and they were deeply grieved. However, God did not allow them to lose hope, for He still loved them exceedingly. He did promise them the One who will bruise the head of the Serpent, namely Satan.

While Adam and Eve were out of paradise, they were waiting for the coming of the One that would fulfill God’s promise. They were waiting for the time when the Word of God would be incarnated from a virgin; i.e. of the woman's seed only. He is God, who is able to destroy the devil and restore them, along with their children, not just to the Garden of Eden, but even to Paradise. This heavenly promise regarding the Savior and the Only Begotten Son of God was a promise that was aspired to from generation to generation.

God the Father sent His people and prophets to witness for the coming of the Savior, until truly our Lord Jesus Christ came



and restored our dignity and granted us the salvation as a gift, saying, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**





5- Cain and Abel

(Genesis 4)

Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden of Eden, and from that moment, they have not felt happiness or peace. Everything around them seemed to be against them. With every morning, they felt anxious, in pain, and terrified from what can happen to them. They became so tired from working hard, and longed for their companionship with God; their minds were always confused; and their will was shaken. They were experiencing new and strange emotions they never felt before, such as the suffering from pain, diseases, and fear of death. In addition to anger, arrogance, and selfishness, all which became part of their lives. However, every time they remembered God's promise, they knew that He was their heavenly Father, who has promised them to overcome Satan and sin through the coming of our Savior and God Jesus Christ.

Eve was pleased when she bore her first son and named him "Cain" and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." This special occasion was repeated when she bore another son whom they named "Abel," and so they had two sons and several daughters.

Cain worked as a farmer preparing the land to plant crops to earn his living and his family's, however, Cain loved neither God nor his brother Abel, who worked as a shepherd, and cared for the sheep on the hills in the morning returning them back to their fold in the evening. Occasionally, when he found a baby sheep having trouble walking, he would carry it in his arms, until he gets stronger, and can walk on his own later.

One day, Cain brought an offering from the fruit of the field to the Lord; Abel also brought one of the healthiest first born of his flock. God was delighted and accepted Abel's offering because he had offered it with an eager heart full of love; but He did not accept Cain's offering because he was quite reluctant in doing so. God always accepts our offerings whenever we do this with sincere loving hearts.

Because Cain had an evil heart, he became very angry when God preferred Abel's offering over his, and his countenance fell badly. Cain envied his brother, and rebelled against God.



God had noticed that Cain was not happy, so with love and kindness asked him: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen when you knew that your offering did not make Me happy? If you do not do well, sin lies at the door, and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it, and control your anger.”

God had opened the door of hope to Cain in order to discard the evil inside his heart, control his emotions, and repent. But Cain did not listen to God’s warning.

God did not only love Abel, he loved Cain as well, which is why God had warned Cain. Cain neither listened to God’s advice, nor responded to Him. On the contrary, he followed his wicked emotions and evil thoughts transformed into real action. He pretended to be friends with his brother and asked to accompany him to the field, where, Cain fabricated an argument with his brother, finally killing his brother Abel.

Evil has prevailed over humankind, which began with Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden, and then it developed inside Cain’s heart and mind leading him to kill his own brother. Violence and blood shedding started with the first family in the world, and sin penetrated unto us and invaded our lives. With this happening, God would be the only One to take care of us, and aims for our salvation, because He loves us!

Evil has prevailed in the lives of humans; disobedience and rebellion against God, violence between brothers. That is why, the Lord Jesus Christ provided us His Commandments concerning loving God and loving our fellow man as the two principals that the law depends on (Matthew 22:37-39).

The Lord Jesus has come to the world to practically show His love for us. He was crucified with His arms opened to embrace every person; therefore, we should open our arms to everyone and love everybody.

When Cain killed his brother Abel, he gave Him his back and wanted to escape. Why? Law enforcement did not exist at the time to arrest him, no judges to try, and sentence him and no prison to imprison him; but the sin traps the soul. Cain could not





stand seeing his murdered brother. He was afraid and terrified and wanted to flee. He realized what he had done was an evil and a shameful act, even if there was no one there to punish him.

Suddenly Cain heard God's voice as his father Adam had heard it before; but this time God asked Cain "Where is Abel your brother?"

Cain was scared and instead of confessing his sin, he tried to hide it by saying "I do not know. Am I my brother's guardian?"

Therefore, God told him "Cain, the voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now, you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. It shall no longer yield its best for you. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."





6- Cain's Great Terror

(Genesis 4)

Cain was horrified not only because he had killed his brother, but because he felt God's wrath upon him. He did not offer a hopeful repentance, but fell into despair.

While trembling, Cain cried out to God, “How can I live as a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth far from You, and from my land?” “My punishment is greater than I can bear. You have driven me out this day from the face of the land and made me hide from Your face. I shall be a fugitive on Earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.”

Having confessed his sin, God reassured him that He would severely punish anyone who would harm him. And He set a mark on Cain, and declared that God's vengeance shall be taken sevenfold on that who would kill him.

How wonderful is God in His justice, as in His mercy. He punished Cain for killing the innocent Abel; and now even after Cain's fall, He showed him mercy.

Cain moved to the land of Nod on the east of Eden. There he married and had a son whom he called Enoch. Cain toiled very hard until he built a city. He called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch, so that his sons would not live as fugitives like him.

Cain became a ruler of a new people, and none of his descendants returned to the land of his father. His seed multiplied exceedingly and were called Cainnites, however, they did not follow the way of God. Among his offspring were Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, and Lamech.

Lamech surpassed everyone in his evil ways. He was an adversary of God, claiming that he was in no need for His help.

It was said that when Lamech became so old, he had poor eyesight. One day, while his grandson was leading him during a hunting trip, the youngster pointed at a prey for Lamech to aim and shoot his arrow, Lamech inadvertently killed his grandfather Cain. The grandson yelled in distress, declaring Cain's death, so Lamech attacked the boy and killed him as well! That is why he said later, “I have killed a man (Cain) for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me.”



Cain's descendants did all they could to enjoy a comfortable, happy life. They built cities and invented skills. However, their riches did not make them happy, because their lives were detached from God.

God was not pleased with their lives and did not find anyone among them to whom He could entrust with the promise of the incoming of the Savior and the enjoyment of the Divine blessings. For this reason, God gave Eve another son to comfort her. She named him Seth, saying, "For God has appointed another child for me in place of Abel." For the word "Seth" means "substitute" or "appointed."

Seth made Eve happy because he took Abel's place, the son she had lost, and God granted Seth His blessing and chose him to provide the world with the faith in God and the hope in the Savior.

From Seth's descendants came the great fathers we read about in the Bible: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Through these great ones, God led His people throughout the generations to be prepared for the coming of the Savior our Lord Jesus. This is how God used to work for humanity's redemption of sin and for their enjoyment of His glory that He is preparing for people.





The Second Time Period

RENEWING THE WORLD AND HUMAN STUBBORNNESS

As corruption entered the earth due to human evil, God washed it with the flood and saved Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives. Noah offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to God who had saved him and his family from death. God smelled these sacrifices as a soothing aroma and promised Noah and his family that He would never again allow for another flood that would destroy every living thing. He also set a rainbow with its beautiful colors as a sign of that covenant. That is why the rainbow encircles the Divine throne, as was mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

God gave man a new opportunity to be faithful to Him.

Evil returned once more, as when Noah was drunk and became uncovered, his son Ham exposed him before his brothers. Evil increased in their descendants, and as they remembered what had happened in the days of Noah, rather than returning from their evil ways seeking God, they decided to build a tower high enough that its top reached the heavens, so that if another flood occurs they can climb it. God stopped them their work by confusing their language; hence they did not understand one another's speech. They became different communities, each with its distinct and different language. With that, the scope of the inhabited and lived in areas expanded, and differing new nations appeared.

This incident had ended by their scattering, and they left some proofs that showed their stubbornness against the Lord, as well as, their foolishness.



7- A Righteous Man, Taken by the Lord from the Earth

(Genesis 5)

Years have elapsed and Adam's offspring has multiplied, as did their evil. In the midst of this evil, there were few people who still loved God. Among them was a very righteous man who loved God and hated evil. He was named Enoch. As God saw the bitterness of his soul due to the evil surrounding him, God lifted him from the earth. He was then 365 years old, but was considered young, compared to his generation.

Enoch, along with Elijah, did not die, and will return in the last days to support the Church that will be opposed by the antichrist. They will overcome him and the powers of darkness, testify for the Lord Christ, even until they are martyred and receive the crown of martyrdom.





8- Noah's Ark

(Genesis 6)

People forgot the love, care, and honest promises of God their Creator. Wickedness and violence spread widely; hence, God was sorry that He had made man. Among all humanity there was only one good man named Noah. Noah loved God, trusted in His promises, and did all that was good.

God wanted to cleanse the whole earth with a great flood and establish a new world with the descendants of Noah. Hence, the flood would be a practical lesson in Baptism, where we enjoy being God's children through the Cross and get liberated from the bondage of the devil.

God spoke with Noah, as a friend, and He did not hide His plan from His loved ones. God said to Noah:

“Look around you Noah, the land has been filled with violence and corruption.

I was hoping for man to be My ambassador on earth; be holy, as I am holy.

I long for him to bear My image and act according to My likeness. However, he abused the freedom I had granted him and exploited what I had offered him in wickedness. He opposed My work, rejected My love, did not heed My Commandments, and did not comply with My warnings.

The fate of humankind is in My mind, because the earth has been filled with violence. I hereby destroy all humanity, and every living creature I have created for humankind.

I will cover the world with a great flood and cleanse it with water.

Nevertheless, as for you and your family, I will save, make you a promise, and establish a covenant with you. If you want to live, make yourself an ark according to the specifications I am providing you with. The ark will be a great vessel made of gopher-wood, and cover it with pitch to prevent water from leaking into it. You will also make a window and a door on its side.

You, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives shall go into the ark. Moreover, of every living thing of all flesh you shall





bring two: Male and female of the birds, animals, and reptiles. However, of the animals that can be sacrificed you shall bring seven pairs. You shall also bring food for you and the creatures with you to eat.”

Noah hastened and made himself an ark according to the Lord’s Commandment. All passersby ridiculed him. Therefore, he would hear words of mockery with his own ears and receive people's funny looks directed at him. He would talk with everyone he meets about repentance, and his words sounded to others as lunacy, and ignorance!

They used to say, “What happened to Noah? Perhaps his preoccupation with God has driven him to lose his conscience! Would a man make an ark on a dry land! Shall the ground turn into a river, a sea, or an ocean?! Doesn't he understand the value of his money, that he would waste it on such useless wood and tools?”

Suddenly, people observed a strange sight: Noah and his family began to bring to the ark all sorts of birds, reptiles and animals, along with so much food. People watching were laughing at his actions, saying, “What wrong did these animals, reptiles and birds do that they deserve to be imprisoned inside the ark? Perhaps Noah’s family is building an enclosed zoo to live within it? There is no sea or ocean for the ark to sail.”



9- In God's Care Inside the Ark

(Genesis 7-8)

The Spirit of God went on hovering over them, as if He was restoring the creation and renewing it. There was a great silence in the air, as nothing happened for seven days after Noah completed all what God ordered him to do. This situation had attracted many people around the ark, and instead of returning to God, they increased their mockery of Noah and his family who were locked inside the ark doing nothing except waiting!

Noah was struggling between his great joy emanating from his obedience to God, and his deep grief for those other people, who had no faith, anticipating their inevitable demise. The Lord Himself closed the ark's door after Noah entered, to ensure his safety and that of those who were with him.

Everyone was observing the ark's door getting closed, while laughing and mocking, saying, "What is supposed to happen after shutting the door?!"

Suddenly, the sky was filled with extremely dense clouds, and there was great darkness, as if night had fallen. Rain then began to fall violently, also the earth's springs were gushing with water, and the water rushed from the seas and oceans and flooded the dry land.

Screaming had become very loud, some people attempted to climb up to the roofs of the houses, or run towards the mountains to escape the flooding. Water rose until it covered all the hills. It continued to rise until it covered the high mountains tops. All people, along with animals, reptiles, birds, and plants perished. Nothing survived except the ark and those who were inside it.

The flood did not stop rising for forty days and forty nights. When it finally did stop, the water began to recede steadily, and the earth appeared as if it had been cleansed completely.

Finally, God sent a wind to pass over the earth, and the rain ceased. After one-hundred and fifty days the ark settled on the summit of Mount Ararat in Armenia.

Noah opened the window of the ark and sent out a raven, which kept flying back and forth.



Noah waited another forty days, and then sent out the raven, which went out and never returned. Seven days later, he sent out a dove from the window of the ark, and having found no resting place, it returned to Ark. So he put out his hand and drew it in.

After seven days, he sent it again, It spent a whole day in the clean air, flying between the trees, and in the evening it came back carrying a green olive branch in its beak. Hence, he realized that the water had receded from the earth. The dove was referring to the Holy Spirit, who enters the heart of the faithful during his baptism to present to him the heavenly peace.

The safe arrival of the ark had been transformed into a grand celebration as if it was a feast, as they were about to depart it to start a new world.

After seven days, Noah sent out the dove for the third time, but it did not return back to him, then he realized that he could go out with his family and those who were inside the ark to the new world. Noah removed the covering of the ark, but did not leave until God had ordered him to do so.





10- The Covenant with Noah

(Genesis 8-9)

Everyone came out of the ark cheerfully, perceiving the world as if it had been cleansed into a state much better than its previous state. The first thing that Noah did was build an altar for the Lord and to make thanksgiving sacrifices and burnt offerings to God.

Due to Noah's purity of heart, obedience, and gratitude to God, God gave a promise for all humanity, saying, "I will never again curse the land, nor will I destroy every living thing as long as the earth remains. There will be day and night, winter and summer, and seedtime and harvest!"

God blessed Noah and gave him authority over the entire creations on the earth. He established with him and his offspring a covenant that there will never again be a flood that would eradicate all humanity and destroy all creatures on the face of the earth. God gave him a sign of this; that He will set His rainbow with its beautiful colors of the spectrum, appearing in the sky to remind us of His Divine covenant and His promise to all of us.

The Church is the ark, in which we enter as Noah and his family did. We are cleansed through the baptism, where we are buried with Christ and then are raised.

He will carry us to a new world, that is the heaven with all its glory, where we see God, His throne, and all celestials. There we thank God, praise His holy name and live with Him forever.





11- A New World

(Genesis 9–10)

After the flood, the land was fertile, and the blessing of the Lord was apparent in the livestock, and sheep herding as well as agriculture.

Noah was surprised to find the vineyards full of grapes, and that the grapes were huge and full of juice. Noah gathered some of the good grapes, pressed them, and fermented them. He did not realize that the produced wine was very strong, so after drinking it he became intoxicated, fainted, entered his tent, and fell asleep naked.

His son Ham was surprised by the scene, but rather than covering his father, he went and exposed him to his brothers Shem and Japheth. The two brothers took a garment, laid it on their shoulders, moved backward to avoid laying their eyes on their father naked, and covered him. Noah blessed them, and rebuked Ham, who rather than receiving his Father's blessing, he received the curse for not covering him.

Those three sons had many sons and daughters, and their grandchildren grew in number. They formed large communities that split into groups and spread in wide locations, and thus nations started forming by the offspring of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Unfortunately, instead of the grandchildren keeping Noah's faith, the newly formed nations deviated into worship idols.





12- Dumb People and Silly Skyscraper!

(Genesis 11)

If we travel now to India, China or Japan we obviously would not understand what the natives are talking about, nor would they understand us. That is why, if we want to speak with them, we should learn their language first.

After the flood, only the children of Noah were living on the face of earth, they were speaking to each other in the same language, wandering across a very large area, where they used to raise their tents.

Shem received the blessing from the mouth of his father Noah, when Noah said, “Worthy of praise is the Lord, the God of Shem.” Noah also prayed to God, for Shem to know the true God and always worship Him.

Noah's children moved eastward, where they discovered a valley in the land of Shinar, so they settled there. Unfortunately, they deviated from the worship of the true God.

One day, they had a meeting to discuss their security in the land they settled in. They began telling each other: “Let us make bricks and bake them to use them in building a city for us, so that we may make a name for ourselves.”

They did not ask God, or request His guidance. Nonetheless, they made many bricks and burned them in fire. They managed, with unwavering will and sheer determination, to build a vast and glorious city.

The king Nimrod gathered the people and told them, “You are strong and capable people; you have constructed a great city. However, there is another very important matter we are in a dire need for. We need to build a great tower, so high that it would reach the sky. Such that, if God ever decided to bring us another flood, we can escape into the tower, and God can't overpower us!”

Everybody concurred believing this was a good idea. The king started to prepare a list for what was needed to build that tower. He dedicated ten of his top army soldiers as leaders to be responsible for the completion of that tremendous project. He also selected people skilled in all kinds of crafts, and tasked them with





the required technical work and needed planning for that huge undertaking. Therefore, everybody was to participate in that building process.

Engineers searched and chose a suitable location for the tower; others completed the design plans, while another group reviewed those plans and revised them. The women were busy with collecting the straw to be mixed with clay to be poured in a mold before it was burned in a fire forming the red bricks. The oxen were used to bring the wood and building materials to the construction site. Young and strong men were utilized to carry the mortar on their shoulders, while others were occupied with planting vegetation to feed the people working on the project. Even children were collecting fire-wood needed for making the bricks. The young women were taking care of the children of the working mothers, and tending to the life stock and bringing the milk to the working masses.

One of the builder yelled from the top of the structure, “We are greater than God! Soon we will reach the sky, and His flood would not be able to touch us!”

God was not pleased with the stupidity of these arrogant people, and then He thought: “Those are one people, who speak one language. If they build a tower which can reach the sky, they will think that nothing can stop them, and they will become more arrogant.

They have to understand that the tower cannot hide them from Me.

I will remove their ability to speak the same language. I will confuse their tongues, so they would not understand one another, and they would fail in completing the tower.”

One day, everybody was so stunned, suddenly their tongues were confused. Each one spoke words the other could not understand.

One builder asked for mortar and he received red bricks instead. A woman who was asked for water brought straw instead. Someone told the workers to come up the tower, and found them going down instead.



Everybody was in a big jam, severe tension erupted among all workers, and so many revolted, and threw away their tools... and the project came to a complete stop.

God kept the members of each family with the same tongue, so they could stay together, while other families, each with their own language, had to disperse. They left the spot and built new cities on much larger area than the one they used to occupy.

This tongue confusion was for the good of the people, in order to deter them from completing the evil plan they had in mind. It also resulted in the formation of new and different nations, each having its own language and culture.

The people transformed into different scattered groups, each group living together and speaking a particular language.

These groups spread toward the East, West, North and South, and abandoned the unfinished sky-scraper, which gradually decayed over time.

The area was called “Babel,” because there God confused the tongues, and different languages were born, and Noah's descendants became scattered all over the earth.





The Third Time Period

Preparations for Establishing a People for Him

Sam's sons did not return to God to keep the covenant He made with their father on their behalf, but they rejected Him and worshipped idols and creatures instead of Him.

Among these nations and tribes, one person was found to believe in Him and aspire to keep the old covenant that God had established with Noah. God chose him to consecrate a nation for Himself out of his descendants. From the people of that nation, the Word of God would be incarnated; to stretch His hands on the Cross and embrace all who would believe in Him anywhere in the world. The Word of God would establish a holy Church that prepares herself to enjoy the bosom of God and live with Him and in Him in heaven. This person was Abraham, of whose seed came Isaac, then Jacob, then the twelve sons by whom God formed the twelve tribes.

God chose Abram (Abraham) about 1850 years B.C. to become a blessing to the nations and a father of the believers through the coming of the Lord of Glory, who was incarnated of St. Mary, the daughter of Abraham. God asked Abraham to get leave his father's house, not to isolate him from his people, but to shield him from the idols that his relatives had been worshipping. Among his descendants in every generation, God would bring one who will destroy idols and prepare the hearts for the coming of the world's Savior.



13- Sarai, Wife of Abram

(Genesis 11)

Back in Ur of the Chaldeans (currently in Iraq), there was a great merchant city which was very rich and well known. Abram married his half sister Sarai who was the daughter of his father Terah, but had a different mother. Since there were few people on earth, it was permitted for brothers and sisters to marry, as long as they were not from the same mother.

A foreign king occupied the city and issued a decree that the sun was to be worshipped and not the moon. Terah was unhappy with the king's decision, as he was so used to visit the temple of the moon's god to make sacrifices and offerings.

Terah gathered his family and suggested to them that they would leave to the land of Haran, which was about 600 miles north of their city.

Sarai and her husband Abram were happily married. He talked to her in their tent saying, "What do you think, Sarai, about the king's decree?"

She replied, "I am not comfortable."

Abram said, "Is it possible for a king to switch gods? Can he stop worshipping the moon, and begin to worship the sun? Where did the moon come from? And who created the sun?"

She asked him, "Then, what do we do now?"

He replied, "We should worship God, the One who created the sun, the moon, and all the planets!"

So the darkness of idol worshiping prevailed throughout the whole world, yet one man along with his wife were found living in piety in that Chaldean town of Ur. This man Abram knew that God created each human to be unique, with his own mission, which he can accomplish by God's grace, even if the rest of mankind had preferred the darkness over the light and the evil over the good. God, from His side, likes to work with anyone who trusts that he has been given a mission in the mind of God.

Therefore, in every generation, the people of God do exist, even as young children in certain times.

Abram loved God exceedingly, feared Him, loved people, and yearned to serve them. He was generous in giving, hosting



strangers every day. Sarai also used to insist on serving them herself instead of letting her maids and servants do that.

They left their land along with their father and Lot, the son of Abram's brother. They loaded their belongings on animals, and they brought with them numerous herds of sheep and goats. They travelled slowly, and their journey lasted about a month until they reached Haran. In Haran, their father died at the age of two-hundred and five years.







14- Abram's Departure from His Land

(Genesis 12)

In Haran Abram heard a voice, not from the moon god that his father, Terah, worshipped, and not from the sun god, but from the Creator of both the sun and the moon.

He listened to Him saying, "Leave your land, your people, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you." How joyful Abram was when he obeyed God and left without asking where he would go!

This divine call is directed to every human that his heart may be set free, not from a particular place, clan, or house, but from the love of the world, while remaining faithful to his work and responsibilities and loving other people. By this way, he would meet with the Lord of Heaven and live in His embrace.

Abram's departure was not an easy one, as he lived in a major city that was known for its riches, progressiveness and culture. In addition, he had close connections with his family. He heard the calling when he was not a young man, as he departed from Haran at the age of 75 years old, an age when one would need to settle down. Moreover, he had no heir to inherit him or to take care of him at this old age.

We know that one tends to move with ease at younger age, but as he grows older, it becomes harder to move, especially if this move means a complete change to his approach to lifestyle and behavior. Nevertheless, Abram with a youthful flexibility and joy moved out in obedience to God.

Abram left his land with his family and his brother's son Lot. God was delighted with Abram's faith and obedience.

They travelled over the hills, and crossed rivers and camped beside a huge tree (Terebinth) in Moreh, Shechem.

Abram built an altar to the Lord and offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. God appeared to Abram another time and entered with him into a new covenant that He would give his sons that land that they were standing on.

Abram moved to Bethel, pitched the tents, and built an altar for the Lord.





15- Abram in the Land of Egypt

(Genesis 12–13)

Abram departed with his wife and his nephew Lot, toward the south, along with their sheep and their men. Then, there was a drought, and the rain has ceased for several months, resulting in a severe famine. As was customary, Abram talked with his wife, as he loved sharing everything with her saying:

-”Sarai, where do you think we should go next that our sheep and cattle are dying from hunger and thirst?”

-Sarai answered, “Wherever you decide Abram.”

-Abram, “All countries around us have severe drought except for Egypt as they have the Nile River”

-”Agreed, let us go to Egypt”

-”However I have my concerns”

-”Why?” He answered, “because of you”

-”Why? You have my complete obedience Abram”

-”You are a very beautiful woman, and if the Egyptians see you, they will inform Pharaoh about you. Then he would kill me to keep you as his wife”

-”So, what do we do?”

-”Say you are my sister, and in fact you are my half sister from my father’s side.”

She consented with his advice, and they moved to Egypt. There, Abram asked the principals at Pharaoh's court to buy food and grains. The principals appeared before the Pharaoh to get his permission to sell food to Abram, and they informed him about Sarai.

Pharaoh requested to meet with Abram, and when he saw Sarai he loved her. He generously gave Abram slaves, sheep, and gifts, thinking he was her brother. Abram became extremely rich. Pharaoh asked Sarai to move into the women’s ward with the rest of his wives in the royal palace. It was a habit for kings to have many wives.

Sarai, on the other hand, was lifting her heart to God and praying. She was certain that His strong hand would intervene. She was Abram’s wife, and she would not accept any other! Her husband had the same faith.



Then, it happened that Pharaoh and everyone in his household were struck with disease. Later, Pharaoh discovered that Sarai was Abram's wife. Right away, he released her and asked them both to leave his land, allowing them to take the riches he had given them. Abram returned to the place where his tent was set between Bethel and Ai.





16- Strife among the Herdsmen

(Genesis 13)

In Bethel, Abram was extremely wealthy, and so was his nephew Lot. Because of their vast number of belongings, livestock, and herds, the land of Bethel was not large enough to contain it all side by side; as a result, strife erupted among each of their herdsmen.

As a peacemaker, Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no quarrel between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are brothers. The whole land is before you, separate yourself now from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right, but if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

Despite Abram's wealth, his heart was filled with love for God's Commandment and the heavenly Kingdom. While Lot on the other hand was occupied with his wealth, flocks, and tents, disregarding the heavenly Kingdom, which explains why Abram, in spite of being the elder; gladly allowed his younger nephew to choose the land of his dwelling.

Lot chose the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the green fertile Jordan plains. However, the inhabitants of Sodom were wicked people who hated God. According to Lot's materialistic mind, the fertile and well-watered plains of the valley caught his eyes, for he believed that it resembled the Garden of the Lord, or the land of Egypt, so he departed from Abram. Abram, on the other hand, enjoyed God's supreme promises, "Look from the place where you stand to the north, south, east, and west. Get up and walk throughout the land, for I will give it to you."

He received a promise that his descendants, who would be numerous, would inherit the land that God had given him, despite not having any children at the time of the promise.

Faithfully, Abram accepted the promise without a doubt, moved his tents, and "went to live by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord."

God blessed Abram, so he lived in peace, and was respected by the neighboring nations and tribes, and by those whom he visited during his journey.





17- The Unique Priest Melchizedek and Abram

(Genesis 14)

It came to pass that invaders from the East, attacked the cities in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. They looted, robbed, and took many captives, including Lot.

When Abram heard about what happened, he did not blame Lot, nor believe that he cultivated the fruits of his greed. Rather, he assembled his three hundred and eighteen men and advised them with the situation, and led them to free the captives, including Lot.

With God's support and Abram's courage, they were able to break into the stronghold of the invaders, who fled before them.

The kings, who were plundered by the invaders, received Abram and honored him. They offered to give him a portion of the recovered goods, which he respectfully declined and returned to them. He believed that the victory was from God, and his role in saving the oppressed should go without any material reward. However, he allowed his men to accept whatever they wished as given by the kings.

The king of Salem (later called Jerusalem) proceeded to offer a thanksgiving sacrifice to the most High God; he was also a priest of God. In a hurry, He built an altar in the valley near Jerusalem.

Abram and all his men knelt in the desert around the altar, while this priest stood to offer a strange offering; which was a cup of Wine and Bread.

This priest, named Melchizedek, blessed Abram, and Abram gave him the tithes of everything. There was no mention again of this priest who offered wine and bread to the Lord in the Old Testament.

This offering was a symbol of the true bloodless eternal sacrifice of the church of Christ in the whole world, which is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.





God revealed to David the mystery of what had happened, so he said about our Lord Jesus Christ, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: 'You are a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'" In the spirit of prophesy, the Psalmist have seen the Lord Jesus Christ as a Divine High Priest.

In summary, this is a brief comparison between the Lord Jesus Christ and Melchizedek as it was reported in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

- a- Concerning the name "Melchizedek," it means "King of Righteousness." (Rom 3:24)
- b- Concerning the job "King of Salem," it means "King of Peace." (John 16:32)
- c- He was a king and a priest at the same time, which was prohibited among Hebrews, since their kings descended from Judah's tribe and their priests descended from Levi's tribe. In Jesus Christ, both functions have been accomplished.
- d- The offering of Melchizedek was unique; it was pointing to Jesus Christ's Sacrifice.
- e- Concerning Melchizedek, we did not know anything about His father, mother, or how His kingdom began and ended. This parallels the Lord Jesus Christ who had no human father, nor a divine mother, without a beginning, and He is eternal.
- f- The Lord Jesus Christ came as a Priest after the pattern of Melchizedek, as if the Levi's priesthood has ended, and is replaced by this new form of priesthood.
- g- If Abram himself gave tithes of everything he had to Melchizedek, who symbolized Christ, he must have believed that Melchizedek is greater than Abram. I wonder why the Hebrews, who pride themselves for being the children of Abraham (Abram), did not submit and believe in the One (Lord Jesus Christ), as their father Abram had?



18- Renewal of the Divine Promise

(Genesis 15)

Abram emerged from that battle victorious, and although we didn't hear that he was afraid, nevertheless, God assured him in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram! I am your Shield and the One who will reward you in great abundance."





God remained close to him, and Abram gradually drew closer and closer to Him. Moreover, when Abram approached God to speak, he conversed with God boldly and with familiarity, without any formalities, saying, "O sovereign Lord, what benefit comes out of the numerous gifts to a childless person, and my heir is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Abram did not ask Him directly for a son to remove his shame, but he reproached God by questioning the merits of His many gifts to somebody who is childless, and without an heir.

God's dealing with Abram gave him the familiarity to speak to Him freely with an open heart that he became to be known as "the friend of God".

God's answer to him was, "This man will not be your heir, but instead a son who comes from your own body will be your heir." The Lord then took him outside and said, "Gaze into the sky and count the stars – if you are able to count them!" Then He said to him, "You may be able to count your descendants." Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord considered his response of faith as proof of genuine loyalty.

The Lord disclosed to Abram the sign of salvation for all the nations. In that day, He made a covenant with Abram saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River."

Many years passed, during which Abram and Sarai awaited God's promise to grant them a child, although; He promised them with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the sea shore.



19- Hagar, the Maidservant of Sarai

(Genesis 16)

Sarai felt that the years were passing her by, and she had advanced in age without bearing a child.

While discussing God's promise with her husband, Sarai told Abram, "Surely, God will do as He promised. However, I feel that it is impossible for me to bear a child in my old age since the Lord has prevented me from conceiving. There is no way to realize God's promise, unless you take my young Egyptian maidservant Hagar as a wife for a while, and the child she gives birth to would be considered a son for you and me."

Abram did what Sarai suggested to him, and indeed Hagar became pregnant.

Unfortunately, Hagar started to despise her mistress after conceiving, and Sarai felt that she had been belittled in her servant's eyes.

Sarai blamed Abram for what happened, and Abram told her that Hagar was under her authority, and she can do as she pleases. Therefore, when Sarai treated Hagar harshly, she ran away and left them.

The Lord's angel found Hagar near a water spring in the wilderness of Paran, the spring that is along the road to "Shur" or "Sur," which is the caravan's route in the desert. She might have been on her way back to Egypt, her native country.

The angel of the Lord told her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her authority."

He also said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants, so that they will be too numerous to count."

Then the Lord's angel added, "You are now pregnant and are about to give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your affliction."

It was not possible for Hagar to return to Sarai and Abram, or to give birth to a son, until she met the Lord's angel at the spring along the road to Shur. The angel of the Lord symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ, who came down to us in our arid



wilderness to meet us at the waters of Baptism (the spring), which became our refuge "Sur," to divert us to the heavenly Canaan instead of returning back to Egypt (i.e. loving the world).

Let us cast out Hagar from our place for a while, (i.e. any foreign thought), let us deal with it harshly until it straightens out and transforms our mind into pure and faithful minds seeking righteous life.

Hagar delivered her son and called him "Ishmael" as the Lord's angel said. The name means, "God has heard," and Abram called him the same name, because he considered that God has heard him, and gave him an heir. He didn't know at the time that Sarai would later bear a son for him.

Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, and was 100 years old when Isaac was born.







20- God's New Covenant and the Circumcision

(Genesis 17)

About 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, God appeared to Abram. He was 99 years old at that time, and God reassured him about His earlier promise, "This is My Covenant with you: You will be the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you fruitful and multiply in abundance, and turn you into nations."

Then God told him that his name no longer is "Abram," instead it would be "Abraham," which means "father of a multitude of nations" and his wife, he must no longer call her "Sarai," but "Sarah".

The story of God with humankind is a story of continuous and renewed promises, through which God reveals His love for mankind, and His longing for humans to return His love with their love.

God told Abraham also, "This is My Covenant that you and your descendants after you must keep: Every male among you must be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskins. This will be a reminder of the Covenant between you and Me. Throughout your generations, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised. The sign of My Covenant will be visible in your flesh as a permanent reminder. Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin will be cut off from his people; he has failed to carry out My Covenant."

The change of the names of Abram and Sarai happened at the same time with the circumcision as a sign for this complete renewal.

Let us hope that we, who accepted the spiritual circumcision by the Holy Spirit in the water of Baptism, will continue to strive to remain spiritually circumcised in all our organs and in our lives, so we can enjoy the Divine promise, and remain in an eternal Covenant with God.

For the first time, God openly reveals that the heir to Abraham would be from his wife Sarah, saying, "I will bless her





and will give you a son through her. I will bless her, and she will become a mother of nations, kings of countries will come from her!"

Abraham thought that the promise was fulfilled through the son of Hagar. However, although God blessed Ishmael, He did assure Abraham that the promise was for Isaac from Sarah.

Abraham could not understand that declaration, and fell on his face laughing, and thinking in his heart, "Is it possible for a 100 year old man to have a son? Is it possible even for Sarah to bear a child at age 90?!"

His laughter was not a sign of lack of faith, rather his amazement with God's plan for him, to grant descendants to an old man in his hundredth year, or his barren wife at the age of ninety. Falling on his face in thanksgiving to God is the proof of Abraham's faith.

Abraham and Sarah treasured this promise in their hearts. They understood that God would give them a child from whom the One, who would bless all the nations of the world, would come. This is our Lord Jesus Christ, who came from David's descendants, of the tribe of Judah, the grandson of Abraham and Sarah.



21- The Fulfillment of the Divine Promise **(Genesis 18-19)**

After some time has passed, it happened around noon time that Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent under a big tree by the oaks of Mamre. He was watching for any stranger who might pass by, to invite him over to eat, as he was accustomed to do every day.

Three men passed by him, and he didn't realize that they were the Lord and two of His angels.

Abraham bowed down to the ground before them, and invited them to stay with him. He rushed to Sarah, asking her to prepare food for the strangers. Immediately, with great joy she began to prepare a meal for their guests.

The following dialogue took place, which Sarah could hear from inside the tent:

- Where is Sarah your wife?

- She is inside the tent.

- I will return to you after one year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.

When Sarah heard this, she laughed because she and Abraham were advanced in age, and she considered it impossible for her to give birth.

The Lord said, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything impossible for the Lord?"

Sarah got scared, and denied it saying, "I did not laugh."

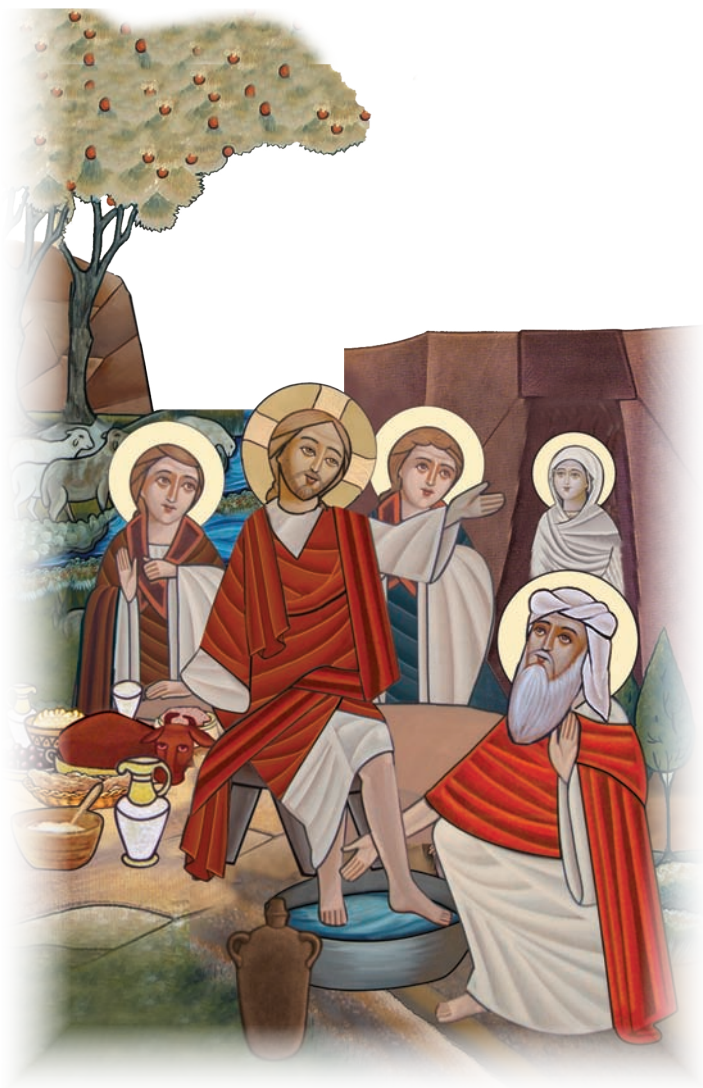
But the Lord said, "No! You did laugh."

Because Abraham was returning God's love with love, God spoke to him as a friend. God said, "Should I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? After all, Abraham will surely become a great and a powerful nation, and all the nations on the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using his name?!"

God explained to Abraham the conditions at Sodom and Gomorrah, saying, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so blatant that I must go down and see if they are as wicked as the outcry suggests. If not, I want to know."



After this conversation, the two angels headed to Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. Abraham approached the Lord and with gentle love and tenderness wondered saying, "Will You sweep away the godly along with the wicked? Far be it from You! Will not the Judge of the whole earth do what is right? Will You forgive the place if You find fifty godly people in it?" God answered him, "Yes, I would spare the whole place for the sake of fifty godly people."





Abraham began to plead on behalf of the cities attempting to lower the number of godly people required to spare the place. Finally reaching ten people needed for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah, and lovingly, God agreeing to Abraham's requests. Unfortunately, the two cities did not have ten godly people. The conversation ended, and Abraham retreated to his tent and grieved over the corruption of the people.

The two angels entered the house of Lot, and told him and his family about the destruction that was about to take place in these two cities. In the early morning, the two angels, Lot, his wife, and his two daughters fled the city. The two angels asked them to move fast, and warned them not to look back.

Suddenly, the sky rained fire and stones on Sodom and Gomorrah, and loud screams could be heard, and no one escaped. In spite of the angels' warning, Lot's wife looked back, and immediately, she turned into a pillar of salt and died. She became a lesson to all those who do not flee from evil.





22- Abraham's Sons: Isaac and Ishmael

(Genesis 21)

When our father Abraham turned 100 years old, God fulfilled His promise to him.

Sarah gave birth to a son, so they held a great feast. Their son was named Isaac, which means "laughter". This was because Sarah laughed inside the tent when she heard that God would give them a son in their old age. For that reason she said, "God gave me laughter and everyone who hears will laugh with me".

Previously, Abraham had another son called Ishmael from Hagar the Egyptian maidservant. Ishmael, 14 years old at the time, was angry when he found out that Isaac is the only heir to their father. This made Sarah worried, and so she asked Abraham to send Hagar and her son away because she did not want any relationship to form between Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham was saddened by Sarah's request to expel Ishmael his son. However; God spoke to Abraham reassuring him about the boy and the maidservant; and to listen to whatever Sarah tells him because it is in Isaac that his offspring will be reckoned. God promised to make the son of the maidservant into a nation also because he is Abraham's offspring.

Early the next morning, Hagar and her son Ishmael left Abraham's tent. Abraham gave them water and bread for the trip. When the water ran out, Hagar was concerned for her son lest he may die of thirst, so she started crying. The angel of God appeared to her and said, "Fear not, Hagar, for your son will become a great nation."

Ishmael grew stronger and became a hunter in the wilderness.





23- A Sacrifice of Obedience and Love

(Genesis 22)

How much was Abraham and Sarah's joy with Isaac; whenever they looked at him they remembered God's promise to establishing a great nation in number out of their descendants, as many as the stars of the heaven and the sands of the sea.

Their lives were filled with joy and peace, especially since Isaac came as God's gift to fulfill His Divine promise to them; in addition, Isaac was so obedient, devout and loving to God and his parents.

Sarah was unable to bear his absence. But, it happened once that Isaac went away for about a week with his father Abraham, and upon their return, Sarah noticed that they both looked extremely jubilant, and seemed like angels walking on earth. Despite her old age, she ran to greet them.

She asked Abraham, "Where have you been? Why were you gone for such a long time? And what is the reason behind the happiness and cheerfulness of your hearts?"

Abraham said to her, "The Lord appeared to me at night while I was sleeping and said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love and go to the mountain that I will show to you, and there you will sacrifice him as a burnt offering.' I did recognize the voice of my wonderful Friend, the Lord Himself. I did not question how His promise of giving me multitudes of descendants would be fulfilled.

I believed that He was able to raise him from the dead and return him to me alive."

Then Abraham proceeded to tell her how he woke up early in the morning, strapped the wood, prepared his colt, and left with Isaac his son and two of his young servants. They all kept walking together for three days, then Abraham saw the sign that indicated the spot of offering his son as a burnt offering on the mountain of Moriah.

Sarah was following his story attentively with all her feelings and emotions, but in spite of her great love to her husband





Abraham and her complete obedience, she did the unusual, by interrupting him to say:

"Why did you not ask me about this matter? Is Isaac not my own son too?"

Abraham responded, "You know, I hide nothing from you. I even discuss all things, and listen to you just as you listen to me. However; this matter was coming from the Lord, who is above you and me."

Sarah, "Maybe I wanted to go with you and participate in what God wanted you to do."

Abraham, "I fulfilled what our Lord asked me to do!"

Sarah, "What thoughts and emotions did you experience on your journey to sacrifice your own son?"

Abraham, "I know that the Lord refuses the slaughter of any humans, and He does not accept human sacrifices. Therefore, I was sure that there was another Divine plan that was beyond my comprehension. That is why the Lord filled my heart with peace and confidence. I said to myself, ' the Lord promised me that Isaac's offspring will bless all nations; He is capable of raising him from the dead, and I was sure that he was going to return home alive with me'".

Sarah, "Then, what happened?"

Abraham, "We walked for three days, then we saw the sign from afar."

Sarah, "I wish I would have seen that sign with you."

Abraham, "You can see it in your blessed son Isaac."

Sarah, "Then, what happened?"

Abraham, "Then, I left the two servants and the colt behind, and walked with Isaac, who was carrying the wood needed for the burnt offering. On the way, Isaac asked me, 'We have the rope and the wood, but where is the sheep for the offering?' I replied, 'My son, the Lord will find the sheep for His offering.' We continued walking until we reached the place. We built an altar; I tied my son Isaac as he surrendered to me completely. Then, I held the knife and stretched my hand, but I heard a loud voice."



Sarah, "Whose voice was it?"

Abraham, "That was the voice of the Lord's angel from heaven that told me, 'Abraham, Abraham, do not extend your hand to the boy, and do no harm him because now I know that you fear the Lord, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'"

Sarah, "Did God make you a promise?"

Abraham, "Yes. After I saw a ram nearby and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of my son. The Angel of the Lord called to me a second time out of heaven. He said, 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as many as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is on the seashore. Moreover, your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'"





24- Sarah's Burial Place

(Genesis 23)

Sarah died at one hundred and twenty-seven years of age; all of these years were fruitful and joyful in the Lord. She died in Kirjath Arba that is Hebron in the land of Canaan.

She shared everything with her husband Abraham in all his days of struggle. She obeyed him, carrying all hardships with him, and accepting all divine promises with him with great joy.

It appears that Abraham was away from his tent during her final moments. He heard the news upon his return, so he stood before her, recalling the decades they shared, especially since she was the only member of his whole family to leave with him from Ur of the Chaldeans to live in a foreign land.

He stood by her body, remembering his lifelong partner, and he began to mourn her and weep over her, declaring his feelings of love towards his wife, Sarah.

This is the first time we hear about the elderly, venerated Abraham mourning and weeping. We have never heard of him crying or grieving before that, not when departing from his family at Ur of the Chaldeans, nor during Lot's exile, or his departure for three days to slay his son. Now, he stands in front of the departed Sarah, mourning and weeping.

Abraham told the sons of Heth, "I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying, "Hear us, our lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places."

Then Abraham stood up and in humility expressed his gratitude to their love and bowed to the ground before the people of the land, the sons of Heth.

The sons of Heth were greatly touched by the elderly man, who had lost his wife, so they revealed their love and appreciation to him and their eagerness to present him with the best burial place they can offer. However, he did not take advantage of that love, but in purity of heart, he asked them to accept the price of the burial place and insisted on paying its price.





25- Searching for a Bride for Isaac

(Genesis 24)

Three years after Sarah died; Abraham called his chief servant Eliezer of Damascus, who was in charge of his household. He made him swear to go to the land where Abraham's family was living, to find a bride for his son Isaac. Abraham was hoping that this bride would help his son in the way of the Lord, as was Sarah a helper for him. He told Eliezer, "The Lord will send His angel before you so that you may find for my son the good wife."

Therefore, Eliezer took a group of servants, ten camels, and numerous gifts, and went to Haran. He traveled to the region of Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nahor, and there he set loose the camels and made them kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water from the well.

Eliezer prayed, saying, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. The girls of the city will come to draw water from this well. If it pleases You, let the girl I ask for a drink offers me with generosity, and also offers to give my camels a drink, be the bride whom You have chosen for my master's son."

Before long, a beautiful and gentle girl came and approached the well. Eliezer looked at her with great interest, and as she turned her face to leave the place after she filled her water jug from the well, he knelt in front of her and said, "Please give me of your jug to drink."

The girl replied, "Sure, and I will draw water for your camels too, until they have drank as much as they want."

She gave him the jug with a smile, and quickly began to draw water for the camels.

Eliezer marveled at her reply and wondered whether she was the one whom God had chosen for Isaac.

Eliezer lifted up his heart to God, thanking Him for the speed by which He answered his prayer.

Then, he asked her, "What is your name?" She replied, "I am Rebekah. My father is Bethuel."

Eliezer realized that she was the daughter of Abraham's brother.



The girl said to him, "Come and lodge at our home, for we have enough room for you and your companions to spend the night."

Eliezer thanked God who answered his prayer. He gave Rebekah a golden nose ring, weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists, weighing ten shekels of gold, as a gift.

He told her that he had come from her Uncle Abraham's place. She asked him to come to the house to meet with her family, saying, "We have both straw and enough feed, and room for you to lodge."





26- Marriage of Isaac to Rebekah

(Genesis 24)

Rebekah rushed to her house and told her family about Eliezer, Abraham's servant. Her father was deceased at the time. But when her brother Laban saw that his sister was adorned with the nose ring and the golden bracelets, and heard what had happened by the well, he ran out to meet the man, saying to him, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and I also have a place for your camels."

Then the man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels. Laban provided food to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were in his company, and he set food before them to eat.

Eliezer was impressed by the actions of Rebekah and her family, for what they had shown of great kindness and generosity. So, he had the courage to say, "I will not eat until I have said what I want to say."

When Laban asked him to go ahead, he started to inform Rebekah's household about what happened to his master. He told them about the greatness of Abraham, about the son of his old age who was born from Sarah, about the instructions that Abraham gave him concerning his son Isaac's marriage, and about God's work with him when he got to the well and met with Rebekah. He concluded his speech by saying, "Now, if you will show favor and faithful love to my master, tell me. But if not, tell me as well, so that I may go on my way."

In every step, Eliezer, the chief servant of the house of Abraham, felt God's blessings; he would bow all the way to the ground, offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, who arranged the matter by His own hands.

Everyone also felt deeply that this arrangement had been established by the Lord. Then Abraham's servant brought out gold, silver jewelry, and clothing and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave valuable gifts to her brother and to her mother.

The next morning, when the caravan got ready to move, they said, "We will call the girl and ask her opinion personally." Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Do you want to go with this man?" She answered them, "I want to go." They allowed



her the freedom of choice, and no one forced her to be married to any specific person, regardless!

Rebekah's family asked God on her behalf for her growth and fruition that she may become the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and that her descendants to possess the strongholds of their enemies.

Rebekah left with Eliezer accompanied by her much beloved nurse, named Deborah.

She travelled to meet her bridegroom, Isaac, after having left her family and her father's household. She resembles the church of the New Testament, which has left the heathen world to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as her Bridegroom.

As the caravan drew closer to the house of Abraham, Isaac went out to meet his bride at Beer Lahai Roi, resembling the water of baptism. Isaac loved Rebekah and was comforted after his mother's death.





27- Esau and Jacob

(Genesis 25, 27)

Like his father Abraham, Isaac lived in the land of Canaan with his wife Rebekah, who was barren and unable to bear children. Isaac kept pleading with God about her, and after twenty years, God granted his plea. She gave birth to twin boys. The firstborn was named Esau, and the younger Jacob.

Jacob was a peace-loving farmer, characterized by calmness and wisdom. He was God-fearing and submissive in his obedience to his parents. Esau, on the other hand, was a hunter, who tended to be violent. For these reasons Rebekah loved her younger son, Jacob, more than Esau.

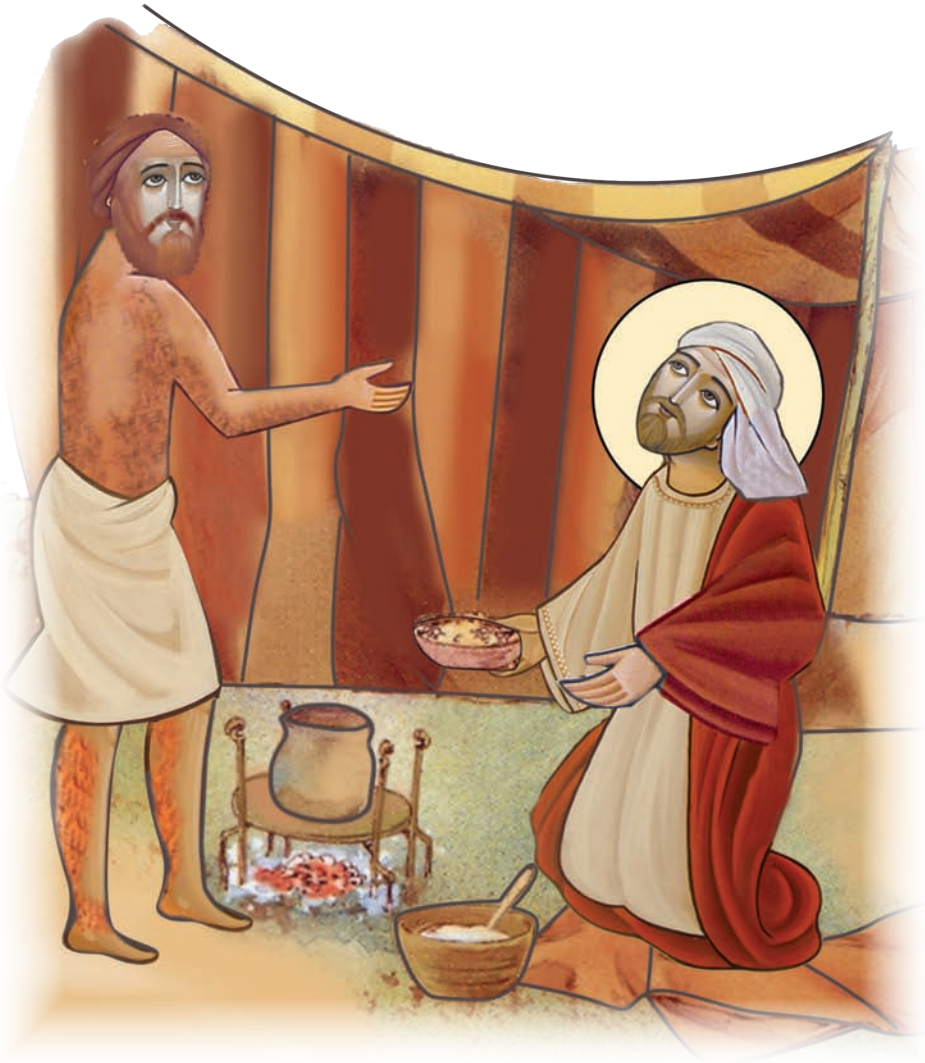
One day, Esau returned from the hunt hungry and weary. He found his brother Jacob preparing a meal of red lentils, so he asked for a bowl of lentil from his brother. Jacob knew about Esau's carelessness, so he responded, "Give me your birthright, and I will give you a dish of lentils." Esau carelessly and foolishly sold his birthright.

Esau appeared as an earthly human, as he had sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a dish of red lentils. Esau's name was called Edom (which means Red), because when he was born he had a reddish skin, as well as, a red head of hair. His carelessness was made apparent when he said, "Look, I am about to die; what use is the birthright to me?" Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob made a mistake in taking advantage of his brother's weariness and bargained with him over the birthright. Yet as a spiritual person, he did not sell his dish of lentils for materialistic hunt or money, but rather, for earning the birthright, which meant being granted its blessings.

If Esau represented the irresponsible person, who squanders his spiritual blessings in return for the living and fleshly lusts, then Jacob represented the person who treasured the spiritual blessings.

Isaac aged and his eyesight weakened. He asked his son Esau to hunt some wild animal, cook it, and present it to him to eat that he may bless him before he dies.





Rebekah heard what Isaac said to Esau, so she called her son Jacob, and asked him to bring her two goats in order that she may cook for Isaac that he may offer him the food, pretending to be Esau, and by that way his father may bless him instead of Esau, who was rude to her. Jacob objected, fearing that his father might discover the matter; hence, a curse might befall him rather than a blessing. But his mother insisted that he would follow her advice. She gave him some of his brother's clothing, and asked him to cover his neck and arms with goat skin.

Jacob carried out his mother's instructions.

Isaac said to him, "Your voice is Jacob's voice. Come near me, that I may feel your hands to verify you are Esau." As he felt that his hands were hairy, as was his neck, he believed that he was Esau. After having finished eating, Isaac blessed Jacob and made him his heir.

After Jacob left, Esau came in with the dish of food. Isaac realized then that he had been deceived, so he was troubled. Esau lifted up his voice and wept, asking his father to bless him as well, but Isaac had already made Jacob his master. He gave Jacob all the blessings, and nothing was left to Esau.





28- Jacob's Ladder and the Open Heaven

(Genesis 28-30)

Rebekah worried about her son Jacob, fearing that his brother Esau might try to kill him, as she had sensed his desire for getting his revenge. So, she suggested to her husband Isaac to bless his son Jacob and advise him to leave and go to his uncle Laban, in Haran. She also asked Isaac to tell him that he may take a wife from among his uncle's young women to support him in his journey of faith, rather than getting married to any of the idol-worshipping daughters of Heth, as his brother has already done.

Jacob followed his father's advice. But, at the end of the first day of his exhausting journey, Jacob wanted to rest, so he put his head on one of the stones and went to sleep. In a dream, he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder, whose top reached the heaven. This ladder is a symbol of the Cross of our Savior, who opened for us the gates of heavens. It also represents the Virgin Mary whom God descended to our world through her.

Jacob heard the Lord God at the top of the ladder saying to him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie is a gift to you and your descendants. All nations of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Behold, I am with you! I will never forget you!"

When Jacob woke up, his heart was full of reverence, so he shouted, "Surely the Lord is in this place! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" He took the stone; he rested his head on, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. He called the name of that place "Bethel," which literally means "the House of God".

As Jacob enjoyed the peace of God through his vision of the ladder, he hurried toward Padan Aram, and there he saw a well in a field and three flocks of sheep lying beside it, waiting for somebody who would lift the large stone that covered that well, that everyone might drink of it.

As Jacob was speaking with the shepherds, he saw Rachel coming with his uncle Laban's sheep. So, he went over and rolled



the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother (Laban). Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. He told her he was the son of Rebekah, so she ran home to tell her father.

Laban came and said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." Jacob stayed with him for a month. He was tending his uncle's sheep with all honesty. Laban sensed that Jacob was becoming indispensable, so he asked him about his wages. Since Jacob loved Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, he requested to marry her, and Laban agreed on one condition; to work for him for seven years as a bride's dowry. The years passed by so quickly because of the love he had for Rachel.

On his wedding day, as the bride's procession was advancing during the marriage ceremony, the bride was wearing a red veil. It was not easy for Jacob to distinguish her face at night, where there was only faint light.

In the morning, Jacob realized that Laban had deceived him, having found himself with her older sister Leah. Jacob was very angry, but as soon as he recalled that he himself had also deceived his own father Isaac, he did manage to calm himself down.

However, Laban made him another offer; for Jacob to work for him an additional seven years as a Rachel's dowry. Jacob accepted, and his wish was fulfilled and he married Rachel. Jacob loved her more than his first wife Leah.





29- Jacob's Return to Canaan

(Genesis 31-33)

The children of Laban envied Jacob and his wealth. They sensed that he had taken all that once belonged to their father. That feeling caused Laban's attitude toward Jacob to change. In the meantime, the Lord told Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

While Jacob was returning to Canaan with his two wives, his children, his men, along with his sheep and livestock, the angels of God met him on the road.

It seems that the number of angels was so large, leading Jacob to call them "The camp of God". As for us, as long as we remain with God, we will be walking with a Divine escort, and the angels who long for our salvation will always accompany us.

Out of human weakness, Jacob feared that his brother Esau might seek revenge. He sent him messengers ahead of the escort, with a letter of reconciliation, hoping that he may turn away from his anger and avoid getting into a fight with his own brother.

Esau, who was also very wealthy, heard Jacob's message then went to meet his brother with four hundred men from his servants. This move severely frightened Jacob, and he was greatly distressed.

Jacob resorted to God in prayer, and considered dividing his escort into two camps. This way, if Esau attacked the first camp, the second would be able to escape. He also decided to offer his brother gifts of love and submission to appease him.

One night, as Jacob was lying down sleeping, a Stranger appeared to him and wrestled with him all night.

By daybreak, the Stranger asked Jacob to release Him, and then He struck him on the socket of his hip. Jacob felt His amazing strength, and realized that this Stranger was from heavens.

Then, Jacob told the Stranger, "I will not let You go, unless You bless me." The Stranger asked him, "What is your name?" He answered, "Jacob". The Stranger told him "No longer will your





name be Jacob, but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed." This incident was one of the Son's appearances in the Old Testament.

God softened Esau's heart, and He kindled in him the brotherly love feelings, and ignited in him the compassion for meeting his brother. Esau ran toward his brother, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they both wept.

Esau also requested that Jacob's whole escort would join his camp and return with him as his guests to the land of Canaan.

Jacob apologized to Esau because his children were young, and his sheep were exhausted, his camp was forced to move much slower. He asked Esau to move ahead of them. So, Esau suggested leaving some of his men for support and to guide him, but Jacob declined.

The first thing Jacob did when he returned to the land of Canaan was to build an altar to the Lord.





30- Job the Righteous

(Book of Job)

In the days of the forefathers, most probably in the days of Abraham or his grandson Jacob, there was a man who was not a descendant of Abraham, but he was God-fearing individual. He used to offer daily sacrifices on his behalf as well as his children's, so they would have a pious life, and God would forgive them any of their unintentional wrongdoings.

As Job has loved the purity and chastity, he never looked at any girl or any woman in an evil way. He loved poor people, and considered himself as a father to them. He used to welcome and host the strangers in his home.

In a meeting with God, and without perceiving His glory, the devil talked to Him about Job.

The devil complained about Job's God-fearing traits, claiming that they were induced because of the abundance of gifts God had granted him. The devil asked that Job would be made to suffer, and claimed that, if suffering, Job would curse Him as the others have done. So, God allowed him.

The devil planned to strip Job from all his belongings.

Quick and provocative messages came to Job, informing him that all he once owned of sheep and cattle had been robbed. Also, winds blew on the house of one of his sons, where all his siblings, along with their families, were assembled, and as a result all of Job's children and their sons and daughters perished.

During a continuous chain of bitter messages Job was receiving, he kept bowing his head in a submission to God's will. Job said, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. May the name of the Lord be blessed!"

Once again, the devil complained to God about Job, asking Him to permit him to afflict Job in his own body. God allowed him. So indeed, the devil afflicted Job with malignant ulcers from the sole of his feet to the top of his head.

In all that, Job was blessing God and thanking Him, until his wife became angry and complained.



Three of his friends came to visit and console him about these calamities, but instead of comforting him they were about to crush his soul, and disturb his inner peace. They added to his agony and multiplied his pain. They insisted that Job must have committed serious sins unseen by humans but known to God, for this to happen to him.

This is how the human consolation works; it is all vain and worthless!

Job tried to defend himself without any success. At the same time, he was reproaching God who allowed these tribulations to fall upon him and caused so many to misjudge him.

While his friends were determined, that Job confesses his hidden sins that caused him these successive disasters and ask God for forgiveness, God appeared to him.

God did not blame Job for any hidden sins, but posed to him questions intended for him to realize his inability to comprehend God's wisdom or His plan and scheme.

God started to ask Job about the planets, the wind, the clouds and the rain. He revealed to Job in a detailed speech, that He is the One who direct all creations, and He is the One who takes care of them by His Divine Care. Job realized that he was supposed to trust God's supreme patronage, even when he was experiencing these trials and tribulations that seemed unbearable.

Job stopped objecting to what have devastated him; instead, he started very humbly begging God to reveal His wisdom to him, because he was eager to learn.

No matter how great the human wisdom is, as humans we can't comprehend God's mind, or understand His plans concerning His eternal life.

Job's attitude had changed; he stopped arguing with God as if he was so knowledgeable. On the contrary, he admitted that he needed God to explain to him what he didn't comprehend. He never stopped asking God to grant him understanding. He was meekly requesting to be made familiar with the Divine Truth.

Job no longer desired to engage in dialogues or argument with God any more. Instead, he requested to be allowed to sit by His feet and learn from Him about His undisclosed Divine Ways. He concluded that it is hard for the human thinking to reason





God's love and plan especially when it comes to pain. God, who allows it to happen, is the only One who knows the limits which suits each individual.

For this reason, it is proper for the believers to put their trust in the Word of God and His Love.

Although, God had spoken to Job with firmness (harshness), He is the One who offers the true consolation, and if He allows the tribulation, He will also provide the way out. If He allows the wounds, He will also provide the healing. He also will glorify the ones that prevail over trials.

Job displayed in his answers to God, a wonderful submission, and God revealed Himself to him.

As soon as this judgment was over, God did not leave Job to die in the midst of his pain, but He granted him gifts beyond what he could have imagined. He gave him double what he lost from belongings, and as many as he lost from sons and daughters, because those who departed are living at God's place.

By the end of Job's life story, God wanted to indicate that He likes to see people who are pleased with God's gifts and enjoying them, as long as, their eyes are fixed on Him and their hearts are offering thanksgiving sacrifice and praise.

God did not only absolve Job, but He made him a mediator for his friends. He became a symbol to our Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator for all humanity, which has resisted Him.

Sometimes, God's action might seem strange, it could startle the humans! Although, God had blamed Job in His personal dialogue with him, and showed him how he was incapable of understanding God's power, wisdom or planning, He did glorify him before his friends who opposed him, and considered him a mediator between them and God Himself.

Job was consoled by this encounter; he knelt before God on the dirt in a true humility. His soul rejoiced, saying, "I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen You!"

By this way, the devil's hope in Job's fall was completely wiped out.





31- Joseph, Son of Jacob

(Genesis 37)

Jacob had twelve sons, his youngest was Benjamin, and Joseph was his second youngest son from his wife Rachel who had been barren for a long time.

All of them were shepherds, and they had lots of livestock.

Joseph loved being a shepherd since his childhood; for he loved the animals and birds as well as nature.

He saw his aging father sitting under the shade of a tree, and rushed to him to talk, because he liked the gentleness in his father's voice and loved to listen to his advice, and learn the wisdom from his words. His father smiled and leaned towards him and hugged him, while saying, "What can I do for you my son, Joseph? I'll give you a surprise gift tonight." Then, he kissed him.

At night, while the twelve brothers were sitting inside the tent, his father Jacob presented him with a gift, saying, "You are an obedient son, here is a token of my love for you!"

In a deep resentment, his older brothers looked at Joseph and his gift.

One of them whispered, "A gift! Our father never gave us any gifts!"

Another one whispered, "He is spoiling Joseph and corrupting him."

A third one said, "Is this fair? Why is he the favorite?!"

Their looks at him expressed a deep desire for retaliation, which Joseph was unaware of at the time.

He bashfully thanked his father Jacob, and didn't open the gift. But his father insisted that he open it. It was a surprise; it was a colored tunic! It is an attire worthy of a responsible person or someone with authority!

One of the brothers said, "We tire all day long in shepherding and we wear rough clothing, while little Joseph is to wear a colored tunic. How unfair this is!"

His brothers envied him, while he loved them and kept serving them.





32- Two Dreams

(Genesis 37)

When Jacob used to sit down together with his sons, the ten older brothers used to give their backs to Joseph, they couldn't stand seeing his face. But, he loved them and enjoyed their company.

He innocently told them, "Yesterday, I had a dream, which was so vivid. It was the harvest time, and we all were in the field binding sheaves. Suddenly, my sheaf rose up and stood upright, and your sheaves surrounded my sheaf and bowed down to it!"

On another night, he told them, "I had another dream."

