

Our beloved Father H.H. Pope Shenouda III

(1923-2012)



Remember us in your prayers

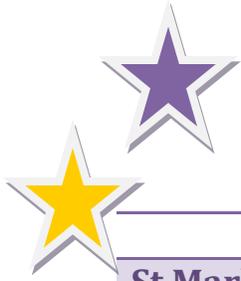


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Be Transformed

St. Mark's Festival 2012 Anthem

I fear my heart has changed after a shiny world
How did my way become very twisted and curled?!

Reform me back, O Lord, to your image, I pray!
Come work your way through a heart long gone astray } x2

Come live within me, transform me, renew the mind
So I can live my life truly as your child

Give me the strength to change the inside of me first
My soul becomes so free to the world no longer thirsts } x2
to the world no longer thirsts

Be Transformed

Many times people think about change in their lives and its necessity for the improvement of their lives. People may think about changing to improve their health or financial situation or living conditions. This change is good, but after all, it is temporal. Radical change, on the other hand, is a change from the roots; a change for the present and the future, temporal and eternal.

“Change is a feature of life, everything is evolving and changing. You can say that change is the thing that is constant.” St. Makarius



There are 2 kinds of people...What kind of person are you?

The Contented

Happy with what they have and do not see a need for change.



The Adventurous

Loves change and thinks change is healthy.

Healthy change is not a superficial change, but a fundamental change from the inside, as St. Paul said **“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” Romans 12:2**

I- Elements of Change

St Paul gives us 4 elements of this fundamental change

- 1. The renewing of our minds with repentance**
- 2. Membership in the Body of Christ**

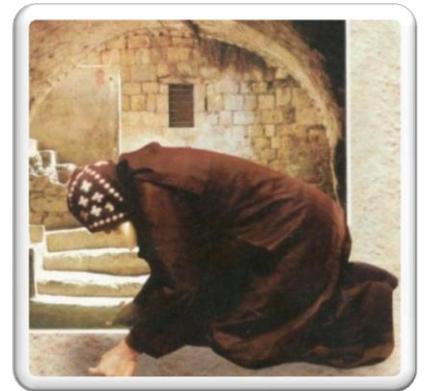
- 3. Using our gifts in service**
- 4. Faithfully witnessing in our society**

1. Renewing of the mind with repentance:

The Greek word “Metania” means change of mind. Meta = change, nos= mind.

This means that the repentant is a person that thought about the consequences of sin and separation from God, and realized that sin:

- a- Destroys the spirit: since it separates me from God
- b- Destroys the thought: it becomes dark and scattered
- c- Destroys the soul: instinct and desires rebel against us
- d- Destroys the body: addiction is an example
- e- Destroys relationships



However, holiness builds the spirit (we get filled with God), the mind (enlightened by the Holy Bible), the soul (controlled with spiritual struggle and by grace), the body (kept away from sin), and relationships (if we are successful spiritually, we will also be socially successful)

2. Membership in the Body of Christ (the Church):

With faith, baptism, and repentance; we become members of the body. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the head of it, with His unconditional love, and unlimited powers; the saints are the members who are in heaven, who became our role models and intercessors; and the believers are the ones here on earth, we live in communion through the Eucharist.

“For we, though many are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that One Bread.” 1 Corinthians 10:17- WE ALL HELP OTHER MEMBERS FOR THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE BODY.

3. Gifts are for serving the Church:

St. Paul tells us about 12 gifts that are given by the Lord to the members of His Holy Body: **prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, showing mercy, brotherly love, worship, distributing to the saints, and hospitality.** (1 Corinthians 12)



- Every member of the body has a vital role in building the whole body. We cooperate despite our differences, and are united despite diversity.

4. Faithfully witnessing in our society:

Christianity does not isolate us from society but sends us as messengers of love, peace, and goodness.

St. Paul is teaching us this through these verses in Romans 12:

“Given to hospitality” (13), “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (17),

“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (18),

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (21)

II- How I Can Change

The Holy Bible and the Orthodox Church teach us that change will occur through personal striving and divine grace.

1. PERSONAL STRIVING: This is manifested in different ways...

a. **Sincerity:** The Lord Christ said to the man with the infirmity “Do you want to be made well.” John 5:6.

The Holy Spirit reproves me when I sin, but do I want to get rid of my sins and live for the Lord? The Spirit works in me, but I have to respond. The Lord Christ says “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” Rev 3:20; and waits for me to open and let Him in so He can come and dine with me.

b. **Making an effort:** It is necessary to make an effort in...

- **Keeping the senses pure:** what I listen to... what I say... and what I watch...
- **Good relationships:** salvation is impossible in the middle of bad company
- **Striving against sin:** by staying away from circumstances that can lead to sin
- **If I fall I will get up again:** don't stay in sin but repent and confess to my father of confession to receive an absolution and guidance

c. **Spiritual Satisfaction:** “A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb.” Proverbs 27:7

I can be satisfied by the means of grace such as prayers and praises, the Holy Bible, partaking in the communion, spiritual readings, spiritual meetings, fasting and mutually beneficial friendships, etc...

d. **Spiritual watchfulness:** by watching my senses and being watchful for the war and being prepared with the weapons (Ephesians 6)

2. **GRACE OF GOD:** Humans are limited beings. We need God to save us because He is unlimited in His love, wisdom, and power. Therefore when we are filled with the means of grace, we can say with St. Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

The Grace of God:

- **Justifies:** through the blood of Christ who carried our sins on the cross and paid the price of sin instead of us.
- **Saves:** the Lord saves us from sin through repentance and confession.
- **Sanctifies:** The Holy Spirit abides in us and we become holy temples for Him through the Chrismation.
- **Glorifies:** we become children of God and at the end of days, we will have heavenly bodies and will live with Him forever and be heirs in His kingdom.

Thus with striving and the grace of God, we can change and become better!!





Careful...Bump Ahead!

It is good to ask for change, but it's also important to start by changing ourselves

***“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye,
but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” Matthew 7:3***

Our Lord Jesus Christ warns us about being judgmental of others. It is *so much easier* to see sin in others than it is to see it in ourselves. Chances are good that if you see a sinful behavior or attitude in another person that irritates you, you yourself, to some degree, probably exhibit that same behavior. Before you go pointing fingers at someone else (as a Pharisee would), examine yourself very carefully.

Notice the great contrast our Lord Jesus Christ uses in Matthew 7:3: “And why do you look at the *speck* in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” If we have a critical heart, we will find and judge people for small offenses all the while ignoring our own, much larger offenses against God! Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us simply: **deal with your own sin before you try and help others with theirs.**

If we don’t, others will see our hypocrisy. It’s pretty hard to miss a plank sticking out of someone’s eye! Again, none of this is to say that we should not approach our brothers and sisters in Christ if we feel the Lord is leading us to speak to them about a behavior, sin, or attitude that is not reflecting the Lord. **But we must do so carefully, in prayer, humbly and with love.** If our attitude is one of condemnation then we will do absolutely no good. See Gal. 6:1-5 and James 5:19-20.

