

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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## CHRISTMAS

For many years, people — both believers and non-believers — have celebrated the joyous holiday of Christmas. Preparations begin well in advance, and in the days leading up to the holiday, stores, markets, and transportation fill with crowds. Everyone is rushing somewhere, carrying gifts and festive drinks. Some have already had a few sips, while others are still thinking of what to say during the main toast. The familiar routine unfolds: glasses are raised, and someone says, "Merry Christmas!" For many, Christmas is simply another excuse to relax and enjoy themselves.

Thankfully, there are also those who see Christmas differently. For them, it is a time of worship and celebration of the Savior's birth. Believers approach December 25 with special reverence. These are the dates when churches around the world commemorate Christ's birth, though the exact reason for choosing these days isn't widely known. Many assume Jesus was born around this time, but the precise date remains unknown. These days serve as symbolic reminders

of that sacred event.

The true significance of Christmas lies not in the date but in the event itself. God demonstrated His boundless love by sending His Son for our salvation: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (John 3:16).

Christmas reflects God's great plan to provide humanity with a model of righteous living through Jesus Christ. By coming to earth, Jesus showed us how believers should live, what their priorities should be, and the purpose of life. Through His example, we gain the truths that lead to eternal life. Without Christmas, we would lack the guidance to draw near to God's Kingdom. *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

It's essential to understand that Jesus' birth from the



Virgin Mary was not the beginning of His existence. Instead, it was God becoming human: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. ... The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:14, 18). As we know the trinity has always existed. As He said: *Before Abraham*

*was, I AM* (John 8:58). This makes it impossible to assign a specific day as the "birthday" of the eternal God. Yet Christmas remains important as a celebration of God becoming flesh. Even though the exact date is unknown, believers have the chance to be "born with Christ" every day. Why not

start each morning by remembering that Christ lives in our hearts daily? In doing so, Christmas can be more than just an annual event — it can become a way of life.

It's interesting how we celebrate both Christmas and Easter only once a year. Why do we declare *Christ is risen!* only on Easter? That statement is the foundation of our faith: *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). What if we made Christmas and Easter a daily part of our lives? Imagine if, instead of saying "Hello", we greeted each other with "Christ is risen!" Perhaps then the enemy would flee from us, seeing our unshakeable faith.

Dear brothers, sisters, and readers of *Prisoner*,

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on this glorious occasion — the birth of Jesus Christ! May God's peace fill your homes and hearts, and may His love overflow through you to others.

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8).

Igor GORIK.

## Chemo Wasn't an Option — That's When God Supernaturally Healed This Man of Inoperable Cancer

David Baker had stage four melanoma. A tumor on the side of his face had grown so huge he couldn't see out of his right eye, and he could barely eat. Doctors said there was nothing they could do for him.

David was suffering more and more, day by day. Still, he managed to get to church on Easter morning, and that's where he received a miracle.

*When you're going to the doctor and you hear nothing encouraging, that's when your faith, it's going to have to stand*, says Jerilyn Baker. In November 2020, her husband David started having constant nose bleeds. Doctors removed a polyp from his sinus cavity. But soon after, things got worse.

Jerilyn remembers, *When his face began to swell I thought, he's got an infection. And I told him, "We need to contact the doctor quickly"*.

The results of a CT scan shocked the family. David's brother-in-law, Chuck Denny was there. *They told him he had stage four nasal cavity melanoma*, says Chuck. *They said surgery wasn't an option. Cause of the facial disfigurement would be too massive.*

Jerilyn felt hopeless, *They told us that, that there was really nothing*



*that they could do. Chemo wasn't for that type that he had.*

Chuck says, *I'd never seen anybody healed of cancer. Every time I heard the word cancer, it was a death sentence. And I feel like unless God moved, I feel like David wouldn't, you know, he wasn't gonna make it.*

*You know my first thought was in my teaching is that we need to move into a fast and seek God and see God heal*, says Jerilyn.

David's face rapidly swelled to the point where he couldn't eat or see out of his right eye.

Pastor Mark Gilbert remembers the many prayers from multiple church locations and beyond.

*Both church families was praying for David and there was a multitude of other people. It wasn't just our churches. David used to be a pastor himself. So there's a lot of people that he knows. It was praying for him in different areas of the country, just believing God for the turnaround in his life*, he says.

*Several times a day we would pray together*, says Jerilyn. *And there was times that you felt like you were just lost for words. You felt like that you were only repeating yourself because you were worn out. You were worn down from this sickness.*

*His condition just kept getting worse*, says Chuck. *But the prayers at that point, we didn't see much.*

*This was swelling inside of his mouth, as fast as it was on the outside*, says Jerilyn. *And he couldn't hardly eat. It was just terrible. And we knew that we were facing a horrible storm in life.*

On Easter morning, Dr. Tom Renfro and his wife, Sid, were visiting their church for a special prayer service. Remembering her husband's own miraculous healing from cancer, Sid

was moved with compassion to pray for David.

Sid remembers, *When I prayed for David, I don't touch people's head. I, I normally just touch their shoulders, but I did touch his face because I, I wanted to be very specific and very direct.*

Jerilyn watched, *I remember standing there and I thought that's going to come off in her hand because you could feel such a presence of God's Spirit.*

Sid continues, *I prayed the prayer that my dad had prayed. "By this time tomorrow, this side of your face will look like this side of your face" because that prayer had worked for my dad.*

The day after Easter, something amazing happened.

*He said, "There's a change in my face. Do you see it?" I said, "I've already seen it"*, says Jerilyn.

David smiles as he recalls, *I looked at my wife and I said, "I see a change in my face". She said, "I do too. But I was afraid to say anything". So, we decided to go eat with our family again. And we said, "Well let's just see what they have to say". And they all seen me and they said it, "That thing's shrinking". And it was just a matter of days. It was gone.*

(Continued on pg. 3)

Who doesn't know such a feeling as love? How many songs have been sung about love, poems and books written in all languages of the world! How much happiness, joy and... suffering have been experienced by loving people. What is love?

**Love is a state of deep respect, affection and sacrificial care for someone.**

**Love is a quality of the soul in which the lover is capable of sacrifice for the sake of the beloved, even to the detriment of himself.**

It is easy to love an unfamiliar person whom the lover idealizes in his mind, attributing to him far-fetched positive qualities that this character does not possess at all. This love of one's own fantasies borders on self-deception and often leads to disappointment. Especially often young people who dream of marrying a perfect or ideal person suffer from this when they act like they're ideal to the candidate they meet to become their spouse.

#### DIFFERENT SHADES OF LOVE

As you know, in the Greek language, in which the New Testament is written, the word love has many different shades, of which we will recall the three main ones, and this should greatly facilitate our reasoning on this topic.

Let's start from the lowest level. The first meaning of the word love is **eros**, carnal attraction to the opposite sex based on external attractiveness and therefore short-lived. Appearances change, attractiveness is lost, and love-eros withers. This type of love is more based on feelings and is known as infatuation, which lasts from a few months to two years. The word *erotica* is derived from the word *eros*.

The next type of love is **philia**. This word in Greek describes love between friends who have common interests, and means emotional affection, deep respect between people, regardless of age and social status. It's good when people getting married have, in addition to love-eros, a deep inner understanding of each other on a spiritual level. Marriages concluded on the basis of these two types of love are much stronger and are able to withstand great strains of family trials and time.

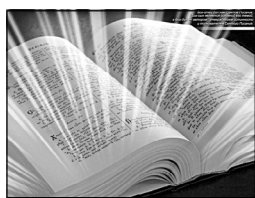
But the highest of all types of love is **agape** and means the unconditional love inherent in God Himself, Who loves even those who do not love Him or who reject Him. This type of love can only be found in spiritual people who are born again. A mother's love for her children is a weak reflection of this perfect agape love, which does not require any conditions or merit on the part of the children in order to love them. The Word of God calls us to achieve such love. It is in the presence of this love that a person can love his enemies and do good to those who hate him. Agape love is Christ-centered and service-oriented to others. If soulful love loves for something, then spiritual love (agape) only needs a person to love him. Spiritually mature love will ultimately strive to make the loved one a spiritual person. If all these three forms of love are present in a marriage, then it will be, if not an ideal marriage, then one of the best.

As you grow spiritually, love will manifest itself in different ways. Carnal and spiritual love requires reasons. She loves for something. For external charm, for intelligence, for cheerfulness, for reciprocal attention and care, or, even loves for status. Parents love and care for their children, a wife for her husband, as this is part of them. If the children are slob or the husband does not look good, then a shadow falls on the mother and wife, and this is her prestige. Sometimes this connection is expressed in the words: *Don't disgrace us (me)*. And this shows that in such love the Self, which is selfish in nature, does not take the last place as it should. Soulful love will please the loved one on a physical, mental level, but can also be destructive to the spirit. This happens to loving parents who often unknowingly spoil their children by unwisely catering to their unjustified demands or whims. Therefore, it is good when love is associated with maturity and wisdom.

**The Bible describes the qualities of love this way:**

**1 Cor. 13:4-8** — *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.*

Simply put, a person who loves with this perfect love will, over time, become long-suffering and forgiving towards others. He will not be proud, envious, arrogant, seek his own, be irritated, suspect others of something,



## PASTOR'S WORD

# LOVE

although he himself has good and pure motives. A loving person spreads around himself an atmosphere of sacrifice, trust, and respect for others. He will always look for the best in people, encouraging them to live up to the trust placed in them. The influence from a loving person will spread and affect others.

**1 Cor. 7:14** — *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.*

#### WITHOUT LOVE ITS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE SAVED

An unloving person is obviously unsaved. Or a spiritual baby, who is still guided by carnal feelings and who still needs to do a lot of work on themselves.

**1 John 3:14** — *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*

**1 John 4:8** — *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

#### WHAT DOES LOVE LEAD TO?

Love leads a person to perfection, since a person filled with love cannot hate or do harm to those he loves. God's love transforms both the lover himself and his relationships with other people. A person who loves God will definitely love people.

**1 John 4:20** — *If someone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

**Col. 3:14** — *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

**1 John 4:17** — *Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.*

#### HOW TO CHECK, DO I HAVE LOVE?

- 1) a person who loves the Lord will:
  - love His Word and commandments, the observance of which will not be a burden to him (**John 14:21; 1 John 5:3**);
  - love God's children and be sacrificial to others (**1 John 4:8**);
  - joyfully visit the house of God and love to pray (**1 Thess. 5:17**);
  - not love this world and will not be attached to earthly things (**James 4:4; 1 John 2:15; Heb. 11:13**);
  - be among those who await His appearing (**2 Pet. 3:14; Heb. 9:28**);
  - not be narcissistic and selfish (selfishness and love are incompatible);
  - not grumble about the circumstances of life, since he understands that they all work for his own good (**Rom. 8:28**);
  - be grateful to God for everything (**1 Thess. 5:18**)!

#### HOW TO ACHIEVE LOVE

**1 Cor. 14:1** — *Pursue love...*  
Upon repentance and rebirth, a person becomes homogeneous with God and an amazing process begins, which can be called the principle of overflowing vessels. The closer a person approaches God, the more clearly he begins to possess God's qualities. It is written:

**1 Cor. 6:17** — *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*

Communication with God, the Source of love, and filling with the Holy Spirit transforms a person and literally charges him with love. But that's not all. This initial portion of love is given by God as good seeds for the new farmer to reproduce. And then to develop love you need to work.