One of them answered him, "We don't want to hear anymore about your dreams!"

But, his father said, "Tell us about that dream."

He said, "I have seen the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowing down to me!"

His brothers got very angry with him, saying, "What do you mean? We will all bow down to you?"

His father was also irritated, and said, "Do you mean that I, your mother (Leah), and your brothers will actually bow down to you?"

He said, "My father, I don't mean that, but I am just telling you exactly what I have seen in that dream."

His older brothers couldn't tolerate him any longer, so they conspired among themselves to get rid of him.

One day, Joseph and his brother Benjamin were at home while their ten brothers were working at a very far field. His father Jacob asked him to go and find them to check on their welfare and give them some food. With loving attitude, Joseph went to look for his brothers. When he finally found their location, he rushed happily to meet them.

When they saw him coming from a distance, they said, "Now, it's our chance to get rid of that boy with dreams!"

One of them was heard saying sarcastically, "Here is the master of dreams!"





Each one looked to the other, and then one of them said, "This chance can't be wasted. What are you waiting for? Let's kill him and get rid of his troubles."

Reuben, the eldest, begged them saying, "No, we don't kill him. Let us throw him, for a while, into this cistern that is here in the wilderness, he'll learn a lesson he'll never forget. But, we shouldn't shed his blood!"

Once Joseph came close to where they were, they jumped on him and took away his colored tunic, without saying a word. Then, they took him and threw him into the deep well.

Then, they sat down to eat the food Joseph brought for them.

He started to beg them, from the bottom of the cistern, to release him, but they totally ignored his tears and bitter cries. However, he heard Judah suggesting to the others to sell him for 20 silver pieces to merchants on their way to Egypt, and it seemed that they all agreed on that.

They lowered a rope for him to catch, and they pulled him up. Reuben was not with them while Joseph was being sold to the merchants. Joseph found himself among caravan's people with camels. His brothers handed him to those people saying, "Here is the boy; he is handsome and healthy, you can take him as a slave to serve you." The caravan's people gave them the 20 silver pieces, his price. In the meanwhile, Joseph's tears were streaming down his face.

His brothers went back to their father Jacob, and showed him the torn colored tunic after tearing it apart, and staining it with animal's blood. They said to him while pretending to cry, "We found this. Look, is that our Brother Joseph's tunic?"

Jacob answered, "It is my son's tunic! Where is my son Joseph?"

They said, "Apparently, a wild animal has attacked and fatally mauled him!"

Jacob became very bitter, he tore his clothes, and began to cry and scream, "My son Joseph is not here anymore!"



33- Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

(Genesis 39)

When the merchants brought him to Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard. In Potiphar's house, he learned the ancient Egyptian language “Demotic,” as well as, the Egyptian traditions.





Joseph worked hard in Potiphar's house and with diligence. God gave him grace in the eyes of his master who liked him very much, and put him in charge of his entire household.

Once Potiphar asked him, "How come you succeed in everything you do?"

He answered, "It's God's gift, He is the One who grants us the blessing and success!"

One day, Joseph was shocked when his master's wife grabbed him, while nobody else was in the house. She demanded him to do an evil act with her. But right away, while she was pursuing him, he left his outer garment in her hands and ran outside.

Then, while she was still holding his outer garment, she started screaming for help, and accused him with attempting to force her to do evil with him. Her husband, who believed her, got very angry with Joseph.

Joseph was placed in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. But the Lord was with Joseph, and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.





34- The Dreams' Interpreter

(Genesis 40-41)

Joseph was imprisoned unfairly, and didn't find anybody to defend him because he was a foreign slave. But his God was with him; He gave him peace and joy; and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. The warden put all the prison's administration under Joseph's care. The Lord was with him and whatever he was doing the Lord blessed it.

Then, it happened that Egypt's Pharaoh was offended by his chief cupbearer and his chief baker, so he imprisoned both of them in the same jail where Joseph was confined.

One day, Joseph noticed that both of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and the chief baker looked troubled, so he asked them about the reason. They told him that they were concerned by dreams each one of them had. Joseph told them, "Tell me about your dreams and by God's help I'll interpret them to you."

The chief cupbearer saw in his dream a vine with three branches, and as it was budding, its blossoms opened and its clusters ripened into grapes. So, he took the grapes, squeezed them into the Pharaoh's cup, and put the cup in Pharaoh's hand. Joseph told him, "The three branches represent three days, after which Pharaoh will reinstate you as his cupbearer." Joseph requested that he would mention him to Pharaoh when he returns back to his work.

The chief baker saw in his dream three baskets of white bread, made for Pharaoh, on his head, but the birds were eating the bread from the top basket. Joseph told him that the three baskets represented three days, at the end of which his head was to be cut off and hanged on a pole and the birds would come and feed on his flesh.

All Joseph's interpretations were fulfilled in time. The Pharaoh cupbearer was so happy, but soon he forgot about Joseph. However, God never forgot Joseph in the prison.

After two years, Pharaoh the king of Egypt had two dreams of his own. All Pharaoh's wise men couldn't interpret the dreams.



Pharaoh was troubled, he called on all Egypt's magicians and wise people and told them about his two dreams, but none of them could interpret them.

Finally, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph. He mentioned him to Pharaoh, so the Pharaoh called for Joseph from the prison. After Joseph cut his hair and changed his clothes, he appeared before Pharaoh.

The Pharaoh told Joseph that he saw in a dream that he was standing by the river, then seven fat and fine-looking cows were coming up out of the river, but later seven other cows came up after them; which were scrawny, very bad-looking, and lean. The lean, bad-looking cows ate up the seven fat cows. Then, he also saw in a second dream seven heads of grain growing on one stalk, full and good, then seven heads of grain, withered and thin and burned with the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads of grain.

Joseph explained to the Pharaoh that both dreams carried the same meaning. There would be seven years of great abundance throughout the whole land of Egypt. But, these would be followed by seven years of famine, during which all the abundance would be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The dream was repeated to Pharaoh, because the matter has been decreed by God, and God would make it happen soon. Joseph advised the Pharaoh to build vast storage facilities to gather as much as possible of grain during the years of abundance to support the country during the years of famine.

The Pharaoh was pleased with Joseph, and told him, "You are blessed by God's Spirit, you are a wise man, and you'll make a plan to save the country during the famine years. You'll live with me in my palace, and ride a royal chariot. You will oversee my household and all my people will submit to your command. Only I, the king, will be greater than you. I am sure that you understand God's plan, so do whatever you see proper!"





35- Joseph's Meeting with His Brothers

(Genesis 42-45)

God granted Joseph wisdom, so he managed to build huge storage tanks to hold the entire grain surplus, while he maintained a disciplined approach during the time of abundance. So, when the famine began, the people of Egypt rejoiced and appreciated Joseph's wisdom, since they had accumulated all that grain to provide for the country's needs through the duration of the famine.

Joseph anticipated that because of the famine, his brothers would be coming to buy wheat from Egypt. Indeed, once they ran out of Jacob's stored grain, they all came to buy wheat from Egypt, but they left his brother Benjamin behind at home with his father. They all knelt to the ground before Joseph without recognizing him. Although, he recognized them, he showed them little attention, and asked them about their father and their brother. He was comforted by learning that both of them were doing well. But he never revealed his identity to them.

Joseph pretended that he was suspicious of their intentions! He told them, "You are spies, who have come to see if our land is vulnerable!" He placed them in jail for three days, and on the third day Joseph said to them, "Do as I say and you will live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, leave one of your brothers (Simeon) confined here in prison while the rest of you go and take grain back for your hungry families. But you must bring your youngest brother (Benjamin) to me. Then your words will be verified and you will not die."

The orders were given to fill their bags with grain, and to return the money each man paid to his own sack.

In the middle of the road, when one of them opened his sack, he discovered his money inside. The other brothers found the same thing in their sacks. They were all frightened, believing that Pharaoh would certainly think that they were all thieves. However, they didn't know what to do, so they just continued their journey back to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan with the wheat and the money.





Jacob was happy with the wheat, but he was deeply saddened when he heard from them that the Egyptian ruler was suspicious about them, and that he held Simeon as hostage until they return to him with Benjamin.

When they ran out of wheat, they had to return again to Egypt with Benjamin in their company. Jacob didn't want to let Benjamin go with them, but Judas intervened and assured his father that he would be responsible for Benjamin's safe return to him. Then, Jacob allowed them to take Benjamin with them.

The nine older brothers along with Benjamin came back to see Joseph carrying with them the returned silver, in addition to new silver to buy grain with, as well as a special gift. They all stood before him, but Joseph requested that they all be brought to see him at his own home.

They prepared their gift, and once they entered the house, they knelt to the ground before Joseph. He asked them how they were doing, and asked about their aging father and whether he was still alive.

When Joseph looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, he was overcome by affection and was close to tears. So he left them and went to his private room and wept there. Then he washed his face and returned to his brothers.

Joseph prepared a big banquet for his brothers, including Simeon. They were very happy with his hospitality, although to their surprise Benjamin was being served food portions five times as much as the other brothers were.

When morning came, the brothers and their donkeys with their sacks full of grain were sent off with another trap Joseph had planned. They were not very far from the city, when Joseph told his chief servant and his men to pursue them, to look for his missing silver cup he used to drink from.

When the men overtook them on horsebacks, they accused them with stealing their master's silver cup. The brothers were surprised and knowing that they were innocent, they asked them to search their sacks. The men started searching the brothers' sacks, until they found the cup in Benjamin's sack. They all tore



their clothes! So Judah and his brothers came back to Joseph's house. They threw themselves to the ground before him. They didn't know what else they were supposed to do! Joseph told them that they all had to go back in peace to their father Jacob, but leave Benjamin behind, because his silver cup was found in his sack.

Then, Judah begged Joseph saying "Please let your servant remain as my lord's slave instead of the boy. If I return to my father and the boy is not with us – his very life is bound up in his son's life and he will die, because he loves him very much!"

Joseph insisted that Benjamin would stay with him, while the rest of the brothers declared that they couldn't possibly go back to their father without Benjamin.

Joseph was no longer able to control himself before all his attendants, after he realized that his older brothers now have real good hearts. So he shouted, "Make everyone go out from my presence!" No one remained with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. He wept loudly, and told them, "I am your brother, Joseph! Is my father still alive?!"

His brothers were terrified and didn't utter a single word. Then, he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be upset and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here, it is not you who sent me here, but God!"

They were very puzzled, and felt very sorry for what they had done to him in the past, and they all knelt before him. Joseph, however, asked them not to do so, because his heart was filled with joy for finding his own brothers, especially Benjamin.

Then he threw himself on the neck of his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck too.

He kissed all his brothers and wept before them.



36- Jacob's Journey to Egypt

(Genesis 46)

How eager was Joseph to see his father, and for his brothers to leave Canaan and move to Egypt. He sent his chariots for his father to ride comfortably during this long journey back to Egypt. He offered them lots of food for the trip, suitable garments and gifts, and then sent them off.

With great difficulty Jacob believed the joyful news! Joseph is alive, and rules as second in command after Egypt's Pharaoh. He couldn't wait, but moved quickly with all his family without any hesitation.

In the midst of this exciting event, Jacob heard God's voice telling him, "I am God, the God of your fathers; do not fear the journey to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."

Jacob journeyed with his family (about seventy people), heading southwest. Joseph traveled to the eastern boarder of Egypt to meet his father. When they met Joseph fell on his father's neck and wept for a long time.

Jacob said, "Now I die after I have seen your face, you are still alive."

Pharaoh welcomed Jacob and his grandsons in Egypt, and there they became a large and strong nation within 430 years, where they were known as sons of Israel (Jacob). God was preparing His people to believe in Him and to accept the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah who will save the world.

Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years, in the land of Goshen. Then, when it was time for him to die, he blessed Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim who was on his left, and his left hand on Manasseh who was on his right. His arms were the shape of a cross, the right on the younger boy's head and the left on the older boy's head.

Jacob asked Joseph to bury him with his fathers in the field of Ephron in Canaan.



Jacob blessed all his sons, each one with a special blessing. As for Judah, he saved the greatest blessings; from his offspring would come our Lord Jesus Christ. Jacob told him, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, or a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” This blessing is considered the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise in Eden when He said to the serpent (the devil), “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.”

Joseph closed his beloved father’s eyes after he died, and he embalmed his body as the customs of the Egyptians at the time. After seventy days of mourning, Jacob’s sons carried his body in a great ceremony to be buried in Canaan as he wished.





After their father's death, Joseph's brothers feared his revenge, but Joseph reassured them with compassion saying, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me; but God meant it for good. Do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your children."





The Fourth Time Period

The Rising of God's Special People

With God's Spirit, Moses documented for us how this nation started, and how they received God's Law and lived by it amongst the Gentile nations. Unfortunately, they rebelled against God and disobeyed His laws. He was patient with them and offered the incarnation of Jesus to save the world and open the door for all nations to accept His salvation.

All the events of this period are found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Many centuries passed since God created man. The number of people multiplied, kingdoms and nations developed, many cities were built, and diverse cultures arose.

It's true that few individuals in each nation believed in God, but no one whole nation believed except for the Israelites who were named God's people.

One of the pharaohs realized how powerful the Jews have become in Egypt and suspected that they could turn against him. Therefore, he oppressed them and forced them to work as his slaves.

In the year 1450 B.C., God chose Moses to be His prophet, to free His people from slavery and bring them out of Egypt to the Promised Land by the border of Canaan.



37- The Baby in the River Prophet Moses

(Exodus 1-2:1-4)

Pharaoh stood in his great palace, and watched the construction work nearby of fancy buildings, where huge and heavy stones were being used. But he began to worry; he said angrily, “These workers are Hebrews! They were small number of people when they first came to Egypt 400 years ago, but now they have multiplied and are about to outnumber us. They are indeed my slaves and work very hard for me, but I cannot trust them, for if I am not careful, they will rebel against me and overtake my kingdom.”

Pharaoh met with his noblemen and told them, “Now, the children of Israel exceed us in number and power. Let us deal shrewdly with them before they become a real threat. Let us take away their freedom, and burden them with bitter hard work; so we may remain safe! I am in need of their labor as my slaves, but...”

Very strict orders were given to oppress the Jews with extremely hard work in the planting fields and in the construction of great cities, temples, castles and tombs. They had to make lime bricks to build with, and to carry very heavy stones. The tough taskmasters who were assigned over them treated them with cruelty and made their lives miserable, but they kept growing and multiplied in numbers.

The king of Egypt ordered the two Hebrew midwives, who were in charge of delivering the pregnant Hebrew women, to kill every Hebrew male newborn. However, the midwives feared God and ignored the king's decree.

In those days, there was a woman called “Jochebed” from the Levi's tribe. When she gave birth to a beautiful boy, she hid him with the help of her husband “Amram” and her two other children “Aaron” and “Miriam.”

Living under the threat that her whole family could get killed, she couldn't hide her baby boy longer than three months.

Then, she begged God to save her baby and asked all her family members to gather for her some papyrus reeds from the Nile banks. Then, she weaved the papyrus reeds in the form of a





basket, and they coated its outer surfaces with asphalt and pitch to prevent any water from seeping into it. The finished basket looked like a small boat. Next, she clothed her nursing baby well, kissed him, wrapped him in a blanket to keep him warm, and feeling peaceful.

The mother kept watching for Pharaoh's soldiers, from behind a window, passing by their house, until the road was all clear. Then she carried her baby, and asked her daughter to carry the basket and follow her. They kept walking together until they reached the Nile bank. At that point, the young girl started to understand her mother's plan.

The mother placed the basket on the water among the papyrus reeds, and then she put her baby inside it. She lifted her eyes towards heaven and had a silent prayer. She talked to God through her running tears and her heart's uninterrupted sighs. Water didn't seep into the baby's basket, while he just kept yawning and fell asleep quietly.

The mother wiped her tears whispering, "The king will never find him. He is hidden among the papyrus; he is protected by God's hands!"

In a quiet sad voice, Miriam told her mother, "My mother, I'll stay here with my brother all day, so the birds would not get near him. And, if somebody comes, I'll pretend that I am playing." The mother kissed her young daughter, put her hands around her and hugged her. She left feeling that her daughter, although very young, had a mature heart and mind.



38- The Infant and the Princess

(Ex 2:5-10)

Poor Miriam, stayed alone by the river sitting on a rock for sometime, she was observing her brother intently with all her emotions and feelings.

From time to time, when she was sure that nobody could see her, she would sneak in between the papyrus reeds to check on her sleeping baby brother.

Then, she saw a procession of women, led by one girl; she was Pharaoh's daughter. It was her father who ordered that all the Jewish male children to be put to death. She had the habit of coming to the river shore to bathe. Miriam realized who she was, so she hid away behind the reeds, making sure not to make any noise.

The princess went down the river to bathe, then she heard an infant's cry, and when she looked at where the sound was coming from, she saw his strange-looking basket.

She asked one of her female servants to bring the basket to her. She opened its cover, and found the crying baby. The princess shouted, "Look! It's floating infant! Sure, he is a Hebrew!" The princess took him out of the basket with great joy, she loved him very much, "How lovely and good-looking he is! I'll take him with me to the palace to live with me!"

His sister Miriam noticed the signs of joy on the princess's face. So, she quietly managed to get close to the princess and her female slaves pretending to pay very little attention to the group of women.

Miriam got closer, and said, "Greetings! Is this a nursing infant?!"

The princess answered, "Yes, I found him floating over here!"

Miriam Said, "Do you need a nursing woman to nurse him and take care of him for you? I do know a Hebrew woman who can tend to him night and day."

Miriam bowed down to the princess, while she was trying hard to make the baby stop crying. The princess told her in a thankful tone, "Would you please, go and bring her over to me."



The mother came in a hurry; she bowed down to the princess, and said, "Whatever you ask I will do."

The princess looked at her with a wide smile, and said, "Take the infant and nurse him for me, I'll pay you very well to raise him up. You should love him as if he was your own. When he becomes strong, bring him back to me in the palace."

Then, the princess said, "I'll call him, Moses," which is an Egyptian name meaning: "Picked up from water."

The mother's eyes were filled with tears, and her heart was filled with joy. She praised God who returned her infant back to her, and gave him safety. Miriam also was very pleased with how God have protected her infant brother.

The mother carried her infant and took him back home, there in a small hut made of dried clay bricks.

The infant grew up in that neighborhood. He used to hear the sound of whips in the hands of the Egyptian foremen who were exploiting the Hebrew laborers working under them. He listened to his mother and brothers telling him many old stories about his people. He heard about God's work with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and how Joseph brought all his ancestors here to Egypt. Moses knew also, that once he would get a little older, he had no choice but to be separated from his family and return to the king's palace, as a son to Pharaoh's daughter.







39- A Slave Becomes a Prince

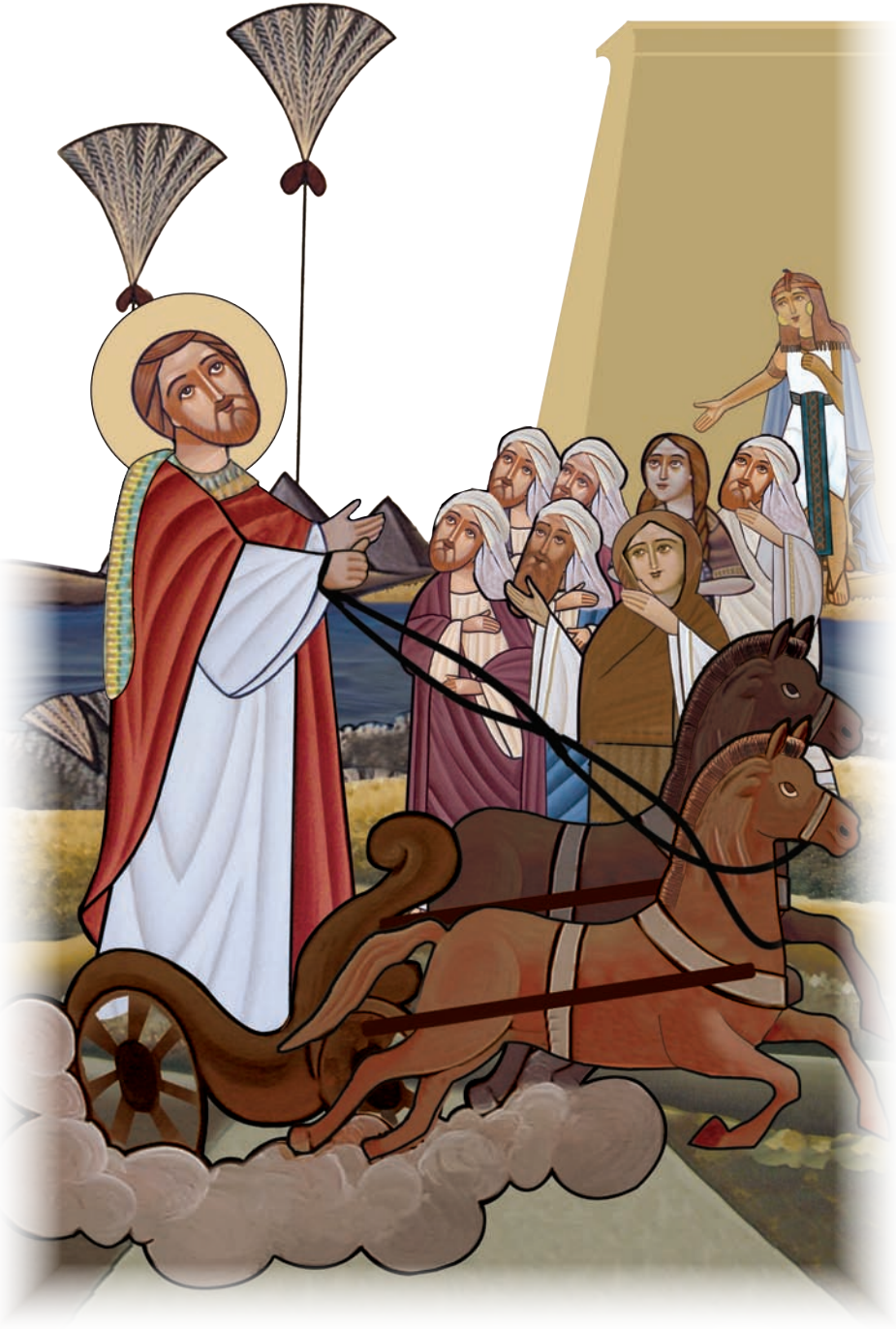
(Exodus 2)

When Moses grew older, his mother Jochebed had to take him back to the royal palace, to become the son of Pharaoh's daughter and be under her care. He would no longer be that simple Hebrew who used to live in a hut, but he would be transformed into somebody who would be highly regarded in his community at that time.

Moses' life as a prince was vastly different from the life he experienced when he lived at his parents' home.

He was taught at the palace's school, while his religious principals were provided by his own mother during the time he was living with her. She told him also about his people and their suffering in Egypt. Moses lived within the palace, however his heart was groaning with his people's cries.

Moses grew up in stature and knowledge, and he was cultured by all the Egyptian wisdom; literature, sciences, philosophy as well as other religions. But Moses never forgot that he was a Hebrew, and that he lived in a hut made of mud among the children of slaves. He chose to worship the Living God, and didn't accept the worship of the sun, the river Nile, or the calf of Apis.





40- Moses Flees from Egypt

(Exodus 2:10-15)

One day, as Moses was alone in the fields, he noted the suffering his people were enduring during their hard labor. He felt the bitterness of the humiliation they experienced. His spirit was troubled in him as he saw, in one corner of the field, one of the Egyptian foremen whipping mercilessly one of the Hebrew slaves. He got angry and couldn't stop himself, but he struck the Egyptian, killing him. Then, Moses concealed the body of the Egyptian in the sand, and returned to the palace with a bitter soul.

The following day, Moses went back to the fields, watching his people. He did see two Jewish slaves fighting each other. He told the aggressor, "Why are you attacking your fellow Hebrew?"

The man replied mocking him and saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us, Oh, Egyptian prince? Do you intend to kill me as you killed that Egyptian, yesterday?!"

Moses left them trembling, he realized that what he had done was no longer a secret, and everybody had heard about it. When the news reached Pharaoh, he sought to kill Moses. So Moses decided to flee from Pharaoh right away. He left the royal palace and the fields of Egypt. He joined a merchant convoy traveling towards the East through the copper mines in Sinai, on their way to the land of Midian.





41- A Fugitive Being Prepared for Leadership

(Exodus 2:16-25)

Moses arrived to the nomadic Midianites tribes; there he sat by a well. Perhaps, he was thinking about his oppressed people whom he left behind fleeing to this foreign land.

Soon, five sisters arrived at well to draw water and fill the troughs in order to water their father's flock. However, few strong and viscous shepherds came and offended the girls and drove them so that they can water their own flock rather than the girls'.

Moses intervened, defended the girls and forced those rowdy shepherds to wait until the sisters' flock has been watered. He knew that they were there first and they were the ones who filled the troughs.

So when the girls returned home early, they met their father Jethro, who was a pagan priest, and a member of a tribe called the Kenites that worked in the copper mines.

Their father was surprised and asked them, "What happened? Why have you come home so early today?"

They said, "An Egyptian man rescued us from the rowdy shepherds, and he actually drew water for us and watered our flock as well!"

He said to his daughters, "So where is he? Did you leave without inviting him to our tent? Go immediately and invite him to eat with us."

Moses went with the girls to meet their father Jethro, and their strong and friendly relationship began.

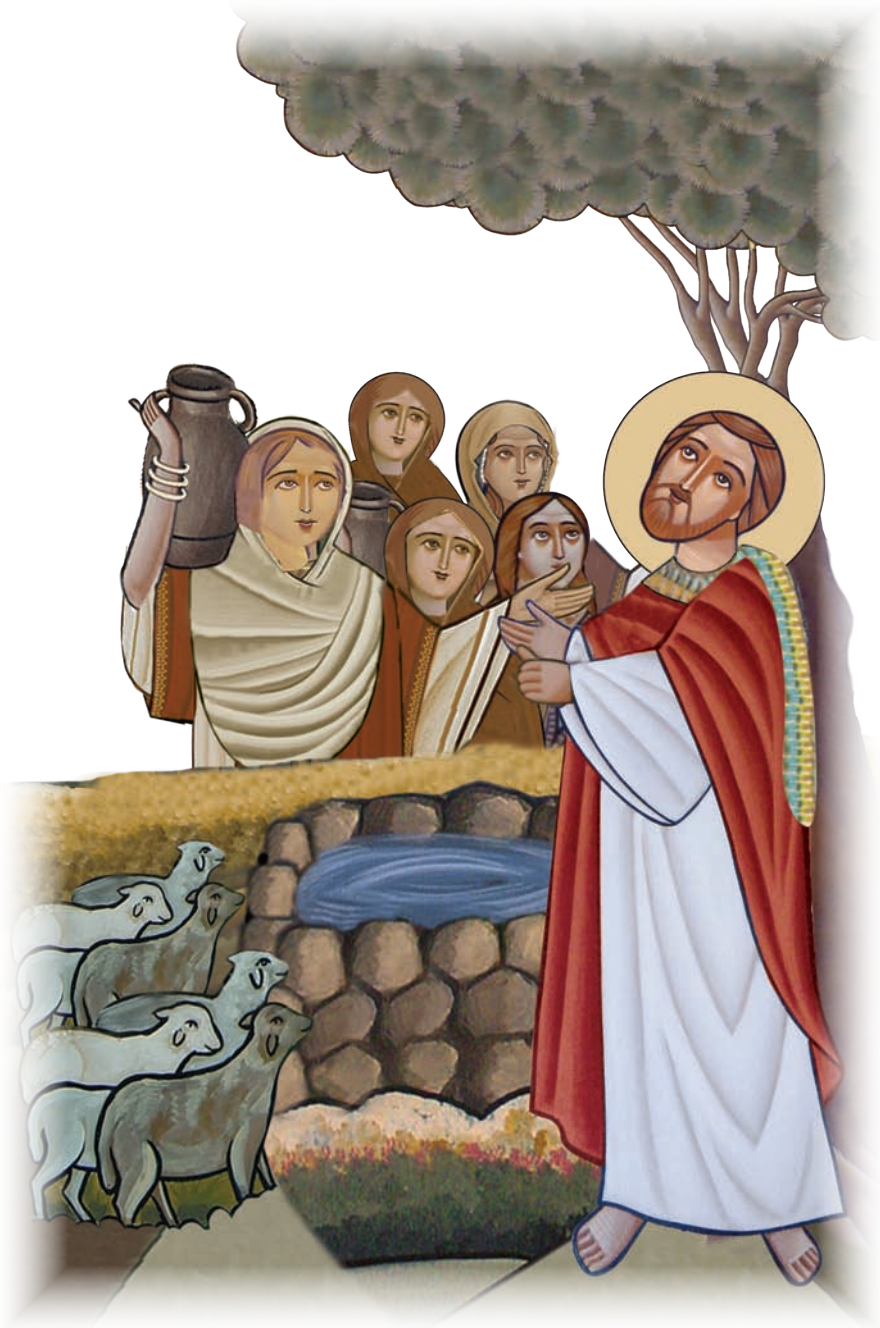
Jethro was pleased when he discovered that Moses was a Hebrew, whose ancestors were shepherds living in Canaan. Jethro invited Moses to live with them, and he gave him his daughter Zipporah as a wife.

Moses was very pleased living in a tent, grazing his father-in-law's flock, and wandering in the desert like his ancestors. However, the zeal in his heart towards his oppressed people who were humiliated in Egypt, was building up day after day.

When Zipporah bore a son, Moses named him Gershom, which means "foreigner," for he said, "I am a foreigner in a foreign land."



During that time, another Pharaoh came to rule Egypt, and it became safe for Moses to return there. While in Egypt, the Jews were in slavery lamenting to God because of their misery.





42- The Burning Bush

(Exodus 3-4:9)

God heard the cries of His people and seen their despair. He heard the hopeless moans coming from the lips of those slaves collapsing in the mud. Every day, few were wounded and others died under the merciless whipping of their heartless foremen.

God transformed this severe hardship into a tool for their revival and salvation. He prepared for them a plan to snatch them from the land of slavery and bring them over to the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. After all, they were the people who worshiped the One Living God, and deserve to get the earlier promises God made with their ancestors.

About forty years had passed since Moses left the palace, and fled to the wilderness to work as a simple shepherd. He lived a quiet life, although his heart was in pain for the suffering of his own people, but he couldn't do any thing to help at that time.

One day, Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, when he led the flock to the side of the mountain of Sinai, (or Horeb). It appears that he was thinking about his people, and their need for a leader to stand up to Pharaoh, and force him to release his people from the bitter slavery. But, where can they possibly find a leader among people that have been crushed by the shame of slavery?!

While he was meditating and praying with all his heart, he saw a very unusual seen, he saw a flame of fire full of splendor coming from within a bush full of thorns. The bush looked ablaze with fire, but it was not consumed!

Moses watched that view in amazement. He thought, "I will turn and draw closer to see this amazing sight." When the Lord saw that he had come nearer to look, God called to him from within the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

Moses answered, "Here I am."

God said,

"Do not approach any closer! Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.



I am the God of your people, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

For I know their sorrows, I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up to a land that is both good and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Quickly, Moses took his sandals off his feet, and fell on the ground in worship. He also covered his face, because he was afraid to stare at God's splendor light shining from within the burning bush.

God continued His conversation with Moses through the bush;

“So now go, I am sending you Moses to Pharaoh, You'll tell him to let My people go to the wilderness, a three-days march, to offer Me sacrifices.

I know that the king will not let you leave easily.

For this reason, I'll raise My hand and strike Egypt. Afterwards, he will let you go.”

Moses was terrified and said, “Who am I to lead them and go to Pharaoh, and relay to him this matter?!”

God answered him, “Surely, I will be with you!”

Moses said, “But, what is Your name? The Egyptians have lots of gods, and they call them by their names, and they draw their strengths from them. That is why I should know Your name. Also, by this way my people would believe that You have talked to me.”

God answered him,

“I am that I am. (Jehovah),

I am God, Yahweh, your people's God.

They will call me Yahweh, which means He is.

Go; tell your people that Yahweh will lead you to Canaan.”

Moses responded, “If we assume that they do not believe me, but say that Yahweh has never talked to you. What would I do?”

The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”



He said, “A staff.”

The Lord ordered him, “Throw it to the ground.”

So he threw it to the ground, the staff started to crawl and it turned into a snake, and Moses ran from it.

But the Lord told Moses, “Now reach out and grab it by the tail.”

So, Moses put out his hand and caught it, and right away it became a staff again in his hand.

God then said, “With this, you would be able to convince My people that I have appeared to you. Look, I'll give you two more signs. Put your hand into your robe.”

So, Moses put his hand into his robe, and when he brought it out, it was as white as snow!

God said, “Put your hand back into your robe.”

So, he obeyed and put his hand back into his robe, and when he brought it out it turned back to normal.

The third sign which God showed to Moses was that He ordered him to take some water from the Nile and pour it out on the dry ground. The water turned into blood.





43- Moses' Fears

(Ex 4:10 - 6:9)

Moses was very troubled, but he trusted God who is able to save.

Moses' fears never ceased, for he had many reasons on his mind to sway him from going to Pharaoh.

He pleaded with God saying, "O my Lord, I am not an eloquent man, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to Your servant. I am not like those in Pharaoh's Palace, who can easily present long convincing speeches. I can't do that. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue!"

The Lord said to him, "Who gave you your mouth? Is it not I, the Lord? So now go, and I will be with your mouth and will teach you what you must say."

But Moses begged, "O my Lord, please... please send anyone else whom You wish to send, anybody but me!"

Then the Lord answered Moses reluctantly,

"What about your brother Aaron? I know that he can speak very well.

So you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And as for Me, I will be with both of you, and he shall speak to Pharaoh.

Now, he is leaving Egypt to meet you, because Pharaoh has died, and it became safe for you to go back. Aaron is coming to find you.

He rejoices when he hears about you, and he shall speak to the people for you. You tell him what to say.

You go now, and remember to take your staff and to do the signs that I have shown you."

Moses took his staff and the flock, and went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "The time has come for me to go back, so that I may visit my relatives in Egypt and see if they are still alive."

Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

Then Moses took his wife and sons and left. On the road, he



met Aaron who searching for him, as God had already told him. Then they both went back together to the land of Egypt.

In Egypt, Aaron informed the people about all what God told Moses. The people realized that God had heard their cries, and they fell to the ground and worshiped God. They felt that God had decided to put an end to their agony and that He shall lead them to Canaan, the land He promised to their ancestors hundreds of years before.

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him, “Release our people, so that they may go for a three-day journey into the desert, in order to sacrifice to the Lord our God and worship Him.”

Pharaoh did not allow the Jewish people to leave, but he said, “Who is your God Yahweh? I do not know any god by that name. Don't expect me to release my slaves that way. Why do you cause the people to refrain from their work? You too should return to your labor!”

Pharaoh expelled Moses and Aaron from his palace, and he called the taskmasters and the slave foremen, and in a storm of rage, he ordered them,

“This unbelievable matter has to be stopped, these people are very lazy.

You have never been able to drive them seriously to work as you should have done. That is why they have ample time to dream up a god of their own.

What about the Egyptian gods?!

Listen to me; from now on, you must no longer give straw to those people to make bricks as before. Let them go to the fields and collect straw for themselves. But you must require of them the same quota of bricks that they were making before.

By this way, they wouldn't have time to waste on stupid matters like these.”

Consequently, the Jewish slave laborers had to spread all over the wheat fields to collect the straw, while their taskmasters were after them with whips to speed up the process.



Without providing the straw to them, the people could not produce the same quota of bricks that they were making before. So, the Israelite foremen went and cried out to Pharaoh, “Why are you treating your servants this way? No straw is given to your servants, while we are told to make the same quota of bricks. We can't do that when we have to collect the straw as well.”

Pharaoh answered them,

“You are slackers! Slackers! That is why you had enough time to think of what is unreasonable about God, saying, 'Let us go sacrifice to the Lord.'

So now, get back to your work immediately!

You will not be given straw, but you must still produce your quota of bricks!”

The angry Israelite foremen went out after their encounter with Pharaoh, and met Moses and Aaron outside the palace. The foremen angrily said to them, “Leave us alone! May God judge you both harshly as you deserve! Look what Pharaoh is doing to us now! This is all because of you! And, you keep telling us that God will set us free!”

Moses didn't answer them, but looked upwards towards heaven, and complained to God saying,

“Lord, why have You caused trouble for this people? Why did You ever send me?

From the time I went to speak to Pharaoh in Your name, he has caused trouble for this people, and You have certainly not rescued them!”

Then, Moses recalled God's promises to His people, and asked Him to support him. Then, he heard the Lord saying, “Now, you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh. He himself will drive My people out of Egypt. I will free them from slavery. I will lead them to the land which I promised them with.”

Moses believed in his heart that what God told him would definitely come true. He recognized that God the Almighty, the Lover of mankind, was the One who was speaking with him. Indeed, he felt God's presence, and believed in His promises, His might and His love!





44- The Ten Plagues

(Exodus 7 - 11)

God asked Moses to see Pharaoh again, to demand that he would release the Jewish people. Moses questioned God's request, he was wondering how God would expect Pharaoh to listen to him, while His own people no longer believed him.

God repeated to Moses the same request, and He explained to him that Pharaoh's heart had been hardened in order for God's glory and miraculous powers to be manifested.

When Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh again, Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three years old. Pharaoh demanded from them a proof, so Aaron threw the staff on the ground and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed and he sent for his magicians and wise men. When they arrived, they in turn, each of them threw his own staff on the ground and each staff also turned into a snake. However, the snake from Aaron staff swallowed all the magicians' snakes. Pharaoh did not pay any attention to that, and refused completely to let the people go to worship the Lord and offer sacrifices.

1- Shortly after, Moses and Aaron met with Pharaoh by the riverbank. Aaron struck the river by his staff, **the water in the Nile River and in all water-wheels turned into blood**. The Egyptians could not drink the river water which turned into blood, while the river water remained as water for the Israelites. The fish died in the river and began to rot. The Egyptians were forced to dig near the river to find some water to drink.

Some of the Egyptians used to worship the river and considered it as their god, others used to worship the crocodiles living in the Nile. The real God showed them clearly that the river and all the creatures living in it were under His control.

The plagues against the Egyptians kept coming in succession. With each plague, the Egyptians would revolt against Pharaoh, who used to concur with the Israelites' requests, but soon would change his mind and harden his heart,





and refuse to let them go to worship the Lord. On the contrary, Pharaoh grew more stubborn and harsh.

These plagues were also directed against the Egyptian gods they were worshipping in Egypt.

- 2- **The river over flew with frogs**, the whole land was covered with frogs, and they entered into the palace of the king including his private bedroom and entered the homes of his nobles as well.

Pharaoh, who forced the Israelites to make the brick from the mud, was punished in a disgusting fashion, where frogs would jump from the mud with their awful smell, and disturbing noise, to enter his own house and invade his dinner table, his bed and his secret storages. By this way, Pharaoh's life had turned into mud and misery! For by the measure he used, it was the measure he received, and more.

Also, the hungry Egyptian lost their appetite, due to the stench of the dead frogs that filled their houses, so everything became unpleasant for the Egyptians. However, for those who trusted God, they enjoyed later on, the wonderful food that came down from heaven for them in the desert.

Finally, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. He told them, "Pray to your God, so He would take away the frogs from my place and from among my people, and I will release the Israelites to go to offer sacrifices to their Lord." However, shortly after, he changed his mind and stopped them from leaving.

- 3- Aaron stretched his staff and struck the dirt on the ground, and right away, **the ground was filled with mosquitoes**, and they covered people and animals.

The Egyptian priests used to care greatly about cleanliness, and guard themselves from getting defiled with mosquitoes and fleas. That was why they were struck by the mosquitoes. The king's magicians tried to create mosquitoes from dirt, but they failed and admitted to Pharaoh that, "The finger of God is behind that."

- 4- **The whole land was filled with flies**, except the land of Goshen where the people of Moses and Aaron lived.



Some of the Egyptians used to worship gods that were supposed to get rid of flies... So, God wanted to show them the worthlessness of their gods.

Pharaoh could not tolerate that plague in his own palace, so he asked Moses and Aaron to go to the desert and pray on his behalf. However, shortly after, he retreated from his promise.

- 5- Each plague was stronger and harder than the prior, a very **terrible plague came down on all the livestock of the Egyptians**, and most of them died. But the livestock in the land of Goshen were safe.

The Egyptians considered number of the animals as holy beings, especially the calf of Apis, in which they believed that the spirit of their god Osiris dwelt. So, by striking the animals, the Egyptians would realize the falseness of their beliefs.

- 6- **Boils and sores broke out and impacted all the Egyptians**, including the magicians and fortune tellers.
- 7- **God brought down very large hail in all the land of Egypt, and fire mingled with the hail and spread below.**

The fire kept growing with the falling of the heavy hail from above, and the hail kept increasing with the spreading of the fire below.

God left nature itself to respond to the evil Pharaoh. It's well known that Egypt's weather in general does not include hail, but against nature, the pagan Egyptians were punished by hail. In addition, what was really surprising, the presence of both hail and lightening (fire) at the same time in this plague. Normally, this combination doesn't occur in nature, but these opposite phenomena were allowed by God's permission as a punishment. By this way, nature managed to silence the arrogant Pharaoh's mouth, and showed him that he lacked all sound judgment and wisdom by resisting God's request.

- 8- **The Lord sent locusts** that covered the whole region until the sky turned dark. No green leaf was left behind on the trees of the Egyptians. The locusts destroyed whatever survived the



hail plague. They consumed the leftover grass and the tree fruits everywhere.

- 9- **A complete darkness was cast over the land for three whole days.** The Egyptians were so afraid to move from their places. They all became prisoners without any shackles or locked gates. On the contrary, the land of Goshen never lost its light, so the Israelites were moving freely in their area.

The plagues started with turning the Nile water into blood, to prove to the Egyptians that God is the Source of man's true life. He is the Living Water, and not their Nile River or any worldly matters. While in the darkness plague, the plague before last, which was considered the last warning before killing their first-borns, they should have realized their own inner darkness, which had occupied their hearts and minds. Their souls were completely lost, since they had refused the Divine Light. They imprisoned themselves in their own homes in the middle of total darkness. Even, the gift of the physical sunrise had been taken away from them, in order to show that their sun god, "Ra" whom they worshipped, was totally incapable of helping them escape the darkness.

God had allowed the above plagues to urge Pharaoh and his people to abandon the worship of idol gods they created for themselves, such as animals like the calf of Apis, and to embrace the worship of the Living God.

After the ninth plague of the darkness, Moses and Aaron stopped their meetings with Pharaoh. They were waiting for God's most serious plague to Pharaoh and his people!

- 10- Concerning that final plague, God had allowed **the killing of all the male first-born of the Egyptians**, from Pharaoh's son to the son of a captive in a prison, as well as the male first-born of animals. This happened in the middle of the night.

The plague of killing the male first-born points to the killing of Satan and his army for us to become members of the Church of the firstborns.



45- The Passover's Lamb

(Exodus 12)

How unwise and arrogant was Pharaoh! God had exposed for him his own weakness, and the weakness of all his counselors and magicians. Nevertheless, he insisted not to let the Israelites go to the desert to worship the Lord and offer sacrifices.

Pharaoh considered it a personal public insult, to be asked to let the Israelites go to worship God and offer Him sacrifices, while Pharaoh was expecting everybody under him to worship Pharaoh himself as a god!

After the first nine plagues, Pharaoh didn't have any other alternative, but to enter his palace and lock himself inside, in order to avoid meeting anybody.

Pharaoh stopped riding his own chariot, to avoid hearing the cries of his own people demanding from him to get rid of the Israelites, to avoid the fury of them and their God.

God spoke to Moses to let him know in advance that He was planning to allow the killing of the Egyptian male first-born; from Pharaoh's family to the house of the poorest. This would happen, even among the animals of the Egyptians.

God asked Moses that each Hebrew household would offer at sundown, a one year old lamb. Then, they would take some of the lamb's blood and brush it on the two side posts and on the top of the doorframe. Since, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness or salvation.

God's instructions were that they would eat the lamb roasted over the fire spiced with bitter herbs, and with bread made without yeast. Also, no one was to leave their homes until the morning, no matter what happened.

In addition, God asked Moses to make sure that they wouldn't take any lamb's leftover outside their homes. This was a symbol for the Church where the holy body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is eaten. The offered lamb was a symbol of our Lord, the One who was crucified for our salvation, and freed us from the slavery of Satan.



God told Moses that this day would become an annual memorial for the Israelites, it should be called, “The Passover Festival.” The people would celebrate it perpetually as a lasting ordinance, once they reach the Promised Land.

God's avenging angel passed through the land of Egypt, and over the homes of the Israelites, and whoever did what Moses the prophet ordered, no harm fell on them.

That night, before sunrise, the sound of screaming was heard coming from all the Egyptian homes, from Pharaoh's palace and from the poorest hut.

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and when they arrived, they found his eyes filled with tears, his heart totally broken, and the men who were surrounding him were all sad and bitter. Pharaoh had a great difficulty talking to them, but he finally said, “Get out immediately from among my people, both of you and all of your people! Take with you all your flocks and your herds, and just leave. Go, worship the Lord! But bless me also.”

Moses and Aaron rushed out of Pharaoh's place. All their people were preparing to leave Egypt in a hurry. The Egyptians too were urging them to move fast, and they offered them whatever they requested from their gold, silver or clothing and all precious items.

They left after 430 years, from the time Jacob (Israel) and his family came to Egypt.

They left in a procession of about six hundred thousand men, in addition to the women and children.

They left on foot, along with their animals and belongings.

They left from a city called “Ramses” on the Eastern borders of Egypt, and headed toward Canaan, through the desert of Sinai.

Many Egyptians insisted on leaving with them and joined their company, after they rejected their idol worship and believed in Moses' Living God.

Those Egyptians were called the Mixed Multitude.





46- Crossing the Red Sea

(Exodus 14: 15-21)

The procession started from Egypt; the Children of Israel felt they could smell the scent of freedom they were denied for a long time. They knew that it would be a long journey through the desert until they would reach the land that God had promised them, Canaan.

When Pharaoh heard that the Jewish people had already left, he felt along with his palace people that they had suddenly lost such a large number of their own slaves. Those slaves' free labor, they had already depended on, for so long, in all of their daily needs and construction projects.

From his best war machines, Pharaoh ordered the selection of six hundred chariots, with its warriors, soldiers, and horses, to re-capture the runaway Israelites, and to return them in humiliation to slavery.

Pharaoh's mighty army moved quickly, and managed to catch up to Moses, Aaron and their people, who were traveling on foot, as they approached the Pi-hahiroth region near the Red Sea.

When the Israelites saw Pharaoh's army approaching, they felt trapped with the sea ahead of them, and mountains to their right and left. They were certain they would be killed or be forced to return as captives in great shame.

The Israelites were terrified and began to scream. They complained frantically that because of Moses, they had been brought into that difficult situation, which would lead them to their demise.

They told Moses, "Have you taken us to die in the wilderness because there were no graves for us in Egypt?"

Look what you have done by bringing us out of Egypt! Haven't we told you before that this would happen? We asked you to leave us alone and to let us remain slaves serving the Egyptians. It would have been much better for us to live as slaves in Egypt than to die here in the desert."

With faith, Moses answered them, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the coming salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."





Moses cried out to God in his heart, but before he could speak one word to God, the Lord comforted him saying, "Why are you crying to Me? Just stretch out your staff, and hold it out over the sea. The water shall divide, and the Israelites will be able to cross through the depths of the sea on a dry land."

God's angel and the pillar of cloud that used to be in front of them to lead their way, moved to the rear behind them, to ensure the Israelites' safety from Pharaoh's army.

The pillar of cloud in the rear separated them from the army of Pharaoh. It gave light to the people in front of it, but brought darkness to Pharaoh's army that was behind it. So the Israelites were moving during the night as if it was daytime, while Pharaoh and his army had to stop.

Moses the prophet stretched out his hand over the sea; and God caused a strong east wind that blew all night and separated the sea water into two halves. In the middle, a crossroad through the sea floor appeared, and the Israelites crossed through the sea on the dry land. They had protecting walls of standing water on both sides!

They were able to walk through it with full confidence and moved over to the other side of the sea.

The Egyptians army rushed to pursue them. But, when they were in the middle of the sea, they felt that the Lord was fighting against them, so they considered retreating. However, after Moses and his people reached the other side of the red sea, Moses stretched out his hands again, and the water returned to its original state burying the Egyptians, all their chariots and horses at the bottom of the sea. None of them survived.

The sea turned into a graveyard for Pharaoh's army, while the people on the Eastern sea shore were celebrating and praising God for granted them victory.

Moses, Aaron, their sister Miriam, and the people beheld the sea which became their bridge to cross over and a graveyard for their enemies. They praised God saying:

"The Lord is my Strength, my Praise, and has become my sacred Salvation,

They (the enemy) sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?"



The prophet Moses led the people in praising God, while his sister Miriam the prophetess lead the women. She danced with timbrel and everybody was singing to God, the miracles' Maker.

Everyone was repeating: "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea!"

The Israelites perceived the sea, the same way we look at the baptismal water. Through it, we cross over from Satan's bondage, to the glorious freedom of God's children. In it, Satan and his powers sink like lead, so we would not perish. Through the baptism, we cross over from grief to praise and happiness with God our Savior.





47- The Bitter Water Becomes Fresh

(Exodus 15: 22-27)

The Israelites praised the Lord who crossed with them the Red Sea and rescued them from Pharaoh's army. Now, they came into the desert of Shur, which was an enormous wilderness.

Right after crossing the sea and experiencing the joys of victory, their happiness soon turned into discomfort and bitterness. Since they became very thirsty and couldn't find any water, although they kept searching for a well for a while. The reason was that they did not follow the familiar route that would have drinking water wells. God was leading them into an unfamiliar path which hasn't been travelled before.

Finally, they found a well full of bitter tasting water. They hurried towards it because the people were extremely thirsty, along with their children, and their animals. But none of them could drink the water because it was too bitter.

The people began to complain to Moses saying, "What are we going to drink?" Moses cried out to the Lord, so the Lord led him to a piece of wood taken from a dead tree which had fallen on the ground. Moses carried the piece of wood, and then he cast it in that water.

The people were astonished as the bitter water turned fresh. It did not just quench their thirst, but they found in it sweetness what they had not experienced before, as it also filled their spirits with joy.

The dry piece of wood was a symbol of the tree of the Cross that enters our grieving hearts, making it a kingdom for the delighting sweet God.

Then, the Israelites went to Elim, and found twelve wells of fresh water and seventy palm trees. That was a symbol of the twelve disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, who provided us with the heavenly water of life, and His Seventy Apostles, who provided us with the spiritual food.

Indeed it was a challenging journey, but it offers to us plenty of joyful experiences!





48- God, the Leader of His People and their Shepherd

(Exodus 16-17)

The procession continued into the arid desert. But, how can Moses provide all these people, whose population was close to two million, with sufficient food?

What would he do if any of them got sick?

Who would make shoes for the kids when their shoes are torn? Or when their feet get bigger?

God was the Leader who provided for them. He gave them what they needed and He never allowed any of them to get sick; so, they never needed a physician or medications, nor did their shoes tear apart or their clothes get old.

St. John Chrysostom described in a very beautiful way, God's care for His people in the desert, when he said:

[(In the wilderness, the Israelites) did not go to the market, but they got their goods for free.

They did not cultivate any land, and they did not use any plows, or cleared the land for plantation, or planted any seeds. They never needed rain, wind, or seasons for agriculture. They never needed any sunlight, moon phases, weather conditions, or anything of that sort.

They never had to prepare the land, grind the wheat, or use a pitchfork to separate the wheat from the straw. They never used a mill or an oven, and they never had to bring home logs or fire.

They never needed baking equipments, or any other tools for weaving, building, or foot-wear making. But the Word of God was all they needed.

They had a table prepared for them, not by a human hand, prepared for them without any effort or labor on their part. For that was the nature of the manna, it was new and fresh, and it would not burden them with any hardship or effort. Similarly, their clothes, their foot-wear and even their bodies, all had alleviated their natural weaknesses. So, their clothes and sandals did not get old with the passage of time, neither their feet swelled, despite their difficult journeys.





It was never mentioned that physicians were among them, nor medications nor anything of that nature. Clearly, every weakness within them had been removed, for it was said: "He also brought them out with silver and gold, and there was none feeble among His tribes" (Ps 105: 37).

The heat of the sun rays did not strike them, for the cloud provided a shade and a mobile shelter that protected their bodies.

They did not need lamps to dispel the darkness of the night, but He was a Pillar of fire for them, and a Source of unspeakable light that offered two functions: lighting and guidance for them through their journey... He led those unnumbered guests in the middle of the wilderness with a precision greater than any human guide.

Not only did they travel by land, but they also traveled by sea as if it was a dry land. They did experience a daring adventure that even violated the basic laws of nature.

As they set their feet in the raging sea, they marched through it as if it was a hard steady dry rock.

As they stepped in the sea, its substance became as dry as land.

But when the enemies reached the sea, it returned back to its natural state. It became a passage for the first group, but a grave to the enemies.

The mindless sea mastered its role as if it was the wisest and smartest human being. Once the sea was the guardian, and in another instance it was the avenger, performing the act and its contradictory act on the same day.

What shall I say about the rock from where the water sprang?

How about the clouds of birds that covered the land with its abundance?

What about all the wonders that took place in Egypt?

These wonders were not all meant just to satisfy their needs, but to let the people remember, in precise details, the teachings given to Moses about how to know God."]



49- The Heaven Rains Food!

(Genesis 16:1-36)

Soon, the people experienced hunger in the middle of the arid desert. But there was no food to eat. People started murmuring again against Moses, saying, "We wish that you had left us in Egypt to die there. That would have been better for us than dying in the desert!"

Then, God said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread for them from heaven every morning. Let them go out and gather their fill of food for the whole day."

So, every morning before sunrise, God would send them food from heaven; white "manna" resembling frost on the ground. It looked like coriander seeds, and tasted like wafer dipped in delicious honey.

Why was it called "manna"? The people were wondering about it and kept asking, "What is this?" Hence, it was called that, since the word "Mann" means "what is this?"

Moses told them: "This is God's bread; He is offering it to you! Take from it what you need for a whole day. Do not keep any leftover to the next day, it would breed worms and stink."

However, some people did keep some "manna" to the next day, and sure enough, it did stink and was full of worms.

People used to collect the "manna" in the early morning, because, once the sun became warm, the "manna" did melt on the ground.

People used to eat the "manna" fresh every day, except on Saturdays, because on Fridays they collected double the amount of "manna," and saved half of it for Saturdays. This way, they devoted the Sabbath for worshipping the Lord. And, that "manna" they kept overnight for Saturdays stayed fresh.

Manna never stopped raining during the forty years the Israelites stayed in the wilderness, and the people never went hungry. When they entered the Land of Promise, the land of milk and honey, the manna stopped falling.

When the people moved from Elim to the Desert of Sin, they craved meat. They murmured against Moses again saying, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat eating bread to the cooking smell!"



So, instead of the smell of meat they craved, God sent them birds (quails) in the evening, which covered the whole camp. The people were very happy to eat their meat. However, those people who were too glutton and lustful, were punished by God.





50- Moses Strikes the Rock

(Genesis 17:1-7)

People of Israel traveled from the Desert of Sin to Dophkah, and from there to Alush, before arriving to Rephidim.

When the people did not find water to drink, they again complained against Moses and Aaron saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt – to kill us out of thirst, along with our children and our cattle?"

Moses cried out to the Lord with his heart as well as his tongue, saying, "What can I do with this people? – a little more and they will stone me?!" Moses cried to God believing that the Divine grace exceeds all normal capabilities, and he trusted that God, somehow, would quench the thirst of His people.

God told Moses to go before the people; and to take with him few of the elders of Israel, holding the staff that he struck the Nile River with. Then, God said, "Behold, I will be standing before you there on the rock in Horeb."

Following God's order, Moses struck the rock with his staff, and cold pure water emerged out of it. And the rock kept following them, so they would not thirst again.

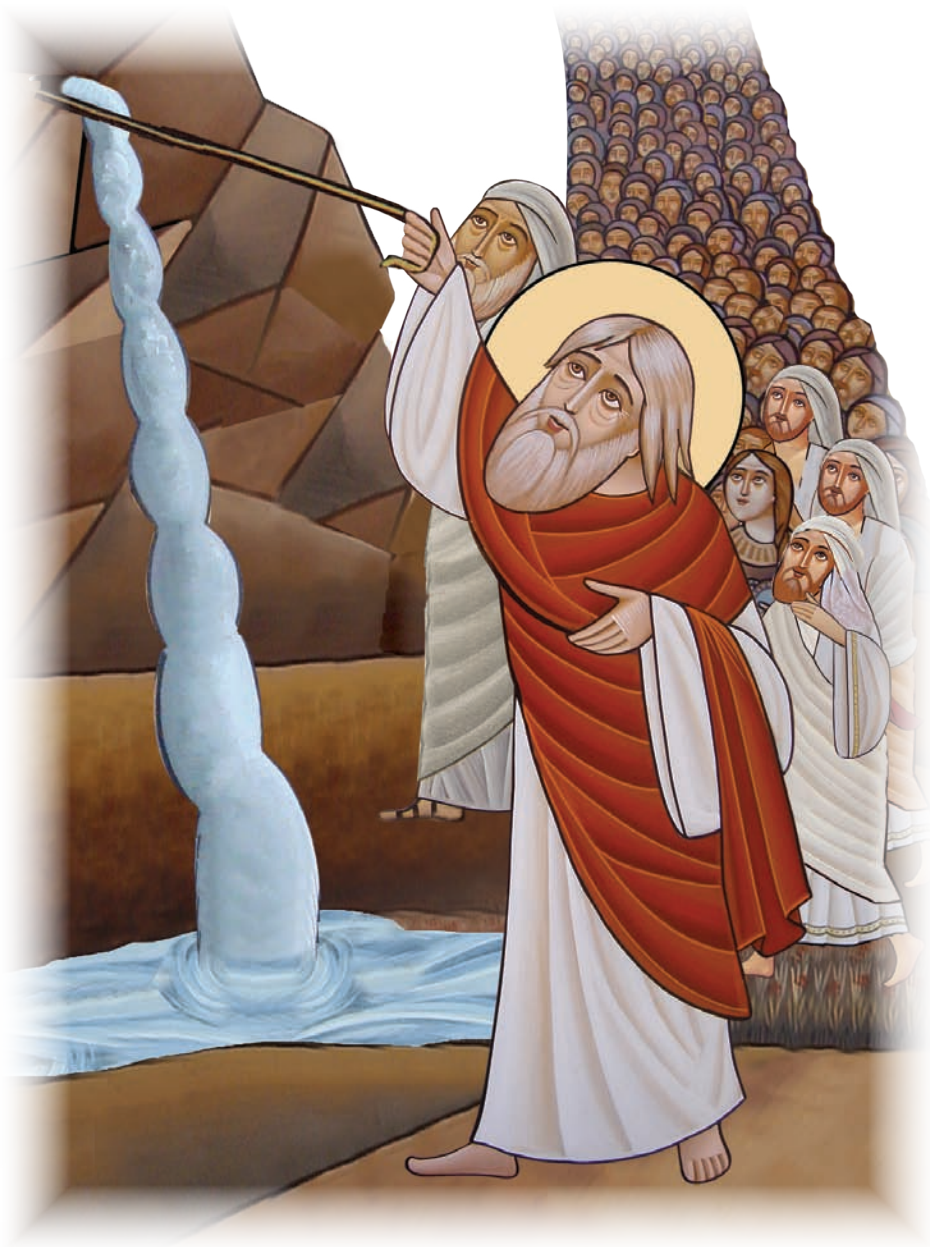
As the rock was stricken in public, in the same fashion, our Lord Jesus Christ was hung on the Cross for our sins, before the people. He was crucified once for the whole world, when He shed blood and water for us to redeem and purify all those who believe in Him.

The people of Israel could not have quenched their thirst from that fountain, unless that rock had been struck with the staff. In the same manner, we could not have quenched our thirst from the fountain of Infinite Divine Love, or receive the Holy Spirit within us, unless our Lord Jesus Christ had been struck on the Cross, carrying the punishment for our sins.

During the first seven days of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, they used to bring water from the lake of Siloam in a golden bowl. The high priest used to spill that water in front of all people, proclaiming that whoever was thirsty let him come and drink his fill. That was a reference to that rock that overflowed with water for their ancestors in the wilderness.



On the eighth day and the final day of the Feast, Jesus Christ, our great High Priest and the Bishop of our souls stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Who believes in Me, Scripture has it: 'From within him, rivers of living water shall flow.'"





51- A Battle with Amalek

(Genesis 17:8-16)

Suddenly, gigantic people called Amalek came and attacked the people of Israel. This was the first time for the Israelites to fight in a war against another nation.

Moses selected men to fight, under the command of his disciple Joshua, but the people of Amalek were much stronger and more experienced in the art of war.

Moses stood on a hill holding his staff that God used to separate the Red Sea, and He sprang the water out of the rock. On that hill, Moses stretched his arms, in the form of the Cross. Aaron and Hur had to hold up his arms so he would not lower them. Because, whenever Moses lowered his arms his army was defeated, but whenever he kept them raised, his army prevailed. He remained that way until sunset, by that time, Joshua's army managed to conquer Amalek.

This was a symbol for our victory over Satan and his entire evil kingdom through the power of the Cross.





52- Jethro's Advice to Moses

(Genesis 18)

Zipporah the daughter of Jethro, the pagan priest of Midian, accompanied her husband Moses, all the way out of Egypt and crossed the Red sea with him. But, when they got close to the area where her father lived, she left Moses to visit her father to let him know about all the marvelous deeds God had done for Moses and His people of Israel. Then, she brought her father, the pagan priest, back with her to hear and see for himself the work of God. In turn, Jethro did offer a burnt sacrifice to God.

This daughter had experienced God's work in her life, so she invited her father, the pagan priest, to enjoy with her God's blessings. Jethro came to meet with Moses, planning to glorify God with all his heart for His works of salvation. He reached that area in the desert where Moses was camping by the mountain of God. On the other hand, Moses, the great among the prophets, whom God granted all these miracles, in all modesty hurried and went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down to him and kissed him.

They each asked about the other's wellbeing, and then they entered the tent.

Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the hardship that they had encountered along the way, and how the Lord had delivered them.

Jethro was overjoyed to hear about all what the Lord had done for them. Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord who has delivered you out of the hands of the Egyptians, and out of the hands of Pharaoh. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods."

Then Jethro went ahead and brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God. Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat food with Moses' father-in-law before God.

On the next day, Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. When Jethro saw all what Moses was doing, he said to him, "What is it that you are doing to the people? Why are you sitting by yourself, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"

Moses replied, "The people come to me to inquire about God. When they have a dispute, they come to me, and I arbitrate between them, and I make known the statutes and laws of God."

Jethro saw that Moses was bearing a significant burden, judging every dispute whether regardless of how big or small. He felt that Moses was spending a good part of his day doing just that. So, he was frank and told Moses:

"What you are doing is not favorable! Both you and these people will surely wear yourselves out, for this is too heavy a burden for you; and you cannot perform it all by yourself.

Now listen to me, I will give you an advice, and may God be with you:

Stand before God on behalf of the people, so that you may bring their disputes to God.

Teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must lead and the deeds they must do

But you choose capable men from among the people, God-fearing, men of truth, those who hate bribes. You put them over the people as rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times.

Have them bring to you the difficult cases, but as for the small cases, let them judge by themselves. This way you may lessen your load, and they will bear the burden with you.

If you do it this way, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will be able to go home in peace."

Moses did not reject his father-in-law's advice. Although he was the leader of this great nation, and had drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, and performed so many wonderful miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness, he considered himself a simple person. Moses did not refuse his father-in-law's council. He respected his father-in-law and accepted his advice without any anger. Moses did not say to him, "What is this? Are you giving me an advice after I have accomplished all these great undertakings?!" No, Moses behaved properly with modesty and wisdom. He listened to his father-in-law and did all he suggested to him.



Moses chose capable men from all Israel, and he made them heads over the people; rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. They judged the people under normal circumstances; while the difficult cases they would bring to Moses, but all small cases they would judge themselves.

Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro went to his own land.





53- On Mount Sinai

(Genesis 19-24)

When the people departed from the land of slavery, and walked through the arid wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, they needed to receive the Divine Law (Divine Commandments). That is why the Psalmist cries from the land of his exile, saying, "I am like a foreigner in this land, do not hide Your commands from me!" (Ps. 119:19).

The people walked through the desert of Sinai, and after three months from exiting Egypt, they arrived to the foot of the Mount Sinai or Horeb Mountain, where they camped.

Before giving them the Law, God declared His practical love to the Israelites. He told Moses on the mountaintop, "Thus you will tell the house of Jacob, I lifted you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. And now, if you will diligently listen to Me and keep My covenant, then you will be My special possession out of all the nations, for all the earth is Mine."

God loves us, He lifts us by the Holy Spirit (eagles' wings), and brings us to Himself, in other words, to His Divine Bosoms. For us to know that He is our Heavenly Father, and He wants us to be His "special possession."

When Moses descended from the mountaintop and told the people what he heard from God, they responded, "We will do all what the Lord has commanded!"

People prepared themselves for three days, before God would come to the mountain, before all of them. Then, there was thunder and lightning, and the sounds of very loud horns, which grew louder and louder. When God made His presence known, the whole mountain seemed to light up and tremble. And Moses spoke with God, and God answered him.

All the people who went out of the camp to meet God, and took their place at the foot of the mountain were frightened. Mount Sinai was completely covered with smoke because the Lord had descended on it in the form of fire, and the whole mountain shook violently. Then, a dialogue took place between God and Moses.



