

THE WORD: THE ORIGIN OF MAN

THE ROLE OF THE COPTIC CHURCH IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY



RAMIZ GILADA

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The Word: The Origin of Man
The Role of the Coptic Church in Christian History
by Ramiz Gilada

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ABOUT THE COVER ART



The icon on the book cover is a painting by George Edward of Jesus Christ

sitting on the throne and is entitled “The King of kings and the Lord of lords.” Coptic Orthodox churches typically have a similar painting on the main east wall inside the altar area (the most holy place in a church) to remind their congregations of the glory of God in heaven. Through this painting viewers have the perspective of standing in the house of God, in His very presence.

The art brings together several revelations seen by prophets of the Old Testament and John of the New Testament. The visions symbolize God sitting on His throne surrounded by four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. The throne is depicted in gold symbolizing the kingdom of God (see Exodus 25:11; Revelation 21:18-21). These visions are provided to us by John in Revelation 4:2-8 and 19:4 by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-3 and by prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:4-9. Jesus is seated reflecting His calmness and peace in spite of any worldly troubles, wars, or hardships. As the King of kings and Lord of lords, nothing disturbs His peace and reign.

The One sitting on the throne is Jesus Christ with the markings of the wounds of the cross on His hands. He is carrying the world in His left hand meaning He is the Pantocrator—the controller of everyone and everything including kings, nations, armies, nature, earth, and the universe. The cross at the top of the world signifies Christ blessing the world with His salvation and His love of man (see John 3:16).

The golden scepter in Jesus’ right hand means He is the King and Ruler and has the power to put one to death or to extend the scepter that one may live (see Esther 4:11; 5:2). He is the One who came to us to tell us about the Father, to save us from our sins, and to judge everyone according to his or her deeds.

The book on His lap is the scroll that was sealed and no one could open except the Lamb (see Revelation 5:1-10). Christ is the One who holds the

keys of Hades and of Death (see Revelation 1:18). He is the Judge who saved the world through His sacrifice, and therefore, the only One who can judge the world. The book represents the Book of Life (see Revelation 20:12) and is open meaning God knows everything. In the open book are words written in Greek “ἐγὼ εἰμι” pronounced “ego eimi” meaning “I am of My own doing” or “My existence is of My own doing.” In Arabic it translates to “ana kaen bezatee.” On the same page are the words written in Greek, “I Am the Alpha and the Omega” which means “I Am the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (see Revelation 1:8, 17).

The three words at the bottom of the artwork in Greek and are “HOLY” “HOLY” “HOLY” (see Revelation 4:8).



Surrounding Jesus Christ, the Pantocrator sitting on the throne, are four living creatures: a man, an eagle, a lion, and a calf. The man represents the Incarnate God as the Son of Man. The calf represents His crucifixion. The lion represents His resurrection. And the eagle represents His ascension to His throne as the Father, the King of kings.

In the outer area are twenty-four elders clothed in white garments with

their golden crowns laid at their feet (see Revelation 4:4). The picture shows seventeen of the twenty-four elders who represent the priesthood of the Old and the New Testaments—the twelve tribes of Israel from the Old Testament and the twelve disciples from the New Testament. Together the twenty-four represent all those who are at the service of God worshiping and giving Him glory for all of His work towards mankind. The golden bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints for the whole world and their praising of the Lord (see Revelation 5:8). The 12 elders on each side signify Christ at the center or the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the proof that God exists.

The artist and iconographer is George Edward. George was born in El Minia, Egypt in 1961. He graduated from El Minia University in 1983 with a BSc degree in Science and Education. He developed his specific love for illustrations and found great interest in Coptic iconography (Coptic Church paintings). George essentially followed in the footsteps of his grandfather who scripted church books by hand when the printing press was not readily available. He drew icons for churches in Egypt, Europe, and the United States before he finally immigrated to the U.S. under special request by churches in the United States. His paintings fulfilled the Coptic congregations' desire to have artwork in their newly built churches in the United States that closely resembled that of their mother churches in Egypt. George's artwork was found to be more touching in reflecting the Coptic culture and heritage than traditional artwork. This painting is among his best art.

I have known George Edward for nearly ten years. The first time I came across his paintings, I knew he was heading for a great future as an iconographer. The style of his paintings brings into perspective a personal sense of interaction with the image. For example, he painted the face and eyes of Jesus in such a way that you feel He is looking directly at you and

you can almost feel His touch. George has a unique talent in perceiving biblical events and personalities and transferring them into icons. His contribution to the field of iconography in the Coptic Church will be enjoyed for generations to come. I would not be surprised if one day he was given the title “Michelangelo of the Coptic Heritage.”

DEDICATION



This book is dedicated to

The Coptic Christian Orthodox Church of Alexandria, Egypt in her preservation of the faith unchanged since the time of Christ through endless suffering and persecution till this day.

My wife, Nagwa, son Daniel, and daughters Sarah, Julianne, and Marie. My mother, Loula Yousif, father, Girgis Gilada, and sister, Magdalene William.

My brothers and sisters already born and those yet to come to be in the Lord’s pasture, fellow men and women sharing this temporary residence, we came to know as Earth, gifted to us by the One whom all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



First and foremost, I am thankful for the beneficent and merciful God, the

Father of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, for He has aided, kept, directed, and motivated me throughout this project. At times, I thought I could no longer continue to get this work accomplished due to emergent health issues and afflictions, but He sustained me.

The support and prayers I received from my wife, Nagwa, her continuous encouragement, and for searching for ways to improve the message behind this book have been a source of strength to me. My daughters Sarah, Julianne, and Marie, and my son Daniel have provided ideas and comments throughout this book that helped bring clarity. Marie spent many hours in the midst of her preparation for postgraduate education to proofread the manuscript. Thank you.

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my editor, Keren Kilgore. Through her relentless editing over the past four-and-a-half years, she took the book to higher and higher grounds. Keren's precision and quality of editing far exceeded my expectations of what I thought would be a straightforward task. I have learned a lot by just addressing her comments. Her book layout and cover design were remarkable. It has been a blessing to work with Lightning Tree Creative Media on this book project.

I would also like to acknowledge Cyndi Bracy, one of the book proofreaders. Cyndi has provided valuable feedback and changes during her reading of the book adding to its clarity and purpose. It was a long road and I am grateful she stayed the course.

George Edward, the painter of the art on the cover of this book, is a brother in the Lord whom I have known for many years. I am grateful for his contribution to the Coptic Church's iconography that will be enjoyed for generations to come. George's artistic work has been a form of evangelism to many in the community. This masterpiece, entitled "The King of kings and the Lord of lords," depicts Jesus sitting on the throne. George took the events

from Revelation in the visions of John, the disciple of the Lord Jesus, and reflected it gloriously as an icon located in the church's most holy place, the altar east wall. Thank you, George, for your contribution.

And to Kristi Bise, a co-worker who got me in contact with Keren and Cyndi, my heart-felt gratitude. Kristi has been a true sister in the Lord and worked hard to get me the help I needed to complete this book.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those who are unknown to me but in one way or another inspired me to write this book. They saw my presentations of the Coptic Church history and her contribution to Christianity before I even thought about writing this book. Many came to me at the end of these presentations seeking additional information or references regarding church history. After realizing that the information is mostly scattered and many sources are in different languages (Arabic and Coptic) that are not readily available, I thought about writing a book that could bring things together. So, I began to write about Christ as seen through the ancient Coptic Church faith and tradition. Thus, *The Word: The Origin of Man* began. Christ truly is the common factor who holds all things together.

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The Word: The Origin of Man highlights the history of God with mankind. This history is reviewed through the interpretation of the early Coptic Orthodox Church founded in Egypt around 60 AD by Mark the apostle and gospel writer. Its focus is on the rich background rooted in nearly two thousand years of tradition, wisdom, and knowledge of ancient Christians of the Middle East and known today as the Coptic people or the Copts of Egypt.

Despite the fact that the ancient Egyptian Copts were direct descendants of the Pharaohs, they chose Christianity as their faith. Coptic Church history goes back to the time of Christ in its beliefs, customs, and ceremonies. Through the teachings of St. Mark, they developed a solid faith based on the wisdom of centuries of saints.

This book has taken nearly ten years to research, write, and edit. The book is based on my personal belief that Jesus Christ is God Incarnate and the root behind our very existence, survival, and salvation. As the primary figure in world history, Jesus Christ is the Word, the origin of man. My goal in this book is to illustrate the continuity of God as a Father in dealing with mankind from Adam through His Presence among us as the Son of Man and today through the Holy Spirit. The epic of God's relationship with us was the moment of His crucifixion followed by His overcoming death in the resurrection. The glorious outcome was the defeat of Satan and the redemption of mankind from his original sin committed against God in Paradise. Christ provided us eternal salvation.

Jesus Christ is the only means available to get from earth to heaven. A practical comparison may aid in embracing this critical point: the only means to get from New York to Los Angeles in six hours is by flying in an airplane. Nothing else we can do would get us there in such a relatively short amount of time. No amount of possessions or attributes—intelligence, education, scientific knowledge, wealth, good deeds, national origin, gender, race, or

faith—can replace an airplane to achieve that journey in a short time. The airplane is the sole means. Christ is the sole means to get us from earth to heaven.

My hope is that this book will be a tool for learning, self-improvement, and growth so that readers can make choices leading to salvation. In the end, man wins everything by gaining eternal salvation. All the fame, money, or material rewards of this world are not worth trading for one's salvation.

I have broken this book into five parts that can be viewed as a closed loop of events between God and man. We came from God and to God we return.

Part I presents creation and identifies Christ the Word as the origin of man and the events where man encountered a problem with his Creator. In the remainder of the Old Testament, man was living with the consequences of this problem. God, who one day would be the Incarnate Word coming to earth to dwell among men, is portrayed as the Father for the human race and the common thread for continued and sustained existence. God continuously came to man's aid to prevent loss of hope and complete annihilation. This part also illustrates mankind as one family under God the Father and illustrates the development of the one human family into nations.

Part II is based on the book of Exodus in the Old Testament and focuses on the inception of the existing world and the role of the Desert Fathers, judges, kings, and prophets.

Part III focuses on the four Gospels and the book of Acts with details about the First Coming of Christ and its lasting impact on mankind.

Part IV covers the New Testament—the period after Christ's resurrection from the Epistles to Revelation. In that period, the establishment of Christianity by His followers and the role of the early church is highlighted.

Part V is the development of the early church focusing on the Church of Egypt and the children of the pharaohs—the Copts—who abandoned the gods of their fathers in favor of Jesus Christ as their Lord, God, and Savior. This part also looks into the Christian history developing throughout the world until this day in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ.

These events between God and man can also be seen in the four covenants He made with us. Three are found in the Old Testament and the fourth is in the New Testament and each involved a physical act. The first covenant was with Noah and his children following the Great Flood and was identified by the rainbow as a sign of peace. The second covenant involved Abraham and his children and was identified by the act of male circumcision as a sign of purification. The third covenant was with Moses and his children and was identified by the tablet of the Ten Commandments symbolizing civil and moral discipline in human society. The fourth and final covenant is the new covenant found in the New Testament where Jesus Christ offered His body and blood for the salvation of man.

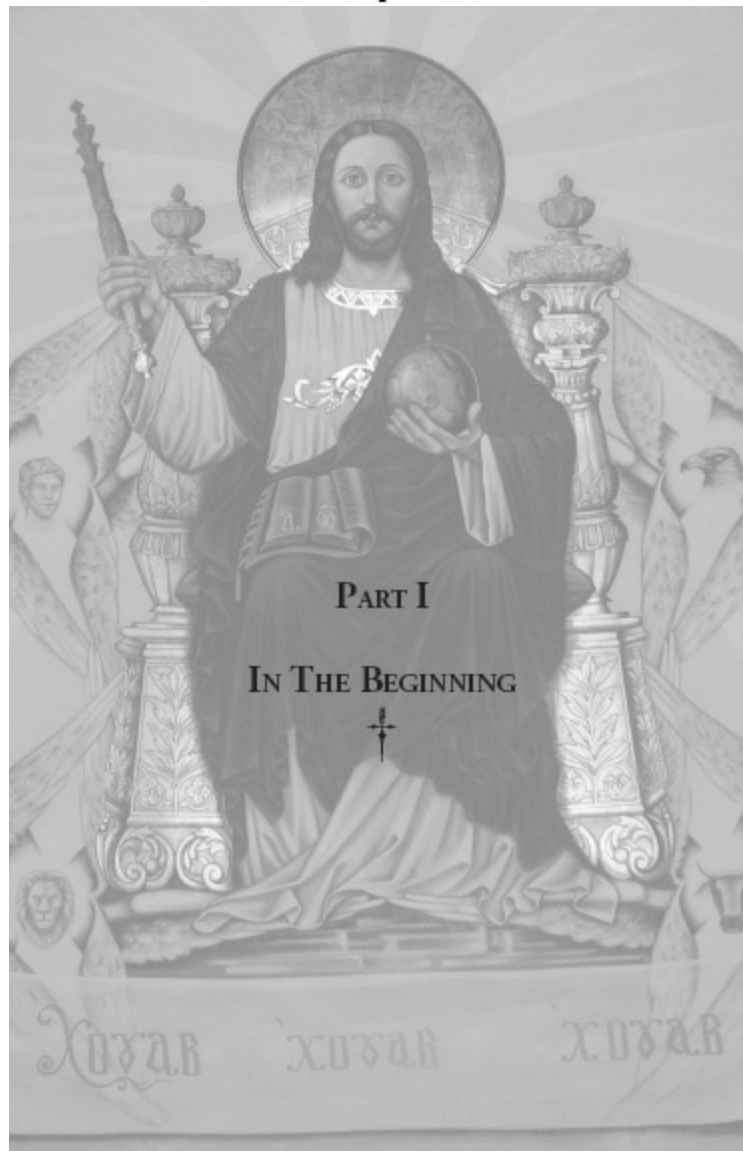
In a similar manner, God had specific purposes in mind in each of the four gospels of the New Testament. The book of Matthew introduced Christ to the Jewish nation as the King predicted by the prophecies. The book of Mark introduced Christ to the Romans as the Servant illustrated by His parables and miracles. The book of Luke introduced Christ to the Greeks as the Savior illustrated by His act of salvation. And, finally, the book of John introduced Christ to the world as the Incarnate God by emphasizing His divinity that never separated from His humanity.

The fact that the church in the Middle East survived intense domination by the ruling majority of those of non-Christian faith for over two thousand years should be a testament to the power of God to maintain a Christian base. This is the same faith that St. Mark left us with it when he was martyred for

his beliefs, tied to a horse's tail and dragged through the streets of Alexandria's district of Bokalia for two days until his body was torn to pieces. This faith is our heritage.

Ramiz Gilada

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CHAPTER 1

CREATION



THE ORIGIN

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). The use of “Word,” “God,” and “He” indicates unity of being One in Three and Three in One and links the attribute of language that is unique to both the Trinity and mankind. This direct link of man with his Creator is further evidence by the fact that man was created in His image. In the book of John, the “Word” clearly refers to Jesus Christ as evident in the continuation, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4).

In essence, the “Word” manifested in the language goes much further than just a means for communication. God used it as the means to create the world. For example, “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). At this moment, the physics and reality of light came into existence. Today, we know that light is a form of energy that can behave like a wave as well as particles or photons. We also know that photons respond to gravitational fields, such as the sun, that can alter its path of travel. Because it is particle-like, it has a speed limit, but no other matter known to man can travel faster than light. All of this came into existence from the Word uttering

the words, “Let there be light.”

This same power of the “Word” was utilized centuries later when Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth!” (John 11:43) and after four days in the grave, life came back into Lazarus and he walked out of the tomb. Lazarus’ vital organs began to function again; his heart started pumping, his blood started flowing, and his senses were restored. Jesus and the Father are One (see John 10:30) and just as the all-powerful God created light by the Word of His mouth, Jesus created life with His words.

ONE FAMILY: THE TRINITY

On several occasions in Scripture, God refers to Himself as “Us.” In Genesis 1:26, He said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” In Genesis 3:22, He said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil.” And, Genesis 11:7 states, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” The use of the words Our and Us are early indications of the existence of the Trinity of God that later (especially in the New Testament) came to be known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This concept of the Trinity can be extended further to reflect what was demonstrated in writing about Christ being the Word and the One through whom all things were made (see John 1:1, 10, 14, 17-18). If we take a closer look at this concept, we can see almost limitless evidence of the Trinity in the creation of the world.

Christ, as part of the Trinity, became flesh and took on the image of man who was created in Their image (see Genesis 1:26). The ancient Egyptians believed in the concept of a Trinity and demonstrated it in the architectural designs of the pyramids and in their major towns where they consistently

recognized some kind of a triad even though the Christian Holy Trinity was alien to them. The number “3” was significant to the Egyptians as evident in the three great pyramids of Giza, namely the Great Pyramid of Khufu, the Pyramid of Khafre, and the Pyramid of Menkaure. We witness the Trinity in many other ways:

- In the three main races of the world: Caucasoids, Mongoloids, and Negroids originating from the three children of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
- In the three branches of our material world:
 - living things (mammals, fish, and birds; and many of the things they feed on such as trees, plants, and organisms)
 - science (physics, chemistry, and biology)
 - nature (air, water, and land)
- In the human body, mind, and spirit and in the primary functions of seeing, hearing, and feeling.
- In the lifelines of existence: breathing, eating, and drinking.
- In the atom, the fundamental particle of the physical world composed of neutrons, protons, and electrons.
- In the electron composed of particles that are triode in composition known as quasars.
- In the family nucleus: man, woman, and child.

- The Trinity can even be seen in human organizations such as the military in its basic form: Army, Navy, and Air Force (land, sea, and air).
- In the three forces on earth: gravitational, nuclear (weak and strong – fission and fusion), and electromagnetic (including light as particles and/or waves).

With these in mind, we can see that the entire creation is made to reflect His image in the fundamentals of existence. According to John 1:3, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made,” indicating that Jesus Christ due to His deity is the Word of God (see John 1:1) and is the common, infinite link between all things coexisting together. Since these forces will continue to coexist, this common link ensures their continued applicability and existence.

Christ being the Word of God is the *commonality* that exists among all creation centered on the triune nature of God. The discussion related to Jesus Christ as the Word of God later in this book will further relate His power to that of the Father and the Holy Spirit as one God behind the existence of mankind and their reserved place in heaven. Such place exceeds any other place in glory when compared with the other nine heavenly hosts because man and woman were created in His image and are the only ones able to share His body and blood.

TEN HOSTS OF HEAVEN

In the very beginning, before God created the physical universe where man and woman came to live, He created ten hosts to reside with Him in the *nonphysical* heavenly places. Ten represents perfection, just as God is

perfect. It is this heavenly place where God, also known as the *Pantocrator*, will reunite with the *redeemed* among mankind to be together forever with all the heavenly hosts. The ten hosts that resided with God before the creation of mankind were:

1 angels 6 dominions
2 archangels 7 powers
3 principalities 8 cherubim
4 authorities 9 seraphim
5 thrones 10 Lucifer

Among the ten hosts was Lucifer. In the Coptic tradition, God created him as the most glorious of all the hosts. In Isaiah 14:12, he was referred to as the “son of the morning.” Lucifer fell into the sin of pride causing him to rebel against God. As a result, he was no longer considered one of the ten hosts and could not abide in God’s presence. He was cast out of heaven into Hades. His ejection caused the hosts of heaven to become nine—an incomplete number before God who is perfect and complete, which required a replacement to perfect what became an imperfect condition in heaven. Man was created to fulfill this position as the tenth host of heaven so that heavenly perfection could be restored. Those who reached the heavenly realm through the work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, would become the tenth host in God’s eternal kingdom together with the other nine hosts. According to Coptic tradition, this is the eternal kingdom of God that was referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

The creation of the thrones, the dominions, the principalities, and powers are mentioned in Colossians 1:16-17,

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on

*earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or **dominions** or **principalities** or **powers**. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

The existence of the angels, authorities, and powers is also mentioned in 1 Peter 3:21-22, “. . . Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, *angels* and *authorities* and *powers* having been made subject to Him.”

The cherubim were mentioned in Hebrews 9:1-5 when referring to the tabernacle of the Old Testament,

*¹Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. ²For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; ³and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; ⁵and above it were the **cherubim** of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

The existence of the seraphim was referred in Isaiah 6:1-3,

*¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. ²Above it stood **seraphim**; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”*

The nine heavenly hosts are listed in the Liturgy of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Basil in the prayer of the Anaphora, as follows:

Priest: *Before whom stand the angels, the archangels, the principalities, the authorities, the thrones, the dominions, and the powers.*

Deacon: *Look towards the east.*

Priest: *You are He around whom stand the cherubim full of eyes, and the seraphim with six wings praising continuously, without ceasing saying (congregation joins in):*

Congregation: *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts; heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory.*

The term “Anaphora” is a Greek term meaning “offering” and it is the most holy part of the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharistic Prayer, when the offerings of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of Christ. The Liturgies according to St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril are the Liturgies recited in the Coptic Orthodox Church an ancient Eastern Christianity based in Egypt founded by St. Mark the apostle around 60 AD.^{[1](#)}

Also, the *nine* hosts are praised in the *Tasbeha* of the Doxology of the heavenly hosts of the Coptic Orthodox Church book of hymns. *Tasbeha*, or the Holy Psalmody, is a book of praising hymns in English or Arabic composed of the Holy Bible, especially the Psalms. In the hymn of the heavenly hosts, the nine hosts are shown to perform the heavenly duties of praise:

Seven archangels are praising as they stand before the Pantocrator serving the hidden mystery. Michael is the first archangel, Gabriel is the second, and Raphael is the third. The three are a symbol of the Trinity. Suriel,

Sedakiel, Sarathiel, and Ananiel are the luminous, the great, and the holy who are continually asking God for the creation.

The cherubim, the seraphim, the thrones, the dominions and powers, and the four incorporeal creatures carrying the throne of God. The twenty-four presbyters in the Church of the firstborn praising Him incessantly proclaiming:

Holy, O God, the sick O Lord, heal them, holy O Mighty, those who slept repose them. Holy O Immortal, bless Your inheritance, and may Your mercy and Your peace be a fortress unto Your people.

Holy, holy, holy O Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your glory and Your honor. And when they say “Alleluia,” the heavenly follow them saying, “Holy Amen Alleluia, glory be to our God.”

Intercede on our behalf, O angelic hosts and all the heavenly multitudes that He may forgive us our sins.

Furthermore, the *nine* hosts are indirectly referred to in Psalm 150. The word “praise” in the Psalm starting with “Praise God in His sanctuary” and ending with “Praise Him with clashing cymbals!” is mentioned ten times. Ten represents the number of perfection meaning perfect praise for God for His goodness, blessings, and care for humanity. Another explanation behind the number ten in this Psalm is that David the prophet was urging the nine heavenly orders to praise with him, which are: 1) angels 2) archangels 3) principalities 4) authorities 5) thrones 6) dominions 7) powers 8) cherubim 9) seraphim. The tenth order is the order of the human saints. When our Lord Jesus Christ became Incarnate, took our form, and redeemed us on the cross, He restored man created in His image and likeness to his original rank.²

THE CREATION

The first words of the Bible, “In the beginning,” signify God’s eternal existence. His existence enabled the creation of the physical universe including the earth and light on day one of creation. The universe is the enormous space of the physical heavens. The sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day (see Genesis 1:16-19).