**Rom. 5:5** — *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

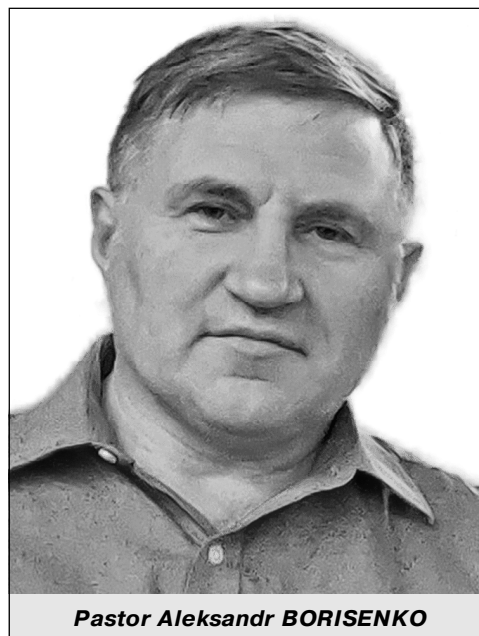
There is an interesting phenomenon: the more a person sacrifices himself for someone, the more he begins to love him. It has been noticed that those mothers who breastfeed their babies are more attached to them than those who feed formula from a bottle. Why is this so? Because the former devote much more of their time, energy and attention to their children than the latter. At the same time, a closer connection is formed between them. It turns out that it is not without reason that Christ commanded to do good to those who hate, to pray for those who offend and persecute. When a person begins to do this, then with the dedication of his energy and

time to it, his heart changes and he wants to see the result of his efforts. Thus, little by little he begins to become attached to the one for whom he prays or to whom he serves with love. This is one of the successful principles of achieving love — consciously manifesting acts of love, regardless of feelings. And feelings follow later.

So, achieving love happens like this: first a person decides to love, then one needs to invest in love through acts of love, and then feelings of affection, connection and love come.

**Matthew 5:44** — *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*

**Another way to achieve love for God and people is through spiritual insight.**



Pastor Aleksandr BORISENKO

Although all Christians have access to their Heavenly Father at all times, nevertheless, sometimes there are special experiences of the nearness of God. The experience is difficult to describe, but it feels as if you are in a heavenly environment of purity, holiness and the glory of God. And when this happens and we contemplate the greatness of the glory of God, then against the backdrop of this revelation we feel like corrupt sinners who can never reach God's standards of holiness. Then the awareness of the depth of God's love for us, so imperfect, touches us and evokes reciprocal love for God, gratitude and reverence. And also after such insight we become more forgiving and merciful towards other people. Opening up about our shortcomings gives us great respect for those who tolerate us and treat us condescendingly, and we begin to love them even more.

#### RECIPROCAL LOVE FOR GOD

Love for God, unlike love for man, will never remain unrequited. In the Holy Scriptures we clearly see the dependence of the magnitude of God's love for a person on his correct decisions or efforts.

Psalm 91 says that **because a person has chosen and loved the Lord**, He will do great things for him in return.

**Psalm 91** — *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust". Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He*

*shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation".*

In Deuteronomy, in the seventh chapter, in the eighth verse, we read where the Lord says that He loves the Israeli people. But further, in the thirteenth verse of the same chapter, God says that if Israel keeps His laws, He will love and bless them even more. From this text we see that the magnitude of God's love depends on the fulfillment of God's commandments.

Also in the Epistle to the Hebrews we find an amazing text that says how highly the Lord values man's sacrifice and his labor of love.

**Heb. 6:10-11** — *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.*

And the following text (from the New Testament) confirms that those who fulfill the commandments of the Lord will have a special fate already here on earth, to be in a special relationship with both the Heavenly Father and the Son.

**John 14:21, 23** — *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. ... Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him".*

#### WHAT ABOUT LOVE TO YOURSELF?

Have you ever heard the saying that we should love ourselves?

This statement was born on the basis of the text: Love your neighbor as yourself. That's why some argue that we should love ourselves! *How can we love others if we don't love ourselves?* they argue. To confirm this thesis about the usefulness and importance of pride and narcissism, they also cite the text of the Apostle Paul:

**Eph. 5:28-29** — *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

This statement about self-love is often indiscriminately transferred to love and pity for the whole self, including the old, Adamic nature, which Christ spoke about:

**John 12:25** — *He who loves his life will lose it...*

Can you imagine such narcissistic people who were told that they had to love themselves? And people living with them under the same roof or in the same church? What kind of atmosphere will there be in such families or churches where such narcissists are prevalent?

(**Narcissism** is a character trait consisting of excessive narcissism and self-esteem — grandiosity, which in most cases does not correspond to reality.)

And if this statement can lead to such dire consequences, then how should this text in Scripture be understood? How can we avoid the mistaken belief that the Bible tells us to love others as we love ourselves?

#### The explanation is very simple.

When God created man, he laid in him the law of self-preservation, expressed in taking care of his body. Thanks to this law, we heal our wounds and also have a sense of danger and fear when we approach the edge of a cliff. This law saves us from premature death. The Apostle Paul refers to him, saying that husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies, and take care of them as they take care of themselves. But as for our old corrupt nature, the presence of which all born again people are aware of, that is a completely different question. It is written about her that you should hate her. And whoever loves his soul (carnal essence) will not be saved at all.

**John 12:24-25** — *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

Do you see the danger of shifting emphasis onto the issue of self-love?

This could determine where we spend eternity! Therefore, let us take care of our bodies, which are the temple of God, and, in turn, hate the remnants of our old nature with its pride, narcissism and laziness.

May the Lord keep us on the path of salvation, without distortion, so that we grow in love that never ceases!



What is Christmas usually associated with? A Christmas tree, garlands, various decorations, a festive table, Father Frost, Santa Claus, Yule Goat, or some other mythical grandfather who brings gifts to those who have behaved well throughout the year. There is a pre-holiday bustle everywhere: people are rushing around, buying things, preparing meals, and some are trying to finish up what they didn't manage to do over the past year. The air is buzzing with tension. Everyone is preparing intensely so that when the long-awaited holiday comes, they can allow themselves to relax with a clear conscience.

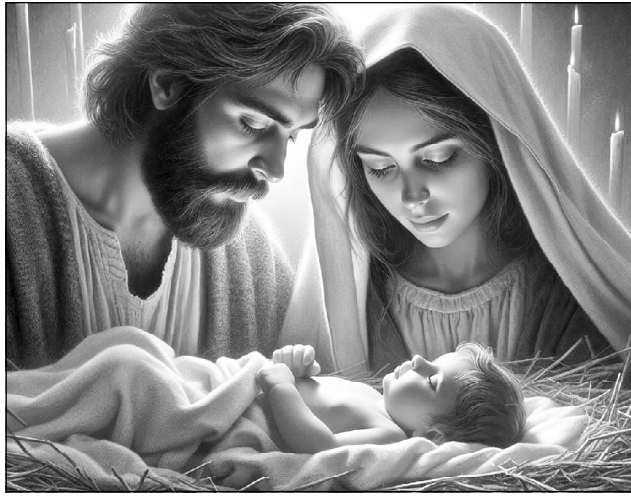
In all this commotion, few stop to think about what this holiday is really about. For many, Christmas is simply a chance to forget about everyday problems, have fun, and rest. And this is despite the fact that the full name of the holiday is the Nativity of Christ. Sadly, many — whether out of habit or simply not wanting to delve into the deeper meaning — just say, *Merry Christmas!* and that's it. Yet, by doing so, the most important part is missed...

The Nativity of Christ commemorates the great event that occurred over two thousand years ago in the ancient Israeli town with the beautiful name Bethlehem. It was there that the most important event in the history of humanity took place, which had been prophesied long ago by the Old Testament prophet Micah: *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).*

## WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN FOR US

It was in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago that the Son of God came into our world in human form, born of the Virgin Mary, to whom the angel had appeared and announced the coming birth: *Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:31–33, 35).*

Just think about it: the Son of God came down from heaven and became a Man, just like any one of us, and then He lived not just a day or two, but an entire earthly life, with all its flaws (compared to what He had in the house of God in heaven), and in the end, He even endured unbearable suffering when His sinful humanity crucified Him on the cross. Why did He have to do all this? The answer to this question was given to us by Christ Himself when He said:



*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:38–40).*

The reason for this act lies in God's infinite love for His creation (humanity, which had become mired in sin) and His desire to save it.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

Therefore, the purpose of Christmas is to reconcile us with God and give us eternal life through the subsequent sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And this means that Christmas is inseparable from another very important event — the Resurrection of Christ. In essence, Christmas is the beginning of our Lord's journey to the Golgotha cross for the redemption of all mankind. If Jesus had not been born, our salvation would have been impossible, because Christ is the only one who can change us and help restore our relationship with God after the Fall and separation from Him.

*Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:4–6).*

Therefore, during the celebration of Christmas, it is very important to remember what Jesus did for the salvation of each of us and, if possible, share this with those around us, so that every Christian may become the Good News among those who, though sinful, are still dearly loved by God. After all, even people who are far from faith in the Creator feel something very unusual around them at this festive time, something incomparable, something that inspires awe and hope for the future. Give them this hope for eternal life with Christ!

A. BURTSEV.

### CHRISTIAN NEWS

## Chemo Wasn't an Option - That's When God Supernaturally Healed This Man of Inoperable Cancer

(Continuation. Beginning on pg. 1)

David's tumor vanished and doctors later confirmed that he is now cancer-free. The Bakers are forever thankful to God for answering their prayers.

*There's many people that has got a diagnosis like David and I feel like they saw death, says Jerilyn. Maybe they prepared for death, but I'd say don't give up. I'd say take His word into your spirit and I'd say believe it with everything you've got because that's what we done.*

*What I witnessed with David up close and personal with him, I mean, it just boosted my faith, says Chuck. I mean I know God can do anything big, little, it don't matter. He can, he can move in anything.*

*Sid smiles, I felt jubilant when I saw the picture and the tumor was gone and he had a normal face.*

*When I see David now, I think about the benevolence of God, the mercy of God, that God in this state of David's life in his older years, that God has proven His faithfulness to him, says Pastor Mark.*

*Well, I'm thankful that you know what happened that God healed me, says David. I'm thankful for that. I've never doubted what God was capable of doing. I've always believed that He's the healer, that He can heal cancer, He can heal heart attacks, He can kill anything that's affected me and He can take care of it if we'll just believe Him and walk in His word and not let doubt and unbelief in 'cause that stops the hand of God. I'm very thankful.*

CBN NEWS



Pastor Thongkham Philavanh was feeding his chickens and ducks behind his house in Vanghay village, north-western Laos, on Monday (July 22) when two men on motorcycles, faces covered, arrived.

After a brief exchange, one

## Unknown Assailants Shoot Pastor Dead in Laos

of the gunmen fired seven shots into his head and body.

The assailant's gun was fitted with a silencer. They escaped as Pastor Thongkham was rushed to a provincial hospital, where he died on arrival, leaving behind a wife and two teenagers. Pastor Thongkham was 40.

Pastor Thongkham was a tribal Khmu leader and provincial head of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). He had been actively sharing the gospel, showing the Jesus Film and hosting trainings for pastors.

According to local Christians, Pastor Thongkham was closely monitored by the authorities, and had been

warned several times to stop his *Christian activities*.

Christians across Laos have posted messages of shock and grief on social media.

*His profound wisdom, unwavering faith and boundless compassion touched the lives of many, read one Facebook post.*

Despite a national law guaranteeing freedom of religion, persecution in Laos has been steadily increasing in the country. Christians continue to be imprisoned in Laos, most of them held for a short period and then released.

Local officials have been driving Protestant Christians from their villages, tearing down and burning their homes and rice silos, leaving families with no place to go. Even though the government has

been informed about these incidents, it has allowed this to continue without any charges filed.

Despite the increased persecution, the church in Laos is rapidly growing every year, with hundreds of Khmu coming to the Lord. Daily live Christian broadcasts on the Khmu Facebook page continue to attract thousands; in one three-day period, 10,000 people were watching.

Discipleship trainings are being held across the country by local teams, which has proven very effective.

Laos was ranked 21st on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

morningstarnews.org

The High Court (HC) of the south Indian state of Kerala recently ruled that two young adults were allowed to change their religion in their educational certificates from Hindu to Christian, setting a precedent that a person cannot be tied down to one religion merely by reason of birth.

The ruling given by the HC sets a significant precedent and relief to converts who face legal and social hurdles to change their religion on their official documents across the country.

## India High Court Affirms Religious Freedom

The HC made this statement while ruling in favor of two young adults from Kochi City in Kerala who changed their religion from Hindu to Christian in their school certificates following their conversion.

Lohith and Logith, 24-year-old twins, were allowed to change their names on their school certificates after they embraced Christianity, but the educational authorities refused to register their new religion in their certificates.