God invited Moses to come up the mountain, and He asked him to warn the people not to touch the mountain, or cross the boundaries which were assigned to them, lest they might force their way through to see Lord, and then perish.

Then, Moses took Aaron, Aaron's two sons Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel and went up the mountain. They all bowed and worshiped from a distance. Then, only Moses approached the Lord.

Moses spoke to God, and all the people could hear God's voice as if it was thunder, but they could not recognize what has been said.

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and told him about the covenant He wanted to have with the people of Israel.

That covenant was offered to Israel, until the time when the Lord Jesus Christ would come to offer us a New Covenant by the Cross. So, the Lord has declared His Love for all humanity by the Cross.

God talked to Moses about the Commandments, as follows:

- ❖ I, the Lord, am your God, you shall have no other gods before Me.
- ❖ You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
- ❖ You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.
- ❖ Remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy. For six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.
- ❖ Honor your father and your mother that you may live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving to you.
- ❖ You shall not murder.
- ❖ You shall not commit adultery.
- ❖ You shall not steal.
- ❖ You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- ❖ You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

God also gave Moses detailed statutes and laws to regulate all aspects of the daily living.





54- God's Priests

(Ex 27:20-28:5)

God declared Aaron, Moses' brother, to be the high priest, and his sons would be his priests. They would lead the worship and serve God.

The high priest would wear a beautiful tunic with bells upon the hem and a turban on his head. On his forehead, there would be a plate of pure gold engraved on it the words "Holiness to the Lord." He would wear a breastplate on his chest adorned with twelve precious stones, symbolizing the twelve tribes.

The high priest was a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly High Priest, who intercedes for those who believe in Him, by His Sacrifice (on the Cross), then He takes them into the Bosom of God.

No one was allowed to enter the Tent except the priests. They were the ones assigned to charge the Tent's lamps with olive oil, and to keep them lit at all times. They also were to offer incense, and preserve the twelve loaves of the bread of the tabernacle.

Aaron and his sons were from the tribe of Levi, and as priests, they were assisted by the rest of the tribe members.





55- The Golden Calf

(Exodus 32)

The people proclaimed their acceptance to the covenant (oath) at the foot of the mountain.

They announced that they were accepting the Living God (Jehovah) as their own God, and that they were rejecting any other gods (idols). Similarly, God declared that He accepted them as His Own special people, as long as; they observed His commandments and did not break them.

God invited Moses to come up God's mountain or Mount Sinai for a second time. There, he fasted for forty days and forty nights without any food or drink.

It was a unique period in Moses' life. His experience resembled those living in heaven, he didn't think of anything else but meeting God and speaking with Him. During this period, God carved the Ten Commandments on two pieces of stone; they were called the two Tablets of the Testimony.

There, God gave him instructions concerning the Tent of Meeting and its furnishing. No wonder, it was God's House in which He dwelled among His people. It was a beautiful icon of heaven.

During Moses' long absence on the mountaintop, the people began to worry about him. They feared he may have gotten hurt, and he may never return back.

So, they gathered around Aaron, and insisted that he would mold a calf made from gold, as a visible god marching in front of them! In Egypt, people used to worship animals as tangible objects that they can see before their eyes. What the Israelites did was a result of a relapse to their old worship of the calf that was still buried in their minds.

So, they collected all the gold earrings that belonged to their wives, sons and daughters, and created a molded gold calf. They offered it burned sacrifices, and then they sat down to eat and drink. They rose up to dance, and were repeating a song, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

God told Moses, "Go quickly, descend, because your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves."

When the people became corrupt, God didn't refer to them as "My people," but He said to Moses, "your people."

In the morning, Moses came down from the mountain, carrying the Two Tablets which God had given him. At that point, he wasn't thinking about his people, but he was so happy and rejoicing the memories of those forty days and forty nights he spent in a continuous communication with God, during which he didn't think about food, drink, or even sleep. God was his fullness, and the Source of his joy and comfort.

Moses descended from the mountain to the camp, and he saw how the people were worshiping the golden calf.

Moses was enraged that he threw the Tablets on the ground and they broke into pieces.

In a hurry, Moses took the calf statue they had made and burned it in the fire, ground its molten gold into powder, scattered it on the water surface, and made the Israelites drink all of it.

Then, Moses stood at the camp's entrance and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side – come to me." Then he issued orders to kill those who encouraged the worship of the idol, especially those from Levi's tribe.

Moses was angry with the people, because he was zealous for their sanctity. But he never lost his deep-rooted love for them. On the next day, he gathered the people and told them, "You have committed a very serious sin, but now I will go up again to the Lord – perhaps, I might be able to make atonement for your sin."

When the Lord in His anger asked Moses, "Leave Me alone, so that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. Then, I will make from you a great nation." Moses did not agree to have God annihilate his people, but he begged Him not to destroy them, in spite of God's plan to replace them with Moses' descendants.

When God told Moses, "Leave Me alone so...," He gave him a chance to intercede on their behalf and reveal his love to his people, in other words, God gave him a chance to exercise his paternal responsibility. And, as if God didn't want to destroy them without Moses' consent, so He was asking Moses to let Him to do it! Moses interceded in behave of his people before God. He offered three excuses:



First: he reminded Him that those were His people, whom He has taken care of in the past, and have brought them out from Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

Second: he told Him that the enemy would gloat over the demise of His people.

Third: he reminded Him about His promises to their fathers; His servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom He swore by Himself that He will multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven, and that He will grant them the Promised Land.

Moses went up the mountain, and confessed for the sins of all the people. He interceded on their behalf before God, and then said, "If You will, forgive their sin; but, if not, then wipe me out from Your book that You have written."

God was pleased by Moses' love for His people and his intercession on their behalf, even though He did chastise them.

He told Moses, "My Angel shall go before you." God wanted to send an angel to go before them. But Moses insisted that God's presence should walk before them.

God answered, "I will do this thing also that you have requested, for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name."

The greatest features in Moses' life were his clinging to God and his association with Him, in addition to his love for his people more than his love for himself or his descendants!





56- Show Me Your Glory

(Exodus 33)

Moses erected a tent outside the camp, and called it "the Tent of Meeting." When Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise up and stand at the entrance to their tents, to enjoy seeing God's encounter with Moses. And whenever Moses entered the Tent, a pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent. The Lord would speak with Moses. When the people would see this, each one at the entrance of his own tent, would rise and worship. "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, the way a person speaks with a friend."

Moses had a strong familiarity with God, and his heart was progressively inflamed and filled with longing to Him, that he asked, "Show me Your glory."

The Lord told him, "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live," then He told him, "I shall show you a place; and you will position yourself on a rock. So, when My glory passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock and I will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face must not be seen."





57- The Shining Face of Moses

(Exodus 34:5-35:1)

For the second time, Moses spent forty days with God. God engraved His Commandments on Two new Tablets, and spoke with Moses.

On the first time, God prepared the Two Tablets with the engraved commandments, but on this second time God asked Moses to cut the tablets himself, similar to those he broke. Then God wrote the commandments on the new tablets.

God renewed His covenant with His fallen people, but the people lost the Tablets that were made by God's hands.

Moses came down the mountain with the Two new Tablets.

Moses didn't realize that his face was shining with the light of the Lord. His face was so bright that people couldn't look at it. They felt that his face's brightness was hurting their eyes, so they asked him to put a veil on his face. Then, Moses started to tell them about God's commandments.

When Moses stood before God, "the skin of his face became shiny while speaking with Him." This didn't happen at all during the previous years, when he met God through the Burning Bush, or when he received the Ten Commandments on the first time.

It was as if God wanted to reward Moses this time for his deep love that he had shown to his people, even more than his love for himself. Through love, he was ready to have his name erased from the eternal book, when he asked God, "If You will, forgive their sin? But if not, then wipe me out from Your book that You have written." Also, because of his love, his face became so bright despite his presence here on earth!

This is the splendor and glory of the life of true love!





58- Erecting the Meeting Tent or the Tabernacle of God

(Exodus 35-40)

On the mountaintop, God informed Moses of His plan for His people; which was to grant them the pleasure of God's presence among them. God instructed him to erect a Tent of Meeting, and showed him a replica for it in Heaven.

God gave him a detailed procedure by which the tabernacle dedicated to God could be built in the midst of the Israelites' tents. In that tent, God would meet with His people, which is the reason behind calling it "the Meeting Tent."

The Tent was divided into two sections: The Holy of Holies and The Holy Place.

Inside the Holy of Holies, the Ark of Covenant was located. The Ark was overlaid with gold inside and out, and on its lid (the mercy seat) there were two Cherubim made of solid gold. Placed inside the Ark were the two tablets with the Ten Commandments engraved on them, a jar of "manna," and Aaron's staff that blossomed.

The Holy of Holies was considered to be the residence of God. No one would enter except the high priest to intercede on behalf of all people.

The Holy Place had the golden lampstand with its seven lamps, the golden altar on which incense was offered, and the golden table of the showbread.

Outside the Meeting Tent, there was an open outer court. That outer court had the bronze altar which was used for the burnt offerings.

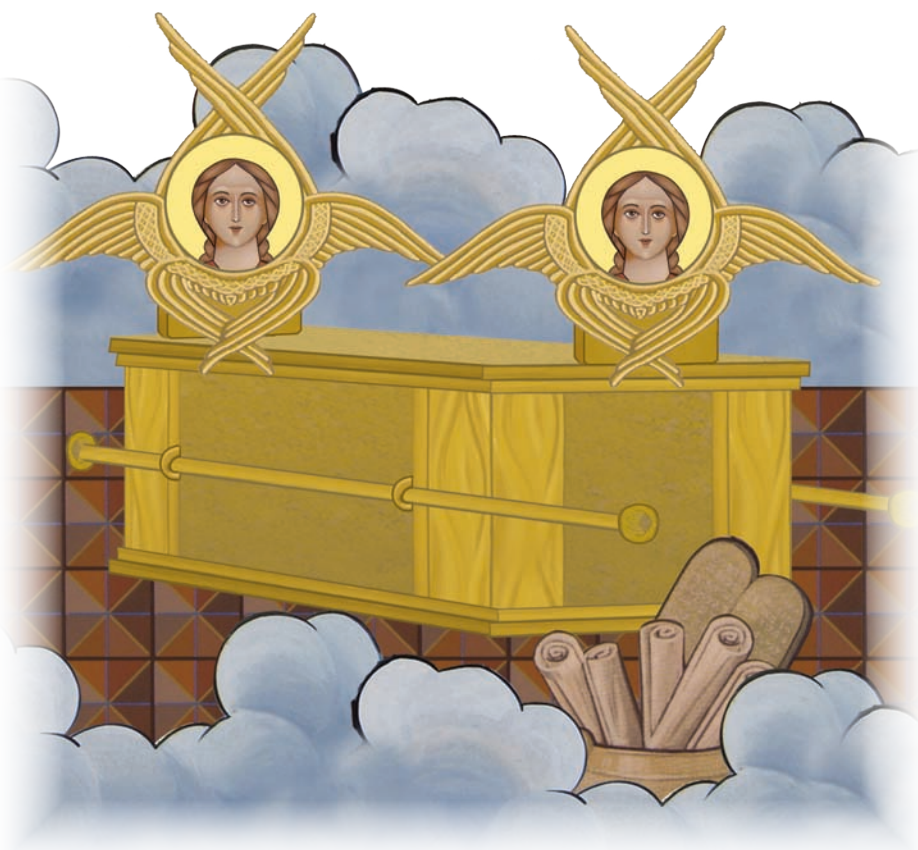
Also, God asked Moses that the entire congregation would participate in providing materials to build the Tabernacle; from gold, silver, bronze, incense, fabric, or precious stones. God has granted Bezalel the son of Uri a Divine wisdom and insight in order to build the Tent which was to be sanctified by God Himself. No wonder, it was assigned as God's residence among His own people. Lots of



other skilled craftsmen participated in building the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle was great, very elegant and precious, made from the most precious materials, as designed by God Himself. It was a master piece inside and outside, it was covered with skins of rams and goats.

Finally, when the building of the Tabernacle was complete, the Tent was filled with the cloud, which indicated the presence of the Lord with all His marvelous Glory.





59- The Great Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

(Leviticus 16 : 7-10)

The Jewish people are unique for having the Feast of the "Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur]," for which we cannot find an equivalent in any other culture.

This day had a special importance and a unique ritual. It gives us a great understanding for the sacrifice of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, on the Cross.

They used to be looking forward for this day, in the same manner as we would anticipate our "Good Friday."

The seventy Sanhedrin elders used to train the new priests on its rituals and teach them how to memorize all the matters related to it.

The night prior to the Day of Atonement, the high priest is to remain awake through the morning, so he would avoid the possibility of having an evil dream that might defile his body in his sleep. The priests and elders would stay with him and keep his company, so he wouldn't doze or fall asleep during that night.

The high priest used to perform four services:

- A. **The daily Morning service:** The high priest would wear luxurious garments for the splendor and glory. He would enter the Holy Place, light the lamps, burn the incense, and then he would offer the regular daily burnt sacrifice.
- B. **The Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] service:** As the high priest concludes the regular morning service, the ritual of the Day of Atonement would begin with the high priest changing his golden garments and washing off his body. Then he would wear linen clothes (conventional priesthood clothes), to avoid feeling glorious, but would rather experience the reason behind that day's ritual, which is to discard his own sins, along with the sins of his brothers and children among the priests and the people.

[It is mentioned in the Jewish tradition that the high priest used to wash five times that day. And, ten times he would wash his hands and feet in a golden vessel set aside for that purpose.]





C. The Service of offering the additional sacrifices scheduled for that day.

D. The daily Evening service: The high priest performs it wearing his luxurious garments for this service too.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, on behalf of the entire community. This occurred only on that day, once a year, after engaging in long and detailed rituals and elaborate preparations.

On the Day of Atonement, there were special animal sacrifices to atone for the people's sins, and they were symbolizing the Cross' sacrifice.

On that day, a special ritual for atonement would be performed. The priests would go over that ritual with the high priest, while keeping his company, and spending the whole night with him so he wouldn't sleep and become vulnerable to having an evil thought.

Two identical rams would be chosen, as they would represent the whole people of Israel and their sins for the whole year. One ram would be slaughtered as a sin offering to God, while the second ram would be set free in the wilderness, where it could not return to the camp anymore. This action meant that their sins would have been completely removed, and they would not be counted against them.

When the high priest would complete the service of the Day of Atonement, he would enter the Holy Place. He would remove his linen clothes, wash his body, and wear his luxurious garments made for glory. Then, he would offer the burnt sacrifices for himself and for his people.

It was not possible for the high priest to offer sacrifices that were pleasing to God except after atoning for himself, the priests, and all the people through the sin sacrifice. Likewise, the believer cannot offer the sacrifice of praise and joy unless he offers repentance to obtain the remission of sins and be worthy of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

60- The Twelve Spies

(Numbers 13, 14)

The Israelites were continuously complaining, yearning to return to the land of slavery for its leeks, onions, and watermelons etc. The Lord wanted to reveal to them the quality of the fruits of the new land He had promised them with, in order to draw their hearts towards it, instead of reverting to the land of slavery.

One year after their exodus from Egypt, and while they were in the wilderness, the Lord told Moses, "Send men to spy on the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send one man, a leader among his tribe."

God ordered Moses to send men to scout the land on their own. That was His response to the request made earlier by the people themselves. Moses the Prophet did say, "Every one of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.' The plan pleased me well."

Among the men who were sent, there were two distinguished people. They were Hoshea who was called Joshua son of Nun, and Caleb son of Jephunneh.

The instructions which were given to these men could be summarized in two words: "Ascend" and "Be strong."

The men went quickly and returned after forty days and presented their reports.

The reports presented by the men were divided into two groups. The majority could not recall the good bounties that they saw. But they got terrified by the Anak's tribe, and they caused all the people to tremble. They had lost their hope and fell into despair. They were saying, "The land indeed overflows with milk and honey, but the people who live there are giants. It is impossible to beat them, for they are strong and aggressive. And the forts of the cities are well defended."

But the second group which included Caleb with Joshua, said, "We will ascend and own it, because we are capable of doing that. If God is pleased with us, He will let us enter this land."



But the women began to cry, and almost everyone entered into a state of severe frustration, and they started asking, "Who could lead us back to Egypt? We do not want Moses or his plans!"

Joshua and Caleb attempted to calm the people down, telling them that with the help of God, they could achieve victory and enjoy the Promised Land, for God is true and able to fulfill His promises.

God wanted to destroy that nation that was skeptical and constantly complaining about His ability to fulfill His promise. But Moses interceded on their behalf before God. So, God listened to him and forgave them. But He did punish them. He allowed them to remain wandering in the wilderness until that entire generation that came out of Egypt perished. No one from that generation entered the Promised Land except Joshua and Caleb.

That generation that came out from Egypt was buried in the wilderness. The people's journey in the desert lasted about forty years since their exodus from Egypt until they reached the Promised Land.





61-The Bronze Serpent

(Numbers 21)

For Israel the chastisement was very harsh. Nevertheless, from time to time, the people would return to idol worshipping; moving back and forth like a seesaw. When they discovered that they were not entering the Promised Land, but only their children would, they accepted the punishment and occasionally held unto God as their God.

Years passed by as they continued to wander in the wilderness. Even with all the continuous care that God had provided them with, nevertheless, they continually complained and rebelled against God.

God granted them victory over the king of Arad, who confronted them as a wild donkey. But soon the people started complaining and spoke against God and against Moses saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt? Is it to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the Lord, in His anger, sent poisonous serpents among the people, the serpents bit them; and many of them died.

When they complained before about thirst, God was patient with them and did not rebuke them even with a single word. He ordered Moses and Aaron to provide them with water from the rock. But, after He granted them victory and quenched their thirst from the rock, when they repeated their complaints, God punished them. The people rushed to Moses, confessing their sins, and Moses prayed to God on their behalf.

God did not remove His punishment, but He opened a door to allow them to be saved from it. The Lord told Moses, "Make a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live."

That serpent is nothing other than a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who carried our sins on the Cross in order to heal us from the bites of the old serpent: Satan.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life."





62- The Talking Donkey!

(Numbers 22 – 24)

As the people drew close to entering the Promised Land, the devil created another evil plan using a capable magician and a fortune-teller by the name Balaam. However, God had used this plan to achieve a divine message and a higher purpose. For, it is surprising for Him to bring out of the eater something to be eaten, and out of the harsh brings something sweet.

The king of Moab, Balak, realized that the secret behind the Israelites' strength was not their military might, but it was the blessing of God's existence in their midst. The king saw that danger surrounding him. So, instead of preparing for war using a military plan, he sent messengers to Balaam the magician, and gave him many gifts, and made him lots of promises. Then, he asked him to come and put a curse on the Israelites to lose their God's blessing, in order for him to defeat them in battle. However, the opposite happened and the curse transformed into a blessing.

The order was already issued from God Himself that Balaam would fail to curse His people.

Balaam refused to go with Balak's messengers, so Balak sent him messengers more distinguished than the first, from among the leaders of Moab. They tried to persuade Balaam with money and prestige, saying, "Balak will certainly receive you with great honor, and will do whatever you ask of him. So, please come now, curse those people for us." Balaam responded firmly, "Even if Balak were to give me the fill of his house in silver and gold, I could not possibly go against the word of the Lord my God, in any small or big matter." Balaam's answer was unequivocal and strong, and the Divine Revelation recorded it specifically to reprimand us.

Despite his strong answer, Balaam's heart was leaning towards the earthly rewards. So, instead of telling them what God had told him already, he asked them to stay one more night, in order for him to listen to God's voice another time. As if he was hoping God might change His mind. So, God just allowed him to go with them, because that was his heart's desire. Often times, God would listen to our twisted hearts' desires when we insist on our wishes.



The Lord responded to Balaam according to his crooked heart's yearning for earthly rewards. So, He let him go with the messengers of Moab. As Balaam proceeded to go with them, God's anger was kindling because he didn't reconsider. The Lord's angel stood in the middle of the road, trying to block it, while Balaam was riding on his donkey, in the company of his two servants. The donkey saw the Lord's angel standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand. So, the donkey drifted off the road and went into the field. Balaam kept striking the donkey, trying to turn it back on the road to Moab.

The Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it spoke to Balaam asking, "What have I done to you to strike me three times?" Balaam did not show any sign of surprise, but he replied, "If I had a sword right now, I would have killed you because you made me look like a fool." The donkey became his judge, and this mute animal spoke for all those who perceive themselves to be wise to be reprimanded.

When the donkey saw the Lord's angel, it drifted and walked parallel to the wall and pressed Balaam's leg against the wall, so Balaam hit the donkey again.

The king himself went out to meet him. He criticized him saying: "Did I not earnestly send calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"

Balak, the king, took Balaam to the hills of Baal. And there the later asked Balak to build seven altars, and to prepare seven bulls and seven rams. Balak and Balaam sacrificed one bull and one ram at each altar before going to a nearby hill to hear the voice of the Lord.

God wanted the truth to be declared before the Gentiles, even through a fortune-teller.

God took advantage of that situation to present to the Gentiles five prophesies, through Balaam's mouth that remained documented in the Gentiles' records:

The first prophesy (23:7-10): about the Incarnation of God.

The second prophesy (23:16-24): about the Lord's Passions and His Resurrection.

The third prophesy (24: 1-14): about the Pentecost.



The fourth prophesy (24: 15-19): preaching about Jesus Christ.
The fifth prophesy (24: 21-25): about acquiring Jesus Christ our Lord.



63- The Farwell Sermon or Moses Song

(Deuteronomy 31-32)

The whole Jewish people now reached the North East area of the Dead Sea, across from the land of Canaan.

Moses knew that soon he would depart from this world, and that he would not be entering the Promised Land.

God ordered him to lay his hands on his disciple Joshua to transfer the authority and power unto him.

Moses was a successful leader, as he took care of the rank of leaders. So, the leadership role would continue without seamlessly and without interruption. In humility, Moses said, "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in." Furthermore, he proclaimed his joy that his disciple Joshua was going to accomplish what he could not. He continued, "The Lord said, don't cross the Jordan... Joshua will cross before you, as the Lord foretold'."

The Prophet Moses did not ask God to extend his life to accomplish the mission and bring his people to the Promised Land. He assured his people that God is the real Leader, and as He led them during his days, He would lead them during the days of Joshua.

Moses urged the people to support Joshua to accomplish his mission. He also supported Joshua announcing, "God is walking before you, He will be with you, He will never forsake you or neglect you. Never be afraid or terrified."

Moses stood next to Joshua and he started teaching the people. This was his last sermon to them, and was called "Moses' Song." In that song, Moses spoke of the greatness of God, and how He selected them as His chosen nation. He also rebuked them because they occasionally have turned their back to God and worshipped idols. He also explained to them, with clear frankness and enough boldness, what would happen if they were to deviate from the Divine Truth.

What did Moses present to them in his Farewell Sermon or Last Song?



- 1- Moses the prophet called upon the Angels and all the Heavenly Ranks, as well as all the nations, to bear witness to what he would be uttering concerning God's miraculous deeds with His people.
2. God's greatness is manifested in His caring for His creation. He is righteous and thorough in caring for His creation. Whatever He allows is for the good of His people. Also, He is just and honest, and there is no unfairness in Him.
3. Even with God's flawless honesty with His people, which is without a single blemish, they did betray Him and foolishly broke their covenants with Him.

With their crooked behavior with the honest God, they did not harm Him in any way, but they ended up defiling themselves. They were the source of their own sins. They were behind their own corruption and their own destruction.

- 4- It is good for the faithful to learn from his ancestors, not only about God's word and His Commandments, but also to learn about His works with them through the ages.
5. God freed His people from slavery. He cared for them in the wilderness, not to give them a land that overflows with milk and honey, but to present to them Himself. So He would become their Inheritance and they would become His; "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance."
6. The eagle shakes its nest, spreads its wings then flaps them, to force its young to leave the nest and learn how to fly.

In the same manner, God shook everything surrounding His people using the Ten Plagues, to drive them out of Egypt, and to fly into the wilderness. He did that so they not only enter the Promised Land; but rather be carried by Him entering it.

He said to them, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself." (Ex 19:4). He opens up His bosom for us, in order for us to find rest in Him.





64- The Deadly Kiss

(Deuteronomy 33-34)

After the prophet Moses chanted his final song to end his life rejoicing, he offered his blessing to all of his people, then he blessed each tribe individually. He did that, in spite of his knowledge of what was going to happen to his people whenever they deny their faith.

We did not hear anything about Moses' wife, his sons or daughters according to the flesh. He did not instruct any of them about their affairs or cared for setting up their financial needs. But, he considered all the people to be his own children. He did not depart from the world until he blessed them all.

He blessed the tribes, starting with Judah, from which Lord Jesus Christ descended, and finally he blessed the entire congregation. After he blessed everyone, he left the camp alone and slowly climbed the mount of Nebo until he reached its top.

From there he could see Canaan across the Jordan River. God told Moses, "This is the land I promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give to their descendants. You could see it from here, but you cannot enter it."

Then, Moses the prophet surrendered his soul in the hands of the Lord. He was one hundred and twenty years old. To the end, his eyesight had never weakened, and his natural vigor had not diminished. It was said that God buried him in the "Wide Valley" opposite to Beth Peor, but no one knows the exact location of his burial place until this day.

His funeral was unique; it was not attended by any humans, but celebrated with joy by the celestials. He didn't have any one with him for his burial, so the Lord Himself buried him.

Till this day, no one knows his burial location. Since his departure, there is not one person who resembled Moses, until the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, Moses' Lord.

The Jewish people call Moses' death: "The Deadly Kiss," since they believed that the Lord had kissed him then took his soul.



It was written in the Letter of Jude that the devil wanted to bring forth Moses' body so the Jews would worship him instead of the Lord, because of their great love for him. But the Archangel Michael rebuked him in the name of the Lord.





The Fifth Time Period

A Land which Flows Milk and Honey

At that point in time, the prophet Moses has departed, and Joshua - the symbol of Jesus Christ - was given the leadership role of the people. Joshua was able to get them into the Promised Land. They became an independent nation, having its own homeland and leaders.

Joshua was a spiritual leader, skilled in military action as well, although the army did not have any significant military experience. Joshua entered into many battles with those nations that were residing in that region. His victories were dependant on his relationship with God, because the true Leader in war is the Almighty God.

The battles continued for many years. By the year 1015 B.C., the Israelites were able to rule the land under somewhat real peace.

Joshua divided the land among the tribes. Each tribe had its elders who would rule the tribe from time to time. However, they oftentimes would fall into evil, and the Lord would punish them by letting them fall in the hands of their enemies. Then, God would raise Judges to rescue them. The Judge used to govern only few of the tribes, and not all them.



65- Two Spies on the Roof

(Joshua 1 & 2)

God led the people in the wilderness for forty years. Finally they camped in the land of Moab, east of the Jordan River. By a divine order, Moses placed his hand on the head of his disciple Joshua, who was filled with wisdom.

God spoke to Joshua, the new leader, “Stand firm and have courage. As I was with Moses, I will be there for you. You will be leading My people to the land I promised them with.” Joshua believed in the Lord’s promise, and he informed the people what God told him. He said, “Now is the time to cross the Jordan and enter the land God granted to us.”

During their forty years in the desert, they fought number of wars, and God was always the source of their strength. However, since they became a nation, they never had any experience with invading fortified cities. That was a task that required strategies, skills and weaponries, which were beyond their abilities.

While people were moving on rather quickly, each one was busy packing his belongings in preparation for leaving the region, Joshua met secretly with two spies and told them:

“I have a very important and dangerous mission for you.

I want you to cross the river and secretly enter the city of Jericho, and then I want you to bring a report to me about this fortified city, its massive high walls and about the land surrounding it. This city is protected by strong men who will stand against us and fight us.”

The two men were very nervous. One of them said to the other, “Spies! We will become spies for God’s sake! It is a dangerous mission, but God will protect us.”

Around noon time, they both crossed the Jordan River, and by night time, they were standing outside the massive walls of Jericho. It wasn’t easy at all for them to enter the city.

Many people entered and exited the city gates. The two spies blended into the crowd, so no one noticed they were strangers.



One of them said to the other:

“We need to find a place to spend the night, it is very late.

- But I am afraid that someone would see us and notify the king, so he would kill us.

- Look! That house is built by the wall. And it has a window in the back. We could run through it and no one would spot us.

- Let us see if we can find a place for us there.”

Rahab, the house owner, welcomed the spies when they came in, and she asked them, “Are you the spies whom the king is looking for?”

The two spies trembled and thought to themselves, “Did we enter a trap with our own feet?”

Rahab realized what the spies were going through, as the signs of anxiety were showing on them. But, with a kind smile, she assured them, “Do not be afraid. I will hide you. I am glad that you have come to my home! The king, his advisors, the soldiers and all the people are afraid. We have heard of your people and of your God who performs many wonders for you.

Everyone heard how your God helped you to defeat your enemies. He has given you victory. He is the heavenly God. That is what urges me to help you!”

Rahab paused a little, and then continued on, “I admit to you, that every day I stand on the roof of my house, and I watch from a distance, your people across the Jordan River, in Moab. I used to and I still tell myself, 'Oh, how happy that nation with the Lord of heaven and earth. Could I believe in Him too and feel His love?'

I confess to you the many sins I have done. But, I am confident that God will forgive me.

I grew tired of sin; it is alluring, but corruptive, and does not satisfy my heart!

I would like to give up the worship of Baal, and to worship the Living God!”





While Rahab was talking to the two spies, who were listening attentively and praising God, loud commotion on the street was approaching the house. The king's soldiers were rushing to her house.

Rahab told the two spies, "Quick! Go up to the roof and hide behind the flax stalks until the soldiers pass by."

They sped to the roof and she covered them with the flax stalks. They lied there, carefully watching and listening, wondering what would happen.

The soldiers shouted as they were pounded their fists on the door, "Rahab! Open in the name of the king!"

Rahab asked, "What do you want?"

The soldiers responded, "The king and the people are following the movements of the Israelites camping across the Eastern bank of the Jordan River. The king is aware that the spies came to you, and we were sent to demand that you deliver to us the two men who came here and you are housing them. They are spies for the Jewish army, and they came to scout the whole city."

Rahab said quietly, "Yes. Two men came here before dark. I would like to help the king. I would really love to, but unfortunately, they have left me, and I don't know where they have gone. They left not long ago. They wanted to cross the gates before nightfall. So, may be there is still time for you to catch up with them, if you run after them right now."

The spies were relieved, asking themselves, "Would the soldiers believe her? Are they going to search the house? Will they climb up to the roof?"

Then, they heard the soldiers rushing out of the house. They closed the city gates behind them.

God used Rahab to rescue them. And later when the Israelites seized the city of Jericho, they returned to rescue her.



66- Rahab and the Scarlet Rope

(Joshua 2)

After Rahab made sure that the soldiers had left, she went up and fetched the two spies out of their hiding place.

One of them asked her, "What made you do this?"

Rahab replied, "I know that your God has already given you this land. Now, promise me that you spare me and my household, when you take over Jericho."

The two spies said, "Because of your faith, we will help you out. Just hang a scarlet (red) rope out of your window. When we enter Jericho, make sure that you and all your family stay inside the house, and just remain there. So, no harm would befall you."

At night time, she reminded them again to save her and her household when they return to Jericho, and they again promised her.

That house was a symbol of the Church, where people find their salvation by joining it and becoming worthy through Christ's blood (the scarlet rope).

Rahab bound a scarlet rope into her window. The rope was strong enough for both of the spies to use it to get down the outer wall and flee.

Through faith the two spies were saved, and through faith Rahab was saved. Later on, our Lord Jesus Christ came from her descendants.

The two spies returned back to Joshua, joyfully shouted, "With the grace of God, we will absolutely conquer and prevail! All their people are scared of us!"

They reported to him the state of panic that afflicted both the king and his people, in spite of the strength of the heavily fortified walls surrounding their city.

Joshua did rejoice when he heard the spies' report. He was also overjoyed about learning that there was one believer in the city. Joshua decided to invade the city of Jericho; he believed that God would deliver it to him.



However, some of the people asked, “Where is the bridge we will be using to cross the Jordan River?”

A young boy said, “Maybe God will dry up the water, like you told us, He did earlier with the Red Sea.”

Joshua said, “Surely God will lead us. By a word of His mouth, the Jordan's waters could be pulled back. Do not be afraid, our God will grant us victory.”







67- Crossing the Jordan River

(Joshua 3, 4)

Early in the morning, the people took down the camp, packed the tents, pulled out the wooden stakes and loaded their belongings on the backs of their animals. They traveled almost seven miles till they reached the banks of the Jordan River.

Joshua said, “Let us camp here for three days.” So, they setup the tents by the river bank; the water was overflowing its banks. The city of Jericho was lying across the river, approximately four miles away.

The city of Jericho was in a state of extreme confusion, except for Rahab who helped the spies. She believed their promise that she along with her household would be safe. All her family moved in her house and stayed with her as the spies had instructed. The red scarlet rope that they used for their escape was still hanging from the window down the wall.

God asked all the people to prepare for crossing the Jordan River by spending three days in prayers and intense worship.

On the third day, Joshua asked the priests to carry the Ark of Covenant, (which represented God’s Presence among His people), and to lead the procession.

As soon as the feet of the two priests in front touched the water, all the water piled up on one side, while the other side became a dry land. All the tribes crossed walking on the dry surface.

In the morning of the fourth day, Rahab called her family, saying, “Look, the Jews are unwinding their tents.”

Rahab kept watching the Israelites' camp across the Jordan River from afar for three days. But nothing new was happening.

Rahab and her family looked at each other with mixed feelings of fear, surprise and hope. Rahab screamed, “God is performing a miracle for them. He does work on their behalf! Look! They are crossing the river fast; maybe they do not want to drown, as what happened to Pharaoh’s army that drowned in the Red Sea.”





Rahab shouted, “Look at the river, the water has piled up on one side, and I now could see a dry pathway! What a miracle! The Jordan River has dried up”

Rahab and her family noticed the Priests lifting the Ark of the Covenant and stopping in the middle of the Jordan River. While by the Divine grace, all the people of Israel crossed the river through the dry path to the other side.

In fear and silence, the people marched through Gilgal's route for about two miles from the river and four miles from the city of Jericho. There, they set up a memorial monument of twelve stones they collected from the bottom of the Jordan River.

One of the guards watching by the wall surrounding Jericho shouted, “The Hebrews are coming. Sound the alarm!”

Once they knew that the Hebrews camped close to their city, the king of Jericho ordered to keep the city gates closed day and night. No one could go in or out, so the whole city would rather prepare for war.

Now, Jericho was in a state of complete confusion. The soldiers ran to their stations at the walls. They knew for sure that soon the Israelites were going to attack their city.

But nothing happened; days passed and the gates of Jericho remained closed. Everybody was fearfully waiting for what happens next.



68- Meeting the Commander of the Lord's Army **(Joshua 5, 6)**

One day as Joshua was walking by the walls of Jericho expecting to receive some orders from God, he saw an amazing person, holding a drawn sword, with its double edge blades shining.

Joshua's heart was beating very fast, as he was wondering; "Is it possible that the king might have sent this powerful warrior to engage in a duel with one of our Hebrew soldiers to settle the battle over the city? Or, did this stranger come from somewhere else? But, from where?"

Joshua lifted his heart to God and prayed, asking for His divine guidance. Once he regained his inner peace, he approached the man.

Joshua asked, "Are you an enemy or an ally? Are you with us or against us?"

The person replied, "I am the Commander of the army of the Lord."

His face lit up, while Joshua bowed down with his head touching the ground. Joshua asked Him, "What does my Master want to say to His servant?"

The commander of the army of the Lord answered, "Take your sandal off your feet, because the place where you stand is holy."

When Joshua returned to the people, he was confident they will prevail.

Joshua shouted in the midst of the people, saying:

"God has told me what we should do. Let the men of war take the lead and march around the city one time.

Also, let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns and march around the city, in front of the Ark of Covenant, one time as well."

With somewhat broken hearts the men of war marched; they were followed by the priests carrying the horns and the Ark of Covenant, and all the people behind them. They walked in a circle around the city's outer walls and returned to where they started. Jericho's soldiers peered from the top of the city walls, and



ridiculed the Hebrews for what they were doing, saying, “What kind of commotion are they doing? How foolish are these people?! All what they are doing is marching around the walls without trying to break through them!”

They marched near Jericho's gigantic gates which were tightly locked, and their great procession continued marching around the walls silently, according to the divine order. The procession around Jericho was occurred again on the next day. It was repeated for a total of six days; but nothing was happening.

The sentries peered from the walls' towers; the king and all the people of Jericho were also watching what the Israelites were doing throughout those six days.

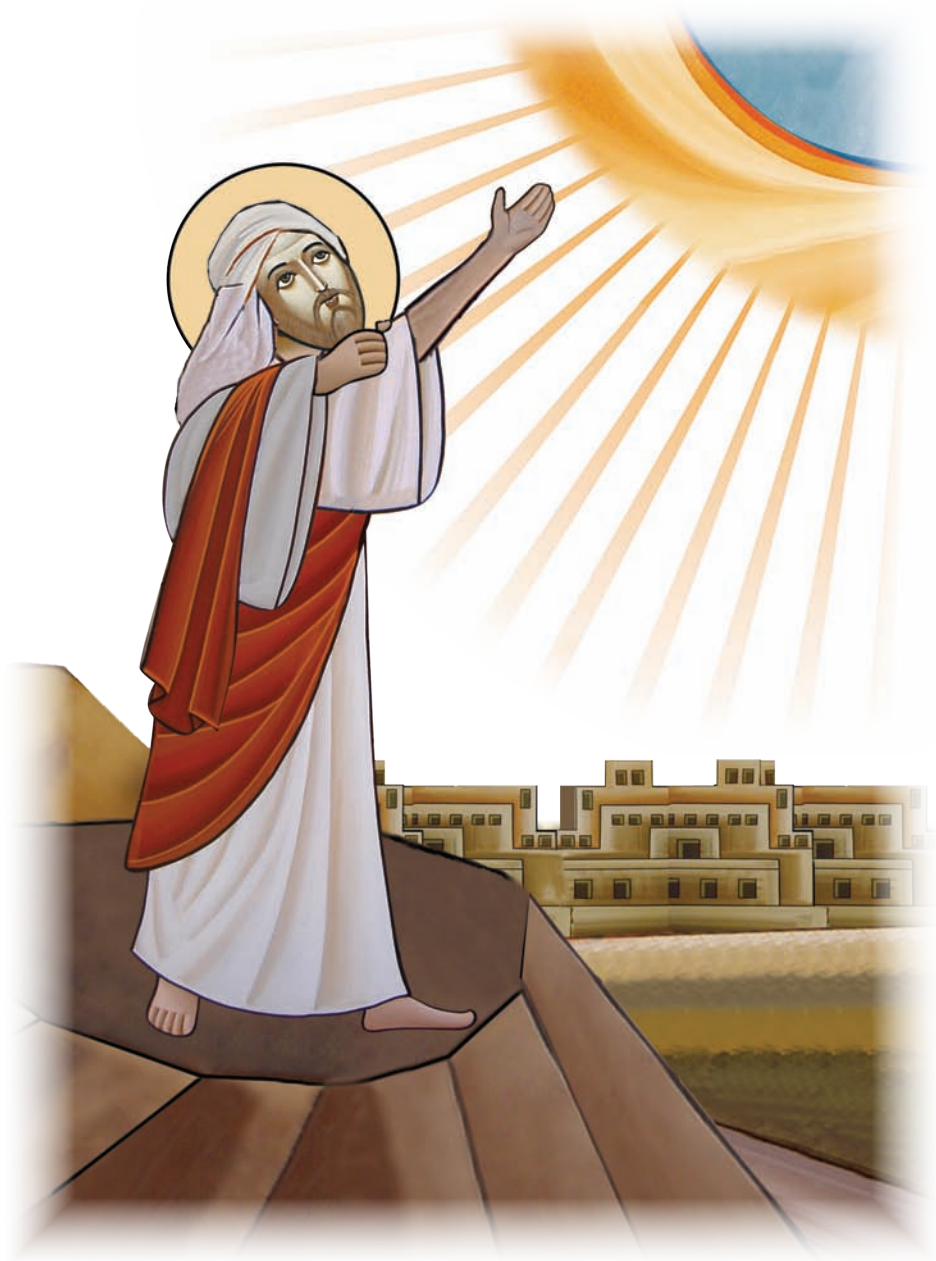
At sunset of the sixth day, Joshua told his people, “This is God's battle. So, very early tomorrow be prepared, because we will not march around the walls once, but seven times.”

Some people started to doubt him thinking deep inside; how could they march around the walls seven times? Wouldn't that be a waste of time and effort? How could they be able to fight after they drain their strengths marching? These thoughts kept floating in their minds, while others were expecting a real battle.

However, at dawn on the seventh day, everyone was ready. In silence, they walked in rows around the walls, one time after another. The soldiers were still observing from the top of the walls and from the houses built by the walls, they could see the huge crowd marching around the walls. Rahab and her household were also watching through the windows, not to ridicule, but expecting God's miraculous work.

The residents of Jericho watched the procession moving. The sentries on the walls continued to laugh and ridicule the convoy, which was just circling around the walls silently and without any accomplishments.

After they made the first round around the city, the procession did not stop as usual, but they started the second round then the third, until the sixth round. The people of Jericho, its king and commanders all deemed the Israelites' actions as foolishness. They felt that those people had exhausted themselves and had wasted their energy in vain and without a goal.





Then the seventh round started, and everyone in the city, including those who were not able to view the procession, wondered, “What are these people doing?”

Finally, the seventh round ended. Then Joshua raised his voice and told his people, “Let everyone look at the walls. Blow all the horns and everyone shouts.”

The priests sounded the horns and the people shouted with loud voices!

Rahab was expecting the city's gates to fall, for the Jewish soldiers to enter Jericho. Her house began to shake, and loud noises could be heard coming from all directions.

Rahab barely believed her eyes. The huge high walls of the city started to crack down, and within moments, they crumbled and turned into piles of rubble. The majority of Jericho's army was buried under the dirt and rocks, while the Jewish soldiers managed to enter the city.

The Israeli soldiers leaped over the walls' crumbled stones and killed the residents of the city. But, Rahab's house, where she hid the two spies, escaped without harm.

Joshua warned the people, including the soldiers not to loot anything from the city as spoils; because the victory was the Lord's and not theirs.

Rahab was very afraid, thinking, “Would the two spies remember their promise to me and save us?”

Joshua looked for the two spies and told them, “Remember your promise. Go and bring Rahab and her household immediately.” As Rahab heard knocks at her door, she jumped to open it. She was very pleased to see the two spies whom she had hidden; they had kept their promise to her. They told her and her family, “Come quickly. We have to get out of the city right away!”

They crossed over the rubbles of the fallen walls till they reached the Jewish camp.

The flame of the burning city reached the sky, and the atmosphere was filled with clouds of dark smoke. Jericho had turned to ashes. The king's palace and the temple of the god Baal were razed to the ground. Jericho was totally destroyed and was forgotten for a long time.



69- The Defeat at Ai

(Joshua 7 & 8)

The Israelites started moving from Jericho towards a small village called Ai. They were confident they could easily win the battle against it, since Ai was a very small town, compared to Jericho.

It wasn't possible for the Israelites to move towards the protected Jericho until God has spoken to Joshua and told him, "To your hand I have given Jericho, along with its king and their very strong men."

But in the case of Ai, and because it was a small village, we haven't heard that Joshua had consulted with God before deciding on the number of men he would be sending to fight Ai.

Joshua ordered the attack. But, his astonishment and bitterness of heart were great when they were defeated. Earlier, the people had achieved an amazing victory against the fortified city of Jericho, but defeated before that small village of Ai, because of one person among them who committed a transgression. God was no longer in their midst.

Had Joshua consulted with God in advance, He would have forbidden him from going to war until the Israelites have gotten rid of all the evil that secretly infiltrated them, and their defeat would have been avoided.

Joshua stood before the Lord, interceding on behalf of his people. He tore his clothes, and fell to the ground on his face before the Ark of Covenant until the evening. He became a symbol for our Lord Jesus Christ, who vacated Himself, as if He removed His coat of glory for our sake. The One before Whom, the heavenly ranks tremble, came down to earth, and He completed the reconciliation on the Cross till the evening.

Joshua cried to the Lord, and the answer came, "There is a foul situation in your midst, Israel."

Joshua found out that Achan the son of Carmi had not heeded the voice of the Lord. He concealed gold and silver during the victory over Jericho and that was prohibited.



Achan and his family were stoned to death, to give a harsh lesson to the whole nation of Israel! As the evil was removed from the midst of the people, the Lord told Joshua, “Do not be afraid or dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.”

God had a special plan for him. He ordered him to divide the people into two groups: the first group would form two ambushing teams: first team to hide behind Ai and the second team to the west between Ai and Bethel, in order to confront any help coming from Bethel to rescue Ai. The first team would remain close to Ai to invade it when Joshua would give them the signal.

The second group was the obvious attacking army under the leadership of Joshua. They would assault Ai from the front. Then, when the people of Ai would come out to confront them, they would flee away from them, drawing the whole city of Ai to chase after them. If this plan works, the city of Ai would be clear from all its inhabitants. So the two ambushing teams, left behind, would seize the city of Ai.

This second attack on Ai went as planned and the Israelites were victorious this time.

Now that Joshua entered the Promised Land and was victorious over Jericho and Ai, he did exactly what Moses instructed them to do. He erected an altar made of stones. God instructed Moses and the elders of Israel, saying: “Keep all the Commandments that I am giving you today, so that the day you cross the Jordan to the land the Lord God has given you, you shall erect for yourself large stones (altar) and you shall write all the words of this Law on them. When you shall cross over to the land flowing with milk and honey that God has given you.”

The location to raise that altar, method of erecting it, and its purpose has been thoroughly identified.





70- The Trick of the Gibeonites

(Joshua 9)

When the people of Gibeon heard about what Joshua did to Jericho and Ai, they were terrified. They felt that the day of their defeat at the hands of the Israelites was approaching fast.

So, three men from Gibeon planned to pretend that they were coming from a very far place, and went to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, to establish a peace accord with him, and to have him promise not to harm them or their people.

They deceptively told Joshua and the Israelites:

“We have come from a distant land. Now, make a treaty with us... This bread of ours was warm when we packed it in our homes the day we started out to meet you, but now it is dry and hard.

These wineskins that we filled were brand new, but look how they have ripped.

Our clothes and sandals have worn out because it has been a very long journey.”

For the second time, Joshua and his men failed to seek the Lord's guidance before they acted. They fell in the same mistake that they did when they attacked Ai the first time.

Although the Israelites doubted those people of Gibeon, but instead of consulting with God about this matter, they settled on using their human wisdom. They were engaged into a dialogue with these men, telling them, “Perhaps you live near us. So how can we establish a treaty with you?!”

Their answer came from a human mouth, but, “from the Lord's mouth they didn't ask.” They relied on the human thinking without resorting to God, so they were deceived!

After Joshua entered in a peace treaty with them, he found out that Gibeon is very close to Ai.

Joshua was furious, but he still honored the treaty, on the condition that the Gibeonites were to serve the Israelites.





71- The Siege of Gibeon

(Joshua 10)

At that time, the land of Canaan was divided into many large and small states; each one ruled by a king. Some of these states had alliance treaties among themselves to defend against any enemy attacks on any of these states.

The king of Jerusalem heard about Joshua's victories, so he made alliance with four other kings, and they put a siege around Gibeon which had recently made a treaty with Joshua.

A message was sent to Joshua from that besieged town, telling him about what happened to them and asking him for rescue.

God said to Joshua, "Don't be afraid of them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you."

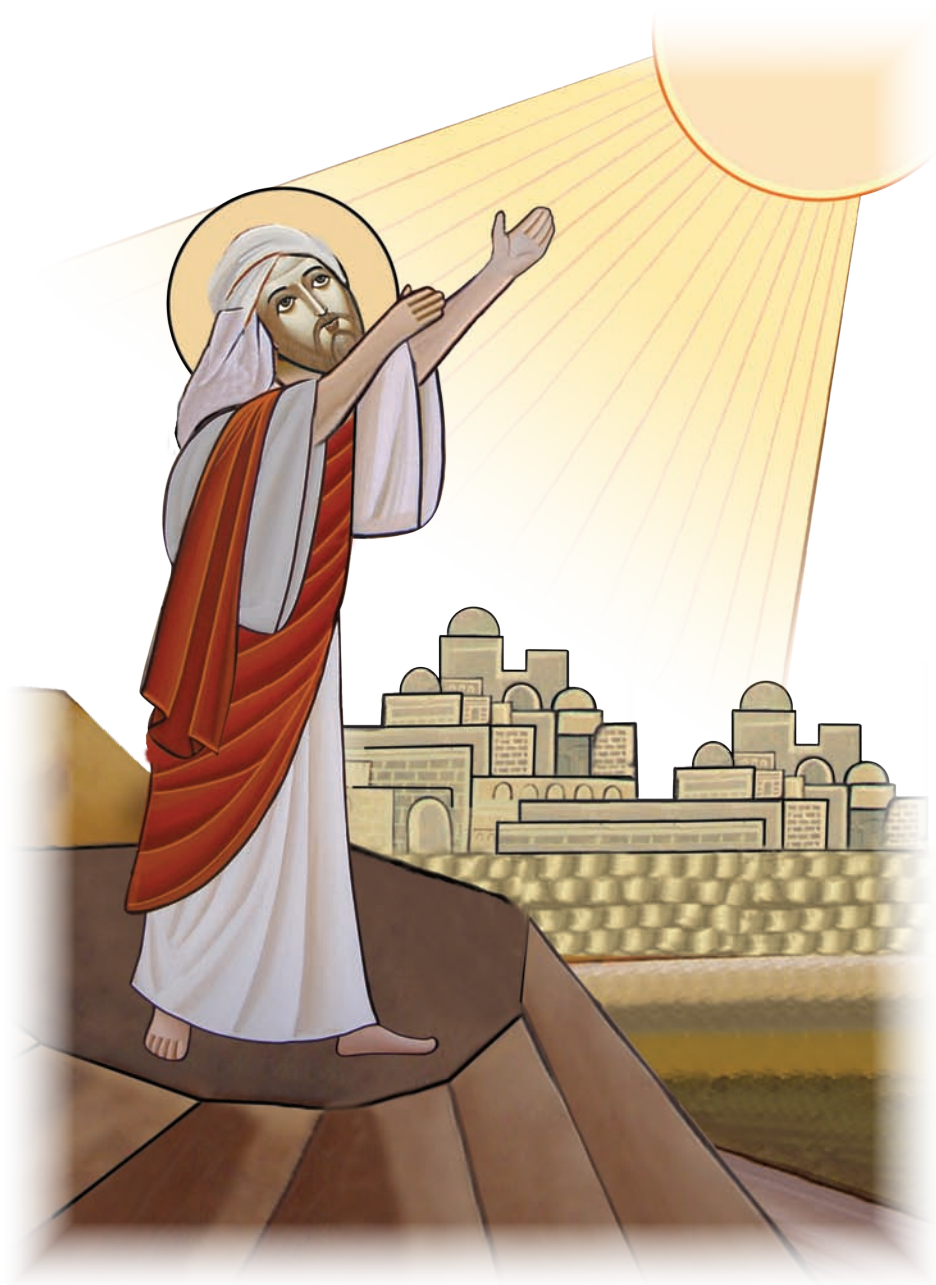
Then, Joshua marched all night from Gilgal, and the Lord conquered those kings before Israel. Israel thoroughly defeated them at Gibeon, and they were expelled.

As they fled from Israel, the Lord from the sky threw down large hailstones on them. More people died from the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword.

While Israel was fighting, Joshua asked God to postpone the coming of nighttime until they concluded their victory in that battle. Joshua said, "O sun, stand still over Gibeon! O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon!" And the sun shined over them until their victory was completed!!

After their victory in that battle, Joshua continued the war until they won all the region of Philistine.

When the war was over, Joshua dedicated all his time to dividing the acquired land among the tribes of Israel.





72- Dividing the Promised Land Among the Tribes as Inheritance

(Joshua 13-22)

Things began to settle down, and everyone in Israel felt that God's promise to their fathers had been fulfilled. At the same time, their Canaanites neighbors recognized that the Israelites had received this land from the Mighty Hand of God.

Then, Joshua started to divide the land among the twelve tribes. These tribes were ten for the sons of Jacob, and two tribes for Joseph's two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh. The Levi tribe did not get a share in the Promised Land, since God Himself was their share, and they were to live on the tithes, vows and offerings donated to them by the other tribes.

Joshua ordered the tribes to go to the land allocated to each of them according to the arrangement Moses had set up for them from before.

Some of them had their land on the East bank of Jordan River, the others on its West bank.

It was not easy for each tribe to occupy the land assigned to it, except for the tribe of Judah that established itself in the land by force.

By now, the lives of the Israelites changed drastically, from nomadic people to an organized stable nation with its own land that has to advance in all aspects of life.

They started to build homes instead of the tents that they had become accustomed to. They began to learn how to weave, how to craft jewelry and how to manage different projects. Their lives were transformed from ongoing battles with the inhabitants of Canaan to a stable state.

Joshua's mission as a leader leading the people into the Promised Land and divide it between them was accomplished.

Then, Joshua gathered the heads of the tribes; he reminded them with the great deeds God had performed among them. God chose them as a nation, as His "special possession." He urged them to adhere to the obedience of the Ten Commandments that Moses received on Mount Sinai. Finally, he warned them about practicing any pagan customs.

Joshua died shortly afterwards. He was one hundred and ten years old.





73- Cities of Refuge for Israel

(Joshua 20)

God asked Moses to select six cities for a special purpose, to be used as cities of refuge.

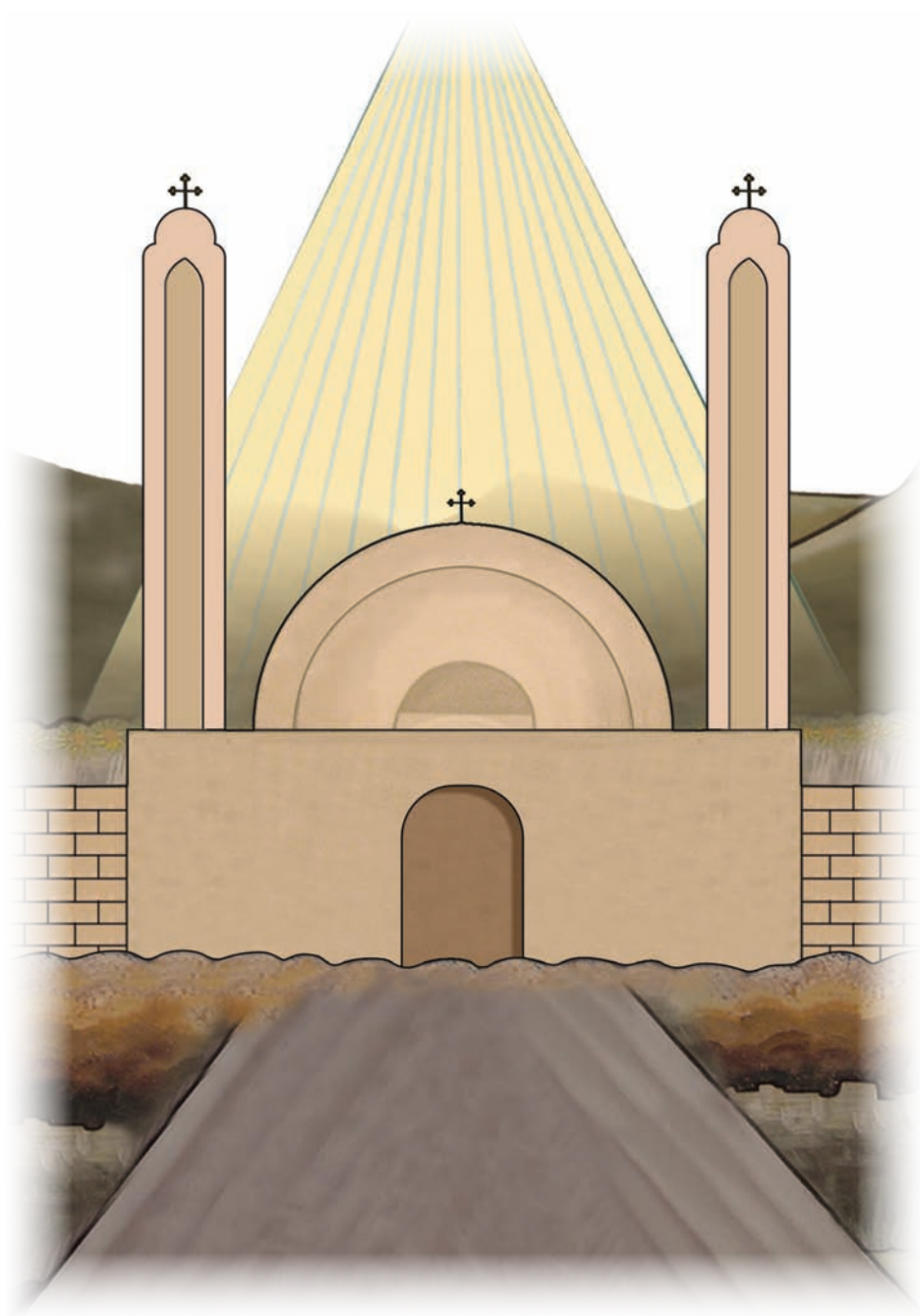
If a man kills another man by accident in Israel, the killer could escape to one of those cities of refuge. In this case, the relatives of the deceased couldn't invade that city of refuge to seek revenge for the victim.

For example, someone cutting fire-wood with an ax, and the blade flew off and hit somebody else accidentally and killing that person. That person would pay for this mistake his life if he did not flee to a city of refuge. But, if he did, he would be saved, and when the high priest dies, he may leave the city of refuge and no body would seek revenge from him.

Here, the city of refuge was a reference to the Church. Through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sins have been redeemed and we are not going to be condemned to eternal death.

Another example: If a hunter, by mistake, hit somebody by his arrow and killed him, the hunter would have to run to the closest city of refuge. There, the elders would gather to decide whether the killing was intentional or not. The guilty person would remain in that city until the death of the high priest. Then he would be free to go back to his home in peace without fear.

By this arrangement, the Law offered justice for the innocent, and a granted tranquility in life.





74- An Altar without a Sacrifice

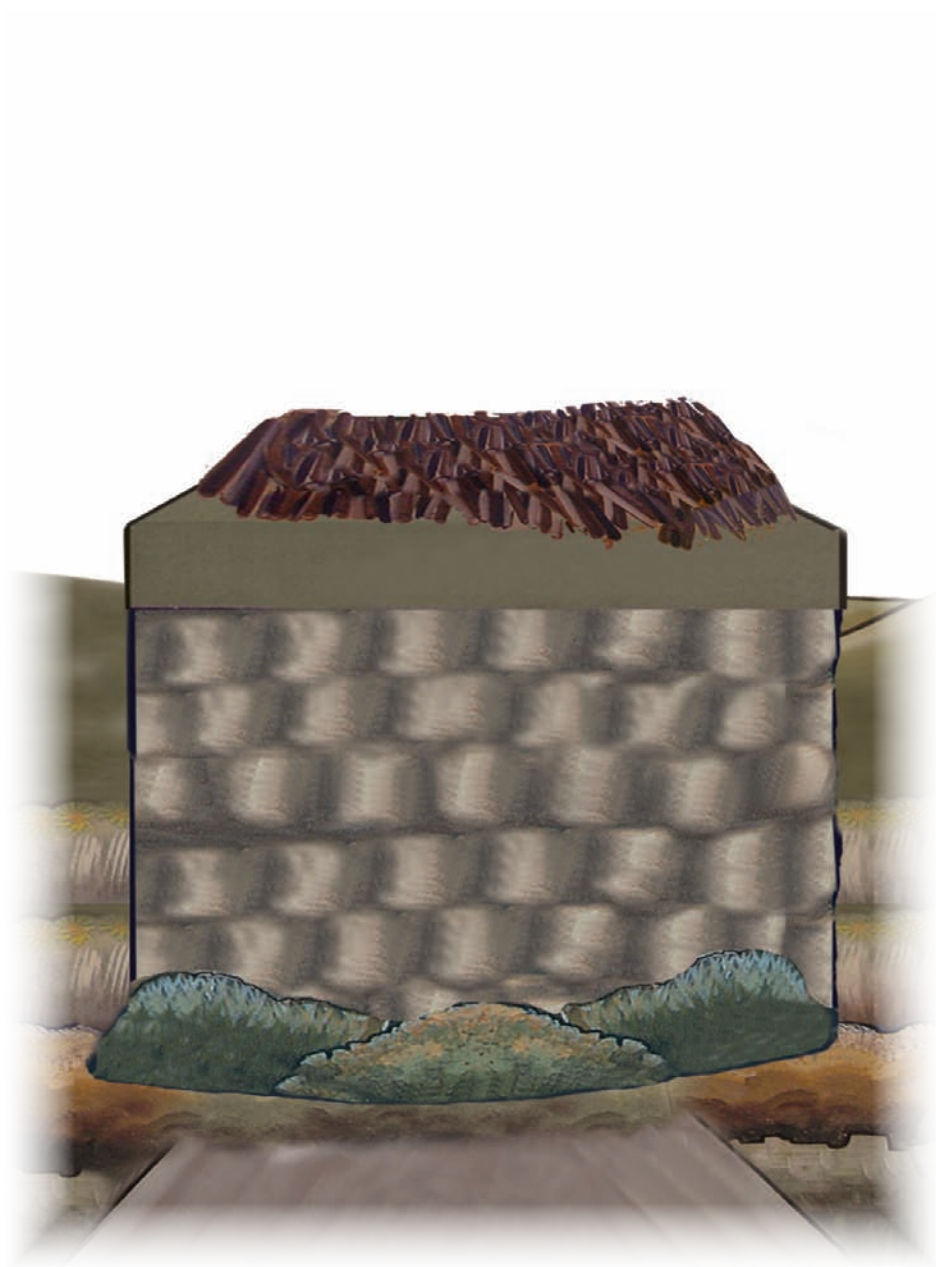
(Joshua 22)

In the days of Joshua, the men from the Levi tribe were serving in the Tabernacle of Meeting as priests for all Israel. They were not given land to cultivate, but they were given cities to inhabit. They were living off the tithes and offerings given to them by the other tribes. They were serving as priests' part of the year, and then they would return to work in their cities.

Joshua placed the Tabernacle in Shiloh, nearly in the middle of the Promised Land. The people used to go there to worship three times every year. The Tabernacle was the only place where they were allowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

The tribes living on the East of Jordan built for themselves another altar, and as a result the tribes living on the West of Jordan were troubled. They considered this action to cause a division among the people of Israel, on the East and on the West of the Jordan. They were about to start a civil war.

The ones in the West were asking, "Why did you build another altar?" The ones in the East answered wisely, "Don't you see that our altar is on our land on the East of the river? We have built it as a reminder for our descendants who would follow us; we didn't build it to offer sacrifices. Our descendants would remember that Israel was one people on both sides of the river. This altar would be a reminder that the Lord is the God of all of us."





75- Deborah the Judge

(Judges 4)

After the death of Joshua, each tribe was governed by its own leader.

When sometime passed, the people of Israel started to form friendly relationship with their pagan neighbors. Unfortunately, number of the Israelites began to practice the pagan worship. The Israelites found more pleasure in worshiping idols, and practicing evil habits, and their sins have become so great.

From time to time, God would punish them, by allowing their hostile neighboring pagan nations to attack them.

Each time, whenever the Israelites regretted their guilt, and repented and had a desire to return back to God, He would send to them leaders to deliver them from the enemies who occupied them and subjugated them. Those leaders were called Judges. Sometimes, they were only ruling over a group of tribes, and not all the people of Israel.

Among those Judges was Deborah the Judge, and the pious just prophetess.

Deborah used to sit by an old palm tree between Ramah and Bethel, and the Israelites would come up to her to seek settlements in their disputes. God guided her in everything she was doing.

The people were extremely evil in the days of Deborah, therefore, God allowed king Jabin of Canaan to cruelly oppress the Israelites for twenty years.

The Israelites cried to God to deliver them and free their land.

God was searching for a courageous leader to save His people. And who was more qualified than the capable loyal Deborah, the Judge who served God for a long time with honesty and dedication?

God told her, “Deborah, listen to Me. You have to assemble an army to free your country. I will be with you, and make you the leader of My people.”



Deborah answered:

“How can I do that? The war is a man's duty,
However, if You lead me, O God, I can do anything.
I find You, O God, always coming to my rescue,
because You are the God of the unattainable.”





76- Victory for Deborah and Barak

(Judges 4 & 5)

Deborah sent a message to a man called Barak, telling him:

"Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded you, 'Go and deploy troops to Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men, and against you I will have Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his countless army at the Kishon river. And, I will deliver him into your hand!'"

Barak, the young man answered her, "I agree fully, but I seek your support. Please join me, Deborah. If you go with me, I will go, but if you do not come with me I will not go."

She answered him, "I will indeed go with you, and into the hands of a woman the Lord will deliver Sisera."

Deborah joined Barak, as well as many volunteers from near and far tribes to fight. Deborah stood up and addressed that army, saying, "The Lord will help us, He will lead us, and we will conquer by His guidance."

Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army went out to war proud of his nine hundred iron chariots, and confident in his skills.

What could Deborah's army do to face their enemy? They don't have any chariots. How could an army of foot soldiers resist another army equipped with more advanced military machinery?

That evening, Sisera's troops gathered in a nearby camp, parading their overconfidence and arrogance. Suddenly, the sky was filled with thick dark clouds, followed by an extremely heavy rain. The water level in the river Kishon rose until it flooded its banks and reached the tents in Sisera's camp.

The inclement weather continued through the next morning.