The remainder of the planets in the solar system could have been created with the earth on day one, or with the sun, the moon, and the stars on day four. There is no mention of their timing of creation in Genesis. As for the remainder of creation, following is the order of creation according to the book of Genesis.

Day One: On the first day (see Genesis 1:3) the universe (heavens), the earth, the light, the day, and the night were created. The earth may or may not have been rotating around its own axis with the physical light coming upon it. There is no mention in Genesis 1:4-5 of the origin of this light that is coming upon the earth dividing the light from the darkness. In the opinion of the author, this physical light most likely was emanating from God Himself, the true Light of the world, before the sun was created on the fourth day to divide the light from the darkness. The earth included land and water. The water covered the entire planet. God called the light *day* and called the darkness *night* and thus, time was created. So, on the first day, space (universe, earth, and light) and time (day and night) were created. Space and time coexisted.

Day Two: On the second day (see Genesis 1:6), the atmosphere above earth was created enabling the formation of mist or water vapor. The atmosphere is the air with its different layers (stratosphere) that eventually thins out and merges with space.

Day Three: On the third day (see Genesis 1:9, 11), the water (of day one) receded and was confined to seas and lakes. The dry land appeared and the mountains could be seen. God called the dry land Earth and the gathering together of waters He called *seas*. On that same day, God also created the vegetation.

Day Four: On the fourth day (see Genesis 1:14), the sun, moon, and stars were created. God set the sun and the moon to give light on the earth, to divide the day from the night, and for signs (see Matthew 24:29-31) and seasons.

Day Five: On the fifth day (see Genesis 1:20), the living creatures that occupy the sea and air including marine life and birds of all kinds were created.

Day Six: On the sixth day (see Genesis 1:24-26), land animals of all kinds were created including beasts, cattle, and everything that creeps on the earth. On that same day came the last of all creation: man and woman. We will look into the creation of man in more detail. On previous days everything that man needed had been created and nothing new was created after man. Man was to have dominion over all other creation.

Day Seven: God rested (see Genesis 2:3), not for Himself but as an example to man of the need for regular rest from doing work. Resting, as we will see later in addressing the Sabbath day, is an important time for man to worship his Creator. It also signifies that the task of creation is done and no further creation is needed. In the same manner, when Christ completed His mission on earth announcing on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30), no other form of redemption would be needed.

LUCIFER

Prior to his ejection from heaven and his fall into Hades, Lucifer was preeminent among the angels. According to Coptic tradition, Lucifer in Hebrew means “Satan eel” and stands for the phrase, “Who is this God?” Lucifer, the head of all angels, fell into the sin of pride when he said to himself, “I will raise my throne and be like God” (see Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:13-15). After his ejection from heaven, he was no longer an angel of heavenly glory; he became an angel of darkness desiring nothing but to entice his replacement, mankind, to follow his example of rebellion against God and also be expelled from the heavenly presence.

Revelation 12:7-9 reveals Satan not just sinning against God but fighting a war against Him believing that he had a chance of winning. God let His archangels engage in the fight, defeat Satan, and permanently cast him from heaven.

The prophetic book of Ezekiel gives us a vivid description of Lucifer, the chief of all angels, and God’s wrath following his transgression against Him.

¹⁴You were the anointed cherub who covers;

I established you;

You were on the holy mountain of God;

You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

¹⁵You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,

Till iniquity was found in you.

¹⁶*By the abundance of your trading*
You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones.

¹⁷*Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;*
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you.

¹⁸*You defiled your sanctuaries*
By the multitude of your iniquities,
By the iniquity of your trading;
Therefore I brought fire from your midst;
It devoured you,

And I turned you to ashes upon the earth

In the sight of all who saw you.

¹⁹All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you;

You have become a horror,

And shall be no more forever (Ezekiel 28:14-19).

In Isaiah 14:12 we also see a description about the chief of angels:

How you are fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!

How you are cut down to the ground,

You who weakened the nations!

Isaiah continues to describe Satan's plot against God in Isaiah 14:13-14:

For you have said in your heart:

'I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;

I will also sit on the mount of the congregation

On the farthest sides of the north;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will be like the Most High.'

And then Isaiah 14:15 reveals God's anger towards Satan,

Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,

To the lowest depths of the Pit.

Being fully aware of the consequences of his rebellion, Satan still attempted to overthrow God. He would not worship the Highest of the High like all the other nine powers of heaven nor would he repent for his rebellion. Instead of repenting, Satan, which stands for adversary, chose to fight a war with Archangel Michael and his angels in heaven (see Revelation 12:7). Satan the dragon and Satan's angels did not prevail so there was no longer a place for them in heaven. According to Coptic tradition, Archangel Michael is translated "Who is like God?" in the Hebrew language. He is commissioned to be on our side as beings created in the image of God, a state that God permitted man that is unequaled by any other creation in heaven. Because of this, in the opinion of the author, Archangel Michael could easily defend us against Satan by praising man as the one who was created in the image of God saying, "Who is like man?" Similarly, since we are created in God's image, Satan can look at us as adversaries and declare, "Who is this man?" Man includes Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God as well as human Man.

[CREATION OF MAN](#)

Let's look at the creation of man in more detail. In creating Adam and Eve God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. . . . So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). After God

finished creation, He saw all the things He created and “indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Before He created Eve, God said that it was not good that man be alone (see Genesis 2:18). God saw Adam as incomplete without a helper and used Adam’s rib to create Eve. When God took one of Adam’s ribs and “closed up the flesh in that place” (Genesis 2:21) it was God’s first divine surgery.

The term “man” is representative of both genders. The creation of Adam from dust and Eve from Adam’s rib are divine miracles. God formed man with both a physical and spiritual nature and brought him to life when He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). He named the male Adam and Adam named the female Eve and God gave them dominion over all creation. The means by which Adam and Eve came to existence was the first and the last of its kind. They were given the divine mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Man is the only creature who has a soul, spirit, and body because he is the only living creation who God breathed into. Thus, man having the Spirit of God is inherently eternal. In creating Adam and Eve as male and female with the commission to *fill the earth*, the intent was to empower man to survive on his own by subduing and populating the earth.

This leads us to an important perspective about death. God created man to live forever and did not intend for him to die and return to dust. Neither did God intend to put all this effort into creating man and the world around him for it to be destroyed with wars or other natural calamities that came after the sin of Adam. Indeed, everything that He did was very good in His eyes. Therefore, even the consequences of the sin of Adam are ultimately for the good for those who love Him because Scripture says that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Even after they die and no longer

physically exist on earth, those who love God are truly alive in their spiritual glory with God and, as He intended, in His heavenly presence.

When God created man, He gave him eternal breath. As a created being, when he chooses to follow God's commands, he is allowed into heaven and destined to replace heaven's fallen angels in the kingdom of God so this breath will never leave him—he will experience eternal life. However, those of mankind who choose not to be part of the kingdom of God will be with the evil one in the place yet to be formed for his ultimate dwelling—these people are considered dead. Because of these serious consequences, God provided a rescue mechanism—His Son as God Incarnate—in order to give mankind every opportunity to inherit His kingdom. There is nothing new under the sun about man's desire to live life apart from God. There are many theories about the origin of mankind that seek to prove that men and women were not created by God. The belief is that they come from other preexisting beings or conditions unrelated to God, thus making Him irrelevant and that they do not have to be accountable to Him as a supreme being, awarding themselves a false sense of independence.

The process of creation involves one male and one female, which produces one body—a child. Man and woman can be viewed as *two* individuals who are equal *halves* and when they come together they become *one* (mathematically this is $2 \times \frac{1}{2} = 1$). The purpose of mankind's union was to continue human existence by having sons and daughters naturally without further divine intervention. Not only did God create mankind in His image, but He created him with the ability to reproduce that image.

Both male and female are spiritually equal in the eyes of their Creator; it is only physical differences that separate them. Skin color and facial features are differences attributed to environmental conditions. God, as a Father, sees all His children as equal regardless of their gender, height, skin color, hair

type, or size of nose. These differences in appearance add to the diversity in God's creation and are what attract the genders to one another resulting in their union as husband and wife (becoming one body) and having their own offspring, thus continuing the act of creation.

SCIENTIFIC DATA OF CREATION

Many people in the field of science have established theories claiming to be backed by extensive research that suggest man's existence on earth was either by chance or through evolution from sub-creatures spanning millions or billions of years. It is proposed that mankind evolved from an animal into a human without divine intervention. However, the existence of mankind, as well as the other living beings, points more towards *careful planning* as the most likely cause behind creation. Someone with wisdom and power planned creation; it did not happen by chance. Claiming such theories under the name of science is nothing but a heresy against the Creator. No amount of time—even millions or billions of years—can replace the mighty power of God in the creation of man.

One of the research tools used in determining the age of the world is carbon dating as a means to measure the age of certain components or artifacts. Based on this data and other related research, mankind reached certain conclusions and decided that God may not have been the Creator of the world. Instead, the world and the universe were created by other means, the theories of which were pulled together by *scientific data*. Such data utilized time frames that are inconsistent with the Bible's six days of creation. Man was created to pursue knowledge and the Coptic Church believes that anything man proposes to do will not be withheld from him, even the pursuit of theories denying the existence of God. Relying on scientific data to

conclude that God does not exist or that He did not create the world as delineated in Genesis can be seen by God as a challenge that perhaps He will address in time.

In the creation of Adam, for example, God formed man out of dust and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7) and man became a living being. If we have to put a date on Adam’s existence using scientific data, we are faced with a few challenges. First, we have to ask the right questions. Are we trying to measure the age of the dust that Adam was made from? Or, are we trying to measure the age of the breath of God that is inside Adam giving him life? Or, are we trying to find the length of Adam’s age on earth as a man. Let us look at these possibilities one by one:

1. To put a scientific date on Adam’s existence, we may measure the age of the dust God used to create Adam. The dust would be directly coupled with the age of the earth the dust came from and to which he will go back. Measuring the age of the earth is a challenge because the earth was void and darkness was in the face of the deep for an undetermined period of time while the Spirit of God was “hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). Then God created light by a *Word from His mouth* saying, “Let there be light” and that was the first day (Genesis 1:3-5). Only the earth’s Creator could know its age, yet man continues pursuit of this information.

2. To put a scientific date on Adam’s existence, we may try to measure the age of the breath of God inside Adam. This would be the time duration since the day he was created up to the instant he died. The breath inside Adam is directly coupled with the age of God. Therefore, by definition, this can only equate to infinity. In other words, man can never die but can only go from this earth to another place with infinite dimensions, age, and time.

3. To put a scientific date on the length of Adam’s existence, we may try

to measure his age on earth as a man. The age of Adam as a living being on earth was provided to us in Genesis 5:5 and is equal to nine hundred and thirty years.

Actually, all of these answers are correct and complement one another. Man, created in God's image, is of infinite spirit. He has a finite time on earth and a body made of material with an indeterminate age. It serves man no good to eliminate the existence of his Creator without whom he could never have existed.

Everything that God created in those six days was for mankind. The Bible states that God rested on the seventh day (see Genesis 2:2). Since God does not need to rest, this seventh day of rest was intended as an example to man of the importance to rest from work. Resting from work is something that God desired for man even before the earth was cursed. God is and has always been at work caring for man even after man sinned against Him.

God's presence in our lives and in the universe He created is not just limited to the breath of life He gave us; it is intimately involved in the details of nature and in keeping the laws of physics and science effective and applicable in order for man's survival to continue.

[THE BEGINNING OF SIN](#)

When God decided to create the universe, He created the planet Earth among many other planets and adapted it to serve man. Then He created man on the sixth and final day of creation. The devil—Satan—knew that man was created to eventually replace him in heaven and that is why he envies us. This is reflected in the Reconciliation Prayer in the Liturgy:³

God, the Great and the Eternal, who formed man in incorruption; and

death which entered into the world by the envy of the devil; You have destroyed, by the life-giving manifestation of Your only begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Because we were created in God's image and lived in intimacy in the Garden of Eden, the devil envies us, is angry at us, and despises us. In order to humiliate us, he tricked us into the same sin he fell into—pride, that is to be like God (see Genesis 3:5) by equating ourselves to God. He continues to fight us for he does not want us to be in heaven where he will never again be permitted to enter. Satan will never again enjoy the presence of God in His kingdom.

MAN FALLING INTO SIN

The temptation of man by Satan led to man falling into the sin of disobeying his God. Before Eve was created, God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:15-17). This tree symbolized man's choice to obey his Creator, bringing *good* upon himself, or to disobey his Creator, bringing evil upon himself. If he ate from the tree, death would result (see Genesis 2:17). God's first commandment to Adam was to preserve the goodness of creation (see Genesis 1:28-30; 2:5). It is clear that Adam communicated God's command to Eve because in Genesis 3:2–3, the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Satan convinced Eve, and later Adam, that they could become like God if they ate of the fruit. It is not clear if Eve would have reacted differently and not eaten from the tree if she had heard directly from God, but they believed Satan's lie, broke God's commandment, and sinned against Him. Afterwards, the

Lord God said,

Behold, the man has become like one of Us [the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit], to know [how to distinguish between] good and evil and blessing and calamity; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever—Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 3:22 AMP).

In the end, Satan found a way to separate Adam from Eve and both from God. This was when the troubles for mankind began and creation was no longer “very good” as God intended.

Man became aware of sin as a consequence of his disobedience to the Lord in the same Garden of Eden where he was created. Sin is not stagnant; once we begin to head down the path of sin, man’s relationship with the Lord continuously deteriorates. This sin was the same sin committed by Lucifer against God—pride. Scripture is clear that “pride goes before destruction” (Proverbs 16:18). Once pride was acted upon, disobedience resulted leading to questioning rather than accepting God’s commands. From that moment, rebellion was the natural outcome.

God’s mercy allowed Adam and Eve to live, but His justice required the punishment of death—the curse of an earthly life of toil, pain, and suffering and then returning to the dust he came from. For man to live outside the Garden of Eden, he would have to cultivate the land (see Genesis 3:17-18). Work was originally intended to be a good thing for man. However, after sin, the earth was cursed and man was required to labor and deal with thorns and thistles in order to earn his daily bread. Man would have to work even harder to maintain a relationship with the God he disobeyed.

The Bible is not clear on Adam’s age when he sinned, but most likely

the event occurred later in his life. His *earthly* age (nine hundred and thirty years) could have started from the day he was expelled from out of the Garden of Eden into the cursed world. It could also have been this moment when the *earthly* measure of time began, the time that we have come to know today as a twenty-four hour day. However, only God knows the true beginning of earthly time. Adam was no longer allowed in the *heavenly* place of Paradise until Christ readmitted him.

In the midst of their fear and despair of being ejected from the Garden of Eden, God promised some good news—that a Seed of the woman would one day be born and would atone for the sin of Adam (see Genesis 3:15). This future Seed of the woman would crush Satan. God’s justice allowed man to be saved when his sin was reconciled by a Savior. The alternative was to face the same destiny as Satan who, fully aware of the consequences of his rebellion against God, was forever left without reconciliation. God’s mercy through Jesus Christ ultimately allowed Adam and Eve to live in His kingdom, an even better place than Eden, where there is no pain and suffering.

[WAR AGAINST MANKIND](#)

The day man was created Satan declared him a foe and soon began his adversity against him. To fully understand the reason for Satan’s attack on mankind, we need some background information.

The instant Satan saw the creation of man in Paradise he knew that God created man in His image and was very pleased with His creation. He also understood their potential to be the new power in heaven and set his goal for man’s ultimate destruction. Using one of God’s creations—the forbidden tree—Satan attacked our innocent and inexperienced nature with a series of lies

and a play on words in order to distract us from God. By doing so, Satan was still fighting to unseat God. The war against mankind is being fought here on earth. It is a vicious war against a powerful adversary who used to be the head of all angels and who has nothing to lose. Satan will use any method to achieve his one and only goal—the destruction of mankind so that we could join him in his failure. One of Satan’s most valuable tools in dealing with mankind was that man would be relatively inexperienced in spiritual warfare allowing Satan to misrepresent the truth.

The Lord Jesus Christ described Satan as the father of lies (see John 8:44). His lies divert our attention away from following God and obeying His commandments. Disobedience is sin and, “he who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8). Satan was successful in deceiving Adam and Eve and won the first battle causing them to rebel against God.

[PLAN OF SALVATION AND THE TREE OF LIFE](#)

God’s plan to save mankind from Satan’s death and destruction required the Seed of a woman. This Seed was a Savior who led the way for man while reconciling the sin committed in Paradise. The Savior that mankind was in desperate need of was the only One capable of taking the contaminated nature of man following his fall in Paradise and transforming it to the original image God intended—His own image. This Savior became the Second Adam who has and will overcome evil waged against Him until God comes again to judge the world. In the garden, man was unable to overcome evil on his own; through Christ man was enabled to overcome the evil warfare raged against him.

God’s justice prohibited them from remaining in Paradise. His mercy

allowed them a second chance—to live on the earth but not eat from the tree of life until the time a Savior was born. The tree of life signifies the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Had Adam and Eve continued to live in Paradise, eating from this tree would have allowed them to live forever with the inherent sin of disobedience and rebellion against God. Living forever with such a sin and being liable to eternal despair and ultimate destruction was Satan's objective for man beginning with Adam and Eve. The justice of God understood Satan's trickery and His mercy initiated the corrective action needed to help mankind in this dilemma.

God then placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden with flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life. He would eventually permit man to eat from that tree—through Christ coming Incarnate and redeeming humanity. The cleansed man through the blood of Christ would then be permitted to enter Paradise, eat from the tree of life, and live forever. Nothing will prevent the believer sanctified by the blood of Christ to enter into the presence of the Lord. Since man was deceived into sin by Satan, he was not eternally destroyed. The Lord Jesus Christ was the only One capable of saving man from sin that deserved eternal punishment and death. As the Incarnate God who is eternal, He took it upon Himself to sustain the punishment for our transgression.

The tree of life is the body and the blood of Christ as came to be taught by the doctrine of the Apostolic Church among them the Coptic Orthodox Church. In the Coptic Church, the body and blood of Christ is partaken of by the congregation in the Sacrament of Eucharist. Beforehand, the believer has to have been baptized, confirmed, and confess of any transgressions to be able to partake of the Eucharist according to Church tradition. Thus, the Sacrament of Baptism (washed with water to be born again), the Sacrament of Confirmation (anointed with holy oil as a child of God), and the Sacrament

of Confession (repentance) provide the path for the believer to safely travel the way back to the tree of life past the cherubim and the flaming sword to come and eat from the body and blood of Christ the Redeemer.

Following the Lord Jesus Christ's completion of the work of salvation on the cross on behalf of mankind, the eating of the body of Christ and the drinking of the blood of Christ is required of every believer willing to accept Christ as the Savior. As such, the believer will live with Him forever. When Christ died on the cross, He made the atonement for man from the original sin of Adam and from all sins thereafter and paid the price of our transgressions. Jesus Christ the Incarnate God saved mankind and restored him to Paradise to freely eat from the tree of life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

God created mankind to be the tenth host in heaven in place of Satan. He created man purely out of love. God wanted to enjoy man's company and wanted man to be among the other hosts in heaven to glorify and worship Him for all eternity. God is holy and is deserving of worship. When God created man, He created a suitable and safe environment for his survival and placed him in Paradise with the intention that man should enjoy a good life and be merry and content.

In the beginning when God created man, He gave him glory that is unequalled among all creation: God created him in His own image, male and female He created them (see Genesis 1:27). There was one man for one woman and one woman for one man. Satan envied mankind for such glory and waged a war against him. Thus, temptation came into the world and separated man from God and the image of God went back to the dust it came from. As mentioned in Coptic Church Liturgy, "God, the Great and the

Eternal, who formed man in incorruption; and death which entered into the world by the envy of the devil; You have destroyed, by the life-giving manifestation of Your only begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁴ Christ, the One who defeated Satan, restored man to His glory. Through Christ we can defeat Satan. The wars aimed against mankind are tactically diverse and will continue against the body of Christ, the Church, until His Second Coming.

When God created man in His image it was the epic of all His creation. He put together the brain, the heart, the liver, the kidneys, the lungs, and other required organs, connected them with blood vessels and the nervous system; these function as separate systems and yet are part of an integral system. He designed the brain to take full control of the organs as well as timing and maneuverability of emotions and feelings expressed in laughter or tears, speech or silence. These aspects of the soul and spirit in the human body were powered by the breath that came from His Own mouth. Another source of energy comes from the food we eat aimed mainly to transform energy to power the physical body for the spirit to continue to control the entire body. This operation is so detailed and complex that after the fall man’s pursuit of remedies had to develop an entire science to understand its design and functionality. Our bodies were designed to perform repair activities, but after the fall we needed external help that included minor things such as external medications that supplement the chemical, physical, and biological reactions and major things such as surgery and performing heart transplants. In such complex operations man was able to develop mechanical devices that can fulfill the function of the heart’s physical pumping action. Furthermore, in order to separate the identity of each one of us, a unique ID was assigned to our blood type called DNA.

It is in this creation made in His image that you see the ability to think,

reason, analyze, communicate, plan, design, develop, modify, evaluate, and implement. In order to perpetuate this creation made in His image, He designed two independently functioning systems, male and female, to come together and through the transfer of fluid-like material from the male to the female, continue this creation with its own unique DNA. A male and female coming together is the only scenario permitted by God to cause the continuity of mankind. Any other relationship between genders or acts that terminate the existence of a human inside a woman puts an end to what the Lord worked so hard and diligently to create in His image. We owe Him our existence. Any act against man's continued existence and survival is therefore an act against God.

In all of the above work of creation the Lord saw ownership, satisfaction, pride, and achievement. He loves it with all His holy heart, with all His Holy Spirit, with His entire holy mind, with all His holy strength. He loves it with all His Trinity. He will protect His work by any means and will save it at any cost.

Man is the only creature who will ultimately be transferred from this life into His eternal kingdom provided he follows God's commandments. God's intent is the eternal salvation of mankind even after they sinned against Him in Paradise. His genuine desire is to see man, created in His image, ultimately residing with Him in His eternal kingdom as the tenth host of heaven.



CHAPTER 2

ONE FATHER, ONE FAMILY, ONE NATURE



In Chapter 1, we discussed the Coptic tradition about the creation of the earth and the ten hosts of heaven which originally included Lucifer and how after his fall from heaven, man replaced him. We also addressed Jesus being the tree of life and how eating from His body and drinking His blood allowed us to live forever. In the first chapter, we can begin to see the origin of man. In this chapter, we continue to see the unfolding of the origins of man by looking at the proliferation of man through Adam and Eve and how man became unified in doing evil resulting in the Great Flood that wiped out most of God's creation. After the Great Flood, the entire human race was one family but through the events at the Tower of Babel, mankind quickly became diversified in both language and culture.

[DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CAIN AND ABEL](#)

Once Adam and Eve were banned from Paradise, they were sent out to work the land to start their new dwelling. Alone, they had to face the hardships in the new world where sin, evil, trials, and temptations existed and they had to continuously choose between doing good and doing evil. Adam and Eve had two children, Cain and Abel. Even with the same upbringing, the children of Eve were very different from one another. Abel was a shepherd and apparently quiet and obedient. Cain was a tiller of the ground and appeared to be a man who could revert to extreme anger as a way of expressing his feelings. It is evident that they were both aware of the existence of God because they kept the tradition of making sacrifices and

offerings to Him:

³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:3–5 NAS).