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

Watch your heart, **do not have a critical heart,**

Only God can truly and rightly judge others, for only He can see the heart and motive of a person.



“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” 1 Corinthians 10:12

Social Networking: Pros and Cons

How can we use it to positively influence others in a Christian way?

Should a Christian participate in social networking? The answer to these questions should be determined by whether we can honestly ask God to bless and use our actions for His own good purposes.

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31.

If we are willing to let God use our participation for His glory, we have freedom to participate.

Christians who choose to participate in social networking should be aware of the negative aspects of social networking. It should be remembered that **NOT everyone** on the Internet has pure motives, and we should use safety precautions, utilize the privacy settings, and be selective as to who is accepted as a “friend” or “fan.” Your parents should regularly interact with their children and be active participants in their child's use of social networking sites. In addition, Christians should be aware of the danger of the narcissism (excessive self-love and preoccupation with self) inherent in self-oriented sites. Studies have shown that overuse or wrong motives in social media participation can breed narcissism. When we rely on social media sites primarily to promote ourselves or draw attention to ourselves, it is time to take a step back. It's wise to utilize accountability, encouraging family members, and friends to view our social networking activity and hold us accountable.



"As iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend's." Proverbs 27:17

It's also important to understand the impact our status, photo, comments, or blog posts may have in the future. It should be remembered that social networking sites involve publishing to the entire Internet, including family members, current and future employers, college admissions personnel, etc. The ramifications of any statements, both now and in the future, should be considered. It should be assumed that everything written is permanent and viewable by everyone. Furthermore, while maintaining relationships is important and healthy, addiction is not.

Limiting the amount of time we devote to these social networking sites is both healthy and wise!!!

On the other hand, there are definitely positive aspects of social networking. For the Christian, social media sites can be an enormously productive mission field. Reconnecting with old friends and increasing our sphere of influence can lead to evangelistic opportunities unavailable elsewhere. Social media allows us to reenter the daily lives of people we may have lost contact with and open up new avenues for sharing our Lord Jesus Christ. As such, we can influence the views of others by what we post, bringing encouragement and spiritual guidance to others and using friends lists or Facebook status updates to pray regularly for friends and their needs.

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

Ask Yourself ARE YOU ADDICTED TO FACEBOOK:

- How often do you update your Facebook status?
- How often do you check Facebook?
- How many Facebook friends do you have?
- How many photos are you tagged in?
- Do you use Facebook or your mobile phone?
- Do you get annoyed when someone doesn't upload and tag photos to Facebook after a social outing?
- If a friend or family isn't using Facebook, do you encourage them to sign up?
- When you sit down at a computer what do you usually check first?



Communication Skills

***“Listen to counsel and receive instruction,
That you may be wise in your latter days.”
Proverbs 19:20***



When having a conversation with others do you listen to the other person’s opinion? Do you try to convince them of your own opinion without being open to change your mind if you’re wrong?

Your communication skills are critical to the success of all you do! Communication really is an art form which we learn very little about in our formative years. Yet it is so necessary to our success in life. Excellent communication skills will help us to **avoid conflict, resolve problems, get our needs met, have great relationships etc.**

To improve your communication skills **begin by observing yourself.**

***“The wise in heart will receive commands,
But a prating fool will fall” Proverbs 10:8***

- Are you a good listener?
- Do you interrupt others?
- Are you quick to think of a response before listening and understanding what is being said?
- Are you preoccupied when others are speaking to you?
- Do you give others your undivided attention?
- Do you roll your eyes when you disagree with what is being said?
- Do you care about the person speaking or what he is saying?

Next, **listen to the way you communicate.**

- Do you answer people's questions directly or do you beat around the bush?
- Do you expand your communication giving too many details?
- Do you omit important details not giving others a clear picture of what you are saying?
- Do you allow your thinking to be easily derailed by incoming thoughts?
- Do you exercise discretion?
- Do you use coarse language?

To improve your communication even more **think about the best way you can communicate** your thoughts and ideas. **Begin to think about what it is that you are trying to communicate.**

- What point are you trying to convey with your words?
- Why are you trying to convey it?
- What needs do you want to get met?
- What are your motivations?

These are deep questions and are very important for you to consider if you truly want to improve your communication skills and particularly your relationships.

***“A fool’s mouth is his destruction,
And his lips are the snare of his soul.” Proverbs 18:7***

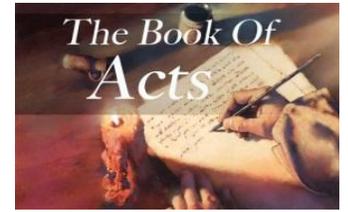
Finally, consider **how people close to you respond** when you communicate with them.

- Are they attentive?
- Do you get positive feedback from them?
- Do your communications often result in feelings of conflict, failure or rejection?
- Do you speak clearly?
- Do you speak too loud or not loud enough?

There is much to becoming an excellent communicator. Self-awareness is a huge factor to that end.

Best Leader of Change

A Study of the Book of Acts Chapters 1-12



THE BOOK OF ACTS:

Our church believes **in changing for the better**... Our Lord Jesus Christ said: *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have [it] more abundantly.” John 10:10.* St. Paul also says about change: *“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2*

The book of Acts, along with the four Gospels, is considered the historical books of the New Testament. The Gospels tell us the story of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to the world to change the corrupted human nature, and change the hearts of people; while the book of Acts tells of the birth of the Church, and the complete change in the way of life.

The Four Gospels	The Book of Acts
The Holy Spirit forms a human body for Christ in the womb of St. Mary the virgin	The Holy spirit forms a body for the Son of Man, which is the Church
The work of God in people	The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church
The preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ	The preaching of the disciples and the apostles
The suffering of Christ for the Church	The striving of the Church for Christ

**For the servant: Please make sure to use the Holy Bible along with this article, while reading each chapter focus on the idea of change

Read together through the Book of Acts to find the greatest leader of change who transformed the hearts of the people of the early church, and see the results of change.

