

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



# PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

*"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".*

John 8:32

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Every year on the same dates (December 25 and January 7) Christians around the world celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Festive services are held to celebrate this great event in churches, temples and prayer houses. The Scripture says:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mat. 1:18-21).*

However, the exact birth date of Jesus is not mentioned in the Bible. In addition, it never directs us to celebrate His birthday. The Encyclopedia of McClintock and Strong notes: "The celebration of Christmas is not established by God and its origins are not in the New Testament".

The study of the origin of Christmas reveals the pagan roots of this holiday. The Bible makes it clear that worshiping God in an unacceptable manner is an offense to the Lord (Ex. 32:5-7).

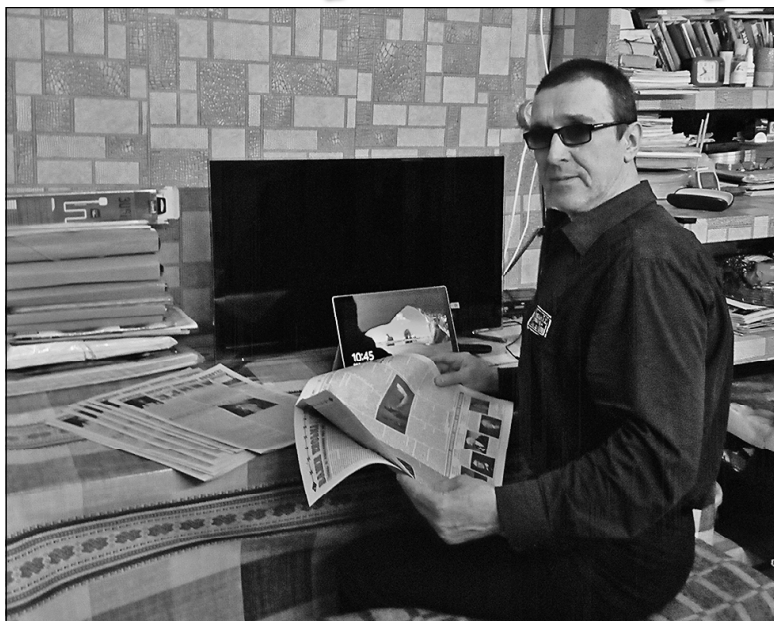
The Bible does not directly point out when our Lord was born. Instead, it describes two events that are connected with His birth that provide strong evidence to the fact that he was neither born on December 25 nor on January 7.

An argument in favor of this belief is the fact that shortly before the birth of Jesus, "...a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered". The gospel of Luke tells us that in order to obey that decree, each person had to undertake, in some cases, a week long journey to his or her city of origin (Luke 2:1-3).

The collection of taxes and conscription were, most likely, main reasons why that decree was issued. In addition, if that decree came out in the cold time of the year that fact alone could cause discontent among the people that inhabited the Roman Empire. Therefore, it was highly improbable that the emperor was willing to cast an additional burden on his subjects, by forcing them to go on a long journey in the cold of winter.

Another argument is that the shepherds "...kept watch over their flock by night", as stated in the Gospel of Luke (2:8). Alexander Men in the History of Religion writes: "...no matter how hard it is to part with an age-long tradition, it must be admitted that the Gospel does not confirm that fact. St. Luke says that the shepherds of Bethlehem '...lived in the open air and guarded their flock at night'. And in December, various sources indicate that sheep were already kept in shelters in that area. They were in pastures only from March to November,

## CHRISTMAS



from this follows that Jesus was born precisely in that time range".

We can know the approximate time of the birth of Jesus by counting down from the day of His crucifixion, which occurred in the spring, on Passover, Nisan 14, 33 AD (John 19:14-16). Jesus' ministry began when He was about thirty years old and continued for about three years. From that fact follows that Jesus was born in the early autumn of 2 BC (Luke 3:23).

In general, there is no evidence that Jesus was born on December 25 or January 7. It seems like the church chose this date, because it coincided with the time of the pagan festivities that were held during the winter solstice.

Millions of people around the world believe that they should celebrate Christmas, or the birthday of Jesus Christ. But did the apostles and other early Christians celebrate Christmas?

First, there is no indication in the Bible that anyone celebrated the birthday of Jesus. It stated only two people who celebrated their birthday. Neither one of them were servants of God, and, besides, those celebrations were marred by tragic events (Gen. 40:20; Mark 6:21). According to Britannica, early Christians rejected pagan customs of celebrating birthdays. There is no exact date that indicates when Jesus was born. "The date of Christ's birth cannot be known from the New Testament or from any other source", says McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia. If Jesus had wanted Christians to celebrate His birthday, He would have given them the exact date.

Second, there is no supporting evidence anywhere in the Bible that Jesus or any of His disciples celebrated Christmas. According to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, the celebration of Christmas is first mentioned in the Chronograph of Filocalus, an almanac

compiled around 336 AD. By that time, several centuries had already passed since the writing of the Bible and the coming of Jesus to earth. That is why the Encyclopedia of McClintock and Strong notes that "the celebration of Christmas is not established by God and does not originate in the New Testament".

Jesus Christ, our great Teacher, clearly explained to His followers what He expected from them, and these instructions were recorded in the Bible. But the celebration of Christmas was not included in them. Just as a teacher in a school expects his students to stay within the limits given to them, so Jesus did not want His students to go "above that which is written" in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6). On the other hand, there is one important event that was well known to early Christians. Jesus personally told His disciples when to celebrate and commemorate the event of his crucifixion and showed them how to do it. These detailed instructions, as well as the exact date of His passing, are recorded in the Bible (Luke 22:7, 19; 1 Cor. 11:25).

We can conclude that Christmas is nothing but a birthday celebration, and the early Christians rejected that pagan tradition. Also, there is no mention in the Bible of Jesus or anyone else celebrating Christmas.

However, despite all the above mentioned, I believe that such a great event as the birth of Jesus Christ, should be remembered and celebrated by humankind, praising God for sending to earth His only begotten Son. After all, if there had been no birth of Jesus Christ, then His crucifixion would not have taken place. That also means that there would have been no holy sacrifice for sin, by which we receive forgiveness if we come to God with faith and repentance. The birth of Jesus Christ is God's providence so that all people through His birth and death have the opportunity to be saved and inherit the Kingdom of God. And probably, it is not so important that the exact date of the birth of Jesus Christ has not yet been established. The main thing is to remember one thing: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

And if it so happened that for more than one century mankind has been celebrating Holy Christmas on December 25 and January 7, then so be it. After all, the essence is not in the date itself. Mankind is simply obliged at least once a year, as a token of gratitude, to remember this great event and the sacrifice that God sent to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. Of course, the day of remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ should be largely spiritual. Unfortunately, today most of mankind has turned, the day of Holy Christmas into some kind of festive drinking and mass entertainment, where there is no longer a place for the One Who came into this world for the sake of our salvation.

May the Lord forgive our spiritual blindness and sinfulness! May His holy name be glorified forever and ever!

I. GORIK.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

## Gave me goosebumps. The waitress asked God for help and got a huge tip

Every Christian knows that God hears our prayers and answers even what may seem insignificant in the eyes of others. But the main thing is that He hears and answers. This happened to a believing waitress in a restaurant in New Orleans (USA), who turned to God for help and was heard.

Ava Guan, a waitress at the Hoshun Chinese Restaurant in New Orleans, Louisiana, believes God recently answered her sincere request for help.

She was at Oliver Church on the Saturday before starting her

work shift. This is a small prayer house that was in dire need of repair.

When the parishioners started donating for the renovations, Guan donated a few hundred dollars as well, but that wasn't enough to cover all the expenses. Then she prayed to God for help.

On the same day that she started working at the restaurant, something extremely unusual happened: someone left her a tip of 777 dollars, despite the fact that they had to pay only 63 dollars for

food. This completely shocked Guan.

"I tell him enjoy your food. That's it. So he gave me the big tip. I don't know why, it's so



crazy. A surprise for me", the woman said. "I can't believe. I think it was God [who] gave me the gift".

After that, Guan donated this money to the church, as she realized that this was nothing more than an answer to her prayer.

"It's not my money", she informed, assuming that the one who left that much money was an angel.

Alice Ho, the restaurant manager, said she was also taken aback by the experience, espe-

cially after learning about the woman's prayer before receiving such a generous tip.

"Gave me goosebumps", she told reporters. "She told me she prayed that day, and it came true. That means somebody listened. Someone listened".

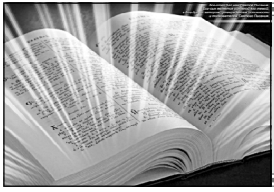
Later they found out that the person, who gave the tip, had himself opened a local restaurant that morning and was so grateful that he wanted to do something good for someone else.



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## PASTOR'S WORD

## THE SAVING FAITH



The word *faith*, in addition to denoting a female name, has many other different meanings and understandings. This word determines the reaction to the information heard and the level of trust in it. Sometimes people ask each other: *Do you believe this? Or should it be trusted?*

The word *faith* defines the level of trust between friends or spouses. This is usually expressed in the following words: *I believe him/her; I don't have any secrets from him/her; I trust him/her.* This implies that a person who is believed or trusted will not let you down, will not do something insidious and will not deceive.

Also, this word defines religious movements or confessions. When people ask: *What faith are you?* by this they identify a person with some particular denomination and, accordingly, presuppose their moral standards.

Every day, spiritual faith is inherent in all people. For example, a person leaves home for work and believes that today he will work at their workplace; goes to the store, believing that they will buy what they want.

**So, what is faith?** This question becomes even more relevant when we learn (from the Bible) that the salvation of the human soul is impossible without faith.

**Heb. 11:6** — *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

The faith necessary for the salvation of the human soul is something special. This faith is born deep in the heart of a person who has heard God's way of salvation, and leads to radical changes in the life of the believer.

**Rom. 10:17** — *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

This faith brings God closer to the believer, so to speak, and produces changes in the mind and character of the believer.

The Bible also speaks of faith as one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gift of faith is less common and can be described as not a natural kind of faith, but a gift from God that works when God turns it on to perform healings and miracles.

**Acts 3:16** — *And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

#### Definition of Faith in the Bible:

**Heb. 11:1** — *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

**Faith is being convinced of what we hope for and the certainty of what we have not yet seen.**

**Faith is the ability of the human spirit to actually reproduce invisible things in consciousness.**

By faith people perceive Christ and His teachings, becoming His followers and more like Him.

But today I wanted to focus on saving faith, without which is impossible to save your immortal soul and generally please God. My desire in this article is to more accurately describe the saving, correct faith and to warn of the dangers that exist today, associated with the substitution of the true faith for a counterfeit one.

Often people believe false information, and sometimes even obvious fairy tales. The mass media effects the consciousness of people and forms their worldview. To do this, in many countries (including *democratic* ones), institutions with huge annual budgets work behind the scenes, developing a certain strategy. The media are given main talking points, which they talk about for twenty-four hours. This explains such synchronicity in their actions.

Due to excessive gullibility, every day in the world people suffer from fraud. Most countries have various laws to protect the public from scammers, and many of these criminals are even placed in prison, but the evil is not reduced...

But when it comes to information on which the salvation of our immortal soul depends, it is much more critical. Lies in this area can be fatal for the soul. Even the Bible says that for those who do not love the truth, their salvation will be replaced by acts of confusion, and they will believe lies.

**2 Thess. 2:11-12** — *And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Therefore, it is important that faith has the right foundation. The basis for faith cannot be arguments such as *I think it will be right, or It will be good for everyone, or I really want it to be so.* All this may look attractive and even correct, but it is not always so. No wonder they say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The only proper basis for faith is the revelation of God's Word, the Bible.

There is a vivid biblical example when a human idea served as the basis for faith. This happened when the people of Israel were defeated in the battle with the Philistines under the young Samuel. After this battle, the elders offered to take the Ark of the Covenant, which would go among the army and give victory to the Jews. Perhaps they remembered from the recent past how the waters of the full-flowing Jordan River parted before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord for an unimpeded passage, and this gave them confidence. Whatever it was, the Jews believed that it would be so, and brought the Ark of the Covenant to the camp, preparing for battle. This greatly inspired the Jewish soldiers, so that they greeted the ark with a great

cry of joy and anticipation of victory, and the spirit of the Philistines fell when they learned the cause of the joyful noise in the Israelite camp. But the Israelites did nothing in the matter of putting their lives in order based on the law given to them by God. They did not repent and did not change their depraved way of life. Therefore, regardless of the manipulation of the Ark of the Covenant, God did not take the side of the Jews. In the subsequent battle, the Jews lost not four thousand killed, as in the first battle, but thirty thousand. The reason for the death of so many soldiers was a false belief in a supposed victory. The Jews who believed in the inevitable victory no longer fled for their lives, as before, but stubbornly died in battle with the Philistines, when the Lord was not with them.

Now we are experiencing a shift in the attention of believers from a deep, regenerating faith towards an adapted, selfish faith, aimed at improving the material life of Christians on earth. Obviously, at all times of freedom and prosperity, there is an accumulation of clogging of the dogma in the minds of believers, and during the persecution of Christians and difficult times, there is a purification and revival of ancient truths.

In the Christian environment, various *clever ideas* are presented aimed at achieving the desired goals without any sanctification by God on the basis of the teachings of Christ. It is not surprising that many of the followers of such ideas experience spiritual falls, are broken in their faith, and are not based on God's Word.

**Rom 10:17** — *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Faith must also be clearly distinguished from self-hypnosis. Today, teachings aimed at proselytizing are common. One such trend is called the *Word Faith Movement*. Their credo: *Create an image and have faith, just believe! Imagine and speak this into existence!* But these are psychological tricks that have no basis in Scripture.

Biblical faith differs from a strong desire to believe what you want in that it has a foundation, which is God's Word. The correct basis for the Christian faith is God's revelation received in a particular situation for certain circumstances.