Abel's offering to God reflected obedience toward what appears to be God's commandment about acceptable offerings—a burnt sacrifice symbolizing Jesus Christ and thus carried future meaning and purpose. Cain's offering was disregarded by God. God warned Cain beforehand that sin was waiting for him:

⁶So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Genesis 4:6-7).

According to Orthodox tradition, Cain reflected the corrupted nature of mankind due to man's disobedience in Paradise by eating from the forbidden tree. Rather than repent for offering a lesser sacrifice than his brother, he responded out of envy and jealousy and took his brother's life. Abel was the first human to die and as such offered us a foreshadowing of the life of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial Lamb.

A lesson can be learned from Cain and Abel: when we are in a position to give God our time, treasure, or talents, we should give Him the very best—the best time of the day when we have the energy to serve, the best of our finances before we expend them on our own wants or needs, and the best of

our talents. Abel gave God the best he had to offer. Cain gave God less than the best.

Adam and Eve reared two children in an identical environment free from any external human influence. Just as Adam and Eve were given the choice between good and evil in Paradise, Cain and Abel appeared to be faced with an equal choice: to obey or not obey God's commandments. Like his parents, Cain made an evil choice but took sin beyond that of his parents and committed mankind's first murder. Abel chose to follow God's will. Cain's sin started with an unrepentant heart that led him to envy, then to anger, then to murder. He had no outside influences to blame; only Satan can be attributed to aiding him in committing this sin. Cain could only blame himself for not heeding God's warning of such evil waiting to overcome him. Eve blamed the serpent, Adam blamed Eve, but Cain had no one to blame. He may not have understood what murder was, but he understood what anger was. The Lord clearly warned him about how sin had the desire to rule over him. After pleading for mercy, the Lord provided him a sign for protection while at the same time giving him his consequential sentence: the life of a fugitive and a vagabond moving from place to place in the land without a permanent home (see Genesis 4:12).

[SONS OF ADAM](#)

Following the death of Abel, a new son was born to Adam and Eve whose name was Seth. This son replaced Abel as the seed who would ultimately lead to the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Seth, the family of Adam was extended to include many other sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons including Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared (see Genesis 5). Of particular interest in the genealogy of Adam was Enoch, the son of Jared who lived in a

reverent relationship with God his entire 365 years on earth. It is recorded in Scripture that “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). Enoch’s devotion to the Lord was perhaps the reason he was taken alive to heaven (see 2 Kings 2:11). With the exception of Elijah, Enoch was the only other descendant of Adam who did not die, alluding to the curse of death from eating from the forbidden tree. Enoch’s age of 365 years times 365 days is a symbol of a perfect record with God in Coptic tradition. Enoch symbolizes two things for us: *first*, the ability to walk with God all the days of our lives and *second*, that death has no power over us because heaven is our end reward.

God had an important mission for Enoch. This mission, as interpreted in Coptic tradition, will happen at the end of times when Enoch will come down from heaven together with Elijah to be one of two witnesses (see Revelation 11:3) for God to resist the antichrist and the beast. The beast will make war with them, overcome, and kill them and the two witnesses will taste death like all mankind (see Revelation 11:7-8). Three-and-a-half days later they will be given life from the Lord and will ascend back into heaven, and there will be great fear upon their enemies (see Revelation 11:12). This second coming of Enoch and Elijah and their eventual death signifies the imminent Second Coming of Christ for the judgment of the world. Therefore, when that happens, it will be a clear warning sign that the end is near, thus offering us a last chance for repentance before the Judgment Day of the Lord when He will come to reward everyone according to their works (see Matthew 16:27).

Another descendant of Adam who continued in the way of the Lord and was of great interest to humanity is Noah. His father, Lamech, predicted that Noah would provide comfort to the land that God had cursed (see Genesis 5:28-29). Noah is another symbol of comforting those who are under the burden of sin because of the curse of God in the Garden of Eden. We will

discuss Noah in more detail in this chapter.

SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MEN

The root cause of such a momentous event as the Great Flood started when the *sons of God* saw that the *daughters of men* were beautiful (see Genesis 6:1-2),

In the Coptic Church the *sons of God* is not gender specific but represents the children of Adam and Eve through their son, Seth, who replaced Abel and was the seed who led to the Lord Jesus Christ. The *daughters of men* is again not gender specific but represents the children of Adam and Eve through their son Cain who murdered his brother Abel.

Genesis 6:4 says, “There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.” The sons of God were not aliens, angels, or other non-human forms that married daughters of men resulting in a different mingled human race. The Bible states their offspring to be “mighty men” but they were humans, not angels. God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh” and, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (Genesis 6:3, 7). If angels were the subject of these verses, they could not be capable of reproducing as mankind does since they are of a different host as mentioned in Chapter 1 and clearly stated in Genesis 1, 6, and 7 regarding the principal of creation each “according to its kind.”

As the sons of God multiplied in numbers, they became less and less aware of their relationship as brothers and sisters to one another and began to view the daughters of men as objects for sexual pleasure. This led men into having multiple wives and ungodly relationships with women. It is no

coincidence that an event as significant as the Great Flood occurred at a time when men's perception of daughters was not aimed at developing a godly relationship consistent with raising a family but more towards satisfying selfish desires. Sin is not limited to gender and God saw evil in these unlawful physical interactions.

When people drift away from God and His ways, they drift away from being the *sons and daughters of God* to becoming the *sons and daughters of men*. Some key distinctions can be made between the *sons and daughters of God* and the *sons and daughters of men*. The differences include behaviors built on spiritual upbringing, mental processing of information, and physical appearances that are linked together and define one's personality and output to society. The distinctions are:

1. *Sons and daughters of men* reject God's spoken or written commandments, ignore His ways, and go after sin. *Sons and daughters of God* possess a responsibility to society to help their fellow brothers or sisters follow the commandments of God by being role models in order to win the battle against the evil one whose mission is to derail us from taking our position in heaven.

2. Christ provided redemption to all; the spirit of man can be saved from corruption provided man abides by the Lord's commandments. *Sons and daughters of God* accept the redemption of the Lord by their faith and deeds and will receive a new glorified body in His eternal kingdom. *Sons and daughters of men* possess no accountability toward God or respect for His commandments because they choose to remain corrupted by the sin of Adam. They choose to be tools in the hands of Satan in corrupting everything God saw as very good when He created the world (see Genesis 1:31). They will remain corrupted forever in eternal Hades.

3. *Sons and daughters of God* are not immune from sin. Because their loyalty to the Lord is always kindled, they can come back to the Lord if they choose to repent. *Sons and daughters of men* simply have no desire for the Lord. In the example of the Great Flood, the *sons and daughters of God* fell into temptation that came upon them from the *sons and daughters of men*. They could not keep God's commandments and abandoned His ways and they did not repent. Therefore, all have sinned with the exception of Noah and his immediate family who remained loyal to God and found favor with Him.

These examples are being repeated even today with many people sinning and abandoning the Lord because of the temptations of the world and few remaining loyal to Him.

As human beings in the same family under God, if we truly desire to be *sons and daughters of God*, one of our main responsibilities toward society is how we present ourselves. This involves our physical appearance as well as our thoughts and intentions. The world is a group of societies linked together and ultimately we influence one another. It is evident that God saw this when He looked at mankind as a whole. When mankind so sinned at the time of the Great Flood, God was sorry that He created them (see Genesis 6:5-7). This was one of history's lowest points in the relationship between God and man. The root cause leading to God's regret was the *physical attraction* that the *sons of God* saw in the *daughters of men* leading both to wickedness and impurity of the heart, which God could no longer tolerate. During this period the sins of the flesh played a key role in the destruction of man and revealed God's displeasure of where this sin ultimately took man.

It is no surprise that the sin of impurity in both men and women has been the weakest point in their relationship with God. Time and again we have seen it mentioned in the Old and the New Testaments. For example,

David's relationship with God hit a low point because of his sinful relationship with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11:4). Mary Magdalene required the intervention of Christ to save her from being stoned and this intervention ultimately led her to repentance (see John 8:7-11). However, while God reviews the thoughts and intents of our hearts, we should strive to please Him by keeping our minds and hearts free from impurity.

An example of striving for purity is found in the life of St. Antony the great monk of Egypt and will be addressed later in the book regarding the history of the Coptic Church. Even in his life of solitude in the wilderness of Egypt, Satan did not leave him untested and exposed him to images of impurities. Satan would appear to him disguised in female images to tempt him and to inflict impurities on his soul. The saint would resist him and would ultimately prevail relying on the name of the Lord and this short prayer, "My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner," which became a well-known prayer recited by many believers in distress.

Physical attraction between the genders is significant in continuing the existence of mankind. This attraction under a holy relationship between man and woman is critical for the survival of mankind and is according to God's plan. When the Lord commanded Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and multiply," (Genesis 1:28), He clearly demonstrated that such multiplication involved one man and one woman. The woman, formed from man's rib, was to be on the same level as man.

In the Coptic Church when the wedding ceremony or the Sacrament of Marriage is conducted, the man and woman are continuously reminded through recited prayers that they are to complement one another. They are no longer separate individuals but one in body, mind, and spirit similar to Christ's relationship with the Church. Christ protects and guides the Church and the Church submits to Christ and glorifies Him (see Matthew 19:5-6;

John 17:20-26). This is a mysterious relationship where two halves make one whole. This wholeness is the key to a successful marriage relationship. In the case of adultery, that one body is divided and the wholeness may be cracked. Conflict in marriage is inevitable, but oneness in the relationship means reconciliation is not optional—it is imperative. Reconciliation signals man's intent to defeat what is evil and wants to separate what God has brought together. In the Coptic Church, divorce is effectively limited only to cases of adultery as permitted by Christ. All other differences are reconcilable for nothing is impossible with God. In Christ we can then find the ideal relationship between a man and a woman, one that is capable of reflecting the image of Christ with the Church and bringing forth future generations with the knowledge of their Creator.

This ideal relationship between man and woman took a different turn after sin separated man and God. As a result of man's disobediences, he began to not only question the value of the woman but began to physically compare her with other women rather than see her as a human being with a heart and soul like his. These types of physical desires between the genders are based on fulfilling the lusts of the flesh with personal pleasure rather than the pleasures based on genuine love as soul mates that were originally intended by God for raising a strong, God-fearing family. The goal behind sexual attraction was no longer the act of multiplication or proliferation but a diversion solely focused on the pleasures that are associated with that act. Satan used the *sons and daughters of men* as tools to distort the intimacy between a man and his wife for the purpose of child bearing to an act of mocking God's design for a sanctified relationship intended to be between the *sons and daughters of God*. In the bigger scheme of things, mankind is the enemy's replacement in heaven, so evil continually looks for ways to not only distort mankind but to demean and humiliate him.

NOAH FOUND FAVOR

God saw Noah as a just man, one who was perfect in his generation and walked with Him (see Genesis 6:9). Noah found favor with God in the way he conducted his life.

Three attributes found in a just man reflect an excellent relationship with God: love, knowledge, and an understanding of justice and fairness. These are typically found in the commandments of God. In the days of Noah such commandments, although not written in stone, were inherently engraved in the heart of man because he was created in the image of God. Walking with the Lord in love, knowledge and understanding further enhances the road to justice and perfection. This was the heart God found in Noah. Because he was pleasing to God, he was chosen as the new father of mankind following Adam. Noah and his family were the only survivors of the Great Flood.

In today's world, we are close to the conditions preceding the Great Flood because many people neglect of God's commandments and do whatever is pleasing to the flesh with total disregard to the purity of their body, mind, and spirit. God's view of right and wrong does not change with time. Humanity was in a dire situation when Christ came to save the world from sin. If humanity reverted back to similar behaviors as in the days prior to the Great Flood, then we could be subjected to conditions that have been unseen since the foundation of the world, making His Second Coming more imminent than ever.

NOAH, GOD'S ONE WITNESS

Regardless of the state of man, at no point in time did God leave Himself without a witness to carry out His plan of salvation. His actions relating to the flood teach us much about His character. He had promised

Adam and Eve that a Savior would bruise the head of Satan, so Satan would have rejoiced to see God's wrath come down on his archenemy mankind and annihilate him once and for all. However, because of God's ultimate mercy and love toward mankind, He did not abandon us without a witness; He found and used Noah who was righteousness in the eyes of God. Thus, our existence was maintained and Satan's dream diverted. God has eternally supported and protected those who resist evil, follow His commandments, and live righteously even when doing so causes them to seem alone in this world.

Man's choice to follow evil would subject him to total destruction. However, as evidenced in the Great Flood, such destruction only occurred through God's permission. Evil has no power or permission to destroy what God created. Evil can distort, mislead, and cause man to stray away from God, but the actual destruction of man's existence has to be permitted by God. The story of Job is an excellent example of God's command over our trials and tribulations (see Job 1:6-12). Before allowing the Great Flood to destroy a corrupt world enmeshed in violence and unable to repent, He found a righteous man through whom He could rebuild the world.

Suppose prior to the Great Flood that God revealed Himself to the people of the earth so that they could repent and not be flooded in their own sins. Noah did not need such an intervention to become a holy man. Others could have learned from Noah's example, therefore avoiding the destruction of the earth. When one chooses not to follow the Lord's commandments, even an apparition of God will not bring about change; hence, the status quo is perpetuated. In Noah, however, He found a righteous witness.

The story of Noah reveals the significance of a one-on-one relationship with God; He was clearly not a stranger to Noah. Noah walked with God just as Enoch did. Had there not been such intimate relationship between God and

Noah after humanity had abandoned its Creator, two things could have happened. First, without Noah, God could have totally annihilated mankind with the intention of starting over in the creation of a new human. Secondly, He could have continued His search for another witness like Noah to continue man's existence even though they might have been generations away. In essence, God will never leave Himself without a witness (see Acts 14:17). Other men through history followed God with their whole heart such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David. If all else fails, Emmanuel (God with us) Himself is the ultimate witness to mankind that He exists. In addition to being the Savior of humanity, the last One was and is the ultimate, effective answer for all mankind and for all eternity.

THE GREAT FLOOD

In order to exterminate the sinful human race, God flooded the whole earth drowning all humans and animals with the exception of Noah, his family, and two of every animal. This event came to be known as the Great Flood. It was an event of great magnitude in natural history and second only to creation because it covered the entire earth, defined mankind's race, language, and culture. The flood probably had a great environmental impact on land boundaries as well as lakes, rivers, and streams. It is obvious that the earth was no longer the same after the flood. It was an event unlike anything in history and was a consequence of man adopting the sin of the flesh rather than God's intended life of purity and holiness for man. Because of that sin, man abandoned God's ways and deserved total annihilation with the exception of Noah and his sons. Noah continued in the path of God, followed His commandments, and became the father for all nations through whom the world continued to exist. Thus, he is a symbol of the life of Christ, the Incarnate Father, who will save the world from eternal destruction. Through

Christ this world including Adam, Noah, and all their descendants will have eternal salvation offered to all those who accept Him as their Savior and follow His commandments.

The words uttered from the mouth of God to Noah in Genesis 6:13, “I intend to make an end of all flesh, for through men the land is filled with violence; and behold, I will destroy them and the land,” (AMP) marked the destruction of mankind. Man, without spiritual desires, mental aspirations, or other attributes typical of a godly creature, was degraded to nothing more than the sinful desires of the flesh and could no longer replicate the holy attributes of his Creator. In this degraded status, man could no longer be a substitute for Lucifer or Satan *eel*, which in Hebrew means, “*Who is this God?*” In His anger, God might have given up on His creation allowing mankind to be consumed and destroyed by sin, but He chose to redeem mankind.

The elimination of mankind would have marked a tremendous victory for the forces of evil had it not been for the righteousness of Noah and his family who did not conform to their surrounding culture. Noah’s lifestyle was consistent with the commandments of his Creator. In the midst of a world living in sin and with no written Bible, God found a family who lived out the essence of the Ten Commandments and whose hearts pleased Him. As a result, Noah was chosen to facilitate the preservation of mankind and all other living things from God’s original creation. He was given the plans for an ark and responsibility for creation’s safety in the midst of a flood so great that no living creature excluded from the ark could survive. Noah and his family were the only living beings created in God’s image on the planet. Because of this, Noah became comparable to Adam in his fatherhood of the human race. Adam was the father before the flood and afterward Noah was the father through whom survival of the human race was able to continue.

The Great Flood represents two significant points for mankind. First, the world was flooded to cleanse it from the sins of man resulting in a new start for creation. This was similar to baptism in its cleansing of our preexisting sinful conditions and giving us a new start to a purified life. The second and more nebulous perspective is the continuation of a purified life in a one-on-one relationship with God. He takes such relationships so seriously that its existence impacts His decision when it comes to the survival or elimination of all mankind. If not for the power of the relationship He had with Noah and his family, mankind's existence could have been brought to an end. We will see this again in the life of Moses when destruction of Israel was imminent if not for Moses' intervention.

[SYMBOL OF THE ARK](#)

In the early stage of man's history (only a few generations after Adam), God introduced man to the skill of ship building. The ark had to be big enough to accommodate a male and female of every species for over a year (see Genesis 7:17, 24; 8:3-5, 14), yet be capable of withstanding adverse weather conditions. The size of the ark was comparable to a sea liner or an oil tanker and may have taken around 120 years to build (see Genesis 6:3). God was very detailed in how the ark was to be built:

¹⁴Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. ¹⁵And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks (Genesis 6:14-16).

The Lord is just as detailed with us today as He was with Noah. Noah clearly communicated with God and followed His instructions for building the ark. He was not a structural engineer so he relied on God to build it according to the laws of buoyancy and accounting for the distribution of loads and stresses that was required to sustain the people and animals as well as the wind, rain, storms, and the hydrodynamic loads of sloshing from the waves. Without God, the ark could not have been built given the amount of engineering knowledge that was required to construct this massive and complex structure for the survival of its occupants until they reached the peaks of the mountains of Ararat. It was no coincidence that God chose the profession of carpentry when He came to earth—the profession needed to build the ark. Although we'll have to wait until we get to heaven to find out, it is likely that God physically participated in building the ark with Noah. One thing is certain: after everyone was inside, the Lord secured the ark and “shut him in” (Genesis 7:16), an indication of the massive size of the ark door that required heavenly intervention to close. This is also a foreshadowing that no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven except through Christ Himself.

The preparation prior to the Great Flood and God's choice of animals, birds, insects, and other creatures is testimony of God who is not only in control of His creation but is concerned for every living thing He made so that it not be destroyed because of man's sin. Once the waters of the Great Flood subsided and the ark came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat, Noah, his family, and all the accompanying animals came out of the ark and God blessed them. He gave Noah the same blessing He previously gave to Adam: “be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Genesis 8:17). In essence, the Lord emphasized the continuity of creation despite its subjection to the Great Flood. Regardless of man's deeds, God is determined that His creation fulfill His purpose even if He has to implement correction to what He created.

The ark represents the Church or the human body that houses the children of God in order to withstand the adverse conditions of life without losing a soul until they reached the peaks of Mount Ararat, which spiritually symbolizes heaven.

[SYMBOL OF THE RAINBOW](#)

God's commitment to relationship with man is revealed through the events of the Great Flood. He laid out the criteria for dealing with man in the future. The heart of man gravitates toward evil, yet God promised never to retaliate with such catastrophic devastation of the entire world again. He established a covenant with man that He would never again destroy every living thing as He did in the Great Flood:

¹²This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: ¹³I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth (Genesis 9:12-17).

The rainbow serves as a reminder in heaven and on earth of this covenant. It is equivalent to the future sign of the cross. It acts as a sign of

salvation of mankind from eternal destruction in Hades.

Scientists explain that the rainbow is caused by the refraction of sunlight as it strikes water droplets from rain. When a portion of the sky is covered with drizzling clouds and the sunlight is directed at a certain angle on the opposite end of the clouds, a rainbow occurs. According to Scripture, this physical phenomenon was not part of the initial creation and did not occur prior to the Great Flood; God established it afterwards as sign between Himself and man.

Note the use of the word *flesh* in verse 17. Since the soul is not destroyed but ultimately resides in its designated eternal location, there are several ways to interpret that moment in history when the existence of the rainbow may have originated or its presence in the sky was clearly mentioned in the Bible. If the laws of physics are needed to serve God's purpose of man's salvation, then these laws will be introduced, modified, or altered as God sees fit.

The creation of the world in six days was all that was needed to allow for the safe existence and survival of man and woman as the heavenly replacement for Lucifer who sinned against God. This does not mean God's hands were tied from that moment onwards or that He has limited Himself to only these six days for any further changes to the laws of physics. As illustrated in the story of the Great Flood, if changes are required to accommodate a rainbow that is best suited to be introduced at that instant following the Great Flood rather than at the beginning of creation, then those changes will be implemented for the benefit of man and for the covenant God wanted to continually remind us of. Indeed, the rainbow also represents the Lord sitting on His throne:

Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the

appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28).

This is also stated in Revelation:

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald (Revelation 4:2-3).

The rainbow acts as God's witness to His salvation through the saving of Noah and his sons and that He is always there for us.

[SYMBOL OF THE DOVE](#)

Before they left the ark, Noah used a dove to determine if the land was dry enough to inhabit:

⁸He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. ⁹But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. ¹⁰And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. ¹¹Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. ¹²So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore (Genesis 8:8-12).

In Coptic Church teachings it is believed that the first trip by the dove represents the Holy Spirit prior to the flood in finding no human souls to

reside within. On the second trip, the dove returned with an olive branch representing peace to mankind through the baptism of Jesus and His work that brought salvation (olive branch) to mankind. The third trip when the dove did not return represents the Holy Spirit who had found souls in which He could reside following the salvation of the Lord. Thus, the ark represents the Church that shelters the believers on earth from the adversity of the world. It also represents the heavenly Church or the kingdom of God made up of those who leave this world having been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ by believing in Him and abiding by His commandments.

[SYMBOL OF THE ARK, RAINBOW AND DOVE](#)

All of these symbols combined with the Great Flood have one purpose. They reveal the work of a careful and determined planner clearly aware of the future events and actions required to pursue an organized agenda for the long term existence of His creation in an eternal place. These attributes can only be applicable to an Almighty thinker. God is clearly determined to make man a replacement for Lucifer as one of His ten hosts in heaven.

Ultimately we can learn from the story of Noah (our new father who came from Adam) the importance of a one-on-one relationship with God and the pivotal effect of such a relationship determining our destiny.

[ONE FAMILY, ONE COMMON LANGUAGE](#)

From Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—the whole earth was populated (see Genesis 9:18-19). As first families in the world after the flood, it is reasonable to assume that they spoke a common language with each other and with their God, leading us to conclude that the people of the earth originally had one language and were of one ethnic group.

Our ability to communicate is critical to our existence. This is true for every living being including the animal kingdom. Over time, man began communicating not only for the sake of food and safety but for the purpose of expressing thoughts. It is this same attribute that forces us to think about the existence of God and the meaning of life.

The word or language empowered man to fulfill his original mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). His mission was to populate the earth, work the land, and have dominion over all living things (see Genesis 1:26-30, 2:5, 15).

ONE FAMILY, ONE GENETIC RACE

Shem, Ham, and Japheth were from the same father and mother and therefore of the same genetic race. However, when they were spread throughout the world, they were exposed to different elements such as climate and geography. As a result, over the centuries they adapted to their conditions and developed specific attributes in order to survive. For example, people who dwelt in hotter regions developed darker skin tones to protect them from the intense exposure to sunlight.