When the Holy Spirit comes in the life of man, He gives him the ability to change his life for the better

THE WRITER:

- **St. Luke**, who also wrote the Gospel.
- The meaning of his name: the carrier of light, or the enlightened
- He was a physician from Antioch. He was also a painter, he painted the first picture of St. Mary

MAJOR THEME:

OUTLINE of the BOOK OF ACTS	
The Birth of the Church	1:4-12:24
Preparation of the Church	1:4-26
Beginning of the Church	2:1-4:37
Life in the Church	5:1-7:60
Persecution and expansion of the Church	8:1-12:24
The Growth of the Church from Antioch: The Labor of Paul	12:25-28:31
Barnabus and Saul commissioned	12:25-13:3
The first missionary journey	13:4-14:28
The Jerusalem Council	15:1-35
The second missionary journey	15:36-18:22
The third missionary journey	18:23-21:14
Paul in Jerusalem	21:15-23:22
The journey to Rome	23:23-28:31

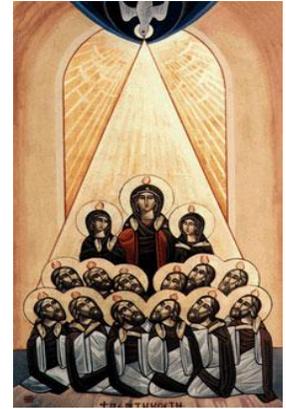
THE BOOK:

- It was written for, Theophilus but intended to be read by many
- Talks about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the apostles and of the Early Church
- The spread of the gospel by the Apostles, from Jerusalem to the whole world
- The Book of Acts tells us of the dramatic and radical change which took place in the attitudes and actions of the disciples.
- In **Chapters 1-12 the focus is the ministry of St. Peter and the church being established**, while in **chapters 13-28 the focus is the ministry of St. Paul and the expansion of the church.**
- In Acts, the Incarnate Son of God, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, is yet present in the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- This book is of great importance for understanding the organization and structure of the Church: its method of resolving controversies; the role of apostles, bishops, priests (elders) and deacons; and the spiritual life of the church.

The book of Acts is the story of the beginning of the Church and its spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the world. **The real hero in the story is the Holy Spirit** who worked in the disciples and through them. - The Book of Acts does not end in **AMEN** because the church still continues today!

THE HOLY SPIRIT:

- Established the church
- Gave the apostles the words to speak
- Filled the apostles every time they prayed and asked
- Guided their decisions
- Gave the apostles power and supported them with miracles and gifts, such as speaking in tongues, teaching, and prophecy.



CHAPTER 1: THE PROMISE AND THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE

1- Ascension (1-11)

• Jesus presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by His disciples. This was to prove His resurrection and that He is not an imaginary spirit.

• Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His disciples everything concerning the Church orders and sacraments. These were handed over from generation to generation until it came to us. This is what we call “tradition”.

2- Gathering of the disciples in the Upper Room (12-14)

• Our Lord Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven 40 days after His Resurrection. He promised His disciples that He will come again, and He will send them the Holy Spirit, Who will stay with them and with the Church forever.

3- Choosing of Matthias instead of Judas Iscariot (15-26)

- Judas was counted as one of the disciples; but his heart changed and he became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.
- The disciples asked the guidance of the Holy Spirit and prayed before choosing lots to select another disciple.
- The name Matthias, who was the disciple picked, means “Gift of God”.

CHAPTER 2: DAY 50: PENTECOST

1- The Descent of the Holy Spirit and Speaking with Tongues (1-13)

- The day of the Pentecost was the Feast of the Harvest when Jews from different places and different languages came to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.
- That day, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. The descent of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with the rushing of a strong wind, which attracted the attention of those who were gathered to celebrate the feast, and the Tongues of Fire, which signify the presence of God.

2- The Effect of St. Peter’s Sermon (14- 41)

- St. Peter stood very courageously witnessing for Christ. He started with Joel and David’s prophecies, which spoke about the coming of the Messiah who would be crucified, die and rise from the dead.
- The Holy Spirit worked in St. Peter’s sermon and three thousand men were baptized. He explained to them that in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, they have to repent and be baptized.

3- The First Church (42-47)

- “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).
- Breaking bread from house to house was a chance to share the meals with the needy.

CHAPTER 3: JESUS IS GLORIFIED

1- Healing the lame man (1-10)

- The first miracle mentioned in the Book of Acts was performed by the apostles as our Lord promised.
- St. Peter and St. John had nothing to give to the lame man but they were very rich through Christ's Name. They gave the man a new life and he began to thank and praise God.

2- St. Peter and St. John witness to the Lord (11 – 26)

- God alone is worthy to be glorified. In every success, we should always glorify Him as St. Peter and St. John did after healing the lame man. We must not steal God's glory for ourselves.
- One of the Church fathers once said, "There is no gift without increase except for that without thanksgiving"

"To you first, God, having raised up His servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:26

Ask yourself: Do you sometimes feel that turning away from sin makes life not as enjoyable? Actually the opposite is true; repentance always brings blessings from the Lord. **Through repentance your existence is transformed into an abundant life of faith, love and joy.**

CHAPTER 4: THE COURAGE OF TRANSFORMATION

1- St. Peter and St. John witness before the High Priests (1-22)

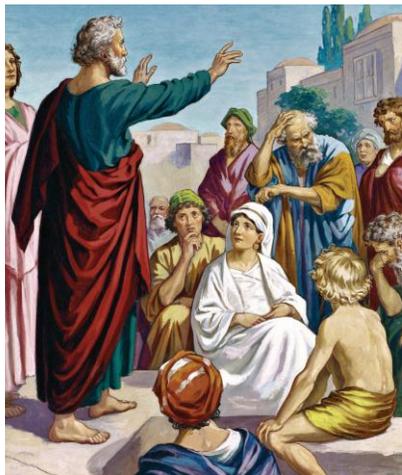
- Although the miracle was very clear, the Sadducees refused the Word and stood against St. Peter and St. John, but there were many who believed in Christ and the number of these believers was about five thousand.
- On the next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as the High Priests (the Sanhedrin) gathered together at Jerusalem. These were the same people who judged Christ.
- The disciples were asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" St. Peter responded saying that only through Jesus' name can one perform such miracles and wonders.

2- St. Peter and St. John pray with the people (22- 31)

- They prayed the second psalm, followed by personal prayers asking God for power and help to complete their mission.
- The place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, they were able to speak the Word of God with boldness.

3- Communal life in the church (31- 37)

- The believers were of one heart and one accord.



CHAPTER 5: BEWARE... DO NOT LIE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

1- Ananias and Sapphira's lie (1-11)

- Their sin was not that they did not give their money, for God does not force anyone to give. Their sin was that they lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not give out of their love for God, for the poor or for the Church but rather to look good in front of the disciples and all the believers.
- They thought they could hide something from God, so their punishment was severe. We must not forget God's justice. Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the people but they could not deceive God.

2- St. Peter's shadow heals the sick (12-16)

- They brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and the shadow of St. Peter would heal them. Yet many of the people were afraid to follow the disciples because they feared the Romans and the Jews.

3- The disciples in the same prison and Gamaliel's advice (17 – 40)

- Satan filled the heart of the Sadducees and the High Priests with envy, while the disciples and the believers were full of the Holy Spirit.
- The Lord sent His angel to open the prison doors. God never leaves His children. He is a compassionate Father, but sometimes He allows them to share in carrying the cross for His glory. When people see their steadfastness and their love to God, they will believe.
- The disciples felt that suffering for Christ was a great gain and that they were not worthy of it. Whoever will suffer with Him will be glorified with Him. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.
- The descent to the Holy Spirit on the disciples and their transformation had many fruits; such as faith and trust in God's promises and true peace and joy despite sufferings.