The authorities said there is no specific provision enabling a change of religion in school certificates. Following this, the students filed a plea which was allowed by the Kerala HC.

In its observation, the HC said, *Even if it is to be accepted that there is no provision enabling change of religion entered in school certificates, that is no reason to tie down a person to one religion, merely by reason of his birth. The freedom to practice and profess any religion of one's choice is guaranteed by Article 25(1) of the Constitution. If a person embraces another religion by exercising that freedom, necessary corrections will have to be made in his records.*

persecution.org

## Muslim Father Burns Daughter for Turning to Christ

A Muslim in eastern Uganda burned his 19-year-old daughter with a flat iron on July 21 after learning that she had converted to Christianity, sources said.

Naasike Maliyati of Nampologoma, Butaleja District said she attended an evangelistic crusade with a friend in the course of a visit to her grandmother in Lwagoli, Busoba Sub-County, Mbale District, on July 15.

*When they called people to give their lives to Christ, I also went and prayed to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, Maliyati said. When I went back home, I told my sister that I had left Islam. She went and told our dad of my conversion to Christianity.*

The following Sunday Maliyati, a student at Noor Islamic Institute in Mbale, attended a church service, and upon returning home found her father, 44-year-old Abdulrahim Kutosi, and uncles angry with her, she said.

*They tied me up, beat me, and finally my dad picked up a hot flat iron and hot water and burned me and shouted loudly that I was an embarrassment to the family, Maliyati told Morning Star News. I was burnt for leaving Islam and converting to Christianity, as my father furiously continued shouting that I had ashamed the family. He continued saying that even Allah is annoyed with me as the pain continued inside my body.*

She heard him order her to stop attending church services before relatives put her on a motorbike and left her near the Namatala River, she said. A Christian on a motorcycle who



happened by, Nicolas Ndobooli, rescued her.

*I saw someone yelling for help and calling, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" Ndobooli told Morning Star News. Being a Christian, I decided to stop and took the risk and put her on my motorbike to the clinic.*

He paid 30,000 Uganda shillings (8 USD) to admit her for medical treatment, he said.

Area Christians have condemned Kutosi's cruel treatment of his daughter, sources said.

The attack was the latest of many instances of persecution of Christians in Uganda that Morning Star News has documented.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.

morningstarnews.org

## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

## God answered despite my lack of Faith!

I was born and raised in Kyiv in a respectable Soviet family. My relatives instilled in me what they considered to be the best moral values. However, as I grew up, I saw that morality in this world was often a relative concept.

I decided that I would determine my own way of life and set my own ideals. I began hanging out with friends who were hardened criminals and addicts. By the age of eighteen, I was already using drugs and was part of one of Kyiv's organized crime groups. We even had lawyers on standby, ready to pull us out of any police station within two hours if we were caught. Back then, I thought I had reached my goals and was standing strong. But in reality, things were very different. Drugs had taken over my life, and soon, even my friends turned away from me. With no one left to help handle run-ins with the law,



my first criminal record was followed by a second and a third.

I would get released, but I had no strength to start a new life. I was trapped in a vicious cycle and couldn't help but wonder if it would ever end.

One day, when believers visited the prison, I happened to stop by the camp's social hall and saw an old acquaintance — someone who had been in our circles. He was a completely different person, with genuine life in his eyes!

We talked for a long time, and for the first time, I heard from him that freedom was possible if I could believe in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In November 2004, after being released from prison, I entered a rehabilitation center. I no longer believed that anyone or anything could help me. But God responded even to that zero faith! In the very first days of rehab, the Lord freed me from all my addictions and gave me a new mindset and outlook on life. Later, I found my calling in the rehabilitation ministry, where I helped others who were once like me. Today, I lead a church home group that prays for the needy and those who are struggling. And in 2007, God blessed me with a wonderful wife, Patty, and we now have two children. Thank God for everything!

Yevhen KRASNOVSKIY,  
Ukraine.

I grew up without a father. My mother did her best to raise me, but I never listened to her, rejecting her guidance and discipline. The streets were my true teacher. Back then, I thought I'd grown up quickly on the streets, though in reality, I was just a child.

While my mom worked shifts, I was left to myself. Money was always tight, so by age seven, I started collecting bottles to buy toys. At nine, I'd use that money for sweets, and as I got older, it all went to alcohol.



## God turned all my negatives into positives

The streets don't favor the weak. Drinking made me feel like a hero, and soon I turned to stealing. This was my life until I was fifteen, when I tried marijuana and later began using poppy-based drugs. Poppies and cannabis grew on local farms, so I didn't even have to pay for drugs. I could even make money selling them. For three years, I used drugs consistently, thinking it was *prestigious*. I was making easy money from people who wanted nothing more than to be high, enjoying life with no apparent consequences.

But this so-called *paradise* didn't last long. At eighteen, I was arrested. While I'd mentally prepared for jail, I wasn't ready for the pain of withdrawal. After 30 months, I was released and had no desire to return to prison. I changed my lifestyle, earning a legal income for several years by selling goods, eventually buying a car, an apartment, and getting married. Life was stable — I had everything I needed.

Yet, as the saying goes, *Drugs can wait*. I got hooked again and went back to prison. My life unraveled. I tried escaping the city to quit drugs, but I couldn't escape myself. In 1997, I started transporting poppies into the city for sale. Although I wasn't injecting at the time, I was drinking heavily. Eventually, I relapsed into drug use and suffered severe nerve damage in my arm, ending up with a disability. This was a hard blow—at just 32, I was devastated.

A year later, my daughter was born — a true gift from God! I thought I was finally living for my family, yet I continued dealing drugs. When police caught me, I'd just pay them off, thinking I could buy my way out of anything. I had an operation running in the city, distributing drugs all over. My life was a mess, and I didn't even notice how much it hurt those around me, especially my mother.

My surroundings were filled with filth and immorality, and to numb myself, I increased my drug dose each time. Darkness surrounded me, and I radiated that darkness outward. In 2001, I fell asleep at the wheel while transporting drugs and had another accident — my third. This time, both my heels were crushed. I couldn't walk for a while and used a wheelchair, then crutches. But even this didn't stop me from dealing drugs.

In 2004, I was imprisoned again. My health worsened, and I was diagnosed with early-stage tuberculosis, eventually being moved to a ward for the terminally ill, where people went to die. I referred to it as the *last trip*. Despite everything, I started up the drug and alcohol trade even there.

One day, someone sent me with marijuana, and I prayed to God for the delivery to go smoothly. Instead, I was beaten with baseball bats, left with damaged kidneys and broken ribs. Lying in the prison infirmary in unbearable pain, I realized, *God, I have no one left to trust but You*.

People had always invited me to church, but I refused to discuss God. Deep down, though, I admired the lives of believers. Broken and sick, I had to let go of my pride and attend a service. There, they invited me to repent, but I said I'd think about it. It didn't take long — a week later, I gave my life to Jesus Christ.

My repentance transformed my life: what used to feel right suddenly felt wrong. I began seriously reflecting on how to live. The more I read the Bible, the more I understood that if I lived according to its words, things would go well.

A month later, I heard a voice within, saying, *Son, you have a good heart, but you've ruined your body. Start exercising*. From that day, I began running an hour every day. I was later cleared from disability for both my leg issues and tuberculosis. This is God's glory, pouring into my life.

How could I ever turn away from the Lord who lifted me from such depths and prepared the best for me? Today, He fills me with His love so that I can share His limitless love with the people in our city. God turns all my negatives into positives.

Igor MYKHAILENKO (RYBAK), Ukraine,  
gazetasp.net

## Our love story feels like a movie

The urge to go against the grain often takes root in childhood, especially when life is tough. My father drank heavily, and my parents divorced when I was still a preschooler. My mother did her best to raise me, enrolling me in different sports programs, but I would quickly lose interest. My grades were poor, and my behavior was even worse. By the time I was fifteen, I had started smoking marijuana and using harder drugs. In 1999, during a night of heavy drinking, I was involved with a group in a brutal crime — we killed a drug dealer. Some of us received sentences of fourteen years, others less. I got five years in a high-security prison in the village of Martusivka.

Regrettably, I felt no remorse for what I had done; in fact, I was proud of it. In prison, I tried to earn status by resisting the prison rules and making a name for myself. My rebellious streak, however, only earned me repeated stays in solitary confinement — harsh, damp, underground cells with limited

food and basic facilities.

After a while, I realized that suffering for the «thief's code» was a deception. Around the same time, I began observing prisoners who had found faith in Jesus Christ. They spoke to me about God's love, and I started to think that I wanted friends like that and a life like theirs. After three and a half years in prison, I felt a deep urge to read the New Testament. From that moment, my life began to change. God's Word revealed who I truly was and where my reckless path would lead. I started attending the prison gatherings, and after being released, I completed a rehabilitation program. For nearly ten years now, I've been serving God. I married a wonderful Christian woman named Anna, and our love story feels like a movie plot.

In church, I was asked to help with the children's ministry, working with homeless children and teens. I shared with them the story



of Jesus and how God can change lives when we trust Him. Anna, who was also volunteering, was raised differently than I was: she finished school, went to college, and joined the church as a student. Friends saw how well we worked together and encouraged us to notice each other, but we seemed blind to it, simply committed to serving together. Then, one day, the feelings hit us, and we realized we couldn't imagine life apart.

In December 2009, our daughter Margarita was born. After her birth, we moved from the village of Pochuyky, where we had been serving as missionaries, to Kyiv. When our new church was established, we became members and continued our ministry with children. Today, I oversee the Sunday school, a daycare, a youth group, two shelters, and a children's wing in the hospital. Anna leads the women's rehabilitation ministry and the women's ministry in our church.

Demyan NAZARENKO,  
Ukraine.





TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

# God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...

I was one of those kids who seemed destined for trouble since childhood. My father was an alcoholic, and to keep us going, my mother worked three shifts. So, I spent nearly all my time on the streets. I started smoking while still in kindergarten and tried heroin and other drugs by thirteen.

Left to myself, I began skipping school from the first grade. Growing up on the streets, I got involved in various crimes, and by the time I was fifteen, I received my first conviction, though only probation. Less than a year later, I was convicted again and sentenced to six years. I spent part of this time in a juvenile prison, where I witnessed a level of cruelty among inmates I could never have imagined. My young heart grew harder, turning to stone. The adult prison was even worse — friends around me were willing to betray and deceive for just a bit of drugs, but I wasn't ready to change my ways.

Three months before I was due for release, something happened that broke my character and changed the course of my life. Out of boredom, I attended an evangelistic service held by Christians who'd brought fruit and sweets (it was a harvest festival). Naturally, many inmates came, drawn by the food. As we started eating, the guests prayed over the meal, picked up a guitar, and began singing songs. I suddenly wondered why they were doing this. It became clear they were driven not by profit or gain, but something greater: the love of Jesus Christ. I felt deeply ashamed of myself and my friends. From that moment, I started visiting the prayer room in prison, listening to the preaching of God's Word, and realizing how far my life was from the teachings of Jesus Christ.

One day, I repented. I began to transform from a hardened, corrupt young man with a heart of stone, who could



barely read or write, into someone new. I experienced changes beyond anything I could have dreamed. God made me His servant. Some may find this statement odd or overconfident, but I see God's Word being fulfilled in me: *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has*

*chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).*

God did even more in my life: He gave me a blessed wife, many brothers and sisters to serve. My wife Nelya and I are raising two children, a daughter and a son. This is yet another joy from God. Now we live and serve in the Christian rehabilitation center of our church.

Having experienced God's love and blessing in my life, I can't remain an indifferent bystander. If Christ came today, He would go out seeking the lost, rescuing those destined for death. He would not be building a name for Himself, earning social status, or seeking worldly recognition. He would seek out the outcasts, the broken and

hopeless, and be a friend to sinners. I am sure of this!

It may sound harsh, but today there are many consumers rather than laborers in churches — those who give an impression rather than live as true Christians. Many come to rehab and leave, come and go. And I pray, *Lord, why don't they stay in Your grace? Why don't they fall in love with You, when You have never changed?* Now my brothers and I are constantly praying and fasting for God to raise up laborers for this harvest! So that in these final days, which are so evident, we will not forget Christ's calling — to save those destined for death!