**1 Cor. 2:5** — *...that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

**Matt. 4:4** — *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'".*

**By the way, Christ was surprised by two things related to faith:**

1. The unbelief of the Jews, who should not have doubted that He was the messenger of God, since they saw the healings and miracles that Christ performed before their eyes.

**Mark 6:6** — *And He marveled because of their unbelief.*

2. The tremendous faith of the pagan who has never seen Christ in person, but only heard about Him and believed that He is the Son of God. This pagan did not consider himself worthy to come to Jesus personally, but conveyed his request through friends for the healing of his servant.

**Luke 7:9-10** — *When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.*

### Why does God value faith in a person?

God values faith because it is the link between man and God. If a person is connected with the outside world by five sense organs, then with God, who is a Spirit, a person connects by faith, at the level of the spirit. Therefore, in order to communicate with God, faith is necessary, in the presence of which a person can come into contact with the almighty God, receive answers and be guided by Him. Faith is a manifestation of the human spirit, and its magnitude depends on the condition of the human heart.

**Is. 26:3** — *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

Biblical faith can be described as obedience and faithfulness. Today you can often hear sermons about faith as a way to inspire yourself with something that you really want, or, even worse, a means of believing in your dream. Before living a dream, you need to know where this dream was born. Perhaps the source of such a dream came from the search for fame, material well-being, or something else dictated by the decrepit human nature? Some dreams are the fruit of a sick imagination... Sometimes some dreams intoxicate for a longer time than alcohol and drugs, and can make the dreamer's life completely miserable.

**Jude 1:7-8** — *...as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them... are set forth as an example, suffering the*

*vengeance of eternal fire... so it will certainly be with these dreamers...*

**Ps. 72:20** — *As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.*

Consider the biblical example of *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*, who, at the command of the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, were thrown into a red-hot furnace for disobedience to his idol (**Dan. 3**). We do not see that they were one hundred percent sure of their survival in the furnace, but they had faithfulness to God and a willingness to die rather than betray Him and worship an idol. And the Lord saved them, glorifying His name with this glorious deliverance. Did these three young men have faith in the power of God? They did. Were they confident in their personal deliverance from the furnace? Not quite. We see this in their words: *If it should not be so?* But they relied completely on God, being faithful unto death. They gave their lives into His hands, and He was glorified through them! This is a very important factor — not to dictate your conditions to God, but to humbly accept His will and trust Him!

**Dan. 3:16-18** — *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up".*

### What does faith give

#### 1. Right Faith Leads to Obedience to God

Right faith leads to complete dependence on God and trust in Him. Obedience to God makes it possible to live life according to the will of God, that is, as productively as possible.

Abraham obeyed the call of God to leave his people and go to an unknown country. This was pleasing to God, and His blessing to Abraham was great: He made him the father of many peoples who, like him, obey God.

**Heb. 11:8-10** — *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance.*

*And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

#### 2. Faith produces boldness towards God, that is, it opens a direct path to fellowship with God

**Heb. 4:16** — *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

#### 3. Faith makes it possible to see pictures of the invisible future and gives strength in anticipation

That is why the men of faith described in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 11), having not received the fulfillment of the promise, *saw it from afar and rejoiced.*

**Heb. 11:13-14** — *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.*

**Heb. 11:26-27** — *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is Invisible.*

#### 4. Faith helps you stay calm in trials

**Ex. 14:13** — *And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever".*

**Is. 30:7** — *For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose. Therefore I have called her Rahab-Hem-Shebeth.*

**Is. 30:15** — *For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength". But you would no.*

#### 5. Faith gives strength

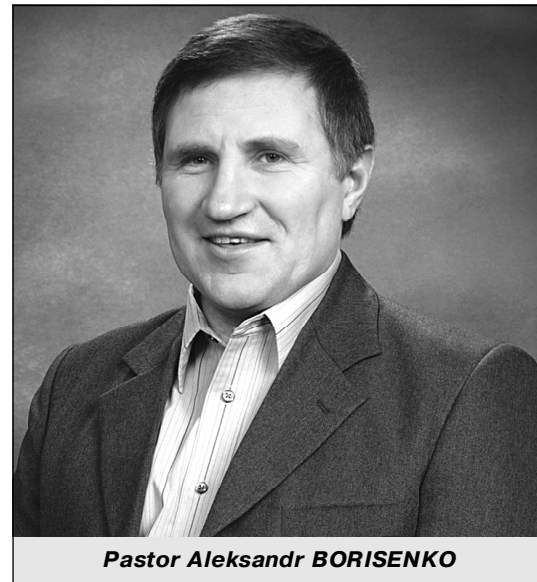
**Rev. 3:10** — *Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

#### 6. By faith we overcome the world

**1 John 5:4** — *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.*

This world is ruled by fashion, the desire for fame and fortune... But these are unattainable things, because sinful human nature always wants more. This does not bring happiness and peace, but makes people unhappy even when they achieve all that they dreamed about before.

Faith gives strength to live holy, contrary to the ideals of this world and public opinion. After all, regardless of social status, God cherishes every believer and treats them as an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. This gives strength, fills the life of a Christian with joy and happiness here on earth, and even more so in eternity.



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO





# PRODIGAL SON

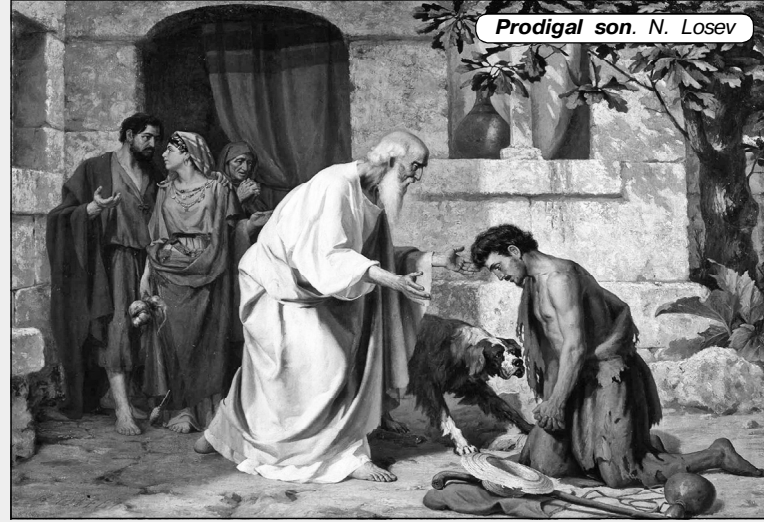
There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me". And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants'". And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son". But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found". And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has

received him back safe and sound". But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:11-32).

Many incarcerated (and not just incarcerated) people today can compare themselves to the prodigal son (or daughter) because once they left the father's house, all of them started to wonder on life's roads, trying to obtain everything there is to obtain. The book of Isaiah says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way" (Isiah 53:6). And now having found themselves at the very bottom, many of these prodigal children are trying to return home. How many of these prodigal sons and daughters are wondering on life's roads right now is difficult to say. One thing is for certain: many of them who have went through their share of life's school of hard knocks are ready to say the same thing as the prodigal son said in the parable: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). Words similar to this are what comes out of our mouth when we come with repentance before God.

The parable of the prodigal son is just an illustration of how a large portion of society, rejecting God, is smugly and arrogantly sailing on

without a set destination along life's currents up until the point when they start to run into the shores that are lined with sicknesses, sorrows, and problems. When we distance ourselves from God for one reason or another, we end up as slaves to sin. As it is written, "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he



Prodigal son. N. Losev

is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:19). When we end up as slaves of sin, and are unable to get out of this bondage, this is when these words come from our heart and spirit: "Father, forgive us"

The readers of these lines are most likely picturing their own, personal fall and despair where they were on the precipice with so little separating them from eternal darkness. For many this was the point of no return. The question arises: why only at the point of no return are we able to acknowledge our worthless lives and to grab onto the hand of the gracious and loving God? What is keeping a person from calling out to God before they make it to this point of no return? Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans gives an answer to this question. He cites what had already

been said by the prophets earlier: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one". "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive". "The venom of asps is under their lips". "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness". "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are

Because of this, today, regardless of social standing or location, every prodigal son and prodigal daughter with an open heart can come to the Heavenly Father who is patiently waiting for the return of His children back home.

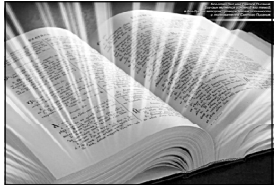
Often times analyzing the sources of humanities woes, I come to the conclusion that humanity, in its majority, live without thinking, or to be more precise, don't think at all. Everything in life becomes normal for a person and they simply do not pay attention to anything or think about anything other than personal desires; while all that we have to do is look up... The ancient prophet said: "Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing" (Isaiah 40:26). Unfortunately, many people have stopped thinking a long time ago. By the way, there is a wonderful saying about this topic that was said by the great writer Leo Tolstoy and was written down by his secretary. It goes like this: "People think like their fathers used to think; and their fathers thought like their grandfathers thought; and their grandfathers thought like their great-grandfathers thought; and their great-grandfathers thought like their great-great-grandfathers thought; and great-great-grandfathers — they did not think at all". Our recklessness does not allow us to timely think about God and about what awaits us there — after the finish of our earthly lives. Our Heavenly Father till this day is patiently waiting for all of his prodigal children to return back to His family. For many centuries His words sound to all people: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).



I. GORIK.

## PASTOR'S WORD

# THE SAVING FAITH



(Ending. Beginning on page 2)

### 7. Faith helps to make the last important step from the material world into the spiritual

Everybody is aware that in sporting tournaments, the last yards and feet before the finish line are the most important. But far more important are the last hours of our lives on earth! For some, they might be saving, but to some they might be fatal as in the example of the two thieves on the cross that were crucified next to Jesus. One turned to Jesus and was saved, while the other, while dying, mocked Christ. Very often, during the last moments of a person's life on earth, the expression on their face will tell you who came to take the person's soul. To die peacefully is the blessing given to people with a clear conscious who are at peace with God. Faith helps us to go on to the next life without fear and with peace in our heart.

### 8. God multiplied Abraham in faith before any descendants were born to him

Joshua 24:3 — Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many (made his offspring many when he still did not have any offspring) I gave him Isaac.

### 9. Learning about God and his truths happens with the help of faith

Hebrews 11:3 — By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

1 Corinthians 2:10 — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Galatians 2:16 — yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus...

1 John 4:16 — So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

Once we found out, we believed... But many people found out and have experienced in their lives God's miracles yet did not believe. They did not want to submit to God because they see a life without sin and entertainment as boring. To speak frankly, when a person turns to God, their heart changes and they are no longer drawn by the fleshly desires, life becomes much more colorful and interesting without breaking any moral laws, and a person gains a clear conscious and peace in the heart. Life becomes much happier than the one in the world!

### How the correct, saving faith is born and what makes it grow

Romans 1:20 — For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

#### 1. True faith is born in the spirit of a person from hearing the Word of God

The faith is not dependent on the presence or absence of evidence to support it. The correct foundation for Christian faith is God's revelation that is received in a specific situation for specific circumstances.

1 Corinthians 2:5 — ...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men (not in human logic or conclusions) but in the power of God.

Romans 10:17 — So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Matthew 4:4 — But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'".

Why did Job who went through so many sufferings remain faithful? Because he had a direct relationship with God and had received from Him revelations (answers) on the basis of which his faith grew.

Job 6:10 — This would be my comfort; I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

Job 12:4 — I am a laughingstock to my friends; I, who called to God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock.

Job 23:12 — I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

Abraham also had a direct relationship with God.

Genesis 12:1 — Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you..."

#### 2. Faith is strengthened from being filled with The Holy Spirit

A Christian needs to experience being filled with the Holy Spirit during prayer for their faith will grow because of this. Sometimes the touch of God's power in prayer can do much more for the growth of faith than the hearing of many dry (without the anointing of the Holy Spirit) sermons.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 — And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration

of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

#### 3. Faith grows from having a sincere and simple relationship with God and from being led by the Holy Spirit

Paying attention to what the Lord does leads to spiritual wisdom and maturity. Those that are led by the Holy Spirit are kept from disappointments since with God's guidance, everything has purpose and meaning. Those that are led by the Holy Spirit make less mistakes because when they make decisions, they try to align them with the will of God.

1 Corinthians 6:17 — But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

### Who is responsible for the growth of faith

The Bible has many wonderful examples of when people were in the same exact circumstances, saw and heard everything exactly the same, but some grew in faith while others remained spiritual dwarfs. This happened during the exodus of God's people from Egypt when God performed the 10 curses over the Egyptians. Everyone saw God's miracle of liberation from the strong and well-armed Egyptian conquerors. The Jews walked on the floor of the Red Sea that had parted for them but had consumed and drowned the Egyptians that were persecuting them. Everyone ate of the heavenly bread-mana and drank from the water that God gave them from the rock, ...but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (Hebrews 4:2).

The Bible says that for the majority of Israelites, this did not bring benefit. Their faith did not grow because they did not work on themselves by mixing (the word) with faith. How can we understand this? As an example, we can use the gastrointestinal tract that breaks down food that the person eats. The same thing happens spiritually. The Word that is heard must be analyzed, taken to memory, and put into practice. This requires personal effort and discipline.

Turns out, every person is responsible for their own level of faith: will they desire to work and dissolve that which they heard with faith or will they remain spiritually passive and apathetic. A whole generation of Israelites were unable to go into the Promised Land because of unbelief. They were unable to go in because they did not grow their faith. Joshua and Caleb turned out to be polar opposites to them. They sincerely believed in and obeyed God and for this, they inherited the Promised Land and had a positive influence on history.

Hebrews 3:19 — ...they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:6 — ...failed to enter because of disobedience...

We are in a better position right now! We still have the opportunity to grow our faith in us, which, going through all the trials, will lead us to the Heavenly Kingdom with Christ in eternity!