“And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” Acts 5:32

**Ever wonder how did Christ's disciples find the strength to serve Him?
Through the Power of the Holy Spirit!! The Holy Spirit is given by God to those who obey Him!**

CHAPTER 6: THE FIRST DEACONS

1- Seven deacons are chosen (1 – 8)

- The Apostles ordain deacons because they recognize the need for assistants to serve the growing church. The qualifications for deacons are having a good reputation, being full of the Holy Spirit, and full of wisdom.
- The first ordination of deacons is by the Apostles themselves.
- St Stephen was the leader and one of the seven deacons because of his special gifts and attributes. He was full of the Holy Spirit and did many miracles. He also witnessed for Christ in the Council of the Jews.

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” Acts 6:3

2- St. Stephen's wisdom (9-15)

- The synagogue was a place of worship without the offering of sacrifices.
- St. Stephen debated with the Jews in many of their synagogues to teach them the true faith and enlighten their way.

CHAPTER 7: THE FIRST MARTYR

1- St. Stephen's speech (1-53)

- St. Stephen started his speech by addressing the Jews in a Christian manner with a heart full of love. He ended his life as a good witness to Christ.
- He told them that when people are more privileged; their judgment is greater if they deviate from the right way.
- He mentioned Abraham, who was an honorable father for them and how he obeyed God and left his people and his land to go to a land that he did not know. He believed in God's promises and trusted that He will give this land to him and to his children.
- He mentioned Moses, who led the Israelites from the land of slavery to the Promised Land. He spoke with God and received the commandments and the Law, yet they rebelled against him many times with their hearts, minds and deeds.
- St. Stephen rebuked them for their disobedience. He told them that they were stiff-necked and uncircumcised in their hearts and ears.
- Circumcision is a symbol of cutting out sin from our lives. This was a covenant between God and His people. But they were circumcised in their bodies only and their hearts were away from God and full of evil and impurities.

2- St. Stephen stoned (54-60)

- After his speech, they stoned him and he saw the Heavens open.
- Although St. Stephen was responsible for the service of the widows, he knew the Holy Scripture well and was able to debate with the Jews.
- St. Stephen loved our Lord Jesus Christ and followed Him, forgiving those who stoned him as Jesus forgave those who crucified Him.

CHAPTER 8: THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH LEADS TO ITS GROWTH

1- The Church is persecuted and the believers are scattered (1-8)

- Saul stood against the church, entering every house and dragging out men and women, committing them to prison. As a result, the believers were scattered to Judea and Samaria. They were preaching Christianity and spreading the Word, fulfilling the Lord's plan before His ascension to witness in Judea and Samaria.
- The power of the Church increased and the disciples became bolder and more courageous. They rejoiced and did not fear tribulations.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ empowered His disciples with miracles. The people trusted the Word of God and experienced true joy.

2- What did Simon do? (9-25)

- As with Simon the sorcerer, the devil can deceive those who are far away from God. When God's Word is in us, it enlightens our way and disperses the darkness, revealing Satan's deceiving acts.
- Although Simon the sorcerer was baptized, his thoughts were evil. He wanted to buy the gift of the laying of the hands to serve his corrupt intentions.

3- Philip and the Eunuch (26-40)

- God sent Philip to help the Eunuch when he wanted to understand the Word of God.
- The Eunuch's faith was not enough. To become Christian, he had to be baptized by Philip.
- Philip was taken by the Holy Spirit to Azotus, 20 miles away from Gaza, where God wanted him to serve.



CHAPTER 9: SAUL BECOMES PAUL

1- The Lord calls Saul (1-9)

- One of the greatest examples of transformation in the Holy Bible is Saul of Tarsus who changed from the biggest enemy of the Church to becoming the apostle of the Gentiles.
- Saul was a Jew from Tarsus, a Pharisee with a Roman citizenship. He learned at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher.
- As a Pharisee, he studied the Law and the Prophets which helped him later on in his mission. His zeal for Judaism made him hate Christianity. He guarded the clothes of those who stoned St. Stephen, consenting to his death. He wreaked havoc on the Church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.
- Although Saul was persecuting the believers, the Lord considered this persecution to be towards Him personally.
- After the Lord's call, he discovered that all what he learned in the Old Testament was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He believed that Christianity was the true religion and he started to defend the Christian faith with great enthusiasm until his death.

2- Saul is baptized and persecuted by the Jews (10-30)

- The scales were like a hindrance on Saul's eyes that prevented him from seeing and knowing that Jesus was the true God.
- Satan was surprised that the tool that he used to attack the Church (Saul) became the same tool that the Church used to attack him (Paul). So he moved the Jews to kill him but Saul was growing in strength.

3- The Church's growth and its empowerment by miracles (31-40)

- In spite of the tribulations and persecutions, the Church grew. God gave the apostles the gift of performing miracles to support their preaching that Jesus Christ is God. St. Peter healed the lame man and raised Tabitha from the dead.
- St. Peter always prayed before performing any miracle to ask God for power.

CHAPTER 10: A GENERAL CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION

1- Who was Cornelius? (1-8)

- After the spread of the Word of God from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, God wanted to spread His Word to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were always rejected by the Jews and treated as dogs. Therefore the Jews refused to share the faith with the Gentiles before they became Jewish first. But God sent His Son for everyone who is willing to accept Him. Cornelius was a centurion but he loved and feared God although he did not know Him. He was a devout man who gave alms generously to people. God was pleased with his faith because he sought Him with all his heart and loved all people. Whoever loves others is not far from the kingdom of God.

2- St. Peter's vision (9-16)

- It was not easy for St. Peter as a Jew to understand that God would accept the Gentiles. So God revealed to him His acceptance to them.
- The unclean animals resemble the Gentiles in Judaism but Christianity accepts all people.
- God did not come for a special nation but He came for the whole world.

3- Cornelius' faith (17-48)

- God prevented the interaction between the Jews and the Gentiles because He did not want the Jews to worship idols and eat unclean animals as the Gentiles did. But after God's salvation for the whole world, He sanctified all the believers in the Church.
- Peter spoke about how God loved the world, was incarnate, crucified, died and rose from the dead to save the whole world. We have to witness for the risen Christ to feel His power in our life.
- God declared the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles. He granted them the gift of speaking with tongues, as He did with His disciples. This was to prove that God accepts all people, whether Jewish or Gentile.



CHAPTER 11: THE SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

1- The Jews' opposition to the acceptance of the Gentiles (1-18)

• The Jews heard about what St. Peter did in Jerusalem and the acceptance of the Gentiles. They contended with him and tried to make circumcision a requirement for the Gentiles in order to become Christians.

2- The result of the scattering (19-21)

• The Church continued to go through tribulations and persecution, which led to the scattering of the believers. Those who were scattered after the persecution traveled everywhere preaching the Word.

3- The ministry in Italy (22-30)

- The first Gentiles' church was instituted in Antioch. The believers were first named "Christian" in Antioch.
- Barnabas, whose name means "the Son of Encouragement", was a preacher and a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and many believed because of him. He was St. Mark's uncle and was the one who introduced St. Paul to the disciples and accompanied him during his mission.
- He was sent by the Church in Jerusalem to outreach the Church in Antioch since it was going through some difficulties.
- Our good behavior can attract people to Christ. Actions speak louder than words.