In closing, I want to emphasize that I now see my life as inseparable from Jesus Christ. He is the meaning and essence of my life! For it was God who stopped me in my sinful ways, gave me new life, led me to the true path, and gives me strength to keep going!

Andriy NOVIKOV, Ukraine.



## My message to you: trust in God

My name is Andriy, and I am about to turn forty this year. Twenty-six of those years, I lived far from a Christian life. But by His grace and love for me, God drew me close and gave me hope for eternal life. I come from a family of six children: me, three brothers, and two sisters. Among my siblings, I was the most troublesome and disobedient. I always wanted to grow up quickly and would often run away from home to live my own life.

At eleven, I befriended boys from a difficult background who liked to drink and steal. As the saying goes, *You become like the company you keep*, and soon I, too, began drinking, smoking, and eventually stealing. By twelve, I was already on record with the police and was often taken into juvenile detention. At fourteen, I was convicted of theft for the first time and given a suspended sentence of one year. At seventeen, I was convicted of theft again and sentenced to three years in prison. While incarcerated, I



often wondered how I could change my life to avoid ending up there again. People would often tell me that without God, I couldn't truly change, but I believed that if I just changed my

friends, my life would be different.

When my release day finally came, I stopped drinking and distanced myself from my old friends. I got a job, and my life seemed to be changing. After about two months, though, I made new friends, and before long, I was drinking again, this time without shame in front of my parents. Ten months later, I was caught stealing again and sentenced to one year and six months in prison. During this time, I once again thought about how to stay out of prison. Changing friends hadn't worked because I hadn't changed myself, so I had just found similar company in new people. I decided that starting a family might be what I needed to keep me on track.

After I was released, about a month later, I began living with a girl and her child, just as I had hoped. But within a year or so, I was drinking again and socializing with the same type of people. Two years and four

months later, I was caught stealing again and sentenced to four years and six months. In prison, I met a fellow from my hometown who was a Christian. He often invited me to church, but I would only make empty promises. For several months, he kept inviting me, and finally, I decided to attend. It was there that I first heard the Word of God. The preacher spoke about God and salvation. Seven months later, God freed me from smoking, drinking, and all my sinful habits. In January 2011, I repented before God, and on July 2, 2011, I was baptized. To this day, I serve the Lord freely, and it brings me great joy.

Only now do I understand that neither changing friends, starting a family, nor anything else can truly transform a person's life. And if it can, it doesn't last long.

My wish for you is this: trust in God, who can change your life, too. Don't strive to change it yourself — it's futile, as I've learned from experience.

Andriy CHUIKIN, Ukraine.

How old is our moon? Actually, no-one can *measure* the moon's age. However, the usual assumption is *uniformitarianism*, i.e. that *the present is the key to the past* (the view of the Bible skeptics in **2 Peter 3:4b**). And so they claim, on that basis, that the moon's age is of the order of four-and-a-half billion years.

However, here are four uniformitarian *measures*, that by any measure, expose the contradictions in the billions of years lunar *dating*.

### RECESSION OF THE MOON FROM THE EARTH

Tidal friction causes the moon to recede from the earth at a rate of 4 cm per year. It would have been greater in the past when the moon and earth were closer together. The moon could never have been closer than 18,400 km (11,500 miles), known as the Roche Limit,

## MOON MADNESS

### Spurious billions-of-years lunar 'ages'

because Earth's tidal forces (due to gravity) would have shattered it. But even if the moon had started receding from being in contact with the earth, it would have taken only 1.37 billion years to reach its present distance — only one-quarter of the claimed evolutionary age. Of course if it was created near where it is now, there is no need for vast periods of time.

### GHOST CRATERS

Ghost craters on the moon's *maria* (singular mare: dark seas formed from massive lava flows) are a problem for long ages. Enormous impacts apparently caused the lava flows, but not before other, smaller, impact craters formed within the larger craters. These can be seen as *ghosts* under the

lava flows. But this means that the smaller impacts can't have been very long after the huge ones, otherwise the lava would have hardened before the impacts. So it was a very short time frame for the cratering. This also implies that other cratered bodies of our solar system are also much younger than assumed.

### RECENTLY-FORMED SCARPS

NASA's surveys have revealed scarps (steep slopes) due to faulting, thought to be due to shrinking of the moon. These scarps are global and their freshness and lack of cratering suggest very recent origin. However, such recent tectonic movements should not be possible if the moon has been



cold and *dead* for at least two billion years.

### RECENT VOLCANIC ACTIVITY

Evidence of recent volcanic activity on Earth's moon is inconsistent with its supposed vast age because it should have long since cooled if it were billions of years old.

Note that we are not saying that any of these evidences give

us an actual age of the moon. All we can say from such a uniformitarian approach is that the contradictions between all such *measures* show that we can't trust *any* of them — that there is something seriously wrong with the assumption that *the present is the key to the past!*

The *only* reliable means of knowing the age of the moon (or anything else in the cosmos, or on Earth) is by the testimony

of a reliable witness who observed its formation. Only the Bible with its Creation account from the Creator Himself can inform us as to the moon's true age. Formed on Day 4 of Creation Week, our moon is just a few days younger than our Earth, i.e. about 6,000 years old. The real (biblical) past is the key to understanding the present!

Don BATTEN, creation.com

## I. DESCRIPTION OF JUDAS'S BETRAYAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Matthew 26:14-25** — Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him. Now on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples"'". So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me". And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, **but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born**". Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it".

**John 13:21-30** — When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me". Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it". And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. **Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him.** Then Jesus said to him, "**What you do, do quickly**". But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast", or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

**Matthew 26:45-50** — Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand". And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him". Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.

## II. PROPHECY ABOUT JUDAS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

**John 13:18** — "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me'" (**Psalm 41:9**). The phrase *lifted up his heel* is similar to the expression *raised his hand against someone*.

**Psalm 41:9** — *Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.*

**Psalm 109:6-20** — *Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children continually be vagabonds and beg; let them seek their bread also from their desolate places. Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labor. Let there be none to extend mercy to him, nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,*

## TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

# THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be continually before the Lord, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth; because he did not remember to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart. As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; as he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it enter his body like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be to him like the garment which covers him, and for a belt with which he girds himself continually. Let this be the Lord's reward to my accusers, and to those who speak evil against my person.

## III. MOTIVE FOR JUDAS'S BETRAYAL

The Jews awaited the Messiah. They believed the Messiah would be an earthly king who would restore Israel's kingdom, meaning He would free Israel from the rule of the Roman Empire.

Jesus's disciples were no exception. Many times, they argued about who among them was the greatest (**Mark 9:33-34; Luke 9:46** — *Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest; Luke 22:24*) and who had the right to sit on Jesus's left and right hand in His Kingdom (**Mark 10:36-37** — *He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory"*).

Judas was no exception either; he too believed in such an earthly Messiah.

In betraying Jesus to the Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests, Judas thought he was doing Jesus a favor and earning himself a high position in His Kingdom. After all, he had witnessed all of Jesus's miracles

and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. But when he saw that Jesus was condemned to death, Judas realized what he had done. He could not bear it.

## IV. THE CHARACTER OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

**John 12:1-6** — Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but **because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.**

Judas's deceitful nature likely developed gradually, leading to the moment when **Satan entered him (John 13:27)** and used him to betray our Lord Jesus (**John 18:3**). Afterward, Judas was filled with remorse, threw away the thirty pieces of silver he had received for his betrayal, and then went and hanged himself (**Matthew 27:5**).

If you still doubt the accuracy of our theory, let us compare it with another theory we'll call **the "petty thief" theory**.

Some claim that Judas betrayed Jesus solely for the thirty pieces of silver. If that's the case, how do we answer the following questions?

1. We know that Judas Iscariot was a thief. He stole from the treasury he carried. He could have continued stealing as much



(healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, walking on water, feeding thousands with a few loaves and fish). Judas had no doubt that no one could harm Jesus.

Additionally, Judas knew the people were ready to make Jesus king and proclaim Him as Israel's ruler. The people had already attempted to do so: **John 6:14-15** — *Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world". Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*

In Judas's view, only the priests, scribes, and Pharisees remained to be convinced. Jesus had long sought an opportunity to preach to them about the Kingdom of God. Judas thought that by handing Jesus over to them, he was giving Him a chance to witness to them of God's great works and proclaim Himself king by performing many miracles before them (**1 Corinthians 1:22** — *For Jews request a sign...*). It never occurred to

the thirty pieces of silver alone, but he decided to earn some money in the process.

## V. THE DEATH OF JUDAS

**Matthew 27:1-10** — When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood". And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood". And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me".

At first glance, it may seem that Judas repented of his actions. Indeed, the Bible states that he felt remorse. However, this was not true repentance; he was simply distressed that his plan had failed.

True repentance in the Word of God is called *godly sorrow* and means that, **first**, a person acknowledges their guilt, and **second**, they turn away from their sin and turn toward God. Looking at Judas Iscariot and his sorrow, we can confidently say that he had worldly sorrow because he did not turn to God but took it upon himself to handle his life. True and worldly sorrow are detailed in **2 Corinthians 7:8-10**: *For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.* Peter also betrayed Jesus, denying Him three times. However, he later genuinely repented. Judas, on the other hand, had worldly sorrow, which, as we have just read, *produces death*.

**Acts 1:15-20** — *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry". (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms (Psalm 109:6-20): 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office'".*

He died with his guilt and went to his own place (**Acts 1:25**). The phrase *falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out (Acts 1:18)* does not contradict what is written in **Matthew 27:5** (*he went and hanged himself*). Most likely, Judas hanged himself over the Valley of Hinnom (on a cliff), but the rope or branch broke under the weight of his body, causing him to fall and break on the rocks below.

Why such a man as Judas Iscariot was chosen by Jesus to be one of His twelve apostles, we do not know. All we know is that Jesus knew precisely who would betray Him (**John 6:64** — *For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him*).

Material for the newspaper "Prisoner" kindly provided by  
 **The Bible Discussion Club,**  
 Montreal, Canada  
<http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/004.htm>

Thus, we now clearly see that Judas betrayed Jesus Christ not for

Throughout life, everyone learns something. Yet, there is one thing that many overlook, though it is vital for every person: studying the Word of God, as it is tied to eternal life. Let us consider a few reasons why studying the Bible is essential. May this help us approach the Holy Word with deeper intent and explain its necessity to non-believers, encouraging them to seek God.

1. Because the Bible is the Word of God (**2 Timothy 3:16**: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*; **2 Peter 1:19–21**: *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*).

2. The Bible provides answers to life's important questions (**Ecclesiastes 12:13–14**: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil*; **Acts 17:26–27**: *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*).

3. The teachings of the Bible are the true standard of morality (**Matthew 7:12**: *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*; **Proverbs 14:12**: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*).

4. The Bible provides nourishment for the soul. It offers milk for the spiritual growth of new believers and solid food for mature Christians (**Matthew 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"*; **1 Peter 2:1–2**: *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*; **Hebrews 5:12–14**: *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*).

5. The Bible grants wisdom (**Ephesians 5:17**: *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*; **1 Corinthians 2:6–7**; **3:19**: *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory. ... For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"*).

6. Knowledge of and obedience to the truth (the Bible) are

necessary to be freed from sin (**John 17:17**: *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*; **John 8:31–32**: *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*; **1 Peter 1:22**: *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart*).

7. The Bible reveals how God views people and enables us to

to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God).

10. The Scriptures contain all good works pleasing to God and provide everything needed for life and godliness (**2 Timothy 3:16–17**: *All Scripture is given by*

which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified; **John 5:39**: *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*; **2 Timothy 3:15**: *...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*).