THE CURSE OF HAM

Through an incident where Noah was dishonored came the curse of Ham and the distinction between servants and masters. This distinction was physically evident in skin tones.

²⁰And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.

²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and

told his two brothers outside. ²³But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. ²⁵Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren." ²⁶And he said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. ²⁷May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant" (Genesis 9:20–27).

Ham did not honor his father when he found him drunk and naked. Perhaps he even ridiculed his father or had thoughts of rebellion against him. Whatever the reason, his behavior was sin resulting in a curse from his father of being a “servant of servants” to his brothers and their descendants. This kind of servitude is different than a voluntary relationship in service of others. It was effectively a prophecy that predicted his future. Skin color could have been the mark that defined the differences between the descendants of these brothers and the reason they treated one another as master-slave, the darker skinned one having no choice but to be subject to the lighter skinned one. After this encounter, darker skin became associated with servants and lighter skin became associated with masters. This incident may have been the per-conditions that God permitted to exist among the nations where one can become enslaved by another due to these differences in appearance and skin color. Ham and his descendants were always servants to their brethren.

The variety in human skin color is only skin deep. The human race remains united genetically going back to one father and one mother. The human race will always be one family and one genetic race.

There is another view of Ham's curse for dishonoring his father, Noah. The curse of Ham by Noah could be tied to his children's rejection or hostility in the future against God and His commandments. A curse signifies a response to a sinful act of some form or another. In Genesis 3:17-19, God cursed the earth (ground) because of Adam and Eve's transgressions against Him. The earth was permanently inflicted with thorns and thistles—plants that may have not been there before the fall in the Garden of Eden. They signified that life for man on earth would be that of pain, suffering, and death—things that were not there before the transgression of Adam. Similarly, the curse of Ham due to his transgression against his father, Noah, who was considered favored in the eyes of God, brought permanent division among his children. There will always be those who are obedient and those who are transgressors. Throughout history, men and women would receive individual rewards or consequences from God according to their faith in Him and their deeds in following His commandments rather than receive global judgment such as the Great Flood.

ONE SAVIOR FOR THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE

At this point it is important to reflect on the role that Christ played in the differences among the human race in terms of appearance and skin color. As the Creator of man, God's role of mercy and justice was to reconcile our differences through Christ's sacrifice. His judgment of us is not based on any skin color, social status, or appearance. Indeed, His definition of greatness appears to be based on being a servant for all—a totally different concept of our view of greatness and mastery. In that framework, we can accept His will of permitting differences in our appearances and skin color as a form of diversity. He never intended to create different status levels in the human race. These differences were misused by Satan to create discrimination and

persecution among people. When Christ came to the world, He chose to live the life of a servant and was a spiritual rather than worldly Master. It is our responsibility to resist such misuse and live by the Lord's example of servanthood. In Mark 10:43-45, we see Him telling us what it means to be a servant:

⁴³Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

And also in Galatians 3:27-28, we see the true unity found in the common faith in Christ,

²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 6:5-8, we see true servanthship found in serving Christ regardless of the conditions,

⁵Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

In Colossians 3:9-11, we see true knowledge and liberty that becomes Christ-like and goes beyond skin and national origin,

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his

deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Having defined Jesus Christ's role in reconciling our differences by the example of His life of servitude on earth, it is important for us to replicate His example toward one another. Sin leaves scars that can only be healed by following the ways of the Lord. Therefore, followers of Christ have a key role in being a light to the world. Every time they look at someone as equal in the eyes of God and move beyond skin deep, they reflect Christ's image. Just as Christ died for the entire human race making Christianity a religion for all, Christians in turn should demonstrate love and equality toward others.

God will never abandon us but will continually guide us to salvation and redeem us from our original sins as we will see through His carefully chosen people and prophets. His mission is to get us to heaven to take our designated place among the nine hosts. Sin, aided by the harshness and emptiness of this world, separated us as one family from each other and from God. God crafted the plan to rid us from this sin and bring us back to Him as victorious beings worthy of being created in His image provided we choose to accept Him as our Savior.

[THE HUMAN RACE AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD](#)

The entire earth was populated from the descendants of Noah—Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Noah's three sons reflect the three genetic races that populated the earth (*Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid*) and were a contributing factor to these three broad classifications (see Genesis 10). Most of the descendants of Japheth settled towards the north, more likely towards

Europe, and became known as the *Caucasoid* or European. Most of Shem's descendants settled towards the middle and near east, more likely towards Asia, and became known as the *Mongoloid* or Chinese. Most of Ham's descendants settled towards south of the land of Ararat near Africa where the ark rested (see Genesis 8:4). This people group became known as the *Negroid* or African. Each one of these groups, equal in the eyes of God, contributed in pioneering the civilization of mankind in one form or another as early as the Nubian and the Egyptian (Ham), Greek and Roman (Japheth), and Oriental (Shem) civilizations.

Out of Noah's son, Japheth, came the coastline peoples or nations of the Gentiles who were later separated according to their own language following the events of the Tower of Babel. This event will be addressed in more detail later. Genesis 10:5 stated that, "From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations." And in Genesis 10:32 it was stated, "³²These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood."

The word *Gentiles* would later represent nations saved through the coming of the Savior who descended from Shem, the middle of Noah's three sons (see Genesis 11:10-26).

Ham became the father of Canaan whose offspring followed ungodly ways in their worship and were enemies of Israel. From the sons of Ham came Nimrod who was a mighty character and a major influence in the building of the Tower of Babel.

Shem became the father of Nahor and Terah from whom came Abraham then Isaac and Jacob and eventually the Lord Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1). God chose to come in physical form through the lineage of Shem.

It is interesting to look at the reduction in life spans from Adam's time (see Genesis 11:10) until today. For Adam and his immediate children, a lifespan was less than 1,000 years. Following the Great Flood, a lifespan was less than 500 years and by Abraham's time, a lifespan was less than 200 years. It is possible that a day, known to us as 24 hours, may not have been established until after the Great Flood and the new life on earth.

[TOWER OF BABEL: THE END OF ONE LANGUAGE](#)

Before the events of the Tower of Babel, the earth had one language (see Genesis 11:1). God spoke with Adam in the Garden of Eden using some language. It might have been a language similar to the ancient Greek script or even Latin or Aramaic similar to what Jesus used here on earth. In any case, God Himself introduced new languages to man and it was the most important event to happen to mankind since His creation in the Garden of Eden or the Great Flood. The ability to communicate separates mankind from all the other creations of God. Language is His gift that reflects man's supremacy having been created in the image of a Supreme Being. Nothing in nature could prove the supremacy of man but the ability to communicate with one another in translatable written language and speech. Mathematics supplements language and speech and is a unique attribute invented by mankind. It became the common language utilized by humanity to describe and quantify the fields of science, engineering, and medicine.

When man began building the Tower of Babel, he was looking for ways to equate himself to God by attempting to reach heaven by his own means (see Genesis 11:4). In this event, man fell victim to the sin of pride yet again, similar to the sin of Adam and to the sin of mankind that resulted in the Great Flood. As stated in Coptic tradition, all of these sins had a common root—

satisfying the human ego, thus following the example of the old serpent Satan in putting pride before God. As a result, God confused man's language and drove them apart, dispersing them throughout the earth according to language.

After the dispersion at the Tower of Babel, man began to spread to lands that did not bear names as they do today. Just as people began to carry names for their own identification, names for lands were soon needed. The first name given by God the Creator was "Adam." God then gave Adam the authority to name all living things (see Genesis 2:19) including his wife, who he named "Eve" because "she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). Adam's children carried the same authority of naming one another as well as naming nations and lands. The power to name a person or land does not remove God's continuous ownership of that person or land. Man will always be a temporary visitor on earth, not an owner. God stated in Leviticus 25:23, "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me." In the Arabic translation the verse literally means *you are strangers and my visitors*. The land belonged to God not to the people although they were responsible for its cultivation and progress as part of His plan for their survival.

Many more languages have been created since the Tower of Babel. When mankind is united in His kingdom, there may be only one language—the language of unity, love, peace, and edification (see 1 Corinthians 14:5-6, 12, 26-27) understood by all and for the glorification of God in His kingdom.

[LESSONS FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL](#)

Let's look briefly at why God the Father prevented His children from completing the Tower of Babel, a project they felt was needed. God is not

against man building things or being creative. Looking back through history on what humanity has achieved, we begin to understand some of God's wisdom and planning for mankind to be technologically advanced.

In God's planning for humanity, it could be deduced that several things had to occur in a certain order for mankind to build, invent, and develop. First, the need for man to disperse over all the earth and not be able to communicate directly would be a long term benefit in the earlier stages of human civilization. People would develop independent ideas. Nations with different languages would result in different cultures, which, through later interactions of civilization would result in great achievements for all mankind. For example, what the ancient Egyptians achieved in their language, culture, and ideas would benefit the ancient Greeks who, in turn, would add that knowledge to the discoveries of the ancient Chinese on the other side of the world that would also benefit mankind. With such combined achievements, men and women progressed from building towers to achieving many great things through the centuries.

[GOD'S PLAN FOR THE SALVATION OF NOAH'S CHILDREN](#)

Although Noah's descendants were children of one family, as a result of the events of the Tower of Babel they were driven apart in confusion with the various languages. As the people gathered together according to their particular languages, cultures and traditions began to emerge and were used to dominate and subdue fellow mankind, quickly creating barriers that alienated people from one another. Regardless of all the barriers between the descendants of Noah, the Creator had only one plan for salvation of all people.

The Lord will not leave Himself without a witness, yet a struggle will

always exist between the children of God who reject Him and those who accept Him. Those who accept Him will replace Satan in God's kingdom. Because of the inherent sin that impeded man, God's plan for salvation included restoration to our original image as people who love one another. The Holy Spirit has a major role in our lives in this restoration. His unrelenting work to make individuals Christ-like is a lifetime effort.

[THE HUMAN DIMENSION](#)

Regardless of where we live, we long for the company of one another. We laugh, cry, rejoice, grieve, and worry together. We marry, bear children, and bury those who have gone before us. We share the same air and live together in uncertainty regarding the future. Like our fathers, we have to work the land to survive and look for ways to make living easier.

As individuals, we are basically composed of similar attributes. We have spiritual and physical dimensions that include sociological and psychological properties. For example, the ability to produce children is common to all of humanity. Likewise, the composition of a typical human personality has been the same since the creation of man. The reactions, needs, struggles, motivations, and value systems are directly defined by the complex interaction of five dimensions: spiritual, psychological, sociological, emotional, and physical. This reflects the fundamental principle that we are created in the image of God. All five of the dimensions of the human race were passed on through the genes of Noah. In order to better understand the human race having *one nature*, let's look at all five of these dimensions.

[ONE NATURE: SPIRITUAL DIMENSION](#)

The spiritual part of the human being looks for the unknown or the

afterlife—the part of us that came from the breath of God and is eternal. This dimension does not rely on physical food for survival; its source of strength is always from its origin—God. Our spiritual dimension gravitates toward a relationship with its Creator relying on some form of communication. We know one of the most common methods for communication is prayer. In Christianity, other methods that feed this spiritual dimension include attending Church, receiving the Church sacraments, involvement in missionary work, listening to sermons, following Christ's actions in helping the needy and visiting the sick, and servant leadership in positions of responsibility. The spiritual dimension is what separates humans from all other creation. The spirit never dies; it resides in one of two places eternal heaven or eternal Hades. The entire salvation work of Jesus Christ is intended for mankind to live forever with Him in His kingdom as the tenth host in heaven in the utmost state of glory awarded by the Lord for all those who won their warfare against Satan. They are the people from all corners of the earth who remained obedient to the commandments of the Lord.

ONE NATURE: PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The psychological dimension of the human being reflects the power to reason and judge through mental capabilities. Man is enabled to pursue knowledge in understanding the mysteries of nature and the laws of God's kingdom. We are created in the image of God and that includes the freedom of choice. The psychological dimension of our human nature is greatly influenced by that choice. For example, after looking at identical scientific facts, one may conclude that there is a God while another may conclude there is not. There are no restrictions to what we can choose. Because freedom of choice is inherently built into our nature, we have the ability to think and act independent of the image in which we were created. This freedom of choice

can go beyond instincts; it consists of a complex nature that makes man the only being capable of near unlimited imaginations and creativity similar to his Creator. In the case of the original sin against God in the Garden of Eden, man had the choice to eat or not to eat from the forbidden tree. Nothing was *forcing him to eat* from it or *preventing him from eating* it. He ultimately made his own choice even though the serpent misguided him.

Adam and Eve had seen God. As human beings, their psychological dimension must have been significantly affected by His splendor. The serpent led them to believe that they could be like Him knowing good and evil by simply eating from the forbidden tree (see Genesis 3:5). Once they made that choice, Adam and Eve did become like God knowing good and evil. Scripture says, “. . .the man has become like one of Us” (Genesis 3:22). They kept their freedom to choose between good and evil, but they did not become like God in glory. Instead, they lost their place in Paradise, felt their nakedness, and thought they would surely die. Everything Satan told them was a lie with the exception of knowing good and evil, a burden in itself. They would have to live the rest of their lives choosing between good and evil. Man and woman have the freedom of choice and will always be accountable for such choices. In this psychological dimension, they are no different than Lucifer who chose to rebel against God and was held accountable for eternity. If we are to replace Lucifer in heaven, we must make the right choice as an intelligent creation of God capable of differentiating between good and evil and choosing the good by following the commandments of God.

After eating from the forbidden tree, man and woman became aware of their nakedness, a sign of the loss of innocence and purity (see Genesis 3:7). They were punished for their transgressions and were removed from Paradise and forced to live in a world full of trials and tribulations. They found

themselves in a new psychological dimension where their desires and feelings were constantly challenged in their freedom of choice between good and evil. They would no longer enjoy the same peace and comfort they enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before their fall.

ONE NATURE: SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The sociological part of human nature reflects a complex and intriguing dimension about God in whose image we are created. God created us to have fellowship with Him not just in His eventual kingdom but here on earth through mutual love, prayers, and worship. Simply stated, *God desires the company of mankind*. Psalm 149:4 states, “For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.” Similarly, mankind is created to seek the fellowship of other human beings for social interaction and communication and to jointly worship their Creator. Positive sociological influences can result in stable personalities and positive contributors to society. On the other hand, negative sociological influences can lead to adverse influence on behavior if a person is in the company of evildoers. The sociological dimensions of man were significantly impacted by the original sin of Adam. When people have evil thoughts, they are allowing themselves to be in Satan’s company and be influenced by him. Man was not only exposed to the thoughts of Satan but reached a point where he fell deep into sin to the point of doing only evil such as prior to the Great Flood.

ONE NATURE: EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

The emotional nature of a human being is the bridge that connects us to one another, to nature and the world around us, and to other living creatures. Most importantly, it connects us to God Himself. It is the emotional part of

the human being that makes life vibrant. Emotions allow us to share our happiness and sadness, our losses and gains, and our ups and downs with the people around us. At a spiritual level, getting emotional with God can be very healthy and consoling. When our heart is completely full of God's love, we can rid ourselves of the fear of death and feel a complete sense of liberation from bondage to this world.

A good example of the importance of the emotional dimension is David. In his Psalms, David expresses his relationship to God by singing to the Creator of his soul. His role as a king of Israel did not keep him from seeking God as his source of strength. When he sinned against God in adultery with the wife of another man, that sin did not separate him from loving his God. His repentance became a model of forgiveness for each of us and showed us that in the end the love of God will prevail over all of our shortcomings. Without emotions, humanity would be cold and stagnant.

The gradual erosion of emotional love toward God and toward one another is in itself a sign of the end of the times; we are reaching the point of fulfilling the prophecy of His Second Coming as stated by the Lord in Matthew 24:12, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

ONE NATURE: PHYSICAL DIMENSION

A human's physical dimension reflects all of the dimensions of man combined. The physical body demonstrates an individual's ideologies and belief system through behaviors. For example, the way we dress and where we go for social interactions is part of the physical dimension. In a similar way our desire to rest, exercise, eat, and drink so that we can maintain good health is part of the physical dimension.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they felt naked—their physical bodies were impacted by their sin of disobedience. They saw one another differently because the cloth of innocence and glory that surrounded their bodies was no longer present. Adam and Eve lost their heavenly clothing and God Himself had to make them physical clothing out of animal skins to cover their physical nakedness (see Genesis 3:21). This was the first time an animal was sacrificed because of the sin of Adam and Eve signifying the ultimate sacrifice God Himself would make on the cross.

Since the transgression in the Garden of Eden, mankind's struggle to properly cover his nakedness with modest clothing has remained constant. Before sin, the physical body of man did not require any form of covering because it was covered with glory. After sin, the nakedness of man became shameful because man lost his glorified body. Therefore, nakedness of the physical body became associated with sin and impurity. Men and women can thus choose to treat their bodies with a sense of responsibility toward society or choose to expose their bodies in an ungodly way tempting fellow human beings into the sin of lust.

[CONCLUDING REMARKS](#)

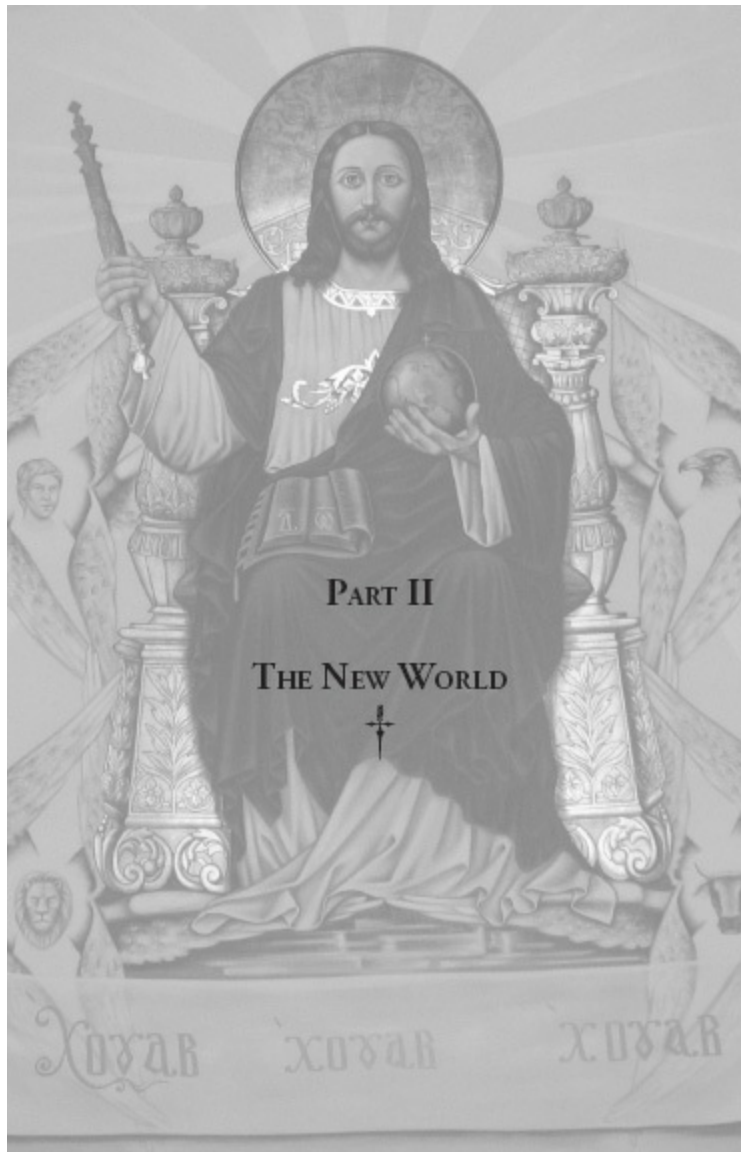
God's desire for the ultimate salvation of man eventually led Him to plan for His First Coming on earth as the peak of all efforts. To accomplish this, He chose a descendant from Shem from which to bring salvation to the whole human race. The birth of Noah marked a new era in history. When the *sons of God* began to multiply, they became less and less aware of their relationship as brothers and sisters to one another and began to view the *daughters of men* as beautiful and as objects for sexual pleasures. This led men into ungodly relationships and resulted in the destruction of all mankind

in the Great Flood.

After the Flood, man spoke one common language and was of one ethnic group. His mission was to populate the earth, work the land, and have dominion over all living things. The entire earth was populated from the descendants of Noah—Ham, Shem, and Japheth. However, man again fell into pride, the same sin of Adam, when he began building the Tower of Babel to reach heaven by his own means and *equate* himself to God. Because of our inherent sin, God's plan for salvation included restoration to our original image as people who can love one another.

The next phase of the history or *His story with mankind* begins when God used the Desert Fathers in the long process of choosing the nation of Israel for His First Coming on earth.





CHAPTER 3

ISRAEL: ITS DESERT FATHERS, FIRST PROPHET, TRADITION AND LAND



The next phase of the history or His story with mankind begins when God used the Desert Fathers of Israel in the long process of choosing and preparing the nation of Israel for His First Coming on earth. The nation would have to adopt certain laws and principals for Him to accomplish His mission of coming to earth in the flesh as a Man. The Desert Fathers and the prophets were used in this preparation for a two-fold purpose.

First, the prophets continuously provided symbols or prophecies reminding us of God's intended visit so that when He came, He could be the only One capable of fulfilling such prophecies and thus alleviating doubts in the minds of future generations (see Isaiah 40:3, 5; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:11; Lamentations 3). This is critically important since His visit to us involved God being crucified on the cross, which would pose a great challenge to understanding His mission and the purpose of salvation in the minds of not only the believers but all mankind.

Second, the Desert Fathers directly demonstrated to us the life and behaviors we should adopt as heavenly creatures, thereby completing His work in restoring us back to His original intention when He created us in His image.

The Desert Fathers of Israel were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua. These were the men who the Lord used to accomplish the founding of the nation of Israel as he promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3:

¹Now the Lord had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father's house,

To a land that I will show you.

²I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

From these words comes the term “Promised Land.” This land, defined in Genesis 15:18-21 and Exodus 23:31, formed a large territory: from the Mediterranean on the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Gulf of Aqaba (symbolizing the words “river of Egypt” in Genesis 15:18) and the Euphrates river towards the east, to Canaan (or Jerusalem) in the west. God’s promise to Israel of this piece of land had been fulfilled during Israel’s glory days under King David.

About a thousand years after Abraham, Samuel became the first prophet of Israel (see 1 Samuel 3). According to Coptic tradition, both the Desert Fathers and the prophets of Israel lived in the hope that one day the Lord Himself would come to deliver Israel from the grip of Satan, the real enemy of mankind, and restore man back to Paradise. Thus, comes the term “the awaited Messiah” (see John 1:41; 4:25-26; Daniel 9:20-27). The term “awaited” is a combination of Scripture and Coptic Orthodox tradition. In Arabic, the term “awaited Messiah” is commonly known as “El-Messih El-

Montazar” and can be applied to both His First and Second comings. The term is still applicable today.

The lineage of the Desert Fathers begins with Abraham who was the father of nations and was followed by his sons Isaac and Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are considered to be the Desert Fathers. God identified Himself to the people of Israel as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The people of Israel found their fathers to be great examples of worshiping God from the heart. In a similar way, the Coptic Church finds in its Desert Fathers—St. Antony who was the first Christian monk, St. Pachom who established rules of monastic life, St. Paula who was the first anchorite, and others like St. Makarios, St. Moses the Black, St. Mina the wondrous, and as recent as the twentieth century, Pope Cyril the VI—great role models of worshiping the Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ from the heart. We begin our journey in understanding the Desert Fathers with Abraham and Sarah.