Habakkuk 2:4 — Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

# The Lord healed me from HIV disease

I was born in Ternopil in a family of workers. I studied at a school with a focus in gymnastics and mathematics. From first grade, I began to do gymnastics, in which I achieved good results. After graduating from primary and high school, I studied at a local college, and instead of serving in the army I ended up in another place...

Nothing then foreshadowed any danger. I loved the comradeship, and I often spent time with my friends, among whom there were many athletes. At that time, the city was divided into districts between certain rivaling groups. My circle of friends was from the East side of town. Oftentimes, conflicts would arise between the regions, they struggled for precedence and authority in the city. When I started studying at school, I made friends with guys who used drugs, however for more than a year I did not have the desire to join them. Even though they would offer me them multiple times.

By that time, my older brother had been injecting for over two years. I constantly communicated with people who used drugs. Eventually the moment came when I myself became interested in trying them. In our environment, it was considered cool because they weren't affordable for the majority of people.

At that point in time, people responded to drug addicts with fear, but not with disgust. In those days, the phenomenon of drug addiction was something new, still full of unknowns. I tried my first dose out of curiosity, it spiraled into a drug addiction. I gradually began to bring suffering and pain to the people who loved me — especially my family. Because of my addiction to drugs, some friends turned their backs on me completely, while others kept their distance. People stopped trusting me because I started stealing, cheating and lying in order to get money for a dose. I ended up going to prison when I was twenty-two.

While in prison for the first time, I didn't learn anything, and did not want to change anything in my life. Therefore, when I was released, I again returned to the same group of drug addicts and thieves.

After not even being free for a year, I again ended up in prison, this time at a maximum-security facility. Here I had to face the realities of life behind bars, especially when I fell ill with tuberculosis and a stomach ailment.

After I was released, I again found myself in the same swamp, with the only difference that I have now acquired a whole bunch of diseases. Being enslaved to my drug addiction, I could not even

fathom freeing myself. It seemed to me that I was a vicious circle with no hope of change. When some kind of epiphany came, I realized that it was no longer possible to live like this. The end could come at any moment. Many of my friends had already died from an overdose, from diseases or were missing. Time passed, but my drug addiction and the sense of doom continued. I was haunted by fear of the police, of the uncertainty of tomorrow, and of not having a dose in the morning. In such a situation, a person becomes like a hunted animal, constantly being in captivity of slavery and hopelessness.

At thirty, I went back to prison, taking the blame for my older brother's crime. In the spring, just before the court session, my mother died. And in a few short days after the funeral, I was convicted — and again faced prison...

In the pre-trial center in Chortkiv, they took my blood for analysis in the medical center. After some time, I was sent to the prison and then for some reason I was called to the doctors again. They gave me a form on which was printed that I was strictly forbidden: to share a razor, to get tattoos, to inject and share needles and also to have sexual relations and the like. If I violate this order, I would be held criminally liable. I was confronted with a terrible fact: I was HIV-positive!

When I realized what was happening, I was really scared. I was in shock and only gradually began to realize that I could never have a family or children. It was like an executioner's shot in the head for me. In addition to that news, my older brother died of a drug overdose. I then had to experience the heaviest blow to my mental health in my life. My hands went limp, life has lost all meaning.

I didn't tell anyone that I had HIV. I withdrew into myself, and began to live like a lone wolf.

When I was released, I did not know where to go and what to do. No one was waiting for me at home: my father was struggling with his vodka addiction. In my thirty-one years, no one needed or wanted me!

While in the village of Krasnoye, where I had to transfer to a train to Ternopil, I had to wait six hours and, not knowing what to do, I bought some alcohol. Under the scorching sun, I quickly got drunk and vodka only increased my depression. I wanted to take my life... I only came to my senses while in intensive care.

After returning home from the hospital, I calmed down a bit and started working. And

although the management knew that I had a record they helped me get a job.

In my life, everything seemed to be getting better: I had a good salary, and was respected by my peers. We have a saying, that a holy place is never empty. My spiritual emptiness this time was filled with alcohol. At first, I drank with the workers, then by

me. Thank God I got healed! But I was still worried about the thought of my HIV infection...

After rehabilitation, I began to serve the Lord: I preached the Gospel, prayed for the sick, and served in the rehabilitation center. When we celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of our church, I looked at happily married people and thought: *Am I really going to be single? Can the enemy really manipulate my disease?* I decided to pray for healing from HIV. I asked myself: *Couldn't the Lord, who pulled me out of such a bottom, heal me?* Although I was convinced: no matter how my life develops, that I will always serve Jesus Christ — the Son of God!

When I decided to take the medical tests, the doctor asked me if I had ever been tested for HIV/AIDs. I replied that in 2004 I was registered as HIV-positive.

The woman was taken aback: *Why do you need to take tests again?* I answered her: *Can't Christ, who healed me of tuberculosis and stomach disease, heal me of HIV?!* *Well, it is your right to believe so,* the doctor said incredulously.

I completed the tests and immediately started fasting, asking the Lord God for complete healing. For twelve days I did not eat anything, was in the Word, prayed and served. Four days later, I began to thank God, I was sure that the Lord had heard my request. I had to wait another fifteen days for the test results. And when I arrived, the nurse, taking my form, told me:

*You have a negative result. What does it mean?* I asked. *You are healthy!* was the answer.

I immediately began to thank God. When the doctor entered, she was shocked, and came out to my table to meet me.

I did not stop, I do not stop and I will never stop praising God, because He is worthy of our glory! Christ took all our sins, curses, sicknesses, infirmities and brought them to the cross, defeating the intentions of Satan.

I'm on the cross, the Son of God proclaimed: *It's done!* thus completing the plan of salvation, healing, and deliverance. It remains for each of us to accept this in our hearts by faith and, having humbled ourselves, fall at the feet of Jesus Christ and give Him our lives completely, giving the Lord the opportunity to act and live in each of us. Open yourself to Him too!

**Boris FENTS,**  
Ternopil, Ukraine,  
[www.love-healing.org.ua](http://www.love-healing.org.ua)



myself, and then I fell into the slavery again! And when I realized that I was completely addicted, I consoled myself with the thought: *It's okay: I managed to quit drugs — I'll quit alcohol.* When I tried to do this, that is, I abruptly stopped drinking, then I felt what a real nightmare is! For three days and three nights I did not sleep at all, I was shaking from alcohol deprivation and was overwhelmed with fear, my body was on fire and itched somehow unpleasantly. I thought I was going to die. And by the next day I began to hear voices and hallucinate. But it did not help me and did not help out of this state. I heard voices, argued with people with whom I once knew, I would convince them of something, and they would convince me. And when the arguments with myself reached its climax, I grabbed a knife from the counter in the store looking to take revenge on those who argued with me. I stood in the store with a knife in my hand (in front of the shocked viewers), looking around: where are my enemies? But there was no one, only the hostile voices which sounded in my head... Thinking I was defending myself, I stabbed myself right below the heart!

I woke up in intensive care. This event slowed me down. I didn't drink for a while after that. When I started to return

can't say that I was looking for God, most likely it was He who found me, although I didn't understand it then.

When I came to the rehabilitation center, I stayed there. Being in the center, I immediately stopped drinking, smoking and cursing, and started leading a healthy lifestyle. As they say, I was a cultural sinner. But there came a moment when I realized that something was wrong with me. I began to realize how terrible of a sinner I was and was plagued by thoughts about how the Lord could never forgive me. Although I prayed and read a lot of literature, all this seemed to me dry and unreal.

As soon as I was assured of my salvation, I began to go beyond the center, into the field, where I called out to God, sang and prayed. Then I began to fast for one, two, three days and more. I drank only water and continued to read the Word of God and pray. One fine day, when my fellow brothers and I were in prayer, something came over me. I received the cleansing and baptism with the Holy Spirit from the Lord. The barrier of sin has fallen! I was so overjoyed that I couldn't sleep, I wanted to sing and pray. I even began to perceive the colors of nature as more vibrant and beautiful. After a while I noticed that my lungs and stomach stopped bothering

## Be thankful for everything

One thanksgiving eve, two believers met. A very ordinary conversation took place:

*Well how are you?* one asked. *So-so,* answered the another, *My apartment is small, I live with my wife's parents, My salary is small, there are problems at my orchard: my apple trees are not bearing fruit. It's not all that great...*

That night the man had a dream. In a dream, he met an

angel who was pulling a huge cart filled with various things, including some that are very familiar to him.

*What's the matter? What's happening?* he asked the angel.

*I take from people everything for which they did not thank God,* the angel answered.

The man imagined himself without an apartment, without an orchard, without his wife's parents, who helped him with the children, and sincerely repented. This Thanksgiving has been the most sincere and grateful day ever!



## Grandmother and grandson

One day the grandson asked his grandmother:

*Grandma, you read the Bible every day, and for so many years now... Do you remember anything at all?*

*Not exactly grandson. I'm already old! I can't remember everything.*

*Then why are you reading it over and over again?*

*See that basket of potatoes over there? Remove the potatoes and bring me some water!*

The grandson cannot bring water

to the house in a basket, because the water passes through the holes. And he went and tried several times.

*Grandma, what's the point of fetching water with a basket if I can't carry even a drop home?*

*Do you remember what the basket was like before you took it?*

*Dirty.*

*What is it like now?*

*Clean.*

*So our mind is cleansed every day when reading the Bible and is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.*

<http://bible-facts.ru>



TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

My name is Aleksandr Averyanov. I was born in the Belarusian city of Baranovichi. I have been involved in sports since the age of eight. At the age of seventeen, when I entered the institute, I was taken to the basketball team with the further prospect of playing for the national team of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Everything was going very well, and life seemed already quite arranged. But in those same seventeen years, I fell under the influence of people who use drugs and alcohol, and everything turned upside down: being expelled from the institute, then from the team. I lost everything I wanted. But I was fine with a carefree high life, until the first withdrawal manifested itself. It was then that I realized that life without drugs is better.



But it is not so easy to free yourself from the devil's shackles. Drugs very soon ceased to bring pleasure, and I was already their slave. For the sake of drugs, I went into crime. A life full of evil fell upon me. Betrayal, loneliness, broken relationships with my family,

## Jesus pulled me out of the world of sin

health problems, another conviction and a term of imprisonment — this was the result of a twelve-year drug addiction. At twenty-nine, I was on the verge of death. But it did not scare me, but seemed the only way to solve my problems. Indeed, before that, many times I had visited various clinics with no success, turning to extra-sensory people for help, looking for peace in an Orthodox monastery. I thought about suicide more and more often. And then the Lord reminded me of Himself.

Many years ago, brothers from the Baranovichi Christian Church Salvation visited me with a sermon about Christ, testimonies and prayers. They told about themselves and about how the Lord pulled them out of the world of sin and crimes. But then I did not listen to them, did not believe that God could help. And now, after eight long years, I met Jesus again: I ended up in a Christian rehabilitation center. There I was met by hospitable brothers. I was surprised and inspired by the testimonies of the guys whose lives were changed by Christ.

I wanted to quickly get to know God, who is behind all this. And soon after I said the prayer of repentance, the long-awaited happened: I received freedom from drugs, and my life changed dramatically. Christ forgave, did not condemn, understood and accepted me, He showed that He loves me! Transformation is what happened to me in Christ Jesus. Very soon the Lord healed my kidneys as well as my wounded soul.

After a while, I began to pray that I would become the pastor of a church. The Lord encouraged us to organize brothers and sisters for fasting, prayers for our unsaved relatives. I learned to testify, to preach. God gave me a wonderful wife, Veronica. The main thing for our family from the first days was the fulfillment of the will of God. Shortly after we got married, we were invited to Spain to minister to drug addicts. They prepared a house for us five kilometers from the sea, a car as a gift, and good financial support. Rejoiced, my wife and I learned Spanish and resolved issues with documents. Almost before leaving, we decided to go to the Gomel region, to our rehabilitation center, to say goodbye to everyone.

Meeting us, our pastor Aleksandr said:

*I offer you a ministry in the village of Rudnya. There are several people there, a house of prayer, but there is no pastor.*

I still do not know why this happened, but we agreed, accepting this proposal as a word from the Lord. Of course, purely humanly, we wanted to go to Barcelona and our parents and friends did as well and did not understand why we chose Rudnya over Barcelona, even condemning our

decision. But God gave us faith and firmness. A month later we came to Rudnya to serve in the local church.

What we had to face was not easy. The apartment we rented used to be a hangout for alcoholics and drug addicts. Due to the lack of a heating system, we had to spend the winter in the cold, in some places there was even frost on the walls in the apartment. We couldn't eat properly, because we lived without money and there was no work either. And even at the first meeting with church members, I heard:

*We don't need a pastor, why did you come here?*

The locals didn't show much joy about our arrival either. Glasses were smashed at us, objects of an occult nature were thrown (it is clear that someone was casting spells against us). Later, our car was smashed, then robbed. Everything was bad and more than once I grumbled at my fate. For over a year, I resented everyone and everything. More than once I wanted to quit everything, but the Lord gave support and faith. God worked with the Holy Spirit over my heart, and one day the offense left. And life began to change. Praise God for His patience!

Our church began to grow in numbers and continues to grow to this day. Sometimes in our house of prayer there is not even enough space for everyone! We have a lot of young people, there is a Sunday school, there is a prayer service. On the basis of the church, a public organization *Mothers Against Drugs* was opened, which conducts work in schools. Then the *Right to Life* rehab center was opened, where we help drug addicts, alcoholics, homeless people to return to life.

We happily celebrated the opening of the new building of the rehabilitation center, where we can take up to fifteen people for the recovery program. In addition, we regularly hold meetings in the neighboring village, where if the Lord wills in the future we plan to open a church.

Many changes have taken place in our village. Local residents treat us differently now, we have good relations with many, the authorities are compromising with us. And also, our village was included in the presidential project of agricultural towns. New streets are being built, shops, houses, a gym, streets are being restored. They cleaned the lake where the recreation center will be. Thank God!

