

MIGHTY MAGAZINE ARROWS

LIFE. GOD. TRUTH. FOR COPTIC YOUTH.

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Mary Gobran

Assistant Editor

Samuel Youssef

Contributing Editors

Justine Ekladius

Raymond Abdelmalek

Dalia Havens

Carine Iskander

Designers

Christine Eskander

Rafik Massoud

Magazine Writers

Spiritual and Patristic

Maria Mansour

J.M. Stephanos

Apologetics and Logic

George Bassilios

Reid Fanous

Counseling and Psychology

Emad Al-Komos

Elizabeth George

Mimi Ignatius

Dogma and Theology

Mounir Wassef

Mission Statement

We, the magazine staff, have a mission regarding you, the reader: to encourage you on your Christian walk and to strengthen you through articles, answers and more about God's very special plan for you.

Material Submission

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“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

With the Holy Great Fast and the anticipation of celebrating our glorious Lord's Resurrection upon us it is important to focus on the Holy Bible and our need to dutifully and routinely read it both within our family setting and individually, applying its teachings to our lives.

You cannot grow in your love for God if you do not read His Holy Word and reflect upon His Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. One must read the Holy Bible first to know its contents and commandments, to apply its positive character portrayals to their lives and to learn to avoid the pitfalls of the negative character portrayals. The Holy Bible stories of goodness and evil are to be committed to your heart and mind, to be meditated upon, and to be applied to your spiritual life.

I recommend having your own Holy Bible in your home, on your arm as you enter your beloved church, and with you for Holy Bible study each evening in family circles and individually. Reading your Holy Bible should become not only a reading time but a focused study time. It should include researching words that are unfamiliar, making comparisons between books, authors, geography, symbols, and sound proofs. Difficult verses can be researched by Rev. Fr. Tadros Malaty's commentaries on each book of the Holy Bible. If your church bookstore does not have these, please request Rev. Fr. Tadros Malaty's Holy Bible book commentaries be obtained. Two that I particularly enjoy reading are Judges and I Samuel.

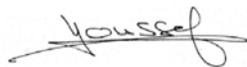
Polycarp, an ante Nicene father and disciple of the Apostle St. John, wrote, “I trust you are well versed in the sacred Scriptures.” (c. 135)

While I am not concerned exclusively with the activity of the mind as much as the spiritual nature of a youth, it is very important to know and understand the contents of the Holy Bible to understand the earthly path a youth must begin in his life.

“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15)

St. Clement of Alexandria said, “Beloved, you understand the sacred Scriptures. In fact, you understand them well. You have looked very earnestly into the prophecies of God.” (c. 96)

It is my prayer that during this introspective season of fasting and reflection that will bring about the glory of our Lord overcoming death and His inspiring Resurrection, that with a committed, sound mind and love of truth we rededicate ourselves in earnest to learn from the Holy Scriptures what will give us eternal life.

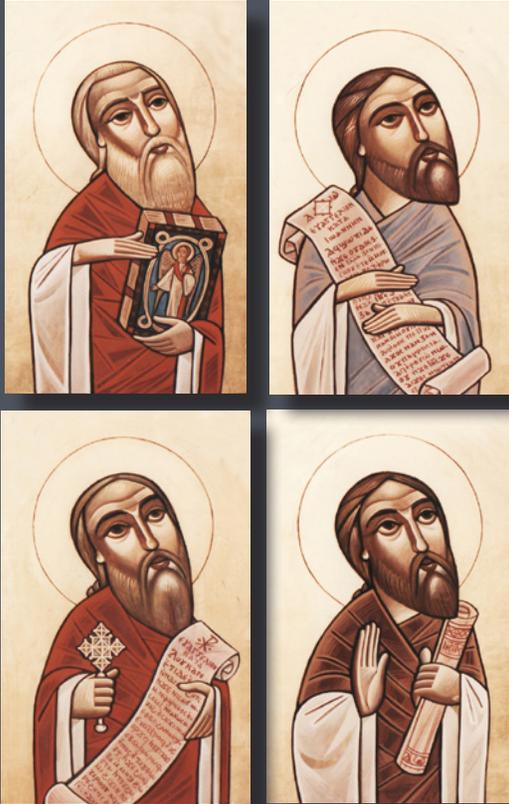


Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

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GREAT NEWS: WE HAVE LAUNCHED OUR NEW WEBSITE

Have you checked it out yet?! We have redesigned it completely. Many great things to mention, by God's grace, we can reach youth in many countries and all over the world.

There's a great feature to this site, we have a contact us tab, here you'll be able to email us (Mighty Arrows Staff), by filling out a form, this form directly sends us an email with any questions you have. You can still email us directly or using the website. Make sure to make your subject line descriptive so we could get back to you as soon as possible.

As you know with our magazine and website kicking off, we'll be needing all the help we could get. So if you have a talent, and would like to serve with us, please email us.

For His Glory,
Mighty Arrows Editor

Is this what your Bible looks like?!

A recent statistic shows that in America, in the average Christian household there's an average of FIVE BIBLES and out of those, only FIVE CHAPTERS are read each year. Scary huh ...

This issue is all about the Bible, we'll talk about its history, reliability, power but if you don't have a personal relationship with Christ, if you never pick it up and read it... you will never be Changed...

That's why we wanted our final article in this issue to be about Quiet Time with God...

Come meet the Lord, the Savior, the Spirit through His Living and Powerful Words...

May this issue be a blessing to you and to all who are touched by it...



LET US KNOW

Let us know what you think about articles from our previous issues

BY MAIL:

Mighty Arrows' inbox
P.O. Box 1005
Colleyville, TX 76034

BY E-MAIL:

mightyarrowsmagazine@suscopts.org
subject: inbox

It was Tuesday late afternoon when Michael looked out the kitchen window and noticed the heavy clouds. He just finished dinner and was thinking of tackling that paper he has been putting off for sometime. This time, as an incentive to finish the paper, he thought of rewarding himself by going to the neighborhood bookstore. He frequented this bookstore and enjoyed scanning the new published titles that give him a quick overview of what people are thinking about or concerned with at the time. He used to check out the bestseller lists of non-fiction put out by major newspapers. Lately he has been wondering if there

was a best selling book for the year? How about for the decade? Why stop there, how about the best selling book ever? If there is such thing wouldn't it be a great experience to get his hands on it, go through it, and enjoy exploring it. Yet, there is that paper! He reminded himself of the self-control exercise he has been focusing on for a while now and said to himself "Here's my chance to practice: Finish the first draft of the paper, THEN go to the bookstore and explore these "best book" notions".

He walked to his room, sat at his desk, closed his eyes, and prayed quietly as he usually does. He asked his Best Friend

Jesus to complement his efforts to produce a paper that truly expresses his thoughts and what he learned thus far; took a deep breath and got started. He finished the draft in about forty-five minutes, gave it a quick reading, fixed a couple of obvious syntax errors, and decided to leave it till he gets back from the bookstore for a final fine-tune. He headed to the bookstore.

At the bookstore he was pleasantly surprised to find it less busy than usual, as he expected given the weather. This would allow him a more relaxed conversation with the Advisor at the Customer Service

Unlike Anything

Else

By Reid Fanous



desk. He headed to the thirty something Advisor who smiled at him with the usual question: "Can I help you?" His tone of voice was encouraging enough for Michael to say: "Um, I was just wondering if you carry the ..." he bit his tongue before continuing "... best selling book ever? If there were such thing, I mean!" The Advisor looked him straight in the eye, took a moment or two, which felt like a year or two to Michael, to discern the background where this request is coming from, then quietly said: "Yes! Would you like to see it?" Michael couldn't hide his eagerness: "Yes please". As the Advisor exited the booth, to guide Michael to where "such" book is located, he said "With over six billion copies sold worldwide, currently going at the rate of 100 million copies sold or given away every year, and translated to more than 2,400 languages covering about 95% of the world's population, this book is not only a best seller, but certainly unlike anything else". Upon hearing this Michael's excitement was rapidly building up: First his notion of the best selling book ever was not that outlandish as he feared, and more importantly he was about to get his hands on such book.

He followed the Advisor through the Literature isles while the Advisor continued: "the Book may be described as a great story, great literary achievement, and great history book." "Wow! Makes me wonder who is the author?" Michael was getting curious. By this time they were passing through the Science and Engineering isles, the Advisor stopped, looked at Michael and said: "Get this: While the Book reads as if it were written by one person, the Author did not physically write the book, but He rather let about forty of His close and dedicated friends and servants write it. Yet, a good number of these writers didn't personally meet each other. Indeed, most of them were not even alive during the same time period." Then he proceeded on to the Astronomy section with Michael in toe. Michael was getting suspicious, either the Advisor is pulling his leg, and the whole notion was just a mirage; or his growing guess about the identity of this Book is true. Meanwhile, he became aware of another person that has been following them through the isles, but was staying on the other side of the bookracks, as if he

/ she didn't want to be seen. At the next isle intersection, where the Biography rack ended, but before proceeding on to World History, Michael made a sudden stop, the Advisor traced a few steps back toward Michael who asked, with a touch of smugness in his voice: "How big is this book?" "Well, it really is comprised of 66 books, totaling about 800,000 words, give or take" came the answer. "Gee, how long did it take to write all this?" Michael exclaimed. The Advisor ran

"Um, I was just wondering if you carry the *best selling book ever*? If there were such thing, I mean!"

his fingers through his hair, dropped his lower lip, looked up and quietly said: "little over 1,500 years!" At this point, with twinkling eyes Michael jumped with assured self-satisfaction and said: "I knew it! You've all along been talking about the B..." but before finishing his sentence, the person he was suspecting of following them appeared from behind the Biography rack they were standing at, and turned out to be a she. With a steady and bashful voice, she said: "I'm sorry if I appear like eavesdropping, but I over heard a good part of the tail end of y'all conversation, and was interested if the book is the one I had in mind. So I followed you but with one isle in-between us so I wouldn't interrupt you. Then the Advisor's voice grew familiar to me, and when I realized that it is of Mr. Semaan, my Sunday school teacher .." "Sarah?" The Advisor wondered, "good to see you here. Are you looking for a particular book?" "That's alright Mr. Semaan, would you please continue showing ..". She looked at Michael, whose mouth and eyes were wide open; but then he collected himself and said: "Well, my name is Michael, and I was always wondering about what is the best book ever? But now I know, it is the Bible." Sarah said: "Turned out to be the right question to the right person! Mr. Semaan can tell you a whole lot more about the Bible." Mr. Semaan, feeling the temptation to indulge in self-importance, gently said: "Well, I can see a line forming at the Customer Service booth of other patrons who seem to want to inquire about a thing or two. But now since Sarah is here, would you be kind enough to show Michael the Bibles' section, and use the

opportunity to review the facts you learned in our last Sundays' class about the Bible?" With these words he nodded at Michael, wished him good shopping, and turning to Sarah, he said: "See you this coming Sunday at Church, hopefully by then the weather would have cleared out to hold the class outdoors like you guys suggested a couple of Sundays ago." With those words, he headed back to his booth.

Sarah led the way, with Michael following and saying: "I hope I wasn't too slow coming to grips with what Book Mr Semaan was referring to." Sarah turned back and said, while she was still moving forward: "Not at all. As a matter of fact, Mr. Semaan

has a knack for approaching things from different and very interesting angles. That, can some times throw people off. It was a coincidence that we were talking about the Bible in our last Sunday school class. He observed that in spite of the extremely wide circulation of the Bible, the average American has four Bibles at home; yet less than half the population can name the first book of the Bible! Let's see, is it..." Michael was quick to say, "Genesis!" "Alright, looks like you belong to the knowledgeable half. Also, another tidbit that grabbed my attention goes something like this: well over half the population cannot name half of the Ten Commandments" Sarah quipped.