14. God wants people to read the Bible — otherwise, why would it be given to us? (**1 Timothy 2:4**: *...who desires all men to be saved*

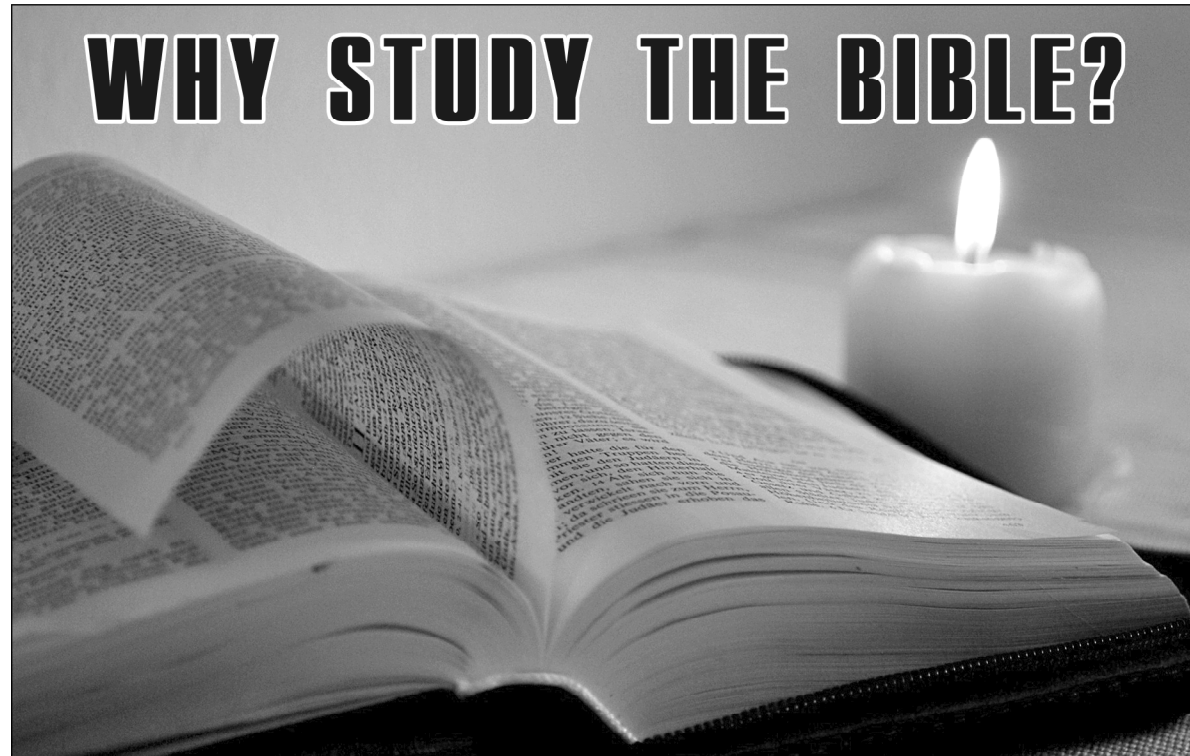
But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God". So then each of us shall give account of himself to God). Seek God's revelation in the Bible, rather than through fortune-tellers, mediums, or other sources.

17. The Bible is the Christian's weapon (**Ephesians 6:17**: *...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*) Consider the Crusades and other religious conflicts. In contrast, Paul wrote: *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ* (**2 Corinthians 10:3–5**). To skillfully wield God's weapon, know the Bible and live accordingly.

18. The Bible is the light of the world (**Psalms 119:105**: *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path*). Jesus is the light of the world (**John 3:19–21**: *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God*). His word dispels darkness (**John 8:12**: *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"*; **John 12:35**: *Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going"*; **John 12:46–47**: *I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness*).

19. People will be judged by God's word (**John 12:48**: *He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*; **Hebrews 4:12–13**: *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*; **Revelation 20:12**: *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books*).

The list of reasons to study the Bible could go on endlessly. But what use is knowledge if it isn't acted upon? Scripture teaches clearly: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ... But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does* (**James 1:22, 25**). Whether we choose to follow God or not, the choice is ours.



## WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

see ourselves through His eyes, serving as a mirror for the soul (**Psalms 8:4–9**: *What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet; **Romans 3:23**: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*; **James 1:21–25**: *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror*).*

8. The Bible equips believers to face life's difficulties. Its words are applicable in every situation, from birth to the grave (**Romans 15:4**: *For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*; **Philippians 4:11–13**: *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*).

9. A Christian who knows the Bible can comfort and encourage those who are broken-hearted (**Colossians 4:6**: *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one*; **1 Thessalonians 4:18**: *Therefore comfort one another with these words*; **1 Thessalonians 5:14**: *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all*; **2 Corinthians 1:2–4**: *Grace*

inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work; **2 Peter 1:3**: *...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*).

11. One must study the Bible to be approved by God, to be a person prepared for work, and to rightly handle the word of truth (**2 Timothy 2:15**: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*; **1 Peter 3:15**: *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*).

12. Knowledge of the Bible (and applying it in life) is the only safeguard against error (**Jeremiah 10:23–24**: *O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice; Not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing*; **Acts 17:11**: *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*; **1 John 4:1, 6**: *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ... We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*).

13. The Scriptures can build us up and give us a home in heaven, for they are the power of God (**Romans 1:16**: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek*; **Acts 20:32**: *So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,*

and to come to the knowledge of the truth). Some suggest that we cannot know God's will revealed in Scripture without help from others or the Holy Spirit. But let us remember Jesus' words: *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (**John 8:32**). Paul wrote to Timothy: *Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you* (**1 Timothy 4:16**). Jesus urged, *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me* (**John 5:39**). Jesus affirmed that people should read God's law (**Matthew 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31**): *But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him?" And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female..."*; Jesus said to them, *"Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?"*; *But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God. Thus, God expects us to read and understand the Holy Scriptures, and He will help us as we seek to know Him*.

15. Only the Bible tells us all we need to know about God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. How do we know that Jesus is the Son of God? *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name* (**John 20:30–31**).

16. The Bible speaks about everyone's future (**Hebrews 9:27**: *And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*; **Matthew 25:46**: *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*; **Romans 14:10–12**:



# BIRTH OF JESUS

The time when one year passes the baton to the next has traditionally become a season of celebration. During these days, people wish each other a Happy New Year and Merry Christmas. Let's explore two aspects of Christmas: the physical — Jesus' birth into the world, and the spiritual — the birth of the Son of God in the hearts of people. Unfortunately, many are unaware of this second aspect of Jesus' birth.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS INTO THE WORLD

The account of Christ's birth in Bethlehem appropriately begins with the prophecy from Isaiah, referenced by the apostle Matthew. Describing the angel's appearance to Joseph, he says: *So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel", which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:22–23).*

This prophecy emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ's appearance in earthly life: He was conceived without a man's involvement! Such an event is unprecedented. The miraculous conception itself is proof of Jesus' divine nature (Luke 1:35). There are several important things related to Christ's birth worth highlighting.

**Jesus Christ is not of this world.** Oswald Chambers wrote: *Jesus Christ was born into this world, not of it. He was not a "product of history", but He entered history from outside it. Jesus Christ cannot be described as the best of men; He is a Being upon whom the human race has no claim. He is not a man who became God, but God incarnate... Christmas marks His entry into the world. The Son of God is the Creator of the world, which exists through Him (John 1:3, 10). Yet, the Creator, born as a regular man, willingly becomes part of this world. Truly, as the apostle Paul wrote: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).**

**Coming into our world through birth is a humbling for the Lord.** The apostle Paul describes Jesus this way: *...but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man... (Philippians 2:7).* The incarnation of Jesus as a man was a humbling for Him. After all, Jesus is God and Creator, thus holding the highest position. Any change from this position could only be a descent.

**But what was the purpose of Christ's birth?** Why did Jesus humble Himself? Concerning Jesus' appearance, the apostle mentions that some things are a mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16). However, the purpose of Jesus' coming — and thus, the purpose of His birth — is not a mystery. Scripture clearly and repeatedly declares that Jesus came to save people: *...just as the Son of Man did not come to be*



*served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28); ...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).* It can also be said that Jesus was born to die: *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14–15).*

Through His death, Jesus makes it possible for humanity to be saved from sin. Therefore, Jesus' birth and death are both the means and the price of salvation and new life with God. This gives reason to say that Jesus was born into the world so that He might be born in the hearts of people.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN THE HEART OF MAN

This kind of birth is Jesus' desire. He said: *Abide in Me, and I in you (read John 15:4–6).* The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: *My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you (Galatians 4:19).* From these words, we understand that Christ should be reflected in Christians. This means that those who bear the name of Christ (Christian) should reflect Christ Himself to those around them. Just as a

mirror reflects an image, a person's life should become a mirror reflecting Christ. Paul exemplified this, saying about himself: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:19–20).*

**Christ's abiding presence within a person is not mysticism or magic.** This abiding represents the concept of a new creation — a new inner person or spiritual rebirth. One

*former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:21–24).*

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. ... Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:4–11).*

Thus, a new creation is not the old person with new responsibilities and privileges. It is a different person, with a new conscience, will, feelings, thoughts, and actions. A person becomes this new creation only through union with Christ. Notice, the apostle Paul asserts that the new creation is the one who is *in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

This union defines the appearance (birth) of Christ in a person's heart and the rebirth of that person in Christ. This is characterized by a new person so fully devoted to God that Christ is reflected in them, His image. In other words, I live as if it is no longer me but Christ Himself: I think like Him, feel like Him, act like Him, and see life through His eyes. Or, as Paul put it: *...and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20).* This living presence of Christ in people obedient to God is a core element of God's eternal purposes. Paul says that the heart of God's Word, previously hidden, is *Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:24–27).*

In John 15:4–6, Jesus says: *Abide in Me, and I in you.* To abide in this way, union with Jesus is necessary; His birth must take place in people's hearts. What is needed for this? According to the Bible, certain conditions are required for Jesus' birth in a person. One must hear the Gospel of Christ to develop saving faith (Romans 10:13–17; Hebrews 11:6). Based on this faith, a person must repent of all sins (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9) and confess Christ (Romans 10:9–10; Acts 8:37). The final step in being born again is water baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; John 3:3–5). Through this act, a person connects with the sacrifice of Christ (Romans

6:3–4) and receives salvation in the sense of forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:15–16). Baptism is the final step by which a person puts on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Baptism is a symbol of what truly happens during its performance: immersion in water symbolizes death to sin, the destruction of the old person, and emergence from the water symbolizes new life.

## CONCLUSIONS

People love holidays. According to surveys, many count Easter and Christmas among their favorite holidays, as these are associated with the birth, life, death, and ascension of Christ. Despite this, there is a certain issue: people in the world do not take the essence of Jesus' birth seriously. For the vast majority, Christmas is just an occasion for a few days of celebration. But it's hard to imagine a greater insult to Jesus than celebrating His birthday without considering why He was born!

In 1 Corinthians 5:7, it says: *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.* Some see this as a basis for celebrating Easter as the festival of the resurrection. However, these words are actually a call to abandon sinful living and become a new creation. The reason and motivation for this transformation are found in Christ Himself, as He is our Passover — the sacrifice for humanity's sins.

The same applies to Christ's birth. Some see this fact as a reason for feasting and celebration. In one American Christmas film, a main character claims, *If Santa doesn't come, there's no Christmas.* Think about it! This suggests that for many, the holiday of Christmas is entirely disconnected from Jesus.

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman... (Galatians 4:4).* Christ was born into the world to give us a new birth and to be born in our hearts. We could say that He knocks at the door of our hearts. The apostle Paul prayed that *Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17).* Paul's heart had received Christ, giving him the right to say: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.* This is the best way to celebrate Christmas — a life dedicated to God, as this is why He was born and died.

Therefore, there are two types of Christmas celebrations. One is living all 365 days for God; the other is a few festive days filled with gifts and feasting. Which celebration do you choose?

Dmytro GALYUK,  
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## Proverb of Love

Once, long ago on Earth, there was an island where all spiritual values lived. But one day, they noticed that the island was sinking into the water. All the values boarded their ships and left. Only Love remained. She waited until there was no more time, and then she, too, wanted to leave.

She called out to Wealth and asked to board his ship, but Wealth replied:

*My ship is full of treasures and gold; there's no room for you.*

When the ship of Sorrow passed by, she asked to board, but Sorrow responded:

*Forgive me, Love, I am so sad that I must always remain alone.*

Then Love saw the ship of Pride and asked for help, but Pride replied

that Love would disrupt the harmony of her ship.

Joy sailed by, but she was so caught up in her celebration that she didn't hear Love.