Sisera blew the horn, and shouted, "This is the day we were waiting for, and it is our victory day. Although, the ground has become muddy, we are not afraid, we'll teach our enemy a lesson that they will never forget."

On the other side, Deborah, with Barak, cried to their troops, "Advance and don't be afraid. This is not our battle; it's the battle of the Lord who grants the victory and freedom. The Lord





will show you that He is greater than any human, and stronger than any chariots."

The chariots of Sisera began advancing toward the battlefield, but they all sank in the mud, and could not move. Sisera himself attempted to extract his chariot out of the mud, but he failed. All Sisera's men were forced to abandon their chariots, and ran away with all their might to flee from Deborah's army. Amazingly and with determination Deborah's army pursued them and won the war.

As for Sisera, he fled by foot until he reached the city of Kedesh, where he hid in the tent of Heber the Kenite, who was an ally of Canaan. Jael, wife of Heber, came out to welcome Sisera. She told him, "Stop and rest at my place. Don't be afraid." He asked her, "Give me some water to drink, because I'm thirsty."

But, it seemed that Sisera tried to mistreat her in the absence of her husband. He was led by his evil lusts and was not grateful to Heber and his wife. She gave him milk and comforted him. But he asked her, "Stand by the tent's door, and if somebody asks you about I am hiding here, just say there is nobody here."

Sisera was exhausted and weary, and while he was sound asleep, Jael took a tent peg and hammered it into his head and killing him because of his dishonesty.

While Barak was still chasing Sisera, Jael came to him of the tent and said, "Come here and I will show you the man you are looking for." So, when Barak entered her tent, he found him dead.

At the end, the land was freed from Jabin, the violent king of Canaan. Deborah rejoiced with Barak and all the people of Israel were so delighted, and kept praising God.



77- Young Gideon's Invitation to God's Work **(Judges 6:1-24)**

The people of Israel lived in peace for forty years. Again, they committed evil in the sight of the Lord, instead of giving thanks and praise to Him. So, in order for them to repent, God delivered them to be humiliated in the hands of the Midianites for seven years. However, God sent to them Gideon to be their judge and savior, he was a young man from the tribe of Manasseh.

God's angel appeared to Gideon while he was sitting under an oak tree in the village of Ophrah West of the Jordan River. Here, we can see another revelation of the Son of God before the Incarnation. Gideon was threshing wheat with his stick to remove the seeds. Perhaps, he may have lost his threshing tools during the Midianites attacks. He was doing his threshing inside a winepress hiding from the Midianites who could steal his seeds.

The Lord's angel started greeting him, "The Lord is with you, O you mighty warrior!" Gideon was known for his courage, strength and devotion to his people whom the Midianites had humiliated.

Gideon replied:

"My master, if the Lord is with us, so why are we experiencing all of this suffering?

Where are all God's miraculous deeds which our fathers have told us about, saying, 'Isn't He, the Mighty Lord who brought us out of Egypt?'

But now the Lord has abandoned us and delivered us in the hand of Midian".

How beautiful is Gideon's heart that was burning with zeal towards his people's welfare. So, he would stand with an open heart and familiarity to reproach the Lord Himself, in order to receive His mercies!

Then, the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength that you have and you shall save Israel from the hand of Midianites! Have I not sent you?!"

The Lord asked Gideon to go with his holy zeal and to work and serve his people. As if the Lord was saying, "Do not be afraid of what happened to you, I am sending you in order for Me to



work through you, as I did with your fathers!" Also, this was similar to when the Lord said to Joshua earlier, "Have I not ordered you?!"

Gideon did not show any objection to work for God but humbly said: "My Master, I ask You, how can I save Israel?! My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

The Lord said to him, "Ah, but I will be with you! You will strike down the whole Midianites army as if it was a single man."





78- Gideon's Fleece

(Judges 6:25, 7- 8)

After the angel appeared to Gideon, that night, he destroyed the Baal altar that belonged to his father, and he built an altar for the Lord. When the men of the city saw that the Baal altar had been destroyed, they were extremely angry and demanded that he would be killed.

His father knew that what Gideon has done was proper, and he wanted to save his son from death. So, he told those angry people, "As long as my son did destroy Baal's altar, let us leave the god Baal punish him." By this way he managed to save his son's life.

Then, it happened that the Midianites again attacked the Israelites with a strong army and frightened them.

The spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. He blew the trumpet, and sent messengers to the tribes of Israel, saying, "Come help us in driving out the Midianites".

From the mountain of Gilboa, Gideon looked, and saw the Midianites' huge army camping at the foot of the mountain. Gideon prayed to God, "O God, if You really intend to use me to deliver Israel, then give me a sign. I am putting a wool fleece on the rooftop. By tomorrow, if there is moisture from dew only on the fleece, and the ground around it is dry, then I will know that You will use me to deliver Israel."

In the early morning, Gideon found that the fleece was wet from dew, while the ground around it was dry.

Again, Gideon prayed to the Lord, "Please do not get angry with me, when I ask for just one more sign. Please allow me one more test with the fleece. This time let it be dry only on the fleece, while the ground around it be covered with dew."

That night God did as Gideon asked of Him.

Do not be surprised by the signs Gideon asked for, since the fleece is a symbol of Israel: The first sign points to what happened in the Old Testament; as Israel was God's people who enjoyed the dew of His mercies. At the same time, all the Gentile nations suffered from dryness; by being deprived from knowing God, they neither had prophets nor entered into any covenants with God.



The second sign points to what happened in the New Testament; as Israel dried up by refusing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, the Gentile nations accepted to believe in Him, and they enjoyed the dew of His Divine Grace.

Early the next morning, Gideon and his men camped near the spring of Harod. The Midianites were camping in the valley of Jezreel and were prepared for battle with the Israelites.

On the other hand, Gideon had an army which was huge in number. So, the Lord told him, "You have too many men for me to hand Midian over to you. Israel might brag, 'Our own strength has delivered us.'" So, Gideon gradually started to dismiss great number of his men, until his army was reduced to only three hundred men.

Gideon gave each of his men a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch hidden inside it, as God ordered him.

In the middle of the night, when the enemy's camp was sound asleep, Gideon and his men moved quietly, and surrounded the enemy's camp.

When each man was in position, Gideon blew his trumpet, and all his men followed, and simultaneously broke their jars exposing their torches. The enemy was startled with the sudden loud trumpet sound and the sudden bright light in the midst of the darkness.

As a result, the Midianites were utterly confused, and awkwardly disoriented, they did not know what to do or where to go.

Many of them were killed by the Israelites, and the rest of the army fled and never returned.

Later on, the Israelites wanted Gideon to be their king. But he refused, saying, "I would not be a king over you, neither my children after me. God (Jehovah) is your King and will rule over you."





79- The Strange Vow

(Judges 11)

Sadly, when Gideon died, Israel went back to idol worship, so God allowed the Ammonites to attack them. This was the sixth time for Israel to get in trouble during the rule of the Judges. The Spirit of God was upon Jephthah, so he came to save Israel.

Jephthah's step-brothers drove him out of the house because he was the son of a prostitute, so he would not inherit any of their father's wealth. Indeed, nothing was wrong with Jephthah, and God does not punish a child for his father's sin. But, due to his step-brothers' pressure, he fled to the land of Tob on the East bank of the Jordan River, outside the borders of Israel. There, he maintained the love for his brothers in his heart, although he joined the company of evil friends.

When Jephthah's brothers drove him away, they followed the legal judgment issued by the elders of Gilead. Now, those same elders reached out to Jephthah asking him to return to fight the Ammonites for them, saying, "Come, be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." It seems that the elders of Gilead sought Jephthah to be their war commander because he was known to be a mighty warrior.

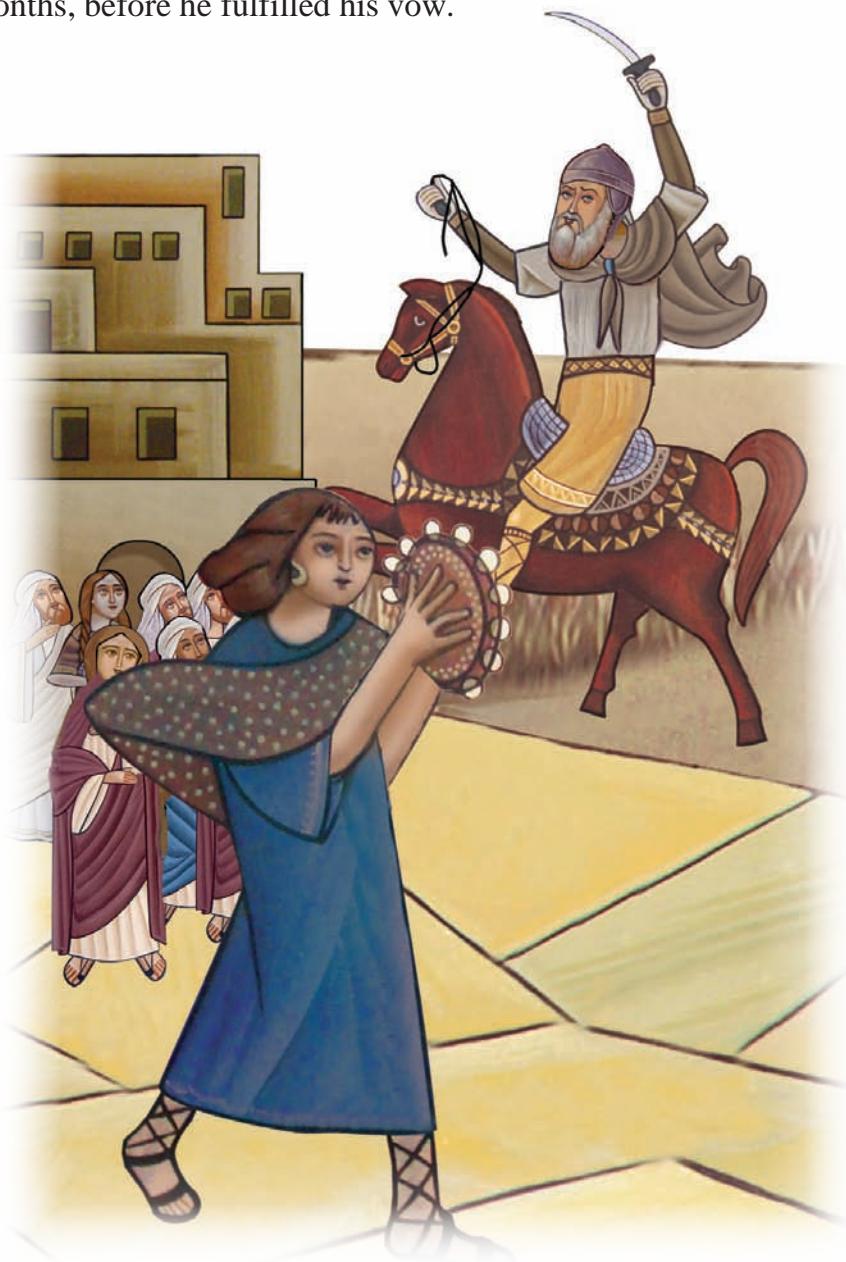
Jephthah accepted the task, after he had a discussion with the elders. He made it clear that he accepted it from God's hands not theirs. He relied on the Lord to fight the war; he did not depend on himself or his men, as it shows in what he told the elders, "If you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord delivers them to me..."

Jephthah left his evil friends and clung to the Lord. He wanted to liberate his people, so he made a strange vow to God, which might not please Him. He said, "O Lord, deliver the Ammonites into my hand, and whatever comes first out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph, I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

God does not accept human sacrifices; on the contrary, He despises them. When He asked Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, He did not allow it to happen, but He was pleased with Abraham's show of obedience. This incident was to demonstrate how Isaac was a symbol of Jesus Christ.



God granted Jephthah a glorious victory over the Ammonites. But when he came back home, his only daughter was the one who hurried to meet him. She was the first to meet him. Jephthah cried, "Oh no! My daughter! I made an oath to the Lord, and I cannot break it." Jephthah left his daughter to weep for two months, before he fulfilled his vow.





80- The Honey-Filled Lion's Mouth The Mighty Samson

(Judges 13)

One more time, the people of Israel reverted from the worship of the Living God to the worship of idols. So, God delivered them to the Philistines to punish them, and the Philistines controlled them for forty years.

When God wanted to save His people from the Philistines, He sent an angel to the wife of Manoah from the Danites tribe. The angel told her, "You will conceive and have a son. You must never cut his hair, for the child will be dedicated to God from birth. He must not drink wine. He will begin to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines."

The child was born, and was named Samson. He was considered physically, the strongest man mentioned in the Holy Bible. He did not lead an army against Israel's enemies, as some Judges have done, but he did defend his people all by himself.

When the Israelites started to worship the idols again, God delivered them to the Philistines. The Philistines robbed all their swords and spears in order for them to become defenseless. They also robbed their crops.

People of Israel cried to God, and God heard their cries.

In Timnah, Samson met a pagan Philistine girl. She caught his eyes, and he wanted to marry her. But, his parents rejected this marriage. However, God allowed that marriage to take place in order to liberate the Israelites from the pagan Philistines.

Samson was on his way to Timnah when he was attacked by a young lion hiding in a vineyard. The lion pounced while roaring, and attacked Samson. The Lord's Spirit empowered him to tear the lion apart with his bare hands.

Later, when Samson was travelling back from Timnah for his wedding, he saw the dead lion's carcass, with its open mouth filled with bees swarming a hive full of honey. Samson took some of the honey and ate it along the road. Also, he spared some honey for his parents, who ate it too, without knowing where it came from, and Samson never told them.





81- A Riddle in a Wedding Ceremony

(Judges 14)

On his wedding, Samson had a great banquet at the house of his bride. His father and thirty of his Philistines friends attended the wedding. Samson's wedding ceremony lasted an entire week.

Young Philistines were used to exchange riddles for fun when they were gathered, especially during wedding celebrations. Samson told his companions, "I have a riddle, if you can correctly solve it within the seven days of the wedding feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing, but if you cannot give me the right answer, you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing."

The youth agreed to those conditions, and Samson started telling them the riddle, "Out of the eater came something to eat; and out of the strong one came something sweet."

For three days, the youth tried hard to figure out what that riddle meant, and they couldn't. Ultimately, they threatened Samson's Philistinian bride to burn her and her father's house, if she couldn't extract the answer from Samson and pass it along to them. Samson's wife kept nagging him and crying, until he was forced to tell her the answer of the riddle. Then, she relayed the information to the youth.

At sunset, the young men came telling Samson, "What is sweeter than honey?! And, what is stronger than a lion?!" So, Samson was obligated to provide them with thirty linen robes and thirty sets of clothes according to their agreement, since they found out that the riddle was about the lion he killed.

Samson went out and killed thirty Philistines, and then he took their clothes and gave them to the men who solved the riddle.

Samson was very angry with his wife because she gave those men the answer to his riddle. So, he left her at her father's house and went home to his parents.





82- Samson Killed a Thousand Men with the Jawbone of a Donkey

(Judges 15-16)

After a while, Samson's anger had subsided and he wanted to reconcile with his wife. He took a young goat as a gift of reconciliation, as this kind of gift was a very common at that time. When he arrived at Timnah, his father-in-law would not let him see his wife. Her father said, "I really thought you absolutely despised her, so I gave her to your best man. Isn't her younger sister more attractive than she is?! Take her instead!"

Samson's father-in-law was wrong when he gave his daughter to her husband's best man, before she was divorced from her husband and even before her husband was notified! Then, the father thought that the beauty and the young age of her sister could persuade Samson to give up his love for his wife. But love can't be bribed with beauty or youth!

That was a sufficient reason to anger Samson exceedingly with the Philistines. So, he went out and gathered three hundred foxes, and then he tied the foxes in pairs by their tails and tied a lit torch to each pair. Then, he set the foxes loose in the Philistines' grain fields. By doing that, Samson burned up the Philistines' grain heaps, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. When the Philistines found out what had happened because of Samson, they went up and took their revenge by burning Samson's wife and her father. However, Samson was not satisfied, because he felt insulted by them burning his wife, so he told the Philistines that before he would quit fighting, he would get revenge against them.

Then Samson went down and dwelt in a cave in the cliff of Etam. It was about two miles Southwest of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Then, the Philistines went up and invaded Judah. The people of Judah inquired and asked, "Why are you attacking us?" The Philistines said, "We have come up to capture Samson as prisoner and then kill him."

Three thousand men of Judah went down to look for Samson. When he was found, they asked him, "Why are you killing the Philistines? Because of you, we are suffering from their attacks." So, Samson let the people of Judah take him as a

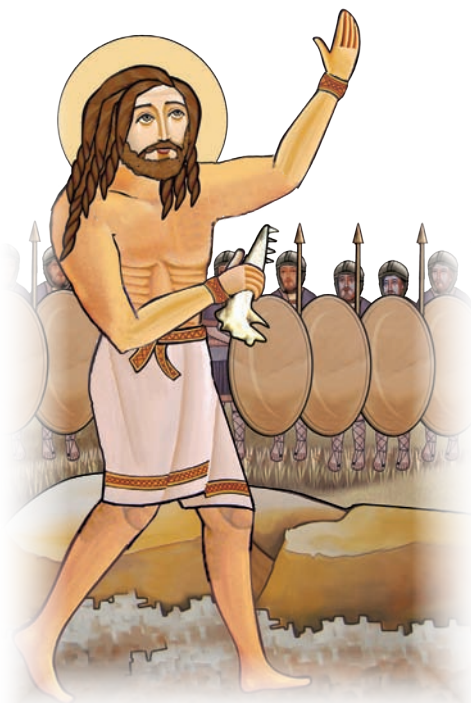


prisoner. They tied him up with two strong brand new ropes, led him up from the cliff and delivered him to the Philistines. The Philistines were so elated for getting Samson, but the Lord's Spirit empowered him to tear the ropes around his arms as easily as flax linens burning in fire. So, instead of being killed by his enemies, Samson grabbed a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and used it to strike down a thousand men!

Samson was very thirsty after that tremendous fight, so he cried out to the Lord. So, God split open a basin and water flowed out from it for him to drink.

Despite Samson hatred for the Philistines due to their occupation to Israel, and their numerous battles against Israel, he did make a mistake by falling in love with a Philistine maiden called Delilah. The leaders of the Philistines went up to visit Delilah and asked her to trick Samson, and to find out the source of his strength. They promised her, if she succeeded, that they would give her eleven hundred silver pieces as a reward.

Another time, Samson pulled out the gates of Gaza city, and carried them on his shoulders up to the top of a hill.





83- The Secret to Samson's Strength

(Judges 16)

To serve her people, Delilah tried her best to find out the secret to Samson's strength, in order to relay it to them. She kept persistently begged him to tell her, and he kept giving her wrong information, and in each time, the Philistines couldn't defeat him.

One time, Samson told Delilah that all it would take was to tie him up with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried yet, i.e. seven ropes made of flax or some other plant. But when they tied him to these seven ropes, he managed to break the bowstrings that snap when they are near a fire.

Another time, he said to her that all it would be to tie him tightly with brand new ropes that have never been used. But when she did that to him, he tore the ropes from his arms as if they were threads of fabric.

On the third attempt, the answer was to weave the seven braids of his hair into the fabric of the loom and secure it with a pin. For example, his hair has to be weaved in seven braids with a wrap that is the same lengthwise as threads on a loom, and not the weft that are the same widthwise as the fabric threads. But when she put him to sleep and did that to him, he woke up and tore apart the pin of the loom and the fabric.

Delilah reproached Samson saying, "How can you say, 'I love you,' and then you lie to me?!"

Finally, after a consistent nagging day after day, for him to uncover the secret of his strength, Samson revealed to her the secret behind the strength of God's work through him. He told her how he has been dedicated to God since his birth and how his hair should never be cut, because if his head would be shaved, God's strength would depart from him.

With a very wide smile on Delilah's face, she realized that this time Samson told her what she was really longing for.

Then, one night, the leaders of the Philistines went up to visit her, bringing the silver in their hands. She made him fall asleep with his head on her lap and then she called a Philistine man, who shaved off his hair quietly. Then, Delilah cried out, "Wake up Samson, the Philistines are here!"



Samson woke up and jumped, this time the Bible didn't say, "God's Spirit was upon him," but it did say that, "He thought, 'I will do as I have before; rise and defeat them.'" Instead, Samson felt that he had no longer had any strength. The power of the Lord had left him. The mighty had fallen, not on the lap of Delilah, but fallen on the lap of his worldly pleasures.

Indeed, the Philistines captured him easily, put him in prison and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza, tied him to the grinder, and forced him to operate it as an ox. They ridiculed and mocked him. What was his feeling when he became the joke for everybody? How shameful it was, for the power of God to leave him because of his worldly concerns and carnal lust!





84- The Death of Samson

(Judges 16:23-31)

Samson realized his mistake, and he offered a true repentance for his evil conduct with Delilah.

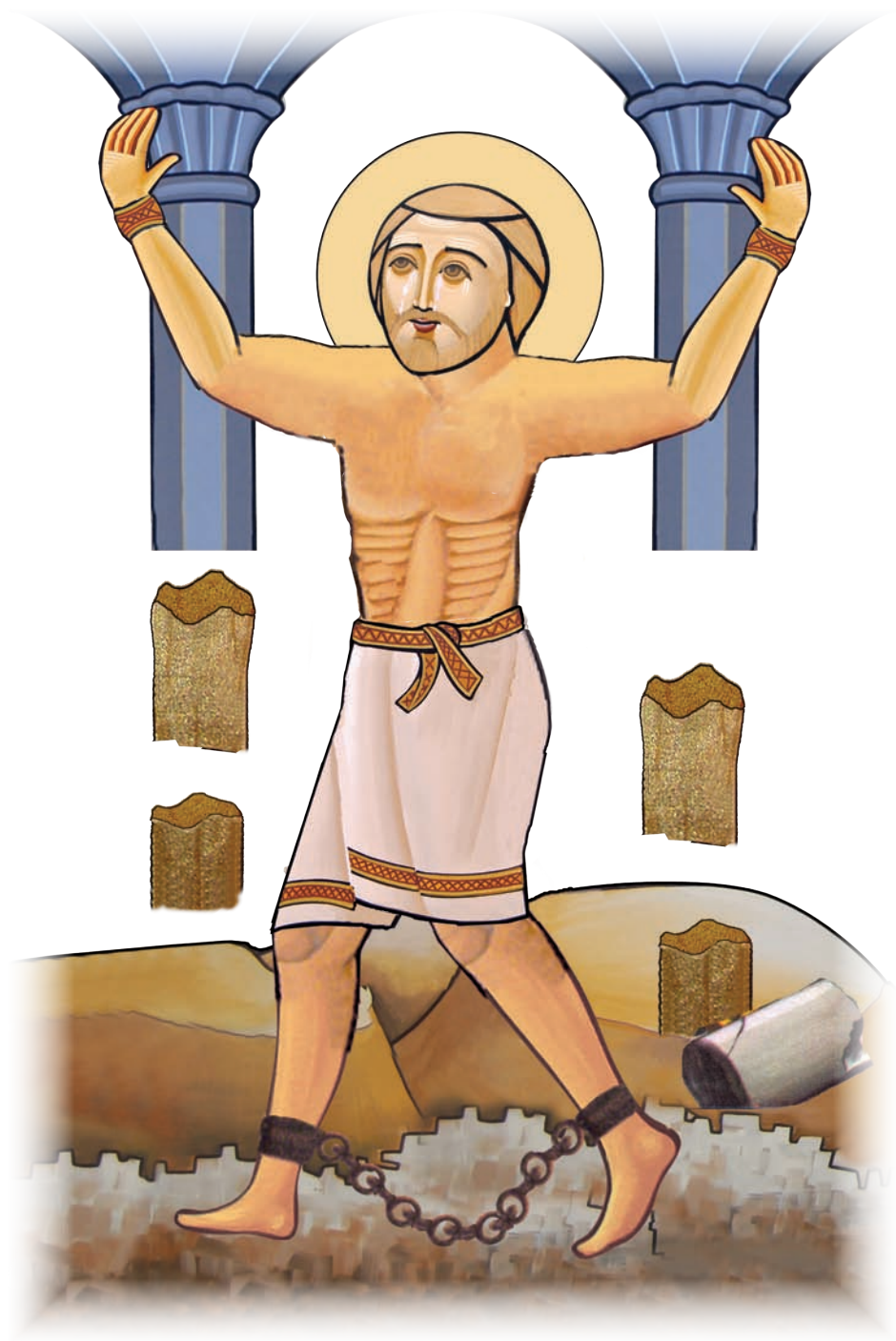
On the feast of their god Dagon, the Philistines leaders gathered in the huge temple to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon and to celebrate his feast. There were more than 3000 men, women and children attending. They requested that Samson be brought into the temple to entertain the masses, and for them to embarrass him and to insult his God. They believed that their god Dagon has delivered Samson to them, and considered that day to be a memorable and a remarkable day, since their god Dagon was glorified at last after capturing for them their enemy Samson.

By that time, Samson's hair began to grow back, while his heart grew every day more humble and repentant, he believed that God wouldn't abandon him forever. So, his heart cried out, "O Master, Lord, remember me! Strengthen me just one more time, O God, so I can get swift revenge against the Philistines for my two eyes!" With a modest heart, Samson asked the Lord to give him back His power to avenge from the pagan enemy, who humiliated the people of God. He discovered in the midst of his misery that God is the Secret to his strength, and stopped depending and relying on his own strength.

Samson asked the young man who held his hand to position him so he could touch the main pillars that support the temple, so he might lean on them.

With a humble spirit and deep repentance, Samson prayed saying, "Remember me O God, and grant me strength. Let Your Name be glorified in me, while letting me die with the Philistines." Then he took hold of the two central pillars and he leaned against them. He cried to God, then he pushed very hard and the whole temple collapsed on all the people in it. He killed many more people in his death than he had killed during his life.

Samson committed a sin, but he repented. He believed in God and loved His people, and later, he prayed to God to grant him the strength to serve Him.





85- A Foreign Widow in Bethlehem: Ruth the Moabite

(Ruth)

During the time when the Judges ruled, there was a severe famine in the land of Israel. So, Elimelech, his wife Naomi and his two sons had to leave to the land of Moab to escape the famine.

After the death of Elimelech, his wife Naomi chose to stay in Moab with her two sons, who later married two Moabite girls; one was named Orpah and the other Ruth. When the two sons died, Naomi longed to return to her home country. Naomi tried to hold her tears before her daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth, but she couldn't. She paused for a few moments, and then said:

"Ten years ago, I came here with my husband and my two sons to avoid death because of the famine in our home town, Bethlehem. We came to your country, Moab, and when my two sons got older, they married both of you. Now, my husband has died as well as my two sons, and I was left a widow as you both are. I have decided to go back to Bethlehem, to spend the rest of my miserable life there, and then die among my people.

So, my daughters, I beg you to return to your families.

I will never forget your love, and I will always appreciate your generosity with my husband and me. I will always remember that you were virtuous wives to my sons.

Now, my daughters, I want you to listen to me, and to go back to your fathers' homes. You are still young, and there is a chance for you to get married again from your own people and settle down. You should not have any hope in me. I am advanced in age, and too old to have a husband. If I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown?

Now, please, go back home, and may God bless you, and have mercy on you, as you were so kind to me and to the dead."

Then, all three of them started to weep loudly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good bye, and went back to her father's house. But Ruth chose to stay with her mother-in-law, and she clung to her. Ruth said to her mother-in-law: "Please, my mother, do not ask me anymore to leave you. I am used to utter and complete obedience to my parents, to my husband and to you. But this time,





I can't listen to you, because I love you, and I am not leaving you alone in this old age. For, wherever you go, I'll go and wherever you stay, I'll stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I'll die, and there I'll be buried. Nothing will separate me from you except death!"

Both Naomi and Ruth left together on their way to the land of Judah, until they arrived to Bethlehem. Many people came out to welcome them, and to greet them. But, the people were sort of disappointed when they found that Naomi was coming back without her husband or sons, only with a young woman. Obviously, people noticed how much Naomi was devastated, troubled and desolate. The expressions on her face had reflected her sadness, and her broken heart. Definitely, signs of aging were clear on her face, not just because of her age, but also because of the ordeals she had gone through. Naomi was unable to even return their greetings.

In great sadness, she told them, "Don't call me 'Naomi' (which means: Blessings), but call me 'Mara' (which means: Bitterness), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I left here with my husband and two sons, but the Lord has caused me to return a bereaved widow."

Ruth kindly answered in a caring way, "Mother, please do not say this. You are not alone. I am your daughter, I'll be here with you and I'll serve you until the last breath."

Naomi responded, "Ruth, I appreciate your love and your loyalty, but despite being incapable to do anything due to my advanced age, I still take the responsibility to care for you. I would like to show you love in return for all you have done for me."

One morning, Naomi told Ruth: "Listen to me my daughter Ruth. According to our God's Law, the crops are not to be harvest in their entirety, but some leftovers should remain in the fields, in order for the needy and strangers to find something to live on. Now go, you might find a field which is owned by a good man who would tell his harvesters to leave behind plenty of heads of grain for the poor to pick up."

Then, Ruth the foreign young widow went to a barley field and started with modesty and seriousness to pick up the heads of



grain left over by the harvesters. She worked intensely in order to collect enough for her and for her mother-in-law. Many workers in that field were observing that widow tirelessly gathering the heads of grain.

It happened that, one day, the owner came to the field. He saw Ruth, and she drew his attention, so he asked the foreman:

"-Who is this young woman?

- She is the Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi. She sought our permission to collect the fallen heads of grains.

- And how she is behaving?

- She never stopped working since the morning. She never took rest or ate or drank. She never looked up or spoke to anybody.

- What is her name?

- Ruth."

Boaz, the field owner, called Ruth to speak with her. He said:

"Listen to me, my daughter Ruth. Do not leave this place. My young women will take care of you; pick up the heads of grain behind them. If you get thirsty, go and drink from the water jar the young women are using."

Ruth's fear had dissipated by the kindness of that man and the way he cared for her. So, she bowed down to the ground before him, and said, "How come I found favor in your eyes, that you looked after me, while I am just a foreigner?!"

Boaz answered her, "I have heard about you and all the good you did to Naomi, your mother-in-law. God rewards you, you have left your country, your people and your god, and came to the Living God who is now shielding you under His wings, like a bird embracing his young."

Ruth said, "Sir, you have comforted your servant's soul, and calmed her heart, although I am not even one of your maidservants."

Boaz pleasantly asked Ruth to join the reapers at meal time. Ruth ate some roasted grain, she ate until she was full and saved the rest, then she went back to pick up heads of grain until the evening.

Ruth took the heads she collected from the field and struck them hard until she extracted all the barley grains from them, and then took the grains to her mother-in-law.



Ruth went back home loaded with food and barley. Her mother-in-law asked her saying, "Where have you gleaned today?"

Ruth said, "I went to the field of a good-hearted man, named Boaz."

Naomi said, "The Lord has sent you to this man. He is one of our close relative, and he is capable to support us."

Ruth said, "He also asked me to stay with his young women in the field."

Naomi said, "Stay with them, and don't go to any other field."

The season of barley harvest came to an end, so Naomi told her daughter-in-law: "Listen to me, my daughter, I haven't forgotten your love and your toil with me, you always were so good to me. May God rewards you and bless your life. I would love to see you married and with children. Boaz is the only man who can help us with that. I want you tonight to go down to the threshing floor, and after the end of the harvest celebration, when he gets ready to go to sleep, see where he lies down. Then go you too, and lie down by his feet."

Ruth obeyed her mother-in-law, and did what she told her to do. Indeed, Boaz woke up in the middle of the night to find a woman lying down by his feet; he was a little startled and couldn't recognize her in the dark. He said, "Who are you?"

Ruth said, "I am Ruth, your maidservant, take me under your wing, for you are a close relative." Ruth said so, as her mother-in-law advised her.

According to Moses' Law, if someone dies without leaving a kid, it is legal that the widow of the deceased to marry the closest relative to him. The first born son will carry the name of the deceased husband, not the name of the father who begotten him. The purpose of this tradition was to perpetuate the name of the dead person.

Boaz knew that Ruth was a virtuous and a chaste woman. He said to her, "I will be glad if you are affiliated to my family. It is true, I am a close relative; however, there is another relative closer than I who has the first right to marry you. If he refuses to marry you, I will be happy to marry you and to take care of you and Naomi all the days of your lives."





In the morning, Boaz and ten of the elders went together to the gate of the city to meet with the man who has the first right to marry Ruth. The man refused the idea of this marriage because he did not want for his first son, to carry the name of Ruth deceased husband. He waived his rights; therefore he did not marry Ruth. The elders were witnesses to all that happened. After all, Boaz married Ruth the Moabites.

Ruth gave birth to a son, and Naomi was so delighted because her wish of becoming a grandmother had come true. Boaz, Ruth, friends and neighbors all rejoiced with that birth. They called the child "Obed".

Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of David, and from David's descendants, came our Lord Jesus Christ - The Fullness of Love - according to the flesh.

Happily and joyfully, Naomi and Ruth cried while they were praising the Lord.





86- Samuel, the Last of the Judges

(1 Sam 1:1-23)

God in heaven looked at His people on earth, and was very disappointed. God gave His people a rich and a fertile land that produced the best crops and best fruits. The people of Israel enjoyed their lives having great fields, plenty of food, and many sheep, but they didn't care about worshiping and praising or lifting their hearts to Him.

God waited hundreds of years for His people to come back to Him, but unfortunately they grew in their wickedness, and stayed away from Him.

Among this disobedient people, lived the high priest Eli, who had two sons that were very evil and dishonest in their service to the Lord, and were not disciplined by their father Eli.

Eli became advanced in age, and God did not allow his dishonest sons to lead the people of Israel. God had pity on His people, and wanted to send them a prophet to guide them and encourage them to return to Him.

At that time, lived a man called Elkanah who was married to two women, Hannah and Peninnah. Every year, Elkanah and his wives used to go to Shiloh in the Promised Land, to worship and to celebrate the feast at the Tabernacle of (House of the Lord).

Hannah found favor in her husband Elkanah's sight because she was faithful and humble. Peninnah was so jealous and attempted to provoke Hannah. She took her aside and told her:

"I see that you are very religious and humble. But, God who knows the hearts have made you barren, because your heart is evil. You deceive the people, but you can't deceive God. Repent and go back to Him!"

Hannah remained quiet, but she was very bitter. She cried and stayed away from food.

Her husband felt that she was very sad because she didn't bear any children, so he told her: "Why are you crying Hannah? And why are you abstaining from eating any food? Why are you so gloomy? Am I not better for you than ten children? Please, O Hannah, be happy and don't cry!"



She nodded in a gentle way, but her heart was still broken.

Hannah went to the House of the Lord where Eli, the high priest was sitting at the entrance of the tent. With a bitter soul, Hannah bowed down to the floor, and kept crying and praying in a faint voice:

"Look O Lord to the misery of Your maidservant. Please, don't forget me. If You give Your maidservant a child, I'll offer him to You, to serve You all the days of his life."

Hannah was shaking uncontrollably from the deep pain and anguish that filled her heart, so Eli the priest believed she was drunk, and rebuked her saying, "Go away woman, and stop getting drunk. Until when are you going to keep drinking?"

Hannah answered him while she was crying, "No, my lord, I am not drunk, I love my God, I am just pouring out my grieving soul to the Lord. One thing I am asking from the Lord, but He is holding it from me."

In a compassionate way and with a kind heart, the aging priest told her, "Go in peace, may the Lord answer your prayer and grant you your request, and bring happiness to your life."

Hannah's heart was filled with peace, and she kept thanking God for the gift He was about to give to her.

Hannah conceived, she gave birth to a beautiful child and called him Samuel, which means "God has heard." She kept telling everybody that the child has been dedicated to the Lord, and that she was rejoicing about his future service to the Lord for the rest of his life.





87- The Lord's Young Prophet

(1 Sam 1 - 2)

Elkanah used to visit God's House in Shiloh every year, but Hannah did not go with him and waited until Samuel was three years old. Then Hannah said, "The time has come to fulfill my promise and to take my son to the House of the Lord, for him to serve there all the days of his life."

Hannah was overjoyed to take her son to the House of the Lord, and she introduced him to Eli the priest, saying, "This is my son whom God gave to me, I nursed him and took care of him for three years. Now, I am offering him to the Lord."

Hannah was thankful to see her young son living at the House of the Lord. With joyful tears, she turned to her son and said, "How blessed you are! You'll be living at the House of the One who created heaven and earth. I'll see you again; I'll visit you every year and bring you new clothes. My son, always remember that you are the Lord's little servant."

Eli the priest looked at the little child and hugged him, saying, "What a blessed son you are! Come my son, I'll show you the place where you are going to stay. May the Lord's angel protect you!"

Eli was the teacher and the instructor for Samuel, the marvelous child, and he loved him dearly. Samuel was happy and satisfied to live at the House of the Lord

Samuel had a linen belt on, and his mother used to come to visit him each year, and to bring a small cloak she had sewed for him. Samuel was very happy when he heard his mother telling him, "You are God's chosen servant. How I wish that I could have lived here too at the Lord's House."

The Lord was pleased with the mother as well as the son. Meanwhile, The Lord was disappointed with Eli's negligence and leniency in guiding his two sons.

God chose Samuel, the young prophet, to lead the people of Israel in coming back to Him.





88- Samuel! Samuel!

(1 Sam 3:1-14)

Samuel served the Lord diligently with all his heart, in spite of his tender age. People, who knew Samuel, loved him very much.

One night, something unusual happened. After Samuel went to sleep, he heard a voice calling him, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Immediately, the young boy woke up, and ran to Eli, believing that the priest needed him. Samuel said to the priest, "Father, did you call me?" Eli told him, " Son, I did not call you, go back to sleep."

The boy was puzzled because he was sure that he had heard a voice calling him, but he went back to his bed as he was told.

After a little while, he heard the voice calling again. Samuel woke up, rushed to Eli the priest, and said, "Here I am, father. You did call me." Eli the priest was puzzled, because he didn't call Samuel. For the second time, he asked the boy to go back to his bed and sleep. For the third time, the boy heard the same voice calling him, and went to see Eli. At this time, Eli realized that it was the voice of the Lord, which had neither been heard there for years, nor seen in any vision.

Eli the priest asked Samuel to go back to his bed, and told him if he heard that voice again, he should bow down to the floor and say, "Speak, O Lord, for Your servant is listening."

Samuel did as Eli told him. The Lord spoke to the young boy about matters concerning the people of Israel, the army, the priest and his two sons.

Obviously, that was a beginning of a frank and an open conversation between the Heavenly Lord and the little boy.

This relationship grew stronger with time. God is always delighted to find someone who is blessed, even if he was a little boy. He would appoint him a leader; He would speak to him about His plans for His people, and would reveal to him His secrets!

God wants to talk to you; He loves you, and likes to make you a leader!





89- The Punishment of Eli the Priest

(1 Sam 3 - 4)

The next morning, Eli the priest asked young Samuel, "What did the Lord speak to you about?"

Samuel answered him frankly, "He told me that your two sons will be killed in battle, and the Philistines will capture the Ark of Covenant, and you will be overwhelmed by what happened and drop dead."

Upon hearing this news from Samuel, Eli bowed his head in surrender and accepted God's holy plan.

Soon after, the Israelites went out to battle against the Philistines. The Israelites were defeated and suffered many losses. The elders decided to bring the Ark of Covenant to the battle field thinking that God will grant them victory. Eli's two sons brought the Ark, and when the army saw the Ark, they thought that victory was at hand without the need for repentance or lifting their hearts to the Lord. Eli's sons didn't consider repentance either. Therefore, they faced unfamiliar circumstances which never happened before. Unexpectedly, thirty thousand of the Israelites were killed in the battle; among them were Eli's two sons. Furthermore, the Philistines took possession of the Ark of Covenant.

Somebody rushed back from the battle line to Shiloh. He updated Eli with the news about the battle; Eli was shocked, fell down and died.

The young Samuel grew up leading God's way with absolute honesty. God gifted him with lots of visions, spoke to him often, and guided him all the way. People of Israel became aware of the truthfulness of Samuel, and considered him as God's prophet. All of what God told him had come true.

People of Israel gathered around Samuel, and chose him to be their judge to lead them and guide them with the Spirit of the Lord.





90- The Ark Returns

(1 Samuel 5-7)

The Philistines captured the Ark of Covenant and it remained in their possession for seven months. They moved it from one city to another because wherever they placed it, a fatal disaster happened there causing great confusion among the Philistines. Eventually, they consulted their pagan priests and diviners whom advised them to send the Ark of God back to Israel. Also, they recommended sending some gold gifts with the Ark of Covenant as a trespass offering and to apologize for mistreating the Ark of God. So they set the Ark and the presents on a new cart that was pulled by two oxen, and no one was there to lead them on the way. Miraculously, the oxen headed in the right direction, pulling the cart all the way, until it reached the territory of Israel.

The Israelites rejoiced having the Holy Ark of Covenant returned back to them, safely and honorably. They were grateful because God showed His power and His glory, and His presence which was represented in the Ark of Covenant.

People of Israel felt more secure to have the Ark of Covenant among them, and they had high expectations in defeating their enemies, but they failed. In the mean time, Samuel explained to them the reason behind their failure and defeat, which was because so many of them had worshiped idols like their pagans neighbors, and practiced sinful pagan habits. He asked them to believe in God, renew their promises to Him, and to be honest in their relationship with Him. Samuel also asked them to reject all idols, and return to worship the Living God, because this was the only way to win and to be saved.

Samuel, the Prophet and Judge, decided for all people of Israel to meet in Mizpah, to pray, fast, and to offer a true repentance. People came from all over the place, and the roads to Mizpah were crowded with people.

Philistines heard about that huge meeting, and they were concerned. Leaders of the Philistines hurried to Mizpah, and took with them a large army, to launch an unexpected attack on the Israelites while worshipping. The Israelites were not ready to battle





against the Philistines, for they gathered in Mizpah just to offer repentance. They realized they were incapable of fighting and completely vulnerable. Therefore, they lifted their hearts to God asking Him to rescue them.

While Samuel stayed with his people praying to the Lord, some of the courageous fighters set off to face the Philistines. When the invaders approached Mizpah, suddenly, lightning struck with a loud thunder and heavy rain upon the Philistines. They were greatly confused, and that led them to be overcome by Israel. The fight did not last long.

Unfortunately, over time, many of the Israelites abandoned the Lord and worshiped idols. The Lord was extremely patient with them, so He spared them one time and disciplined them another.

Meanwhile, He was preparing them to be a holy kingdom that belongs to Him, so that from them He planned to come and incarnate to bring salvation onto the whole world.

When He gave them the Promised Land, as He promised their father Abraham, it was a symbol of saving mankind, with the coming of the Lord of Glory; Jesus offered Himself as a Sacrifice on their behalf.





The Sixth Time Period

One Kingdom

**(1st & 2nd Books of Samuel; 1st & 2nd Books of
Kings &
1st & 2nd Books of Chronicles)**

The people of Israel settled in the Promised Land, which became their own land, despite the constant battles with the Philistines, who were a one united nation with experience and military capabilities. There were problems between the tribes of Israel, and this led to weaken their status.

The spiritual leader for Israel was Samuel the Prophet. The people of Israel asked him to appoint a king for all the tribes. Probably, some of the elders and military leaders believed that having a king would bring harmony to the tribes and would help to organize a strong army. The vast majority of the people asked for a king so they can become a united nation like one of the surrounding nations.



91- The Israelites Seek a King

(1 Samuel 8)

Samuel grew old and believed in his heart that his sons may become his successors as judges. The elders remembered what had happened to them because of the sons of Eli the priest, and rejected Samuel's idea because his sons did not lead in his way either. Nothing was wrong with that decision; however, few of the elders along with a majority of the people were affected by their surrounding nations that took pride in the greatness of their kings who projected power and influence. Those Israelites wanted to have a king like their neighbors. The hearts of the people of Israel were occupied with the external appearances and sought the pride of having a strong king.

Samuel was not happy with this request and considered it as a rejection to having God rule as their King, He who had made them His own special nation, who had set them free from Pharaoh's slavery, who had fulfilled all their needs in the wilderness, who had granted them the Promised Land, and had given them consecutive victories over their aggressor nations by the Judges He had appointed for them.

Samuel was very sad, so he sought refuge in God. He petitioned the matter to Him, while his soul was extremely bitter.

The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people and appoint a king for them. It is not you that they have rejected, but they have rejected Me."

Samuel obeyed the voice of the Lord, and started to plan for crowning a king for them.

This fundamental change in the nation's structure was extremely painful to Samuel, since he recognized how weak the people were. He yearned to find a righteous man who understood clearly that God is the true King, and that he would be honored to represent Him. That man would submit to God's Commandments, listen to His voice, and obey God's men, specially the prophets. Samuel considered these to be the best features in a good king. However, the elders and the people's main concern was not necessarily finding a righteous king, but he had to be well built, good looking, mighty, and strong, in order for them to brag about him among the other nations.





92- Saul the King

(1 Samuel 9 & 10)

God did not leave Samuel in his quest for that righteous king, but He guided him to a person that had the features sought by the people. God gave them someone according to their hearts' desires, so that they do not rebel against Samuel. God wanted them to experience a new lesson in their lives, He wanted to demonstrate to them how far superior His wisdom is over their human wisdom, and how far greater God's choice over theirs'.

God asked Samuel to anoint Saul the son of Kish with the holy oil as the king of Israel.

Saul came to Samuel to inquire about his father's lost donkeys. Saul was a tall, strong, and handsome young man.

Samuel revealed to Saul God's plan to choose him as a king over Israel. He told him also not to worry about his father's donkey because they were already found.

When Samuel the Prophet poured the holy oil on Saul's head, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and gave him a renewed heart.

Saul went back home to his humble family. His family noticed that he has been changed completely, but Saul did not tell his family about what had happened with him.

Based on God's instructions, Samuel called together the elders of the tribes of Israel, to draw a lot to find out who would be chosen to be their king. The tribe of Benjamin was chosen, and then Kish the Benjamin was chosen, then his son Saul was the chosen one.

They searched for Saul but they could not find him. Samuel the Prophet knew that Saul was hiding.

Samuel inquired from the Lord about Saul, and learned that he was in a nearby tent. They brought Saul to Samuel. Samuel introduced Saul to the people of Israel, as their new king, saying, "God has chosen one." Saul was taller than any of the people from his shoulder upward.

All tribes shouted joyfully, "Long live the king."





93- Great Victory over the Ammonites

(1 Samuel 11-15)

Four weeks after declaring Saul as the king of Israel, the people of the Ammonite aggressively attacked the Jewish inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead. Seven days later, the Ammonites' army proceeded towards Jabesh Gilead, while Saul's forces were preparing their troops for the battle. They allowed the Ammonites to march forward, and then attacked the Ammonites from behind to their surprise; Saul accomplished a great victory in this battle.

The people of Israel were so proud of their king, who was anointed, confirmed, and declared to be the king. Now, it was time to enthrone the king. Samuel called the people to Gilgal, where he crowned Saul as king before the Lord. Saul and all the people were very delighted.

Saul suggested setting up a specific location to rule his people from; he also organized a permanent army to protect the kingdom. The people agreed all heartedly. The Philistines kept watching eyes on all what were happening in Israel.

Saul sent his son, Jonathan to attack a small Philistines' garrison, and Saul was encouraged by his victory.

It was reported to Saul that the Philistines were gathering all their forces to fight Israel. When the men of Israel saw they were in danger, they were distressed. Saul, the man of war, was not troubled. But, before fighting the defensive battle, Saul sent for the prophet Samuel to come and offer the Lord a burnt sacrifice.

Saul waited a long time for Samuel to arrive, but when he was delayed, Saul proceeded and offered the burnt sacrifice by himself.

Samuel was upset with Saul's haste and offering the burnt sacrifice despite being neither a priest nor a prophet.

Samuel told Saul, "God has chosen you to be the first of a chain of kings. Now, your family will fall with you." In fact, none of Saul's descendents succeed him.

The battle started and the Philistines' equipments were significantly better and their leaders were stronger. God was displeased with Saul because of his trespass on the priesthood



role, despite that, God was kind to His people and granted them victory.

Saul entered many wars against the enemies of Israel and achieved successive victories.





94- Great Victory over Amalek and the Rebellion of Saul

(1 Samuel 11-15)

It was the Amalek's turn to fight the Israelites. The prophet Samuel was instructed to tell Saul to strike down Amalek in the battle until they had been completely destroyed, and not to spare any of them or their animals. Also, Saul was to be told to abstain from taking any of Amalek's spoils. Samuel relayed to Saul all what God commanded him to say.

Saul won the battle, but he spared Amalek's king Agag, and kept the best of their sheep and cattle. Due to this infraction, the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and the Lord rejected him entirely.

Indeed Saul was victorious against Amalek, but he did not heed to the voice of the Lord.

He killed all the captured Amalek people, except for their king Agag. (Apparently, Agag was a title given to the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh was the title given to the kings of Egypt.)

Saul killed the weak sheep, but spared the strong. He claimed that they were to be used as offering sacrifices to the Lord, while the real motive was his own personal benefit. Likewise, he kept Agag alive to satisfy his own vanity, or maybe because he felt sorry for him, being a king, even though he was a king over a gang of thieves.

The Lord rejected Saul, because Saul rejected Him and turned his back on Him, following his own desires. Samuel was unhappy with him because Saul did not seek the Divine opportunity that was offered to him.

When Samuel decided to rebuke Saul, he cried to the Lord the whole night. He spent that night praying, so God would not let him reprimand Saul by himself. He was weeping for Saul too. The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?!"

Saul went to Carmel, and erected a monument in Gilgal for his victory over Amalek. When Samuel came to him early in the morning, he wanted to congratulate himself indirectly, so he said, "May the Lord bless you! I have done what the Lord said." He





tried to cover his disobedience by using sweet words, but it did not deceive the prophet Samuel, to whom the Lord already revealed Saul's infractions.

Samuel asked, "Then, what are the sounds of sheep, and cattle I hear in my ears?"

Instead of admitting that he was wrong, Saul blamed the people, saying, "For the army spared the best of the sheep and the cattle to sacrifice to the Lord our God. But everything else we slaughtered."

Samuel replied, "Is the delight of the Lord in the burnt offerings and the sacrifices, or is it in obeying the voice of the Lord?! Behold, to obey is far better than to sacrifice, and listening is greater than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry."

At that point, Saul said, "I have sinned." Meanwhile, he blamed the people for his actions, saying, "Because I had feared the people, and listened to their voices." He was not faithful in his repentance, but he wanted to lure Samuel to return with him and give him honor before the elders and his people. For this reason he said, "I have sinned, and now give me the honor in front of the elders of my people and before Israel, and come back with me." In arrogance, Saul referred to the people as if they belonged to him personally not to the Lord, by saying, "my people."





95- David Anointed as King

(1 Samuel 16)

Samuel stopped mourning for Saul as commanded by the Lord, and his heart was filled with His consolations. For God turned the bad into good and He asked him to anoint David the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, as king.

The Lord asked him to take with him oxen as an offering for God, and to also anoint David as king.

The first order is to be offered before the public, while the second one is secretly done. That is how Samuel was not lying when he was asked about the reason for his visit to Bethlehem, but he hid a part of the truth.

Why was the sacrifice offered in Bethlehem in public while at the same time, David was anointed secretly witnessed by only his brothers?

- 1- So Saul, the king would not kill Samuel, the Prophet, as he was known for his foolishness and brutality.
- 2- The time had not yet come to reveal David as king, thus he did not begin his rule until after the death of Saul. But he received the Lord's anointment as a blessing to prepare and support him until he reigned.
- 3- Because the sacrifice represents the Cross (the sacrifice of Jesus Christ) which is connected to the kingdom, the Lord reigned on the wood of the cross (as prophesied in the psalms)

Samuel, the prophet came to Bethlehem, which means "the house of the bread", and it is located about six miles (10 km) south of Jerusalem. In this town, Jesus Christ was born – the King of kings – from the descendants of David.

Jesse introduced his oldest son, Eliab, for Samuel to anoint him, but the Lord told Samuel, who attempted to anoint him, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, for I have rejected him. God does not view things the way men do. People focus on the external appearances, but the Lord observes at the heart."

Jesse brought his next six sons, and the Lord did not choose any of them either. Finally, Jesse called for his youngest son, who



was shepherding the flock, for Samuel to anoint him as a shepherd of the Lord's rational flock.

God did not anoint the handsome looking, but the one that had beauty of the soul. He chose him for his inner purity and kind spirit, not for his physical appearance. Earlier, the Lord gave them a king who was tall and handsome looking as they asked for, but now He would grant them a king according to His Divine Wisdom.

David was characterized by being faithful with the little, so God assigned him much to be in charge of. Being a shepherd, he learned to love his father's flock, each one of them. So, he did courageously attack the wild beasts (a lion and a bear), to save the flock.

When he was shepherding the flock, David learned music, and how to play the harp. So, the Lord used this talent to introduce him to Saul, the king.

Also, while he was shepherding, he enjoyed nature, as well as praising the Lord with the spiritual psalms. In the mean time, he learned sling-shooting, which helped him to kill the mighty Goliath.

The word "David" perhaps comes from the word "*dôd*," which means "love" or "loved." As if God takes those whom He loves and whom respond to His love, to crown them as kings to inherit the eternal kingdom with Him.

The Lord's Spirit descended upon David, and granted him the blessing of kingship and wise leadership of God's people, so he would perform his job according to God's guidance not according to his own wisdom.

The Spirit of the Lord departed Saul, whom he was troubled by an evil spirit.

Saul's servants advised him to assign someone to play the harp for him to make him feel better. David the son of Jesse of Bethlehem was recommended for this job because he was known as a skilled harp player.

David was eloquent in speech, sweet in his psalms, and good in his appearance, but the greatest of all was that "**the Lord was with him,**" and that was the secret to his strength.





96- David and Goliath

(1 Samuel 17)

David was the youngest of his seven brothers, he used to be called "little David" who took care of his father's sheep.

Since his early age, he learned how to sing the psalms while playing his harp, day and night. Noon time was a special time for David to sing the psalms; it was the time of the day when the sheep rested around him in the shadow of the trees. David would feel as if the sheep were participating with him in praising his God.

One day, a thought crossed his mind:

"It is not right that my three older brothers would leave and join the army of King Saul, while I would stay here with the sheep.

I am in the peak of my youthfulness, and I am capable of performing much more important chores.

I love shepherding and am not ashamed of it!

I love my sheep so much and I would give my life for them.

I would like to give all my life to serve God's human flock, every human on earth."

Jesse, David's father, called him and said, "Now, take this bread and cheese, and go to your brothers at the camp and see how they are doing."

David was happy that he would be visiting his brothers, who were fighting for the nation, and would provide them with the food they needed.

Very early in the morning, David left, heading to where the battle field was. When he arrived, he heard loud noises and shouting, he saw a terrible scene. The Israelite soldiers were in great confusion and running in every direction.

David climbed on a nearby hill to be able to see and watch what was happening down at the Valley of Elah. He hardly could believe his eyes.

A warrior came out from the camp of the Philistines Goliath, who was an extremely gigantic warrior; whose height was about ten feet; he wore a large bronze helmet on his head, and was fully dressed in a shiny metal military armor. On his side, he carried a long sword, while holding with his both mighty hands a great spear, about seven feet long!



He stood there, ridiculing the army of God's people. He shouted and roared like a lion, saying:

"Send me someone to fight me.

Why haven't you sent someone yet to face me in battle?

I dare you to choose a man from among you, to come down and fight me!

If he is able to kill me, then we all become your slaves. But if I kill him, then you all become our slaves."

When King Saul and his army heard Goliath's words, they froze and were greatly distressed. None of them was bold enough to come out and fight the mighty Goliath, but all waited in terror.

In the midst of this scary silence among the Israelites' army, David shouted, "O well! Why doesn't anybody go to fight him?" One of David's brothers tried to silence him saying, "Be silent! Go back to your sheep! What do you know about war?"

David was annoyed but pretended that he listened to his brother and said, "I have done nothing, and it is mere talk."

David left his brother and went toward another soldier until he reached the battlefield. He asked one of the soldiers, "Which one would go and fight Goliath?" The soldier replied, "No one tried to fight him, although the king has offered a big reward to whoever fights this giant." David said, "I can fight him."

Amazingly, within moments, David found himself standing in front of the king.

The king told David, "You are young, just a boy, and Goliath is a dangerous warrior. He is a champion fighter, who was trained in war techniques since he was young."

David replied: "My master, perhaps I am young, but I am capable of fighting him. Once, with my own hands, I killed a lion and a bear when they tried to attack my father's sheep. I can do the same thing with Goliath. God who rescued me from the lion and the bear, He will surely save me from his hand. My master, I can kill this giant who ridiculed the army of the Living God."

The king could not wait, but he said to him, "Go and may God be with you, but be careful. Here is my military gear for you to wear."

King Saul was well built; David was hardly able to carry his heavy sword, and to fit in his huge military uniform. But



Saul's bulky bronze helmet, covered his face, and he could not see where to go. He was barely able to move!

David said, "This uniform does not suit me, as I am not trained to use these things. I do not need this military gear, but I have my own plan to carry out."

David was armed with his shepherd staff and his sling. Quietly, he sneaked to the foot of the mountain in the valley, he stopped by a creek, where he picked five smooth stones, and put them in his pouch, which he carried on his side.

David started to approach Goliath. Goliath was gazing at him, but David did not pay any attention. He believed that he had to be brave for his God would be the One who will fight for him.

Goliath kept watching David, while he could hardly believe his eyes. Then, he started to mock David saying, "Ha! Ha! Ha! What kind of a joke is this? What is it? He is just a little boy! Would he be able to fight a giant?" He looked at David's staff and said, "Am I a dog that you come to me with a stick?"

David said to him: "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. He will help me win. The whole world will learn that my God is stronger than any bronze or iron weapons!"

The two armies stopped to watch in an eerie silence. Goliath, full of anger, started to move towards David

David took out one of the stones from the pouch, put it in his sling, and rotated the sling fast above his head. The stone flew in the air, and amazingly, it hit Goliath's forehead, and Goliath fell on his face to the ground! David rushed towards the fallen Goliath, and as the victor, he took Goliath's heavy sword out of its sheath and with one strike, he cut Goliath's head off. David held the head up and waved it to show it to both armies.

When Goliath's army lost their leader, the Philistines retreated, and fled in a big confusion, leaving behind their equipments in their tents. While the army of the Israelites felt safe and confident. Their soldiers pursued their enemy, and followed them to their own towns; Ekron and Gath.

God used David, the young boy, who had nothing but few stones and a sling, to fight an experienced giant equipped with heavy weapons! **Because God was with him, he won!**





97- Saul Resents David

(1 Samuel 18)

Saul did not recognize David, even though David earlier played the harp for him when he was younger. Saul forgot David, because Saul was emotionally disturbed and experiencing a memory loss and mood swing. Besides, David might have looked different as he matured.

After the victory over the Philistines, David became so near and dear to Saul's heart, at least for a while. Saul assigned him to be his personal armor-bearer.

Saul promised to give his daughter in marriage to whoever would kill Goliath, and save Saul from the shame of defeat. When David did what Saul was hoping for, Saul did not keep his promise, as he gave his oldest daughter; Merab to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. And, instead of honoring David, he started to envy him and tried to get rid of him, one way or another.

He did not award him with the prize he had promised to give him, but God did not forget David, and blessed him generously more than what Saul had promised him. God gave him the following:

A. The love of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and his wonderful affection towards David, which was so amazing, as was never heard of before in history or tales and stories. Jonathan was a brave, bold, man of war, and highly respected among the people. Although he was the crown prince, he loved David who was honored among people and among the servants of the royal court even more than Saul himself.

Saul warned his son Jonathan that David might overtake the throne of the kingdom from him. But Jonathan's love, his loyalty, and his friendship to David were more valuable to him than inheriting the kingdom.

His friendship with David was more precious, in his view, than his obedience to his father, who planned to kill David! It was said, "The soul of Jonathan was attached to the soul of David, and he loved him as his own self." Jonathan expressed this love by offering David his robe, his armor, his bow, and his belt. Jonathan gave him his robe, the honorable clothing that he wore daily.





Also, he gave him all the war equipment as a sign of his loyalty to him under any circumstances, whether in war or in peace.

B. David was successful in everything he did. He was greatly admired by the people, as well as Saul's servants.

C. Women sang for David, and they honored him more than Saul.

D. Saul fell under the control of a distressing spirit; therefore, he needed David's music to comfort him.

E. Saul deprived David from marrying his daughter, Merab, but his daughter Michal, who loved David, became his wife, and saved him from her father.

Saul's heart was full of envy towards David, because he was successful in everything he did. Many people were attracted to David and loved him, and he was greatly honored and respected in the sight of many people, more than Saul. The Lord was with David, but He left Saul.

Saul began to use every way possible to get rid of David.

Saul could not bear the sight of David or even his name uttered in his presence.

A bad spirit came upon Saul, so he became disturbed within his own house. He lost his peace and his mind, meanwhile, David was full of peace, which he was extending into Saul himself. David would comfort Saul by singing his psalms while playing the music.

Sitting on his throne, Saul used to hold on to a spear in his hand, as if it was a scepter. Twice, he cast that spear, targeting David to kill him, but the Lord was with David and saved him.

David had neither authority nor weapon, and never tried to challenge Saul, and despite it all, Saul feared him. He felt inferior whenever he faced David, and sensed that his throne was shaking longing to be occupied by this righteous youth.



98- Michal Saves David from her Father Saul

(1 Samuel 19-20)

Jonathan – the son of Saul –took David's side and defended him, so his father rebuked him and wanted to kill him. But eventually, Jonathan helped David to escape and flee from his father's face.

Jonathan said to David, "Do not be afraid because my father's hand will never reach you. You will be the king of Israel, and I will be there for you, as the second man. My father Saul knows this matter." David and Jonathan made a covenant before the Lord.

Jonathan talked with his father on behalf of David; he reminded Saul that they needed a righteous and brave man to build and expand the kingdom. Saul listened to his honest and faithful son and promised him to keep David safe. After that, David went back to his position in Saul's court.

The war broke out again between Israel and their enemies. David fought the enemies and struck them with might until they fled. In the end, Saul was jealous and his heart was full of envy towards David.

Saul sent his messengers to David's house to watch him, so they would kill him in the morning. But David was saved by Michal, Saul's daughter, for she let him escape from the window. Apparently, her house was built by the wall of the town. David fled the town to begin a new cycle in his life filled with precious experiences. In the midst of his troubles, he had no place to stay, he was driven out to relate to those who were banished and wounded.

Michal took a "Teraphim" (a human size idol), and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting a pillow of goat's hair under its head. It seemed like, Michal hid the idol in her house, not to worship it, but as an omen to help her bear a son, however; David had no idea about it.

On the other hand, Michal lied, for she claimed that David was sick. When her father blamed her saying, "Why have you deceived me, and sent my enemy away, so that he has escaped?" she said, "He told me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'" When



David had fled and made his escape, he went to Ramah where he stayed with the prophet Samuel in Naioth. Probably, it was a residence for those who were listed in the School of Prophets.

Perhaps, David came to Naioth, believing that Saul would respect the place and its leader. But Saul, whose heart was filled with hatred, neither cared, nor went in person to seek Samuel's advice. He just sent messengers to Naioth in order to capture David and bring him back to be killed.

When the messengers reached the place, they forgot about their mission. The spiritual environment influenced them, and the Lord's Spirit came upon them, and they started to prophesize. They took part with the prophets in praising and worshipping the Lord.

Saul thought that those messengers were deceived, or they were intimidated by Samuel's authority, thus he sent another group of messengers. Amazingly, when they got there, they also started to prophesize as well.

For the third time, a third group of Saul's messengers came to that place, and they started to prophesize as well. In spite of it all, Saul did not learn his lesson, or attempt to change his behavior.

Finally, Saul decided to go by himself, so he went to Ramah, and came to the great well which was at Sechu. For God to be glorified, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul too, and he went to Naioth and started to prophesize.

Saul was excited to be among the worshippers, listening to a magnificent music, so he discarded his outer clothes and stayed only with his white under-garment, kneeling on the floor face down all day and all night, praising the Lord. Everyone was surprised to see Saul in this condition, and they were wondering, "Is Saul also one of the prophets?!"

Some people thought that Samuel and David mocked Saul, when he was lying almost naked on the ground all day and all night. In fact, to the contrary; these two great prophets glorified God, for the way He had transformed Saul, even if that was temporary. That incident left a great impression on David's heart. Therefore, David - later on - praised Saul before his son Jonathan saying, "Saul and Jonathan, the sweet and the beloved ones." That

was what in David's heart towards Saul; he had forgotten Saul's envy, his oppression, and his plotting to kill him. David just viewed Saul as the sweet and the beloved man, who was praising the Lord among the prophets.





99- David Eats from the Holy Bread

(1 Samuel 21)

David became a fugitive; he had neither a sword nor bread. He did not seek the Lord's guidance, and accordingly, he started to behave improperly. He entered Nob, the city of the priests, and because of him, the priests were killed, and the city perished.

David, who frightened the pagans, and the women sang for him saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," David, who won the love and the admiration of the king, his son, his daughter, the leaders and all the people, now is runaway before the rejected king, Saul. It is the time for the bitter trial, when David feels that he is all alone, with no one to support him, or to share his emotions.

David the Prophet came to Nob, which is north of Jerusalem. It was considered a city for the priests, because the Tabernacle was set up there, after it was moved from Shiloh, due to its demise. There, David met with Ahimelech, the priest.

David was weary and exhausted, so he used deception, twisting of facts and lies to justify his situation before Ahimelech the priest. He told him, "The king has tasked me, and said: 'Do not let anyone know anything about the task I sent you for, or what I have commanded you with'. But regarding my men, I have directed them to such and such place."