By that time they arrived at the Bibles' section and Sarah said: "surely you already have at least one at home?" Michael nodded in agreement, then said: "I'm sure you've been reading the Bible, but do you understand it all?" Sarah said: "You're right as far as the reading part, actually I read it every day, twice; and no I do not understand all I'm reading, but it really doesn't bother me at all." Michael asked: "How come?" then he suggested if they go for a cup of coffee at the bookstore coffee shop. Sarah said: "Sure, but I have to leave soon to prepare for a quiz tomorrow". Michael sighed "Tell me about it! I got a paper myself due tomorrow and I MUST fine-tune it before the end of the day - How is 7:00 sharp to hit the door out?" Sarah agreed, and as they headed to the coffee shop, she set her cell phone alarm to 7:00 PM. Sipping their coffees, Sarah continued: "As for understanding it all, I guess this is one of

the miraculous features of the Bible: I feel it addressing us in a unique way tailored to each of the practically unlimited phases of life we go through: Be it childhood, adolescence, youth, full adulthood, highly educated, or less educated, rich or poor, in good or poor health, and so forth. So far I read the Bible at least twice over, and every time I understand quite a bit more than the time before. It's like growing up with the Bible in a sense, that each reading takes me a step or two up where I can see more, and dig deeper. I became very comfortable with the notion that what I don't understand is simply due to a lower degree of maturity on my part than that required to understand. Actually, that's where faith comes in and supports my inadequate spiritual maturity. How often do you read the Bible?" Michael was comfortable now and said: "Actually I read it every day, twice. Got to admit, that if for some reason I don't read, and the reason is typically just being lazy, I go through the day with a real sense of loss, or hunger." Sarah commented: "Didn't Jesus say in Matthew 4:4: 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God', and since the Bible is truly God's word, then you just gave a live illustration of this verse". Michael continued: "Yea, it truly is food, and just as David said "your words are sweeter than honey". It is like we listen to our Father through reading the Bible, then we talk to Him through our prayers. It is very interesting to me that within the covers of the Bible we find drama, justice, wisdom, management, architecture, finance, art, music, poetry, and most importantly God's revelation of Himself to us. With the Nativity just around the corner, did you know that the Old Testament contains over one thousand

hints and pointers to the coming of the Messiah? There are 61 major promises about the Nativity alone: Where will He be born? The manner of His birth, the descent into Egypt, the massacre of children, the wise men, from the house of David, tribe of Judah, family of Jesse, and lots and lots of other shadows and hints". Sarah said: "This is new to me - I really hope you'd be able to come to our Sunday school one time – you sound like you have some cool ideas and concepts to share with others". Before Michael could answer, Sarah's phone chimed announcing it is 7:00 PM, he smiled and said: "It's time to run, thanks for the invite, I would love to attend one of Mr. Semaan's classes. What's the web site of your church?"

Collected data / sources

Bible

Matt 4:4

Ps 119:103

Knowing the Bible 101: A Guide to God's Word in Plain Language – Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz

Bestselling book in the world

Since invention of the press in 1455 > 6 B copes of the Bible have been printed in > 2000 languages

Great story

Great literary achievement

Great history book

Great book of prophecy

Great holy book

It is God's revelation of Himself to people

Hebrew (mostly OT) & Greek (mostly NT)

66 books

Written by about 40 different authors

Stories and Storytellers - The Economist 12/13/07

Written down over a period of > 1,500 years

Entire history of God's relationship with man and creation

The Battle of the Books - The Economist 12/22/07

Almost 800,000 words

100 million copies are sold or given away every year

50 million Bibles have been published in atheist China

There are 900 English translations of the Bible

Gideon's International gives away a Bible every second

2,426 languages covering 95% of the World's population

You can read it on your "Psalm Pilot", mobile phones, MP3, iPods, then eBible

Average American has 4 Bibles at home

Yet: < 1/2 Americans can name the first book of the Bible (can you?)

Only 1/3 know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount

1/4 do not know what is celebrated at Easter

60% cannot name 1/2 the ten commandments

Notes collected from a TV Sermon by Dr. Edwin Young, of Second Baptist Church of Houston on Sunday before Christmas 2007

OT has > 1000 hints and promises about the Messiah's coming – some are obscure

300 Clear promises

61 major promises about the Nativity alone: Where will he be born? Manner of his birth? Descent into Egypt, Massacre of children, wise men, House of David, Tribe of Judah, Family of Jesse, - Shadows and hints

DIOCESE BOOKSTORE www.suscopts.org/diocese/bookstore

+ Melodies Book

English and Arabic; Coptic, when applicable
Leather Hardcover

This book contains all the melodies chanted during the distributions of the Holy Mysteries at the end of the Divine Liturgy. This is the first comprehensive translation for all the Melodies (English/Arabic and Coptic when applicable) in order to help the believers participate in praising the Lord during the Distribution. Also included in this book are the Melodies for the whole liturgical year and those that are chanted in the veneration of the saints. A thorough review of the melodies in the book was done to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

+ The Divine Liturgies of Saints Basil, Gregory, and Cyril - Second Edition

Liturgical Book - English, Arabic, Coptic
Leather Hardcover

This second edition of the Divine Liturgies of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria is the culmination of efforts that began with His Grace Bishop Serapion and His Grace Bishop Youssef. This book of three Divine Liturgies is presented in Coptic, English, and Arabic. This new edition contains a section for hymns and doxologies along with additional fractions.



Way, Truth & Life High School BOYS



Happenings

Way, Truth & Life High School GIRLS

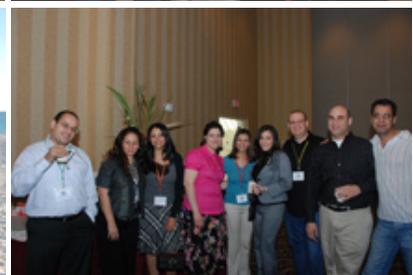


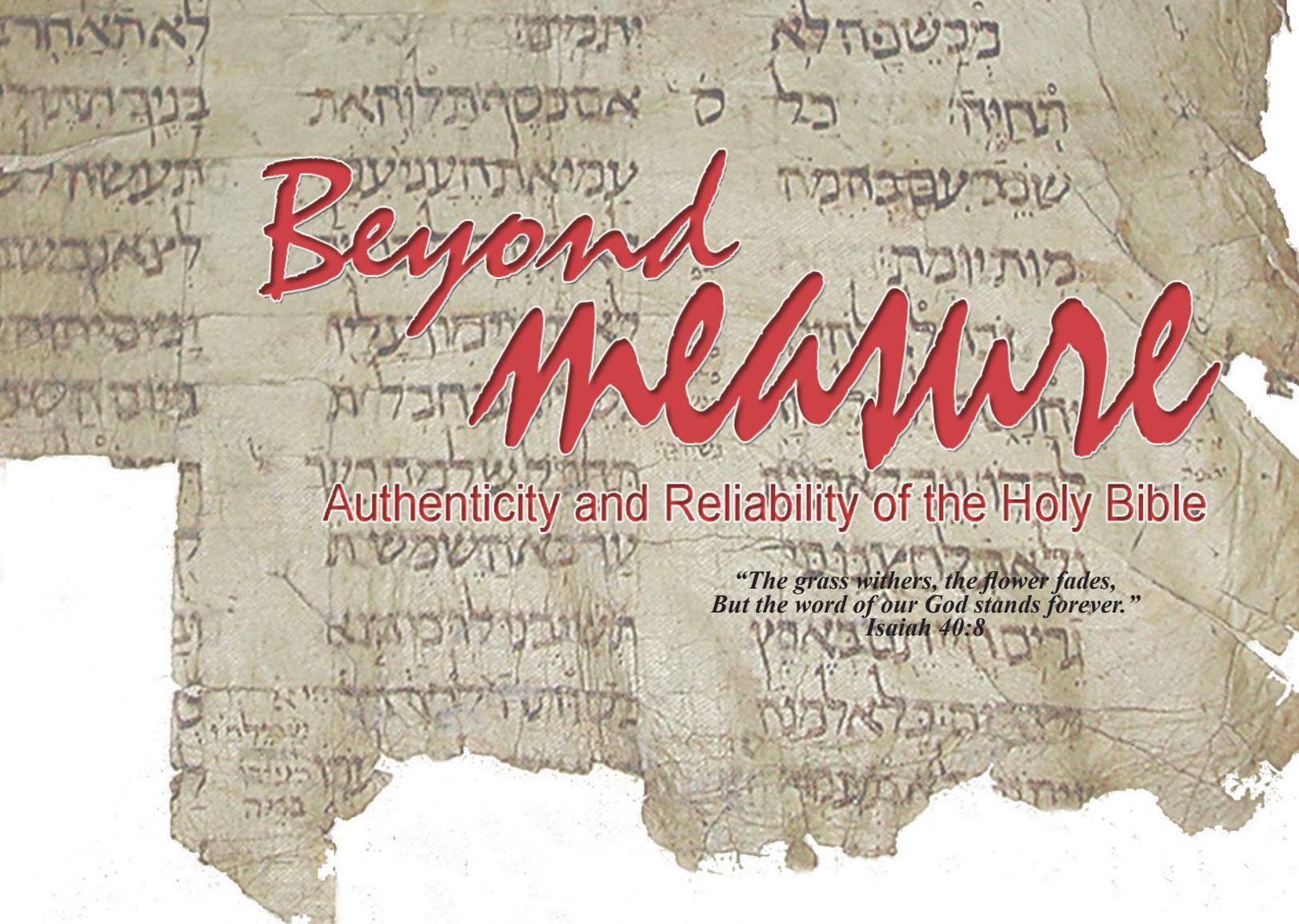


John 8:32

2008 Water, Wind & Faith
Convention

COLLEGE YOUTH





Beyond measure

Authenticity and Reliability of the Holy Bible

*“The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”
Isaiah 40:8*

A book must meet certain requirements to be considered to have come from an all-powerful and all-knowing God. **First**, it must be transmitted to us accurately from the time it was originally written so that we may have an exact representation of what God said and did. **Second**, it must be correct when it deals with historical events. **Finally**, it must be without any scientific absurdities, which would indicate that it came by human authorship. The Holy Bible meets these requirements and many more.

I PROOF OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLY BIBLE

The Holy Bible is unique in its **continuity**. It was written over a 1600 year span, over 40 generations. It was written by more than 40 authors from every walk of life (kings, peasants,

philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, physicians, etc...). It was written in different places ranging from the Sinai desert to the prison walls of St. Paul. It was written during times of peace and war and in moods of joy and sorrow. It was written on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) and in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Finally, it is a book whose subject matter includes hundreds of topics. Despite these variables, the Holy Bible speaks with extraordinary harmony and continuity about one unfolding story: God’s redemption of the human race.

Let us compare the first three chapters of the Holy Book of Genesis and the last three chapters of the Holy Book of Revelation:

- In Genesis we read, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* (Genesis 1:1) and in Revelation we discover *“a new heaven*

and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

- In the second chapter of Genesis we learn about the first wedding and chapter 19 of *Revelation* mentions the wedding between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Church.

- The third chapter of Genesis tells about the temporary victory of the serpent (Satan), and Revelation describes the eternal defeat of *“the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”* (Revelation 20:2–10).