[ABRAHAM \[2175 – 2000 BC\]](#)

God’s first and foremost role for Abraham was to become the father of the nation of Israel. Perhaps God saw in Abraham loyalty, true love, and genuine faith toward Him. The Coptic Church called Abraham a man who was dear to God. Only God knows the true reason for His choice of Abraham as the father of Israel.

Another role Abraham had as a Desert Father was in his encounter with Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18-20), the righteous king of Salem who was also priest over ancient Jerusalem. Melchizedek’s priesthood had similar attributes to Christ’s priesthood: a unique High Priest and a priest of God Most High. Following his victory from war, Abraham visited with

Melchizedek and was blessed by him. In turn, Abraham offered him a tithe of ten percent of all that was captured by Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings who took his brother Lot captive (see Genesis 14:15-16). But most likely, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils (tenth of the captured herd) (see Hebrews 7:1-4). This was the first occasion in Scripture of giving to the Lord. Abraham's voluntary offering to a king was a reflection of God's voluntary offering of His Own Son for the redemption of His creation.

Without being told to do so, men with the heart of Abraham feel indebted to give back to God a portion of the gifts He gives (see Genesis 28:22). Jacob repeated the same tradition he acquired from his fathers. Tithing ten percent eventually became a standard that the Lord required from Israel in the Mosaic Law (see Numbers 18:21, 24, 26; Deuteronomy 14:22; 26:12) to meet the needs of the Levites (priesthood), the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Israel became a nation that honored His name and was chosen for His coming.

God gave Abram the name Abraham after He declared His intention to make him a father of many nations (see Genesis 17:5). Israel was where the priesthood in the order of Aaron was established. The priesthood of Aaron administered the Law and was a different priesthood than Melchizedek who represented the priesthood of Christ. Israel was chosen to be the gateway for all other nations to come to Christ. It was through Israel that Christ came to the world. Abraham as the father of Israel was thus the father of the nation of priests established beginning with Aaron, that is, to the order of Aaron (see Hebrews 7:11).

Finally, this priesthood came to fruition in the nations of the world through the order or in the likeness of Melchizedek (see Hebrews 7:11, 15-17, 20) through the ministry of the Most High of all priests, Jesus Christ

Himself. Melchizedek, identified as “the priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18) and king of Salem, represents the priesthood of Christ in the New Testament. Melchizedek was a righteous man whom Abraham looked to for a blessing. In Psalm 110:4, David refers to Jesus the Messiah as “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” Jesus is the Most High Priest and His priesthood is everlasting. Hebrews states, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (7:17) and “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually” (7:3). Jesus is considered a priest in the order of Melchizedek because, like Melchizedek, He is not under the priesthood of the Old Testament that began with Aaron. Christ is the only One who was sinless and needed no sacrifice for any sins (see Hebrews 7:26-27). Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine symbolizing Christ giving His body and blood for our redemption.

One of the seven sacraments of the Coptic Church is the ordination of priests after the order of Melchizedek, a title reserved for the Pope of the church. In the Coptic Church, the Pope is not a man without sin because only Jesus is the sinless One, but he receives the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek meaning he is empowered by Christ to be the shepherd of the church for preserving the faith. This sacrament of ordination signifies that the Pope is a servant, apostle, and disciple of the Lord in leading the church. This apostolic succession in the Coptic Church started with St. Mark who received the authority to administer the body and blood of Christ and preserve the faith from Jesus Christ, along with the other disciples and apostles. The Coptic Church has preserved the Christian faith without any changes since the time of St. Mark.

Abraham developed a one-on-one relationship with God to the point of absolute trust and obedience to His will. As we will see, this was revealed

when he was tested by God to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrificial lamb. In this act, Abraham reflected God the Father when He offered His only Son as the sacrificial Lamb for the whole world.

God asked for Abraham's full attention and called him away from the distractions of family, friends, and society to a new environment where, according to Coptic tradition, he would only have time for God Himself. God informed Abraham how He intended to use him and what he should do:

¹Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1–3).

When God gives someone a mission, He demands their full dedication to serve His purposes. Abraham responded without hesitation and put God first above family and friends in his life. He cultivated a relationship with God as did his predecessors Enoch and Noah (see Genesis 5:21-23; 6:9) who walked with God. The phrase "families of the earth" symbolizes the diversity in the nations of the earth following the events at the Tower of Babel. God chose Abraham to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming of God on earth as the Savior Jesus Christ through whom the ultimate blessing will be fulfilled.

The journey of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, originated from their native land Ur, a known and populous city in Mesopotamia or the current nation of Iraq. Ur was located on the southern end of the Euphrates River near its connection with the Tigris River, one of the rivers related to the Garden of Eden that is also believed to have been located in the area of

Babylon in the Mesopotamian Valley. As God directed, Abraham left his home country of Haran and journeyed to the Land of Canaan where the Lord appeared to him and promised to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Canaan included the current land of Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan and centered around Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Following God's revelation about the Promised Land, Abram built an altar to the Lord, perhaps the first place of worship in the Promised Land. In Coptic tradition, the word "promise" is directly related to or a continuation of the original promise that God gave man and woman in the Garden of Eden: "He shall bruise your head" (Genesis 3:15). The Lord shall bruise the head of the serpent that made man and woman sin against Him. The fulfillment of this promise to Adam and Eve involved His coming to earth as a human, God Incarnate, through the lineage of Abraham to bruise the head of the serpent and provide salvation to mankind. The land He prepared for this mission was the Promised Land. In the Coptic faith, this is the land promised to humanity to be the staging place for their salvation.

Because of Abraham's close relationship with the Lord, he may have understood that this was God's plan toward man. During his life on earth, he never hesitated to respond properly to God and was used by Him to be a father for the nation of people that He was preparing for His coming. The key role that Abraham played in the history of this story of salvation is that through his own personal belief in God, he set the grass roots for his children to know of the existence of God. Abram made sure that the teachings and traditions he acquired through his personal experience with God would be passed on to his sons and daughters after him and in doing so, prepared a nation for the First Coming of the Lord.

Abraham's short visit to Egypt due to a famine (see Genesis 12:10) was the first time that nation was introduced in the Bible. Egypt played an

important role in the preparation of one of the chosen children of Abraham, the nation of Israel and the coming of the Lord. One of the roles of Egypt was that it was the place where the people of Israel went into exile for 430 years. It was also where the Lord took refuge for about three years to escape King Herod who wanted to kill Him when He came to earth as a baby.

In Genesis 15:1, the Lord God sent an assuring message to Abraham that we can all identify with: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” God rewarded Abraham for his great deeds by becoming a shield from danger and adversity throughout his life.

The remainder of the story of Abraham sheds light on how he developed an intimate relationship with God. Abraham’s descendants were the nation prepared for His ultimate visit to earth for our salvation. Abraham was first told about the location of the Promised Land where his descendants settled and where God came as Incarnate Man. In Coptic theology, the Promised Land is the ancient land of Canaan or currently Israel and specifically Jerusalem and more precisely Bethlehem where the Lord was born as a human.

God’s promise to Abraham of the Promised Land was followed by the promise of a son conceived by Sarah, his barren wife. The child’s name was to be Isaac and he was part of God’s mission to establish the chosen nation required for God’s plan of salvation of mankind from the original consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve. It is Isaac with whom God chose to establish His covenant (see Genesis 17:21).

God tested Abraham (see Genesis 22:1) by asking him to offer his only, long awaited, and beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice to Him, prematurely ending his life. As we will see in the story of Job, when God tests someone, He is revealing something unique about the person. This was probably very confusing to Abraham since Isaac was the promised son from whom nations

and kings would come to existence (see Genesis 17:16). It is evident that Abraham's relationship with God was such that he had no doubt that God was capable of anything even raising people from death. Based on this faith, Abraham concluded that obeying Him was the best and only option. Abraham also may have realized that he was dealing with God who could be testing his faith, a faith that did not initially believe that God could be capable of giving him a son from a wife who could no longer bear children (see Genesis 17:17). Through these experiences Abraham learned not to doubt God.

Abraham followed God's commandment to offer his son as a sacrifice to Him, giving us a glimpse into His intention to offer His Son as a sacrifice for mankind's salvation. Isaac represented Jesus Christ the sacrificial lamb and Abraham represented the Father who offered His only chosen and promised Son. Surely Abraham was pleased to see that God ultimately held him back from hurting his only son by providing him a ram caught in a thicket by its horns (see Genesis 22:13). Instead of Isaac, that ram became the burnt offering for God. The fact that Abraham found the ram behind him meant the Lord was there before Abraham and was planning for the salvation of man as stated in John 8:58 when Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." The fact that the ram was caught by its horns represents the Lord forgoing His glory and taking the image of a slave to come as the offering for the sake of all mankind. However, this time the sacrifice of the Son would not be held back. In His discussions with the Jews, Jesus answered, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). In this, the Lord Jesus Christ alluded to Abraham's joy in seeing Jesus as the sacrificial lamb and rejoiced knowing that He is the true Savior yet to come for all mankind.

God chose one of the mountains in the land of Moriah (see Genesis

22:2) for Abraham to offer Isaac. Later, this place became the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and is currently the center of the struggle for ownership between the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael. The significance of that event is that the Father was to offer His Son as a sacrifice. The Son was to fulfill a commandment from His God, the Creator, and had full faith and obedience toward God in doing so. The location of the sacrifice was significant in that it gave another hint of His coming to earth when He stated to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." This was complementary to the words spoken to Eve in Paradise after the fall that the seed of Eve shall bruise the head of the serpent (see Genesis 3:15). It is not buildings or locations that matter to God but events that move us toward His promised coming to earth to the Promised Land for the implementation of His plan of salvation. The plan involved Abraham's purchase of real estate at the center of the Promised Land that would be the burial site for Abraham. His death would also signify his settling down in a land away from the nomadic life he lived. This land known as the cave (see Genesis 23) is Hebron in Canaan.

Abram had another son from whom a great nation would descend. Ishmael was his son from Hagar, an Egyptian maidservant to Sarai who may have come with Abram and Sarai from their short visit in Egypt. Sarai believed that her barren state was an irreversible condition. God permitted her to get to this stage before fulfilling His promise that she would deliver Isaac, the child of the covenant. In the meantime, Sarai ran out of patience waiting on God to act on His promise and reverted to her own method of fulfilling God's promise. Abram and Sarai ended up with a son through the womb of her maid Hagar, but it did not change anything from God's original plan of having a son from Sarai's womb. It was through Mary, a descendant of Sarai that the Savior eventually came.

Since Abram would become a father of many nations other than just that of Isaac and Ishmael, God renamed him Abraham. Sarai was also renamed Sarah because of her role as the mother of Isaac who was to be the father of many kings yet to come and from whom the King of kings would descend as a human being when He came to earth.

There are many lessons about relying on human logic in the story of Abraham. Most importantly is that man cannot change God's plan for his salvation; it is designed to yield maximum results so that man and woman can regain their place in His kingdom and recover from the original sin committed in Paradise. Man's actions have consequences that become part of our history with God.

The consequences of Abraham and Sarah "helping" God fulfill His promise of a child continue to result in conflict in the Middle East between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac. Regardless of the details, this conflict focuses on land claimed equally by both sons of Abraham. On this property, the descendants of Isaac built the Temple of Solomon according to God's directions. It was through the lineage of David and his son, King Solomon (900 BC), that God came Incarnate to earth for the mission of humanity's salvation. After a long history of conflict between the children of Ishmael and Isaac, the status of this property evolved into another dimension at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the same location, a place of holiness to the children of Ishmael resides directly over the remains of sections of the children of Isaac's holy place, the Temple of Solomon. The existing place is a typical dome design construction consistent with Byzantine style and is known as the Dome of the Rock or Holy Rock.

The significance of this ancient place is two-fold. For the descendants of Isaac, it is the place where Abraham offered His promised son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to God, representing Jesus Christ as the One to be offered as the

sacrificed Son on the cross for the salvation of mankind from the sin of Adam and Eve. For the descendants of Ishmael, it is the place where an alternate messenger other than Christ was trusted to reflect faith in God. The message from their prophet was not based on Christ's work of salvation. This started around 600 years after Christ's First Coming on earth and may have resulted from confusion about who Christ was and the intent of His mission. This faith came to be known as Islam and continues today. The descendants of Hagar until this moment in history had rejected Christ as their Savior. This rejection may continue until His Second Coming for the judgment of this world or until God sees fit to change these conditions where His salvation could be recognized. The descendants of Sarah are in a similar condition, but their acceptance of Christ is anticipated to occur before His Second Coming (see Romans 11).

In the Coptic Church a possible temporary solution to this problem is to share the Holy Rock by both descendants of Abraham. For example, the rock structure can be surrounded by two holy buildings housing each of the descendants' places of worship with the rock itself becoming a common ground. The descendants of Ishmael could perhaps build on the west side (west bank) and the descendants of Isaac on the east side of the rock structure. This solution would be temporary since it would not lead the children of Ishmael and Isaac to ultimate recognition of Christ, but it may serve to permit peace among these nations. Such peace could lead to opposite but independent results. Either, they would come to the recognition of Christ when they realize that their rejection of Him led them nowhere and their sacrifices carry no real meaning and are essentially obsolete, or they would continue to reject Him as Incarnate God who came to earth to deal with us face-to-face and Man-to-man.

Since their rejection of Christ for over two thousand years, the

descendants of Isaac remain unable to offer any mosaic sacrifices in the Temple of Solomon until that temple is rebuilt. The primary hope of the nation of Israel is to see that temple rebuilt. The challenge facing all of the descendants of Abraham is to recognize that God is more than capable to come to earth to deal with man face-to-face especially if it directly serves His mission of saving them.

God's encounter with Abraham was perhaps one of the most important revelations about God coming in the image of man because it affected humanity as a whole. In Genesis 18, the Lord and two other men appeared to Abraham to inform him that Sarah would have a child from her own womb. From this encounter, we learn that Almighty God is willing to humble Himself to our human level in order to speak to us one-on-one. He may communicate with His creation through physical manifestations such as He did with Moses in a pillar of fire or a thunderous voice. He may also communicate through prophets or men or women of faith. Judging from Abraham's discussions with Sarah about bearing Isaac, the promised son, he recognized that the One visiting him was the Lord Himself.

It is interesting to compare the reaction of Sarah to that of St. Mary, the Mother of God, when both women were informed about their impending pregnancy with a promised son. Sarah was no longer at the age of conceiving children and St. Mary had no intention to marry. When informed by God about being a mother, Sarah "laughed within herself" (Genesis 18:12-15) while St. Mary said, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), i.e., the will of the Lord. This reveals God's intimate knowledge of our feelings and intentions as our Creator. It also reveals that the One who visited Abraham was clearly God Himself. God was talking to Abraham while Sarah was listening from inside a tent and laughing within herself. Even though Sarah denied her actions, God insisted that she laughed at the promise He

gave Abraham of her conceiving a child even as an old woman. Abraham chose to believe in God; when he got to know Him through their one-on-one relationship, he came to love and respect Him.

[ISAAC \[2075 – 1950 BC\]](#)

Isaac as the next Desert Father is important to us because he represents a one-on-one, Father-Son relationship that involved a Father offering His Son as a sacrificial lamb. Isaac, as promised, was born from Sarah and became the father of Israel. His brother, Ishmael, became the father of the nations of Arabia. The departure of these two brothers from a common home to separate lands occurred following the birth of Isaac. Ishmael played no role in the life of the Savior; he was simply the son of Abraham. It was Isaac's descendants from whom Christ the Savior of the world would eventually come.

God's plan for salvation involved Abraham's son, Isaac, who continued the pursuit of God's promise to build the nation from whom the Lord would ultimately come. With God's help, Abraham carefully chose a bride for Isaac. He knew the woman could not be from the daughters of the Canaanites where he was dwelling but needed to be from a people who had faith in the God of Abraham. So, Isaac's wife-to-be was from a distant location from his own country and family, most likely from the people of Mesopotamia or ancient Ur (currently Syria and Iraq) where Abraham started his initial immigration journey (see Genesis 11:27-31; 12:1-6). Abraham saw that the marriage of Isaac had the potential of creating a generation who could lead the people away from God. In that respect, Abraham unknowingly laid the foundation for a nation chosen to be prepared for the coming of the Savior.

With the departure of his father, Abraham, Isaac became the chosen son (the one God promised to give to Abraham from Sarah), chosen to carry out

the plan of God for the establishment of the nation of Israel from which the Messiah would come. As for Ishmael, Isaac's brother from Abraham and whose mother was Hagar the Egyptian, he continued to multiply to many nations "twelve princes according to their nations" (Genesis 25:12-16).

JACOB [~ 2000 – 1850 BC]

Isaac's wife Rebekah became pregnant with two sons (see Genesis 25:20-28). It was customary for the older son to have certain privileges, take a leadership role in the family, and have more shares in inheritance than the younger son(s). However, contrary to tradition, Rebekah's older son, Esau, became the one to serve the younger son, Jacob. This indicated that the Lord does not necessarily follow established tradition but must have seen that the younger son, Jacob, was more prepared in spirit and soul to be pleasing to Him in worship and obedience. Also, Esau was a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah in his choices of foreign wives (see Genesis 26:34-35). Thus, he did not follow the tradition of his family set forth by Abraham in choosing to marry a godly woman. Jacob's mother Rebekah saw him as more worthy of his father's blessing (see Genesis 27:5-10). As such, Jacob was chosen as part of the grand plan of God's salvation of man through the establishment of the nation of Israel and those subsequently born in it.

Later in his life, Jacob received the blessing of his father, Isaac. Consistent with the blessing of an elder son, Isaac (and his descendants) was given the privilege of having his mother's sons bow down to him (see Genesis 27:29). In a similar manner, the wise men represented nations that bowed down to baby Jesus, the descendant of Isaac, when He was laid in a manger.

In his latter years, Isaac ensured that Jacob, the blessed or privileged

son, would have a godly wife who was worthy of his blessing. This wife ultimately played a role in the coming of the Messiah and continued the promise given to Abraham regarding the development and the preparation of the nation of Israel for the Lord's mission (see Genesis 28:1-4). This mission was emphasized in Genesis 28:10-18 where Jacob had a dream of a ladder set up between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending on it. In the eastern churches, including the Coptic Church of Egypt, this ladder is viewed as a representation of St. Mary becoming the means, the ladder, for God to descend to earth. That is, He will Incarnate (take the image of man) and come from His residential heaven into earth. In Genesis 28:13, this was clearly demonstrated when the Lord standing above the ladder saying "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac, the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. . . ." When Jacob awoke from his sleep he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place. . .how awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:16-17). Jacob anointed that place with oil and gave it the name "Bethel" that is, "House of God." The city of Bethlehem where Christ was born is only about 16 miles south of that location. In Genesis 31:13, at a time when Jacob was encountering injustice from his father-in-law, God in another dream again reminded Jacob of this encounter by saying, "I am the God of Bethel. . . ."

A similar event was later recorded in Genesis 32:24 where Jacob wrestled with God. This is one of the most important events where man encountered God, perhaps similar to Abraham's visit by three men, one of whom was God in the image of man (see Genesis 18). Jacob wrestled with the Lord and emerged victorious. No one can see God face-to-face and live, yet Jacob left that place alive and managed to earn His blessing (see Genesis 32:28-30). From Jacob we learn that prayers can be viewed as "wrestling

with the Lord” and that we are not to let go until we receive what we asked for.

Jacob called that place Peniel or “face of God” and left with a significant blessing and a new name—“Israel” meaning “God’s fighter” or “he struggles with God.” This became the name for the nation through whom the coming of the Lord would materialize. It is this nation that the Lord prepared to accept a new set of rules and regulations including the well-known Ten Commandments that ultimately served as a beacon to mankind in his struggle against the evil forces that were working to derail his way to heaven and the reserved place in God’s kingdom. This incident reveals the nature of God as Someone who can interface with man at his own level and develop a relationship with him. Through his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and his own experience with God, Jacob was prepared for such an encounter with the Lord. Further, he was strengthened through his difficult interface with people such as his brother Esau and father-in-law, Laban, and the challenges of his marriage with his wives.

In those days, an ordinary man developing a close relationship with God was something of great value to the Lord. There were no churches or books (Bible) or media or any similar means to remind mankind about God. Yet Jacob loved God even under difficult conditions. Jacob’s intimate relationship with God earned him respect and blessings as well as a new name, Israel, which will be remembered for generations to come. Behind Jacob’s one-on-one encounters with God were revelations of what future generations would experience with God as the Incarnate Jesus Christ.

[JOSEPH \[~ 1900 –1800 BC\]](#)

The story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, was the beginning of a new era in

the history of the people of Israel. God's grand plan continued and Joseph found himself in Egypt as a result of a family dispute. Joseph's brothers saw him as dominating because of the dreams he openly shared with them. Their feelings of resentment made them want to kill him. God intervened through Joseph's older brother, Reuben, and he was thrown into a pit rather than killed (see Genesis 37:21-22). His brothers later removed him from the pit and sold him as a slave to Ishmaelite traders who brought him to Egypt where he spent the rest of his life.

To some extent, the life of Joseph represented the Lord when His Own people did not accept His words and surrendered Him into the hands of the Romans with the intent of harming Him. When jealousy and resentment occupy the heart, it is not surprising that human nature can be capable of delivering such pain and suffering even to those who are considered brothers in the flesh.

Joseph came to Egypt as a slave and through him, the people of Egypt and Israel eventually found refuge from the famine that hit the land. God led Joseph to become a ruler in Egypt. He symbolized Christ who was successful because the Father was with Him. Christ, who came to us born in a stable among animals like a disgraced slave, was able to save the world on the cross and through the glory of the resurrection became the King of kings.

In Egypt, Joseph became a tool in the hands of God. Joseph was a successful man because the Lord was with him (see Genesis 39:2). Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that predicted a famine, managed Egypt's resources, and saved the Egyptians as well as his father and brothers from starvation (see Genesis 41). Joseph's going to Egypt became one of the most important moments in the history of salvation. This was the miraculous exodus and ultimate deliverance of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt. That journey involved many challenges including crossing the Red

Sea and the Sinai wilderness in order to get to the Promised Land. It equates to the deliverance of mankind from the land of the original sin of Adam through baptism to the land of salvation by the Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

Joseph's life involved many successful struggles against sin so that he could have a relationship with God. In one event, he encountered the sinful wife of his master in whose house Joseph lived as overseer. The Lord blessed Joseph in all the things and those blessings were noticed by his Egyptian master. In the absence of her husband, the master's wife saw an opportunity to attract the handsome Joseph and commanded him to sleep with her. He was in a difficult situation because refusing the wife's orders even if they were sinful meant he would lose his job. Joseph inherently knew the commandment about not committing adultery even though it was not yet handed down by God. Joseph knew that even though he was a slave in the eyes of man, he was the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham—the man with the covenant with God. He knew his noble background as a son meant following God's commandments of purity and holiness engraved in the hearts of those who love Him even though there was no written book commanding him to live such lifestyle. He, therefore, declared that he could not commit such a sin against His Father God (see Genesis 39:8-9). Joseph was a continuation of God's plan to always have a witness for Him. Starting with Adam and continuing through Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then Joseph, God left no generation without someone acting as salt of the earth and light to the world in the manner in which they conducted themselves and demonstrated obedience to His commandments with or without written laws.