David was a man who led according to God's heart, but in his weakness, he sinned. This weakness and lying had led to terrible consequences.

David asked for the Holy Bread, which was allowed to be eaten by the priests only. The priests used to prepare a fresh batch of the Holy bread every Saturday, and they would eat the old one. In spite of that, Ahimelech permitted David and his men to eat it, as long as they were pure from any marital relationships, because they were hungry and there was no other kind of bread for them to eat.

When David ate the bread of the Presence with his men, he did not mean any disregard or belittle the ordinance, but he had no other choice. Therefore, his action was not considered against the





Commandment. Besides, this action of David was a symbol. As the Gentiles, who were not among the chosen people, had enjoyed, not eating the bread of Presence, rather eating the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bread that came down from heaven.

David asked for a weapon, and Ahimelech gave him the sword of Goliath, whom he killed. The sword was wrapped in a garment, and was placed behind another piece of priests' clothing (ephod) to keep it safe.

Doeg, one of Saul's servants, was in Nob at that time. When David learned about Doeg, he realized that he was in danger, so he hurried and left Nob on that same day.

David set off to Gath. There the Philistines considered him a reckless spy. For that reason, David had to pretend that he was insane to save his life. David, the courageous man of faith, had moments in his life, when he was weak and helpless.





100- In the Cave Of Adullam

(1 Samuel 22)

David the Prophet departed from Gath and escaped to the secluded Cave of Adullam to hide there. The cave was a refuge place for everyone, who was in distress, in debt, or discontented, because of the degradation and the corruption of the rule of Saul. The cave's inhabitants started to gather around David, who was like a shelter for them, and they demanded his leadership. Those people, whom were considered dangerous and lost in Saul's view, followed David, and were attached to him and later on, became the powerful men who built the new kingdom.

It seems that Samuel the Prophet had advised David to let Gad the Prophet (or the seer) accompany him. Gad advised David not to stay in the stronghold in Moab (Adullam's Cave), but to go to the land of Judah, where he would face tribulations for the sake of God's people. So David left and came to the forest of Hereth.

Moving to land of Judah was for the good of David, and the people. David was able to save the people of Keilah's from the Philistines, and defended the cities of Judah. Consequently, David became very popular, and won the trust of Judah, and when Saul was killed, David was ready to take over.

There was an enemy assault on Keilah, and the people of Keilah sought David and his fellows (around 600 men) to protect them. They ignored the official king with all his army. They had no faith in him, after he disappointed them before, so many times. Many Israelites had acknowledged that David, the fugitive, was working to build the Holy Community, while Saul's main concern was to chase David and capture him, without any valid reason. Apparently, the evil ones cannot tolerate the children of God.

David's heart was full of love towards his people, so he consulted the Lord; whether he should proceed to fight for Keilah or not. The answer was affirmative. But, because of the small number of men and inadequate weapons they had, David and his men were worried. David returned to God to ask Him again to confirm the answer, and it was the same. David and his men



advanced for Keilah to save its inhabitants. They won the battle, and enjoyed huge loot. However, God directed David to flee Keilah for Saul not to kill him.





101- Saul Kills the Priests

(1 Samuel 22)

When David and his men returned to the land of Judah, the news of what happened began to spread. Almost everybody loved their action hero. Again, Saul was very jealous, and his soul was bitter. He felt that all David was doing is to destroy his kingdom, and that whoever accompanied David had no role except to betray him, even his own son, the heir to the throne, stood by David against him.

Saul was stationed at Gibeah in Ramah. He was sitting under a tree on an elevated location with his spear in hand as a scepter. All his servants surrounded him. Saul started to reprimand them saying, "Listen up, you Benjaminites! Is Jesse's son giving you fields and vineyards? Or is he making all of you officers of a thousand and officers of a hundred?!"

It was obvious that Saul had selected all the men of his royal palace and the high ranking officers from only his own tribe, that is why when he called them, he said, "Listen up, you Benjaminites."

Saul, because of his shallow faith, may have feared bringing any non-Benjaminites into his close circle of servants, lest they overthrow him and his descendants and take charge of the kingdom.

Saul's imagination went wild, and he considered all his servants, who were from his own tribe, as opponents. He accused them, saying, "All of you have conspired against me! No one informs me when my own son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse! Not one of you feels sorry for me or informs me that my own son has commissioned my own servant to hide an ambush against me, as is the case today!"

Saul couldn't tolerate uttering the name "David," which is why he referred to him, "son of Jesse."

Doeg the Edomite, wanted to display his loyalty and his fellow servants' loyalty, because they were afraid that Saul may hurt them all, so he blamed the high priest for the situation. He



said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub, whom inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Doeg told the truth; however he didn't state all the facts, including the dialogue that took place between Ahimelech the priest and David, which may have explained the true intention of Ahimelech. On the contrary, he portrayed Ahimelech as a traitor who intentionally supported Saul's enemy David.

Then, Saul called for Ahimelech and all the priests in his household in order to take his revenge. They all arrived at the king's place.

Saul humiliated Ahimelech saying, "Listen, son of Ahitub." On the other hand, the priest answered him respectfully saying, "Here I am, my lord."

Saul accused him saying, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse? You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God on his behalf, so that he opposes me and waits in ambush, as is the case today!"

Ahimelech then defended himself against all the charges, as follows:

- a. Ahimelech did not deny that he gave David bread, the sword, and inquired of the Lord for him, but he explained that he did that because of David's honesty towards the king, and being his son-in-law, and also for his position in the royal court. Here is what he told the king, "Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, captain of your guards, and highly respected in your household?!" With this question, he defended himself and somehow blamed Saul for his unstable, and sometimes unreasonable, attitude towards people.
- b. Ahimelech was not aware of what happened between Saul and David, not in whole or in part!

Saul didn't have any response for Aimelech, but as usual, he gave a rash unfair decision, and it was conducted without consulting anyone.





He issued the verdict, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your entire household!" Saul was the opponent in this case, issued the rule by himself, and asked the servants to execute the verdict, but they refused to harm the priests of the Lord. So they became witnesses for the injustice, the violence and the abuse of the Lord's servants.

So Doeg the Edomite, who charged those priests, turned and struck down the priests. He killed on that day eighty-five priests. Then, he went to their city, Nob, and with the edge of his sword, he killed the men, women, children, the nursing infants, and even the animals. This was a very ugly picture that stained Saul's image in history and was denounced by all the tribes.

However, it happened that Abiathar the son of Ahimelech did not accompany his father and relatives when they went to Saul, but stayed behind to guard the Tabernacle. When Abiathar heard about that massacre, he fled before Doeg the Edomite arrived to Nob. Abiathar told David about the slaughter. David the prophet answered, "I am guilty of all the deaths in your father's house! Stay with me, and don't be afraid! Whoever seeks my life is seeking your life as well. With me you shall be safe." David blamed himself, so he tried to correct his fault by embracing Abiathar and protecting him. So, David now was accompanied by a prophet (Gad) as well as a priest.





102- David Cuts off the Edge of Saul's Robe

(1 Samuel 24)

David fled to the strongholds of En Gedi, and when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines out of his own land, he resumed his bitter chase after David.

Saul went to the wilderness of En Gedi, and took with him three thousands of his chosen men. They went to the Rocks of the Wild Goats, as that area had a tough terrain, only mountain goats could move freely there. But, Saul was determined to get rid of David, no matter how much trouble he and his men had to endure.

Saul entered a cave by the road, and the Bible says: "to cover his feet," which is a polite term for "attend to his needs." In the meantime, David and his men were resting deep inside that cave.

Because of the darkness in the cave, Saul didn't see anybody. However, David and his men, who were in the dark for a while, recognized Saul the moment he entered the cave.

David's men suggested to him to take advantage of this chance, while Saul was all alone in the cave, claiming that God had arranged that for him to be able to grab hold of the kingdom. They told David, "This is the day about which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand that you may do to him as it seems good to you.'"

David refused because God didn't ask him to deal with Saul as an enemy, and he preferred to treat him as a friend. David and his men waited until Saul took a corner in the cave and went to sleep. Then, David got up and quietly cut off an edge of Saul's robe. Immediately he felt guilty and his heart was troubled because he feared that he might have offended the anointed by the Lord. David waited until Saul exited the cave, and then he followed him. In a humble voice, he shouted, "My lord, O king!"

When Saul looked behind, David knelt down and bowed with his face to the ground.

What an amazing contradiction! The evil Saul has neglected all his kingdom affairs to focus his efforts on killing David, while



David has saved his life and honored him by bowing to the ground for him, he who didn't deserve to be honored.

David continued to tell Saul: "Behind whom has the king of Israel come out? Behind whom are you chasing? Behind a dead dog? Behind an insignificant flea? Why do you pay attention to those saying, 'David is seeking to do you harm?!' Today your own eyes see how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. People urged me to kill you, but my eye spared you and I said, 'I will not extend my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' So realize and understand that I am not planning any evil or rebellion. Even though I have not sinned against you, you are waiting in ambush to take my life. My hand shall not be against you."

Saul felt terrible and regretted what he did to David and started calling him, his son, saying, "Is that your voice, my son David?"

Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept intensely. He felt that his world was coming to an end, and sensed that he put himself in a trap, where there was no one to save him!

Saul acknowledged that he couldn't hold onto the kingdom any longer, and that David, who always succeeded in whatever he was doing, ought to be the one to take charge after him. So he told David, "Now look, I realize that you will in fact be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established at your hand. So now swear to me in the Lord's name that you will not kill my descendants after me or destroy my name from the house of my father."





103- David and Abigail, the Wise Lady

(1 Samuel 25)

After the funeral ceremony for the prophet Samuel the Judge, David went down to the desert of Paran, which is a vast wilderness in the south of Judah, and hardly inhabited by any humans. The presence of David and his men in the area provided peace and security, especially for the shepherds. They used to be subjected to attacks from the Amaleks and Philistines, in addition to the wild animals.

David and his men were like a protective wall around the livestock's feeding areas. One of the people who benefited the most from David's protection was Nabal. He was a very rich man, for he had three thousands sheep and a thousand goats.

Nabal's shepherds expressed their gratitude to David and his men for their protection, by saying: "These men were very good to us. We were not hurt nor lost anything. They were like our protectors, day and night, when we were taking care of the sheep in the fields."

The name "Nabal" in Hebrew means "fool." And, as his wife Abigail said about him to calm David's anger, "He simply lives up to his name! His name means 'fool,' and he is indeed foolish!" It was said about him, "the man was harsh and his deeds were evil."

David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep (that was considered a joyful time when everybody eat, drink and share generously what they could spare). That was why David sent him some of his servants saying: "Live in prosperity, peace to you and your house! Peace to all that is yours! Now I heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your own servants; they can tell you! May my servants find favor in your eyes, for we came on the day of a feast. Please provide us – your servants and your son David – with whatever you can spare."

These servants had served Nabal well; they protected his belongings from wild animals and thieves, free of charge. David didn't want to take anything without the man's consent. So, he sent



to him on that occasion asking for whatever he could spare gladly. He asked politely with courtesy, as a son talking to his father. He even asked his messengers not to add anything different than his message, in order to avoid saying any inappropriate words that could put David to blame.

But Nabal met David's decency with an insulting and unappreciative attitude. He ignored the real reasons David became a fugitive, and harshly considered him a villain who revolted against his master the king. So, he treated David as an outlaw, who didn't deserve anything good.

It was clear from his response that Nabal was greedy. He did say, "Should I take my bread, my water, and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers and give them to these men? I don't even know where they came from!"

When David heard about the way that man responded to his messengers, he realized how disrespect Nabal was to him. He understood how greedy and unfair Nabal was to his men who protected his properties diligently.

So, David was furious, and asked his men to strap on their swords. About four hundred men followed David up, while two hundred stayed behind with their gear.

David, who was known for his self-control and modesty, now, through moments of weakness, was about to commit a crime. If he indeed had gone through it, it would have saddened his heart for the rest of his life, and it would have been a major obstacle for his people later on, during his reign.

One of Nabal's servants knew well that his wife Abigail was a wise woman, unlike her foolish husband. So he rushed and told her about what happened: "David sent messengers from the desert to greet our lord, but he screamed at them. These men were very good to us. They did not insult us, nor did we sustain any loss during the entire time we were with them in the field. Night and day they were our protective wall. Now be aware of this, and see what you can do. For disaster has been planned for our lord and his entire household. He (Nabal) is such a wicked person that no one can tell him anything!"

This frank statement given by that servant to his master's wife, in a polite and bashful manner, describing her husband as a



wicked person, uncovers two aspects in Abigail's life. Namely; she was trusted by all, and they believed in her judgment, and also, her appreciation for all human beings. As a result, the servant didn't hesitate to speak honestly, and even to call her husband a wicked person, because he knew that she was a good and kind listener, who would listen with a sensible mind to each word uttered, without any arrogance or rudeness.

Abigail listened patiently to what that servant had to say, she didn't scold him for interfering into a delicate matter beyond him or for calling her husband a wicked person. She didn't discuss it any further with him. She felt that there was very little time left to avert this disaster, which would need plenty of swift wisdom to accomplish.

So Abigail quickly took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five measures of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys and told her servants to go ahead of her. But she did not tell her husband Nabal about what she was about to do.

David, in his anger was swearing to his men, "May God does so, and more, to the enemies of David, if I leave anything that he has, until the morning light!"

With her sound wisdom, Abigail presented material gifts which were sent ahead of her to David, and she showed humility when she met him, by climbing down her donkey, and throwing herself down before him, bowing to the ground. On falling at his feet, she apologized eloquently for her husband's actions, in a way that dissipated David's anger.

This lady started to blame herself for a mistake that she did not commit, but she acknowledged it, because of the foolishness of her husband. A spouse's mistake would shame everybody in the household.

She apologized kindly explaining that had she seen his servants, she would have given them from her belongings that God gave her. Also, Abigail showed faith when she considered Saul, a rejected king, by calling him the "man" not the "king", and in the meantime, she looked at David as a leader and a king who was on his way to take over the throne.





With her wisdom, Abigail gently reminded David with the following:

- a. That it was not appropriate to fight a foolish man like Nabal, for David far superior than one who would lay his hand on Nabal.
- b. That God had sent her to him so David would not retaliate for himself, as he was a special person who cares for people not just for himself.
- c. That Saul persecuted him, but God kept him safe, as wrapped in a sealed bag. But his enemies were thrown away as stones. So why was he defending himself now?
- d. That he was usually concerned with fighting God's wars; it's not befitting him to worry about trivial matters.
- e. That he would soon take over the throne and be a king to all people. As a king, he should lead by example, and avoid confusing them by looking for his personal revenge.
- f. That he would remember his servant (Abigail), when the Lord has granted him the kingdom.

Abigail's message was that all eyes were focused on him as a king, and anticipating his kindness that should be his main concern.

David felt that Abigail was carrying to him a Divine message full of wisdom, so he told her, "Praised be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me! Be assured that I have listened to you and responded favorably."

David's humility was marvelous, for he had listened to her, praised her wisdom and accepted her advice.

Nabal suffered from distress and depression, and ten days after Abigail's visit to David, he died of a heart attack.

Later on, David married Abigail.



104- David Refuses to Kill Saul

(1 Samuel 26)

Saul never stopped chasing David, in spite of the fact that David spared his life before, forgave him, and entered a covenant with him. David never stopped forgiving Saul, leaving his case in God's hands.

For the second time, the Ziphites came to Saul to betray David. They informed him that David was hiding on the hill of Hakilah at the edge of the wilderness. So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, forgetting how David had treated him kindly and never harmed him, when he fell into his hands in the cave. Saul forgot how he felt humbled by David's generosity, modesty and politeness. He didn't remember how he lifted up his voice and wept intensely, and asked David to swear to him to never to kill him.

Now, as before, Saul's evil heart dragged him into betrayal again. David found it hard to believe that Saul was not honoring their covenant.

David didn't flee from Saul, but he sent spies to make sure that Saul had really come after him.

When it was confirmed to David that Saul broke the covenant, and came with his men to kill him, he was not afraid. But, with a unique courage, he went in the company of Abishai the son of Zeruiah and Ahimelech the Hittite, and from over a near by hill, they inspected the area where Saul was camping. They found that Saul and his army were in deep sleep behind an entrenchment (which is a wall made of stones, dirt or wood, where soldiers can hide behind it to get protection from enemy's attacks).

When they came closer, Abishai said to his uncle David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me drive the spear right through him into the ground with one swift jab! A second jab won't be necessary!"

Abishai thought that the deep sleep, which God put on Saul and his army, was a sign for David to kill Saul. But, David refused to extend his hand against the Lord's anointed. Although he was the one who broke their agreement, and was filled with envy and outrage, and was seeking his blood.



David also stopped Abishai from extending his hand against him, saying, "As the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him down. Either his day will come and he will die, or he will go down into battle and be swept away. But may the Lord prevent me from extending my hand against the Lord's anointed! Now take the spear by Saul's head and the jug of water, and let's leave!"

Then, David crossed to the other side and stood on the top of the hill of Hakilah, some distance away. They kept a considerable distance between them, because David didn't trust Saul.

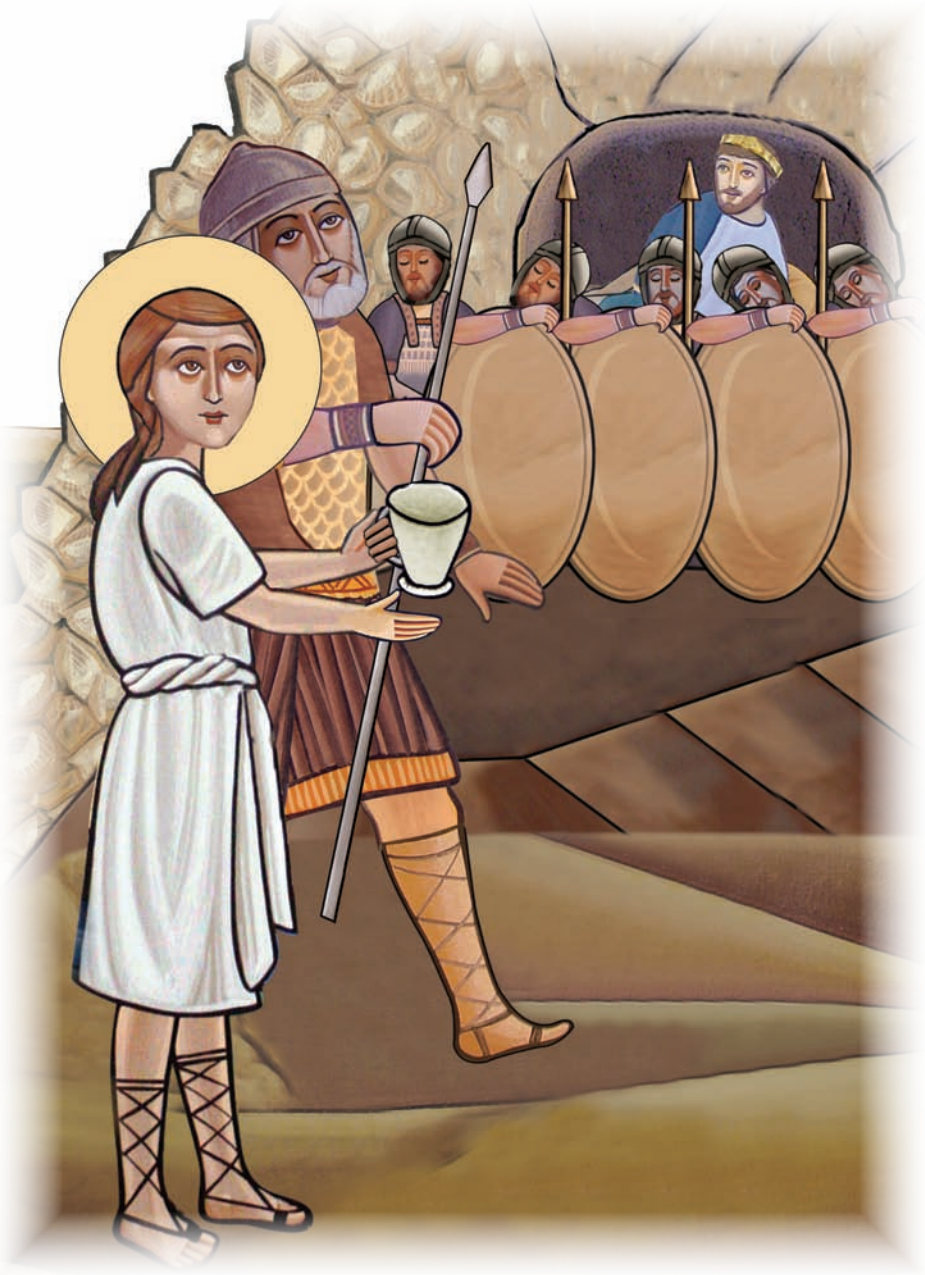
David called out to Abner, the commander of the army and Saul's own guard, and rebuked him politely, saying, "Won't you answer, Abner?" As if David was telling him, "Didn't you have enough sleep?!"

It was dawn, and Abner was disturbed and didn't know who was he, that dared to wake up the king by yelling and addressing him in that manner. So, Abner responded, "Who are you, calling out for the king?"

After realizing that David entered their camp and left with his spear and jug, Saul was moved, and said, "Is that your voice, my son David?!"

Politely, David rebuked him saying, "Yes, it's my voice, my lord and king. Why is my lord chasing his servant? What have I done? What evil have I committed? Now don't let my blood fall to the ground before the face of the Lord, for the king of Israel has gone out to look for a flea."

Saul collapsed and replied, "I have sinned. Come back, my son David. I won't harm you; my life was valuable in your eyes this day." As usual, Saul was repentant just for a short while, but David didn't trust him. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his palace.





105- The Death of Saul and his Sons

(1 Samuel 31)

Saul tried repeatedly to kill David, but failed, David was leaving his safety in God's hands. One day, Saul, his sons and his armor bearer all perished, without the need for David to stretch his arm to harm them. David's heart never carried any malice against Saul for his transgressions, but carried only sincere love for him. When Saul died, David grieved deeply for him, and with bitter sadness he lamented him and his son Jonathan, praising and glorifying them.

The Philistines killed Saul's three sons: Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua.

Saul had put up in his heart to kill David, so his kingdom would not be taken away from his son Jonathan, after his death. Now, Saul had witnessed the death of the mighty Jonathan and his two brothers, while David was safe to take over the kingdom.

Saul expelled David from his own land, but he didn't realize that by doing that he put him out of harm's way, until Saul and his sons died and then David would succeed him to the throne.

The Philistines focused their attacks on Saul, believing that once the king would fall, the whole army would collapse. The archers spotted Saul and wounded him severely. When he felt that he was dying, Saul asked his armor bearer to draw his sword and stab him with it, so the Philistines would not kill him.

Perhaps, Saul had feared that the Philistines might abuse him as they did with Samson, whose eyes were gouged, and was tied with brass chains. They had him milling in the prison house, and finally, they brought him in the temple of their god Dagon to entertain three thousand men and women while they ridiculed him.

But his armor bearer was terrified to stab his king. So, Saul took his sword and fell on it. When the armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his own sword and died with him.

So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men (his private guards) died together that day. But his son Ish-





Bosheth (who was disabled), and his army commander Abner, did not die. It was a great defeat for the Israelites.

The Israelites who lived along the valley and across the Jordan (i.e. east of Jordan) all of them departed their cities. The Philistines came over and occupied them.

The Philistines came back to the battlefield to collect the loot (clothing, armors and all the other valuables) from the corpses. They discovered Saul and his three sons lying dead on Mount Gilboa. They cut off Saul's head and stripped him of his armor. They sent messengers throughout their land, proclaiming his death, attributing the victory to their idols, so they placed Saul's armor in the temple of Ashtoreths.

The Philistines nailed the corpses of Saul and his sons on the city wall of Beth Shan. (Currently, Beth Shan is the Bison City which is about five miles west of the Jordan River).

When the residents of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, they wanted to return a favor Saul did to them in the past: Saul did save them from the hands of Nahash the Ammonite who defeated them. Nahash wanted to enter a peace treaty to serve him, on the condition that he would gouge out the right eyes of each of them as a sign of their submission to him. But, Saul managed to assemble a huge army and saved the people of Jabesh Gilead from Nahash.

All the warriors of Jabesh Gilead set out and traveled to Beth Shan through the night. They took down Saul's corpse and the corpses of his sons hanging in disgrace from the city wall. They traveled back to Jabesh, bringing the corpses. They buried them at Jabesh; then they fasted for seven days.



106- David: The King of Judah Becomes The King of All Israel

(2 Sam 5 - 6)

Saul had deviated completely from his objective, but God never forgot His people. God chose somebody else for them, a person who had a pure heart, full of love for God and for the people, and is brave by nature. That person was David, the young shepherd.

God was preparing David for the royal and pastoral work. David lived as a shepherd taking care of sheep, and willing to sacrifice himself for them. He learned how to love his flock and to be brave in defending them from the wild beasts.

His musical talent coupled with his sensitive feelings, had played a big role in filling his heart with God's love, and he started praising Him with his psalms. This talent gave him the chance to enter Saul's palace, and to witness firsthand the corruption inside the palace. Accordingly, David learned how to be cautious about maintaining holiness in his own palace, and how to repent if he, any of his children, or his household should sin.

The victory that David achieved against mighty Goliath was recent in the memory and the hearts of many of the Israelites' fighters. Therefore, when Saul died, the elders and the leaders turned to David. In Hebron, David was anointed to become a king over Judah, and he started his royal job as God had planned.

In spite of him being anointed by Samuel since his boyhood, he was never anxious about when he would become a king and he never sought it.

Abner, Saul's army commander, played here an important role. He declared Ish-bosheth, the only son left to Saul, as a king over the rest of the tribes. A dispute broke out between the allies for Saul's son, and David's followers. This dispute continued for seven and half years, while Saul's son followers were in a gradual decline.

Finally, Abner sent to David offering him all the tribes to rule over them. Meanwhile, Abner met with the tribes' elders and explained to them the risk of dividing the people into two kingdoms, and how this will weaken them before their enemies.



So, Abner, accompanied by the tribe's elders, went to see David in Hebron, and they declared their obedience and loyalty to him. This way, all the tribes were united, and David became a king over all Israel.

David felt that there was an urgent need for a fortified city to be the capital of the kingdom. So, he chose Jerusalem, which used to belong to the Jebusites. Although, the Jebusites resisted the idea, eventually Jerusalem became the capital.

David went through many wars. He was attacked by the Ammonites, the Moabites, Edom and other peoples, but the Lord was always with him. After long battles, he conquered the Philistines, and the smaller nations around them surrendered, and peace was achieved with a union between all the tribes of Israel.

David brought the Ark of Covenant to Jerusalem. It was a great celebration, where there was blowing trumpets, playing music, and David danced in front of the Ark of Covenant. The Ark of Covenant was placed in the midst of the Tabernacle that was prepared for the Ark's arrival. Many sacrifices and burnt offerings were made to the Lord. Also, a precise system for worship was established in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was called "The City of God".





107- David the Prophet in a Dialogue with God

(2 Sam 7)

David the Prophet and the king lived in his house and God gave him relief from all his enemies. He appreciated all the victories that God had granted him, and he wanted to build a house for God instead of the Tabernacle.

The king said to Nathan the Prophet, "Look! I am living in a house made of cedar, while the Ark of God sits in the middle of a Tent."

Nathan agreed initially with David about building a house for the Lord, because he felt that it was the right thing to do. So he replied to the king saying, "You should go and do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you."

However, when Nathan consulted the Lord that night, the Lord told him: "Go, tell My servant David: 'Thus, says the Lord: Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not lived in a house since the time I brought the Israelites out of Egypt to the present day. Instead, I was traveling with them living in a Tent.

Wherever I moved among all the Israelites, I did not say to any of the Judges whom I appointed to care for My people Israel, "Why haven't you built Me a house made of cedar?"

So now, say this to My servant David: 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel.

I was with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men of the earth.

I have established a place for My people Israel and settled them there; that they may dwell there and not be disturbed any more. Evil men shall not oppress them again, as they have earlier during the time when I appointed Judges to lead My people Israel. Instead, I will give you relief from all your enemies. The Lord declares to you that He will build a dynastic house for you.

When the time comes for you to die and rest with your fathers, I will raise your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a



house for My name, and I will make his dynasty forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.

But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed before you. Your house and your kingdom will stand before Me forever; your dynasty will be forever."

After he received the Lord's message, Nathan told David everything that was revealed to him.

Probably, David sat on the floor and bowed his head before the Lord to thank Him for the promise He bestowed on him, and said:

"Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that You should have brought me this far? What more can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant, O Lord God! For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them.

Therefore You are great, O Lord God, for there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears! Who is like Your people, Israel, a unique nation on earth? Whose God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name! For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Lord, have become their God.

Now, O Lord God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish it forever and do as You have said. So let Your name be magnified forever, so people would say, 'The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel!' And, let the dynasty of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel have told Your servant, 'I will build you a dynastic house.' That is why, Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.

Now, O sovereign Lord, You are the true God! And Your words are true! You have made this good promise to Your servant!



Now therefore, let it please You to bless Your servant's dynasty so that it may continue forever before You, for You, O sovereign Lord, have spoken. By Your blessing may Your servant's dynasty be blessed forever!"





108- David Shows Kindness to Mephibosheth The Son of Jonathan

(2 Samuel 9)

Generally, when a man is comfortable and settled, he forgets about the past with all its trials and tribulations, and ignores the feelings of others. David on the other hand, the king and prophet, who had an affectionate heart, was different, his success and his stability led him to seek the comfort for others.

God had given David rest from all his enemies, and 15 years after the death of Saul and Jonathan, David never forgotten his covenant with Jonathan. He inquired about the existence of anyone from Saul's house, to show him kindness for the sake of Jonathan. David said to his men in the palace, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" And there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. They called him for David. The king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" Ziba replied, "Your servant." The king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both his feet." So the king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Makir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar."

Then, David sent for Mephibosheth out of the house of Makir. Mephibosheth fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down. David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually." Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" And the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him:

"I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to his household. Therefore, you and your sons and servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in the harvest that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always, as one of the king's sons."



Ziba answered the king, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do." And, Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all the members of Ziba's household were Mephibosheth's servants. Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he was a regular guest at the king's table.

David, in his generosity was a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ, who longs for us to meet with Him, for we are His loved ones. He takes away our fears, and restores back to us what we have lost. He grants us to sit at His Divine Table, and partake in His Body and His Blood which was shed as a sacrament for our redemption and is the way to enjoy the eternal life with Him.





109- Shortcomings of David the King **(2 Sam 11-12)**

The Holy Bible demonstrated a practical image of David the prophet and the king's personality, who loved God and people dearly, since he was young. He lived in purity and chastity, and always longed to serve and glorify God, in a complete seriousness, and with inflamed zeal. David was always willing to give his own life for what he was entrusted with, even when he was shepherding the mute sheep. God rewarded him for leading this serious and holy life, and granted him successes in whatever he was doing, until he became extremely great. And, the Lord of hosts was with him.

In a moment of weakness, David was less strict and negligent so he stumbled and fell. This happened to demonstrate the depth of the weakness of the human nature, even in the life of the great David. This mighty man collapsed, and gradually tumbled from one sin to the next. David thought that he could hide this weakness; instead it was exposed before us across all the generations. And, because of his sins, David received several bitter punishments, and successive sadness accompanied David the rest of his life.

As a result of being careless in a moment of weakness, David committed a serious sin. He committed a sin with the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of the competent leaders of his army. This wrongdoing led him to a chain of sins, for he planned to kill this loyal commander by sending him to the frontline of the battle.

God sent Nathan the prophet to David. He told David a story about a rich master who owned a flock of sheep. But, when a guest came to visit that rich man, and the man wanted to prepare food for that guest, he took a goat that belonged to his poor neighbor, and served it to his guest. When David heard the story, he was upset and said that this rich man should be killed. Then, Nathan pointed out his finger at David and said, "You are that man."

David realized the seriousness of his sin, and humbly proclaimed his repentance saying, "I have sinned against the Lord, and against my friend." Nathan told him, "The Lord has taken



away your sin, you are not going to die, but you will be punished."

God wanted to punish David so he wouldn't repeat these sins. Therefore, the last days of David were troubled and he suffered.

The child born to his illegitimate relationship died. Also, Amnon, David's son, committed a shameful sin with Tamar, his half-sister. Consequently, Absalom, Tamar's brother, took revenge on Amnon and killed him.





110- Absalom, Son of David

(2 Samuel 13-19)

When David the Prophet became a king, apparently, he wanted to imitate the kings of the other nations surrounding him, which was another one of his shortcomings. A sign of those neighboring kings' vast greatness was being married to many wives. So, David married a beautiful girl named Maacah the daughter of Talmai, the king of Geshur. She gave birth to Absalom the handsome man, "and in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." He had a very attractive personality as well.

When Amnon raped his beautiful half-sister Tamar, David did not take any serious action against Amnon for his shameful behavior, probably because Amnon was his spoiled first born son. However, Absalom, Tamar's brother, wanted to take revenge for his sister, so he waited for two years for a chance to kill Amnon. Then, when all David's sons met together to celebrate the feast, the servants of Absalom had a chance to kill Amnon. There was a big confusion and everybody fled.

David was very sad for the death of his son Amnon, and he tore his clothes. Absalom feared his father's anger, so he fled to his mother's family in Geshur, and remained there for three years.

Joab, the commander of the army, intervened and talked to David on behalf of Absalom, and then brought him back to Jerusalem. David asked that Absalom to be taken to his own house and that his face not to be seen. So, Absalom couldn't meet his father for two years. Finally, David accepted him and met with him.

Absalom's sweet talk, and his attractive personality, enabled him to attract many people to his side. Absalom went to Hebron with his followers pretending that he was going to worship. There, he arranged a rebellion movement against his father, and declared that he was the king of Israel. David realized that the situation was risky, where Absalom was striving for killing David. So, David fled Jerusalem and went to Gilead, east of the Jordan River, and many people were sad for his departure.



An army gathered around David, although, it was not as big as Absalom's army. But David's followers resisted Absalom's army with courage and zeal, and Absalom's army had to flee. There was a terrible civil war between both armies, and David advised his army saying "Be gentle with the young man Absalom."

Twenty thousand people died in the battle, while the armies scattered in the wilderness. As Absalom realized that he was defeated, he tried to run away into the deep wilderness. But, his long hair got caught in a branch of a huge oak tree, while the mule he was riding, kept on going, and he was left hanging in the air. When Joab found him, he struck him with three spears. Then, he took his body, and threw him in a pit, and laid a very large heap of stones over him.







111- David Mourns his Rebellious Son Absalom

(2 Samuel 18-19)

David was watching the gates of the city, and then, he saw a man, running. He said to himself, "Behold, a messenger is coming from the battle."

The man approached David, and David asked him, "Is Absalom safe?"

The man answered, "May your entire enemies die, like him."

David covered his face and cried saying, "O, my son Absalom! I wish I could have died in your place! O Absalom my son!"

The army heard about David's sadness for his son Absalom! The great victory turned into mourning and distress for all the army.

Joab, the commander of the army came to David and said:

"Today you have humiliated all your men. This army has saved your life. You, your sons and daughters, and your wives are all safe.

You act as if you love those who hate you. Do you hate those who love you?

Please, speak gently to encourage your people.

Because, I am sure if you do not do as I ask you, a great disaster will come upon you."

So, David went out and greeted his returning army with gentle words.

This was the bitter fruit of David's multiple wives and spoiling his children.

Also, it was a result of Absalom's conduct, which relied on his good looks, and his attractive personality, instead of seeking God's wisdom and advice.

Absalom's attractive personality was a good gift from God, but he misused it.





112- Choosing a Location to Build

The House of the Lord

(2 Samuel 24 & 1 Chronicles 21)

The kingdom has largely expanded during the days of King David. The kingdom extended from the Euphrates River to the Egyptian borders, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the great desert. David, who relied on God in all of his affairs, had made a mistake when he asked Joab, the commander of the army, to conduct a census for the tribes of Israel.

The Lord was angry with David, not because of conducting the census, in itself, as Moses preceded and counted them before, three times or more. Our God is the God of regulations not the God of chaos. But, the Lord was angry for the following possible reasons:

- a. David did not consult the Lord as he used to do.
- b. David began to depend on the number of his men, and their capabilities. However, if he looked back to his life since the days of his youth, he would have remembered that he was elevated from a shepherd to his father's sheep, to becoming responsible over the whole kingdom, through God's power, not by his own strength or the strength of any human.
- c. Perhaps, through the census, David wanted to initiate wars to expand his kingdom.
- d. Perhaps he wanted to impose more taxes on the people, to add it to his own account or to the treasury, not for the benefit of the Tabernacle.
- e. Perhaps the motive was to demonstrate his greatness, capabilities, and power.
- f. The people were in need of discipline. God, sometimes, allows the shepherd to make mistakes in order to discipline the flock. The Bible says, "Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, go number."
- g. David ordered to count all people including those who were under twenty years old, as long as their stature and their abilities were appropriate for the war. This act was against the law.



h. David didn't impose the ransom on each person of a half shekel to be paid to the Tabernacle, when a census was conducted. (Exodus 30:12)

God wanted to punish David, so He allowed an epidemic to spread countrywide, in only three days seventy thousand souls perished. The angel of destruction stood at Araunah's field to destroy Jerusalem, but the Lord commanded him to stop. The Lord asked David to offer a sacrifice at Araunah's field on the top of Moria Mountain, the place where Abraham planned to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. David called the Lord, and the Lord answered him and sent fire that consumed the sacrifice. David said, "This is the place where we build the House of the Lord. Here, where the altar of the burnt offering should be erected."





113- King Solomon, the Wise

(1 Kings 1-3)

David was growing old and was bed-ridden, ill and unable to move. Perhaps the difficult lifestyle and the many troubles that he endured accelerated his aging process. He had suffered greatly from Saul and his men who dedicated all their power to get rid of him. Also, he faced innumerable difficulties after being enthroned, especially from within his own family; like the assault of his son Amnon on his sister Tamar, and the rebellion of his other son Absalom. It was expected for Adonijah, David's fourth son, to succeed him to the throne, because the other three older sons had died: Amnon, Absalom and Kilab. Indeed, Adonijah planned to receive the kingship, but the prophet Nathan declined to approve Adonijah's plan.

Nathan knew God's promise to David, "You will bear a son, and I will give him rest from all his enemies around him, for he will be called Solomon. I will bring peace and calmness in Israel during his days. He will build a house for My name, he will be My son, and I shall be his Father. I will establish his throne over Israel forever."

Adonijah took advantage of his father's sickness and old age. He announced himself as king succeeding his father, without taking his permission. He was supported by Joab, the army commander and Abiathar the priest. However, Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and the mighty men of David were not on Adonijah's side. David did not discover what Adonijah had done, until according to Nathan's advice, Solomon's mother Bathsheba entered to David's chamber and told the king what had happened. She reminded the king of his oath that Solomon will inherit the throne after him, and then she left. Nathan then entered and gave David all the details of what had happened.

David responded quickly and asked his men to allow Sadouk the priest and Nathan the prophet to anoint Solomon as king, and they would blow the trumpet and declare him as a king. They did that, and the people rejoiced and shouted, "Long live King Solomon."





Solomon married the Pharaoh's daughter to establish a coalition with Egypt. That way, Solomon made ties with one of the greatest nations in the world at that time. This Coalition disturbed the Philistines, for Egypt had had a sweeping military victory over them shortly before that.

Solomon loved the Lord and walked in the path of his father David. He went to Gibeon, one of the High Places, and offered to God a thousand burnt offerings. The Lord was very pleased with Solomon and appeared to him at night in a vision. God told him, "Ask! What shall I give you?" Solomon said, "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?" God was pleased with this petition, for Solomon did not ask for himself a long life, riches, or victory over the enemies, but he requested the wisdom. So, God granted him the wisdom, as well as, the riches and the honors.

To this day, Solomon is considered the wisest and the richest man ever. His reign was characterized by glory, eminence and fame.

An example of Solomon's wisdom can be shown in the following biblical story: It happened that two women came to king Solomon pleading he solves their dispute. One of them was holding a dead child, while the other was holding well child.

The first woman claimed that the son of the second woman died, and she replaced him with the living boy. But the woman who was holding the living son, said, that it was not true, and the living child is her son. Solomon called a soldier, and he commanded him, to cut the living child, and to split him into two halves, and to give each woman one half.

The woman, whose true son was living, bowed down before the king, begging him to give her child to the other woman and save his life. While, the other woman whose son was truly dead, said, "Neither one of us will have him! Let them cut him in two!"

Solomon, through his wisdom, was able to find out who the real mother was, and who the lying one was. The king commanded that the child be given to his mother, the one who saved him. All people were amazed, and feared Solomon, for they saw the wisdom of God in him.



114- Solomon, the Builder of God's Temple (1 Kings 4 - 8)

The people of Israel began to become known due to the Wisdom of Solomon. He had a great knowledge of the secrets of nature. Also, Solomon had good relationships with the other neighboring nations. During his reign, Israel had abundant prosperity.





God had chosen Solomon to accomplish a great unique task: Building the Temple. His father David longed to build it, but God promised him that his son will do the job. That was because David was a man of war, and he was engaged in many battles with the surrounding nations, until the peace was accomplished. But Solomon's rule was characterized with peace. His father David had prepared significant amounts of the building materials and supplies for him to build and furnish the Temple.

Solomon carried out this work with inflamed zeal and a great joy. The construction continued for seven years, where thousands participated in the work. They brought the precious materials from distant countries. The vessels were of pure gold and silver, and were decorated with precious stones. Wherever the person would look in the Temple, he would witness God's Glory through the valuable and beautiful items inside.

Once the building was completed, Solomon sent to the elderly and asked all the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the delivery of the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of the Hollies, and to consecrate the sanctuary. Innumerable sacrifices were offered. Suddenly, God revealed His presence inside the Temple. The inner Temple was filled with thick cloud.

Solomon stood by the altar and raised his hands to the heaven. He praised God in a loud voice. He kneeled to the ground with great reverence, and then stood up and turned to the people and blessed them.

The celebration continued for fourteen days. Afterwards, King Solomon and all the people returned to their homes, thanking God for His mercy and His blessings. Everyone felt that the building of the Temple was a great sign of God's dwelling in the midst of His people.



115- The Deviation of Solomon the Wise

(1 Kings 11)

Perhaps, one of the bitterest turn of events was the deviation of Solomon, who was granted wisdom from above, with riches and dignity, and was the one who built the Temple, which was considered one of the wonders of the world.

Solomon, who started his reign by caring and loving his people, became preoccupied with building his private palace, and other major installations. And consequently, he imposed more taxes on his people, and enslaved them to do more labor.

He married several foreign women as he sought the acceptance from the neighboring nations. But, those foreign women dragged him into worshiping their pagan gods. It was common among the nations, that the king of a weak nation would offer one of his daughters or his beautiful women, to the king of a strong nation to marry her. Accordingly, this would ensure that the strong king would not consider attacking the weak king or enslaving him. This act was known as the "Present of Peace."

God had allowed this to happen, first, because although God had chosen Solomon for a holy task, however, He did not force him to lead a holy life against his own will. Secondly, for us to be cautious about sinning, no matter how experienced we have. And finally, to learn that regardless of the seriousness of his sins, when Solomon repented, God accepted him back, and even made him one of the Men of Faith. And, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon recorded his experiences for us in many Holy Books such the Proverbs, the Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

In the Book of Proverbs, the Spirit of God teaches us to take pleasure in the Divine Wisdom in our behavior on earth. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon realized that the world is vain, but it is the road we have to cross to our home in heaven. In the Book of Song of Songs, Solomon experienced the hidden marvelous love between Jesus Christ and His bride; which is the Church, as well as each soul of the true believers.

And in the Book of Wisdom, Solomon presented the wisdom as being the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom we unite with in a



spiritual heavenly marital union. With that union, we live as the God's wise people. Also, the book teaches us that in God we are created masters and free people. Thus, we should not enslave ourselves to Satan, to our bodily lusts, to the love of this world, to the false glory, nor to the fear of the future.





The Seventh Time Period

Division and Destruction

After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided. That was because of his son Rehoboam, who listened to a group of companions who were full of violence, while rejecting the advice of the elders.

The kingdom was divided into two kingdoms:

The first was the Kingdom of Judah and its capital was Jerusalem. It included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and was called the Kingdom of the South.

The second was the Kingdom of Israel and its capital was Samaria. It included the rest of the tribes and was called the Kingdom of the North.

Many challenges arose between the two kingdoms. At times, one of the two kingdoms would ally with foreign pagan nations against its sister kingdom. There was no righteous king in the kingdom of Israel, which resulted in the mixed worship of God along with the worship of idols!

Within this period lived great prophets who called for repentance and for the returning to God, but they were faced with persecution and sometimes murder.



116- The Division of the Kingdom

(1Kings 12)

After the death of Solomon, his son, Rehoboam went to Shechem where all Israel had gathered to crown him as the king. They asked Rehoboam saying, "Your father burdened us with a harsh yoke. If you have pity on us, we will be your loyal servants." He did not listen to the advice of the elders, and said to them rudely, "My yoke is much heavier than my father's yoke."

When they heard this answer, they immediately replied saying, "What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son?" Jeroboam, who was in dispute with Solomon, became their king. And the North kingdom was established, to include all the tribes except Judah and Benjamin.

Jeroboam was worried that the hearts of his people may desire to see the Temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, he built two shrines, one in Bethel and the other in Dan, and set up a statue of bull in each. All the kings of Israel of the Northern kingdom were wicked ones. After a long period, they made an alliance with Syria, and both nations fell under the rule of Assyria. Assyria was known as harsh rulers of the countries they occupied; as they used various methods of violence and humiliation.

Regarding occupying Israel, Assyria had captured many people from Samaria and sent them to Assyria, and at the same time, Assyria sent foreigners to Samaria, so that the Israelites would lose their identity, their language, their culture, and their beliefs. Therefore, the Samaritans, i.e. the inhabitants of Samaria, the Capital of Israel, were a mixed group of Jewish people and Pagan nations. They believed in the five Books of Moses but not the other Books, and they combined the worship of the Living God with the pagan worship. This led to a bitter hostility between the Samaritans and the rest of the Jewish people.

The kingdom of Judah was proud that their king was a descendant of David, and that they kept Jerusalem, the City of God where His Temple is, as their capital. However, not all of the kings of Judah were righteous ones.



The kingdom of Judah was expected to learn from what happened to the kingdom of Israel under the Assyrian's exile. But unfortunately, they had fallen into so many evils. They assumed that God would not allow the destruction of His city and His Temple, and He would not humiliate their kings because they were David's descendants.

Several times, the prophets warned the kings and the people of the kingdom of Judah as well as the kingdom of Israel, but they did not listen to them, instead, they persecuted them.

When Nebuchadnezzar became emperor over Babylon, he insisted on taking over Judah to destroy utterly the nationality of the Jewish people and all their worshiping rituals and traditions. Indeed, Judah was exiled, and the honorable, the nobles and the skilled in business, were deported to the exile.





117- Aserhadon and Aliphana

(Judith 1-2)

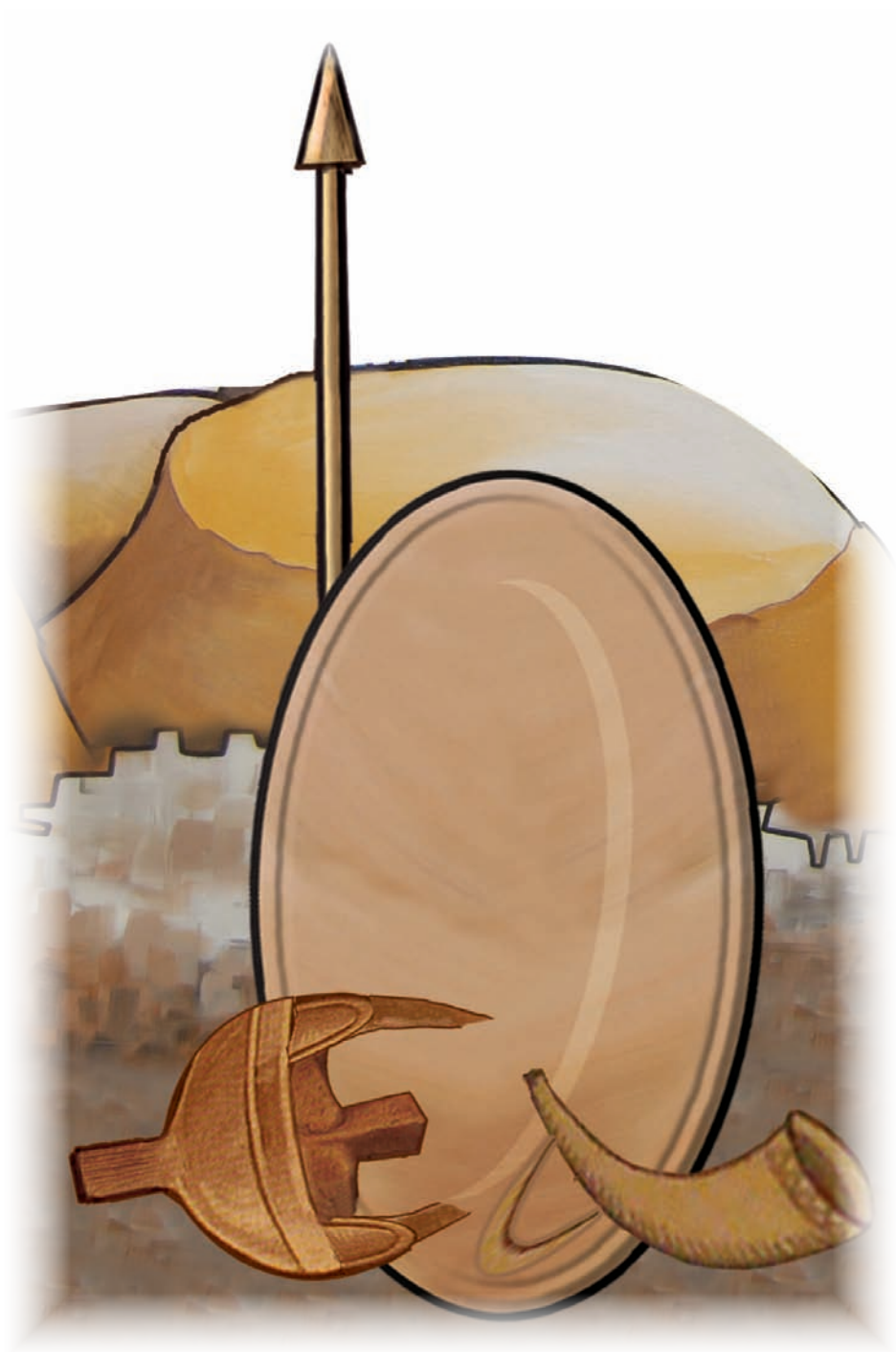
Nebuchadnezzar planned in his heart to occupy the entire world at this time. He called himself the "The lord of the whole earth." Nebuchadnezzar was a title which was used for many of the kings of Assyria. Here, it is intended to be Aserhadon the son of Sennacherib. His chief captain was Holofernes (Aliphana) who says, "There is no other gods, except Nebuchadnezzar. He sends his forces, to destroy them from the face of the earth, and their God will not rescue them."

Aliphana's first job, when he would occupy any nation, was to destroy its temples, so all the nations would worship only Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar was a symbol of Satan who wanted to take over God's throne, and Aliphana was a symbol of the anti-Christ who worked for Satan, and then the Satan makes him a god for all humans.

Aliphana led a variety of raids against many nations, among those nations was Medians. Arphaxad was the king of Medians. Aliphana wanted to take revenge on Arphaxad because he was loved by the Jews, who were the enemies of the father of his king Aserhadon.

All nations hurried to surrender to Aliphana, saying, "We are the slaves of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, we and our children are in your hands, do to us whatever pleases you." They were welcoming him with dance and tambourines, while Aliphana was destroying their temples, so everybody would only worship Nebuchadnezzar.

When the Jews heard about all what Aliphana had done to other nations, they dreaded surrendering to him, for that would entail the destruction of the Temple and forcing them to worship Nebuchadnezzar. Joakim, the high priest, called for resisting the invaders to protect the city of God and God's Temple. Joakim made that call, while the Jews' feeble military capabilities were nothing to be compared with Aliphana's mighty one.





118- Meeting with the Military Commanders of the Surrendered Nations

(Judith 3)

Aliphana was surprised by the Jews' stance, so he held a meeting with the military commanders of the surrendered nations. He inquired from those leaders about the reasons for which the Jews were not afraid of him as other nations were. Among those who were present, was the commander of the Ammonites' army, and he was called Achior (it means the brother of the light) or Akhiod (it means the brother of the Jews), and he was brave.

Achior told Aliphana, that he would not defeat the Jews unless they fall into sin, and consequently, their God would abandon them. He told Aliphana about God's blessings with the Jews through history. He briefed him on the Jews' chronicles, warning him and his army from entering into a shameful encounter with them. He explained that their war capabilities did not depend on their military readiness, but relied on their relationship with their God and how obedient they were to Him. Achior ended his account by concluding that there was no other way to defeat them except for having the Jews rebel against their God.

Aliphana was angry with Achior, and in a sarcastic manner, mocked him. He claimed that Achior considered himself a prophet, and that he prophesied for Aliphana not to fight with the Jews. He accused Achior of being a spy of the Jews, and for that reason, he would not to be imprisoned, but rather killed.

Aliphana asked his men to take Achior to the springs which were below Bethulia (Bait Phelwy) and to leave him there tied, in order for the Jews to find him and take him to their city. And later on, he would see for himself, how the Jews were defeated and killed, and he would be killed too.

Indeed, the men brought Achior into Bait Phelwy, and the Jews took him to the City of Jerusalem. Uzziah, who was the first among the leaders of the people, hosted Achior in his house and had a banquet for him. Achior told Uzziah and the other leaders about the dialogue he had with Aliphana. And, it happened that Judith heard that conversation. Judith regarded what she had heard

as a message from God asking her to rescue her people. Judith was a good-looking Jewish woman with a strong faith.

The people bowed down before God, and they prayed with deep humility, asking for His salvation.





119- The Siege of Bait Phelwy

(Judith 7)

It was impossible for Aliphana to break into the fortified City of Jerusalem because of geographical aspects; therefore he camped in Bait Phelwy, which meant the house of virginity. Aliphana camped in the area, where the springs of water were. He captured these springs, and made sure that no water would reach Jerusalem. He also put a blockade around the city.

Consequently, the Jewish people were subjected to thirst and hunger; therefore they complained to Uzziah and the leaders of the city, saying, "May God judge between you and us! You have done us grave injustice in not making peace with the Assyrians." They also complained against God saying, "There is no one to help us now! God has delivered us into their hands to be thrown before them in thirst, and utter exhaustion."

Under the pressure of the agitated people, Uzziah asked the people to wait only five days for God's work to save them, and if nothing happened after those five days, he vowed that he would surrender to the enemy. Uzziah was wrong to set a certain time for God. But, perhaps Uzziah wanted to wait until the Saturday to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings for their salvation.

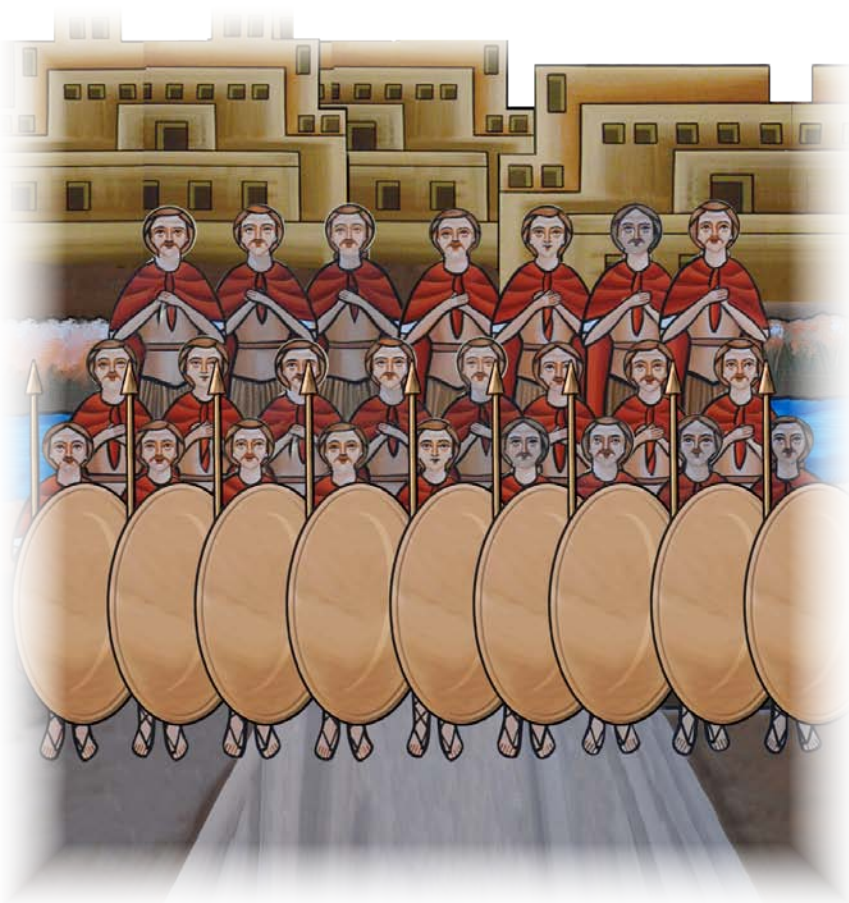
Judith heard that Uzziah vowed to the people to deliver the city to the Assyrians in five days. Judith sent her housekeeper, (who was in charge of managing her assets), to the elders of her city, Uzziah was one of them, and asked her to invite them to a meeting in her place. In that meeting, she confronted them and stressed that what they vowed to the people was improper. She told them, "Now, who are you to put God to the test today, setting yourselves in place of God in human affairs? Let us give thanks to the Lord for putting us to the test as He did our ancestors."

The righteous Judith was able to persuade the Jewish leaders to change their minds from grumbling to offering sacrifices of thanksgiving to their Beneficent God. The elders were filled with inner peace and true comfort, and Uzziah asked Judith to pray on their behalf.



Judith asserted the elders that they were not invited there to be rebuked or criticized by her, but to ask them to pray on her behalf concerning a very serious matter. Judith told them that she was intending to conduct a crucial act, which the history might even remember. And, she declared to them that she knew, by faith, that God would fulfill their salvation before that specified date they already had set.

The elders were expecting God to send rain instead of the water springs, which had been cut off. Instead, Judith asked for their prayers on her behalf, however, she did not reveal her plan to them. She just let them know about her need to exit and enter the city gates freely without being questioned by the guards. She also asked them to keep an utmost secrecy about the matter and not to disclose her role to anyone.





120- Judith in the Camp of the Assyrians Army **(Judith 10)**

Judith and her maid set off at night, to the Assyrians' camp. The Assyrians were surprised to see her, coming without fear. She asked them to let her meet with their leader, Aliphana. They relayed her request to him, and told him about her extreme beauty. Aliphana met with her, and she found favor in his eyes.

Judith told Aliphana that she came to tell him that the surrender of the city was quite imminent, and that she would plan the city's surrender without the loss of any man in his army. Also, she told him that she needed from him a passage permit to enter and exit the tent (where she would be staying with her maid), to go back and forth to Bait Phelwy, to practice the purification rituals required by her religion. Aliphana agreed, and commanded the camp guards to let Judith and her maid move freely without any interference.

Aliphana longed to see Judith again. For three days, she left the tent and came back, every night. On the fourth day, the leader invited her to a banquet attended by all his army commanders. Judith accepted his invitation, and Aliphana was very happy.

Judith came to the banquet with her maid. During the banquet, Aliphana drank wine until he became entirely intoxicated. When it was over, the commanders left their leader alone with Judith, so he could spend some private time with her.

The leader fell unconscious. Judith ordered her loyal maid to stay outside the chamber and to wait for her.

Judith prayed and said, "O Lord, God of all might, in this hour look graciously on the work of my hands for the glory of Jerusalem". Then, she grabbed the sword, which was hanging by his bed, and with all her might, she struck his neck twice, beheading him.

She took the canopy of his bed and wrapped the head with it, as evidence that he was killed in the midst of his house. She handed over the head to her maid, who put it in her food bag.

As David struck Goliath's head with his sword, so did Judith, the young widow, when she beheaded Aliphana with his sword. Both incidents symbolize the work of Christ in the battle





of the Cross. Satan, the enemy of every good, thought that he was able to get rid of the Lord Jesus Christ and to destroy His kingdom by the Cross. However, this Cross, destroyed the enemy of every good himself, wiped away his authority, and disgraced him. Likewise Aliphana, with the same sword that he wanted to use to destroy God's name and His people, he was beheaded, lost his authority, and became a shame and a disgrace to all.

Judith and her maid left the Assyrians' camp and walked as they used to do every night, and no one stopped them. When they reached the gate of the city, Judith called on the guards and they opened the gate for them. She told the elders of the city and the high priest how God led her way successfully, and she praised the Lord for His work with her.

The young widow was put in charge of the command center. So, she became, through her pious life, the efficient counselor for the army, and for all the Israelites.

When Achior saw Aliphana's head, he was terrified, but glorified God, and believed in His power.

Judith requested that Aliphana's head to be hung on the top of the city wall, in order for his army to realize that their leader had been killed!

Indeed, the head was hung on the wall, while the trumpet of war was sounding. The camp of the Assyrians was thoroughly disturbed, and they went searching for Aliphana. When they found him beheaded in his tent, they were deeply shocked, and in their confusion, they ran away from the Israelites, and were defeated.

Judith converted her people into a heaven-like congregation. For three month, they rejoiced and celebrated an unending feast, as if they were living in Heaven itself!



121- Judith and the Life of Prayer and Praise **(Judith 9, 13, 16)**

Judith used to pray and praise God during her successful mission. She offered three types of prayers: a prayer in the midst of distress, a prayer before work, and a thanksgiving prayer.

The first prayer: during distress, and it was in her private room.

The second prayer: before carrying out the plan and it was in the enemy's tent.

The third prayer: it was to praise and thank God after victory, and it was among the people inside the city.

Also, she offered individual private prayers wherever she was; she also had communal prayers and praises with the people! And when she was in a foreign location, she would ask for a permission to pray.

She said in her praise:

"Chant to my Lord with tambourines, and sing to the Lord with cymbals, improvise for Him a new song, exalt and acclaim His name...

I will sing a new song to my God.

O Lord, You are great and glorious, marvelous in power, and invincible".

The distress was transformed into glorification for God, and instead of groaning, all of the people joined in and offered thanksgiving praise to God who saved them.

The people remained in a state of a wonderful joy and a continuous celebration. They carried the loot from the Assyrians' camp to their dwellings rejoicing and constantly praising and glorifying God their Savior. Now they went in a magnificent procession towards Jerusalem to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving for their safe-return and to fulfill their vows and offerings.

Judith offered to God all Aliphana's belongings that were given to her by the people. Judith was not looking for any personal gain, and she did not ask anyone to get her anything. However, the people believed that they must give her the belongings of this defeated leader.



She gave back all what the people delivered to her to declare that she was not behind the victory, but it was the work of God Himself. And, to God, should the thanks, the honor and the glory be given.

Judith wanted to place this valuable loot in the Temple, in order for the next generations to remember the work of God with His people. Thus, it is important to mention that, the Temple in Jerusalem was stacked with precious gifts, which tempted pagans and thieves to steal it.

The Jews used to read the Book of Judith in the feast of Hanukkah (feast of consecration), and the Book of Song of Songs in the feast of Passover, and the Book of Ruth in the feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Book of Ecclesiastes in the feast of Tabernacles, and the Book of Esther in the feast of Purim, and the Book of Lamentations of Jeremiah in the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple.







122- Ahab, the King of Israel and Elijah, the Prophet **(1 Kings 17 & 18)**

Ahab, king of Israel, loved Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidonians, and he married her. Ahab was one of the worst kings of Israel. His wife Jezebel and her father were priests of Baal the idol.

The people of Sidon (Phoenicians) were skillful sailors; they were also skilled in construction and in many other crafts. They believed that their god "Baal" would protect them against storms when they sail, and would grant them rain for farming and drinking. So, they chose high places with attractive sceneries to build magnificent temples for this god and they decorated them lavishly. In the burning fire on those temples' altars, the women used to throw their children as sacrifices for that god!

Queen Jezebel said, "Dear Ahab, I have brought with me a small number of priests from Sidon, to worship the god 'Baal' with me. We will build him a small beautiful temple, here by the palace, on the top of the hill. What do you think?" Ahab was fascinated with Jezebel's beauty and elegance, dressed in her beautiful clothes and adorned with precious jewels; so, he answered her saying, "Indeed, all what you are saying is perfectly fine!"

Jezebel said to her priests: "Our utmost important job is to destroy completely the worship of their God. And, once the king Ahab worships Baal with us, many of his people will join in worshipping Baal, alongside the worship of their own God. With respect to the minority who would refuse to worship Baal, we would kill them!"

Jezebel's plan was skillfully achieved. Ahab built an altar for Baal in Samaria the capital, which became one of the main centers for worshipping Baal. So, people worshiped the god "Baal" and his wife "Ashtaret." The sacrifices continued and the fire was never put out. The priests, barefooted, danced and kissed the statue as a primary part of their rituals.

Jezebel started to spread the worship of Baal by force. She demolished the altars, and killed many believers, particularly the prophets, so there would be no place to worship God, nor a voice



to rebuke the king's conscious, his men or his people. This continued, until the kingdom of Israel appeared as a pagan kingdom worshiping Baal.