- *Genesis 3* tells about sin that separates us from God, and *Revelation 21* announces our redemption, *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (Revelation 21:3).

- *Genesis 3* also shows God preventing Adam from coming near the tree of life in contrast to *Revelation 22* *“the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every*

month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2).

The Holy Bible is unique in its **survival**. Being written on material that perishes and having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press did not diminish the style, correctness, or existence of the Holy Bible. Compared with other ancient writings, the Holy Bible has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined. The Holy Bible survived not only time, but also active persecution, both political and intellectual. The Holy Bible survives despite daily criticism. No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. No other book has been subject to such mass attacks. Nevertheless, it remains the book most read, most quoted, most referenced, most circulated, most translated, and most cherished until this very day. If this criticism were ever effective in the past, it would have rendered the Holy Bible unworthy of the critics’ attention today. The fact that critics continue to target the Holy Bible proves that past criticism did nothing less than strengthen the belief in the Holy Bible.

THE PROOF OF TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

The Old Testament Manuscripts:

There are fewer Old Testament manuscripts in existence today than New Testament manuscripts, and those that do exist do not date very close to the time of the author’s original document. The Old Testament was written sometime between 1500-400 BC. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest complete Old Testament manuscript was dated about 900 AD. This made a time gap of 1300 years between when the Old Testament was completed (around 400 BC) and the earliest manuscript (around 900 AD).

One might be concerned with the lack of very old copies of the Old Testament text, until one considers the nature of the copying technique that was used by the Hebrew scribes:

1. A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals prepared by a Jew.

2. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals.

3. Every skin (page) must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex.

4. The length of each column must not extend less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters.

5. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words were written without a line, it is worthless.

6. The ink should be black and prepared according to a definite recipe.

7. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate.

8. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him.

9. The copyist must wash his whole body and sit in full Jewish dress.

10. He must not begin to write the name of God (YHWH) with a pen newly dipped in ink and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him. (Samuel Davidson, *Hebrew Text of the Old Testament*, 2d Ed., Samuel Bagster & Son 1859).

The Massorettes (AD 500-900, from *massora*, ‘tradition’) took upon themselves the tedious and time consuming job of editing and standardizing the Hebrew text and adding vowel points that would insure proper pronunciation (the earliest Hebrew was written using only consonants, correct pronunciation was assumed). The text that the Massorettes produced is called the ‘Massoretic’ text. This is the standard Hebrew text that is used today. The Hebrew scribes had elaborate systems for transcribing that gave them enough confidence in the new copies that the original copy actually became **less** valuable with age!

“The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also the reason for the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the

Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all are equally correct, age gave no advantage to a manuscript; on the contrary, age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use. Thus, far from regarding an older copy of the Scriptures as more valuable, the Jewish habit has been to prefer the newer, as being the most perfect and free from damage.” (Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* – Harper & Brothers, 1941.P.43). Therefore, the very absence of very old Hebrew manuscripts confirms the reliability of the copies that exist today, once the rules and methods of the copyists are considered.

The Dead Sea Scrolls:

The discovery of the ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ at Qumran has been hailed as the most important archeological discovery of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a commune of monastic farmers lived in the valley from about 150 BC to 70 AD. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their cherished leather scrolls in jars and hid them in caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea. This discovery provided an incredible proof for the authenticity and reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts. One of the complete books found in Qumran cave 1 were two copies of Isaiah. These books were more than a thousand years older than the oldest dated manuscripts previously known. Nevertheless, they proved to be word for word identical to the standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.

The New Testament Manuscripts:

We have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the ‘Iliad’ by Homer is second with only 643 surviving manuscripts. Other books such as the writings of Plato and

Herodotus have no more than 20 surviving manuscripts. (Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments*, Rev. Ed. Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1963)

Besides the number of manuscripts that survived, the New Testament is unique in that the time span between its composition and the date of the earliest manuscript is incredibly short compared to other classical works. This time span is 100-125 years for most of the New Testament. This is to be compared with spans of 1000-1600 years for the classical works of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Herodotus, and many more. The reliability of the New Testament manuscripts is also supported by the writings of the early Church fathers. Suppose that the New Testament had been destroyed, and every copy of it lost by the end of the third century (that's 100 years before the Synod of Hippo canonized the New Testament), how much of it could be collected from the writings of the fathers of the second and third centuries? The answer is stunning! **All of it except for 11 verses.** (Leah, C. *Our Bible: How we got it*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1998)

III THE PROOF OF FULFILLED PROPHECIES

The Messianic Prophecies:

These are the prophecies about the anointed one ('Messiah' in Hebrew) who was to arrive in the future. The number of these prophecies is **more than 300**, all of them very accurately fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as an example we mention *Psalm 22* in which King David describes the crucifixion of the Lord almost 1000 years before it happened, he said:

- "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (*Psalm 22:1*)
- "All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver, since He delights in Him!" (*Psalm 22:7-8*)
- "My tongue clings to my Jaws" (*Psalm 22:15*)
- "They pierced My hands and My feet" (*Psalm 22:16*)
- "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." (*Psalm 22:18*)

Prophecies dealing with nations:

Archeologists have evidence that these prophecies were written down many years before they were fulfilled; proving that they were not falsified documents of prophecies that came true. Actually, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls stopped the majority of that talk. Although an entire lecture is needed to cover this part we will provide only one example that is relevant to the majority of us: Everyone of you has proof of a fulfilled prophecy on his/her ID card; the fact that your last name is not 'Mohamed', or any other Muslim name, is a fulfillment of the word of Isaiah about Egypt, "*In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border... Then The Lord will be known to Egypt and the Egyptians will know the Lord*" (*Isaiah 19:19-21*).

IV THE PROOF OF PEOPLE LIVING AT THE TIME OF OUR LORD:

A special proof exists for the New Testament, since Christians were strongly persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman government. If the New Testament writings were false, these two groups would have produced a great deal of evidence to stop the growth of this 'sect'. None exists. Further, the New Testament writings circulated during the lifetimes of thousands of people who had actually seen our Lord's miracles and other historic events. No one ever refuted the New Testament writings as fairy tales.

V THE PROOF OF HISTORIANS

Secular history supports the Holy Bible. For example, in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 3, paragraph 3 the famous historian Flavius Josephus writes: "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us, had condemned him to the

cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

VI THE PROOF OF SCIENCE

The Holy Bible is not a science book, yet it is scientifically accurate. In order to get an idea about the difference between the Holy Bible and science books you may want to try to read a 50-year-old scientific book. Science is like a baby that is still growing but the Holy Bible is like a distinguished elder full of knowledge and wisdom. The following are statements that are consistent with known scientific facts. Many of them were listed in the Holy Bible hundreds or even thousands of years before being recorded elsewhere.

Statement consistent with Geology:

- "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth" (*Isaiah 40:22*), the Holy Book of Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Aristotle suggested that the earth might be a sphere.

Statements consistent with Hydrology:

- "He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries." (*Psalm 135:7*)
- "When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: 'And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasuries'" (*Jeremiah 10:13*)

In these verses you can see several phases of the hydrologic cycle – the worldwide process of evaporation, circulation, condensation with electrical discharge and precipitation.

- The Holy Bible also describes the re-circulation of water: "*All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again*" (*Ecclesiastes 1:7*)

Statements consistent with Anthropology:

- "They were driven out from among men, they shouted at them as at a thief. They had to live in the clefts of the

valleys, in caves of the earth and the rocks.” (Job 30:5-6)

The Holy Bible is describing cave men; note that these were not apemen, but descendants of those who scattered from Babel. They were driven from the community by those tribes who competed successfully for the more desirable regions of the earth. Then for some reason they deteriorated mentally, physically, and spiritually. If you go into a bad part of your town you may see this concept in action today.

Statements consistent with Astronomy:

• “He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing.” (Job 26:7)

Here the Holy Bible describes the suspension of the earth in space during a time where scientists believed the earth rested between the horns of a great animal.

Statements consistent with Psychology:

• “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22)
It is a proven fact that a person’s mental and spiritual health is strongly correlated with physical health.

Statements consistent with Biology:

The phrase “according to its kind” occurs repeatedly in the Holy Book of Genesis, stressing the reproductive integrity of each kind of animal and

plant. Today we know this occurs because all of these reproductive systems are programmed by their genetic codes.

Statements consistent with Physics:

“You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes they will all grow old like a garment” (Psalm 102:25-26). The words of King David describe the concept of Entropy.

* This article is adapted from ‘Our Christian Faith; Certain and Truthful’ by Dr. Sameh Helmy, and ‘The Book We Call The Bible’ from CoptNet



By His Grace Bishop Serapion

On September 12th, our Church celebrates the Coptic New Year (Feast of the Nairouz), which is the calendar of the Church. The Coptic New Year is the calendar of the martyrs. Our Church offered thousands of martyrs. Since the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian was one of the harshest periods of persecution, especially in Egypt, the Church chose the year 284 AD, which is the beginning of the reign of Diocletian, to mark the beginning of the Coptic calendar. This year, September 12th, marks the beginning of the year 1716 in the Coptic Calendar or the Calendar of Martyrs.

Amongst the martyrs during the reign of Diocletian (284-305) and his contemporary ruler, Maximian (286-305), we chose the martyrs of the Theban Legion and their leader, Saint Maurice.

The Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion:

Saint Maurice is a Coptic saint from Thebes (Luxor). He enlisted in the Roman army and was gradually promoted until he became the leader of a legion consisting of approximately 6600 soldiers in Thebes, thus the name “Theban

Legion”. During the reign of Emperor Maximian (286-305), the Roman Emperor for the Western Empire, the Berbers invaded the western borders of the Roman Empire. Maximian asked for the help of Emperor Diocletian, the Roman Emperor for the Eastern Empire. He sent the Theban Legion headed by Maurice to restrain the revolt of the Berbers.

The legion camped all along the defense line on the western border of the empire, from Germany in the North to Italy in the South, passing through Switzerland. The defense center of the legion was in the area of Agauman, which lies close to the city of Lausanne in Switzerland. When the legion and its leader where asked to offer sacrifices to the idols and worship them, they refused and publicly confessed their Christian faith. Emperor Maximian was disturbed by the attitude of the legion’s leader and its members.

He came and camped close to the legion’s leadership center and ordered the torture and killing of one tenth of the legion’s members, thinking that the rest would be afraid. But Saint Maurice encouraged the soldiers to keep their Christian faith. As a result, the emperor ordered another tenth to be tortured and killed. During their torture, many miracles occurred and others started

confessing their belief in Christ. Saint Maurice sent a letter to the emperor declaring in it the legion's loyalty to him, but at the same time their strict observance of their Christian faith. He explained that they were not rebelling against him as emperor. As a proof of this, the members of the legion gave up their weapons.

The emperor was angered by Saint Maurice's perseverance and the loyalty of the legion's members to their Christian faith. He ordered that Saint Maurice be tortured and then killed, along with the members of the legion. Thus Saint Maurice and members of his legion were martyred in Lausanne and along the defense line which extended from Germany to Italy.

The Church celebrates the martyrdom of Saint Maurice on Toot 25th. In the current edition of the Coptic Synxarium, the life of Saint Maurice is not mentioned. However, I presented a request to the Holy Synod's Committee of Rites, which reviews the Synxarium, to add the life story of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion, as well as the life story of Saint Verena. They agreed to the request, and their life stories will be included in the new edition of the Coptic Synxarium.

Beneficial Lessons to be learned from the Life of Saint Maurice:

1. Saint Maurice offers a living example of one who is faithful to Christ until the end. Like all martyrs, Saint Maurice preferred to be tortured until death rather than deny Christ and worship the idols.