The greatest highlight of Joseph's life was being raised to be second in command to Pharaoh after interpreting Pharaoh's dream about the pending famine in Egypt. Joseph led the nation in preparations to sustain them

through severe drought that also resulted in Joseph's family including Jacob and his eleven sons, relocating to Egypt (see Genesis 42–47). With Joseph already in Egypt, Jacob then had all twelve of his sons together and thus, the children of Israel started their life in the land of Egypt where eventually Moses was born. This relocation occurred around 1875 BC and continued until around the year 1445 BC, at the time of the Exodus or return from Egypt to the Promised Land, the land of Canaan.

In Jacob's last days on earth, he gathered his twelve sons and blessed each one with their own blessing. Of particular interest was the blessing Jacob gave Judah, the one from whom Christ descended. Jacob directly interfaced with God in the wilderness and saw the ladder to heaven that reminded us yet again of the coming of the Messiah. Jacob's revelations to his twelve sons about Judah's descendants indicated the closeness of this man to God's heart. God used Jacob to tell us about His intended coming to earth as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Following is what Jacob said about his son, Judah. Note the reference about the Lord descending from his genealogy (Genesis 49:8-12):

⁸*“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;*

Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;

Your father's children shall bow down before you.

⁹*Judah is a lion's whelp;*

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

¹⁰*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

¹¹*Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.*

¹²*His eyes are darker than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk.*

When Pharaoh asked Jacob, “How old are you?” Jacob answered, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life. . .” (Genesis 47:8-9). This summarizes the way the early fathers viewed their life on earth: a temporary disposition away from their homeland with God.

Jacob's life on earth marked a critical stage in the history of God with man. Jacob and his twelve sons were chosen to ultimately serve as the bridge in God's grand plan to come to earth. The goal is for the children of Adam to be saved from the sin of their fathers against Him and be restored back into His image in which they were created. With the relocation of the twelve sons of Jacob to Egypt, the birth of the nation of Israel formally began. The twelve sons of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son Terah, the son of

Shem, the son of Noah, the son Seth, the son of Adam became the twelve tribes that formed the nation of Israel. After their experience in Egypt, Israel understood that the best means to defend itself was to rely on God for their protection. God wanted Israel to be an example to all other nations of what it means to be strong and prosperous and rely upon God. In order to achieve that, Israel had to experience dealing with Him through difficult times, trials, and tribulations. God demonstrated that even as slaves in Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth at that time, He could and would liberate them from such superpower, single handedly using Moses, one of the weakest tools. Moses became the one chosen by God to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt.

[MOSES \[~ 1525 – 1400 BC\]](#)

Moses was born around 1525 BC in the land of Egypt where the Israelites had lived for 430 years since the time Jacob and his sons came to the land. A new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, saw the Israelites growing mighty and thereby posed a threat to the security of Egypt. To reduce this threat, Pharaoh decreed to kill all newborn Israelite males. God, however, overrode this decree. As an infant, Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter in a floating ark on the river (see Exodus 2:1-10) and was raised in the house of Pharaoh. His name was chosen by the daughter of Pharaoh and meant "lifted from water" and he was given to a slave serving in Pharaoh's palace to breast feed, who turned out to be his own mother. Pharaoh did not know Moses was an Israelite and thus, Moses was saved from Pharaoh's death decree.

As Moses grew, he learned from the wisdom of the Egyptians (see Acts 7:22), which prepared him for the task of leading the people of Israel out of

that nation. As a son of royalty in the house of Pharaoh, Moses would have been taught the arts, reading, writing, and sporting activities reserved for the king and his royal family. Being raised in the house of Pharaoh prepared Moses for leadership later in his life. It also prepared him to face the residing Pharaoh of Egypt, perhaps the most powerful man on earth at that time. Moses led his people Israel out of Egypt across a sea and a desert under most difficult conditions into a new land to be free from the control of the Egyptians and to lay a foundation for a new nation.

Egypt had become a land of suffering and persecution for the children of Israel because they were slaves serving hard taskmasters. Moses may have known about his Jewish origin from coming to know his true mother or through the daughter of Pharaoh. One day after having learned of his Jewish heritage, Moses saw a fellow Jew suffering under a taskmaster and in defense of the slave, Moses killed the Egyptian. In that event, Moses sought justice for his people. As a result of killing the Egyptian, Moses had to flee to the land of Midian. While herding sheep in that land, Moses had his first encounter with God at the burning bush and was amazed that the tree was on fire but not consumed.

The Coptic faith equates the burning bush to the Mother of God in that she contained the all-consuming God in her womb without being consumed by the fire of His presence inside her. Moses' first few encounters with God revealed that he had some doubts that God could use him to overcome the mighty Pharaoh and deliver His people out of Egypt. In Exodus 3:11-13; 4:1, 10, 13-17, Moses had long discussions with God about this. Eventually, Moses surrendered to God's will and guidance with minimal questioning of His plans and accepted that God would deliver His people out of Egypt.

In one encounter, Moses asked God what name he should give Pharaoh when asked who sent him (see Exodus 3:13-14). God told him to use the

name “I AM WHO I AM.” This signifies eternity from “-ve infinity” to “+ve infinity” (extracted from a mathematical term indicating no beginning and no end) meaning He was not created and will not vanish, HE is GOD, the I AM WHO I AM. God’s deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt can be compared with His deliverance of man from the bondage of sin—single handedly using whatever tool He chooses to accomplish His mission. In this case, God told Moses to go to Pharaoh with a rod in his hand signifying the wooden cross in the hands of the believer in the face of evil. The use of the rod in the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt can be compared to the cross of the Lord Jesus in His mission of salvation.

Moses was sent to lead the Israelites out of slavery, but Pharaoh refused to let them go. Through Moses, God beleaguered Pharaoh and his people with ten plagues that nearly destroyed the land until he finally acknowledged that God the Creator is in charge of the universe. In the last and most significant plague, the Lord sent an angel of death to strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt who did not have the blood of the lamb marked on the lintel and the two door posts of their homes. The Israelites who marked their homes with blood were not affected, but the Egyptians suffered severe loss of their firstborn including Pharaoh losing his own son. As a result, Pharaoh permitted the people of Israel to leave Egypt. The Passover Feast was instituted in memory of the last plague and Israel’s exodus. The feast signifies the blood of Christ shed for the salvation of believers from the pending judgment of God against mankind.

In this story of delivering the people of Israel out of Egypt, we can learn a very important lesson: God is patient. God could be perceived as having neglected the people of Israel for 430 years under the brutal dictatorship of Pharaoh, however God always exhibited patience toward His children. He patiently delivered them from difficulties so as to strengthen their stamina

and perseverance. Israel became strong enough to tolerate a journey through the wilderness and pay the price for freedom from brutality. The Egyptians came to know that no matter how long they were in control of their slaves, they could not control their lives. Both the Israelis and the Egyptians came to know that there is One who is mightier than all and His name is I AM.

There is another explanation as to why the Lord permitted such suffering and bondage for the Israelites for nearly 400 years in Egypt (see Exodus 12:40-41). The land where they would eventually settle, the land that God promised to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, would be the land where the Savior of the world would be born. After all of the bondage and suffering, God rewarded them by choosing them and sanctifying them through suffering to become His people. Many times the Lord chooses suffering and pain to purify our lives, to take us to a better spiritual level, and to reward us with His presence in our lives if we can only persevere with patience.

Even after choosing Moses to lead His people, God found something lacking in the lives of Moses and his wife Zipporah. They had failed to circumcise their son according to the covenant given to Abraham (see Exodus 4:24-26). God is serious about the keeping of His commandments and this failure could have cost Moses his life if not for the swift action of Zipporah who circumcised their son in accordance with God's covenant.

The Passover Feast required the sacrifice of a one-year-old male, unblemished lamb, which represented the Lord Jesus Christ (see Exodus 12:5; Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6; 13:8). The lamb was under observation by the whole assembly for four days until the fourteenth day of the same month and then killed at twilight (see Exodus 12:6). The fathers of the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church helped us understand the significance of the Old Testament foreshadowing of a New Testament event. After entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (see Matthew 21;

Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12), Jesus was interrogated by the Jewish leadership for four days, captured on Thursday and died on the cross on Friday at around 3 pm or twilight (see Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-19; Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-16). The blood dripping off the vertical lintel and horizontal door posts mark the sign of the cross through which the angel of death could not pass (see Exodus 12:7). This signifies the salvation of the children of God from eternal death through the blood of the Lord on the cross. Finally, the roasting of the lamb in fire, eating unleavened bread, and the bitter taste of herbs signifies the Lord suffering on the cross (see Exodus 12:8). Those who would follow His example and carry their own daily cross would do so in bitterness, yet would be saved by believing. This one historical event would last through eternity. Israel celebrating the Passover signifies the church celebrating receiving the body and blood of the Lord. Unleavened bread has no yeast and will bake swiftly, indicating a speedy departure of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt. Also unleavened bread signifies a new beginning. There is no yeast in it that is used from the past to bake new bread. Thus unleavened bread indicates a new life with no connection with the past. In the Coptic Church, the Eucharist is served with leavened bread and the yeast indicates that Christ carried the sins of the world past, present, and future. When the bread is fully baked, the yeast is removed by the heating process. When Christ died on the cross, our sins were removed. We became like unleavened bread and are no longer connected to the sins of the past, but we have a new beginning, a new life with the Lord.

The advent of the Passover demonstrated that blood was required so that salvation from death could occur. This salvation was granted when the angel passing over the homes saw the sign of the blood on their doorstep. The sign was in the form of a cross marked on the top and two sides of the door post (see Exodus 12:22). The First Coming of the Lord required His blood on the

cross for our salvation from death. Thus, this event reveals the mission of Christ on earth in a clear and concise manner.

Israel dedicated their firstborn man or beast, the ones left untouched by the angle of death, for the service of God for life. The term “firstborn” implies “it is Mine,” and that it utterly belongs to God. This includes and indirectly refers to the firstborn baby of Joseph and Mary. Jesus the Christ could not be defeated by death brought into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve; this Son would forever overcome death through His resurrection.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a remembrance to the people of Israel of their exodus from Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. The unleavened bread signifies the body of Christ and when we eat from it, we do so in remembrance of Christ (see Luke 22:19). Through this gift of receiving His body, we are set free from the bondage of sin to be with Him in the Promised Land—His kingdom in heaven. In the Orthodox Church, Eucharist services with the bread and the wine are not just symbol but consubstantial transformation of bread to the body of Christ and wine to the blood of Christ exactly as the Lord said and meant by “My body” and “My blood” in Luke 22:20.

The exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan (Israel) was a miracle. The number of men not including women and children in this exodus was about 600,000 or approximately 1½ to 2 million people (see Exodus 12:37). This would be equivalent to relocating the population of a large city across the country to another state. The relocation required the crossing of a sea into a desolate wilderness. The people had no food or water reserves, no replacement of shoes or clothing. All they had were their personal belongings and some other items they requested from the Egyptians (see Exodus 12:35-36). God continuously intervened to maintain their survival—a testament to

the power of God to care for them.

The next major event in Israel's departure from Egypt was crossing the border of the Red Sea. It represented a significant obstacle in the massive relocation of the people of Israel and could have put an end to their hopes for freedom even after seeing God work wonders for their release. The natural barrier of the sea was no surprise to God nor did it divert Him from His original plan for salvation; it revealed a root problem in Israel's relationship with God. After all they had seen Him do in Egypt, they still had not realized His full potential as their Savior. They complained to Moses about bringing them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. Complaining became the theme of their relationship for the next 40 years.

In retrospect, the Israelites coming out of Egypt may have not been able to clearly grasp the symbolic meaning of their experiences in Egypt, their exodus from it, and their journey to the Promised Land as it relates to Jesus Christ, the awaited Messiah. Because of this, they were in a continuous struggle to accept God's will and guidance in the wilderness and His ultimate desire to free them from real bondage, the bondage of sin, and use their nation as an example for others to follow. Israelis are a reflection to all mankind of such challenges helping people to comprehend God's plans to set us free from the bondage of sin through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is a problem that many nations throughout the world experience even today.

The fathers of the Coptic Church compare the Red Sea to baptism in the time of Christ. In the Red Sea event, God, the Creator of water and the seas, created a physical road to freedom for the people of Israel to flee from Pharaoh's troops. He made the sea into dry land and the waters were divided (see Exodus 14:21). Pharaoh's troops followed the Israelites inside the sea walls on both sides of the dry ground (see Exodus 14:22) in the midst of the Red Sea.

Through baptism (sea crossing) we are separated from the bondage of the sin of Adam. Just as the Israelites were born into slavery in Egypt, we are born again into the new life in the Promised Land that Christ provided for us through His salvation on the cross. This is provided so that we can pursue the road to freedom in accordance with God's commandments to take us to the Promised Land, which is the infinite kingdom of God.

One of the scientific explanations related to the Red Sea event attributes the separation of the water to naturally occurring phenomena such as tides and the position of the moon relative to the earth at the very instant Israel needed to escape. This theory does not account for the fact that the departure of the people of Israel is not just an isolated incident that involves the separation of the Red Sea but an entire series of events that started from the burning bush where Moses was assigned the task of taking Israel to Canaan, the Promised Land. The purpose of all these events was God's preparation of a nation for His First Coming.

The original people who left Egypt, including Moses and the elders, were not permitted to enter the Promised Land because of that generation's continuous petulant behavior toward God. Their relationship was marred by doubt and lack of trust in God regardless of the miracles He performed that physically lead to their Exodus from the bondage of a powerful nation. Thus, it was left for their children to enjoy the privilege of entering and settling in the Promised Land.

The same doubt and lack of trust continues today. Jesus performed miracles such as raising the dead, making the blind see, silencing storms, and feeding thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, yet He was neither appreciated nor recognized for His care of His people. And it did not stop there. He was ridiculed for doing good deeds on holy days such as the Sabbath when it was wrongfully understood by the Jewish leadership that no

one is supposed to do any form of work on that day even good deeds as commanded them by God. They did not learn from His example and His proper use of the Sabbath. He was significantly punished and put through pain and suffering and, as if that was not enough, He was then crucified. Thus, it was left for the Jews who accepted Him and the Gentiles who believed in Him to enjoy the privilege of His salvation and entering into the promised kingdom. For Moses, the entrance to the Promised Land was finally granted when he met with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 16:27; Mark 9:2-4; Luke 9:28-31). In the wilderness, the Lord God continued to care for His people (see Exodus 16:4) providing them water and bread regardless of their complaints and doubts towards Him. Sweet water came from bitter waters and bread rained from heaven. Water even came from a rock.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the Israelites thought he and his God had permanently disappeared. They felt they needed a replacement for this prophet and his associated God, so they made for themselves a gold calf to serve as their new god (see Exodus 32). Even today, we replace God with various forms of materialism, scientific theories, and other beliefs. For Israel, this was yet another incident in their continuing history of doubting the existence of God. When Moses came down the mountain holding the Tablets of Commands and saw the people and the calf, he became angry at their betrayal of God and broke the tablets.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, gave him wise advice by suggesting the use of the pyramid form of management to effectively govern the massive number of Israelites. Moses heeded this advice leaving him only the decisions for the more difficult cases and freeing him to pursue his relationship with the Lord (see Exodus 18).

Christ came not to do away with Moses' moral law, but to fulfill it. He elevated the commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" to include not just the act but even the thought of adultery. God wants our physical acts as well as the thoughts and intentions of our hearts to reflect His honor. As Jesus stated, God wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love others as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:28-34). He gave us an example to follow by unconditionally loving others regardless of their treatment of Him. Loving God means keeping His commandments and keeping His commandments means loving Him.

In Matthew 22:40, the Lord even went so far as stating that upon these two commandments, loving God and loving others, hang all the law and the prophets thereby effectively reducing the Ten Commandments down to two. In the Old Testament, God emphasized the need for us to honor, love, and follow His commandments (see Exodus 20:3-4; Deuteronomy 5, 6:4, 8). In the New Testament, the Lord repeated this expectation in John 14:21 and 15:9-14. Thus, in His eyes it is a critical requirement for us to fulfill.

The Ten Commandments signified the departure of Israel from Egypt not just physically but morally and established the Judaic faith, doctrines, feasts, and sacrificial requirements as described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The ultimate purpose was to establish a standard of human behavior toward God as Creator and toward one another that truly reflects the image of God in creativity, justice, and happiness. This is the lifestyle that leads to His kingdom. Some may label it a Christian lifestyle, but in essence, it is a continuation of His story with mankind.

The coming of Christ fulfilled three main aspects of the moral law:

1. Christ provided the example of following this law by honoring His Father in heaven as the obedient sacrificial Son. He also honored His Mother

at the wedding in Cana of Galilee by fulfilling her request to intervene when the wine ran out (see John 2:1-12). Christ showed commitment not just toward the commandments of His Father and the salvation of man, but for blessing of the marriage sacrament between man and woman as well.

2. The second fulfillment is in regard to the symbols and traditions that point toward Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God. In Exodus 27, God initiated the burnt offering as a requirement to compensate for Israel's transgressions. God provided the tabernacle as the place for such offerings. In the New Testament, this sacrificial place became the Church. The tabernacle was not just a place for offerings; inside was the Holy of Holies where God in His Holiness met and dwelt with man. It was also where the Ark of the Covenant resided that contained the history and promises the Lord had made with the fathers of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. In order to attend to the needs of the tabernacle and that of His people, God also established the priesthood. Moses and Aaron were appointed as the first priests. In the New Testament, the priesthood and the place of worship became the church where the ultimate sacrifice, receiving the body and blood of the Lord, is served with other church sacraments including baptism, marriage, and confessions.

Moses is the only person who actually saw the Lord face-to-face as a man speaks to his friend (see Exodus 33:11). In this encounter, God revealed that He indeed created us in His image and with glory. As a result of Moses' interface with God, his external image changed: the skin of his face shone causing the people of Israel to be afraid to come near him (see Exodus 34:29). Moses reflected an image that Adam and Eve most likely lost due to their being expelled from their place in Paradise. Moses reflected the glorious state of bodies that will be saved and be with the Lord in Paradise with the

light of God upon them after their departure from this place of suffering. Moses lived to about 120 years of age and his days were full.

When he was about 80 years old Moses took leadership of the nation of Israel living in Egypt. It took a journey of 40 years to get Israel from Egypt to the doorsteps of the Promised Land, the earthly Jerusalem. Before beginning His mission on earth to bring man to the Promised Land, the heavenly Jerusalem, Jesus Christ spent 40 days in the wilderness praying and fasting.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 35:4 through the last chapter of Exodus provides a detailed illustration of God's engineering at a level that humans can appreciate and understand. They may find these chapters of the Bible of interest as to how the planning and executing of the tabernacle, a project of historic proportions, took place in the history of the people of Israel (see Exodus 35:10-19; 39:32-43).

In these chapters we see God's selection of the project managers, engineers, planners, and architects such as Bezalel, the son of Uri of the Tribe of Judah, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. God gave these men and others the knowledge and wisdom to design artistic works from metal, wood, and linen materials for the tabernacle, the sanctuary where God would dwell among them (see Exodus 25:8) and for the clothing of the priesthood who served in it.

The tabernacle was intricately designed. The construction involved making curtains of goats' hair for the tent over the tabernacle, boards and bars of acacia wood for the framework, and veils of blue, purple, and scarlet thread as well as fine woven linen worked with artistic designs of cherubim and other details for the interior. A screen for the tabernacle door was also

made.

The Ark of the Covenant was made of acacia wood and contained the mercy seat held up by two poles. Over it were two cherubim made of beaten gold with their faces turned toward the mercy seat and their wings spread out covering it. Inside the Ark of the Covenant were the two tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod, and a pot that contained an omer of manna, all laid in front of the Lord to serve as a reminder to the two million people of Israel of the wonders that God performed to care for them in the wilderness.

There was also a table for the showbread that was made of acacia wood and it had its own utensils and a gold lamp stand.

The altar of incense was made of acacia wood and had horns, rings of gold, and poles associated with it. The holy anointing oil on the altar of incense was made according to the perfumer.

The altar of the burnt offering was made of acacia wood with horns, poles and other details.

The laver was made of bronze from the mirrors of women.

The court of the tabernacle was made with hangings and pillars.

Finally, the garment for the priesthood included the ephod, breastplate, robe of the ephod of all blue woven work. The tunics of fine linen for Aaron and his sons included a turban and exquisite hats, short trousers, a sash, and a scarlet thread made by a weaver as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then they made the holy crown of pure gold and wrote on it an inscription like the engraving of a signet:

HOLINESS TO THE LORD

The tabernacle was organized, planned, and erected as commanded by

the Lord in Exodus 40. Through Moses, God engineered the building and functionality of the tabernacle with specific detail. In the Coptic Church of Egypt, the church has preserved this order of tradition including the use of the altar, incense, and priestly garments because it was in preparation for His coming to earth as the ultimate sacrificial offering for the salvation of man.

The tabernacle of meetings where the people of Israel worshiped ultimately symbolized the church of the New Testament with its altar as the Holy of Holy place over which the bread and wine was transferred into the body and blood of the Lord to be served to the followers of Christ. In the New Testament church, the body and blood of Christ is offered to the congregation through the priesthood of the New Testament residing over the church altar as the place of serving the New Covenant with man for the remission of sins.

God told Moses exactly how He wanted the twelve tribes of Israel to camp around the tabernacle tent (see Numbers 2), three of the tribes on each side of the tabernacle: east, west, north, and south. The tribe of Judah, from whom Jesus descended, was on the east side. In the Orthodox Church, the servicing priest standing at the church altar leads the congregation in prayer and during liturgy service and all are facing towards the East in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ (see Ezekiel 43:1-5). The priest is not giving his back to the people but as a shepherd is leading the flock toward their eternal land. The twelve tribes formed a cross with the Ten Commandments in the center of the cross. This was the first symbol of the cross with the Lord, our Savior, at its center.

Because the people of Israel were in such transient conditions until their arrival into the Promised Land, their first house of worship was a movable tent. When they settled in Canaan they made a permanent place for worship, feasts, and offering of sacrifices to the Lord as required by the Mosaic Law.

The main purpose of the laws described in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy was to get Israel to depart from worldly idol worship in Egypt to pure worship of the eternal God so that man could be prepared for His coming on earth. Through salvation man is able to regain the image of God that was lost in the Garden of Eden and be allowed into His kingdom.

TYPES OF OFFERINGS

In Leviticus, God instituted five types of offerings through the Desert Fathers to reflect the full aspects of the future cross of the Lord Jesus Christ when He came to earth:

Burnt offering: Jesus offered Himself as beautiful aroma for the Father.

Grain offering: The Incarnation of the Lord occurred when the Holy Spirit (oil) entered into the flesh. This was divinity fully combined with humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Peace offering: The body and blood of the Lord are shared with humanity as a sign of peace between God and man.

Sin offering: Through the cross Christ crucified our sinful nature inherited from the sin of Adam and replaced it with a new nature through baptism and acceptance of His salvation.

Trespass offering: Christ through the cross has accounted for all sins past, present, and future. The followers of Christ have to practice sincere repentance and submission to the Holy Spirit for their part in accepting the salvation of the Lord and for acknowledging His suffering on their behalf.

THE SABBATH DAY

The Commandments that the Lord gave Moses (see Exodus 35) established the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath is the day when God rested after completing creation. The Lord commanded Israel to set aside a holy day (holiday) of rest where no work was performed. As we saw from the life of Jesus, He amended a Mosaic Law by setting aside a religious practice that was of no value such as observing a Sabbath when no work should be done and focused on work that related to the physical or spiritual well-being of the people such as healings. Jesus worked to do good things regardless of which day of the week such work can be accomplished.