Nine years ago, God saved me and I've been a pastor for eight years now. It's a miracle! Jesus Christ put in my heart the desire to lead a local church and open new ones in other places, as well as to open a rehab center. Our family is ready to follow God wherever He leads us, because there is nothing better than to serve Him!

✻ Aleksandr AVERYANOV, Belarus, [www.shans.by](http://www.shans.by)

## I am infinitely grateful to God!

My name is Bogdan, I am forty-four years old, and I want to tell you about the wonderful moments of life given to me by the Lord, for which I am infinitely grateful to Him.

When I was thirty years old, drugs entered my life. Now, looking back, I realize that it was because my life was wicked. Despite the fact that I had a wife and a little daughter, I spent my free time in constant partying and very often did not spend the night at home. Subsequently, I wanted something more and this required money, and a lot of it. That something turned out to be drugs, and in order to buy them, I began to steal. Over time, I became dependent on them, I had already been treated in a drug dispensary more than once. But unfortunately, the doctors could not help me. As soon as I left the hospital after treatment, I ran again to look for drugs to inject myself. My family was crumbling, and my parents' endless attempts to influence me were in vain.

I have been repeatedly prosecuted for theft and possession of drugs. I was convicted three times, served my sentence in places of deprivation of liberty of enhanced and strict regime. But nothing has changed. On the contrary, everything was repeated again: as soon as I got out of prison, I continued to do the same. It was no longer life, but simply existence. Almost everyone turned away from me, avoiding even communication with me. My family, my loved ones suffered because of me. I broke up with my wife, and rarely saw my daughter. Only my mother still tolerated me, but she constantly cried over my fate.



Then a terrible tragedy happened in my life: my daughter died in a car accident... Her name was Natalya, and she was only sixteen years old — she was just beginning to live! This tragedy just knocked me down, I lost all interest in life. If earlier I still sometimes restrained myself, now I didn't give a damn about anything. I sank lower and lower, the sun in my life began to set even faster. Finally, I reached the point where I could no longer walk, but only lay in bed. And although the coffee table next to me was littered with medicines, for some reason they did not help me. I was diagnosed with pneumonia, but the circumstances were such that the doctors simply did not care about me, nor could

help me. I lay there with no hope of improvement. I had a broken spirit, a crippled soul and a sick body...

It was at this most difficult time in my life that brothers came to my house and told me about God, that there is still a way out of this seemingly hopeless situation for me, and it is only in Jesus Christ! I believed in these words, and placed all my last hope and faith in God. Sincerely repenting of all my sins, I decided to devote my life to Him, because I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

I am infinitely grateful to God for this moment, because it was then that a miracle happened and from that moment my life began to change rapidly. Still not understanding many things, at first, I did what my brothers in Christ advised me to do. Unlike the circumstances that were before, now everything began to change for the better. I was admitted to the hospital. I recovered so quickly that even the doctors were surprised. Despite the fact that I had a whole bunch of diseases, after two weeks I was already discharged, because my condition improved, and I thank the Lord for this.

After my recovery, I immediately went to the church where my brothers in Christ came from. I was accepted into this Christian family with love and joy. I started attending a gathering for former drug addicts and I want to testify that my life has changed dramatically. I have been in the church for five years already, and during this time I successfully went through rehabilitation, the Lord completely restored my health, healing me from hepatitis C, and in addition, helped me to renew my relationship with my family and friends. My mother repented and accepted Jesus Christ into her heart.

I successfully graduated from Bible College, where I received my initial theological education, and now I serve in a rehabilitation center for the same addicts as I once was. I also sing in the church choir, where I glorify our Lord Jesus Christ with songs. I am currently in my fourth year at the Bible Institute. And the most important thing is that the Lord gave me freedom from all sinful addiction and peace in my heart. Every morning I wake up with joy from the realization of freedom and also from the fact that the Lord is with me.

I lived through moments when I should have been crippled and even died but in an amazing way the Lord saved me, His hand was with me. I give thanks for all the blessings the Lord has given me, for His grace that is with me every day. The Lord restored me and changed my life.

I want to sincerely thank my mother for her love and great patience. I am grateful to my brother, mentor, the person through whom the Lord touched me, Andrey Guzenko, and also to the pastor of the rehabilitation center Roman Deshchakovsky and the entire team at the rehabilitation center, for giving a lot of their time and energy to help me. Special thanks to Oleg Savchak, our blessed God-appointed pastor of the Church *Love and Healing*, as well as Anna Mikhailovna, our sister in the Lord and spiritual mother for many!

Bogdan GNATIEVICH, Ukraine, [www.love-healing.org.ua](http://www.love-healing.org.ua)

## What is the definition of sin?

Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (**1 John 3:4**) and rebellion against God (**Deuteronomy 9:7; Joshua 1:18**). Sin had its beginning with Lucifer, probably the most beautiful and powerful of the angels. Not content with his position, he desired to be higher than God, and that was his downfall, the beginning of sin (**Isaiah 14:12-15**). Renamed Satan, he brought sin to the human race in the Garden of Eden, where he tempted Adam and Eve with the same enticement, *you shall be like God*. **Genesis 3** describes Adam and Eve's rebellion against God and against His command. Since that time, sin has been passed down through all the generations of mankind and we, Adam's descendants, have inherited sin from him. **Romans 5:12** tells us that through Adam sin entered the world, and so death was passed on to all men because *the wages of sin is death* (**Romans 6:23**).

Through Adam, the inherent inclination to sin entered the human race, and human beings became sinners by nature. When Adam sinned, his inner nature was transformed by his sin of rebellion, bringing to him spiritual death and depravity which would be passed on to all who came after him. We are sinners not because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinners. This passed-on depravity is known as inherited sin. Just as we inherit physical characteristics from our parents, we inherit our sinful natures from Adam. King David lamented this condition of fallen human nature in **Psalms 51:5**: *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*.

Another type of sin is known as imputed sin. Used in both financial and legal settings, the Greek word translated *imputed* means *to take something that belongs to someone and credit it to another's account*. Before the Law of Moses was given, sin was not imputed to man, although men were still sinners because of inherited sin. After the Law was given, sins committed in violation of the Law were imputed (accounted) to them (**Romans 5:13**). Even before transgressions of the law were imputed to men, the ultimate penalty for sin (death) continued to reign (**Romans 5:14**). All humans, from Adam to Moses, were subject to death, not because of their sinful acts against the Mosaic Law (which they did not have), but because of their own inherited sinful nature. After Moses, humans were subject to death both because of inherited sin from Adam and imputed sin from violating the laws of God.

God used the principle of imputation to benefit mankind when He imputed the sin of believers to the account of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for that sin — death — on the cross. Imputing our sin to Jesus, God treated Him as if He were a sinner, though He was not, and had Him die for the sins of the entire world (**1 John 2:2**). It is important to understand that sin was imputed to Him, but He did not inherit it from Adam. He bore the penalty for sin, but He never became a sinner. His pure and perfect nature was untouched by sin. He was treated as though He were guilty of all the sins ever committed by the human race, even though He committed none. In exchange, God imputed the righteousness of Christ to believers and credited our accounts with His righteousness, just as He had credited our sins to Christ's account (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).

A third type of sin is personal sin, that which is committed every day by every human being. Because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, we commit individual, personal sins, everything from seemingly innocent untruths to murder. Those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ must pay the penalty for these personal sins, as well as inherited and imputed sin. However, believers have been freed from the eternal penalty of sin — hell and spiritual death — but now we also have the power to resist sinning. Now we can choose whether or not to commit personal sins because we have the power to resist sin through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, sanctifying and convicting us of our sins when we do commit them (**Romans 8:9-11**). Once we confess our personal sins to God and ask forgiveness for them, we are restored to perfect fellowship and communion with Him. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (**1 John 1:9**).

We are all three times condemned due to inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin. The only

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

# ABOUT SIN

just penalty for this sin is death (**Romans 6:23**), not just physical death but eternal death (**Revelation 20:11-15**). Thankfully, inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin have all been crucified on the cross of Jesus, and now by faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior *we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* (**Ephesians 1:7**).

## How can I know if something is a sin?

There are two issues involved in this question, the things that the Bible specifically mentions and declares to be sin and those the Bible does not directly address. Scriptural lists of various sins include **Proverbs 6:16-19**, **Galatians 5:19-21**, and **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**. There can be no doubt that these passages present the activities as sinful, things God does not approve of. Murder, adultery, lying, stealing, etc. — there is no doubt the Bible presents such things as sin. The more difficult issue is in determining what is sinful in areas that the Bible does not directly address. When the Bible does not cover a certain subject, we have some general principles in His Word to guide us.

First, when there is no specific scriptural reference, it is good to ask not whether a certain thing is wrong, but, rather, if it is definitely good. The Bible says, for example, that we are to *make the most of every opportunity* (**Colossians 4:5**). Our few days here on earth are so short and precious in relation to eternity that we ought never to waste time on selfish things, but to use it only on *what is helpful for building others up according to their needs* (**Ephesians 4:29**).

A good test is to determine whether we can honestly, in good conscience, ask God to bless and use the particular activity for His own good purposes. *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God* (**1 Corinthians 10:31**). If there is room for doubt as to whether it pleases God, then it is best to give it up. *Everything that does not come from faith is sin* (**Romans 14:23**). We need to remember that our bodies, as well as our souls, have been redeemed and belong to God. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body* (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). This great truth should have a real bearing on what we do and where we go.

In addition, we must evaluate our actions not only in relation to God, but also in relation to their effect on our family, our friends, and other people in general. Even if a particular thing may not hurt us personally, if it harmfully influences or affects someone else, it is a sin. *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. ... We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves* (**Romans 14:21; 15:1**).

Finally, remember that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and nothing else can be allowed to take priority over our conformity to His will. No habit or recreation or ambition can be allowed to have undue control over our lives; only Christ has that authority. *Everything is permissible for me — but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me — but I will not be mastered by anything* (**1 Corinthians 6:12**). *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (**Colossians 3:17**).

## Are all sins equal to God?

All sin is a falling short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). So there's either righteousness or unrighteousness, and righteousness — perfection — is an absolute. Broadly speaking, all sins are equal to

God in that all sins are by definition *unrighteous* and *imperfect*. All things less than holy share the quality of unholiness.

We can picture man's efforts to attain righteousness as a group of people trying to jump a chasm. Some get a running start; some try to pole vault; others flap their arms on the way across — but none of them reach the other side. It doesn't matter if they fall short by two inches, two yards, or two miles — they all plunge downward. In a similar way, all sins are equal to God; it doesn't really matter how short we fall. We all fall.

Jesus indicated that, by their nature, all sins are equal to God. In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord mentioned two *big* sins — murder and adultery — and equated them with unjustified anger and lustful thoughts (**Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28**). Anger,

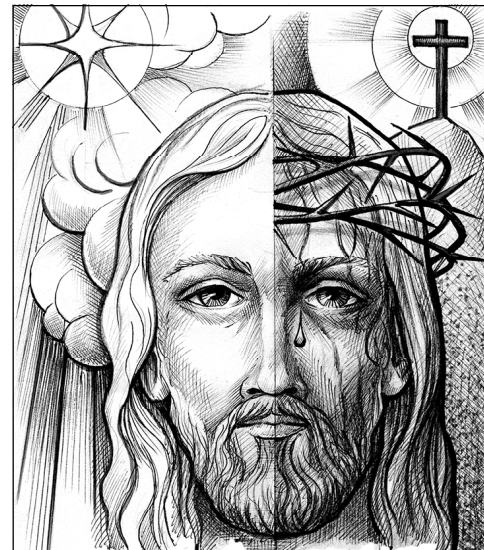


Illustration by Igor OSOKIN

murder, lust, and adultery are all sins, and we need to take them all seriously.

Now that we've established the general rule that all sins are equal to God by nature, we can add some refinements. Although lust and adultery are both sinful, that does not mean they are equal in every respect. Having lust in one's heart will have consequences in this world, but those consequences will not be as severe as committing the physical act of adultery. The same is true with harboring a grudge versus actually committing murder. Coveting has a lesser effect than thieving. Sin is sin, but not all sin bears the same penalties in this world. In that sense, some sins are worse than others.

Scripture singles out sexual sin as having worse consequences than other types of sin: *Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body* (**1 Corinthians 6:18**). In this passage, immorality is considered apart from other sins such as dishonesty, pride, envy, etc. All sin will negatively affect the mind and soul of a person, but sexual immorality will immediately and directly affect one's body. The destruction wrought by sexual immorality will have a physical impact. The extended warning against sexual sin in **Proverbs 6** contains this warning: *A man who commits adultery has no sense; whoever does so destroys himself* (**verse 32**).

All sins are equal to God in that any and every sin will keep one out of heaven. In the eternal state, the New Jerusalem will be inhabited by the righteous, the redeemed of the Lord. *Outside the city are the dogs — the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idol worshipers, and all who love to live a lie* (**Revelation 22:15, NLT; cf. 21:8**). At the same time, even in the final judgment, there seem to be degrees of punishment among the dogs: *Someone who does not know [the master's will], and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly* (**Luke 12:48, NLT**). So not all sins carry the same weight of punishment in hell.

There is one other way in which all sins are equal in God's eyes: all sins, no matter how *big* or *small*, can be forgiven in Christ. Scripture says that *where*

*sin increased, grace increased all the more* (**Romans 5:20**). No one can out-sin God's grace. We are all equally sinful before God. But, in Christ, we are made righteous. We are *justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood* (**Romans 3:24-25**). By faith in Christ, we are born again and therefore victorious over sin: *Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith* (**1 John 5:4**).

## What are the seven deadly sins?

According to Catholic theology, the seven deadly sins are seven vices or negative character qualities that, left unchecked, will result in a host of other sins and eventually kill a person's soul. The seven *deadly* sins are pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth. The list was first delineated by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century. Thomas Aquinas later expounded on the idea. In the fourteenth century, Dante wrote his epic poem *Inferno* in which he pictured Purgatory as having seven terraces corresponding to the seven deadly sins.