2. Although the Roman Emperor was not Christian, yet Saint Maurice and the soldiers of the Theban Legion were loyal

to him; they were faithful and fought courageously against the enemies of the emperor and the empire. However, when a conflict arose between their loyalty to Christ and their loyalty to the emperor, the choice was very clear for them, and they acted without hesitation. Therefore, the Christian person is patriotic to his country and its rulers, so long as this is not in conflict with his Christian faith. When a conflict arises, then God ought to be obeyed more than man.

3. Saint Maurice and members of the Theban Legion were born in Egypt and lived there. Yet, they were martyred in Europe, which was pagan at that time. The stories of their torture and martyrdom caused many to believe in Christ. Thus the presence of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion was not only for a military duty, but actually they became missionaries by the way they lived, how they kept their Christian faith, and finally martyred. They give an example of missionary work in a foreign land.

We, too, can learn from this example. The Copts immigrated for economic, social, family reasons, or as a result of certain pressures they faced. But none came for missionary work. However, this doesn't preclude the Copts from witnessing to Christ in the society in which they live. Missionary work can be accomplished by living in purity and holiness and being faithful to Christ even to death.

The life of Saint Maurice reminds us of our responsibility to witness to Christ in the society, in which we live. Saint Maurice's missionary work depended on:

1. Complete understanding of the value of his Christian faith, to which he sacrificed everything, even his life.
2. His willingness to endure hardship

and torture, even to death.

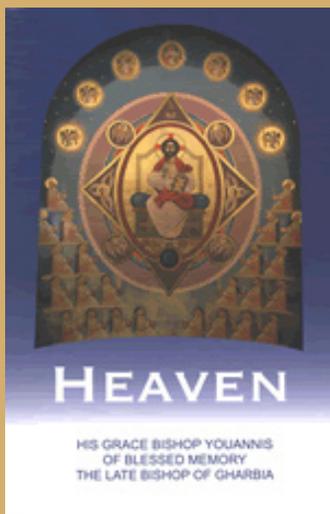
3. His pure life.

Witnessing to Christ requires understanding the Christian faith. The deeper we comprehend our Christian faith, the happier we become and the more proud we are of our faith. On the other hand, those who have a superficial understanding of the Christian faith find it easy to leave the true faith. The true understanding of the faith is actually one that is based on a life of purity and holiness. The true missionary person is the one who lives in holiness. Witnessing to Christ requires paying a price, and the one who witnesses must be ready to pay the price in full.

Whereas missionary work requires effort and sacrifice even to the point of shedding one's blood, evangelism, which is accompanied by advertisement and praise, is easy and is deceiving to the soul. It makes the beginners in spiritual life think that they are evangelists like Saint Paul, when in fact they only carry the name of a missionary.

Saint Maurice and the members of the legion witnessed to Christ by their loyalty to their faith and by enduring torture and death. There weren't any newspapers to write about them, nor were their pictures taken or movies made about them. Yet, their missionary work was effective. That is why many believed in Christ. Despite the elapse of hundred of years, their life story still gives forth fruit. On the other hand, evangelism, which is media-oriented, gives forth-minimal fruit and does not last long.

May our Lord grants us the ability to follow the example of Saint Maurice in witnessing to Christ in a sacrificial way, which is accompanied by true knowledge.



Through the blessings of our Lord, we are happy to announce the publication of the English translation, **Heaven by H.G. Bishop Youannis, the late bishop of Gharbia.** Under the joint efforts of the Diocese of the Southern United States and the Diocese of Los Angeles and Southern California, this book is now available.

Cost: \$10 (plus shipping & handling)

Please place an order by visiting
www.suscopts.org/diocese/bookstore/

PRAYER WARRIOR

Many times my heart is troubled
And my soul is weak within
My worries are often doubled
And my world is caving in

I turn to a friend
The world is still hard to bear
I see a trend
There is no comfort there

I even work harder
Success supposedly causes happiness
And yet I only feel sadder
I still feel only emptiness

I pray I am in need
I have searched all around
God's light I seek indeed
His love is so profound

In prayer I find comfort
God's always there for me
He takes away the hurt
And listens lovingly

I was once blind
But now I see
The sin in me I bind
Because God has set me free

Forever my heart is His
My life to Him I owe
To Him I promise this
To sin I will not go.

Coptic 100 %

Prayer before Studying

Most blessed Lord, send the grace of Your Holy Spirit on me to strengthen me that I may learn well the subject I am about to study and by it become a better person for Your glory, the comfort of my family and the benefit of Your Church and our Nation. Amen

Christ, the true light, who enlightens and sanctifies every person coming into the world, let the light of Your countenance shine upon me (us) that I (we) may see Your unapproachable light; and guide my (our) steps in the way of Your commandments, through the intercessions of Your all-holy Mother and of all the Saints. Amen.

Prayer after Studying

I thank You, Lord our God, that again on this occasion You have opened my eyes to the light of Your wisdom. You have gladdened my heart with the knowledge of truth. I entreat You, Lord, help me always to do Your will.

Bless my soul and body, my words and deeds.

Enable me to grow in grace, virtue and good habits, that Your name may be glorified, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Coptic Agepya



THE CONSECRATION OF SAINT ABANOUB COPTIC CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF EULESS, TEXAS on February 3rd



Dallas Morning News (edited for length)- Three years after its founding, St. Abanoub Coptic Orthodox Church received the blessing of the church's patriarch on Sunday. Church consecration is a longstanding tradition of the Christian Coptic Orthodox Church, which was founded in Egypt more than 19 centuries ago.

Pope Shenouda III journeyed from Egypt to lead the service, which was attended by an overflow crowd and included prayers for "the peace, the fathers and the assemblies." It culminated with the consecration of the church's altar. "Send down upon us the grace of your holy spirit," the 84-year-old pope prayed as he and four bishops rubbed holy oil onto the altar's wooden surface.

A flurry of excitement erupted from the packed house as Pope Shenouda circled the room's outer walls, blessing the church's icons. The Coptic community has churches in every state, including two other North Texas congregations in Colleyville and Richardson. Officials at the Eules church, which is led by the Rev. Ghobrial Samaan and counts 184 families in its membership.

Eules Mayor Mary Libb and Police Chief Michael Brown attended the consecration, which alternated between English and Arabic. "It's just awe-inspiring," Ms. Libb said. "I think it's a treasure to see something like this happen." After the official service ended, Pope Shenouda sat down to address the congregants. His



humorous side bubbled to the surface almost immediately. "Now we are crowded into the church, I want it every Sunday to be the same," he said, evoking laughter from the congregants, many of whom came from other churches for Sunday's special service. He gently reminded Father Samaan to get to know all the families in the church, and he urged parents to be good teachers for their children. "When I ask children, 'What did you take in Sunday school?' They always tell me the same three lessons," Pope Shenouda said. "The 'I don't know' lesson, the 'I don't remember' lesson and the 'I didn't attend' lesson."

Turning to the women, who were seated on one side of the sanctuary, he told them it's their job to ensure the children are learning their lessons. When the women pointed at the men across the aisle, it was the pope's turn to laugh. "Transferring sins from one to the other is not accepted," he said, eyes twinkling.

As the time to leave drew near, Pope Shenouda stood and bestowed a final blessing on the gathering. "I wish for you a blessed life abiding in the Lord, and also a happy life."

Through the prayers and intercessions of Saint Abanoub, Lord keep the life of our honored father, the high priest Papa Abba Shenouda III.



Photographs provided by local church members and newspaper's photographer

Dear Mary,

I didn't grow up in a religious home so things like fasting, agpeya, and going to church every Sunday were not the norm in my household. God has used a very dear friend to bring me closer to Him through His word. I'm finding myself however, questioning a lot more. The biggest conflict lately has been between tradition and doctrine. I believe in the doctrine but didn't grow up in the traditions. I'm hesitant as to what I should and should not do. My latest struggle is fasting. Is it tradition or doctrine? If the purpose is to get closer to God, why is it mandatory? Why does the church go so far as to regulate what can and cannot be eaten, which days, and how long one should abstain? Shouldn't it be up to the person's own choice and sacrifice?

Hesitant

Dear Hesitant,

In addressing your last question first, I'd like you to consider the following analogy. You belong to a sports team in which every athlete has submitted himself or herself to the training regime with understanding and heart has gone on to win. If your goal is to win, do you submit to the training? Should you have the right to decide what you do and when? What if you decide not to follow the sleep schedule the coach has prescribed and come to practice tired? Will that not affect the entire team? But you should be able to choose your own plan, shouldn't you? If this is not acceptable for a sports team, how much more unacceptable is this in the Body of Christ?

Your question of doctrine v. Tradition is also a good one and should be answered for those who grew up in the Church as well as those who did not. Doctrine are those teachings given by God Himself and passed down to us via the practice of the Apostles. Ideally, doctrine and Tradition are one and the same; where the doctrine is the Tradition. I think the "tradition" that you are referring to is how we practice the doctrine. Practices can differ from place to place, doctrine cannot. For example, some churches pray in Coptic, some in Arabic, some in English, and some in Swahili. While the language is different, the theology is the same. In terms of fasting (abstaining from food), we see this from the very beginning in the book of Genesis. Adam was told to fast from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The prophets fasted (David, Daniel, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, Ezra, Anna, Moses, and Isaiah), God's people fasted (Ester, Ezra, Nehemiah, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Zechariah.), Gentiles fasted (the Ninevites, Cornelius), and the Apostles fasted. Also, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus said, "When you fast. . ." (6:16-17) not if you fast. Fasting is doctrine although the Lord did not refer to specific days, foods or complete abstention from foods because they were known to the people of that time. Christ refers to fasting as a sincere attitude of deep humility and repentance, with discipline and vigorous uprightness, all to be held in secrecy (Matt. 6:18). This principle of secrecy is to be applied not only to fasting, but also to its accompanying prayer and almsgiving (Matt. 6:4, 6). Originally, the Jews fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, but the Apostles changed this for us as we read in the Didache (Teaching of the 12): But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday).

Fasting is not merely about food. It is wise to heed the words of St. John Chrysostom as he warns: "It is possible for one who fasts not to be rewarded for his fasting. How? When indeed we abstain from foods, but do not abstain from iniquities - when we do not eat meat, but gnaw to pieces the homes of the poor - when we do not become drunkards with wine, but we become drunkards with evil pleasures; when we abstain all the day, but all the night we spend in unchastened shows. Then what is the benefit of abstention from foods, when on the one hand you deprive your body of a selected food, but on the other offer yourself unlawful food?" You are right in saying that the goal of fasting (like prayer and other spiritual disciplines) is communion with God. But this is as training that we put ourselves under because we chose to be members of God's family. We are following the footsteps of those before us who taught us the benefits of fasting, which are available for all faithful practicers. Through fasting, we

- ♦ Gain mastery over the flesh by being liberated from dependence on the things of the world.
- ♦ Allow our spirit to grow (by denying the flesh and feeding the spirit)
- ♦ Develop the habit of saying "NO" to our earthly desires in order to have discipline and self control. It will strengthen our willpower against temptations.
- ♦ Control "gluttony" that has become a way of life for most people.
- ♦ Are free to concentrate more on prayer and spiritual activities (prayer, reading, contemplation)
- ♦ Eliminate those things which distract us and cause us to be detached from our spirit—in essence, hitting the "pause" button of earthly life
- ♦ Are more attuned to the Holy Spirit to reveal our true spiritual condition, resulting in repentance and transformation.