Love was beginning to despair. Suddenly, she heard a voice behind her:

*Come, Love, I will take you with me.*



Love turned and saw an old man. He took her to dry land, and as he sailed away, Love realized she hadn't asked his name. She approached Knowledge and asked:

*Tell me, Knowledge, who saved me? Who was that old man?*

Knowledge looked at Love and replied:

*That was Time. Time? asked Love. But why did it save me?*

Knowledge looked at Love once more and then out into the distance where the old man had sailed:

*Because only Time knows how important Love is in life.*

Cherish Love!



# MY HOUSE IS AT THE EDGE

At least repost it!  
Every little bit can help!  
We need \$50,000 for treatment,  
or she won't survive...

Be honest with yourself: do you scroll past posts like this on Facebook, because there are just so many of them now? You calm your conscience by thinking, *I can't help everyone...* and move on to the next post, like one about how great Danik's birthday celebration was.

It's become easier for us to read or watch something positive and entertaining, something that doesn't make us think too hard or feel guilty. Until you find out that someone close to you has cancer. Suddenly, you're fully involved in the fight to save their life and are surprised at how few people react to your requests to at least share the post or donate even a small amount.

In a way, this is my story. I never really thought about how terrifying a situation like this is until I started raising funds for the treatment of a friend's daughter. Thank God, she was saved, but that year changed me. Now I wonder: do I really need to be placed in such a difficult situation before I finally realize that *my house is at the edge* is not the way to live in this world?

I still remember the times when, during a street fight, everyone

action. But pity and sympathy fade quickly, because people can't sympathize for long, and the treatment of a child often takes a year or more... This shocked me. What has happened to us? Why has sympathy stopped being a constant driving force to help others?

Once, while riding a tram, I noticed a person sitting next to me who, as it seemed, hadn't been sober in a long time. He reeked of alcohol, and I was about to move to a different part of the tram to find a place where the air was fresher. But then I saw that he was holding an old phone, looking intently at something on it. I became curious about what someone like him could be interested in, so I looked over his shoulder to see the screen. Honestly, I was surprised — it was filled with beautiful green landscapes that he was flipping through and clearly enjoying.

Then I understood: even someone whom society has written off, someone abandoned by everyone because of their own mistakes, needs something beautiful. Even such a person is a child of God, who needs love, compassion, and support.

Once, Jesus told an interesting story about a young man who left

son; make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18–19).

And the story continues with an amazing turn of events: *And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son". But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:20–24).*

No matter what happens in a person's life, God is always waiting for them to come home. *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... (Matthew 11:28).* These words of Jesus are meant for those who no longer believe that they matter in this life. They are for those who have lost hope for healing, for those whose families are falling apart, or who have problems with friends. Jesus is waiting even for those who have long turned their back on Him and said that they will never return. He waits to comfort, to give them a second chance, because He loves them more than anything in the world.

*My house is at the edge, I know nothing* — this is the usual ending we hear for this proverb. But historians suggest that, in ancient times, the saying may have had a different continuation: *My house is at the edge, I meet the enemy first.* This version, as you can agree, radically changes the position a person takes in society.

I don't know your religion, I don't know your dreams and aspirations in life, but today I urge you: take an active position in serving others. The Bible advises: *...through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13).*

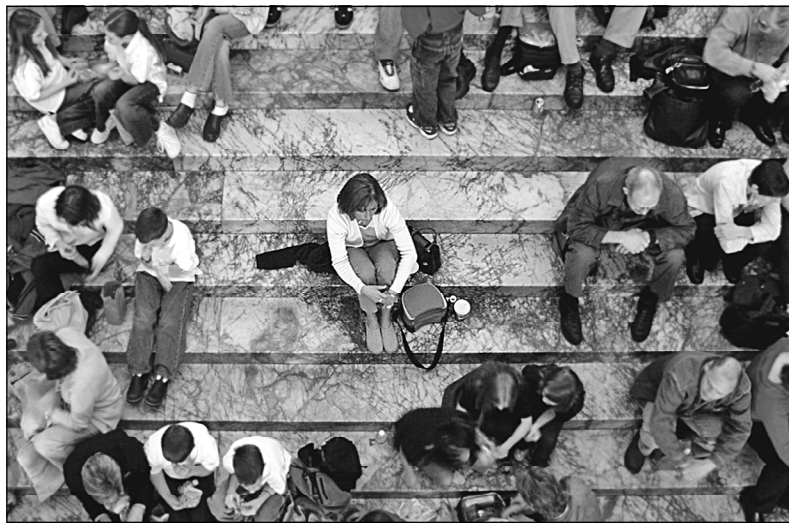
Yes, you might wait until you're in a situation where you'll desperately seek a second chance and only after divine intervention change your direction in life toward selflessness and helping others. But why wait? Why take the long route, when there's a simpler way?

I know you're not Batman or Spider-Man, and you won't make huge societal changes (though you know), but you can start small: smile at the cashier, help an elderly person with their heavy bag, give up your seat for a girl on the bus — and drop by drop, you can begin to change the world.

With God, you can do this. Because it is His way. Let Him open your second wind.



Serhiy STEPANYUK,  
adventist.ua



would run to break it up. Today, people still run, but only to record it on their phones, to share the video on *YouTube* or *Instagram* — because such content will definitely get a lot of likes. We've become indifferent to the pain of others; we've simply grown used to it because it's everywhere.

Olga Kudinenko, the founder of the charity *Tabletochki*, told me on the program *Second Wind* that the strongest emotion that encourages people to donate for children's medical treatment is **anger**! When a person sees injustice, it makes them angry and spurs them into

his home, taking all the money that he would only inherit after his father's death. He spent it all in the city with friends, and soon there was no money and no friends left. He tried to earn a living and ended up feeding pigs, eating and living with them. Then he remembered how good his life was back home and, looking at his miserable situation, decided to return, though he didn't know how his father would react. He thought: *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your*

## Interesting facts about apostle Peter

Peter is known in the Bible by several other names. Originally, Peter's name was Simon. However, Jesus, seeing the spiritual strength in his heart, gave him a new name — Cephas (or Kepha), which means *stone* or *rock* in Aramaic. As a result, Peter is also called Simeon, Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas.

The Apostle Peter is frequently mentioned in the Gospels as part of a special group among the twelve apostles, along with James the son of Zebedee and John. This group was present at events where the others were not, such as the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:1–13), the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35–43), and the final prayer in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46). This could indicate that these three were entrusted by Christ with the most important tasks He asked of them.



An interesting fact is that all three of Jesus' closest disciples — Peter, James, and John — were fishermen. It seems that Peter was the first of the apostles to see the resurrected Lord (1 Cor. 15:5). He was also the only one who dared to walk on water to come to Jesus. According to Matthew 4:18–22, Jesus first called two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew.

Peter preached with such power that he would instantly convert up to five thousand people to Christ, heal the sick, and raise the dead. People revered him so much that they would lay the sick in the streets, hoping that even his shadow might fall on them (Acts 5:15). In Joppa, Peter raised a Christian woman named Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–43).

St. Petersburg was not named after its founder, Peter the Great, but in honor of Saint Peter (literally *the city of Saint Peter*).

The Apostle Peter (Simon) was born in Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the family of a simple fisherman named Jonah from the tribe of Naphtali. Peter's character was lively and impulsive: it was he who wished to walk on water to approach Jesus. He also cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in the Garden of Gethsemane.

On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter, as the Teacher had predicted, fearing trouble, denied Christ three times, and after realizing what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly.

The Apostle Peter is repeatedly mentioned in the first part of the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 1–15). In the later chapters, he is not mentioned at all, as they focus exclusively on the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul.

The evangelist Luke notes that Peter was an unlettered and simple man (Acts 4:13).

The largest cathedral in the world, St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, is named after Saint Peter. The second largest cathedral, located in London, is named after the Apostle Paul. Despite their vast differences, the apostles always worked together, united by their burning, unwavering faith in God and their love for Him.

Peter is the only one of the twelve apostles mentioned in the New Testament as being married.

The Apostle Peter is the most famous of the twelve apostles: his name is mentioned so often in the Gospels that it only ranks second in mentions after Christ.

Although Peter did not write any of the four Gospels, he plays an important role in all of them.

Peter's brother Andrew is the only family member who is regularly seen in the Gospels, but the Bible says very little about him.

It was Peter who first noticed the withered fig tree (Mark 11:21).

In church tradition, Peter is considered the author of two general epistles included in the New Testament: First Peter and Second Peter. Although Peter was a simple fisherman before meeting Jesus, presumably with no formal education, it is likely that someone helped him write down his words, as in the closing words of his first epistle, where he clearly mentions that a man named Silvanus helped him: *By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I consider him, I have written to you briefly... (1 Peter 5:12).* Dictating letters was not uncommon, and it would not be surprising if an uneducated leader sought help from someone with formal training.

Peter is often depicted in art and literature as the gatekeeper of heaven, deciding who may enter and who may not. This image is drawn from Matthew 16:19, where Jesus says: *...and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...*

Peter was the first among Jesus' disciples to call Him the Messiah (Matt. 16:16; Luke 9:20). Peter was also among the first two apostles to witness the empty tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:3–6).

Miracles performed by the Apostle Peter:

✪ In the city of Lydda, he healed a man named Aeneas who had been paralyzed for eight years (Acts 9:33–34),

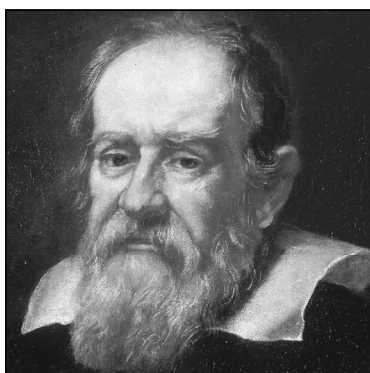
✪ He raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:40),

✪ Peter performed many other miracles, which are not recorded in the Bible.



bible-facts.org

## QUOTES OF FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE



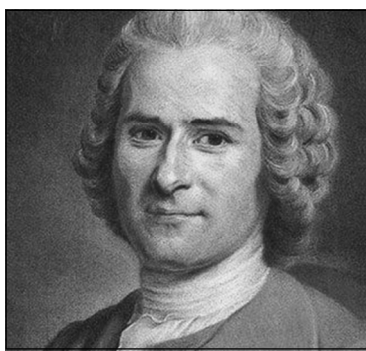
Galileo GALILEI,  
Italian astronomer  
and mathematician

*The Holy Scriptures can never lie or be in error. Everything it says is absolutely irrefutable. Both the Scriptures and nature were created by the divine Word: the Bible by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and nature by the fulfillment of divine commands.*



Johann Wolfgang  
von GOETHE,  
German poet

*The human mind can expand as much as it wants, but it will never rise above the greatness and moral culture of Christianity, as reflected in the Gospels... For in them is revealed the reflection of the greatness of the personality of Christ, and in a form that only Divinity could manifest on earth...*



Jean-Jacques  
ROUSSEAU,  
French philosopher

*...I loved the Bible, I accepted it, spread it, and explained it; I clung to it with all the zeal of my heart. Everything I have written breathes love for the Gospel and the same reverence for Jesus Christ. This Holy Book must be regarded as the law of a teacher and guide.*

# THE NATURE OF BIBLE INSPIRATION

What does it mean to say: *The Bible is inspired*? Answers to this question are legion. Some regard the Bible as *inspired* in the same way that great authors in history have risen above the average person in their literary pursuits, e.g., Homer, Shakespeare, Dickens, or Eliot. Others would say that the writers of the Bible were influenced by supernatural connections, but that their written records of those connections suffer from the same flaws that mere humans are prone to make. Many people fail to assess the Bible's own claims regarding its inspiration. Before the Bible can be determined to be *inspired*, it is necessary to conceptualize the meaning and nature of that inspiration. The Bible literally is filled with descriptions of the essence of its own inspiration.