The seven deadly sins are also called the seven capital sins or the seven cardinal sins — cardinal in this context meaning, of *basic importance* or *extremely grave*. The seven deadly sins are considered to be the most basic sins that plague humanity and the sins that are most likely to beset us. Each of the seven deadly sins leads to other sins; for example, anger can lead to evil speaking, violence, or murder.

Here is a brief description of each of the seven deadly sins:

**Pride** — An inflated, unrealistic sense of your self-worth.

**Envy** — The feeling that you deserve the possessions, success, virtues, or talents of another person.

**Gluttony** — An excessive desire for the pleasure of eating and drinking.

**Lust** — A selfish focus on sex or a desire to have sexual pleasure with someone other than your spouse.

**Anger** — An excessive, improper desire to exact revenge.

**Greed** — A strong desire for possessions, especially for possessions belonging to another.

**Sloth** — Lack of effort in the face of a necessary task, causing it to go undone (or done badly).

A common misconception about the seven deadly sins is that they are sins that God will not forgive. The Roman Catholic Church does not teach the sins to be unforgivable; in Catholic doctrine, the seven deadly sins can lead to mortal sins, which will send a person to hell immediately upon death, unless such sins are repented of before death. Catholicism also teaches that the seven deadly sins can be overcome with the seven virtues (humility, gratitude, charity, temperance, chastity, patience, and diligence).

Is the idea of seven deadly sins biblical? Yes and no. **Proverbs 6:16-19** lists seven things that are detestable to God: 1) haughty eyes, 2) a lying tongue, 3) hands that shed innocent blood, 4) a heart that plots evil, 5) feet that are quick to rush to do wrong, 6) a false witness, and 7) a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Of course, this list is not what most people understand as the *seven deadly sins*.

Yes, pride, envy, etc., are sins that the Bible condemns; however, they are never called the *seven deadly sins* in the Bible. The traditional list of seven deadly sins can function as a way to categorize the many different sins that exist. Nearly every sin could be placed in one of those seven categories.

In the final analysis, no sin is any more *deadly* than any other sin. All sin results in death (**Romans 6:23**). Even one sin condemns a person as a lawbreaker (**James 2:10**). Praise be to God that Jesus Christ took the penalty for all of our sins, including the *seven deadly sins*. By the grace of God, through faith in Christ, we can be forgiven (**Matthew 26:28; Acts 10:43; Ephesians 1:7**).



www.gotquestions.org

## CHRISTIAN NEWS Only 3 % of Christian missionaries worldwide focus on unreached people groups: report

Of the roughly 7.7 billion people on the planet, more than 3 billion are considered either unreached or least reached. Of those, approximately 7,000 people groups have been categorized as unreached, which means less than 2 % identify as Evangelical Christian and less than 5 % identify as someone who claims any form of the Christian religion.

Unreached people group (UPG) resources indicate that at least 2 % of a population is needed to reach an entire group.

In all, the unreached of the world comprise nearly 42 % of the global population, according to the global

evangelism ministry East-West.

Several factors are behind why these groups are unreached, including physical, political and cultural barriers.

Many of these people groups live in largely inaccessible terrain or far-flung corners of South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, making access to evangelists extremely challenging.

But beyond the physical barriers, oftentimes, missionaries are faced with cultural and political hardships — including persecution — simply for advancing the Gospel in hostile nations and areas.

The religions of Islam, Hinduism

and others typically dominate in most countries where UPGs live, while other cultures tend to disprove of conversion to Christianity or other religions.

These factors account for why some avoid making the effort altogether: of the roughly 400,000 Christian missionaries worldwide, only 3.3 % are focused on UPGs, according to The Traveling Team data cited by East-West.

John Maisel, founder of East-West, says God ultimately gets the glory when His people willingly take risks for the Gospel.

*God's greatest delight is when His children choose by faith to get*

*out of the safety of the boat to meet Him and follow His leading*, he wrote in a blog post.

Maisel — whose travels for international ministry during the Cold War era of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in his East-West Ministries International in 1993 — said he believes God is at work in the lives of the people we meet every day.

*You show me a Christian without a passion for those around them who are outside of Christ, and I will show you a Christian without vision who is playing it safe*, he added.

Earlier this year, author and Pastor David Platt spoke about the

need for missions during the Together for the Gospel Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

Citing the over 3 billion worldwide who are *unreached*, Platt said *unreached* did not simply mean being an unbeliever, but rather it meant that it was a community where the people had no access to the Gospel.

*People are just as lost in Kentucky and the places where most all of us live as they are in Yemen*, said Platt. *The difference is there are churches in Kentucky and all the places where most of us live. Gospel-preaching churches.*

The Christian Post.



## TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

## THE LORD'S BAPTISM



## THE STORY OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

☉ **Matthew 3:13-17** — Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness". Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased".

☉ **Mark 1:9-11** — At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased".

☉ **Luke 3:21-22** — When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased".

☉ **John 1:29-34** — The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel". Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit'. I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One".

## I. PURPOSE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

## 1. Preach about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven

**Matthew 3:1-2** — In those days John the Baptist came and preached in the wilderness of Judah and said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The question: How did the Kingdom of Heaven become nearby? **Answer:** The kingdom of heaven has come near in the form of a person in Jesus Christ, The God and King of the entire universe.

In the bible, John the Baptist is called the forerunner of Jesus Christ. Forerunner is the Greek word for **prodromos**, which referred to a speeder who ran ahead of the chariot of a king or noble nobleman to announce his approach and free (clear) his way.

So, John the Baptist's mission was to proclaim the coming of the Lord and His kingdom.

## 2. Calling People to Repentance

John the Baptist's mission as the forerunner of the Lord was not only to announce the coming of Christ into the world, but also to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of the Lord and His kingdom.

There was a prophecy about John the Baptist and his mission in Isaiah: **Luke 3:4-6** — As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation'" (the same is said in **Isaiah 40:3-5**).

This passage testifies not only to John the Baptist and his mission to prepare people for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, but also to the way, or ways, of preparing the heart for the coming of the Lord. The salvation of God can be seen only by one who has recognized themselves as a sinner and confessed to God their sins and the renunciation of their former sinful life.

That is why John's baptism with water, which is inextricably linked to the preaching of repentance, implied the realization by the baptized of one's sinfulness and the confession of one's sins: **Mark 1:4-5** — John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole country of Judah and Jerusalem came out to him, and all in the Jordan River were baptized from him, confessing their sins; **Matthew 3:6** — ...and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins; **Luke 3:3** — And he marched throughout the surrounding country of Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; **Luke 3:8a** — Make the worthy fruits of repentance.

## 3. Reveal Christ to Israel

John the Baptist knew full well that he was the forerunner of the Messiah. Here's what

John said about Christ: **Matthew 3:11** — I baptize you in the water in repentance, but He who follows me is stronger than me; I am not worthy to bear His shoes; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

However, the mission of John the Baptist was not only to proclaim the coming of Christ into the world and to call people to prepare their hearts for His coming. The third purpose of John's baptism was to reveal Christ to Israel. Here's how John the Baptist himself testifies to this: **John 1:31, 33-34** — I did not know Him; but for that I came to baptize in water so that He would be revealed to Israel. ... I did not know Him; but he who sent me to baptize in the water said to me, "On whom shall you see the Spirit coming down and dwelling on him, He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit". And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

## II. THE PROTOTYPES OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

The baptism in the water carried out by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, was undoubtedly interconnected with the Old Testament ablutions, which symbolized partial cleansing (**Exodus 19:10** — And the Lord said to Moses: Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow; let them wash their garments; **Leviticus 8:6** — And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water; **Leviticus 14:8** — The Cleansed Man will wash his clothes, cut off all his hair, be washed with water, and will be clean...) and in prophetic prophecies that was a symbol of cleansing from sins: **Isaiah 1:16** — Wash up, be cleansed; remove your evil deeds from my eyes; stop doing evil; **Ezekiel 36:25** — And I will sprinkle you with pure water, and you will be cleansed of all your defilements, and of all your idols I will cleanse you; **Zechariah 13:1** — That day a spring will be opened to the house of David and the people of Jerusalem to wash away sin and impurity.

Along with these Old Testament patterns, akin to John's baptism was also the baptism of the Proselytes, presumably appearing in the first century A.D. This baptism, along with circumcision, was performed on pagans, and for girls and women was an external sign of their conversion to Judaism.

## III. WHY JESUS WAS BAPTIZED

For people, ever since they began to reflect on the Gospel narrative, it has been difficult to understand the story of Jesus' baptism. John's baptism included a call to repentance; he offered people a way to forgive their sins. But if Jesus is God in the flesh (**1 Timothy 3:16**), then He needed neither repentance nor forgiveness of sins. John's baptism was intended for sinners who realized their sin, not for a sinless God who came into our world to save us from sins. Why did Jesus Christ need to receive a water baptism — a baptism of repentance?

## Context of John's Baptism

The Jews knew baptism, but only for proselytes who converted to Judaism from some other faith. It seemed perfectly natural that a sin-stained and corrupt proselyte should be baptized into the Jewish faith to cleanse their former pagan sins. But no Jew could have imagined that they, a representative of God's chosen people, a descendant of Abraham, who was provided with God's salvation, would ever need to be baptized as proselytes. Baptism was for

sinners, but no Jew could ever think of himself as a sinner who was denied access to God and salvation. And now, for the first time in the history of their people, the Jews were confronted with John the Baptist's sermon of repentance addressed to them and began to realize their own sinfulness and the need for forgiveness of sins — the need for God. And this was the moment when Jesus Christ was to appear on the historical arena.

## Reasons Why Jesus Christ Was Baptized by John

## 1. Jesus was baptized in water to testify to John the Baptist

Looking at the purposes of John's Baptism, we found out that one of his purposes was the appearance of Christ to Israel. But before revealing Christ to Israel, John the Baptist had to see for himself that Jesus was the Christ. Let's take a close look at the following passage: **John 1:31, 33-34** — I did not know Him; but I came to baptize in water so that He might be revealed to Israel. ... I did not know Him; but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, "On whom shall you see the Spirit coming down and dwelling on him, he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit". And I have seen and witnessed that this is the Son of God.

## A. Who did John the Baptist not know?

John repeats twice in this passage the phrase I did not know Him. Who didn't John know? Jesus? How did he not know Jesus when Jesus was his relative? Recall that Mary (the mother of Jesus) and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) were relatives. Here are the angel's words to Mary about Elizabeth: **Luke 1:36** — Here is Elizabeth, your relative, called infertile, and she conceived a son in her old age, and she is now six months old.

So, we can conclude from all of this that John was familiar with Jesus. Who was John the Baptist referring to when he said, I didn't know Him? The answer is obvious. John was talking about the Messiah, the Christ. He knew Jesus very well, but he didn't know who the Messiah was, meaning he didn't even know that Jesus might be the long-awaited Messiah.

## B. How was John the Baptist supposed to know the Messiah?

From the passage we are studying, John the Baptist received simple and clear instructions from the Lord God concerning the Messiah whom John was to reveal to Israel: The one who sent me to baptize in the water said to me, "On whom shall you see the Spirit coming down and dwelling on Him, He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit".

Immediately after Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist received a sign of which the Lord God warned him. He saw the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove: **Mark 1:9-11** — And it was in those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came out of the water, immediately John saw the heavens opening and the Spirit like a dove coming down on Him. And the voice was from heaven: You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

## 2. Jesus was baptized by John as a witness to Israel

## A. Testimony of John the Baptist of Christ

☉ According to John the Baptist, he was to reveal Christ to Israel: **John 1:31** — I did

not know Him; but in order to do so, he came to baptize in water so that He might be revealed to Israel. Before Jesus' baptism, speaking to the Pharisees, John the Baptist said to them, I baptize in water; but there is someone among you whom you do not know. He is coming after me, but who has stood ahead of me. I am not worthy to untie the belt at His shoes (**John 1:26-27**). Seeing Jesus come to him to be baptized, John testified of Him that He was the Lamb of God: **John 1:29** — The next day John sees Jesus coming to him and says, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes upon Himself the sin of the world.

☉ During the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist received an additional sign from God confirming that Jesus is the Christ, after which he proclaims to the people that Jesus is the Son of God: **John 1:34** — And I saw and testified that this is the Son of God.

☉ After his baptism, John the Baptist testifies not only to those around him, but even to his own disciples, that Jesus is the Lamb of God — Messiah: **John 1:35-36** — The next day John and two of his disciples stood again. And when he saw Jesus walking, he said, "Here is the Lamb of God".

## B. Voice from the sky

The voice from heaven heard by John, Jesus, and many at the baptism of Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance: This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (**Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22**).

This sentence consists of two quotations:

☉ This is My Son... is a quote from **Psalms 2:7**: ...I will proclaim the definition: The Lord has said unto me, Thou art my Son; I have now given birth to You... Every Jew saw in this psalm an indication of the Messiah, the coming mighty King.

☉ ...In which My favor is a quote from **Isaiah 42:1**: Behold, My Youth, whom I hold by the hand, my chosen one, to whom my soul favors. I will lay my spirit upon Him, and proclaim judgment to the nations. This is a description of the sin-suffering world of the Messiah, which receives its completion in **Isaiah 53**.

Thus, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan was nothing more than an act of Christ's appearance to the people of Israel and the beginning of His mission on earth — a mission to save mankind from sin, death, and hell.

## 3. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan to fulfill all righteousness

When Jesus came to be baptized, John recognized Him as the Messiah by the Spirit, as **Matthew 3:14** testifies: And John held Him and said, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

Notice Jesus' reaction and behavior: **Matthew 3:15** — But Jesus said to him in response, "Forsake now, for this is how we must fulfill all righteousness. Then John admits him".