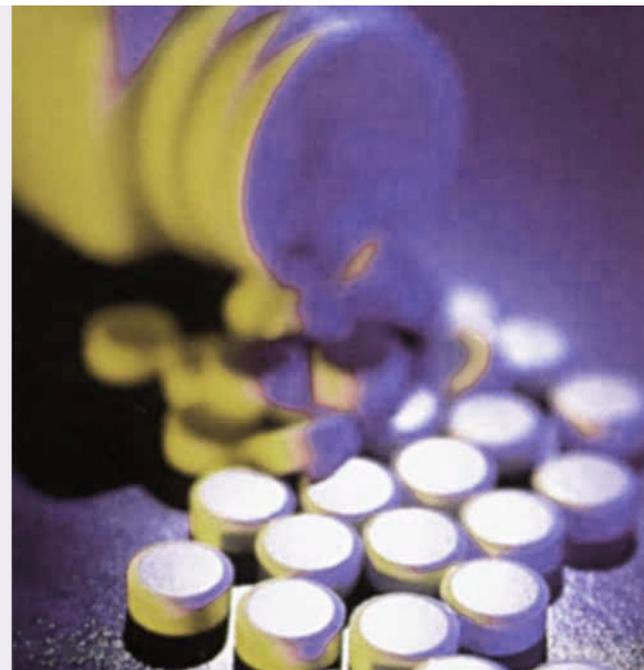
I'd like to end with a quote I found the other day from The Philokalia-Bible of Orthodox Spirituality by Anthony Coniaris. Now, it is important to distinguish "training" from trying. I might try very hard to win a marathon race, but, if I had not trained, I will not even finish, not mentioning win. Without training, the resources simply are not in my muscles, they are not in the ingrained habit structures of my body. On the day of the race, no amount of trying will make up for the failure to train. It is the training that will enable me to participate effectively in the race. The same is true in the spiritual life. Training builds interior habits within us, "holy habits".

May God bless your fasting this coming Lenten season and may your obedience and faith be rewarded with a deepening relationship with Him.

Ask Me.
if you have a question
about ANYTHING,
send it to:
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P.O. BOX 1005
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OR e-mail:
mightyarrowsmagazine@susCopts.org
Subject: Dear Mary

THE FORGOTTEN MEDICINE THE MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE

by Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev



A rich weary traveler went from one place to the other seeking shelter for the night. A nice lady welcomed him but her house was so dirty, he could not stand the stench. At another house, the master of the house set his dogs on the weary traveler. And so the traveler went from house to house, many rejecting him. In the rare case when he was accepted into a house, it was so dirty or smelly that he could not stay in it. None of the villagers knew that he had promised a wealthy gift to whoever would give him a clean place to rest. Finally he found shelter in a poor and small but clean house at the end of the village.

Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev, an outstanding spiritual pastor in Bulgaria, opens his book *The Forgotten Medicine* by comparing the dirty homes, mentioned in the story above, to unrepentant sinners. In this short, well-organized book, Aleksiev talks about the “Mystery of Repentance” that cleanses our hearts to make them worthy to receive the Heavenly Guest. “Through confession the soul is adorned, so that it becomes fit to accept the most marvelous guest - Jesus Christ.”

Aleksiev starts by defining sin as a deadly sickness of the soul which deprives us of the joys of heaven and earth, separates us from God, and destroys our lives. Aleksiev then focuses on the ability of repentance to save us from our sins. The Mystery of Repentance is an open door for all who are willing to rebuild what was ruined. He explains how confession, in front of a priest, erases sins and cleanses the heart and soul. He calls it a “spiritual bath.”

Confession is not always easy. Aleksiev refutes all common objections we make against confession, including “I am so sinful! Can God forgive my sins?” To “Why do I need to confess before a priest?” He gives an answer to each of these doubtful thoughts that Satan plants within us in an attempt to dissuade us from approaching this mystery.

The book takes a very practical turn in chapter five, “Rules for a

Saving Confession.” The first section “What should we do before we go to the confessor?” tells how both Judas and Peter denied Jesus Christ right before the Cross. However, one perished while the other was forgiven. He explains how Peter was granted forgiveness and how, by following in his footsteps, we also can go to confession offering repentance and gaining forgiveness. The following section “What should we do when we are with the confessor?” describes in ten points what our confession should involve; beginning with the realization that we are entering Christ’s infirmary and concluding with our firm intention not to sin anymore.

“The angels said, ‘we know that this soul is sinful, but we also know that he cried a lot for his sins and confessed them. That is why the Lord forgave him all his sins.’ This is how the angels greet the repentant soul upon its death. In chapter six, Aleksiev talks about the earthly and heavenly consequences of confession, portraying its cleansing effect and sweet peace.

The Forgotten Medicine is a short yet engaging book that will benefit both the beginning and experienced confessor. The beginner will gain understanding of this mystery and practical guidance regarding its practice. For the experienced confessor, this book will re-ignite his flame, reminding him of the true meaning of confession while providing a spiritual approach to this mystery. It is a must read to all who wish to benefit from this forgotten medicine freely offered to all who wish to be healed and cleansed.



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PUTTING IT ALL

The Canonization of the Christian Scriptures

By J. M. Stephanos



One fascinating aspect of early Christianity that one may study is the lengthy process that led to the compilation and canonization of the New Testament scriptures. Indeed, it is a field that may seem uninteresting or irrelevant to one who has never acquired a taste for historical inquiry or for him who has not yet begun a study of the scriptures themselves. However, when one approaches biblical history with a right heart, one comes to realize that he is not studying a mere historical “process”—not a mechanical and, as it were, incidental development—but truly a major work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the burgeoning church.

The Sowing of the Seed

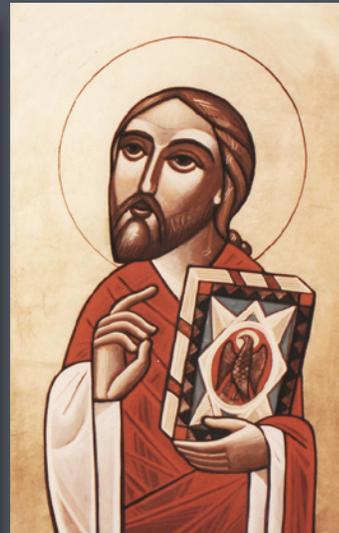
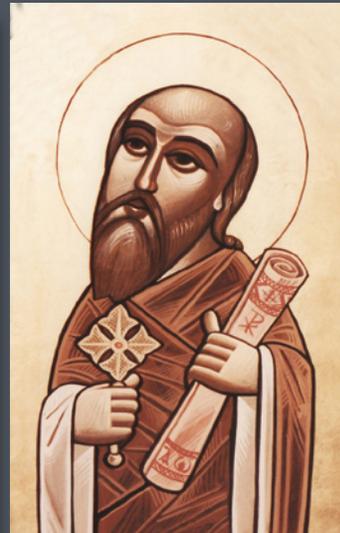
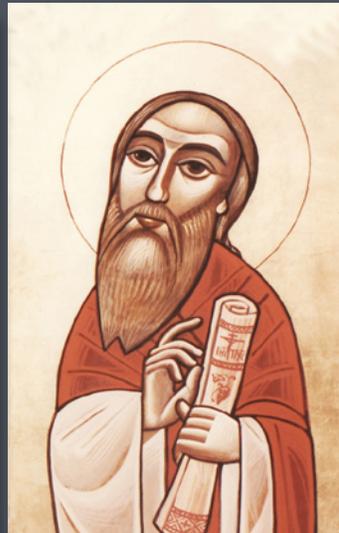
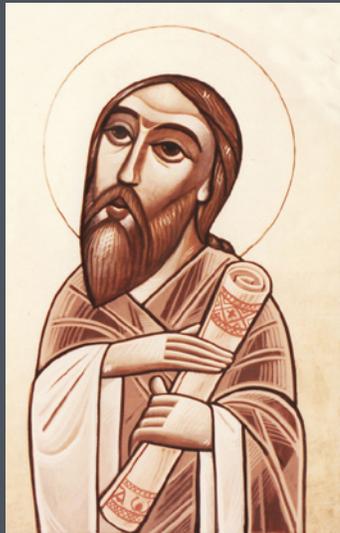
The canonization process was long and gradual. It was not accomplished by a single pronouncement of a Church Father or by the decision of a single Church council. In fact, the early Church did not intend to form a new canon of scripture—the scripture of the early church was the Septuagint. But all the books of the New Testament, soon after being written,

inevitably became integral and living parts of the church’s worship. The Pauline epistles, for example, were cherished and read repeatedly by the churches that received them, and by others who came to appreciate them as valued testimonies from the Apostolic Age. When St. Paul wrote an epistle to the church in Rome, their reaction would not have been, “This is the New Testament,” or “This is Scripture,” but they would have seen it as an illuminating explanation of Christian doctrine.

In the decades immediately following the birth of the Church, the sayings and works of Christ were not communicated in written form but were remembered and preached by the apostles and thereafter passed on to posterity by oral tradition. They were known as the “good news” that was quickly spreading throughout the churches, rather than as a new “Scripture” that needed to be reverently written down and preserved. That is, the gospel was seen more as, “Hark, the Scriptures have been fulfilled! The Messiah has come!” And less as, “We have a new doctrine to follow now.” An example

of this comes from the book of Acts. When the very early Christians quoted Christ, they would typically say, “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus...” Instead of the familiar Old Testament line “As it is written...” In quoting Psalms, the book of Acts employs the phrases, “*The place in the Scripture which he read was...*” (Acts 8:32) and, “*As it is also written in the second Psalm...*” (Acts 13:33). In contrast, St. Paul is recorded saying, “*remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*” (Acts 20:35) Although Christ’s words and deeds were initially passed on by oral tradition, they were given as much authoritative weight as the Septuagint. This was because the people recognized that He spoke with an authority no less than that of the Jewish Scriptures; He aligned His utterances with the precepts of the ancient Law, correcting and fulfilling them. So the early Church treasured and quoted the words and works of Christ as being equal or even superior to those of the Old Testament. This is why St. Paul appeals so strongly to the words of the Lord when

TOGETHER:



Icons written by the late Isaac Fanous

enforcing a lesson (*1 Corinthians 9:14*) or confirming a holy mystery (*1 Corinthians 11:23*).

The Gospels in Written Form

By the mid to late 1st century, the four evangelists finally put the Gospel into written form. It is not clear why God waited several decades before putting it in print; but it is important to note that the writers were not giving an account of Christ that had yet to be heard. They were giving written expression to the faith and tradition of Christ that already existed in the churches. Or put another way, the Gospel did not begin with the evangelists—the gospel was already alive in the churches. However, God chose to have it recorded on paper, which the Holy Spirit accomplished through the evangelists.

Once the Gospels were written down, they still were not primarily considered to be part of a “Christian Scripture.” The Church did not bind them together with other New Testament books or write verse-by-verse commentaries on them. Their primary function, as seen by

the Church, was *liturgical*: prayer and worship. That is, the Gospels were incorporated into the prayer books of the churches—in a very similar manner to the *katameros* of the Coptic Church. And thus it can be seen why the Coptic Church so rightly and correctly *chants* the gospel during the Liturgy and has the entire congregation stand up: she is telling us that we are not just listening, but we are also worshipping.