In the midst of this atmosphere of absolute darkness, God sent a wonderful prophet, Elijah the Tishbite, from Gilead Hills, east of the Jordan River. He lived a life of solitude; his clothes were simple, consisting of a rough garment with a leather belt. He worshiped God and always had Him in his thoughts. His mission in life was to defend the faith in the True God against the worshipers of Baal, no matter what it would cost him.

No one, among the kings of Israel, was as daring as Ahab, in committing all kinds of sins. At the mean time, there was no brave or fiery prophet as Elijah, the crying voice that testified for God. God sent the prophet Elijah to Samaria to rebuke Ahab for his wickedness, and to ask him to cease worshiping Baal, and return back to God by repentance.

From a distance, Elijah looked at the huge gate of the palace, which stands on the top of a great hill, guarded all around by armed soldiers. Suddenly, he heard the sound of the silver trumpets blowing, and out of the palace's gate, there was a great procession of men and women, wearing glamorous clothes. It was the procession of the priests and the priestesses of Baal led of Queen Jezebel. She headed the procession wearing her charming purple and scarlet dress; she had placed a golden band on her chest with a picture of a human riding an ox and holding a bundle of lightening over his head.

The procession was heading towards the temple of Baal near the palace, where it was surrounded by the trees of a forest.

Elijah was disgusted and felt sick. He stopped to think about a way to enter the palace which was erected on the top of the hill, in order to rebuke the king for abandoning the worship of the Living God. Elijah was confident that God, who had sent him there, was capable of making him accomplish his mission.

After the procession passed by, Elijah climbed up the top of the hill without being noticed by the soldiers as they were entirely focused on the queen and her company. Elijah sneaked into the opened hall and hurried towards the throne chamber. Elijah was



barefooted, quick in his movements, and was able to reach the hall before the king could see him.

Elijah looked at the king and with a loud voice he said, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there will be no dew or rain in the years ahead, unless I give the command." Elijah's voice was echoing in every corner in the palace, which was made out of marbles, and decorated with ivory and precious stones. Elijah addressed the king in front of everybody, because the wickedness had touched all the people, and there was a need for a strong echoing voice, to urge the people to return to God.

Here, Elijah confirmed the power of prayer. For he closed shut the skies from raining for three and a half years, and the pagan gods had no way of opening them. Only when God allowed it to happen: "I give the command."

It was mentioned in many of the old Jewish books, like the Talmud, that a dialogue and a challenge took place between the king and Elijah. The king challenged Elijah that the curse Elijah announced concerning the drought won't happen, for the king trusted in his gods. However, Elijah assured him that it would happen.

Elijah turned his back to the king and rushed out of the palace, while the king was in state of shock. The king's face turned red and he was so angry, he leapt out of his throne and called out, "O, guards, guards, catch him!"

The king was surprised to see that the clouds in the sky disappeared, and the rain had completely stopped. There was a great drought in the capital and the entire nation, and it caused a severe famine among the people.





123-The Man Fed by Ravens

(1 Kings 17:1-7)

When Isabelle returned from Baal's temple to the palace, she found her husband puzzled and perplexed. She asked him about the reason for his condition, so he told her what happened with Elijah. Isabelle shivered while saying:

"He is like a wolf that lives among hills, but that will not allow him to get away from me, I will kill him.

Don't you ever fear Ahab? I know that he is hiding in the desert, among the mountains and the hills, but I will never rest until I bring you his head. Where could he escape from me? I'm a very powerful queen!"

Elijah crossed the Jordan River to reach Gilead. He couldn't settle in any place so the soldiers wouldn't be able to track him down. Right before dawn, Elijah reached a small brook called Cherith; he was very hungry and exhausted. He never feared the isolation, the life in the desert or the mountains, because he was used to it. But he didn't know how to find food to eat in that deserted area?!

Elijah looked up towards the heaven and prayed saying, "I thank You God for protecting me till this moment. I'm sure that You will care of me. Please, sustain my faith in You!"

Elijah drank from the water of the brook, soon enough the ravens were hovering above him, as if to welcome him as faithful servant to God the Creator of everything. Several of the ravens drew close to him, one of them had bread and another had a cooked piece of meat. Elijah stretched his arms to accept the food from them with a gentle smile on his face.

The prophet Elijah spent few happy days there, feeling that God had sent him those ravens to keep his company and to bring him food daily.

Elijah was awakening by the sound of a very strong wind, he went out of his cave to watch the weather, but soon there was a sand storm, however, there was no rain at all.

The farmers were in distress, they weren't able to resume farming because of the drought. Even the green trees started to dry out and lost all their leaves, the cattle became very weak,

everyone needed water. But there was no way, the rain totally stopped.





124- A Poor Widow in Zarephath

(1 Kings 17)

Elijah kept watching the brook of Cherith, for its water was evaporating day after day, because of the scorching heat of the sun. The brook was drying up, and the animals of the wilderness hardly found water to drink.

When the brook dried up completely, Elijah cried out to God asking, "O Lord, what can I do?"

God asked Elijah to leave that place and to head toward the northern west until he finds a poor widow at the village of Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon. And, that widow would take care of him.

Elijah did not inquire of how a poor widow would be capable of caring for him in the midst of this famine. But with faith he headed towards the northern west, to the village of Zarephath.

Elijah kept on going until he reached the gate of the city, where he was fatigued, starved and thirsty.

Elijah found the poor widow that he was looking for. She was gathering wooden sticks to set a fire for cooking. The prophet asked her, "Please, could you give me a little of water to drink?" The widow looked at him, and he could see in her face that she was hungry. When the widow started walking away, Elijah asked her again, "Please, when you bring the water, could you bring me also a piece of bread?!"

The woman fell silent for a long period, and then she said:

"I know that you are a true servant of God, and I would like to help you.

As certainly as the Lord your God lives, I have no food, except for a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. Right now I am gathering a couple of sticks for a fire. Then I'm going home to make one final meal for my son and myself. After we have eaten that, we will die of starvation."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go and do as you planned. But first bake me a small cake and bring it to me; then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord God of Israel says, 'The jar of flour will not be empty and the





jug of oil will not run out until the day the Lord makes it rain on the surface of the ground."

The widow walked towards the city gate without saying a word. Elijah followed her and walked through the city lanes until she reached her small modest home.

Elijah entered the home through a wooden door, where he found stairs which he climbed up to the top room in the house. While the widow went to the backyard of the house, lit a fire using the sticks she gathered before, and she placed a porcelain pot on the fire.

She returned inside, to use part of the flour and a little oil, to knead the cake, and then she baked it on the fire.

In silence, she presented the cake with a cup of water to Elijah.

The prophet bowed his head and thanked the widow, who belonged to a foreign race. In a little while, he looked at her and realized that she was still standing there, as if she were waiting for him to do something.

The prophet Elijah asked her, "Why don't you make a cake for yourself and for your son?" So, she went to use what was left in the flour jar and the oil jug to bake their cake. When she did, she realized that there was still flour and oil remaining.

She came back to the prophet saying, "You are the man of God, I believe in your God, although I am of foreign race. Your God blessed the flour and the oil."

Elijah the prophet answered her saying, "As the Lord lives, the jar of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jug of oil run dry, until the day the Lord makes it rain on the surface of the ground."



125- Raising the Son of the Widow

(1 Kings 17)

This widow enjoyed living through the first miracle mentioned in the Bible concerning the blessing of food in abundance. Also she had the privilege of taking care of Elijah, the great among the prophets, this privilege which many believers until this moment would aspire for. But suddenly, her son got sick, and his sickness was so severe that he hardly had any breath left in him.

She could not tell Elijah about the sick boy, while he was in the upper room. But she did talk to him after her son died in her arms.

The widow believed in her heart that the heavens were blocked before the sinful earth. And, she feared she may have sinned against God or His prophet. She was worried that the death of her son may have been a result of a sin that she had committed. Therefore, she said to Elijah, "What have I done to you, O man of God? Have you come to me to confront me with my sin and kill my son?"

Elijah had pity on her, and he asked God to restore the soul of the dead child. He was the first prophet to boldly and with familiarity ask this of God. For he said to her, "Give me your son," and he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Elijah cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord, my God, why are you also bringing disaster on this widow I am staying with, by killing her son?"

He stretched out over the child three times and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord, my God, please let this boy's soul return back to him."

Elijah bowed down three times, revealing the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity was the One who restored the life of the Gentile woman's son. This also is accomplished in the sacrament of Baptism, when the person is submerged in water three times to prepare him to rise as the New Man.



The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came back to him.

Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. Elijah said, "See, your son is alive!" The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the Lord really does speak through you."







126- Prophet Elijah's Meeting with the People On Mount Carmel

(1 Kings 18)

After about two years, God commanded Elijah the Prophet to meet with King Ahab. And indeed, Elijah met with the king in an open space, and asked him to call all the people to meet him on Mount Carmel. Elijah wanted to show everybody who the True God is.

The people of Israel gathered along with four hundred and fifty priests of Baal to challenge Elijah. Each party built an altar, placed wood on it, and prepared a slaughtered bull. Both bulls were placed on each altar, but there was no fire used.

First, the priests of Baal started to call upon their god to send fire to consume their sacrifice, but there was no response. They kept crying out in vain. Elijah urged them to cry out louder to Baal for he might be asleep.

After they failed, Elijah asked them to pour water on his sacrifice, and let the water flow on the altar and around it, so no one would claim that there was a hidden fire somewhere. Then, Elijah lifted his heart and prayed with zeal. Immediately, a fire came down and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, even the altar that was built of stones. The people cried out, "The Lord is God. He is the Almighty Everlasting God!"





127- Murder and Inheritance!

(1 Kings 21)

King of Israel Ahab paid close attention to his palaces and to his gardens. He yearned for a vineyard that was adjacent to his winter palace in Jezreel. It was owned by Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab was willing to pay Naboth for the vineyard, or to offer him another vineyard instead.

Naboth refused to sell his fathers' inheritance. Naboth was an Israelite who feared God, and who was proud of his fathers' heritage, including the vineyard that he inherited. Naboth did not intend to insult the king or to disobey his orders, but he was committed to God's Law which prevents anyone from selling his inheritance to another person, particularly if he was from another tribe. And, if it happened and the inheritance was sold for one reason or another, it should be acquired back on the seventh year or on the jubilee.

Additionally, Naboth knew that the king had deviated towards the worship of idols; therefore, he did not want to defile his fathers' heritage, in case the king considered setting up pagan idols there. So, his refusal to sell was based primarily on his obedience to God's Commandment.

Ahab threw himself on his bed, and turned his face to the wall. Perhaps, he did not want anyone to see him depressed, or even give a chance to anyone to ask him about the reason for his depression or his sickness. He also refrained from eating.

Jezebel asked her husband about the reason for his distress and abstaining from food. He told her what had happened between him and Naboth the Jezreelite. The king did not refer to the reasons why Naboth refused to sell the vineyard, which was God's Commandment. Perhaps, he was afraid to mention God in his conversations with her.

Pretending to comfort and console her sad husband, Jezebel boosted his ego. She considered his behavior, his distress, and his refraining from food, an insult to his position as a king with authority, who would give orders and dictate decisions. She



believed this matter was minor below what a king should worry about. In her perspective, for the king to conduct a dialogue with a commoner, like Naboth, was insulting to him, to his throne and to his royal crown. It was inappropriate for the king to bargain, to sell, or to buy, but he was supposed to give orders and to be obeyed.

So, she gave the king a lesson in arrogance, loftiness and exploiting authority. She told him that, as the queen, she would get him the vineyard without much effort and it would be free.

The queen wrote letters, in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the elders and the nobles in Jezreel, about seven miles away.

She wrote asking them to fabricate a forged testimony against Naboth, and to sentence him to death without expressing the reason behind this request.

She herself did not send false witnesses, but she asked the judges to find them on her behalf to issue the sentence accordingly, despite it being based on a false testimony.

The wicked Jezebel requested that the judges would proclaim a fast, as if the matter was serious and required supplications and humiliation before God. This fast was not for God to repent, showing remorse or seeking their return to Him, but it was called for by a wicked pagan priestess, to hide her evil with a layer of deceit.

The evil Jezebel planned to kill Naboth. The Baal priestess accused him of blasphemy against the name of God and the king, as if the killer of the prophets cared for the Lord's name.

That was impossible to happen, unless she had known in advance, that those judges had no conscience, or virtue. The manner she wrote letter in clearly confirmed that she was confident that those judges would blindly obey her regardless of justice.

Jezebel's plan was carried out accurately, while she was in her palace not watching any of these events. Whereas God, who is in total control and defends the oppressed, was watching these



events. Sometimes, God allows Satan to have power for some time to spread his evil thinking that he has control.

Jezebel had a precise plan, and the hypocrites executed it.

The elders sent her a message confirming that her plan was meticulously followed, and Naboth and his sons were executed. They sent their message to her from Jezreel to Samaria.

Rejoicing Jezebel ran to tell Ahab that Naboth no longer lived, for he was dead. She asked him to take possession of the vineyard.

The king had no right to inherit Naboth's vineyard. But according to the traditions, the possessions of the king's traitors would be inherited by the king, once they were executed.

It was expected that the king would send one of his men to receive the vineyard, but out of his extreme joy for what had happened, he appeared himself to the vineyard to inherit it.

On the next day, God sent Elijah the prophet to the king, who participated in the crime of murder, in order to inherit Naboth. The king had not enjoyed the vineyard for more than few hours, but before he put his plans to improve the vineyard, the Divine judgment was issued against him.

Ahab noticed that Elijah was angry and furious, and realized that God sent him with a bitter message, so he considered Elijah to be his enemy, and said to him, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" The king believed there was a personal animosity between him and the prophet. But Elijah explained to him that the king was his own enemy, since he sold himself by committing evil in the sight of the Lord.

The sin transformed the king into a cowardly individual who tried to escape from the truth. So, being terrified, the king said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Elijah answered, "I have found you, for you cannot run away from God's eyes or from His hands. He had sent me to you. Thus said the Lord, 'Have you murdered and also inherited the slain?! In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick your blood too'."





When Ahab heard the Divine Judgment through the mouth of Elijah the prophet, he was troubled and offered repentance, which turned out to be temporary. He tore his clothes, wore sackcloth, fasted, and walked silently barefooted.

God, in His extreme mercy, said to Elijah, "Have you seen, how Ahab humbled himself before me?! Because he has, I will not bring the calamity during his days. But I will bring the evil upon his household during his son's days".

Later on, the elders of Jezreel received a message from "Jehu," who reigned over Israel afterward. The message was saying, "If you are with me, and you listen to me, then behead the sons of your master (Ahab), and come to meet with me in Jezreel tomorrow around this time." So, the elders killed the seventy sons of Ahab, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jezreel. With the measure that Jezebel used, it was measured back for her. She did drink from the same cup that she originally poured.





128- A Fiery Chariot Carries Elijah to Heaven **(2 Kings 2)**

Elijah had a unique one of a kind character. His life events were mentioned in the Holy Bible, and contained mostly surprising elements. Some of the Jewish teachers thought he was an angel as he appears suddenly in a human shape but later disappears.

He appeared in history suddenly, since know nothing about his family. And suddenly he ascended into heaven in a chariot of fire. He appeared with the Lord Jesus Christ suddenly during His transfiguration. All Elijah's movements had that same surprise element, for example, his meeting with Ahab to stop the rain, his encounter with the angel feeding him, and so on.

Some called him a heavenly bird, who flies around the world to accomplish heavenly missions.

It was mentioned in the Jewish tradition that he did not die. But he still wanders on earth, and he will appear to introduce the Messiah and help in the final heavenly salvation.

When Elijah's last hours of life drew near, the Lord called him to ascend to heaven. He sent him a glorious heavenly chariot that came down especially for him to lift him to heaven.

Elijah did not want any human to glorify him before his ascension. Being modest, he told his disciple Elisha when they were in the Gilgal, "Stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel." Elisha answered him, "As certainly as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So, they went down to Bethel. The sons of the prophets in Bethel came out to Elisha and said, "Do you know that today the Lord is going to take away your master from you?" He answered, "Yes, I know. Be quiet."

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." So he replied, "As certainly as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So, they went to Jericho.

Elijah tried to hide the matter concerning his ascension to heaven from Elisha without lying. When he told his disciple that the Lord has sent him to Bethel, to Jericho or to Jordan; he did not



lie, but only hid the matter of being lifted up. So nobody would see him riding the fiery chariot. Elisha insisted on staying with his teacher, in order to acquire from him the spiritual richness. The Holy God revealed the secret to Elisha and to a host of prophets. The prophets held a celebration for Elijah on earth, before he was received with great joy in heaven by the celestial hosts!

Elijah and Elisha came to Bethel, Jericho then they arrived in Jordan. Fifty of the sons of the prophets came and stood to watch them from a distance. They needed to cross the Jordan River, and found no difficulty in doing that, by taking a new way!

Elijah took his cloak, folded it up, and hit the water with it. The water divided, and the two of them crossed over on the dry land. As a loving father, Elijah wanted to offer Elisha all he can before his ascension. So, he asked him, "What can I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha answered him wisely, not asking for any worldly needs, but to receive a double portion of the prophetic spirit that energized Elijah. As if he was telling his teacher, "I am extremely weak and I need more support."

He did not request that out of arrogance, as if he deserved it, neither out of love to vainglory. But he requested it because of his belief that he was weak and in need for a double strength, in light of the people's continuous degradation towards corruption.

As a sign of love, Elisha considered himself as a firstborn, who had the right to have double possessions. Daringly, Elisha asked to benefit by the double portion from Elijah. Amazingly, the number of miracles recorded for Elisha in the Holy Bible was about double those recorded for Elijah!

Elijah was not offended by Elisha's request; on the contrary, he was deeply moved. Although, he knew that it was not in his power to grant him anything. However, he was happy that his disciple would complete his mission with a zealous spirit.

As a successful leader, Elijah did not belittle his disciple, but he asked God to grant him greater gifts than the ones he received himself. A spirit needed for the Church to be more powerful, and to be capable in facing the challenges of the future





with the spirit of triumph and victory. Elijah, the Prophet, answered his disciple saying, "That's a difficult request! If you see me taken from you, may it be so, but if you don't, it will not happen." As if he was telling him, "It will not be according to my will, but the will of my Father who is in Heaven!"

Indeed, as they were walking and talking, a fiery chariot led by horses parted them, and Elisha watched his teacher in the chariot heading for heaven.

That scene was imprinted in Elisha's heart and memory all his life. With that experience, his faith was empowered. So, in the time of distress, he was able to say, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (2 Kings 6:16)

When the fiery chariot was taking off, Elisha was crying out, "My father, my father, the chariot and the horsemen of Israel!" Then he could no longer see him.

He grabbed Elijah's clothes and tore them in two. He picked up Elijah's cloak, which had fallen off him, and went back and stood on the shore of the Jordan. He took the cloak and hit the water with it saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" When he hit the water, it split in two and Elisha crossed over.

When the sons of the prophets in Jericho, who were standing at a distance, saw him do this, they said, "The spirit that energized Elijah rests upon Elisha." They went to meet him and bowed down to the ground before him.



129- The Abundance of the Widow's Oil

(2 Kings 4)

One of the prophets fell sick, and he spent all his money on physicians, then he had to borrow more money from an evil money lender, who loaned him the while charging an extremely high interest. Then the prophet died. The money lender demanded from the prophet's widow to repay the debt, otherwise, he would take away her two sons as his slaves. It was possible for the poor and indebted to sell themselves or their children to pay back their loans. Often, those people would ask the rich to be kind to them, being all humans. The Law also demanded from the rich not to take advantage of the poor's misfortunes. However, this lender did not care for the Law, and that poor widow had no refuge except the prophet Elisha. Elisha had one of two options; either to pay her debt or to ask the lender to be patient with her.

Elisha had no money to pay the debt; nor did the lender have a kind heart to heed to the prophet's request. The greed had blinded his heart, and the selfishness did not allow him to accept the advice or to act in a loving or merciful way.

It was much easier for Elisha to use the fat of oil to fill up all the pots by the power of God, rather than dealing with the heart of the lender and his wickedness.

Elisha said to the widow, "What can I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"

The prophet Elisha was rich, richer than the kings of his time. However, his richness was very unique; his treasure was in God who was so close to him. Therefore, the prophet did not offer the widow anything materialistic, directly or through his followers. But, he insisted on asking her about what she had, by this way he could bless what she had in order for her to pay back her husband's debt and save her orphaned sons.

She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a small jar of oil." He said, "Go and ask all your neighbors for empty containers. Get as many as you can. Then, go and close the door behind you and your sons. Pour the oil into all the containers; set aside each one when you have filled it."



The widow accepted in her house from the market and the neighbors' empty containers to fill them with oil. Likewise, the Church accepts people from all nations and countries, to fill their hearts with the oil of God's grace!

He asked her to enter her house with her two sons then close the door behind them, in order that the empty containers would be filled with oil. It is a great portrayal of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ that offers God's rich sacraments with the oil of His grace.

Her sons were bringing the containers to her, and she was poured the oil. When all the containers were full, she said to one of her sons, "Bring me another container." But he answered her, "There are no more." Then the oil stopped flowing.

The widow asked her sons to participate in the work, where they were handing her the empty containers, while she was pouring the oil. In order for them to practically experience God's work that fulfills our needs.

The prophet assured us by what he did, that God is capable of fulfilling the needs of the believers, even their material ones.

The widow was wise and pious, so when the containers were all full, she did not act on her own. But, she went and in modesty asked the prophet about what to do. He said, "Go, and sell the oil. Repay your creditor, and then you and your sons can live off the rest of the profit."

Who was that money lender who wanted to enslave the sons of mankind other than Satan?





130- Resurrecting the Shunammite's Son

(2 Kings 4)

Oftentimes, Elisha would pass by Shunem as it was on his way from Carmel to the cities of Galilee, to the prophets' schools in Gilgal, Bethel and other places. There was a prominent woman living in Shunem, and she invited Elisha to stop by her house to eat every time he is in her town.

She told her husband, "Look, I am sure that the man who regularly passes through here is a very special prophet. Let's make a small private upper room and furnish it with a bed, table, chair, and lamp. So, when he visits us, he can stay there." Elisha was a generous appreciative man, and he always wanted to return the favor to anyone that helped him.

One day when he came to Shunem, he asked his servant Gehazi, "Call this Shunammite woman." When he called her, she came and stood before him. Then, Elisha asked Gehazi, "Now, tell her, 'Look, you have troubled yourself so much with all this care for us! What could be done for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or the army's commander?'" The woman answered, "Among my own people I am living." She meant that she was a commoner and would not aspire to deal with those high ranking individuals whom the prophet mentioned. That is how modest she was!

Elisha asked his servant, "She did not ask for anything, what then is to be done for her?" Gehazi asked the Prophet not to try to help her by speaking on her behalf to the king or to the other nobles, but to God Himself; the God of the impossible, who alone was capable of granting her a son. So, he said, "Actually, she has no son, and her husband is advanced in age."

Elisha said, "Call her again." When he had called her, she stood at the doorway. Then Elisha told her, "About this time next year you will be holding a son." She answered, "No, my lord the man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!" She thought that she was not worthy for such a gift.



But the woman conceived, and gave birth to a son when the appointed time had come, according to what Elisha had told her.

And the child grew. Then, it happened one day that he went out to see his father, who was with the harvest workers. He complained to his father, saying, "My head hurts!" So the father ordered a servant, "Carry him to his mother." When he had brought him to her, the boy sat on her knees till noon, and then he died.

She went up and laid him down on the bed of the man of God, she shut the door behind her and left. Then, she called on to her husband, and said, "Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so I can go see the prophet quickly and then return." So he said, "Why do you want to go see him today? It is not the new moon or the Sabbath." And she said, "Everything is fine." Then she saddled the donkey, and said to her servant, "Lead on, and do not stop unless I tell you."

She left and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to his servant Gehazi, "Look, the Shunammite woman! Now, run to meet her, and ask her, 'Are you well? Are your husband and the boy well?'" And she answered, "Everything is well." But, when she reached the man of God on the mountain, she grabbed hold of his feet.

Gehazi drew closer to push her away. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone; for her soul is bitter within her; and the Lord has kept the matter hidden from me; He didn't tell me about it." She said, "Did I ask my master for a son? Didn't I say, 'don't mislead me?'"

Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your robes into your belt, take my staff, and go! Don't stop to exchange greetings with anyone! Place my staff on the child's face." The child's mother insisted that Elisha himself would come with her to pray, so God would work and raise her son from the dead.

Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither sound nor response. Then he went back to meet Elisha, and told him, "The child did not wake up."



When Elisha arrived at the house, there was the child lying dead on his bed. He went in by himself and closed the door. Then he prayed to the Lord. And he went up and stretched himself on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands; until the child's body became warm. Elisha returned and walked back and forth in the house before going up to the room where the dead child laid and bent down over him. The child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

He called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite woman." So he called her.

When she came in, he said to her, "Pick up your son." So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out. Then, Elisha returned to Gilgal.







131- O, Man of God, Death Lies in the Pot

(2 Kings 4)

Elisha went back to Gilgal, and there was famine in the land, and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him.

He said to his servant, "Put the big pot on the fire, and boil some stew for the sons of the prophets."

So, someone went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild poisonous vine. He picked some of its fruit, enough to fill up the fold of his robe. He came back, cut it up, and threw the slices into the stew pot, not knowing it was poisonous. Then, it was served to the men to eat.

While they were eating the stew, they cried out and said, "O, man of God, death lies in the pot!" And, they could not eat it.

So he said, "Bring some flour." And, he put it into the pot, and said, "Serve it to the people so they may eat." The sons of the prophets showed their faith in God and His Prophet. They ate what was previously poisonous, trusting the words of the Prophet without any doubt or fear.

It was as if nothing was wrong with the stew in the pot.

That flour was a symbol to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, who became the Bread of Life; whoever eats from It enjoys eternal life instead of death (John 6: 53).

Then, a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought to the man of God twenty loaves of bread made from the first-fruits of the barley harvest, as well as fresh ears of grain in his knapsack.

Elisha said, "Set it before the people so they may eat."

But his servant said, "Pardon me. How can I feed a hundred men with this?" The man of God said again, "Set it before the people so they may eat, for this is what the Lord says, 'They will eat and have some left over'." So the servant set it before them; and they ate and had some left over, according to the Word of the Lord. That is the mission of the true servant of God, or rather, every Christian; not to extend his hand like someone in need, but to extend it to give generously, so everyone around him would have their fill and more would be left over.





132- Bathing Seven Times in the Jordan River

(2 Kings 5)

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was a great brave man. He had gone to war and he was returning victorious to his country at the head of a long procession of slaves captured from the lands he defeated. The captives carried on their backs gold, silver, wheat and many other provisions. They were also followed by camels, donkeys, lambs and many other animals.

The country's nobles and all the people came out to welcome the victorious hero; they were shouting, "Hail to the brave leader Naaman! Hail to the courageous! Hail to the mighty warrior!"

The king also came out to meet him, riding his royal chariot. He greeted his commander and his army, welcoming their safe and triumphant return to their country. The king declared in front of the nation, "We are very proud of you and your men! You have glorified your country!"

Naaman was pleased and contented; until he noticed how some people were staring at his leprous skin. He became dismayed. Many did not want to draw near to him, fearing getting infected by the disease. Naaman returned to his home very depressed.

Earlier, when the Syrians attacked the Jews, Naaman managed to capture hostages, among whom there was a young girl, who ended up serving Naaman's wife at home as a maid.

She was in a foreign land, without a father, without a mother, and without a sibling. No relative to meet her emotional needs; no priest to support her spirit and pray for her; no Holy Book at hand. She had lost her freedom and her humanity and now, others were deciding her destiny. The girl noticed that Naaman had leprosy, and that matter had caused anguish to his entire family. She wanted to help the family; and also glorify her God before the commander of the foreign army.

She told her mistress, "How I wish my master would have lived in Israel, there he would have met the prophet Elisha, who could have prayed for him and he would have been healed on the spot."



Elisha was living in a land that the Syrians viewed as enemies' territories. It was not easy for the heroic leader to accept the idea of going there in humiliation, asking for healing, despite yearning to be cured from this disease. His wife informed him, and he in turn told the king. When the king heard about the prophet, he gave Naaman a letter and told him, "You can go to him. Take my letter to the king of Israel." In the letter, he wrote the request, "Please, heal this man of leprosy!"

Naaman hurried to Samaria, carrying the royal letter, together with gold, silver and new clothes.

When Naaman appeared before the king of Israel, he presented to him his king's letter. As the king of Israel read the letter, he was greatly disturbed, replying, "What is this? Am I God? Can I kill or restore life? Why does he ask me to cure a man of his leprosy?! Oh, this must be a trap. Certainly you must see that he is looking for an excuse to fight me, when I do not heal his commander!"

But, when Elisha heard about the matter, he sent a message to the king, "Send the man to me, so he may know that there is a prophet of God in Israel." Naaman came to Elisha's house, accompanied by his great entourage of servants and followers. The beats of his heart were running faster and faster, as he was thinking to himself, "Come on out, man of God. Come quickly to pray for me and heal me today."

Naaman was expecting the prophet to come out to greet him, but Elisha just sent his servant to relay a message to that mighty man coming from Syria. The message was, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River, and you shall be healed."

Naaman was disappointed. He thought, "I expected him to come out to me, stand up and call on the Name of the Lord his God, then place his hand on me and heal me. Why do I have to go to their river, the Jordan? Does this muddy river even begin to compare with our rivers? I didn't travel this entire long journey to wash myself today!"

So, Naaman turned around and went away angry. But, one of his servants tried to reason with him, "Please Sir, do what the prophet asked of you. If he had asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?" Realizing that his servant



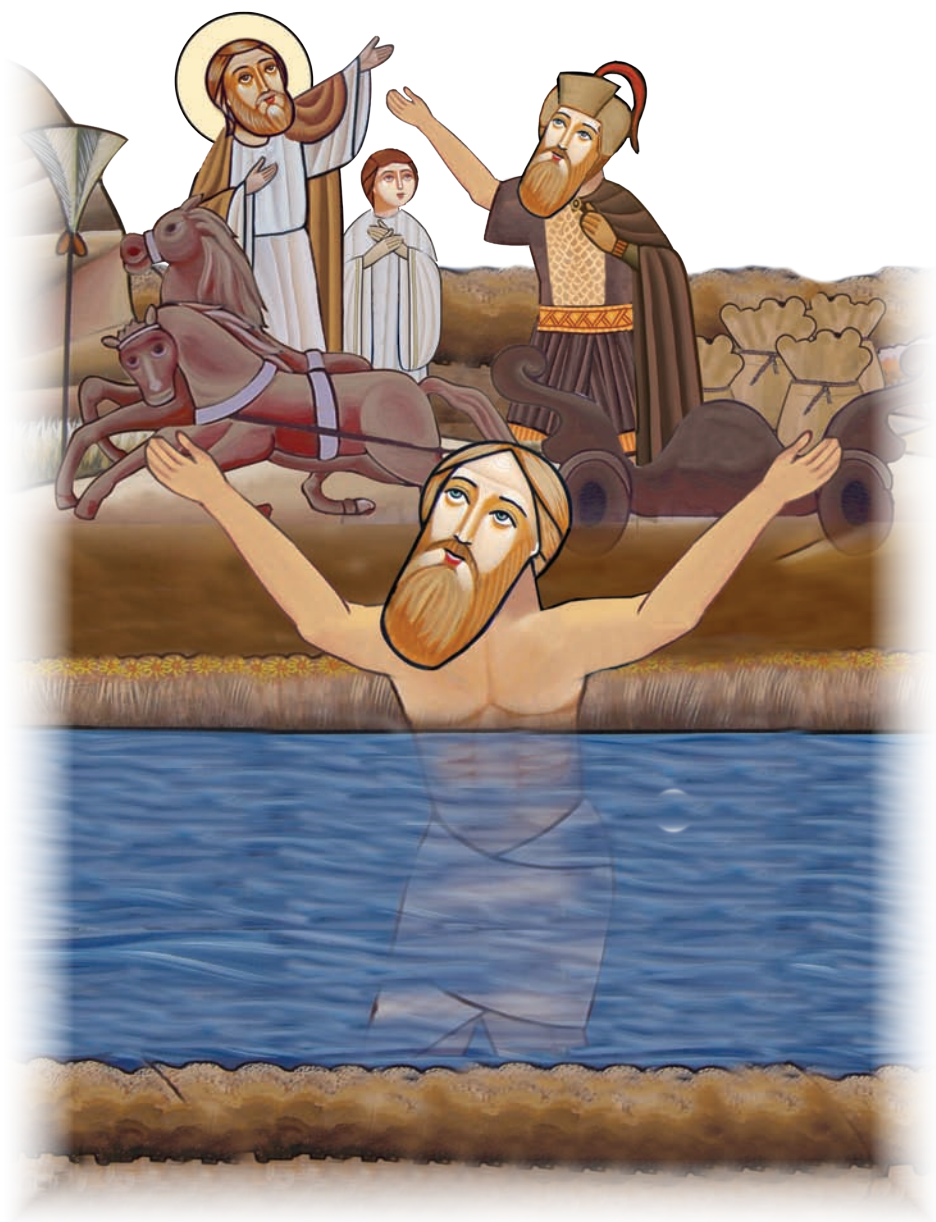
was right, Naaman headed towards the Jordan. He descended into it, dipped himself once and came out. He looked at his body; there was no change. He told himself, "I will try a second time," and dipped himself and swam. He repeated that until the sixth time, with no change. He said, "If I dip in the water the seventh time, will I be healed? I will try it anyway!"

He threw himself in for the seventh time, then swam back to the shore, only to find that he was totally healed of his leprosy and his body's skin was like that of a young child.

Naaman returned to the prophet Elisha, he stood in front of him in all modesty, and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth like your God." Naaman tried to give Elisha gifts, but the prophet refused. Naaman returned happily to his king, his wife and the young slave girl. He was thanking God and praising Him. The girl went to her room and knelt down to thank God as well.

What had happened to Naaman happens to all of us. We have been washed of the leprosy of sin and have become God's children through our Baptism.







133- Iron Floats

(2Kings 6)

The sons of the prophets told Elisha, "The place where we meet with you is not large enough to contain us. Let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam of wood from there, so we can build a meeting place for ourselves there." Elisha said, "Go!"

Here, Elisha appears to be like a kind father, the sons of prophets were seeking him for all kinds of issues, whether big or small. The prophet, who was respected by kings and commanders, did not forget to care for his disciples even in small matters.

One of them asked him, "Please, come and join us, your servants." So, he consented, "I will go."

As they went to the Jordan to cut wood to build a meeting place for them, he accompanied them. But as one of them was cutting the tree, the iron axe head fell into the water. He cried out, "O! Master, it was borrowed." The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" And that individual showed him the place. So, Elisha cut off a piece of a stick and cast it over there. Right away, the iron axe head floated on the surface at that spot!

He told that individual, "Pick it up for yourself," and so he stretched out his arm and picked it up.

This miracle symbolizes our salvation through the Cross. As sin creeps into our lives it sinks to the bottom of our souls as the axe sank in the bottom of the river. This is what happened with Pharaoh and his soldiers; as it was said, that they sank to the bottom of the sea like lead.

And now that sin has burdened our souls, and submerged us to the deep, only the wood, which is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, can lift us up.





134- The Battle with Aram

(2 Kings 6)

Now, the king of Syria (Aram) was at war with Israel. He consulted his advisers, who said, "We'll set up our camp to invade at such and such a place." But Elisha, the man of God, sent to the king of Israel, warning him, "Make sure you don't pass through this place because Syria is invading it." So, the king of Israel sent a message to the place the prophet had pointed out, warning them. This happened on several occasions.

The heart of the king of Aram was disturbed about that matter. He called his advisors and said to them, "Will you not tell me, which who of you, is the spy for the king of Israel?"

One of his advisors said, "No, my master, O king. The prophet Elisha, who lives in Israel, informs the king of Israel the things you say, even in your private room." The king of Aram ordered, "Go and find out where he is, that I may send some men to capture him." They told him, "He is in Dothan."

So the king of Aram sent horses, chariots and a strong army there, and they arrived by night and surrounded the city. Early in the morning, the servant of the man of God got up and went outside. There, he found an army surrounding the city, along with horses and chariots. Elisha's servant fearfully told him, "Oh no, my master! What will we do?"

He answered, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

And, Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he was able to see. And behold, the mountain was full of horses leading fiery chariots all around Elisha.

When the army approached him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike these people with blindness." And, the Lord struck them with blindness as Elisha had requested.

Then, Elisha told them, "This is neither the right way nor the right city. Follow me and I will lead you to the man you seek."

And, so he led them to Samaria. When they entered the city, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see." And, as the Lord opened their eyes, they saw that they were in the middle of Samaria!





Thus, one man was able to drive away a battalion of soldiers and capture them, without lifting a sword or any other weapon.

They also realized that he was the man they were searching for. They became frightened and wondered how they did not recognize him on the way?

Now, when the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "My father, should I strike them down? Should I kill them?"

The king saw them and moved boldly to kill them, as if he was the one who had defeated them and captured them. He wanted to lift his mighty hand and destroy them. But the man of God stopped him from committing that evil.

He told the king, "Do not strike them down! You did not capture them with your sword or bow? Just give them some food and water, so they can eat and drink, and then return to their master."

Thus, the king prepared for them a banquet; and after they ate and drank, he sent them back to their master. After that, no Syrian king invaded the land of Israel.

The prophet Elisha glorified God, the Commander of the battle; and at the same time, he showed how compassionate his heart was. He refused to allow anybody to kill a peaceful army, stripped of its weapons.

Instead of killing the soldiers, he ordered food to be presented to them, to bring peace between the two countries.



135- Jonah the Prophet

(Jonah)

God loves mankind. He wants them to be familiar with His love so they would love Him back. When God looked at the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (in Iraq), which is an ancient pagan city, He was saddened, because the evil of its people was great. God ordered a man called Jonah to go to those people and ask them to repent, and warn them about the gross evil they were committing:

"Tell the people that I don't like their lying, cheating or killing. Tell them to change their lifestyle.

I love them and want them to be holy as I am Holy."

Jonah didn't want to preach in a pagan city. He thought to himself, "I can't waste my time with strangers, they don't love my God and they aren't my friends. Saving them is not my responsibility". Perhaps, Jonah imagined that if he would go to the Gentiles, this might mean that God has already rejected the Jews!

He didn't want to upset God, so he thought to himself, "I will go some place where God wouldn't find me. He is asking me to go to Nineveh in the Northern East, then, I will go west to Tarshish (in Spain)." So, he rushed to Joppa at the sea shore to sail from there. Jonah got into the bottom of the sailing ship, and fell into a deep sleep, since he was very tired from rushing to Joppa to catch the ship.

Immediately, a strong wind storm started to blow and kept increasing in intensity. The sea waves became high all around the ship. The storm violently rocked the ship almost destroying it.

One of the sailors said, "This storm is hitting us because of the evil of somebody aboard the ship. We should identify him!"

The sailors were terrified, each one started to call on his god to save the ship. They started to throw the ship's cargo overboard to make the ship lighter. All that didn't do any good. The waves were getting higher and kept slamming the ship with tremendous force. The sailors were completely baffled. When they found Jonah asleep, they woke him up wondering:



"What are you doing asleep? Get up! Cry out to your God! Who are you? Where did you come from? Are you the one who caused this storm to happen? Did your God send us this storm because of something you did?"

Jonah was brave enough to tell the sailors that he was fleeing from his God's Face. Jonah said, "I am a Hebrew! I am trying to escape from the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land. Now, I know that I can't disappear from His Face. I know that my God is the One who has sent the wind and the violent waves. Throw me into the sea, if you want the storm to quiet down!"

The storm continued in its severity, still the sailors decided to draw lots to know who was responsible for that storm, and the lots fell onto Jonah. Jonah realized for sure that what happened was because of his disobedience to God's request. So, to save the lives of everybody on board, he encouraged them to throw him into the sea to calm the storm.

The sailors were afraid of Jonah's God. So, they screamed, "We can't do this." They tried to row back to land, but they were not able to do so because the storm kept growing stronger. So they cried out to the Lord, "Oh, please, Lord, don't let us die on account of this man! Don't hold us guilty of shedding innocent blood. After all, You, Lord, have done just as You please."

After the sailors failed to row back to land, they were forced to throw him overboard, since he told them that he was fleeing from God's face. Immediately, the sea stopped raging, and the ship sailed smoothly. The men kneeled and prayed to God.

Once Jonah sank under the waves, he couldn't breath. But God sent a whale to save him from drowning. The whale swam and opened his huge mouth and swallowed Jonah. Once he entered inside the belly of the whale, God didn't allow Jonah to die. He stayed inside the whale for three days and three nights, and from there he offered a beautiful hymn to God, he felt as if he was in heavens. After three days, the whale disgorged Jonah on a dry land.





In the whale's belly, Jonah's heart rejoiced, he saw for himself how the salty sea waters had engulfed him, and how God had transformed it into a river quenching him with its fresh water.

Sometimes, the whale used to emerge above water to open his mouth to breathe, and Jonah got chance to breathe fresh air. Other times, the whale would descend into the deep, and Jonah would feel as if he was in the deep darkness of a grave!

In all that, Jonah experienced God's care for him, he felt that God has resurrected him from death, and granted him salvation. He envisioned the Holy Heavenly Temple while in the whale's belly. Jonah didn't sleep during those three days, but he wasn't worried. He felt that he was held on the eternal arms of God and instead of crying out of fear; he was praising God out of joy. God spoke to the heart of Jonah, who was fleeing from His face:

"You have to know, Jonah that no one can flee or disappear from Me. You have to know, Jonah, that I love all mankind.

For you, the people on Nineveh may feel like strangers, but they are My people too. You ought to relay My Words to them as I ordered you. I am planning to come down to the world to become a human being to die for all mankind. I am opening My Church's doors to all nations, peoples and tongues".

God offered Jonah a second chance to obey Him, and go on to Nineveh. So, He sent the whale to the shore, and ordered it to spit Jonah from its stomach onto the dry land.

By now, Jonah knew what he had to do, and went straight to Nineveh without any hesitation. In Nineveh, Jonah said to the people, "God will destroy Nineveh because of its sins".

The people realized that Jonah was a great prophet, and understood that God was speaking to them through him.

The people told the king about what Jonah relayed to them. The king ordered them to pray to God asking for the forgiveness of their sins. The king also, was very serious in requesting God's forgiveness that he took off his royal attire and put on sackcloth. The king sat on ashes, and kept praying to God. He declared a fasting, saying, "Nobody is to taste anything; they must not eat and they must not drink water. Everyone must turn from their evil way of living. Perhaps God might change His mind, so that we might not die".



The people of Nineveh believed in God and listened to their king. They fasted, wept and abandoned their wicked ways, saying, "Who knows? Perhaps God might turn from His fierce anger if we go back to righteousness." They asked God to forgive them, and to save their city.

When God has seen the people of Nineveh repenting from their evil deeds and asking Him for forgiveness, He didn't destroy the city. God told Jonah that He would not destroy the city, which did not please Jonah. He thought that the people would mock him, and consider him as a false prophet. Jonah was sad worrying about himself and his image, and left the city! He sat outside the city, watching whatever might happen to it.

The weather was hot. So, Jonah built a shelter for himself out of sticks to shield him from the hot sun. While he was sitting in the shade, God prepared for him a gourd. God let it grow until it covered over Jonah. Jonah was happy with that gourd, since it provided him with extra comfort and moisture. Then, God sent a worm which attacked the gourd such that its leaves withered and fell. Jonah said to himself, "What is this? I have just lost the shade I was enjoying!" He looked closely at the gourd and he discovered a hole in its stem, and he realized that a worm had caused all that damage. God sent a blowing hot eastern wind, and Jonah became engulfed in a very hot environment. He felt miserable and wanted to die. God said to Jonah, "Are you really very angry about this little plant?" And he said, "I am as angry as I could possibly be!"

The Lord said, "Are you angry because of this gourd? Something for which you have not worked nor did you do anything to make it grow. It grew overnight and died the next day.

Should I not be even more concerned about Nineveh, this enormous city which has more than one hundred twenty thousand people in it, who do not know right from wrong, as well as many animals! What do you think about My feelings towards those people of Nineveh? Do you think I seek their death? What kind of man are you? You feel bad about the loss of a gourd, and you don't care about the destruction of a whole city?!

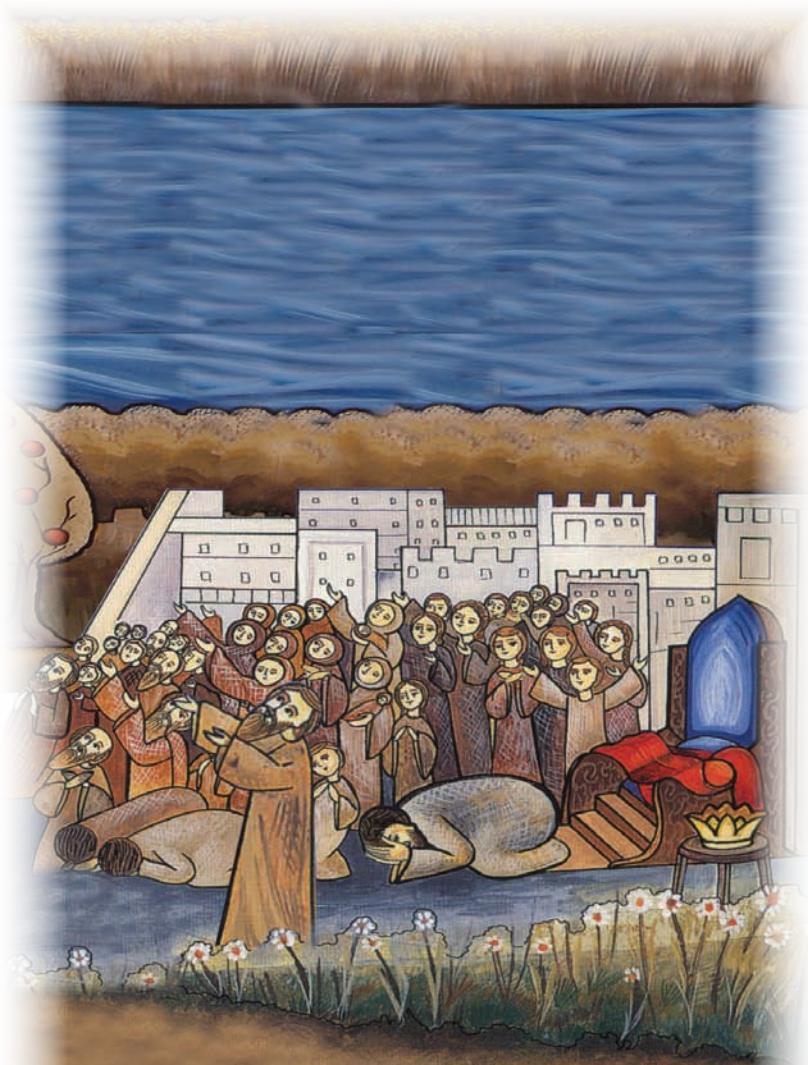
Look, see how happy they are! How come you frown?

Don't you know that the angels rejoice by just one repentant sinner, while a whole city was saved, and with your own help!"



Jonah realized that God is righteous and loving to all mankind.

The Lord of Glory Jesus will be coming to the world, like Jonah came to Nineveh, and He will stretch His arms to gather His people from all the nations.





136- Ember Fire in the Heart of Isaiah the Prophet

(Isaiah 1-2)

More than 700 years before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah was born into the royal family ruling Judah. He was one of the greatest prophets.

Isaiah was a righteous man, who loved God and His people. He also loved the Temple and Jerusalem, the city of God. He was very unhappy because of the evil that the king and his family were committing. Even the priests and those serving in the Temple, in fact almost all the people were wicked.

Since his childhood, he lived in a depressing atmosphere, but at the same time he felt as if he was the happiest person on the face of the earth, and perhaps, the happiest man in history. Where did his happiness and joy come from?

Since his youth, he heard how that the whole world had turned away from acknowledging God and they turned to worshiping idols, how all the nations fought each other for supremacy, and turned to violence. Not one worshiped God except the nation of Judah, and no city considered God except Jerusalem, where the holiest place was, the Temple. At the same time, he could see the royal palace; from the king to the modest helpers there, also in the Temple; from the high priest to the simplest laborer, and also the different classes of people... everybody had turned away from God and walked the evil path.

Isaiah had ember fire in his heart that no one could extinguish. He used to pray saying:

"My God, does anyone yearn to Your Bosom, or hope for the fellowship of the Celestials?

Have You created mankind to perish?"

And in a quiet moment, great light came over him, and his soul rejoiced immensely.

Isaiah knelt down before God. God started talking to him, as if to a friend, telling him about His plans concerning His people, as well as, His plans for other nations.



He heard God telling him in a sad voice, about the kingdom of Judah, "Wrath is on the sinning nation... They left the Lord; they have despised the Holy One of Israel... The whole head has a massive wound, the whole heart is sick, from the soles of the feet to the head, there is no spot that is unharmed, and there are only bruises, cuts, and open wounds... How tragic that the once-faithful city Jerusalem has become a prostitute?!"

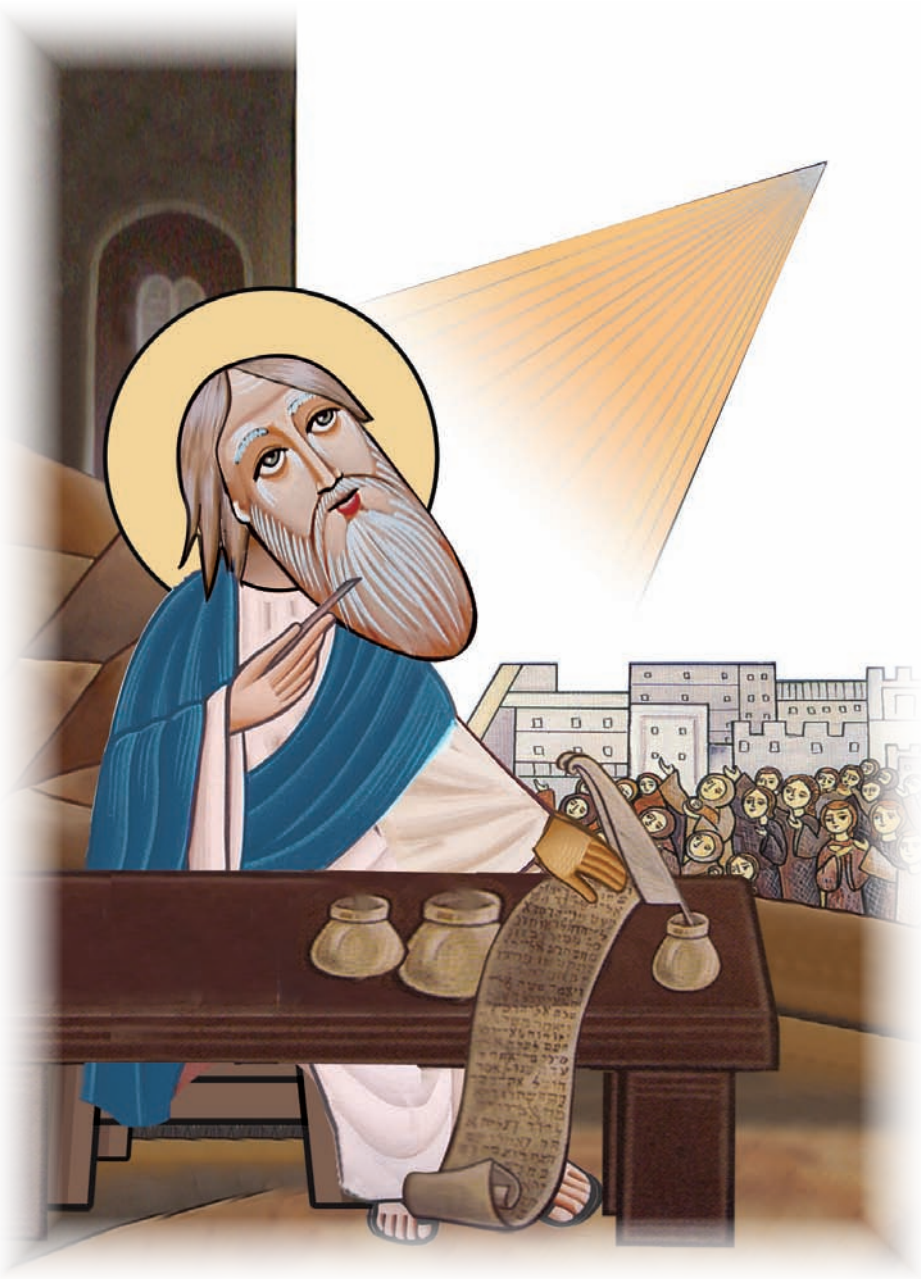
Isaiah wept profusely, and his heart was crushed inside him. He wondered, "What would be the solution? Who can change the hearts? Who can remove the corruption from the holiest city in the world?!"

Isaiah was deeply troubled, but the splendor of God's glory filled his inner soul with joy. God spoke to him saying:

"Do not be afraid, Isaiah, I love all humanity. I will reveal to you what I am planning to do, not only with Judah, but with all mankind. In the fullness of time, I will become Man, be crucified for the world and offer Myself as a Sacrifice to carry the sins of humanity.

And it shall be, at the end of time that the mountain of the Lord's Temple shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above all the hills and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up the mountain of the Lord. '"

Isaiah saw God's plan for the salvation, and the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed to him, attracting the souls of so many people from all the nations. Isaiah understood the power of the Cross. It removes the sadness, transforming it into joy. It fills the soul with hope, so it would see in its midst a heavenly light, which dissipates the darkness.





137- Here I am, Send Me Isaiah inside the Temple

(Isaiah 6)

God's speech to Isaiah filled his heart with hope, so he daydreamed about the fulfillment of God's promises; for all the people and nations to go up to the Lord's mountain, to enter Jerusalem in the highest, and to enjoy the Heavenly Temple. Isaiah believed that God, the Lover of mankind, would definitely fulfill this Divine plan, since He is the God of the impossible.

Yet every time Isaiah went into the palace and met with one of the king's men, he would return to his room screaming, "O, Lord, when will You accomplish Your plan? Please, tell me how that can be done!" And, whenever he met one of the priests or Levites, or one of the people, he would go back to his room asking, "O, my God, when will I see everyone with You in heaven?"

While Isaiah was wrestling in his prayers, screaming his heart out to God, suddenly he found himself inside the Temple. There were neither priests nor Levites nor any of those who served in the Temple, but he witnessed the most splendid light that nobody can stare at.

Isaiah fell on his face to the ground, trembling with fear mixed with inner joy. He lifted his head to see the Holy One seated on His throne in great glory. He was not able to focus his eyes on Him from the overwhelming glory; neither did he know what to call Him, should he call Him God, the Omnipotent, the Creator, the Judge, or the Holy One? Finally, he called Him "the Lord" as all names are deficient in describing the truth about God.

He saw the hem of His robe filling the Temple, and he heard in his heart, "Isaiah, don't be afraid, I fill the Temple of heaven too. All the Celestials yearn to see all mankind participating with them in praising Me. I wish that you, with all your brothers are like the best order among the Celestials!"

Isaiah observed the order of the six-winged Seraphim, and longed to see all humans would be like them. He saw each of them covering his face from the splendor of God with two wings, with two other wings he covered his legs, and he used the



remaining two to fly. The prophet heard the Seraphim praising God without ceasing, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts! His Majestic Splendor fills the entire heaven and earth!"

He heard the sound of their praise filling the Temple, while the clouds were rising and filling the whole place.

It was such a great cheerful view! He realized that only the Holy One is capable of sanctifying the sinners! His heart jumped for joy and his whole being shook. How was he permitted to see this amazing sight?!

Isaiah knelt down before the Lord God, he cried to Him saying, "Woe to me! I am doomed, for I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips!" Right away, one of the Seraphim flew towards Isaiah holding in his hand an ember he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched the prophet's mouth with it and said, "Isaiah, your lips have been cleansed and sanctified and your sins have been wiped away!"

Isaiah was very happy by the presence of God and for the cleansing of not only his lips, but also his body and spirit. He longed to show that vision to everyone, and for all to enjoy the purity and cleanliness by taking the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Ember that purifies the heart.

It is the ember of the Body and Blood of Christ the Master. When we take them, we enjoy the forgiveness of sins according to His truthful promise. Isaiah longed that every body would enjoy what he himself had experienced.

Right away, he heard the Master's voice saying, "Whom will I send? Who will go on Our behalf?" Isaiah answered, "Here I am, send me!" He stepped forward to serve, so God installed him as His prophet.

At that time, the kingdom of Judah was very rich. But because of its close association with the pagan nations, its doors were opened for idols' worship. So, God asked Isaiah to warn the people of Judah, calling for repentance. He was rebuking the noble and the rich for their idol worship with the pagans, and for practicing their immoral habits and for their selfishness.

The kingdom of Judah made an alliance with Assyria and didn't rely on God, so Isaiah foretold them that they would fall into captivity; however, a holy remnant would return from the captivity and rebuild Jerusalem once more.



In the middle of these severe circumstances and his stern warnings, the doors of hope were opened:

First: He informed them directly of the coming of Christ Jesus the Savior of the world.

Second: He reassured them that the other nations would believe in the Messiah the Savior.

Third: He prophesized about the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, and the building of the Lord's altar there. He also said, "Blessed be My people, Egypt".





“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is filled with His glory!” (Isa 6:3)



138- A Journey through the Manger

(Isaiah 7, 9)

The Spirit of God lifted Isaiah from the glory of the great Temple, where the High and Mighty God's divine throne resides, surrounded by the Seraphim rejoicing and flapping their wings, and brought him to a simple manger in Bethlehem.

There he saw the greatest wonder, the Lord in person humbling Himself and taking the form of a slave, the limitless Creator sharing life with humanity.

Isaiah heard this Heavenly Voice, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Isaiah remained silent when he heard that statement. He wondered, "What did the zeal of the Lord have to do with that sign?"

Truly His zeal and love that cannot be expressed is what got Him to become Man, to share with us, even the food we eat, although He is the Extraordinary, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace!



“Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Emmanuel”. (Isa 7:14)



139- A Journey through the Land of the Pharaohs

(Isaiah 2, 19)

Isaiah the prophet saw all the nations running to the house of the Heavenly Lord, so he asked himself if any of the sons of the pharaohs were among the nations coming. In the past, the heart of Pharaoh had been hardened, and he humiliated God's people. But, God sent Moses, the great among the prophets, to bring out His people out of Egypt. He took them across the Red Sea, and guided them through the wilderness.

Isaiah had received through his ancestors' tradition that the Egyptians were full of violence; they were the sons of the Pharaohs! Could they have a share with the rest of the nations in the heavenly house of the Lord?

How surprised was Isaiah when the Lord took him forward to about 730 years in the future. He saw Him coming to the world; becoming a Child who singled out Egypt with His visit, over all other countries, to seek as refuge, riding on a shining cloud, light and swift.

What was that beautiful shining cloud? She was St. Mary whom the Holy Spirit came upon, and prepared her for the Word of God to be incarnated from her and dwell in her womb! Here she was with the Child Jesus and St. Joseph the carpenter, rushing to Egypt, fleeing from the face of Herod, who sought to kill Jesus. What do you think? Do you believe the Savior of the whole world was afraid of Herod? Certainly not, but the Holy One was teaching humanity not to fight evil and stand before it, rather flee from it.

What did our Lord Jesus Christ do in Egypt? Did He punish those cruel Pharaohs' descendants? No, but "The idols of Egypt trembled before Him; the hearts of the Egyptians melted within them... On that day there shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a sacred pillar to the Lord at its border. This will be a sign and witness to the Lord of Hosts in the land of Egypt, so that when they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, He will send them a Savior, a Mighty One, Who will

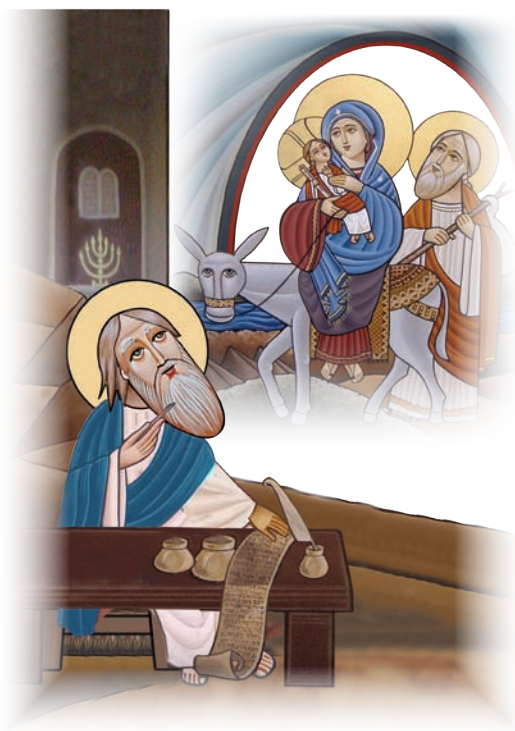


deliver them. Then, the Lord shall make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day; they shall offer sacrifices and oblations, make vows to the Lord and fulfill them."

How could an altar to the Lord be built in the midst of the land of Egypt? Didn't the Lord forbid having an altar built outside of Jerusalem? Yes, but it isn't the Old Testament's altar, it is the New Testament's! How about the sacrifice? Didn't the Lord forbid the offering of sacrifices outside Jerusalem? Yes, but it is the sacrifice of the Eucharist, the Lord's Body and Blood given for us on the Cross!

Oh, what a great love that God has for all mankind that even in Egypt an altar can be erected for Him? Yes, Isaiah the prophet heard the Lord of Hosts' blessing, when He said, "Blessed is Egypt My people".

What a delightful tour, Isaiah's heart rejoiced for the love of God to all humanity; He even loves Egypt, which had His people in bondage!



“Blessed is Egypt My people”.(Isa 19:25)



140- A Journey over the Holy Mountains

(Isaiah 52)

In one of those times when Isaiah was in the Spirit, he saw Jerusalem as an old, sad woman. She appeared as one wearing tattered and soiled clothes, downcast and embittered. She seemed in a daze or trance!

As tears welled in Isaiah's eyes, he heard the Lord call her out, "Wake up! Wake up! Clothe yourself with strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem."

Isaiah was surprised by a multitude of countless people coming from all directions, the East, the West, the North, and from the South, as if ascending the mountain, but not to go to the earthly Jerusalem but ascending to the Heavenly Jerusalem. He heard a lovely voice singing hymns, "How delightful is it to see, approaching over the mountains, the feet of a Messenger who proclaims peace, a Messenger who brings good news, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

Isaiah realized that this was a tour of what is to happen 730 years later, when Christ sends His disciples and apostles to the whole world, to establish His kingdom in the hearts of humans; then the King of kings would reign inside us.



“How delightful is to see, approaching over the mountains,
the feet of a Messenger who proclaims peace” (Is 52:7)



141- A Journey to the Golgotha Mountain

(Isaiah 53)

Isaiah was delighted with his previous tour of the holy mountains. He enjoyed seeing the King of kings establish His kingdom in the hearts of the people of all nations. "What is that great secret?" he asked himself.

The Spirit of the Lord carried him and guided him through a new tour on the Golgotha Mountain. And there, Isaiah shouted wondering, "Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed?"

He saw the Crucified One, and said in bitterness, "He has no form or beauty to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Like One we hid our faces from Him; He was despised and we held Him in no esteem."

What did Isaiah see? He saw the King of kings, the Creator of heaven and earth had become a Man, and was hanged on the wood of a Cross, and he saw Him covered with wounds, mocked by the Jews, and pierced by a soldier. His disciples ran away from Him and disappeared. It just became unbearable to watch Him!

But quickly, Isaiah realized the glory and the power of the Cross. He heard the praise of all the believers, saying, "Yet it was our pain that He bore, our sufferings He endured. We thought of Him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But He was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by His wounds we were healed... Though harshly treated, He submitted and did not open His mouth; like a Lamb led to slaughter or Sheep before its shearers, He did not open His mouth."

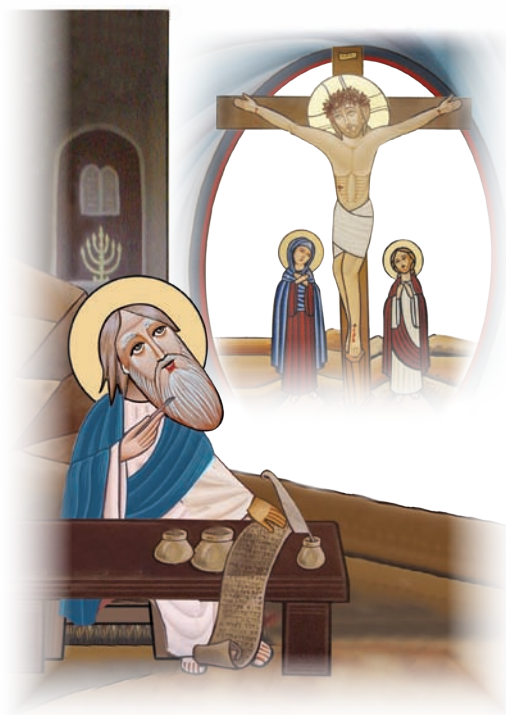
Isaiah remained silent before this praise, as he knew it was about the world's Savior, who died so that humanity may live.

Then, what was after the Cross? The Spirit carried Isaiah to see the burial of Christ, and he was told, "He was given a grave among the wicked, but with the rich at His death. Though He had done no wrong, nor was deceit found in His mouth."



He saw Christ the Master crucified between two thieves, and was buried by a rich man: Joseph from Ramah with Nicodemus in a grave guarded by evil guards. But Isaiah was ecstatic when He saw Him complete the redemption, and carry those who had died and were in Hades, and brought them to paradise. The Father was pleased with them, "Yet it pleased the Lord (Father) to bruise Him; He made His soul an offering for sin". Our Lord Jesus Christ has offered Himself as a unique Sacrifice for all the generations. "Bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors."