## How can we understand the phrase, for this is how it is for us to fulfill all righteousness?

**First**, Jesus was well aware of John the Baptist's mission to reveal Christ to Israel and the sign he was to see during the baptism of the Messiah. If Jesus had not been baptized in the Jordan, John would not have seen that sign and would not have been able to fulfill his mission to the end.

**Second**, Jesus' baptism was to be the beginning of His mission on earth. As we know, Jesus did not come to break the law, but to fulfill (**Matthew 5:17**). For the same reason, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day; for the same reason, at the age of twelve, He passed through a bar mitzvah (a rite in Judaism associated with the attainment of adulthood). For the same reason, He received water baptism: to fulfill all truth.

**Third**, by his baptism in the Jordan, the Lord Jesus showed us the perfect example of humility and obedience to Heavenly Father: **Philippians 2:6-8** — He, being the image of God, did not regard it as theft to be equal to God; but humiliated Himself by taking the form of a slave, becoming like a man; he humbled Himself, being obedient even to the death and death of the godmother.

Thus, Jesus voluntarily humbled himself (descended) to the level of a sinner, just as he voluntarily descended to earth and took upon Himself the blame for our sins. That is how He was to fulfill all righteousness. Through water baptism, Jesus is identified with His creation, for whose sins He will soon offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross.

**Fourth**, by His own words for this is how we must fulfill all righteousness, Jesus reminded John the Baptist that the baptism with which he baptized was not of men, but of God Himself, and the will of God must be obeyed by all without exception.

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by

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<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/133.htm>

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris [Hebrew: Hiddekel], which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates [Hebrew: P'rath] (Genesis 2:10–14).

Genesis 2 reads like it is describing actual geography, but the sort that doesn't exist anywhere on today's globe — which is exactly what we would expect if today's geography was totally reshaped by the global Flood in Noah's day.

Yet, many people believe Eden should be located somewhere around Mesopotamia. Could they be right, and how can we know?

Incidentally, the low-lying area of Mesopotamia would have been mostly underwater right after the Flood, and the shoreline seems to have changed drastically even in historical times (the shoreline is constantly being added to as sediments are dumped into the Persian Gulf at the mouth of the Tigris/Euphrates).

### What about shared names?

There are a number of names that are used for landmarks in both the pre-Flood world and the post-Flood world. For instance, Genesis 2 says the Hiddekel river flows east of Asshur. In Daniel 10:4, the Hebrew word Hiddekel is used to refer to the modern Tigris river. The ancient, post-Flood city of Asshur (the capital of the Assyrian empire in its several different forms) is on the west bank of the Tigris/Hiddekel (therefore the

descendants of Adam's third named son, Seth, and are listed among the ancestors of Noah (Genesis 5:18–30). This is even more remarkable when one considers the sparse name data we have for that period. If people's names could be re-used on such a scale, then surely it is not a stretch to imagine that generic names could also be reapplied to places. So a post-Flood location called Havilah (Genesis 25:18), which can roughly be translated *sandy place*, may have been named after one of several post-Flood men named Havilah (the second son of Cush or the 12th son of Joktan, Genesis 10:7, 29), who happen to share a name with a pre-Flood place called Havilah (Genesis 2:11), which may or may not be named after a pre-Flood person unmentioned in Scripture.

### A model of Eden?

If we tease out all the geographical clues possible from Genesis 2, we can arrive at a rough model for Eden. Since the single river coming out of Eden breaks up into four rivers, we know that Eden must be higher than the surrounding region — perhaps much higher. There is etymological evidence for this. The name *Pishon* means *bubbling*, and *Gihon* means *bursting forth*. Since all four rivers share the same source, this cannot be describing the river flowing out of Eden. It must be describing something about the rivers after they divided and went their separate ways. So it might indicate that the rivers flowed fairly rapidly, which may indicate a significant drop in elevation. We cannot be certain, but the language clues are interesting.

Ezekiel 28 is full of Edenic imagery and refers multiple times to the *mountain of God*. A mountain location would also explain how there was apparently only one entrance to Eden that needed to be guarded (Genesis 3:24). All other routes could have been impassable due to the steepness of the terrain at other points.

There is also extrabiblical evidence associating Eden with a mountain. For example, some scholars make the case that the most ancient form of Chinese writing contains pictographs that harken back to the biblical accounts of Creation, the Fall, and Noah's Flood. Consider the following series of symbols.

Ψ	+	^	+	□	+	∧	+	□	=	⊠
God		mountain		mouth		persons		enclosure		garden

Of the several pictograms that mean "garden" in the most ancient Chinese script, this one has a mountain standing prominently within it

Additionally, early religious buildings, from Mesopotamian ziggurats to Egyptian and Mesoamerican pyramids, share a *mountain-like* shape. The idea that the gods were associated with high mountains is almost universal in ancient cultures — to the point where mountains were considered holy places, and ancient people even constructed artificial mountains as places of worship.

There are many possible layouts that would include the necessary geographical elements of 1) a garden in a larger area called *Eden*; 2) a relative elevation for the source of the river (possibly but not necessarily mountainous); and 3) an eastward progression of features, which is an assumption based on the overall implication from Genesis 2–4.

What is clear, however, is that no modern-day candidate for the location of Eden possesses characteristics resembling this rough schematic. In particular, low-lying Mesopotamia, which is a flat alluvial plain, is disqualified.

### Genesis is history!

In the end, we are forced to conclude that the rivers of Genesis are not the modern rivers, even if they share the same names. There is no reason to expect a geographical association between the two sets of names; names get re-used too often, and the Flood caused massive changes to the landscape, to the point where there should be no correlation between pre-Flood and post-Flood geography.

We want to encourage our readers to dig deeply into the word of God. When we study Scripture, we must carefully examine the entire text to discern what it intends to communicate. Secularists and compromised Christian scholars (e.g. those who maintain the idea of a local flood in Genesis to appease long-age thinking) have caused much confusion. In the case of the location of Eden, however, we do not have to chase fables and accidental associations. It is no longer with us.

Lita SANDERS (COSNER)  
and Robert CARTER, creation.com

# Where was Eden?

## Genesis places Eden in the real world

There are many different ways to handle this passage. Some Bible commentators, sadly, argue that it is misguided to try to find Eden on a map, because, they say, Genesis was never intended to communicate a location on the globe. They draw analogies to the Temple or other spiritual meanings to explain the details given in Genesis 2. In their view, trying to locate Eden would be like trying to find Santa's workshop at the physical North Pole.

On the other hand, many people try to argue that Eden was in the Middle East, specifically in lower Mesopotamia, maybe near ancient Ur or Sumer. They assert, correctly, that there is nowhere else in the historical passages of Scripture that gives an *unearthly* geography, and there is nothing in the text that indicates anything other than an actual geographical description. As Derek Kidner comments: *verses 10–14 go to some lengths to present it as an actual, not an allegorical or mythical spot*. There are alternate possible locations proposed, but the goal is to find Eden by looking at today's geographical clues.

Yet, this view is in error, too.

Think about it — the Flood was global and highly destructive. Huge amounts of sediment were deposited on the continents, and massive amounts of erosion occurred during the Recessive Stage as the waters drained off the continents. Plus, the continental plates moved around, raising mountains and creating deep basins. Why would we expect the modern landscape to reflect the pre-Flood landscape?

## Eden is not findable on today's globe

As we would expect from the above consideration, nothing on today's Earth matches the geographical clues provided in Genesis. Any proposed location for Eden must include four rivers originating from one source. Today, there are only a couple of examples of *two* rivers originating from the same lake or spring (e.g. Isa Lake in Yellowstone National Park (USA), because it sits on the continental divide, drains in one direction to form the Lewis River, which flows toward the Pacific Ocean, and in the other direction to form the Firehole River, which flows toward the Gulf of Mexico). This is because today's landscape is shaped by erosion, and it is nearly impossible for an erosional landscape to produce multiple rivers from one source. Even if initially such a system existed, the lowermost or fastest-eroding outlet of any drainage area tends to dominate and eventually takes over.

Contrary to common opinion, the Tigris and Euphrates of Genesis 2 cannot be the modern rivers flowing through Syria and Iraq today, because they do not share the same source. And while today they merge just before they reach the Persian Gulf, this was not true historically: Pliny (AD 23–79) claimed they emptied into a common lake in the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC).



The Garden of Eden. Thomas Cole (1801–1848)

river is to its east). So the pre-Flood and post-Flood Hiddekel rivers are associated with places called Asshur. Does the loose connection between a river and a region both before and after the Flood tell us that Eden is somewhere nearby? Even if we ignore the Flood's effects on the land surface, not unless there are a lot more confirmations. But this is all we have. If Eden is in that area, *all* of the geographic details must match, not just one or two.

The Hebrew word *P'rath*, used both for a river in Genesis 2 and for the modern Euphrates, is significant because it forms the eastern border of the land promised to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15:18). Yet Genesis 2 mentions it with no other geographical data. This is strange, considering it is the most important river in the region today and factors heavily in the historical biblical narrative (see, for example, Genesis 15:18, Genesis 31:21, Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 24:2, and 2 Samuel 8:3).

Havilah and Cush are two other place designations that occur both before and after the Flood.

We have three options for interpreting these duplicated names:

1) The pre-Flood and post-Flood regions are identical. While biblical creationists like Luther, Calvin, and others held this view, it is not a viable option today, in light of current geological knowledge. For example, on average there are several kilometres of sedimentary rock, laid down during the Flood, beneath the surface of the Middle East today. Equating the pre- and post-Flood landmarks fails to appreciate the devastating geological impact of the global Flood.

2) Post-Flood places are named after pre-Flood places. This is the most common biblical creationist explanation. While this was probably the case for some landmarks, like the Hiddekel and P'rath, we know, for instance, that some post-Flood places with pre-Flood names were named after post-Flood people. Some of the re-used names are generic enough to be applicable in multiple places, so simple renaming is not a full explanation.

The most likely explanation seems to be that:

There should be no correlation between pre-Flood and post-Flood geography.

3) Pre- and post-Flood places share certain popular, generic names. The early chapters of Genesis contain several repeated names. For example, men named Enoch and Lamech are descendants of Adam's first son, Cain (Genesis 4:17–18), but a different Enoch and Lamech were



## Foul Mouth

My boss always forbade locksmiths and electricians to swear in front of me. Perhaps you have also encountered such a habit in some people? For some reason, you can't use profanity amongst women and children. Where did this rule come from?

### THE CURSED MOTHER

When a group of men went out on the battlefield, Slavic warriors began to pour swear words on each other. That is, they sent curses to the entire female race of the enemy. One of the most important reasons of these words in the magical rites of the Slavic peoples was to inflict damage on the enemy, to curse his kind. No wonder almost all obscene words are associated with the reproductive organs of men and women and sexual intercourse.

### PSYCHOLOGY OF SWEARING

The famous psychophysicologist, Doctor Leonid Kitaev-Smyk, has been dealing for many years with the problem of stress and swearing as its integral component. He says that a person resorts to swearing in the case when he is not confident in his abilities, that is, he feels inferior.



In women, the use of swear words leads to hormonal disorders. Cosmetologists noticed that those clients who cannot live without swearing, most of them suffer from increased hairiness of the limbs. The voice of such women eventually becomes lower (L. A. Kitaev-Smyk, *Psychophysiological and socio-psychological aspects of sexual invectives and "swear speech"*). My observations of others say that women who very often use swear words suffer from female diseases and have problems with childbearing.

### NO BORDERS

Swearing demonstrates a willingness to break taboos, to cross certain boundaries. Therefore, swearing is very popular among criminals and is not used among the intelligent. According to surveys, profanity is more common among young people than among older people. Probably because young people are trying to break taboos and cross borders. Ivan the Terrible's statement on this subject has been preserved: *It is not proper for noble men to swear like commoners.*

### THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Solomon wrote many hundreds of years ago: *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21).*

Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg and communication expert Mark Robert Waldman argue that words have a direct impact on the brain: *Evil words send alarming signals to the brain, partially stopping the work of the centers responsible for logic and awareness (A. Newberg, M. R. Waldman, Words that can change consciousness).*

I have two acquaintances who, as a result of a severe injury, stutter very much. One of them stops stuttering when he starts to swear. And the other stops stuttering when he sings Christian songs. If we consider swearing as a spell, and Christian singing as a prayer, it is not difficult to draw a conclusion. Two forces are fighting for a man. Which of them will win is decided by the person themselves.

### THE BEST WAY

The Bible lovingly assures: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29-30).*

*The mouth speaks out of an excess of heart,* Jesus said. And you must have noticed this pattern. If a person is filled with goodness and love, his words do not hurt others. Conversely, if there is bitterness and malice inside a person, he tries to hurt and offend with a word.

You have the right to choose how to deal with your speech, who to call on as your assistants with words flying out of your mouth. You may decide to be a rotten swamp or a fragrant meadow. And only you decide who to worship and serve.

Nadezhda SELEZNYOVA, <https://proekt7d.ru>

I was lucky. You could say that. My first *Jesus* was quite nice and kind: he looked at me from a small icon, somehow folding his fingers strangely. He had big sad eyes, but they did not frighten me. When there was no one in the room, I often took this icon out of my desk and talked with the sad man depicted on it.

I think the living God, watching this, really wanted me to take my eyes off the picture and recognize the real Jesus. He did His best to do so. I opened the door of my soul to Him, and He has been with me ever since. Now I don't need a picture. And no one will prove to me that there is no God. It's like someone trying to convince me that my best friend or my parents are fiction.

What have I learned about Jesus during this time?

☉ He loves me. He loves me not only when I'm right and good. He loves me even when I'm at the bottom. One day I found myself to be the last sinner. I never would have thought it would happen to me. I used to think that such fallen people were so far from God that they couldn't communicate with Him. But, to my great surprise, I made the discovery: Jesus did not turn his back on me. He was there with me, at the very bottom of my life. He didn't judge. He believed in me, He reached out and assured me of love. And He pulled me out. He saved and taught him not to look with contempt at the fallen people who are leading their life battles. No matter how low we fall, Jesus' love descends there as well.