CHAPTER 12: PETER SLEEPING PEACEFULLY

1- St. Peter in prison (1-5)

- St. James was the first apostle martyred.
- In times of tribulations, we must pray as the first Church did when St. Peter was in prison.

2- How did Peter get out of the prison? (6-17)

- In prison, St. Peter was not afraid; he went into a deep peaceful sleep until the angel came and struck his side to wake him up. Peter was transformed from feelings of fear and denial to feelings of comfort and peace. It is his trust in the Lord's power that gave him this peace.
- The disciples thought that it was St. Peter's angel who knocked on the door. They thought he was martyred.
- James the Son of Alphaeus is also referred to as "the Lord's brother". He was the bishop of Jerusalem's council and the writer of the Epistle of St. James. He is not James the son of Zebedee who was the first to be martyred.

3- What happened to Herod (18-25)

- The people of Tyre and Sidon shouted saying to Herod, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then, immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.
- When God gives us success, we must remember to thank Him and not attribute it to our own efforts. Herod was the reason for the Church's destruction, but God always took care of her growth. Herod died but the Church spread to the whole world.
- We must put our life in God's hands and not trouble ourselves with problems, so we can feel His peace and comfort.
- The Word of God will grow and multiply in His Church forever.

St Peter: The Leader of the Early Church

Through empowerment that comes from the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), Peter's characteristics of fearfulness and inconsistency are replaced by confidence, conviction and compassion (Acts 2:14-4:31). Peter inspires crowds of thousands, bringing new believers into the faith, healing the blind, and standing up to the leaders that he once feared. He understood the risks he was taking as he took up the "works of Christ" preaching in public, healing the sick, converting followers. Clearly, Peter is focused on bringing Christ's message to transform the world, without consideration for his own safety.

**"THEN, HAVING FASTED AND PRAYED, AND LAID HANDS ON THEM, THEY SENT THEM AWAY."
ACTS 13:3**

The 7 Sacraments of the Church



THE HOLY SPIRIT has existed in the church since the day of Pentecost, when He dwelt in it according to the Lord's promise: **"I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth when the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He dwells with you, and will be in you"** (John 14:16, 17).

THE HOLY SPIRIT works in the church through the Sacraments, giving us His gifts, blessings and comfort, and teaches us and guides us to the way of truth. **"But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you"** (John 14:26).

The Seven Sacraments of the Church are:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1- Sacrament of Baptism | 5- Sacrament of Unction of Sick |
| 2- Sacrament of Confirmation | 6- Sacrament of Matrimony |
| 3- Sacrament of Repentance & Confession | 7- Sacrament of Priesthood |
| 4- Sacrament of Eucharist | |

The Lord Christ instituted all these Sacraments, and the Holy Bible mentions them in detail.

1- SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Instituted by the Lord Jesus by His Baptism in the Jordan River and by His words to Nicodemus saying: **"Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"** John 3.

Also by saying to our fathers the Apostles, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** Matthew 28:19.



2- SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Instituted by Lord Jesus when He said: **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is also mentioned in the Book of Acts: **"Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."** Acts 8:14-17



DID YOU KNOW: The Holy Spirit was received by the laying of hands, but when the number of believers increased, the Apostles were unable to keep track of each individual to lay upon them their hands in order to receive the Holy Spirit. So they made the Myron out of certain oils mixed with spices used to embalm the body of Christ. It was approved for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and allowed the priests to anoint the newly baptized by the Myron to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in them, in order to become temples of the Holy Spirit.

3- SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE& CONFESSION

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His pure disciples: *“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18)*

After His Resurrection He said, *“As the Father has sent me, I also send you and when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20: 21-22).*

4- SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST (COMMUNION)

Instituted by the Lord Jesus in the upper room in Zion, on the night of His passion when He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, *“Take eat, this is My Body. Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it and He said to them “This is My Blood of the new covenant which is shed for many” (Mark 14: 22-24).*



5- SACRAMENT OF THE UNCTION OF THE SICK

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His disciples, *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers” (Matthew 10:8)*, and, *“Whatever city you enter ... heal the sick who are there” (Luke 10:8)*. The Apostles then put the Lord’s words into practice: *“They anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them” (Mark 6:13)*.

Our teacher St. James the Apostle advised believers to practice it, by saying, *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).*

6- SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY MATRIMONY

Instituted by the Lord Jesus who blessed the Sacrament of Matrimony by attending the wedding of Cana of Galilee, where, *“He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2: 1-11)*. Also, teacher St. Paul says, *“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Churches” (Ephesians 5:32)*. This means that the physical union between a man and his wife is a sign and symbol of a greater spiritual matter, that is, of the unity of heart and soul, resembling the unity of Christ and the Church.



7- SACRAMENT OF PRIESTHOOD

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He chose His twelve disciples among many of His followers, and called them Apostles. The selection was accomplished after a whole night of prayer, when the Lord Jesus went out to the mountain to pray (Luke 6: 12-13), and then sent them to preach saying, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” Matthew 10:7*. The Lord said to them, *“I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John 15:16)*. He gave them the authority saying, *“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18)*.

After the resurrection, the Lord, *“Breathed on them and said to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” John 2:23*, and to them only, He said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew: 28:19-20)*. He gave the mystery of His Holy Body and Blood only to them saying, *“Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19).*



DEFINITION OF A CHURCH SACRAMENT:

The Church Sacrament is an invisible grace we receive by practicing a visible rite, and a visible sign or substance performed by a priest.

	SACRAMENT	VISIBLE SIGN OR SUBSTANCE	INVISIBLE GRACE
REDEEMPTIVE SACRAMENTS	1. Baptism	Substance is water	We receive the second birth from Water and Spirit
	2. Confirmation	Substance is the Oil of Myron	By which the Holy Spirit dwells in us
	3. Repentance & Confession	The sign is the confessing person,	Who accepts the prayer of absolution at the end of Confession gains forgiveness of sins
	4. Communion	The substance is the bread and wine	By which we eat the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Emmanuel our God.
NON-REDEEMPTIVE SACRAMENTS	5. Unction of the Sick Given for the remedy of those who are physically or psychologically unwell only.	The substance is oil	By which we receive physical and psychological remedy
	6. Matrimony For those who want to marry for the purpose of sharing lives and bearing children. However, there are many monks and nuns, and those who live celibate lives who gain eternal life with merit.	The sign is the bride and groom	They receive the prayers so the Holy Spirit dwells upon them and unites them in body and spirit.
	7. Priesthood Reserved only for those who are ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop. However, the majority of the Congregation has no priestly ranks, but is called for redemption and eternal life.	The sign is the ordained person	Accepts the prayers of the Sacrament of Priesthood and the laying of hands for a certain priestly rank, to gain the grace for starting church services - whether Sacraments or authority for various church matters and management.