Paul boldly claimed, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek term underlying the word *inspiratio* means *God-breathed*. Paul was affirming that Scripture, referring primarily to the Old Testament, is the product of the breath of God. God actually breathed out the Scriptures. The Bible is **God's Word** — not man's — though He used man to produce them. Three verses later (4:2), Paul declared, *Therefore... preach the word... Why? Because it is God's Word*. Just as surely as God's breath brought the Universe into existence (Psalm 33:6), so the Bible is the result of God's out-breathing.

Peter alluded to the momentous occasion of Christ's transfiguration when God literally spoke from heaven directly to Peter, James, and John (2 Peter 1:19–21). God orally boomed forth His insistence that Jesus is His beloved Son, and human beings are commanded to listen to Him (Matthew 17:5). Peter then declared, *We also have the prophetic word made more sure... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation*. Peter was saying that the Scriptures provided to us by the prophets are just as certain, and just as authoritative, as the voice of God that spoke on the mount of transfiguration.

Peter further explained that the prophetic word, meaning the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures, did not originate on its own, or in the minds of those who wrote them (the meaning of *private interpretation*). Scripture did not come from *the will of man*. Scripture was not the result of human research or human investigation into the nature of things. Scripture was not the product of its writers' own thinking. Where, then, did Scripture come from? Peter claimed, *but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*. The word *moved* in the original language is the usual word for being *carried or brought*, hence, to be moved or under a moving influence. Peter was stating that the Holy Spirit, in essence, **picked up** the writers, the prophets, and brought them to the goal of **His** choosing. That means that the Scriptures, though written by means of human instrumentality, were so superintended by God that the resulting writings are truly God's.

This same Peter, while awaiting the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 on Pentecost, stood up among fellow disciples and declared, *Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas*, and then he quoted from the Psalms (Acts 1:16). Peter affirmed that the Holy Spirit governed what David wrote, and the results of David's writing therefore are designated as *Scripture*.

This same Peter, in 1 Peter 1:10–12, explained: (1) that the inspired spokesmen of the Old Testament did not always understand all the information given by God through them; (2) it was the Spirit of Christ that was operating upon them; (3) this same inspired information was being presented in Peter's day by the apostles; and (4) the same Holy Spirit was directing their utterances. It is very important to note that Peter was claiming that inspired men had **their own minds engaged** as they produced inspired material, but **the product was God's**, since they did not always grasp all of the significance of their own productions.

This same Peter, in 2 Peter 3:15–16, referred to *our beloved brother Paul* as having *written to you*. He then noted: *as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard*

*to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures*. Peter made clear three salient points: (1) Paul wrote epistles; (2) those epistles are classified with *the other Scriptures*, which means that Paul's letters are **Scripture** every bit as much as the Old Testament and other New Testament writings; and (3) these writings are divinely authoritative, since to twist them is to invite *destruction* — an obvious reference to **God's** disfavor and the spiritual/eternal harm that results from disobeying **God's** words, not man's words. Cornelius well-understood this principle, for when Peter came to his house, he stated: *Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God* (Acts 10:33, emp. added).

While on Earth, Jesus demonstrated a high regard for Scripture, i.e., the Old



Testament. On one occasion, He involved Himself in an interchange with some Jews who accused Him of blasphemy (John 10:33). He repelled the charge by quoting Psalm 82:6, referring to the passage as *law* (vs. 34). But how could Jesus refer to a psalm as *law*, since the Psalms were poetic wisdom literature and not a part of the Torah (the Pentateuch)? He referred to a psalm as *law* in the sense that the Psalms are part of Scripture. Jesus was thus ascribing **legal authority** to the entire corpus of Scripture. He did the same thing in John 15:25. Likewise, Paul quoted from the Psalms, Isaiah, and Genesis and referred to each as *the Law* (1 Corinthians 14:21; Romans 3:19; Galatians 4:21).

After Jesus quoted from a psalm and called it *law*, He added, *and the Scripture cannot be broken* (vs. 35). Notice that He was equating *law* with *Scripture* — using the terms as synonyms. When He declared that *law*, or *Scripture*, *cannot be broken*, He was making the point that it is impossible for Scripture to be annulled, for its authority to be denied, or its truth to be withstood. Jesus considered every part of Scripture, even its most casual phrases, to be the authoritative Word of God.

This attitude toward Scripture as an authoritative document is intimated by the customary formula: *It is written*. For example, when facing Satan, Jesus repelled his attacks all three times with a simple, *It is written*, which was sufficient to establish authoritative credibility (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10) — so much so that Satan attempted to copy Jesus in this respect (Matthew 4:6). After His resurrection, Jesus equated the entire Old Testament (i.e., the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms) with *Scripture*, and again noted *it is written* (Luke 24:44–46). He insisted very emphatically that *all things* in the Scriptures concerning Himself *must be fulfilled*. Earlier in the chapter, He equated *Moses and all the prophets* with *the Scriptures* (vss. 25–27).

No wonder Jesus would rebuke His religious challengers with such phrases as, *Have you not read even this Scripture?* (Mark 12:10; cf. Matthew 21:42); or, *You do err, not knowing the Scriptures* (Matthew 22:29); or, *if you had known*

*what this means... (Matthew 12:7); or, Go and learn what this means... (Mark 9:13)*. The underlying thought in such pronouncements is that **God's truth is found in Scripture**, and if you are ignorant of the Scriptures, you are susceptible to error. Jesus therefore was affirming that God is the Author of Scripture.

Even the words of Scripture that do not constitute direct quotes of deity are, in fact, the words of God. For example, Jesus assigned the words of Genesis 2:24 to God as the author (Matthew 19:4–6). Yet, in the original setting of Genesis 2:24, no indication is given that God was the speaker. Rather, the words are simply narrative comment written down by the human author — Moses. By Jesus attributing the words to God, He was making clear that the whole of Scripture was authored by God. That means that

presents itself as the very words of God.

In Hebrews 1:5–13, the writer quoted seven Old Testament passages: Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 104:4; Psalm 45:6–7; Psalm 102:25–27; and Psalm 110:1. The Hebrews writer attributed each of these passages to God as the speaker. Yet in their original setting in the Old Testament, sometimes God **is** the speaker, while sometimes He is **not** the speaker, and is, in fact, being spoken **to** or spoken **about**. Why would the writer of Hebrews indiscriminately assign all of these passages to God? Because they all have in common the fact that they are the words of Scripture, and, as such, are the words of God.

The same is true with Romans 15:9–12 where Paul quoted from Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10. The first one he introduced with the formula as it is written; the second one is introduced by *again he says*; the third with simply *again*; and the fourth is prefaced with *Isaiah says*. Yet, in the Old Testament setting, only in the Isaiah passage is specifically God talking — and Paul assigns those words to Isaiah. So *it is written, he says*, and *Isaiah says*, are all different ways of saying the same thing, i.e., **God** says! Sometimes the New Testament writers assigned Scripture to its human authors. Yet it is clear that when the writers said, *Moses said*, or *David said*, such was simply another way to say, *Scripture says*, which, again, was the same thing as saying *God says*.

## VERBAL INSPIRATION

Notice that the inspiration that the Bible claims for itself is **verbal** inspiration, i.e., God's superintendence extends even to the **words** of the writer. Paul based his argument on a plural noun, and insisted that God intended the word to be understood in its singular sense (Galatians 3:16). As noted previously, Jesus based an argument on the precise verbal form of Scripture (John 10:34). He based His point on a particular **word** in Matthew 22:43, on a particular **tense** in Matthew 22:32, and even on the **letters** and their minute strokes in Matthew 5:17–18. In the latter passage, Jesus said that **Exodus 3:6** was spoken to the Sadducees with whom He was conversing — even though the original context of **Exodus 3:6** has God speaking to Moses. That proves that Jesus expects all people on Earth to understand that the Bible is written to every single accountable human being, and that Scripture is intended to be **authoritative** for human living.

Paul also affirmed verbal inspiration in 1 Corinthians 2. He claimed that his speech and his preaching were not *words of human wisdom* (vs. 4). Rather, his words were *in demonstration of the Spirit*. He claimed that he and his fellow apostles were speaking the wisdom of God (vs. 7). He claimed that the things which they had been speaking were revealed to them by God through the Holy Spirit (vs. 10). Then he affirmed very clearly: *These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches* (vs. 13). So inspiration involves the very **words**, and that makes it **verbal** inspiration.

## NEW TESTAMENT INSPIRATION

Most of the passages examined thus far are New Testament references to the inspiration of the Old Testament. Liberal scholars have claimed that the New Testament does not make the claim of inspiration for itself. That claim is not true. As already noted, in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter classified Paul's epistles as *Scripture*, and he affirmed that Paul's writings carry such divine authority that those who twist them will be destroyed. It also was noted that Peter linked the apostles with the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:10–12). And, as just seen, Paul made a comparable claim in 1 Corinthians 2.

As one reads the New Testament, it is clear that the writers made the extension of Old Testament inspiration to their own writings. They did not for a moment consider themselves — the ministers of the

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does the Bible say about tattoos?

new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6) — to be less in possession of the Spirit of God than the ministers of the old covenant. Jesus, without question, declared the impending inspiration of the authors of the New Testament. In Matthew 10:17-20, and the parallels in Mark 13:11 and Luke 12:12, Jesus explained to the apostles that the Holy Spirit would direct their verbal activities in terms of both how and what they spoke. He reiterated the same thing in Luke 21:12-15, urging them not to worry how to defend themselves when hauled before the authorities, since He would provide them with a mouth and wisdom that their adversaries would not be able to withstand. So Jesus pre-authenticated the teaching of the apostles, and insured respect for their authority.

Jesus directed several promises to the apostles in John chapters 14, 15, and 16. Allusion to just one of these will suffice. Jesus promised the apostles: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come* (John 16:12-13). Just prior to His ascension, Jesus promised to the apostles the impending baptism of the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:5, 8). This promise commenced its fulfillment in Acts 2 when the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit and empowered to preach the message God wanted preached.

Numerous passages indicate the fulfillment of these promises to the apostles to the extent that the words which they spoke were God's words (Acts 4:8, 31; 5:32; 15:8, 27-28; 16:6-8). As already noted, Paul claimed direct guidance of the Holy Spirit for the words that he spoke (1 Corinthians 2). He did the same thing in Galatians 1:12. In Ephesians 3:1-5, he claimed that his message was made known to him by revelation (vs. 3), along with the other apostles and prophets (vs. 5). Other passages reflect the same point (1 Timothy 4:1; Galatians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). A good summary of Paul's claims to inspiration is seen in his firm declaration: *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord* (1 Corinthians 14:37). His inspiration extended to both his oral utterances as well as his writings (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6, 14; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:2, 15; Galatians 1:7-8). In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quoted Luke 10:7 and referred to it as Scripture. So Luke's Gospel record was already available and classified with the inspired canon of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

The unbiased individual can easily see that the Bible claims for itself the status of inspiration, having been breathed out by God Himself. That inspiration entailed such superintendence by God that even the words came under His influence. Thus the Bible is verbally inspired. This conclusion does not imply that the writers merely took dictation. Rather, the Bible indicates that God adapted His inspiring activity to the individual temperament, vocabulary, educational level, and stylistic idiosyncrasies of each writer. The Bible is infallible in that it is incapable of deceiving or misleading, and is therefore completely trustworthy and reliable. Plenary inspiration means that inspiration extends to all of its parts. Thus the Bible is fully inspired.

The Bible is also inerrant, that is, it is free of error. God used human beings to write the Bible, and in so doing, allowed them to leave their mark upon it, but without making any of the mistakes that human writings are prone to make. God made certain that the words produced by the human writers were free from the errors and mistakes characteristic of uninspired writers. This influence even extended to matters of science, geography, and history. Proof for the inspiration of the Bible is a separate and necessary inquiry. However, it is important that a person understand what the Bible means when it claims for itself inspiration.

Dave MILLER, apologeticspress.org

Tattoos are more popular than ever in many parts of the world. The number of people with tattoos has increased dramatically in recent years. Tattoos are not just for delinquents or rebels anymore. The edginess of rebellion historically associated with tattoos is starting to wear off.

The New Testament does not say anything about whether or not a believer in Jesus Christ should get a tattoo. Therefore, we cannot say that getting a tattoo is a sin. Because of Scripture's silence, getting inked falls under the category of a gray area, and believers should follow their convictions in the matter, respecting those who may have different convictions.