In the New Testament, the Sabbath is the day of resurrection. On this day, a new world was established where man was saved from the bondage of original sin and was restored to the glory of being created in the image of God. At the dawn of this day when God appeared in His glory, it was a moment that represented our new glorified state awarded to us by the salvation achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross on our behalf. Man can now rest assured that He is truly saved if he chooses to accept the salvation that was offered on the cross.

[ENTRY INTO THE PROMISED LAND](#)

Moses, near the completion of his mission on earth, disobeyed God at Kadesh (see Numbers 20:1-13); that disobedience prevented his entrance into the Promised Land. The Israelites had been complaining about the lack of water and Moses took their complaints to God. He was instructed to speak to the rock to produce water, but did not follow the exact instructions. Instead of speaking, Moses used his rod and hit the rock. This was the second time Moses used his rod to strike a rock. The first time was at the corner of the land in Canaan (see Exodus 16:35; 17:1-7).

Perhaps the Israelites had begun to see the rod as an idol and God wanted to illustrate that He was the provider and the miracle maker so He told Moses to *speak* to the rock. The rock symbolizes Jesus Christ, the rock of our salvation. When crucified, a spear or rod punctured His side and blood and water (from the rock) came out fulfilling mankind's thirst for God's mercy and forgiveness. The water from the rock must have flowed like a river because it was enough to quench the thirst of about two million people. Likewise, the blood and water of life that came from Jesus is capable of feeding the spiritual thirst for salvation of the entire human race for those willing to accept the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

The striking of the rock should have only happened once as directed by God in Exodus 17:6. From it came water to save the people from their thirst in the wilderness (see Exodus 17:2). This symbolized Jesus who was crucified once on the cross to save the world from their sins. There is no need for another salvation or to strike the rock again. Because Moses did not heed God's instructions and struck the rock twice, Moses and Aaron, along with the original generation of Israelites were not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

Instead, Moses was led to Mount Abarim (see Numbers 27:12) where God permitted him to see the land that He had given to the twelve tribes of Israel. Mount Abarim is also known as Mount Nebo in the land of Moab across from Jericho where one can view the land of Canaan (see Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-3). In preparation for His First Coming, this is the land they would be dwelling in. Moses was permitted to see the Promised Land from Mount Nebo that God has promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses died on the top of that mountain and Joshua was given the great task of leading Israel into the Promised Land. Moses was only allowed to physically enter this land on the day when he and Elijah talked with Jesus

on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9:27).

In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Moses reminded Israel that a prophet like him would come to preach and lead His people. This was pointing toward the Messiah who offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of man. This Messiah would not just be a Savior from the bondage of Egypt but from the bondage of the world.

All of the details in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy regarding the Mosaic Law reveals a critical godly attribute. He is a God of order, organization, and planning for the purpose of holiness and purity. Pursuit of these attributes allows man to be formed into the image of God and enter God's kingdom. In the New Testament we can see the big picture: Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law, atoned for our sins, and gave us a new set of commandments. We are to love God and follow His commandments so that our mission on earth can be accomplished and He can take us with Him to places reserved for us in His kingdom.

Moses' song found in Deuteronomy 32:39 and 43 spoke about the God of mercy and justice who should be taken seriously:

³⁹Now see that I, even I, am He,

And there is no God besides Me;

I kill and I make alive;

I wound and I heal;

Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

⁴³Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people;

For He will avenge the blood of His servants,

And render vengeance to His adversaries;

He will provide atonement for His land and His people.

In verse 43, Moses referred to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that will encompass Gentiles as well as His people.

Toward the end of his life, Moses commanded the children of Israel to be careful to observe all the words of the law. The intent was to prepare a nation for Christ's ultimate arrival on earth for salvation and fulfillment of the sacrifices and prophecies provided under that law. This law came to be known as the Law of Moses. He also gave them his final blessing with specific mention of the twelve sons of Jacob. Moses had become a prophet-king to Israel, setting the precedent for how future kings would rule the nation of Israel.

Moses' death is considered to have occurred in the year of 1405 BC on the 18th of September by today's calendar and he lived 120 years, which occurred in three stages:

- Forty years in Pharaoh's palace exposed to the Egyptian wisdom and culture;
- Forty years in the wilderness of Midian where he found a wife and met with God on Mount Sinai; and
- Forty years as a prophet and leader to the people of Israel to free them from the bondage of Egypt.

Similarly, the life of Christ is composed of three stages:

- Thirty years exposed to the world's ungodly wisdom and culture (similar to Moses exposed to the worldly wisdom and culture of the Egyptians);
- Forty days in the wilderness as the Incarnate God where He was tempted by Satan and defeated him;
- Three years as a Savior and a leader to the people of the world to free them from the bondage of sin by defeating death through resurrection.

Through Christ, true freedom from sin has been made available to us so that we can be victorious against the world and its desires.

[JOSHUA \[~ 1410 – 1390 BC\]](#)

Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of wisdom due to Moses laying his hands on him and giving him responsibility to lead Israel into the Promised Land. This is perhaps a direct indication of the same power of the Holy Spirit we would later receive through baptism—power that would allow us to heed the Lord's commands, carry His cross, deny ourselves, and follow Him. The name Joshua means "Jehovah saves" or the "Lord is salvation" and directly corresponds to the name "Jesus," the One who will provide man the ultimate leadership to enter the promised kingdom of God.

God's mission for Joshua was to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land and take control over it. God strengthened Joshua with a strong message that has become a short prayer for many believers, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). This promise from God resulted in three things: it brought the Israelites out of

Egypt against the will of Pharaoh, it gave Joshua a reputation throughout the land as someone to be feared because of what his God could do, and it instilled fear in other nations because God took their land for the people of Israel to inhabit. God exalted Joshua among his own people and they respected and obeyed him (see Joshua 3:7).

Similar to Moses and the Red Sea, Joshua led Israel across another water barrier—the Jordon River. On the journey they picked twelve stones from the river and built a memorial to remind themselves of the awesome nature of their God who had full command over nature (see Joshua 4).

Joshua, similar to his predecessors, had an encounter with God who appeared to him as a Man and introduced Himself as the Commander of the army of the Lord. This was another occasion in the pre-New Testament period when God in pre-Incarnate form took the image of Man to talk to man (see Joshua 5:13). The purpose may have been to strengthen Joshua to accomplish His mission. God found Joshua to be a trustworthy leader who could continuously remind Israel to abide by the laws of Moses (see Joshua 8:34-35).

As with Moses and the Red Sea, God momentarily put nature under Joshua's command when he commanded the sun and moon to stand still for nearly a full day (see Joshua 10:12). Joshua needed an extra day to complete a certain task that was critical to God. When God is determined to accomplish something, He will go to great measures to do so. He did so in initiating the Great Flood, raining fire over Sodom and Gomorrah, introducing multiple languages at the Tower of Babel, inflicting ten plagues on Egypt, and many others. These events were intended to win the war against evil. In the case of Joshua, that war was against a coalition of armies composed of the Amorites and other inhabitants. Joshua had to defeat them to take the land promised to Israel. This was one of the main events in Israel's struggle to occupy the

Promised Land and for God to fulfill His planned mission of the salvation of mankind (see Joshua 10, 12, 13). Once this land was occupied, it was divided among the tribes of Israel with one section for the Levite priests and to serve as cities of refuge according to the Law of Moses (see Joshua 14-22).

Joshua completed his mission of leading Israel to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Joshua 23, 24). In his farewell speech, Joshua reminded the people of God's awesome acts: He brought them out of the powerful nation of Egypt, guarded and guided them through a harsh wilderness, gave them strength to defeat their enemies, then provided them rest. All of this was accomplished for a people who were no more than slaves for over 400 years, an act that can only be attributed to the Creator.

Israel was God's chosen nation, but that did not guarantee that His will would be done. Those who left Egypt rebelled against God in the wilderness and did not enter the Promised Land. However, God did not include their children as part of the rebellion against Him. He permitted their children to enter the Promised Land along with Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh (see Numbers 14:11-36). Today, anyone who wants entrance into God's promised kingdom of heaven—no matter what nationality, gender, ethnicity, or age—must obey His commandments and recognize His salvation on the cross.

The Israelites entrance to the Promised Land and displacing those who were there before them could not have occurred if not enforced by God. This reveals the Lord as the ultimate owner and controller of this land and indeed the earth. Man has never been the owner of anything, even land. People will live where the Lord plans for them to live according to His will. The covenant at Shechem under the leadership of Joshua summarizes the choice we all have to make in this life as precisely summarized by Joshua: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

[SAMUEL \[~ 1070 – 950 BC\]](#)

Samuel became among the last judges to rule Israel before a human king was to be anointed for such a task. During his time, two important events happened that would change the way God would deal with Israel from that moment forward. These events were when Israel had its first worldly king ever, and when Samuel became its first prophet. The communication of God with the kings of Israel would mainly be through the prophets. In 1 Samuel 8:6, the people of Israel wanted a king to judge (rule) over them. In 1 Samuel 8:7, God responded saying to Samuel, “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” Saul became their first ever king. God communicated with Israel and Saul through Samuel.

Samuel was born to a mother by the name of Hannah, a spiritual and godly woman. She could not conceive for many years, which became a source of bitterness in her soul. After praying to the Lord and weeping with anguish, the Lord finally granted her a son whom she named Samuel meaning “name of God.” His mother vowed to the Lord to give Samuel to His service in the house of the Lord, the tabernacle compound (see 1 Samuel 1:25-28). Samuel became an important figure in the history of Israel. He was the person God used in Israel’s transition from the rule of judges to that of the monarchy. Samuel’s life began at a low point in the history of Israel. The priesthood was corrupted (see 1 Samuel 2:12; 2:22), the people practiced idolatry, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines and was therefore not at the house of the Lord at the tabernacle (see 1 Samuel 4:11), and their judges did not govern with integrity (see 1 Samuel 3:11-14).

From the time of Joshua to the time of Samuel, a period of about 350 years, the nation of Israel did not have a king to rule over them like many of

the surrounding nations. They were ruled by priests and judges, which required the people to have a strong relationship with God. If their faith in God was lacking, then conditions would exist leading to immorality, corruption, and unfaithfulness toward God and one another, the state inherited from Adam's fall. The people of Israel found themselves in these conditions and therefore their desire to have a king prevailed. However, their reason for wanting a king was not based on a desire to improve and maintain their spiritual status with God (see Deuteronomy 17:14), but rather on worldly desire for power and dependence on a human king for their protection and organization. They wanted to be no different than the Egyptians with Pharaoh as their earthly king and protector. Under Israel's judges, the people were gradually becoming lax in their relationship with God and lacking accountability for their actions. They wanted a god they could see and fear and credit with victories.

For many years, the Lord was their King and He provided guidance to them through judges such as Othniel, Deborah and Gideon (see Judges 3, 6). The people of Israel were led by these judges to continue their struggles with the surrounding nations and neighboring tribal people, such as the Mesopotamians, Canaanites, Midianites, and Philistines (see Judges 3, 4, 6, 10, 13). It was a period where these nations lived according to their sinful nature: "In those days there were no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Although God instructed Israel to destroy surrounding nations, there were a few He allowed to remain for two main reasons: to teach the younger generations of Israelites to know war, and that God might test Israel by them and to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord (see Judges 3:2, 4). Throughout history the Lord has wanted us to know how to make war against the evil one (see Revelation 12:17; 17:14).

God's input in our lives is a form of grace. Before Samuel's time (around 1050 AD) Gideon looked for a sign from God that He would save Israel from their enemies. The sign the Lord gave him was two-fold:

³⁶So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—³⁷look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said."

³⁸And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew."

⁴⁰And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground (Judges 6:36-40).

The fleece of wool represented Israel. The ground represented the Gentiles. The dew is the grace of God. The wet fleece of wool represents Israel in the Old Testament having the grace of God, whereas the Gentiles were dry left with no grace. The dry fleece of wool represents Israel in the New Testament and Israel was left dry due to their rejection of the Lord, whereas the Gentiles accepted God and received His grace. Our free will is to choose between receiving the grace of God or be left dry—to choose the way of Israel or to accept Christ as the Redeemer.

The most important test Israel had to face in their entire history was their encounter with the Lord Himself when He came to earth. Their continued unfaithfulness toward Him may have been a root cause or a significant contributing factor in their inability to recognize Him as the Messiah. God, as the Creator of man and in His ultimate knowledge of the depth of His

creation, knew that man's inherent sin of pride, disobedience, and choosing evil over good would result in His crucifixion. Through this act of salvation and suffering, God not only experienced the pain and suffering of sin in person, but can now declare the salvation of man, provided man makes use of it and accepts it as the only means or cure available for his sinful nature.

When Samuel met David, the history of Israel entered into a new phase and a turning point where Israel would transform to a nation ruled by a king rather than by judges. Samuel was told by God to appoint David as king over Israel. David was not Israel's first king, but he was the first to be blessed by the Lord. God found David to be loyal to Him and blessed him with a kingdom that achieved glory and respect in the eyes of its neighbors. Through this success, Solomon, the son of David the king, was able to build the permanent structure for the house of the Lord, the Temple of Solomon.

It is evident from the genealogy of David in the book of Ruth that God's plan included Israel being ruled by a king. Ruth, the Moabitess, was a foreigner in the land of Israel but through her marriage to Boaz was included in the genealogy of the Lord implying God's will to include the Gentiles in His human genealogy (see Ruth 4:13). Ruth's life closely resembled the virtuous wife mentioned in Proverbs 31:10, and also stated throughout the book of Ruth. In particular was the testimony of her husband Boaz about her being a very moral person among the people of their town (see Ruth 3:10).

Hannah's (Samuel's mother) prayer to the Lord before and after Samuel was born revealed Hannah's strong faith in God. Hannah's prayer is similar to that of the Mother of God in that both exalt God's miracles with people. In this prayer she predicted that God would ultimately send a King, the Messiah, who would judge the ends of the earth.

While Samuel judged Israel, the nation returned from a period of neglecting their relationship with the Lord to a relationship of repentance and

of serving the Lord (see 1 Samuel 7:2-6). Samuel not only led Israel spiritually but fought successful wars against the Philistines who were a hostile nation to Israel from the west (see 1 Samuel 7:7-12). Another hostile nation to Israel was the Ammonites, descendants of Lot from the east (see 1 Samuel 11). However, Israel found peace with their Amorite neighbors.

At the end of his term, Samuel made his sons judges over Israel (see 1 Samuel 8), but they did not follow their father's footsteps of honoring God. They went after dishonest gains, took bribes, and perverted justice (see 1 Samuel 8:3). Samuel in his later years was approached by the elders of Israel revealing their disapproval of his sons' behavior. They demanded that Samuel establish a king to judge them so that they could become like other nations. Saul was chosen based purely on his external appearance: he was handsome and taller than any of the children of Israel (see 1 Samuel 9:2). As Samuel warned, this criteria for a king rather than the inner character of the heart proved to be disastrous for Israel (see 1 Samuel 8:10-21). Saul ultimately followed his own ways of ruling Israel rather than following the Lord's commandments. This became Saul's catalyst for failure, for God rejected him as king and chose David as the new king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 12-16). The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (see 1 Samuel 16:13) empowering him for the task of becoming the king of Israel and to be a part for God's plan for Israel.

David was a king who reflected the Spirit of the Lord. He wrote Psalms which are a source of prayers for millions of believers even today. He was described as a man after God's own heart. Caring more for his people than for himself, he became an example of a servant king reflecting an image that culminated in Jesus Christ the ultimate sacrificing King coming to earth.



CHAPTER 4

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



The story of God with man in regard to salvation continued from the Desert Fathers through David, his son, Solomon, and through the kings of Judah. Each played a significant role in bringing into perspective God's intended work of salvation through His eventual Incarnation, bearing the sins of mankind, and redeeming him from his transgressions. The descending of God to earth to perform such an act on behalf of mankind was incomprehensible perhaps even to the heavenly hosts. This was especially true to the people of the Old Testament, Israel in particular, who were used to an awesome and powerful God prevailing over Pharaoh and other kings to get Israel to the Promised Land. For this God to permit Himself to be humiliated and degraded to a lowly human being and disguise Himself to become a serving Savior for humanity was a form of love that even the Desert Fathers could not comprehend or imagine. Nonetheless, God utilized these Desert Fathers to prepare humanity to understand and accept such an unimaginable act of love and mercy towards mankind—the tenth host in heaven. Thus is the theme of the entire Old Testament: to prepare mankind to accept Christ, the origin of Man, as His only Savior.

David gave us Psalms that revealed God's intended coming to earth for

mankind (see Psalms 53:6, 60:11-12, 69:29-36). He prophesied about the sufferings of Christ inflicted upon Him by His adversaries (see Psalm 56:1-6; 69:1-4, 7-12, 20-21). We see David prophesying about the future when God would defeat all His enemies by triumphing over death through resurrection (see Psalms 83, 84, 90, 92). The Coptic Orthodox Church reminds its congregation of these critical moments in the life of Christ through its daily book of prayers known as the Coptic Book of Hours or *The Agpeya*. This book centers on the Psalms of David that were written nearly 1,000 years before the crucifixion of Christ and contains prayers that remind the believer of the suffering of Christ hour by hour on the day of crucifixion.

In their own ways, Solomon and the kings of Israel demonstrated that greatness comes through humility, not pride. A godly king would loyally serve his God and his people, would not abandon the true God, nor seek his own glorification. A godly king like David reflected the image of Christ by setting an example for his people of doing the will of God and remaining loyal to Him.

Some of the kings of Israel abandoned God and His ways and lusted after the world. God permitted them to rule over His people, but they were also in need of His mercy and salvation. All have sinned and must repent if they are to be saved.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi by the very meaning of their names reflected that a true Lord of the people is the one who helps, comforts, and heals. These people were messengers and tools in the hands of the Lord to shepherd their people, representing the true Shepherd who will care for His sheep and give His life as a ransom for them.

Finally, Esther, Job, and the poetic books are centered on the same theme of the Old Testament: God, regardless of the power of the devastation that sin and Satan are capable of inflicting, will help mankind to eventually

prevail and rejoin Him in His kingdom.

[DAVID \[1010 – 970 BC\]](#)

David laid the foundation on which God would build His kingdom on earth—the temple of Israel. David represented a new order—a nation governed by a king who loved and was loyal to his God. As king, David could have used his worldly position to glorify himself; instead he gave glory only to God.

It is important to shed some light on Israel's surrounding environment and her place among the neighboring nations during David's time because the establishment of other great empires was also developing on a parallel path, some even earlier than the nation of Israel. The great empires of the world in that time period (1050 BC) were Egypt and Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia included Babylon (Iraq), Assyria (Syria), and Phoenicia (Lebanon). Israel was being formed to be an important player among these empires. Due to its ties with the Lord's plan of salvation, the reputation of Israel's God as one to be feared and respected was impacting these neighboring nations. These nations heard, for example, how their God used plagues upon the Pharaoh of Egypt in order to take Israel out of Egypt. They in turn feared the Lord (see 2 Kings 17:33, 41). Israel's ancient rival, the Philistines (Palestinians), along with these empires were continually fighting over dominance of land and resources.

David achieved historical milestones including the writing of the Psalms in which we can see the heart of God in David. God may have chosen David to become king of Israel because He was pleased with his attitude or heart. From the first mention of David in 1 Samuel 16, we can see that he was a man who deeply loved the God of Israel. Even when he stumbled or fell into

sin, he desired to rebuild his relationship with God, repented, and found his way back.

David had a strong faith in his God. When he encountered the giant Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17), he believed that with God on his side, a few stones would be more than sufficient to defeat the most powerful enemy of Israel. Through David, God delivered Israel from their Philistine enemies. The ongoing struggle between these two nations continues even today.

Thus, it can be concluded that even in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit of God has always been at work through chosen people to establish and strengthen Israel. In the life of David, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit working in him was clearly evident in the depth of the Psalms he wrote not just for the moment but also related to the Jesus of the New Testament. We see David prophesying the sufferings of the Christ in Psalms such as 54, 57, and 70 as well as prophesying about His resurrection and reign over the cross in Psalms 96, 97, and 99.

DAVID'S PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

David's life was full of both downfalls and victories that many of us experience in our own journey, but David had three attributes that God loved: he knew how to forgive, he was compassionate, and he was merciful. He forgave Saul, he loved his God and his people dearly, and he was merciful on his son Absalom.

When Saul did not follow God's commandments by destroying the city of Amalek in its entirety including their king Agag, God regretted making Saul king of Israel and rejected him from ruling over Israel (see 1 Samuel 15:3, 9, 11). The Amalekites represented Satan, sin, and darkness; Israel represented the Savior. Saul thought he could use the Amalekites' cattle as an

offering to God, not realizing that God has no share in any of Satan's kingdom. Saul was an earthly man and was not fit to be a king for a nation that would be used by God for His holy purposes. Israel needed a new king, a spiritual king that could carry God's mission for Israel forward as a godly nation from whom a Savior would be born. The first and foremost requirement for such a king for Israel was obeying the voice of the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15:22). God then prepared David to be king of Israel by placing him in Saul's court to see firsthand the consequences of a king who lived without God's guidance.

As Saul became more distressed knowing that the God of Israel was no longer with him and that He would appoint a king (most likely knowing it was David) to replace him (see 1 Samuel 15:23; 18:28-29), he persecuted David and on several occasions tried to take his life. David, however, had a forgiving heart and spared Saul's life when he easily could have killed him. In the middle of such persecution, David found love and loyalty in the hearts of several men and women including Jonathan and Michal, the son and daughter of Saul (see 1 Samuel 16-19). In the case of Jonathan, David showed particular mercy towards him. Jonathan's loyalty for David was proven when Jonathan realized that his father Saul meant to harm David and intervened to save David (see 1 Samuel 20). David made a covenant with Jonathan not to harm him or his descendants when the time came for David to eliminate all his enemies (see 1 Samuel 20:14-16, 41-42).

Like the Lord, David was compassionate towards his men as was evident when they were hungry and he sought permission from Ahimelech the priest to eat from holy bread that was reserved for the priesthood (see 1 Samuel 21:3-4; Leviticus 24:9). The priest, in return, sought God's permission provided the men were deemed holy enough to receive it (see 1 Samuel 21:5; 22:10). The lives of David's men were important to him just as

David and his men were important to God. This act by David was a reflection of the Lord's compassion towards man.

In 2 Samuel, David transitioned from being a citizen to a king. His rulership over Israel was full of glory in that his relationship with God resulted in solidifying Israel's existence as a nation that was feared and respected by its neighbors. His kingship was in preparation for God's First Coming. For David, his relationship with God was foremost.

David's love for God was tested when he was tempted with the sin of impurity. The low point in David's life happened with a woman who ultimately bore his son, Solomon (see 2 Samuel 11-12). David forgot that even as a king he had to live by God's boundaries and limitations. David saw Bathsheba and, knowing she belonged to another man, took her for himself and arranged for her husband to be killed on the front lines in the war. Thus he broke three of God's commandments: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, and you shall not covet your neighbor wife (see Exodus 20:13, 14, 17). David not only took this woman away from her husband but also planned his murder. Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, was a man fulfilling his duties by going to war to protect not only the nation but its king and his king chose to cover up his own sin and avoid humiliation by setting Uriah up to be killed by the enemy on the front lines of the war.