☉ He gives everyone an equal chance. Let me explain. Many of us are too fair. Fair without mercy. He did the deeds — he gets what he deserves. And we look at God through the prism of our own justice, reasoning as follows: this man is good — he goes to heaven, and the unworthy — he cannot see paradise.

## Became human? For what?

Why did You come to earth, Jesus Christ, and what will You give me?

A few days ago, I was sitting on the beach of a lake watching the waves crash against the shore. *What is the meaning of life?* — that's the question I've been thinking about. I'm sure that's the kind of thought that every person has sooner or later.

Surely, if this question had been asked me five years ago, I would have been confused. Perhaps it would have been whispered softly: *I don't know...* But with the arrival of Jesus in my life, everything changed. It played with colors, there was a clear meaning in it.

To answer that question now, I'll say, *My meaning is in Jesus,* and it's not just words. I want to live like Him. I want to think, to love, to accept everyone as He is. And naturally, I look forward to meeting Him.

I was once asked, *Why did Jesus come to earth?* He came to make friends with me. He became accessible, tangible, real. Who wants to be friends with the ephemeral heavenly spirit? It's incomprehensible to us, complicated, and too confusing.

Therefore, Jesus decided to take such a step. He left the heavenly world, where He was respected, praised, and loved by all, and came to us. Here Jesus was waiting for many trials, difficulties and dislikes. He was tired, crying, happy, working, learning, he lived. As each of us does. But now I know for sure that Jesus understands me, because He experienced such a thing. He went through

## What I Know About Jesus



Do we think that people are born in different families, in different conditions? What are the chances of an alcoholic child becoming a decent person? And God gives everyone an equal chance. He died once both for the sins of good people and for the sins of the most notorious villains. And he said that people are saved by faith in His merits, and not by using the bonuses earned. By itself, even a good person is not good enough.

Entrance to heaven is not carried out on the principle of a single state exam (who scored more points). There will be those who have been able to appreciate what Jesus did for them. And what did He do? He took upon Himself the punishment (in fairness there should be a punishment!) for all our sins and sinners. And being saved, it turns out, is very simple: you must faithfully accept the feat of Jesus and repent of your sins.

We are all sinners (some more, some less), and we all need a Savior. Getting up from their knees after praying repentance, *the good and the bad* are equally pure in the eyes of God who has forgiven both of them.

☉ Jesus is God and man at the same time. It's not easy to

understand. Or rather, it's impossible. The Bible calls it the secret of piety. But the bottom line is this: God became one of us so that we can become like Him. Jesus, born to a girl named Mary, inherited human nature. He faced the same problems and trials that you and I are experiencing. He is not a distant God that's unable to have compassion for us. He is the One who has experienced for Himself what falls to us. He can have compassion for us in our infirmities because, like us, He is tempted in all things except sin (**Hebrews 4:15**).

☉ Jesus is coming soon! This is not another sectarian prophecy. This is the unequivocal message of the Bible. This is the greatest Christian hope. There is not long to wait: *For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37).* He will come so that I may look into His eyes — not painted, but real. He will come that we may always be together. He will come to put an end to suffering and evil, to give a meeting with dead loved ones. He will surely come!

I'll go talk to Jesus. Miss.



Elena KUDINOVA,  
<https://proekt7d.ru>

a relationship. It's a relationship based on love and acceptance. I talk to Him a lot. When I'm feeling good. And when I'm bad, I do. I ask for advice, I seek His will. It's really important to know how He sees this or that issue in my life. Because I trust completely. I start to trust even more when I go through difficult moments with Jesus. He holds his hand and never betrays.

Does Jesus respond? Yes of course! Through the Bible, thoughts, conversations with people, nature and so on. Our dialogues are rich and joyful. After that, it's easier and calmer for me.

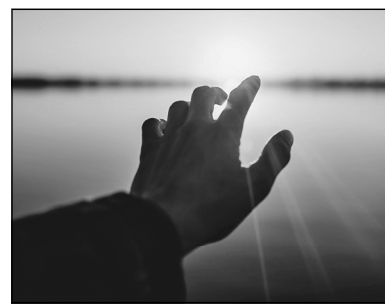
And in friendship, I value selflessness and sacrifice. I have many friends, but none of them died for me. And hardly anyone would agree to give their life for mine. No one. Except Jesus. It surprises, makes you tremble, rejoice, cry and sing at the same time. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the sacrifice on the cross made personally for me. A sacrifice of the love of a great and so accessible and understandable God to me.

Jesus came to love. To hug. To serve. To become a Friend.

For all of us living in the twenty-first century, Jesus is hope, love, and grace. And to find all this, you just need to take the first step. Try to say to Him: *Hello!* I'm sure you will hear a quiet, gentle: *Hello, daughter/son! I was waiting for you!* He'll hug you and understand everything. Jesus wants to communicate with you. The question is, do you want that?



Vika ZHELTUHINA,  
<https://proekt7d.ru>



After all, Jesus is really great! Great, and at the same time so simple... He is ready to touch everyone, healing wounds. Always finds words of comfort and support for those who feel bad. Maybe just sit and chat with people at the dinner table. Take the children in your arms and hug them. Watch with kindness and love, smiling. Jesus is open...

And even though He doesn't walk the streets of our city now, but we know exactly what it was. In the pages of the Bible, stories come to life. As I read it, I see His image on every page and rejoice. I rejoice that He was, is, and will be.

I tell everyone that Jesus is my Friend. Many people wonder: *Is it possible to be friends with God Himself? How?* For me, friendship is first and foremost

## How can I forgive those who sin against me?

Everyone has been wronged, offended, and sinned against at some point. How are Christians to respond when such offenses occur against them? According to the Bible, we are to forgive others. **Ephesians 4:32** declares, *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* Similarly, **Colossians 3:13** proclaims, *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* The key in both Scriptures is that we are to forgive fellow believers as God has forgiven us. Why do we forgive? Because we have been forgiven! Our forgiveness of others should reflect God's forgiveness of us.

In order to forgive those who sin against us, we must first of all understand God's forgiveness. God does not just forgive everyone automatically with no preconditions — if He did, there would be no lake of fire in **Revelation 20:14–15**. Forgiveness, properly understood, involves repentance on the sinner's part and love and grace on God's part. The love and grace are there, but the repentance is often lacking. So, the Bible's command for us to forgive one another does not mean we ignore sin. It means we gladly, gracefully, lovingly extend forgiveness to those who repent. We are always willing to forgive when given the opportunity. Not just seven times, but *seventy times seven* (**Matthew 18:22, KJV**). Refusing to forgive a person who requests it demonstrates resentment, bitterness, and anger, none of which are the traits of a true Christian.



To forgive those who sin against us requires patience and forbearance. The church has the command to *be patient with everyone* (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**). We should be able to overlook personal slights and minor offenses. Jesus said, *If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also* (**Matthew 5:39**). Not every *slap in the face* needs a response.

To forgive those who sin against us requires the transformational power of God in our lives. There is something deep within fallen human nature that thirsts for revenge and urges retaliation in kind. We naturally want to inflict the same type of injury on the one who injured us — an eye for an eye seems only fair. In Christ, however, we have been given the power to love our enemies, do good to the haters, bless the cursers, and pray for the abusers (see **Luke 6:27–28**). Jesus gives us a heart that is willing to forgive and will work to that end.

Forgiving those who sin against us is made easier when we consider the extent to which God forgives our transgressions. We who have been lavished with grace have no right to withhold grace from others. We have sinned against God infinitely more than any person can sin against us. Jesus' parable in **Matthew 18:23–35** is a powerful illustration of this truth.

God promises that, when we come to Him asking for forgiveness, He freely grants it (**1 John 1:9**). The grace we extend to those who seek our forgiveness should be just as readily available (**Luke 17:3–4**).

## Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

Abraham had obeyed God many times in his walk with Him, but no test could have been more severe than the one in **Genesis 22**. God commanded, *Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you* (**Genesis 22:2**).

This was an astounding command because Isaac was the son of promise. God had promised several times that from Abraham's own body would come a nation as multitudinous as the stars in heaven (**Genesis 12:2–3; 15:4–5**). Later, Abraham was specifically told that the promise would be through Isaac (**Genesis 21:12**).

Given that God's testing of Abraham involved a command to do something He elsewhere forbids (see **Jeremiah 7:31**), we must ask, *Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?* The Bible does not specifically address the answer to this question, but in our study of Scripture we can compile a few reasons:

**God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to test Abraham's faith.** God's tests prove and purify our faith. They cause us to seek Him and trust Him more. God's test of Abraham allowed His child — and all the world — to see the reality of faith in action. Faith is more than an inner spiritual attitude; faith works (see **James 2:18**).

**God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to validate Abraham as the father of all who have faith in God.** Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness (**Romans 4:9**). And we today who have the faith of Abraham also find that *he is the father of us all* (**verse 16**). Without Abraham's response to the command to sacrifice Isaac, we would have difficulty knowing all that faith entails. God uses Abraham's faith as an example of the type of faith required for salvation.

**God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to provide an example of absolute obedience.** After God gave the command, *early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey and headed out with his son and the wood for a burnt offering* (**Genesis 22:3**). There was no delay, no questioning, no arguing. Just simple obedience, which brought a blessing (**verses 15–18**).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to reveal God as Jehovah-Jireh. On the way up the mountain to the place of sacrifice, Isaac inquired as to the animal to be sacrificed, and his father said, *God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son* (**Genesis 22:8**). After God's provision of a ram to take Isaac's place on the altar, *Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide* (**verse 14**). Thus we have another character-revealing name of God: Yahweh-Yireh.



**God's command to sacrifice Isaac was to foreshadow God's sacrifice of His own Son.** The story of Abraham prefigures the New Testament teaching of the atonement, the sacrificial offering of the Lord Jesus on the cross for the sin of mankind. Here are some of the parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ:

☉ *Take your son, your only son, whom you love* (**Genesis 22:2**); *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son* (**John 3:16**).

☉ *Go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there* (**Genesis 22:2**); it is believed that this same area is where the city of Jerusalem was built many years later. Jesus was crucified in the same area that Isaac had been laid on the altar.

☉ *Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering* (**Genesis 22:2**); *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures* (**1 Corinthians 15:3**).

☉ *Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac* (**Genesis 22:6**); Jesus, carrying his own cross, walked to Calvary (**John 19:17**).

☉ *But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?* (**Genesis 22:7**); John said, *Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (**John 1:29**).

☉ *God himself will provide the lamb* (**Genesis 22:8**); Jesus is likened to a spotless lamb in **1 Peter 1:18–19** and a slain lamb in **Revelation 5:6**.

☉ Isaac, who was likely a young man at the time of his sacrifice, acted in obedience to his father (**Genesis 22:9**); before His sacrifice, Jesus prayed, *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will* (**Matthew 26:39**).

☉ Isaac was resurrected figuratively, and Jesus in reality: *Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death* (**Hebrews 11:19**); *Jesus was buried, and... was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (**1 Corinthians 15:4**).

Many centuries after God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Jesus said, *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad* (**John 8:56**). This is a reference to Abraham's joy in seeing the ram caught in the thicket in **Genesis 22**. That ram was the substitute that would save Isaac's life. Seeing that ram was, in essence, seeing the day of Christ, the Substitute for all of us.

## What does it mean to be a born again Christian?



The classic passage from the Bible that answers this question is **John 3:1–21**. The Lord Jesus Christ is talking to Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin (the ruling body of the Jews). Nicodemus had come to Jesus at night with some questions.

As Jesus talked with Nicodemus, He said, *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" (**John 3:3–7**).*

The phrase *born again* literally means *born from above*. Nicodemus had a real need. He needed a change of his heart — a spiritual transformation. New birth, being born again, is an act of God whereby eternal life is imparted to the person who believes (**2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1–4, 18**). **John 1:12–13** indicates that being *born again* also carries the idea of *becoming children of God* through trust in the name of Jesus Christ.

The question logically comes, *Why does a person need to be born again?* The apostle Paul in **Ephesians 2:1** says, *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins* (**NKJV**). To the Romans he wrote, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (**Romans 3:23**). Sinners are spiritually dead; when they receive spiritual life through faith in Christ, the Bible likens it to a rebirth. Only those who are born again have their sins forgiven and have a relationship with God.

How does that come to be? **Ephesians 2:8–9** states, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.* When one is saved, he/she has been born again, spiritually renewed, and is now a child of God by right of new birth. Trusting in Jesus Christ, the One who paid the penalty of sin when He died on the cross, is the means to be born again. Therefore, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!* (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

If you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, will you consider the prompting of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to your heart? You need to be born again. Will you pray the prayer of repentance and become a new creation in Christ today? *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (**John 1:12–13**).

If you want to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and be born again, here is a sample prayer. Remember, saying this prayer or any other prayer will not save you. It is only trusting in Christ that can save you from sin. This prayer is simply a way to express to God your faith in Him and thank Him for providing for your salvation. *God, I know that I have sinned against you and am deserving of punishment. But Jesus Christ took the punishment that I deserve so that through faith in Him I could be forgiven. I place my trust in You for salvation. Thank You for Your wonderful grace and forgiveness — the gift of eternal life! Amen!*

## What is the importance of Christian baptism?

Christian baptism is one of two ordinances that Jesus instituted for the church. Just before His ascension, Jesus said, *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (**Matthew 28:19–20**). These instructions specify that the church is responsible to teach Jesus' word, make disciples, and baptize those disciples. These things are to be done everywhere (*all nations*) until the very end of the age. So, if for no other reason, baptism has importance because Jesus commanded it.

Baptism was practiced before the founding of the church. The Jews of ancient times would baptize proselytes to signify the converts' *cleansed* nature. John the Baptist used baptism to prepare the way of the Lord, requiring *everyone*, not just Gentiles, to be baptized because *everyone* needs repentance. However, John's baptism, signifying repentance, is not the same as Christian baptism, as seen in **Acts 18:24–26** and **19:1–7**. Christian baptism has a deeper significance.