REDEMPTIVE AND NON-REDEMPTIVE SACRAMENTS:

There are four **Redemptive Sacraments** out of the Seven Sacraments. They are necessary for eternal salvation, and every believer should practice them in order to gain eternal salvation. They are Baptism, Confirmation, Repentance & Confession and Communion. The other three Sacraments are **Non-Redemptive Sacraments** and unnecessary for eternal salvation. They are the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, Matrimony, and Sacrament of Priesthood:

Heroes in the Battle Against Change



The Church believes in change, but some changes are unacceptable if it involves our faith and beliefs. In the Coptic Orthodox Church fewer changes have taken place than any other church

Ecumenical Council	Year	Leading Patriarch	Bishops attending	What Happened?
1- Council of Nicaea	325 AD	Pope Alexander 19th of Alexandria	318	Rejected Arianism, adopted the Nicene Creed
2- Council of Constantinople	381 AD	Pope Timothy I of Alexandria	150	Revised the Nicene Creed with the confirmation of the divinity of Christ
3- Council of Ephesus	431 AD	Pope Cyril I of Alexandria	200	Rejected Nestorianism, proclaimed the Virgin Mary the Mother of God

ROLE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

WHAT IS AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL??

An **ecumenical council** is a conference of ecclesiastical dignitaries and theological experts organized to discuss and settle matters of Church doctrine and practice.

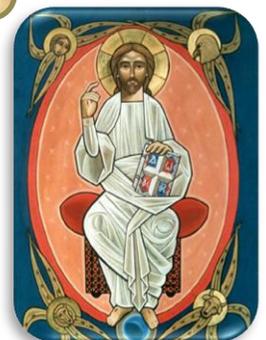
COUNCIL OF NICAEA

In the 4th century, an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius began a theological dispute about the nature of Christ that spread throughout the Christian world and is now known as *Arianism*. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea AD 325 was convened by Constantine under the presidency of Saint Hosius of Cordova and Saint Alexander of Alexandria to resolve the dispute, and eventually led to the formulation of the Symbol of Faith, also known as the Nicene Creed. Arius denied the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Creed, which is now recited throughout the Christian world, was based largely on the teaching put forth by a Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, the chief opponent of Arius. He defended the faith and proved the divinity of our Lord Christ from the scriptures. The heresy of Arius was exposed and he was excommunicated and exiled.

COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

In the year AD 381, Pope Timothy I of Alexandria presided over the second ecumenical council known as the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople to examine the Macedonian heresy. Macedonius claimed that the Holy Spirit was created. This council completed the Nicene Creed with this confirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit:

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified who spoke by the Prophets and in One, Holy, Universal, and Apostolic church. I confess one Baptism for the remission of sins and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age, Amen."



COUNCIL OF EPHEBUS

Another theological dispute in the 5th century occurred over the teachings of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople who taught that God the Word was not hypostatically joined with human nature, but rather dwelt in the man Jesus. As a consequence of this, he denied the title "Mother of God" (Theotokos) to the Virgin Mary, declaring her instead to be "Mother of Christ" (Christotokos).

When reports of this reached the Apostolic Throne of Saint Mark, Pope Saint Cyril I of Alexandria acted quickly to correct this breach with orthodoxy, requesting that Nestorius repent. When he would not, the Synod of Alexandria met in an emergency session and a unanimous agreement was reached. Pope Cyril I of Alexandria, supported by the entire See, sent a letter to Nestorius known as "The Third Epistle of Saint Cyril to Nestorius." This epistle drew heavily on the established Patristic Constitutions and contained the most famous article of Alexandrian Orthodoxy: "The Twelve Anathemas of Saint Cyril." (*Anathema means to be formally set apart or excommunicated*). In these anathemas, Cyril excommunicated anyone who followed the teachings of Nestorius. For example, "Anyone who dares to deny the Holy Virgin the title *Theotokos* is Anathema!" Nestorius however, still would not repent and so this led to the convening of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431 AD), over which St. Cyril presided.

The Council confirmed the teachings of Saint Athanasius and confirmed the title of St. Mary as "Mother of God". It also clearly stated that anyone who separated Christ into two hypostases was anathema, as St. Athanasius had said that there is "One Nature and One Hypostasis for God the Word Incarnate" Also, the introduction to the creed was formulated as follows:



"We magnify you O Mother of the True Light and we glorify you O saint and Mother of God (*Theotokos*) for you have borne unto us the Saviour of the world. Glory to you O our Master and King: Christ, the pride of the Apostles, the crown of the martyrs, the rejoicing of the righteous, firmness of the churches and the forgiveness of sins. We proclaim the Holy Trinity in One Godhead: we worship Him, we glorify Him, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord bless us, Amen."

Light to the World



POPE CYRIL IV

Pope Cyril IV was born in the town of Sawamaa of the district of the city of Girga, to righteous parents in the year 1816 A.D. They gave him the name David (Daoud) after his grandfather. His father brought him up and educated him well. He grew up despising the things of the world and its vanities. When he was 22 years old, he went to the monastery of St. Anthony, where he conducted himself virtuously and lived an ascetic life, which convinced the abbot of the monastery, Father Athanasius (El-Kalousni), to clothe him with the garb of the monks. He continued to read and to study the holy books.



Two years after David's ordination as a monk, the abbot of the monastery departed. David (Daoud) was chosen, by the consensus of the monks, to become their abbot. Pope Peter "El-Gawly" (Anba Peter VII), 19th Pope of Alexandria, ordained him a priest, and he appointed him as abbot of the monastery. He took care of the state of affairs of the monastery and those concerning the monks.

He was very sharp intellectually and was very well versed in religious matters. When a problem transpired among the Ethiopians concerning some doctrinal issues, the Pope, Anba Peter called upon him to go to Ethiopia to solve these problems. He performed his duty admirably. Father Daoud returned on July 13, 1852, to find that Pope Peter had departed on April 15, 1852. When they tried to choose a successor to the Pope, there was a split in the people's opinions, some wanted Father Daoud and others wanted to choose someone else.

Finally they decided to ordain Father Daoud an auxiliary bishop in the year 1853. He performed his duties as such, for a year and two months, during which, he showed discretion and good conduct that made him worthy to be chosen patriarch on the 28th of Bashanse of 1571 A.M. (1854 A.D.).



He devoted all his efforts to disciplining the youth and educating them. He established the great Coptic school in the patriarchate. He also established another school in Haret-El-Sakkayeen. He paid great attention to the teaching of the Coptic language. He also established a great printing house and printed many church books.

Generally, the progress of the Copts at that time attributed to his efforts. He demolished the old church in the Patriarchate and built another, but he could not complete it because of his absence in Ethiopia for the second time.

This great pontiff upheld the canons of the church, and was charitable to the poor and the needy, and was deeply loved by his flock. He departed on the 23rd of Tubah in 1577 A.M. (1861 A.D.)

May his prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.