Blessed and happy are you Isaiah! You have seen the birth of Christ the Master from the virgin; you have seen His crucifixion, His burial and His resurrection seven centuries before His coming! You believed in Him, while so many of the Jews didn't, even when He came to them in person!



“Yet it was our pain that He bore, our sufferings He endured. He was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity.” (Isa 53:4-5)



142- A Pleasant Journey through the Church Of the New Testament

(Isaiah 54, 60)

We have seen how the Lord's Spirit had taken Isaiah through the tour of the Golgotha, which started with the pain scene, and ended with the vision of Jesus Christ, who through His blood intercedes for us before the Father, taking the believers into eternal glory. Now, the Spirit took him in a pleasant tour to see the Church of the New Testament, an icon of heaven.

Isaiah has seen the nations in the form of a barren woman who could not bear children, because she didn't worship the True God, nor had prophets, nor had entered into a covenant with the Lord. Now, you can hear the Lord's voice saying, "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back".

The nations (barren woman) finally bore the pleasant fruits of the Holy Spirit, as if they were the many children of the Church. She was told: "Raise a glad cry, you barren one, who never bore a child, break forth in jubilant song, you who have never been in labor. For more numerous are the children of the deserted wife than the children of her who has a husband. For your husband is your Maker; the Lord of Hosts is His name; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth".

Isaiah saw the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. He established His Church full of heavenly light. The prophet heard the following song:

"Arise! Shine, for your Light has come!

And the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.

Though darkness covers the earth... Nations shall walk by your light, kings by the radiance of your dawning."

How happy was Isaiah, for he had seen the believers become kings, with their hearts full of light, walking towards the heaven in the light of Christ's Church!



“Arise! Shine, for your light has come! And the glory
of the Lord has dawned upon you.” (Isa 60:1)



143- A Joyous Meeting with the Church's Messiah **(Isaiah 40 - 44)**

We end our journey with the prophet Isaiah, with his meeting with the Church's Messiah. Isaiah tried to describe for us what he saw when he met Christ, the Joy of humanity. He saw Him working in His people filling their hearts with joyful hope, saying, "Comfort! Give comfort to My people!, says your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her struggle has ended and that her guilt is pardoned."

He saw Saint John the Baptist preparing the way for Him: "A voice proclaims in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God! Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and everyone shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken".

He saw Him as the Good Shepherd, "Like a Shepherd, He feeds His flock. In His arms He gathers the lambs, carrying them in His bosom, and gently leading those who are with young."

He saw Him reaching to every human being, assuring each one, "Fear not, for I am with you... I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

It seems as if somebody shouted, "Who deserves this marvelous Divine Compassion?", and the answer came:

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking wick He will not quench".

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name: you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you: through rivers, you shall not be swept away. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you".

"I, I am the Lord; there is no Savior but Me!" (Isa 43:11)



“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you
by your name: you are Mine.” (Isa 43:1)



144- The Young Man Who Surpassed His Father, King Hezekiah (2 Kings 16 & 2 Chronicles 28-29)

Young Hezekiah would often sit in his room, in the princes' quarters at the palace, and weep. He felt pain deep down in his soul; whenever he remembered that particular story he was told about what his father Ahaz, the king of Judah, had done few years earlier. His father offered his older brother, as an infant, as a burnt sacrifice for the idols!!

He used to ask himself:

"How cruel are those gods that they would take my brother's life, and deprive me from his company?

How could my father deliver him to the pagan priest to be thrown into the fire of the glowing bronze statue, with the drums playing loud?

Didn't my father hear his baby's screams?

What about my mother's agony during all of that?"

He was also astounded at the damage done by his father to the Temple of the Living God that was built by King Solomon the wise. In addition, his father extinguished the lamps, and banned the offering of sacrifices in that Holy Temple. Now, he was worshipping lifeless idols and filled the royal palace with their statues.

He was saddened to see his father climb the high places and hills, and then go under the green trees to offer sacrifices to the idols.

Hezekiah heard that his father was in a great trouble. It happened that Rezin, king of Aram (Syria) and Pekah, king of Israel, had joined forces, during the reign of his grandfather, Jotham. But after the death of Jotham, the two kings decided to besiege Jerusalem.

The Lord sent His prophet Isaiah to support Ahaz. He told him, "Fear not, and do not let your heart weaken! Don't seek the king of Asshur (Assyria) for help".





The prophet Isaiah asked him not to rely on foreign human powers, but to trust in the Lord.

Ahaz didn't heed Isaiah's advice, but he pleaded for the help of Tiglath-Pileser, king of Asshur, after he bribed him with silver and gold that was in the house of the Lord and any treasure in the palace as well.

Indeed, the Assyrian army started to assist, and the two kings lifted their siege around Jerusalem. The king of Asshur attacked the Philistines and proceeded to Samaria, and then he took over Damascus, the capital of Aram.

Ahaz went to Damascus to show his submission to the king of Asshur, who defeated Aram. There, he was fascinated by a pagan temple, so on his journey back to Jerusalem, he ordered a similar one to be built.

Towards the end of the reign of Ahaz, the Philistines invaded the south of Judah, while the Edomites attacked it from another direction. So, Ahaz asked the help of Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Asshur, but the latter didn't respond to his request, but he rather acted against him.

Ahaz died in the year 721 B.C at thirty six years old. Hezekiah was quite bitter about his father's corruption, his relentless resistance to the worship of God, his attempts to spread paganism, and disobeying the prophet Isaiah.

During the last seven years of his father's reign, Ahaz was not capable of performing the king's duties. So, Hezekiah participated in ruling Judah in the year 728 B.C., while he was still very young.

It was a great pleasure for Hezekiah to hear what the prophet Isaiah was telling his father. Perhaps, he himself was meeting with the prophet and was listening to his advice. So, he was really determined to fix what his father had ruined.



145- A Righteous King from a Corrupt and Evil Father

(2 Kings 18 & 2 Chronicles 29-30)

The pious king Hezekiah started his reign with religious and political reforms, relying totally on God's help. Since he sat on the throne, he desired to serve the Lord, dedicating his heart and life to God.

On the political side, Hezekiah was not ready to appease the king of Asshur (Assyria) or to go along with his religious and political views, as his father has done.

On the religious side, Hezekiah removed the high places and the hills and destroyed the idols. In addition, due to the fact that his father spread the idol worship everywhere, he feared that the Jews might start worshipping the Bronze Serpent, which God had asked Moses to make and lift to heal the Jews. In the Book of Numbers, those who were bitten by the serpents were healed when they looked up at the Bronze Serpent made by Moses.

So, although Hezekiah had revered the Bronze Serpent as a symbol of our Savior's Cross that saves believers from the stings of Satan, as the people diverted from that understanding and started worshipping it as an idol, he destroyed it.

He was quite bitter about what his father had done to the Temple, damaging it and defiling it with idols. Therefore, he started repairing and cleansing it from anything remotely linked to paganism. He sanctified all the utensils that his father had desecrated, so that the priests and Levites could use them in their services.

Then, Hezekiah reopened the Temple in Jerusalem and organized the spiritual services to be performed,* specially the ones concerning God's praise, as in the days of King David.

And, for the first time since the days of king Solomon, the festivities for the Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem not only for Judah, but the Jews in the kingdom of Israel were also invited. It was a joyous event.



- * It seems that after the Temple was reopened, Hezekiah was officially anointed king at the age of twenty-five, although, his reign started earlier, when his father Ahaz died (715 B.C.).





146- The Conflict with Asshur (Assyria) **(2 Kings 18-19 & 2 Chronicles 32 & Isaiah 36-37)**

In the fourth year of the rule of Hezekiah, in the year 724 B.C., Shalmaneser king of Assyria, besieged Samaria, and in the year 722 B.C. Sargon II accomplished the mission and took into captivity to Asshur (Assyria) the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel.

The Assyrians were hoping to take over Judah as they did with Israel, and they conducted a series of attacks.

Sargon II, king of Asshur, sent his son Sennacherib, commander of his armies, to subjugate Berodach-baladan, king of Babylon, who rebelled against Asshur. Then, Sennacherib turned West to subjugate Phoenicia and the rest of the rebellious nations on the Mediterranean coast. He managed to boast about conquering forty-six cities.

Hezekiah sent his apologies to the king of Asshur asking for mercy, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; and whatever you impose on me I will bear." And, indeed, the king of Asshur asked him for three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gathered these funds from the house of the Lord and the treasury of the king's house and paid it off.

But after a little while, Sennacherib betrayed his trust and sent an army to invade Jerusalem. The books written about the Assyrian history confirm that. Hezekiah was as a captive bird in a cage, he couldn't leave Jerusalem, he paid the ransom and 200,000 of his people were taken as captives.

So, the king of Asshur sent his representatives, among them was Rabshakeh, to Hezekiah to terrorize him and his people. Rabshakeh stood up and shouted in a very loud voice speaking Hebrew, in order for his words to be understood by all the people, in the hope that they would revolt against Hezekiah. He said:

"Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria; Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, he can not save you. And do not let him ask you to trust in the Lord saying: 'The Lord will certainly rescue us. He will not deliver this city into the hands of the Assyrians'. Do not listen to Hezekiah."



This is what the king of Asshur is saying, 'Send me a token of your submission and surrender to me. Then each of you may eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land just like your own – a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards.' Hezekiah is misleading you when he says, 'The Lord will rescue us.' Has any of the gods of the nations rescued his land from the power of the king of Assyria?!"

When the priest and the other Jewish leaders heard that, they tore their clothes and went to Hezekiah and reported to him what Rabshakeh had said.

When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and entered the Lord's Temple. Then he sent a message to the prophet Isaiah begging his help against the one who had insulted the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah said to the messengers: "Do not be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servant of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. He shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

Indeed, a short while later, Rabshakeh heard that Babylon had revolted against Asshur, so he abandoned the siege, and left without attacking Jerusalem.

Once the Assyrian left, Philistines and the neighboring nations sent their congratulations to Hezekiah with many presents. Then a period of financial prosperity started in a way the kingdom of Judah had not seen for a long time.





147- I Will Add Fifteen Years to Your Life **(2 Kings 20)**

King Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah visited him and said, "This is what the Lord says, Set your house in order, for you are about to die; you will not get well."

In complete humility and with crushed heart, Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly, and then he prayed to the Lord. As Isaiah was on his way back, the Lord told him to return to the king and tell him, "This is what the Lord God of your ancestor David says, 'I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will heal you. The day after tomorrow you will go up to the Lord's Temple. I will add fifteen years to your life and rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for My own sake and for the sake of My servant David.'"





148- Giving in to Pride!

(2 Kings 20)

At that time, Berodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, sent a message and presents to Hezekiah congratulating him for recovering from his illness.

He was aiming at getting him to join in a secret alliance with some other countries against the Assyrians.

Unfortunately, the humble and devout Hezekiah fell into a state of pride and started to brag about his treasures and his armory, boasting about them to the men sent by the king of Babylon.

As a result of this pride and arrogance, the prophet Isaiah approached the king and asked him:

- "What did those men tell you? And where did they come from?"
- "They came from a far country, from Babylon"
- "What have they seen in your house?"
- "There's nothing among my treasures that I haven't shown them"
- "Listen to what God says, 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left says the Lord.'

And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget, and they shall be made eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon".

- "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good."

And that stern prophecy eliminated all the joy that was generated by his healing.



149- The Destruction of King Sennacherib and His Army

(2 Kings 19; Isaiah 37)

Ten years later, around the year 689 B.C., Sennacherib, king of Asshur (Assyria), was able to destroy Babylon and put an end to its continuous rebellions.

He heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia (Cush), was about to cross the Arabian Desert heading towards Egypt in 688 B.C.

Sennacherib sent to Hezekiah asking him to surrender. Hezekiah rushed to the house of the Lord. He put forth the messages which were sent by Sennacherib before the Lord, and he asked God to help him.

Then, a message came from the prophet Isaiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not enter this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, he shall return."

That night, the angel of the Lord went out and killed one hundred and eighty five thousands men from the Assyrian army. They were all dead corps by the morning. And so Sennacherib departed in defeat and returned to Nineveh. While worshipping his god Nisroch in his temple, his two sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer assassinated him, just as Isaiah had foretold twenty years earlier. As Hezekiah completed the fifteen years God added to his life, he departed in peace.





150- Josiah, the King of Judah And the Peasant Prophet

(2 Chronicles 34 & 35)

Terrible things happened in Jerusalem. Some of its kings erected a great statue for the god Moloch in the valley of the son of Hinnom, outside the city walls. The arms of the bronze statue were stretched forward to hold human sacrifices. The priests and priestesses would start a huge fire under the arms and they keep feeding it until the arms glow from the heat. Then, the poor mother would bring her baby and throw him onto the statue's glowing arms. The pagan priests would beat the drums and sing their loud songs, so that no one could hear the screams of the burning babies.

But, when Josiah became king of Judah, he wanted to get rid of all those pagan statues. He heard Jeremiah, the young peasant prophet, shouting in Jerusalem:

"These strange vain gods are made by the other nations. They neither hear nor speak nor move. Destroy them and get rid of them. There is no use in them, and they cannot harm you. Return to the Living God, and repair His holy house that you have desecrated."

As the king heard what Jeremiah was saying, he loved him, and he loved his words. Right away, Josiah ordered the high priest Hilkiah, to repair the Temple.

Therefore, work started in earnest on the Temple. The craftsmen, the builders and the carpenters started to fix and restore the House of the Lord.

"Look! What is this?" exclaimed one of the workers, lifting a scroll in his hand. He had found an old scroll in the rubble. He shook the dust off it and gave it to Hilkiah, the high priest, who started reading it.

At once he told Shaphan the king's scribe, saying, "We found the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord." Shaphan took the scroll and unfolded it and started to read it. Immediately,





he said, "We should bring it to the king." Shaphan came to the king Josiah and said, "Hilkiah gave me this scroll."

The king replied, "Read it out loud!" Shaphan started reading aloud the Commandments and Laws mentioned in the scroll; and Josiah sat silent, listening intently:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your might.

God does not favor faces. He cares for the orphans and loves the strangers. And you too must love the foreigners as you were estranged in Egypt. Do not give preference to anyone.

When you harvest your crops make sure you leave some grain in the field, some olives on the trees and grapes in the vineyard, so that the poor could find something to eat."

When Josiah heard the laws, he started to tremble. He stepped down from his throne, he took off his crown and tore his royal robes and cried, "Great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured over us, as no one in Judah is observing these Commandments of this Book."

Josiah stood next to a pillar, and he promised God to observe His laws written in the scroll. And, the whole nation shouted after him, "Amen."

The king ordered all the pagan altars to be destroyed immediately; he also ordered the statue of Moloch to be crushed completely. By that way, the whole valley of the son of Hinnom became a garbage dump. Josiah also issued orders to celebrate the great feast of the Passover in Jerusalem, as he read the scroll. That feast had not been celebrated for so many years.

All the people rejoiced and began to obey the Law. However, they soon returned to their old wicked ways. Jeremiah was observing all that. He initially rejoiced for the repentance of his people and their return to God; but soon enough, he went into grief as he saw them abandoning the love of God and disobeying His Commandments.



151- The Call of the Prophet Jeremiah

(Jeremiah 1)

Jeremiah was born in the village of Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, in the land of Benjamin. He was from a family of priests, the son of the high priest Hilkiah, and he loved the Temple. Since his early youth, he was so sad to see his people preoccupied by worldly pleasures, more than the worship of God.

In the calm of the village, Jeremiah used to spend time with God, who was a personal Friend to him. Often he would go up to his house's rooftop to look at the arid desert surrounding his village. Sometimes, at a distance, he would see a wild beast roaming around. Whether in the midst of the safety of his village, or in the danger of the desert, he would always plead with God to protect His people and deliver everyone from corruption.

He was sad for the wickedness of his own family, as they used to offer sacrifices outside the Temple in Jerusalem, a matter that was forbidden by the Law. His family, therefore, considered him a traitor to his country, and the king and his men were angry with him.

Then, the Lord called him to the service and said, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; and before you were born I sanctified you. I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Jeremiah felt the heavy burden of that calling because of his young age and lack of experience, so he declined saying to the Lord, "I am just a boy, I do not know how to speak, and even if I spoke, no one would listen to me." But God reassured him that He was going to give him the words as soon as he would open his mouth.

God told him, "I have made you a prophet to all the nations," since Jeremiah prophesied about the coming of Christ, as a Redeemer for the whole world.

God answered him, "Jeremiah, fear not, for I am with you, I will walk with you, I will put My word in your mouth and I will care for you by Myself!" Jeremiah felt a Divine Power touching his lips, and with joy and deep confidence he proclaimed, "God has touched my mouth."

"What do you see, Jeremiah?" God asked.



Jeremiah replied, "O Lord, I see a branch of an almond tree. It is a 'sentinel' tree, flowering before all the other trees, so we think it is proclaiming the arrival of spring."

God said, "Me too Jeremiah, I am like the 'sentinel' tree, I keep My word and I make it blossom, and yield fruit in the hearts of men. I am with you to save you."

Jeremiah left his little village and went to Jerusalem. King Josiah heard that Jeremiah was preaching in the public squares, instructing the people against false idols and the worship of the god Moloch. He issued a decree to demolish all the pagan altars and every altar outside Jerusalem, so that no sacrifice would be offered outside the Temple of God.

God warned Jeremiah against returning to his village Anathoth. He said to him, "The king's men have demolished the altar in Anathoth. Your family was made aware that you were behind that. They are up in arms against you and want to kill you, instead of returning to Me to be forgiven. Do not go back to them. Do not be afraid for I am with you."

Jeremiah replied, "Yes Lord, I know that You are with me."

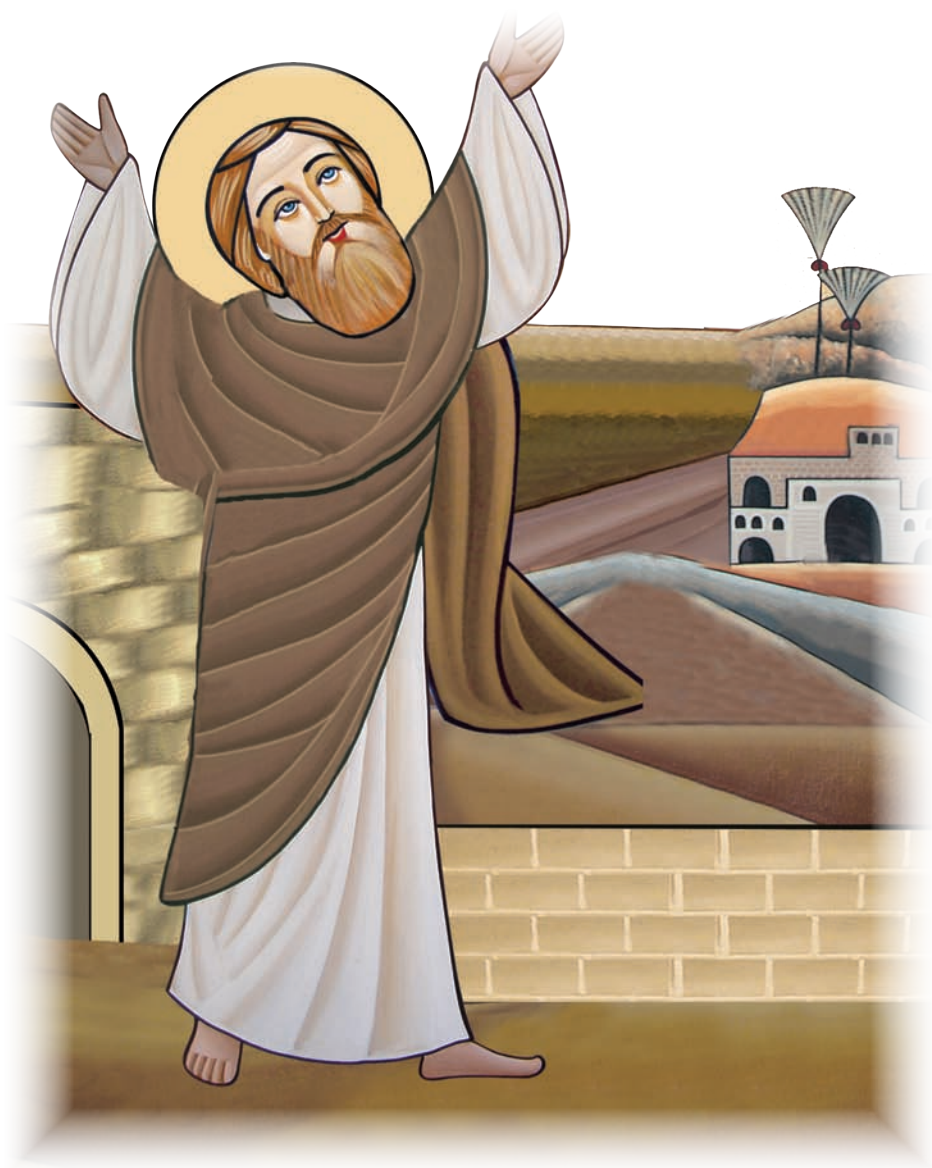
Jeremiah warned God's people about the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple and the ransacking of all the wealth of the city. They all mocked him, laughing and saying that they had heard all that for many years before and nothing had happened. They thought that no one could invade Jerusalem, nor touch the Temple. Therefore, they pursued their evil ways and lived in corruption, until their wickedness exceeded that of the kingdom of Israel before its captivity by the Assyrians.

Often Jeremiah complained to God that no one was listening to him. The Lord would comfort him. He kept sending him messages and prophecies to warn the people about what was going to happen to them.

Jeremiah's heart was always occupied by how to urge the people to repent, not only by the words he spoke, but with bitter tears and deep love for them.

The king formed an alliance with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah cautioned them that the road to victory was not through an alliance with Egypt, but rather by repenting and returning to God. But as they refused to listen to him and

opposed him fiercely, he declared to them that Babylon was going to take Judah into captivity.





152- My Heart's Walls are in Pain

(Jeremiah 4)

In the year 612 B.C., Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, the great country that had dominated the whole world for nearly 300 years, had fallen. The Jews thought that they were no longer in danger because of the fall of Nineveh. But Jeremiah had warned that Babylon was to take them into captivity because of their sins. Everyone mocked him, as Babylon was just a small kingdom at that time. They considered his words pessimistic enough to destroy the morals of both the nation and the army.

Then in the year 609 B.C., Necho, the Egyptian Pharaoh wanted to occupy the land of the Euphrates. King Josiah stood against him, but he was then killed. Pharaoh then established Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah as king over Judah after his father. Only three months later, Necho deposed him, and established his own brother Jehoiakim as a king instead.

Four years later (605 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, defeated Necho, the Pharaoh of Egypt. The loyalty of Jehoiakim to Egypt was supposed to be switched to Babylon. Nevertheless, the king, leaders and people were at a loss, as whether to support Egypt, or Babylon, in order to protect them.

Jeremiah, then, asked the people to surrender to Babylon, not in servility and lowliness but as punishment for their sins, whose only remedy was to return to God, and not support Pharaoh.

The people screamed, "We want liberation from the yoke of Babylon." Jeremiah lifted a huge heavy clay pot and threw it on the ground in front of all the people. It was completely shattered. Then he said to them, "Who could repair it? Likewise, Judah will be broken and Pharaoh will not be able to repair it, but only God can."

This enraged the priests and all the leaders. They thought Jeremiah was an agent for the Babylonians and a traitor to his country. Pashur, the priest, struck him and put him in the stocks, and chained his hands and feet. They treated him as a criminal, and everybody ridiculed him.





Jeremiah did not wish to see his people humiliated, but he could not stop foretelling their fate; his family, the priests, and all the people were to be taken captives to Babylon in utter humiliation.

His heart was aflame because of what was about to happen to his nation, his people and his land, and the house of the Lord especially that all the destruction was to happen on the great day of the Lord.

Jeremiah was greatly saddened when he heard God asking the people to go around the streets of Jerusalem, the city of God, searching for just one righteous man, in order for God to forgive them.

In bitterness Jeremiah cried, "My bowels! My bowels! I squirm in anguish, Oh, the pain in the walls of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep quiet."

A man of courage and grief, Jeremiah continued to warn the people of what were to happen, but to no avail. The priests and the religious leaders even stopped him from contacting the people, and he continued to mourn.





153- The Words that Fire Could Not Burn!

(Jeremiah 36)

King Jehoiakim was sitting in front of the fire to get warm. One of his men came holding a scroll. The king asked, "What is that?"

The man replied, "This is a scroll, I took it from Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. We banned Jeremiah from entering the House of the Lord, but he has sent his scribe with this scroll, and the scribe managed to read it aloud in front of all the people in the day of fasting. We let him do it to avoid any riot, but we did take the scroll away from him, afterwards."

The king asked, "What is in the scroll?"

The man replied, "Your majesty, what do you expect from a troublemaker like Jeremiah? He wishes to destroy the morals of every military and religious leadership, as well as his own people! He prophesied that Babylon would subjugate Judah into captivity. This scroll contains everything Jeremiah said since the days of Josiah the king till today."

Angrily, the king took the scroll from the man's hand. He grabbed a knife to tear it up and throw it in the fire. Some of the king attendants shouted "Oh, our king! Do not do that lest the wrath of God comes upon us." Nevertheless, the king laughed in mockery, and he tore it up then threw it in the fire. Then he said, "Bring both Jeremiah and Baruch to me immediately."

They searched for them but could not find them. Some of the king's devout men hid them.

Jeremiah announced that God was about to discipline His people. And indeed, everything he said was fulfilled.

Jehoiakim tried to rise against Babylon, but the king of Babylon sent an army to suppress the revolution. Jehoiakim died in a mysterious way. His son Jehoiachin became king for three months. Then Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, took him captive, and he placed his brother Zedekiah on the throne instead of him.



Thus, even though Jehoiakim burnt the scroll, he was not able to stop the fulfillment of the prophecies in it, the same words we still have in the Holy Bible to this day.





154- The Imprisoned Prophet

(Jeremiah 37 -38)

King Zedekiah was torn between the need to appear loyal to his master, the king of Babylon, as to not have the same fate as his brother Jehoiachin, and the desire to show national pride in front of the people by standing against the occupying king of Babylon and seeking help from the Pharaoh of Egypt, who was fighting against the Babylonians.

The king secretly sent for Jeremiah asking for his advice. He told him, "Pharaoh's army is coming to our rescue against Nebuchadnezzar. It is our golden chance to get delivered from the Babylonian occupation."

"No," replied Jeremiah. "Pharaoh's army will return to Egypt, and the Babylonians will attack Jerusalem, seize it and burn it. Listen Zedekiah to my advice before it is too late. Surrender Jerusalem to Babylon and save us. Do not rely on Pharaoh's army." Jeremiah also asked him to repent for his wickedness. However, Zedekiah was too afraid to reveal what Jeremiah the prophet had told him.

As Pharaoh's army moved towards Palestine, the Babylonians released their siege of Jerusalem to face the Egyptians. As Jeremiah was escaping Jerusalem to return to his village, the city's guards arrested him, thinking that he was a traitor, and was defecting to the enemy, to plot with the Babylonians and encourage them to seize his country. Jeremiah was beaten and thrown into prison, in the house of Jonathan, for several days and left hungry!

Secretly, Zedekiah brought him over to the palace and asked him, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

Jeremiah replied: "God is always ready to converse with us. You are the one who refuses to listen to Him and obey Him. God is telling you Zedekiah, that you shall be delivered into the hands of the Babylonians."

Those around the king looked to each other in bewilderment. How dare this prisoner utter such things in front of the king? Nevertheless, as Jeremiah noted their looks, he bravely admonished the king, "What offense have I committed against



you, against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? Where are your prophets who have prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land?' Now listen to me, my king. Do not return me back to the house of Jonathan, lest he kills me."

The king was terrified in front of the imprisoned prophet, and was worried that God might punish him. He ordered that they put Jeremiah in a better cell in the prison of the house of Jonathan, and that he would be given a piece of bread every day until the city runs out of bread.

When the leaders of the people heard the words of Jeremiah, urging the whole nation to surrender to Babylon, they advised the king, "Let this man be put to death. He weakens the hands of the men of war left in our city. He also demoralizes your people. His words do not bring peace to the nation but evil and discontent."

The king replied, "He is in your hands, do to him what you wish."

They took Jeremiah and threw him in a deep dungeon inside the prison. There, he was drowning in the mire and was left to die from hunger.

Now, one of the king's servants from Ethiopia heard what happened to Jeremiah. He rushed to the king saying, "This is cruel! It is a great evil to leave this brave man to perish in the dungeon. He is blameless. He is a man of God, who has only spoken the truth and is not afraid of death!"

"Very well," said the king, "take thirty men with you, and go pull him out of the dungeon."

The Ethiopian hurried, with the men, to the store. He took old clothes and rags and let them down by ropes to the dungeon. Jeremiah wrapped himself with the rags, and by the ropes he was pulled up out of the dungeon. However, he stayed in prison until all his words were fulfilled. And Jerusalem fell into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in the year 587 B.C.

Once again, king Zedekiah came to him, asking for his advice. Jeremiah did not change his words. Zedekiah asked him not to let anyone know about his prophecy, as he was afraid of the leaders in his palace.





155- The Fall of Jerusalem into the Hands of the Babylonians

(Jeremiah 39-52)

Jeremiah was depressed while in prison. He saw what was going to befall his country and his people, and was saddened. They were all living in their wicked ways, and no one was listening to his warnings; no one sought repentance.

Truly, the king highly respected him, while the elders feared him. The Lord saved him from death in the dungeon, and sent him an Ethiopian, a foreigner, to intercede on his behalf and save him from death in the dungeon. Still, one matter made his heart smolder with fire: his yearning for the salvation of his people.

Jeremiah was in jail at the time Babylon besieged Jerusalem. After eighteen months of siege, Jerusalem fell. Many of its poor people were killed. The rich and noble were taken to Babylon in great humiliation.

Jerusalem fell in the hands of the Babylonians, and Zedekiah and his men of war fled the city at night through the king's gardens. However, the Babylonian army pursued them until they were captured.

The king's sons were murdered before his eyes. They then put out his eyes, bound him in bronze chains and took him to Babylon. They set fire to the palace and all the houses of the noble, until Jerusalem was full of thick smoke. The walls were destroyed, and the army ransacked all the gold, silver, precious stones and ivory in the treasury. They also trailed so many captives to Babylon.

The king of Babylon heard about Jeremiah, his prophecies, and what he had suffered. He thought that Jeremiah had done that for his sake. As a result, he gave orders to treat him well. He also gave Jeremiah the choice between either leaving for Babylon glorified, or staying behind in his own land. The chief of the police gave him food and gifts before releasing him. Jeremiah chose to stay among his own poor people sharing their pain, those whom he loved with all his heart, although they resisted him repeatedly.



Gedaliah, who was set as governor of Judah by the Babylonians, was murdered. The people considered fleeing to Egypt. Jeremiah tried to persuade them not to go, but they were persistent, to the point that they forcibly carried him to Egypt, along with his dear friend, Baruch the scribe. And there, in Egypt, he uttered his last prophecies. The people could not accept his reproach and honesty in warning them, and rather than repent and seek the mercy of God, they stoned Jeremiah to get rid of him.





156- Lamentations in the Cave of Jeremiah

(Lamentations)

Jerusalem was in ruins and the Temple had been destroyed. Jeremiah withdrew to a cave near Jerusalem to weep and lament the state of his people, the city of God and the Temple. Later on, that cave was known as Jeremiah's cave.

He cried to God in lamentations, which he recorded. In them he expressed the bitterness of his soul for what had befallen his people. For forty years he warned them, to no avail. Instead they hurt him and insulted him. And when his prophecies were fulfilled, he did not cease to pray and cry out to God on their behalf, and kept discussing the matter with them.

He revealed his love for them, and explained the ugliness of sin and its destructive fruits; and opened to them the doors of hope in God's mercies, whenever they would repent and return to Him.

The destruction of Jerusalem was not just the loss of a magnificent fortified capital. For Jeremiah, it was of great beauty, being the City of God, embracing the unique Temple. It represented the presence of God in the middle of His people. He felt that its destruction meant that the Glory of God had abandoned the city, its Temple and its people. With all that, Jeremiah did not lose hope, but he awaited the glorious salvation of God.

However, the shock and grief was beyond his tolerance, so he cried in pain, and mourned and called for prayers and turning back to God through practical repentance.

In his lamentations, Jeremiah foretold, by the spirit of prophesy, the return of his people from captivity. God wants the glory of His people, even while He is punishing them.

In each lamentation, Jeremiah revealed the Divine Grace:

In the first lamentation, the prophet say, "The Lord is right to judge me! For I rebelled against His commands."

In the second lamentation, God revealed to him that the captivity would end after seventy years.

In the third lamentation, he declared that the Lord's mercies do not end. "They are new every morning... The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will put my hope in Him. The



Lord is good to those who trust in Him, to the soul that seeks Him."

In the fourth lamentation he acknowledges, "The punishment of your sin will come to an end, O daughter of Zion."

In the fifth lamentation he says, "But You, O Lord, reign forever; Your throne endures from generation to generation."





157- Ezekiel the Prophet

(Ezekiel)

During the seventy years of the captivity of the Jewish people, there were many righteous people living among them. In the land of captivity, God also sent prophets to urge His people to repent and draw closer to God.

The Jews enjoyed some liberty and were given land to farm. They had businesses and technical crafts, and a group of them succeeded and became rich. Some people had grown accustomed to their new situation. But others felt out of place, and felt deprived of their own land; particularly, they missed visiting the City of God, Jerusalem with its Temple, and celebrating the feasts and offering their sacrifices.

Furthermore, quite a few pagan traditions were being integrated into the lives of some of the Jewish people. Others gave in to despair at the thought of not returning to their homeland, after all these years in captivity. For many, their seemingly successful new lives were not able to compensate for their internal anguish.

Ezekiel, the prophet, was a priest and a son of a priest. As he was taken captive, he had never performed the priestly rites. But, Ezekiel had a message for the Jewish people. His message was that the reason for all their woes came from their own doing; because they had rebelled against God who cared for them, and they ignored His wondrous works that had made from them a nation and a special people for Himself. But, the people did not realize that the period of captivity was meant to be a period of punishment and purification for them.

One day, when Ezekiel was alone in the open, he had a unique vision. He saw God's throne adorned in a splendid glory. He fell on his face to the ground.

The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed God's wrath on His people because of their sins. While the false prophets were preaching the idle life, with its indulgence in lust, they led the people to the worship of idols. Ezekiel revealed to them that he had seen the glory of God departing from the Temple, and that Jerusalem was about to fall. The people did not believe him but believed the false prophets.



What Ezekiel the prophet had foretold came to happen; but the prophet opened a door to them for hope in the Temple of the New Testament. It might be that Ezekiel was yearning, while in captivity, to serve as a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem, so God revealed to him the service of the Heavenly Temple instead.





158- Throne in Heaven

(Ezekiel 1- 2)

Ezekiel used to get very enlivened when he would join his father, the priest, when it was his turn to serve in the Temple. He felt as if the gates of Heaven were opening to him. He also felt as if the days were going by so slowly for him, as he waited for his thirtieth birthday to be able to have the honor of serving as a priest like his father.

Ezekiel's happiness could not be contained, as he would read the books of Moses with the rest of the Old Testament, and while he would study the prophecies. Sometimes, he would lift his heart up to God in thanksgiving, praising Him for His mercies through the generations towards His people. Other times, his tears would roll down his cheeks as he was waiting for God's punishment for His people, after His warning to them and His threat to them for captivity.

Ezekiel lived through the captivity. He was captured with some other youths, and they were all dragged to Babylon, after he had witnessed the fall of Jerusalem, and saw first hand how many of the people and their leaders were killed. Some tried to escape; even the king, tried to flee, though he was captured. His sons were killed in front of him; after which, his eyes were put out. The Temple was destroyed and the utensils of the altar were stolen and taken to Babylon to the pagan king's treasury to be used for the pagan festivals.

During the captivity, Ezekiel's dreams and aspirations were lost. He wanted to serve as a priest, offering sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the people. However, it was only in the Temple of Jerusalem that sacrifices could be offered.

When Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord, he fell to the ground. The Lord was on His heavenly throne, surrounded by the Seraphim, the highest Heavenly Order. He heard the Voice of the Lord, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you."

Then, the Lord said to him, "Do not be saddened, Ezekiel, because you have lost the Temple, and you cannot see the altar, the Ark of Covenant, the golden lamp-stand or the Table of the Showbread. Do not worry, I will show you how the heavens will



move for My people, and for all mankind. Do not be troubled that you are not performing your duties as a priest. I will have you as My prophet, and My secrets I will reveal to you. Captivity will not stop you from serving Me, and nobody would be able to frighten you. Speak and do not be afraid, for I discipline and I forgive."





159- Strange Behavior and Strange Visions

(Ezekiel 4 - 5)

Ezekiel had to resort to some behavior that might have seemed odd or bizarre. That might have been because the people, through the centuries, had not listened to the Lord's warnings that were given to them. Seven centuries before, Moses warned them; one century ago, they ignored the warning delivered by Isaiah. They also disregarded what Jeremiah had been proclaiming for forty years before their captivity.

The king, the priests and the people were persistent in their contempt and negligence for the Lord's warnings. Therefore, God spoke to them through Ezekiel's strange actions.

At first, Ezekiel took a big brick of clay and placed it in front of the people. He started to draw the city of Jerusalem on its surface. He drew it surrounded with a mound and ramp. Then, he placed a narrow iron sheet around it to let the people visualize how bitter the siege was, and how terrible the destruction that happened to it.

Then, Ezekiel laid down on his left side for three hundred and ninety days; then turned and laid down on his right side.

Lying on his left side was to show what sin had done to the kingdom of Israel; and lying on his right side was what it had done to the kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel then took a sharp knife and cut his hair and his beard. He then divided the cut hair into three portions. He burnt the first third, cut the second third with the sword, and scattered the last third into the wind.

That was what happened to Jerusalem: the city was burnt; the sword killed some; and some were captured and taken to far away lands, to Babylon.

This is what sin had done to the city and people of God. But God disciplines and then forgives, if we return to Him.





160- The Lord's Glory Departs the Temple **(1 Kings 8; Ezekiel 10:18 - 22)**

Ezekiel struggled every time he was reminded of what was going to befall the people of God, His city, and the Temple. No one believed the Lord's warnings, and he was full of bitterness. Nevertheless, whenever he lifted his heart up to Heaven and envisioned God's overall plan, he rejoiced.

In the later stages before the Babylonian captivity took place, Ezekiel wept as he looked onto the Temple. He recalled the day it was consecrated by King Solomon and his top leaders; how the Ark of Covenant was brought into the Temple, and how thousands of sacrifices were offered. He remembered how the cloud that had overshadowed the people of Israel in the wilderness suddenly appeared and filled the Temple, and how the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord. How the people's hearts leapt with joy and the angels celebrated with the people the dwelling of God among His people.

Ezekiel wished he had lived during the days of Solomon; that he would have seen the glory of the Lord in the Temple!

Suddenly, amidst those happy dreams, he saw the glory of the Lord moving away from the Holy of Holies, and the cloud kept moving and filled the inner court, and then it paused shortly over the entrance of the Temple. Ezekiel's heart cried out, "Lord, where are You going? Why are the Cherubim leaving Your Divine throne, the Holy of Holies?"

Silently, in front of him, the Cherubim lifted their wings and left the place. He felt his heart leap out of his chest with them, and tears rolled down his cheeks:

"Will You leave Your house forever?"

Could it be still called the Lord's Temple, while You are no longer in it?

Could Jerusalem be still called the City of God?"

God did not leave Ezekiel guessing. In the middle of his agony, He held his hand and opened his eyes to see what others were not permitted to enjoy. God revealed to him a host of visions that transformed his heart to a paradise of happiness.





161-A Gentile Little Girl Becomes a Heavenly Queen **(Ezekiel 16)**

When God held Ezekiel's hand, He took him ahead 620 years into the future. He saw a curious sight. A baby girl whose umbilical cord was still uncut, naked on the dirt, in the middle of a field; nobody washed her from her birth blood. She was unattended and unnoticed by passers by.

- My Lord, who is this poor girl?

+ Her mother is a Hittite, and her father is an Amorite.

- Does no one pity her?

+ I am the Word of God, the Only Begotten Son. I will come down for her.

- Will You leave Heaven and come for her?

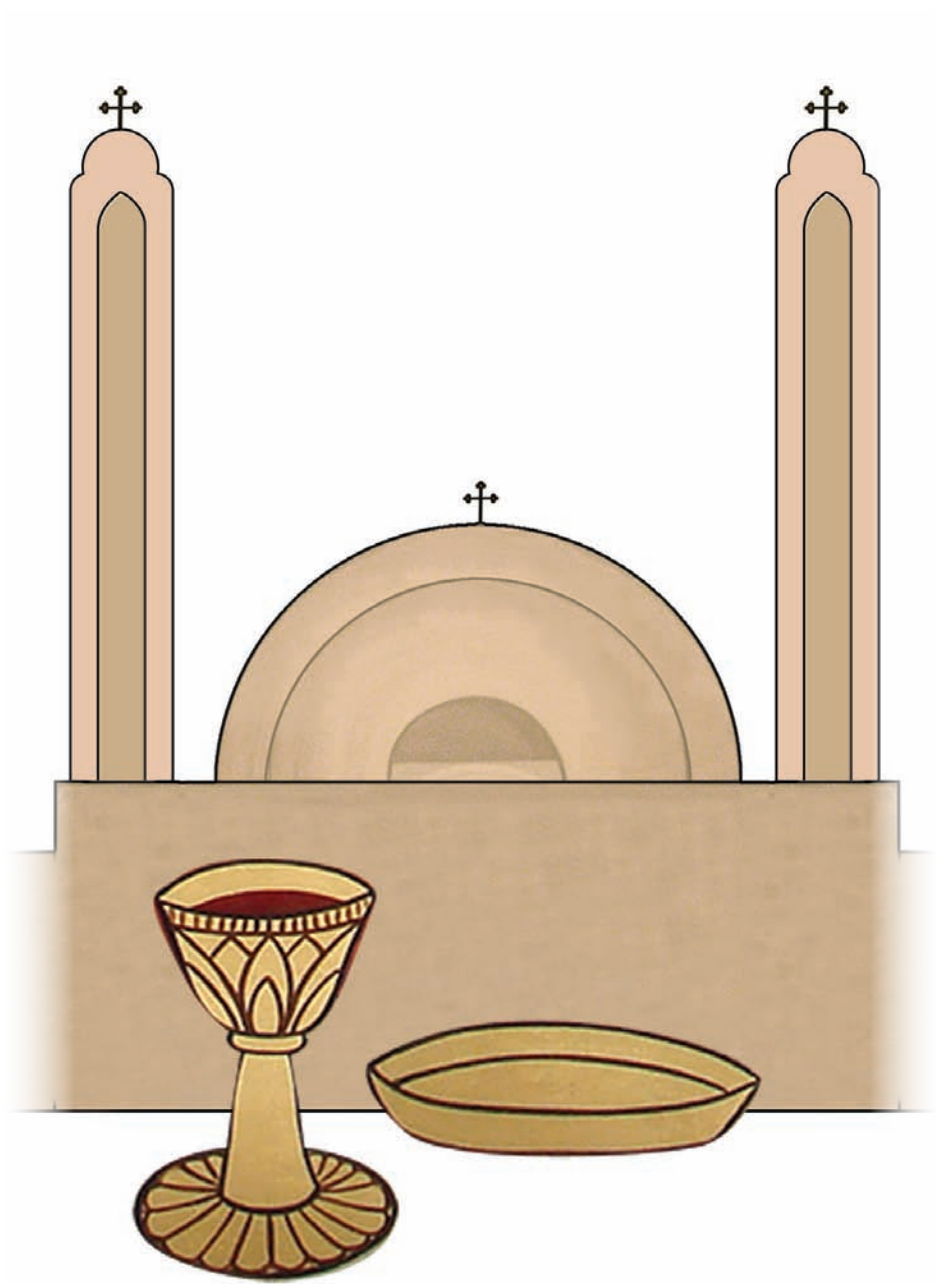
+ The time of love has come; I will become Man for her, bow toward the dust and pick her up in My arms.

+ I will wash her with the water of baptism and she will become the daughter of God. I will anoint her with the Myron oil and the Holy Spirit will dwell within her. I will shield her, and she will become righteous. I will be crucified on her behalf to deliver her from her sins, and grant her My image. I will grant her a royal robe and adorn her by the fruits of My Holy Spirit. I will sanctify all her senses and feelings. I will place a beautiful heavenly crown on her head, so the angels will desire to see her and be in awe of her beauty. They will wonder about the one who was in the dirt, who is now sitting like a queen on My right hand!

+ I will give her My Body and My Blood to eat and drink; to become a living icon for Me.

Ezekiel looked and saw the Lord proceed to the girl, telling her, "You have become exceedingly beautiful that you deserve to be a queen. Your fame has gone out to the nations because of your beauty that has become perfect because of the splendor I have bestowed upon you."

Ezekiel longed to see that day, the day the Lord would come to our earth to be crucified, die, be buried and rise again. So, He would raise from among the corrupt Gentile nations a Holy Church, a Heavenly Bride, and a glorious Queen.





162- The Good Shepherd!

(Ezekiel 34)

The sight of the little girl lying in the dirt did not disappear from Ezekiel's mind. She was beautified, sanctified, and raised by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe he asked himself, "Who could have raised the little girl from the garbage dump, and lifted her to be the most honorable celestial, like a Divine Bride?"

Therefore, Ezekiel's heart never stopped rejoicing; however, his tears were often shed for Israel's shepherds who did not help their people return to God, their Savior. Because of their selfishness and greed, they were only after worldly matters.

Ezekiel heard God's voice calling him:

"Son of man, prophesize about the shepherds of Israel,

Prophesize and tell them, 'My sheep are scattered, and no one is seeking or searching for them.

Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

I will feed My flock and I will make them lie down, the Lord says.

I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and bandage the wounded.

I will establish one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them - My servant David."

His saying, "My servant David," does not mean raising king David from the dead to reign again, but He meant the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became a Servant to reign over us by His humility and love. He is our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and the Son of David.

Ezekiel's heart was at peace, as he heard about the coming of the Good Shepherd who sacrifices Himself for His sheep.

That heavenly Shepherd honors His sheep, and makes them His people. He is their God and dwells in their midst and unites with them. "They will know that I am the Lord their God with them, they are My people... You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God," says the Lord God.

That is His ultimate gift. He becomes their God, and they are His flock, His people. He honors them and they honor Him.



St. John the beloved heard about a description of Heaven; "Behold the dwelling of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."



“Indeed, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out
... and I will make them lie down” (Ezekiel 34:11-15)



163- A Valley Full of Dry Bones!

(Ezekiel 37)

In the previous vision, Ezekiel had seen the sinners as a little girl, soiled with birth blood thrown in a field, with no one asking about her or looking after her. Then a Savior had come to her, and lifted her to Heaven to the eternal glory. Now, Ezekiel saw the Lord's hand grasping him, taking him out of his residence, and leading him to a valley full of bones.

Ezekiel was puzzled. He could see a graveyard that did not have many graves, but it looked like one vast grave full of the bones of thousands of dead people.

The Lord looked at him, and asked, "Son of man, can these dry bones live?"

Ezekiel was afraid to tell the Creator, "How that could be?" or, to say, "I have never seen that happen before!" Instead, he answered, "O Lord God, You know."

The Lord told him to repeat after Him, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

The Lord paused in silence, and then He ordered the bones saying, "I will introduce breath into you and you shall live..."

Ezekiel was stunned to see all the dry bones rattle and shake. They moved in groups to gather each individual's bones to form skeletons. Then, they gradually started to be covered with muscles, nerves, flesh and skin.

The spirits returned to the bodies, in order for the body to share the spirit in the Heavenly glory.

The dead had risen in a great joyful procession. They were like a splendid army proceeding upward toward heaven, to join the celestials in their heavenly lives.

Ezekiel watched this great army in silence. He heard the Lord's voice proclaiming, "O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come out of your graves."

Ezekiel felt that God spoke to him, as if He had spoken to all His people.



He rejoiced greatly saying, "How magnificent is God's love and might! He opens my internal grave, and brings my soul out, and makes me like a great army. He is calling me among 'His people'... He is happy to make us belong to Him."





164- The Coming of the Bridegroom King, The Grantor of the Resurrection

(Ezekiel 44)

Ezekiel was uttering to himself, "Who will come to lift the little girl who was thrown in the field up to heaven, after washing her from her blood, adorning her, and pouring his splendor on her?"

"Who is able to bring the bones together and restore to the body its greatness and glory?"

The Lord took Ezekiel by the hand and ushered him into a Holy Temple. That Temple greatly exceeded Solomon's Temple in its glory and holiness. It is a new Heavenly Temple facing the East. The Sun of righteousness shines on it.

Ezekiel stood at the outer gate, for it was locked, and no one could enter.

Ezekiel asked the Lord, "Who can enter through this gate? And why is it locked?"

The Lord answered him, "This gate shall be locked, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered through it; therefore it shall be locked. As for the Prince, because He is the Prince, He may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord."

Ezekiel was astounded, as he saw God's glory fill the house of the Lord, so he fell on his face.

He realized that the Prince was the Word of God, who was to be incarnated and become Man, and be born of a virgin, Saint Mary, who was to remain a virgin even after His birth.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came, and filled the heavens, the house of the Lord, with His glory. He filled the lives of His believers with His glory as He pours His Splendor over them. Only He, the heavenly High Priest, can lift the little girl thrown in the field and take her to heaven, after He washes her of her blood, adorning her and pouring His splendor on her. Only He is the Resurrection, who can collect the bones together and restore to the dead body its elegance and glory.

The soul of Ezekiel rejoiced, and he no longer was sad for not serving as a priest, and for not seeing Solomon's Temple or

Jerusalem. He had seen the Heavenly Jerusalem, and had seen its gates opened to let in the King of glory, with His believers, in their way to the bosom of the Father.





165- The Prophet Daniel and His Friends

(Daniel 1, 2)

In 605 B.C., king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Iraq), attacked Jerusalem and laid siege on it. After defeating it, he left the poor people to struggle in the city ruins, and he captured many of the noble, and took them back with him to Babylon.

He laid his hands on more than 5400 articles of gold and silver that was in the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and he put them in his temple of pagan idols.

Then, the king called the head of his household, Ashpenaz, and said to him:

"Some of the young captive men are princes and of the noble of Israel.

Choose among them those who are good-looking and intelligent, to live in the palace.

Teach them the Chaldean language and wisdom that they may serve in my palace.

You will feed them of my food and wine, and bring them to me after three years."

Ashpenaz obeyed the king, and he chose some of the Israeli youths. Among those youth were Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

They all had to follow an intense teaching program to train them for the court of king Nebuchadnezzar. They were also given Chaldean names in order to remove any nationalistic spirit in them, and to integrate them into the Babylonian empire.

Daniel and his friends set their hearts on avoiding to taint themselves with the king's delicacies, or with his wine, as it was brought to the king's table from his pagan temple after being offered to his false gods. In this way, they lived on just beans and vegetables; and God gave them grace and wisdom.

The faces of the youths were cheerful and radiant, and they were healthier and stronger than those who were eating of the king's food and wine.

God also gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom.

He also gave Daniel the gift of interpreting dreams.





After three years of training, when Daniel and his three friends were brought before the king, he was impressed by them. He questioned them and found them to be better than all the others. They were able to answer, with great wisdom; every question put to them and solved any problem set before them. He, therefore, chose them to remain in his court.

And because of his wisdom and popularity, Daniel became the most important man in the court, revered by all.

This was an important matter in those days. At that time, every kingdom had many prestigious schools for divination and wisdom; and Daniel was not in any of those schools. And possibly, those wise and knowledgeable people around the king wanted to keep Daniel away from that field, lest he might expose their weaknesses.

Then, it happened that king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that greatly disturbed him. He called upon his wise men, astrologers and magicians. They asked him for the dream in order to interpret it for him. The king refused to tell them about the dream. He demanded that they would tell him about both the dream and its interpretation; otherwise, he might kill them.

Truly indeed, the king proceeded in murdering some of the wise men. When it came to Daniel's turn, he asked the king for a short reprieve. He fasted and prayed, and God revealed everything to him. He went to the king and spoke to him frankly. He told him how God Himself had revealed the dream to him. He told the king about the dream and its interpretation, and explained to him what it meant with all honesty and courage. The king admired him greatly.

Daniel was an active man, who reprimanded the kings for their pagan worship.

He worked and prayed for his people, as many of them strayed from the path of the truth during their captivity.

He opened the doors of hope in enjoying the new glorious Jerusalem, and spoke about the timing of the first coming of the Messiah; and spoke about His second coming.

Eventually, Daniel died in the land of captivity.



166- The Three Young Men in the Furnace

(Daniel 3)

For a while, king Nebuchadnezzar was modest in his dealing with Daniel the prophet. However, he returned to his old ways of pride and love of the mortal glory. He made a golden statue; sixty cubits (90 ft) high and six cubits (9 ft) wide. He set it up in the plain of Dura, within the province of Babylon. Then, Nebuchadnezzar summoned the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the other officials of the provinces to come to attend the dedication of the statue he made, and then to worship it.

A herald was sent to proclaim loudly, "O peoples, nations and tongues, the following command is given: When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre and all kinds of music; you must fall down and worship the golden statue that king Nebuchadnezzar has erected. Whoever does not fall down and worship, shall be cast immediately into the midst of a fiery blazing furnace!"

Nebuchadnezzar used all possible means to get the people to worship his statue. He ordered the army commanders and the nobles to lead the worshippers' lines in order to influence the ordinary people. At the same time, he utilized all sorts of music to excite the people's feelings.

In every generation, the evil one uses all various means to entice us to worship him; either by getting mankind to slip into the path of sin or to make them consider the life of holiness as a revolt against society.

Following the king's command, people from various nations fell down and worshipped the statue. Whether they worshipped Baal, the king or for any other idol, it was out of fear of the king, who had threatened them not just with death, but also torture, where the offenders would be thrown into the furnace of blazing fire.

At that time, some Chaldeans stepped forward and complained about the Jews. They told the king:

"O king, may you live forever!

You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the music shall fall down, and worship the golden



statue; and whoever does not fall down and worship, shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.

There are certain Jews, whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael) and Abednego (Azariah); these men have not paid your due respect, O king.

They do not worship your gods or bow down to the golden statue which you have set up"

The wicked men talked to the king, with flattery and deceit, assigning to the honest, righteous youths all kinds of ingratitude and defiance towards the king and his decrees. As for the young men, they knew in their hearts that God had to be obeyed more than men.

Then in a rage and fury, Nebuchadnezzar demanded that they would be brought before him. So, they were.

Nebuchadnezzar told them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not worship my gods and do not fall and worship the golden statue I erected? If you are ready now, then when you hear the music, bow down and worship the statue. Otherwise, you will be cast into the furnace of blazing fire. Now, who is that God, who can rescue you from my hands?"

Nothing enrages those tyrants more than the feeling that their power is being despised. They want everyone to obey them, even when their demands are unfair.

As the king calmed down a little, he gave them a last chance to save their lives, by bowing only once to the statue! What bothered him was not whether they worship the statue or not, but their defiance to his power. That is why; he mocked their God, denying that He could save them from his hands.

Surely, the three young men could have found many excuses to justify bowing to the statue! Such as:

They were young and captives.

They were under the control of a brutal king.

The king had absolute power over them, especially they were prisoners of war.

That music that was playing was starting to affect them.





The king, who had granted them a good living in the palace, was the one pleading with them, and then started threatening them.

- a. They were abandoned in a foreign land, and easily accused of wrong doing. It was easy to apply the saying, "When you are in Rome, do what the Romans do," when you are in a foreign land.
- b. It was not out of the ordinary, for their ancestors had worshipped pagan idols, while they were in Jerusalem and even inside the Temple. All the people of Judah and Israel and without any coercion did this occasionally. Now, despite being foreigners in a far away land, they refused to worship the statue!
- c. By declining to bow down and worship the statue, they may lose every future opportunity of helping their countrymen.

The young men answered him saying, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. Our God, whom we worship, is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us from your hands, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden statue that you have erected."

Nebuchadnezzar, full of rage and anger, ordered the furnace to be heated seven times the usual level. He commanded his mighty army soldiers to tie them and throw them into the fire.

The three youths were bound while still wearing their cloaks, trousers, turbans, and the rest of their clothes, and were carried and cast them bound into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.

As the king had strictly ordered, the furnace was exceedingly hot, in such a way that the flame killed the men who cast the youths in. Then, to his astonishment, the king saw them walking in the midst of the fire, unbound and praising their God and blessing the Lord.

Azariah (Abednego) stood in the middle of the fire and praised God, saying:

"Blessed are You and praiseworthy, O Lord, the God of our fathers, and glorified is Your holy Name unto all ages.





For You are righteous in all what You did for us, and all Your works are truthful. Your ways are upright and all Your judgments are proper.

Your judgments are justified, in all what You had brought on us and on the holy city of our fathers, Jerusalem. Because of our sins, You brought these judgments on us with all fairness.

For we had sinned, acted lawlessly and turned away from You, we committed evil in every way...

Now we are following You with all our hearts, and we fear You and seek Your face.

Do not put us to shame, but deal with us according to Your kindness and according to the abundance of Your mercy."

As the king's servants were still carrying on stoking the fire, the flames shot forty-nine cubits (74 ft) above the furnace. The fire spread out and burned those Chaldeans who were nearby the furnace.

The Angel of the Lord came down into the furnace, and transformed the inside of the furnace into a cool dew-laden breeze blowing through it. So, the fire did not harm them at all, nor trouble them or cause them any pain. Then the three youths praised, glorified and blessed God in the furnace, as if with one mouth, saying:

"Blessed are You, O Lord God of our fathers, for You are praiseworthy and exalted beyond measure unto the ages.

Blessed is Your holy Name and exalted beyond measure unto the ages...

O, you all works of the Lord, bless the Lord, and sing a hymn to Him and exalt Him beyond measure unto the ages.

O, you angels of the Lord, bless the Lord, and sing a hymn to Him and exalt Him beyond measure unto the ages...

O, you children of men, bless the Lord, and sing a hymn to Him and exalt Him beyond measure unto the ages...

Acknowledge the Lord, for He is good and His mercy endures forever."

Our Church delights in using the words of this praise for the Third Cantic.



Nebuchadnezzar got up in a haste marveling, and asked his advisors, "Did we not cast three bound men into the fire?"

"We certainly did!" they answered.

"Behold, I can see four men, untied and walking in the midst of the fire. They are unharmed and the fourth is like a son of the gods."

The king approached the door of the furnace and called out, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, get out and come here!" The three youths came out of the furnace.

All the nation's officials gathered around them and saw that the fire had no power over their bodies; neither had it touch their hair, nor scorched their clothes, not even the smell of fire was on them!

So, king Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed:

"Blessed is the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent His Angel, and saved His servants who trusted in Him;

For they defied the king's word. And handed over their bodies to be burned so as not to serve and worship any god other than their God.

Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that blasphemes against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will be shredded into pieces and their houses will be plundered, for there is no other God who is capable to rescue in this way."

Then, the king gave higher authority to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the province of Babylon.



167- King Belshazzar and the Secret Hand

(Daniel 5)

When Belshazzar became king, he got rid of his father's wise advisors. He was an extremely corrupt man, who had nothing to occupy himself with except pleasure and parties.

Belshazzar prepared a great banquet, using the holy golden and silver vessels, taken away from the Lord's Temple, to serve the wine in the banquet. He had about a thousand guests, mocking and jeering.

Suddenly, terror gripped the king. His countenance fell and all those present stood still in their places as solid rocks.

The king shouted:

"Bring in the magicians and the wise men.

Whoever reads this writing, which the secret hand had written on this white wall, and tells me its interpretation shall be clothed with purple and have a golden collar around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom, after the queen and me."

The queen-mother told him about Daniel, his father's friend, that he could interpret the dreams and the mysterious words by the power of his God's Spirit.

Daniel was called in; and he read what was inscribed on the wall: "Mene, Mene, Teqel, Pharsin." Daniel gave him the interpretation:

"Mene: God has numbered your kingdom's days and brought it to an end.

Teqel: You have been weighed in the balances and found to be lacking.

Pharsin: Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians."

Belshazzar ordered that Daniel be clothed with purple and put a golden collar around his neck, and be proclaimed as the third ruler in the kingdom.

That very night, King Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, was murdered; and King Darius, the Mede, seized control of the kingdom and ruled at the age of sixty two.





168- A Lion's Den or a Paradise? Daniel, the Brave

(Daniel 6)

The new king Darius rearranged the government of Babylon. He divided the kingdom into 120 states, and appointed a governor (satrap) in charge of each state. Then, he chose three personal advisors to supervise all those governors. Daniel was among those three advisors. Daniel was a very successful supervisor and he distinguished himself above the other two.

Within a very short time, the king realized that Daniel was the best and the wisest among his advisors. The other two advisors felt that it was a matter of time before the king would set Daniel over them; and make him the second in command in the kingdom.

All the advisors, the governors and the royal palace's men became envious of this Jewish exile. They tried very hard to find a fault with the way he was handling the affairs of the empire.

Then, one of them told the other, "The only way for us to get rid of him is to find something wrong with his worship to his God, to whom he is very faithful. We all know well that he prays in his room three times every day."

They agreed about the idea. And, soon were contemplating a plan. They shouted, "Let us proceed swiftly!", and rushed to find the king. They told the king:

"O great king Darius, your majesty would live forever!

We know how great you are. We have, therefore agreed that your majesty should issue a decree stating that no one is allowed to petition any god or man for any of his needs, but he should petition you, O king. Moreover, whoever does not observe that decree should be thrown into the den of lions.

Your majesty, O king, you should issue such a decree, which nobody can alter!"

The king thought to himself, "Why not? I am as good as a god to my people!" and foolishly, he issued the decree after signing it.



Daniel learned about the king's decree, which was signed. He went home, and as usual, entered his bedroom and opened the window that looked towards the direction of Jerusalem's ruins, and knelt down and prayed to God. Three times a day, he worshipped God with the windows open.

As his enemies watched him pray, they did not waste any time. They went to the king and asked for the decree to be applied to one of the Jewish exiles from Judah.

"Who is that man?" asked Darius; and when he was told that it was Daniel, he was greatly distressed.

"O Daniel! He is a good man and has never done anything wrong," said the king. But the men approached the king, "O king, you know that whatever decree or statute that the king issues could not be changed. It has to be enforced."

After the king's failed attempt to save Daniel, he called for him and spoke to him sadly saying, "I am sorry Daniel. As you can see, I have been driven into a trap. However, I cannot change a law I have issued. May the God whom you serve faithfully save you now."

The soldiers took Daniel and lowered him down in the lions' den; placed a big rock on the den's mouth and the king sealed it with his own signet ring. Then the king went back, broken-hearted, to his palace. He could not eat or drink, and did not allow his musicians to entertain him that night. He spent his night unable to sleep, and kept telling himself, "My dear friend Daniel has never done anything but good deeds for my kingdom."

By contrast, this day was a joyous day for Daniel's enemies; they were overjoyed for the success of their plan. Daniel was gone for good, and it was time for them to celebrate by having a great party. They spent their night mocking Daniel, visualizing how his body would have been torn apart as it was devoured by the hungry lions. They would not have to worry anymore about Daniel's achievements and him being the favorite with the king.



However, as Daniel was being lowered into the lion's den, he lifted his heart to heaven and cried out to his God asking for help. The angel of God came down to the den and shut the mouths of the hungry lions.

As Daniel drew close to the lions, he found them very calm and waiting peacefully, as if they were loyal friends enjoying his company. Instead of becoming food for the hungry lions, Daniel felt as if he was sent to Paradise to spend his sweetest days of his life. He had the lions moving around by him, bowing to him and licking his hands and feet. He hugged them like friends and they kept him warm through the night.

Daniel spent his night with the angel and the lions, and the den was transformed into a place for praising God. He felt as if the whole creation was praising the Lord his God, so he sang Psalm 148:

"Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens... Praise Him, all His angels... Praise Him, O sun and moon!... Praise Him, all you shiny stars! Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures... you beasts and all you cattle... you young men and young women; you elderly, along with you children! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted."

Very early in the morning, just as the day was breaking, King Darius hurried to the den, and with a heavy-heart and lamenting voice called out, "O Daniel, servant of the Living God! Has your God, whom you always served, been able to save you from the lions?!"

How ecstatic was the king when he heard Daniel's response, full of joy and triumph, coming from behind the rock:

"O king, may you live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so they would not hurt me,

Because, I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."

The king was exceedingly happy and thanked God for saving Daniel. He commanded his soldiers to remove the seals and pull Daniel out of the den.

The king then ordered the soldiers to arrest those who had conspired against Daniel, then, to throw them, together with their families, into the lions' den. As soon as they were lowered into





the den, the lions devoured all of them and crushed their bones, even before they reached the bottom of the den.

Darius then issued a new decree, which he sent to the peoples and the nations all over the empire, saying:

"Peace and prosperity! I have issued an edict that throughout all the dominion of my kingdom, people are to revere and fear the God of Daniel... He rescues and delivers, and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth.

He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

The king hosted a banquet in honor of Daniel, the man who believed in the Lord his God, who can save from lions and transforms the den into an enjoyable Paradise!





169- Susanna, the Chaste And Daniel, the Wise

(Daniel 13)

There was an extremely rich man living in Babylon, his name was Joakim. He married a woman called Susanna, the daughter of Hilkiah. She was a beautiful and God-fearing woman. The Jews used to gather in their house.

One year, two elders of the people were appointed as judges in people's disputes. These two men used to convene at Joakim's house, and all who had disputes came to them.