David, however, had no intention of rebelling against the God he dearly loved. David abandoned his sin, repented from his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah, and God found David's heart to be like His Own. No sin is too big to be forgiven. In spite of David's failure, negligence, and pride, God saw in him the willingness to repent and ask for forgiveness. For God, forgiveness washes away His memory of sin. David's repentant heart was reflected in his writing of the Psalms and in his song of praise David called the Lord the "Rock of my salvation" (2 Samuel

22:47) referring to Lord Jesus Christ who will pay for his sins and provide his eternal salvation. David, through the Holy Spirit within him, knew that God was his true Savior from his sins.

David, however, had to pay for the consequence of his sins for the rest of his life, even calling death the time to rest (see 2 Samuel 12-20; Psalms 114). He encountered humiliation and treason from his people including his own son Absalom (see 2 Samuel 16:20-23). Because of the depth of David's repentance, God entirely forgave David. God later said this about David, in his rebuke of Jeroboam, one of the two kings of the divided kingdom of Israel, following the death of Solomon, the son of David:

⁷Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you ruler over My people Israel, ⁸and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and yet you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only what was right in My eyes'" (1 Kings 14:7-8).

God again restored David to the status of king as mentioned in Acts 13:22, "He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" Once God gave David rest from all his enemies, David desired to build a formal house for God. This house or temple envisioned by David was eventually built by his son, Solomon. In 2 Samuel 7:16, David said, "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you." The "house" signifies the Church that would be established following the salvation mission of Jesus Christ, the "kingdom" is the kingdom of heaven, and the "throne" is that of Jesus Christ, the King of kings that shall be established forever.

David's life on earth ended with a set of instructions to his son, Solomon (see 1 Kings 2:1-4), emphasizing the importance of following God's commandments. His life was a mixture of glory and defeat: glory in God using him to triumph over his enemies and defeat in the sins he committed when he forgot the presence of God in his life.

[SOLOMON \[970 – 930 BC\]](#)

David prepared his son, Solomon, to rule after him. Solomon's greatest accomplishment was building the temple for God, which came to be known as Solomon's Temple. The permanent structure was a house of worship built according to God's specifications and in the likeness of the tabernacle having a Holy Place and the Holy of Holiest place. David gave his son Solomon all the planning and the details for the house of the Lord and for the order of serving in it by the priesthood, as David had received all the works of these plans from the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 28:11-13, 19).

The main purpose of Solomon's Temple was to offer the sacrifice of the lamb for the forgiveness of people's sins. This animal sacrifice was a temporary measure of receiving forgiveness for the sins of mankind until the Lord's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Once the Lord accomplished His mission on earth and was resurrected, the sacrificial lamb was replaced by the celebration of receiving His body and blood.

Solomon assumed the leadership of Israel from his father, David. Solomon asked God for one thing: wisdom (see 1 Kings 3:5-14, 4:29-34, 5:12) and his wisdom was so great that it was renowned throughout the land. It was wisdom that Solomon needed to build a permanent house for the God of Israel in the Promised Land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

¹¹Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying: ¹²“Concerning

this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David. ¹³And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel.” (1 Kings 6:11-13)

The house, known as the Temple of Solomon, was where the offerings under the Law of Moses were made and it was built by plans that were provided directly to David by God Himself. Similar to the temporary tent, the temple was divided into a sanctuary or holy place containing the altar of incense and an inner sanctuary or the Most Holy Place containing the Ark of the Covenant (see 1 Kings 6:16, 19). God placed within each craftsman His spirit and wisdom to understand and implement His exact plans (see 1 Kings 7:13-14). Following the completion of the Temple, which took over seven years, Solomon began building structures and houses for himself. These palaces were elaborate with gold decorations and facilities for servants and horses. One of the palaces housed Pharaoh’s daughter whom Solomon had taken as one of his wives.

The Lord instructed Israel not to marry foreign women so that they would not turn away from their God, but Solomon became entangled with many foreign women including Pharaoh’s daughter. These women had no appreciation or awareness of the God of Israel or His commandments. Solomon’s life is an example of the importance of relationships that lead you closer to God rather than causing you to stray away from Him. In spite of Solomon’s unprecedented wisdom, he entered into a lifestyle of worldly pleasure and accepting other gods in order to gain favor in the eyes of the women. His relationships with ungodly women caused him to fall away from the Lord.

King Solomon was referred to by the Lord in His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 6:29) when He compared his glory to that of the lilies of the field. God's message was that Solomon's physical glory during his life on earth was nothing compared to His attention to the needs of His creation. If He can array the lilies in beauty and color, He can take care of our daily needs.

King Solomon was an excellent example of a person who had everything. He lived a life of abundance with pleasures and luxury and access to anything he desired. Yet in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon looked at all that he had and in one of the most famous sayings concluded, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Fathers of the Coptic Church concluded from this statement and Solomon's other writings in Ecclesiastes that before his departure from this world he had reached a state of repentance for his sins against God. Nonetheless, as was the case with his father, David, Solomon's sins against God brought upon him God's judgment as stated in 1 Kings 11:9-13,

⁹So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, ¹⁰and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. ¹¹Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. ¹²Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

The Lord permitted adversaries to rise against Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:14, 23, 26). Following Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam reigned in his place. It should be noted that God is not a God of fear but of love towards mankind. We can see His love in His discipline of us the moment we stray from Him and His ways. Fear is when we insist on our way and reject His calling us back to Him.

Solomon's Temple was eventually replaced by the Church, which we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 22, The Birth of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Israel was a united kingdom only during the reign of its first three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. After Solomon's reign, the nation was divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Solomon's main achievement was building the temple that symbolized the church of the New Testament. His other important mission was to share with us his God-given wisdom. Because he was an extremely rich man and had everything he wanted within his reach, his conclusions regarding this life help us focus on the afterlife. Like him, we may come to accept that this life is vanity after all and choose to seek the eternal kingdom of God that Christ will eventually permit us to enter.

[THE KINGS OF ISRAEL \[~ 931–722 BC\] AND JUDAH \[~ 931–586 BC\]](#)

The end of Solomon's life was a critical point in the history of Israel because no other king could match his wisdom and glory. Following Solomon's reign, God permitted the division of Israel into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah (from which the Lord eventually descended starting from 931 BC until 586 BC) and the northern kingdom of Israel (starting from 931 BC until 722 BC). In spite of David's shortcomings, he

was the most loyal of all the kings of Israel towards God and became God's benchmark to measure the loyalty of the kings who followed him. For example, Scripture states that Ahaz (see 2 Chronicles 28:1) did not do what was right in the sight of God as his father David had, but Hezekiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done (see 2 Chronicles 29:1-2).

The kings of Israel can be divided into three categories. First, kings who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did their father, David.

David (2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1:1, 2:9; 1 Chronicles 11:1, 29:30) - one kingdom

Asa (1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14:1, 16:14) - Judah

Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1, 20:21; 2 Chronicles 29:1, 32:33) - Judah

Josiah (2 Kings 22:1, 23:30; 2 Chronicles 34:1, 35:27) - Judah

Second, kings who walked in the sins of their predecessors; whose hearts were not loyal to the Lord.

From Israel:

Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12, 14)

Nadab (1 Kings 15)

Baasha (1 Kings 15)

Elah (1 Kings 16)

Zimri (1 Kings 16)

Tibni (1 Kings 16)

Omri (1 Kings 16)

Ahab (1 Kings 16)

Ahaziah (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 1)

Jehoram (Joram) (2 Kings 2:8)

Jehu (2 Kings 9, 10)

Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13)

Jehoash (Joash) (2 Kings 13)

Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14)

Zechariah (2 Kings 15)

Shallum (2 Kings 15)

Menahem (2 Kings 15)

Pekahiah (2 Kings 15)

Pekah (2 Kings 15)

Hoshea (2 Kings 17)

From Judah:

Rehoboam (1 Kings 12, 14; 2 Chronicles 10)

Abijam (Abijah) (1 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 13)

Joram (Jehoram) (2 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 21)

Ahaziah (2 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 22)

Athaliah (queen) (2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22)

Ahaz (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28)

Manasseh (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33)

Amon (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33)

Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 36)

Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 36)

Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24; 2 Chronicles 36)

Zedekiah (2 Kings 24; 2 Chronicles 36)

Third, kings who were neither cold nor hot in their relationship with the Lord. They did not completely fulfill God's will but had shortcomings in leadership such as ignoring some of God's laws that were delivered by Moses. This type of relationship with God is subject to His rejection as was later revealed in Revelation 3:15-16 when the church was delivered to the guardian of the Church of the Laodiceans and was judged for its lukewarm relationship with God. Except for Solomon, these were all kings of Judah.

Solomon (1 Kings 2:10-11:43; 2 Chronicles 1:1-9:3) - One kingdom

Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Chronicles 17:1-20:37) - Judah

Joash (Jehoash) (2 Kings 11:17-12:21; 2 Chronicles 23:16-24:27) - Judah

Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1-22; 2 Chronicles 25:1-28) - Judah

Uzziah (Azariah) (2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26:1-23) - Judah

Jotham (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27:1-9) - Judah

During this period (931- 586 BC) several significant events occurred:

- During the reign of King Ahab and Ahaziah who were among the most sinful of Israel's kings (see 1 Kings 16; 22; 2 Kings 1) the prophets Elijah and Elisha each raised someone from the dead. The son of the Zarephath widow was raised by Elijah (see 1 Kings 17) and the son of the Shunammite widow was raised by Elisha (see 2 King 4).
- During the reign of Hoshea (732-722 BC), the last king over the northern kingdom of Israel, the people of Israel were taken captive to Assyria (see 2 Kings 17).
- During the reign of Rehoboam, king of northern kingdom Israel (931-913 BC), Shishak king of Egypt came against Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 14:25) and took the treasures from Solomon's Temple.
- During the reign of Zedekiah (597-586 BC), the last king over Judah's southern kingdom, the people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and the house of the Lord (Solomon Temple) was burned (see 2 Kings 25:8-11).

From the reign of King Solomon until the last kings of Israel and Judah, the state of affairs of both nations progressively worsened leading to their

captivity as the ultimate consequence of God's anger towards them. It can also be concluded that during that period in the history of the people of Israel from Saul until Zedekiah (586 BC), the majority of their kings did not follow the ways of the Lord as commanded them by Moses. Out of a total of 43 kings who ruled over them before their Babylonian exile, only four were truly loyal to the Almighty God—this is less than ten percent. Their loyalty was towards other gods rather than in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The people of Israel did not reflect the purpose for which the Lord selected them. They were to reflect God's light and glory to surrounding nations. The miracles of raising two people from the dead by Elijah and Elisha should have drawn the people closer to the God of these prophets. Instead, they worshiped the idols of the surrounding nations and pursued sins of immorality.⁵ Israel's condition was similar to the world surrounding them: living in the darkness of the sin of Adam and his descendants.

[EZRA \["JEHOVAH HELPS" ~ 458 BC\]](#)

[NEHEMIAH \["JEHOVAH COMFORTS" ~ 446 BC\] AND](#)

[MALACHI \["THE LORD'S MESSENGER" ~ 437 - 417 BC\]](#)

The period of Israel being ruled by their own kings ended with the Babylonian exile. From the period of 605 BC to 586 BC there were three waves of deportation from Israel to Babylon. For those who love, trust, and follow God's commandments, He has promised to protect and bless them (see Leviticus 26:3-13); for those who choose to not trust and follow Him, God's protection and blessing could be denied and may even result in punishment and wrath (see Leviticus 26:14-39). Since the days of Adam and Noah, the Lord has not changed His ways. He continues to give each of us a significant number of loving warnings knowing that the evil one is intent to

derail man from his journey towards God and ultimately destroy him. The war between God and the evil one to win man's heart is the ultimate issue. God's punishment of man's sins will always include mercy. The people of Israel could have been treated like those in Noah's time if not for God's promise to never flood the world again. However, the Lord Himself came to save us from this raging war against us and to provide desperately needed salvation.

After 70 years of exile and captivity, the people of Israel returned to a land that was no longer the land of glory they had once enjoyed. When they first came to the Promised Land, they were feared by their enemies and the surrounding nations but sin changed all of that. On their second return to the Promised Land, the conditions were quite different. The past glory of King David and Solomon no longer existed. The temple of God was in ruins (see Ezra) and Jerusalem had no security because the walls had been destroyed (see Nehemiah). The only blessing appeared to be their physical return to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps Israel's most significant loss was the departure of God's divine presence among them. God's glory was no longer evident over them and they were no longer feared by surrounding nations. Because Israel was living under the darkness of the consequence of the sin of their father Adam, they were no longer distinctively different from the rest of the nations. All had sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Nonetheless, God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the ultimate salvation of mankind through Christ remained unaffected by these events. Similar to the days of Noah after the Great Flood when God began a new chapter with mankind, God brought Israel back to the Promised Land with the intent to restore His relationship with them. The second return to the Promised Land started with the works of the Jewish leaders Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Like Moses, each of them had a mission to accomplish in the

return to the Promised Land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Each headed a return of three waves of the people of Israel from Babylon to Jerusalem:

- The first return was around 538 BC led by Zerubbabel under the rule of the Persian king Cyrus (see Ezra 1-6).
- The second return was around 458 BC led by Ezra under the rule of the Persian King Artaxerxes (see Ezra 7-10).
- The third return was around 445 BC led by Nehemiah under the rule of the same Persian King Artaxerxes (see Nehemiah 1-13).

At that time, Persia (currently Iran) was at odds with Babylon (currently Iraq) and Babylon was defeated by Persia. God sovereignly used pagan kings to punish or judge Israel just as He used them to bless Israel. Other men who played a role in resettling the people of Israel, rebuilding the second Temple, which started in 536 BC and was completed in 516 BC, and rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem (some of which can be seen to this date), were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, all prophets of God. During Israel's captivity and exile, God also used Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Habakkuk to provide guidance and protection for Israel either by warnings or deliverance from tribulations and difficulties. All of them clearly projected Christ's coming for the salvation of man, but some also gave revelations into mankind's future.

Israel and Judah repeatedly ignored the warnings of God delivered to them through His prophets to repent from their ways. Consequently, God used the Assyrians and the Babylonians to judge Israel and Judah. They became slaves again in the hands of these nations similar to their condition in Egypt prior to the Exodus. In 722 BC, the Assyrians deported the ten northern tribes of Israel from the Promised Land and scattered them all over

their empire. In 586 BC, the Babylonians removed Judah from the Promised Land and nearly depopulated Jerusalem. Judah remained in captivity for 70 years; their return to Jerusalem was detailed by Ezra and Nehemiah as well as their work building the second Temple, completed around 516 BC, and the wall around Jerusalem, completed around 445 BC

Unlike Israel, Judah had kings who essentially followed the will of God, so their punishment was shorter (70 years). Even though Judah, representing the new Israel after captivity, regained ownership of the Promised Land, complete uncontested political autonomy never returned. While the Jews were held captive in Babylon, the Persian Empire took world leadership from the Babylonians. Jerusalem came under the rule of the Persian King Artaxerxes (464 – 423 BC) where Nehemiah served in the trusted role as his cupbearer to ensure his safety. Nehemiah eventually became governor of Jerusalem (445-433 BC) and God used him to lead the people in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem.

King Artaxerxes' stepmother, Esther (who we will learn about), played a role in the king looking favorably upon the Jews. The nation of Israel throughout its future history would continue to rely on God's intervention for the protection and favor needed for their survival. We see such protection provided by some of the leading nations of the world even today.

Following their exile from the Promised Land, Israel came to learn the hard truth about the root cause of their exile: abandonment of the law of God. In Nehemiah 8, Ezra the priest read the law to the people of Israel in such a way that they could hear with understanding. In that event it is evident that the people of Israel realized that their continual ignoring of God's law led to their exile in a strange land. God abandoned them to foreign nations. Upon hearing the words, the people wept and mourned. This is reflected in Nehemiah 8:9:

⁹And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Following their return to the Promised Land from exile and captivity in Babylon around 424 BC, Nehemiah returned to Israel from Persia to deal with the sins that Malachi described (see Nehemiah 13:6-11). Nehemiah and Malachi both reflected the last historical events in the Old Testament. Malachi delivered God’s message of judgment to Israel regarding their lifestyle of sinfulness and impurity that included both priests and people. The words of this message are found in Malachi Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Israel refused to grant God the honor He deserved from the day He freed them from bondage in Egypt.

In less than one hundred years after their return from the Babylonian captivity (536 BC), the 50,000 exiles (see Ezra 2:64-65; Nehemiah 7:66-67) and their predecessors were living deeper in sin (424 BC) than those who were sent into exile before them by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Malachi’s words of condemnation of Israel in Chapters 1-3 were the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of God’s 400 years of silence when God stopped communicating to His people Israel. Thus, the final words of Malachi to the nation of Israel were a bitter reminder of His condemning judgment towards them until He resumed His communication through John the Baptist in the New Testament, as was prophesied by Malachi in 3:1. This time, however, the message from God was delivered not just to the people of Israel but to the whole world. It was a message of hope that would change the human race forever regarding the imminent coming of a Savior Jesus Christ when he stated in Matthew 3:1-3:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’”

At the end of the Old Testament, Malachi’s words clearly pointed to the Lord’s critical mission on earth (see Malachi 3)—to pursue the work of salvation Himself without relying on prophets or angels or any other creation—a mission that changed the calendar from BC (Before Christ) to AD (Anno Domini or in the year of our Lord). In Malachi 3:1, John the Baptist was referred to as the messenger preparing the way for God’s First Coming. God came to earth to represent His creation and deliver us from the sin committed by Adam. As such, God took upon Himself the dual title: Son of Man and Son of God.

Finally, in Malachi 4:5 at the end of the Old Testament, Elijah was named as the prophet who will precede the Second Coming of the Lord for the judgment of the world, “Before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord.” As mentioned earlier, the Coptic Church sees Elijah and Enoch as the two witnesses (see Revelation 11:3) who will be sent by the Lord to prepare for His Second Coming, in essence a similar role John the Baptist took prior to Christ’s First Coming. The matter of the Second Coming of the Lord was also the final closing words of the New Testament in Revelation 22, “Surely I am coming quickly.”

[ESTHER \[“MYRTLE” ~ 483 BC\]](#)

In the story of Esther, Satan attempted to eradicate the people of Israel through Haman who was inherently against the nation. God used Esther and

Mordecai, her older cousin and father figure, to spoil Satan's plan of destruction and turn it against him and his followers. Esther was a beautiful, young Jewish virgin who found favor in the eye of Ahasuerus, king of Persia where the Israelites were in exile (see Esther 2). Esther became the queen of Persia around 483 BC and she loved God. A man by the name of Haman conspired against the Jews when Mordecai refused to bow to him or pay him homage (see Esther 3). Haman had authority above the princes of the kingdom and sought to destroy the Jews by inflaming the king against them saying that they refuse to obey the king's laws in lieu of their own. Esther intervened through a godly plan to discredit Haman and upheld the Jews as truly loyal citizens to the kingdom (see Esther 5–10).

God used Esther to save His people with whom He had a covenant and mission of salvation. Esther is a testament to the continuous intervention by God to preserve Israel for His purposes and plans. Although the world ultimately belongs to God, there is a silent war between good and evil, God and Satan. God is always in control and often uses the authorities of this world as He deems necessary in a supreme fashion that humans cannot comprehend.

In Coptic Church history a similar story existed. As a Christian minority in Egypt, the Copts were to be destroyed by a ruling Muslim majority if not for the intervention of God. This story, known to the Copts as the "Moving of El-Mokattam Mountain" (meaning broken mountain), will be discussed later in this book. God not only saved us from sin, but He also saves his people from adversities.

[JOB \["PERSECUTED OR REPENTANT ONE" ~ PRIOR TO 2000 BC\]](#)

The story of Job is indirectly related to Israel as His people and God's

plan for salvation of the world through them. The time period of Job's life is not clear but appears to be between the time of the Tower of Babel and the birth of Abraham. In Coptic teachings, Job represented the Gentiles. Although Job was not a Jew, the fact that Israel was His chosen people did not mean other nations could not have Him as their God as well. Job was an excellent example of an Old Testament Gentile who had a close and loving relation with his Creator. Job represented the Gentiles of the New Testament who would eventually be saved through their love of the true God.

Studying Job's relationship with God in the next few sections highlights important lessons that we, both Jews and Gentiles, can all learn about true love and obedience to God's will. Job has become the example that many believers refer to as the exemplary person who did not abandon his God or rebel against Him when tempted to unbearable extremes. Job was a holy man and Satan worked diligently to destroy his family and property. God permitted Satan to attack Job's children, servants, livestock, and wealth but limited Satan from killing Job (see Job 1:12). He was even stricken in his physical body, yet his temptations did not shatter his relationship with his Creator. Job's relationship with the Lord can be compared to Noah or Abraham in that he was a man of great faith in God, the depth of which we saw through the trials and tribulations God permitted him to endure.

In addition to Satan's other blows, Job's temporary separation from his children was the peak of his suffering. However, in the eyes of God, human destruction is only on earth. As previously discussed, in the Coptic faith there is no such a thing as dead people. Prior to the First Coming of Christ, evildoers were taken to a place of darkness and the righteous were kept waiting in a temporary place reserved for them until His First Coming. After Jesus Christ's First Coming, the place of waiting for the righteous is now the heavenly Paradise (Adam and Eve's original residence prior to their fall that

is no longer found on earth after their fall) and where they will be residing until His Second Coming where the new place will be the kingdom of God. Therefore, to God, Job's loss of his children was simply relocation to a better place if they deserve to be there. Although Job's children were taken from him during his tribulation, if they were righteous before the Lord, He would have brought them from the temporary place to be with Him in Paradise following His First Coming. They are now in Paradise with all the other believers who died in the hope of Christ's salvation before His First Coming and those who were with Christ during His time on earth such as the right thief and all the believers thereafter.

In the midst of suffering, Job maintained his integrity and faithfulness towards God regardless of all he had to endure because he believed that the God he loved had permitted the suffering and it could only be for his good. God did not initiate this evil against Job, but He does permit things to happen for one reason or another as He sees fit. In the Coptic tradition, He is frequently referred to as "*Thabt AL-KOLE*" that is "The Controller of All." He may be testing us to reveal our true faith or to reveal His own glory. Regardless of the reasons, He will never abandon those who are loyal to Him.

This brings us back to God's intent for those who love Him and follow His commandments and His ways to replace Satan as one of the ten hosts in heaven. Not only are we to take Satan's place, but because we are created in God's image, we are to be second to God. Satan rose against God to take first place. Because God willingly gives us a place second only to Him, we are in a position that Satan envies.

Job played a role in God's plan of salvation in that he reflected the sufferings of the Lord, torment inflicted by a merciless evil one on someone who was good. Job was a man of loyalty, patience, and perseverance who never doubted his Creator's love for him (see Job 42:1-6); the same attributes

reflected by Jesus towards His Father even in the midst of suffering.

Evidently, Job saw his righteousness and justice as independent of God and something he could put on like a robe and turban (see Job 29:14), yet he felt he did not deserve such treatment from the God he loved (see Job 30:11, 19-21). The Lord in His response to the agonizing temptation faced by Job provided him another view: the beginning days when He created the world (see highlights addressed below from Job 38-41). He wanted to tell us through Job that, as the Creator of the world, He is the origin not just of righteousness but all of our lives and our existence. Any righteousness that humans acquire is from God bestowing it upon them. We only reflect God's righteousness just as the moon reflects the light of the sun but is not the source of light.

End of Preview