Here are some general biblical principles that may apply to getting a tattoo:

- Children are to honor and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-2). For a minor to get a tattoo in violation of his or her parents' wishes is biblically unsupportable. Tattoos born of rebellion are sinful.

- Outward adornment is not as important as the development of the inner self and should not be the focus of a Christian (1 Peter 3:3-4). A person who desires a tattoo to garner attention or draw admiration has a vain, sinful focus on self.

- God sees the heart, and our motivation for anything we do should be to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Motivations for getting a tattoo such as to fit in, to stand out, etc., fall short of the glory of God. The tattoo itself may not be a sin, but the motivation in getting it might be.

- Our bodies, as well as our souls, have been redeemed and belong to God. The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). How much modification of that temple is appropriate? Is there a line that should not be crossed? Is there a point at which the proliferation of tattoos on one body ceases to be art and starts becoming sinful mutilation? This should be a matter of individual reflection and honest prayer.

- We are Christ's ambassadors, delivering God's message to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). What message does the tattoo send, and will it aid or detract from representing Christ and sharing the gospel?

- Whatever does not come from faith is sin (Romans 14:23), so the person getting the tattoo should be fully convinced that it is God's will for him or her.

We cannot leave the discussion of tattoos without looking at the Old Testament law that prohibited tattoos: *Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD* (Leviticus 19:28). The reason for the prohibition of tattoos in this passage is not stated, but it is likely that tattooing was a

pagan practice connected with idolatry and superstition. It was probably common for the pagans to mark their skin with the name of a false god or with a symbol honoring some idol. God demanded that His children be different. As He reminded them in the same verse, *I am the LORD*. The Israelites belonged to Him; they were His workmanship, and they should not bear the name of a false god on their bodies. While New Testament believers are not under the Mosaic Law, we can take from this command the principle that, if a Christian chooses to get a tattoo, it should never be for superstitious reasons or to promote worldly philosophy. The bottom line is that getting a tattoo is not a sin, per se. It is a matter of Christian freedom and should be guided by biblical principles and rooted in love

Why did God choose Israel to be His chosen people?

Speaking of the nation of Israel, Deuteronomy 7:7-9 tells us, *The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands.*

God chose the nation of Israel to be the people through whom Jesus Christ would be born — the Savior from sin and death (John 3:16). God first promised the Messiah after Adam and Eve's fall into sin (Genesis chapter 3). God later confirmed that the Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus Christ is the ultimate reason why God chose Israel to be His special people. God did not need to have a chosen people, but He decided to do it that way. Jesus had to come from some nation of people, and God chose Israel.

However, God's reason for choosing the nation of Israel was not solely for the purpose of producing the Messiah. God's desire for Israel was that they would go and teach others about Him. Israel was to be a nation of priests, prophets, and missionaries to the world. God's intent was for Israel to be a distinct people, a nation who pointed others towards God and His promised provision of a Redeemer, Messiah, and Savior. For the most part, Israel failed in this task. However, God's ultimate purpose for Israel — that of bringing the Messiah into the world — was fulfilled perfectly in the Person of Jesus Christ.

gotquestions.org

Did you know that most scientists were Christians?

The most famous atheist scientist, Antony Flew, publicly admitted: *I was wrong, and the universe could not have come into existence by itself — it was obviously created by someone far more powerful than we can imagine.*

According to Flew, modern data on the structure of the DNA molecule provides undeniable evidence that it could not have arisen on its own but is the work of someone's design. The genetic code and the encyclopedic volumes of information contained within the molecule negate the possibility of random coincidence.



The scientist also noted that, in previous centuries, many physicists believed in God. Did you know that most scientists were Christians? Unfortunately, most people are unaware that almost 90% of scientists who made outstanding contributions to science were deeply religious people.

Of the 300 greatest scientists who lived in the 17th-19th centuries, 276 (92%) believed in God; 18 (6%) were skeptical, wavering, or indifferent to religion; and only 6 (2%) were atheists.

The vast majority of scientists who laid the foundations of modern sciences were Christians. Faithful scientist-founders include:

- Astronomy — Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543);
- Astronomy — Galileo Galilei (1564-1642);

- Galactic Astronomy — William Herschel (1738-1822);
- Bacteriology — Louis Pasteur (1822-1895);
- Computer Science — Charles Babbage (1791-1871);
- Genetics — Gregor Johann Mendel (1822-1884);
- Hydraulics — Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519);
- Hydrography — Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806-1873);
- Hydrostatics — Blaise Pascal (1623-1662);

- Gynecology — James Young Simpson (1811-1870);
- Glaciology — Louis Agassiz (1807-1873);
- Dynamics — Isaac Newton (1642-1727);
- Gas Dynamics — Robert Boyle (1627-1691);
- Natural History — John Ray (1627-1705);
- Calculus — Isaac Newton (1642-1727);
- Ichthyology — Louis Agassiz (1807-1873);
- Fluid Mechanics — George Gabriel Stokes (1819-1903);
- Celestial Mechanics — Johannes Kepler (1571-1630);
- Non-Euclidean Geometry — Bernhard Riemann (1826-1866);
- Reversible Thermodynamics — James Joule (1818-1889);
- Oceanography — Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806-1873);
- Optical Mineralogy — David Brewster (1781-1868);
- Paleontology — John Woodward (1665-1728);
- Vertebrate Paleontology — Georges Leopold Cuvier (1769-1832);
- Pathology — Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902);

- Spatial Analysis — John William Strutt, Lord Rayleigh (1842-1919);
- Systematic Biology — Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778);
- Comparative Anatomy — Georges Leopold Cuvier (1769-1832);
- Statistical Thermodynamics — James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879);
- Stratigraphy — Nicolas Steno (1638-1686);
- Field Theory — Michael Faraday (1791-1867);
- Theory of Relativity — Albert Einstein (1879-1955);
- Model Theory — John William Strutt, Lord Rayleigh (1842-1919);
- Thermodynamics — William Thomson, Lord Kelvin (1824-1907);
- Thermokinetics — Humphry Davy (1778-1829);
- Physical Astronomy — Johannes Kepler (1671-1630);
- Chemistry — Robert Boyle (1627-1691);
- Isotope Chemistry — William Ramsay (1852-1916);
- Surgical Antiseptics — Joseph Lister (1827-1912);
- Electrodynamics — James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879);
- Electromagnetism — Michael Faraday (1791-1867);
- Electronics — John Ambrose Fleming (1849-1946);
- Energy — William Thomson, Lord Kelvin (1824-1907);
- Entomology — Jean Henri Fabre (1823-1915).

Many of the greatest scientists were deeply religious, as reflected in their lives: Sir Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, Thomas Edison, Louis Pasteur, Immanuel Kant, James Clerk Maxwell, and many others.

They were not only believers but also faithful members of their religious communities. For, in life, it is most important to believe in moral and spiritual values, to believe that life has meaning and purpose, to believe that we are headed somewhere! It is unlikely these scientists would have become great without such faith.

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# Questions about the Church

## What is the church?

Many people today understand the church as a building. This is not a biblical understanding of the church. The word *church* is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is defined as *an assembly or called-out ones*. The root meaning of church is not that of a building, but of people. It is ironic that when you ask people what church they attend, they usually identify a building. **Romans 16:5** says, *Greet the church that is in their house*. Paul refers to the church in their house — not a church building, but a body of believers.

The church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. **Ephesians 1:22-23** says, *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*. The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**) until Christ's return. Biblically, we may regard the church in two ways, as the universal church or as the local church.

The universal church consists of everyone, everywhere, who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink* (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). This verse says that anyone who believes is part of the body of Christ and has received the Spirit of Christ as evidence. All those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ comprise the universal church.

The local church is described in **Galatians 1:1-2**: *Paul, an apostle... and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia*. Here we see that in the province of Galatia there were many churches — they had a localized ministry and were scattered throughout the province. They were local churches. A Baptist church, a Lutheran church, an E-Free church, etc., is not the church, as in the universal church; rather, it is a local church, a local body of believers. The universal church is comprised of everyone who belongs to Christ. Members of the universal church should seek fellowship and edification in a local church.

In summary, the church is not a building or a denomination. According to the Bible, the church is the body of Christ — all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (**John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13**). Local churches are gatherings of people who claim the name of Christ. Members of a local church may or may not be members of the universal church, depending on the genuineness of their faith. The local church is where believers can fully apply the *body* principles of **1 Corinthians chapter 12** — encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## What is the purpose of the church?

**Acts 2:42** could be considered a purpose statement for the church: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*. According to this verse, the purposes/activities of the church should be 1) teaching biblical doctrine, 2) providing a place of fellowship for believers, 3) observing the Lord's supper, and 4) praying.

The church is to teach biblical doctrine so we can be grounded in our faith. **Ephesians 4:14** tells us, *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming*. The church is to be a place of fellowship, where Christians can be devoted to one another and honor one another (**Romans 12:10**), instruct one another (**Romans 15:14**), be kind and compassionate to one another (**Ephesians 4:32**),

encourage one another (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**), and most importantly, love one another (**1 John 3:11**).

The church is to be a place where believers can observe the Lord's Supper, remembering Christ's death and shed blood on our behalf (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**). The concept of *breaking bread* (**Acts 2:42**) also carries the idea of having meals together. This is another example of the church promoting fellowship. The final purpose of the church according to **Acts 2:42** is prayer. The church is to be a place that promotes prayer, teaches prayer, and practices prayer. **Philippians 4:6-7** encourages us, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*.

Another commission given to the church is proclaiming the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ (**Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8**). The church is called to be faithful in sharing the gospel through word and deed. The church is to be a *lighthouse* in the community, pointing people toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The church is to both promote the gospel and prepare its members to proclaim the gospel (**1 Peter 3:15**).

Some final purposes of the church are given in **James 1:27**: *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*. The church is to be about the business of ministering to those in need. This includes not only sharing the gospel, but also providing for physical needs (food, clothing, shelter) as necessary and appropriate. The church is also to equip believers in Christ with the tools they need to overcome sin and remain free from the pollution of the world. This is done by biblical teaching and Christian fellowship.

So, what is the purpose of the church? Paul gave an excellent illustration to the believers in Corinth. The church is God's hands, mouth, and feet in this world — the body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**). We are to be doing the things that Jesus Christ would do if He were here physically on the earth. The church is to be *Christian, Christ-like, and Christ-following*.

## What is biblical separation?

Biblical separation is the recognition that God has called believers out of the world and into a personal and corporate purity in the midst of sinful

cultures. Biblical separation is usually considered in two areas: personal and ecclesiastical.

Personal separation involves an individual's commitment to a godly standard of behavior. Daniel practiced personal separatism when he *resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine* (**Daniel 1:8**). His was a biblical separatism because his standard was based on God's revelation in the Mosaic law.

A modern example of personal separation could be the decision to decline invitations to parties where alcohol is served. Such a decision might be made in order to circumvent temptation (**Romans 13:14**), to avoid *every kind of evil* (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**), or simply to be consistent with a personal conviction (**Romans 14:5**).

The Bible clearly teaches that the child of God is to be separate from the world. *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people". Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord* (**2 Corinthians 6:14-17**; see also **1 Peter 1:14-16**).

Ecclesiastical separation involves the decisions of a church concerning its ties to other organizations, based on their theology or practices. Separatism is implied in the very word *church*, which comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* meaning a *called-out assembly*. In Jesus' letter to the church of Pergamum, He warned against tolerating those who taught false doctrine (**Revelation 2:14-15**). The church was to be separate, breaking ties with heresy. A modern example of ecclesiastical separation could be a denomination's stance against ecumenical alliances which would unite the church with apostates.

Biblical separation does not require Christians to have no contact with unbelievers. Like Jesus, we should befriend the sinner without partaking of the sin (**Luke 7:34**). Paul expresses a balanced view of separatism: *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world* (**1 Corinthians 5:9-10**). In other words, we are in the world, but not of it.

We are to be light to the world without allowing the world to diminish our light. *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven* (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

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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!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

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That you may say to the prisoners, "Go forth", To those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves" (Is. 49:9).

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And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

*"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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