HIS HOLINESS POPE SHENOUDA III

He was born in the village of Salam in Assiyut, on Aug. 3rd, 1923, the youngest of 8 brothers & sisters with the name of Nazeer Gayed Roufail. He graduated from Cairo University with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English & History in 1947. He chose the monastic life, went to the Virgin Mary monastery known as El-Suriyan, and on July 18th, 1954, he became Fr. Antonios El-Syriyani, he was ordained a priest on Aug. 31st, 1958.

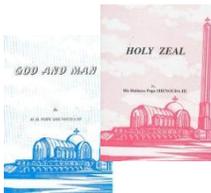
On Sept. 30th, 1962, Pope Kyrillos VI, ordained Fr. Antonios a bishop of Christian education with the name of Bishop Shenouda.



On Nov. 14th, 1971, H. G. Bishop Shenouda was enthroned His Holiness Pope Shenouda, the 117th Pope & Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.



H. H. is the author of 101 books; some are translated to English, French, German, and Italian. He is also the composer of a bank of poems known as the "Spiritual Poetry".



He ordained about 80 metropolitans and bishops and over 600 priests. He established new branches to the Theological Seminary in Egypt, America, Australia, and the UK.

During his papacy, he increased the number of parishes in North America from 4 to over 200; (200 in the US, 23 in Canada and 1 in Mexico). He established 2 dioceses in North America (Los Angeles and the Southern United States "SUS", also in Latin America (Brazil & Bolivia), as well as Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and Europe. He also established new monasteries in many of these places.



He visited the sister churches of Constantinople, Moscow, Romania and Antioch. He was the first Coptic Pope to visit the Vatican (Rome) for over 1500 years. During his papacy, the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of churches, National Council of Churches in Christ in USA, Canadian Council of Churches, and Australian Council of Churches. He paid several Pastoral visits to Ethiopia, North America, Australia and Europe.



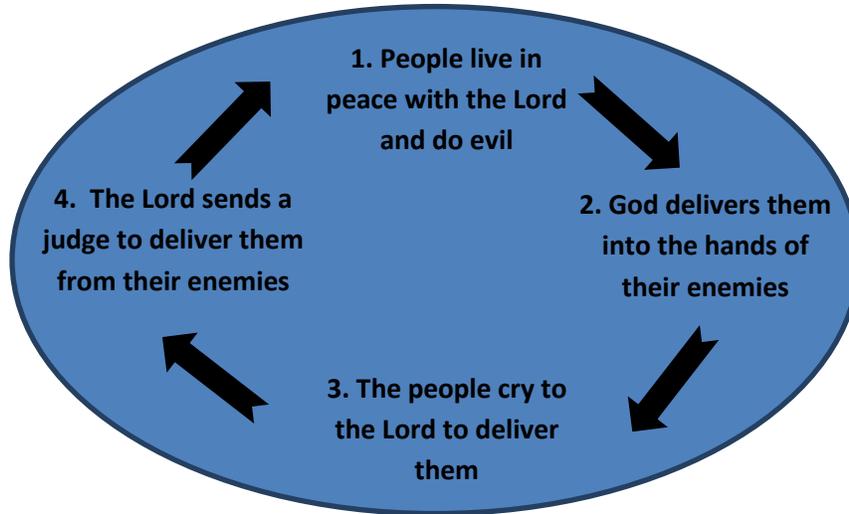
He departed on March 17th, 2012 after shepherding the Flock of Christ for 40 years, 4 months & 4 days at the age of 88. According to his will, his body is resting (buried) in the monastery of St. Pishoy in the Western desert (Wadi El-Natroun) of Egypt

May his prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.



Cycle of Transformation

The Book of Judges Chapter 1-8 & 13-16



In Judges, disobedient and idolatrous people are defeated time and time again because of their rebellion against God. Israel set aside God's law and in its place substituted "what was right in his own eyes." Judges 21:25

Judges 1:1-3:4 **Deterioration:** Judges begins with short-lived military successes after Joshua's death, but quickly turns to the repeated failure of all the tribes to drive out their enemies. The people feel the lack of a unified central leader, but the primary reasons for their failure are a lack of faith in God and a lack of obedience to Him (2:3)

Judges 3:5-16:31 **Deliverances:** The section describes seven apostasies (falling away from God), seven servitudes and seven deliverances. Each of the seven cycles has five steps, **sin, servitude, supplication, salvation and silence**. They can also be described by rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration and rest. The seven cycles connect together as a descending spiral of sin. The Israelites chose to disobey God. God allows the enemies of the Israelites to make life hard for them. The Israelites turn back to God and pray to Him to help them and to show them mercy. God shows mercy to His people and He sends very strong leaders to help and guide the Israelites. As soon as a judge dies, God's people choose to disobey Him again and again and again. We see the results of the Israelites' disobedience to God.

Judges 17:1-21:25 **Depravity:** (Corruption): These chapters illustrate religious apostasy, social and moral depravity, Chapters 19 & 20 tells the worst story of degradation in the Bible, showing how badly people can be treated when a community ethics are detached from the absolute standards of God.

The Book of Judges closes with a key to understanding the period: "everyone did what was right in his own eyes"(21:25). The people are not doing what is wrong in their eyes, but what is "evil in the sight of the Lord" (2:11)

Who are the main people that are mentioned in the Book of Judges? The Judges! The chief judges were Deborah, Gideon, Samson and Samuel

Chapter 1: In the first two chapters of the book of the Judges, we are reminded that the Israelites still need to finish the job that God has given them to do. Joshua is no longer alive but the Israelites still need to drive out the wicked people who lived in Canaan. God wanted His people to live in this land of Canaan and to burn all the altars where the wicked people of Canaan worshipped idols. God was judging the wicked people of Canaan for their wickedness. He chose the tribe of Judah to lead the people.

God's people make a choice NOT to obey God. The Israelites decide NOT to drive out the wicked people of Canaan and instead decide to live with them as neighbors. God's people even started worshipping idols just like the people of Canaan. God's people made a decision NOT to obey God and God decided that He would not help the Israelites drive the Canaanites out of the land.

Message: We must not associate with bad friends or pursue bad relationships that can drive us away from god and teach us bad habits.

Chapter 2: The Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. The Angel of the Lord is one of the manifestations of God the Logos in the Old Testament.

Message: If we want to receive god's grace and help, we must repent and change. god will be faithful to His covenant and this gives us hope.

Chapter 3: We see that the Israelites are worshipping idols. God allows their enemies to conquer them. When God's people turn to God for mercy and pray to Him, He shows them mercy and He sends Othniel to free them. Othniel (God's power/God's answer) was the first judge from the tribe of Judah. God's people choose to disobey God again. Again, they are made slaves. Once again, when they pray for help to God, He sends them help. God sends Ehud (the second judge) to free them. He was from the tribe of Benjamin

Message: It is important to keep ourselves away from the corrupt habits of the unbelievers as St. Paul warned us saying, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Chapters 4, 5: The Israelites sin again in Chapters 4 and 5. God's people are punished by Sisera's army. Sisera and his army are destroyed through the leadership of Deborah (the fourth judge) and Barak. In choosing Deborah, God is showing us that men are not greater than women. Deborah's song of victory starts with blessing the Lord and ends by glorifying Him for His great work and grace.