Immediately following the first century, the Christian literature had grown into a sizable corpus, and there grew a need to formally declare which books were essential to the life of the Church and which were only edifying. Second-century church leaders such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Rome, for example, were still writing epistles to their churches which were marked by great spiritual depth. But simultaneously, these writers recognized the superior standing of the apostolic writers who lived so close to the time of Christ’s earthly ministry. For all the light shining from an epistle of St. Clement, it could not compare to the radiance of an epistle of St. Paul or St. James. And since the Gospels were

seen as the center of the Good News, it was natural that the Church aspire to delineate which epistles were truly canonical.

Heresies

There were two different but complementary dangers that arose at this time which put immense strains on the canonization process. The first was a group of writings that came out of the second century known as the apocryphal gospels, a collection of fantastic and legendary accounts of Christ’s life that claimed to be of equal authority as the Four Gospels. These “gospels” were written mainly to fill in the “gaps” in Christ’s life, apparently to satisfy people’s curiosity. For example, one major blank left by the Four Gospels (for so God would have it) was Christ’s childhood. We know nothing about it except for one brief incident of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple. The apocryphal gospels, however, furnish us with a multitude of incidents of His childhood, such as the following: five year old Jesus was playing by a brook one day and made 12 sparrows from clay. A Pharisee

complained to Joseph that Jesus broke the Sabbath; Jesus clapped His hands and said, "Off with you!" And the birds flew away chirping.

One can immediately feel the difference in an apocryphal miracle like this one. It has a strange, occultist cast to it, and it is done purely for show; no one is healed, no one is given faith, no problem is set right. Although the apocryphal gospels sometimes mimicked the Four Gospels very closely and were widely circulated, the Church was quick to condemn them. In addition, their rejection was a catalyst for the Church's efforts to bring to completion her canonized scriptures.

The second threat to rise in the early centuries was a pagan heresy known as Gnosticism. It was a syncretistic (mixed and confounded) religion based on elements of oriental



mysticism, Greek philosophy, Judaism, and a warped Christianity, and it permeated the intellectual atmosphere of the first centuries. Basically, Gnosticism taught that human souls are divine sparks temporarily imprisoned in physical bodies as a result of a pre-cosmic catastrophe; so our bodies, along with the rest of the material creation, are fundamentally evil. The only way to salvation is to revile and spit upon our bodies and the earth, as well as by possessing a special gnosis, or knowledge, of the spiritual world. The poison of Gnostic teaching was copiously transfused into most of the apocryphal gospels; the apocryphal writers were themselves Gnostic. A certain one named Marcion even produced his own "bible" composed

of an edited form of Luke and several epistles, and he began a whole Marcionite church which lasted several centuries. Another, by the name of Tatian, decided to blend the Gospels into one continuous narrative (the Diatessaron) to do away with the apparent differences and difficulties of the Four. But the Church repudiated it for its elimination of the multiplicity of the gospels—a key trait ordained by God Himself.

Toward Canonization

Starting in the third century, in order to attend to an increasing need for a standard Christian scripture and to protect against heresy, the Church began making a deliberate effort to define exactly which books belonged to the Christian canon. Typically, to be considered canonical, a document had to pass three basic tests. It had to be: (1) written by an apostle or an immediate disciple of an apostle; (2)

New Testament books were listed. "These," he declares, "are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied by the living words which they contain. In these alone the teaching of godliness is proclaimed. Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away from them." Thus, 367 AD marks the first time the scope of the whole New Testament is clearly defined.

During that same period, the Church Fathers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and others, began making lists of what the canon should include. In the West, two church councils (Hippo, 393 AD and Carthage, 397 AD) defined the same canon as that noted in St. Athanasius' festal letter of 367 AD. In these councils, St. Augustine had considerable influence on the selection of the New Testament scriptures.

Again, no one Father or church council can be given final responsibility

"The Church did not endow the New Testament with authority but simply recognized its long-standing existence. The Holy Spirit who guided the apostles in writing the holy books also guided the Church in determining its canon."

recognized as authentic by most of the churches at large; (3) consistent with apostolic doctrine—the rule of faith preserved by the living tradition of the Church.

The most influential Father in defining the canon, as noted by most western and eastern scholars, was St. Athanasius. He was the first bishop to use his position as head of an extensive and important diocese (Alexandria) to deal with the question of the biblical canon. It was ancient custom that every year after Epiphany, the bishop of Alexandria would write a festal letter to all the churches and monasteries of Egypt, informing them of the date of the Resurrection feast and the beginning of the Lenten fast. In St. Athanasius' 39th festal letter of 367 AD, he made a complete list of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. Twenty-seven

for defining the boundaries of the Christian scriptures. All they did was give official approval of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament that were already recognized among the churches to be unique and divine in their message. That is, the Church did not endow the New Testament with authority but simply recognized its long-standing existence. The Holy Spirit who guided the apostles in writing the holy books also guided the Church in determining its canon.

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Q *I'm reading this book by a contemporary Christian author from a protestant background. I like her writing, relating mainly to women. Few days ago, as I was reading, she wrote something in regards to James the writer of the epistle. In her words, James, the little (half) brother of Jesus... This author has several degrees in theology and is a very educated women, yet when I read that, I was dead in my tracts. I would have surely heard of this before. There's no denying the virgin birth of Christ, but are there enough evidence and certainty concerning the brother or brothers in this case of Jesus?*
- Monica

A The word "brother" has a fuller and broader meaning in the scriptures. It does not only mean real brother, but also cousin or nephew. For example, Lot is called Abraham's brother whereas in reality he is his nephew (Gen. 14:14). Jacob is also called a brother of Laban whereas in reality Laban is his uncle (Gen 27:43. 29:15). In the New Testament, following from the Jewish tradition, they would continue calling relatives as "brothers", because people knew what they were talking about, they were used to this linguistic custom. Below are 4 reasons that are counted as evidence for the broader use of the word "brother."

1. It is evident that the holy family consisted of three persons only: The Virgin, Joseph, and the Lord Jesus. There was no mention of any brothers of the Lord up until he was 12 years old. (Luke 2:41-43). Therefore, if other brothers of Jesus were born they must have been born after the Lord Jesus' 12th birthday. But after His 12th birthday, nowhere is Joseph seen any more. It is assumed that Joseph had probably died and the Virgin seems to be on her own.
2. In the gospels these brothers are mentioned as brothers of the Lord Jesus but not as sons of the Virgin, as it is said in Mark 6:3. Additionally, the angel tells Joseph: "Arise, take the young child and his mother" (Mat. 2:13). He doesn't say "Arise, take your child and your wife". In other words, if after Jesus' birth the Virgin had Joseph as her husband, the angel would have said to him: "take your child and your wife".
3. The Lord Jesus, while on the cross, gave His mother to be looked after by John (John 19:26-27). How can this be logically acceptable if the Virgin had other

children?
The custom of the time was that if the eldest son died, the other male children would look after their mother.

4. The Scriptures do not only speak about "brothers" of the Lord Jesus, but also about sisters of His, for it says: "all His sisters" (Mark 6:3). If this is taken in the literal sense, then we end up with a family of at least 9 members. The Virgin, Joseph, 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters.

With that in mind, how could the doctrine of the ever-virginity of the Theotokos come to be accepted so easily from the times of the Apostolic Fathers? A 9 member family and the Virgin being called "Ever Virgin" would not be an easy issue to settle or believe! But if people knew she only had Jesus as a child, the issue would be much simpler to settle.

Let us now discuss the verse that our Protestant brothers use for their argument. "And he knew her not TILL she had brought forth her firstborn son" (Mat 1:25) The word "firstborn" does not imply that other children followed; it means the first born child, the one that opens the bosom of his mother, regardless of whether other children follow later on or not. Now what does the word "till" mean in this context? The word 'till or until' by no means necessarily implies that St. Joseph knew her after the birth of Lord Jesus Christ. For the word 'till' does not in any way imply the opposite of what is mentioned before it; this word in Holy Scriptures means eternally

Let's look at some examples.

- 1)The Bible says: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool". The question logically follows. Will Christ cease to sit on the right hand of the Father after the submission of his enemies? Of course not!
- 2)Elsewhere the Lord tells His apostles: "I am with you always, until the end of the age". (Mat 28:20) The same question follows. Will Christ cease to be with His disciples AFTER the end of the age? Of course not!

With this evidence at hand it seems



Q *My question is very simple: why the 7th of January.... I know the scientific reason, so on and so forth, but isn't it important for us here in the west to celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ on days where everyone around us does too? This year as I tried to explain to a friend why our calendars are different, he shocked when he said, "you sound like a cult, you just want to be different!"*
-Mina

A Why do you feel it is important for us here in the west to celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ on days where everyone around us does too? Does the Catholic in Egypt celebrate the birth of Christ on January 7 or December 25? They celebrate it on December 25 although January 7 is a national holiday in Egypt and they also use their own calendar for the resurrection of the Lord although this is against the canons of the first ecumenical council.

I wonder whether your friend makes his judgment about cults based on calendar or on sound doctrines. You should not be shocked with misjudgments.

Regarding celebrating the Nativity of the Lord on January 7 or on December 25 here in the west, an American convert shared with me that he is totally against the idea of celebrating it on December 25 because Christmas here in the west has become now very commercialized and it is like a secular feast. Christ is not the reason for the season anymore. The media usually shocks us every Christmas season with blasphemous articles or movies or shows or songs...etc. Most of the people are preoccupied with shopping, gifts, parties, decorations...etc. Keeping the celebration of the Nativity on January 7 will at least keep it away from this secular atmosphere to be a spiritual and religious feast.

only logical not mention biblical to believe in the ever-virginity of the Holy Mother of God, St Mary.

If you have a question about our faith, send it

BY MAIL: Mighty Arrows: Q&A FAITH
P.O. BOX 1005
Colleyville, TX 76034

BY E-MAIL: mightyarrowsmagazine@suscopts.org
Subject: Q&A FAITH

Digging Deeper



Faithful Humbleness

A Commitment to be lived

By H.G. Bishop Youssef

Faith is more than the five letter word used to spell it. Faith is not one simple definition but an on-going process of constant learning, growing, failure, restoration, and empowerment. Faith takes effort and stamina to build and courage to fail and to defend. It is a commitment in one's life to live what you believe, a call to preparation to represent your belief, accepting your mistakes as necessary to strengthen your faith, to live wisely, and above all to remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ. Building a strong and mature faith requires "starting at the bottom and working your way up." In today's world, society encourages us to start fast and prepare, if at all, along the way. We are indoctrinated to start as close to the top of the ladder as possible and that to think it's okay to miss a few steps. With faith this does not work and is not productive at any phase of establishing a strong faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we must learn to trust in God. The Lord Jesus Christ was constantly discouraged by the sporadic, maybe even surprising lack of faith in His disciples and followers. Perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ wanted them to completely trust in His Word with the simple, less complicated experiences in their life so that they could fathom the glorious Resurrection which would be in their future. From the transformed disciples calling to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, from their travelling and personal experiences with Him, from His preaching and teachings they were always privileged to hear, from their own personal teachings gleaned from Him, should the Lord have lamented once regarding their lack of faith? Does faith come easily?

"He answered then, 'you faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put

up with you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him.

When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy...Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.'

Jesus said to him, 'If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:19-24)."

Second, in the development of faith is a strong belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and his teachings. Humbleness is an integral part in a developing faith that should be intertwined with believing in the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ...

"The centurion answered, 'Lord I am not worthy to have You come under my roof; but only speak the Word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go' and he goes, and to another, 'Come' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this' and the slave does it.' When Jesus heard him, He was amazed and said to those who followed Him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith (Matthew 8:8-10)."