When the people would leave at midday, Susanna would go for a walk in her husband's garden. The two elders used to watch her every day and they each began to desire her. However, they did not reveal their thoughts to each other, as they were ashamed to tell about their lustful desires. One day, one of them said to the other, "I am going home now, as it is time for lunch." They both left. But, they both returned back and suddenly met each other in the garden. They pressured each other to confess the reason for their return, and they had to admit to each other their lustful desires. Then they agreed to look for an occasion when they could be alone with her.

One day, while they were waiting for an opportunity, she went into the garden as usual with two of her maids. She wanted to bathe in the garden as it was a hot day, and she thought that there was no one else in the garden. The two elders were hiding from her in the garden, while watching what she was doing.

She told her maids, "Bring me oil and shut the garden gates, so that I may bathe." They did as she said; they shut the garden gates and left by the side gate to get her what she ordered. They did not know that they left her with the two elders.

When the two maids left, the elders appeared from their hiding place and confronted Susanna. They told her, "Look, the garden doors are shut and no one can see us. We desire you. So, give in to our demands and lie with us. Otherwise, we are going to testify that you had a young man here with you; and that was the reason you sent your maids away."



Shocked, Susanna said, "I am completely trapped. If I yield, it is death for me; and if I do not, I will not escape your hands. But, it is better for me not to do it and to fall into your hands, than to sin before the Lord."

Then, Susanna screamed out loud, and the two elders also shouted. One of them ran and opened the garden gates. The people in the house heard the shouts from the garden and ran to see what had happened there. The elders told their story, and the servants were very ashamed, as they had never heard anything like it about their mistress.

The next day, the people gathered at Joakim's house. The two elders came, with the wicked intention of putting Susanna to death. They told the people, "Call Susanna, daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim." So they sent for her.

Susanna came, with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. She looked very delicate and beautiful under her veil. They ordered her to remove her veil in order for them to enjoy her beauty. All her family and onlookers were distraught and crying. The two elders got up and put their hands on her head. As Susanna wept, she looked up to heaven; for she trusted God wholeheartedly.

The two old men gave their testimony, "We were both here alone in the garden, yesterday, when this woman came in with her two maids. She dismissed both of them and closed the garden gates. A young man, who was hiding in the garden, came up to her and was with her. We were both hiding in a corner of the garden. When we saw their sin, we ran towards them, as they were embracing. The young man escaped and we could not catch him for he was stronger than we. He opened the gates and fled. As for her, we managed to catch and we asked her about the young man. She has refused to tell us. We testify that this is what we witnessed."

The assembly believed them as they were elders and judges of the people, and they condemned her to death.

Susanna cried out with a loud voice, "O Eternal God, who knows what is hidden and all things before they come to be. You know these men testified falsely against me. Here I am about to



die, although I have not done any of the fabricated things for which these men have condemned me."

The Lord heard her prayer, and as she was being taken away to be put to death, God stirred up the Holy Spirit of a young man called Daniel. He cried out aloud, "I am innocent of the blood of this woman." All the people turned to him, bewildered and asked, "What are you saying?"

Standing in their midst, he said, "Are you such fools, you Israelites, to condemn a daughter of Israel without proper investigation and without clear evidence? Return back to court, for those two elders have testified falsely against her." Then, the people turned around and came back in a rush. The two old men, mockingly, told Daniel, "Come, sit with us and guide us, for God has given you the wisdom of an elder!"

Daniel said to the people, "Separate these two from each other, and I will examine them." After they were separated from each other, Daniel summoned one of them and said to him, "You, old man of evil days, now the sins of your younger days have come home. You pronounce unjust judgments, condemn the innocent, and set the guilty free. The Lord said that you shall not kill the innocent or the righteous. Now, if indeed you have witnessed Susanna with someone, tell me under which tree you saw them together?" The man said, "Under the mastic tree."

Daniel then said to him, "Your fine lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has already received the sentence from God and shall split you in two."

He had him removed and the other elder to be brought to him. He said, "You seed of Canaan and not of Judah. Beauty has seduced you, and lust has perverted your heart. This is how both of you acted with the daughters of Israel and in their fear they yielded to you. But this daughter of Judah did not tolerate your lawlessness. Now, tell me under which tree you saw them together." The man replied, "Under the oak tree." Daniel said, "Your fine lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God waits with a sword to cut you in two so as to destroy you both."

Then, the whole assembly cried out with a loud voice, and blessed God who saves those who put their trust in Him. They rose against the two elders as Daniel had convicted them of



bearing false witness; and they did to them what they had maliciously intended for their neighbor. According to the Law of Moses they put them to death. This way, the innocent blood was saved on that day.

Hilkiah and his wife with Joakim and Susanna's family praised God for saving her, for there was nothing shameful about her.





170- Daniel and the Priests of the god Bel

(Daniel 14: 1- 22)

Daniel was the confidant of the king and was honored above all the king's friends. The Babylonians had an idol called Bel. Everyday they provided for it six bushels of fine flour, forty sheep and fifty gallons of wine. The king went everyday to worship Bel. As for Daniel, he worshipped only his God. "Why don't you worship Bel?" asked the king. "Because I do not worship idols made with hands," answered Daniel, "but only the Living God who created heaven and earth and has power over all creatures."

Then, the king was asking, "Do you think Bel is not a living god? Haven't you seen how much he eats and drinks every day?"

Daniel laughed and said: "Do not be deceived O king! It is made of clay inside and bronze outside, and it has never eaten or drunk anything."

The king became furious; and called the priests of Bel. "You shall die if you do not tell me who consumes all those provisions. If you can prove that Bel consumes it, you will live, and Daniel shall die because he has blasphemed against Bel." Daniel said to the king, "Let it be according to your word."

The Bel's priests were seventy in number, besides their wives and children. The king and Daniel went into the temple. Then, the priests of Bel said, "Look, we are going to leave. You, O king, set up the food and wine, then shut the door and seal it with your ring. If you do not find that Bel has eaten it all when you come back tomorrow, then we shall all be put to death - or else Daniel should be put to death because he has spoken lies about us.

They were not bothered about the matter, because they had a secret entrance under the table, through which they could come and go each day to consume the food and drink the wine. When they had left, the king set the food before Bel. Daniel then ordered his servants to bring some ashes, which they sprinkled throughout the whole temple in the presence of only the king. Then they went out, shut the door, sealed it with the king's ring, and departed.



During the night, the priests came as usual, with their wives and children, and they ate and drank everything. Early in the next morning, the king and Daniel went to the temple.

"Are the seals intact, Daniel?" asked the king. "They are intact, O king," answered Daniel.

As soon as the doors were opened, the king saw that the table was empty. He cried out loud, "You are great, O Bel, and with you there is no deceit!" Daniel laughed and kept the king from entering the temple. "Look at the floor," he pointed to him, "and notice whose footprints those are."

The king replied, "I see the footprints of men, women and children." and he became very angry.

Then, the king ordered the arrest of all the priests, their wives and children; and they showed him the secret entrance through which they came in, to consume what was on the table.

The king sentenced them all to death; and handed Bel over to Daniel, who destroyed it and its temple.







171- Daniel and the Dragon

(Daniel 14: 23 - 42)

There was a great dragon (serpent) in Babylon, which the people worshipped. So, the king told Daniel about the dragon, "Are you also going to say that it is made of bronze? It lives, eats and drinks - You cannot say it is not a living god. Therefore, you should worship it."

Daniel replied, "I only worship the Lord my God; for He is the Living God. But with your permission, O king, I can show you how I would kill this serpent without a sword or a club."

"I grant you permission," replied the king.

Then Daniel took some pitch, fat and hair, and boiled them together and made them into cakes, and put them in the mouth of the serpent. When the serpent ate them, it burst open. Then Daniel said, "Behold, what you worship!"

When the people of Babylon heard about what had happened, they were enraged and turned against the king, "The king has become a Jew; he has destroyed Bel, killed the serpent and slain the priests." Then, they went to the king and demanded, "Deliver Daniel into our hands or we will kill you and your family." When the king saw that he himself was threatened, he was forced to hand Daniel over to them. They threw Daniel into the lions' den, where he remained for six days.

The den was occupied by seven lions. Every day, they used to feed the lions two carcasses and two sheep. But now, the lions were not given any food, in order to starve them to devour Daniel.

In the meantime, back in Judea, the prophet Habakkuk was living. It happened that he had made a stew and broken bread into a bowl, and was going out to the fields to give the food to the reapers. However, the angel of the Lord appeared and said to Habakkuk, "Go, carry your food to Babylon to Daniel in the lions' den." Habakkuk replied, "O Lord, I have never seen Babylon, nor do I know where the den is."

So the angel took him by the crown of his head and carried him by the hair, and with the speed of the wind, he placed him in Babylon above the lions' den.





Habakkuk then cried out loud, "O Daniel, Daniel, take the meal God has sent you." Daniel said, "You have remembered me, O God, for You do not forget those who love You." Daniel got up and ate; while the angel brought Habakkuk back to Judea.

On the seventh day, the king came, mourning Daniel. He approached the den and looked, and was shocked when he found Daniel sitting there.

The king cried out loud, "Great are You, the Lord God of Daniel, and there is no other besides You." And, right away, he got him out of the den.

As for those who sought to destroy Daniel, the king had them thrown into the den, and they were immediately devoured by the lions.

The king then decreed that all the nations must fear the God of Daniel, for He is the real Savior, who would perform miracles and wonders, and who saved Daniel from the lions' den!



172- Tobit



(Tobit)

Tobit was a righteous man, from the tribe of Naphtali. He was generous to the needy and faithful in his worship to God. He was taken as a captive to Nineveh during the Assyrian captivity.

During captivity, the Jews suffered from severe persecution. Tobit dedicated his time and money to provide food and clothes to his brethren. Every day, he shared what he had with those who were with him, among his people in captivity. He used to care for the sick and bury the bodies of the dead and the murdered.

One night, he was extremely exhausted and fell asleep under a tree. The droppings of a sparrow, nesting above, fell in his eyes, and he was blinded.

Tobit did not stop loving God or lose his trust in Him. However, many people, including his wife, mocked him. Tobit kept crying with tears and prayed to God, saying:

"O Lord You are Just, and all Your judgments are correct and Your ways are full of mercy, truth and fairness.

Now, remember me O Lord, and do not punish me for my sins, and ignore my trespasses, and those of my ancestors.

Because we did not obey Your commandments, You have delivered us for looting and unto captivity and unto death, and we became a proverb and a reproach to all the nations among whom we are dispersed.

Now, O Lord, great is Your judgment, for we have not kept Your commandments, neither have walked in the truth before You. Now, O Lord, deal with me according to Your will. Command that my spirit to be taken from me peacefully, since it is better for me to die rather than to live."

Then, when Tobit was in financial difficulties, he remembered a loan that he had given to one of his friends in Media (South of the Caspian Sea and part of present day Iran). Tobit instructed his son Tobias, saying, "My son, find a friend who would accompany you to the town of Rages in Media, to visit one of my friends, his name is 'Gabael'. There, you will claim my loan from him."



Tobias left the house to prepare for his journey, and he met an honorable man who offered to accompany him in his journey and to guide him in the road. Tobias consulted his father, and they found this man to be trustworthy person. It was amazing that this strange man knew the town that Tobias was going to, the road leading to it, and the people whom he was going to.

That man was in reality Archangel Raphael, who introduced himself as Azariah. He was a great support to Tobias and a wise leader for him. He rescued him from a ferocious attack by a huge fish, and told him, "Save the fish's gallbladder, heart and liver."

Finally, when they approached the house of one of Tobias' relatives, Azariah suggested for Tobias to propose to marry his relative's daughter 'Sarah,' and Tobias agreed.

Sarah married previously, seven times. Each time she married, the groom died shortly after the wedding, and no one knew the reason. Tobias did not allow these fears to find its way to his thoughts or to his heart.

During the celebration of the wedding, Azariah decided to go and collect the loan of Tobit, then come back to go with Tobias to his house. Also, Azariah advised Tobias to dedicate together with his wife, the first three days of their married life for prayers, without having any physical relationship.

The next day, expecting to find the groom dead, Sarah's father was preparing a grave to bury Tobias. He thought that what happened to the other seven husbands would happen to him as well, since they had all died during the first night of marriage. What a surprise it was, to find Tobias alive and well. He lived happily with Sarah.

Tobias returned to his father accompanied by Azariah, who advised him to anoint his father's eyes with the gallbladder of the fish. And Tobit's sight was restored.

Tobit's house was again full of happiness, for the return of his eyesight, the safe return of his son with his wife Sarah, and the financial problem was resolved.

Tobias tried to reward Azariah, but Azariah told him, "I am Archangel Raphael."





173- Queen Esther

(Esther)

Around the year 486 B.C., Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) became king over all the Persian Empire (modern day Iran). Many of the Jews were living in the Persian cities and villages.

One time, Ahasuerus held a great feast to his nobles and all the governors of the empire. That feast lasted for nearly half a year. At the end of the feast, king Ahasuerus gave a special banquet for all the palace men. That banquet lasted for seven days, during which the noblemen were drinking the wine out of the king's special golden goblets. At the same time, Queen Vashti also gave a feast for all the women in the royal palace.

On the last day of the feast, as the king and his men were drunk, the king decided to bring Queen Vashti to his feast. He asked her to wear her best royal gown and to place the royal crown on her head. He wanted to show her beauty to the men attending his feast. The tradition then was that a woman would only reveal her beauty to her husband in private. Consequently, Queen Vashti refused to yield to the king's request; especially since she knew that the men were drunk!

Queen Vashti declined to go and be in that inappropriate atmosphere. The king's advisors and friends turned him against the queen. They told him that she would set a bad example to how the wives would disobey their husbands. So the king divorced her.

The king was so furious, and on his advisors suggestion, he issued an order to expel her and prevent her from being part of the king's court anymore.

Then, the king sent messengers to all the provinces, proclaiming that Vashti was no longer the queen, and inviting all the beautiful maidens to come to the palace, for the king to choose one of them to become his queen.

Beautiful maidens gathered from all the provinces and went to the women's quarters in the royal palace. The chief of the women's quarters treated them well and prepared them to meet the king; so that he could choose one of them as his queen.





A Jewish man named Mordecai was working as a guard outside the palace. He had raised his orphan cousin, Hadassah, or 'Esther' (in Persian, meaning a star). Esther was very beautiful, so he presented her with the rest of the girls. Esther went to the women's quarters and found grace in the eyes of the chief. There, she stayed for a whole year, but she did not inform anyone that she was Jewish. When the king saw her, he loved her very much, and placed the crown on her head and made her the queen. He gave a great banquet in her honor, and invited the nobles; and proclaimed the day a holiday throughout the nation.

One day, as Mordecai was sitting by the palace gates, he discovered that two of the palace's entrance guards were plotting to kill the king. Mordecai informed Queen Esther, who in turn informed the king. The two traitors were put to death and the matter was written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Persia.

Now, the king appointed a chief over all the others who worked in the palace, his name was Haman. He gave him his signet ring to be able to pass laws as he would see fit. Haman was an arrogant man, and all the nobles and the heads of Persia had to bow to him, as a kind of worship. Mordecai, on the other hand refused to bow down to him, which infuriated Haman; and day after day, his anger increased.

Haman's family felt his bitterness and asked him that he should not take his revenge by killing just only Mordecai, but by killing all his Jewish people. Haman consulted the magicians, who cast a lot (Pur) and decided for him the appropriate day to kill all the Jews. After Haman took permission from the king Ahasuerus, he issued a decree to all the governors of all the Persian provinces to kill all the Jews on the third day of the twelfth month and to confiscate all their possessions.

The news spread and all the Jews were extremely distressed. They tore their clothes, wore sackcloth and put ashes on their heads, as a sign of their great anguish. Mordecai did the same, but could not enter the palace while he was in that shape.



The queen heard about her cousin, Mordecai's behavior and his wearing of sackcloth and having ashes on his head. She sent some clothes to him, but he did not accept them. Again, she sent asking him about his reasons. Then he informed her about Haman's plot against all the Jews, and he asked her to intervene on behalf of her people.

She sent again to him, telling him that she had not been called into the king's presence for the past thirty days. And, she told him that if anyone goes to the king without being called, and without having the king holding out his golden scepter to him, would be killed.

Mordecai told her, "Do not think in your heart that you will escape our fate, just by being in the king's palace. If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another source. But remember, who knows if you may maintain the royal status through such a time as this!"

Esther put the matter in God's hands. Together with her maids, she fasted for three days, without food or drink. She also asked Mordecai and the rest of the Jews to fast on her behalf. On the third day, she put on her royal robes. Because of her fast and prayers, she was very frail.

With her two maids, she went to see the king; one maid holding her hand and the other holding the tail of her robes.

All the doors were opened to her until she came to the king's inner room. When she saw the king, she fainted and fell down. God gave her grace in the king's eyes and he leapt off his throne. He extended his golden scepter to her, and she held onto it. He embraced her, and treated her lovingly, and then he asked her, "What is wrong, queen Esther? What do you seek? To one half of my kingdom you could have, if you wish." That was a sign of Christ who loves His Church, and with great kindness He listens to her voice.

God gave success for her plan. However, she could not reveal the reason of her distress before the king. Esther did not rush her request, but she asked the king and Haman to agree to



attend a banquet she was planning for them. When they both came, the king again asked her what her request was. She kindly invited them both to another special banquet the following day, promising she would then tell him about her request.

Haman left while he was full of joy, believing that the queen does not invite the king without him. However, when he passed by the gate of the palace, he saw Mordecai who did not rise or bow before him. He was full of indignation. He went home and told his household what had happened. His wife and his friends suggested that he would build a wooden gallows, fifty cubits (75 ft) high, and would ask the king to have Mordecai hung on it. That way, he would be able to go to the second banquet and enjoy it.

Esther struggled with fasting and praying, and humiliated herself before God, and the heaven replied. God kept the king up all night, and took away the sleep from his eyes. The king asked for the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Persia, and he started to read it. He read about what Mordecai had disclosed, regarding the plot that was planned by the eunuchs, the two entrance guards, to assassinate the king. Then, the king asked the attendants who were serving him, about what was given to Mordecai as a reward for his deed. "Not a thing was done for him," that was their answer. The king inquired about who was in the outer court at this time, and he was told, that Haman had just entered the court. He had come back early to ask for the king's consent to hang Mordecai on the gallows. Haman was called in, and the following dialogue took place:

- What should be done to a man whom the king wishes to honor?

- He should wear the king's royal robe, and the king's crown, and should ride the king's horse and then should be led through the city square, while people call and say, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!"

- Hurry up then, and do what you have said to Mordecai, who is sitting at the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken.



Haman thought that the king was speaking about him. He never imagined that he could be talking about Mordecai.

Haman did what the king commanded him to do. Then he went back home, mourning, with his head covered. He told his wife and his friends all what had happened to him. Everybody noticed that Haman started to crumble before Mordecai the Jew. And while they were still discussing the matter with him, the eunuchs of the king came and requested Haman to hurry and go to the second banquet that Esther had prepared.

At the banquet, the following dialogue took place:

King, "What is your request, Queen Esther?"

Esther, "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss."

King, "Who dares to do such a thing?"

Esther, "It is an adversary and an enemy, the wicked Haman."





The king could not bear the situation, and left to the palace's garden. When he came back, he found Haman falling across the couch where Esther was, he was pleading for his life. The king thought that Haman is assaulting her, so the king called out, "Cover his face!" in order to kill him.

One of the eunuchs told the king, "Haman had built gallows to hang Mordecai, the one who saved your life".

The king ordered, "Hang Haman on it. Give all his possessions to Esther, and my signet ring to Mordecai."

The story of Haman's hanging will remain as a practical lesson for everyone who would seek to harm others. The evil you want to do to your brother returns to you, and you drink the same cup that you have prepared for him.

Esther fell by the king's feet, interceding for the lives of her people. The king extended the golden scepter to her as a sign of his acceptance.

It was not possible to issue a statement to cancel the previous decree, so another decree was proclaimed; to help the Jews against their enemies.

The day for killing the Jews, had become a day of joy and celebration. That day was called 'the feast of Purim' or the Lot, because Haman had cast the lot to choose the day to kill the Jews, then it turned to be the day of their salvation.

Every year, the Jews celebrate that feast and read the story of Esther. They remember how God saves those who put their trust in Him.





The Eighth Time Period

Return from Captivity And Awaiting the Messiah

Before the captivity, God sent His prophets to Israel and Judah, warning them of their captivity.

Israel did not listen to the voice of the Lord; and indeed the kingdom of Israel fell into captivity to the Assyrians. That captivity was very cruel and violent.

The kingdom of Judah did not take heed, and later on, fell into captivity to the Babylonians. And the two nations met together under captivity.

God did not forget His people, but sent them prophets in captivity, giving them hope for return, as His promises. During captivity, some people repented and yearned for the return to the Promised Land and for worshipping the Living God.

In the year 538 B.C. in the days of Cyrus the Persian, the Jews were allowed to go back to Jerusalem to build the Temple.



174- Return from Captivity

(Ezra 1 - 3)

King Cyrus, founder of the Persian Kingdom, who defeated the kingdom of Babylon, gave permission to the Jews, that whoever wished to return to the homeland, might do so. He allowed them to rebuild their Temple and returned to them the Temple's vessels that were taken away by the Babylonians.

In the spring of the year 537 B.C., King Cyrus appointed Zerubbabel as a governor of Judea and Jeshua as a high priest. Nearly fifty thousand people moved with their possessions, from Babylon to Judea.

Most of the Jews in captivity were of the rich and educated class, not like many of the captives taken from other nations.

Settling down again in Jerusalem took the returning captives around six months. The families and tribes had to look for houses to live in.

Many collapsed houses were rebuilt; some others bought ready-made houses from their owners; whereas the rest lived in temporary tents.

In the seventh month after their arrival, they started rebuilding the Temple. During their captivity, Ezekiel had inflamed the hearts of some people with the zeal for returning to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.

They started with the altar, in order to be able to offer sacrifices to God, and then they continued with the rest of the Temple. They collected the raw materials needed for the job and brought the cedar wood from Lebanon.

There were many obstacles during the rebuilding of the Temple. Some of those were due to the fact that many of the returning men had married Samaritans or women from pagan nations, such as Babylon. This was absolutely forbidden by the Law of Moses.

One of the other obstacles in rebuilding the Temple, was that people were occupied by building their own houses first, claiming that it was not yet time to rebuild the Temple of God.



God sent them two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to urge them to build the house of the Lord; "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your coated (with gold) houses, while leaving the Temple to lie in ruins?"

Zechariah, who was younger than Haggai, also had a message, "Thus, says the Lord of hosts, 'Return to Me, and I will return to you. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets called... But they did not hear nor heed Me,' says the Lord of hosts."





175- Ezra and His Friends Ascend to Jerusalem

(Ezra 7)

The rebuilding of the Temple was delayed because of so many reasons, some internal, others external. The neighboring nations managed to delay the rebuilding process by claiming that it was a sort of rebellion against the Persian Kingdom. Due to their opposition, the rebuilding stopped until Ezra the priest and scribe, was sent to Jerusalem by the king Artaxerxes of Persia. Ezra was a zealous leader, and he brought with him back to Jerusalem some of the Jews who were in captivity.

Ezra was very keen on gathering the books of the Holy Bible, and paid attention to observing the law, especially the law regarding the mixed marriage between the Jews and the non-Jew (pagan) women. Ezra also dissolved all the Jewish marriages, which were to foreign pagan women.

Jerusalem was in need for a righteous and courageous leader, to bring about the necessary religious spiritual reform needed for that period. God provided such a leader, in the person of 'Nehemiah'.

Before the coming of Nehemiah, there had been so many attempts to build city walls to protect Jerusalem, but none of these attempts were successful. Jerusalem had been left an open city vulnerable to any raids by the neighboring nations.



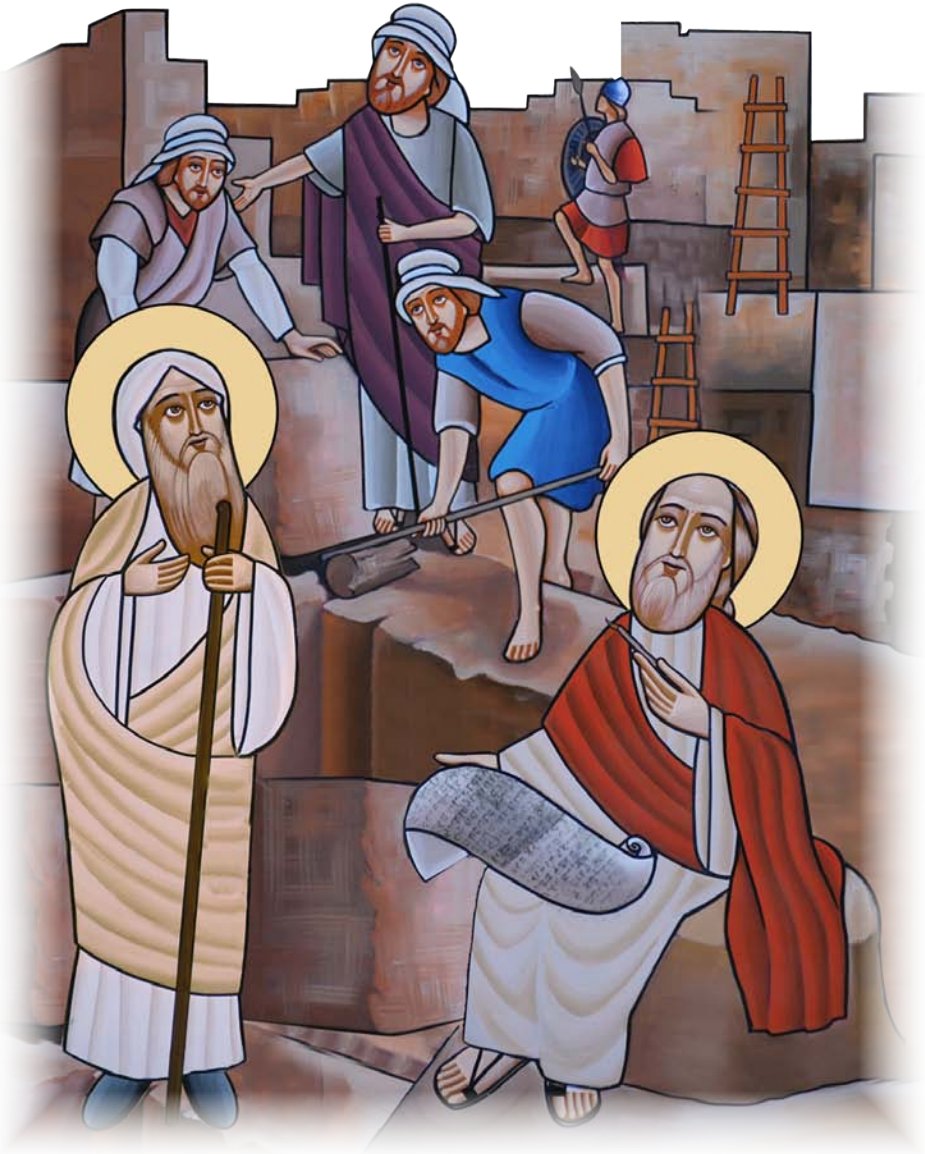


176- Come; Let Us Build the Walls of Jerusalem **(Nehemiah 2:11- 3:32)**

Nehemiah traveled on horseback for more than thousand miles to reach Jerusalem. He was accompanied by a group of horsemen. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he did not reveal his heart's intention about rebuilding the walls. But for three days, Nehemiah quietly surveyed the task ahead of him; praying and preparing for the work.

At night, he took a group of few men, and went to inspect the remnants of the wall and see for himself the condition the wall was in. It was a difficult road to travel, so he had to dismount his horse and to walk to the ruins. They found the wall remnants in a bad shape and the gate doors of the city burnt.

Then, Nehemiah returned to the city, and declared, "Come! Let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; so that the nations surrounding us might respect us."





177- The Wall of Jerusalem is Built

(Nehemiah 4:1-6:16)

Nehemiah got the work on building the wall to begin; but no sooner had it started than the enemies' opposition intensified, aiming to stop the work. First came the mockery; Sanballat, the Samaritan was shouting, "What is this feeble work that these Jews are doing? If a fox were to run on this wall, it would crumble down into pieces."

The builders carried on, undeterred by this mockery. They continued to build the wall until it was half the planned height.

The Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites became very hostile, for they did not want to see a fortified Jerusalem.

So, the Jews had to guard the wall intensely day and night, while carrying on with the construction work.

"Do not be afraid of them," said Nehemiah. "Remember, that the Lord is great and fearsome, and that you are fighting for your families and your homes."

Now, it happened when the Samaritan Sanballat, the Ammonite Tobiah and the Arabian Geshem, felt that they were unable to stop the work, they sent a message to Nehemiah. They asked to meet him in the Valley of Ono. Their plan was to get him away from his people and guards, to harm him.

Nehemiah responded, "I am busy with very important work, why should I stop to go and meet with you?!"

Finally, after fifty two days, the wall was completed and the city gates were secured, and the city became well-guarded. Fear gripped the enemies, after they realized that God's help completed the work.

It is vital for us to understand that whenever we are undertaking an important task, the devil will attempt to block it by all possible means. These include using mockery to deflate our momentum sometimes, other times by violent attacks to bring in the spirit of fear to stop us from completing the task. And if the devil fails, he would try to enter into stupid arguments with us to distract us and waste our time. As for us, it is our duty to seek God's counsel and not to be afraid of the evil one.





178- Ezra Reads the Book of the Law

(Nehemiah 8:1-13:31)

After the wall was built, the people started settling down and feeling safe in their cities and villages. Ezra, the priest and Nehemiah prepared for sanctifying the people to make them holy, because it was essential to secure the people's souls as well.

All the people gathered in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate, and then Ezra brought out the Book of the Law of Moses and started reading it out loud for them. He read it from morning until midday, while the people were acknowledging by saying, "Amen, Amen!"

As they listened attentively, they wept when they heard the words of the Law. Ezra and the priests told them, "Do not weep or mourn; for today is holy for the Lord your God." So, all the people returned home, rejoicing in a festive mood.

Nehemiah then returned to Shushan the Citadel, and met the king of Persia. After a while, he returned to Jerusalem, only to find that the people had not kept the Law, having not observed the Sabbath. Nehemiah was very saddened. He rebuked them for their stance, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you break the Sabbath?"

Nehemiah ordered the city gates to be closed at sunset on Fridays, only to be opened on Sunday morning.





179- Malachi

(Malachi)

The rebuilding of the Temple was accomplished, sacrifices had been offered to God, and the people started to observe the Sabbath. Synagogues were erected for group worship and teaching. However, the people again forgot what the prophets had proclaimed. And the wickedness found its way back into their lives.

The priests as well as the people strayed and sinned. The evil seeped even into the Temple and the altar. The priests started offering sacrifices, which were inappropriate to the Holy God. They neglected their tithing. And worst of all, so many of them married foreign pagan women and the divorce cases increased considerably.

God allowed them to be disciplined; by letting them go through periods of severe drought and locusts attacks their fields.

The people were supposed to repent and return to God to understand His message to them through the hardships they were inflicted with. But those people did not repent. Instead of repentance, they began to lay blame on God Himself. They started questioning God's love for them as His people.

God did not leave them, but He sent another prophet; the last prophet of the Old Testament before the coming of St. John the Baptist.

The prophet Malachi spoke to them clearly and frankly about God's love and goodness. He told them that they will not enjoy His blessings unless they returned to Him by repentance.

He emphasized His love, not only to them, but also to the whole world, which will join the Church of the New Testament, through His coming as the Savior of the world.

"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts."

The Jews were not allowed to offer incense except on the altar of incense inside the Temple. Malachi declared that incense shall be offered to the name of the Lord everywhere and in every

place. That was fulfilled in the New Testament Church. "But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings."



“Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says
the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:7)



180- The Maccabees and Antiochus Epiphanes **(1 Maccabees 1:10-15; 41-43; 54-64)**

The first and second Books of the Maccabees present to us a historical depiction of the Maccabees' faith and the period they lived in.

The name 'Maccabee' means 'hammer'. This was the title given to Judas Maccabeus, the third son of Mattathias the priest. Later on, that title was given to his brothers and all his warriors. Then, it was given to all those who were persecuted, especially in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.

In the year 538 B.C., a decree was issued by Cyrus, the Persian king that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild their Temple. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah documented how that return took place. The Books of Haggai and Zechariah were written to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple.

Afterwards, the Jews lived peacefully for nearly two centuries. But in the year 333 B.C., Alexander the Great, the king of the Macedonia, defeated the Persians in the Battle of Issus. That victory opened the way to the conquest of many of the Mediterranean countries. Within ten years, the young emperor, Alexander the Great, almost ruled over the entire known world of his time. The Greeks strived to spread their Hellenistic culture; and many of the Jews were impressed by it. Alexander maintained a good relationship with the Jews.

In the year 323 B.C. Alexander the Great died, and his empire was divided among his generals. Egypt went to the Ptolemy and his sons, and Syria to the Seleucid rulers. Palestine's Jews throughout the third century lived under Egypt's rulers, the Ptolemaic Dynasty, in an autonomous rule, especially regarding their worship.

In the year 198 B.C., Antiochus the Third, the Seleucid ruler annexed Palestine from the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

At the beginning of their reign, the Seleucids respected the beliefs, culture and traditions of the Jews. As money ran out, Seleucus IV ordered his minister, Heliodorus, to seize the treasures of the Temple. He was later followed by his brother,





Antiochus the Fourth Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) in ruling Syria; and the first Book of the Maccabees began at that point.

Antiochus Epiphanes is considered the 'Antichrist' of the Old Testament. After he spent a period as a hostage in Rome, he returned to Syria to become its king in the 137th year from the beginning of the Greek empire (175 B.C.). Antiochus IV was called 'Epiphanes' which meant a 'manifestation of god,' as he was interested in culture and architecture. He built many stunning and grandiose buildings. However, many of his subjects, by changing just one letter, called him 'Epimanes' which meant a 'maniac,' since he was known to be violent, cruel and maniacal in his actions.

When Antiochus Epiphanes arrived in Israel, he forcibly persuaded many of the Jews, saying, "Let us make a covenant with the Gentile nations surrounding us, because since the time we were separated from them, many evils have befallen us." This proposal found favor in the eyes of many of the Jews. They were eager to go along with what the king commanded. They were also curious about the cultures of other nations. And, according to the pagan traditions, they soon built a Greek Coliseum in Jerusalem to perform evil practices, and so they drifted away from their holy lives, and drew nearer to the pagans.

Antiochus wanted to fulfill Alexander's dream, by establishing one empire covering the entire world, and imposing the Hellenistic culture on all the nations under that empire's rule. He wrote to the people of all the nations urging them to become united as one nation, and urged each nation to abandon their traditions and follow the Hellenistic culture. All nations submitted and embraced the Greek pagan practices; with the exception of the Jews.

Antiochus Epiphanes exerted every possible means to compel the Jews to forsake their faith and tradition and adopt the Greek culture. He forced them to abandon their Law and the worship of the Living God; thus annulling the covenant struck between the Jews and Antiochus III in the year 198 B.C., in which Antiochus the Third had proclaimed that the Law of Moses was the source of authority for the Jews. The same action had been favored before by the Persians, during the Jewish captivity.



Accordingly, following the Laws of the Living God was deemed a disobedience and defiance to the laws of the empire. And, from here, persecution commenced.

Many of the Jewish thought leaders were charmed by the Hellenistic culture. They were fascinated by it to the point they ignored their belief in the One Living God and the Temple. The Maccabees stood up against this Hellenisation movement, helped by a number of honest, faithful, and pious people who were holding onto their ancestors' traditions. Their message became witnessing to the One True God, the Almighty, regardless of the price, which included their own lives. Thus, many thousands of them perished.

The Maccabees' military resistance campaign was mostly successful, despite the death of many of them. They were very dedicated to the cause, and they considered martyrdom as the triumphal victory.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was known for his deceitful trickery, did not forbid the worship of God; but he intruded the pagan worship inside the Temple, alongside the worship of God. By this way, he gradually seeped the pagan Greek spirit into the life of Israel.

The painful events, to which Jerusalem was subjected during that period, were as follows:

1. Antiochus Epiphanes sent messengers with letters to Jerusalem and Judah asking them:

- a. Not to offer burnt sacrifices and drink offerings on the altar.
 - b. To neither observe the Sabbath nor celebrate the Jewish feasts.
 - c. To defile the altar and the holy contents.
 - d. To build altars, sanctuaries and temples for the idols.
 - e. To sacrifice swine and unclean animals.
 - f. To leave their sons uncircumcised, and accept lewd actions.
 - g. Not to adhere to the Mosaic Law.
- The faithful, therefore, had to live in hiding.



2. Jason was appointed high priest. He participated with Antiochus in the shameful pagan practices. He embraced the Hellenistic culture in Jerusalem. He appointed secular rulers over the people, encouraged by some of the Jews who were fascinated by the Greek civilization.

3. In the year 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem with a great army. He entered the Temple, desecrating the Holy of Holies and ransacking its treasures. He offered a pig as sacrifice on the altar and killed thousands of the Jews. All Judea was stunned by his bizarre action. Also, he officially banned the making of sacrifices or offerings in the Temple. And, when he saw many people gathered to celebrate the Sabbath, he burned them alive.

4. When a false rumor circulated about the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jews rejoiced. In retaliation, he sent one of his commanders; Apollonius, to punish the people by trashing the city and burning it. He crushed its walls, and used the walls stones to build a fortress on a hill overlooking the Temple. Then, he placed a statue of Jupiter Olympus on the top of the altar in the Temple. After that, he banned the offering of the permanent burnt sacrifice for three and a half years. He also proclaimed himself a god, which is considered as 'the abomination of desolation of the Temple' that symbolizes the 'abomination of desolation' at the end of ages that our Lord Jesus Christ pointed to.

5. He issued a decree forcing all the people to eat of the meat of sacrifices which were offered to pagan idols. Anyone refusing to eat was sentenced to death, which led to a bloody persecution.

6. Many pagan altars were built in various cities of Judah. They burned incense in the squares and outside the houses. They collected the Books of the Torah and they tore them before burning them. Anyone found with a Book of the Old Testament or followed the Mosaic Law would be killed. Women who circumcised their sons were murdered, their children were hung by the neck, and those who performed the circumcision were also killed. Despite it all, so many gladly accepted death to remain faithful to God and to His covenant.



7. In June of the year 167 B.C., one of the high priests; Eleazar was brutally beaten to death.

8. A mother and her seven sons were subjected to flogging, burning and their limbs severed bleeding to death.

Judas led the revolt against this evil. Together with his army, he showed extreme bravery and refused to compromise allowing the mixing of paganism with the Jewish faith in the Living God. And, God was with them and in many battles, the Syrian army fled before them.

It was said that Antiochus died a horrible death. Like king Herod Agrippa I, worms ate his flesh.

In the year 160 B.C., Judas put an end to years of pain and strife, in a battle against Nicanor. He destroyed paganism and cleansed the Temple, and a great joy spread throughout the nation.

From that point on, the worship of the Living God flourished in Judea; with a few exceptions. In the year 63 B.C. the Roman commander Pompey invaded Jerusalem and all of Palestine, in the name of the emperor Augustus. Thus, Israel became a part of the Roman Empire.





181- Mattathias **(175-164 B.C.)**

(1 Maccabees)

The name 'Mattathias' is similar to 'Matthew', and in Greek 'Theodorus', which means the 'gift of God'.

Mattathias, the son of John, the son of Simeon, was a priest of the family of Joarib, of the house of Hashmon.

Antiochus Epiphanes' actions greatly distressed Mattathias. And so the Jewish scene witnessed two opposing figures, competing for supporters. The figure of Antiochus attracted some Jews who were bewitched by the Greek culture, as well as some traitors, who supported that ruler's actions hoping to achieve personal gain and status. In contrast, the figure of Mattathias represented the religious and national opposition of the people who held onto their belief in God, their Law and their Temple. And so, Mattathias called for a holy war.

The response to the call of Mattathias was great, and many people bravely did not yield to the pressures from Epiphanes, and they preferred death over life. Thousands of these saints were martyred for believing in the glorious eternal life.

As Mattathias saw the atrocities taking place in Judea and Jerusalem, he said, "Alas, why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the destruction of the Holy City, and to live there when the city was delivered into the hands of the enemy, the sanctuary into the hands of foreigners?... Our holies, our beauty and our glory have been wasted, and the Gentiles have desecrated them. Why should we live any longer?" And Mattathias and his five sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned deeply.

The lamentation over Jerusalem was widespread because of what had happened to it. Having heard about that, the governor attempted to defuse the tension, so he tried to tempt Mattathias to offer sacrifices to the idols. Mattathias refused. He went on to kill a Jewish person, who travelled along with the king's messenger and tried to be the first to offer a pagan sacrifice. Mattathias



courageously cried out, "Whoever wants to keep the Ordinance and holds to the Covenant of God, let him follow me." Then, he fled with his sons to the mountains, forsaking all their wealth and possessions.

In the mountain caves, Mattathias organized a steady revolt against the Hellenistic movement. However, the first attack on his followers, ended up with great bloodshed, as they adhered to the Sabbath rules to the letter. When they were attacked on the Sabbath, they did not resist, or even seal the entrances to the caves, and many of them perished.

When the time of his death approached, he followed some of the spiritual leaders in the Old Testament; such as Jacob, Moses and David, and he called his sons. He blessed them and gave them advice instructing them to be faithful to God and His Covenant and His Law. He urged them to continue the struggle against paganism, for the sake of the Lord and His Law.

In his advice to his sons, Mattathias urged them to be honest and keep God's Covenant to receive great honor. He gave them the following examples of various faithful people who gained honor and glory for their dedication to God:

a. **Abraham** was found faithful even during God's trial and it was counted for him as righteousness.

b. **Joseph** kept the commandments during the time of trouble and became a ruler of Egypt.

c. **Phinehas** showed true zeal towards the holy Temple and the priesthood, and he received a covenant of eternal priesthood.

d. **Joshua** obeyed the word of the Lord and became a judge of Israel.

e. **Caleb**, though he was not a member of the assembly, believed in God's promises and received an inheritance in the land with Judah.

f. **David**, showing mercy, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever in Christ, the King of kings.

g. **Elijah**, for his great zeal for the Law, was taken up into heaven.



h. **Ananias, Azarias and Mishael** believed and were saved from the fiery furnace.

i. **Daniel**, for his righteousness, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

The sons of Mattathias had succeeded their father in leading the revolt:

1. Judas Maccabeus (166-160 B.C.)
2. Jonathan (160-142 B.C.)
3. Simon (142-134 B.C.)





182- Judas Maccabeus **(166-160 B.C.)**

(1, 2 Maccabees)

Judas Maccabeus succeeded his father after his death. His only concern was to sanctify the temple that was desecrated by the Syrian king; Antiochus Epiphanes.

In the summer of 166 B.C., Apollonius gathered together a massive army from Samaria. Judas went out to meet him; he defeated Apollonius and killed him ceasing his sword and fighting with it for the rest of his life.

Now Seron, the leader of the pagan Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a group of faithful men around him, and they were going out to battle. So, he said to himself, "I will make a name for myself and be honored in the kingdom, by fighting Judas and his followers who despised the king." He set forth with a great army consisting of pagans and unfaithful Jews. Judas went out to meet him with only a few people. As they saw the army coming towards them, they said to Judas, "How will we, being a few, be able to fight against such a powerful number? And we have no energy for we have been fasting today." Judas answered them, "Victory in the battle does not come from the size of the army, but from the Might of heaven." Seron and his army were destroyed before Judas; and terror fell upon the nations surrounding them. So, the king was informed, and all the Gentile nations talked about what happened.

Judas won several battles against Antiochus Epiphanes' army commanders. Then, he purified the Temple and brought religious freedom for the Jewish people.

When Antiochus heard about Seron's army defeat, he was very furious. He prepared an exceedingly mighty army. And after giving a whole year's wages to the troops, his treasury was depleted. So, he decided to go to provinces far away to collect taxes to support his mission. He left Lysias in charge of all the affairs of the kingdom, from the river Euphrates to the boundary



of Egypt. Lysias was the top Syrian leader, a man of distinction, from the Seleucid royal lineage. Antiochus ordered Lysias to send that army to attack the Jews, and uproot them completely and destroy the might of Israel and Jerusalem, and then completely annihilate them. He was to wipe out all the rebels or sell them as slaves, seize their land and settle foreigners on it.

Lysias appointed three valiant men: Ptolemy, the son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor and Gorgias. Ptolemy was the commander of the Syrian and Phoenician provinces. Gorgias was the chief of the military operations, while Nicanor was the king's best friend and within five years, he became a chief of the army. Lysias sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to crush the land of Judea.

When the rich merchants of the region heard about the arrangement, they came with their gold and silver to buy the Jewish slaves. They came from all across the region and were joined by people from Edom and all of Palestine.

The people of Judea assembled and went into Mizpah, about 13 Km from Jerusalem, because at a former time Mizpah was a place for prayer in Israel. They fasted on that day and put on sackcloth, sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their garments. They unrolled the Scroll of the Law and cried to God in bitter humility and distress.

Then, Judas started organizing the army according to the Law. He asked those in his army who were in the process of building houses, were betrothed to women, were growing vineyards or were afraid to fight; he asked them to return to their homes.

Gorgias took five thousand men and a thousand cavalry. They marched on at night to surprise attack the camp of the Jews. Judas was informed about that move, and he marched out with his soldiers to Emmaus, to strike the king's army camp, whose forces were dispersed outside the camp.

When Gorgias arrived at Judas' camp, he did not find





anybody. He searched for them in the mountains, thinking that they had gotten scared and fled away from him.

When Judas reached the pagans' camp, he waged war and broke the Gentiles' army. Some fled and the rest were killed by the sword. Later on, when Gorgias' battalion saw what had happened, they were shocked by the defeat of the Gentiles' camp, and they fled into Palestine. While, Judas and his men returned back praising God.

The following year, Lysias recruited sixty thousand infantrymen and fifty thousand cavalry. They came to Idumea and camped in Beth-zur. Judas met them there with ten thousand soldiers. When he saw their mighty camp, Judas prayed and cried to God. Then, Lysias' army was broken, and they withdrew to Antioch. There, Lysias began to recruit mercenaries so as to return to invade Judea with an even greater army.

Judas' priorities included the purification and restoration of the Temple. It was necessary for them to destroy the altar of the burnt offering as it had been desecrated by the Gentiles. At the same time, they could not throw the stones away, as holy sacrifices to the Lord had been offered on them. They, therefore, stacked the stones in an appropriate location on the Temple hill, until God, in His mercies, would send them a prophet to tell them what should be done, although prophecies had ceased for a long time.

On the 25th day of the ninth month - the month of Chislev (December) - in the 148th year from the beginning of the Greek empire (164 B.C.), the Jewish people arose early to offer sacrifices according to the Law on the new altar of burnt offerings which they had built. On that day, the altar was consecrated with songs using harps, flutes and cymbals. It happened that the altar's consecration took place on the anniversary of its desecration by the Gentiles. All the people fell down with their faces to the ground and worshipped and thanked the God of heaven for having guided them until that point. They completed the celebration in



eight days; during which they made burnt offerings with great joy, as well as sacrifice of peace offering and thanksgiving offering. They also adorned the face of the Temple with crowns of gold and shields; and restored the gates and the priests' quarters and installed new doors.

There was great rejoicing among the people, and the disgrace imposed by the Gentiles was removed. Then, a decision was made by Judas, his brothers and all the people of Israel, that each year at that same time, they should observe with joy and appreciation, the days of the consecration of the altar, for eight full days, beginning on the 25th day of the month of Chislev.

Around that time, they also built high walls and strong towers around Mount Zion, lest the Gentiles come and destroy this holy place, as they had done before. And Judas stationed a battalion to guard it, and he fortified the town of Beth-zur; so the people would have a fortress facing Idumea.

Judas and his brothers waged war against the surrounding nations, who were resolved to annihilate the race of Jacob; and Judas was victorious.

Some people wanted to follow the example of Judas and his brothers, but it was for the sake of the worldly glory; therefore, they failed.

There were many accounts about the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes; and how it was a result of him hearing about the victories of Judas and his brothers over his own armies.

On his deathbed, Antiochus IV put one of his friends, Philip, in charge of his son Antiochus, to raise him to rule in his place.

Antiochus V, moved with a large army to attack Judea, and did achieve some victories. But, when he heard that Philip was trying to take over the kingdom, he stopped the war and entered a treaty with the Jews, giving them their religious freedom.

In the 151st year from the beginning of the Greek empire (=161 B.C.), Demetrius, the son of Seleucus arrived from Rome,



and landed at Tripoli, in Lebanon; and from there traveled to Antioch. Then, his army killed Antiochus V and Lysias, and he became king Demetrius I.

People of Judea suffered during the days of Demetrius I, from the plots of Alcimus, who was a descendant of Aaron's. Alcimus aspired to be appointed a high priest. In 161 B.C., the king agreed to his request, but he ordered him also to punish those Israelites who followed Judas and refused to deal with the Greeks.

The king Demetrius I sent Bacchides with Alcimus to force Judas to agree to a truce, while they were plotting evil. They both killed many of the people and spread corruption, intending to ruin Judea.

Later, the king sent one of his most capable commanders, Nicanor, to kidnap Judas and destroy the Temple. Judas refused firmly to meet with him. A battle ensued which ended up in the killing of Nicanor and the defeat of his army at Adassa (in 160 B.C.)

Judas wanted to stabilize the situation, so he made a treaty with Rome and established his position.

However, Bacchides and Alcimus were sent for the second time, to Judea by the king Demetrius I. They were heading an army of twenty thousand infantrymen and a thousand cavalry. Judas had only three thousand warriors. But, many of them ran away and he was left with 800 infantry. They tried to convince Judas to retreat and withdraw, but he refused. In the battle, Judas fell fighting, and was killed. His army fled. And, he was succeeded by his brother, Jonathan.



183- Jonathan the Maccabean (160-142 B.C.)

(1 Maccabees 9-10)

After the death of Judas, many lawless individuals among Judas' opponents seized control of all the regions of Judea. They benefited from a great famine happening at that time, which made the surrounding nations yield to them. Then, when Bacchides, who was sent to Judea by king Demetrius I, started to appoint leaders for the country, he chose them from among those lawless opponents. These men searched for the allies of Judas and captured them. They brought them to Bacchides. He took vengeance on them and ridiculed them.

Then all Judas' friends came together and chose his brother Jonathan as his successor to be their ruler and to lead them in their opposition against their enemy. When Bacchides heard about that, he sought to kill Jonathan. But Jonathan, his brother Simon, and everyone with him escaped to the desert of Tekoa, where they established their camp.

An Arab tribe, called Jambri, killed John, Jonathan's brother while he was traveling and killed those who were with him. Jonathan and his brother Simon sought revenge for their brother from the Jambri tribe. So, they ambushed and killed a large number of them during a wedding celebration. They later returned to the valley of the Jordan.

Some tempted Bacchides to go after Jonathan. He tried to do so but failed. Jonathan then sent messengers offering a truce. Bacchides accepted the arrangement and returned to his homeland (Syria).

Jonathan's first mission was his leadership to the Jews (160-143 B.C.). He continued his brother's military campaigns until the danger of war against Israel was gone. In the meantime, it happened that Alcimus had tried to destroy the wall of the inner court of the sanctuary. But, he became very ill and died after a serious sickness.

Then, Jonathan resorted to politics in his leadership style rather than military campaigns. He took advantage of the struggle on the throne of Antioch (Syria), especially, that the parties



fighting over the throne were competing for his friendship: Demetrius I, sent Jonathan a letter to flatter him, offering him a peace treaty, he also allowed him to assemble an army and ordered that the Jewish hostages held in the citadel to be released to him. While, Alexander, the son of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was called also Alexander I Balas (152-145 B.C.), sent Jonathan a friendship letter with a purple robe and a golden crown; and he appointed him a high priest over his people, in the year 152 B.C., immediately after the high priest Alcimus died. That was Jonathan's second mission, being the nation's high priest. His brother Judas, however, was only a military leader, although he was the son of the high priest Mattathias.

Now- it happened that Alexander I married Cleopatra, the daughter of Ptolemy VI, king of Egypt (180-145 B.C.). At the same time, Demetrius II, the son of Demetrius I, came back to claim his father's kingdom, and he appointed Apollonius governor over the Syrian regions.

When Demetrius II met Jonathan at Ptolemais, he honored him and acknowledged him as a high priest (the role that was given to him by Alexander I). He also exempted the people of Judea from taxes in spite of the denouncement of some. He returned the possession of the citadel in Jerusalem to Jonathan, and permitted the Jews to practice all their religious rites.

Then, when Demetrius II felt that the peace was established in the land, he dismissed his troops, each to his own town. However, that dismissal angered his army men, and they would have killed him, but Jonathan's men managed to save him. However, Demetrius II did not repay Jonathan's favor, and reneged on all his previous promises. And, what had started as a friendship between them, ended with enmity.

Jonathan tried to maintain the peace treaties with Rome and Sparta. At that time, Demetrius II prepared an invasion plan against Jonathan, but Jonathan moved quickly and he was victorious.

Jonathan did not accept Demetrius II's offers, and Demetrius II died later on (126 B.C.) during a battle against Alexander II.



During the crisis caused by the troop's dismissal, Trypho was trying to take that opportunity to enthrone Antiochus VI, the son of Alexander I. (Trypho, was a title given to a man who was entrusted with raising the young Antiochus, Alexander I's son, to make him king succeeding his father.)

At the end, Jonathan fell in a trap set for him by Trypho for Antiochus VI. In 143 B.C., Trypho pretended to befriend him and received him with a great ceremony at Ptolemais. He convinced Jonathan that he should not fear him, and therefore, he sent away most of his men. Trypho then closed the gates of the city, seized him and all those who accompanied him, and murdered them.

And so, his brother Simon followed him.





184- Simon Maccabeus (142-134 B.C.)

(1 Maccabees 13-16)

He was the eldest son of Mattathias; and although his father had left his brothers in his care, he assigned the leadership to Judas and then to Jonathan after him.

The Jews gathered around him after Jonathan's death. He helped king Demetrius II, who had regained the throne. The king therefore acknowledged his priesthood and his leadership of the Jews, he also lifted the hardship imposed on them. Simon observed the Law and was dedicated to the Temple and worship.

He fortified the fortresses and took over the city of Gazara. He got rid of the foreign soldiers who were protecting the citadel and set his son John as a commander of all his armies.

Both Rome and Sparta sent envoys to offer him friendship. So, his rule was a time of peace and prosperity. However, Antiochus VII turned against the Jews, and he killed Simon and two of his sons. Antiochus's son-in-law carried out the murder; he wanted to appease the king of Antioch.

The Jews engraved the deeds of Simon and his sons on bronze doors and placed them among the Temple's treasures.

Although Antiochus VII acknowledged Simon's priesthood, he took a stand against him and sent Cendebeus, the coast commander, to kill him. John and Judas, Simon's sons defeated him. But Simon was killed through a treachery, and his son John succeeded him.





185- Eleazar the Martyr

(2 Maccabees 6)

The name 'Eleazar' means 'God supports'.

Eleazar, the martyr, is not the same as Eleazar Maccabeus, one of the brothers of Judas. He was one of the scholars of the Law of Moses. He was a distinguished, elderly man. During the times when they were persecuting the Jews, Eleazar was forced fed pork meat, which was forbidden by the Law. He spat the meat out of his mouth, as it was considered unclean.

Those in charge, who were among his friends, advised him to pretend that he was eating the food offered to the idols as sacrifice, in order to save his life, and become a friend of the king and his officials. But, he rebuked them, as he could not accept to be a hypocrite for the sake of this short-lived life. He said:

"It is not honorable for me to pretend. Many of the youth may suppose that I, in my ninetieth year, had taken up the Pagan beliefs.

Because of my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I earn only defilement in my old age.

Even if I avoid the punishment in the meantime, yet whether I live or die, I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty.

Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will leave to the young a noble example of how to die a joyful death willingly and bravely for the Holy Laws."

After saying those words, he was immediately taken to be tortured. They did beat him to death.

When he was about to die from the blows to his old frail body, he groaned and said:

"The Lord knows that although I was able to avoid being put to death, I am now enduring the terrible sufferings in my body from this beating, while my soul is rejoicing the suffering, because I fear Him."

And so, in the manner of his death, he left an example of his noble character and a memorial for his virtue, not only to the youth but to many of his people, and to the generations to come.





186- Martyrdom of a Mother And Her Seven Children

(2 Maccabees 7)

The story of the martyrdom of this family is the story of a living faith that would welcome death over breaking the Divine Law, and keep holding onto the Resurrection and the Eternal Life.

The Second Book of Maccabees presents to us a great story of a mother, whose motherly words pulsed with manlike courage, despite the cruelty of her persecutors.

Among those who became martyrs during the Maccabees' period were a mother and her seven children. They showed extraordinary courage in their yearning for death. Their final statements revealed their resilient faith in the Eternal Life.

Antiochus Epiphanes brutally persecuted the Jews who adhered to the Divine Law and to their religious traditions. Many of them were martyred.

It happened that the king arrested seven brothers and their mother. They were beaten with whips and oxen cords to force them to eat pork, in order to break the Law of Moses.

One of the brothers stepped forward and said in behalf of the rest, "What do you want from us? What do you want us to tell you? We are ready to die rather than disobeying the Laws of our fathers."

The king was enraged, and requested that the fire beneath special giant kettles to be intensified. Then, he ordered that the tongue of that brother who spoke to be cut and his limbs to be torn, and before dying, to be thrown into one of those fiery kettles. His family was forced to watch his horrific death.

While the smoke was spreading out of the kettle, his mother and brothers were encouraging each other to die bravely, "The Lord God is taking notice of us. As Moses said in his song, bearing witness to us; He will have compassion on His servants."

When the first son died, they brought the second son. They tore away the skin off with his head's hair. Then, they offered him swine meat to eat, otherwise his body parts would be tortured one by one. When he refused, they tortured him as his brother before him. When he was about to die, he groaned, "You wretch! You set



us free from this present life, but after we die, the King of the world will raise us to an everlasting life, because we die for His Laws."

After him, the third was tortured and tormented. When he was told, he stretched out his tongue courageously, and his arms saying bravely, "I received these limbs from heaven, and for His Laws, I disregard them and hope to get them back again in heaven."

The king and his people were greatly astonished at that young man's spirit, who disregarded his sufferings completely.

When he died, they tortured the fourth brother in the same way. So when he was near death, he told the king, "It is better to be chosen to die at the hands of men, and to hope that God would raise you again. But for you, there shall be no hope in a resurrection or an eternal life."

That is what differentiates the believer who will be raised to eternal life and the wicked who has no eternal life.

The fifth brother warned the king of the Divine punishment for him and his descendants.

The sixth brother proclaimed to the king that what they were experiencing was merely temporary punishment by God's permission. And, that the king had declared war on God Himself by treating His believers in that way.

The mother's attitude was more than admirable. She bore her affliction courageously because of her faith in the Lord. She saw her seven sons perish in the span of a single day. Filled with a heroic patience from heavens, she kept encouraging them and directed their eyes to God, their Creator, who would restore them in His mercies, to the everlasting life.

She told them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you breath and life, nor I who arranged the elements in order within each of you. Therefore, the Creator of the world, who formed man in the beginning and devised the origin of all things, in His kindness, will give both life and breath back to you again,; since you now have disregarded yourselves for the sake of His Laws."

Antiochus Epiphanes thought that her words before him were contemptuous. So, he tried his best to tempt the youngest



son, who was her last remaining child. He tried to persuade him to abandon the Laws of his fathers and become loyal to him. He offered him guarantees of wealth, status and great position in his court. But the seventh son refused to pay any attention to all these offers. The king urged the mother to advise the boy to save himself. After much persuasion, the mother drew close to her son, and mocked the tyrant, speaking in her native tongue:

"My son, forgive me. I carried you for nine months in my womb and nursed you for three years. I fed you and brought you up to this point in your life. Please, I beseech you my son, to look at heaven and earth and see everything in them, and know that God made them all out of nothing, including mankind. So, do not fear this executioner! Be worthy of your brothers and accept death, that in God's mercy I may receive you back again with your brothers."

No sooner had she finished talking to him than he rebuked the king, warning him about God's punishment. Then, he said, "What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's commands, but I obey only the command of the Law given to our fathers through Moses."

The king tortured him even harsher than his brothers, and he died delivering his trust completely in the Lord's hands.

The mother, looking towards the king said, "You who have committed so much evil against the Hebrews will not escape the wrath of God."

She bore the sight of torture and execution of her seven sons with great courage; and at last she joined them on the same day.

The words of these martyrs came to underline so many facts. The most important of which is that God is the Creator of all from nothing, and that the true believers place their hopes in the Everlasting Life to come.





187- Joshua ben Sirach

(Wisdom of Sirach)

Joshua, the son of Eleazar, the son of Sirach was born in Jerusalem in the middle of the third century B.C. He was a scribe and a teacher of wisdom in Jerusalem at the turn between the third century and second century B.C. At that time, Judah and Samaria were part of the regions of Syria.

He was a wealthy man, concerned about the upbringing of his children. He had strong faith and was an upright man, with a wealth of experience. His travels and contacts with many leaders and influential people in various countries had gained him significant knowledge. He also was assigned to certain political missions in those countries. During his travels, he witnessed many situations, and his comprehension surpassed the ordinary level.

While still a young man, he had searched for wisdom. He started a school in Jerusalem, because he loved teaching. His pupils were the sons of the wealthy families in the city. As their tutor, he prepared them for their future responsibilities in the society.

Among what he wrote:

"While I was still young, before I began my travels, I sought wisdom openly in my prayer.

Before the Temple I prayed about her, and I will search for her to the end of my life.

From blossoms to ripening grapes, my heart rejoiced in her. From youth, my foot searched for her righteous path."

He toiled in thinking about the Law of God, and searching for the wisdom of the fathers. He devoted his free time to prophecies.

He loved prayer and knew its power.

He was in love with the beautiful nature, and full of admiration for the created universe. He considered God's works as full of majesty and goodness. In his poetry, Sirach expressed beautifully, the greatness of God in His creations.



The Book of Wisdom of Sirach was written between 190 and 180 B.C. in Hebrew; and was translated into Greek by his grandson, Sirach, in Egypt around 130 B.C.

The Book is called 'Ecclesiasticus,' meaning the book of the church as it was used in the catechism and teaching of those who were getting ready for baptism to join the church. That name was given to the Book since the days of St. Cyprian. It was revered by Eusebius and others as "**All-Virtuous Wisdom**" and Clement of Alexandria called him, "**The Teacher.**"

Joshua wanted to bring to the Jews the wisdom from their own tradition, rather than from the Hellenistic (Greek) teaching.

This Book is a great document about wisdom, treating many topics of great importance, among which: The belief in God the Creator and Sustainer of life; love of wisdom; the practical faith behavior; the importance of tradition. It also provides guidance for the behavior of the faithful regarding eating and drinking, trading and leisure, education and study, poverty and riches, as well as, health and illness.

There is a special section honoring the great men of Israel, similar to that included in the Book of Hebrews chapter 11. He concentrated on the righteous men and prophets, rather than the kings of Israel.

The early Fathers of the Church were influenced by that Book and they loved using many of its passages, whereas the Jews refused it because they considered it leaning towards the Sadducees' tradition.

The Book talks about the greatness of man. It says:

"The Lord created man from earth and returned him to it again. He gave them a certain number of days and appointed time, and He gave them authority over other creatures on the earth. He clothed them in strength that befits them, created them in His own image and to His likeness. He put the fear of man upon all flesh and gave him dominion over wild animals and birds. He gave man the ability to think, and a tongue, eyes and ears. He filled them



with comprehension, and showed them good and evil. He set His eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of His works. They will praise His Holy Name and declare His great deeds. He added knowledge to them, and gave them the Law of life as a heritage. He established an eternal covenant with them, and showed them His judgments. Their eyes saw His glorious majesty, and their ears heard His glorious voice."







188- God and the Old Testament

The Old Testament began with the creation of the world for man's sake. God created him to rule the earth, with great authority, in the image and likeness of God; His wonderful beloved.

Man fell by disobedience, and lost his good nature, but God revealed to him His plan for salvation.

Sin entered the world through Adam, but with repentance he restored his love for God, and waited for the promised salvation to come.

The sins of man multiplied badly in such a way that there was nobody left in the world who was righteous except Noah and his family. The flood came, cleansing and renewing the earth; just as baptism brings a new nature to the believers' life.

Noah was followed by Abraham, who entered into a covenant with God by demonstrating his faith with his actions. He became the father of many nations, and through him the believers were blessed. Then, came Isaac and was followed by Jacob and his sons. The people of Israel were established by the twelve tribes from the sons of Jacob in Egypt. When they fell under the yoke of slavery, God sent Moses to deliver them triumphantly out of Egypt. That was a sign to our crossing from Satan's slavery to the freedom of the glory of God's children through the cross.

Throughout the ages, righteous men and women were to be found, just as there were people who rebelled against God. The kingdom was divided: First Israel, and then Judah taken into captivity. After seventy years from the exile of Judah, both kingdoms returned from captivity.

In all generations, God sent His prophets calling people to repentance and prophesying about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Malachi was the last prophet. Afterwards, God stopped sending prophets, for all to await, as if in a state of silence, the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only One who is capable of taking us into His heaven.



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Queen Mary & Prince Tadros Church



Queen Saint Mary and Prince Theodore's Translation and Evangelism Committee wishes to thank the congregation for their support and efforts in the translation and edit of the Old Testament for our Juniors with God's Grace.

We also invite you to reach out to us should you have sometime and wish to participate in this amazing service of translating and or editing.

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