Message: We are one in Christ and every member has a role, like the unity between Deborah and Barak. In our spiritual struggle, we must praise God with a song of joy and offer Him thanksgiving in every condition. "If god is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

Chapters 6- 8: The Israelites are overcome by the Midianites. God chooses Gideon to be the fifth judge and to take charge of the army; even though Gideon wanted many proofs of God's faithfulness. Gideon realizes he saw God and thinks he will die, but God assures him that he will not die. He builds an altar for the Lord, The Lord-is-Peace. Gideon gathers people for the war, but God commands him to reduce the number to 300 men to fight 135000. God wanted to show His people that it is by His power that they would defeat the enemy so they wouldn't attribute the victory to themselves. God leads Gideon to defeat the Midianites.

Message: We must destroy the "Baal" in our lives as we cannot serve two masters. When we humble ourselves before the Lord, He will give us power to do our duties, and glorify Himself in us. God uses the little we have to reveal His strength. We must always be kind and compassionate with others. When we are under the leadership of Christ, we will conquer Satan.

Chapters 13, 14: When the children of Israel return to their evil ways, God delivers them into the hands of the Philistines. God appears to Manoah and his wife and tells them that they will have a son; Samson. He prepares him from the womb (Judges 13:5) When the Angel of the Lord appears to Manoah, he wanted to offer Him a goat, but He told him to offer the sacrifice before God. Manoah asks about His name but the Angel says: "Why do you ask me My name, seeing it is wonderful?". So god's name was wonderful and it was God who appeared like an angel. Samson grew his hair as a sign of consecration to God, but his real power was not in the hair but in the Spirit of the Lord.

Message: God is faithful in His promises but in His own time. The Lord's Spirit works within us, and He is the source of our power.

Chapters 15, 16: Samson uses his great strength to defeat the Philistines but he foolishly wastes his ability. Samson lets a Philistine woman put him in the power of his enemies. Samson's enemies blind him and make him a slave. God returns Samson's strength and Samson's dies when he destroys the prison that he had been a slave at. Samson's enemies are destroyed when Samson destroys their building.

Message: Satan will not give up, but he will present us with the opportunity to sin in different ways repeatedly. He was able to defeat Samson, the mighty judge, with lust. In order to defeat Satan, we must reject the sin and not begin to debate with Satan. When the Spirit of the Lord is with us, we have extraordinary powers against sin. as soon as we leave god, we become weak. Repentance has no restricted time or place and god will always accept our repentance.

In the book of Judges, we see that each judge was a ruler and someone who protected the Israelites. By looking at the judges, we get a preview of what the promised Savior will be like. The promised Savior is our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the book of Judges, the people did what was right in his own eyes. **What kind of trouble did this bring upon them?**

I am sure that you noticed how time and time again God's people chose to disobey Him. It was a cycle of disobedience, consequences, repentance, God's forgiveness, and then more disobedience. **Why do you think that the Israelites repeated their acts of disobedience even after God would so graciously forgive them and rescue them?**

We are all disobedient sometimes and we need to ask God to help us to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Keep God as the central focus in your life and pray that God will help you to live a life that is right in His eyes.

What do you think?

God's faithfulness and mercy to the Israelites was incredible! No matter what the Israelites did, all they had to do was turn and ask God for His help and His mercy. God was always there to provide forgiveness and mercy to His people. How much love do you think God must have had for His children to have been so incredibly patient with them? No matter what your sins are, God will forgive you too if you truly repent and ask God for his forgiveness.

God cares for his people even in the midst of heartbreaking apostasy

Who is Christ?

Many heresies arose that denied the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the church always confronted them and proved them wrong. The Arian heresy is the most famous one; it was examined and refuted in the first ecumenical council, the council of Nicaea. Nevertheless, until this day, many atheists are rising trying to deny the divinity of the Lord Christ.

Here, we include some verses that prove the divinity of Christ

- a. "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." John 8:58
- b. "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man Who is in heaven". John 3:13
- c. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen". Matthew 28: 20
- d. "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works". Matthew 16:27
- e. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" Matthew 7:22
- f. "I and My Father are one". John 10:30
- g. "Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me". John 10: 24-25
- h. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" John 10: 27-28
- i. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me". John 14: 11
- j. "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." John 8:51

Memorization

1-From the Agpeya-Prayer of the Eleventh Hour

PSALM 119

“In my own affliction I cried to You, O Lord, and You heard me. O Lord, You shall deliver my soul from unjust lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What should be given to you, and what should be added to you, a crafty tongue?! The weapons of the mighty are sharpened with coals of the desert! Woe to me, that my sojourning is prolonged; I have lived among the dwellings of Kedar. My soul has long been a sojourner; I was peaceable among those who hated peace; when I spoke to them. They warred against me without a cause.” Alleluia

The Gospel according to St. Luke 4: 38-41

“And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they requested Him concerning her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her; and immediately she arose and served them.

When the sun was setting, all those who had any sick with diverse diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are Christ, the Son of God!” And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak; for they knew that He was Christ.”

Litanies

1. If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I, the sinner, appear? The burden and heat of the day I did not endure because of the weakness of my humanity. But, O merciful God, count me with the fellows of the eleventh hour. For behold, in iniquities I was conceived, and in sins my mother bore me. Therefore, I do not dare to lift up my eyes to Heaven; but rather, I rely on the abundance of Your mercy and love for mankind, crying out and saying, “God, forgive me, a sinner, and have mercy on me.”
2. Hasten, O Savior, to open to me the Fatherly bosom, for I wasted my life in pleasures and lusts, and the day has passed me and vanished. Therefore, now I rely on the richness of Your never-ending compassion. So, then, do not forsake a submissive heart which is in need of your mercy. For unto You, I cry, O Lord, humbly, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before You, and I am no longer worthy to be called Your son, so make me as one of Your hired servants.”
3. Every iniquity I did with prudence and activity, and every sin I committed with eagerness and diligence, and of all torment and judgment I am worthy. Therefore, prepare for me the ways of repentance, O Lady the Virgin; for to you I appeal, and through you I seen intercession, and upon you I call to help me, lest I might be put to shame. And when my soul departs my body, attend to me, and defeat the conspiracy of the enemies, and shut the gates of Hades, lest they might swallow my soul, O you, blameless bride of the true Bridegroom.

2-Sayings of the Fathers

1. Wherefore the mercy of God is necessary not only when a man repents, but even to lead him to repent. (St. Augustine)
2. Put on humility all the time, to turn yourself into a dwelling place for God. (Mar. John Saba)
3. I no longer fear God: I love Him. For perfect love casts out fear. (St. Anthony The Great)

4. Let us honor God, and carry Him in our bodies and Spirits. (St. John Chyrosotom)
5. Let the fear of God be in your heart, as a weapon in hand. (Mar. Ephram the Syrian)
6. When you go to sleep on your bed, remember God's blessings, His care for you and thank Him for that. (St. Anthony)
7. If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself. (Saint Augustine)