Baptism is to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit — this is what makes it *Christian* baptism. It is through this ordinance that a person is admitted into the fellowship of the church. When we are saved, we are *baptized* by the Spirit into the Body of Christ, which is the church. **1 Corinthians 12:13** says, *We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* Baptism by water is a *reenactment* of the baptism by the Spirit.

Christian baptism is the means by which a person makes a public profession of faith and discipleship. In the waters of baptism, a person says, wordlessly, *I confess faith in Christ; Jesus has cleansed my soul from sin, and I now have a new life of sanctification.*

Christian baptism illustrates, in dramatic style, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. At the same time, it also illustrates our death to sin and new life in Christ. As the sinner confesses the Lord Jesus, he dies to sin (**Romans 6:11**) and is raised to a brand-new life (**Colossians 2:12**). Being submerged in the water represents death to sin, and emerging from the water represents the cleansed, holy life that follows salvation. **Romans 6:4** puts it this way: *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Very simply, baptism is an outward testimony of the inward change in a believer's life. Christian baptism is an act of obedience to the Lord *after* salvation; although baptism is closely associated with salvation, it is not a requirement to be saved. The Bible shows in many places that the order of events is 1) a person believes in the Lord Jesus and 2) he is baptized. This sequence is seen in **Acts 2:41**, *Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized* (see also **Acts 16:14–15**).

A new believer in Jesus Christ should desire to be baptized as soon as possible. In Acts 8 Philip speaks the good news about Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, and, *as they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"* (**verses 35–36**). Right away, they stopped the chariot, and Philip baptized the man.

Baptism illustrates a believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Everywhere the gospel is preached and people are drawn to faith in Christ, they are to be baptized.



# CRUELTY IN BIBLE

Many call Christianity a bloody religion, the Bible a bloody book, and God a cruel and bloody one. But it's not. And we're going to talk about that today.

Let's look at the main accusations made against the God of the Bible!

## I. OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES

Why did God need bloody sacrifices?

### 1. Sacrifices before the Law

God's Law required the sacrifice of an animal for sin, and only then was sin forgiven (**Leviticus 4:27-35; Leviticus 5:7-10**). This principle was known to people long before the Lord gave the people of Israel His Law.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord gave them leather garments, shedding the blood of an innocent animal for their sin (**Genesis 3:21**).

As we know, Cain and Abel also offered sacrifices to God. Thus, the Bible describes that Abel offered a sacrifice to God from *the firstborn of his flock* (**Genesis 4:4-5**).

After the Flood, the first thing Noah did was to offer the Lord a burnt offering, which was *the pleasing aroma* in God's eyes (**Genesis 8:20-21**).

Abraham also offered sacrifices to the Almighty. Many people know the story of how God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. But we also know that the Lord did not want the death of the boy, but only tested the faithfulness of Abraham and therefore did not allow Isaac to die but prepared a wild ram instead (**Genesis 22:10-13**).

### 2. The People of Israel and the Sacrifices

The peak of the Old Testament system of sacrifices falls on the era of the development of the Jewish nation. The Lord gave His people a Law that needed to be kept. Non-observance of the commandments was considered a sin, the forgiveness of which required the offering of certain sacrifices. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy detail God's Law and the order of sacrifices.

A. According to the law, the animal for sacrifice must be without blemish: **Leviticus 1:3** — *If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD.*

B. The person offering the sacrifice had to identify with the sacrifice: **Leviticus 1:4** — *You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.*

C. Then this man had to stab the animal: **Leviticus 1:5** — *You are to slaughter the young bull before the LORD...*

D. If a person did this in faith, their sins were forgiven.

In a nutshell, the Lord commanded people to sacrifice animals so that they could receive forgiveness of sins. The animal in this case was a substitutionary sacrifice, dying instead of the sinner for their sins.

### 3. Old Testament sacrifices is the prototype of Christ's sacrifice on the cross

Animal sacrifice was abolished with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus became a true substitutionary sacrifice and mediator between mankind and its great Creator: **1 Timothy 2:5** — *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus...*

As we now know, animal sacrifices could not actually make perfect and sinless the people who offer these sacrifices to God: **Hebrews 9:9** — *...the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper; Hebrews 10:4* — *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

Sacrifices in Old Testament times were needed in order to, **first**, remind people of their sins: **Hebrews 10:3** — *But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. Second*, the sacrifices were the prototype of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the whole world on the cross.

This is well stated in **Hebrews 10:5-10**: *Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll I have come to do your will, my God'". First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" — though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will". He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

### 4. Is Christianity a bloody religion?

Hebrews explains the need to shed the blood of animals: **Hebrews 9:16-22** — *In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. Therefore even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep". In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

However, Christianity is not a bloody religion. The shedding of animal blood in the Old Testament only testifies to how seriously God takes sin and what a serious punishment is imposed for sin — death (**Romans 6:23**).



Sin (big or small) is a very serious crime. It would seem that pride is such a minor sin, but it was pride that turned Lucifer into the devil. Similarly, Cain's jealousy prompted him to kill his brother Abel. Distrust of God led Adam and Eve to disobey His commandment, which brought great curses upon all mankind.

Many consider Christianity a bloody religion precisely because Christianity takes sin as seriously as God treats it.

Furthermore, God's justice requires that sin be punished. Sin cannot be mercifully forgiven and forgotten until God's justice is fully and finally served. This explains the need to offer a sacrifice for sin. But, as we emphasized earlier, the blood of animals did not destroy sins, but only covered them for a while (**Hebrews 10:4**). This continued until Christ came and paid with His holy blood for sin. Thus, Christianity, unlike other religions, offers a solution to the problem of sin.

Yes, Christianity requires a death penalty for sin, but it is the only religion that leads to life. By His death on the cross, Jesus Christ gave eternal life to believers in Him. All that is required of us is to entrust our lives to Christ and believe in His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross for our sins. By faith man receives forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life: **John 5:24** — *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life; John 3:16-18* — *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

Christ is life. All other paths lead to death: **John 14:6** — *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"; Acts 4:12* — *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*

So, summarizing all of the above, answer the question: which religion is bloody — Christianity, which leads to eternal life, or all other religions that promise life, but lead to death, because they are not able to free a person from sin and punishment for it?

### 5. Facts that are rarely taken into account

#### A. Meat is meat

In most cases (except for the burnt offering and sin sacrifice), the meat of the sacrificed animal was eaten by humans, while the blood was drained to

the base of the altar and the animal's entrails burned on the altar.

Remember God's commands about the Passover lamb. The Lord said, *That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire — with the head, legs and internal organs. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it* (**Exodus 12:8-10**).

Today, during lunch, few people think about the cruelty associated with the killing of an animal whose meat was cooked for dinner.

#### B. God's Law and Human Sacrifice

Unlike pagan religions, The Old Testament law, despite the entire system of sacrifices, forbade the sacrifice of people: **Deuteronomy 12:31** — *You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods; Leviticus 18:21* — *Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD; Leviticus 20:1-2* — *The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him'".*

Heavenly Father not only discourages such sacrifices, but forbids the sacrifice of people. Why? Because, **first**, they are made in the image and likeness of God, and **second**, man is sinful, and therefore his death cannot be a pleasant sacrifice for God.

## II. THE CRUELTY OF OLD TESTAMENT LAW

### 1. Death penalty

According to God's Law, the state of Israel in Old Testament times was to punish with death people who did not obey the Law of God. But such punishment had the purpose of restoring God's order of things. And so it was not considered the destruction of God's creation, but the restoration of God's order of things in His creation according to God's laws and commandments: **Exodus 21:12-15** — *Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. ... Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death; Exodus 22:18-20* — *Do not allow a sorceress to live. Anyone who*

*has sexual relations with an animal is to be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD must be destroyed.*

Resisting God and His Law is a sin, and sin is a contagious thing. It acts and spreads among humans like a virus. The death penalty was introduced by God in order to exterminate sin and evil from the society of the people of God.

### 2. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth

The well-known *eye-for-eye* law is not at all unfair and cruel. On the contrary, it calls for justice and mercy. How do you understand this? It's very simple. The world is cruel, because a person is cruel. In response to a blow, a person responds with two blows. And if someone gouges out his eye, he will gouge out two eyes, and even tear off a person's hand that was used to gouge out his eye.

That is why God instituted a law that forbade such behavior and called people to justice: **Exodus 21:23-24** — *If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.*

## III. EXTERMINATION OF THE CANAANITE PEOPLE

**1 Samuel 15:1-3** says, *Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy a all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys'".*

Why did the Lord God command the Israelites to exterminate entire nations, including the elderly, women, and children?

### 1. Extermination of Canaanite peoples as God's punishment

When God called Abraham to go from Ur of the Chaldeans to the Promised Land, He promised him and his seed to give the land of ten nations for eternal use — Canaan: **Genesis 15:18-21** — *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites".*

The most interesting thing is that God did not tell Abraham that he already owned this land. God promised to give this land to Abraham's offspring after a certain period of time. That's how the Bible says it.

(Continued on page 12)



# CRUELTY IN BIBLE

(Ending. Beginning on page 11)

**A. First, the descendants of Abraham will fall into slavery in Egypt: Genesis 15:13-14** — Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions".

**B. After slavery in Egypt, Abraham's descendants will enter and take possession of Canaan: Genesis 15:16** — In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

Notice the reason why the Israelites are exterminating the Canaanite peoples, their iniquities.

The Lord allowed the Israelites to enter Canaan and take possession of it by exterminating the peoples who had previously lived there because of the iniquity and sinfulness of these peoples. Until the measure of their iniquities is overflowing, God will endure and wait for their repentance. But at one point, according to God's Word, the cup of God's wrath will overflow. And the people of God will be an instrument of punishment for the wicked Gentiles living in Canaan. And that's exactly what happened.

**2. Extermination of Canaanite people is protection of God's people**

God protects His children. The Israelites were God's chosen people — His children. And He protected them from other nations.

Let us turn to the case of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:1-3). The Lord God, unlike us, knows the future. And He knew what would happen to the Israelites if they did not completely exterminate the Amalekites. That is why God instructed His people to exterminate the Amalekites, so that they would not come and attack the Israelites and destroy the people of God. King Saul testified, that he killed all the Amalekites except their king Agag: 1 Samuel 15:20 — Saul said, "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king".

As history has shown, King Saul did not tell the truth, because about twenty years later the Amalekites began to attack the cities of Israel with renewed vigor during the reign of King David: 1 Samuel 30:1-3 — David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.

After King David and his army attacked the Amalekites and freed the captive people, the four Amalekites managed to escape. If King Saul had fulfilled the Lord's command in due time, this would never have happened. A few centuries later, Haman, Hamag's descendant, nearly exterminated all the Jews (the book of Esther). Thus, Saul's incomplete obedience almost ended in the complete destruction of the people of Israel. God foresaw all this, and that is why he commanded Israel to exterminate the Amalekites.

**3. Extermination of the Canaanites is Preventing the Corruption of God's People**

With regard to the inhabitants of Canaan, God commanded the following: Deuteronomy 20:16-18 — However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as

an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.

The Israelites did not carry out this command properly. And what the Lord warned of happened exactly as He had foretold it: Exodus 23:31-33 — I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, to the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in



Illustration by Igor OSOKIN

the land, and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you; Judges 2:1-3 — The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars'. Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? And I have also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; they will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you'; 1 Kings 11:4-8 — As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods; 1 Kings 14:23-24 — They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male

shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites; 2 Kings 16:2-4 — Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

God commanded the destruction of the Canaanite peoples not just for the sake of extermination. The Lord tried to keep His people pure and blameless — holy, that is, separated from other pagan peoples to serve the Lord God. Foreseeing the future, God knew that all these Gentiles would surely seduce the Israelites into the path of sin. And so it went.

We do not need to forget that God is our Creator and we are His creation. God has the right to control both the destinies of individuals and the destinies of entire nations.

The Lord never makes mistakes or makes wrong decisions. He's always right. He is a righteous and just Judge before whom each of us will appear one day to give an account for our lives on earth. If the Lord has not spared the Gentiles of Canaan, who once turned away from the true God and converted to idolatry, then you can be sure that the same will happen to us if we do not turn away from our sins and receive the gift of salvation and forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### IV. KILL OR LOVE ENEMIES?

Many wonder why in the New Testament God commands to love enemies, while in the Old Testament He commanded to kill enemies?

The fact is that the idea of love and mercy for enemies is not a New Testament idea. In the Old Testament we read the following about the same thing: Exodus 23:45 — If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it; Proverbs 24:17-18 — Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart rejoice when they stumble. Otherwise, the Lord will see, and it will not be pleasing in His eyes, and He will turn away His wrath from him; Proverbs 25:21-22 — If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

What's the big deal? Why, in one case, does the Lord in the Old Testament command to take care of the enemy, and in another case to kill enemies? It's all about the concept of the enemy. It's one thing when God takes the lives of His enemies, and it's quite another thing when a man takes the lives of his enemies.

We human beings have no right to judge other people and carry out our own sentence, which is why God said, It is mine to avenge; I will repay (Deuteronomy 32:35). And also, the New Testament quotes an Old Testament passage, adding the following: Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay", says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head" (Romans 12:19-20).

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**"Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!"**



## PRISONER

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Our contacts:

redakciya.uznik@yahoo.com  
tel.: +380645225707  
+380661395801

Mailing address in U.S. for the newspaper "Prisoner":

Hope of Freedom, P.O. Box 4053 Everett, WA 98204

Editor Trubitsin Igor Evgenyevich (pseudonym Igor Gorik)

Responsible for the issue Irina Dolgushina.

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Translation services

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## ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper "Prisoner" has the status of the two languages: Russian and English. "Prisoner" is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, it is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of "Prisoner" all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper "Prisoner" and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

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