Third, once a strong belief in the Lord Jesus Christ develops within a person, one must be Biblically literate to reinforce his beliefs both personally and for others he will encounter. You cannot play a sport if you do not understand the rules or cannot refer back to them when they are challenged. You cannot defend your faith if you do not understand it.

“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; And you when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22: 31-32).”

Fourth, faith is a call to action and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever noticed that those youth who do not fail are usually those youth who are not out there trying very hard? The point being, people who try learn methods of trying. People who try may fail at times, but learn from their failures and become stronger. St. Peter is a good example for us of someone who made mistakes but eventually as his faith matured he learned from his mistakes, went to prison for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and was martyred because of his strong faith.

St. Peter walked on water for a distance and then could no longer and sank due to his faltering faith that started out strong but was not mature enough yet for the deed. Many remember his “sinking faith” rather than the probability of him being the only man to live upon this earth who has ever walked on water. Although he was certainly “a quick immature starter” look at how strong his faith was when he started off and how much stronger it would become. St. Peter was quick to act, quick to speak, and quick to run away from Gethsemane which leads us to speculate that he as us are long term works in progress. St. Peter was often humiliated by his failure of faith, often hesitant to challenge his faith for fear of failure, but when St. Peter did fail and recover from his failure, St. Peter was more effective than ever in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Failures of faith should be seen as challenges because we all are going to fail as part of our human nature. We all fall short of the glory of God. No matter how gifted you are no matter how committed you are, no matter how many friends you have you are prone to failure. Failure does not elude anyone particularly when it comes to faith. Failure is certainly humbling but should never be seen as finality.

Fifth, faith also calls us to be prepared at all times and at all places to support our beliefs.

“But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into, Therefore you also must be ready (Matthew 24: 43-44).”

“Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept (Matthew 25: 1-5)”

Sixth, praying for stronger faith and asking the Lord to guide our actions is another important component of faith. Faith is the willingness to believe and trust that God cares about each of us and is with us each day. Faith is not something full of emotion, of grandiosity, is not perfect, and often requires confidence in the fact that what we are doing is the right thing to do.

When we think about David and Goliath certainly the size and powerfulness of the faithful person was not central to winning. When the paralyzed man was brought to the Lord Jesus Christ the huge crowds surrounding the Lord Jesus Christ would have been enough to turn many of those with conviction away. The woman who reached out to touch the hem of the Lord Jesus Christ’s cloak shows us a deeper trust that in the Lord all things are possible.

Faith ensures an effort of some sort is made, develops confidence, and leads us to believe that something positive can happen.

Hebrew teachers in Biblical days would often use imagery of moving mountains to point out to and encourage the disciples that the most difficult of missions could be carried out with the smallest of faith. What seems overwhelming, insurmountable, and rugged as a mountain top can be overcome by a little faith.

“If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you (Matthew 17:20).”

Origen (c.245) says, “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain...” The mountains here spoken of are, in my opinion, the hostile powers that have their being in a flood of great wickedness...Whenever, Then, anyone has all faith so that he no longer disbelieves in any things that are contained in the Holy Scriptures... he has all faith as a grain of mustard seed.”

In summary, one faithful Sunday school servant can make a difference to start a person on their journey of faith. One convention of faithful attendees can make a difference in the life of a weaker student. One whose faith needs strengthening encouraged to attend the Midnight Praises may praise God throughout the remainder of his life. One candle lit in a church liturgy could brighten the path of a sinner.

“The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just live by faith (Romans 1:17).”

St. Clement of Alexandria (c.195) said, “We have discovered faith to be the first movement towards salvation. After faith, fear, hope, and repentance (accompanied by temperance and patience) lead us to love and knowledge.”

It is my prayer that through perseverance, persistence, vigilance and the Grace of God we grow and mature in faith reaping the fruits of joy and sustaining love for the Lord Jesus Christ.



Hey Mike,

I'm struggling with the whole concept of white lies. I have a friend who literally told a lie to save a friend from getting caught by the authorities and ruining his life. My mom actually commended his action which confused me even more. When is a white lie ok? When I questioned my Sunday School servant he gave me the example of Rahab in the old testament. She lied to the king and his men about the men she hid and she was saved by hiding them. I didn't tell the servant all the details but I definitely wasn't expecting his answer. Is he right?
John

Dear John,

The concept of lying, no matter what color it is, is against the teaching of the Bible. From the Ten Commandments you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor Exodus 20:16 to Proverbs lying lips are abomination to the Lord. But those who deal truthfully are His delight Proverbs 12:22, to the teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself that we'll be participating in the work of the devil for he is a liar and the father of it John 8:44. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul mentions putting away lying Eph 4:25 before stealing, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking.

Now, I can't comment on your mother's commendation of your friend's actions, but I don't think the analogy of Rahab is correct since she wasn't one of God's people at that time and wasn't aware of God's commandments. I'll give you another example; our father Jacob's lying to his father Isaac can be justified by his zealotry to get the blessing that he felt was much more important to him than his brother Esau, who showed total disregard and contempt to his birthright, that he sold it for a bowl of lentils. The end result was that he was lied upon by his uncle, and then again by his sons about the death of his beloved son, Joseph. He was deprived from seeing him for many years. Unfortunately, lying of any kind, only show that we're afraid of people more than God; and/or want to please people more than to please God.

Even if seemingly white lies might not hurt anyone, it will definitely hurt who ever is lying, if not physically, emotionally, socially or financially; then most definitely spiritually.

Unless we acknowledge-without excuses- that lying is a sin, and we offer true and sincere repentance, then it will lead to other sins. So, we shouldn't sell our salvation and eternal life for a bowl of lentils, and have to be diligent in exposing our actions to the bright light of the Word of God.

Hey Mike,

I've liked this girl for a while and I'm wondering when I could let her know of my feelings. We have a great friendship and wouldn't ever want to ruin that. I want to let her know that she could be the one. I've known her long enough to see how good she is (about three years or so) but I know we might be too young (I'm 19) but I want to be ready. What should I do to prepare myself? Any advice?

Tony

Dear Tony,

You've already taken the right first step by asking before acting. Feelings are good, as they are God's creation to move us in the direction of marriage. You only have to remember that relationships are very much like fruit: you must wait till ripe to enjoy. I once took a nice fat banana that started to turn yellow, but not quite yellow enough, and peeled it out of impatience and began eating but man was I disappointed! You said that you wouldn't ever want to ruin your great friendship. Well, then even if the friendship seems to be turning yellow, don't start peeling (expressing your feelings) or you'll be surprised how easily it can spoil. Don't hit the gas before the light turns green. May I suggest keeping your feelings on down-low until you are seriously ready for marriage. In the meantime, focus on your growth in Christ: this will actually be your main goal after marriage.

Ask Me,
if you have a question
about ANYTHING,

send it to:

Mighty Arrows: Hey Mike
P.O. BOX 1005
Colleyville, TX 76034

OR e-mail:

mightyarrowsmagazine@suscopts.org
Subject: Hey Mike

LIVING AND POWERFUL

by George Bassilios



St. Paul declares that *“the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”* (Hebrews 4:12) He asserts elsewhere that he is *“not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16)

The Incarnate Word and the Inspired Word

Much that can be said of the Lord Jesus may also be said of the inspired scriptures because they are so closely allied! The Word made flesh and the Word uttered by inspired men are intimately joined together. We may say the same thing of the written Word and the embodied Word. In fact, they are now so linked together that it would be impossible to divide them. If you leave Christ out of Scripture, you have left out the essential Truth of God. If you leave out Christ, you have left out all that is living and powerful.

The Word of God is Alive

The word of God is living since it is the word of *“the living God.”* (Hebrews 3:12) The Word of God is alive and will live forever. Isaiah proclaims, *“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”* (Isaiah 40:8) In our Holy Liturgy, the reader of the Praxis concludes his reading by saying that the

Word of the Lord shall grow, multiply, be mighty, and be confirmed in the Holy Church of God forever. Amen.

This is a mystery which only man, living by the Spirit of God, will fully comprehend. It moves and communes with man as a living Word. Solomon says concerning it, *“When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you.”* (Proverbs 6:22)

There are many books nobody will ever read because they are out-dated. Not the living word of God. We may outgrow teachers and preachers but not Apostles and Prophets. The word of God is always fresh and new and full of force and power.

Coming to it we are like the dead man who, when he was put into the grave of Elijah, rose again as soon as he touched his bones. Even these “bones” of the Prophets, words spoken and written thousands of years ago, will impart life to those who come into contact with them. The Word of God is alive. We do not need to bring life to the Scriptures. Instead, we need to draw life from the Scriptures!

The Word of God is Powerful

The Bible is God’s voice. You and I speak and often nothing happens. But God speaks and it is done. The Psalmist

says, *“For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.”* (Psalm 33:9)

What an honor for one’s calling to be reading, studying and contemplating the sacred Word of God. It is said, *“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10) Here we are told that God’s words are power, life-giving energy. You may be a great preacher and able to deliver your sermon with wonderful fluency and force. But the only efficacious power of preaching is the power which does not lie in your word but in the Word of God. It is God’s Word, not our comment on God’s Word, which inflames our yearning hearts and souls. For St. Anthony, God’s message was so powerful and transforming he followed it without faltering. We, also, must be ready and willing to receive, respond, and willfully live by its transforming power. The seed bears life within itself, but this life is dependent on the ground upon which it falls (Matthew 13).

The sacred Text has an indescribable vitality and transforming ability to breathe and speak and conquer. Because the Gospel is a living and powerful Word, we find the Scriptures attributing many characteristics to it. It is likened to a lamp and a light (Proverbs 6:23; Psalm 119:105), to a living and incorruptible seed (1 Peter 1:23), to rain and dew (Deuteronomy 32:2), and to honey (Psalm 119:103). The Gospel Word is portrayed as increasing, growing, and multiplying (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). It runs (2 Thessalonians. 3:1) through the world and opens doors (Colossians 4:3).

The Gospel works hope into our present lives, which are crowded with the concerns of this world. The Gospel does not merely declare this hope but promises we will have a share in it by virtue of the Gospel message. St. Paul says: *“if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”* (Colossians 1:23) Let us draw near to the living and powerful words of Scripture. Let us come forward to the spring of Life and quench our thirsty souls. Let us allow the living seed to blossom in our lives. Let us be cut through to our hearts (Acts 2:37) when hearing the mighty and transforming Words of our Lord, to Whom is glory forever. Amen.

GOOD MORNING, my beloved

I am so glad you are here today. I have been waiting for you for quite some time now. You didn't realize it but I have been here since last night. I didn't move from this very spot, because I knew you would be here this morning. So I decided to wait for you. I didn't want to risk missing you. You don't know how much I have been looking forward to this moment. I love you more that you could ever possibly realize. Since the beginning I have loved you with everlasting love. One that no human could ever fully understand, but my plan is to share a little more of this love with you this morning, there is nothing I wouldn't give to show you how much I love you. No cost is too high; my desire is to give you everything. Everything that is good and everything that you need, I came here today to give you life and to give it abundantly. There is nothing that you lack that I can not give you today. My dream is you and I walk together in power, in victory, and in joy.

I desire that because I care for you more than you care for yourself. I have never taken my eyes off you for a single moment, or twinkling of an eye. Now I am excited that you came here this morning, so that I can shower you with more. More of whatever it is you need in life. More power, more joy, more peace, and more of me in your life. And most of all, I am excited reveal a new aspect of my relationship with you. Today I am going to bring you one step closer to me and one step closer to the kingdom. There is nothing that gives me more pleasure than to give you the kingdom. My deepest and strongest desire is that we maybe one, as I, my father are one. That is why I am so glad you came this morning I have been waiting to spend this time with you. I do not want anything from you, I just want you. I do not want your time, I do not want your money, I do not even want your words. I just want your heart, I want you to be mine and I want to be yours that is why I am here this morning knocking at the door, I am coming to see you.

- God

Be Still and Listen

Quiet time, or devotion time, refers to our daily appointment with God, when we shut out as much outside interference as possible. During our quiet time, we may sing praise songs, pray, read Scripture or daily devotions, meditate on God's Word, or simply be still and listen. Making that appointment is one thing; keeping it is something else entirely!

The Outer Challenge

Quiet time is a goal that sounds simple, but which meets with greater challenges than many physical endurance contests. In America particularly, we live in a world of noise. Everywhere we go, even in our own homes, there is some kind of noise to distract us, from telephones to TV to traffic. But making time for daily devotion is critical to hearing God!

If we stop to think about it for a moment, we recognize that we live in enemy-occupied territory, so constructing an ideal spiritual surrounding is nearly impossible. Satan, our chief opponent, does not want us to spend quiet times with God. In fact, it is his goal to prevent that in any way possible. He knows that the more time we spend with God, the more like God we will become and the more we will be accomplishing God's goals on this earth. Satan does not want us to succeed.

God wants all people to be saved, but Satan wants us all to perish. Praise God because His plan is greater! Satan is no match for God, but he can trouble God's children, and he does. The next time you are finding it difficult to get away from the noise and get alone with God, remember who is standing in your way. Then remember who is greater!

The Inner Challenge

Quiet time involves an inner state of being, as well as an outward condition. Have you ever noticed that when you sit down to read your Bible or pray, your mind begins to wander or you suddenly remember what you needed at the grocery store? Inner "noise" can be just as troublesome as outer noise when it comes to having quiet time with God.

Our own human weaknesses combine with the enemy's efforts to keep us from God. There is a reason he is known as the Prince of the Power of the Air! But again, God is greater still. Defeating the inner noise can be done, but it requires commitment and discipline.

What's the Big Deal? Why Is It Important?

Quiet time can be so difficult to prioritize. It's tempting to make excuses or just not bother. Preparing our hearts to hear from God requires a focused effort. Noise, whether outside or

inside, distracts us. If we fail to understand the importance of having a regular, committed quiet time with God, we are not likely to hear His voice...the One that whispers, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

God longs to spend time with us. Consider what He was willing to do for us, in order to reunite us with Him. Is it asking too much that we devote daily time to Him?

Jesus set the example for us concerning quiet time. He took time to connect with the Father regularly, as the following Scriptures tell us:

"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray'" (Matthew 26:36).

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35).

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16).

When Should I Meet with God?

Quiet time is such an easy habit to forget, especially if we haven't yet made it a priority. It's all too tempting to slip our lives into cruise control and forget that we need to gas up the engine before we can go anywhere. We may already have a grip on the Bible, the owner's manual of life, but without a daily filling we're in danger of burning out, running on empty, stalling on the side of the road. Yes, we can always put in a call to God's "auto club," but why not be prepared before the emergency occurs? King David sought God daily before he went into battle. Maybe you know the familiar melody put to the words of Psalm 5. If you do, sing it now:

"Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my meditation. Harken unto the voice of my cry, my King and my God. For unto Thee will I pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning. O Lord in the morning, will I direct my prayer unto Thee and will look up."

What a great pattern for us to follow! Setting aside quiet time to seek Him everyday reminds us that we rely on Him everyday! Seeking Him every morning, putting the day in His control before it gets out of control, is the best way to be sure we're ready for whatever comes our way.

Finally, do you desire to hear from God? Are you passionate about wanting His will in your life, above your own? Daily quiet time prepares your heart to listen. You may "hear" Him speak to you in those quiet moments...or you may hear Him through a friend or circumstance later in the day. But because you've made time with Him a priority and have been willing to shut out the world to hear Him, He will make sure you do.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD

By Maria Mansour

Have you ever wondered about the winter's cool silence and keening winds making their own frosty music. Then spring, on the rebound from winter's solemnity, sings in full throat with the sounds of a schoolyard at recess. The summer in all of its green lushness, you can sometimes hear a noisy symphony of natural sounds making their way to heaven praising the Lord. Then autumn comes combining the voices of many animals in the crisp breezes in the dry foliage, but from a sincere heart. In every place and time, a gift of praise is offered to God the creator. Praise is a natural activity that issues from a life filled with the love of God.

Our King David had a heart and mind full of the love of God. He wrote so many amazing psalms expressing his relationship with God in many different situations that have been a guide in our daily lives. His praise confirms a deep relationship with God that is his weapon against Satan and his army. I invite you to join in this journey where King David is going to take us on a trip to the school of praise that is offered to our Lord the creator. Get ready, open your mind and heart to witness the awesomeness of God and experience his Love to us His children.

PSALM 18

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims the work of His hands. Day to day utters speech, and night to night proclaims knowledge. There are no speeches or words, in which their voice is not heard. Their sound has gone out upon all the earth and their words have reached to the ends of the world. In the sun He has set His dwelling; and it comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber: it shall exult as a giant running his course. Its going forth is from the extremity of heaven, and its goal is to the other end of heaven: and nothing will be hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is pure, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, instructing the babes. The ordinances of the Lord are straight, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is a light, enlightening the eyes from afar. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever and ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, and justified altogether. The desires of His heart are chosen more than gold and precious stone, and sweeter than honey and the honey comb. For Your servant keeps them: and in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can understand transgressions? From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord, and from the attack of strangers spare your servant: if they do not have dominion over me, then I shall be blameless, and I shall be cleansed from great sin. All the sayings of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, shall be pleasing continually before you. O Lord; you are my helper, and my Savior. ALLELUIA.

King David contemplated on the glory of God that manifested in his creations, and the wisdom of the creature. For example, He meditates on the sun illuminating the whole world and its warmth reaching to the end of the earth. As his thoughts meditate deeper in the creation of God, the similarity between the sun and the law of God becomes unique. The Law of God is distinctive and thorough illuminating the pass for us. It also testifies his tender love and knowledge that is sent to mankind. When King David became familiar with the law of God, it helped him discover his small inner sin, which any human being might overlook if they don't have this light inside of them.

With a prophesizing eye King David saw the evangelism of the apostles that reached the end of the earth. Although they got tortured, persecuted, and killed for spreading the word of God, they considered everything as rubbish just to gain Christ the

Lord. Keeping the word of God and was a beautiful praise that was offered to Christ the redeemer for his love and mercy.

Have you ever wondered from where does king David finds words to praise God? From an experienced heart King David testifies about the beauty of the words of God.

As the word reaches the soul and enters into the depths of the heart it cleans it from every sin and illuminated with the love of God. Then the Lords come and dwell in our hearts and change our nature to become pure and holy. From here words of praise to God becomes a natural habit thanking him for His great mercy, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

"The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever and ever" Have you ever marveled at the meaning of this verse, how can fear be pure and endures for ever? King David guided by the Holy Spirit puts a synonym to the law of God which is "fear".

Out of our love to God we fear him, knowing that his words are a guide for us in our lives. Those words are pure without blemish or corruption that they endure for ever and ever. In addition, we find peace and pleasure in obeying his commandants. As a result we say with King David: "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who delights greatly in His commandments." (Psalm 112:1)

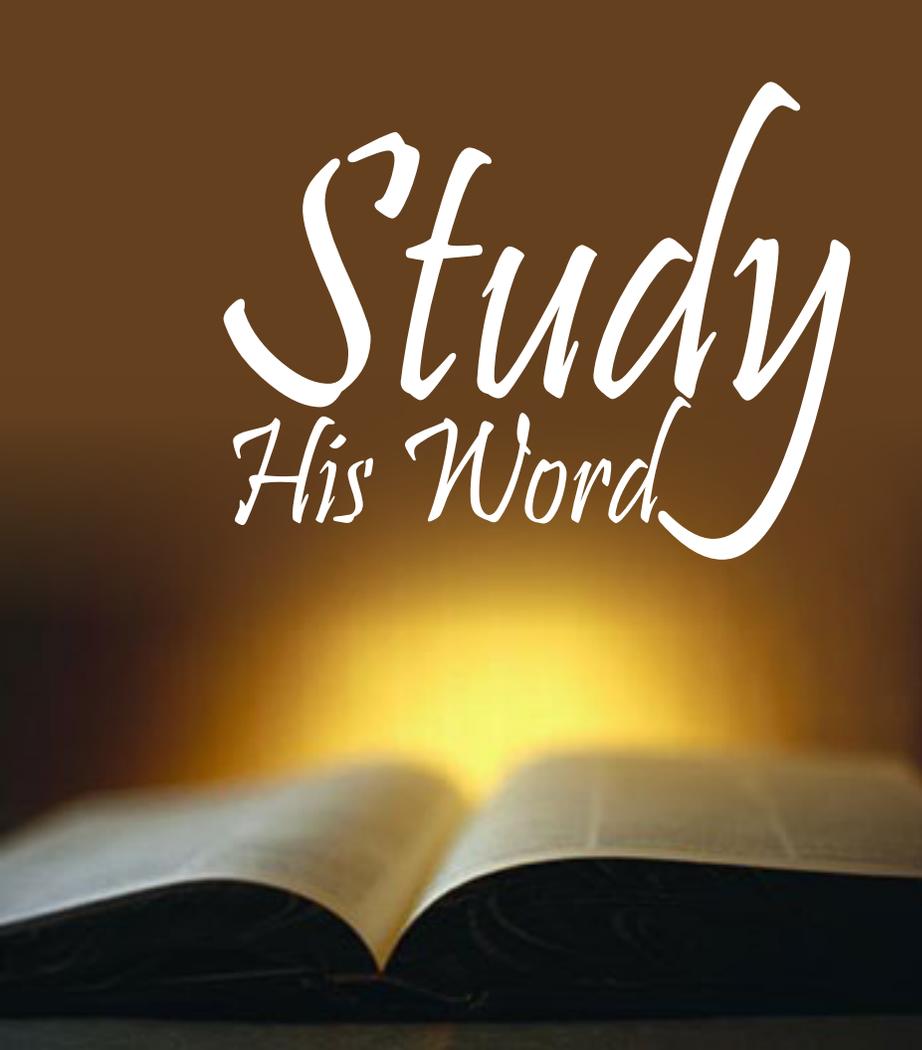
Have you felt unfair, judged by others and that is the world is against you? Great news, for King David has

assured us saying: "the judgments of the Lord are true, and justified altogether." Although King David was anointed as a king in his youth, the promise of God regarding his reign was not fulfilled until years after in which he has suffered greatly from King Saul. What kept King David going in life was his trust in the words of God and his promises, for our God is a just Judge. For many generations the word of God has given hope to many and restored lives, "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him." (Exodus 15:2)

I lift up my heart to God with King David saying: "The desires of His heart are chosen more than gold and precious stone, and sweeter than honey and the honey comb." After reading the Bible, and seeing the wisdom and justice of our God nothing else satisfies us. The world and all its desires becomes nothing against the truth, ordinances, and justice of our Lord. Therefore, our hearts then praise God day and night thanking him for his great mercy.

Therefore my brethren, lets us all keep the commandant of God daily in our hearts and mind. In keeping His words there will be a protection against evil, it will lift up our spirit, and grant us peace. For God has prepared a daily manual for us in our life to guide us. Then, all his creation testified about its ordinances and justice. So let us also left our heart and unite with our heavenly church to praise our lord the Greater. For Truly our God is an awesome God.





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